

“Go Get ‘Em” – James 5:19-20

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in James 5...

We have come to the final sermon in our series through James. We began this series when the pandemic initially kept us from gathering in person. You might recall that James was writing to a group of believers that he was no longer able to gather with because they had been scattered from Jerusalem. In their case, it wasn't a pandemic that kept them apart, but a severe outbreak of persecution. It seemed to me that our unique situation, while owing to a different cause, might benefit from James' counsel to his dispersed congregation. I think this has proven to be the case, even as we have been able to come back together (unlike James' audience). When I look back on this pandemic, I will always think about these lessons in James. And I hope that is true for you as well.

But all good things must come to an end, unless and until Jesus returns, so it's time for us to wrap this series up. Look with me at the final two verses of James 5. It's something of an abrupt closing. But that James would close on this thought should underscore how important this lesson is. Listen accordingly as I read, beginning in verse 19. This is God's Word...

“My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20)

Last week we considered the imbedded assumption of verse 19, namely, that there is such a thing as truth. This is a concept that society seems quite confused on. We love the idea of truth when it suits our purposes and we love to deny the existence of absolute truth when it doesn't. But this just won't do. If there is truth, there is by necessity error. And if there is error, there are major consequences to embracing it. This is what's at stake for James here. He is concerned for those who wander from the truth. And he is concerned that we be concerned for them. This is how the epistle comes to a close.

We can probably understand why he ends the letter with this subject, given the urgency of pursuing those who are drifting from the faith, but it's not immediately obvious how these verses relate to the ones that come before them. Do they relate? I think so. You'll notice there is a repeated phrase in this section—*“anyone among you”*—which occurs at the beginning of verses 13, 14, and now 19. So this whole section is really about the mutual care we ought to show one another in the community of faith. Whether people are suffering or rejoicing, we should join them (5:13). If they are sick, we should care for them and pray with them (5:14ff). And now, if they are wandering from the truth, we should urgently pursue them (5:19-20).

Taken together, these verses remind us that we should care for the spiritual troubles of people, not just the physical. If we are being honest, sometimes we lack this balance. It's easy to show support to those who are suffering physically—to call and check on a person, make a visit in the hospital, give a contribution for the care package—as such actions are generally met with appreciation and favorably regarded by the recipient. But when someone is backsliding spiritually—they have fallen into sin, their presence in corporate worship has dropped off, they no longer seem to prioritize the things of God—raising the matter with the person can be quite awkward and we fear will not be well received.

So the Christian community can sometimes lose the balance of care that James speaks of here. Perhaps our prayer requests in our Sunday School or Home Groups sometimes evidence this when they are full of physical needs and devoid of spiritual concerns. But “if the family of God prays together when physical illness wounds a member, they should certainly work together if spiritual troubles threaten.”¹ Therefore, James calls his readers to take note of those who wander from “*the truth*” (5:19).

Interestingly, the verb for “*wanders*” is actually the Greek word from which we derive the term “planet” because planets, at least from our vantage point on earth, appear to our senses as wandering bodies that streak across the night sky.² Perhaps that is a good analogy for us.

When I was on vacation, our group took the time to watch the sunsets each night and each night as the sun went down the sky was painted with a beautiful array of colors. As the colors faded, brilliant stars would come into view. One star was always brighter than all the others. Someone actually informed me that it wasn’t a star at all, but the planet Venus. With the exception of the moon, Venus, the earth’s nearest planetary neighbor, is the brightest natural object that we see in the night sky this time of year. Every night we could see it, bright and steady, in the exact same spot.

