

**Some Parables of Jesus Found in the Gospel of Matthew**  
**A Study in Eight Lessons**  
**Wednesday Evening Studies**  
**Lesson Five**

**The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

**Matthew 18:10-14**

**The Placement of the Lost Sheep Parable**

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is found in Chapter 18, considered the fourth great discourse (of five) into which Matthew is divided. We will look at Matthew 18:1-20. In these verses, several themes emerge. And one thing is clear: Jesus has a community of believers in mind as he preaches and teaches here about rank and status, stumbling blocks, and what it means to sin and to bring back into the fold. The parable is located squarely in the middle of these verses, 1-20, and in the midst of these themes.

The disciples have come to Jesus to ask him a question that we often consider ourselves: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus surprises the disciples by putting a child in the midst of the disciples and telling them to look carefully -- here you see the one who will show you how to be the greatest. In other words, Jesus says, have the mind and heart of a child and you will better prepare yourself for God's realm (vv. 2-5).

**Jesus Appoints Disciples to be Pastoral Care Givers**

Jesus sternly warns the disciples that they are to be very careful about causing any young believers to stumble, that is, to make mistakes that might cause them to fall. The "little ones" Jesus names may refer to the child recently pulled into the group and other children standing around; but they also refer to those who are fresh in the faith. The disciples are admonished to care for them as they would care for their own souls -- risking life and limb, literally, to be sure that the little ones grow in the faith without causing the little ones to stumble (18:6-9). Saunders says of these warnings: "Causing another to stumble not only destroys the lives of the 'little ones,' but puts the offender at risk of eternal judgment. Better to be drowned in the depth of the sea than to face such consequences."<sup>1</sup>

**The Parable**

The Parable of the Lost Sheep begins immediately after the warnings to the disciples to care for the "little ones." Jesus reveals to the disciples that the "little ones" have guardian angels, "who continually see the face of my Father in heaven" (18:10). Surely this would further increase the gravity of the warning! Jesus tells of the shepherd who has one hundred sheep. One sheep

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<sup>1</sup> Saunders, *Preaching the Gospel of Matthew*, 180.

strays away from the flock. What is the shepherd to do? The shepherd will search for the sheep until he finds it. And when he finds it, there will be joy! Finding the lost one provides the shepherd more joy than all ninety-nine who placidly fed and slept in place without straying.

How would the disciples have heard this parable? Would their understanding have been different from ours? Would they have thought of the comforting Psalm 23? Or would they have thought of other Old Testament references to God as shepherd. In contrast to the calming comfort of Psalm 23, there is the convicting message in Ezekiel 34 of God's anger at the leaders over Israel who have been selfish and greedy -- not shepherds of the people but, rather, ravagers of the people. God vows that he will become the shepherd. "I myself will search for my sheep, and I will seek them out," God says (Ezekiel 34:11); and "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice" (34:16).

What other Old Testament references might you remember as you read the parable of the sheep? What other references in the New Testament do you recall? How do these references give insight into what Jesus might have been saying to the disciples? What is he saying to you?

**Congregational Study of the Parables in the Gospel of Matthew**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Natchez, Mississippi**  
**Eight Parable Lessons for Adult and Teen Sunday Study**  
**Lesson Five**

**Matthew 18:1-20**

**Parable of the Lost Sheep**

*Teachers: Have the class read the Gospel lesson, Matthew 18:1-20.*

**The Parable and Its Surroundings**

On Wednesday evening, we looked at the location of the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Matthew. We talked about how Jesus leads up to the parable with his words about how to be prepared to enter the kingdom of heaven: Be like a child. Jesus goes on to talk about vulnerable "little ones," not just children, but those who are young in the faith. Then he warns the disciples to be good stewards of the gospel they are receiving; not to put any stumbling block before a person just learning about the good news of God's kingdom. The parable comes next.

**Read just the parable again.**

Have someone retell the parable in his or her own words. Then discuss these questions:

1. What is the lesson of the parable for the disciples that day?
2. How does that lesson translate into our own lives and the life of the church?
3. What do you think you need to hear from this parable? What do you think the church most needs to hear from this parable?
4. So far, where do you see a lesson of "ins" and "outs," "victors" and "victims," or "judgment" and "mercy"?

**Keeping the Flock Together**

Jesus continues this discourse with instruction about how to help a brother or sister in the faith repent of a sin. The carefully outlined process has been instructive for the church for years. Let's read it together: 18:15-20.

1. How do these words make you feel? What instructs you?
2. Where do you find something that you wish Jesus had said in a different way?
3. Do you agree with this teaching and have you ever been a part of it? If so, how did it work?
4. What is most important about the message in 15-20?

## **Comforting and Reassuring Words for the Church**

In the final words in this teaching unit, Jesus provides two verses that have been cherished by the church. Read these verses together again.

1. Why are these words such important words to the church?
2. How do they fit with, enhance, or *not* pertain to the parable?

# Lessons of Love and Hospitality in the Gospel Parables: How Jesus Leads the Church to Love, Welcome, and Serve Our Neighbors

Devotionals by Rev. Joan Gandy  
Based on Parables of Jesus Found in the Gospel of Matthew

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am excited to offer devotional guides for your use during the eight weeks we will be studying Parables of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew. These devotionals may be used by one person, two, a family of five or a room full of relatives and friends! The important thing is to use them faithfully, each week. Of course, have a Bible nearby, also!

