

# My brother's keeper

## *Deep concern for the straying*

### **Mondays at 7:30 p.m.**

We all, like sheep.....	May 9
Why do the straying stray?.....	May 16
Deep concern for the straying.....	May 23
<i>No class - Memorial Day</i> .....	<i>May 30</i>
Overcoming hurdles to serve and regain the straying .....	June 6
The church seeks the straying .....	June 13

### **Wednesdays at 8:30 a.m.**

We all, like sheep.....	May 11
Why do the straying stray?.....	May 18
Deep concern for the straying.....	May 25
Overcoming hurdles to serve and regain the straying .....	June 1
The church seeks the straying .....	June 8

## **Introduction**

The apostle Paul writes to Timothy, "This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3,4). "All people" includes every man and woman, every boy and girl who has ever or will ever live. And it includes not only the lost—those who have never believed in Christ as the Savior—but it includes the straying as well. The Lord has declared, "I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strays" (Ezekiel 34:16).

## **God's concern for the straying**

### **Read Genesis 4:1-16.**

1. From the very beginning, God has demonstrated his great concern for the strays. Cain was the first child born into this world. He was the first child born to Christian parents and the first child of such parents to join the ranks of those who became lost. Yet in dealing with Cain, the Lord demonstrated his deep love for Cain and his desire for Cain to be restored as his child. God has the same love and concern for the straying today. On the basis of the first verse, describe the home life into which Cain was privileged to be born.
2. The Lord issued straying Cain several calls to repentance. Identify the call in each of the following verses.
  - **Verses 4,5 (Call 1)**

- **Verse 6 (Call 2)**
- **Verse 7a (Call 3)**
- **Verse 7b (Call 4)**
- **Verse 9 (Call 5)**
- **Verses 11,12 (Call 6)**
- **Verse 15 (Call 7)**

3. Summarize God's dealings with the straying one, Cain.

4. The first child born into this world and born again into God's family became inactive and delinquent. No mention is ever made of Cain repenting. Yet, until the day Cain died, God demonstrated his mercy and his desire for Cain to be saved. When God came into our world in the flesh, he continued to demonstrate his love for the straying. Recall how Jesus dealt with . . .

- **Peter.**
- **Thomas.**
- **Judas.**

## **God's concern is our concern**

Because our loving God is deeply concerned about the soul of every person and because he has a deep desire that the straying not be lost but come back to him and live, he has commanded the church to regain the straying. His concern for the inactive and straying member is to be our concern also. Through the apostle Paul, God instructs, "If a person is caught in some trespass, you who are spiritual should restore such a person in a spirit of humility, carefully watching yourself so that you are not also tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1,2). The Lord Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his sin just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have regained your brother" (Matthew 18:15). Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 18 were preceded by his parable of the lost sheep. This parable is also recorded in Luke together with the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost son. Together, these parables reveal God's heart for the straying and inactive members. These parables also teach us about the concern for the straying that God wants us to have.

### **Read Luke 15:3-7.**

5. How does the Lord feel about one single sheep—a sheep that is just one of many, many sheep—that happens to go astray?

Why didn't the shepherd simply let the lost sheep stray around in the open country for a while until the sheep finally strayed back to him?

Comment on the effort and persistence with which the shepherd sought the lost sheep.

### **Read Luke 15:8-10.**

6. As the woman swept her house, what did she apparently sweep out? What was she careful not to sweep out?
7. Our sinful nature may tell us that in dealing with the inactive and straying members in our own church it would be a lot easier to simply sweep them out and off the membership list. What does the parable of the lost coin teach us?

### **Read Luke 15:11-32.**

8. How did the father feel toward his son after the son turned his back on the father and strayed from home?

The father's forgiveness was unconditional. Explain.

Was the father displeased with his older son? Why or why not?

Before we close this lesson, here is some food for thought: The Lord has said to each member of our church, including the straying, "I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine." As we give our attention to the straying members of our congregation and prepare ourselves to put our love and concern for them into action, might it not be beneficial—rather than speaking about straying members in a general, impersonal way—to call each one by name?

For example, "\_\_\_\_\_ is at public worship with less and less regularity. By all indications, \_\_\_\_\_ is straying from the Lord. I'm concerned because according to everything God's Word tells me, \_\_\_\_\_'s faith is becoming weaker and his (her) spiritual and eternal life is being placed in danger. \_\_\_\_\_, most likely, will not drift back on his (her) own. I'm going to speak to \_\_\_\_\_ now!"

What impact does that change make in your life?

### **Summary**

Since God continues to love and yearn for the straying members of our church to return to him, so do we. When the straying and inactive members return, we rejoice with the Lord and assure our returned brothers or sisters of the Lord's and our unconditional love and forgiveness. We too are displeased when, like the older brother, members of our church show no concern for those who are straying from the Father.