



For
now

– *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 the 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?

Watch a short introduction to this session by [clicking here](#)

Read: Luke 15:1-7. [Click here](#) for the passage

Talk 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?
3. Think back again to the conversation to which Jesus was responding in telling this parable (vv1-2). 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 (vv4-5) 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?

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 can 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 keep them engaged, 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?

Try: *Tips 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?” “Are you missing out on a lot of your usual activities 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: About what God is leading you to do for now to encourage young people in your church

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 by [clicking here](#).

