

# Search & Rescue

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 07 May 2023

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[ 0 : 00 ] If you're there in your Bible, James chapter 5, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

! James chapter 5, verses 19 through 20. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 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.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? When Danny and I were newlyweds, we lived in a little one-bedroom apartment in North Kansas City, and we occupied that small space with two dogs.

One was Chuck, our English bulldog, and the other was Annabelle, a black lab mix we rescued. Chuck was slow and lazy. Annabelle was fast and clever. And Annabelle drove us crazy.

[ 1 : 27 ] You know some dogs, how after having them for a while, they can almost kind of take on a personality in a nature that is sort of human?

Well, not Annabelle. She was all dog. She was all animal. And she was an escape artist.

If we left our apartment door open even an inch, Annabelle would be gone and she would be running for miles. And you'd see her off in the distance when she would do that.

You would call out to her softly, tenderly, trying to coax her to follow your voice back home.

Come on, Annabelle. Let's go home. She'd perk up her head and she'd look at you and then she'd bolt in the other direction.

[ 2 : 26 ] I remember one night when Annabelle had Houdini'd us yet again. We chased her, but it was dark. It was late at night.

And with her black fur, she just vanished into the night. Danny and I got in the car and we drove through our apartment complex and we'd spot her.

One of us would get out of the car and we'd call out to her, try to even corner her. But she just kept running and running. And it was getting late.

And I was getting angry. I was thinking to myself, we feed you. We take care of you. We rescued you when nobody else wanted you.

And this is how you repay us for our love and our kindness. So finally I said to Danny, you know what? Just let her go. She's not wanting to be with us.

[ 3 : 27 ] She's wanting to do this. I'm tired of doing this. Following her around. Just let her go. And so we turned around and we went back home. But early that morning sometime after probably 1 a.m., we were feeling bad.

And we decided one more time that we'll go out and we'll search for Annabelle. We extended our search to the neighborhoods around our apartment.

And we turned down one dark, lonely street. And off in the distance, a creature was stirring, slowly walking down the roads towards us.

It was Annabelle, exhausted from her misadventure, covered in some kind of green slime. We don't know how that happened. We had a little bit of a mess.

Smelling like death. And we got her in the car, rolled down the windows. And in our apartment complex, we had like a stall where people could wash their cars.

[ 4 : 37 ] So we chained Annabelle up in that stall and we gave her a bath. And sometime after 2 a.m., we got back home. And this was a weeknight, I believe.

We're thankful that Annabelle had been found. The prodigal had returned home. She drove us crazy. But we loved her and we were thankful that our search and rescue mission was a success. In our text today, James tells us of what to do when someone wanders. When someone goes astray from the truth. Those who, in their wandering from the truth, have polluted their hearts, their

minds, their lives with the filth and the stench of sin.

We aren't to, when that happens, in our disgust or in our anger, just shrug our shoulders, throw up our hands and say something like, Just let them go.

Instead, we are to do for them what Jesus did for us when he saved us. Seek them.

[ 5 : 48 ] Find them. Rescue them from their wandering. And so the main idea of this morning's sermon is that God desires to use you to save others.

God desires to use you to save others. James, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has done just that through this epistle.

He's been used by God to present a series of tests for believers to evaluate whether or not they have been genuinely saved. He's challenged them to this point to evaluate the genuineness of their claim to be a follower of Jesus.

He's tested their confession by showing how a person who has been truly saved is both a hearer and a doer of the word. They are people whose faith in God endures trials and suffering.

They are people who overcome temptation, who don't show partiality to others based on their outward external appearances. They are people who have learned how to tame their tongues.

[ 6 : 54 ] They are people whose lives are lived in submission to God's will. They have a proper understanding of money and how it is to be used. They are people who pray and who seek prayer when they are spiritually weary and exhausted.

James is aware here and has been aware throughout this epistle of a reality that Jesus often spoke about and warned about.

For example, in Matthew 7, verses 21 through 23, Jesus says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?

