

Maranatha Bible Church 2020
Equipping Hour: Proactive Discipleship
Week 5: Discipleship and Accountability

Schedule of Classes:

Theological:

Week 1: What is proactive discipleship?

Week 2: Why should we disciple?

Week 3: What are some common excuses and barriers to discipleship?

Practical:

Week 4: Discipling the hurting.

Week 5: Discipleship and Accountability

Week 6: Dangers and Joys of discipleship

Introduction

One of the most common forms of *discipleship* is under the banner of accountability or having an accountability partner or some kind of accountability group. This term *accountability partner* is relatively new and has only gained real usage since the early 1990's. It actually finds its origins from the 1960's with the widespread weight loss programs coming into mainstream society. Therefore, the idea of an *accountability partner* or *accountability groups* does not find its roots in Scripture. This does not mean that it is a bad thing, but we want to be able to rightly frame it how the Bible defines it and then God will bless it.

Before diving into this topic, I want to take a moment and define some of the commonly used terms. Accountability partner, in most cases, is someone who meets with you on a regular basis to make sure that you are going in the direction that you should be going. Additionally, it usually has to do with a specific sin, such as pornography, drinking alcohol, swearing, or watching some immoral shows. Generally speaking, there are probing questions which are asked, confession of sin and prayer for the person to get / stay on the right path.

Some churches have accountability groups. Painting with a broad brush, the majority of accountability groups have very little Biblical or Christian focus. They are places that people, who all struggle with the same or very similar sins, meet up to confess their issues. Most of the time, people lie (as not to look bad in front of others) or use it as a time for showing how great you have been.

Do they work? For some people, and perhaps it is just a behavior change, not an actual heart change. There is not likely true repentance, but just a drive to get over the problem.

Our Christian life should be filled with accountability from a variety of sources. While not all accountability is discipleship, all discipleship *is* accountability. Strictly speaking, if you are just looking for someone to keep you from a certain sin, you are not necessarily looking to grow in your walk with the Lord. Conversely, if you are looking to grow in Christlikeness, you are definitely looking to mortify the sin in your life and grow in holiness. By default, you will overcome the sin which besets you.

If we can define it like this, accountability has a focus on sin while discipleship has a focus on sanctification. One desires to behave correctly while the other to behave like Christ.

Accountability and Discipleship in the Church:

- 1) In the church, there are four main ways we are held accountable to live a life which is pleasing to God. Firstly, the preaching of the Word...secondly, our membership to the church...thirdly, our fellowship / one-another ministry in the church...fourthly, our own personal Bible reading time.
- 2) **Preaching of the Word**
 - a) It is fully our responsibility to sit under good preaching of the Word. The first mark of a healthy church is one that teaches the Bible expositionally¹.
 - i) If you expect to be healthy in your walk with the Lord, it is essential that you are constantly sitting under the proper teaching of the Word.
 - ii) **2 Timothy 4:3-4 “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”**
 - (1) As bad as false teachers are, they would not exist if people did not want to hear them. It falls on us to make sure that we are sitting under proper preaching and handling of the Word.
 - b) By sitting under the proper preaching/teaching of the Word, the Holy Spirit is going to use what is taught to convict us and lead us into a life of repentance and holiness.
 - c) It shows that your desire is not for man’s opinions or agendas, but for God’s.
 - i) **Psalm 12:6 “The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.”**
 - ii) **Psalm 119:160 “The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.**
 - iii) **John 17:17 “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”**

¹ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, p. 42

(1) God's Word is pure and true. We should desire this above anything else so that we can be accountable and living according to God's righteous standards.

- d) When you listen to a sermon, you should not just be recording an historical event that is taking place. Your note taking should include how the teacher is putting verses/phrases together, how he is interpreting and applying them and what cross references are being noted.
- e) This will insure that the sermon is not something that simply took place, but something that you are taking to heart and applying to your own life.
- f) At the end of each sermon, you should be able to summarize the teaching in a sentence or two.
- g) Actively listening and applying a sermon is a skill that needs to be perfected over time. It takes practice but is well worth the work.

3) **Our Membership to a Local Church**

- a) Church membership is one more part in helping one be accountable. The public practice of church discipline, while certainly uncomfortable and dreadful, is necessary for the purity of the church and the salvation of its members.
 - i) **Hebrews 10:24-25** “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”
 - ii) The idea of church discipline is enough to keep some from grievous sins.
 - iii) We need to be assembled in order to encourage one another on a regular basis.
- b) “Membership in a local church involves commitment to worship the Lord corporately, edifying brothers and sisters through mutual exhortation and service, cooperating in mission, and holding each other accountable to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord as a witness to the truth of Christ in the world.”²
- c) The NT teachings on both church discipline and church government would have little to no meaning if we did not have church membership. There would be no need for believers to commit to mutual accountability among one another.

4) **Our Fellowship / One Another Ministry**

- a) As we interact with one another we are to help each other along.
 - i) **Romans 15:14** “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and **able also to admonish one another.**”
 - ii) **Colossians 3:16** “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom **teaching and admonishing one another** with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-meaning-of-membership-and-church-accountability> 03/17/2021

iii) 1 Thessalonians 5:14 “We urge you, brethren, **admonish** the unruly, **encourage** the fainthearted, **help** the weak, **be patient** with everyone.”

iv) We have looked at these verses before, but it is a good reminder that we have a responsibility to one another. Part of our accountability comes from others who love and care about us. We should desire to not only have others come to us, but be able to lovingly go others as well.

b) We are exhorted in Galatians 6:1-2 “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, **restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness**; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

i) When we see our brothers and sisters in sin, we have a responsibility to go to them. Remember, as I said above, be ready for others to come to you when you are in sin too. None of us stand without sin and we all have blind spots in our life.

