



Growing Accountability

Finding the motivation and encouragement to keep on keeping on without getting bogged down by guilt and despair.

An eBook by

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Growing Accountability – Defeating Guilt

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Growing Accountability

The world is conspiring to make our lives more difficult – together we are going to break through the noise and chaos of this world so that we can walk out that abundant life we desire and we are designed to live.

It begins with walking – take the steps – doing what we know to do when we know to do it – this is an accountability thing.

Accountability is all about helping me take the step. Make the move. Walk the walk. Or maybe sometimes just get up off the couch and turn off the Netflix.

Accountability will sometimes make me feel uncomfortable because I am not where I am supposed to be and I know it – but accountability will also make me hopeful because I know I can get there. Accountability can convict me of my inactions or wrong choices – but accountability will also support me in turning around the actions and choices.

Now there is a HUGE difference between guilt and accountability and when you realize the difference then you will be in a position to embrace the power that comes with accountability.

My husband came from a household where his mother dusted and vacuumed every day – she also held a full time job. He EXPECTED things to be clean and orderly according to his standards at all times.

I came from a household where that was not so much the standards. I remember straightening my room once in high school and my closest friend walked in, looked around, and asked when I had gotten carpet. The room ALWAYS had carpet. She just hadn't seen it before that moment. It had order – or order to my standards – but if you wanted something from my room you were safest if you approached me and asked for it. It was possible to get lost in my order.

When my idea of order and my husband's idea of order collided, it was not pretty.

I began to learn about different organization, and cleaning schedules. As I grew in my relationship with God I began to recognize that stuff was not necessary and I started cleaning out and letting go of things.

This is where guilt tries to sneak in. There are still times when my husband will say something about the clutter in the corner of the room (those boxes of crafts or pictures from three generations that I have yet to get sorted).

Guilt says: Look what you haven't done.

Accountability says: How can I help you continue to move forward.

Guilt crushes

Accountability Grows.

Finding people that will hold us accountability without trying to crush us with guilt can mean the difference between walking it out and curling up in the corner. Sharing with others can make us stronger in the journey. Just the other day I was sharing a struggle with some friends and while I shared one of them challenged me to come up with one action that would make a difference in that struggle.

I did – and between letting it out with the sharing and coming up with the action (and following through in that action) it DID make a difference.

Because sharing with others and talking with others helps to maintain the focus that we need to walk out this journey.

The people around us – the accountability and encouragement that they offer – can be vital to maintaining that focus.

In my own life, we are dealing with an earthly issue that has tied my knickers all up in knots – and a knotted knickered momma is not a pretty site. I contacted some “wise counsel” friends of mine and shared with them the edges of the situation. I knew if I gave them all the details I would just get fired up again and I needed to quench the flames of vengeance.

They gave me words of encouragement and words of the Spirit. That’s what I needed in the moment. I didn’t want to find people that would say “take ‘em all out back and show them what a mad momma really can do.” Although I am certain at one point I did hear one of them shouting “mommy bloggers of the world – unite” or maybe that was just in my head.

Reaching out to them has helped me unknot my knickers – and I needed that. I was able to continue to deal with the situation, but from a calm place of prayer and wisdom and not a place of revenge.

Let It Go

- One – release the situation
- Two – think happy thoughts
- Three – judge between accountability and guilt
- Four – always maintain three points of contact
- Five – take a time out

These five steps helped me focus on the more important things.

How do you get to that place of focus? One step at a time.

Part One **Release the Situation**

For me, finding comfort in accountability requires me to let go of the need to control everything. I had to learn how to release the situation. I was dealing with people and people . . . well, let's just say that people are not always prone to cooperate with my way of doing and being.

Although I want to deal with this situation, I will never fix the people involved and it's not my job to fix them. When I let it go then I can begin to move forward in the Spirit and not in the emotions and feelings.

This has been one of the most difficult steps for me to take in my journey. I grew up taking stands, challenging authority, and basically fighting for the underdog even when it was not requested of me.

The need still rises up in me . . . in the flesh part of me. It has taken a LOT of prayer and focus to get beyond that flesh.

I am learning to look at the situation from different perspectives to determine if I should make a fight or let it go.

I usually know to let go when I have answered just five questions:

1. Will it cause physical harm to me or to my family if I do nothing? There are going to be PLENTY of things that annoy me or cause me discomfort or make me uncomfortable – if I spent all my time and energy on these things then I wouldn't have time to sleep. Ironically, I came to this understanding while attending a church.

A situation came up that made no sense. The leaders did something I didn't like and that I thought was the wrong choice – actually, I knew beyond a reasonable doubt that it was the wrong choice. The me of high school and college would have considered it a declaration of war. I would have fought and shouted and raised the roof. I would have made some serious noise . . . and the leaders would have still done what the leaders were going to do.

I knew what I wanted to do and what I would have done, but God had been moving me in a different direction – a better direction. I am learning that when it doesn't cause me or mine physical harm then I let God handle it. It turns out He is just a little bit better equipped to do what needs to be done.

Not every thing I face and not every situation I come upon is for me to handle.

The second question I need to ask myself is:

2. Is this my place? There are times when I am in a position of leadership or authority and something happens that needs my attention. There are MORE times when I am NOT in those places, and not even interested in being in those places. If it's not my place then it's not my problem. I can already hear you telling me that I'm going to let the world go to hell in a handbasket if I don't do something – and I do something. I do what's my place to do and I don't

try to do things that are out of my place and then if I want to still do more then I change my place.

