



## **Congregational Bible Study**



## Shepherding the Strays Congregational Bible Study

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**Please capture key points from the discussions and insightful answers to the questions. Add any suggestions you have for improvements, corrections, etc.**

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### **Shepherding Our Strays – Congregational Bible Study**

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**Part I: We Are Sheep, We Are a Body, We Are the Church**

**1. A Flock of Sheep**

Psalm 79:13

*But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.*

John 10:14-16

*[Jesus said,] <sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*

A flock of sheep. This is one of the ways in which the Bible pictures the church. It was a very powerful image for the people who lived when the Bible was written and is a very helpful image for us today. Unlike many of the people who heard the prophets speak about sheep or who listened to Jesus teach with parables involving sheep, we may not have much experience with sheep. But we don't have to know a lot about sheep to understand what the Bible is picturing for us.

**1a. Check one box on each line to select which of the two statements on that line best describes sheep as you understand them:**

<i>Independent</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Dependent</i>
Do not have any natural enemies (i.e., predators)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are the target of predators like wolves and lions
Able to defend themselves against enemies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not able to defend themselves against enemies
Are leaders by nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are followers by nature
Can take care of themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Need a shepherd to care for them
Better off when they are away from the flock and the shepherd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Better off when they are with the flock and the shepherd

**1b. Based on the characteristics of sheep that you selected above, would you say that sheep are naturally independent or naturally dependent?**

**1c. What dangers, if any, do sheep face when they live independently?**

**1d. What, if anything, do sheep need from their shepherd?**

## **2. Not Just Any Sheep**

Whatever we may think about sheep, God speaks of us as sheep. When He calls us sheep He wants us to realize that we aren't just any sheep, but His sheep who are more dear to Him than literal sheep are dear to their shepherds. Some of the passages of Scripture that use this image include:

### Psalm 95:6-7

*<sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! <sup>7</sup> For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

### Psalm 101:1-3

*<sup>1</sup> Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! <sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! <sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

### Luke 12:32

*[Jesus said,] "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom ..."*

### Isaiah 40:11

*He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.*

### John 10:11

*[Jesus said,] "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*

**2a. In what ways do the above passages picture how the Lord views and cares for His ‘sheep’?**

**2b. Based on these passages, would we expect the Lord’s sheep to want to be with their Shepherd or want to be away from Him? Why?**

### **3. There Are Sheep in Grave Danger**

Despite God’s loving care for His sheep and the dangers that we face when we are apart from Him, we tend to wander away from our Shepherd. Our wanderings lead us into sin. Without our Shepherd’s intervention, we would certainly be overtaken by our adversary, the devil, who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Thankfully, our Shepherd has intervened for us, His sheep.

#### Ezekiel 34:11-12

<sup>11</sup> “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will **I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them** from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

#### Isaiah 53:4-6

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> **All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

**3a. How has the Lord rescued us, His sheep?**

**3b. What tempts us to “go astray” – to wander away from our Shepherd?**

**4. Remembering and Not Remembering Our Sins**

At first glance, Jeremiah 14:10 and Psalm 103:8-13 may seem to contradict each other. One says that the Lord will remember our sins. The other says that the Lord will not remember our sins. A careful reading of the two passages makes it clear that there is an important difference that resolves any contradiction.

Jeremiah 14:10

*Thus says the LORD concerning this people: “They have loved to wander thus; they have not restrained their feet; therefore the LORD does not accept them; now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins.”*

Psalm 103:8-13

*<sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. <sup>9</sup> He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. <sup>10</sup> He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup> As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.*

**4a. What accounts for the difference in how the Lord deals with our sins?**

**4b. According to Jeremiah 14:10, what dangers face a person who wanders away from the Lord after being rescued by Him?**

## **5. A Body Meant to Be Whole**

The human body is another important image that the Bible uses to describe the church. 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 explains the application of this image in detail. It also highlights the reason that God has “so composed the body” (1 Corinthians 12:24):

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

*<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> **that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.** <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

