



A Measure of Grace

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Accountability *by Roger Jones*

When the topic of accountability comes up, lots of questions come as well. What does accountability mean? How do I get an accountability partner? How long do I need one? In theory, almost everyone wants an accountability partner, but we resist accountability as well. In part, this is due to our failure to understand the value of relationship.

We resist accountability for a number of reasons. We live in a culture that places a high value on our being strong individuals, able to do things on our own. We think that are weak if we need help. This belief system is in direct conflict with the very nature of accountability, which acknowledges our need for others. Left to ourselves, we will likely be unsuccessful in our goals.

Another reason we resist accountability is that we often hold a short term vision for what our healing process should look like. Our self talk goes something like, "Okay, I will get an accountability partner, but as soon as I have my struggle with pornography under control, I can end that rela-

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relationship. “ Or, “This codependent relationship I’m in is painful to talk about, but I won’t have to be vulnerable like this forever. Soon I can go back to my normal life.”

One of the core teachings at Where Grace Abounds is that all sexual and relational problems stem from a difficulty in relating correctly with other people. When we live superficial and compartmentalized lives, problems can and will arise. The key to our healing is healthy and intimate relationships with God and other people. Further, it is essential that we continue to know and be known by others in order for our healing to continue. This goes on for the rest of our lives!

A few years ago, I was at a seminar taught by Joe Dallas. During one of his talks, he told the audience that when he travels to speak, which is often, he always pre-arranges with his accountability partner to talk on the phone every night. Joe knows his areas of weakness, and staying in a hotel away from his wife and family presents an increased amount of temptation for him.

Joe’s admission about his ongoing need for accountability challenged my understanding of what healing and change means. He has been in ministry for decades now and I have always respected him, but part of me was asking, “Shouldn’t he be past this?” And therein lies the problem with our understanding of what it means to change. Healing does not mean the absence of struggle. It

means that we are better equipped to handle temptation when it arises (and it will).

In Ephesians 6:11, we are told, “Put on the full armor of God so you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” In verse 14, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist....” When we are truly accountable, the truth of who we are (and what we are capable of) is reflected back to us. We are reminded of our weakness and of the strength of Christ within us, upon which we must depend. When we are

truly known and supported by others, we are encouraged to be the best we can be. On our own, we tend towards living in “survival mode,” forgetting the fullness of life promised to us in Scripture.

In every talk I’ve ever heard on the subject of accountability, an inevitable dilemma is raised. There is always someone who is in a dire situation – no friends they trust enough to share with and/or the conse-

quences of sharing their struggle seem too great. “What am I supposed to do?” they ask.

There really is no good news to offer those in this situation. Sexual and relational problems are only made worse the longer those involved continue to choose to be “unknown” to those around them. In order to heal, we must be known. In order to be known, we must be truthful and honest about the best *and* the worst parts of ourselves. This cannot be ac-

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Holy Alignment

By Mary Heathman

If we are to be in Holy Alignment with God's purposes we must do our part . . . which can be summed up in a single verse: *"Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His presence continually."* (Psalm 105:4)

Several translations of Psalm 105:4 contain two phrases that start with "seek". And when you look at the original language, we find two different Hebrew words – *darash* and *bakash* – the first "means to search carefully, and the last means to request something desired."ⁱ

John Piper commenting on Psalm 105 says,

*"Seeking the Lord means seeking his presence. 'Presence' is a common translation of the Hebrew word 'face.' Literally, we are to seek his 'face.' But this is the Hebraic way of having access to God. To be before his face is to be in his presence."*ⁱⁱ

As I have been thinking about how to write about the part of the believer in accessing the presence and power of God, I find myself meditating on the basics. As Jesus so clearly taught, the

greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and strength, love our neighbor as ourselves, and remember that if we do these two things, then we will have fulfilled the whole of the rest of the law.

In the daily walking out of this loving God and our neighbor, of course, there is plenty to do—there is no end to the variety of ways in which we can love God and others. There are practical acts of service, sacrificial gifts, kind words and joyous celebrating of each other. There are quiet considerations and secret interventions, and the list goes on and on and on. .

Our favorite writings are full of descriptions of honor, sacrifice, servanthood. But in order to qualify as love—love the way God loves—all these deeds must spring from a deeply rooted motivation that only comes from God Himself—It is His Spirit within us that inspires both the will and the deed.ⁱⁱⁱ

So let's spend a little time thinking of what it looks like to "search carefully" for God's presence and "request what we

Antidotes for the 5 "C's" of Sabotage:

Carelessness - "Make the most of every opportunity."

Comparison - Look to Jesus alone for our standards.

Complacency - Confession, "Lord . . . melt away my complacency."

Critical Spirit - Fill our thoughts with whatever is good, true, Holy, of good report.

Compromise - Commit to a life of No Compromise - to a Holy Obedience to Him.