Only it wasn’t in the exact same spot in fact. A trained eye could discern a slight shift each night, in accordance with its and the earth’s orbit around the sun. This time of year we can spot it in the Western sky around dusk, but look again in mid-January and the naked eye will only be able to detect it in the East, shortly before sunrise. So depending on the time of the year, you might see it brilliantly in the sky or hardly at all without the help of binoculars or a telescope. And if you were looking for it around March 26, this past year, you wouldn’t have seen it at all because, from our perspective, it would have been behind the sun (i.e., “superior conjunction”). It wanders out of view. Of course, it doesn’t really look like it’s wandering across the sky from one night to the next, but when you compare its position from week to week or month to month the movement is undeniable. And there eventually comes a day where it has disappeared from the skyline all together.

People often wander from the fold of the church in much the same fashion. The movement is subtle. You get used to seeing them when you gather for worship on Sunday. They’re something of a fixture that you come to expect. But as they drift away it’s often slowly. It’s subtle. It’s gradual. You may not even notice it until one day, month’s later, you’re looking around and you don’t see them. If that’s true in the normal rhythm of a church, then how much more when a church has been separated because of a pandemic.

It’s easy to assume that so-and-so hasn’t been around because they are just not comfortable in public or have medical concerns or whatever. That may be true and legitimate. But those possibilities and assumptions, over time, also provide cover for people to drift. We get used to not gathering in worship. We drift. We content ourselves with the neglect. We drift. The months pile on and we don’t even realize how much our neglect is costing us spiritually. James knew. That’s why he so strongly urges us toward a search-and-rescue mission. If ever there were a time where these closing words were relevant to local churches, perhaps it is a time like ours.

When I read the end of James, I can’t help but be reminded of the warning at the start of Hebrews 2...

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Hebrews 2:1-3a)

If ever there is a section of God’s Word to remind us that the drifting that James is talking about is dangerous, it’s the book of Hebrews! The fact of the matter is: “Unless the believer stays close to the truth, he will start to drift away.”³ If you’re not regularly digging in, you’re likely drifting from. And this is a problem for every generation of believers and it has intergenerational consequences. D. A. Carson has often said that the church in any given setting is (at best) three generations from losing the Gospel entirely, but for the grace of God and

healthy intergenerational discipleship. What one generation *believes*, the next generation often *assumes*, and the generation to follow regularly outright *denies*.

Which generation are we? What might that say about the generation coming after us? What will we do about it? Hopefully we will take seriously, as James would have us, pursuing those who are giving *any* indication of drifting from faith and Christian practice. We drift to assumption and denial. We don't drift to belief and holiness. Elsewhere, Carson makes this perceptive observation:

“People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.”⁴

Are you drifting? Again, that's not just something that harms you. It harms others too. James is focused on the danger that the wandering soul is courting. But the Scriptures as a whole would also have us note that such backsliding individuals are also a danger to other members of the local church because “the wandering offender can influence others and lead them astray.”⁵ In the words of Ecclesiastes 9:18, “*one sinner destroys much good.*” This explains the New Testament's stress on church discipline. It aims to protect the people of God, both corporately and individually. It's meant to be restorative. It's motivated by love, including love for the one who stumbles.

But I should clarify that drifting from the truth doesn't necessitate a lack of presence in the local church. Let's be clear, the person who “*wanders from the truth*” may still present himself or herself among God's people. They may freely identify with us. But their life choices are characteristically out of step with the Gospel. I'm reminded of how Paul speaks of the “*knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness*” (Titus 1:1). Truth, rightly understood, and godliness belong together. J. A. Motyer said it well,

“It is impossible (in Scripture) to make ‘truth’ a mere matter of holding some propositions or credal statements in our heads. Truth is a living thing; when it grips our minds it changes our lives. If we claim to know the truth, then the Bible would require us to prove our claim not only by reciting a creed and understanding it, but by the evidence of a way of life matching the truth.... Truth and life belong together.... It is one of the crowning follies of the present time that people think they can have Christian standards without Christian convictions. But it is beaten into second place by the folly of church leaders who think that they can deny, or acquiesce in the denial of, biblical truth and still maintain, in the church and in society at large, Christian moral virtues.... But within the local fellowship we dare not treat truth and life as negotiable. It is our task to care and to rescue.”⁶

