



Accountability

(www.mensgroup.org - "Original Study")

PRAY: Opening and Closing prayers are suggested for small group members or individuals to invite God into the study to seek Him in His Word. Feel free to add your own words in prayer.

Dear Lord, help us to learn and understand what accountability is and how we can use it as we work through this study. Guide us as we apply these lessons so that we improve ourselves according to Your will. Amen.

INTRODUCTION:

Pastor Jensen said to new hire Richard, "I want you to obtain an accountability partner in the next two weeks and begin meeting with them on a regular basis."

"Ok," said Richard, "what would be important for me to know when I meet with them?"

"They are to hold you accountable by asking you questions concerning areas of your life you suggest to them when you meet," said Pastor Jensen.

This is how my first discussion about an accountability partner began. I was unsure at that time how this relationship would help me, but found out, over the many years it went on, that it was one of the best things I ever did and wished someone had challenged me to it sooner.

Birthered out of my own experience, which is talked about further in Lesson 1, I believe an accountability friendship can be a great blessing to you. Not only did I get to know my friend better, but their presence helped me to consider in a deeper way what I wanted in life.

I knew that every time I met with him, at some point in our conversation, he was going to pull from his wallet a folded piece of paper that contained my handwritten questions I requested him to ask me every time we met. My promise to him was that I would tell the truth as I answered these questions.

PURPOSE:

This lesson series is to help you understand what accountability is and its importance in your life, and challenge you to initiate an accountability friendship. I will explain the process in detail and give you a one-page summary to give to your accountability partner so that they can better understand their responsibility in meeting with you.

Note: All verses used are from the 2011 New International Version (NIV) of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

The 4 Lessons included in this “Extended Study” are:

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Lesson 1 – Accountability What?

Lesson Focus: This lesson follows Richard through twenty years of ministry experience before anyone suggested that he have an accountability partner. It will challenge each man to examine the positive results in his life by participating in an accountability friendship.

“Blessing on each man who will seriously consider that his life is precious to God as well as to the church, and that God desires he live a righteous life. Further, that meeting with an accountability partner will be a positive addition to his spiritual activities.” – C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *God, we are fearfully and wonderfully made and we know that You delight in each one of us as we do right. Help us to understand clearly what it means to be accountable for our lives before You, and also before the world. Protect us in the trials that come upon us and help us to be accountable.*

Opening Questions:

1. When have you been accountable for your life to another person?

2. What were its advantages?

Scripture Passage: *But David took an oath and said, Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he said to himself, ‘Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.’ Yet as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death. Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do for you. (1 Samuel 20:3-4)*

Lesson Substance:

Jonathan and David’s hearts were knit together since he killed the giant, Goliath. In this passage, David seeks to convince Jonathan that Saul, his father, is seeking to kill him. Though Jonathan has some initial disbelief, he does come alongside David and ask him what he could do to help him. We are looking for a similar action to take place between you and a friend as he commits to help you with accountability.

The following backstory to our study considers a challenge by a Senior Pastor to his new staff member, that would be me, about finding an accountability partner.

There I was in the Senior Pastor's office. He had requested we meet just two months after I began working at the church as its Singles Pastor. I was curious about the reason for the meeting, but promptly replied. The Senior Pastor had been there for many years before I was hired. I respected him and his wisdom and wanted to be a part of making the pastor and other staff successful with a growing congregation.

I spent four years at a Bible College, sat in many courses, had a major in Bible and minor in music, was involved in sports, and spent my last year there as the student body president. Later I spent seven years in graduate work at two different Seminaries obtaining two master's degrees. People knew me and I enjoyed my experience in both undergrad and post-graduate work, but no one suggested this important challenge to become accountable to another man and I don't remember this topic being discussed in any of my courses.

Besides my educational experiences, I was on the staff in three different churches, in California, Colorado, and Virginia, and on a traveling revival ministry team for two years. In my time at each place, I participated in many ministry discussions and prayed with other members of the team. I grew in my understanding of the church and I made many connections to believers in each congregation that brightened my life, but no one challenged me to be accountable to someone with respect to my life.

I was single during the first part of my time in ministry and later married. We had a child, and shortly after that my life crashed into real-world problems. My wife decided to exit our marriage of eight years. There was unfaithfulness on her part but I didn't walk through that time without sharing some of the blame. It was a tough experience and little did I know how much it would help me in my future ministry. It was for sure a testing time and, as I reflect on it now, I would have benefited by having an accountability partner, but no one encouraged me to it.

