



“Winning the Wayward”

Today we consider the last two verses of James’ letter. He wrote this letter to encourage both Jewish and Gentile believers in their Christian walk. He pointedly addressed the whole issue of genuine trust in God. We can easily claim to have strong faith until it is compared to God’s standard. Faith begins in our thinking and results in actions or behavior. Some title James “The Behavior of Belief”.

James penned over 50 instructions regarding how genuine faith acts, accompanied by insights related to the implementation of those instructions in our life.

- I. Faith’s response to trials 1:2-27**
Joyfully endure – continued endurance produces maturity and stability.
- II. Faith’s response to partiality and prejudice 2:1-13**
Love others as ourselves
- III. Faith’s True Nature 2:14-26**
Believe God and behave godly or demonstrate your belief by your behavior
- IV. Faith’s response to conversation 3:1-12**
Control your speech it can be destructive or constructive
- V. Faith’s way of life 3:13-4:12**
Live wisely according to God’s way
- VI. Faith’s Response to God’s will 4:13-17**
Include God in all your plans
- VII. Faith’s response to suffering and persecution 5:1-13**
Patiently endure and pray
- VIII. Faith’s response to joy 5:13**
Sing praises of Psalm it.
- IX. Faith’s response to weakness 5:14-18**
Ask for help, confess sins and pray for one another

The last two verses of James can be linked to the letter in two ways. It is either a continuation of the insight part of faith’s response to weakness or it could be viewed as a new category. As a new category one might title it, “Faith’s Response to Waywardness.” Since there is not really an instruction, I think that the verse fits better as a continuation of the previous section concerning response to weakness in the family.

A. The Instructions 5:14-17

1. The life circumstance – weakness

Is anyone among you without strength (weak)? James 5:14a

- a. Physical weakness - sickness*
- b. Weakness flesh*
- c. Emotional weakness*
- d. Weakness of faith or spiritual weakness*
- e. Demonically distressed*
- f. General Inability*

2. The prescribed conduct of the weak 5:14a, 16

James prescribes two instructions for those sensing weaknesses in any of these areas of their life.

a. Call for the elders of the church 5:14a

Is anyone among you without strength? Call for the elders of the church...James 5:14

Elders can be a reference to the official appointed elder leadership in the church or a reference to maturity. Ask for help from those spiritually mature.

b. Confess sins to one another 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another... James 5:16

James shifted from addressing an individual sensing weakness to a prescription that should be regularly practiced by the family. Why isn't this a regular practice in churches today? Fear, bad experience, pride, lack of trust in other people, embarrassment.

3. The prescribed conduct of the elders 5:14b

So, what are the "elders to do? James included specific instructions for them.

Is anyone among you without strength? Call for the elders of the church, and let them pray on him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14

a. Anoint with oil in the name of the Lord

b. Pray in faith

4. The anticipated consequence or outcome 5:15-16

What is the anticipated result of the prayer of faith?

Most of the words indicating some level of life change had the same range of application that our word "weakness" had.

The prayer of faith will bring...

a. Salvation

And the prayer of faith will save the one who is weak James 5:15

b. Restoration

And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. James 5:15

c. Forgiveness

And the prayer of faith will save the one who is weak, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. James 5:15

d. Healing

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. James 5:16

James included, like he has all through the letter, accompanying insight intended to motivate the eager practice of the instruction.

Why should we ask for and offer help from the church family?

B. Insights 5:16-20

1. Because prayer for the weak works 5:16-18

The prayer of a righteous person has great ability as it is working. James 5:16

Prayer is powerful! Prayer accomplishes much. James illustrated the power of prayer from the prayer life of Elijah.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. James 5:17-18

Some observations.

First, Elijah was not a super hero.

He struggled with the same struggles as the rest of humanity.

- He transformed from a powerful prophet to a whining wimp.
- A significant deliverer to a sidelined disaster
- A man who defied power to a man who hid from power.
- A man with every reason to live to a man pleading to die.
- A man of victorious prayer on a mountain to a desperation prayer in the valley.
- A man who waited for the word of the sovereign Lord to one who ran from the word of a wicked queen.
- A man of faith to a man of fear.

As we observed when we explored Elijah's depression we saw how...

God addressed his physical exhaustion and depletion with food and rest.

God addressed his fear with reality. "yes, the journey is too great for you."

God addressed his loss of loss of purpose and sense of failure with new perspective.

I am not out to get you.

Reconnect with me.

What are you doing here? Reevaluate your mission.

I never intended you to do it all.

You are not alone.

It all doesn't depend on you.

God addressed his isolation and loneliness with community. Elisha

God put him back in the game.

Elijah struggled like we do yet God promised impact, heard and answered prayer. We minister to one another with prayer and confession because God powerfully works through humble prayers of faith.

2. Because prayer for the weak is worth the effort. 19-20

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20

James reminded them that ministry to those struggling with weakness has great value.

He first paints a scenario, then describes an action and visualizes the result.

a. The circumstance - wandering

James used a conditional phrase indicating a likely scenario. If anyone should wander from true living and it is highly likely. The address to "brother" and "any of you" indicates the wanderer here is most likely a fellow Christian.

Matthew used this term when recounting the parable of the wandering sheep. It means to wander off or stray from the path.

This may seem like an abrupt ending to the letter, but it could summarize the whole purpose of the letter. The whole book of James addresses a departure from the true path.

Grumbling under trials.

Partiality and prejudice

Stumbling in many ways

Caustic tongue

Unbridled tongue

Hearing but not doing the word.

Phony or dead faith.

Friendship with the world.

