

LARGE GROUP LESSON

BOTTOM LINE:

God loves you very much!

OBJECTIVE:

Kids will learn that they matter to God and He loves them.

KEY PASSAGE:

Matthew 18:10-14, Parable of the Wandering Sheep

INTRO:

Have you ever noticed that everything that you look for is always in the last place you look? There's a simple explanation for this: when you find what you're looking for, you stop looking. There's no need to look any place else because you've already found what you wanted to find.

It's the searching that happens before you find that thing that can be stressful. Whether it's searching for your backpack in the morning before school, searching for the remote control to watch TV, or searching for car keys, the search can become quite intense.

The searching becomes even more intense if you're searching for a lost animal or even a lost person. We become frantic when our beloved pet runs away, and parents become even more frantic when a child goes missing - even if it's just for a few seconds.

Today's parable is about something that went missing. It's the story of a shepherd who noticed that one of his sheep was missing. This wasn't a beloved pet or even a person. It was one sheep out of a flock of one hundred. Big deal, you might think, but Jesus uses this story to show us how much he truly loves us.

READ MATTHEW 18:10-14**MAIN POINT:**

One sheep out of a hundred might not seem important to us. They are sheep. They aren't pets who live in the house with their masters. They are herd animals raised for their wool and for food. And losing a sheep was unfortunately sometimes part of the business. With a flock of a hundred, it was a challenge to defend all those sheep from predators.

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A sheep may be just a sheep to you and me, but a good shepherd knows every sheep in the flock. He knows all his sheep by sight. He knows them well enough that he not only knows he is one sheep short, he knows exactly which sheep is lost. He leaves the others behind and goes back over the ground he and the flock covered that day. He will not rest until he finds the lost sheep.

The shepherd in this story represents Jesus. We are the sheep of his flock. Jesus is telling us that He loves us so much, He would do anything to come and find us if we went astray.

Jesus showed us that these were not empty words when He died on the cross. He loved us so much, he left Heaven behind to come and die for our sins. Jesus wants to take all of us to Heaven with Him, and if we listen for His voice, He will lead us there.

DRIVE IT HOME:

I want to go back a few verses in Matthew 18. Let’s read what Jesus had to say before this parable, and continue on reading the parable again.

READ MATTHEW 18:1-14

Who is Jesus talking about before He tells this parable? He’s talking about kids! He’s telling His disciples that He loves the children, and if they want to see the Kingdom of God, they must become like little children and follow Him.

Kids matter to Jesus, and He gave His listeners a stern warning against leading children astray. God wants parents to guide their children in the ways of the Lord. He wants all of you to have a place like this where you can come and hear the good news that you are loved!

It’s easy to feel unimportant when you’re just a kid. It’s easy to feel like you’re just another sheep in the flock, one face out of hundreds. Believe it or not, even adults feel that way sometimes. Jesus tells us in this parable that **NONE** of us are just another face in the crowd. He knows us by name. He knows us by sight. He would leave the 99 behind to come and find us, and woe to anyone who would lead you, me, or any one of us away from Him.

Jesus loves us like crazy. He loves us like the shepherd who left the flock to find one lost sheep. He loved us enough to lay down His life for us. Why? Because He wants us to love Him in return and receive Him as our Savior.

There may come a time in your life when you feel like the lost sheep. You may make a wrong turn. You may make some bad choices. You may think God has forgotten you. He never, ever will.

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He loves you with all His heart, and if you go astray, He will come find you. That is why Jesus is the Good Shepherd; He is our Savior who loves us!

CLOSE WITH A SIMPLE PRAYER:

Dear God,

Thank you for loving us!

*In Jesus’ name,
Amen*