

CHARACTER MATTERS

Week Ten | March 10, 2019 | Accountability: Revealing the Gospel with Our Relationships

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's texts. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

You can't do life alone.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Christian community is vital to growing in your relationship with God and to fighting against sin in your life.

MEDITATE

"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

The church is most basically and simply defined as the people of God. By definition, the church requires the gathering together of more people than just yourself. "People" is plural, not singular. The word for church in the original Greek literally means "assembly." To have church requires the assembling of believers together to do

the very same things the early church devoted themselves to—the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42). You can’t be the church by yourself. You can’t do church without other people. From the very beginning, the Christian faith was intended to be a communal faith. God wasn’t intending to just redeem individual people for Himself, but He sought to redeem a people for His own possession (1 Peter 2:9).

The gathering together of believers is important for lots of reasons, but three in particular make Christian community vitally important to your individual faith. First, the church’s greatest apologetic to the watching world is displayed by its love for one another (John 13:35). If you want to live a life that points other people to Jesus and makes the gospel visible in both word and deed, then simply loving other Christians and inviting them into your life will be an incredible witness.

Second, the church is made up of people of all races, ages, life stages, nationalities, and ethnicities. The power of gathering with other people who have a common faith and belief in Jesus despite all of their cultural and preferential differences is another powerful witness.

Third, Christian community holds you accountable. It holds you accountable for what you believe and the doctrines you live by. It holds you accountable to practice spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, serving others, and evangelism. Community holds you accountable to hearing the Word of God preached and taught and to meeting with other believers regularly and intentionally. It holds you accountable to being sharpened and to sharpening others—to encourage and be encouraged, to help and be helped, and to comfort and be comforted.

Q: *What about being around other believers is of most benefit to you? What is most enjoyable and most profitable for your faith?*

Q: *What are the positive benefits of accountability? What is hard about accountability?*

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Throughout Scripture God makes it clear that He is making and saving a people for Himself. Whether it was the Israelites, the people of God as God’s chosen nation under the old covenant or the church as the people of God under the new covenant, God never intended the Christian faith to be an individual experience. We need other people to help us grow as disciples of Jesus and other people rely on and need us to help them to grow as disciples of Jesus.

1. ACCOUNTABILITY ALLOWS YOU TO SHARPEN OTHERS
2. ACCOUNTABILITY ALLOWS YOU TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS
3. ACCOUNTABILITY ALLOWS YOU TO HELP OTHERS
4. ACCOUNTABILITY ALLOWS YOU TO COMFORT OTHERS

GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.

ACCOUNTABILITY ALLOWS YOU TO SHARPEN OTHERS

❏ PROVERBS 27:17

Q: *Which individual person has had the greatest impact on your faith journey and your spiritual growth as a follower and disciple of Jesus?*

Q: *What are your biggest barriers or excuses for not engaging with other believers for the purpose of spiritual edification?*

Sanctification is the process of growing as a Christian and being made more holy and Christlike. It is a slow, gradual, never ending process. You never graduate from sanctification. You never master it. You never finish being sanctified in this life. The Christian life is one of continual growth and constant learning.

Since we never fully arrive in this life, we must continue to put ourselves in positions to be sharpened and challenged to grow in our sanctification. Christians come in all shapes, sizes, and maturity levels. There will always be believers further ahead of you who are able to help you grow. At the same time, there will always be believers who aren't as far along as you, and you are held accountable to help them grow.

The Christian life is referred to throughout Scripture as a walk. Paul warns the church in Ephesians to “be

careful how you walk” (Ephesians 5:15). As we walk, as we go through the Christian life, we are always to be looking for people to help pull us along and for people we can help pull along.

Proverbs give us a powerful, yet simple reminder that people are the mission. It is one man that sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17). It is not one book that sharpens another man. It is not one conference or seminar or lecture that sharpens another man. All of those things are good and beneficial in helping people grow in their spiritual journeys, but if the Christian faith is ultimately a collective thing, then we need other people. True spiritual growth happens person-to-person. It happens through the accountability of relationships and the community of the church.

