

## **Cut from the Herd**

**“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” 1 Peter 5:8**

On the Serengeti Plains in Tanzania, a drama will unfold within the wildebeest migration that happens from December – July. It happens every year, for there are natures of the beasts that drive both prey and predator alike. The wildebeest is a “herd” animal and it stays together for comfort and protection. Although it can kick and run, it has no other means of protecting itself except to stay close to others of its kind in a herd. These beasts protect one another using what is called by researchers as “swarm intelligence,” where the animals try to overcome a threat by confusing an attacker with a circling stampede. Even so, a predator such as a lion counteracts this distraction by fixing its eyes intently on a young or ill animal within the herd before it makes its attack. When the lion spots such a beast, the predator will then attempt to separate his prey from the herd and attack it. I have watched with amazement how a lion will lock on one of these weak or young animals like a heat seeking missile, and block out every other animal in its pursuit of its prey. Very scary and desperate for the wildebeest when it’s in the lion’s focused stare. But, also very scary and desperate for the man of God who has become weak and isolated, for the devil, as Apostle Peter describes him, takes on the same predator instincts and goes for this man without mercy. Are you weak or isolated? Better give it some serious thought, for you could be in the devil’s focus even now.

How do God’s men become weak and isolated? It is one thing to willingly take this route by choice, but another to do so out of ignorance? I cannot say much to the man who will not be convinced of his vulnerability and stays in it. If the Holy Spirit cannot convince this man through His word and conscience, no servant of His can do so either. This man will likely come to understand his predicament after his fall, and perhaps he will come back to the Father as the Prodigal son came back to his father. Unfortunately, a fool only comes to understand his vulnerability when he is in the clutch of the Roaring Lion, for he thinks he can never be caught, for he is too smart.

G K Chesterton has a good thought on this: “When all philosophies shall fail, this word alone shall fit; that a sage feels too small for life and a fool too large for it.” – Ballad of the White Horse, bk.8.

A fool is “too large” in his own eyes, and he cannot be convinced until the blows and pain come his way. Unfortunately, the consequences for himself and his loved ones come as well. Too bad that he must be left to figure it out for himself. However, if a man is only ignorant rather than being willingly disobedient, and he wants to know how to stay safe, then I write this devotional to that man.

How do we safeguard ourselves from weakness and isolation and the resulting vulnerability? First we must consider that isolation comes in many forms. For example, we can be in a group of people such as a church, a small group or even among friends and still be isolated in mind, emotions and soul, even though we are around these people physically. Have you ever felt lonely while in a group of people? Have you ever been around a group who have there “own thing going on” and you are not part of it? Kind of hard to be part of “their thing” isn’t it. This is the beginning of isolation. Better find some friends who are interested and concerned about you, if you want to draw strength from your relationships.

Otherwise, you will find yourself isolated, and the uncaring group you've been running with will not even miss you when you are picked off. Find some people who really care about you and allow them to keep you from isolation. But, it is a two way street in your relationship with them. You also need to be interested in your friends and their needs, for there is nothing more anti-relationship building than a self-absorbed person who is concerned only about himself. Don't allow a friend to become isolated by not showing concern for him.

Next, when you build a relationship with some guys who you trust, and who are interested in you, it is essential that you are transparent with them. You will be surprised to find that you are not alone in what you are being tempted in, and through prayer and encouragement with your true friends, you will draw close to these men and grow stronger against the Lion, and they will as well.

Back to the wildebeest. When this beast is physically weak, it is also vulnerable to attack. When God's man is spiritually weak, he is also vulnerable. This weakness most often happens when his intake of God's word is sporadic, or non-existent. Too often we see men relying only on what they grab from a 30 minute sermon or devotional, rather than the feast found in the presence of God in His word. This limited intake of God's word creates a spiritually anemic condition in a man. God's man will not grow spiritually using only spoon fed meals from someone else, no matter how good the speaker, rather than learning to self-feed from God's word. Now don't confuse what I am saying to you. I believe it is good to be under the steady teaching of a wise man of God. We should not exempt ourselves from this. If this pastor or teacher is under God's leadership, he will agree with what I am saying to you about his words not being enough for you. He will agree that a man of God must also have a steady diet of God's word. Therefore, commit to becoming stronger and less vulnerable by prioritizing your day and life around getting your spiritual food for the day. Otherwise, you will become prey to the predator of your soul.

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:28-31

It has been said that casualty is the next word after casual. Casual means: "seeming or tending to be indifferent to what is happening; apathetic; unconcerned: a casual, nonchalant air."

When a man of God becomes a casualty in his soul, it is because he was casual in his commitment to staying close to Christ. Do not allow this casualty in your life, for the Roaring Lion is watching for an opportunity to attack you.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17)

We seem to live in a society that greatly promotes individualism, and unfortunately, this can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. As human beings, we were not created to go through life alone. God created us to be in relationship with one another.

While on Earth, Jesus gathered a group of believers to join Him in His journey of changing the world. These 12 men, known as the disciples, traveled with Jesus and learned from His teachings. They educated others about the teachings of Jesus and continued to do so after His death.

Jesus had the power to go about His journey alone, but He chose to live in community with His disciples. This serves as an example to us of the importance of living in community. After all, we were created with the need for companionship.

There are so many benefits to being in a loving, Christian community. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Being in a community allows us to build friendships. Our friends encourage us and walk alongside us when we are going through trials, and we do the same for them. Most importantly, friends can help us to remain faithful and obedient in our walk with Christ, and He is present when we gather in His name. Matthew 18:20 says, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

In the end, living in community is such an important aspect of living a Christian life. I encourage you to become involved in a Christian community, whether it is through serving at church, joining a men’s group, or focus group at Legacy. When we lift each other up and come together to live for Christ, we bring glory to His name.