

Should a woman be her husband's accountability partner?

With the advent of movements like Promise Keepers, *accountability* has been a buzzword in male Christian community. Men are regularly encouraged by friends, pastors, and mentors to find good accountability partners in their struggle against lust, masturbation, and pornography. But often women will ask me this question: Should I be my husband's accountability partner in these areas?

Sometimes a husband believes his wife would make an ideal accountability partner. After all, she is around him all the time and knows him in ways no one else does. She is his confidant, friend, lover, and soul-mate. Why not throw "accountability partner" into the mix?

The Pain of Knowing

Our answer to this question centers on the definition of an "accountability partner." What is *accountability*, really? Recently I asked Joe Dallas this question. Joe is the author of [*The Game Plan: The Men's 30-Day Strategy for Attaining Sexual Integrity*](#) and speaks widely on the subject of sexual brokenness. He said,

"I don't personally believe in a wife being a husband's accountability partner, but I do believe a husband is accountable to his wife—and that's not a contradiction in terms. An accountability partner on a week basis asks you: '*Did you look at pornography? Did you masturbate? Did you flirt? Did you allow yourself to entertain unclean thoughts? Did you handle your sexuality well this week?*' If the wife is the one asking those questions, the husband is going to be imposing on his wife unnecessary pain and detail."

I asked Amy Smalley the same question. Amy and her husband regularly counsel couples through their Marriage Restoration Intensive programs. She believes when a husband exclusively looks to his wife to confess his sexual struggles, this only serves to trigger a myriad of false beliefs in her: I'm not satisfying enough, I'm not pretty enough, I'm not good enough for him, etc. Amy said,

"The reason why it's not best for her to be the accountability partner is because that directly affects her. There's a message: when my husband views pornography, whether he does it intentionally or not, he will say, 'Oh, it has nothing to do with you'—you can say that, but that's not how she feels. She feels like, 'This has a *direct* reflection on me.'"

Fred Stoeker, co-author of [*Every Man's Battle*](#), gave me the same answer. He believes the sort of raw details discussed in accountability conversations could be very hurtful to a marriage: "The wife is going to be shocked how many times he stumbles as he tries to win this battle, and it will begin to dishearten her. . . . It will actually hurt the relationship instead of strengthen it."

While Fred knows of some wives who are able to not be disheartened by their husband's temptations and sins, he says it is a rare thing.

The Need to Trust

That being said, healthy marriages must be built on honesty and transparency. Jesus, the bridegroom of the church, was pleased to reveal to us *everything* His Father taught Him (John 15:15). Jesus has given to

us His own Spirit who shares with us “the deep things” of God’s heart (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). Husbands, we must follow our Master’s example. We must be open and honest as we share our hearts with our wives.

Joe Dallas mentioned this issue in my conversation with him. While a husband does not need to belabor his wife with intricate details of his sexual struggles, a man should *volunteer* information to his wife about how he is doing in the fight to stay pure. If there has been a breach of trust in the past, or if he has given into habitual lust, she needs to see the fruit of repentance in her husband. She needs a window to peer into his soul so she can see his diligent faithfulness to her. Trust is built only when he builds a track record of trustworthiness.

In my conversation with [Dr. Mark Laaser](#), he affirmed, “The husband is accountable to the wife to stay sexually pure,” but then quickly added, “but I don’t think the wife should be a part of his network such that she’s engaged at the same level other men are going to be. . . He should have a network of men he is able to call.”

Couples need to dialogue about what sort of details she needs to hear and what details should be reserved for other guys who are helping him in his struggle.

The “Need” to Know

Dr. Laaser also pointed out the slippery slope of spousal accountability. Women have often found “they sometimes get into controlling their husband’s behavior.” Amy Smalley was also very attuned to this tendency in women—when the need to build trust turns into an obsessive curiosity. These obsessive thoughts often feed unforgiveness or a desire to control or manipulate. Joe Dallas told me when a wife is engaged in accountability on a deep level with her husband “it puts the wife in a rather *maternal* position with a husband,” which he thinks is very unhealthy for a marriage.

What is the difference between helpful honesty that encourages trust and unhelpful probing that leads to tension? The difference is in the *heart* of the wife. Amy Smalley says this is a matter of serious prayer: God, reveal my *motives*. Tell me when want to know so I can be confident in my husband’s repentance and when just want to feed my bitterness or control him in some way.

The Need for Male Community

When the struggle is with Internet pornography, many people have made use of accountability software, such as [Covenant Eyes](#). When all of your Internet activity is monitored and detailed reports are sent to others who have agreed to stand with you in fight for purity, this makes an enormous difference in how we use the Web.

I work for Covenant Eyes, and recently we surveyed some of our members and found that about 30% of them have their accountability reports emailed to their wives. For many couples this is a token of real transparency and honesty, as if to say, “My life is completely open to you. I have no secrets. I love you.”

Still, many guys have the same report emailed to other men in their accountability network. These are the men who hear the nitty-gritty details: the lustful glances, the fantasies, and the temptations we face on a regular basis in our sex-saturated world. This is the brotherhood that encourages us to flee from

youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace in our world and our relationships (2 Timothy 2:22).

In my conversation with Amy Smalley she said how assuring this can be for a wife, to know her husband is meeting regularly with another guy or a group of men who are engaged in the battle with him. It is freeing to a woman when she knows and trusts the men who surround her husband with encouragement, prayer, and correction. Amy's message to husbands is for them to find accountability among other brothers:

“Covenant Eyes is a great way for men to be accountable to other men. That way, first of all, there's some compassion there, because it's another man who's hard-wired the same way that you are. And two, it someone that you feel has a connection and that will love you no matter what but really kick you in the pants when you need to, and talk to you the way a man needs to talk to another man.”

If you want to listen to these conversations, please listen to [our podcast](#) (11 minutes) on the Covenant Eyes blog.

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