



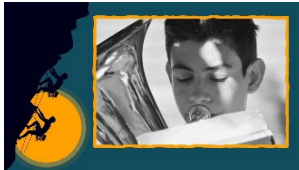
Push Me to Be Better

Accountability #1 • August 16, 2026

Opening

The conductor walks to the music stand and raises his baton [demonstrate with pen]. Every instrument is moved into ready position, musicians poised to play. With a sweeping gesture, the conductor calls the brass and woodwinds to life. They put forth a mighty sound, punctuated by the rhythms of snare and bass drum.

*Baaa Baaa Baaaammmmm [To the tune of “Hot Cross Buns”]
Baaa Baaa Baaaammmmm
Ba-Ba-Ba-Ba Ba-Ba-Ba-Ba
Baaa Baaa Baaaammmmm*

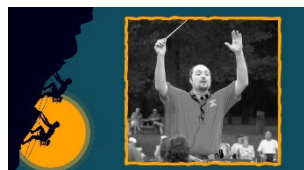


Yes, the 5th grade band, playing their first song ever in concert after learning a few simple notes, after learning how to count musical patterns, and after learning to follow the band director, stands and takes a bow.

And our own Charles Van Middlesworth (aka “Mr Van” – director of bands at all our Tonganoxie schools) steps off to the side... and gestures with enthusiasm! “*Look at those guys! Wasn’t that awesome! “Hot Cross Buns” is one of my favorite songs!*”

Meanwhile, everyone in the audience is wiping the grimaces off their faces and trying to change back to smiles. And they clap...but it’s not *polite* applause. Many of them are genuinely proud of their little clarinet or saxophone players! They go home and say with honesty, “*I enjoyed your concert.*”

How? How can they say those words with a straight face?



Mr. Van knows good music. Charles has played at a high level with other top-notch musicians at the Lawrence City Band. He has earned degrees in music and has been exposed to the best performances you could imagine. There is *no way* that “Hot Cross Buns,” played with so many (SO MANY!) wrong notes was pleasing to his ears.

Yet, I don't think Mr. Van is a liar. I don't think the parents are faking. I think their joy and enthusiasm is sincere. It is not the joy of hearing musical perfection; it is the joy of hearing *progress*. These students started out knowing nothing. And now they can play a simple song, together. That is exciting progress! That is worth celebrating!



But... if Mr. Van – or you, or I – went to the Kansas City Symphony and the musicians played “Hot Cross Buns” with such poor skill? I don't think he'd be cheering. In fact, he'd be asking for a refund. None of us would have joy – we'd express frustration and anger.

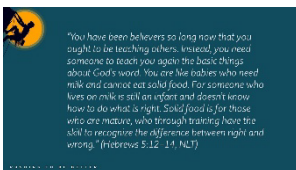
Why? Because we expect more from those who have matured. We want to see growth and progress and results.

Every single career or hobby or activity has an expectation of growth! We might celebrate that first weld, that first drawing, that first quilt, that first lemon merengue pie, that first oil change. But then we expect you to do more – to grow in skill, in competency, in excellence.



Here's a true statement: that growth doesn't happen on its own. **You and I need others to push us to be better!** A coach, a mentor, an example, an author, a friend, a parent, a Mr. Van... you and I need people who will not settle for mediocrity, who will push and teach and motivate and encourage us to move to excellence and maturity.

The same is true of our faith in Jesus Christ. You and I should be growing! The words of Hebrews 5 apply to us.



“You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God’s word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn’t know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.”
(Hebrews 5:12–14, NLT)

If we are currently growing in knowledge and godly living, that's awesome! But if we want to continue growing and not settle for milk (or “Hot Cross Buns”), we will need **others to push us** to be better. And we need to **push others** who want to grow, too.

Series Intro



Today, we begin a short series on the topic of **accountability**. For the rest of August we will lean into this area and consider what it looks like for the church to push each other to grow.

This topic has been on my mind for a couple of months, not tied to any specific situation, but as a part of developing the church culture we need to have. I don't want us to settle for mediocracy. Do you? Our Lord deserves the best from us. If we want to honor Him, we can't sit back and be content with where we're at.