And this is chilling. Jesus says, I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, workers of lawlessness.

[ 8 : 08 ] Now, throughout the history of the church, there have always been tares among the wheat. Rocky, shallow, thorny soils that produce no spiritual fruit.

People who draw near to God. But as Isaiah says in chapter 9, verse 13, they draw near with their words, but their hearts are far from him.

In James chapter 4, verses 7 through 10, he addressed such people directly when he said, Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. And so now as he closes his epistle with these final two verses, he addresses those who have passed the test of genuine saving faith.

[ 9 : 16 ] And he calls them here to pursue those who are lost and who are wandering from the truth and are in sin. He implores them to obey God's desire to use them as he saves those who wander from the truth and are lost in sin.

Again, God desires to use you to save others. And in these verses, James gives two instructions on how to do just that.

The first instruction comes from verse 19. And there we see that we are to search for those who have wandered. Search for those who have wandered.

Again, in the beginning of verse 19, James says, My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth. And with this last concluding statement, James transitions from addressing the spiritually weary who need prayer to a different group of people within the church.

Those who have or may soon wander from the truth. Now, I think it's important that we pause here and keep a couple of things in mind before talking about those who wander from the truth.

[ 10 : 40 ] First, the Bible says that all Christians were wandering from the truth before God saved them. We read in 1 Peter 2.25, In Ephesians 2.25, He describes our spiritual condition prior to our salvation and conversion.

There He says, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in

the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved. Secondly, what we need to keep in mind as we think about those who wander from the truth is that God is the ultimate searcher and Savior of our souls.

Jesus said in John 10, verse 11 and 27 and 28, Jesus is the good shepherd who searches for His sheep, calls out to them by their name and rescues them by giving life to them, by giving His own life to save them from their sins, which He accomplished on the cross.

[12:57] And thirdly, His desire is that all those whom He's saved join Him, sharing this good news with unbelievers, that they will turn from their sin and be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28, 18 through 20 tells us, And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you to the end of the age.

2 Corinthians 5, 20 says to us, Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.

You see, God desires that you join Him. God desires that you be involved. God desires that you be engaged. God desires that you participate and understand the urgency of searching for those who have wandered from the truth.

In the rest of verse 19, James talks about someone who brings those who have wandered from the truth back to it. God's desire is that you be that someone.

[14:24] You know, as kids, and sometimes as adults too, when someone needed to volunteer to do something that was uncomfortable, no one was volunteering, someone would say, nose goes.

You ever done that before? Nose goes? Okay, I'll share with you what it is. Everyone would race to put their finger on their nose. Some of you know what I'm talking about. You put your finger on your nose.

And the last person who didn't have their finger on their nose was the one who would go. They were it. But when it comes to joining God in searching for those who wander from the truth, our response, if we truly understand the amazing grace that we have received from God when He saved us, shouldn't be to look around for someone else to volunteer or to race to cover our nose so we don't have to go, but to raise our hand like Isaiah and say, here I am, Lord.

Send me. Now it's important to understand that James has a specific wanderer in mind in verse 19 that we are to be searching for.

It is anyone among you. This describes someone who at some point made a public profession that Jesus Christ was their Lord and Savior.

[15:49] Joined, probably was baptized and then joined the fellowship of the church and regularly participated in its life and in its ministry. Someone who maybe was, as we like to say, on fire for the Lord.

But over time, their enthusiasm diminished, their participation lessened, and they were neglecting assembling with the church for worship, engaged in activity that contradicted their confession that they were a disciple of Jesus Christ.

It may have been the case that someone in the church stayed active in its ministries, but had wandered into teachings and myths and false doctrines and false teachers that were leading them to stray from the truth.

It may have been the case that someone in the church was active in its ministries, appeared on the surface to be anchored in the word, committed to the truth, and were doctrinally and theologically orthodox, at least in what they said.

But their lifestyle told a different story. They were engaged in habitual sinful activity, which called, again, into question the genuineness of their salvation.