Demonic disturbance.
Selfish ambition.
Foolish living
Blaming God for temptation
Quarrels and fighting
Pride and arrogance
Presumption

Insensitively to the poor
Grumbling
Impatience
Doubleminded
Doubt
Impure hearts.

The word was used for leading others from the truth i.e. deceiving others.

It was used in relation to being deceived.

James warned about being deceived in chapter one about God's goodness.

It indicates a heart not fully committed.

It references the consequences of not receiving the word implanted.

It applies to intentional and unintentional departure from God's ways.

James used a passive voice indicating an unintentional wandering. This word applies to all the things mentioned previously in his letter. If anyone of YOU (fellow believers) wanders from the right path and many will. The implication is that Christians will wander off track in their life.

James earlier emphasized that we ALL stumble in many ways! No surprise!

b. The conduct – turns back

James addresses a response toward those who wander off the path. If any wanders and someone turns them back. This ministry is not limited to pastors or elders. It includes ANYONE.

This term means to return, turn back, revert and appears often in the New Testament.

It is used in relation to a change or turn in heart or thinking.

It was used of John the Baptist turning the children of Israel to God, the hearts of father to their children, the disobedient to wisdom.

Peter "returned" to the Lord after his denials.

The call to repent and "turn back" to the Lord.

The turning to the Lord

Those who believed "turned" to the Lord.

Many "turned from" darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

but declared ... to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. Acts 26:20

Paul warned about turning back to the elementary principles Gal 4:9

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 1 Thessalonians 1:9

You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:25

The concept of turning back to the Lord appears often in the Old Testament as well.

God graciously allows us to partner with Him in urging people to turned back.

c. The consequence

James names two wonderful results from the effort to minister to wanderers. This should motivate us to expend the effort. Let them continually realize (present tense) or know or perceive or contemplate the power of ministry to the wandering.

(1) You will save his soul from death

This is the same term we observed above. It is the general word used regarding salvation, deliverance, restoration, healing, preservation, making whole, making well. James specifically focuses on the benefit to the soul rather than the body. He wrote of a work of God in the immaterial part of us. Earlier James wrote of the implanted word which is able to save your souls.

The term death communicates a separation, cessation of function.

Brain death, Body death, Relational death, Emotional death, Spiritual death

Sin causes death, deterioration, destruction, separation; slow or immediate.

James commented on the consequence of yielding to temptation in chapter one.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. James 1:14-15

Wandering results in death and destruction to the person and those around him.

Paul emphasized of the law of the sowing and reaping.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8

The loving act of turning one from a path of death will save them from eventual death or the way of death if he continues that path. “*Turn from the error of his way*” points to a lifestyle characterized by destruction. Those taking the Lord’s Supper unworthily could be saved from the consequences of sickness, weakness or death through the loving intervention of a fellow believer.

John promised a similar result.

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. 1 John 5:16-17

Moses passionately interceded for the sins of Israel and averted God’s plan to destroy them and start over with Moses. Ex 30

(2) You will cover considerable sin

This is a probable reference to the forgiveness stemming from prayer already prescribed above.

The Old Testament sense is to “cause many sins to be forgotten or forgiven.”

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. Psalm 32:1-2

LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin. Selah You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger. Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us! Psalm 85:1-4

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Proverbs 10:12

Peter alluded to this as well.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

Only God can forgive sins. We help bring a person to the point of right relationship with God where sin no longer breaks fellowship. “Calvary covers it all.” Once there is a turning back to the Lord and forgiveness expressed there is no need to broadcast that sin or continually hold it against them.

The Corinthians did this to one of their members and Paul had to boldly correct them. We will explore that important passage next week. The church often gravitates to one of two extremes when it comes to those who

have wandered from the path. We ignore it and do nothing. We ostracize them and cut them off. We sometimes automatically assume that when someone pulls back or drops out, they have defected when, in reality, they have been critically wounded on the battle field somewhere in desperate need of loving rescue and restoration.

Calls to come along side one another and minister to one another flow all through the New Testament. The ministry of restoration can be messy. It is hard. It can sometimes be like trying to rescue a drowning person. I learned in Lifeguard training that you always approach a drowning person with extreme caution.

Chuck Swindoll had this to say about this analogy.

Lifeguards who have rescued swimmers from drowning know better than most that victims tend to fight their rescuers in the hysteria of that terrifying moment. In an uncontrollable panic, they will even pull their rescuers under the water. Reason should tell them that if the lifeguard goes under, so does their only hope of surviving. But a drowning person isn't thinking reasonably. The same is often true when a believer attempts to rescue those who are floundering spiritually because their faith has suffered shipwreck. My mentor and lifelong friend, Professor Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary, tells the story of a young man who, after straying far from the Lord, was finally brought back by the help of a friend who loved him unconditionally. When he was fully restored, Dr. Hendricks asked him what it felt like when he was straying from God.

The man answered, "It seemed like I was being pulled farther and farther out to sea, into deep water. And all my friends were standing on the shoreline hurling accusations at me about justice, condemnation, and sin." Then he added, "But there was one Christian brother who actually swam out to get me and he wouldn't let me go. I fought him, but he withstood my fighting. He grasped me, put a life jacket around me, and managed to pull me to shore. By the grace of God he was the single reason I was restored—the man refused to let me go."

Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary - Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James, 1 & 2 Peter.

What kind of friend are we? How will we respond to the wanderer?

We have the opportunity to stop the descent into the way of death.

We have the opportunity to offer forgiveness and life.

I love the truth penned by Fanny Crosby in the old hymn "Rescue the Perishing".

Verse 1

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

Verse 2

Tho' 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

Verse 3

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 are broken Will vibrate once more

Verse 4

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 wanderer A Saviour has died

Rescue the perishing Care for the dying Jesus is merciful Jesus will save