"Who among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until you find it?"

From the Gospel of St. Luke

I lost a kid once. As a matter of fact, I lost two kids once on the same day. I and a few other adults from our parish had taken several young teens from our youth group on a bus trip to New York City for a day of sightseeing, eating, and fun. We got to Manhattan with those small town kids and set about seeing the usual sights: the Statue of Liberty; Rockefeller Center; shopping on 5th Avenue; St. Patrick’s Cathedral; and, of course, the greatest toy store in the world, FAO Schwartz. Our last stop before heading back to Massachusetts was gonna be the top of the Empire State Building to give them a bird’s eye view of the whole city from the 108th floor. While we were at the top, I saw all our kids either on the observation deck or in the gift shop as they hunted for souvenirs of their day in Manhattan. Each kid I saw I reminded that we were gonna go right to the bus that was waiting below, nearby and make our way outta the city before the rush hour. I saw each of the kids. I spoke to each of the kids. What could possibly go wrong? Well, at the specified time, we made our way to the elevators for the drop to street level and found our bus parked right where our driver
said he’d be. We took a head-count. We took it again cuz we musta just miscounted. Hey, we were two short ... two of the boys from the group weren’t on the bus. I and one of the other chaperones left the group on the bus with the driver and other adults as we went in search of our two delinquents. I kept sputtering about how mad I was ... how could they have misunderstood what I’d said to them at the top of the Empire State Building. But, inside I was scared outta my mind: where could they be ... what could've happened ... how the heck would I find them in a city of eight million people, several million of whom were just beginning to get outta work and crowding the streets as they made their ways home?? This was before everybody had cell phones. I couldn’t just call them or text them and tell them to get their butts back to the bus. I felt like I was searching for a needle in a haystack. Back to the top of the building we went, but no boys there. Up and down the streets in the area, but no boys there. Panic was setting in and I couldn’t imagine what I’d say to their parents ... “Uh, funny thing, I lost your kids in New York!”

We started to head back to the bus taking a little different route and, wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles, who do I see up ahead, but our two little prodigal sons not looking too cocky or comfortable and very happy to be found even if I was yelling at them the whole time, “How could you, what got into you, what were you thinking, get on that bus and I better not hear one single peep outta either of you??!!!”

After that, I breathed a huge sigh of relief and spent the next three and a half hours of the bus ride trying to get my heart back into its normal rhythm!
I had lost two kids and I was responsible for them. I just hadda find them, but when I went in search of them, I didn’t leave the other kids in the group alone in the city to fend for themselves. I put them safely on the bus. I left adults, chaperones with them to watch over them. I’d already lost two. I wasn’t takin’ any chances with losing the rest of the kids!

But Jesus tells a different story about how He works. The Shepherd lost one of His sheep, one out of the hundred He was tending. He leaves the other ninety-nine by themselves and goes in search of the lost one. That’s crazy! Why would you expose the vast majority to such danger while going off to find just one straggler? It’s foolish! It’s nuts! And, that’s exactly the point ... God’s so crazy in love with us, His not-too-bright sheep, that when we wander and stray and stubbornly refuse to listen to Him, He’ll do anything to find us, anything to bring us home to His loving arms, even if it means exposing His only Son to danger and death.

When you find yourself thinking that God’s forgotten you; when you feel like you’re too far gone, too bad, too unforgivable; when you think the Church and your family and the world would be much better off if you just vanished for good, just look at a cross. That’s how much the Good Shepherd loves you. That’s how much God’s willing to put on the line for you. That’s how far God is willing to go to find you and bring you back to Him.

And, maybe, before we run away in the first place, we’ll look at the cross and decide I don’t wanna run, I don’t wanna hurt, I don’t wanna hide from Someone who loves me that much, who cares that much
about me! And maybe I'll decide I don't wanna be some dumb sheep; I jus' wanna be a lamb of God.