



LESSON #8 THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF A LEADER

The first thing we need to define in this lesson is, what exactly is accountability? The dictionary defines it as, *“The obligation of an individual to give an account for his or her actions and accepting responsibility for them”*. Simply put, it means taking ownership as a leader, not only for your successes, but especially for your failures—even when the error wasn’t directly caused by you. That’s a tough lesson. Why is that important? Because leadership in God’s house involves taking responsibility for your own personal mistakes, as well as the blunders of those under you. Joshua is a prime example of a leader who was held by God to account for Israel’s failure to obey Him, specifically Achan’s sin of deception and theft in covering up what God forbade. This is the sobering account:

“Then Joshua cried out, “O Lord God, why did you bring us across the Jordan River if you are going to let the Amorites kill us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side! ⁸ Lord, what can I say since Israel has fled from its enemies? ⁹ For when the Canaanites and all the other people living in the land hear about it, they will surround us and wipe our name off the face of the earth. And then what will happen to the honor of your great name?” ¹⁰ But the Lord said to Joshua, “Get up! Why are you lying on your face like this? ¹¹ Israel has sinned and broken my covenant! They have stolen some of the things that I commanded must be set apart for me. And they have not only stolen them but have lied about it and hidden the things among their belongings. ¹² That is why the Israelites are running from their enemies in defeat”. Joshua 7:7-13

Jacob knew nothing about Achan’s scheme. He was not part of the plot against God’s command. He did not brush aside the failure, but inquired of the Lord for revelation and clarity. And yet though he was directly innocent, Joshua was fully to blame for the consequences resulting in angering God and bringing death to 30 innocent soldiers at the hands of their enemy.

The simple fact whether we agree with it or not, is that leaders are accountable for the overall success or demise of the whole—the buck stops with them. How are we as leaders in God’s house to accept the consequences of someone else’s failure?

LEADERS ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD

Henry Blackaby writes, *"If God has proceeded to select you for an important assignment among His people, He will thoroughly equip you with His Spirit to do it, and you will be fully accountable to obey Him, and let Him do His will through you."* The fact is: we are not fully accountable to produce results—we are held to account for our actions to carry out God’s revealed plan. Think about it this way—the moment you drop a letter in the mailbox, it is out of your hands. You are no longer accountable for the safe delivery of your letter to the proper person and address. You are, however, responsible to provide sufficient postage along with a name and address. After that, the buck no longer stops with you. You’re not answerable at that point for the results. And so leaders are accountable to God to be diligent in doing God’s known will. In 1 Timothy 3, the apostle Paul prescribes a long list of 16 distinct conditions of accountability for pastors, called by God in order to fulfill their ministry well. These are virtual requirements, not recommendations. Both pastors and church leaders should refer to this list regularly as a spiritual check up to ensure they are adhering to the conditions. Let’s look at one of the principles.

“A pastor must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. ⁵ For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? 1 Timothy 3:4-5

Whether you serve as a pastor or in another leadership position, and whether you have children or not, what truth does this principle speak to you as a leader?

Thank God that He works with us to accomplish His purpose, not by our might, not by our power, but by His Spirit. David prayed this simple prayer in Psalm 143:10, *“I know what to do, now show me how to do it.”* God’s will is not complicated when we do our part and trust Him to do His part. If you’re like me, the problem is not in knowing what to do—the challenge is doing it!

Our part of accountability to His revealed will consists of three things; intention, motivation and activation. Intention requires *making up your mind* to do it. Motivation is *being inspired* to do it. Activation is *doing it*. God gives all the grace, wisdom and provision that the leader needs in each stage of undertaking His established will. If they fail, it's entirely their own fault. We clearly see this principle in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to Christ's arrest. Jesus was in great agony as His crucifixion drew close. He needed the prayer support of His closest disciples, Peter, James and John. He took them with Him into the garden for one purpose—to pray for Him. That was His known will for them at that very hour. But they sadly failed. Read the pitiful account.

“Then Jesus came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” Mark 14:37-38

All 3 disciples fell asleep and yet Christ only singled out Peter. He was the chosen, dominant leader of the other 11 disciples and for that reason, he was accountable for the failure of James and John to pray, as well as himself. We must not take this lightly, considering the ramifications of not carrying out God's will. God had to send ministering angels to strengthen His Son because the 3 failed to watch and pray. This account in the Garden of Gethsemane brings into focus the severe warning that James, through the truth of the Holy Spirit gave to the Church.

“Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.” James 3:1

Expound on this verse what James meant regarding the seriousness of leadership accountability.

In his book, “Spiritual Leadership”, Henry Blackaby made this grave observation: *“Whenever sin brings a canceling of God's call on a leader's life, the special anointing needed for fulfilling their assignment is withdrawn. He is no longer needed, for God has withdrawn His assignment. Does such a person often try to continue to function in his position? Yes, often for years like Saul. But his effectiveness never returns”*. Saul refused to be corrected more than once and finally, after many years as a failed king, God, in His justice, removed him from the throne, for Saul was no longer accountable to God's will that he once knew in his early years of successful, faithful leadership.

LEADERS ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO THEIR PASTORS

In Proverbs 13:18, we read, ***“All who refuse correction will be poor and disgraced; all who receive correction will be honoured.”*** The best thing for a leader to do when God is correcting them through their pastor is to be quiet and receive it. Don’t try to defend yourself, don’t try to excuse yourself, just sit there and respectfully listen. I have learned that lesson many times! Several years ago, I held a part-time pastoral position in a large church. I made a huge mistake by making what I thought was a right decision without consulting my senior pastor. After the damage was done, he sat me down and gracefully but firmly corrected me. I sat there extremely humbled and embarrassed for what I had done, acknowledging that he was perfectly right to correct me. It was a hard lesson to learn, but much needed. Leaders are accountable to their pastor or their overseer.

Jesus expressed a sober truth to His disciples concerning their accountability to His Word. ***“Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. 25 For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away”*** Mark 4:24-25 What did Jesus mean by this statement?

Overall, this lesson stresses that we, as leaders, are accountable to act on what God has shown us—if we continue to disobey what we know, He will remove the voice of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual ears. Leadership is not a right—it is a privilege from God and He requires obedience to His Word which results in the favour and blessing of God upon the work. Psalm 1 is a powerful depiction of a faithful man or woman who prospers in all that they do. Leaders would do well to memorize and meditate on this opening Psalm. There can be serious consequences when leaders sin, both for the person of authority and the people under them. In 2 Samuel 24, we see the tragic consequences of David going against God’s specific command by taking a census and numbering the people of Israel and Judah. His belligerent action, even after being warned, brought the death of 70,000 people that he was accountable by God to shepherd. Let’s close this lesson with one final warning from Henry Blackaby- ***“One act of disobedience may make you unacceptable to God, especially to lead His people. I must have the continuous convicting work by His Holy Spirit, lest to any degree I should depart from Him or His ways. This is my constant plea before God. The consequences are too incredible, and eternity is at stake in my own life and in the lives of those I lead.”*** We can depend on the Holy Spirit to empower us to be accountable! Amen!