

Creating Accountability and Community in Your Church

Scott Hathaway

Wouldn't it be great to be a part of a church where everyone was involved in each other's lives? Don't you long to be a part of a church family where the members care enough to check up on your spiritual health throughout the week? I want to share with you how God did just that in our church, and how it can happen in yours.

Seeing the Need

More than one year ago, the pastoral team at our church sat down together pondering a couple of questions. We asked each other, "How can we build into our people a sense of community where everyone plays a part and where everyone is important?" We also asked, "How can we gain a high level of accountability in our church?" We had no answers, but we were open to trying things that are not typical and we were willing to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

All the pastors on the team had been a part of many different churches throughout our years in ministry. We had never encountered a church that was successful in developing these two essentials. My family and I had visited a wonderful church close to our house that came close to what we wanted in the area of community. I talked with the pastors of the church to see if they had any insight into what caused their church to bond in this manner. They did not know.

After speaking with them, I had no answers. I posed the questions to my wife and so did the others on the pastoral team. We earnestly were seeking the Lord's guidance on these items. I believed that these characteristics would shape all the other ministries at our church. After much prayer and seeking the Lord, I believed that the Lord had given us the answer.

The Two Virtues

You may already be wondering, "Why choose community and accountability as the two virtues to implement in your church?" The simple answer is that I see these two concepts in the Scripture as being vital to a church being what God wants her to be. Community gives us a sense of belonging to each other and to the Lord. The world may pretend to be our friend and may tell us that they are tolerant and accept us, but they do not. If we are going to belong anywhere on this earth as Christians, we must belong at our church.

Not only did I see the need for community and belonging in church, but I realized that church members today do not know each other. They do not have any idea what struggles another member of the church faces on a daily basis. They do not pray for each other, call each other, encourage each other, or correct each other. We live hopelessly separate lives. We needed to have a strong sense of community because none of us is strong enough to make it on our own.

I felt the need to incorporate accountability because of the lack of involvement that church members have in each other's affairs. If a member missed church, people might call them and tell them we missed them, but no one would venture far enough into their lives to find out why they missed the service. We might know about a sin in a church member's life, but not feel comfortable about confronting the person.

I realized that I need accountability to help me live a more godly, consistent life. Many spiritual disciplines are much easier to do if I am being held accountable. I desired to be a part of a church body that understood how we all miss God's mark of perfection, and who could be open and honest with each other about our failures and fears.

The Solution

We came to realize both of these goals in ways beyond what I ever dreamed was possible. The Lord has truly given us the desire of our hearts. Our church now enjoys a strong sense of belonging and community. We fellowship with each other all throughout the week. We are involved in each other's lives in spiritual matters as well. Holding each other accountable and helping follow up with someone about a particular area of sin has been achieved wholesale in our congregation in both our people and our leaders.

How did this happen? I believe the following items are the keys to having these things in our church.

1. Our leaders are open and accessible to all the people. The congregation knows that we fail and they know that we sin, too.
2. At weekly Bible Studies, which almost all our church members attend, we go around the circle and everyone answers three vital questions.
 - What has been your greatest spiritual victory this week?
 - What has been your greatest spiritual failure this week?
 - What is the Lord trying to teach you this week?
3. We have many fellowships with the church and we have members over to the homes of our leaders frequently.
4. We preach and teach on these themes frequently and consistently.

The Results

We had a situation where a couple in our church was having some trouble with their marriage. I went over to counsel with them. The fellow told me that he did not share his family business with outsiders. I explained to him the importance of having accountability and being open to insight and correction from others. I challenged them to open their lives to the power of accountability and see if God would not repair the damage they had caused each other. They stuck with our church and with each other!

At our weekly Bible Study, we confess to the group if we have been short with our kids. Confession is made if we blew up at our spouse. We tell about our fears and failures. We talk about our joys and victories with Jesus. There is no pretending...no pretentious spirit. We just love each other and try to help each other become more like Jesus. If I tell our group that I am having trouble with my anger, I will get calls throughout the week asking me how I am doing. What a blessing!

There have been some side-effects from implementing community and accountability that I had not foreseen. I am now familiar with the spiritual state of the people I serve. I can make much more informed decisions about placing people in leadership roles. I can tell when Joe is hurting and can pray for him much more effectively than I ever could before. I know when Betty has a monetary need that either my family or our church needs to meet. I have served at many churches, but never with a people that I loved like this and never with a people who loved me and my family. I am humbled to serve them and grateful to know them.

Whenever I tell people about the care and accountability at our church, they almost always respond in the same manner. They are filled with longing to experience that same thing at their church. I believe, with God's help, they can, and you can too!