**Matthew 18:12-14**

**Parable of the Straying Sheep**

**Introduction**

Before telling the parable in 18:12-14 Jesus has called his disciples to be like children and not be a stumbling block to people.

This parable uses fitting imagery to describe us and God

* God as Shepherd (Psalm 23; John 10)
* We are the sheep of God’s pasture: Ps 79:13; 95:7; 100:3

18:12-14: Parable of the Straying Sheep

The name of the parable is important. This is not the Parable of the lost sheep, but the Parable of the Straying Sheep.

**1. Straying Sheep**

* Gone astray (18:12)
* Straying (18:12)
* 99 who have not gone astray (18:13)

This sheep did not get stuck somewhere waiting to be rescued, he went astray.

This sheep was not carried away by wild animal (Gen 31:39; 1 Sam 17:34-37; Amos 3:12)

***This sheep was active in leaving***. The picture is of a person who wonders away from the Lord. Remember, James 1 addresses the fact that we sin when we are led away by our own lusts. People want to withdraw from God for a number of reasons. At first it does not look like much the person just wants some distance and so they come less often and then leave completely. They have less time for spiritual matters, so they drift and stray from God. How does God respond when one of His sheep strays?

**2. God’s Response**

The shepherd goes out searching for the straying sheep (18:12). Notice the area they are in that they must search for is mountain area (18:12). I know that we do not live in mountainous area, but this is not an easy place to search. It can also be dangerous since footing is not good and wild animals are ready to protect their homes.

Symbolism: It is not easy or simple to bring the straying one back to the Lord.

Powerful Lesson: God will go to great lengths to bring us back!

***God wants us back because to Him we are valuable!***

* This was not the shepherd’s favorite sheep
* It did not have a special skill that the flock would fall apart without
* The shepherd did not have a special bond with this sheep
* God realizes the value in each of us!

Are we willing to follow God’s example and be active in restoring the wondering sheep?

Do we realize the worth of each sheep?

**3. IF…**

* If he finds it (18:13)

It is not an automatic that the straying sheep will be returned safely. It could have been devoured by an animal or succumbed to some other danger. It is not automatic that someone be restored. So, when one is restored… ***there is joy!***

If we understand the danger of straying, then we have joy when that sheep returns to the fold. If we have felt the sorrow of loss, then we know the joy of restoring the lost! There is joy because the Father does not want anyone to perish (18:14). ***Straying could lead one to perish!*** God does not desire that and rejoices over the one who returns.

***God wants us restored to Him and His people***

**Sad Reality**

* 1 Peter 2:20-25

We have all strayed.

This should result in joy over the straying one returning.

We should cease to stray as we come to the Shepherd.