

Why I Resist Accountability | Louis McBurney

Four reasons I avoid the relationships I need (and how I embrace them anyway).

I had nothing to hide. No reprehensible behavior I was struggling with, no glaring character defects. In fact, I was feeling pretty self-righteous. Doug Self, with whom I've been meeting weekly since 1976, and I were sitting comfortably in front of the fireplace at the Redstone Inn, enjoying our early cup of coffee as usual. We filled each other in on our week's events as usual. We enjoyed the peaceful ambiance as usual.

Then out of the blue, Doug said, "Louis, I have something for you from the Lord."

Not as usual. Doug proceeded to point out some ungodly attitudes in me that he'd been noticing. He had been hearing me be critical and unloving.

Ouch! I knew what he was referring to. Frankly, I wasn't interested in re-evaluating my position or changing it.

The encounter reminded me why I need accountability-and why I resist it. I find accountability difficult for at least four reasons.

I Fear Rejection

I've heard that from countless individuals during my twenty-five years as a psychiatrist. At times I've felt the same way. Fear of rejection often makes accountability scary. But the times I've come clean, no matter how hard, have led to acceptance and forgiveness rather than rejection.

One time, I had to confess to my wife that I'd become emotionally involved with a nurse during my internship. That stupidity could easily have ended our marriage. Only by God's grace and Melissa's remarkable forgiveness did we survive. If I had been open to Melissa or somebody else during that time, the whole thing might have been avoided.

I feared that admitting the temptation and attraction would bring rejection. Instead Melissa said, "Louis, I'm very hurt and angry. I don't understand how you could have let that happen, but I forgive you. I'll need time to rebuild trust, and I want you to know if that ever happens again, I'm gone!"

I believed her. That event helped me learn to have a commitment to accountability.

I Feel Embarrassed

The things I confess to Doug, I often fail at repeatedly. That becomes embarrassing. I feel convicted, get up the courage to confess, pledge to quit doing whatever it was, only to repeat the behavior.

I've heard confessions from hundreds of pastors who have the same struggle, only in other areas: pornography, lustful thoughts, lack of spiritual discipline, loss of temper, emotional abuse of

family members, stealing, lying, cheating on taxes. The list goes on and can become such an embarrassment that accountability is lost.

I Resent Control by Hostile People

I've been blessed by the loving people in my life; many have shown me grace. Being accountable to these people has been *relatively* easy.

It's not so easy to submit to someone angry at you. At our retreat center, we often work with pastors who have broken faith and trust with the people in their lives. One part of working through those situations is being assigned to an "accountability group." I highly encourage it. Making changes in one's life is hard and especially difficult if attempted in isolation.

The problem, though, is that members of the accountability group—often people from the congregation or denomination—are struggling with their own feelings of betrayal. They are hurt and angry. The accountability process can be a healing experience. But if the group members are wounded and angry, accountability deteriorates into hostile oblivion.

I Don't Like Facing My Negative Feelings

I'm a master at self-deceit. My self-image is that I'm a gentle, open, gracious person who seldom has negative feelings. So I find ways to avoid dealing with them.

Denial is a nifty way. I am able to avoid the unattractive feelings so quickly that I'm honestly fooling myself. I can say, "What, me worry?" or "I'm not angry!" I may be the only one who believes it, which is the real danger.

Rationalization, however, is a conscious mechanism, so I can't claim innocence in employing it. I adroitly look at my situation and justify my behavior. Considering the situation logically, I convince myself that my attitudes or behavior are reasonable. In fact, they're admirable. Perhaps, godly. Yes, that's it. I'm totally justified.

For instance, I've been seeing changes come into our church fellowship. Changes in the congregation. Changes in the worship style. Changes in emphases. That has not been easy to watch. (Here's where the rationalization takes over.) My concern *is not* territorial because we were one of the founding families and are protective of the way things have been for twenty years. No, the reason for my discomfort is my deep desire to reach our mountain community. The changes I see may interfere with the opportunity for outreach.

Year after year at Marble Retreat, we hear painful stories of pastors' being abused by some controlling elder in their congregation. These have usually been founding members who have had major positions of responsibility. They become seen as the church boss.

I determined long ago never to create that kind of pressure on a staff person in *my* church. However, Melissa and I fit the description—the only remaining founding family in the church,

lots of leadership roles over the last 18 years, and lots of church experience that many of our people haven't had.

It has been devastating to realize that if my pastor came to Marble Retreat, he'd probably be describing me in those same terms: controlling, critical, resistant to change, non-supportive, rejecting, and untrustworthy.

My Worst Fear Has Been Realized

When our new pastor came, he was enthusiastic and eager to prove himself. His stated purpose was admirable: "To grow us deeper spiritually, then let that spill out into our community in outreach." He wanted to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. I certainly couldn't disagree with that vision.

I must confess, however, that with my perception of our church having done that for fourteen years, I felt defensive. Rather than joining in his enthusiasm, I questioned whether our investment and level of spiritual maturity was being depreciated or denied. I knew my emotional response was exaggerated or unfounded. Yet there it was.

That's when my accountability group stepped in. They held up a mirror for me to see how unlike my self-image I was being. I can easily say this whole experience has been one of the most difficult of my life. The great peacemaker was contributing great distress. The gentle, gracious lover was adding to an atmosphere of non-acceptance.

Speck-and-Log Removal

I felt convicted that I needed to let the whole church know I'd been creating some difficult pressure for our pastor and ask their forgiveness. I have already asked for and received this.

That confession provided a forum for our pastor to express the pain and resistance he has faced. The current climate, after a couple of tense weeks, is much more Christian. Just in time for Easter, there was resurrection and renewal. Our accountability circle has expanded considerably, and I believe in the end there will be new levels of love and trust. We're not totally out of the woods, but it sure feels better to be re-focused on the Lord rather than on myself.

And I rediscovered that accountability works.

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Discuss

1. Do McBurney's reasons for resisting accountability resonate with you? Why or why not?
2. Why is confession an important part of accountability?

3. Why is it important to name the primary reasons we avoid accountability? What's yours?