

# Search and Rescue – Every Christian's Responsibility

## Part 2

*Epistle of James*

By Ty Blackburn

**Bible Text:** James 5:19-20  
**Preached on:** Sunday, May 5, 2019

**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

James 5:19-20. We come, I believe, this morning to our final message from the book of James. We noted last time that it ends on a practical note as is not really surprising, James is eminently practical in his epistle and so he doesn't end with a greeting or a benediction, he ends with an exhortation, an imperative, an instruction to the people that will help safeguard their souls and we've titled the message last time and this time as well, "Search and Rescue." Search and rescue, and subtitle, "Every Christian's Responsibility." Search and rescue, every Christian's responsibility. That's what James describes in these two verses, verses 19 and 20, the straying of believers, the wandering of believers, the fact that they are imperiled; that wandering is not something that is light, trivial, but it is deadly, and so that in the same way as search and rescue operations are undertaken to save people's lives that are at stake, we need to have that mindset and even greater urgency because spiritual search and rescue has eternal consequences, not just life and death consequences in this life but in the life to come.

I shared last time that there were basically 4,000, there are about 4,000 search and rescue operations a year in the national park system of the United States alone. That's pretty amazing, that many people getting in trouble, and about half of those are people wandering from hiking trails, getting lost, and they go out and then people they love, they know, just don't hear from them. They were supposed to be back, they're not back and so they mount a search and rescue operation, and most of those are successful, praise the Lord, for the competency of the personnel that God has given us, it's a blessing, but three or four percent end in fatalities. So the same thing James is describing, this innate tendency of believers to wander or the possibility of us wandering, and so we are going to look again this morning at search and rescue, every Christian's responsibility, James 5:19 and 20.

19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we thank You for Your word and we pray now that You would help us to apply our hearts with all diligence to what You are teaching us, that You would make us eager recipients of Your word, not merely hearers but diligent doers of what You put before us, and help us live with greater urgency and sensitivity to the health of our own souls but also the health of the souls around us that we might see like You see, spiritual life and death and the urgency of the Gospel. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So we're looking at search and rescue, every Christian's responsibility. We talked about this at some length last time but I want us this morning wrap up our discussion by looking at three additional points that I think will help fill out some of what we talked about last time. First of all, I want us to note as a way of getting back into the context a little bit, that we need, if we're going to understand what James is calling for us, we need to do, first of all, we need to recognize the subtle danger and the subtlety of the danger. It's a subtle danger. He describes wandering, "if any among you strays," the NASB translates it and the NIV translates it "wandering," and straying, wandering, the imagery is vivid of sheep. It's interesting, there were a couple I noticed as we were singing, we had a lot of images of, well, at least a couple that I've recognized in the hymns we sang today but they are often there. In the first hymn, "prone to wander, Lord, I feel it." In the last hymn, I can't remember, something in the wonderful merciful Savior was about that too. Oh, we've hopelessly lost our way. Something about us, we lose our way, we're prone to wander, and those hymn writers are picking up on a clear and consistent biblical image in Scripture of God's description for his people. He describes us as sheep and it is indigenous to sheep to be vulnerable to wandering.

Think about this image, I mean, just a few places that we could go on and on and on because the Scriptures are replete with this image, but Psalm 23, many people's favorite Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." The image is a shepherd leading sheep. God is our shepherd and what does he do? "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."

Isaiah 53:7 we looked at a couple of weeks ago on Easter, the picture of the suffering servant in Isaiah. He sums up our great need of salvation when he says, "All we like sheep have gone astray, each to his own way, but the Lord has lain upon him the iniquity of us all."

Psalm 100, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving his courts with praise." He later on says, "We are His people, the sheep of His pasture."

Jesus, one of his "I am" sayings in John 10, "I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. My sheep know My voice. I know them and they follow Me." John 10, I think it's verse 27. "My sheep know My voice. I know them and they follow Me." Earlier in that chapter he says another, a stranger they will not follow.

