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Grounders:

Have you ever lost something of value? What did you do? 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 the lost (Matt. 18:12-14).

First, God seeks the lost (Matt. 18:12). Jesus described the shepherd with the lost sheep leaving his other 99 in order to find the lost one. Our first thought is "Wait a minute! What about the other 99? Did the shepherd abandon them?" Great question! The answer is "No." A cultural study tells us that the shepherd would have never left the other 99 unattended. Rather, he would have had another shepherd watch the flock while he sought after the lost sheep.

Two thousand years ago in Palestine, the people valued sheep for at least 4 reasons: (1) wool for clothing—almost all clothing was wool; (2) tanned skin for leather; (3) sacrifice; and (4) 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 an all out search. They were created in the image of the Shepherd to be in relationship with Him. Their sin has caused them to wander away from God's design.

Jesus, our Shepherd, came to seek the lost (Luke 19:10). What about you? Do you seek the lost? Write down the person's name outside Christ whom you will seek an audience with this week. Pray to the Shepherd that you will connect with that lost sheep.

Second, God saves the lost (Matt. 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 (Matt. 18:11 NASB; cf. Luke 19:10). 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 his story, listen to his heart, and touch your story with his only where it fits (1 Cor. 9:22).

Third, God celebrates the restoration of the lost (Matt. 18:13b-14). The shepherd rejoiced with everyone that his lost sheep was restored to the other 99 (Luke 15:6b-7). Jesus came to celebrate with all of heaven the restoration of the lost (Luke 15:10). What about you? This week, seek an audience with the lost sheep in your life, find him—serving, asking, listening, and touching your story where it fits; then guide him to his lost heart condition and the story of the Shepherd's passionate search for him. Pray with him to surrender his heart and life to Christ as Savior and Lord. You will celebrate his restoration to the Shepherd and His community of sheep.

Seeking, Finding, and Celebrating,
Mitch