



Accountability:
A *Living the*
Way Guide





Accountability is the practice of entering a reciprocal relationship where partners reveal struggles and temptations, speak the truth, and walk together towards spiritual transformation.

This workshop will guide participants to:

- Plan for a successful accountability partnership
 - Learn the difficult skill of vulnerability
 - Speak and receive truth in love
 - Listen actively to one another

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
(Hebrews 10:24-25)

Resources you will need ...

LTW Accountability Workshop Guide
The Bible, any translation
startlivingtheway.com

Session One | Break Free



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. What is something recent that is bringing you joy?
What is something recent that is causing you stress?

Then, discuss the following questions about your experience and hopes for this guide.

1. What is your experience with accountability? Has it been positive? Negative? A mix of both?
2. How do you hope to grow in your experience of accountability through this workshop?

Session One | Break Free

Love and Good Deeds

Accountability is the practice of entering a reciprocal relationship where partners reveal struggles and temptations, speak the truth, and walk together towards spiritual transformation. Sounds great in principles, but why would we ever subject ourselves to something so potentially awkward and uncomfortable? It's a fair question. Transparency, vulnerability, and truth aren't the easiest paths to walk. However, there's a very good reason God calls us into accountability relationships. Reflect for a moment on the struggles and temptations to which you succumb. Try to do this without judgment. Simply notice what comes to mind. These patterns only make us miserable. Deep down, we want rid of them. We long to grow. We desire to be and to do more.

Accountability is one of the practices God provides to help us break free. It's crucial you and I hear this. We can break free. God hasn't left us alone. One of the primary gifts He's given to us is having one another. Accountability is often just what we need to get spiritually unstuck.

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

These verses encapsulate the heart of the matter. We aren't loners. God didn't mean for us to struggle in isolation. He's given us one another. That's a massive gift. We can help one another see the vision God has for us. It's love and good deeds. It's fullness of life. This happens because of the Holy Spirit who works within us. That's absolutely true. But it also happens when we spur one another on, i.e., hold one another accountable to grow in Jesus. Well done in signing up for this guide. It may not always be comfortable—growth rarely is—but it's God's intention for us.

We aren't loners. God didn't mean for us to struggle alone. He's given us one another.

1. What concerns do you have as you launch into the practice of accountability?
2. How difficult is it for you to admit to yourself that you need others to live the life God intends?

Who Needs Accountability?

In this session, we will explore the dynamics of a healthy accountability relationship. Then, in subsequent sessions, we will look at three skills you'll want to develop as you grow in this practice. These include truth-telling, vulnerability, and active listening. First, let's briefly discuss who exactly needs an accountability relationship.

It's tempting to think of accountability as something we need when we are in crisis. And that's clearly the case. If we are struggling with extreme bitterness, addiction, or habitual sin, accountability is one of God's ways to help us. However, we all struggle, yes? We all have tendencies to sin that we know we ought to overcome. We know we'd experience God more if we did. So, accountability is unequivocally for everyone. We all need it. We all benefit from it.



Session One | Break Free

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ²Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. (Galatians 6:1-3)

This passage affirms our need for accountability in no uncertain terms. It tells us, **first**, that sin is never to be kept secret and, **second**, that none of us should think of ourselves as too mature to sin. The call to accountability, in short, is a call to all of God's people who want to grow.

1. What's it like, mentally and emotionally, to keep sin a secret, even from those closest to you?
2. What happens when we think ourselves "too mature to sin" in some particular way? Why does the Bible warn against such an attitude of the heart?

How Accountability Works

Every accountability relationship will look a bit different. We are all unique, as are our struggles. Yet there are some guidelines that will help make your relationship as successful as possible. And don't forget—success in accountability means you are transparent, truthful, and carry one another to Jesus for restoration. That's it. Let's look at some best practices before you launch in.

First, accountability depends on the desire for spiritual transformation. This sounds simple, but accountability is not going to flourish without a desire on the part of both partners to grow and see the other grow. This is gut check time. Do you have a strong desire to become more like Jesus through accountability? Do you have a strong desire to see the other do the same? If so, you're in the right place! God is ready to move and work in your lives.