My second wife came into the picture six years later. We had known each other before either of us was married to our previous spouses but had not spoken for fifteen years. She too had a spouse who was unfaithful. We started a relationship and several months later began a blended family home with her daughters, my son from my first marriage, and amazingly a new son that came along at the end of our first year of marriage. No one came beside me, or helped me to see the differences present in a blended family as opposed to a nuclear family, neither did anyone talk with me about being accountable to another man during that time.

Two years after we were married, I felt the desire to go back into ministry. It had been years of business work while I healed and did what was necessary to get back to square one. I didn't know if I would even be accepted because there was a divorce in my history. I sent out thirty-four resumes, received several interviews, and eventually was called to work at a church in January 1991.

Two months later I found myself in the Senior Pastor's office at the age of forty-one, having a conversation with him about accountability. During his tenure at this church, a staff member

had participated in an affair which was one of the reasons he decided to require accountability for all staff. He explained accountability to me, which no one had ever done before, and gave me two weeks to come back to him and verify that I had enlisted an accountability person.

Maybe you have a similar story or one quite different but the reality is that not many men have heard about being in accountability. And, that it should be happening far wider than just recommending it to a church's staff. It is needed in all types of secular work, too. Families, reputations, businesses, churches, and non-profits need their people to be accountable. There is too much at stake not to have it available for men and women, even government work as well.

Here are a few more personal things to what I have previously said. Accountability is important but your age, marital status, position in business or church, whether male or female, or any other additional criteria, should have any bearing on whether or not you have an accountability partner. It is a responsible choice to participate for your sake and for those around you.

In my life, I have encouraged this very important step as something every believer should do. That's why I have created this lesson series for you—to clearly present and encourage you to use the information provided to initiate an accountability partnership for yourself.

Discussion Questions:

1. David and Jonathan are a good model of how this would look. What do you know about their friendship?

2. What struck you most in Richard's story?

3. What are your thoughts concerning personal accountability?

Application:

1. Thinking of your personal experience and knowing briefly about accountability from this lesson, how do you think having an accountability partner would help you?

2. What would be important areas for you to share with your accountability partner?

3. Who would you think of being your accountability partner?

Closing Prayer: *God, we understand that we are your highest creation, and yet we still make mistakes and can hurt ourselves and others with our words and actions. We understand that there is help available to us through the means of an accountability partner who will come alongside us and provide encouragement. Help us to take this seriously and begin to pray for a person to be accountable to.*

Suggested Additional Resources:

No additional resources for this lesson.

Lesson 2 – Accountability Needed?

Lesson Focus: We will be reviewing what it means to grow and why is accountability needed.

“Blessing on each man who recognizes his need to keep growing. Much of life is surely just showing up and realizing your needs. It’s easy to get off track and accountability helps you stay focused.” – C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *Father, we know that we can stagnate in our lives but we also know that growth can deepen our relationship with You and others. Help us to understand how we can do this with Your help.*

Opening Questions:

1. What’s the difference between growing and stagnating?

2. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being putting no effort into your life and 5 being incremental growth every day, how would you rate your present growth?

Scripture Passage: *What will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? (Job 31:14) And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him...And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:40, 52)*

Lesson Substance:

It has been said that most adults stop learning around the age of forty. If the average life span of an American is late seventies into their eighties, isn’t that a lot of time to be operating out of thirty-to-forty-year-old information? Think about that. How have you challenged yourself to learn recently?

The whole idea of nature is growth. Every vegetable, fruit, plant, tree, animal, fowl, fish, and sea creature grows with the nutrients that God provides. All go through the process of infant to maturity and then repeat the cycle by reproducing in their own image.

Think about your cell phone or computer, what do you do when it suggests it is time to update? If you ignore that notice you will get further and further behind in updates. That is when your system starts to have problems. Instead, I’m sure you would patiently wait for your system and programs to update. We don’t like to be left behind.

Our lesson verses suggest that God will hold us to account to mature, and the example of Jesus is plain, he grew in four areas: physical, mental, spiritual, and relational. How are you doing with those for a start?

