

Accountability  
1 Samuel 12  
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A few years ago there was a really powerful movie called Black Hawk Down. In it a group of elite soldiers were dropped in to capture two of the top leaders of a local warlord. But of course things go south when their helicopter goes down. In the movie there is a moment where the question is asked: what is the most valuable resource a soldier has in combat, is it their rifle? Is it their grenade? No. The most important resource a person has in combat is their friends, the one who walks into enemy territory with them and says to them, “hey, when push comes to shove, I’ve got your back.”

The most valuable asset you and I have as citizens in the kingdom of God is one another. Someone you can call at 2am when things are going badly; someone who will celebrate more jubilantly in your victories than in their own; someone who will not leave you or forsake you when you’re spiraling in a whirlpool of bad decisions. We are all ultimately accountable to God, but do you have someone in your life to whom you’re accountable? I want to suggest that in order to live the “with-God” life we all need accountability.

This morning we’re going to take a look at a chapter in the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel where the dedication and accountability of one man to a people and God will show us how we can be built up and encouraged by one another. So I invite you to open your bibles to the book of 1 Samuel, if you’re following along in the Red Pew Bibles it can be found on page 249 of the Old Testament. As we go, I will read a few verses, offer a few comments and then move on to the next.

**And Samuel said to all Israel, “Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. 2 And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. 3 Here I am; testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.” 4 They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.” 5 And he said to them, “The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they said, “He is witness.”**

Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, is getting up in years. Samuel has labored faithfully in his post and is now coming to the end. And recognizing that he was no spring chicken anymore, the people back in chapter 8 say to him “Samuel, you’re not getting any younger, how about you just go ahead and give us a king. After all, all the other kids in the neighborhood have got one and we want one too.” And this gravely discouraged Samuel, so much so that he cried out to God, “God, they’re asking for a king. Now I know you are the only king, so what do I do?”

Seems as though the people already made up their minds. Anyone of you who has ever had a close friend knows that when a person has made up their mind about a decision, it is really hard to get them to change it.

But Samuel recognizes the chain of command here. He asks God what he's to do, and God says it's not you they've rejected, but me. So go ahead and give 'em what they want. So Samuel anointed a king, King Saul. Then in chapter 12, Samuel, who is in his last days, takes inventory with his people and begins by saying, "listen, I want to make clear that I've been faithful, both to you in all my ways, and more importantly to God." It's as if Samuel is establishing his credibility with the audience. The Lord is witness that you've not seen any impropriety from me, and they say "He is witness" or you're right.

Then Samuel as a friend and caretaker of the people, goes on to point out where they've forgotten their identity, and forgotten God's presence with them.

**13 And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the Lord has set a king over you. 14 If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well.**

Samuel is like the best kind of friend a person can have. He is honest even in the tough stuff. Samuel doesn't blow sunshine with the people, he shoots straight. And even when the people continue to miss the mark, Samuel remains both steadfastly faithful to God and committed to prayer for the people. Samuel is a man for the people, he doesn't belittle them with accusations, or ridicule them because they had forgotten. He just reminds them. History is God's way of bringing clarity to cloudy thoughts.

In her book *Unbroken* Laura Hillenbrand, tells the story of Louie Zamparini, the Olympic runner who became a prisoner of war, victim of some of the most cruel treatment imaginable. Near the end she recounts Louie's experience of attending a Billy Graham crusade after he had returned from the war. And how for two straight nights he left enraged by what he heard. God works miracles one after another, he said. If you suffer, I'll give you the grace to go forward.

Louie found himself thinking of the moment at which he had woken in the sinking hull of his ship, the wires that had trapped him a moment earlier now, inexplicably, gone. And he remembered the Japanese bomber swooping over the rafts, riddling them with bullets, and yet not a single bullet had struck him, Phil or Mac. He had fallen into unbearably cruel worlds, and yet he had borne them. When he turned these memories in his mind, the only explanation he could find was one in which the impossible was possible.