Second, your goals for spiritual growth should be clear. It may take some time to make your goals specific, but they should be narrowed and stated clearly sooner rather than later. For instance, your goal might be to overcome an addiction or repetitive sin, to be a source of life at home for your family, or to reduce busyness and increase time for silence and solitude. These are all goals with which accountability can help tremendously.

Third, the plans for attaining your goals should be clear. How will you work towards these goals? What spiritual practices will you need to incorporate into your life? What will your prayer life look like? What will you ask God to do for you? How will your accountability partner help you along the way? Make sure your plans are specific, bit-sized, and attainable. Agree upon a way to track progress over time. This may sound a bit daunting. Remember, that's why you have one another.

Fourth, balance challenge and encouragement. One of the main reasons why accountability relationships flounder is too much policing. In other words, they fail when one partner challenges the other to the point of shame. Truth-telling is key, but it must always be done in the context of affirmation and encouragement. Doing so will build the kind of trust on which accountability relationships rely.



Session One | Break Free

Fifth, establish consistent meetings times, paired with a system for regular check-ins. Another reason accountability relationships fizzle is that they don't meet consistently. Plan for it ahead of time. Get the meetings on the calendar. Decide how often you need to meet (we recommend no less than every three weeks). And plan for regular check-ins, e.g., texts or phone calls during the week.

Accountability relationships will likely not last for the span of years (though they might). Make sure you are planning regular discussions about progress and potential end dates. Meet for as long as you both desire but, by the same token, make space for jumping off points.

Here's a fictional example that summarizes these guidelines. Sarah and Marissa decide to meet as accountability partners. In their initial meeting (or two) they gather to share their struggles and how they can help one another. They build trust and feel comfortable being more vulnerable. Sarah shares with Marissa that she is struggling with deception. She frequently distorts the truth to cover her actions at work and at home. Sarah desires to become a truth-teller, regardless of the consequences. While this example focuses on Sarah, assume that Marissa shares her struggles and develops goals as well.

Sarah and Marissa decide they will meet every week for the next three months (with the option of continuing further). Their goals are clear. They will meet these goals by, first, praying with and for one another. There is tremendous power in this. God must be at the heart of accountability. If He's not, don't expect much spiritual progress. They will then ask one another a series of questions they've developed together. These include questions like:

- Have you been honest in your thoughts and words? If not, what was your motivation for deception?
- What temptations did you face since we last met? Did you give in to any? Why?
- Have you been calling on God for grace and strength? If not, what stood in the way?
- Have you been making times for rest and rejuvenation? If not, what stood in the way?
- Have you been drawing life from God's Word and other spiritual practices? If not, what stood in the way?
- What needs to change in the time between now and when we next meet?
- What can I (your accountability partner) do to help you along the way?

Sarah and Marissa speak truth, practice vulnerability, and encourage one another. Along the way, together with other spiritual practices (e.g., Bible study and Sabbath-keeping) they see God work in their lives for good. They experience more joy and peace as they grow. Accountability, they learn to see, is vital to becoming more like Jesus.

Discuss the above scenario and share any thoughts, questions, or concerns.

Exercises for Session Two

1. Complete the discussion questions for session two. Come ready to discuss!
2. Make time and space to be with God. Ask Him to search your heart and show you where you need to be held accountable. Ask Him to give you the courage to enter a relationship like this.



Session Two | Truth-Telling



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. Is there anything causing you anxiety, worry, or fear in the past weeks? Pray for one another about these things.

1. After reflecting more on Session One, how are you feeling about accountability in general?
2. Have you experienced an accountability partner like the example with Sarah and Marissa?
3. What do you see as a benefit of having an accountability partner?

Session Two | Truth-Telling

Being Set Free

Jesus says that truth and freedom are closely related. Truth, in fact, sets us free. Truth can be uncomfortable, yes. It can be frightening. Ultimately, though, it's very good for us. It paves the way for our souls to flourish as God intends. In this session, we will explore the importance of truth for accountability relationships. In short, they won't happen without it.