**5a. In what ways does the human body demonstrate how God has put together our congregation?**

**5b. Doctors routinely remove a person’s tonsils, appendix, and gall bladder when deemed medically necessary. Imagine that you had to have five additional members of your body removed and that you had to choose which ones. Why would it be difficult to choose which members of your body to give up?**

**5c. What would happen to your ability to do the things that you can now do if parts of your body were missing?**

**5d. Romans 12:5 reminds us that we are one body in Christ and that each of us, though individual members, belong to one another.**

Romans 12:3-5

*<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

**How does this passage reinforce God’s purpose for composing the body as it is: “that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:25)?**

**5e. When we think of our congregation in terms of a body, our inactive members are parts of our body that are missing. Which of the follow statements reflect our response to the members of our congregation who are currently inactive (*check all that apply*):**

- We think more of ourselves than them because we are faithful in worship and service (Romans 2:3)
- We are hurting because they are hurting (1 Cor. 12:26)
- We have responded by saying, in essence, “I have no need of you.” (1 Cor. 12:21)
- We recognize them as weaker members and give them greater care and concern (1 Cor. 12:23)
- We are willing to make sacrifices for their benefit because we know that we belong to one another (Romans 12:5)

**Discuss which statements you checked and why you checked them.**

## **Part II: Our Call to Shepherd the Strays**

### **6. “Food for all the Wild Beasts”**

#### Ezekiel 34:1-6

<sup>1</sup> *The word of the LORD came to me:* <sup>2</sup> *“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?”* <sup>3</sup> *You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.* <sup>4</sup> *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.* <sup>5</sup> *So **they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts.** My sheep were scattered;* <sup>6</sup> *they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.*

The image of our congregation as a flock highlights something that the image of a body with missing parts doesn't fully convey: the people who are missing are at great risk. In Ezekiel 34:5, the Lord puts the issue in very stark terms. He says that His scattered sheep have “become food for all the wild beasts.” This word picture reminds us that serving our inactive members is about much more than membership numbers, attendance figures, or financial contributions. It is a matter of life and death.

**6a. How are the inactive members of our congregation like “food for all the wild beasts”?**

**6b. Do you think that our inactive members see themselves as scattered sheep in grave danger? Do we see them in that way?**

**6c. Whom does the Lord hold responsible for the plight of the sheep in Ezekiel 34?**

## **7. Two Kinds of Shepherds**

### Jeremiah 23:1-4

<sup>1</sup> *“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD.*

<sup>2</sup> *Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. <sup>4</sup> I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.*

Jeremiah 23 speaks of two very different kinds of shepherds. It first speaks of shepherds who have been unfaithful in the care of God’s sheep. The Lord tells these shepherds that they will face the consequences of their unfaithfulness and that He will replace them with shepherds who will be faithful.

**7a. What became of the sheep who had unfaithful shepherds?**

**7b. What will the Lord do through the faithful shepherds He will put into place?**

**7c. In regard to our inactive members, how are we like the unfaithful shepherds? How are we like the faithful shepherds?**

**7d. Who is the ultimate faithful shepherd being spoken of in Jeremiah 23:5, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”?**

## **8. Sheep that Stray on Purpose**

Matthew 18:15-20

*[Jesus said,] <sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

While some people stray away from the church because of the unfaithfulness of their shepherds, many people stray because of their own unfaithfulness. When people have sinfully separated themselves from the flock, we are called to approach them in care and concern. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus taught us how to do this. Often referred to as “Church Discipline,” this important passage guides us in how to lovingly approach people who are “despising preaching and God’s Word” (see Luther’s explanation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment).