The devotionals, it is hoped, may deepen your spiritual experience of reading and studying the beautiful parables of Jesus. If you are able, it is helpful to have a particular time of day when you devote yourself to reading and reflecting. Try to create a space where there are few distractions. Seek God's presence by devoting mind, body, and strength to listening for that divine voice to speak to you through Scripture and prayer. And be with one another, taking time to talk about what you are reading and feeling as you devote yourself to this informal worship time.

There are three devotional readings for each of the eight weeks we will study selected parables in Matthew. Choose the same three days each week to share these little devotionals in your family circle -- maybe Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

Here is how the devotionals are arranged: In addition to a verse or two from the Gospel to guide your spiritual experience, there also is a verse from Psalms that helps perhaps to expand the meaning of the Gospel reading. The devotional concludes with a short prayer that you may read together. Then it is hoped that you will have your own family prayers together. If family prayers are not a habit you have cultivated, this is a great time to try that helpful practice. So: three times a week, devotionals are provided. Use them on whatever days you wish, but do try to enjoy the devotionals during the week designated if possible.

I leave you with these readings with a prayer that God will be with each one of us as we make this journey through parables together in the weeks ahead.

In Christ's love,

*Joan*

**Week Five: May 27-June 2, Matthew 18:10-14**  
**First Devotional**

*Gospel verse for the day:*

"Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matthew 18:10a).

*Psalm verse for the day:*

"How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word" (Psalm 119:9).

Jesus makes this so clear. We are the stewards of the next generations. We exhibit for them what it means to love and follow the way God has called us to live. We show them by example that it is important to be involved in church activities, to read and study the Bible, and to pray often. So much to do and so little time! When we think about our commitment to God and to his church, we do well to stop and figure out just where we place it on the scale of important things to do every day. It sometimes is disheartening to do that, and that's because we see that we fall desperately short of putting a priority on strengthening our faith and that of the little ones around us. Jesus also makes clear that little ones aren't just the children but also the ones who are new and therefore still growing in the faith. We were there once! Ask God to give you a new heart for serving. Listen for his voice as you read again the whole section of Matthew 18:1-20. Keep your heart open and God will speak to you. God will lead you in the way he wants you to go. May God bless you and your family in mighty ways this week.

*Pray this prayer; then pray your family's prayers.*

Our Lord God, you are great and you are good. You are strong and powerful and yet you bend to earth and take each one of us in your arms when we need comforting. Thank you for leading us in the way we should go. Thank you for loving us and tending to us as we struggle to follow in obedience the way that Jesus has put before us. In his name we pray. Amen.

**Notes and Questions**

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**Week Five, Matthew 18:10-14**  
**Second Devotional**

*Gospel verse for the day:*

"Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"  
(Matthew 18:4).

*Psalm verse for the day:*

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away" (Psalm 139:1-2).

Isn't it wonderful that we can imagine ourselves children again as we think about how it will be to be in the presence of God one day? Jesus has told us to be like a child in accepting his word and his plan for our lives. He has told us that we must become like the child -- letting go of our preconceived notions about so many things that keep us from living the faithful life! Being humble is not an easy thing for a grown-up to do. We are afraid to let our vulnerability show. We don't know how to let go of our pride! It isn't easy to be humble. It isn't easy to be totally trusting. God has shown us again and again that he is sovereign over all and loves his Creation as his treasure. In the verse from Psalm 139, we are reminded that God knows all about us. Let go of what might be keeping you from yielding to the invitation to trust God completely. Let go and let God take over. Ask for his blessings every day as you turn to him in prayer.

*Pray this prayer and then pray your family's prayers:*

God our Father, you have taught us that we should pray to you as our parent. You love us and care for us. You provide what we need. And you promise that we can trust you in our lives because you will always walk beside us. Help us to give our lives over to you. Protect us from the foolish things that can separate us from your love. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Notes and Questions**

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**Week Five: Matthew 18:10-14**  
**Third Devotional**

*Gospel verse for the day:*

"It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost" (Matthew 18:14).

*Psalm verse for the day:*

"It is you who light my lamp; the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness" (Psalm 18:28).

Jesus takes time to let the disciples know that children are important to him. In the church, we take strength from the presence of children in our midst. They enliven our worship and give us hope for the future. Their joy turns our dark moments brighter. Take a moment now to remember the children in your family and in your neighborhood. Who are they? What do they bring to the world? How can you find God in their young lives? Not only do we have the call to be stewards of their future; we also have the benefit and blessing of learning from them and finding joy in their presence. As you read again the short parable of the Lost Sheep, see how the shepherd recovers that little lost one in joy and makes the flock whole again as he brings that one lost one back to the flock. What joy there was for him in that restoration! What joy God takes in regaining our trust when we have been lost to him! Give thanks to God for his everlasting goodness and faithfulness. Blessed be our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for all the ways he teaches us to live before God and with our neighbors. In his name we pray. Amen.

*Pray this prayer together; then pray your family's prayers:*

Dear God, we love you in so many ways. We love the beautiful world around us and all the blessings of your Creation. We love the families you have given us. And we love all the friends who bless our lives. Today we thank you for the young people in our lives and the joy they bring to us. Bless us to bless them in your name. Thank you for Jesus. Amen.

**Notes and Questions**

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