

# Healthy Accountability

By Ben Bennett

**“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7 ESV**

Throughout years of fighting a porn addiction and a multitude of other habitual sins, I practiced reactive and unhealthy accountability as opposed to proactive and healthy accountability. Sure I had an Internet filtering software on my devices and an accountability partner, but this often just resulted in a weekly meeting with a friend to confess sin. The meeting often ended with a futile commitment to try harder next time to stay away from sin. These weekly confessional meetings were not a bad thing, they were a great start, but I was missing out on so much by limiting accountability to these interactions.

Maybe you’ve experienced reactive accountability in your own life. Or maybe you’ve experienced unhealthy accountability by hearing lots of truth from others and receiving little grace. Maybe you were encouraged to simply try harder next time, or to have more faith, resulting in immense shame in your life. Maybe penance or punishment was encouraged as a way to attempt to pay God or others back for the damage you had done.



Rather than simply trying harder to stop sinning or picking up the pieces after returning to the place we swore we’d never go again, we have a much more Biblical and helpful option. God has given us an incredible gift through the body of Christ to do life together in a much deeper way. We have the option of proactive and healthy accountability, battling alongside others, and setting ourselves up well to prevent future destructive choices through the power of the Holy Spirit and a gracious and loving God who is for us.

WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN AN ACTIVE ROLE TO PLAY IN FIGHTING SIN IN OUR LIVES THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Several years ago, I began to learn about and implement healthy accountability in my life. I truly began to experience 1 John 1:7, which speaks of walking in the light and the progressive sanctifying and cleansing of sin that Jesus does in our lives. Walking in the light, or a daily lifestyle of being fully transparent with our emotional well-being and sin with Jesus and safe people, is a proactive choice. We do not just let go and let God. We have been given an active role to play in fighting sin in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13). As we confess our sin to God and one another, share our deepest sin and hurts, and ask for help, the Holy Spirit brings about growth and healing in our lives.

Healthy accountability incorporates assessing the precursors, stressors, emotions, and situations that tend to occur before you end up in sin patterns and creating a faith filled plan of action with safe people. It’s asking trusted friends to encourage you, support you with specific challenges you are facing, and to follow up with you throughout the week... knowing you won’t face condemnation and will be met with grace and truth from safe people.

WE SIN BECAUSE WE ARE SINFUL BUT WE ALSO SIN BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN SINNED AGAINST.

Regardless of our particular sin struggles, we live in a broken and fallen world, so we all have ways of dealing with stress and pain in life. We all have areas of habitual sin, or coping mechanisms, that we run to for comfort and to escape. Whether it's sexual sin, anger, anxiety/fear, bingeing on video games or Netflix, drinking alcohol excessively, control, performance, overeating, body image issues, or a number of many other things. Through identifying our specific coping mechanisms and why we run to them, we can take steps towards surrendering to God, who always meets our needs (Psalm 14:16).

Healthy accountability is also not limited to simply talking about sin in our lives. Healthy accountability is a daily lifestyle of reaching out for help to process the pain and stress in life that often influences our decision to cope through sin. As we begin to identify habitual sin in our lives, immense growth can happen by looking at what pain from our past may be getting triggered in our current situations and working through this pain with Jesus and safe people. Yes, we sin because we are sinful, but we also sin because we have been sinned against and have developed ways to cope when that past pain gets triggered in life.

For example, I've struggle with habitual anger and fear throughout my life. Why? Obviously because I am sinful, but looking below the surface, I often felt rejected by friends and those closest to me as a kid. I learned to keep others away and to protect myself by becoming angry. This deep fear of rejection carried on into adulthood, influencing my desire to power up and compensate when I felt rejected.

In recent years, God has done a lot of healing in my life as I worked through the pain from my past in light of my identity in Christ and forgave those who hurt me. Whenever anger would show up again, I'd try to be proactive by repenting, addressing the fear of rejection that was leading me to compensate, and meditate on the full acceptance and approval I have as a son of God. As I took these faith-filled steps, and as God brought close friends into my life who showed immense grace, acceptance, and a desire to battle alongside me, these fears of rejection lessened drastically resulting in less anger in my life. Through being proactive and implementing healthy accountability, the Holy Spirit brought immense growth, healing, and greater intimacy with Jesus and others to my life.

## **To Implement Healthy Accountability**

1. Read the following pages and learn how to use the FASTER Scale and Double Bind.
2. Find a peer of the same gender to meet with weekly for an hour, either on the phone or in person, and use the weekly accountability instructions on the following pages. Reach out to this person on a daily basis and process life with them.
3. Begin filling out a FASTER Scale Exercise weekly prior to each meeting with your accountability partner. An online version can be found at [fasterscaleapp.com](http://fasterscaleapp.com).