Now let's think about how wandering happens. How do you wander from the truth? How do you stray from the truth? The word is emphasized really twice in the passage we have the same basic word. It doesn't show up in the New American Standard, "if any among

you strays." The word "strays" there is the verb we talked about last time, "planao," which means "to wander; to lose one's way; to be deceived." I mentioned the word "planet" comes from that, the wandering stars that are the planets; they move across the sky in an unusual way compared to the other fixed stars. So the word "planao" as in "strays, if any among you strays from the truth," that's planao, "let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way," the error is the word "plane," the same root word. It's the noun form and it means "a wandering." The ESV, I think, does it the best here in this particular verse. It essentially reads like this in the ESV, "My brethren, if any among you wanders from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the wandering of his way or from his wandering will save his soul. "So the emphasis on the word is really clear in the passage. Wandering, the person that is wandering needs to be turned back. So you have wandering twice and you have turned back twice. One who strays from the truth and the one who turns him back, verse 19. Let him know that he who turns a sinner, the same word repeated there in the Greek as well. So the emphasis, the word picture.

Sheep. How does it happen that sheep wander? I think it's helpful to think about this a little bit and look at the image that God is inviting us to consider. How do sheep follow their shepherd? I mean, none of us probably has been around sheep that much. I've been around goats a little bit, not much sheep, you know? And you know, what's it like to be a shepherd? Well, there are some interesting things about sheep and Jesus hints at it when he says, "My sheep know My voice and another they will not follow." The way sheep follow is they listen to the voice of the shepherd. They hear the voice of the shepherd and then they look at the shepherd and they follow the shepherd. Now think about this, we said earlier, Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures." What does that mean? He leads them into a green pasture and he lets them eat and the shepherd stands there as they eat. He may sit down, he may be whittling, he may do whatever he wants to do, he might be on his cell phone nowadays, you know, checking the news. He lets them eat and then he calls them and they stop eating, they look at the shepherd and they follow the shepherd until he leads them to still waters, and then they drink water, and then he calls them and leads them and they go to the next place.

An interesting story is told, I think it's by Philip Keller in his book, "A Shepherd Looks at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm," it might be Charles Jefferson, "Minister as Shepherd," it's one of those two books. He talks about, one of those guys talks about three Palestinian shepherds. He was, I think it was Philip Keller, he was observing actually saw this with his own eyes, he was watching shepherds in Palestine and he saw three guys leading flocks in open country, you know, this open range area, and they are leading their flocks and here's a guy with 50 sheep roughly, here's a guy with 75, here's a guy with 100, and their sheep are following them and the three shepherds come and hang out together. So they start talking and the sheep just intermingle. You've got this, and the guy observing it is sitting there thinking, "How are you ever going to divide, you know?" Well, what happened was each shepherd made his call and out of that mass, 50, 75 and 100 go, they all follow their shepherd. They know the voice of their shepherd. When they hear the voice of the shepherd, they look up from what they're doing and they follow him.

This is the model of how we are to live the Christian life. This is what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is not someone who makes a decision and then never changes, a Christian is someone who has a change of life and an entire reorientation of one's life so that they used to live for themselves, they used to go their own way, but now they are learning to follow Jesus as their shepherd. Well, where do you hear Jesus? You hear Jesus in the word of God. You hear Jesus in the preaching of God, the preaching of God's word, the teaching of God's word. You hear Jesus when you are reading God's word, when you are meditating upon God's word. He is the one speaking in his word. This is where he speaks, the pages of Scripture, the 39 books of the Old Testament, the 27 books of the New Testament. That and that alone is where Jesus speaks.

So when you hear his word, though, the key is what do you do with it? How do you respond? The subtle danger in wandering lies in how we respond to the shepherd's voice. It's not a question of hearing, it's a question of what you do once you hear. Now think about that image again. So a shepherd with his sheep, he takes them, they're in a pasture, he then calls to them and he's going to take them now to get them water, and then he's going to take them now back to the sheepfold. So each time they have to hear his voice and respond to his voice and follow him. If they decide to get careless and, "You know, yeah, I hear him but he'll probably call again in a minute," and they just keep eating. "I'm really having some great grass right here. I've found some clover and I'm just going to stay right here for a little while." Well, the next thing you know you have wandered. You have lost your way because you did not respond to what he said and follow him. In the same way, when God speaks through his word to us, it's as if Jesus is calling out to you and saying, he's calling out to me and he's finding us where we're amiss, things are wrong in our lives, and he's kind of hitting us with his staff and saying, "Listen, follow Me." And if you make a habit of not following him actively, the inevitable result is wandering. You will find yourself more and more distant from the shepherd and you will find yourself if you're distant from the shepherd, you are more and more imperiled for your soul. It is not a small thing to wander. It's a subtle and easy thing but it is of the gravest and most serious consequence.

