

Week 1: More Than a Number

Those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. John 6:37

Read:

Luke 15:1-7

When Jesus would speak in public, tax collectors and other well-known sinners would often gather around him to listen. When the Pharisees and teachers would hear about these gatherings, they would become upset that Jesus would associate himself with such “sinful” people. Jesus knew how the religious leaders felt about him spending time with sinners, so he began to tell a story we now know as the Parable of the Lost Sheep. In this story, we see how desperately God loves us. Enough to leave an entire flock to go after even just one “lost” sheep, or sinner. Like a shepherd, he would do anything to bring his children back to him – even if that child had sinned or gone astray. Jesus explained this parable by saying that heaven rejoices even *more* over one sinner returning than over one who had never gone astray. This tells us that God loves and accepts us just as we are – flaws, sins, shortcomings and all. He promises to welcome us back no matter how far we’ve strayed.

Jesus knew the Pharisees were speaking poorly of him, and this is the story he chose to share with them. Instead of getting prideful, insecure, or embarrassed that people were judgmental of his actions, Jesus told them – through parables – how much he loved and accepted them. When we overhear others talking negatively about us, our first tendency is probably not to show love and acceptance. Jesus could have ignored the Pharisees or said bad things about them in return. But, just like the shepherd and his lost sheep, God accepts us for who we are even when we stray from him. He never gives up on us. He continues to search and call for us. When we repent and ask for forgiveness, God promises us that he will never reject us. It’s up to us to believe and claim God’s promise of acceptance.

Questions to think about:

1. Do you extend God’s acceptance toward other people? Who do you have a hard time accepting?
2. Is there someone in your life you need to intentionally go after and offer forgiveness or acceptance to? Pray about what that looks like and what God may be asking you to do.
3. What do you need to confess or repent of to God, allowing him to fully love and accept you? Do you truly believe he will do that?