It turns out that there are a lot more things that are not my place than are.

And that leads to the third question:

3. How much am I willing to invest in this? I learned early on that if I was going to complain about something then I better be ready to step up and take the reins. If I'm not interested enough to make an investment then I should just let those that are interested handle it. Investing is not about control – it is about putting my efforts behind my words. I have to be willing to walk the walk if I'm going to talk the talk – otherwise I should just keep my words to myself.

I didn't say it was easy to release the situation. I've been taught to fight for the little guy, to stand my ground, to force the issue. God is leading me down a different path and that is what the fourth question is all about.

4. Will this bring me closer to God or hinder my walk with Him? Everything I do should be held up to this light. I have limited resources to invest and if what I invest in hinders my journey then it may be time to let it go or to just not get involved at all. Taking serious stock of the investment – in other words, counting the cost of my actions – allows me to see it from all sides before I make a move into the fray.

When I am focused in and on that relationship with God then I can determine the fuel that is driving the decisions. The fifth question I ask myself is:

5. Am I acting in Faith or in emotions? I think I dislike this question most of all – particularly when someone else points out the obvious. When I want to seek revenge, to cause harm, or to fix someone it's not because I have gone to God in prayer and contemplation – it is because I'm angry or hurt or frustrated. My emotions have crawled all over me and they are all that really matters in that moment.

I choose better when I take a few moments to think about these questions, that pause gives me time to let the situation cool. I wonder sometimes if that's why Jesus knelt down to write in the dirt – if he was just allowing the heat of the moment to die down so that the heart of the people could begin to direct the actions instead of giving in to the emotional side.

It is with these five questions that I am learning how to release the situation – to let it go when necessary or to deal with it in a better way. Either way – I'm releasing the need to make it fit into my scheme of things and by releasing it I'm able to make a better way.

A Foundation to Let It Go

Philippians 4:6 has been an foundational Scripture for guiding me through the need to stay in control. It reads: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

The King James translation says to be “careful” for nothing.

In other words, I have to learn to trust that God not only can handle it but that He will handle it – and that means trusting his timing and his judgement as well.

I don’t always like that. Sometimes I want to explain to God how it needs to be handle and I want him to follow my advice. Sometimes I want Him to approve of my taking control “Look God, I know you have this but just this once can I slap them around for you?”

He has yet to agree to this request.

This Scripture also tells me that I need to address everything by prayer – and have you noticed it can be tough to be annoyed at someone when you are praying for that someone – not impossible mind you – just tough.

I am also to address EVERYTHING by supplication – which is entreating God or to earnestly and even anxiously to implore god.

But that is not even the tough part – the tough part comes next . . . it says to do it IN THANKSGIVING – that means to bring every situation (and person) to go in prayer and entreating God and imploring God in thankfulness and gratitude.

1 Peter 5:7 keeps it going with this declaration – Cast all of your cares upon God because God cares for you.

Simple. Give it to God. And then Paul explains HOW we give it to God.

I don’t have like it I just have to be obedient in it – and then the interesting thing is that it turns out that I like it because I have peace and contentment and joy.

My husband’s favorite verse – Proverbs 3: 5 – 6 says “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

God has this. I have to do what I have to do but that is all I have to do.

That is NOT my husband’s favorite saying (for the record). But it is so true.

I will never figure it all out and the best thing is that I’m not supposed to. I’m not supposed to figure it all out and I’m not supposed to fix it all.

That should be a relief – but for some reason we want to take control and take back the stress and worry that comes with that control.

Before I jump in and try to fix it I need to ask myself a few questions:

Will this cause me harm?
Is this my place?
How much am I willing to invest?
Does it draw me closer to God?
Is it based on faith or emotions?

Emotions will try to take over. Pride can step to the front of the line. There are dozens of things that can stir me up and knock me out of alignment with God's design for my life – and that is a design of peace and calm. If I truly want to live out a life of accountability – a life where I release the situation; think happy thoughts; judge between accountability and guilt; always maintain three points of contact; and take a time out

That type of accountability that leads to a life of peace begins with letting it go. Release the situation – that is the first step to getting to the place that I need to be. By releasing the situations that are not mine, I reserve the resources necessary to handle those that are mine.

Part TWO

Think Happy Thoughts

My thoughts directly and indirectly affect my actions, my attitudes, and my attentions. I change where I am going by changing what I am thinking. I adjust my thinking by sifting through all of the stuff I allow into my eyes and into my ears – because those take root in my heart and spill over into my mind.

And as a man thinks – so is he.

I see you. I know you are rolling your eyes at that whole idea of “think happy thoughts.” I get it, but thoughts matter. The thoughts we think have will make a difference in the actions and the actions will determine the journey. So it does start with thoughts.

Several years ago, I worked for a boss that subscribed to many of the positive thinking messages. He even took us to a Zig Ziglar conference because he believed in the idea that what we thought and said would affect our ability to sell his product. Every morning we had a staff meeting that ended with us chanting “I feel happy. I feel healthy. I feel terrific.” Ending with a two claps *clap* *clap* - and we repeated the process three times. I always found myself smiling at the end of the staff meetings no matter how I went into the staff meetings. There was just something about grown people standing around cheering those cheers that I had to smile about.

