

Christadelphian Caring Network of Canada



Fall 2010

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Lost Sheep



The Lost Sheep's Perspective

When I left the sheepfold, I was surprised at what a sense of relief it was to leave. For years, I had endured the constant bickering amongst the other sheep. The pen had grown more fetid over time. By the time I left, when things really got heated, it was an unbearable stench. Sometimes the sheep didn't even act like sheep but more like the wild goats or, even worse, wolves. It made me question why I was staying in the pen. Nevertheless, even though it had been a less than ideal situation for years, I stayed in there because that is what sheep are supposed to do. My heart wasn't really in it, but I could tell easily enough that this was the case for many of my fellow sheep and yet they stayed in the pen.

For many years, the call of leaving the pen became louder and louder. My wild goat friends seemed to be having a blast on the treacherous slopes. They could come and go as they pleased. They were not hemmed in by the fence or the shepherd's staff. Sure, a couple of them had been eaten by wild animals or hurt themselves with no one to care from them, but it was very few so far as I could tell.

The reaction from the pen when I left was varied. A few of my old friends begged me not to go. My mother cried. Others just glared at me as if I was the lowest form of life on the face of the earth. Most didn't seem to notice I was gone. They didn't really know me anyway. I was just a face to them.

Life with the goats has been tough. It gets so tough that sometimes I think about going back to the pen. The trouble is that the problems in the pen don't seem any better and I am really not sure how I will be treated once I get back. I remember some other sheep trying to go back to the pen a while ago. It seemed like they had to climb fence after fence, barrier after barrier, just to get back. Once they were back in the pen, they were treated like black sheep. I am so weak now, I am not sure I could make it anyway without some help.

Is this how our lost sheep feel? There are probably as many different experiences out there as there are lost sheep. However, there are a few questions we would like to consider:

- Is our current ecclesial environment one that erects barriers to lost sheep returning? Obviously the Bible requires repentance. What else are we requiring? Are we more like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son or like the older brother?
- Are we doing all we can to retain our sheep? It is far easier to retain sheep than it is to recover them. This means we should be very proactive to help at-risk brethren before they leave rather than after. By design, my ecclesial board deals with at risk and lost sheep issues at each board meeting first before any other business is

"I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands."
Psalm 119:175-176

All references are from the NIV except where cited.

See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost." Matthew 18:10-14

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Lost Sheep's Perspective..cont...

considered. As shepherds of the ecclesia, we don't feel that there is anything more important to discuss and therefore always put it first on the agenda.

- Is our current ecclesial environment conducive to retaining our sheep or is it giving them one more reason to leave? If our lost sheep are glad to be out of our dysfunctional ecclesia rather than missing the sweet and loving fellowship they once enjoyed, we are part of the problem rather than part of the solution.
- Are we, as individuals, doing all we can to recover lost sheep? Are we living our lives in such a manner that the lost sheep cannot reasonably accuse us of hypocrisy? Are we letting people know that we care and want them back?
- Is there a difference enough between our ecclesia and the world that the lost sheep can tell the difference? Is our ecclesia characterized by discord, jealousy, factions, politics, domineering individuals, anger, bitterness or backbiting? If there isn't a difference between our ecclesia and the world, what compelling reason can we offer them to come back? **Bro. Kvlé Tucker -Thought for the Week, January 8, 2007**

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. **John 10:11-14**

We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. **Isaiah 53:6**

Questions to Ponder:

When and where have I gone astray?

How has God forgiven me and called me back into His fold?

Do I see myself as a Lost Sheep outside or inside the church?

Have I felt like a Lost Sheep in the past and what can I learn?

What am I going to do about it?

How will I help other Lost Sheep?

Ezekiel 34 – Warning to the Shepherds

*¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?' ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. **You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost.** You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ...¹⁶ **I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.**"*

Operation Lost Sheep

The following excerpts are from the book Operation Lost Sheep, by Bro Dan Richards. Bro Dan also dealt with the subject at the 2010 Caring Network AGM.

