



Small Group Guide

Matthew 18:12-14 | [Community Discourse \(Pastor Mark\)](#)

Overview

This week's sermon explored Jesus' instruction manual for the church, drawing from the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Matthew 18. The central question the sermon raised is one worth sitting with as a group: Why are we here? Not just on a Sunday morning, but as the church — as a community of people on a shared mission together.

Key Takeaways

- Matthew 18 is Jesus' operating manual for the church, specifically addressing how believers relate to one another and to those outside the faith.
- In Matthew 18:14, God is described as "not willing" that any should perish — language that conveys urgency and deep intentionality in God's pursuit of the lost.
- The church exists not primarily for its members, but for those who have not yet found their way in.
- When people are aligned on a common mission, the minor grievances and preferences that so often divide communities lose their power.
- Belonging often precedes believing — relationships within the church can be the bridge that draws people toward faith in Christ.

Discussion Questions

Opening the Text

1. In Matthew 18:12-14, Jesus describes a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep to search for one that wandered off. What does this say about how God values every individual person? Does that challenge or comfort you, and why?
2. Pastor Mark pointed out that verse 14 uses especially strong language — God is described as "not willing" that any should perish. How does that level of urgency shape the way you think about the people in your life who do not yet know Jesus?

Going Deeper

3. Pastor Mark asked the group to honestly consider why they show up to church. What are the real reasons you engage with your church community? What sometimes pulls you away?
4. Pastor Mark acknowledged that being part of a church family is genuinely hard. Have you ever been hurt, disappointed, or overlooked in a church context? How did you respond, and what did that experience teach you?
5. Pastor Mark said, "You weren't called to abandon the church. Maybe you were called to renew the church." What does it look like practically to be someone who renews rather than withdraws?
6. The story of the four chaplains on the *Dorchester* illustrated how a shared mission can unite people who have significant differences. Where in your own life do you see mission bringing people together despite their differences? Where do you see preferences or grievances getting in the way?

7. Pastor Mark made the point that the church is the only organization in the world that exists for its non-members. How does that idea challenge the way you personally engage with your church community?

Personal Reflection

8. Pastor Mark mentioned that one of the most effective ways to grow in your own faith is to actively share it with others. When was the last time you had a meaningful conversation about faith with someone who does not yet believe? What made it easy or difficult?
9. Pastor Mark referenced Augustine's mother, who prayed for her son's salvation for years before he came to faith. Is there someone in your life you have been praying for over a long period of time? How do you stay encouraged when you do not see results?
10. Pastor Mark said, "It is hard to complain about the temperature of the boat when you are too busy pulling people out of the water." Where in your life might you be focused on personal comfort or preferences when God may be calling you toward something bigger?

Practical Applications

This Week, Choose One:

- Pray by name. Write down the names of two or three people in your life who do not have a relationship with Jesus. Commit to praying for them by name every day this week. Share those names with someone in your group so they can pray alongside you.
- Make contact. Reach out to one person on that list — not with an agenda, but simply to invest in the relationship. A text, a phone call, or an invitation to grab coffee goes a long way.
- Take a next step in community. If you are not yet in a small group, or if you have been on the edges of one, commit to showing up consistently for the next six weeks. Community is built through presence over time.
- Reflect on your posture toward the church. Spend some time in honest prayer this week, asking God to show you whether you are engaging with your church community as a consumer or as someone on mission. Ask him to shift your perspective where it needs to shift.

Memory Verse for the Week

Matthew 18:14 — God is not willing that any of the little ones should perish. Let that truth anchor your week.