

Last month we continued our conversation about *Spiritual Community* by taking a look at “belonging.” To bring us back up to speed...

- **Discipleship always takes place in the context of relationship**—relationship with God and relationships with others.
- Our relationship with Christ (being **in Christ**) is first and foremost. Outside of Christ, *Spiritual Community* cannot happen.
- **Transformation** is the natural and expected result of *Spiritual Community*. If we are not changed by it we are not experiencing genuine *Spiritual Community*.
- **Belonging** means we fit in. We are where we belong. We are made for community. It also means we belong to others and others belong to us. We are both “owned by” and “owners of” one another, which means we have responsibility.

Okay. Those are the highlights so far. If you would like to catch up on the whole conversation, please feel free to visit our website (www.lampcob.com). Hover your mouse cursor over the “Ministries” tab at the top and click on Discipleship. You can then click on “more” under “connect” (small groups). From there it should be pretty self explanatory.

Last month we looked at **belonging** and concluded with the idea that belonging to one another means we have responsibility for each other. And with responsibility comes this month’s subject of **accountability**.

Spiritual community is a relationship of **accountability**. We are **accountable** to God and we are **accountable** to others. Unfortunately many people have either had a bad experience with **accountability** or have a bad understanding of what it is and how to practice it. Most often I seen it practiced with “**accountability** partners,” with the idea that if I have to share what I’ve done the social pressure to do what is right will motivate me towards Christ-likeness. While shame and fear can be effective motivators they rarely produce **transformation** or a sense of **belonging**. In fact, they produce conformation and people pleasing at best.

Life-changing **accountability** is motivated by love, not fear. It is a love for Christ, and a love for one another. (See the first article.) I want to be obedient to Christ and be more like him not because I am afraid of Jesus, but because I love him. I want to be obedient to Christ and encouraged by my brothers and sisters in Christ because they love him, too, and want me to become more like him because they know it is best for me and for them. The same is true in the other direction.

Accountability, therefore, is not punitive but the process of helping one another more accurately measure ourselves according to Christ with the motivation of helping each other grow more-and-more into Christ-likeness, or to use our LCOB vernacular; to each other take our next step with Jesus.

The reason we are challenged by **accountability** is because we have lost a common understanding of what, specifically, we are **accountable** to. Because of the Reformation’s anti-works theology, we have lost our measuring stick and have simply made it a matter of believing the right thing rather than doing

the right thing. However, we intuitively know what the right thing is when we see it done or not done, and we know what the wrong thing is when we see it done or not done.

Precisely what we are **accountable** to is to be obedient to Jesus. Are we loving other people? Are helping the poor? Are sharing the good news? Are we helping the oppressed? Are we observing the Lord's Supper? Are we observing baptism? Are we living simply? Are we generous? Are we praying? Are we forgiving? Are we confessing? Etc.

So, in fact, our discipleship is measurable and it is indeed measured in the context of community because it is in the context of community where our obedience or disobedience to Christ takes place. Now, the question becomes, do I really want to be held **accountable**? (The nebulous notion of **accountability** of "believing the right thing" is comfortable, but not transformative. In fact, you actually do what you truly believe, and so do I. Ouch!)

And that last question is important. **Accountability** is mutually agreed to. When I made the choice to follow Jesus I agreed to be held **accountable** to his standard—to become his disciple. (See Matthew 25) If I do not want to be held **accountable** I can simply declare I no longer want to be his disciple. If I do not want to be held **accountable** by other people, I can choose to abandon the relationships. But where would this leave such a person. That person would be outside of Christ and outside of community.

In the end, without **accountability** there is no **belonging**, and where there is no **belonging** there can be no **accountability**. We will continue to see how all of these parts of **Spiritual Community** work together as we continue this conversation.

To summarize what we've touched on here...

- Accountability is motivated by love in the context our relationships with Christ and other people.
- Accountability is an instrument of measurement to help is progress in Christ-likeness.
- Accountability is mutually agreed to.
- Accountability, belonging and community (relationships) go hand-in-hand.

So let's stop here for now and allow this to be an ongoing conversation. I encourage you to take some time to ponder these questions...

- #1 – Why do I believe accountability is so hard?
- #2 – In what ways do I allow myself to be held accountable in discipleship? If not, why not?
- #3 – Who is/are the people in my life I allow to hold me accountable? Who do I hold accountable?
- #4 – Is the accountability I experience/practice motivated by fear or love?
- #5 – How do I think accountability can build community and encourage spiritual growth?

