



– *being the church
in unusual times*

For now – encouraging young people

Just now: when the flock is scattered

We often don't focus a lot on the place of young people in the life of our congregation, because we know they have their own age-related groups and activities and we have a general sense of whether or not they are regularly attending these programmes. For now, things are very different as the Covid-19 pandemic has robbed our young people of much of the regular structure provided by familiar activities in both church and wider life. Some of them may be around at Sunday services, or appear to some extent in what we are able to do for now, but how well are they staying connected and what messages are they getting about how important they still are to us?

Wednesday, 17 March

Read Luke 15:1-7.

Watch a short introduction to this session by clicking [here](#) or read its transcript below.

For now, just about everything about church life is difficult, due to the restrictions arising from Covid-19. We face the challenge of having to think differently and wondering what we can do. One of the questions we find ourselves asking is, "How can we encourage young people around our church?" I wonder what you have found challenging about that.

At this time, it's difficult to retain connection with young people, because most of our usual programs have stopped. Jesus' parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15 reminds us of the importance of each and every young person in our congregation. Now is an important moment to think about things like:

- how do we measure the value of what we're doing when numbers aren't what we're used to?
- why might young people not be engaging with what we're doing?
- what simple things can we do to let young people know we value and care for them and want to support them in this time of upheaval in just about every area of their lives?
- how could you have a congregation with a young person that might mean the world to them just now?

For now, it's so important to focus on the simple things and find one thing that we *can* do engage and encourage young people in this next season of church life.

Graeme Thompson, Youth Development Officer

Pray

Thursday, 18 March

Read Luke 15:1-7.

Think about *the value of every one.*

The backdrop against which Jesus tells this parable is the discomfort of the Pharisees with how He welcomed sinners – those usually overlooked, or looked down upon by many. However, the story He unfolds teaches us about the value God places on each individual in His family, the Church.

1. Jesus' parables usually contain a surprise and a challenge as part of the tale. What is surprising about the attitude of the shepherd in this story? What challenge does it bring to us today as churches which often find ourselves measuring the value of what we do by numbers of those attending our carefully planned programmes?

2. In the current situation, we may just be glad to see whoever is able to come attending whatever we are able to do. How does this passage remind us of the importance of doing what we can for 'our ninety-nine' - those who regularly show up at whatever we try to do?

Pray

Friday, 19 March

Read Luke 15:1-7.

Think about *the value of every one.*

3. Think back again to the conversation to which Jesus was responding in telling this parable (vv.1-2). What similar attitudes and value judgements made by the Pharisees might we make towards young people who, for now, are not attending or engaging with our efforts to keep them connected? How might we be jumping to conclusions and not fully understanding why that might be happening?

4. What does the effort the sheep owner exerts to find his one lost sheep (vv.4-5) tell us about what it looks like to value each individual in our church family? How do you think young people in particular would feel if they sensed the church cared about them in this way? Are there particular young people around your church who might be 'the one' for whom you need to make extra efforts just now?

Pray

Saturday, 20 March

Read Luke 15:1-7.

Consider *ways we can encourage and value young people.*

There are straightforward ways we can practically demonstrate to every individual young person that they matter as part of our church just now.

- **A simple greeting** – there is huge value in a simple “hi” with a wave after church, or in the street. It communicates “I know you – I see you - you matter to me”.
- **A follow-up system** – to help avoid ‘the one’ getting lost, make a list of all your young people. Divide the names among leaders so that they can keep track of their engagement in church and any youth activities you are able to run.
- **Multiple communication methods** – young people use a variety of means of communication and social media, so we may need to try something different or keep experimenting until we find the most effective way to keep in touch.
- **Worship services** – be aware of the presence of teenagers’ in worship, especially if they are not usually there. Using inclusive language and illustrations, or providing tools to help them engage, can help them feel part of what is going on.
- **Small groups** – this youth ministry favourite is working especially well these days, as it can cope with changes in restrictions by moving between online and face to face work.
- **Gifts** – a carefully chosen Christian book or Bible reading resource sent to every young person could have a big impact and gives opportunity for follow-up.
- **Playing their part** – are there ways young people can serve and contribute actively to church life now?

Pray

Sunday, 21 March

Pray with us from 7-8 pm, on Zoom if you are able.

Monday, 22 March

Read Luke 15:1-7.

Try *suggestions for having a conversation with young people.*

- **Everyone can do it** – young people love it when any adult shows they care enough to say hello. Any connection counts, however simple.
- **Avoid over-complicating it** – start with a “hi”, establish eye contact. Use their name if you know it. Ask if you don’t. Don’t be put off by initial awkwardness. It does not mean they want you to stop talking to them.
- **The power of simple, open-ended questions** – ask questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer. “What have you been up to? What’s life like for you these days? What usual activities are you missing out on just now?”
- **Have a quiet word with parents** – a simple question to the parent of a teenager will be appreciated and opens doors to better conversations. “How is she getting on through all of this? I’m sure he’s missing out on a lot these days? How can we pray for her?”

- **Walk in their shoes** – try to understand things from the perspective of a young person, rather than assuming you know what it is like because you were once their age in a very different world. A caring question is better than an adult who comes across like they know it all.
- **Just listen to them** – if you get a young person onto their pet subject – football, Dr. Who, computer games, or some obscure hobby – just listen to them for as long as you can. You are giving them a huge gift. Focused adult attention can be in short supply these days.

Pray through these suggestions and commit to trying one in the coming week.

Tuesday, 23 March

Read Luke 15:1-7.

Follow up?

Watch this [short video](#), 'Engaging with Teenagers', by youth ministry teacher Professor Duffy Robbins for some simple tips for listening to young people.

Pray about what God is leading you to do for now to encourage young people in your church.