

Session 9: Becoming a Shepherd

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. 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. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. 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 34:1-6

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. Mark 6:34

In this session, we're going to look at how small-group leaders can become shepherds and how they should pursue those who stray from relationship. We will be using Luke 15 to help guide our discussion.

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Luke 15:1-2

In response, Jesus told three stories: the story of the lost sheep, the story of the lost coin, and finally the story of the lost son. (Luke 15:3-32)

For our purposes today, we are going to use the four things that were lost in Luke 15 to represent four types of people who stray from relationship:

- Lost sheep - People who have strayed from you/the group/God. It's no one's fault, they just got lost (wandered away, distracted).
- Lost coin - People you have caused to stray from you/the group/God.
- Lost son (younger) - People who are selfish or rebellious; they chose to stray from relationship with you/your group/God (intentionally walked away).
- Lost son (older) - People who don't know they have strayed from relationship. They show up every week to group and church. They check their religious boxes. They know the Bible, but they somehow have strayed or completely missed having an intimate, personal relationship with God.

ACTIVITY - PURSUING STRAYS

Using the chart on the following page, think through the following questions:

- Attitudes, beliefs and actions:
 - Why did the person stray from relationship?
 - What might they think about God, you, and/or the small group?
 - Did they get distracted, offended, were they chasing the things of the world, and/or lost in rules rather than having a personal relationship with God?
 - Are they angry, divisive, hurt, self-centered, fearful, defensive, ashamed, guilty, apathetic, judgmental, and/or legalistic?

- Your part:
 - Does Scripture help me know how to pursue the stray person?
 - What can I learn about God, his nature, and his word through this situation?
 - How do I let God direct me?
 - In what ways do I need to trust God?
 - Do I need to humble myself, apologize, and/or repent of something?
 - How do I feel about the stray person (love, value, etc.)?
 - How do I approach the stray person?
 - How much do I chase them and for how long?
 - Do I need to stand my ground on a truth/sin issue?
 - How do I show the stray person love?
 - How can I avoid doing the stray person's part or God's part?

- Their part (the stray person):
 - What might they need to consider about God?
 - What can they learn about God, his nature, and his word through this situation?
 - How do they hear from God or let him direct them?
 - What might need to happen before they are ready to see truth/repent?
 - What should they expect from you/the group/God?
 - What shouldn't they expect from you/the group/God?
 - Do they need a heart change?
 - What do they need to own and what actions do they need to take?

- God's part:
 - How might God want to lead you?
 - What might God want to do in or through you?
 - How might God want to lead the stray person?
 - What might God want to do in or through the stray person?
 - How else might God be working throughout this situation and with whom?

	Attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of the stray – what contributed to them getting lost?	Your part – how do you pursue the stray?	The part of the person who has strayed – what do they need to do to be found, to restore the relationship?	God's part – How is God working (with you and with the stray person)?
People who have strayed from relationship with you/your group/God – no one's fault, they just got lost.				
People you have caused to stray from relationship with you/the group/God.				
People who are selfish or rebellious – they chose to stray from relationship with you/the group/God.				
People who are still in the group but don't know they have strayed from their relationship with God.				

THINGS TO CONSIDER - PURSUING STRAYS

- From the perspective of a small-group leader, discuss the following steps for pursuing people who stray from relationship:
 1. Pray - Ask God into the situation. Seek guidance and wisdom from the Holy Spirit. Pray for yourself; ask God to show you any wrong motivations or things that you may have done to cause or escalate the issue. Pray for the other person involved and others who may be affected. Ask God to help break your heart for the stray person.
 2. Identify - Which kind of stray person you are pursuing: sheep (strayed), coin (someone you caused to stray), younger son (selfish, they chose to stray), or older son (unaware they strayed from God)? You may not be able to do this until you actually meet with them.
 3. Take personal responsibility - Don't pass the buck or ignore the situation—take action. Think through the situation and consider the responsibilities of each part—yours, theirs, and God's. Do your part.
 4. Seek wise counsel - Get good advice. Ask others to be in prayer about the situation. You might ask someone to come with you, if appropriate. Seeking counsel also helps hold you accountable to make sure you actually take care of the situation.
 5. Initiate a meeting - Enter in by asking permission to meet. Give them notice of your intentions and the purpose of the meeting. Assure a fair process.
 6. Meet face to face - Enter their world where they are—not where they should be.
 - a. Go to them with an open mind and loving heart. God is in control.
 - b. Start by praying together.
 - c. Own your part, if any. Confess your sin. Ask for forgiveness.
 - d. Listen. Fully hear them and their side of the story. Use active listening skills.
 - e. Ask good questions; seek to understand them and how they got to this place.
 - f. Help them identify or acknowledge their feelings and/or motivations.
 - g. Listen below the surface. What's the underlying/spiritual issue?
 - h. Consider the tensions they may have regarding the situation or issue.
 - i. Get the truth on the table—love in action and in truth. (2 Samuel 12:1-14)
 - j. Attack the problem, not the person.
 - k. Look to God's word for the solution. (Leviticus 26)
 - l. Put God's word into action. (Often the deeper issue is their need to surrender to God.)
 - m. They must take personal responsibility for their part by acknowledging and confessing sin, showing true repentance, and asking for the forgiveness of those they may have wronged.
 - n. Begin building a bridge back to relationship; make a plan.
 - o. Discuss with them God's part in all of this. Help them engage with God.
 - p. Focus on the future; give them hope.
 - q. Take small steps. Don't overwhelm them by trying to resolve everything at once. Make a reasonable plan of action to restore relationship. Include regularly meeting together so you can walk them through this every step of the way.

