

Focus Text

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”
(Matthew 18:10–14, ESV)

The Lost Sheep

Jesus continues his speech about the “little ones,” or vulnerable believers who are easily led astray. Matthew adds a unique touch not found in the other gospels by mentioning that these little ones, along with others, have angels watching over them. This idea of guardian angels is present in the Old Testament and Jewish folklore. Matthew highlights that, as mentioned in Ezekiel, angels watch over God’s people, and Jesus emphasizes that God sees these vulnerable individuals. This provides a harmonious explanation of the warnings and woes in chapter 18.

Next, Jesus illustrates a Shepherd’s love for their sheep with a unique story. He describes how the main Shepherd would leave 99 sheep with an under-shepherd to search for the one that was lost. This might seem unusual, but it shows the Shepherd’s priority to bring the wayward back into the fold. This theme also appears in Ezekiel, where God describes Israel as lost sheep he personally rescues. Jesus, known as the Good Shepherd, seeks to save all who are lost. As John writes, the Gospels convey this message in various ways. Jesus has lifted up all people, drawing them to him. He describes himself as the Good Shepherd, whose sheep recognize his voice and come to him. This is a powerful reminder of God’s compassionate love and desire to save humanity. Jesus speaks of himself as the second person of the Trinity, who left his heavenly throne to come to earth for ministry and to establish the kingdom of heaven. He also challenges Jewish prejudice against Gentiles, ministering to all people groups because, to him, this is not a cultural war. The Good Shepherd seeks to save anyone who will come to him.

Finally, Jesus reminds us that this is part of God’s character. In ancient times, no one loved the sheep more than the main Shepherd, who owned them. While shepherds could hire servants or family members to watch over the sheep, the main Shepherd cared most deeply. God’s original desire was to walk with humanity in Eden without sin and destruction. Although God is just and will punish sin, his true desire is to reunite with his creation because he

9.13.26 Discover the King: “The Lost Sheep” Matthew 18:10-14

has a deep and jealous love for his image-bearers. Matthew paints a picture of these little ones, believers who might be swayed away from the Good Shepherd and God’s compassion. Through Jesus’s person and work, God personally seeks out those on the brink of being wayward.

Application

Reflecting on Matthew 18:10–14 and the parable of the Lost Sheep, consider God’s heart for the one who has strayed. Jesus models the relentless love of the Good Shepherd, who seeks out the vulnerable and rejoices over their return. As a church, Good Shepherd’s mission includes the “share” pillar—helping others become committed followers of Jesus.

What is one practical way you can personally reach out to someone who is far from God this week and begin a conversation that opens the door for relationship and faith?

Think about:

- Who in your life might feel spiritually isolated or overlooked?
- How can you engage them with genuine care rather than obligation?
- What simple step could reflect God’s heart and begin to guide that person back toward Him?

Reflection Goal:

Write down a name and one actionable step you will take this week to embody the heart of the Good Shepherd—seeking the one and celebrating even a single soul returning to God’s family.

Additional Notes

“Probably the point made is not comparative but rather simply that the interests of these little ones is fully and without interruption represented in the near presence of God”¹

“At any rate, Heb 1:14 teaches that angels are concerned for believers and serve them. So Jesus’ words here are appropriate even if we cannot be sure of all the specific ways in which angels minister to us.”²

“Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14, ESV)

“The passage emphasizes that efforts to rescue vulnerable people who have been misled are grounded in God’s own priorities and reflect participation in God’s shepherding work as described in [Ezekiel 34](#)[1]. This frames Christian responsibility not as an isolated ethical obligation, but as alignment with divine concern. The connection to Ezekiel is crucial. Ezekiel condemns Israel’s leaders for exploiting their people, failing to strengthen the weak or heal the sick, and ruling with harshness rather than care ([Ezek 34](#)). God responds by declaring that he himself will search for and seek out the scattered sheep ([Ezek 34](#)). When Matthew’s Jesus teaches about rescuing “little ones,” he’s invoking this prophetic reversal—God personally assumes the shepherd’s role that failed leaders abandoned.

“Those who act according to this parable model themselves on God’s priorities, with Jesus occupying a middle position between God as shepherd and Christians as shepherds to one another[1]. The implication is profound: caring for the vulnerable isn’t peripheral charity—it’s participation in God’s redemptive work. The sheep led astray represents the weak and injured, perhaps those who have been abused, misled, or neglected through lack of care[2].

This reframes the entire ethical landscape. The Father’s will is that none of these vulnerable ones perish ([Matt 18:12–14](#))—not as a sentimental preference, but as the defining characteristic of God’s kingdom. When disciples engage in rescue, they’re not performing an optional good deed; they’re enacting God’s own nature and purposes.”³

¹ Nolland, John. 2005. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

² Blomberg, Craig. 1992. *Matthew*. Vol. 22. *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ [1] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), [743](#).

[2] Mark Bredin and Willard M. Swartley, *Jesus, Revolutionary of the Poor: Matthew’s Subversive Messiah* (New York, NY: Cascade Books, 2017). [See [here](#).]