

“Wolfpack”

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

Have you seen that picture of the line of wolves walking through the snow? The first wolf breaks the crest (surface) of the snow, and others follow in its tracks to save energy. In the family of God, we pray for, honor, and follow our leaders as they follow Jesus; as we follow them, we do not leave any other “wolves” behind. In this wolfpack, we look to those who are ahead for leadership; we look to the strong for protection; we look to the caring for compassion; we look to the wise for direction. You *need* all those things from others; and you *provide* them for others

A bucket of water empties as it fills other containers. But that’s not what happens when you pour into the lives of others. Sure, you might start to feel empty, but God will always fill you up; so, stay close to Him. 1 Thessalonians is a letter Paul wrote to a young church, who were trying to figure it all out from scratch; How to relate to others, how to honor and respect leaders, how to invest into the lives of others without feeling empty myself, how to tend to my own spiritual growth and development.

The **1st general principle of Christian family life in v.14-15 is to look out for each other**, and one way we do that is to “*Admonish the idle*” (v.14). In the NKJV and NASB translations, this reads something like, ‘Warn the unruly.’ *Admonishing is providing helpful, corrective information before a problem arises, which is exactly what a warning is. But “Idle” and “Unruly” sound very different. An idle dog is very different than an unruly dog, right? The word behind this has connotations of breaking military rank; stepping out of line, if you will. As Christ-followers, we’re commanded to obey God’s Word, to live out your faith and to encourage others as they live out theirs; you’re commanded by God to preach the gospel through the way you live AND the way you talk. If you’re not doing those things, you’re an idle Christian – and that’s not an appropriate way for a Christ follower to live.*

The idle/unruly are those who are capable of contributing to the advancement of the kingdom of heaven, but who choose not to; those who have talents but are not using them for the Lord. How are you using the talents you have to meet the opportunities God has in waiting for you? You don’t ever want to hear God say, “Why did you hide your talent instead of putting it to work for the growth of other believers and the advancement of the kingdom?”

Another way to look out for one another is to “encourage the fainthearted.” To be fainthearted or feeble is to lack the courage to act. God has blessed you with talents and opportunities to use them for the advancement of the local church and of the kingdom of heaven. How are you participating in and helping develop the faith of

others in your church family? You can do that many ways, including participating in Wednesday night Bible study, preparing ahead of time and contributing to the discussion in Sunday School or youth group, having great conversations over lunch about the morning message you just heard, just to give a few examples. You encourage others who may be fainthearted just by walking the walk.

The fainthearted are those who have become weary in well-doing; they have given up on ever reaching another for Christ. They are absolutely capable of propelling the kingdom of heaven forward, but either don't realize that or don't believe it. Encourage those people. Recognize the talents that others have and point them out. The world is full of discouragement – be a source of encouragement to fellow believers. Find something to appreciate in others who may not see it in themselves, and let them know!

We look out for each other by helping those who are weak. Now this is a different group than the previous two. To be weak is to be unable – not physically weak, although you may be able to help them as well, but spiritually weak. Those who are unable to grasp God's Word or muster the courage to share their faith or even identify as a Christian; those who are unable to get past some sticking point of theology on their own. They need help! You may be just the person whom God has been preparing to be a helper to them.

All of these things require that you engage in the **2nd general principle: demonstrate patience**. Don't give up on those whose faith is weak, and keep witnessing to those who have not embraced faith yet. Adopt the attitude of God, who Peter says (2 Peter 3:9) is, "...not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

The world in which we live seems to have a weakening effect on faith, drawing you away from fellowship with your church family or pulled away from the disciplines that grow your faith and make your walk with the Lord deeper and more blessed. Like rust settling onto and eventually burrowing through a piece of steel, this world has a corrosive effect on matters of faith. We are fresh water fish living in a salt water world, and we need each other's words of kindness, support, and encouragement. It can be wearying, but hang in there! Keep after it! Galatians 6:9 – "**And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.**" Like trying to light a soggy rope – you have to keep after it and eventually, the fire will light!

And finally, we have our **3rd general principle of Christian family life: pursue forgiveness**. v.15 says, "**See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.**" "Evil for evil" sounds pretty fair, doesn't it? But forgiveness is not about fairness! If there is no injustice – no unfairness, then there is no need for forgiveness. Forgiveness holds the balance beam level, even when the two sides are not even; it's a choice each individual must make.

In Matthew 18, Jesus relates our need to forgive others by sharing what we might call the parable of the unforgiving servant. In that story Jesus told, a king calls in a servant who owes him 20 years' worth of wages. The king forgives that debt completely. Later, that servant chose to settle accounts with a man who owed him just one days' worth of wages, and he refused to even give that man a chance to get the money, choosing instead to have him thrown into debtor's prison. The point of that parable is that Jesus has forgiven you a greater spiritual debt than you could have ever paid off on your own in a lifetime (or 20 lifetimes); who are you to refuse to forgive others?

Forgiveness is a fundamental feature of Christianity, and it's got to be complete; *it's either all forgiven, or it's not forgiven*. You have a corporate responsibility to create and sustain an atmosphere of forgiveness. You do that first by forgiving others (Rom. 12:17-19) and second by holding others to that same standard (v.15). Forgive those who have wronged you, and admonish (gently redirect) others to do that also.

So which wolf are you? Are you in the lead – breaking the crest, so others can walk more easily? Are you somewhere in the middle – using your gifts and talents for the increase of the kingdom of heaven? Or are you bringing up the rear – enduring a season of feeling tired, weak, and worn? No matter where you are in the lineup, there is room for growth. No matter which wolf you are, you are *us*, and we are in this together!

In the wolfpack that is the family of God's children, we look out for each other; we invest in each other. A bucket may grow empty as it fills other containers, but a flame grows no less intense when it lights another flame . . .and another . . . and another. May God light the fire of faith in your life. Draw close to those who will fuel that flame in your life, and close to the God who refills those who grow empty. Invite others to draw from your flame when the flame of their faith is reduced to embers, so that you can help reignite the passion for Jesus Christ that once burned hot and true in their lives. There are no lone wolves here; we are **us** – all as one, united in Jesus Christ.

Takeaways from this message.

3 General principles of Christian Family Life

1. LOOK OUT for each other

- Admonishing is providing helpful, CORRECTIVE information before a greater PROBLEM arises.
- ENCOURAGE the fainthearted just by walking the walk.
- RECOGNIZE the TALENTS that others have and point them out.

2. Demonstrate PATIENCE

- The world in which we live seems to have a WEAKENING EFFECT on faith.

3. Pursue FORGIVENESS

- Forgiveness is not about FAIRNESS; it requires INJUSTICE.
- Forgiveness cannot be in part – it's either ALL forgiven or it's NOT forgiven.

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. **1 Thess. 5:14 describes three groups; the idle, the fainthearted, and the weak. Honestly, which one best describes you? Why?**
2. **Of those three groups, which one has God called and equipped you to minister to? How so?**
3. **What danger is there in not correcting/ encouraging/ helping one another in the local church? What benefits are there in doing these things?**
4. **When is it hard for you to be patient with others? What advice would you give to help someone else learn to develop patience?**
5. **What is your natural reaction when others are unkind to you? How can you learn to react in a better way?**
6. **List 3-5 ways that one might 'seek revenge' on another person. Now, what one word would describe these types of behaviors? Is that a word that you want to be used to describe you? Why or why not?**
7. **Compare and contrast 1 Thessalonians 5:15 with Romans 12:17-19. What similarities and differences do you see?**
8. **Who do you need to forgive today? What's stopping you?**
9. **What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**