- r. Direct them to helpful resources—relationships, mentoring, classes, books, etc.
 - s. Schedule your next meeting.
 - t. End in prayer.
7. Rejoice and celebrate every step of the way!
- a. For them taking your call.
 - b. Agreeing to meet.
 - c. Hearing you.
 - d. Taking personal responsibility and repenting.
 - e. Submitting to God.
 - f. Being willing to move forward.
 - g. Every positive step forward.

SHREWD AS SNAKES - GENTLE AS DOVES

Jesus gives us some good advice regarding when and how to confront others.
I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Matthew 10:16

Shrewd (or wise) as snakes.

- How is a snake shrewd or wise?
 - Cunning.
 - Waits.
 - Watches for opportunities.
 - Decisive—strikes when the time is right.
- Why would Jesus want us to be as shrewd or wise as snakes when confronting others?
 - Show patience with others on the journey.
 - Wise about people and situations.
 - Shrewd to seize opportunities that God provides.
 - Not timid in taking action when the time is right.
 - Speaking hard truth and calling out sin.

Innocent (or harmless) as doves.

- How is a dove innocent or harmless?
 - Think of how a dove lands—gentle, soft.
 - What are the attributes of the Holy Spirit?
- When confronting others, what would it look like for us to be as innocent or harmless as doves?
 - Speaking truth in love.
 - We can say hard things to people if they know we love them and want the best for them.
 - Choosing our words carefully, giving people the best opportunity to really hear us.

BIBLICAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

When conflict or sin issues between group members arise, we want to make sure that we are honoring God and each other in how we deal with these issues.

- What do you believe about conflict (good, bad, scary, helps relationship/hurts relationship, etc.)?
- Where do you fall on the conflict scale?
 - Avoid/never deal with it ----- Rush in/too quick to jump into it.
- How do your beliefs about conflict help or hinder your ability to resolve conflict in a healthy manner?
 - What you believe about conflict has a direct result on how you approach it and deal with it.
 - Too timid = slow to action or no action whatsoever, increases the likelihood that a blow-up will come – waits until the volcano is ready to erupt, lets issue remain, leaves growth obstacles in the lives of others, etc.
 - Too eager = too abrupt, lack of preparation, limited understanding, move in your own power, can cause additional damage, etc.
- Go through the list of Scriptures below and address the following:
 - Consider which Scriptures you would apply in different situations.
 - How would you walk this out in a group you were leading?
 - How would you walk this out with those directly involved in the conflict?
 - How would you use times of conflict to disciple others in the group who might not be directly involved?
 - Proverbs 15:1; Proverbs 16:7; Proverbs 19:20
 - Matthew 5:9; Matthew 5:23-24; Matthew 5:25-26; Matthew 5:38-42; Matthew 5:43-48
 - Matthew 18:15-20 (Is this meant to be punitive or restorative?)
 - Matthew 18:21-22; Matthew 22:37-40
 - Luke 6:46; Luke 17:3
 - Romans 12:17-21; Romans 13:1-4
 - 1 Corinthians 4:20-21; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5
 - Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians 4:26; Philippians 2:4; Colossians 3:13
 - 1 Timothy 5:19; Titus 1:9
 - Hebrews 12:14-17; Hebrews 13:17
 - James 1:19-20; 1 Peter 2:13-15

Application Questions:

1. Name 2 or 3 intentional ways you can shepherd the people in your group. How can you put these in to practice in your group?
2. Consider the ways you have and haven't pursued people who have strayed from relationship? What was healthy and what was unhealthy? What is your biggest challenge in pursuing people who stray?
3. Do you tend to pursue resolving conflict or do you tend to avoid it? Do your beliefs about conflict help or hinder your ability to resolve conflict in a healthy manner? What could you do to be more effective in this area?