**8a. What are the three stages of engaging someone who is caught up in a sin?**

**8b. What is the desired outcome of each of the stages?**

**8c. What are some ways in which this approach gets twisted or abused by church leaders or active members?**

**8d. Which of the following reactions do we expect from people when we approach them using the guidance of Matthew 18?**

- They will recognize we are acting in love
- They will get defensive or angry
- They will welcome us
- They will accuse us of being sinners too
- They will not see any reason to discuss things with us
- They will blame us (or the church or the pastor) for the problem
- They will be blessed by us
- They will return to our flock
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**8e. According to Galatians 6:1, of what should we be mindful when we serve people with this approach?**

Galatians 6:1

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

## **9. Why Should We Act?**

Proverbs 24:11-12

*<sup>11</sup> Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. <sup>12</sup> If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?*

Ezekiel 3:20-21

*<sup>20</sup> Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>21</sup> But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul."*

1 John 4:18-21

*<sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

We may not see the need. We may not expect much in terms of results. We may even be convinced that our inactive members don't want us to contact them. But God's Word makes it clear that we are called to serve our inactive members. Before we do what we are called to do, we need to check our motives. If we are acting because of the threats of the Law, our approach to serving our inactive members will tend to be law-based. However, if we find our motivation in the love of the Gospel, that love will show forth in how we serve them.

### **9a. Which parts of the above passages are Law? Which are Gospel?**

**9b. Identify each of the following statements as being motivated by the Law or motivated by the Gospel:**

“We need to get more people involved to share the load around here. Let’s see if we can get some inactive members involved again.”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel
“The By-Laws say that we should remove inactive members from the roster after one year. Let’s clean up the rolls.”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel
“We’ve lost touch with some of our members. We should reach out to them to make sure that they are being cared for spiritually.”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel
“We’re not going to make the budget this year. If we get some people back we could erase some of the deficit.”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel
“Our mission is not what it could be. If we could find ways to include some of our missing members we would be more whole and better able to serve our community.”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel
“Missing members are likely to be hurting members. How can we reach out to them to bring healing?”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel
“Membership comes with responsibilities. They’re the ones who have shirked their responsibilities. It’s time to clear out some of the dead wood.”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel
“Matthew 18 is clear on this. Let’s make the three required visits. We should be able to clean things up in no time.”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel
“Matthew 18 is clear on this. Let’s start visiting our missing members and see what we can do to encourage them to return to our flock.”	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel

**9c. Why is it so important that the Gospel is our motivation for serving our inactive members?**

## **10. The Joy of Restoration**

### 1 Peter 5:8-10

<sup>8</sup> *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* <sup>9</sup> *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* <sup>10</sup> *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself **restore**, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*

### 1 Corinthians 1:10

*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be **united** in the same mind and the same judgment.*

What do we hope to accomplish by serving our inactive members in love? In a word, restoration. We want the people who are missing from the body and have strayed into grave danger to be restored to our fellowship of believers. The Greek word that is translated as ‘restore’ in 1 Peter 5:10 and ‘united’ in 1 Corinthians 1:10 is *katartizo*. It’s the same word used in Galatians 6:1, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should **restore** him in a spirit of gentleness.”

**10a. According to 1 Peter 5:10, who does the actual restoring of the people who have strayed?**

**10b. How are people restored to the Church-at-large? How are they restored to a congregation?**

**10c. There is great joy when a sheep is restored to the flock. The parable of the lost sheep that Jesus told in Luke 15 captures that joy:**

Luke 14:3-7

<sup>3</sup> [Jesus] told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

<sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ <sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

**Who is included in the joy of a sheep being restored to the flock?**

**10d. Complete the next page and give it to the Bible study leader.**

**10d. Just as the body is made up of many parts for different functions, active members of the congregation are each gifted for different roles in restoring the sheep that have strayed to the flock. Check the boxes on the list below for the things that you are willing to do to serve our inactive members:**

- Pray for the people who have strayed
- Pray for the people who will be contacting and visiting our inactive members
- Contact inactive members to arrange visits
- Visit inactive members
- Track worship and Bible study attendance to identify people who are straying
- Keep records of the scheduled and completed visits to inactive members
- Send handwritten notes or cards to inactive members
- Put together gift baskets to be delivered to inactive members
- Help the people who come back feel welcomed and loved
- Other:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_