❓: *How are you tempted to believe that you are growing in your faith apart from relationships with other believers?*

❓: *Who are you currently sharpening in their faith? Who is currently sharpening you in your faith?*

ACCOUNTABILITY ALLOWS YOU TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS

▣ HEBREWS 10:24-25

❓: *According to Hebrews 10:24-25, what are we to not neglect? Why is this so important, based on what we've already seen and on the world we live in today?*

❓: *Why is encouragement so necessary as “the Day” draws near? What day is the writer talking about? How can you testify to that necessity in your own life?*

There are fifty-nine “one another” commands in the New Testament. These are fifty-nine separate instances where believers are called to do something to or for other believers. Perhaps there is no greater argument for the biblical necessity and value of the gathering of the church than these fifty-nine commands in which one person is charged to do something for someone else. We cannot do that by living an individualized and private

faith. We can only fulfill these commands by being with other Christians.

In providing accountability for other believers, the church creates commitment. By covenanting to walk together, we are committing to uphold and participate in doing these fifty-nine “one-another” commands. Loving one another, serving one another, forgiving, teaching, bearing with, and encouraging one another can only be done through life-on-life relationships where there is mutual commitment and mutual accountability.

The number one thing encouragement does is provide hope and joy in the midst of despair and pain. The writer of Hebrews says encouragement allows others to not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). Life in our fallen world is filled with constant temptation, and having faith in the gospel in the minute-by-minute affairs of life is hard. We need the encouragement of others. We need to be reminded of the good news that Jesus has saved us! We need to be encouraged to take heart and trust that God’s promises never fail and that He is faithful to the end.

Living in community with other believers gives us a front-row seat to the struggles and toils this life has to offer. If we are close enough to other people, we will see them suffer loss. We will see them hurt. We will see them being lonely. We will see them wanting to give up and take their eyes off the prize. As fellow believers, we have the task of reminding them of the hope we have in Christ. We are called to encourage one another to press on and fight the good fight.

Similarly, as a result of living in a fallen world, we will wrestle with hurt and pain and loss. We will want to lose the faith. We will struggle to believe what we say we believe now. We need other people who are committed and accountable to us who will be there to encourage our souls that Jesus is enough, that eternity is real, and that the world is not our home. There is nothing like Christian community to keep us committed and encouraged in our faith. We can’t survive this world on our own.

Q: *What things in your life cause you to lose hope? How are you able to fix your eyes on Jesus and be reminded of the good news of the gospel when those things happen?*

Q: *How do you need specifically to be encouraged right now? What issues, hurts, or struggles are you dealing with that you need others to encourage you?*

ACCOUNTABILITY ALLOWS YOU TO HELP OTHERS

■ ECCLESIASTES 4:9–12

Q: *What things do you need other people's help to accomplish? How are you hard-wired to live in dependence on other people?*

Q: *What ways do you generally help other people most?*

The World Triathlon Series finale doesn't normally get a ton of attention. But in 2016, Jonny Brownlee of Britain was leading in the final race, which would have clinched the season-long title for him. Jonny had won a bronze medal at the 2012 Olympics and a silver medal at the 2016 Olympics. He was an elite athlete and one of the world's best triathletes. His older brother, Alistair, was even better, having won Olympic gold in both 2012 and 2016.

Alistair was just behind Jonny in a heated battle for second place. As they approached the finish line, Jonny stumbled. Suffering from extreme dehydration, Jonny staggered, losing his balance and his sense of direction, unable to continue running toward the finish. Rather than pass him by and continue fighting the other racer he was neck-and-neck with, Alistair stopped and wrapped his arm around his brother, dragging and guiding him for the final kilometer to the finish line. He shoved Jonny over the finish line in second place just before he crossed the line in third.

It was an incredible scene, watching this Olympic champion surrender his chance to win in order to help his brother finish. Alistair not only helped Jonny get across the line, but he did it at great personal cost to himself. Alistair and Jonny modeled what we see throughout Scripture—that we need other people to help us finish the race. We need other people to help us along when we stumble, and we must be willing to surrender our personal goals and accomplishments to help other people along when they are in need.

The New Testament compares the church to a body (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). Just as a human body has many different parts with different responsibilities, all working together to function and accomplish tasks, so the church has multiple individuals who all have different gifts and talents and abilities. But, together they cooperate and function to accomplish the church's mission. The commitment and accountability of the church allow us to use our gifts and serve other people within the church and to each play our role in helping the church make disciples and preach the gospel.

Again, a present and physical church community gives us relationships with individuals around us to help and serve. Individualized Christians have no one to help and no one to serve and no one who can help and serve them in their time of need. We need people in our lives who know us well enough to be able to help and serve us and whom we are able to help and serve. This is what it means to be the church, to be the family of God.