[17:03] And in that way, they too had wandered from the truth. As Christians, you and I need to be on the lookout for such people and be the someone who brings them back to the truth.

Be the person who calls. Be the person who texts, who writes. Be the person who's willing to ask the hard questions.

Be the person who doesn't turn a blind eye to your brother or your sister's wandering from the truth. You know, in Oklahoma, we have a state law that requires every person, whether as a private citizen or a professional, who has reason to believe that a child under the age of 18 is a victim of neglect, to immediately report that to the Department of Human Services.

If you see abuse, you are required to do something about it. You are required to report it. You are required to be the someone who sheds light on the darkness that that child is enduring.

In the same way, when you see someone wandering from the truth, you have a duty. You have a duty to report.

[ 18 : 36 ] You have a duty to go to that person one on one. But to turn a blind eye to them, to think that it's none of your business to neglect those who have wandered from the truth, is to wander from the truth yourself.

James said in chapter 4, verse 17, So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Be the someone. Now, as you search for them, the most effective way to bring them back, to persuade them to return to the truth from which they've wandered, is to do so in a spirit of gentleness and compassion and love.

As the Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 6, 1-2, 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. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Now, the temptation for us when we see people who have wandered is to act as if we've never wandered from the truth ourselves and then to shame them.

[ 20 : 01 ] As if you weren't totally lost before God graciously saved you. Matthew 18, 12-4, Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep.

He said, What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. And we need to have that same attitude as we search for those who wander from the truth.

Imagine, a father has five children. Late one night, the smoke detectors are going off.

The father and the wife, the mother, they awake to find the house is filled with smoke. They hear the crackling of the wood all around them, panicked. he races to his children's bedrooms and begins to rouse them, to wake them up, calling out to some, carrying others out of the house, getting them to safety.

[ 21 : 19 ] Once outside, gasping for air, he squints through his dried eyes and he counts four kids. What will the father do?

Will he say, well, four out of five is pretty good? That's like 80% of our children who are safe. No. He races back into that house to find and to rescue his child, sacrificing his life if need be to bring it back to safety.

God is a father who counts his children. He knows their names. He rejoices that some are already safely in Christ, but some are missing.

God doesn't abandon the 99. They are safely in his kingdom, guided by his Holy Spirit. But he desires those who are not yet in his fold.

For those who have wandered into peril. Now, I think of the apostle Paul. Paul persecuted the church. He hated Christians. He sought their imprisonment and even their death.

[ 22 : 37 ] But Jesus, resurrected, appeared to him, called out to him, and saved him and sent Ananias to him to pray for him and to strengthen him for the task that the Lord had for him.

David, in the Old Testament, had wandered from the truth. He had taken another man's wife and he tried to cover it up by having that man killed. Remember, it was Nathan, the prophet, who boldly and courageously and compassionately went to David, shared a story that convicted him, and then he pointed his finger at him and he said, you are the man.

And he repented. God desires to use you to save those who are lost and to rescue those who have stumbled and wandered from the truth.

James' first instruction is that you should search for them and now his second instruction is that you seek to bring them back. In verse 20, seek to bring them back.

Let him know, he writes, that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

[ 23 : 55 ] Now the question that we need to ponder here is this. In verse 19, these wanderers from the truth who are among the churches James was writing to, meaning that some of them had professed to be a follower of Christ and now here in verse 20 they are called sinners.

And typically in the New Testament, sinner, that word in the Greek is used to describe someone who is outside of the kingdom, someone who is not saved, those who are without Christ, those who are without God, those who are in need of salvation.

In every church there are those who make shipwreck of their professed faith by wandering from God's truth. people who appear to have received the gospel.

Again, they've been baptized, they've taken communion, they've purchased a nice, new, expensive study Bible. But before long, they realize the cost that comes with following Christ and they're not willing to make it.

They are people like Judas who everyone thought was truly a follower of Jesus. Remember Jesus on the night of his betrayal at the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, he has all of his disciples with him and he says, one of you will betray me.

