

A FAITH THAT WORKS

(A Study of the Book of James)

Helping Those Who Go Astray

TEXT: James 5:19-20

INTRODUCTION: Do you know someone who has gone astray?

Do you care about a person who has wandered away from the truth?

The tender voice of the Holy Spirit of God whispered in James' heart to speak a brief message of encouragement and challenge to you. Would you just listen very carefully? You probably have no idea how much you need to hear these words.

James 5:19–20 19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Folks, we have all wandered from the truth sometime in our lives, haven't we? After all, the Bible says of us, "There is none righteous; no, not one. All have sinned and come short of God's standard."

Let me be quick to say that if there is a person with us today and

- you are at this very moment wandering from the truth,
- you, yourself are the one who has gone astray

Understand that you can come home to the Father's House this morning.

You can come to Christ, and He will forgive you and welcome you into the family of God like the father received his prodigal son so many years ago.

But for those of you who are not at this moment the one who has gone astray, but rather you know and love a person who has wandered away from the truth, this message in the Book of James is for you. It may be a son or a daughter. It may be a friend. For me it was my dad. I'll tell you about that in a few minutes if God grants me the grace to be able to do it.

But whoever it is in your life, whether they have just wandered a bit or they have gone so far astray you have wondered if even the power of Almighty God can bring them back from the abyss into which they have gone, listen to what the Word of God has to say.

First it says to us,

I. DON'T GIVE UP. THEY CAN COME BACK!

A. God’s salvation is available to all.

Rev. 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

B. No child of God can wander so far astray that he cannot return to the Father.

Peter denied his Lord three times in the hour that Jesus needed His disciples most, yet after His death and resurrection, it was Jesus who sought out Peter on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where Peter had returned to his former profession.

No child of God can wander so far astray that they cannot return to the Father!

Do you have someone for whom your heart aches because they are so far from Christ at this moment?

DON’T GIVE UP. THEY CAN COME BACK!

II. DON’T GIVE UP. JESUS DIDN’T!

In Jesus’ day, the Jews really stuck together. After all, it was them against the Romans, just as it had always been them against the world. (Not much has changed in that regard, has it?) So a Jew pretty much stood up and wouldn’t give up on his fellow Jew – with one glaring exception.

- More than Jews hated Romans,
- more than they hated Gentiles who hated them,
- Jews hated their fellow Jews who had become tax collectors

And to the Jews, tax collectors were beyond redemption, beyond salvation.

But not to Jesus. So not only had Jesus called a Jewish tax collector to be one of His disciples, when Jesus walked through Jericho on His way to His final trip to Jerusalem, he stopped in front of a sycamore tree, and said to the little short man named Zacchaeus sitting on one of its limbs, who was the chief tax collector for the region, and said, “Get down, Zacchaeus, I’ve come for you. Let’s go to your house.”

And Jesus said after a while, “Today salvation has come to this house because I have come to seek and to save those who are lost.”

DON’T GIVE UP.

- No matter what they’ve done
- No matter how hard you have tried to bring them back without success
- No matter how much they may want you to give up on them

DON’T GIVE UP. JESUS DIDN’T!

III. DON'T GIVE UP. DO SOMETHING!

Pastor, what kind of help is that? Can you be more specific? Can you tell me what I can do?

Well yes, and I will. But I say this because actually there are so many things you can do to bring back those who have wandered from the truth and gone astray that I could not describe them all if you stayed here all day.

So what I am going to do is to give you some examples that I hope God will use to spark what you personally need to do. First, here is what some of the ladies of our church are doing for young ladies of our community, some of whom have wandered from truth and gone astray.

May I change a few words of our text that in no way violates the meaning of it but would help make an application of that text clear?

James 5:19–20 If anyone ... wanders from the truth, and someone turns her back, 20 let her know that she who turns a sinner from the error of her way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

It may not be the person you personally love who has gone astray that walks one day into A Sheltering Tree to find a kind voice and a helpful hand, but it may well be someone another mother or father or sister or friend has prayed and longed earnestly for.