5) Our Own Personal Bible Reading Time

a) I cannot stress this enough, you can fake everyone else around you, but you cannot lie to God.

b) Romans 14:12 “So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.”

i) Knowing that you, alone, are going to have to stand before God and give an account for your life should motivate you to live a life of holiness.

c) Hebrews 4:12-13 “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

i) The Word of God cuts to our hearts, where others cannot see, and lays us bare before God almighty. We can hide nothing before Him.

d) 2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

i) This should be the greatest accountability a believer has, they are going to stand before God one day and give an account about their whole life as a Christian.

6) There are many things which may keep a man on the straight and narrow path, a desire to please his spouse, keep the family together, not go to jail, etc. But the cold hard truth is that God Himself demands an account of our life, knowing everything that we have done.

Dangers to Personal Accountability Relationships:

- 1) Before we look at some ideas of accountability within discipling, there are three main issues which have risen from the desire of accountability partners and wrongly applying accountability.
- 2) Shepherding Movement
 - a) In the 1970's / 80's there emerged a movement called *The Shepherding Movement / Discipleship Movement*. It was founded by the budding Charismatic Church in a response to a "weak commitment, shallow community, and the general worldliness characteristic of many American churches."³
 - b) This movement sought to employ all the one-another's in Scripture using 2 Timothy 2:2 "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."
 - c) This movement had several red flags which brought its demise:
 - i) It was not under the authority of a local church.
 - (1) Because the founding five members thought the church had become corrupt, they started a type of house church movement (this included pastors, elders, etc.) to employ a hierarchy scheme.
 - ii) It took all the individuals decision making power and placed it in those over them.
 - (1) The people in the movement, if they were sheep, they could not make decisions (like go to the movies, marry someone, etc.) without first asking their house pastor/elder.
 - iii) They focused on submission to the shepherd, not unto God.
 - (1) Students in college would pay tithes to their college shepherd for his leading.
 - (2) Whatever the group leader said, they would do... anything. This was passed down through the ranks. The founding five to their subordinates and on down the line.
 - d) These five men saw a legitimate problem within the church. They saw that the church as a whole was being influenced by the world and consequently the church members were living worldly life's.
 - e) Unfortunately, they thought that more law was needed in order to bring people into submission to the Word of God. They had left the Spirit and leaned on their own power.
 - 3) Accountability partners are usually not discipleship partners.
 - a) It is a time to confess what you have done, not necessarily repent of it.
 - i) Usually with accountability partners, there is little in the way of repentance but simply a system which is set up in order to keep a person from sin.
 - ii) These systems may be good deterrents, but if the heart is not right, there is nothing that will keep a person who desires to sin.

³ Jonathan Leeman, "Don't Be a 9Marxist," 9Marks Journal, 2016, 88.

- b) There is a time for confession, but if you are just sitting around talking about sin, there might not be too much good which comes from it.
 - i) In group settings, there is also a tendency to simply tell the group your “sin” and then move on to the next person. The individual in charge may give some encouragement *we all fall in areas or just try and do better next time.*
 - (1) There is no real care for the person, just a hope that behavior will change.

4) Lack of accountability due to a desire to go it alone.

- a) Ultimately, what I have experienced with people who have come from accountability groups/partners, they realize something was off and they desire to go it alone.
- b) We know that there are not solo-Christians and that we need one another. We are part of the body of Christ and fit together with one another.

Proper Way to View Accountability:

- 1) While the idea of having an exclusive accountability partner may not be found in the Bible, there are benefits to having accountability built into the natural discipleship relationship.
 - a) As previously stated, discipleship may or may not include someone’s sin. Someone may simply desire to grow in the Word or in some specific area of their life. But, there may be people who come to you in search of help with sin or sin may come to the surface as you are discipling someone.
- 2) How can you disciple a person who is struggling with sin, keeping them accountable?
 - a) **Encourage them to pray that the Lord examine them and that they examine themselves.**
 - i) Psalm 26:2 “Examine me, O LORD, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.”
 - ii) 2 Corinthians 13:5 “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?”
 - (1) These are times that you encourage someone to go home and pray about what they are stuck in.
 - (2) Do not just leave them there, give them some Biblical references to meditate on and pray about.

Remember, it is not about you changing their behavior but the Holy Spirit changing their heart.
 - b) **Confess Their Sins**
 - i) Psalm 38:18 “For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin.”
 - ii) James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”
 - iii) 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
 - iv) We should be ready to tell people they need to confess their sins to one another and also to God. Ultimately, if they are unable to confess their sin to another person, they need to know they have sinned against God. They need to make that relationship right before anything else.

c) **Seek Out Discipleship**

- i) If someone comes looking for a generic accountability relationship, explain to them what discipleship is. They may have a poor understanding of discipleship and really be asking for something like that instead.
- ii) If you know someone who needs discipleship and you are not able to do it, here are some principles that you can lay out for them.
 - (1) Make a list of potential people they would like to disciple them.
 - (a) Look for someone whose character you would like to emulate. Think about if they are following Christ and Biblical principles.
 - (b) Do not be focused on the worldly metrics for success but how they view Christ.
 - (2) Be proactive in asking someone.
 - (a) Most people are not going to notice someone who wants to be discipled.
 - (b) Go to groups where they are teaching or serving. Serve alongside them, reach out to them with your desire to be taught.
 - (3) Patiently wait for a relationship to come to fruition.
 - (a) It may take time for something to come up, but be in pray for them and you.

Accountability is important, but should not be the basis for a relationship in the church. The goal, as stated, is sanctification. We should desire to become more like Christ and as an added benefit we are going to be more sensitive to sin and desiring more to be holy.