We must respond to the word. To hear and not respond, that's the problem. I want to talk about two ways I think this is an especially common temptation for us that we need to be aware of and be vigilant to deal with. The first is spiritual slothfulness. We could say spiritual laziness, that is, that we hear the word, we agree with it, "Yeah, that sounds, I need to do that. That's right. That's me." But we just don't act on it. God does not intend us to hear and not act. He intends us to hear and act, in fact, if you don't act, it's like you haven't even heard. What you've really just done is done damage to your soul; to hear and not act is counterproductive, it's negative, it's hurtful because you have by not acting, you have actively disobeyed. You may think, "Well, I was, I was just, I didn't, is not obeying really disobeying?" Yes, it is, to have knowledge of what God wants you to do and not to do it is sin. So spiritual laziness, spiritual slothfulness.

Mark Dever in a message I heard by him said in too many Christian's lives there's a toxic buildup of truth. A toxic buildup of truth. That's really what James has been trying to talk

about the entire letter, isn't it? It's not just what you know in your head, it's what's become real in your heart and real in your life. I've often wondered if the Lord hasn't allowed one of the miracles of nature to be an example of this, the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is the lowest, the shoreline of the Dead Sea is the lowest dry land on the face of the earth, the lowest point. Do you know that it's approximately 1,400 feet below sea level, the Dead Sea. It's like going down into the earth. Well, the Jordan River runs into the Dead Sea and nothing runs out of the Dead Sea so what happens is all of this life-giving water, minerals, going into the sea and nothing going out and what happens is when nothing goes out, all of what should have been life, water and minerals that normally are life-giving coming down streams, become toxic and deadly, and so nothing lives in the Dead Sea. It becomes a place of death.

So it's urgent to act on the truth. We must stir ourselves out of spiritual slothfulness. This is what we have to do, keep waking each other up. "Come on, wake up. We've got to follow Jesus." It's like one sheep to another sheep saying, "Hey," hitting him upside the head with your head or whatever, you know, sheep can't do. It's kind of tough, I guess you've just got to bang each other, "Come on, the shepherd is moving." Spiritual slothfulness, that's one of the ways that we can wander and we need to learn, then, to try by God's grace to apply what we learn so that we hear it, we make it a purpose to meditate on it and to start actively doing it, taking steps to obey. This is where it's good to have accountability. When you're really convicted about something, to tell someone else about your conviction and, "I'm wanting to work on this and will you please ask me about it? Watch me. This is what I'm convicted about, I do this in these situations and when you see me, if you see me doing that, call me out on it. I'm really trying to work on that. Ask me about it. Pray for me. Pray for me right now." This ties right in with confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.

So James is wanting us to live out the Christian life. So one of the ways that the subtle but deadly danger of wandering comes is through spiritual slothfulness. A second sub point under our first main point, the subtle danger, recognize the subtle danger, is that we also can wander through spiritual pride. Not just spiritual slothfulness, spiritual pride, that is, we can resist the word of God, we can hear it clearly and resist it because we just don't like it or it doesn't make sense to us, it's not appealing to us. The reality is the word of God is often unappealing to us. Why is that? Because we are really seriously messed up. That's why. I'm seriously messed up, that's why the word of God is offensive to me. If I was as Adam was before he sinned, my heart would always leap with everything the word of God says for joy. Now when he has redeemed us, we have a part of us that leaps, so it's a mixed bag. The renewed heart leaps but the old man chafes, and so we must crucify spiritual pride.

You see this, a really good image of this in John, turn over to John 8:31. We talked last time about how this passage brings up for us the reality of genuine salvation versus counterfeit salvation, real faith versus counterfeit faith; spent some time talking about the difference between that and how we really understand the perseverance of the saints, so I encourage you to listen to that if you missed it last week. But this theme comes up again here in John 8:31 and I think helps us to really address spiritual pride right here. John

8:31, Jesus says this, verse 31, "So Jesus was saying to those Jews," listen, he's saying to those Jews, "who had believed Him," he's speaking to those who are professing faith in him and he says, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." That's the perseverance of the saints. If you continue, if you abide, if you remain. The word "continue" means "to abide; to remain; to stay in a place; to tarry somewhere; to not leave." The idea is you're not leaving.

