

Introduction

Have you ever watched one of those wildlife TV shows? The ones where **lions are hunting zebras?**

The suspense is agonizing as shots of zebras being stocked by a pack of lions flash on the screen. You don't know when it is going to happen, but you know it is going to happen.

Sometimes the story writes itself. **One of the zebras will break off from the rest of their heard. Maybe its because of sickness, or injury, or stupidity. Whatever the reason, you watch as the distance between the animal and the safety of the heard widens.**

You would expect this moment to be the moment of the attack. But the lions are cunning. **Some of the lions scare the zebra to push it further and further away from the pack. The gap widens. The animal is isolated and left out on its own. Its at this point that you realize that the **outcome is inevitable** for this poor creature that strayed away.**

In Scripture, the people in Jesus's church are referred to as sheep. Satan is referred to as a roaring lion, seeking whomever he may devour. We have an enemy who's goal is to separate us from the pack. To isolate us and create a gap between us and safety. He will stop at nothing to destroy us.

Our current series is called Together Church. In this series, we are learning **seven guardrails that help us stay the course as a disciple-making first church.**

Today, we have reached guardrail **number four. To be a disciple-making first church, we must be committed to chasing the strays.**

Who is a stray?

A stray is anyone in our church who is drifting from their relationship with God, drifting from their relationship with their church family, or drifting from their mission to follow Jesus.

Look at this description of someone who is straying carefully. Can you relate? Have you ever been the one who was straying? Have you ever been in relationship with someone who was straying?

We know there is danger in the grass. I believe we owe it to each other to go after one another when we see the gap widening. To be a disciple-making first church, we must chase the strays.

Jesus is the expert disciple-maker. Did Jesus chase the strays with His own disciples? What can we learn from Jesus about chasing the strays?

Let's narrow our focus to a specific relationship between Jesus and His disciple Simon, who Jesus renamed Peter.

Open Bible to [John 21](#). Roadmap...

- 1) Meaningful discipleship relationship between Jesus and Peter.**
- 2) A story where Jesus chased Peter when he strayed**
- 3) Question: How can you chase the strays like Jesus?**

Body

At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus invited Peter into a “come and see” discipleship relationship. The relationship between Jesus and Peter was very personal. They were very close. Their discipleship relationship is well documented in the gospel accounts.

- Jesus connected with Peter in a very personal way**
- Peter dropped His nets when Jesus said, “Follow me.”**
- Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter**
- Jesus chose Peter to be one of the 12 apostles**
- Peter was one of the 3 apostles who was closest to Jesus**
- When other disciples were leaving Jesus, Peter stood with Jesus**
- Peter was the first disciple to profess Jesus to be the Christ**
- When Jesus rebuked Peter for unbelief, Peter did not leave**
- Peter pledged his allegiance to Jesus, vowing to never abandon Him**
- Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him three times**

- **When Jesus was arrested, Peter scattered with the other disciples**
- **Peter denied Jesus three times**
- **At the crow of the rooster, Peter and Jesus locked eyes**
- **Peter went away and wept bitterly**
- **After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples on a few occasions**
- **On a third occasion, Jesus appeared to Peter and to a handful of His other disciples at the Sea of Galilee**
- **Peter was struggling. He had drifted by denying Jesus. Jesus knew Peter was drifting, so Jesus chased the strays with Peter.**

John 21:1-19

1 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” 6 He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. 8 The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them,

“Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

What did Jesus do to chase the strays with Peter?

- 1. Jesus knew who He needed to chase**
- 2. Jesus was consistent in Peter’s life through highs and lows**
- 3. Jesus was not easily offended by Peter’s hurtful behavior**
- 4. Jesus showed up for Peter in a meaningful way when Peter was drifting and going back to his old ways**
- 5. Jesus invited Peter to have breakfast**
- 6. Jesus asked Peter questions to help Peter process and become aware of his own feelings and condition**
- 7. Jesus shared truth with Peter in a loving yet honest way**
- 8. Jesus welcomed Peter back into His life and back on the team**

Jesus chased the strays with Peter. He saw the gap widening, and He did His part to close the gap. To be a disciple-making first church, we must follow Jesus and chase the strays.