³¹To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:31-36)

There's so much happening here. Let's note a few things. **First**, Jesus wants us to understand that we cannot call ourselves his followers without integrating His teaching into our lives. **Second**, not only is His teaching true but His very being—He himself—is truth. **Third**, we are enslaved by our sin, and can only be freed by the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

1. Do you agree that your sin is powerful enough to make you a slave? Why or why not?

2. How, specifically, does truth set our minds, hearts, and souls free? Are there any examples from your life that illustrate this reality?

3. Does this passage give you hope that you can mature and find freedom from your current struggles? How do you think Jesus desires to help you grow spiritually?

Thriving accountability relationships do not happen in the absence of truth. God calls us to be willing to examine ourselves and see the truth, both about where we are and where He wants us to be. And God calls us, likewise, to help our accountability partner see God's truth for him or her. Both receiving and telling the truth are skills we can develop. Both have their challenges, but also tremendous rewards. We will spend the remainder of this workshop discussing how we might grow in each area.

Which is more difficult for you—receiving or telling the truth about sin?



Session Two | Truth-Telling

Receiving the Truth

We all have surprisingly effective defense mechanisms that guard us from accepting the truth. Suppose, for instance, that I habitually surf news websites during my workday, so much so that it inhibits my productivity in significant ways. This is what is known as time theft. I'm not stealing tangible resources from the office, but I am stealing, nevertheless. Suppose further that a co-worker with whom I share an office notices my behavior. As a fellow Christian, he is concerned not only for my job security but also my character and integrity.

So, my co-worker confronts me out of genuine concern. At this point, powerful defensive force will likely come into play. **First**, I might deny the behavior altogether. I accuse my co-worker of imagining things or, at the least, exaggerating my behavior. **Second**, I might deflect. I accuse my co-worker of trying to sabotage my work or even to cover his own sins by highlighting mine. **Third**, I might deceive myself into thinking my behavior is justified. After all, I think, I work hard when I'm not surfing websites and I even work better when I've had plenty of breaks.

Denial. Deflection. Deception. These are powerful ways we hide from truth.

The problem is that there are consequences to our behavior, whether or not we accept the truth. In this example, time theft is still theft, regardless of what I tell myself, and the offense will be treated accordingly. At a deeper level, beyond the consequences, my sin harms my soul.

My soul is that deepest part of me. It's where my character comes from. It's what determines the course of my life more than anything else. Truth guards my soul from ruin. It's that simple. I must be ready and willing to hear truth for the sake of the health of my soul. The quality of my life with God and others depends on it. Our soul is that important.

³¹ *Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise.* ³² *Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding.* ³³ *Wisdom's instruction is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honor.* (Proverbs 15:31-33)

1. Do you have a go-to defense mechanism when you are confronted with the truth about your behavior (e.g., denial, deflection, or deception)? Why?

2. Why does Proverbs 15:32 say that those who disregard discipline despise themselves?

Receiving the truth opens the way to confession. **Confession**, i.e., truth-telling about what we've thought, said, and done, is a freedom practice. It is our response to hearing what's true. It is often, if not always, the first step on the road to healing. This accountability relationship, while not easy, is a God-given opportunity to speak your sins out loud. That's freeing. Healing.

Each accountability session should make space for receiving and confessing the truth.



Session Two | Truth-Telling

Speaking the Truth

It can be difficult to speak the truth to others about their behavior in a way that communicates love and concern. We can easily go wrong in one of two directions. **On the one hand**, we might be too brash and forward. In this case, we communicate the truth but not the love and concern. Our words can seem like shaming or condemnation (and they may be!). Accountability partners are not meant to be moral police in the life of the other.

On the other hand, we might be too guarded and timid. In this case, we are more concerned with not hurting feelings or offending the other. So, we simply don't speak the truth or at least we sugarcoat it. Believe it or not, the effects of this mistake can be as consequential as the first. That's because, in both cases, our accountability partner does not hear the truth. So, he or she cannot grow based on having heard it.