If you continue in my word. It's really instructive when you look at John's Gospel as you work your way through it, in chapter 6 he had said some things that were offensive to the Jews that had come out for more bread. They wanted more bread, remember. He had fed 5,000 men plus women and children, the next day they wanted more bread and he basically didn't give them bread, didn't give them what they wanted that day. He said, "I am the bread," one of the "I am" sayings, "and so you need to eat Me," and he went on to say, "You need to eat My flesh and drink My blood," showing that the salvation of our souls was going to happen through his death, and he used a powerful image, an offensive image, something that was unsettling because they needed to see how great their sin was, how great their need was. It's going to take something so incredibly offensive to save you. It's going to take putting God's holy Son on a cross. That's what it's going to take to save you.

So he says something very offensive because they need it. It's true and they need it, but what you see in John 6 is that it says that many who followed him, they said, these are hard words and many who followed him departed, left him that day. You see, they did not continue in his word. Jesus in his humanity felt the weight of that rejection and he said to his disciples, "Will you also leave Me?" He looks to the 12, "Will you also leave Me?" And that's when Peter says, "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life." It's the difference between a disciple and not a true follower, the true follower remains even under the weight of the heaviness and offensiveness of God's word.

It's really instructive too. Back to John 8:31, he says this and then he starts offending because what does he say next, he tells them, "and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free." Now that's good news to us and we've heard the verse and we always think of it in terms of, many of you think of that as a wonderful verse, just a great celebration of the glory of the Gospel. For them, they took it as, "Why do You say we need to be free?" He went on and added to it in verse 36, "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." They had said already, "We are Abraham's descendants and we've never yet been enslaved to anyone," which was ridiculous that they said that, but nevertheless they did. "Why are You saying we need to be free? We are Abraham, children of Abraham. We are free." And he basically says to them, "No, you are the slaves of sin. You are slaves," is what he says. That is offensive. "You think you're free but you are slaves of sin."

Not only that, he takes it a step further. Look at what he says in verse 44, "You who are Abraham's children by physical birth, you are actually slaves. You're not free." Verse 44, "You are of your father the devil." You said that your father is Abraham, I'm telling you

your father is the devil. That is offensive. I mean, seriously. If you read it and look at what's being said and try to put yourself in the place and you see, wow. Now here is the test of discipleship, with what you know of Jesus and his goodness and his trustworthiness and his love, are you willing to remain under the, at times burdensome, almost oppressive weight of what he says to you and calls you to do and be? Are you willing to stay under it? Will you remain? In fact, that word when he says in verse 31, "If you continue in My word, then are you truly My disciples," the word "continue" actually, it looks like it might be a present tense verb but it's actually a Greek aorist tense verb. The aorist tense speaks of a point in time. It doesn't mean that it only happens once, what he's saying is when God's word comes upon you, you must at a point in time make a decision to place yourself under it and disciples do that. Mere professors that profess faith but aren't really born again, will not.

It doesn't mean that it's easy for disciples to do that, it's hard, but if you will wait and trust and actually go to God with your questions. That's one of the things I love about the Scriptures, it's just so real and such transparency on the part of the people in the Bible. You know, the Psalms, just read the Psalms, they're always going to God with questions. How long? Why? I mean, it's almost like they're saying, "What are You doing? What are You thinking?" You read between the lines and they're saying that. Who are they saying that to? They're not saying it to someone else about God, they are going directly to God. So you go, "Jesus, what do You mean I'm a slave? What are You talking about? Help me understand this. What do You mean I'm a child of the devil? Please help me understand that." Well the reality, if you linger there and this is what I've found in so many different areas, there are so many different challenging things that you find in God's word and it's going to keep happening. The good news is if you haven't found anything lately, just keep reading and keep listening. You'll have more and more opportunities to be challenged and confronted by the word of God if you stay in it. That's why it is sharper than any two-edged sword. It cuts but it also brings healing. It does surgery and takes out the malignancies of sin that are in our hearts.