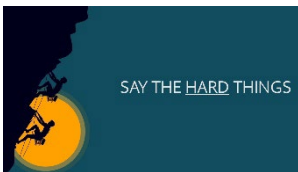
It's a relevant topic, and we all could use growth in this area!

So, for the next three weeks, we'll talk about accountability and what it means to admonish one another in a godly way. To help us gain maturity, we'll put into practice what the Bible says about:

- **Pushing Each Other to Be Better** (Today, Aug 16)
- **The Process of Correction – Matthew 18** (Next Week, Aug 23)
- **Being Correctable** (Final Week, Aug 30)

Have your Bible ready as we jump around from place to place today, and keep your heart open and receptive to being challenged.

"Push me to be better" is where we'll start.

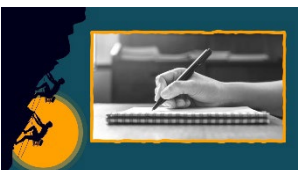


Say the Hard Things

Can I start with a story of correction and accountability of my own?

It was the fall of my freshman year in high school. I was in English class with Mrs. Ryan, and I just received the grade on my first paper of the year. I don't remember what it was about; I don't remember what I should have learned. All I remember is a single letter on the top of the page in red ink as it was passed back to me. It was... a "B."

For those who don't know me, you might not think much of that grade. It's a solid start to the year, right? But for me, that B was more than unpleasant. In fact, I was mad. (I've matured since then, but fifteen-year-old Steve had some issues) *"I got a B?!?!"*



That's not right. I know my paper was better Jason's, and he got an A." I fumed, I fussed, and I finally approached the teacher after class. "Mrs. Ryan, why did I get a B?"

She looked at me and said, "Because I know you can write better than that." In short, my grade wasn't based on meeting a minimum standard – it was based on her evaluation of my potential. Oh, man. That did NOT go over well with me! I was angry. It was unfair! It was outrageous! It was infuriating!

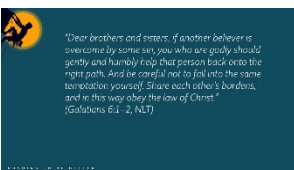
*But you know what? As the year went on, I worked hard in that class. I *did* get an A, even though it took more effort than I thought it should. More effort made me a more effective writer. The accountability Mrs. Ryan provided pushed me to be better.*

Mrs. Ryan is one personal example of accountability in my life. You probably have your own. Someone, somewhere, pushed you to be better.

- A better mom
- A better dad
- A better employee
- A better speaker
- A better driver

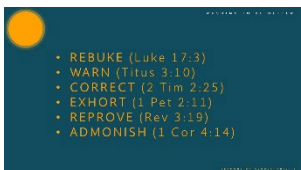
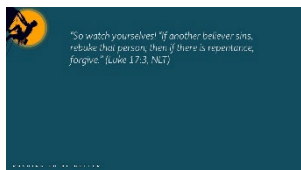
Hopefully, someone also has pushed you to be a better Christian. If no one said anything, you would still be playing "Hot Cross Buns" with your faith!

We need **other** people who have a **willingness to say the hard things**, especially when it comes to sin. And we need to **be** people who have the **willingness to say the hard things**!



"Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1–2, NLT)

It is our task as believers in Christ to confront others. Scripture tells us repeatedly that this is a duty that followers of Jesus must perform. Jesus himself tells us.

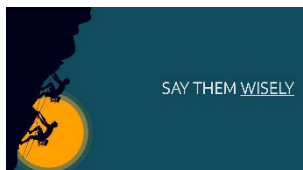


*“So watch yourselves! “If another believer sins, **rebuke** that person; then if there is repentance, forgive.” (Luke 17:3, NLT)*

The Bible incorporates many different verbs to discuss such a push for improvement. Jesus used the word “**rebuke**,” meaning to tell someone that their way is wrong. But other places say to...

- “**Warn**” – tell someone there is danger
*“If people are causing divisions among you, give a first and second **warning**. After that, have nothing more to do with them.” (Titus 3:10, NLT)*
- “**Correct**” – tell someone there is a better way
*“Gently **instruct [correct]** those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will learn the truth.” (2 Timothy 2:25, NLT)*
- “**Exhort**” – strongly tell someone to move toward right action
*“Dearly beloved, I **beseech [exhort]** you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;” (1 Peter 2:11, **KJV** 1900)*
- “**Reprove**” – tell someone off; reprimand their bad actions
*“Those whom I love, I **reprove** and discipline, so be zealous and repent.” (Revelation 3:19, ESV)*
- “**Admonish**” – tell them lovingly to change
*“I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to **admonish** you as my beloved children.” (1 Corinthians 4:14, ESV)*

All of those terms can be lumped under the word “accountability.” We are holding one another accountable for our actions or inactions, for our progress or lack thereof. Conflict and accountability is necessary to push others to be better!



