

One Out Of A Hundred

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Lorain Avenue Church of Christ (07-21-2024)

// Good morning. //

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Today ... Our lesson title is ... "One out of a hundred"

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One out of a hundred is ... one percent. Not all that much, is it?

Who still stops ... bends down ... and picks up a penny these days?

We're more concerned with "where that penny's been" than what it's worth.

We tend to treat one percent as insignificant ... "in the noise" we say.

Would you hop in the car ... and drive to a sale offering one-percent off?

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Yet ... there are times we "do" pay attention to one-percent.

Would you fly on an airline that crashed once every hundred flights?"

Please ... don't raise your hand and ask how low the fare was.

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I was shopping on Amazon ... for rechargeable batteries for our wireless microphones.

I narrowed my choice down to two. I looked at the reviews. Battery A had four percent bad reviews. You know ... one on a scale of five.

Battery B ... two percent bad reviews. I bought "that" one.

Two less people out of a hundred ... NOT disgusted with the product ... made a difference to me.

My point is ... one out of a hundred may seem like a very small amount ... and sometimes it is.

But in some instances ... it can be a huge amount.

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One bad battery out of a hundred is a lot ... if it's the battery in this microphone.

One crash in every hundred flights is lot ... if you're a passenger on that flight.

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We're going to talk about the ninety and nine this morning.

Most of you know the parable of the lost sheep. The one out of a hundred that was lost. How the shepherd searched for that sheep and rescued it.

One out a hundred was a huge thing to that shepherd. (And to that sheep.)

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One sheep ... one soul ... is always ... always ... a lot.

It is to the Lord. It must be to us.

This lesson is to help us ... to always be conscious ... of those souls who wander off and are in danger. And to be conscious ... as well ... of the lost souls that need to be added to the fold.

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Suppose one member of a congregation drifts away and stops attending. One member, say, out of a congregation of one-hundred. That may seem like a small percentage. But it's a huge loss. Often a tragic loss.

In your own minds ... for the sake of the exercise ... put the name of one of our members on that face ... and pay attention to the feelings that surface within you. The loss of that fellow Christian is not acceptable. They could lose their soul ... we would lose their fellowship and mutual support.

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Wolves and other predators ... attack the fringes of a flock or herd. They pick off the loners ... the weak ... the stragglers. This is exactly what Satan does to congregations.

A congregation may not notice a member missing until it's way late in the game. That missing Christian may have developed sloppy attendance habits. When they miss here and there, we get used to the pattern. And then ... they fade silently away.

A heads up ... it's never, ever a bother ... if you drop me or Eddie a text ... or one of our deacons (Carl, Larry, and Bryan) ... if you're away or ill. It can really help. We're all family here.

And ... there is nothing gossipy about raising concerns to the elders and deacons about a sheep that's slipping away. We're all on watch for that one out of a hundred.

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Here's something you probably don't think about ... unless you're involved in customer service.

It takes twice as many resources to regain a lost customer ... than was required to gain that customer to begin with.

Say you're trying to grow a business. But for every new customer you gain ... you lose an established customer (for one reason or another). You never grow because it's too expensive to chase after lost customers. Even if you did ... there's no guarantee you'd be successful. And you might take your eye off the business in the process.

Most businesses are aware of this ... and know that it's just as important to keep current customers happy as it is to gain new ones.

Dissatisfied customers usually slip silently away without ever saying why. You may try to get them back, but in the end, you just accept some percentage of loss as acceptable.

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Much of this applies perfectly well to the sheep-fold of every local congregation. With one exception, however. There is NO percentage of loss that is acceptable. Losing a member may be inevitable, but it is never acceptable.

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We can't afford to take our eye off the members who are safe for the time being. But at the same time, we must do all we can to find and save one who is lost and in danger.

A hundred volunteers may search a mountainside to save one hiker who hasn't reported back in.

Remember the huge effort to rescue the 33 Chilean miners in 2010?

Or the twelve boys and their coach who were rescued from a flooded cave in Thailand in 2018? As many as 10,000 people and 100 divers. 100 governmental agencies, 900 police officers, 2000 soldiers. One diver lost his own life. Would they have done it for 6? For 3? For One?