Before we consider that care and rescue, let's give some thought to why people drift. Why does it happen? Well the reasons are too many for us to itemize. Sometimes we share some of the blame as leaders or as a congregation because we failed to express appropriate love and care. Sometimes the reasons have little to do with us—or at least little to do with things that we should have done differently. I sometimes call these “identity reasons.” These are things that are just part of our DNA as a church—aspects of our beliefs and practices and reforms that are absolutely appropriate, biblical, and in keeping with the Gospel, but people don't like and so they distance themselves from us and eventually leave for reasons having more to do with their own hearts than anything inappropriate on our end.

But any pastor knows that “often when a person drifts away from active involvement in church and even from the faith, it is due to unresolved personal conflict within the congregation.”⁷ And when we are upset, we tend to feel like our choices and emotions are justified. Yet the more we linger with those grudges, the more we refuse to dig out that root of bitterness, the more we persist in unforgiveness, the more we are wandering from the

truth, the way of Jesus, and, therefore, the more we ourselves must repent, turn to the Lord, and pursue peace with others. I tell you all the time, the Gospel, at its heart, is a message of reconciliation, so unreconciled believers do not advertise it very well.

But it's harder to see our part in conflict and disunity when we cut ourselves off from the very means that God uses to awaken us to truth—like gathering for worship and preaching and the ordinances and Christian fellowship. If we cut ourselves off, we are left to our own senses to see and discern where we may be drifting. But you have blind-spots, which means you can't see what you can't see. You may be in harm's way more than you realize. I've been there. But you know what God has used more often than not to alert me to the trouble ahead? God's Word on the lips of God's people in the ordinary rhythms of the local church. God knew what He was doing when He created the local church. It's not perfect in our fallen world, but it is for His glory and our good. And He certainly knows better how to facilitate those ends than you do. If you don't believe that, then you are wandering from the clear truth of God's Word.

Therefore, show me a person who is healthy enough to come and not restrained by some bitter providence who doesn't make the corporate worship gathering (not Sunday School, not Small Group, not BSM, some parachurch or private ministry) a priority in their week, and I will show you someone who is wandering from the truth. And more often than not, the reason is pride. They are unwilling to forgive and pursue peace with someone who has upset them or they are so self-assured that they don't think they need the very means of grace that God provides to thrive spiritually. Their illiteracy of the Bible leads them to believe that they know what's best, not God. Their way is better than the way God prescribes. But they're wrong. And despite their boasts of piety, their way is not to be followed. God offers a better way. And it's not "a solo hike," but "a holy caravan."⁸

But, again, when one "wanders," they often can't see on their own that it's happening. The people around them can overlook it. But so can the individuals themselves. And surely the "truth" that they are wandering from must include the very teaching that James has been unpacking throughout this letter, which has been largely about avoiding what he calls "double-mindedness". This double-mindedness doesn't just keep us from living up to our spiritual potential, it puts us in a perilous situation. "To wander from the truth is to wander from life."⁹ But our double-mindedness often coaxes us toward this danger quite comfortably. Here's how one author described the charm of double-mindedness:

"Being double-minded does not feel dangerous. It feels like getting the best of both worlds, like being relevant, like enjoying all that life has to offer. And it seems even less dangerous when others around us are doing a similar thing. We can't *all* be wrong, right? Yet it is all too easy for an unspoken rule to emerge in our churches indicating that a level of worldliness in particular contexts is tolerable and even encouraged. What that level is will vary from church to church and culture to culture. It might concern greed, or materialism, or gossip, or lust, or worry, or any number of other things which God tells us not to do, but which the world around us encourages and celebrates. But however comfortable it might feel, to wander from the truth is to wander towards death. It is spiritual suicide. Either wandering will keep you from the truth, or the truth will keep you from wandering."¹⁰

At this point, some of us may be hearing this and feeling a sense of conviction. Truth be told we know our level of commitment to the things of God and the local people of God is not what it ought to be or perhaps not what it once was. You have wandered. You have drifted. What a grace that God has you here today that you might realize something of what that says of your spiritual health. How will you respond? I'd like to think that your presence here is God's grace to you. Like Peter, who wandered from the truth and even denied Jesus on multiple occasions, the Lord has, no doubt, interceded for you. Your faith has not failed as a result. You're here today. And the Lord would say to us, as He said to Peter, "*when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*" (Luke 22:32).