How can you chase the strays like Jesus?

1. Know who you need to chase

When Peter strayed, Jesus knew he was one of the ones He needed to chase. Your list needs to start with your small group. It should also include people on ministry teams you are part of, and people God has personally led you to be most intentional with.

2. Be consistent with them through highs and lows

When they miss, text or call them. Let them know you care.

3. Be hard to offend, even when their behavior causes you pain

When conflict arises, AND IT WILL, be determined to fight for relationship and resolve conflict biblically.

4. Show up for them in a meaningful way

When it becomes clear they are not just missing a meeting but they are drifting, show up for them in a meaningful way. We always show up for each other, but we must especially show up for others when they are straying. Look for a meaningful way to show them love.

5. Share a meal with them

Simple but so profound. There is nothing like sharing food together. The simplest start to chasing someone who is truly straying is, "Can we get a bite together?"

6. Ask intentional questions to help you understand and to help them process their own feelings and struggles

Don't ask leading questions. Ask questions to understand and to love rather than to accuse and judge. Let the questions help you understand what's really going on (without being offended). Let the questions help them process their own feelings and struggles.

7. Share truth with them in a loving yet honest way

The best thing you can do is receive a word from the Lord and use Scripture. **DO NOT BE CONDESCENDING OR JUDGEMENTAL!** Ask, "Would you be willing to allow me to share with you an

observation I have made about you?” Share the truth simply and clearly, then ask, “How do you feel about the observation I just shared with you?” Then PAUSE. Do not fix. Do not rescue. Stay silent and listen. Let God’s Spirit work.

8. Welcome them back into your life and back on the team

If they respond with repentance, forgive instantly and welcome them with open arms. Avoid hashing it out too long or keeping things hanging over their heads.

Is there ever a time to stop chasing a stray?

YES! But not before you have done your part...

- Have you contacted them to let them know they are missed and to see if they are doing okay?**
- Have you chased them in a meaningful way once you realized they were not just missing but they were drifting?**
- Have you done your best to ask questions to really understand and to help them process their own struggles and emotions?**
- Have you spoken truth in a loving yet honest way?**

You have done your part! Release the stray... but keep the door for relationship open. Follow any future prompting the Lord places on your heart (I am not the Holy Spirit).

It is amazing! Some of the people I thought would never return from straying have become the strongest disciples I know. Some of the people I thought would never stray have been straying for years. Withhold your judgement and do your part! Let God sort out the rest.

Conclusion

Who is a stray?

A stray is anyone in our church who is drifting from their relationship with God, drifting from their relationship with their church family, or drifting from their mission to follow Jesus.

There is a cost to chase the strays, but there is a much greater cost if we don't. It is not good for man to be alone. There is danger in the grass. We owe it to each other to chase the strays when we see the gap widening.

Jesus chased the strays in His discipleship relationship with Peter. Let's be like Jesus.

To be the disciple-making first church Jesus has called us to be, we must be a church that chases the strays.

As a pastor, I know chasing the strays starts with me. I know that we need systems in our church that help us chase the strays when people miss group and people miss services. In church life, chasing the strays begins with systems, but systems alone will never be enough...

Chasing the strays cannot be done the right way through a system or program in the church. Chasing the strays must become part of our church culture. We must BE a church that chases the strays.

That is happening in my group (story of me being sick this past week).

Invitation

Practice Chasing the Strays:

- **Who do you need to notice that is missing?**
- **Text or call them: "Miss you today! You doing okay?"**
- **Look way a meaningful way to love them**
- **If you sense they are drifting, prayerfully review this message and consider your next steps**

Put a reminder on your phone to chase the strays at every service and every small group meeting. Let's be the disciple-making first church Jesus has called us to be. Let's be like Jesus. Let's chase the strays.

Prayer