The spiritual pride. John 8:31, 36. Okay, so if you remain under the word, you be like the psalmist, you go to him and you say, "Lord, help me understand this," and there are so many areas where that happens but if you will stay in the word and stay before him with a heart that wants to believe and wants to obey, if you don't have a heart that wants to believe and wants to obey, just stop reading, leave. Now what you should do is repent and change but if you don't want to believe, he's not going to speak to you. It'll just be greater condemnation to you. But if you are really genuinely open to pursue the truth, he will show you the truth and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

He is faithful and many of you who are believers through many years, you know many times you can testify to yourself, this time where you were really doubting something about God, maybe it was the sovereignty of God over all the events of life, and you were trying to deal with it and how this thing happened in your life, and it chafed and your soul was wrestling with that and you struggled with that, and like the psalmist, it didn't happen quickly, you weren't able to get over it quickly but you stayed, you remained, and then you saw. There's a verse in one of the Psalms, I think Psalm 118 speaking about the

mystery, when you read it in context, the mystery of God's ways. We don't understand why he does what he does. The psalmist says this, "Lord, You have done it and it is marvelous in our eyes." You see, you linger under it, you consider it and you come to say, "You were right all along and it is so marvelous. Your ways are not our ways. Your thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so far are Your thoughts and Your ways above our thoughts and our ways."

So we have to remain under it and let's just take those two things. Slaves, yes, you're a slave. The Bible says you and I were born slaves. We are the slaves of sin. Look around you, look at yourself, look within you, look at your own life, is it not true that you were the slave of sin? If you're born again, you still wrestle with sin in you but before you were saved, you were clearly a slave. You pursued what you wanted to pursue. You weren't in charge of your life, sin was. That's true and the reality is we were children of our father the devil, yes, we were.

Let me just invite you to read a couple of passages this week. I'm going to kind of summarize them for you. You're just, he's saying you're just like your dad. Now Jesus is saying this to the Jews because at this point they are wanting to kill him because he's telling them the truth and he says, "You're just like your father the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning. You want to murder Me just now. You even now want to murder Me." But he's telling us something that is really true of all of us and what is the devil like? Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, you get unique windows into the character of Satan. Now what you have there and listen carefully so you understand when you read it, you'll see what I'm talking about, you have there oracles pronounced by the prophet Ezekiel and the prophet Isaiah, God gives them to pronounce to particular men, kings, okay?

In Ezekiel 28, it is an oracle to the king of Tyre. Wicked king. Real man in history who is, you know, full of himself, incredible pride and vanity, thinks he's unassailable in his kingdom there on the coastland, and he's a hater of God. But what you have is you have this amazing thing going on, as you watch the words that Ezekiel uses, he's speaking about a man and yet he's not speaking about a man. He uses words that are clearly intended to describe Lucifer, the highest angel that was ever created who we now know as Satan, the devil, and what's happening is, it's like a double message. He's speaking to the man and he's speaking to the spirit behind the man and it's an oracle of judgment upon the king of Tyre and upon Satan himself.

In fact, let's just turn to it and I'll show it to you, Ezekiel 28, because it is complex. Verse 11, Ezekiel 28, "Again the word of the LORD came to me saying," this is Ezekiel talking, this is what God says to him, "Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,'" now here right off the bat you see he's not just talking to the king of Tyre. He says, "You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you. On the day that you were created They were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you there. You were on the holy



mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created Until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade You were internally filled with violence, And you sinned; Therefore I have cast you as profane From the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub." It's real clear and he goes on to say, verse 17, "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty." He was such a beautiful creation that he lifted himself up.

Now in Isaiah 14, we have another similar oracle, this time to the king of Babylon, and here you can see more the human as well as the spiritual reality, the spiritual person that is being spoken to. He says in verse 4, Isaiah 14:4, he says to Isaiah, "that you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, 'How the oppressor has ceased, And how fury has ceased! The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, The scepter of rulers Which used to strike the peoples in fury with unceasing strokes.'" He goes on down like in verse 16, "Those who see you will gaze at you, They will ponder over you, saying, 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble.'" He's talking really to the king of Babylon, "Is this the man who made the earth tremble," but in the middle of it he's talking again to Satan. He's talking to both. Look at verses 12 to 14, "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart," hear Satan's heart, "you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'" That is the spirit of the evil one. That was also embraced by the king of Babylon and the king of Tyre. They were just like their father.