For others among us there are likely people who come to mind. Maybe for the first time you are realizing that you haven't seen so-and-so for a while. Have they been straying? James says we ought to seek to restore them.

Yet there are a lot of ways we can justify in our own minds not following this advice. Some of them are based on a less than biblical understanding of who we are meant to be as a church.

Tony Evans gives a helpful example of a kid running into the street. “Some believers aid the spiritual regression of fellow Christians by assuming it’s none of their business.”¹¹ And in an environment where any correction or warning of judgment is classified as “hate speech,” we’re all the more likely to recoil. But we would never say that if it was our child running into traffic! Why? Because that’s our child. They’re family.

But in a local church we are a family too. We are children of God. Brothers and sisters. This is no mere lip service. It is biblical teaching. And it transcends this lifetime. Relationships like marriage are for this lifetime. But your brothers and sisters in Christ will be forever. We should look after one another. That’s why there are so many “one another” commands in the New Testament. Does our concern for others who wander suggest that we believe these things to be true?

The pursuit of wandering souls is “one of the most neglected responsibilities of the church today.”¹² We ought to be concerned for them enough to go after them. Not just the staff. In fact, not mainly the staff. The congregation. James has already addressed the elders—the pastors—earlier in the chapter. Here the instruction is addressed to anyone among us. This is part of God’s vision of care expressed through the people of the local church. And that care is not expressed by merely talking about people, but pursuing people. Sometimes we settle for talk. We go the way of gossip and slander even. But James has already warned us about that behavior.

“Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?” (James 4:11-12)

But there’s a difference between that judgmental and critical spirit that James describes in chapter 4 and the heartfelt concern that leads to the tangible pursuit in chapter 5. They both notice some of the same things, but what they do with that information is quite different. One tears down—either by (passive) apathy or (active) grumbling—the other, in James’ words, seeks “*to bring back a sinner from his wandering*” and thereby “*save his soul from death*” and “*cover a multitude of sins.*”¹³ If we ever find ourselves sitting around the table complaining about those who seem to have drifted out the “back door” of a church, but not doing our part to change that and foster reconciliation and unity, then we are part of the problem. When someone is wandering from the truth, it’s not just their problem (according to James), it’s our problem too. “Departure from the truth, and from the life that accords with the truth, gives a revealing testimony to how things really are and calls forth a spirit of concern in every truly Christian heart.”¹⁴

The fact that this restoration of the wanderer is said to “*save his soul from death*” could suggest that they were never a true believer.¹⁵ There are many false converts. Jesus warned us clearly about this and the test of genuine faith is seen in the fruit of one’s life (godliness) and the enduring of faith (perseverance). There is no such thing as a truly born-again believer who does not persevere to the end in faith, but when we read Jesus’ parable of the sower it is clear that there are many who seem to be born again for a while only to prove a lack of saving faith by falling away in the end. That could be who James has in mind. So don’t assuage your conscience with reassurances that so-and-so is fine because he used to be a prominent leader in the church or she accepted Christ when she was a kid at camp years ago. That proves nothing. Do you see them walking in the truth now? Do you see evidence of saving faith?