I shared the story with my family, and my oldest son took it to heart. When my morning seems to be starting off on the wrong side of the positive mental attitude, then my oldest son will look at me with a sideways grin and then will start “I feel happy. I feel healthy. I feel terrific.” And he will clap two times *clap* *clap* – and then repeat the charge. By the third time through there is usually one or more in the household that will have joined in with his chant.

I get a smile from his efforts – even on those days when I don’t participate – and that smile lightens my day. He changes my thoughts and when my thoughts change to something hopeful and cheerful then my heart changes – and once my heart changes then everything changes!

A gardening friend shared a plant with me and she told me that it only grew in shade. I didn’t have a bed for shade plants and so I did what I normally do – I put it in the ground and wished it well.

It received full sun in the bed where I located it and apparently it felt happy, healthy, and terrific in its new home. This ground cover grew and grew until it stood almost four feet tall. I didn’t want a plant that tall in that bed and so I dug it up – but the plant was not interested in what I wanted. It came back, bigger and stronger, and it began to spread. For the last several years, we have spent many hours digging up the remnants of this plant and just when I think we have it all, it shows up again.

The things planted will grow up.

That is the way thoughts work. They grow bigger than what we expected and they come back again and again even when we think we’ve gotten rid of them and then they spread into other aspects of our lives and to the people around us. I have to make an effort to plant the right thoughts in the right place so that I can foster the right actions along the way.

My five ideas for growing up the right thoughts and actions in my personal thought garden is:

Watch what you read
Guard what you heard
Mind the people around you
Guard your words
And Create a habit of positive self-affirmation

Everything that I encounter every moment of my day has an effect on what I become – either in the positive or in the negative. It is up to me – and to me alone – to guard my minds so I grow up attitudes and behaviors that will lead me to my desired success.

Thoughts happen . . . well . . . without any thought. They just pup up in the mind and there is nothing I can do about them or sometimes that is how it feels.

The fact that they pop up is only part of the story. The thoughts that pop up in my mind come from something that has been planted there at one point or another – sometimes intentionally (through studies and memorization efforts) but just as often (or more often than not) the thoughts are planted there accidentally from background noises or from just being in close proximity to the attitudes of others.

I have to plant an intentional thought garden to grow up thoughts that drive my actions in their RIGHT direction with a positive focus.

ONE – watch what you read. There are two reasons behind this idea – the first is that what I read will take up some of my time and my time is limited. It turns out that reading stuff on the internet often leads to more stuff that requires more investment and pretty soon I am out of time and have read nothing that is going to improve my day or help my journey.

The second reason runs a little deeper – because what I read – those words that I put into my eyes – will take root in my mind and the deeper those roots grow the more they will begin to push down into my heart. I have to be aware of the things that are allowed to gain my focused attention – and reading **REQUIRES** focused attention – because those things often produce the deepest roots.

It is important that I watch what I put into my eyes by being aware of what I read.

TWO – Guard what you hear. The next step is similar to watching what goes into my eyes. Watch what goes into the ears. I have to be aware of what I hear because what I hear will affect what I say, what I do, and what I think.

My last semester in college, I did an internship planning social activities for the enlisted men and women of NAS Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Florida – and if you don't know that is a **NAVAL** Air Station – which is the Navy. For three months, I was surrounded by sailors almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Let's just agree that they speak with colorful language.

I came home from that experience and was chatting with my mom about something and I made a statement and she turned white. The words that had come out of my mouth had shocked her so much that it caused physical distress – and I confess I still have no idea what those words were that I spoke. She was too shocked to tell me. The words were not intentional, but because the words had been put into my ears for so long they settled in and came out without conscious thought.

The things I hear will have an effect. The music lyrics that are in the background of my day begin to take root. Everything that I allow into my ears will have an effect. I need to guard my ears and watch what I hear.

THREE – Mind the people you hang around. The third step connects to the second step because it has to do with people. I need to be aware of the talk and attitude of the people that are around me all the time – because I begin to reflect what I am around. I have to be alert about who I allow to effect that reflection.

I had a friend that spent most of her time complaining – and I mean about **EVERYTHING** – I found that when I was around her, I found things in my own life to complain about. Even when things were going good, if I was around her, I would find something wrong with the good things.

Negative attracts and even grows negative.

From that experience I recognized that I need to evaluate the effects of the people that I'm around and that I invest in – does the relationship feed the problems or feed the possibilities?

I have discovered that when I put good things into my eyes, and I put good things into my ears, and I choose to be around those people that are lifting up good things – then I begin to project good things when I speak. I also catch the bad things either before they get out or just as they are coming out so that I can stop them from reaching their full capacity.

FOUR – Watch what you speak. Step four pulls the first three steps together – by turning the attention to the words that I speak. Step four is WATCH what you speak.

Words have power. The things I speak will become the things I believe. If I want to see change in my life and for my life then I have to begin to speak that change. If I want my thoughts to be good, positive, and uplifting then I have to begin to speak things that are good, positive, and uplifting.

I don't just need to watch what I say, but I need to speak purposefully and I need to speak the words that provide a positive influence over my life that will directly lead to the change that I desire. Just like I began speaking "I am a writer" before I fully came to the place of embracing the idea, I need to speak positive things over my health, over my family, over my life, and over my change.

