

**5/12 Accountability**

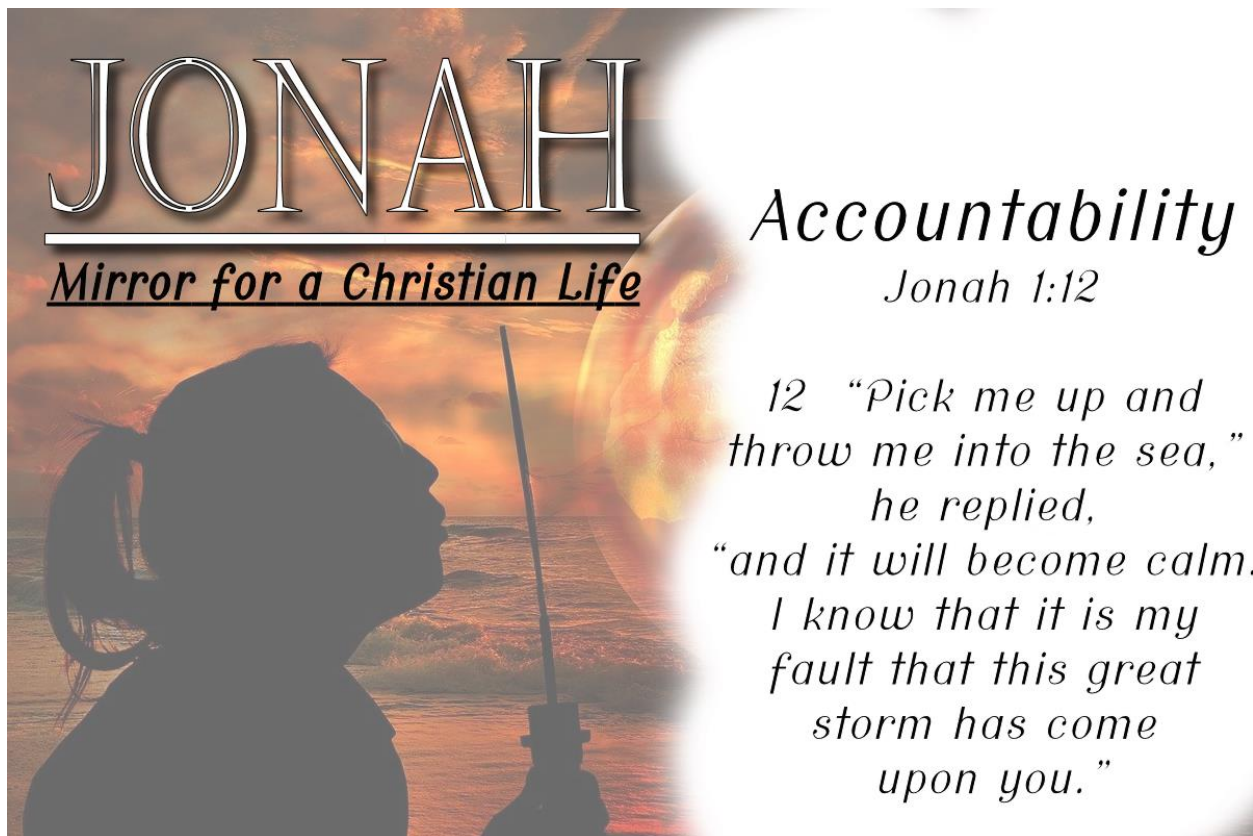
**Jonah 1:12**

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**Special Music: “Guilty”**

**Newboys**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dq1-IX9U95I>



**JONAH**  
*Mirror for a Christian Life*

*Accountability*  
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## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Trudy J. Darling had been a judge in Parable for almost 8 years. She had grown up in the small town where she had gone to high school. Having a keen interest in animals, she had gone to A & M thinking she would pursue a career as a veterinarian. But as things often happen and life takes its turns, she had wound up studying law. After finishing school, she took and passed the bar exam and found gainful employment as a defense attorney for the Legal Aid Society in the Hill Country of central Texas. When old judge Marly Stickles passed away in Parable, she received a phone call from Jimmy Drake, the pharmacist in Parable, who was acting mayor at the time. Jimmy informed her that the position of judge had become open, and the town really had no one to fill the position. He wondered if she might be interested.

