



Tonight, we are beginning a four-week series called “Relentless Pursuit.” The word “relentless” is not a word you probably use too often. And when we do use it, it often has a negative context. “This rain is relentless” or “that football team’s defensive was relentless.” But relentless is more than someone being overbearing and pushy.

Relentless describes someone who is... Unstoppable. Energized. Enduring. Never giving up. Always “on.”

There is a man named Jake Olson, who played football at the University of Southern California. USC is historically one of the most well known football programs in the country. Jake played his last game at USC in 2018 and graduated in 2019. If you don’t know the name Jake Olson, you probably hear his name and don’t recognize it. After all, there are a lot of college athletes in our world.

The difference between Jake and other college athletes began when he was 12 years old. Like most 12-year-old boys, Jake dreamed of playing football. He wanted to be on his high school varsity team and hoped to even one day play college ball.

The problem was that Jake had a rare form of cancer called retinoblastoma. He lost one of his eyes before the age of one and at age 12, he lost his other eye. He has been completely blind since age 12. His dream of playing football was over... or so we would assume.

But Jake was **RELENTLESS**. He was unstoppable and refused to give up on his dream. He decided that he could be a long snapper on punts and extra points without being able to see. So, he practiced and worked at it and made the varsity team as the long snapper as a junior in high school.

In a recent interview, Jake Olson said that one of the last things he did before losing his eyesight was attend a USC football practice in 2009. He always hoped to play for them. Because he was relentless and never gave up on his dream, he went on to play football for USC in 2017 and 2018. It seems that a blind man playing in a football game at a top college program would be impossible, but Jake was relentless and made it happen.

Obviously, over the next few weeks, we aren't talking about being relentless on the football field. My hope is that you learn to have this same relentless passion when pursuing God. How can we relentlessly pursue Christ? How can we be unstoppable, energized, never giving up in our pursuit of God? That's what I hope you will discover over the next few weeks.

As we kick off this series, we first must understand something very important before you can understand how to be relentless in your pursuit of God. Before we ever even considered pursuing God, it's important that we understand that God has relentlessly pursued us!

Let's jump into a conversation that Jesus had with the religious leaders of His day. He told them a series of stories that help us to understand how God relentlessly pursues us.

Luke 15:3-7 (NIV)

*<sup>3</sup>Then Jesus told them this parable. <sup>4</sup>“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' <sup>7</sup>I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

We find here that Jesus told stories. We all enjoy a good story, don't we? That is why the movie industry is a \$40 billion business. Jesus told a story, but the story has a spiritual message to it. It was not just for entertainment.

When Jesus walked this Earth, there were shepherds who would live outside town among the sheep. In Jesus' story, he spoke of a shepherd who had 100 sheep. The shepherd would feed his sheep, moving them from place to place as needed so they had plenty of grass and water. He would protect his sheep, even by stepping in the way of an animal attack and risking his own life to save his sheep.

Each night, the shepherd would bring them into a fenced area and would lay down at the doorway so no sheep could get out and nothing could get in. He would do his nightly head count when he noticed something.

I can image that he thought he must have counted wrong and so he recounted all his sheep. Sure enough, he was missing one. We may think, what's the big deal? It's only one sheep. But for the shepherd, every sheep was precious.

So, the shepherd left the 99 and pursued the one. It wasn't like he crossed the street to go grab the lost animal. When my when my dog gets out, she will just run around the house a few times, but she doesn't really go anywhere.

In this case, the sheep was likely in the middle of nowhere. [\(If you have the capability, show a picture of the desert region of Israel.\)](#) The shepherd had to relentlessly search, maybe even for days, to find his lost sheep. But it was essential for him to do so because if he didn't, the sheep had no hope for survival.

He was relentless in his pursuit, not letting anything get in his way of him finding his lost sheep. And when he found his sheep, he wasn't going to take any chances of it getting lost again. Instead, he would pick it up, put it on his shoulders and carry it back home. Notice that he then celebrated with his friends.

Jesus followed up with another similar story.

Luke 15:8-10 (NIV)

***<sup>8</sup>“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup>In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”***

In this story, it isn't a sheep that went missing but a coin. You might not think that is a big deal. I see people drop change all the time and don't

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