🕒: *What gifts and talents are you currently using to serve and help others in the church? If you can't think of any, where could you start that would give you the opportunity to use your gifts and talents?*

🕒: *How have other people in the church helped and served you? Take a minute to express gratitude for how your church family has helped and served you.*

ACCOUNTABILITY ALLOWS YOU TO COMFORT OTHERS

📖 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7

🕒: *What two things do we share with Christ, according to 2 Corinthians 1:3-7? Explain how we share in those things.*

🕒: *How does viewing suffering and affliction through the lens of your accountability and commitment to church and Christian community change how you view and experience it?*

One result of the accountability and commitment of a church family is that it changes both how we experience the sorrows and joys of life and who we share them with. In the times of sorrow, we have people to cry with us and care for us. In the times of joy, we have people to celebrate and laugh with us. It doesn't mean that life isn't hard when things are bad, but knowing we have other people to care for and comfort us eases the pain and loss some. And when life is good, things are even better because it doesn't just increase our joy and happiness, it also increases the joy and happiness of others.

A deep experience of abiding commitment and accountability with other believers is a lot like what happens when two people get married. When a man and woman get married, everything one person has now becomes the other's as well. Part of our identity and emotional well-being is forever linked and tied to our spouse. Before marriage, no one else was as deeply affected by things in your life as they are now that you are married. Your spouse's troubles are forever tied up in your troubles. Your spouse's joy becomes your joy. It is one way the two of you have become one flesh, as the Bible talks about in Genesis 2:24.

That same reality is what ought to occur in a church community where there is a deep experience of commitment and accountability. Our involvement with and our relationships in the church should affect us to the point that we hurt when other people hurt and suffer loss. When other people experience joy and happiness, we should experience it too. By doing these things, the church isn't merely a collection of individuals sitting in a room together, it is a family that experiences life—and everything that comes with it—together.

Paul tells us that our affliction is a good thing, not discounting that it is painful now, but knowing God will use our affliction now to help someone else walk through the same pain later on. God uses our stories to encourage, comfort, and challenge people who later experience the same things. So, yes, walking through infertility is painful and difficult. But as God redeems all the bad things for our good and His ultimate glory, He can use that pain and difficulty to comfort others who later are in need of the same comfort you have experienced from Christ (2 Corinthians 1:4). It is in comforting others with the comfort we have in Christ that we can most be like the hands and feet of Jesus to our fellow brothers and sister in Christ. God blesses us not just for ourselves, but so that we can be a blessing to others.

The accountability and commitment of the church turns “my life experiences” into “our life experiences.” In the church, everything has a communal identity attached to it. Your life and experiences are now linked to the lives and experiences of your fellow church members. When we understand and practice this truth, we can take our pain and affliction and realize how God works everything for good, because our pain can be used to strengthen and encourage others (Romans 8:28).

Q: *Describe a time in your life when you relied on the comfort of someone who had walked a similar road before you. How did their comfort encourage you in the midst of your struggle and difficulty?*

Q: *What hardships have you experienced that, looking back, you can see now how God has used them to enable you to give comfort and encouragement to someone else?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

🔗: *How committed are you to the church? Is it a place you attend or a people you belong to? What can you do to make church feel less like a place you attend and more like a people you belong to?*

🔗: *Who do you need to let into your life in a deeper way in order to benefit from their experience, wisdom, and encouragement? (Think of a specific person or two.) Who do you need to invite deeper into your life so they can benefit from your experience, wisdom, and encouragement?*

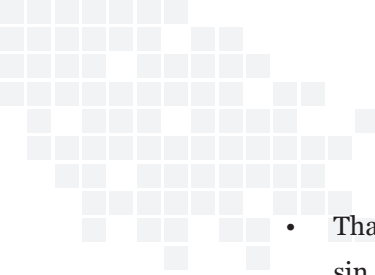

🔗: *Dietrich Bonhoeffer said the person who loves their dream of community will destroy it. What ideals and dreams about community do you need to surrender in order to be fully present in loving and being in community with the people God has placed around you?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

Our most gracious heavenly Father:

- I repent of my belief that I can do life on my own. Help me see and be more aware of how much I need other believers in my life to help me grow and become more like You.
- Thank You for the opportunity to sharpen and edify other believers. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may I always be looking for ways to remind my fellow brothers and sisters of Your good news in the gospel.

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- Thank You for the way other people encourage me in my walk and my fight against sin. Please continue to put people into my life who help me to be pure and holy so that I may honor You.
 - Thank You for giving us the ability to share in the sufferings of Your Son and in Your comfort. It is by Your Son's death on the cross that I have life. I am comforted and encouraged, knowing He was willing to die for me.