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Life, Relationships & Sexuality: Personal & Communal

By Scott Kingry

As the church, we tell the story of creation and redemption, and we speak to one another about sexuality's place in that story. We animate the story through confession and confrontation. We embroider the story with practical tips that help people manage and express desire. We live the story through a series of institutions that display redemption to the world and enable the gospel to transform God's people through sacrament, and hospitality and prayer. Lauren Winner, ***Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity***.

In my last article I discussed the reality that currently in American culture, sexuality is simultaneously both a **public** and **private** phenomenon. This seems contradictory and sort of crazy-making all at the same time, because it is. Sadly, the latest example demonstrating this inconsistency is found in the recent antics of pop singer Miley Cyrus. I shared last time how worn out I was by all the media hoopla over her “twerking” episode with Robin Thicke on the MTV Video Music Awards. Since then, she’s appeared nude, riding a giant wrecking ball in the video of her newest song; done a seminude photo shoot for *Rolling Stone Magazine* and broken up with her fiancé Liam Hemsworth. I know all this because unfortunately I can’t even check my tired, AOL email account without seeing her smiling, pixie-haired face and her abnormally large tongue sticking out several times a day with the latest “headline.”

What’s been fascinating to watch is not that she surpasses each scandal with something even more scandalous (which, by the way, Madonna did with a bit more class 25 years ago), but how she and other celebrities have reacted to the negative press this all has garnered. Pop singer, Lady Gaga’s comment on the event, I think, perfectly illustrates the double standard. Even though someone is splashing their sexuality out there all over the place, it’s still “hands off” when it comes to confronting them with the consequences. She stated in a recent interview, “*I just think everyone needs to lighten up and leave her alone. It’s pop music. Everyone’s entitled to their own artistic expression, and if you have a problem with it, just change the channel. I just don’t understand the incessant need to go on and on about hating things all the time She’s 20 years old, and if anything I give her props, you know. She’s growing up in front of the entire world.*”

Once again, it seems beyond naïve to believe that sex and our choices concerning it can be so tidily compartmentalized. Sex and sexuality are powerful things. We don’t live in a vacuum; it matters what we do with our bodies. The consequences of unboundaried sexual behavior have a ripple effect. We’re all connected by family; families build neighborhoods; neighborhoods, communities; and if you’re Miley Cyrus, your influence reaches the world. These

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realities go a long way towards proving that sexuality has a communal facet.

Isn't that how God has dealt with sexuality and His people from the beginning? He established standards for living, worshipping, and sexual expression, then everyone in the community was encouraged to help one another live up to those standards. Each person's health, welfare and holiness were community efforts. This theme threads through the New Testament, the early church and our lives today. As Winner's very articulately states, the church proclaims the story of creation and redemption and we must be talking and tangibly revealing to the world, sexuality's place in that story. We need to help support and encourage marriages in a divorce-ridden culture; find resources and care for those who are attempting life as celibate and single; and have ongoing, age appropriate education on sexuality for children and teens. Sexuality needs to be part of the church's community conversation.

I can't think of anything more demonstrative of sexuality's communal place than a wedding. The last wedding ceremony I participated in was Roger's, in which I shared the post of best man. Thinking back on that day with this topic in mind, I remember standing next to Roger as he and Jill vowed to one another, in front of God and their communities, to love one another exclusively for their lifetimes. We the community in

turn vowed to help support them in that endeavor. As I've been mulling over these articles for the last several months, I've kept coming back to the question of how, now 3 years into their marriage, I am helping to support them in their marriage (especially as the best man). What's funny and sort of ironic is that, though I work in a ministry dealing with sexuality; sit in counseling sessions, daily listening to very intimate things about peoples sexual lives; and feel like I talk about sex more than Dr. Ruth ever did, I still think sexuality is a very sacred thing. I remember when Roger got

back from his honeymoon and I laughed, suddenly very shy about the whole thing and telling him I didn't need any regaling of the details. Though sexuality is not exactly private (being a somewhat communal thing), it is still holy and deeply personal.

How do we maintain this delicate balance and keep sexuality both personal and communal? I would agree with those who have said

that we, within our church communities, have lost our communal language regarding sexuality. How are we to address one another about sexual issues with the hope of encouraging and supporting one another in every aspect of relationship? In my next article I hope to explore some answers to these questions and more. And I promise, no more using Miley as an example.

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complished until the *desire to be known* is stronger than the *fear of consequences*.

As always, we must use wisdom and discretion when we are sharing, particularly with those directly impacted by our behaviors and/or addictions. This is one of the reasons that support groups, like those at WGA, are in existence. Pastors and counselors can also provide a starting place for those who are first seeking help. Ultimately (and in due time), some of those in our day to day lives need to be let in. There really are no short cuts here.

Depending upon your individual issues, it may be ideal to try and develop an accountability group. If the idea of one accountability partner raises concerns for you about emotional dependency or attraction, gathering more people around you can be greatly beneficial. This can help increase the safety of the setting.

Below are some elements that I believe are necessary in an accountability relationship(s). Being known and loved by others is a good thing, and it is vital to our healing. As we more fully become who God intended us to be, we will impact those around us in a positive way.

