

**Monday**

Read Ezekiel 34:1-16

Salvation does not come through separation or segregation. But the Pharisees strongly believed and lived by the belief that to live a Godly life you must keep sinners and bad people away from you at all times and at all costs. You must stay clean and pure. This is why they grumble about Jesus hanging out with tax collectors and sinners – they wouldn't even be seen teaching such human rabble and here he is welcoming them. These were people who had poor morals or had occupations that religious teachers believed were incompatible with living God's law and everyone knew it. These weren't sinners in the sense that everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. These people were public sinners who were known as such in the community. At best, the Pharisees and others would teach that God will welcome a penitent sinner, but they wouldn't actually teach sinners, so it is a convenient Catch-22 that allows them not to bother with folks that didn't meet their standards. If sinners manage to figure out how to get to God, more power to them. It is a familiar attitude that has lasted millennia.

They had forgotten or had no clue of the meaning of Ezekiel 34. God is not hanging out, waiting for people to come to him once they have it all figured out and are leading the perfect life. God is searching for his sheep and is actively seeking them out. God seeks the lost and rescues them; he bandages up the wounded and gives strength to the weak. God actively and passionately seeks out sinners. Jesus says this is the work he came to do and that's what Luke 15 is teaching.

What does it mean to you that God's mission is to seek out the sheep and not wait for the sheep to come to God? How does your thinking about faith, salvation, and evangelism need to alter because of God who seeks out sheep?

**Tuesday**

Read Luke 15:1-7

The lost sheep is valuable but has lost its direction and doesn't know where it truly is. The first half of Isaiah 53:6 describes the lost sheep well, "All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own." God's path eludes the sheep or is ignored by the sheep and the sheep blazes its own trail. Being lost doesn't mean being immobile or stuck. The sheep might be making incredible progress down this new trail.

There was a famous World War II pilot who radioed into control and the base asked, "Where are you?" And the pilot replied, "I don't know but I am making great time!" We often trick ourselves into thinking that speed is direction. Going the wrong way quickly is no virtue. The lost sheep is separated from the flock.

What are the characteristics of a sheep who knows the direction to go?

**Wednesday**

Read Luke 15

At the end of each of the three stories Jesus tells in Luke 15 there is a big party. In the text, the first party is a heavenly party and the second two are earthly parties (although the parables are pointing towards heavenly parties, too). How wonderful is it that there is a party when a sheep is found?!?

What do you think the heavenly party looked like (or will look like) when you were found? Let your mind wander in imagination for a few minutes!

## Thursday

Read John 10:14-18

An American, traveling in Syria, saw three native shepherds bring their flocks to the same brook, and the flocks drank there together. At length one shepherd arose and called out, “Men-ah! men-ah!” the Arabic for “follow me.” His sheep came out of the common herd and followed him up the hillside. The next shepherd did the same, and his sheep went away with him, and the man did not even stop to count them.

The traveler said to the remaining shepherd, “Give me your turban and crook, and see if they will not follow me as well as you.” So he put on the shepherd’s dress and called out, “Men-ah! men-ah!” Not a sheep moved. They know not a voice of a stranger. “Will your flock never follow anybody but you?” inquired the gentleman. The Syrian shepherd replied, “Oh, yes; sometimes a sheep gets sick, and then he will follow anyone.” - Paul Lee Tan

<sup>27</sup> After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” <sup>28</sup> And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. <sup>29</sup> And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. <sup>30</sup> And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>31</sup> And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” - Luke 5:27–32

## Friday

Each week in 2022, we are praying for the most dangerous places to be a follower of Jesus. Please spend today in prayer for China and the Christians in China. You can get more info, and this info comes from, here: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

What is life like for Christians in China?

The church in China continues to enjoy strong growth; however, life for Christians is anything but straightforward. The policy of “Sinicizing” the church has been implemented nationwide, as the Communist Party limits whatever it perceives as a threat to its rule and ideology. Thousands of churches have been damaged or closed. In some parts of China, children under the age of 18 aren’t allowed to attend church—part of the country’s efforts to stunt future growth.

Areas for prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give church leaders wisdom, discernment and guidance as they lead congregations in light of increased restrictions and surveillance.
- Lift up in prayer all who have left their former religion to follow Jesus. Pray they will be protected from harm, strengthened in their faith and empowered in their witness.
- Ask the Lord to open the eyes of those in authority to the unequalled power and beauty of the gospel.