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Can we here ... at LA ... do it for one? It would be a spiritual rescue. Perhaps maybe even harder than a physical rescue. Do we have teams standing by? Do we have procedures in place? Do we all see it as part of our "job?" How many volunteers stand ready to sacrifice their time and energy? Do we have the stamina and fortitude to keep trying until we succeed?

Christ died for the one who may be slipping back into the world. Just as He died for the one who has yet to hear His Gospel message. Can you put a value on one soul? Jesus has already appraised it as ... "priceless!"

Last Saturday, a man shielded his wife and daughters from gunfire ... losing his own life. As tragic as that was ... and it was a tragedy ... the loss of a soul is yet even more so.

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In the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke ... Jesus tells three parables dealing with the "one" out of the many. The "one" ... who is lost ... and is in danger of losing their soul forever.

The first parable is about a lost sheep. The second is about a woman who lost a coin. And the third is about a Father who lost his son (the prodigal son). Each ... the sheep ... the coin ... the son ... was lost. Each was a priority. Each was searched for. Each was found.

The Shepherd proclaimed ... "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!"

The woman proclaimed ... "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!"

The father proclaimed ... "[My young son] ... was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found."

All three

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The parable of the lost sheep.

Luke 15:4-7 ... [Jesus says] ... "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is

lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 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 which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

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The parable of the lost coin.

Luke 15:8-10 ... [Jesus says] ... "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

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The parable of the lost son.

Luke 15:11-32 ... [Jesus begins] And He said, "A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' And he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

... .. [after the son comes to himself ... he decides to return to his father] ...

Luke 15:20-21 ... "And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him. "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

.... .. [the older son who did not leave his father was angry] ... ["what about me," he pleaded. "I have been here for you all along."]

Luke 15:31-32 ... "And [the father said to him], 'My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 'But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

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A shepherd lost a sheep ... it wandered off. A woman lost a coin ... it got misplaced. A father lost a son ... he rebelled and left.

Christians ... members of a congregation ... do JUST that.

They wander off and become lost. They get misplaced by the congregation. They rebel against the Lord or the Elders and storm off.

All of the lost ... the one sheep out of a hundred ... the precious coin ... the unthankful son ... all of them were important to the ones who had lost them ... irreplaceable. Even though the shepherd had more 99 sheep ... the woman had nine more coins ... the father had another son ... the lost to them, was unacceptable.

To a mom and dad ... with two or more children ... which is expendable?

In our congregation ... who could we afford to lose? All are the most precious brothers and sisters in Christ

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We live in a world that's upside down. It decreases the value of the ONE ... while increasing the value of the MANY. But it's not so in God's mind. Each and every ONE is of the highest value.

In **Matt 8:10** ... Jesus warns us ... to NOT to look down on one of His little ones.

He's talking about Christians ... children of God. In verse 6 ... a few verses earlier ... Jesus mentions "These little ones who believe in Me." He's talking about those who have humbled themselves ... have obeyed the Gospel ... and have become "as little children" before God.

These are the ones Jesus came to earth to save.

He warns ... "Do not let them fail." We must work together so that none of us becomes that one sheep ... that lost coin ... that runaway son. And if one becomes lost ... saving that soul must be the priority of us all.

Matt 18:12-13 ... just as in Luke ... Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep ... "What do you think? If a shepherd 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 tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray."

And in Matt 18:14 ... Jesus says ... "In the same way ... your Father in heaven is not willing that "any" of these little ones should be lost.

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"If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do?"

This is the question Jesus asks in the parable.

We've talked all around this. Now let's take a moment and think? Jesus is asking His listeners ... His readers ... US ... what options do you see? Two?

Option 1: Abandon the "one" in favor of the "ninety-nine."

Option 2: Abandon the "ninety-nine" in favor of the "one."

What's the man going to do? Which will he abandon? Which will he save?

Option 1: He can choose to do what the world so often does... he can DECREASE the value of the one and prioritize the KEEPING of the ninety-nine. That's what conventional wisdom would suggest. After all, it's just ONE sheep.

Option 2: Or... he could leave the ninety-nine to go in search of the ONE.

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But... "What if ...??"

What if ... he leaves the 99 ... and someone comes along and steals his sheep? What if he leaves the 99 and the weather turns bad, and the wind blows and the sheep scatter?

What if an enemy or predator comes along, and the sheep become afraid and run off in every direction!

What if ... what if?

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What happens when the “What If’s” dominate the decisions made by the shepherd?

