

# The Central Question of Accountability

**I**N THE FALL OF 2013, six-time European Tour winner Simon Dyson made an embarrassing mistake. After lagging past the hole during the BMW Masters, Dyson reached down and marked his ball. In the next instant, he used his golf ball to tap down a spike mark about four inches in front of his ball. A mindless error. Something you might do in a casual round with buddies, but a penal move in the midst of competition. Dyson's action was caught on video and he was reminded of what he had done after he had signed his scorecard. According to the rules, the Englishman was rightly disqualified from the tournament.

If only that had been the end of it. Questions swirled around Dyson's move. Had he tried to hide what he had done, or was it an "honest mistake?" Other players and, more notably, European Tour officials wanted to know. Tour standards are very harsh towards those who demonstrate a flagrant disregard for the rules—as severe as suspension or even expulsion from the Tour.

We live in a strange age. Ask a person to own up about some of the more intimate details of their life, and you have "no right to pry." But spot a professional golfer committing a penalizable offense, and let the hammer of accountability fall!

Oh, accountability! It's easy to have a love-hate relationship with the concept. We know it presents us with the opportunity to be humble and honest, two of the most admirable character traits one can demonstrate—and certainly two powerful characteristics of a follower of Christ. At the same time, when we apply accountability to one another, as has become common in Christian small group settings, we set ourselves up for two equally grave forms of error: an attempt at human righteousness and the judgment of others. With this dichotomy before us, what are we to do?

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In Links Fellowships—and similar small groups—an essential standard of accountability is to appeal to Christ, who is the Shepherd and King of every believer. We do well, then, in our sessions of mutual ministry or accountability to ask a question of each participant that has Christ at its center: *What is Jesus showing you today?* We find this to be a powerful question for three reasons: (1) who is at the heart of it, (2) what feeds it, (3) what proceeds from it. Let's look at each of these.

### THE ONE AT THE HEART

At the heart of this central question of accountability is Jesus himself. Too often in accountability settings, the hammer is held in the hands of the leader of the group, or its strongest personalities. These people should instead be pointing us to Christ.

When we ask what Jesus is showing you today, we presume that the person has a relationship with Christ. If we balk at this question, it may indicate that we do not recognize Jesus as Lord, or we have not turned our life over to his Lordship, or both. By asking a question that places those under inquiry under Christ himself, we gain an understanding of where the one asked stands with Jesus. Perhaps they need salvation, which is an essential bit of knowledge about them—for attempts at righteousness without grace-infused salvation through Jesus are utterly pointless. Let Jesus be Savior and Lord in your accountability sessions and you'll see the hammer of judgment be replaced by the "kindness that leads to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

### FEEDING THE QUESTION

Often our accountability sessions fo-

BIBLE  
STUDY

PRAYER

MEDITATION

COUNSEL

OBEDIENCE

What is Jesus  
showing you  
today?

PREPARE

PRACTICE

ENACT

PRaise

cus on spiritual practices or disciplines, many of which can fall into the category of contemporary legalism: Did you do your quiet time every day? How many minutes were you in the Word? Did you keep your mind and body pure? These are not unimportant questions, but again when we start with Jesus they serve a better purpose.

If we ask what Jesus is showing you today, we are automatically asking how this is being shown to you. If a person is not reading Scripture and meditating on it, not in prayerful conversation with God and purposeful conversation with mature believers, and not acting in obedience to God, they will not receive clear direction from the Lord about what he would have them do next in their life. The question can only be well met when the answer is fed by these practices.

(You may even make a habit of adding this follow-up question: *How do you know this is what Jesus is showing you?*)

### FROM OUT OF THE QUESTION

Finally, if the purpose of accountability is to help brothers and sisters follow Jesus more closely in terms of righteousness, this central question should cause those who answer it to take excellent next steps in thought, word, and deed.

When God gives us a clear direction (what we might call a calling), we enter into confident living. We prepare for the function of this calling—again through spiritual practices. We may also practice our calling in closed settings where we may receive assistance and counsel. Then we go out and enact what God has shown us he wants us to do. And finally, we praise him for his work through us. 