



The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-14)

What do you think God does when something of value is lost? In a parable about a shepherd's lost sheep, Jesus described God's passion for lost people (see Matthew 18:12-14).

First, God seeks the lost (see Matthew 18:12). Jesus described the shepherd with the lost sheep leaving his other ninety-nine in order to find the lost one. Our first thought is "*Wait a minute! What about the other ninety-nine? Did the shepherd abandon them?*" Great question! The answer is no. The shepherd would have never left the other ninety-nine unattended. Rather, another shepherd would watch the flock while he sought after the lost sheep.

Two thousand years ago in Palestine, the people valued sheep for at least four reasons: wool for clothing, (almost all clothing was wool); tanned skin for leather; spiritual sacrifice; and food for special meals. Consequently, the lost sheep represented tremendous value to the shepherd. Similarly, lost people (those outside Christ) are valuable to God, so valuable that they warrant His all-out search. Each of us was created in the image of the Shepherd to be in relationship with Him. Our sin has led us to wander away from God's design. Still, Jesus our Shepherd came to seek the lost (see Luke 19:10).

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What about you? Do you seek the lost? Write down the person's name outside Christ with whom you will seek an audience this week. Pray to the Shepherd that you will connect with that lost sheep.

Second, God saves the lost (see Matthew 18:13a). In the parable, the shepherd searched until he found the lost sheep. *Finding* was equated with *saving*. Jesus came to save the lost (see Matthew 18:11 NASB; cf. Luke 19:10).

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What about you? Do you allow the Spirit of the Shepherd to work through you in saving the lost? This week, find that lost sheep and release the Spirit of the Shepherd in

you. Serve the lost person, ask about their story, listen to their heart, and touch your story with theirs where it fits (see 1 Corinthians 9:22).

Third, God celebrates the restoration of the lost (see Matthew 18:13b-14).

The shepherd rejoiced with everyone that his lost sheep was restored to the other ninety-nine (see Luke 15:6b-7). Jesus came to celebrate the restoration of the lost with all of heaven (see Luke 15:10).

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What about you? This week, seek an audience with the lost sheep in your life, find them, serving, asking, listening, and touching your story where it fits; then guide them to their lost heart condition and the story of the Shepherd's passionate search for them. Pray with them to surrender their heart and life to Christ as Savior and Lord. You will celebrate their restoration to the Shepherd and His community of sheep.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ, the Shepherd, came to seek, save, and celebrate the lost. When we fully surrender our lives to Him, then He will use us to do the same.