

Spiritual Accountability Practices in Discipleship Among the Indonesian Seventh-Day Adventist Fellowship Members in Manila

Mangadar Simbolon

mangadar.simbolon@unai.edu

Davied Zebedeus

Jakarta Local Conference

davied.zebedeus@gmail.com

Abstract

Being the disciples of God creates a need for agreeing to hold each other accountable in a manner pleasing to the Lord. Although accountability would be a recommended experience when friends hold each other accountable in such a spiritual progress, the practices might be unknown to the pastor or the members of the church if there is no clear intention to do it. Referring to the participants in the sample that is identified with the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this study will help indicate the aspect of spiritual growth collectively. The research study has been done within this particular Indonesian Seventh-day Adventist fellowship in Manila to know exactly how the members practice their role of discipleship through spiritual accountability. It focuses distinctively on one Indonesian youth fellowship located in the capital city of the Philippines. The members of this church are comprised of mostly young employees or young families who work in the metropolis of Manila within the age of 20-35 approximately. All other churches are obviously not included because including them may not lead this research to reach its conclusion in such time allotted for it. The native origin of the researchers also counts heavily on the reasons why this church is selected.

Keywords: spiritual, accountability, accountable, discipleship

Introduction

Accountability is said to be the processes through which commitment is made by an organization to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities and delivers against this commitment.¹ In this sense, the statement above has echoed what has been suggested in the definition of accountability as the commitment of one another to share evaluation toward one's actions as well as the responsibilities. Due to the importance of accountability, each Christian in the body of believers is expected to hold each other accountable in a discipling church.² In general, since discipleship is obedience—the service and

¹Monica Blagescu, Lucy de las Casas, and Robert Lloyd, *Pathways to Accountability: The Framework* (London: One World Trust, 2005), 20.

²Benjamin Osisioma, "Accountability in the Church," *Research Gate presented at*

allegiance of love as the law written in the heart, the core of matter is bounded.³ When self-sufficiency is more prominent in a church, there is no reminder from the brothers and sisters to be teachable in the growth of being disciples.⁴ Accountability can be a means for Christian discipleship to get closer to Jesus through the fellowship of others. The purpose of this research study is to delve into the practices of spiritual accountability among the church members. At this stage in this study, the spiritual accountability will be generally defined as strengthening one another in their vulnerability to progress the spiritual growth. In relation to discipleship, which is a commitment to Christ in the life of a person,⁵ spiritual accountability has become its crucial part. It is clear that one of the bases for a disciple to become a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ in His likeness is accountability.⁶ As a vital aspect of a Christian's walk with the Lord, accountability means that from one to three people that hold each other responsible for the actions in areas of lives in which they consistently struggle with sin, or fail to live up to God's standards. It is meant to help overcome the sinful strongholds in life.⁷ The focus of the church should be discipleship because when the body of Christ is full of "Christians" but not disciples, the results of mission seem to be disparate. When the church nowadays needs to be more effective in order for the Christians to be His full-fledged imitators, the apprentices of Jesus,⁸ the Christian accountability plays the role to account for what the church members are up to, realizing whether that they are liable, responsible, and answerable their actions in life to God.⁹ In addition, for an individual to grow in the body of Jesus Christ, one will go through the process that involves accountability to each other in the spiritual growth as one body of believers. Although it would be a recommended experience when friends or families in the church hold each other accountable in such progress, the practical aspects might be unknown to the pastor or the members of a church if no clear intention to do it.¹⁰

Conference of Chancellors, Registrars, and Legal Officers, Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion, (August 2016): 13.

³Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1892), 60.

⁴Trilia Newbell, "Why Accountability Matters," accessed from September 2018. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-accountability-matters>.

⁵Stephen Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From the Cross, for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 63.

⁶J. Hampton Keathley III, "Mark 16: Accountability," accessed September 2018. <https://bible.org/seriespage/mark-16-accountability>.

⁷Steve Shirley. "What is Biblical Accountability?" accessed October 2018. <http://jesusalive.cc/ques22.htm>.

⁸Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert Coleman, *DiscipleShift* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), 11.

⁹Richard Joseph Krejcir, "Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development," accessed September 2018, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42506>.

¹⁰W. Clarence Schilt, "Vulnerability, Accountability, and Growth," *Ministry Magazine*, (July 1994): 20-21.

Biblical Foundation

The biblical foundation as a literature review is accompanied with the related discussion found in the documents regarding spiritual accountability. The biblical foundation will be established by giving two different accounts from both testaments in which the principles are present and influential. It will be supplemented by some verses that also explicitly expound the same values and strongly promote the necessity of spiritual accountability in the discipleship among church members. The explanation from related documents shall grapple more with the concepts that give overview in concise ways.

Old Testament—Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Dealing with spiritual accountability, one thing that can be put into consideration is that every thing on this earth under the sun is meaningless or in vain. The *Qoheleth* (teacher who authors this book, leader of the assembly, the son of David) said one case which he observed himself. One man alone had no son nor brother with unending toil to his labor and unceasing dissatisfaction of eyes to his wealth. He unstoppably pursues the miserable business—the sore travail. He finally asks why he has to be working all this and bereaving his soul with this enjoyment? However, one advice is taken here that emphasizes the betterment of being two than one. They have a good return for their work. If one falls, the other friend can help him up. They will keep warm, if two lie down together. The threefold cord is not quickly broken. It portrays the need of companionship in nature.

New Testament—Hebrews 10:19-39

Perhaps, talking about this certain topic, many have only concentrated their attention to the verse 25 of this account. There is a big need to exegetically see the whole context of why “we should not give up meeting together, rather encourage one another.” Spiritual accountability is so concerned with the assemblies of the saints. It is ultimately because of the boldness of being saved by the shedding blood of Christ that has helped God’s people to enter so confidently into the Most Holy Place. This *παρρησία* (boldness, freedom, confidence) should not be cast away, so that the assuring faith and the unswerving hope will enable them to, instead of shrinking back and being doomed because of the deliberate sinning, persevere until they receive the promised rewards as they have done the will of God. This whole context will help draw the complete picture of spiritual accountability in the framework of salvation.

Supplementary Bible Text

These are some additional biblical texts supporting the spiritual accountability, such as: 2 Chr 19:6-7; Ezek 34:2-4; Prov 11:14, 15:22, 27:17; Matt 12:36-37; Rom. 15:7; 2 Cor 12:19-13:6; Gal 6:1-10; Eph 5:21; Col 3:9-10; Jas 5:16; 2 Pet 2:10-11.

Overview of Related Documents

True growth demands accountability. In particular, holding each other accountable has become one of the disciple’s actions.¹¹ When church members want a

¹¹Sherene Hattingh, Lindsay Morton, Rick Ferret, Kevin Petrie, Julie-Anne Heise, and Kayle De Waal, “A Qualitative Analysis of Discipleship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Responses to a Global and Regional Survey,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*

private solution to their private problem, the Bible does not offer private solutions, there are personal solutions but not private. We were created, sanctified, and gloried in community. Accountability is a Christian lifestyle. Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this.¹²

Methodology

The research study utilizes the qualitative research method. The in-depth and focused group interviews, one-to-one interviews, and the literature reviews are the sources of data. The participants are particularly from an Indonesian Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Fellowship in Pasay City, Manila. In conducting the study, a letter of recommendation from the school through the professor was presented to the church board before collecting the data. The recommendation from the church board committee for the specific persons to be asked for the direct and open-ended interview will be the basis for choosing the participants. Informed consent will be given to each participant before starting the interview. Data gathered were transcribed and analyzed into certain categories and themes. Then, the presentation and discussion of the findings, conclusion, and recommendation are the last part of the study. The analysis of data gathered through the one-to-one and focus-group interview of collection method is utilized as the backbone of this study. The answers of research questions would be provided after the collection of data being done. Its results are the emerging themes that come from the explanation of interviewees and the thematic analysis of data are presented in the consolidated integration area.

Data Analysis

The Understanding of Spiritual Accountability

This first section of the data analysis would help answer the first research question: “How do the church members understand the spiritual accountability? The understanding of spiritual accountability is described in the following elaborated points based on the responses of the church members through the interview.