You could be that person, who turns another lady back from that which will not only destroy her baby's life but terribly damage her own.

You could be the one, or you could help another, save a soul and save a life, and help a woman lost and astray come into our Father's forever family.

Another, and very innovative, way to turn back those who have wandered astray is being done by the Boe family: Steve, Amy, Bethany, and Daniel. Tomorrow they are heading out in an RV for a six-week trip that will take them to New Orleans, Houston, Tucson, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Dallas, and eight other major cities. In each location, they are going to partner with local churches, feed the homeless, especially homeless veterans, and share the gospel with all who will listen.

Through their very intentional mission, they are going to save some souls from death and see a multitude of sins covered by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

There is a multitude of ways that each of us can help to turn a person who has gone astray to the Lord.

Sitting idly by won't get it done. **We must do something!**

And the same is true when the someone who has gone astray is someone we love: son or daughter, friend. As I mentioned in the beginning of this message, for me it was my dad.

I was 26 and just finishing my masters at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Karen and I had gone to my parents' house to tell them the good news that I had been accepted into the doctoral program. Instead, my dad told us that he was leaving my mother for another woman.

Not only were we shocked, everyone who knew my parents were flabbergasted. Their marriage had been a model for many. In all the years of my growing up, I never witnessed them fighting or even speaking a harsh word to each other. My mom had taught Sunday School. My dad had been a deacon and church Treasurer.

Over the course of the next several months, things went from bad to worse. Dad moved in with his new girlfriend and started divorce proceedings. When I tried to appeal to him on the basis of Christ and faith, dad told me he no longer believed in God. He declared himself an atheist. My mom and all the rest of the family were heartbroken and devastated.

That is when I began to apply last week's sermon: **WHATEVER YOUR NEED, PRAY!**

After a period of prayer, the Lord gave me a strategy, one I believe was based on the way Jesus Himself sought to save those who are lost. Here it is. Here is what I did.

- **Pray – whatever you need**
- **Love – We can love without approving sin**
- **Share gospel as much as they will allow**
- **Keep communication open**
- **Be ready when God gives opportunity**

Over the next several years, I completed my doctorate, and Karen and I moved to Tulsa, OK. Where I was called to pastor my first church. As we were making the move, my dad was diagnosed with liver cancer. The doctor gave him six months.

From long distance, Karen and I both continued to do what God had put upon our hearts to do: prayed continuously, loved him, shared as much as he would listen, kept communicating, and tried to stay ready. Early one Sunday morning I got a call from my brother. He said, "Mike if you want to see dad alive, you need to come right away." I asked, "Is dad conscious, can he talk?" My brother said, "Usually in the morning when he first wakes up." I got a friend to preach and Karen and I caught a flight to New Orleans that day. We went straight to the hospital and spent the night in dad's room, waiting, praying for God to give him one more chance.

And God did. Dad woke up and recognized us. I asked dad if I could share something with him. To my surprise, he agreed. I simply shared the Roman Road.

(Rom 3:23, 6:23, 5:8, 10:9) and asked my dad if he wanted to repent and trust Christ as His own Lord and Savior. And he did!

He lived three more days, but every time someone entered the room, if he was conscious, he would say to them, “You know what I did? I trusted Jesus as the Lord and Savior of my life.”

Throughout the ordeal, there was an old hymn that often came to my mind whose words sound as if they were written to go with the instructions of this text. Those words often encouraged me, especially when I saw little reason for hope and wanted to give up. If you have someone you love who has wandered from God’s truth and gone astray, I encourage you to learn this song, and sing it to yourself often.

(Rescue the Perishing | Frances J. Crosby)

**Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.**

**Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.**

**Though they are slighting Him, still He is waiting,
Waiting the penitent child to receive;
Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently;
He will forgive if they only believe.**

**Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.**

**Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.**

**Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.**

**Rescue the perishing, duty demands it;
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;
Back to the narrow way patiently win them;
Tell the poor wand’rer a Savior has died.**

**Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.**