

MONDAY MANNA

4 January 2021

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF A FRIEND

By Rick Boxx

If you have ever watched a TV wildlife documentary that shows a lion hunting its prey, you will recognise the lion's common practice: Finding the slowest or weakest gazelle and isolating them. Once the prey has been isolated, victory is assured. There is safety in being part of a group; alone, the prey does not have a prayer.

This problem manifests itself in the marketplace as well. Ambitious, driven people willing to do whatever it takes to reach their goals and advance their careers choose to go it alone. Rather than partnering with others, seeking to leverage their respective skills and strengths, the "lone ranger" pursues the prize unaware of pitfalls lying ahead. Many a rising star has stunningly crashed and burned without the support and accountability that come from being a part of an effectively, well-functioning team.

In a professional, personal and spiritual sense, we have an enemy who – like the cunning lion – also desires to isolate us so we can be taken down morally, knowing we are at our weakest when we are alone. If we allow our pride to prevent us from calling a friend when we sense that we are in danger, we are prone to destruction.

Over and over in the Scriptures, we read about the importance of joining forces with others in common pursuits:

The safety found in numbers. We find countless examples of how working together, whether on a project or seeking to solve a problem, is more effective than trying to accomplish things alone. Two horses, or oxen, can haul multiple times what a single animal can pull. We see this all the time in the business and professional world as well. *"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man falls and has no one to help him up!... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

The value of a trusted friend. Sometimes all it takes is a single genuine friend, someone who cares enough about us to tell us the truth. Even when what they have to say is hard to hear. *"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24).

The benefits of friendly friction. Sometimes "sparks" fly when we interact with others, whether in creative interactions or in receiving constructive criticism. As the adage tells us, "Not one of us is as smart as all of us together." The potential benefits of rubbing shoulders with one another in workplace settings are immeasurable. *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another"* (Proverbs 27:17).

The importance of mutual encouragement. Facing the challenges and struggles of life and work can at times seem overwhelming. Having others alongside of us to offer support, helpful advice and affirmation can make a tremendous difference in how we cope with difficulties and hardships. *"And let us consider how to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:24-25).

When we are well-rested, well-fed, calm and content, we are tempted to believe that we do not need anyone else, that we can handle any and all obstacles alone. But at times like that we can become most vulnerable, letting down our guard against temptations and external threats. So, we are wise to beware and be aware. When you are feeling hungry, angry, lonely or tired, do not insist on trusting in your self-sufficiency. Seek out a friend. It may save you from destruction.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

When you consider the image of a lion stealthily pursuing another animal that has become separated from the group, what thoughts or feelings come to mind?

Has there ever been a time when you felt like the "prey," when you became separated or isolated from everyone else? What was that like? Did you suffer adverse consequences as a result?

What has been your best example of working together with others, rather than choosing to take a "lone ranger" approach of trying to get the job done all by yourself? Describe the difference you saw in the outcome.

Which of the Bible passages listed in this week's "Monday Manna" is most meaningful for you – or has given you the most to think about? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Exodus 4:14-16

Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 20:18

Matthew 10:1-10

Mark 6:7

Hebrews 3:12-14