Limited Information in Inadequate Knowledge

The participants in the study somehow give typical description from their explanation. When it comes to their knowledge of spiritual accountability, the inadequacy is evidently tangible. The participants, composed of mostly youth, have been in this church approximately around the scope of one to two years. They recognized that they might be blessed in doing church activities but they are unsure with what they do. For instance, a person says that the fellowship is a positive gathering where everybody can share testimonies. This statement implies not only limited information regarding spiritual accountability but also indicates the level of spirituality that the church has developed in general. The limited information might probably become the reason why church members are not yet knowledgeable or

12, (December 2016): 162.

¹²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper Row Publishers, 1954), 20.

uninformed in these particular discussions. However, the rough ideas hopefully lead them to proper understanding and practice.

The Rough Ideas

Affected by the inadequate spiritual maturity, the participants are unable to grasp the proper understanding of spiritual accountability in concrete. Perhaps the rough ideas are there, for example when they say that they know that friends will help them in their spirituality but in particular, they do not say why they need it and how to implement it. These young people may not exhibit the ideas in words but they have presented some practical aspects that support the rough perception. As what in the literature has confirmed that accountability marks the maturity of the spirituality,¹³ it is important to know that the practices have taken place though the understanding has not come to the fullest.

The Current Practices of Spiritual Accountability

This second section would provide the answer of second research question: “How do spiritual accountability practices look like among the church members?” The current practices of spiritual accountability are described in the following elaborated points based on the responses of the church members through the interview.

Checks and Balances in Regular Frequency

One person in the interview has said that his responsibility as a young person who has been entrusted to be the one of the church elders needs checks and balances to control his role and also the growth of the church itself in both ways. Like what has been emphasized that it is a safeguard for leaders or even all members to overcome against human tendency in not being open for their sinful condition among God and others. Beside God has given the Holy Bible and the Holy Spirit as the agents to provide direction and controls on our lives, accountability among believers becomes a key to develop spirituality.

Open Conversation with Such Close Relationship

The participants in this part have shared one common theme that supports the idea of being accountable to each other in the church. Since this fellowship has drawn close everyone to the point where they can see each other at least every Sabbath, the conversation about one another will happen on that weekly basis. However, everyone is not that very close to each one individually in the church. In fact, they really emphasize that if one does not know that person so closely, it is not appropriate to have contacts beyond the steps that both parties, for example, have done. They see the necessity to build relationship first before going beyond that contact. Spirituality talk and having accountability partner will happen if they have building quality and deep relationships among one another as the result of accountability between man-to-man or between groups.¹⁴

¹³Keathley III, “Mark 16: Accountability.”

¹⁴Krejcir, “Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development,” 10.

Care group, the crucial aspect

Back-to-back, either the members or the church pastor, care group has been mentioned and become an important and encouraging mechanism in reaching everyone in the church. If done correctly, this aspect will give such involvement that makes disciples and identifies leaders and such accountability among the relationships of those people.¹⁵ Therefore, when they have said that their four care groups in some locations of Metro Manila like in Pasay, Mandaluyong and Taguig, they have practiced the accountability since the only regular time for them to be able to meet together is on Friday night and Sabbath day. It also applies to the pastor due to his business and studies; he can avail to meet directly his members in those time only.

The Barriers that Avoid Church Members to Be Spiritually Accountable

This third section would answer the third research question: “What aspects do make the church members avoid being accountable to each other?”

Common Situated Hindrance of Life

Today, the church members realize that they live in a time when man seeks to make God accountable to him for his comfort and pleasure. Thus, people are not only doing what is right in their own eyes, but the prevailing attitude is ‘do your own thing. You are only accountable to yourself and your own self-fulfillment.’¹⁶ (Keathley III, 2004). This is a shift from a God-centered perspective of life to a man-centered perspective and neglecting the condition that spiritual accountability is about a willingness to explain actions, to answer for life, and to supply the reason why.¹⁷ This is all part of man’s attempt to dismiss any accountability to God. The reality is that when men seek to ignore accountability to God and others, they leave themselves vulnerable to the cold misery of slavery and eventually to the menace of a dictator.

Social Barriers

Living particularly in Metro Manila gives such perspective of emphasis that city is so individualistic. Not only that is a foreign land of the Indonesians, far from their homeward bound, but the metropolis has given an idea that certain people should behave as an adult, thus the need of being accountable to each other is nearly none. However, being accountable to each other provides the necessary discipline and support needed to see people reach godly goals. In contrast, God has given His agents to control and help provide direction in our lives despite the circumstances surrounding us.¹⁸

Cultural Barriers

¹⁵Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 19.