I start by looking at where I want to be in a month, or in a year, or in ten years. I then create statements that will help me in that journey. If I want to be in better physical health then I can make positive statements like "I am health. I am active. I am fit." I'm not saying these affirmations are magic chants – but I will tell you that as you begin speaking the affirmations then you begin believing the affirmations and as you believe the affirmations then you walk out those affirmations – and THAT is when the real change towards those affirmations begins.

I need to speak the positives over my life to begin moving into those positives.

Happy thoughts really do create happy actions. I need to position my words to create a path to possibility. It is not complicated until we think it is complicated. The thoughts I have matter.

Foundation to Think Happy Thoughts

The right foundation makes it easier to follow through on the right planting in my mind garden. I have planted garden in a hole and I have planted gardens in prepared soil and there is a HUGE difference in the return that I get for my investment.

The best foundation for everything in my life is – and will always be – the Word of God. When I go to the word for my direction and my focus then I go to the source that will not only change the world but the source that created the world.

Paul – the one that was Saul until he encountered Jesus and was renamed – was not always toting around a positive thought garden. That was one of the reasons he had the encounter with Jesus in the first place – but when Paul turned around it made a DRASTIC difference in his life and in the lives he encountered – and that is what we are all called to do. In Philippians 4 Paul reminds us

to rejoice – He says rejoice in the Lord always – and then in case we missed it he says – and again I say, rejoice.

Think happy thoughts. Speak positive things. Don't worry – be happy.

Paul goes on to give us specific direction on how to think and speak – in Philippians 4: 8 he says whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

The thoughts in my mind will drive the directions I take.

The wisest man in history – King Solomon – reminds us of the power of thoughts in Proverbs 23:7 when he says as a man thinks in his heart so is he. In other words, the things that I believe are the things that I will be and the things that I believe are the direct result of the thoughts that I grow up in my mind.

I have to be protective of the thoughts with diligence because the thoughts are the beginning of EVERYTHING.

James reminds us of the power that thoughts have – not only for the positive but for the negative. He says in James 1 that a man is first dragged away from the right direction by a thought – or a desire – that passes through his mind. If that thought is allowed to remain then it grows up into a belief and that belief will drive the actions and the actions will lead to destruction.

That's the Kathryn translation. The NIV translation puts it this way “After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

What I think matters. The thoughts that I have will have impact on what I do and how I act which has an effect on others around me which reflects back on me. So thoughts are important – and the things that I let into my mind are the things that grow up into the thoughts.

Jesus turns the focus to the “Don't worry” portion of the idea. In Matthew 6 25 – 34, Jesus shares the story of the birds and of the followers – how the birds are fed and the flowers are clothed even more glorious than even Solomon himself – and if God takes that kind of care for the birds and the flowers then He will care for us. Instead of worrying about the small details, Jesus says “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Worrying won't fix it. Worrying won't change it. However, worrying WILL change my thoughts – it will cause me to lose the one focus that will change my world. When I turn my attention to God and to His kingdom and to His righteousness then not only will the little things be taken care of but I will be in a position to walk on water.

It starts in the mind – with the thoughts that I think – which is why it is so important to be alert about the thoughts I allow to grow up in my mind.

I protect my mind when I stay word aware.

Having the right thoughts will help me live a life accountable and purposeful without falling into a trap of guilt. The more I pour into anchoring my life in accountability – the stronger my resolve will grow to walk out my purpose with boldness.

Part THREE

Accountability vs. Guilt

Accountability will get me there – or at least will help me get there. Guilt will hold me back. The five questions I use to help me distinguish between accountability and guilt are:

Does it feed the motivation or steal the energy?
Does it focus on the possibility or the problem?
Does it deflect from the giver's own journey?
Does it offer an element of hope?
And does it grow me or weigh me down?

It is important to know the difference so that I don't get caught up in things that are not moving me forward.

A while back, I made the mistake of asking my boys to hold me accountable to my writing. Actually, what I did was mention that I wanted to write 7000 words a day and I said it out loud and my boys took it as an invitation to hold me accountable.

So my sons began taking EVERY chance to bring up what I was doing – or not doing. I will say that it started out nice enough. They did want to encourage me and help me stay focused. "He mom, how's the writing going." "Hey mom, how close are you to hitting your mark?"

HOWEVER

They soon began to use my tasks as a deflection from their own work. They would ask the question when I confronted them about their work but not out of love and support for my process.

IF I was struggling that day then I would be pushed down even deeper instead of being lifted up. The heart with which they offered their reminder can have an impact on what I receive.

If I'm being REAL honest then there are times when I ask them about their work because I don't want to address mine or more likely I don't want to have to address my LACK of progress.

I want someone to remind me – when I want reminding.

The balance is not just about what they say but about what I choose to hear. That brings the responsibility back to me – which is kind of annoying because I thought I finally had an out.

It's almost annoying that it comes back around to me – that I am responsible – that I have to make the choice – but it turns out that it is ALL about me . . . of course that is a whole different rabbit hole.

As for the accountability and the guilt – people can throw it out at me one way and I can take it another BUT I should learn to recognize the difference and to judge between those that are trying to help me be accountable and those that are trying to crush me under guilt (because those people are out there).