Say Them Wisely

As one person said, though, “*Conflict rarely feels holy in the moment. It is more often uncomfortable, awkward, and exposing.*”¹

¹ Raymond Chang, Executive for Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives of the TENx10 Collaboration (part of Fuller Theological Seminary) and President of the Asian American Christian Collaborative.



Just this week, Deb and I had a small “uncomfortable, awkward, and exposing” moment. It happened at Panda Express, when my fork reached for some unfinished orange chicken. Deb gave me “a look.”

(Married couples – you understand how much is said in a look. You can skip all the preamble and that single glance brings in all the backstory from past fights. You are ready to go, just with one look!).

The look was tied to my longstanding need to lose a few pounds. I do. I know I do. Yet, there is a resistance to change. I eat like a man this size; I struggle to know how to eat to become a man who is slimmer. And I *really* struggle when those ways of eating clash. Deb’s look said, “Do you really want to eat that?” and I struggled. I was grump... and gave my own “look” (which for the sake of righteousness now I will not explain aloud).

Later, she raised a good question: Was there any way to tell me “eat less” that wouldn’t prompt “a look”?

Deb’s question raises one of the hard parts of pushing others to be better – how do you say it in a way that works?

To that question, I would answer, “You can’t.” I mean to say, your attempts at accountability depend wholly on the other person’s willingness to listen! It is your job to warn; it is their job to change.

However, some words are better than others if you want to push me to be better. Different situations take different tactics. So, I would encourage you to:



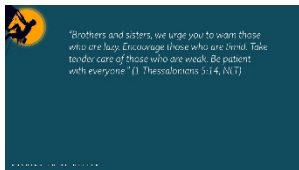
- **Know the person.** If possible, don’t rebuke without personal relationship, without having some knowledge whether they respond better to direct challenge or gentle correction.
- **Know the situation.** If possible, find out more before you speak. Don’t rebuke before you know the full story (see Proverbs 18:17. *“The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.”*)
- **Pray! Pray! Pray!** Don’t approach the situation without relying on God first and foremost. Pray for words and for wisdom.

Scripture is full of examples we can use, where a challenge was offered. The variety of presentations is something we should consider.



- The prophet Nathan (*via a creative story*) pushed David to be better than an adulterous murderer (**2 Samuel 12**)
- Abel (*via an obvious example*) pushed Cain to be better in how he offered honor to God (**Genesis 4**)
- Gehazi (*via a direct question*) pushed Namaan to be better in obedience, to follow a prophet's direction and be healed (**2 Kings 5**)
- Jethro (*via insightful advice*) pushed Moses to be better as a leader for the nation (**Exodus 18**)
- Paul (*via a confrontational challenge*) pushed Peter to be better than a hypocrite (**Galatians 2**) when it came to sharing meals with people from different backgrounds

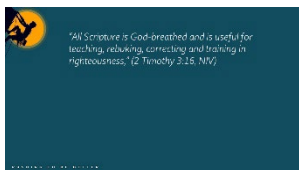
Different methods at different times with different people. What works well for one person may not work as well for the next.



“Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14, NLT)

But the **foundation of every bit of accountability we offer must be Scripture**. Not our own opinions, but God's truth. Say your words wisely!

2 Timothy 3:16 is an oft-repeated passage that talks about the importance of Scripture, and it points out the various ways we can use Scripture to push others to be better.



“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV)

Sometimes the push comes in the form of **teaching**. If instruction is never given, how can someone know what is expected? Scripture fills in

the knowledge gap, helping us know and identify sin. (e.g. “*Do not steal,*” *Exodus 20:15*)

Sometimes the push comes in the form of **rebuke**. If people don’t know how harmful sin is, they won’t think it is important to stop. (“*...What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God,*” *Acts 5:4*). Scriptural wisdom might provide insight into the pain and suffering and damage that our sin causes. And hopefully it helps us stop bad behavior and bad habits before it causes bad results.

