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Essential 4 - CHASE THE STRAYS

Intro:

- 1) What does it look like to be spiritually mature?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 ESV 1 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

- 2) What does it mean to chase the stray? It means that someone has been connected in relationship with 1) the Father, 2) other people, and 3) to God's purpose for their life and for some reason they are now disconnecting from relationship, and we are going to go pursue them in love to encourage them to reconnect

Goal of today: That you would 1) see clearly how Jesus loved other people by chasing them when they strayed, and then 2) you would do the same as Jesus and chase others in your life with love.

Part 1: Chasing the Strays has Old Testament roots

Ezekiel 34: 1-16 ESV 1 "The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; [...] 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered, [...] 16 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, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice."

- Sheep need water to survive like we need relationship with God and others to thrive...
 - You cannot grow in spiritual maturity without relationship
- So if a shepherd is at the watering hole in Israel, and some sheep don't show up, he knows that there is a problem... "You need this!"
- When we apply this forward to today and we say chase the strays, let's ask ourselves two questions
 - What is this person straying from?
 - 1) the Father, 2) other people, 3) true purpose
 - Why is this person straying? Answers below
 - Reason #1: The weak you have not strengthened
 - Reason #2: The sick you have not healed
 - Reason #3: The injured you have not bound up
 - Reason #4 The strayed you have not brought back
 - Reason #5 The lost you have not sought
 - God says "You won't, but I will!"
 - (v. 11) "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."
 - God loves you more than I love my son
 - God is pursuing you in love because He wants you in relationship with Himself and His people
- So you might be thinking: *this passage is for leaders in Israel... what does that (Ezekiel 34) have to do with me?*
 - The answer is that this (chasing the strays) is a part of who God was and still is today, His character... He chases the strays!

Part 2: Imitate Jesus in the Way that He Loved Others

1. Jesus taught about it.

Matthew 18:10-14 ESV 10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. 11 For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. 12 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? 13 And if he

finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

2. Jesus lived it.
 - a. Peter and the breakfast
3. The Bible applies it to the believer

Hebrews 3:12-13 ESV 12“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (Emphasis mine).

- a. A reversal of Cain’s decision who said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Part 3: What does “Chasing the Strays” look like today?

1. What Chasing the Strays is not:
 - a. A guilt trip: inspired by legalism
 - b. Manipulation: I am not asked to control other people; I cannot.
 - i. Instead there is God’s part, my part, and the other person’s part
 1. My part: Call them, Encourage them, Fight lies of the enemy with truth, Help them resolve conflict, and Exhort them
 2. I cannot do God’s part
 3. I also cannot do other people’s part or I will burnout
 - a. Sam Meredith taught me 3 times/2 weeks, 2 methods/1 month
 - b. If the other person is answering you, pursue them as much as they are willing to respond - in proportion to their hunger
2. **Step One** is knowing people well enough in relationship to know when they are disconnecting
3. **Step Two** is to discern why this person is disconnecting because that will help determine your next step
 - a. Don’t underestimate prayer
 - b. Fight lies of the enemy with the truths of scripture
4. **Step Three** is to bring them back in to the fold
 - a. Matthew 18:13 ESV “And if he finds [the lost sheep], truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it [...]”

Conclusion: Who comes to mind when I ask “Who needs chasing?”

- Who needs chasing in this church? _____
- Who needs chasing in your family? _____

Hebrews 10:25 ESV “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”

- Who needs chasing in your friend group? _____

For Small Group Discussion: What stood out to you the most from this week’s message?

Main Scripture: Ezekiel 34:1-16 (Additional Scripture: Matthew 18:10-14)

Opening Question: Have you ever had someone pursue you in a loving way?

- In Ezekiel 34, what are the many reasons why a sheep might be missing? Write them down.
- How do each one of those reasons translate into a reason why a believer might be missing from the gathering of believers?
- Why is it important to remember that we can only do our part when we chase the strays?
- Who needs chasing in your life and what is your next step?

Tips and Resources: Definition: Stray - Those who are saved but are not currently connected to Christ’s body, the church. They are people who once attended our church (or a different body of Christ) and were connected into a relational group for a period of time and now have begun to step away.