Searching in a Bible concordance for the use of the words grow, growing, grows, and growth, we can identify a total of 111 times these words are used. Just a few of these help us to understand the need for growth:

- *Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand (2 Corinthians 10:15).* In summary: Continue to grow.
- *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4:15).* In summary: Grow to look more and more like Christ.
- *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation (1 Peter 2:2a).* In summary: Mature in your understanding of all of what salvation provides.
- *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).* In summary: The direction of our growth is tied to our Savior.
- *They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow (Colossians 2:19).* In summary: God is challenging us to grow, not disconnect, from Christ.

Second, with all this information about growth, how would being in an accountability friendship help you to stay in the growth process? Your accountability partner is there to help you grow. He is ready to ask you questions that you have written out about how you want to grow in various areas of your life. He will ask questions like this, if you desired to grow spiritually, “Well John, you desire to grow, so what is your plan to grow your spiritual life?”

We grow because we are encouraged, challenged, and recognize that we have weaknesses. Your accountability friend wants you to come out from behind your mask and address the needs in your life healthily.

We all need this, so be one who admits your limits and failures and connect with a person that has dedicated time to being with you regularly. If you’re not serious, he will call you on it and that’s a good thing. He has your back and desires God’s best for you.

In the suggested additional resource area below are some personal questions in six areas of your life you can consider possibly as questions you will use in your meetings. Check them out.

Discussion Questions:

1. How about the forty-year mark of your life, if you have reached it, how are you still learning, or how have you stopped learning?

2. Who has challenged you to grow your life?

3. How would you feel if you were in a steady pace of growing your life?

Application:

1. What is holding you back from growing?

2. As you walked through this lesson, what became important for you about growing?

3. What would be your first step forward to expand your growing process?

Closing Prayer: Father, I ask that you will help me to determine if it would be good for me to have an accountability partner. I ask that you would help me to see my soul more clearly and help me to find the partner that would be best for me.

Suggested Additional Resources:

Possible accountability questions

Answer the following questions only after a time of reflection. Put down your first impression. Then, search them out or add additional information as you continue to reflect. No answer should be “yes” or “no” but necessitate a statement of at least a sentence in length.

Mental area:

1. What avenues am I currently pursuing to stimulate new thought in my mind?

2. What am I currently learning through my daily reading material?
3. How much time am I currently spending each week as a spectator in things such as TV, movies, sporting events, etc.?

Social area:

1. What am I learning about my ability to mix well in groups of people?
2. In social encounters, how am I normally acting? Passive or active? Explain: Am I waiting for individuals to come to me rather than go to them?
3. How many individuals have I deepened my relationship with in the last six (6) months on a "one-to-one" basis? Was it their initiation or mine for this?

Financial area:

1. What is my present desire related to having a budget (written or unwritten), and if I now have one, am I staying within the guidelines I have set for myself?
2. In what areas is it extremely hard for me to control my spending? (food, clothing, car expense, etc)
3. What is my preparedness for any future financial difficulties? Or am I living "on the edge?" What is the cause of my unpreparedness, me or other influences?

Physical area:

1. What present actions am I doing concerning my physical health? Continued exercise, or coasting on past strength?
2. What part of my present physical anxiety might be related to pressures from other areas of my life?
3. What is the improvement that I feel is necessary in this area of my life?

Family area:

1. What family relationships am I seeking to continue to develop? (Deeper understanding of my father, mother, brother, sister?)
2. How far do the walls of my "family" extend? (Only to parents, brothers and sisters by birth?)
3. What are five (5) strengths in my family history that could help me in the future?

Spiritual area:

1. How would I assess my growth spiritually in the last 12 months?
2. What new spiritual challenges have I enacted in my life in the last 6 months? (If none, to what do I attribute that?)
3. What is one (1) area of study I would like to pursue in the Bible this year?

Emotional area:

1. What am I a slave to?
2. What is my motivation for serving God? (Duty, Dread, Devotion)

With these questions answered, meditate on and develop a direction for the next twelve (12) months to implement continued growth for yourself. Make sure that what you do is measurable and you can be held accountable for it by another person.

Give five questions to your accountability partner to ask you every time you meet, and give him permission to ask the sixth question, "Are you telling me the truth?"