Trudy had to think long and hard about it. She received a decent salary from for handling indigent cases at Legal Aid, but it was a going-nowhere kind of job, and she really wasn't confident enough to hang out her own shingle. Nor was she interested in doing scut work for some local attorney. If she were to take the job of judge in Parable, she just might be able to make a difference. While the money wasn't great, she loved the people of Parable and found herself often waxing nostalgic about her time there. In the end, she took the job and moved back to her hometown.

Trudy had reaccustomed herself to the slow pace of Parable. She had forgotten how laid back everyone was there. It wasn't that she couldn't keep

herself busy because there was always trouble brewing somewhere, mostly from the older kids in town. But there were a few times that she had to use all her skills, like when Forest Blankenship had caught Stan Doboddy trying to walk off with some tools from a worksite. The two had commenced to throw down and both wound up in the hospital and each blamed the other. Sometimes, peace can be hard to come by, but she had been able to resolve the problem to everyone's satisfaction.

Trudy was grateful that Alfred Spinnaker had agreed to take the position of Justice of the Peace, which allowed her more time to concentrate on more important matters in town. Alfred answered to her, but she usually didn't interfere with his work of delivering subpoenas, doing the occasional wedding, and processing court orders that she handed down.

But today... well, she just hated days like today. The courtroom was quiet, but only because Trudy had kept everyone out except those necessary to the proceedings. From the doorway to her chambers, she ran her eyes across the courtroom to be sure that everyone was there that needed to be there. She saw her usual court personnel who kept things in order and running smoothly. Randal Dickson (who went by the moniker "Rebel") was on rotation to serve as Prosecutor. Sheriff Thom and Deputy Wagner were there as witnesses. Trudy also had several depositions in front of her for testimonies. She would have had to kick this case up to the county if they wanted a real District Attorney. But everyone had agreed that it would be better for the people involved if they could keep this case local. So, Trudy had called in a few favors and managed to keep

the case in her courtroom. She knew that Rebel had the right to move it up to county if he wanted to get an impartial hearing, but everyone knew that doing so would actually be more problematic for everyone involved.

Alice Charm was there as the lawyer for the defense. And sitting beside her was the source of today's irritation, Myron McIntosh, wearing the new brown suit his mother had just brought for him so he would look proper in court. Daisy, Myron's mother, was in the gallery as well as Max Sanders. Trudy wasn't that comfortable having Max there. He had quite a temper and might be disruptive. But, considering the events that occurred, she could hardly keep him away. The sheriff had asked his deputy, Dusty Forrester, to step in as Bailiff for the day and Trudy had quietly asked him to keep an eye on Max to make sure things didn't get out of hand.

Trudy stepped into the courtroom through the door from her chambers and Dusty called out, "ALL RISE!! The Court of General Sessions, Parable, TX is now in session. The Honorable Trudy J. Darling presiding." Wearing her robes, Trudy walked to her bench and sat in her oversized chair, which let out a soft squeak. She had been begging the city council for a new chair, but in the grand scheme of things, that seemed somewhat unimportant.

"You may be seated," Dusty said, loud enough for everyone to hear.

Trudy knocked her gavel, a gift from her dad, on the sounding block, calling out in a loud voice, "This court is now in session."

**She took a deep breath and looked directly at Myron. She really didn't want to be the judge in this case today. This was going to be a hard one.**

**"Mr. McIntosh, will you please stand?" Both Myron and Alice Charm rose to their feet. "Mr. Forrester, please read the list of charges."**

**Dusty looked down at his paperwork and read, "In the case of the people vrs. Myron McIntosh, case # PTX-9902984, the charges are as follows:**

**Charge 1: On the given date, Mr. Myron McIntosh was arrested for Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol.**

**Charge 2: On said occasion, Mr. MacIntosh lost control of his vehicle causing an accident that resulted in major damage to two vehicles**

**a. Vehicle A was a tan Toyota Sienna belonging to one Daisy McIntosh**

**b. Vehicle B was a blue Ford F-150 belonging to one Max Sanders**

**Charge 3: Failing to appear in court at the designated date and time.**

**No one was injured in the accident."**

**As Trudy figured would happen, Max jumped to his feet and screamed, "What do you mean no one was injured? My dog Maggie was killed due to this irresponsible young man!"**

**"Mr. Sanders, please sit down. I've already told you that the city has no ordinances or laws regarding what happened to your dog and that you would**

need to file a civil case with the Justice of the Peace for your complaint to be heard. If you cannot contain yourself, you will need to leave this courtroom”

Max pounded his fist on the railing in frustration, shouted a few expletives and quickly left the courtroom with the trailing words, “Where’s the justice? Why doesn’t anyone care? I’ll make him and his mother pay dearly for this. What he did was unconscionable. You haven’t heard the last from me.” The doors closed behind him, but everyone could still his voice as it echoed off the atrium walls. Dusty quickly positioned himself in the doorway so that Max would not be able to return.