Even more so, what happens when the “What If’s” dominate the decisions made by the local Church?

Going after the lost ... full bore ... may mean leaving something behind ... something undone.

But rescuing the lost one ... means that the flock is restored to 100%. For Jesus, that was a major focus in His decisions and teaching.

One thing is for sure. The 99 “might” be in danger ... but the “one” definitely is in danger.

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So, Jesus says ... “Won’t the shepherd leave the 99 others in the wilderness and go search for the one that is lost until he finds it?” This language means that going after the lost sheep is the exact choice Jesus prefers.

Imagine what would have happened if the man in the parable ... the shepherd in the parable ... had made a different decision?

What if he had said ... “If I leave the 99, who knows what will happen? There might be lions and tigers and bears! And, hey, it’s only “ONE” sheep.

But now ... that shepherd is down to 99 sheep. All is good until ... one day... another sheep turns up missing. Now he only has 98. He could go find that sheep. Yet he’s still more concerned with keeping the sheep who are safe, safe.

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As time goes by ... one day that shepherd looks up and realizes his flock is now only 75 sheep. Or 50 sheep. Or less!

One thing is for sure, so long as he prioritizes keeping the safe sheep safe ... at the expense of the lost ... his flock will never grow. At best it will stay the same, at least for a while. But even if he’s able to not lose another sheep to the wilderness, the sheep he has will eventually grow old, or get sick, and die.

At what point does the shepherd decide, “Maybe I should be more concerned with the lost sheep than the safe sheep?” At what point does it become it too late?

And at what point does the shepherd decide, “Maybe I should give more attention to adding more sheep to the fold?”

Would you call a shepherd who doesn’t go after lost sheep a good shepherd?

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Let’s turn our focus from the shepherd in the parable ... to the Lord’s church today.

How many congregations may be like that?

They work to keep the saved, saved. Yet they spend too little effort in saving those who have fallen away.

Maybe they baptize their own kids. Maybe their membership grows as people move into town ... or as people come over from other nearby congregations.

There's no shame in that. But they spend too little effort in seeking and saving the lost. Both those that fall away ... as well as those who need to become children of God.

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We might think ... that the only way to keep the saved, saved ... is to stay with the 99. Make sure they're happy and they stay here. But what if the only way to really keep the saved, saved is to always be about the work of seeking and saving the lost?

The best way to save the ninety and nine ... is to save the one who is lost.

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Too often ... we are more concerned about what we have rather than what we've lost.

This is backwards from the teaching in Jesus' three parables ... being more concerned over what we've lost than what we have.

And we need to be concerned about what we need to add. After all ... isn't it the mission of the Lord's Church ... to draw those outside of Christ ... to Christ?

Jesus is NOT presenting local churches ... and their leadership ... with an either/or choice. Instead, He is telling us ... that the best way to keep the local church safe ... the best way to keep it growing ... is to go after the lost.

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This is how things work in the Kingdom of Heaven. If you want to save the 99... GO AFTER THE ONE!

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We might miss a big takeaway of this lesson ... if each of us think of ourselves as part of the 99 ... and someone else ... as the lost. But WE ARE ... the lost who have been found. You may not realize it ... but you were lost before some shepherd ... found you wandering on a hillside somewhere.

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We are never more like Christ ... than when we are passionate about seeking and saving the lost. And we become even more like Christ ... when those who are far from God are the ones we're praying for, caring for, and searching for.

So, what if going after the lost sheep isn't just only about saving the lost sheep, but about saving the whole flock?

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We must teach and baptize.

We must continue to teach, edify, solidify ... we must be vigilant of members ... their spiritual health ... keep ahead of the curve ... talk with them ... hear them ...

We must be vigilant ... looking out for one another ... catching each others slips and missteps ... before they become falls.

Look around. Is there someone who needs you to throw them a lifeline? No matter whether they're calling for help ... or are totally unaware that they're in danger? Talk to them. Be open and caringly frank. Call them. Write them. Pray for them. Refuse to let them go.

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God wants the lost to be found ... the broken to be healed ... the alienated to be reconciled ... and the spiritually sick to be made well.

It may be ... that if we are a congregation that is passionate about finding and saving the lost ... then not only are lost people found ... but we too are found?

Remember, this story of hope ... isn't about sheep. It's about people.

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Thank you!

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Invitation