Those who leave the safe confines of their faith and church are at very high risk for drowning in the sea of humanity. Too many believers have jumped ship and decided that they will serve their own interests much better by going it alone. All of us have the fantastic ability to overlook our own faults and justify our thoughts and actions no matter how bleak it looks to outside observers. It's clear that we're all in this same boat together and we need each other to stay afloat. In Acts 27, Paul lived an example for us when his ship with 276 people aboard was about to be shipwrecked. Some sailors believed that they would have a better chance of survival by jumping ship and sailing away in a small boat on their own, just like some of us do with our lives. But Paul gave the command that unless the sailors stayed with the others in the main ship, those left behind couldn't be saved alone. The Centurion in charge wisely listened to Paul and cut the ropes to the smaller boat, so that everyone would live or die together. As promised, the angel who had appeared to Paul made sure to bless their obedience with a safe escape to shore for all. Staying in the ship, or church, together is required of each of us and is an absolute matter of life and death. If Paul's story is meant as an example for us, then it may be even more important for those left in the ship to retain the fellowship and influence of those most inclined to leave. Surely we all have much to learn and rethink about our churches and responsibilities within. **Pg 12**

One big problem with Lost Sheep is that most will deny that they are lost. After all, who wants to be lost anyway? And when lost, who wants to admit it? Some sincerely and fervently believe that they are not lost, but on a better road to a better place. Of course believing that one is not lost is the easy part. Many people convince themselves of many matters, regardless of the truth. This doesn't make their belief any more accurate or true, just fervent.

*Loving Shepherd of thy sheep,
Keep thy lambs, in safety keep;
Nothing can thy power
withstand, None can pluck them
from thine hand.*

*Loving Saviour, thou didst give
Thine own life that they might
live; And the hands
outstretched to bless Bear the
cruel nails' impress.*

*Loving Shepherd, ever near,
Teach thy lambs thy voice to
hear; Suffer not their steps to
stray From the strait and
narrow way.*

Questions to Ponder:

Is every believer in Christ destined to get lost at some point in their walk?

What causes most people to get lost spiritually?

If I get lost, do I have friends I can go to and help find my way?

Am I the friend I should be to anyone I know who is lost?

Is there any significance to "lost" being mentioned 33 times in the Bible, while "found" is over 350 times?

Eight Leadership Principles That Apply To Spiritual Service & Seeking Lost Sheep

I will do more than belong—I will participate.

I will do more than believe—I will practice.

I will do more than forgive—I will forget.

I will do more than teach—I will inspire.

I will do more than comment—I will help.

I will be more than fair—I will be kind.

I will do more than dream—I will work.

I will do more than give—I will serve.

Operation Lost Sheep cont...

In the days of the Kings of Israel many sons were sacrificed to false gods by men who had sincere faith and impressive conviction. King Ahaz was very religious and sincere in his worship, as he made his own son pass through the fire in the valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem. Ahaz had great faith that he was doing the right thing, but he paid for his misguided convictions with the biblical conclusion: "he did not do right in the sight of the Lord." (2 Chron 28:1) Unfortunately for Ahaz and many others today, just believing strongly does not make the belief true or righteous. Often, those who are lost and away from the Good Shepherd can't understand how or why they are lost. The challenge is how to help Lost Sheep understand that they are lost! **pg 22**

Virtually every sheep gets lost within the fold at some point. The trials and tribulations of life are sure to push the best disciples to the limits of their faith. Our deceitful hearts, evil inclinations and spiritual gravity pulls believers to the outskirts of godliness, and to the edge of loneliness within our churches. Try as we may, 'good' sheep have a natural tendency to live their faith away from the center of the fold. The lures of the world pull disciples down and away from the safety of the fold. The apostle Paul, himself, confessed in Romans 7 that even he had trouble doing the good that he wanted to do. His sinful nature created a war in his own mind, and Paul battled sin just like we do. We can only claim victory over sin, as Paul did, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Without a lifeline to the Good Shepherd, true Christians will get lost *both* inside and outside the fold. **Pg36**

How Can I Help? Action Plan 101

1. **Commit** to seek the lost, help the weak, reach out and save a life. Without a commitment to search and rescue, success is fleeting. Each person needs to be fully convinced in our own minds that this life-saving mission is essential to do. Determine to never give up.

2. It may be easier to help someone unrelated and not a close friend. **Finding** those who are similar in age & sex is helpful. Often social situations are the best way to reach any who are close-minded. One brother invited a large group of Lost Sheep to a summer pool party with the intent to use that social gathering as an introduction back to church. It worked and several returned to the fold.

3. **Pray** for the one you plan to help. Pray again. And again and again. Remember that prayer doesn't change God, but can change you. Pray to God, and then row for the shore.

4. Set a time to go **visit** in person—ideally, do not rely on phone calls or e-mail for the initial contact. Try to visit with another member—as Jesus sent his disciples out 2 by 2

5. When there, be brief and get to the point sooner rather than later. Some small talk may be helpful, but try to find out the real reason why this person no longer walks the way they once did. Be sure to **reassure** the person that his/her former church friends miss and love that person. Current events may be a good discussion topic revolving around Israel and God's plans.