I learned a while back that accountability will push me forward while guilt will drive me back. Accountability will help me grow up in my desired success while guilt will crush me in a weight of “what ifs” that keeps me from moving forward – more often, that will keep me from moving ANYWHERE.

Learning to differentiate between accountability and guilt takes a little practice and a LOT of self-awareness – and sometimes more self-awareness and focus than anything else.

When I am faced with a moment of confrontation then I ask myself a few questions

Does it feed the motivation or steal the energy?
Does it focus on the possibility or the problem?
Does it deflect from others?
Does it offer me hope?
Does it grow me or weigh me down?

Accountability is a powerful tool for taking that next step but guilt will stop me in my tracks. I have to know the difference and choose the accountability if I want my efforts to be worthwhile.

I'm getting better about handling the deflecting type comments – or to choose to hear them in a way that is a benefit and not a deficit. I am learning to judge the words from my own journey and not always from the intent with which they were delivered, but sometimes I still have to question the intention.

1. Does it feed the motivation or steal the energy? Accountability may pull me up short and it may be uncomfortable – but it will also provide me with the focused determination I need to get moving in the right direction once again. Guilt, on the other hand, deflates my heart and leaves me mired down in replays of what I should have done or could have done instead of what I will do. It becomes all about my past behavior and not about the future. People may say things to try and guilt me into doing what they expect, or sometimes they throw the words to deflect from their own lack of doing.

No matter if the words are shared with a heart of accountability or a mindset of guilt – I can CHOOSE to take them with a positive spin – and for the record that really annoys the guilt

spreaders. When someone makes a comment about my journey then I need to make the purposeful choice to measure those words up against my actions, my progress, and my own goals before I accept the comment or let it go and move on in my journey. I also need to inspect my own heart so I know where I am and where I am going.

It is not just about the words that come at me but about the actions I take and the actions that I will require energy. If I'm encountering negative words and the people throwing them are weighing me down and drowning me then I need to recognize and reject.

If the words and the people are challenging me – pushing me to move from where I am to where I want to be – then I need to recognize and acknowledge the accountability.

Part of understanding the difference comes when I have the focus – I have to be fixated almost to the point of obsession with where I am investing my attention. There are always multiple sides to every circumstance. There is always a possibility to every problem (and a problem with every possibility). The focus makes the difference. Accountability will shine the light on the possibility because accountability grows hope which ALWAYS has its roots in the possible.

2. Does the comment or person focus on the possibility or focus on the problem? I met a man once that never found a situation where he didn't see a problem. Someone mowed the lawn for him and they mowed it left to right. Someone gave him a new car and it was a bad color. Someone gave him a bushel of produce and he fretted over what they expected in return. He invested a lot of energy into finding the problem. He invested a LOT of time and energy into finding the problems."

No matter how contrived – he always found a negative.

People that are prone to finding the negative are also prone to pointing out guilt. I need to measure negative verses positive capacity and I need to look to see if it leans towards problems or possibility. I will get caught in the trap of problem FINDING if I don't stay alert and aware. When the negatives rear their ugly head, then I seek out my happy thoughts and cover myself with the protective armor of the positive.

Guilt centered words are often thrown to cause a distraction, to deflate the hope, or to discourage the dream – sometimes on purpose and sometimes because that is all that is known. The loaded words of guilt are never thrown in attempt to grow up the target but sometimes they are an attempt to move the spotlight.

3. Are the words an attempt to deflect? I'm going to make a huge confession here – because confession is good for all of us and my confession is that sometimes I ask my sons about their school or their chores because they caught me not doing what I knew I was supposed to be going and they didn't even know it. I want to distract from my own bad choices by shining the light on their bad choices.

It does NOT work that way.

So the next time someone offers up some comments on my journey or questions my actions then I will hold up those words in the light of their own walk. Why are they bringing it up in the first place?

People share their opinions about my journey for a number of reasons – some are trying to encourage me on this journey and others are just trying to make their own journey seem better by pointing out my faults.

4. Does what is being offered pour out hope for my journey? Accountability will ALWAYS grow hope while guilt will crowd out the light with the despair of darkness. Accountability is all about growth – growing hope, growing possibility, growing life, growing purpose. Anything that is not growing is not related to accountability.

And I want to focus on accountability.

I have found that when I invest in growing it makes all aspects of my life a little lighter. It releases the burdens and makes it possible for you to fly towards your dreams.

5. Does it grow up or weigh down? Several years ago, I signed up to work with a personal coach to help me in my journey. Each time we met, she told me what not to do that I had been doing. After each meeting with her I came away feeling heavier. The don'ts that she offered began to take their toll. I finally walked away from her because I recognized that her coaching style weighed me down instead of lifting me up. It wasn't for me – and that's okay because everything is not for everyone.

Part of the journey is discovering what works for your unique style. Part of it is learning to recognize when the words coming at you are meant to pull you down and not to lift you up. All of it is a journey and the more I move along the path the more I learn about what works to encouragement me specifically and what doesn't.

The more I invest in understanding the faster I can recognize accountability so that I can make adjustments in my walk or recognize the guilt so that I can get away from the negatives.

It is up to me to find my own way – and it will be unique from your way – but it helps to have some basic understanding of accountability and of guilt so that I can build up that foundation of support necessary for this journey.