## The FASTER Scale

Look at the FASTER Scale on the following pages as you read this description or check out the online version at [fasterscaleapp.com](http://fasterscaleapp.com). The FASTER Scale is an amazing tool that was developed by a Christian counselor named Michael Dye. Throughout decades of working with individuals struggling with habitual sin, Michael saw the subconscious and emotional things that would take place in someone's life before they ended up back in their habitual sin, otherwise known as Relapse. "FASTER" is an acronym for Forgetting Priorities, Anxiety, Speeding Up, Ticked Off, Exhausted, and Relapse. Jesus tells us in John 10, that He came to give us abundant life. Our goal is to live in Restoration, where we are experiencing God and His abundant life, at peace, and keeping commitments we have made. But the problem is we get distracted by the details and tasks of our day, take life into our own hands and move away from trusting God. This is when we begin the slow descent to Relapse on the FASTER Scale. It begins by Forgetting Priorities and experiencing one or more of the behaviors or thoughts in that category. If we don't deal with those, we are soon in Anxiety, then so on all the way down the scale to Relapse.

### Facts about the FASTER Scale:

1. It's a downward only scale. You can't go back up, you can only get off of it by addressing the Double Bind.
2. Each category stacks on top of one another, you don't leave one and go to the next. Example.: If I'm in Speeding Up then I'm also in Anxiety and Forgetting Priorities.
3. The scale is generic until you become more self aware. All of us have different ways of experiencing each category.
4. You can't skip a category of the scale.
5. At minimum, a relapse is your go to coping mechanism when you are emotionally exhausted. It could be sexual sin, drinking alcohol excessively, bingeing on Netflix or video games, over eating etc.

## The Double Bind

A Double Bind is when you have a decision to make and are stuck between a rock and a hard place. One side of the bind is the easier choice and involves going down the FASTER Scale and trusting your coping mechanisms. The other side of the bind, the harder choice, involves surrendering to God by dealing with the issues at hand and the underlying emotions or behaviors you are experiencing. Taking the harder choice of the Double Bind, involves a Spirit-filled step of faith, and allows you to get off of the FASTER Scale.

Example 1: I am in Anxiety on the FASTER Scale because I have been procrastinating with studying for the test I have next week. I'm really worried because if I don't get an A on the test, I won't get an A in the class. I've been taking the easier choice: I have been procrastinating so much that I went from Forgetting Priorities to now being pretty fearful and in Anxiety. The harder choice probably involves the following: plan out when I will study each day and ask a friend to encourage me and hold me accountable so I don't procrastinate, and identify and address my fears of getting a bad grade with the truth of who I am in Christ (am I fearing feeling like a failure, feeling rejected by my parents or friends if I don't get straight A's, or something else?). Rather than living in fear, I can take these steps of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit and trust God with the tasks He has called me to do. If I don't deal with this now, I'll continue to go down the FASTER Scale and eventually relapse.

Example 2: I'm Ticked Off on the FASTER Scale because my friend and I got into an argument. I took the easier choice here by going down the FASTER Scale and getting Ticked Off. Now, I have to take the harder choice, which is to address the fear behind my anger (normally a fear of rejection) and not being heard by my friend with the truth of who I am in Christ. I can ask God's forgiveness for my anger and I can dwell on past experiences of God's love and provision for me to help me believe the truth. I could also make a phone call to process my emotions. This is how I can take the harder choice of the Double Bind, get off the FASTER Scale, and get back to experiencing Restoration and the abundant life Jesus came to bring.


## Weekly Accountability Instructions

We confess sin to one another for counsel, growth, accountability, and because we are commanded to in James 5:16. We do not confess sin to others for forgiveness because Christ alone can forgive us when we confess to him as 1 John 1:9 says. When confessing, affirm one another, encourage one another with the truth of the gospel, and thank each other for sharing. Help one another implement growth steps to prevent the same slip up from happening again. Please use the below questions during your conversation. Prior to the meeting, fill out a FASTER Scale Exercise to assess how you have been doing emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

1. Have you lied to anyone either directly or indirectly this past week? If so, what may you have been fearing?
2. What did you learn about yourself from the FASTER Scale Exercise this week? (Note that Relapse on the FASTER Scale varies from person to person. It could be sexual sin, drinking alcohol excessively, bingeing on Netflix or video games, over eating etc. It's important to determine what a relapse is for you based on the ways you may escape and cope with pain or stress in life. Online version [fasterscaleapp.com](http://fasterscaleapp.com))
3. Have you given in to sexual sin (whether physical actions or thoughts) this past week, or relapsed in another way? When? What are the details?
4. What were the actions/interactions/reactions that led to this? (people/places/things involved)
5. What was the Double Bind you were dealing with? How could you have practically taken the harder choice in the power of the Holy Spirit?
6. What do you need to implement to prevent this from happening again and how can I help? (IE. call me when triggered or tempted, process stress, get accountability software for phone/computer, give computer to a friend, set boundaries.)
7. What challenge will you be facing (a task, situation, or area of sin) this coming week? How can you set yourself up well to deal with this challenge? How can I encourage you, follow up with you, and hold you accountable with facing this challenge?

Take a few minutes to pray for one another. Remind each other of the gospel, Jesus' forgiveness, and His radical love.