Lesson 3 – Accountability Benefits

Lesson Focus: Our objective in this lesson is to understand a man’s desire for independence but also his need to be interdependent with others and accountable to a person of his choosing.

“Blessing on each man who considers the benefits of accountability and takes the steps to create an accountability partner.” – C. Marsh Bull

Starting Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we understand our uniqueness and our inner drive to be independent but help us to see from this lesson that there are several benefits to having an accountability partner and it will not hinder our independence.*

Opening Questions:

1. What level of independence do you now enjoy?

2. How have you been accountable in your life so far?

Scripture Passage: Jesus speaks to the Pharisees about their words, *But I tell you that everyone will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, or by your words you will be condemned.* (Matthew 12:36-37) *So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.* (Romans 14:12)

Lesson Substance:

As men, we take our independence seriously. It’s taken us years of childhood and adolescence to obtain it. Those around us, including our parents, encouraged us to be independent, so we oblige them. Having achieved it, that’s where we want to stay for the rest of our life -- thinking that is normal.

We could think the suggestion of an accountability partner might be a hindrance to our well-deserved independence. Or, our stubbornness in our independence could cause us to push back at any smidgen of it being taken away, even if it could enhance our life. Or, we could deceive ourselves into valuing our independence so much that we step in a trap that takes us off course in the process of conformity to Christ.

The truth is that making ourselves willingly accountable to another person can enhance and increase our rate of growth in Christ. God made us for relationship, as He is in relationship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and He desires us to move from dependence to independence and then on to interdependence, with people we trust and with Him.

Consider what the wisest man on the earth said:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

The general sense of an accountability friendship is that you ask your committed friend to ask you questions that you have written out for him. They should be concerns you have for your life and places you want to grow in your Christian life. These could include your personal, family, work, social, or spiritual areas in which you want to be held accountable to grow. It is not a friendship where your friend is in charge of your life. You are still independent but also interdependent.

Your honest answers to your friend's questions, which are really your questions you gave him permission to ask you, can lead to good discussions and decisions to grow in many areas.

There are many benefits for you and him in this process.

Here are some examples:

To you:

- It develops personal responsibility to reach your goals
- It hinders excuses for not following through on your goals
- It promotes growing your maturity in Christ and your emotional well-being
- It helps to keep your priorities in perspective

To your accountability partner:

- It develops commitment to God and to one another
- It promotes openness and honesty between two friends, as all discussions are held with confidentiality
- It increases both of your faiths as goals are accomplished

To your church body:

- It reveals unconditional love on both sides (love for God, love for the person holding you accountable)
- It demonstrates total acceptance in the body of Christ
- It recognizes forgiveness upon request without bitterness

This is just the beginning. In the next lesson, we will provide an overview of accountability.

Discussion Questions:

1. Where do you fall on the dependability, independence, and interdependence scale?

2. How do you feel about meeting with another man once or twice per month to talk about your life?

3. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being no interest and 10 being deep interest in accountability, where are you right now?

Application:

1. If you were to start an accountability friendship this week, what would be some questions you would want your accountability partner to ask you every time you meet?

2. What are you most concerned about in initiating and maintaining an accountability partner?

3. How can independence and interdependence be a benefit for you?

Closing Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we are your sons and we desire to be more and more like your son, Jesus. Guide us in our prayers about the accountability process, and help us to find another man who best would fill this role in our life.*

Suggested Additional Resources:

No additional resources for this lesson.

Lesson 4 – Accountability Nuts and Bolts

Lesson Focus: There are many questions raised about the accountability process. In this lesson, we will answer those questions.

“Blessing on you as you enter an accountability friendship with a friend. May God use it in your life and in the life of your friend to draw you both closer to God.” – C. Marsh Bull.

Starting Prayer: *Father, you want the best for us all the time and we know how important it is to be connecting with other men. Help us find the men who will best encourage our spiritual development and our development in the other areas of our lives.*

Opening Questions:

1. If you have built a fence on your property or even if you had someone else build it, what did you learn about fence building?

2. What kind of fences do you have in your life? Are they meant to keep people inside or outside of the fence?

Scripture Passage: *Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? (Luke 14:28) Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:13)*

Lesson Substance:

We all have fences in our lives. We have built them to protect us emotionally and spiritually, and maybe in other ways, too. We use them to keep our life more private, to protect our property, and to set boundaries for us, our neighbors, and criminals. It is a boundary, a hopefully immovable object that prevents us and others from overstepping.