Accountability partners should discuss the importance of truth-telling and make it a central value of their relationships. They should speak and receive truth without policing or shaming and in a spirit of love and concern for the wellbeing of the other. Partners should remind one another of their commitment to spiritual growth and encourage one another to follow through.

All that requires truth spoke with humility and gentleness. It takes hearts that are so committed to seeing good come to the life of the other that jealousy, anger, and shame are cast away.

¹⁵ 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)

¹⁷ An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies. ¹⁸ The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. ¹⁹ Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. (Proverbs 12:17-19)

1. How can you avoid speaking the truth in a way that comes across as shaming, policing, or condemning?

2. How can you speak the truth in a spirit of love and concern for the wellbeing of the other?

3. How can your accountability partner help you receive and speak the truth well?

Exercises for Session Three

1. Complete the discussion questions for session two. Come ready to discuss!

2. Think of some times when you've been confronted about poor behavior. Reflect and ask God how you received what was true. By the same token, ask Him to show you where you've received harsh words that aren't true. Come ready to discuss this exercise.



Session Three | Vulnerability



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. How have you spent your free time over the past weeks? What words would you use to describe it (e.g., rejuvenating, refreshing, wasteful, fretting)?

1. At what stage in your life have you felt like you needed accountability the most? (i.e as a youth, teen, young adult, now).
2. Did you find accountability then? Explain why or why not.
3. Think of some times when you've been confronted about poor behavior. Reflect and ask God how you received what was true. By the same token, ask Him to show you where you've received harsh words that aren't true. Come ready to discuss this exercise.

Session Three | Vulnerability

Take a moment to celebrate. You're on a difficult and rewarding journey. That's what accountability is. It's difficult because we must share parts of who we are that we naturally prefer to keep hidden. It's rewarding because, when we do share so deeply, God frees us from the thoughts, impulses, and actions that make us miserable. In this session, we arrive at another practice that is essential to healthy accountability: vulnerability.

What is Vulnerability?

We all have an ongoing inner dialogue. This discussion with ourselves includes thoughts about our value and worth, judgments about our character, and our guilt, fears, insecurities, and pain. We keep these hidden deep inside. It's uncomfortable to let others know what we've done and how susceptible we are to the world's trials and temptations. Further, it's uncomfortable to let our guard down against being hurt because of our openness.

Vulnerability is doing just that. It's sharing our deepest regrets, pains, and fears with others without the impulse to self-defend. It's opening ourselves honestly to another re: who we really are inside—the good, the bad, and the ugly. When we are vulnerable, we allow our thoughts, emotions, and impulses to be known by another, even as we know that doing so risks our being judged or hurt. We drop the pretense and self-protection that are so common.

1. What do you think and feel when we talk about being vulnerable?
2. Are you ready to be vulnerable in this accountability relationship? Why or why not?

Jesus exhibited vulnerability in many ways. He grieved openly as He longed for the peace of Jerusalem, which the people had rejected (Matthew 23:37). He mourned at the loss of a good friend (John 11:35), even though He knew He was going to raise the friend from the grave. Jesus even showed His own agony the night before He was crucified. Here is that scene from the Garden of Gethsemane.

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." (Matthew 26:36-38)

1. Why do you think Jesus is so open about the pain and sorrow He is experiencing?
2. What effect do you think Jesus' vulnerability had on His disciples? What effect does it have on you?



Session Three | Vulnerability

Why Vulnerability?

Why is vulnerability so crucial in life, especially in forming healthy accountability relationships? Well, at the most basic level, two people can't really make progress building character if they don't understand the wounds and sins from which they need freeing. We have to get them out into the open, as it were. Vulnerability, though difficult, bears tremendous fruit in our lives in many ways. Let's look at some of them.

Vulnerability is cleansing. It rids our inner lives of pretense and excessive self-protection. We feel the need to create an image of who we are and then do all we can to maintain that image. It's how we shelter ourselves from anyone seeing who we really are. This process is exhausting, and we all know it. We all do it. Vulnerability cleanses us from the internal rat race. It gets out into the open all the stuff we are hiding within. Working with our accountability partner, we then see that it can be safe and even healthy to share.

¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

Vulnerability is a witness. Research shows that solidarity is healing. In other words, our mental health improves when we know that others share the same struggles. It's crucial that we know we aren't alone. Vulnerability testifies to the other that our struggles are real, shared, and surmountable, with God's help. Imagine that. You are helping the other simply by being honest and open about your inner life.

¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

Paul makes it clear in this passage. God uses our vulnerability, i.e., sharing who we are deep down without pretense or self-defense, to display His love and power to others.

Vulnerability fosters humility. Believe it or not, our defense mechanisms (i.e., what we do to hide who we really are others) are a type of pride. When we craft a social media image or tell white lies to save face, that's pride, even when it feels like insecurity. It's a refusal to be seen and heard for who we really are. It's an unhealthy focus on what others think of us.

Vulnerability upends this pride and fosters humility. It forces us to confront and unearth our struggles. We then realize that it's OK that we are who we are. We can even embrace it as we hope for transformation. God uses this to grow humility. It's one of the keys to healing.

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

Vulnerability is contagious. Vulnerability builds trust.



Session Three | Vulnerability

Vulnerability is contagious. Finally, our vulnerability clears the ways for others (including our accountability partners) to be vulnerable. Perhaps you've had an experience when one person began to share openly his or her struggles and then others in the group followed suit. We all need to share deeply and one of the best ways to help others be free to do so is to model that kind of sharing yourself. This is especially true in accountability relationships.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. (1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

1. Which benefit (or benefits) of vulnerability did you find to be the most motivating? Why?
2. Have you ever observed vulnerability having one or more of these positive effects?
3. Do you have any lingering concerns or questions about vulnerability, especially in the context of your accountability relationship?

One More Thing

Vulnerability is tremendously valuable. It sets us free and frees others to do the same. And we've learned from the previous verses that God gives us the grace to share openly. One more thing, though. The only way to get better at it is to take some risks and practice. It's scary at first and becomes more natural over time. That's one of the beauties of an accountability relationship. Part of the expectation is that you'll share openly. Practice. Practice. Practice.

Exercises for Session Four

Complete the discussion questions for session four. Come ready to discuss!

Interlude

You've finished the third session of this workshop! You've discovered (or re-discovered!) that, even though communities are made up of imperfect people, God nevertheless wants to give us something beautiful through them. We are called to be a part of the larger body of Jesus. God intends that we not walk the ups and downs of life alone. That's something to celebrate!

Don't forget that it's best to go on this sacred journey alongside others. Make some time to get together and deepen your relationships. Grab coffee just to chat. Go to a baseball game. Gather your families for a movie night. Do something that simply celebrates the joys of being human and knowing others. This is good for its own sake but will also help you grow as you complete future sessions.



Session Four | Active Listening



Begin by catching up on one another's lives. What is one thing that has brought you joy in the past week? Reflect on this and pray for one another.

1. Explain a time when you felt someone truly listened to you. How could you tell they were listening?
2. Have you ever tried listening to the Holy Spirit in your life or during prayer? Explain your experience if so.

Session Four | Active Listening

The Importance of Listening Well

Listening is key. That can't be overstated. It's nearly impossible to walk this journey of accountability without listening well to one another. You'll be sharing from the heart things that are tender and vulnerable. As we've said in previous sessions, this is a process of healing. If ever there was a time to listen and become better listeners, this is it. Further, listening well is one of the best gifts we can give to others. It makes them feel seen, heard, and understood. All of us long for those qualities. Accountability won't happen without them.

1. How often do you feel sincerely heard by others? How often do you sincerely hear others?

2. What does it feel like when you are not heard well? What does it feel like when you are?

Barriers to Listening Well

Let's say it again. Listening is key. Accountability depends on this crucial practice. The bad news is that most of us need to hone our listening skills. The good news is that there are basic ways to do so that will make a big impact. The first step is to become more aware of some common reasons why we fail to listen well. Here are some major ones.

We are already formulating our response while the other person is still talking. This one is common to just about every conversation. To some extent, we can't help it. The ones spoken by the other inevitably trigger thoughts and feelings in us. However, we won't become proficient listeners until we learn to silence this inner voice as much as possible so that we hear the full extent of what the other is trying to communicate.