# F.A.S.T.E.R. RELAPSE AWARENESS SCALE



## ADAPTED FROM THE GENESIS PROCESS BY MICHAEL DYE

### RESTORATION (ACCEPTING LIFE ON GOD'S TERMS, WITH TRUST, VULNERABILITY, AND GRATITUDE.)

- No current secrets
- Working to resolve problems, identifying fears and feelings
- Keeping commitments to meetings, prayer, family, church, people, goals, and self
- Being open and honest, making eye contact
- Reaching out to others
- Increasing in relationships with God and others
- True accountability

### FORGETTING PRIORITIES (START BELIEVING THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND START MOVING AWAY FROM TRUSTING GOD. DENIAL, FLIGHT, A CHANGE IN WHAT'S IMPORTANT, HOW YOU SPEND YOUR TIME AND WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT.)

- Secrets
- Less time/energy for God, meetings, church
- Avoiding support and accountability people
- Superficial conversations
- Sarcasm
- Isolating
- Changes in goals
- Obsessed with relationships
- Breaking promises and commitments
- Neglecting family
- Preoccupation with material things: TV, computers, other entertainment
- Procrastination
- Lying
- Over-confidence
- Bored
- Hiding money

**Forgetting Priorities** will lead to:

### ANXIETY (A GROWING BACKGROUND NOISE OF UNDEFINED FEAR; GETTING ENERGY FROM EMOTIONS.)

- Worry, using profanity, being fearful
- Being resentful
- Replaying old negative thoughts
- Perfectionism
- Judging other's motives
- Making unrealistic goals and to-do lists
- Mind-reading
- Fantasy, co-dependent rescuing
- Sleep problems, trouble concentrating, seeking drama
- Gossip
- Using OTC medication for pain, sleep, or weight control
- Flirting

**Anxiety** then leads to:

### SPEEDING UP (TRYING TO OUTFRAN THE ANXIETY, WHICH IS USUALLY THE FIRST SIGN OF DEPRESSION.)

- Super busy and always in a hurry (finding good reason to justify the busyness), workaholic, can't relax
- Avoiding slowing down
- Feeling driven
- Can't turn off thoughts
- Skipping meals
- Binge eating (usually at night)
- Overspending
- Can't identify own feelings/needs
- Repetitive negative thoughts
- Irritable
- Dramatic mood swings
- Too much caffeine
- Over-exercising
- Nervousness
- Difficulty being alone &/or with people
- Difficulty listening to others
- Making excuses for having to "do it all".



**Speeding Up** then leads to:

**TICKED OFF (GETTING ADRENALINE HIGH FROM ANGER AND AGGRESSION.)**

- Procrastination causing crisis in money, work, relationships
- Increasing sarcasm
- Black and white (all or nothing) thinking
- Feeling alone
- Nobody understands
- Overreacting, road rage
- Constant resentments
- Pushing others away
- Increasing isolation
- Blaming
- Arguing
- Irrational thinking
- Can't take criticism
- Defensive
- People avoiding you
- Needing to be right
- Digestive problems
- Headaches
- Obsessive (stuck) thoughts
- Can't forgive
- Feeling superior
- Using intimidation

**Ticked Off** then leads to:

**EXHAUSTED (LOSS OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ENERGY; COMING OFF THE ADRENALINE HIGH, ONSET OF DEPRESSION.)**

- Depressed
- Panicked
- Confused
- Hopelessness
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Can't cope
- Overwhelmed
- Crying for "no reason"
- Can't think
- Forgetful
- Pessimistic
- Helpless
- Tired
- Numb
- Wanting to run
- Constant cravings for old coping behaviors
- Thinking of using sex, drugs, or alcohol
- Seeking old unhealthy people & places
- Really isolating
- People angry with you
- Self abuse
- Suicidal thoughts
- Spontaneous crying
- No goals
- Survival mode
- Not returning phone calls
- Missing work
- Irritability
- No appetite

**Exhausted** then leads to:

**RELAPSE (RETURNING TO THE PLACE YOU SWORE YOU WOULD NEVER GO AGAIN.)**

- Giving up and giving in
- Out of control
- Lost in your addiction
- Lying to yourself and others
- Feeling you just can't manage without your coping behaviors, at least for now
- Result is reinforcement of shame, guilt, and condemnation, and feelings of abandonment and being alone.

# FASTER SCALE EXERCISE

1. Underline all the behaviors on the FASTER Scale that you identify with.
2. Circle the most powerful one in each section. Write it in the corresponding heading below.
3. Answer these three questions:
  - A. How does it affect me? How do I act and feel?
  - B. How does it affect the important people in my life?
  - C. Why do I do this? What is the benefit for me?

**RESTORATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_

**FORGETTING PRIORITIES:** \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_

**ANXIETY:** \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_

**SPEEDING UP:** \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_

**TICKED OFF:** \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_

**EXHAUSTED:** \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_

**RELAPSE:** \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_