Now the reality is that it is the essence of sin to be like Satan. You remember the first sin that happened, Genesis 3:5, what did Satan say? "God knows that in the day you eat of it," talking about the fruit, remember, "in the day that you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and," what? "You will be like God." We are of our father the devil when we come into this world because we want to be like God, we want to be our own God. We want to rule our lives, we want to live for our own glory, our own kingdom, and so Jesus is absolutely accurate, of course, when he says that. It's offensive but if you linger under it, you see it is true and it's always the way it is. If you understand the Scripture correctly, even when it offends you if you will stay under it, you will find yourself in the end saying, "Lord, You have done it and it is marvelous."

That's one of the ways that we wander, if we don't put ourselves under the word of God. So don't reject it. When God confronts you with some truth that you can't fully comprehend and you can't accept it on face value, you know why do people suffer in hell forever? That's a tough concept but what do you do with that? You don't just stuff it away, you keep talking to the Lord about it and you keep trusting him and you keep putting it in context of all that you see in Scriptures and realize that what's most wrong in the situation is me and my heart. "Lord, make me see what You see. Make me love what You love. Make me hate what You hate."

So it's a subtle danger to wander. The second thing we want to see is in the passage back to James 5:19 and 20, we need to not only recognize the subtle danger, we need to accept our personal responsibility for the search and rescue. He says, "My brethren, if any among you strays and one turns him back." Actually the word "any" and the word "one" are the same Greek indefinite pronoun which can be translated "one" or "anyone" or "someone," but the idea is it's just, if anyone among you strays and if anyone among you turns him back, the idea is that we all might stray and we all are called to help turn people back. It's not just a priestly set among us, it's every single one of us are responsible to be involved in search and rescue. When someone strays and you see them straying, if you see them straying, you are responsible to call them back. Now you may need to call in reinforcements too, and, "Hey, you know, I need some help here. I don't know what to say to them. I talked to them." You call for some help but, again, we need to be very careful about being, one of the things that is really important for us is to as we work to help each other with sin and we confess our sins to one another, we need to be people who honor confidentiality. We don't gossip. We don't talk about people giving details that are unnecessary, even if you're needing instruction from someone, you may not need to say the name. "Hey, I've got a brother or sister who is in need and there is this problem going on, what should I do? Do you have any Scripture I could give them?" You see a brother, not Jim or Billy or whatever, right? A brother. Try to be as confidential as possible. Always err on the side of confidentiality. Now there are limits to that. You never promise absolute confidentiality, that's unbiblical. We are required by law to report certain things to the state. If you find out someone is abusing their wife, you are obligated to call the police. If they won't call the police, you tell them to call the police and turn themselves in.

So there are balances but we must not gossip and allow that kind of thing to damage the oneness that we can have, but what James is saying is, listen, we are all supposed to be involved in going after each other. We are to love one another and see it as our responsibility. The fact that I know about this need, there's an overwhelming likelihood that I'm supposed to do something about it. I'm certainly supposed to pray and I'm supposed to pray about, I need to pray about should I say something now, and I think most of us need to err on the side of moving toward it. You know, we can learn how to do that with some wisdom but it's better just to go and mess it up than it is to do nothing. If you go and you mess it up, then at least everybody else knows there's a problem. Seriously. It will be a bigger problem, somebody else will have to get involved maybe to help clean it up but at least we know there's a problem and we stopped the straying before it got out of hand. Don't be afraid that you don't know enough so I can't say anything. No, if you know Jesus Christ and you love him and you care about this person and you know that we're all sheep, then you know enough to go and say, "Hey, what's going on? I'm concerned about you. Maybe I'm reading this wrong but it looks like you're not, something's going on. Tell me what's happening in your heart. What's going on? How can I pray for you?"

We need to do that and it's our responsibility. That's why Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother sins, go to him and show him his fault." It doesn't say if your brother sins, he's straying, see, go tell somebody else to go talk to him. It does not say that. It says if your

brother sins, go and show him his fault, and the idea is show him his fault is kind of a strong word which means to convict and often shame even. It means not that you try to shame someone in a way of, like, unloving, unkindness, what it means, though, is that you're willing to talk about the issue unapologetically and expose sin and allow God to do what he needs to do to deal with it, and when we really sin and God exposes things, shame is an unavoidable part of it.