Foundation for Accountability vs. Guilt

No matter how good my ideas or my focus, it becomes stronger when I secure it to the words of Scripture.

One of the main things I have found is that when guilt comes over me then I am confused about where I need to go or what I need to do. I settle into a nothingness that keeps me from moving forward.

1 Corinthians 14:33 reminds me that God never intended for me to live in that state of mind. It reads “God is not a God of confusion but of peace.”

He is a God of peace. He desires peace for my life and in my life. Guilt does not provide peace or comfort but creates confusion and chaos – God never puts guilt into my life. That is just not the way Love works.

John 3:17 the verse that follows one of the most famous Bible verses of all times focuses on how God wants us to understand and that he provides peace for the lives of those that follow him. Jesus says “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

It is NOT about condemnation. It is not about guilt. It is about LOVE and hope and possibility.

He didn’t design us to do this alone. And guilt will make me feel like I am in it alone – accountability will remind me that I am NOT alone. Proverbs is one of my favorite places for finding encouragement and support. Proverbs 27:17 reads like this: “as iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend – a man encourages and lifts up the countenance of his friend.”

That is what accountability does – even though it might correct my path, it still lifts up my countenance.

Part FOUR

Three Points of Contact

It is not easy to stay on track in a world determined to distract me. The noise and chaos around me want . . . no DEMAND my attention. The right support will make the difference when it comes to making good and better choices for each moment of my day.

The three points of contact idea all began with my love of caving and climbing. I learned early on to maintain three points of contact to keep from falling. I might slip. I might mis-step. But if I maintained my three points of contact then I could hang on AND I could go higher and further than I ever imagined possible.

I taught my children the three points of contact rule from an early age. I have never worried about them climbing trees (or other objects) or going on adventures because I knew that they would maintain their three points of contact.

It was only during a back porch chat with my dad that I recognized he had been teaching me the same thing for most of my life – only he was teaching me how to maintain three points of contact for life.

He always told me to look at Scripture, tradition, and reason when I was struggling for that next step. I took his teachings and my teachings and came up with the three points of contact that will keep me from falling in life. The Word, Prayer, and Wise counsel.

Just like when I was caving and climbing, these three points of contact can keep me from falling or they can be the key to helping me go higher or further than I ever imagined possible. These three points will keep me focused on the path that God has for my life and when I am pursuing that focus – the one uniquely and specifically designed for me..

But HOW do I gain these three points of contact?

First, I keep a record of the affirmations I receive.

Second, I develop a reservoir of support and encouragement

Third, I create a tunnel vision for purpose

Fourth, I work to keep the momentum going

And Fifth, I grow up advanced giving

Someone will try to pull the rug out from under my feet. Sometimes the ground will shift when I step. Things will fall out of nowhere and try to knock me off balance. Having three points of contact will allow me to maybe slip, or maybe slide, but not fall.

I can build up three points of contact for my life – the Word, prayer, and wise counsel – when I follow some simple tips.

First, I need to keep a record of all the words of affirmation that I receive. I write down the comments that people make about my achievements (great and small), the comments they make about my gifts and talents and even the achievements that they notice. I date the comment and where it happened so that I can remember the moment and the feeling in that moment and not just the words. I keep this list of thoughts in my leather notebook that contains my bible, my Sunday school lessons, sermon notes, and Bible study notes. This keeps all of my focus materials together – but it is important you find something that works for you.

Once I have a way to keep a record of the affirmations, the second thing I do is build a reservoir of support for my journey. Anywhere I can find like-minded (for me that is positive focused) people is a good place to make this happen. It is best if I find others that understand or at least support my journey, but as long as they support me taking steps that is a good thing. I am looking for people that will believe in me and support me because these are the people I will turn to when I need that hand up to encouragement.

The third thing is to keep a focus center to remind me of where I want this journey to take me. I wrote out what I wanted from this journey – painted a word image of me where I wanted to be. I thought about what it would take for me to get to that image and what I would need to sacrifice along the way. THIS is my focus center. It keeps me aimed in the right direction.

When I was first starting to drive, my dad taught me that when something comes at you – a bird flies at the window or something rolls across the road in front of you – you ARE going to react. The key is to train your reactions to keep you safe. I started ducking – just enough that it gave me a place to send my reactions and kept me from reacting by turning the wheel.

For me – creating a focus – a tunnel vision – makes it possible for me to react to everything that comes my way – squirrels, requests, opportunities – but to react in a way that is beneficial to continuing on my journey instead of driving me into a ditch.

I know I'm going to react. I know I'm going to get excited and enthusiastic about things – especially if others are excited and enthusiastic. If I don't have my focus honed and bold and right where I can get my hands on it – then I will be off down the rabbit hole with Alice.

And finally, I have to keep reminding myself that it is not all about me – as a matter of fact very little of it is about me (except for the things that are about me but that is another story for another day). I remember this by building a habit of being relentlessly helpful - of developing a tilt towards advanced giving.

It can be easy to fall into a pattern of “what's in it for me.” I have been bombarded with reminders of late that I have to see beyond what I will get and instead by determined to give to others.

Everything in life – from family, to church, to marketing, to business – is about: 1. Creating lasting connections that grow up into relationships, and 2. Being focused on helping others without expectation of return.