If you were to build a new fence, what process would you have to go through to ensure a good end in your work? Here are some questions that might help:

- What is the reason you are building this fence?
- What will your fence encompass?
- What type of fence are you building?
- What information do you need to make sure you are doing the right steps?

- What materials and tools will you need, and who will you need to help you?
- You will have to place the poles securely in the ground first to support the fence structure. Then, attach the crossbars to connect the poles together and then attach each fence board.
- Now you must ask, will I paint or stain it or let it mature naturally?
- Finally, you start enjoying it, but have to ask one final question, what will I need to do to maintain this fence?

Deciding to have an accountability partner in your life is like building a fence. One that protects you, informs you, challenges you, and you appreciate because of its great benefits. As our verses emphasized, count the cost and remember you are ultimately accountable to God for your life.

Here is what is necessary in this friendship:

An accountability partner is a person to whom you entrust the intimate details of your life. It is essential for every person. The concept of accountability stems from a genuine desire to maintain a high level of personal righteousness and perpetuate the three ideals of purity of life, clarity of purpose, and continued evangelistic and spiritual growth in your life.

An accountability partner is an individual of your own choosing and of your own gender who meets with you on a regular basis to hold you accountable to the questions which you prepare for them in areas of your life you feel challenged. Questions may be in the social, family, friendships, morality, emotional, spiritual, and mental areas of your life.

It is preferred that the friendship NOT be reciprocal. This means it would only be one-way in responsibility. The reasons for this are below. However, if your partner desires to also be held accountable by you, this could happen, although it takes the extreme maturity of both men to handle issues objectively if you, too, are struggling in the same area as them. It is preferable that they find a different person with whom to be accountable.

Steps in securing an accountability partner:

1. Find a person of integrity; one who meshes well with your personality. Pray about your connection to that person before approaching them.
2. At your invitation, take them out for coffee with no strings attached. If you feel comfortable with them, at that time, then ask them to consider taking on this special responsibility for you. If you feel you need a couple more meetings to make sure you feel comfortable, do that. You are not in a rush.
3. Decide on a time to regularly meet, each week, every other week, or once per month, and make an extreme effort to never miss it.
4. At this meeting, talk about the areas of your life in which you are weak and strong.

Prepare for them five to ten questions that you want them to ask you each time you meet.

5. Maintain this relationship for at least one year and then evaluate it. (Some of the questions will change as you achieve victories, so be flexible.)

***Advantage of one-way accountability:** This insures the maintenance of high standards. If a common weakness is present and the accountability is two-way, one could easily excuse the other person rather than pursue God's will.

***Advantage of two-way accountability:** Obviously, the advantage of economizing your time is present. This method depends on the chemistry and spiritual maturity levels of both individuals.

It is always a good thing to have an accountability partner. You might be thinking, I wish I had had this information sooner in my life, but now is as good a time as ever to begin with one. Follow the guidelines above and you will enjoy having someone in your life that prays and cares for you on a regular basis.

Discussion Questions:

1. What questions do you still have about an accountability partner?

2. Reflecting on the fence analogy, how could you apply this type of process to accountability?

3. Why do you think it would be better to be one-way accountability rather than both ways?

Application:

1. After working through these four lessons, what has impacted you?

2. Why do you think men need to have an accountability partner?

3. Take a moment and think about up to three men you might feel comfortable asking to be your accountability friend.

Closing Prayer: Father, you continually challenge us with being in community, and we know that maintaining an accountability friend is helpful to protect us from ourselves and others. Help us find the one person who will agree to do this with us and help it to continue to be a great experience for our spiritual growth.

Suggested Additional Resources:

It is good for your accountability partner to have the information in the paragraphs above starting with the words, “An accountability partner is...” and ending with the two “advantages”

We give you permission to copy and paste it on a blank sheet of paper and have it ready to give to them in person or send to them by email. Discuss it at the meeting where you are considering asking them to be the one for you.

Outside of what will be discussed in these four lessons, you can search the web under “Christian Accountability Partner” and you’ll find additional help in understanding this important relationship.

This concludes our Accountability Study.

All our Blessings,

Men’s Group Foundation, Inc.

A mensgroup.org “Third Party Original Study”

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