

**The Discipline of Encouragement and Accountability**  
**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Hebrews 10:19-25**

Friends, I have a that I want to video to show you this morning – it's not the first time we've shown it so some of you may remember it, but it was a few years ago so there's a number of you who haven't seen it yet.

(Start u-tube video – Battle at Kruger Park)

This video was taken by some tourists at the Kruger National Wildlife Park in South Africa. They are at a watering hole – watching a herd of Buffalo come to drink...

As the first of the Buffalo in the group approach the watering hole they notice several lions that have been hiding out, waiting for them to get close.

The Buffalo run off and the lions give chase and they manage take down a young buffalo calf that wasn't quite fast enough, tackling it at the edge of the watering hole.

The lions gang up on calf and struggle with him in the shallow water – and then as if being jumped by four or five lions wasn't enough... suddenly a crocodile comes up out of the water and grabs the calf by the rear legs.

Now it's a tug of war between the lions and the crocodile to see who will get the calf for dinner.

The lions win out, and drag the calf up the bank and pin it down intending to make a meal out of it.

However – the Buffalo herd is not going to stand by and just let this happen.

The entire herd begins to move towards the lions, and there is a tense standoff – broken when one of the Buffaloes charges the lions and chases one of them off.

Pretty soon the Buffalo have chased all the lions off in a spectacular fashion – even throwing one of the lions around

on their horns – and they have rescued the calf, who manages to get up and rejoin the herd.

And friends – it’s hard to find a better example of why it’s important to belong to the Body of Christ.

Because as the scriptures says *“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”* (1 Peter 5:8)

Friends the devil is going to attack our faith and trust and belief in Jesus Christ. He will stalk and attack us as we go through the tests and trials that come into our life.

And when that happens we can feel like the lions have got us by the arms and the crocodiles are pulling us by the feet – and our faith is being stretched to the limit, and if the devil could have his way – He would see it destroyed.

And it’s during times like this friends that we need our fellow brothers and sisters to surround us, and through prayer and

by the power of the holy Spirit – that roaring lion is going to get tossed around on the Horns of the Holy Spirit and chased off.

And friends – it’s not just for our own protection that we belong to the Body of Christ, it’s for the protection of other Christians too.

Just as we saw the lions in the video going after the young buffalo calf – the Devil is going to go after young Christians, immature Christians, weak or vulnerable Christians – because they are easy prey, and so we who belong to the Church have a responsibility to help protect our fellow Christians as well.

And as we go about fulfilling our mission to make disciples of all nations – we need to recognize that responsibility we have to protect those who are especially vulnerable to the enemies attack.

He is not happy that people are leaving his kingdom and entering into the kingdom of heaven and he is going do all he

can to try to isolate them to make it easy to damage and destroy their faith – but that can be stopped by the support of the Christian Community.

I've seen many instances where new Christians, who are enthusiastic and excited about what God is doing in their lives, suddenly have all sorts of other "things" come up that take them away from their connection to their church – and pretty soon the excitement and enthusiasm they had dies down and so does their faith – unless they are held accountable by their Church.

So friends – for our own good and especially for the good of young and new Christians it is important that we learn and teach the discipline of encouragement and accountability – because not only does this discipline help to express the heart of faith – it helps to protect the heart of faith.

So, in the words that were written on poster which used to hang downstairs in the 1014 room, "It's good to be 'herd' and have friends!"

Now I'm pretty the kid who drew this poster meant to say "it's good to be heard..." But I read that poster shortly after the first time I saw this video and I thought – yes it is good to be **herd!**

It is very good to have that Christian community around to you to help fend off the lions and the crocodiles – and in doing so encourage you and hold you accountable.

Because friends the truth is that we need other Christians - and that need is only going to increase as the heart of our Canadian society no longer reflects the Heart of Discipleship.

We can no longer count on the fact that our neighbors, and co-workers or even our family may share the heart of discipleship that the Holy Spirit has produced in us, and we can no longer expect that they will encourage us and hold us accountable in our faith.

In fact they may have the opposite effect on us – they can undermine our faith, weaken our resolve, discourage our hope, and attack our values.