[ 25 : 21 ] You know, it wasn't like the other disciples said, aha, Jesus, we've been gathering the evidence, we've been concerned about this for some time. we think we knew who it was, but we didn't want to usurp your authority.

It's Judas, right? No, what did they do instead? Is it I? Is it me? They had no idea.

The first church in Acts exploded in growth. People were selling their property and giving it to the church to meet the needs of others. Among them was a couple, Ananias, not the one who went to Paul, and Sapphira.

They sold some land but they kept back some of the proceeds for themselves. However, they lied about it, wanting to appear genuine, wanting to appear holy, wanting to receive the praise of men for their gift and they paid the price for that by dropping dead when their true intentions were revealed.

Jesus had Judas the first church had Ananias and Sapphira. Paul had Demas. In 1 John 2.19 we read about people like them in other churches, false teachers who are wolves dressed in sheep's clothing who arise from within the church but soon depart from its fellowship, sometimes leading others within the church astray with them.

[ 26 : 51 ] John says, they went out from us but they were not of us for if they had been of us they would have continued with us but they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

And so I think this is one reason among many of why we need to share the gospel constantly in our church. We can't assume that everyone here because they're a member, because they've been baptized that they're truly born again.

Hebrews 3.12-14 says, take care brothers lest there be any of you be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by this deceitfulness of sin for we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

In the case of the Hebrews the temptation was to return to old traditions following the Levitical system once again that Christ had made completely unnecessary.

[ 28 : 02 ] For us today it may be the temptation to revert back to our old self the person that we were before Christ saved us but for the person who continues to reject the gospel that they claim to believe it's evidence that they never truly were saved in the first place.

In that case what do we do? Well form a secret committee an undercover task force whose job it is to weed out the counterfeits so we can discover who they are and tar and feather them and send them on their way and we might have to send them on their way but not tarred and feathered.

Jesus says there's a time when you have to stop casting your pearls before swine but only after we have done all that we can to warn them of the consequences of their sins which if they're unsaved will lead to death eternal never ending ultimate separation from God forever in hell and we plead with them repent turn to Christ this must be of great concern for us but I think and I'm confessing here myself too I think too often it isn't and I love being a southern baptist but I think in many ways that applies to our entire denomination and our churches we've become obsessed with statistics

and the statistic that I think we've become most obsessed with is baptism instead of discipleship  
yes

Jesus said go and share the gospel and baptize those who profess faith in him but that wasn't all that he said he followed it up by saying and expressing the importance of discipling them teach them he said to observe all that I have commanded you and for far too long we've treated baptism as if it was the finish line of the Christian faith once they're wet once they've been dunked okay we're good to go report the number instead of walking alongside of them and seeing it not as the finish line but the starting point and discipling them and encouraging them and holding them accountable when they wander from the truth we're good at getting people wet but I think that we've failed to keep watch over their souls to keep them accountable to their confession to disciple them to go to them when they've wandered from the truth and to speak the truth and love to them in hopes that they will turn to Christ genuinely truly and maybe savingly if they weren't genuinely saved to begin with so it could be that those who have wandered from the truth who are among us never really believed in the first place though the

Bible says that God is sovereign in salvation it also says that he desires to use us as he calls his sheep into his fold and we'll know who are truly his based on how they respond to our searching and our seeking to bring them back to the truth from which they wandered but I think our seeking those who have gone astray applies to those among us who have what we like to call backslidden James has just addressed those who are spiritually weak and weary they need to have others pray for them and bear their burdens and you know sometimes a believer a genuine born again follower of Christ can regress in neglecting their spiritual disciplines and get entangled in sin and the Bible says that those who do so will receive God's discipline and that's a good thing