6. **Listen - carefully & kindly**. Do not engage in any debate. Be understanding. Realize that Lost Sheep may hold grudges from some past problems with members, so try not to be defensive or interrogating. Remember that your goal is largely to find out the problem and then start to probe for solutions. Keep the door open for follow up and plan to add your person to regular mailings and e-mailings for any timely spiritual information.

7. **Invite** the person to church, a bible study or future church event. Don't be pushy if an invitation seems inappropriate. You don't want to make matters worse with any contentious talk, so make sure that your ultimate goal of making a positive impression is successful.

8. **Continue to pray** often for the one(s) you seek to help. Remind yourself to never give up. Remind your church to publicly pray for Lost Sheep and never give up. Keep praying for hearts to change and for God to open closed doors.

Action Plan 101 cont...

9. **Share** your visit(s) with others (only public information) and encourage others to make phone or e-mail contact with that person. Do not share any confidential information and do not gossip in any way. Ask your prayer partners to help you help others

10. From time to time, **phone or e-mail** information about upcoming events so that the person sees a long-term true interest. Events in the Middle East provide a good opportunity to discuss matters of our faith without making others feel 'preached at.' Often Lost Sheep keep one eye on Israel and the Middle East anyway, knowing that the Kingdom is coming one day to Jerusalem.

11. Try to **help** solve any hindrance that keeps a person from returning to their former faith. If a car ride, offer to help with that. If child care, offer church help with that. If your sheep has a problem marriage, try to think of ways to help with that. Whatever their problem, try to help and listen as a friend.

12. For at least one full year, mail a church magazine to keep their interest. Or look for anything on the web that you can e-mail as something that **causes rethinking**.

13. **Take a personal interest** in that person's family (spouse, children). Sometimes people return to their childhood church when they have children and want to teach their new family what they were taught. Invite sheep and their family to something social, where you can just spend time together without any overt ulterior motive.

14. **Keep trying and thinking of any other way to help this person.** Do not give up, keep trying, and never accept "no" for an answer. It is a matter of life and death and worth all of our time and effort.

**The Parable of the Lost Sheep,**

by Charles Spurgeon

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1801.htm>

This sheep lies on the shepherd's heart, and he must at once set out to look for it. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness and goes after that which is lost until he find it.

Observe here that it is a **definite search**. The shepherd goes after the sheep, and after nothing else; and he has the one particular sheep in his mind's eye ...It is his own sheep that he is seeking, and he goes distinctly after that one. It is his sheep which was lost,—a well-known sheep; well known not only to himself, but even to his friends and neighbours,—for he speaks to them as if it was perfectly understood which sheep it was that he went to save.

Note that this is an **all-absorbing search**. He is thinking of nothing but his own lost sheep. The ninety-and-nine are left in safety; but they are left. For the time being he is carried away with the one thought that he must seek and save the lost one, and therefore he leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasture. "Shepherd, the way is very rocky!" He does not seem to know what the way is his heart is with his lost sheep. "Shepherd, it is a heavy climb up yon mountainside." He does not note his toll; his excitement lends him the feet of the wild goat; he stands securely where at other times his foot would slip. He looks around for his sheep and seems to see neither crag nor chasm. "Shepherd, it is a terrible path by which you must descend into yonder gloomy valley." It is not terrible to him: his only terror is lest his sheep should perish; he is taken up with that one fear, and nothing else. He leaps

into danger and escapes it by the one strong impulse which bears him on. It is grand to think of the Lord Jesus Christ with his heart set immovably upon the rescue of a soul which at this moment is lost to him

It is **an active search too**; for observe, he goes after that which is lost, until he finds it; and he does this with a **personal search**. He does not say to one of his underlings, "Here, hasten after that sheep which was lost, and bring it home." No, *he* follows it himself. And if ever there is a soul brought from sin to grace, it is not by us poor ministers working alone, but it is by the Master himself, who goes after his own sheep. It is glorious to think of him still personally tracking sinners, who, though they fly from him with a desperateness of folly, yet are still pursued by him—pursued by the Son of God, by the Eternal Lover of men—pursued by him until he finds them.

For notice **the perseverance of the search**: "until he find it." He does not stop until he has done the deed. You and I ought to seek after a soul, how long? Why, until we find it; for such is the model set before us by the Master. The parable says nothing about his not finding it; no hint of failure is given; we dream not that there may be a sheep belonging to him which he will never find. Oh, brethren, there are a great many whom you and I would never find; but when Jesus is after his own lost sheep, depend upon it such is his skill, so clearly does he see, and so effectually does he intervene, that he will surely bring them in. A defeated Christ I cannot conceive of.

It is a **personal search**, and a **persevering search**, and a **successful search**, until he finds it. Let us praise and bless his name for this.