

Episode 046

A Leader's Accountability

In recent times, we have witnessed a sad array of leaders who had been highly esteemed, fall from grace. This is merely the tip of an iceberg in God's church. For there has been a continual array of lesser known and unknown leaders who have fallen for a wide variety of reasons. Why has this happened? What can be done to arrest this? One crucial key to addressing this is accountability.

Too many leaders have failed to be accountable and their organisations have failed to hold them accountable. This lack of accountability has provided fertile ground for all manner of mischief and cover-ups.

Here we will examine what accountability should look like, why it is necessary and how we may achieve this practically.

WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

It is helpful to define what accountability looks like. Accountability is the willingness to be held responsible for one's actions and decisions. To be transparent with our motives and reasons in our leadership choices. In Christian leadership, we should also be accountable for the way we live our lives because our lives and ministry are intertwined.

WHY DO WE NEED ACCOUNTABILITY?

Leaders at every level need accountability. For no leader is exempt from the myriads of challenges including temptations or slackness in various parts of our life and ministry. Some leaders struggle with discouragement, hurts, perhaps emotional and mental stresses that are hidden and unaddressed. Yet there can be little motivation to deal with these if there is a lack of accountability.



To be honest, most of us do not like to be accountable. Many of us realise that God will hold us accountable one day yet somehow there is a disconnect with how it should impact us in the present. Or perhaps there is simply a denial of the degree of accountability God will hold us to. For that reason, it is imperative that there be accountability to some people around us. Accountability becomes much more tangible, much more urgent when we know it will be with those we meet on a regular basis.

Allow me to outline some of the dangers when we lack accountability.

- **Dangers of unaccountable independence**

God expects church members to submit to their church leaders and these leaders will in turn be accountable to God for being good shepherds. Hebrews 13:17 (NIV) Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.

In other words, God gives authority and responsibilities to shepherds, but God will hold to account the exercise of authority and shouldering of responsibilities. Hence, leaders must have the sense of being accountable. At the very least to God. We see further outworking of such a perspective amongst the Early Church leaders. Apostle Paul expected the churches he established to be accountable to him as the spiritual father. Even Apostle Paul was accountable for his missionary endeavours to the apostolic council in Jerusalem. The Early Church did not make major decisions unilaterally but in agreement with other apostolic leadership. They did not make unilateral decisions but were accountable to each other. Thus, we see a pattern of accountability in the Scriptures.

In addition, we find that God placed the leadership of the church into an eldership structure so that there may be inter-dependence as a body, rather than independence so that there may be mutual accountability. Further, Scriptures teach in mutual submission in Ephesians 5:21 (NIV) Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

At the leadership level, it means that elders or leaders must be accountable to one another. This is why, apostle Paul was able to rebuke apostle Peter for his error in separating from the Christian Gentiles like his fellow Christian Jews (Gal 2:11-14).



This mutual accountability protects against the dangers of unilateral decision-making and unaccountable independence. Without check and balances, it can lead to excesses, errors, or deviations. Without accountability, a leader's authority may descend to tyranny and dictatorship.

In the first prophetic presbytery I ever participated in, the prophetic word to me which I always remember is that I must remain yoked to others. I understood that clearly as a call for me to be accountable, to be in submission to others. I took this not only as an advice but a divine warning for accountability. Because I heeded that seriously, I made sure never to lead an independent church but to be part of family where I am accountable for my leadership. I will keep myself under the protection of others, by being accountable.

Every leader should be yoked in order to be accountable.

- **Dangers of sin**

No leader is above sin. Accountability structures help protect from becoming slack in our ethics and morals. Whether in our actions, decision or even theology. The Bible makes it clear that no leader is above rebuke and correction, regardless of the level they are in.

James 5:19 - 20 (NIV) 19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

The above Scripture is not limited only to non-leaders but to every believer, including leaders. Being accountable helps keep us more alert. It also lets others pull us up if they see some problems emerging which we may not be aware of. It is far better to be able to do so, before these problems or issues become too big.

No elders should be above scrutiny, as is also implied in 1 Timothy 5:19 - 20 (NIV) 19 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. 20 Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.

In the case of an elder the reason for requiring at least 2 witnesses is to prevent spurious accusations. We all are aware that being in higher levels of leadership, there will occur every so often those who do not like us or what we represent. Sometimes they may bring false accusations.



Where there are accusations, it should be seriously investigated if there are at least 2 witnesses. Hence, leaders should not be above scrutiny. Regardless of the level of leadership.

- **Dangers of lack of consultation**

Some leaders just like to do things their way. Because it is faster and convenient. When these leaders are very wise and capable, it seems like a good way to go. But eventually, they will reach areas beyond their wisdom and capability. This is when things can well go wrong.

Proverbs 11:14 (NLT) Without wise leadership, a nation falls; with many counsellors, there is safety.

That is why I always make it a habit to consult. That is why in our church, we have developed a leadership culture where we consult. An autocratic leadership will not work in the long run. Eventually it will fail. That is why empires, autocracies eventually fail. That is why we encourage the formation of teams at key levels of leadership. Even in Hope International Ministries, we operate as a Global Eldership where the President takes a lead role.

- **Builds greater trust**

When we are accountable, people feel more confident about our decisions and can trust us more. They also better understand how we reached various decisions. This sets the scene for greater leadership development.

SOME KEY PERSPECTIVES THAT ENABLE ACCOUNTABILITY

- **All will be held accountable by God**

Leaders will only appreciate and desire to be accountable when they have biblical perspectives and convictions. What are some of these perspectives and convictions?