If I carry these principles over into my life journey then they will help me maintain my balance. They lead me into three points of contact that will hold me up, keep me from falling, and keep me focused on the right direction. Three points of contact – Word, Prayer, and Wise Counsel – will keep me well-grounded and even if I do slip a little the three points keep me from falling.

Things happen and it can be tough to hang on – even good days offer slippery slopes of distraction and ditches. Accountability can help me keep the right focus and building “three points of contact” for a foundation of accountability can be VITAL to maintaining that focus.

Foundation for the Three Points of Contact

The Word has a lot to say about building support and keeping focus on the better things.

God made the process simple. He wrote down what I need to know so that I can learn it, so that I can meditate on it, so that I can regularly feed on it. 2 Timothy 3 puts it like this: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”- it is God breathed and God directed. It is designed to be used for teaching me, for rebuking me, for correcting me, and for training me up in righteousness.

If I want to get all the designed benefits from the Word then I have to invest in Word. I have to make time every day – preferably several times a day – to read and study the Word.

We were sharing in class the other day about the knowledge of a teacher on a video and it dawned on me that the reason he was knowledgeable and the reason it seemed so simple to him was because he regularly invested in the Word – and he made the word a priority in his life.

When I do that then the Word will become what God designed it to be for my life.

The world wants me to think it's way and that is NEVER God's way. I have to be invested in the word of God if I want the Word of God to be the direction that I take. In Romans 12 – Paul reminds me of the importance of redirecting my mind. He says in Romans 12:2 (according to the NIV translation) “Do not conform to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

And part of that will is that I am not supposed to be doing it alone – from the beginning God wanted us to be working together and walking through this together. Ecclesiastes 4: 9 – 10 puts it this way: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.”

The Wisdom of Solomon – as shared in Proverbs – goes over and over the idea of wise counsel:

12:15 “A wise man is he who listens to counsel”

13:10 “Wisdom is with those who receive counsel”

24:6 “In abundance of counselors there is victory”

15: 32 “He who heeds correction gains understanding”

I stay on the path by implementing actions and attitudes that keep me from slipping down the slope or falling in the ditch. I grow up a life that holds me accountable to the journey when I invest in the better and the best.

Part FIVE

Take a Time Out

Take a time out from all the world is throwing at you or that maybe you have thrown at yourself. Take a break, a chance to refocus, a deep breath. When I take a time out then I can find the right steps for moving in the direction I desire instead of just running around the court without direction.

Taking a time out may not sound like the best way to get things done but ask any coach or team member and they will tell you that sometimes a time out is the only way to get things back on track.

I used to give my children a time out when they were younger – if they were to throw a fit or get to fighting then I would put them in a corner and let them think about their actions.

The time out that I am talking about is not about doing nothing – it is more about taking the time to think about my actions. It's like the time out you would take in the final seconds of the most

important game of your life. It is all about getting back into alignment and back into balance so that you can press on and win.

I KNOW I can win. I believe that it is possible. I have seen “it” happen in my life in the past. I have encountered “it” happening in my life around me in the moment. I have seen it and I see it – but I still manage to forget it or something distracts me from it or I just get too tied up in self to acknowledge it.

The key to staying focused is not just in the seeing but in the settled down knowing of it. Just like I have the ability to look back and see where I had a win – I need to create the ability to look AHEAD into the unknown or through the chaos and still see the win.

And sometimes – for me – this means I need to take a time out.

I find value in taking a moment – taking my time out.

It gives me a moment to review the steps that have led me to my current position.

It gives me a moment to review the goals that I have set.

It gives me a chance to adjust my direction if my path has gone off course from the goals I have set.

It gives me a chance to adjust my skills or knowledge to complete the goals.

It gives me the time to see the win – and embrace the win – and live the win – and that grows up the ability to believe.

I have played organized sports and I have been a coach as well. I know that when things get intense on the court or in the field then a time out is in order. Let’s face it – around this world, things are ALWAYS intense. The world is noisy and annoying and often overwhelming. I need the coach to call a time out – and since I AM the coach then I can do that any time that I need.

The first time I called a time-out as a coach, I gathered my team and used the time to point out their improvements, to remind them of their goals, and to show them what had been working and moving them forward.

There were a few that were still struggling. Some of them just needed to follow through on the actions we had set up. Looking at the inactions and balancing the results helped them to better understand the value of following through. Some of them needed to re-evaluate their goals because they recognized the actions they were willing to invest did not line up. Some of them had experienced things that changed their goals to a new direction. Taking that time out helped us all make better choices for the future.

A Time out allows me to review my steps.

Sometimes taking a time out helps me find my clarity. Two days after I got my drivers license, I drove myself and a friend to a youth conference in the large city near us. We spent most of the

weekend lost beyond belief. We managed to log in 450 miles on the car in one weekend – all because we stayed lost.

I have been lost many times since that weekend. The worst times for me were the ones when my husband gave me the task of navigation because I was supposed to have an idea of where we were going (as many times as my husband has heard my lost stories you would think he would know different – but NOOOOOO). We would be moving along and I would realize that the landmarks I had always used were no longer around – and I have learned that the sooner I pronounce my concerns the sooner we can stop and find the right way.

Taking a time out – pulling off to the side for a moment – allows me to look around and find my bearings. I can check the map and even ask for directions if necessary. It allows me to see where I am so that I can know where to go.