Sometimes the push comes in the form of **correction**. The person might know that sin is sin, but struggle with understanding what right behavior looks like instead (e.g. “Do This, Not That”). Scripture can take a similar path. It not only calls out bad behavior, but it points out the real goal instead. (“*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...[immorality, impurity, etc]...Put on then, as God’s chose ones, holy and beloved...[kindness, patience, forgiveness]*” *Colossians 3:5ff*)

Sometimes the push comes in the form of **training**. They know the right behavior, but struggle to implement it. They need guidance and insight for the details. Pull up the whole counsel of Scripture on a topic, and practical training is there.

Which approach do you use? That takes wisdom.



Say Them When You Should

But it also takes courage. Holding others accountable is scary. That’s why we don’t always do it.

As I talk about accountability, probably your biggest fear is that you are not the right person to say those words.

“It’s not my place,” you might think.

And I agree that sometimes it is not your place. Maybe you shouldn’t cut in front of a parent to rebuke their child; maybe you shouldn’t interrupt your boss to correct a co-worker.

But if we’re honest, most of the time, “It’s not my place” is really, “I feel inadequate.” We make mistakes, too. We know our own imperfections,



so we hesitate to point out the splinter in someone else's eye while we have a log sticking out of ours.²

But humble correction is different than arrogant, hypocritical correction.



You could be playing “Hot Cross Buns” as a 5th grader and hear a terribly wrong note from your fellow trombone player. You *know* what the song is supposed to sound like. So it's fine for you to say, “I noticed something isn't right.”

Arrogant correction says, “You should do it like me, because I'm the best.”

Mean correction says, “You're terrible. Maybe you shouldn't be in band.”

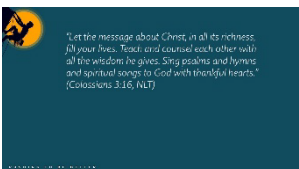
Hypocritical correction says, “That was wrong,” while you play a wrong note yourself.

But humble, godly correction says, “Let's ask Mr. Van how to play the right note.” Or, “I think that D is 4th position, not 5th.”

See the difference? One approach wants glory or power or satisfaction; the other approach just wants it to be right.



In the church, we need to work together on being better...because God deserves our best! And if you are in a position to notice something in the life of a brother or sister, you ARE in a position to provide accountability. Say those hard things when you should. Not because of *you*, but because of Christ.



“Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.” (Colossians 3:16, NLT)

Accountability has a place in your relationships and in your church.

Are you willing to speak up?

² Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 6:41-42



Closing

Don't be satisfied with "Hot Cross Buns."

Say the hard things.

Say those hard things – the warnings, the rebukes, the corrections, the admonishments – with wisdom.

Say them when you should.

Do it for your friends. Do it for your church. Do it for me.

Do it for the love of Jesus.

Push me to be better!

Prayer

Invitation

Sermon Notes

Say the Hard Things

(Hebrews 5:12-14; Galatians 6:1-2; Luke 17:3; Titus 3:10; 2 Timothy 2:25; 1 Peter 2:11; Revelation 3:19; 1 Corinthians 4:14)

Say Them Wisely

(Proverbs 18:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 3:16; Exodus 20:15; Acts 5:4; Colossians 3:5ff)

Say Them When You Should

(Colossians 3:16)

Sermon Discussion Questions

- Who has pushed you to be better? In what area? How did they do it? Why do you appreciate that person pushing you?
- Do you think most Christians want to be pushed to be better? Why or why not?
- Read Galatians 6:1-2. What is the goal of holding others accountable?
- Read Luke 17:3. What does Jesus say to do? Which is easier – the rebuke, the repentance, or the forgiveness?
- Look up the following words used in Scripture to describe accountability: warn, correct, exhort, reprove, rebuke, admonish. Can you give an example of each?
- How do you typically approach the task of admonishing someone you love? Are you direct, subtle, calm, agitated...? How could you improve?
- What role does Scripture have in the accountability process? Read 2 Timothy 3:16.
- Why is it your responsibility to hold other Christians accountable for their behavior and witness?
- In what ways would the church be different if we improved our level of accountability with one another?