Trudy held her forehead in her hands as she sighed and shook her head back and forth. “Let’s get back to the proceedings. Mr. McIntosh, how do you plead to these charges?”

Myron stared at Judge Darling, then looked to his lawyer, Alice Charm, and back to the judge, and then to his mother, looking for any sign of support. He knew what Ms. Charm wanted him to say. He knew what the insurance company had told him to say. But Mr. Sanders’s outburst had convinced him that the only right thing to say was, “I’m guilty, Trudy.”

“Mr. McIntosh, I know that we know each other, and that I used to babysit you for your mother years ago, but this is a court of law and you will address me as ‘Your Honor’. Do you understand?”

Myron bowed his head. It seemed he just couldn’t do anything right lately, but he had to try and make up for all the trouble he caused. “I’m guilty, Your

Honor. I was drunk. I crashed the car. It's all my fault. I killed Mr. Sanders's dog, Maggie. And I tried to run away. I don't care what Ms. Charm tells me is best for me or what the insurance company wants me to say. The truth is, I'm guilty. I did these things, and I am ashamed. I've hurt a lot of people. I am sooooo sorry for what I have done. I know that I cannot make up for what I did, so please punish me in whatever way you think fit."

Alice Charm shrugged her shoulders and looked at the ceiling in resignation. Myron stood silent waiting for Judge Darling to respond, although he was screaming inside. He had resigned himself to his fate. He has taken accountability for his actions against the advice that everyone had given him. And there would be a price to pay for everyone involved. It was all in the hands of Judge Darling at this point. Trudy just shook her head, looked at Myron's mother, and felt the weight of the world on her shoulders, knowing that the decision she rendered would change the lives of everyone involved.

Jonah is considered to be one of the 12 minor prophets in the Bible. I've always struggled with those titles, Major and Minor Prophets. I believe that my mind works a little different than most. In our world today, we try to validate everything, which is an important thing for us to do. That was probably true in the past as well. But where is the test for determining who is a major prophet and who is a minor prophet? Is it the number of miracles they performed, or maybe the volume of words we have from them? Most scholars agree that the books for Major Prophets are longer than the books for Minor Prophets, but there is just something about that nomenclature that scratches on the chalkboard of my soul. To me, a prophet is a prophet no matter how many words are written about them.

And if we travel that train of thought, what determines if a person is a major Christian or a minor Christian? Is it the number of souls saved that are chalked up in our heavenly bank account? Is it the amount of time we spend in Christian service? Is it the number of times we feed the poor, help the needy, or visit the sick? Do we think major Christians should get more press coverage? Do we get crowns with more jewels if we manage to break through that barrier from being a minor Christian to being a major Christian? These kinds of designations are just noise to me in an already confused world. Where does Jesus tell us that some Christians are minor and others major? From everything I have read, we are either followers of Christ or not. I also personally believe that Paul would agree with me. After all, it was Paul who said, **“For I am the least of the apostles and not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”**



And maybe it is also true that I am too focused on unnecessary minutia that doesn't really matter. But then again, maybe I am not. Still, it seems to me that Jesus calls us to be less so that he can be more. Have we become so caught up in our religions that we have forgotten our place at the feet of Jesus, not the hierarchy created by man? I've told you before, and this may be totally outside my prevue, but when I arrive in heaven, I don't need a crown, a robe, or a mansion and I will be quite happy if St. Peter will just point me at the servant's entrance. Nothing I do, say, or experience has anything to do with me entering heaven. The only reason that I can enter is because I have a ticket stamped by Jesus Christ proving that I have been redeemed by the blood of the cross. Any work I have done, any person I have served, any words that I have spoken, any need I have met has been done by Jesus Christ, and I claim no bounty for it. I am owed nothing by my Creator. But I am accepted into his kingdom because I am his child.