A Time Out lets me review my goals and direction.

Getting lost is not the only issue I have encountered when it comes to having the right directions. Sometimes I am just not going the right way if I want to get to a particular location. It is not about being lost but about being on the wrong road.

Many years ago, my friends and I were following a map and we decided to take a scenic drive back to the hotel where we were staying on the beach. The map showed that if we stayed on the back road that it would end at our destination.

Only nobody had mentioned that to the road.

We came upon a sign that announced: “pavement ends here.”

Now I’m from a rural part of the country and we have roads that are gravel, or chert, or just dirt. I thought this was warning us that the road was shifting to a new foundation.

NOPE.

The sign was warning us that the pavement – AND THE ROAD – ended. Right there! Fortunately we were going slow enough that we did not end up in the swamp – but the real irony is that we could see our hotel from the point where we stopped.

Sometimes I get so caught up in the journey that I miss the signs warning that I am going down the wrong path. Taking a time out lets me stop, breath, and think. It gives me a better chance of seeing the blocks or dead ends or other path issues that might show up.

A Time out allows me to adjust or change my path.

It is a miracle we didn’t end up in the swamp that day – because I have always been a plower. I plow ahead without really seeing what lies ahead. I get an idea and I move ahead with blind

determination. This can be a good thing when I am plowing in the right direction – but not such a good thing when I am just plowing. I have left some serious messes in my plowing wake.

It is interesting to me how we often get paired with the perfect balance for our personalities. My husband is NOT a plower . . . he is a plotter. He thinks about it and thinks about it AND THINKS ABOUT IT – ugh. It turns out that I needed a good plotter along with me on this journey – and he needed a determined plower.

He provides me with a time out before I plow everything down around me. He helps me judge the idea or the thought with more focused understanding. He helps me compare my gifts and talents and other resources to those required for the pursuit of my idea.

A time out helps me balance actions with abilities.

I get lots of ideas – living out in the woods on 37 acres gives me lots of room for lots of ideas. I had an AMAZING idea for a landscaping project. It only involved a ton of rocks and soul – it was NOTHING.

When I first envisioned the project, the children were small. I would take on pieces of the project during their nap time. Slowly but surly I got it all in place. Two years later, the whole project was wiped away in a matter of days because the place I had chosen was the place where we needed to create an addition for our growing family.

IF I had taken the time to measure the project and to measure it against the potential future then I would have chosen either a different project or a different location. I begin to see the win – what the future will bring.

A time out allows me to see and then believe.

The more I think about it – the more I appreciate the time outs. They help me avoid making messes, avoid getting lost, avoid running out of road altogether.

A time out provides a lot of direction correction opportunity. It is what will allow me to stay on target or to make adjustments sooner than later.

Foundation for Taking a Time Out

I was sitting in on a seminar recently and the keynote speaker mentioned that when we are upset about something that our brain lights up in one region, but if we take a moment to do a simple math problem then we shift that energy to another region – one that is more analytical and less emotional.

This idea of taking a math time out makes sense – and maybe it was even something Jesus was getting at when he was asked how many times we should forgive our brothers. He made the ones asking him do math.

Even if he wasn't following the idea of the keynote speaker, Jesus himself was known to take a "time out" before responding to others. In John 8:6 they have thrown a woman in front of Jesus that was caught in adultery and Jesus stoops down to write on the ground instead of responding to them.

He takes a timeout – and in His taking a time out everyone had to take a time out as they waited on His answer. Jesus then stands up and makes the comment about those without sin casting the first stone and then stoops down to write again – He takes a second time out – and this time everyone walks away from the moment.

They had the opportunity to look at their own actions and determine that maybe they weren't going down the best path.

The ways of God and the direction that He has me on will not always make sense – as a matter of fact it will NEVER make sense if I hold it up to the standards and the rules of the world – but that is where being still will help me. Philippians 4:7 can be understood like this: "the peace of God – a peace that surpasses all understanding of this world – that peace will guard my heart and my mind." When I take the time to be still in God and focus on God then the peace that pours over me will surpass all understanding.

Isaiah 26:3 puts it this way: "God will keep in perfect peace the person whose mind remains focused on Him."

Have you ever seen a lake or a pond in perfect peace? Nothing is out of place. Nothing is out of balance. There are no waves. It is smooth and clear and calm.

Now this isn't to say that the world is not going to be completely chaotic around that perfect peace – but within the Eye of God that storm will not reach.

That is what taking a time out does – it takes me to that place of still and calm and peace.

I am reminded again in Isaiah 58 that when I go to that place of calm and peace – when I turn my attention to God: "then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."

God will come to me in that place of peace and calm. God will watch me and cover me and be my rear guard. I just have to make the choice to be still – and to know that He is God and that he has this.

It is not complicated – I just have to choose – I have to take a break – review – listen – and then get going once again.

MY path to my unique place begins when I invest in growing up accountability for my journey.

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“Words have power – and I work to share words that ignite hope and possibility in those they encounter.”

Kathryn Lang continues to grow her career as a wordsmith. She shares words in talks, teachings, columns and stories to provide the hearts that hear with some fuel for hope.

Take a moment to visit <http://www.kathrynclang.com> to read more of her writings. You can also contact Kathryn to speak at your next event or conference by emailing her at kathrynlang@kathrynlang.com.

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