

Wandering Sheep and an Ungrateful Servant!

Learning

Introducing the Parable (some example content you can engage with to prep and/or as a group)

- **Read Matthew 18:10-35**
- **Context:** In the middle of Matthew's gospel there has been a whole series of miracle stories about Jesus, culminating in the transfiguration and Jesus predicting his coming death. More immediately in this chapter, Jesus' disciples are arguing about power and greatness. Jesus challenges their cultural norms/expectations by saying, "Children!" And then he sets childlikeness as the standard for his disciples.
- **Culture:** It is obviously quite absurd to leave 99 sheep if you are a shepherd because in the end you will 1 found and 99 lost sheep, Jesus is speaking hyperbolically to emphasize his point. He, unlike normal shepherds, is the type who loves pursuing the lost ones.
- **Interesting Word:** The amount of *ten thousand talents*, is entirely hyperbolic. It is the equivalent of saying ten thousand days wages or in modern times about 9 billion dollars.
- **Themes:** The first parable emphasizes that the work of recovery from our lostness is entirely God's, a sheep can't repent anymore than a lost coin (cf. Luke 15:8-10). The second parable emphasizes the seemingly infinite debt we are forgiven and invites us to participate in this same kind of forgiveness in our lives. The key implication of these parables is hidden in the verses between them! Read the quote below.
- **Quote for reflection:**

"The middle verses 15-20 have at times in church history been used to justify ex-communication (aka kicking someone out of *The Church* because of their unrepentant sin). But when we read this passage in the context of the two parables Jesus tells, there may just be a parable-like teaching Jesus is trying to reframe. It is likely that Jesus endorses confronting sin in your friends, especially those who are within your faith community. But after confronting he says treat that person like 'a pagan or a tax collector.' Cultural Jews would understand this to mean disassociate yourself from them! But... how does Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors? He pursues them lovingly with joy like the lost sheep and forgives them unconditionally. What if the talk of 'binding and loosing' speaks to the power of forgiveness that we have on earth. What if Jesus models a superior way to both challenge and forgive?"

Dialogue Questions (some example questions for this content above)

- Focus on the two parables first! What are the dominating ideas in each parable? Compare, connect, and contrast them.
- What themes do you see between them? How do they build on each other?
- What is Jesus emphasizing here for us as disciples? How are we to be? How are we to treat others?
- Now focus on the seemingly difficult passage in the middle (v. 15-20). Why is this here? What do you think Jesus means?

Implication Questions (some example questions/challenges that engage real life now)

- Read the quote above. Allow people to reread v. 15-20 with this in mind. What do you think of this reading within the context of the chapter? Is it possible Jesus just brought you revelation through indirect communication, or as Kierkegaard said by "deceiving you into truth"?
- Jesus radically challenged and called people from sin to life, yet he seems to have boundless grace, love, and pursuit even when people are in sin. What are you learning from Jesus for engaging sin in your life, your friends, your family?
- What does this teach you about the journey of discipleship? About life in a church community?