Mutuality. With the exceptions of a pastor or a counselor, our partner(s) needs to share at the same level we do. The particulars of the struggles may be dissimilar, but vulnerability is the key to building relationship beyond just simply reporting facts.

Meet regularly. Consistency is important. It is difficult to share vulnerably in the best of circumstances. If you feel disconnected from your partner(s), you may be unable to share as openly as you

need.

Be specific. Give your partner(s) a list of direct questions to ask you each time you meet. This gives them permission to ask difficult questions. Avoid general questions like, “How has your week been?” A more specific question is helpful and keeps us from responding in a general, non-specific way. “Did you view pornography this week? Did you do anything to dance around the edges of pornography, like non-pornographic magazines with titillating images?”

Go deeper. Your list of specific questions will address the facts about your struggle, but what about the underlying reasons for the struggle? “What was happening just before you went on the internet to look at porn? How were you feeling then? How are you feeling about things now?”

Commit to honesty. Honesty is difficult, but it gets easier over time. The shame or embarrassment we may feel about confessing our struggles diminishes greatly once we’ve actually made the confession. The cost of keeping secrets is that we find ourselves living a double life (again). It simply is not worth it!

Spend fun time together too – celebrate. Relationships that are only about struggles get boring over time. It just isn’t fun to spend time together when the only thing talked about is pain! Enjoy one other. Ask your accountability questions in a natural setting, maybe on a hike together or between plays at a ball game. Every accountability conversation does not have to last for hours and be painful. Celebrate your personal victories together.

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desire” from Him so that we will be in His presence continually.

An illustration from Positive Psychology comes to mind as I think about searching carefully for anything. In order to search carefully you have to pay attention to the very moment you are in and the very details of every nook and cranny you are searching.

The other day someone said to me that they had been practicing their Mindfulness exercises. She said that in order to be fully present to any given moment, she was learning to practice describing out loud what she was seeing, feeling, and hearing. “It was the weirdest in the grocery store, when I was saying, ‘right now I am picking up an avocado; it is green and rough texture, and it is firm, too firm to serve tonight, so I will pick up this other one and as I squeeze it, it feels softer, so I will take this green, rough, slightly soft avocado and put it in the cart next to the milk that is cold and in a plastic container.’” That is one way—a very practical and effective way—to build a habit of staying in the moment.

When it is searching carefully for God, we simply add a step. As we live our lives, we are constantly on the lookout for Him everywhere. It is an exercise in the scriptural admonition to “take every thought captive.” If we do that, and then turn the thought to a prayer — Lord, where are you in this, what can I learn of you in this moment, this conflict, this need, this joy, this disappointment. Show yourself, Lord, I want to see You.

When I think of seeking God by asking for what I desire, I am a little less sure of myself. I got it all wrong when I was a

new Christian and read in Psalm 37 that if I delight myself in the Lord, He will give me the desires of my heart. The problem wasn’t the scripture—I eventually found its truth. But in that first moment, I did what so many did with the promises in the word. I forgot to ask Him what it meant and went about delighting myself in the Lord as best I knew how in order to attain what were NOT desires of my heart, but superficial shadows of the real thing. It took me a long time to come back to that verse with a humbled heart and say, “Lord, I don’t even know my own heart; what is a desire of my heart?” That simple shift in the prayer has made all the difference.

So, simply speaking, we will align ourselves with God’s purposes when we carefully look for Him in all things and when we “lean not to our own understanding”^{iv} even of our own hearts, and submit to His teaching. He will take it from there—of this I am very confident!

This month I have written about our part in aligning ourselves with His purposes. In the following two months, I will write about how we stay aligned against the pull of the enemy and our own propensity to wander away, and finish with a bit about the Hope of Glory that makes all that perseverance worth the effort.

May you each have a wonderful Thanksgiving—being mindful of the Lord in all things!

ⁱGod’s Search for Man, by John J. Parsons. <http://hebrew4christians.com/Meditations/Seeking/seeking.html>

ⁱⁱWhat Does It Mean to Seek the Lord?, by John Piper. Meditation of Psalm 105:4, August 19, 2009

ⁱⁱⁱPhilippians 2:13

^{iv}Proverbs 3:5-6



October In Review

October 10th: WGA offered a training for leaders at Providence House

October 16th: The WGA Board of Directors had their monthly meeting

Oct 31-Nov 2: Mary presented at the Hope for Wholeness conference in North Carolina

November And Beyond

November 7-8: WGA will be speaking at Front Range Christian School

November 15th: WGA Donor Appreciation Event

November 21st: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

December 6th: WGA will be presenting at a Celebrate Recovery Meeting

December 7th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry

Thursday Night Group

October 3rd: 33 people

October 10th: 32 people

October 17th: 29 people

October 24th: 40 people

October 31st: 28

Orientation meeting - 3 new people

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A Measure of Grace
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Where Grace Abounds exists to guide and support men and women who seek to understand sexuality and relationship, and to inspire all people to know and personally appropriate God's plan for their sexuality and relationships.

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