¹⁶Keathley III, “Mark 16: Accountability.”

¹⁷John Repass, “Spiritual Accountability,” accessed October 2018.
www.discipleshiplibrary.com/pdfs/OKC2008_09.pdf.

¹⁸Osisoma, “Accountability in the Church,” 10.

The prevailing attitude is promoted or stated in a way that undermines accountability to God and others. The Bible in no way denies our individualism. Indeed, the Scriptures promote no solo Christian, but in a way that holds us each accountable to others. In this context, when proper individualism leads to a certain amount of inventiveness, ingenuity, and freedom, it can also produce irresponsibility without accountability. The church pastor in the interview has proclaimed that among the church members they always promote that one has to “praise in public, rebuke in private.” This good means, however, has implied how the cultural barriers intertwine in the principles of spiritual accountability. There should be a balance not a hindrance when it comes to culture. People may seem impolite when the conversation touches sensitive issues, especially spirituality, but when a person is at stake, being “at the edge of a deadly cliff” or “about to crash a big truck,” a real action must come first as prevention before that “spiritual death” might happen.

Spiritual Barriers

Each one has different kinds of spiritual growth, when one gets stronger, the other one might be strengthened, like Ecclesiastes account has stated in the previous part. In relation to discipleship, the fact is one cannot make disciples or produce growing and mature Christians without accountability. Hence, the perception among the interviewees or church members in general view that one needs to be spiritual enough to be spiritually accountable to each other needs to be evaluated. The church pastor also in his interview has advised that they can still be accountable when they are open to one another, disciplined in the worship, and not afraid of being told Pharisee. Accountability is not merely related to kind of problem or addiction; it is so much so closely attached to the spiritual growth and maturity which impacts thinking and behavior¹⁹

The Practical Strategies of Holding Each Other Accountable

The last section would discuss the fourth research question: What practical strategies can help the church members to be spiritually accountable to each other?

Adequate Imparted Information

This part is closely approaching to the summary and conclusion that may help advise the church. However, this part is not recommendation per se. The suggested practical strategies come from through specially the analysis of interview done to the church pastor and members. Practically speaking, if there will be the providence of complete information in the principles of being spiritually accountable to God and holding each other accountable, then the church members may find the proper understanding and practice that will produce practical strategies of which the church members can make their spirituality better in the sight of God and each other.

Preaching

On one hand, the pastor mentioned that between him and his church members, the preaching content is key aspect in developing the growth of spirituality of his flock. As he often makes the topics of the sermon relevant to the needs of church members, the church members mostly have stated that those topics are their favorites

¹⁹Krejcir, “Mark 16: Accountability,” 9-10.

in the interview. Having said that, this solution may be more contextualized up to the needs to generally overcome barriers in their spiritual struggle and to practice spiritual accountability in church setting.

Care Group Materials

On the other hand, besides the church setting, the crucial aspect of care groups also needs useful resources in order for the members to be nourished spiritually. The spirituality will be emerged in the materials that every week the church members could input as their information in relation to the spirituality as well as accountability. Both together work for individual to be spiritually accountable.

Particular Creative Strategies

Reactivation of spiritual accountability partner will help to minimize the apostasy. Church pastor in the interview said that long time ago he ever suggested for the members to have spiritual accountability partner. Its reaffirmation with proper information from the Bible seems useful to the members as they are in the learning process of spiritual growth.

Social Outdoor Activities

Based on the observation of researcher, this fellowship has so-called the activities such as “Adventist Youth” program. However, the social activities have been suggested to be as helpful as to support the deeper bounding of each other.

Summary

The summary of findings shows that being accountable to God and holding each other accountable are explained by the participants as it becomes a data analysis that structures the development of the findings and conclusion. It is comprehensively bridging the study purpose with the problem statement and the findings and conclusion of study.

The Understanding of Church Members of the Spiritual Accountability

Theme 1 talks about how good the church members comprehend the spiritual accountability in their theoretical framework. The common emerging theme shows that there is a limited information due to such inadequate knowledge among them. They have some rough ideas in the practical activities, but if they are taught a clear guidance in spirituality, the accountability will be better understood.