And after being invited to come forward and surrender his life to God, Louie remembers being outraged once again and rushing for the door, only to be stopped cold. Everyone around him vanishing, and a memory long beaten back, the memory from which he had run the evening before, was there.

Louie was on the raft. There was gentle Phil crumpled up before him, Mac's breathing skeleton, endless ocean stretching away in every direction, the sun lying over them, the cunning bodies of the sharks waiting, circling. He was a body on a raft, dying of thirst. He felt words whisper from his swollen lips. It was a promise thrown at heaven, a promise he had not kept, a promise he had allowed himself to forget until just this instant: If you will save me, I will serve you forever.

Accountability, doesn't shame us into being something that we run from; accountability remembers who we are, and uses that memory to remind us who we are. Samuel doesn't shame the people because they've been utterly ignorant of God's faithfulness, he calls them to remember God's faithfulness and gently holds them to the promise each of them had made to one another. God to Israel and Israel to God.

And finally continuing with verse 19

**And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king." 20 And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. 21 And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. 22 For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. 23 Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. 24 Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you.**

Samuel holds Israel accountable, because he still believes that God is not done with them yet and that there is so much more they can become. And Samuel remains accountable to God, trusting that God's not done with them yet and that his responsibility is to persist in prayer for his people. What a remarkable and important lesson for us. We all need accountability. We need to be accountable to one another and to God. But how does this happen? Really quickly, three ways I think we grow together as a community of accountability.

1. We remind one another who we are. Christian accountability is born out of deep friendships and relationships of love. We have to earn the right to speak into one another's lives. Look around, we are family, but it begins with love and trust.

So when we do remind one another, what do we say? We tell one another just what Samuel said, the Lord will never leave you or forsake you. We tell one another that Jesus offers you a different way, from the worry or fear or anxiety or doubt. In just a minute we are going to sing a song that, for many of you may be one of your favorite hymns. Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine, O what a foretaste of glory divine. Heir of salvation purchase of God, born of his spirit, washed in his blood. This is my story this is my song,

praising my savior all the day long,, this is my story this is my song, praising my savior all the day long.

The narrative of our community is that, Jesus' life, death, resurrection and new life is our story. And we need to remind one another of that. There's a Dietrich Bonhoeffer quote that affirms this: "The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged." Broken, yet holy; holy yet broken. We carry the message of his power and promise around inside like a treasure in clay jars, that break and wither and crumble. Who do you have in your life who will speak these word to you? IF you don't, find someone, and if you can't find someone make and appointment to come see me and I will tell you.

## 2. Accountability shows us what we can become.

Faith is never a private act. Dallas Willard says, strictly speaking there is nothing "just between me and God." For all that is between me and God affects who I am; and that, in turn modifies my relationship to everyone around me. My relationship to others also modifies me and deeply affects my relationship to God. Do you have someone who will challenge you to become more than you are? Because for me and for you, the way we are now is not good enough, because it is far short of who God intended you to be. Do you have a Spiritual Fitness trainer, someone who will encourage you when you need encouraged, and ride you when you get lazy? As the author of Hebrew puts it in chapter 10, we who have confidence to enter this sanctuary as people washed clean by the blood of Jesus, let us consider how to provoke on another. Provoke, that's an interesting way of putting it. Accountability is not just something we gently suggest, "if you want." Accountability in Christ means, we are given God breathed license to be that annoying and pestering voice that calls each other to more.

And finally communities of accountability are not afraid to lovingly hold one another's feet to the fire. When our lives are open to one another we expect that they will freely offer warnings when we need it, encouragement when we need it and a kick in the pants when we need it. This is love, love is not standing by idly as a person walks blindly off a cliff. Love is telling them square, you're heading for trouble turn around now.

When we head down to fellowship time after worship today, no matter who you're talking with I want you to ask them this question—because I will be doing the same: "How can I pray for you?" Ask the question, see what happens. Perhaps you will learn something about someone you've known for years, who is a brother or sister in Christ that is completely new to you.

The greatest asset anyone of us need in the battle is not a weapon, it's a friend. Amen.