

Accountability Groups

An accountability group exists to help people of God stay pure and faithful in their daily walk with Him and help them overcome temptations, sin, and other troubling issues. It provides a context to live out James 5:16, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective”.

Should Pastors belong to an Accountability Group?

Most definitely! The hardest problem for ministers is to find a group of individuals who genuinely care for one another and can keep things confidential. An accountability group of ministers is especially good since many share or struggle with the same issues. Some issues, such as stress and burnout are commonly shared. One survey shows that one in every five ministers has a major moral problem. Another survey reports the responses from ministers who have committed adultery. They discovered 5 things they had in common:

1. They believed they would never be guilty of adultery.
2. Each had regular contact with an attractive lady in their ministry.
3. None were in an accountability group.
4. Each had little or no regular quiet time for personal feeding or confession.
5. Each person had no other place to turn for help.

There are many benefits and blessings in belonging to an accountability group. Listed below are some of these:

1. An accountability group helps members “submit” every part of their lives open before God with trusting individuals that will not judge but are there for support and encouragement. *“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Proverbs 27:17.*
2. An accountability group is a safeguard against temptations from sin, impure thoughts, adultery, or making poor decisions. Richard Exley, a former pastor once said, “Temptation flourishes in the dark, but it withers and dies when it is brought into the light of accountability.”
3. An accountability group offers support and guidance on improving marriage or relationships, helps with personal or church problems, and offers a prayer team who will faithfully support you.
4. An accountability group builds friendships between brothers or sisters in Christ. As they become closer and more involved, many state they feel as if “a load of

weight” comes off their chest. (Accountability groups should be formed within sexes, such as, men’s accountability group, women’s accountability group, youth accountability group, etc.)

An accountability group helps you to be open (and vulnerable) by allowing someone else to examine your life in a particular area and to give you direct feedback on how to improve. You allow this person to call you “to account,” and tell you the truth. To make oneself accountable requires a great amount of trust and confidence with the group members. There is nothing worse than sharing something “very personal” with another person, only to find out later that they cannot keep things confidential. Many Christians have been “wounded” by Christian brothers and sisters who were not trustworthy. Growth can only occur when there is absolutely 100% trust and confidence with members in the group.

Accountability groups should consist of 3-4 individuals of the same sex that would agree to meet together on a weekly basis. During that hour, there should be freedom to discuss any problem that any member is having, the good/bad things that have been going on in one’s life, the joys each one may be experiencing, what God is doing in one’s life, future decisions, ways to improve one’s life, meeting God’s will and plan for one’s life, or even a structured outline as listed below:

1. Did you spend significant time with God through His Word, prayer, devotions, or quiet time this week?
2. What blocks your growth in Christ?
3. Have you faithfully served the Lord this week?
4. How have you struggled with sin?
5. Have you struggled or committed sexual sins? Looked at a woman lustfully? Been in a compromising situation? Struggled with pornography?
6. How is your marriage and/or relationships?
7. Have you made your family a priority this week?
8. What have you done to improve your relationship with your spouse or significant other?
9. In what ways has God blessed you?
10. What are your dreams and how can we help?
11. How are your finances?
12. Have you been trustworthy? Lied? Stolen?
13. Have you been prideful? Gossiped? Angry?
14. Have you demonstrated a servant’s heart?
15. Have you struggled with disappointment this week?
16. Have your thoughts been pure?
17. What do you need to improve your relationship with God and others?
18. Have you compromised your integrity?
19. Do you have any church problems?
20. How can this group help you?

These are just a number of different questions that an accountability group can ask of one another. Take things slow. All questions don't have to be answered at every meeting. Perhaps time only permits one or two questions. The purpose is healing, restoration, sharing of ideas, fellowship, encouragement, strength, support, knowledge, and much more. Be genuine and balanced in your meetings, which means showing a genuine regard for one another without seeming mechanical with a list of questions. People usually respond better when there is a closeness or bonding with one another. Remember, each one is not exempt from temptations and problems.

Choosing Whom to Invite

As mentioned before, it is best to form groups of the same sex. Coed groups have difficulty providing accountability on sexual purity. Listed below are things to consider:

1. Pray about whom to invite.
2. How long have you known this person?
3. Can you trust them with every thing in your life?
4. Can they be trustworthy and hold confidence?
5. Do they care for your health and well-being?
6. Are they people of integrity?
7. Are they critical of others or gossip?
8. How is their Christian walk?
9. How is their marriage?
10. How will their personality fit in with other members?
11. What value do they bring to the accountability group?
12. Why do you want this prospective person to be a part of your group?