So don't be afraid of that. We have to love enough to be willing to get into the mess with each other. That's why Hebrews 3:13, we looked at that last time, it's just the book right before James, the epistle of Hebrews, and we saw in Hebrews 3:12 to 14, we talked about the perseverance of the saints, but it's interesting he says there in verse 13, "But encourage one another," that's Hebrews 3:13. He said, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." You see there's the wandering. The person is falling away. He's actually, this has gone to death level here. But make sure that doesn't happen, that they don't fall away. How? Encourage one another day after day. When you see evidence that there might be some wandering, move toward it in love. The longer that I've lived on the earth and been in ministry, the more that I've seen truth to the old adage, this is a, you know, just common wisdom but where there's smoke, there's fire. It just tends to be, at least if there's smoke, you need to go investigate. If it's not fire, maybe it's a birthday cake, it's a good thing and everything's going to be happy, but still go find out. A birthday cake of someone at least as old as me, that does create some smoke after a while.

Hebrews 10:23 to 25, this same epistle, moving back toward James. He says in verse 23, "Let us hold," this is chapter 10, verse 23 of Hebrews, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." There again, persevere to the end. We need to persevere to the end. We need to all persevere to the end. Verse 24, and so now he says how do you do that? "And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Let us continue to consider how to stimulate one another. That's a strong word, stimulate. It's a word which speaks of a sharp even potential conflict. The same word is used in Acts 15 to speak of when Paul separated from Barnabas. There was a sharp disagreement. He's saying that there's time where we have to stimulate one another, it doesn't just mean, you know, kind of a spiritual shoulder rub, it means popping each other. I mean, not physically, of course, but it means spiritually to say, "Listen, what's going on? Seriously, you're acting like nothing's wrong, what's happening?" Stimulate one another to love and good deeds. So it's all on us. It's important for us to understand it's our responsibility and when a brother comes to us to let them minister to us, it's important, and we need to just trust one another that God's going to work through by his Spirit through each other.

We were talking about this in our elders meeting yesterday and one of our elders, James, said an excellent image that he thought about as he realized there's this tendency in the church that we've recognized, when we have a problem, a sin problem, the Bible says confess your sins to one another, it says to help one another, it says to encourage one

another, right? It should be happening all over the place, the people closest to you. We should be confessing our sins to our spouses or to other close friends. Some things are man to man, woman to woman, right? So we have to do that as well, but it doesn't always have to go to the pastor or the lead counselors, and what he said was this was the image and it was just really striking, he said we can be in danger, if we think we should just go to the pastor or the lead counselors, we're in danger of re-creating the Catholic priesthood where you go to someone anonymously, they probably know your voice but there's still that veil there and you confess and there is no real accountability, no real relationship and it's easy to do because it's impersonal. Listen, it is easy to do and therefore it's not going to make a difference in your life, the difference that it can, if you learn to confess your sins to the people who are right there in your life. Then the other is there for more severe situations that kind of bubble up. The person that loves you says, "Hey, I think we need to go and get some more help and I'm willing to go with you and I'm going to walk with you and we're going to talk to someone and we are going to talk to a pastor, we're going to talk to a counselor that can help us with this," and then it's like the Lord has put around you all the things that you need to help you if you'll just let him do it. Follow his design. Follow his commands.

So take personal responsibility, that means be willing to go after those that we see, and then the final point is a wonderful opportunity. So subtle danger, accept our personal responsibility, and then seek a wonderful glorious opportunity that James describes at the end as the result, "let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Let him know. He's saying, listen, the imperative is, it's interesting, the imperative is not go, the imperative is let him know. Now clearly it's an implied imperative to go, but what he's saying is the motivation for going is to know it is of such great importance. Know that if this person comes back, their soul has been saved from death, and you covered a multitude of sins, the stakes are incredible. This is a wonderful rescue opportunity. You can be used by God to do what only God can do. We can't save ourselves but here in the passage it looks almost as if we can because what he's saying is God who alone can save because salvation is of the Lord, we interpret it in context of all of Scripture, God alone is the one who can save. His word is the only thing that can turn a sinner back. Psalm 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, restoring the soul." In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it's the same Greek verb as you have here in "turns" in James 5:19, *epistrepheo*, to turn upon. So the law of the Lord is perfect, turning the soul, returning the soul, converting the soul.