Many of you know Cheryl Gill – one of our elders, a strong leader in our church, and as mature a Christian as I've ever met – but she recently shared with me that when she has to be away for prolonged periods of time from her Christian community, from her Church community and stay in close proximity with non-Christians – their negativity and unbelief has a discouraging effect on her faith.

So she is always eager to gather with her fellow Christians and to be around them, because just being around them encourages her and holds her accountable to the heart of discipleship that she desires to live out.

If you ask Cheryl friends, she will testify it is not possible to live out the heart of discipleship on your own.

Friends don't misunderstand having a personal faith in Jesus Christ for a private individualistic faith – in fact that's not really faith in Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ has a Body, created by the Holy Spirit, made up of other believers – and you can't truly grow in your faith in Jesus Christ without allowing yourself to become connected to His Body.

And connecting people with His Body was essentially what Christ had in mind when He gave us the command to make disciples of all nations.

And the most profound and fullest sense of what it means to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to grow, to realize, and experience that fullness of being the Body of Christ together as we build each other up in faith with Spiritual gifts, hold each other accountable to being obedient to Christ, and worship God the Father and continue His redemptive work with His creation.

So friends – we need to acknowledge that this takes discipline... right? It doesn't happen on its own, and the

enemy is actively working to discourage us from engaging in this.

And in spite of how obvious it should be that our fellow Christians can help us out when the lions and the crocodiles are attacking us – our sinful nature would still have us try to go it on our own.

So we need to be disciplined to make ourselves participate in the body of Christ, connecting as a group and encouraging each other and holding each other accountable.

That is why the writer of Hebrews challenged his readers by saying *“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.”* (Heb 10:24-25)

So the first thing we need to be disciplined about - is prioritizing meeting together.

And before I ask you if you are following through on “meeting” with your fellow Christians – I want to ask if you are convinced that you actually need to “meet” with them. And I’ll go back one step further and ask what “meeting” with your fellow Christians would actually mean?

However if we are going to allow the scripture to form our opinions and beliefs then we need to accept that “meeting” together with other Christians is not the time for a nice, polite, social visit – instead according to Hebrews 10:24 it is a time when we gather and fix our minds on how we might provoke each other towards love and good deeds.

So do you believe that you need this from your fellow Christians? And if you do - do you make it a priority? Are you disciplined about doing it?

Now I’m not asking you these questions to shame you – this is an example of how, as your minister, I’m supposed to hold you accountable!

And if you are having a tough time being disciplined about meeting with other Christians, I want to also encourage you – starting with telling you that I understand, and I can relate to how difficult it can be.

For example – I regularly meet with our prayer team on Tuesday nights and there are times when I’m feeling tired, or I’m feeling pressed for time because I have a busy evening or a heavy work load that week and I’m sorely tempted to excuse myself from the prayer meeting.

But – I know, and I have experienced that gathering for prayer with my fellow Christians encourages me – and so I hold myself accountable to going, in spite of how I’m feeling or how busy my schedule is.

To be sure there are times I am unable to attend - but it’s not because I’m feeling tired and overwhelmed by the demands and pressures of my schedule.

This is about disciplined attendance – not legalistic attendance, do you see the difference?

In spite of how I’m feeling or what’s on my schedule disciplined attendance occurs because I believe and I know I need that time with my fellow Christians and I know I will come away from it encouraged, and being held accountable for what I’ve prayed about.

So – I want to encourage you to do the same; starting with being disciplined about attending weekly worship with your fellow Christians on a regular basis and eventually becoming disciplined about joining and participating regularly in a Christ Care Group.

Because weekly worship is the starting point for receiving general encouragement and accountability for your Christian walk, and in a Christ Care Group you are able to focus on get more specific about the kind of encouragement and accountability that you and your fellow Christians might need.

So – to start the discipline of encouragement and accountability we must start being disciplined to meet regularly with our fellow Christians.

Now the second thing I want to encourage us to be more disciplined about when we meet together is “considering” since scripture says *“let us consider how we may spur one another on...”*

Friends – “consider” for a moment that much of the New Testament was written because one of the apostles, like Peter, or James, or John or Paul had spent some time “considering” what the Christians of a particular city – like Thessalonica - were in need of in order to be encouraged in their faith and to help hold them accountable to the teaching which the Apostles had passed on to them.

