

*“The pace of life and our preoccupation with unimportant things take so much of our attention. The significant things, like taking time to develop friendship, to read and pray, . . . to listen to God—these all get sacrificed on the altar of good works and Christian busyness.”*

LUCI SHAW

## ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER

<b>Desire</b>	to give a regular and honest account of my choices, priorities and temptations to a godly and wise companion who points me to Christ
<b>Definition</b>	Having an accountability partner means that I appropriately and reciprocally disclose struggles, failures and temptations to a godly friend who is committed to asking hard questions, willing to challenge, and given to encouragement and prayer.
<b>Scripture</b>	<p>“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)</p> <p>“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:1-2)</p> <p>“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (Hebrews 3:13)</p>
<b>Practice Includes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• authentic self-revelation and confession</li> <li>• giving and receiving correction and input</li> <li>• praying for one another</li> <li>• contacting one another in times of temptation and need</li> </ul>
<b>God-Given Fruit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keeping company with Jesus no matter what happens</li> <li>• honoring the truth of being a beloved child of God, in community with another</li> <li>• loving the truth and living in freedom</li> <li>• experiencing God’s love and forgiveness more fully through the love and acceptance of a faithful friend</li> <li>• being aware of how denial, rationalization and blame take over your life when left to your own self-assessment</li> <li>• being free from pretense and dishonesty</li> <li>• being humble</li> <li>• sharing your motivations, goals and priorities with another who can help you keep these things in line with biblical values</li> <li>• having appropriate interdependence, self-disclosure and trust</li> </ul>

## ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER

**WE WERE NOT MEANT TO LIVE** as self-reliant, independent operators. Yet many of us choose to live this way because we are afraid of vulnerability. Being known scares us. Admitting feelings or failures shames us. Somewhere, life taught us that openness was dangerous, so self-protection becomes huge. Fences and defenses keep people at arm's length. Being competent and in control keeps our weaknesses and struggles out of the reach of others. No wonder we feel alone when we struggle with loneliness, temptation and pain. The walls around us are thick. Furthermore, the effort we pour into image maintenance separates us from who we really are. Hiding the "real me" from others sadly hides the "real me" from me! Image management, pretense—it is a lonely, diseased road.

Clearly we were not designed to journey alone. Without trusted friends we wither and sometimes die. God created us for community and interdependence—with the Trinity and with others. God is never alone. The Holy One is Trinity. And we are created in this interdependent image. We need others. We need their wisdom in unmasking defense mechanisms that keep the truth at bay. Many of us cannot get through a day or a relationship without falling back on rationalization, denial and blame. And our blind spots hinder us from recognizing how manipulative and hurtful these defenses are. However, what we cannot see is often blatantly visible to others. Without their help and love and truth, we will never know the taste of real freedom.

Not long ago I was challenged by a psychologist to ask several people I worked with how I came across to them. His suggestion proved to be enlightening. I didn't see clearly how I affected people. I made erroneous assumptions about myself as well as others. And I needed that information if I was ever to change.

Accountability partners help us face into the truth of who we are in Christ. They help us face down the lies that shape us, and they orient us in the direction of God's patient love. Together, accountability partners walk into the temptations and difficulties of life. They share the last 10 percent of themselves with each other. They let their secrets out. And together they focus on living holy and responsible lives, fueled by desire for God. Regular and prayerful companionship becomes a life-changing vehicle of God's grace. Accountability partners are particularly valuable for those who (1) are reticent to share struggles, (2) feel stuck in the faith journey, (3) need help facing temptations, (4) tend to journey alone, (5) want to grow in appreciating the love of the body of Christ.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who do you talk to about your spiritual life?  
Are you comfortable sharing your faith journey with another?
2. Who has helped you grow in loving and trusting God?  
How has he or she helped you?
3. Where are the growing edges of your faith?  
How do you pray about them and live them out?
4. What are your besetting weaknesses? Addictions? Fears? Temptations?  
Who is praying with and for you about these things?
5. How do you celebrate and share God's work in your life with others?

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. If you would like to have an accountability partner, begin by asking God to bring someone to mind. An accountability partner does not have to be older and wiser than you. He or she simply needs to share the desire to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the transformation process. When a name comes to mind, approach the person with your desire. Decide how often you will meet together. Begin by sharing your stories, temptations and desired areas of growth. Pray for each other.
2. Think back over the last three decades about the people that have shaped your faith. List their initials on a piece of paper. Beside each initial describe how they helped you grow. What did they give you? What did they not give you? • What patterns do you see? • Discuss your observations with your accountability partner. • Discuss what you would like to be for one another.
3. Mutually share your struggles and temptations with your accountability partner. • When faced with temptation, covenant to contact them for encouragement and help.
4. Study the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) with your accountability partner (or read *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen). • Share how you are like both the younger and older son. How are you becoming like the Father?
5. Get a box of colorful adhesive bandages and meet with your accountability partner or group. Put a bandage on every part of your body that has been wounded physically or emotionally. Share when and how you received these wounds. Pray for each other. • In the following weeks discuss how your wounds affect your lifestyle. Where do they send you into rationalization, denial and blame? • Confess your sins and pray for each other.
6. If you are someone who responds well to rewards or incentives, consider what sort of rewards motivate you to persevere. Are there particular incentives that could help you in cultivating godly patterns of thought and behavior? • How could your accountability partner help you celebrate times when you resist temptation or hold your tongue or encourage your spouse and so forth?