On the other hand, he may have genuine believers in mind who backslide, and the means God uses to bring them back to the fold is the pursuit of His people. Genuine believers persevere to the end in faith, but God uses a variety of means to preserve us. And one of those means is the church, the body of Christ. “The church is one of the God-ordained means God uses to keep us faithful.”¹⁶ This is why I like to say that perseverance is a community project.¹⁷ We need each other. You need those brothers and sisters sitting around you. They need

you. We need one another. And when we drift that's especially true. Why? Because "One of the primary purposes of the local church", writes Tony Evans, "is to create an environment in which believers can help each other persevere."¹⁸

David Platt strikes the right balance,

"God is sovereign, and He does the preserving, but He does it through the church looking out for, caring for, and loving one another to keep one another from sin. This is yet another reason we ought to be involved in the lives of others in the church. God has ordained brothers and sisters who will share life with you to keep you close to Him, to keep you obedient to His commands, and to preserve you until the Lord comes back."¹⁹

Society puts a low view on the church. And it seems that generation after generation has a lower and lower view of the local church and membership in a local church. But you know who doesn't have a low view of such things? God. This was His idea. And it's for His glory and for His good. A lack of involvement and commitment doesn't bring Him glory and it doesn't do you any good.

So be discerning. Take the time you need. But join a church. This one or another one that preaches the Scriptures and the true Gospel. None of them are perfect. They are all going to tick you off at times. But that's not a bad thing. It actually provides opportunity for us to see the Spirit of God at work and it fosters our sanctification. So perhaps the "most important time for you to go to church is when you don't feel like it."²⁰ And maybe it's time for some of you to join. To be a part of us formally. To plug in deeply. Is it time? If you're sensing that, then let me encourage you to take one of those membership cards, fill it out, drop it in one of the plates when you leave, and we will follow up this week to talk more about you becoming a member. That would make our day, not because we care about numbers, but because we want to care for you.

But as I said earlier, sometimes caring for others in the way they need is quite awkward and, thus, is easily avoided. And, quite honestly, pursuing those who wander entails certain risks. Fortunately, the Bible offers us help for how to proceed.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that we ought to examine ourselves thoroughly and initially so that we can see clearly to tend to the "*speck*" of sin that we see in the eye of another (Matt. 7:1-5). In that same sermon, Jesus tells us to prioritize the pursuit of peace over worship if you know that your brother or sister has something against you (5:23-26). It may be the case that they don't reciprocate, but nevertheless we should not be the reason peacemaking is abandoned. Paul says, "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all*" (Rom. 12:18). And when someone has sinned against us or offended us, Jesus gives us clear instruction on how we are to address that in Matthew 18. The point is that the Bible doesn't leave us hanging on how we can pursue peace and pursue those who wander. We may lack the will to obey, but God has not left us without a way forward.

But the Bible is realistic. Pursuing others may not always result in the end we seek. Yet, here again, the Bible offers us cautionary wisdom. For example, Paul told the Galatians,

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." (Galatians 6:1)

There are a lot of people who like to pick up the mantle of guardians of truth, who lack gentleness. The stuff you read online—the stuff that represents itself as policing the truth and calling out error—is it marked by gentleness? Is it truth in love? If not, maybe you're reading the wrong stuff. It's not going to make you more like Jesus, whose heart was described as gentle and lowly. But it just might make you one of those "champions of the truth" who actually is assaulting and persecuting God's church—and dare I say Jesus—all the while calling it zeal, like Paul. Be careful. Social media is an echo-chamber that's designed to make you feel like your

judgments are right. Those bloggers and youtubers make money off of your clicks and are therefore incentivized by stoking fires. Don't get disciplined by internet bloggers and trolls. Get disciplined in the church. We actually love you, know you, and will pursue you. And hopefully, as Paul instructs, we will do it with the gentleness that seems to have become a lost art in the world's discourse these days.