The Current Spiritual Accountability Practices among Church Members

Theme 2 emphasizes the checks and balances between church members and church pastor reciprocally and among the church members mutually. Based on their regular frequency of meeting each other on care group time and Sabbath service—after their business on weekdays, their conversation has led them to seek and receive counsels. The open conversation, however, depends on how close the relationship between two sides is. The closeness of relationship matters in the spiritual

accountability practices. Though, this is very culturally related, because Indonesians hold the eastern values when they see the truth not from black-white viewpoint but how shame-honor being done in this context, they still uphold the importance of Matthew 18 principles in dealing with accountability to each other. In addition, the frequent sharing devotional thought through chatroom group help them to see the correlations between being spiritually accountable to God and holding each other accountable. Also, care group program has become crucial and inseparable for them to have the regular spiritual checks and balances individually and collectively.

The Barriers that Avoid Church Members to Be Spiritually Accountable

Theme 3 pertains to the common situations that have thoroughly evolved into the hindrance of life socially, culturally, and spiritually. The barriers somehow cover the foreigners in city context, the habitual behavior, and the incomplete maturity. They bar the spirituality of young individuals in this church to perform spiritual accountability properly. Furthermore, the lack of spirituality is the big iceberg problem as far as this church is concerned. The needs of consistent movement toward maturity are essential to the members. Doing it properly makes the church members no longer avoid to be spiritually accountable

The Practical Strategies that Help Church Members to Be Spiritually Accountable

Theme 4 is more about the practical strategies of holding each other accountable needs to be imparted in an adequate information through preaching contents and care group materials. The sufficient knowledge will educate members to better articulate and practice spiritual accountability through suggested creative strategies. Renewing the spiritual accountability partner program is one of beneficial aspects beside the social outdoor activities in the non-formal setting where members could know each other better, so that once solid and strong relationships get established, the spiritual accountability will help members preserve their grace for the life to come accordingly.

Conclusion

The level of spiritual maturity of this young church with young people as the members is unable, yet on progress, to practice actively spiritual accountability in such intensive or proper ways. The socio-cultural barriers alongside with the spiritual hesitance somehow hinder the daily practices of accountability among church members. Nevertheless, the teaching of accountability with spiritual emphasis along with the suggested programs will enhance its understanding and practice among the church members. The Holy Word and Holy Spirit will guide the path of a church that practices spiritual accountability despite the difficulties around them.

On top of that, though the theoretical framework is not fully present, the daily practices are there waiting for improvements. This condition should not happen in this church where men seek to ignore accountability to God and others and they leave themselves vulnerable to the cold misery of slavery and eventually to the menace of a dictator. The convictions in relationships with one another help believers to have complete surrender to the spirit of God and the truth of the Word.

Spiritual Accountability Practices in
Discipleship Among the Indonesian Seventh-Day
Adventist Fellowship Members in Manila

Informed Consent

Title: Investigating the Spiritual Accountability Practices in Discipleship among the Indonesian SDA Fellowship in Manila, Philippines

Research description: This research study, to be conducted by Davied Zebedeus, is about understanding how the spiritual practices are being done in the growth of the church members particularly in the Indonesian Fellowship Manila, Philippines. You are invited to participate in this research study with your selection criteria.

Privacy & confidentiality: Private information collected in this project will not be shared with the public. The names of the participants as well as where they live or work will not be disclosed to anyone during or after the completion of this project. All information that can reveal the identity of the research participants will systematically be removed from the data before data analysis starts. To do so, each research participant will be assigned an anonymous identifier or a number.

Voluntary participation: Research participants freely volunteer to participate in this research study, without being forced. They have the freedom to share what they want to share or stop participating if they want to stop any time.

Risk: There is no known emotional or physical harm that this research study can cause to the researchers and the research participants of this study.

Audio recorder: The researchers will be using an audio-recording device but will keep the information confidential.

Honesty: Both the researchers and the research participant agree to be honest in both data collection and reporting. No dishonesty is allowed.

I, _____, understand the purpose of this research project and voluntarily give my permission to participate freely.

Signature of the participant: _____ / Date: _____

Cellphone numbers (needed only if there is any question): _____

Signatures of researcher: _____

Davied Zebedeus
Cellphone numbers: (+63) 9159069519

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