



gracefellowship

Stay The Course
July 29, 2018
Chase the Strays

:: Luke 15:1-7

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

3 Then Jesus told them this parable:

4 “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?

5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders

6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

God is compassionate toward strays.

- **Those who wander off unintentionally.**
 - Busy season of life
 - Distractions
 - Change of Location

:: Hebrews 10:23-25

23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,

25 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.

Satan loves to see us wander off from life in the body of Christ. We are much easier targets to take down when we aren’t surrounded by our brothers and

sisters and when we are spiritually weak.

- Illustration: Arctic Wolves vs Musk Ox
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7v8l4SAvInY>

How do you think it ends for that little calf who got separated from the herd?
Probably not well!

Church attendance studies show that most people attend church only 2

- **Those who run away**
 - o Some people make the intentional choice to run from God and fellowship with His people. (Story of the Prodigal Son)
- **Those who are led astray by false teaching**

:: Acts 20:38-41

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

- o Just a warning, you may be sitting here today, surrounded by God's people, but the rest of the week you will get false teaching from an outside source that is theologically leading you away from the sound doctrine of Scripture- there are wolves in sheep's clothing who sound like they have the truth, but in reality are leading you away from God's truth.
- o Illustration: Women's Bible study in TX

Jesus especially warned the leaders of the nation of Israel to take their position as shepherds seriously and to care for the people under their watch. But the religious leaders weren't interested in being shepherds of God's people- they were only concerned for themselves.

:: Ezekiel 34:1-6

1 The word of the LORD came to me:

2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?

3 You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.

4 You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.

6 My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

:: Ezekiel 34:11-16

11 “ ‘For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

12 As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.

13 I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.

14 I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

15 I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD.

16 I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Here is our goal when it comes to chasing the strays:

Goal: That every person who has strayed from worship and/or relational environments will be noticed, valued and pursued.

This is for everyone; it can't be accomplished by our Pastors and Elders alone. For a long time I would take a mental note on Sundays of who missed worship and try to either text them, call them or reach out to them on Facebook just to let them know I missed them.

- Illustration: Weston and Cameron Peters
- That one came back to bite me, because apparently chasing the strays works in another way- Cameron told me this week I could use that story if she could hold me accountable to getting back to the gym!

Jesus commanded Peter to care for his sheep. That begins by knowing where the sheep are!

You can't care for people when you don't know where they are and what is happening in their life!

Questions to consider:

- What keeps you connected to God and His people so you straying away doesn't become an option for you?
- Are you connected to the church well enough to know when others are missing?
- Does it bother you when people miss Worship and Life Group?
- How can you be more responsible in noticing, valuing and pursuing people who are not as connected as they once were?

So many times it's easy to come to church and this just be about me. What am I going to get out of today? Will they sing songs I like? Will the message be good? Are they going to ask me to do anything uncomfortable?

But what if we think about others when we come here? What if we notice when someone is missing? Recently, we celebrated the 4th of July with my Dad's side of the family (big family). I wasn't there because of an event I had going on at the church that day. But no one noticed until it was time to say the blessing!

Apparently, I'm the only one in the family who can pray since I'm a Pastor! It would have been nice to be missed not for what I bring to the table, but just for being me! Let's love one another like a family- not like my family- like Jesus' family. If we love like Jesus talked about in Ezekiel 34 we will see some descriptions of how he models caring for one another when we stray away from the family. He uses words like...

- Search
- Look after
- Rescue
- Gather
- Pasture (provide)
- Tend
- Search for
- Bring back
- Bind up
- Strengthen

Closing: