



Children of His Kingdom

GOD'S WAY to **GREATNESS**

LESSON 4 // A HEART FOR THE WANDERER

One of the challenges in taking care of small children is their tendency to wander from safe territory. Keeping up with a child's whereabouts requires vigilance and diligence. To fail at this responsibility is to risk potential danger for the child—a danger they don't comprehend or attempt to avoid.

Wandering is not limited to children. There are many adults who are wanderers. All of us are guilty of this at times and it frequently leads us into dangerous situations and relationships that puts us at risk spiritually and emotionally. Many a wanderer has regretted and bemoaned their straying tendency and the pain it has caused.

God is greatly concerned about those who are wandering and lost. Jesus made this clear as He continued His teaching in Matthew 18:

Matthew 18:12-14 (NIV) *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? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.*

Those who are great in God's kingdom have a heart like His for the wanderer. How can we develop this heart?

1. Understand the causes and consequences of wandering.

Jesus helps us understand more about wandering by using the image of sheep. Sheep tend to wander because they are:

- *Ignorant.* Sheep don't comprehend their vulnerability. If they did, they wouldn't wander!
- *Independent, stubborn and rebellious.* By nature, sheep are not willing to trust and follow the shepherd. They are determined to do things their own way.
- *Curious and enticed by what they see elsewhere.* The grass, water and scenery beyond the boundaries of the flock and the shepherd's watchful eye look much better.
- *Inattentive.* They may simply not pay attention to the shepherd's guidance and voice.
- *Influenced by goats or other wandering sheep.* Goats are frequently herded with sheep and are generally much more stubborn and self-willed.

For sheep, as well as children, wandering is very dangerous. It can be fatal. Like the Great Shepherd, we should be concerned and compassionate toward those who wander.

2. Follow the example of the shepherd.

It's hard to read this passage without being genuinely touched by how much the shepherd cares for his sheep. This image provides great insight into God's nature and the commitment He has made to us. It reveals the intensity of His love and desire to bring us back to Him.

The love of this shepherd can be described as:

- *Personal.* The shepherd loved one wandering sheep enough to go after it. God's love is focused on us individually, even as He cares for all the sheep. He loves us personally.
- *Pursuing.* God's love is a pursuing love. The shepherd was not content to wait for the sheep to come back; he went out to search for it.
- *Protective.* The love of God is extended to us through the protection He provides and the direction He gives. He watches out for us and wants to keep us from danger and destruction.

The following verses explain more about God's heart to pursue the lost and wandering and bring them to Himself through His Son.

Luke 19:10 (NIV) *For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.*

Romans 5:8 (NIV) *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV) *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.*

God wants us to embrace and extend this love, following His example as the Shepherd. This is part of what it means to be great in His kingdom. With patient pursuit, we must seek to restore the wanderer and protect spiritual children from wandering.

James 5:19-20 (NIV) *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back,²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

Discussion Questions

1. Read Matthew 18:12-14. Why do you think God is so concerned about those who wander and are lost?
2. What are some of the causes and consequences of wandering away from God? How does this motivate you to be concerned for wanderers?
3. Read Luke 19:10, Romans 5:8 and 2 Peter 3:9. What do you learn from these verses about God's love for and pursuit of wanderers? How should this make a difference in your walk with the Lord?