



LOVE 201

WE ARE LOST

"LOVE ONE ANOTHER. AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, SO YOU MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER."

-Jesus Christ, as quoted in John 13:34

♥ Who do you think the sheep in this story is supposed to represent? The shepherd? Explain.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR...

Remember how Jesus responded to the question, "What is the greatest commandment in the law?" He said we should love God and love our neighbor as ourselves (*Matthew 22:36-40*).

♥ Why do you think the shepherd can leave all of those sheep unattended to seek the one that wandered off? What makes the one so important?

In the first three segments, we discussed God's love for us and our loving response to it. In the next three segments we will discuss what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

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."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. ~ Luke 15:1-7



...AS YOURSELF

"Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus suggests this is the second most important command in all of the law, but what in the world does this mean? Does loving ourselves mean that we should think highly of ourselves? Clearly not. In chapter 12 of his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us to "not think of yourself more highly than you ought," to "honor one another above yourselves," to "bless those who persecute you," and to not be proud or conceited. So then what does it mean?

When we love ourselves, it means instead that we care enough for ourselves to provide for our needs. When you are cold, what do you do? When you are hungry? When you are out in the elements? Of course, you put on a coat, grab a sandwich, and come inside. To love another as you love yourself, then, would be to provide the same for them if you see them in the same state. If you see your neighbor shivering, starving, or freezing, you provide them clothing, food, or shelter. You ensure their needs are met as you would your own.

♥ Think of one specific and practical way you could love your neighbor, your coworker, or your friend like this. What do you think would happen?

Why does the one sheep get the attention of the shepherd? What of the others and their needs? How does this translate to “love your neighbor?”

♥ So, let’s say we see ourselves as the shepherds and the 99 sheep as our brothers and sisters in Christ (more on this later). Who, then, is the lost sheep?

♥ How about if Jesus is the shepherd we are the 99 sheep? How do you feel about Jesus leaving you for the one? How did you feel when *you* were the one?

♥ Why do you think one sheep is worth endangering all the rest?

What does the Bible say about being worthy of God’s attention (and others being worthy of our attention)?

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image.”... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ~Genesis 1:26-27

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. ~Genesis 5:3

♥ You’re created in God’s image. You bear *imago dei* – the image of God. What does that mean to you?

This is the place we must start. A place of humility. You will notice that God created *all* humans in his image – not only those who follow him, but everyone. We are all worthy of his attention.

*He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but **everyone** to come to repentance.*

~ 2 Peter 3:9

Okay, so everyone is important to God. But what does that look like? What should we do about it?

I’VE FALLEN AND I CAN’T GET UP

Think about yourself as the one sheep. You may not be there now, but you were at some point, and so was (or is) everyone else. In order to identify with and love our neighbor who does not know God, we cannot afford to forget that.

♥ As the one sheep, what would work for you? What would get your attention?

Now, think of yourself as the shepherd. How do you leave the 99? When those of us in the church consider our role as one who shares what God has done for us through Jesus, we call that “evangelism,” which literally means “to be a messenger.” Evangelism has gotten a bad reputation in recent years because people peddled the gospel door-to-door like it was a vacuum cleaner or an encyclopedia. There may have been a time when this worked, but that time has passed.

In many cases, the knee-jerk reaction to that sort of evangelism was to throw out the baby with the bathwater, trying instead to be inoffensive and “attractational” with cool services and flashy programs that didn’t ask too much of those attending. This didn’t really end up working either. “Seeker sensitivity,” often described as “a mile wide and an inch deep,” like any gimmick to share the gospel, fell short of God’s desire for the church. Besides, who wants to be categorized as a “seeker?”

While the “seeker” model falls short, it does have something to commend it. Consider Paul’s challenge to those who expect to “talk people into” following Jesus:


For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ... The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ~ 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:14


So we can probably not come straight at someone who is “perishing,” but we have to reach them, because even as one of Jesus’ chief followers, Paul cries out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (*Romans 7:24-25a*)


Jesus is the rescue for those who are perishing, and we need to share his message, but if the cross is foolishness to those who need it the most, where do we start? What do we do? We love them. Again, Paul:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible...To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.
~ 1 Corinthians 9:19&22

So, perhaps we should avoid becoming too seeker-centric, but according to Paul, we should be willing to give up our very identity to reach the one lost sheep, to break away from the comfort of the 99 to be something else to the stray.

 If someone did this for you, that is, became what you needed them to be in order for you to hear the gospel from them, please share that experience.

 How do you see yourself taking on a different behavior or interest to reach someone you know without compromising your own walk with Christ?

 What does this say about our personal preferences regarding things like translations of the Bible and styles of music?

Consider the lyrics of one of the most popular hymns ever written, *Amazing Grace*:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see

This song, written by John Newton in 1779, still resonates today because it recognizes the parable from both sides – as the lost and the found. We can be the agents of God’s amazing grace, or we can be satisfied to stay behind in the open field, one of the 99. That is our choice.

The next two segments will discuss what it means to be found – that is to be a member of the family of God.

SO FAR:

Jesus ate with T _____ C _____ and S _____

He L _____ the 99 to F _____ the one L _____

We’re created in God’s I _____ or I _____ D _____

The cross is F _____ to those P _____

We must become all T _____ to all P _____