[ 33 : 01 ] Hebrews 12 9-11 says moreover we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we've respected them for it how much more should we submit to the father of spirits and live they disciplined us for a little while as they thought best but God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in his holiness no discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful later on however it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it you guys have heard my stories I've shared with you about how much of an idiot I was in college and here's another one in college I wandered from the truth I went to a Christian school and they required us to go to chapel during the week but they did not require us to go to church on Sunday and so for a kid who had grown up going to church just about every Sunday this was my time to get another day to sleep in my roommates went to church our

RA went to church they all were on the baseball team as well and so one of those Sundays my freshman year I'd slept in and they came back into my room and my roommates with our RA decided to so we had bunk beds we had a bottom a middle and a top so three and I was on the very top and they decided to we also had a bullhorn that we would use to play jokes on people one of them had the bullhorn and the other two were pulling my bed off the bunk while on the bullhorn our RA was yelling at me why didn't you go to church why didn't you go to church where were you you need to go to church what's wrong with you why aren't you in church and how did I respond to that guys you're right thank you thank you for your compassion thank you for your concern that I didn't go to church today was that my response no it wasn't my response but

I was wandering during that time and I remember that my youth pastor I don't know if I called him or if he was checking up on me and I just was honest with him about you know some things that I was struggling with and he I our church was maybe 45 minutes an hour away he drove to my college and he sat down with me in my dorm room and for about two hours he conversed with me he had compassion for me he prayed with me and you know before before coming here as Danny and I were considering if the Lord was calling us to Highland Park I had lunch with him and I found out that in high school we almost got him fired because we went to a convention in Toronto Canada it was a Nazarene youth convention and you only had to be 16 to get a piercing there and so three of the four of us came back with a piercing and he said yeah

I almost got fired for that and so keeping all of this in mind I think here I am this kid who gave! to pray for me to ask me the hard questions that I didn't want to answer and that helped so the main point of application be the someone who turns wanderers back and be the someone who does it in a Christ like way if you see someone wandering know that it's you you are the someone who should go to them and before you do that I would say it's wise to get the facts it's wise also to check your own heart your own motivation for why you are going to this brother this sister and then to pray and

then to go to them directly for application questions for you all to think about today and discuss in your community groups tonight question number one have you ever wandered from the truth and had another

Christian bring you back share a testimony about a time like that or have you ever been the someone who has sought to bring a wandering person back to truth share those testimonies!

[ 37 : 52 ] question number two many Christians avoid trying to restore a sinning believer because confrontation makes them uncomfortable how can you not let your feelings interfere with what the Bible says that you should do share some passages of scripture about that question three read Galatians 6 1 through 2 what does this passage say about your motivation and conduct when you seek to bring someone back to the truth that they have wandered from and by the way bull horns don't work okay bull horns don't work unless you're a coach of a sports team or a gym teacher or something like that or a police officer question number four how do you know when to stop casting your pearls before swine how do you know when you've been searching you've been seeking you've been praying you've been having these conversations how do you know when at least for you it's time to stop let's pray heavenly father thank you that you are a God who searches and who seeks that Lord we as your word says we've all gone astray we've all sinned we've all fallen short of your glory and it's by grace that you have saved us through faith in your son

Jesus Christ who lived the perfect sinless life that we could not live and who died sacrificially in our place for our sins who rose again on the third day victoriously And God it's by your grace through faith in him that the multitude of our sins is wiped away and forgiven completely into you Lord be all the praise and the worship and the glory for that God we also know that you have given us the privilege to join you in going and making disciples to see you at work through us as you do the miraculous bringing a dead soul back to life changing that person from the inside out Lord what a privilege you've given us to be used by you to do that so Lord we pray that you forgive us that too often instead of joining you in that we turn a blind eye we feel uncomfortable and so we come up with excuses for why we should not be that someone

Lord we pray that your word would be fresh in our mind that your spirit would bring it to the forefront of our attention when we think about those who have wandered in God that we would respond in obedience to be that someone to go to them in a spirit of compassion gentleness and love that they would be rescued that they would be restored in some cases Lord that they would be saved thank you for your grace it's in Jesus name that we pray amen Thank you.