So it's the word, it's God who does it and yet what we see in the Bible is God uses means. Our God uses instruments. He lets us be involved in it and we are to act as if at some level it depends on us and we are constantly giving him all the praise and glory because we know it doesn't ultimately depend on us. But it's like he says, you have not because you ask not. Pray like it matters that you pray because it does. He says if you don't go, in Romans 10, after chapter 9 where he said salvation is of the Lord, it's about him who wills, not about him who wills but him who runs, but God makes the choice. Then he says in chapter 10, verses like 11 to 16, how will they hear without a preacher? How will they call on him in whom they have not heard? How will anybody be saved if someone

doesn't preach to them? That's what Romans 10 says, right after Romans 9 says they are only going to be saved because God chooses them. So hear all of God's word and obey it.

So here he says, "Listen, if you go after someone and you turn them back, you will be the instrument in the hand of God to accomplish the salvation, the eternal salvation of a soul for the presence of God and the glory of God forever." How awesome is that? Go to work. Pray for that. No, there's nothing good in me, no, but I'm going to speak the word, the life-giving word of God, and God has made it so we have to hear the word and to hear the word, how do you hear the word? Someone has got to use their vocal cords, their brain to form the words, to read it or to remember what they know from the word, to breathe air across their vocal cords, and that soundwave, those sound waves that come into your eardrum that then are translated by your brain to understand what is said, then goes into your heart, a soul is saved. But someone had to speak. Someone has to go. That's what James is saying.

Save his soul from death and it will cover a multitude of sins. Here we don't know whether this person was saved or not. Remember, it's a brethren so it's one of the persons who professes to be a believer and they've strayed but he's saying live as if, if you don't get them back, they're going to hell. That's what you should be thinking. Now you don't know for certain, you don't know for certain, but live as if everything depends on it. That's what he's saying and if you have that kind of earnestness and you go and God at times you will find that they will not respond and the sheep will stay lost, in those moments what we need to do is not be overwhelmed by it and undone by it but we need to be broken. "God, help me be broken over this more than I am." But when they come back, when he says cover a multitude of sins, it's like all the bad stuff that was going on in their life, all of the ugliness and the vileness of what they were doing, all of the ways God's name was being profaned, God's honor was being drug through the mud, all of that is wonderfully covered in the joy of salvation. It is forgotten.

The three images Jesus uses in Luke 15, the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Each time the idea is you lose one sheep, you go after the one and you leave the 99 and there's more joy of the one than the 99 that remain. You have 10 coins, you lose one, you go after that one, you sweep everything, you find it and you rejoice more over the one than the nine that you already had. Then he says a man had two sons, and when that son came back, he wanted to confess and the father stopped him in the middle of his confession, he knew his heart and he said, "Kill the fatted calf, bring out the robe, put the ring upon him, for my son who was lost now is found." His older brother didn't appreciate it appropriately and the father tells him, "Listen, do you understand he was dead and now he is alive." The joy of the return of the believer and this is how, this is what ought to happen in our church, we need to pray that God will allow us to have these kinds of reclaiming of souls so that there will be joy like he says in that passage, more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 who need no repentance, that God might give us the joy like that. That's something to pray for. That's something to work for and you and I, every word spoken when you speak the truth in love to someone who might be straying, you may be accomplishing something like that. You may be catching them before they are too far off the path and you may find out in heaven had you not said

that word, had you not said that word, they would have been lost. You never know but we do know is that we are to speak the truth in love and leave the results to God.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for a God who is a God who searches and rescues sinners. We're thankful for knowing the God of heaven Who has created all things and made all things and reigns and rules over all things and is so majestic and so transcendent and far above us, and yet who stooped to become a man, God the Son becoming true bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and He was broken and spilled out to save us. O God, we stand in awe of You. We pray for Your salvation to be realized in the hearts of everyone in this room. Lord, You know our hearts. You know those who profess to be believers and who truly possess Christ. You know who profess to be believers and yet aren't believers, don't yet possess Christ. Lord, keep calling Your sheep. Call all of us home. Let us all be in Your fold. Let us know the joy of helping one another to stay close to the Shepherd, to stay safe, and to make it all the way home. Father, be glorified in Your people more and more each day. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*