In other words when Paul or any of the other Apostles wanted to encourage or pray or hold the early church accountable they were specific and intentional about what they said and expected – and we would do well to follow their example.

Look at 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11 which we read this morning. Paul encourages the Thessalonians by specifically telling them:

*“They are not in darkness” (vs. 4) “They are children of the light and of the day” (vs. 5) and that “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation” (vs. 9)*

Paul’s words would have specifically encouraged, or comforted and relieved the anxiety of the Thessalonians who were concerned about being caught off guard and being unprepared by our Lord’s return.

But encouragement also means to exhort in order to motivate people, and so Paul also has specific things which he wants the Thessalonians to do and he is going to hold them accountable to do them.

He says *“be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” (vs. 8)*

*“encourage one another and build each other up.. “ (vs. 11) and “acknowledge those who work hard among you... Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.” (vs 12-13)*

*“warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.” (vs 14-15)*

And these couple verse are especially specific encouragements that Paul is going to hold them accountable to.

If he comes to visit the Thessalonians or sends Timothy to see them and he hears reports that people are being idle and disruptive, he is going to ask *“have you been warning them like I encouraged you to... have you encouraged them... were you patient with them...”* and so on.

Now I want to encourage us in a way that we can consider – or fix our minds upon and commit ourselves to - which will help us be very specific about encouragement and accountability when we meet together.

In face whenever a Christ care group starts, or has a couple of new people start to participate I’m supposed to make sure they go through this material, which summarizes much of what Paul and the other Apostles encouraged the early church to do, to learn specifically how to effectively encourage each other and hold one another accountable.

It’s called the Beginning’s Course and I’m going to encourage us to relate to one another in the way it describes and I’m going to do my best to hold us accountable for doing so.

So, if we are going to effectively encourage each other we must discipline ourselves to listen, not only to find out what someone needs and fully understand their situation before you start giving advice, but most times to refrain ourselves from giving advice and wait until people ask us for it.



Many times the most encouraging thing we can do for each other is to simply listen – and let the other person know they have been heard and understood, and you empathize with them.

Secondly if we are going to being encouraging to one another we must care for the whole person; that means spiritual, physical, emotional – we can pray for each other and study the bible together but we also need to help each other out in the day to day business of life.

To know that you can call on your fellow Christians when you need help with your car, or advice on parenting, or go and catch a movie and dinner together – that’s incredibly encouraging!

When we encourage people we must discipline ourselves to focus on the process, and leave the results to God.

Part of the reason we are encouraging each other is because God is at work in our lives, changing us, transforming us,

making us more like His Son Jesus Christ – and we need to be encouraged to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in that process, and also remember that the Holy Spirit takes time to work this process – encouragement is not about instant results.

And the motivation for our encouragement is Love – shaped and formed by how God has loved us; becoming one of us to take our punishment upon himself, to give us what we did not deserve; to restore and redeem us to be the Stewards He created us to be.

Friends, we need to hold each other accountable to encouraging each other in this way, by reminding each other this is how we will be when we meet together – in fact it is a good practice to write down your expectations on how you will encourage each other and hold each other accountable and review it every so often...

That’s a good way to consider how you can spur each other on towards love and good deeds and not give up meeting together – and you’ve all agreed on it.

And the expectations of what we will be held accountable for must be based on the scriptures – not our own personal preferences - so that we are learning obedience to Christ, the Word of God – which brings us blessing and life.

And in order to effectively hold each other accountable to meeting together in this way, we must communicate assertively.

We can't assume that people can read our minds, we can't assume that people automatically know what we need, or that someone should know when they have offended us.

We must take responsibility to tell people what we need, not aggressively nor timidly – but assertively – to hold each other accountable to how we have committed to encourage each other.

Friends if we are disciplined in these matters, if we are committed to encouraging and holding each other accountable in this way – then it truly will be “good to be herd

and have friends” - Christian community and small group fellowship that will protect your heart of faith, and help you survive the lions and the crocodiles, and thrive as a member of the Body of Christ.

Let's watch this video – and even though it's humorous, make it your prayer that you may belong in this way.