But Paul also warned that we must "*Keep watch*" on ourselves when we pursue others who have departed from truth and fallen into sin, lest we too be tempted. Think of it like this...If I were to take one of these chairs and stand on top of it, while someone was on the floor, it will be easier, even if they are half my size, for them to pull me down from this chair than it will be for me to pull them up. Perhaps that's a good analogy for us. It's not a perfect analogy because, of course, if we are to be used to lift someone out of sin and draw them to repentance, it will only happen through the work of God's Spirit in their hearts.²¹ He must do the heavy lifting. But He is a God of means and one of the means He uses is us in our godly pursuit of others.

The point Paul is making here, however, is that there are times, especially when we don't put on the armor of God and put into practice the counsel of God, that we will want to help someone in their sin and inadvertently be drawn into the same sin. We can easily imagine one man trying to help another man deal with a lust problem, only to find that their accountability conversations actually introduce lustful thoughts into the mind of the first man. He will have to be very diligent to flee those lustful thoughts and mortify his sin, lest he too stumble while trying to help his brother. That may be a battle that requires more brothers and accountability in place, "*lest you too be tempted.*" And how easy is it for us to see the harsh and sinful rhetoric of others and then stoop to their level when trying to call it out? It's pretty easy. It's amazing how often people who seem to be looking for a fight end up being guilty of the same things they are fighting against. They become the thing they hate. "*Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*" Pursue. Correct when needed. But keep watch on yourself.

You can be right on an issue and wrong on your approach. Speak the truth. But do it in love. That's the call.

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

We might actually get somewhere in our dialogues, if they were marked by such love. We might actually stop talking past one another, if we learned to be more patient and kind. We might find we have more in common with others, if we would lay down our arrogance and insistence on our own way. We might actually make some progress with others and converge together on truth, if we were slower to believe the worst about them and quicker to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. The Pharisees were right about a lot of things, brothers and sisters, but they were on the wrong side of Jesus most of the time. Why? Because they were "more interested in convincing others they were right than in being righteous."²²

When confronting others, Sam Allberry reminds us,

*"We need to be humble. It is only by God's grace that we are not in that situation ourselves, and we may well have been so on other occasions. There is a need for gentleness and self-examination. It needs to be done carefully, prayerfully and lovingly; but it does need to be done. And the wonder of the gospel is that it *can* be done. It may risk the friendship, even if done with love. It may cause offence, even if done with care. But it is worth doing. You may end up saving a life; for the death of Jesus—the Lord Jesus of the glory (James 2:1)—can and does 'cover over a multitude of sins' (5:20). You know that, because you know it covers yours."²³*

If you are a believer in Christ Jesus—who has rested your faith in Him alone for salvation—and you're participating in the Lord's Supper with us this morning, let me invite you to start peeling back the tops of that container as we prepare to partake together...

The kind of search-and-rescue mission that James is calling for here is the very mission that God Himself embarked on for our sakes. God the Father sent His own Son, Jesus, to seek and save lost sinners like us. He accomplished that salvation when He offered up His sinless life in our place on the cross. He died for our sins. He rose again. He lives today and saves sinners by His blood, through faith.

When James says, “*love covers a multitude of sins*”, he is echoing the words of Proverbs 10:12 (cf. 1 Pet. 4:8). But never have those words rung more true than when we think on the cross of Christ. Motyer writes the following:

“Covering’ sin is a basic Old Testament idea. . . . It is this same verb (though not in the same form) which the Old Testament uses to describe how God deals with our sin. He covers it over, hides it right out of his and our sight. . . . But it is more than sweeping sin under the carpet; it is atonement; it is a putting of sin out of sight by the provision of a sufficient sacrifice. In effect we must move away from the illustration of pitch ‘covering’ the ark, and think rather of the way we use the idea of ‘cover’ in financial transactions. Perhaps we are planning something for the future and we set aside a sum of money saying, ‘That will cover it’, so that when the bill comes in it can be paid in full and the thing forgotten. In this way the verb ‘to cover’ comes to mean a totally sufficient payment, through the blood of sacrifice, by which God has dealt with our sin. And, of course, if we do not avail ourselves of the death of the lamb, then we must forfeit our own lives, for the wages of sin is death.”