We feel pressure to provide a solution for the person's concerns. We somehow get the idea that we must speak just the right words that to the person that will alleviate the discomfort of his or her situation. This causes us to be distracted and insecure, i.e., in a poor position to listen well. We must remember that a big part of our calling is, first, to listen and comprehend. God is the one who is equipped to meet the person and care for his or her needs. It's OK not to have all the answers! Remember, listening well is a gift in and of itself.

We seek too quickly to identify the person's concerns with our own experiences. We often tell a story we think relates or express how a family member has been through a similar ordeal. Our goal is to be helpful. We think mutual understanding of the circumstances will help the person open up. This may well be true. But we must also be cautious that our person experiences have the opposite affect of turning the attention away from the person and the uniqueness of his or her struggles.

We are assessing the person and circumstances before he or she is done speaking. We tend to make snap judgements. That's part of being human. We quickly believe we understand someone's motives and needs, often before we even have all the relevant information. Needless to say, this significantly harms our ability to listen well and gather all the data.



Session Four | Active Listening

² *Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions. ...* ¹³ *To answer before listening—that is folly and shame. (Proverbs 18:2, 13)*

1. Which of these barriers to listening is most problematic for you?

2. How does it affect you when someone is clearly distracted by one of these barriers when what you really needed was for them to listen well?

Active Listening

Active listening is a practice that avoids the above pitfalls. When we listen actively to another, we are attentive to him or her, seek to understand his or her thoughts, feelings, and circumstances fully, and then we respond reflectively on what was said. Let's break this down into parts.

First, when we listen actively, we are attentive to the speaker. We are present in the moment. We do our best to free our minds from distraction and focus on the other with our body language by, for instance, making eye contact. We allow the speaker time and space to speak freely and fully.

Second, we demonstrate our desire to understand the other. We ask clarifying questions that help us further understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings. We summarize the speaker's words in our own words to ensure that we've comprehended accurately.

Third, we respond reflectively to what we've intently heard and carefully understood. This requires careful discernment and listening to God's leading (more on this in a moment!). Sometimes a response may be reassuring silence. It may be empathy. It may be that we have some potential solutions or next steps.

¹⁹ *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. (James 1:19)*

1. In what area(s) of active listening are you especially strong? In what area(s) do you desire to improve?

2. Can you find examples in the gospels of Jesus as an active listener? What do we learn?



Session Four | Active Listening

Listening to the Holy Spirit

When followers of Jesus practice accountability, it's crucial that they listen not only to one another but, simultaneously, to the Holy Spirit. This may sound foreign or even a bit frightening. By God's grace, though, it's actually pretty straightforward. The heart of it is this: It's not only us and our accountability partners who are involved in this practice. God is with us. God is for us. God actively contributes to the spiritual growth that is taking place. We have the honor, blessing, and calling to involve Him in our accountability discussions.

How might we go about doing so? There's a passage in Romans that offers us some guidance.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

This is astounding. It means that, even when we don't know what to pray (or say, for that matter) we can be confident that God is at work and that His Spirit is speaking on our behalf at the very throne of God. When we meet for accountability, then, we should pray and acknowledge that God is at work. We should make space for listening to Him as we speak.

Sometimes this means simply keeping in your minds that God's presence is near and that He's the one working. You can talk to Him and continually seek His guidance even as you practice speaking and listening to one another. Other times it may mean to stop and take some time for silent listening. God is faithful in these moments. Count on it.

1. How often do you make space in your own prayer life for simply listening to God?

2. Can you think of a time when you believe God spoke to you about how to listen and respond to someone else? What was that like?

Reflections on Accountability

You've now encountered an essential practice God has given to build us in the way of Jesus. Take some time to reflect and celebrate what He has done. We invite you to continue your journey by digging into one of the other LTW guides offered at startlivingtheway.com!

How did you grow because of this practice? What was especially meaningful? What was challenging? Do you plan to continue this accountability relationship? If so, how? How do you plan to celebrate the good things God has done over these past weeks?

