



## **The Truth about Wandering**

### **James 5:19-20**

*<sup>19</sup>My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, <sup>20</sup>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. (ESV)*

#### **God warns us about the dangers of wandering.**

James concluded his letter to the scattered believers by warning them that while they suffer persecution for Christ, there was a likely possibility that some in the church family would wander and stray from Christian truth. This word "wander" comes from a Greek word from which we get our English word "planet." Rather than staying fixed in the night sky, the Greeks noted that the celestial bodies "planet-ed" or "wandered" across the heavens. Here a believer has wandered; the scattered spiritual community have some among them who are scattering and straying from the truth of the Gospel. The wandering here meant to intentionally wander. What was happening here was no accident.

The issue is not merely wandering intellectually or doctrinally. James was talking about wandering from a *life of truth*. Often what happens is that individuals begin to wander morally or ethically; then afterwards they tweak their doctrine to fit their errant lifestyle. Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) once said, "What the heart desires, the will chooses, and the mind justifies."

The picture of "planeting" from the truth is subtle and incremental. Spiritual wandering is not someone who suddenly "jumps the track"; rather, it's someone who drifts at the wheel. In his fascinating study of Nazi Germany, Milton Mayor wrote a book called, *They Thought They Were Free*. He talked about this kind of wandering. At point A, the notion of leaping over to point Z is unthinkable. But not the idea of wandering over point B; then point C, D, etc. Soon you're at point Y and the thought of point Z isn't that far-fetched. A farmer can never see corn growing by the minute. But farmers who remain in corn long enough wake up one day to find that they're in over their heads. Through a series of gradual steps, those who made up the malleable masses ended up in evil—over their heads . . . . So James calls the question, "Where are we wandering?"

## **God calls us to be a spiritual community of rescuers.**

Restored wanderers make the best rescuers! James pleads for the church community to participate in spiritual reclamation. The bringing back of a person is not just the job of the pastoral staff or elders. It is a call to every person in the church family. Could we ever hire enough staff take care of the needs of the church family? (For that matter, even if we could, *should we?*)

God wants us to be the rescuers. Life in a local church community assumes the responsibility not just to live for myself to enjoy the church programs but to live for good of others. James says that the powerful prayer of a righteous person is effective. Thus, righteousness is on behalf of others; and my involvement in the church family is on behalf of others. I am part of God's rescue plan. I am an instrument of His rescue.

Paul Tripp asks a probing question: "Do you have a consumer's or a rescuer's relationship with the body of Christ?" All of us are needed and all of us are called to be rescuers. James ends with the call for a loving, restorative, redemptive community. Are you hearing this call? Are you responding to this call? Is there someone in your sphere of influence whom you see wandering from the truth of the Gospel? When will you take the risk—and risky it is!—and attempt to bring them back?

## **God informs us that the stakes are nothing less than eternal life and death.**

When you bring someone back, you bring someone back to the Messiah—to the One who promises to rescue, forgive, restore, heal, and cleanse. You bring someone to Jesus—glorious in grace and patience. When we bring someone back to God, He never says to the wanderer, "How dare you wander from me?" Rather, "Kill the fattened calf! Put a ring on his finger, a robe, and shoes for his feet! My son was lost and now he's found! He was dead and now he's alive! Let the feast begin!" (Tripp)

When I have sinned, I feel an immediate reluctance to go to Christ. I am ashamed to go. I feel as if it would not do to go, as if it were making Christ the minister of sin, to go straight from the pig-trough to the best robe, and a thousand other excuses. But I am persuaded they are all lies direct from hell. (Robert Murray M'Cheyne)

James argues the opposite way—"*Whoever turns back a wanderer from his wandering saves his soul from death and covers over a multitude of sins.*" There's no one who wants you in heaven more than Jesus! So the moment you feel yourself wandering, think of Him! Run to Him! Let someone bring you back to Him!

*Herein lies the secret of a heavenly walk . . . He who lives in the habit of a prompt acknowledgement of sin, with his eye resting calmly, believably, upon the crucified Redeemer, soars in spirit where the eagle's wings range not.*  
(Robert Murray M'Cheyne)

*God laughs over forgiven sin. (Peter Kreeft)*