The perspective that God will hold us accountable, in both our lives and responsibilities. The Bible clearly teaches that every person will be held accountable. Jesus made it clear that even every flippant word we utter will be judged. How much more our actions and decisions. Matthew 12:36 (ESV) I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.



One day, at God's judgment seat, everyone will be held accountable. Christians will be judged first, then all others at the White Throne. Romans 14:10–12 (NIV) 10 You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.' " 12 So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

- **Leaders will be held to higher standards of accountability by God**

James 3:1 (NIV) Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

This Scripture emphasised the degree of accountability expected by God of those who teach. But is it only limited to teachers? Surely, leaders will be judged with a higher standard. We referred previously to Heb 13:17 which alluded to the accountability that shepherds will be held to. God gave a solemn warning to prophet Ezekiel about his responsibility and accountability in Ezekiel 33:6–7 (NIV) 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood.' 7 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.

When Moses lost his cool because of the grumbling of the Israelites and he struck the rock at Meribah instead of speaking to it as God instructed, God judged him strongly. Numbers 20:10–12 (NIV) 10 He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

12 But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

Moses made a mistake in his frustration, but should he be judged so harshly by God? Sure, he spoilt a typology of Christ giving out living water to those who ask.



But to prevent him from entering the Promised Land? Let me suggest that it is also because of the immense level of responsibility that Moses had over an entire nation of God's people, that he was judged more strictly. Woe, to leaders of great organisations who fail to understand this.

- **Leaders are stewards of the responsibilities that God has given**

Every responsibility that we have, has been given by the grace of God. We are not owners of these, even if we shed blood to develop it. God expects us to be stewards of it. For that reason, He will hold us accountable for our faithfulness.

There is a danger amongst founders, or amongst those who brought great developments during their leadership to imagine that it would not be achieved without their leadership. Pride builds up in their hearts and they assume God would protect them and not hold them accountable in some special way. It is crucial to remain humble and not be deceived by this lie. I shared about the crucial role of humility in a previous podcast "Why We Need Deep Humility".

Jesus gave the greatest example of a humble servant who held Himself accountable to His Father to finish the task on earth He was given (Phil 2:6-8). Consequently, He was exalted to the highest place.

Leaders must have the perspective that they are stewards of the trust their followers give to them. Leaders do not deserve the trust, but are stewards of these trust. Hence, leaders must also have the perspective that they are accountable to those who follow them.

- **Accountability will help protect us**

This is an important perspective. It is when we see accountability as a benefit that we will embrace it whole-heartedly. Otherwise, it will always be with reluctance.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO IMPLEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Following are some recommendations to help us to be accountable.



- **Accountability to God and His Word**

We must resolve in our hearts to be accountable to God in all areas of our lives. We cannot cordon off into some areas of our lives where we are accountable to God and not others. As our life intersects into every other area, it is not possible to delineate it. Accountability is not something that we can switch on and off. We cannot tell God that we will be accountable from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday only.

A leaders should have the perspective that he is not a law to himself but uphold the law of God. To be accountable to the clear standards of God's Word. We live in a world where standards are relative and ambiguous. But God's Word sets our clear standards in many areas. Should we transgress against God's Word, we can be certain that we also transgress against God Himself.

- **Accountability to self**

We should be accountable to our convictions and conscience. God will hold us to His standard and also the standard of our conscience. Romans 2:15 (NIV) They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.

Thus, we should articulate to ourselves our key convictions, perhaps by writing it down. So that we can hold ourselves accountable to it. For example, I set a number of clear, simply articulated convictions for myself. Some of which are, "I will never say no to God", "God will be first in my life, above even my wife", "I will sacrificially serve God and trust Him for my very life." By doing so, it will help us to be more consistent in the way we live our lives.

- **360 degrees of accountability**

There should be vertical accountability to our supervising leader. Particularly to report to them about progress in areas of our responsibilities including challenges we face. We should not hide from our supervisors what is crucial for them to know.

There should be horizontal accountability with one's peer leaders, particularly if we work together in a team.



There should be downward accountability. To our immediate leaders, especially for decisions that will affect them and the organisation as a whole. In our church we always report our financial situation, our key achievements and challenges that we face.

- **Accountable to credible, mature people**

If we have a mentor or coach, they would be a possible person to be accountable for our lives. It is important to have someone or a few persons that we can trust. Who are credible and mature persons who can help us grow in God, in our responsibilities. They can provide input, feedback to assist us in our personal development and challenges.

- **Develop accountability culture and structures**

It is helpful to create structures that facilitate accountability, if that is within our scope to do so. Such structures will instil and reinforce the habit and culture of accountability. When there is a culture of accountability it will help leaders rise within the safety and security of accountability. It will help protect them especially in their developing years. Unfortunately, many founders have risen and developed their organisation without appropriate accountability around them. As a consequence, their flaws were magnified and it eventually led to significant problems.

In seeking to develop an accountability culture, leaders should also be careful to apply the same criteria as they require of others. Leaders can conduct themselves in an accountable way, such as being transparent with their decision-making, reporting clearly on their progress etc.

CONCLUSION

Leaders must embrace accountability because it is an essential part of helping us walk the narrow path of righteousness before God and others. It will help us rise up in the ways of God and lead as we should.



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. In this article, what has impacted you about the need to be more accountable in your life and/or ministry?
2. How effectively are you being accountable? What specific areas could you improve in

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Is there an area of your life or ministry that needs to be more or better accountable? What are some practical steps that you can take to improve it?
2. Is there an adequate culture of accountability in your organisation? What steps can be taken to improve it?





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