Instruction on the Invitation

If you are just starting a group, listed below are some helpful guidelines:

1. Include a short explanation of the purpose of this accountability group.
2. Make it clear that it takes commitment to come to regular meetings and invest their lives to other members.
3. Ask the recipient to pray about whether God wants him to join the group.
4. Ask the recipient to respond by a certain date, usually about 4 weeks after you send out the invitation.
5. It may be helpful to include a page on which they can write questions about the group or you may want to send out some of these outlines to prospective members.
6. Don't include details "just to come to a meeting at a particular time and date." Let them respond first. This is an early indication of commitment.
7. Don't mention the names of others whom you are inviting.

If you already have a group and wish to expand, there are a few other suggestions:

1. First, ask others within your accountability group of the idea of expanding your group by suggesting that you know of someone who has shared desiring to be a part of an accountability group.
2. Be sensitive of the cohesiveness of your group. It is usually successful because of the level of trust and friendship each one has for one another. Bringing in someone new can be a challenge for others and the success by bringing someone new (although a nice person) can change the chemistry and success of the group.
3. If others agree to meet this individual, do it over lunch, not mentioning they are your accountability group partners (for security and confidentiality reasons) or that they are being screened for a new prospective member. Let others get acquainted in a social setting before trying to trust someone they may have just met.
4. After the meeting, ask other members what they think about this individual and ask them to pray whether to expand.
5. Usually, unless it is God's will, expanding a highly successful accountability group is not suggested.

Preparing

Once you have a final response of prospective members, you can officially start the group. Set the time and place for your meetings. You may conduct your meetings at a central location or rotate them from church to church or restaurant to restaurant. Keep in mind if you meet at a restaurant, you may not have the freedom to share personal issues. If a person responded but cannot make the first planned meeting, meet anyway. It is more important to get started now. Send them an agenda and have them show up next week. The place should be private, somewhere easy for all to attend. The length of the meetings should be discussed, as well as goals and objectives they wish to accomplish. It is recommended to have weekly meetings. Longer periods between sessions often leads to frustration and poor attendance for some members.

Content

Suggested content or outline has been listed earlier. It is suggested to open and close each meeting with prayer and ask for God's wisdom. Each member should be encouraged to actively participate, sharing a problem/concern/issue with one another. If a member is struggling with a sin or other important issue, take time to thank them for sharing this, use yourself as a personal example if it applies, ask God for wisdom, and remember to ask the person how the group can help. Lastly, pray for the needs. Keep tensions at a minimum and create an atmosphere of safety and respect for each other's feelings. You may wish to rotate leaders of each meeting to start each meeting.

Accountability Partner Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to bring an awareness of the progress and/or goals of an accountability group or partner. People want to be involved in an accountability group for many reasons. Some seek fellowship, others understand the real importance of holding one another accountable for his/her actions, and there are some who are required to be involved in an accountability group for disciplinary reasons.

To have a successful and meaningful group, one must set guidelines, goals, objectives, and be consistent in reviewing these on a regular basis. Too often accountability groups form a social setting and real issues are never addressed.

Questions to ask prospective partners:

Name: _____ Age: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

1. Reason for joining an accountability group.

2. How long have you known other partners?

3. Can you trust each individual partner in confidence?

4. What value do you and they bring to your accountability group?

5. Are there any personality conflicts or any other barriers that will prevent the effectiveness of your group?

6. What do you expect to gain from an accountability group?

7. What goals do you wish to set for your group?

8. How do you plan achieve these goals?

9. Guidelines for your group:

Guidelines should include size of group, being consistent with meeting times and places, setting and maintaining an atmosphere of safety, allowing each member to have the freedom to share any concerns or needs with fellow members for support, guidance, wisdom, and prayer. The first priority of this group must include maintaining safety and confidentiality for each member as well as expressing a genuine concern to be honest and real with each other. This group is best served with all members being of the same sex and should evaluate their progress at least on a quarterly basis.

Goals should include forming a cohesive group of individuals of like interests, enjoys the company of each other, no personality conflicts, concerned for each other's well being, empathetic and understanding rather than being judgmental, holding each other accountable to one's weakness or temptation knowing we all face much of the same problems, forming a bond and alliance with each other to support, pray, encourage each other at all times. Trust and honesty are two main characteristics of an effective accountability group.

Evaluation Form

This form should be used to evaluate your progress and effectiveness of your accountability group.

1. Month and year formed: _____
2. What goals and objectives have you reached?

3. List the positives of being a part of your accountability group?

4. List the negatives of being a part your accountability group?

5. What did you personally receive from your accountability group?

6. What change would you recommend to your accountability group?

7. Do you feel the accountability group has helped other members?

8. On a scale from one to ten with ten being the best, how effective has your accountability group been? _____

9. Do you feel you should add new members to your group? _____
10. Would adding a new member be an asset or a liability?
Please give reason. _____

11. How can you be a more effective partner?

12. How often do you pray for one another? _____
13. Has your accountability group improved your marriage? If so/not,
why? _____

14. Does your accountability group endeavor to have outside functions
that include your wives? _____
15. Has your accountability group improved your Spiritual life?