Jonah knew that he had messed up. A storm was raging around the boat that he had booked passage on headed for Tarshish. The storm had come up so suddenly that the crew in the boat had decided it must be the result of someone making the gods angry. The wind was tearing the sails, and the water was filling the holds. The waves tossed the boat about while lightning flashed through the sky and the thunder roared. The crew was so convinced that they were all going to die that they figured the only way to save themselves was to find out who had committed this heinous sin, whatever it was, against the gods. So, as the people of that time were prone to do in situations where they felt that everything was out

of their control, they had gathered around each other on their knees, not to pray, but to cast lots to find out who was responsible. They were convinced that pointing their fingers in the right direction would bring them safety. They were looking for someone to blame, someone to hold responsible, someone to punish.

And Jonah sat nearby watching their desperation, knowing that he was the source of the trouble, the reason for the calamity. Just like Myron sitting in that courtroom knowing that he was the cause of Mr. Sanders's pain and his mother's anguish and worry.

Have you ever experienced one of those moments? You know, those moments when time seems to stand still as we take in the chaotic events around us, as our conscience points its' finger and us, and we realize there is only one conclusion. The conclusion that we are the central component of that chaos. That we are responsible for the circumstances in which we find ourselves and the pain of those that we have managed to drag along with us into that tornado of destruction. There is no one else to blame. And those who love us are looking for any other answer because they don't like seeing what is happening to us.

And we find ourselves faced with a choice. A choice between two very difficult, opposing responses.

1. One is that we allow the people around us to find a scapegoat so that we don't go to the slaughter. Our friends, family, and neighbors mean well, but they don't want to see us suffer even if we are guilty. The fact is that if we are found guilty and we suffer, then they are probably going

to suffer as well. If Myron had pleaded “Not Guilty,” both his mother and his lawyer would have had some hope of a fighting chance that Myron would come out okay.

2. Or 2. Like Myron, we could acknowledge and lean into our accountability, step into our responsibility, knowing that it is the right thing to do, even if it guarantees a guilty verdict, and the punishment that will entail. The world teaches us to protect ourselves first, even if it means we are not true to our conscience; that we support an untruth, sometimes thinking that it is okay since our desire is to spare pain for others.

Accountability is hard. It can hurt. It can wear us out. It can leave us destitute. It can take us to the depths of depression. It can make us want to run away to avoid the pain. Holding ourselves accountable can mean a loss of stature, loss of relationships, loss of prosperity, loss of a job, loss of comfort, and a loss of pride. It can try to make us want to hide from the people who care about us. It can send us back to the starting line and make us rebuild from scratch. It can get us thrown into jail. Or, like Jonah, it can get us thrown into the ocean in the middle of a storm. I say it again, accountability is hard. It requires us to face the truth head-on and not see it as a near miss. It means standing up and saying, “I am responsible! It is my fault! I messed up!” and meaning every word. It is telling everyone that we know that the light was red when the insurance company tells us not to mention it, and that we should admit no fault. It’s telling people that we had a moral failure that led to disastrous consequences. It’s about

bringing our wrongs out of the shadows and into the light. It's about accepting truth for what it is, instead of trying to view it through a distorted mirror so that we can live in denial. Being accountable is hard.

I think the hardest part is facing the truth that we have let people down. Our spouses. Our children. Our bosses. Our mentors. Our friends. What we often don't realize, is that the truth will always come out, and the destruction, pain, and hurt will be even deeper when it does. The more we try to hide our transgressions, the deeper the scars will run in our souls.

But I have some great news as well. Do you realize that when we find ourselves sitting in that courtroom, that jail cell, that automobile accident, that lie that we have told, that embellishment on our resumes that isn't true, that argument that turned into a fistfight, that moment of indiscretion that we regret, that instant when we realize we have hurt someone, knowing that we should be punished and that God is ashamed of us, we aren't alone. We may feel alone, but Jesus is sitting right there with us. And while matters of this world may weigh us down and leave us fearful, Christ is there to walk beside us through that storm, telling us **"Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."** There is nothing that we could ever do that would make him turn away from us and leave us alone in our misery.

**Paul said it best in Romans 8:38-39**

**For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor**

**depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

That is our promise in the dark times. This is our promise when we declare our accountability when we own up to our indiscretions. Christ is that brother who will never leave us, even when he knows how badly we have messed up. He sits with us in the darkness, helping us to remember that **“the truth will set us free.”** That is the bullet phrase for accountability, **“the truth will set us free.”** He never promises us that the truth won't hurt. Sometimes we are called to walk through the crucible of truth. But Jesus is always there to bring the light of truth to the darkness in our souls. Even as we find ourselves caged by the world, he sets our souls free.

God bless you all,

**AMEN**

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