But we have availed ourselves. He has drawn us to faith. His blood was and is sufficient for our sin. Paul told the Ephesians,

“*...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*”
(Ephesians 2:12-13)

Amen! What a Savior! Glory to God!

So let us as His blood-bought people draw near with this meal. Take. Eat. Drink. And remember. . .

Let’s pray. . .

¹ Daniel M. Doriani, *James* (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R Publishing, 2007), 202-203.

² Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) 247-248. They also point out: “When this verb (πλανᾶω) appears in the passive, it conveys the idea of being led astray or deceived. This use of the verb can either reflect a true passive (‘be led astray’) or perhaps an implied middle (‘one goes astray’ of one’s own accord). The word for ‘if’ (ἐάν) makes the protasis a third-class condition. James does not assume that people within the congregation have wandered away; perhaps no one has yet acted in this fashion. But the fact that he raises this issue makes it seem probable, whether in his own congregations or within the larger church, that he does know of people leaving the faith.” Ibid., 248.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Mature: Growing Up in Christ* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1978, 2004), 173.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God’s Word* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 2:23.

⁵ Wiersbe, 173.

⁶ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James* (BST; InterVarsity: Downers Grove, 1985), 210-211.

⁷ Blomberg and Kamell, 253. They also write, “If Christians spent even half the time taking their concerns about other people directly to them in gentleness and love (recall Gal 6:1) rather than complaining about them to others, we would all be far healthier, individually and collectively.” Ibid.

⁸ Gunner Gundersen, *What If I Don't Feel Like Going to Church?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 28.

⁹ Sam Allberry, *James for You* (The Good Book Company, 2015), 161.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

¹¹ Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 1347.

¹² Blomberg and Kamell, 252.

¹³ “Whose soul is saved by this action? The answer seems clear because of the parallel uses of αὐτοῦ in both ‘the error of his/her ways’ and ‘saves his/her soul.’ It makes more sense that the soul in danger of being lost belongs to the person who strays from the truth. Meanwhile, the soul of the person who did the restoring would not be saved by this action, as we would assume that such a person already does believe, thus making them want to restore the wanderer. This restoring is more a work that shows their faith than one that creates their salvation.” Blomberg and Kamell, 249. Cf. Doriani, 203-204; Robert L. Plummer, “James” in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 285.

¹⁴ Motyer, 212.

¹⁵ Robert Plummer is correct, “Only God knows who is truly elect, so if a member of the Christian community begins to live as a nonbeliever, the only right thing to do is warn the person that, from all appearances, he is running toward eternal death. That very warning may be the instrument God uses to preserve his salvation.” Plummer, 285.

¹⁶ David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in James* (CCEC; Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014), 104.

¹⁷ I’ve been saying this for years, but I first heard John Piper say something similar (though I don’t recall at present where).

¹⁸ Evans, 1316.

¹⁹ Platt, 104.

²⁰ Gundersen, 9.

²¹ “We cannot but be struck by the fact that James speaks of the concerned believer as ‘bringing back’, ‘saving’ and ‘covering the sins’ of the one in error. Surely these are things which only God can do? Only God can forgive sins, save us from them and give us the gift of repentance by which we return from our personal far country (e.g. Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). How can we do these things? The answer is that we cannot, but we must act as if we could. The words express the measure of the concern and effort we are called to expend in our spiritual concern for those in spiritual need. Though we cannot convert them, we must labour to do so. Though we cannot save them from death, we must strive for their spiritual welfare as if their eternal destiny rested with us. Though we cannot cover their sins, we must follow the example of the Son of God who can do so, and hold nothing dear to ourselves and no sacrifice too great if only they are saved. For the local church of which James speaks is a fellowship of concern.” Motyer, 213-214.

²² Nancy Guthrie, *Saints & Scoundrels in the Story of Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 84.

²³ Allberry, 163-164.