

RUF Large Group Bible Study
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Dec. 1, 2004
James 5:13-20²

James 5:13-20 13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 17 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. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. 19 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.

We come to the end of the book of James. I have to admit I've been surprised at how much I've like this little book written by the brother of Jesus. It's been fascinating to me to see James interweave faith and practice, thinking and doing, subjective and objective, outward and inward. This last passage is no exception, so we'll simply dive in since there is so much here for us to discover.

James pulls many of his concerns together in this last hurrah. He stresses humility, true fellowship and a commitment to the truth that actually affects our lives.

Prayer and Praise

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

James begins by condensing all of life into two categories – the good and the bad. That about covers any circumstance you can think of. John Stott writes, “Here then, in two words, are all life’s experiences, and each of them in turn can so easily be the occasion of spiritual upset. Trouble can give rise to an attitude of surly rebellion against God and the abandonment of spiritual practices. Equally, times of ease and affluence beget complacency, laziness and the assumption that we are able of ourselves to cope with life and God is forgotten. James is fully aware of all this, for the persistence, throughout his letter, of the themes of trial, alongside warnings against allowing the heart to stray after riches, indicate his acquaintance with the full run of life, and his concern to armor us against its varied assaults.”³

In the suffering times, you should pray. You can suffer physically of course, which we'll see more in this passage. But you can also suffer in other ways. You don't get the grade you want. You bomb the test. You aren't asked out or are asked out by the wrong person or rejected by the person you asked out. Your dreams take a blow. You don't get the job you want. Your roommate is too messy. You can't pay your bills this month. Someone else gets what you want. What should you do?

Prayer, as we've seen throughout James, shows our dependency and “to pray to him is to acknowledge his sovereign power to meet our needs, and to praise is to acknowledge his sovereign power in appointing our circumstances. Whether as our source of supply in need, or the source of the gladness of our joy, God is our sufficiency.”⁴

James also tells us that we should have a response when things are good. When we do get the job. What do you do when you find the man of your dreams? When you get accepted? When you ace the test? When you find the perfect house? When you are with good friends? Do you praise God for his good gifts to you in all of these circumstances? I have to admit that I too often don't.

We have a praise book in our house where we write down answers to prayers and things that God has done for us that we're thankful for. I have to admit I make far too infrequent entries.⁵ But if we don't thank God and offer him praise then we're like that friend or child who only calls and shows up in need. We're happy to help him out, but it does get pretty old after awhile. You know that he doesn't appreciate it when things are going well.

This idea of prayer and praise for all of life isn't very well expressed in our daily lives or either in our art forms. Dr. Doriani muses about the lack of a fullness of life expressed in our Christian music: “We need music for worship, public and private. But we can also use songs about nature, work, food, sports – anything that makes us want to praise God. Praise of God should not be confined to public worship. Imagine a family of four. Child one stars in a school musical, child two excels at a

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² Resources used: Peter Davids, *Commentary on James*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982; Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000; John MacArthur, *James*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1998; Dr. Tim Keller's sermons on James found at www.redemptor.com; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, Doubleday: New York, 1995; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (New Interpreter's Bible), Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1998; J.A. Motyer, *The Message of James*, Intervarsity Press: Downer's Grove, Illinois, 1985.

³ Stott, 187

⁴ Stott, 188

⁵ As in *no* entries

soccer match, the father gets a promotion at work and the mother completes and sells a painting, all in the span of ten days. How wonderful to have songs that help us consecrate our joy to the Lord. It can be difficult to achieve and succeed and not succumb to pride. Musicians should write and we should sing songs that turn our successes into occasion to rejoice with God. This way, we sanctify pleasures and consecrate pains.”⁶

James next narrows his focus to what should happen when you are sick.

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

When you’re sick, you should call the elders. “The word James chooses for “sick” literally means “weak.” If the context makes it clear, the term can refer to spiritual or mental weakness (Rom 5:6, 6:19, cf. 4:19) or even a troubled conscience (1 Cor 8:7-10, Rom 14:1-2). Certainly, chronic physical illness can afflict the spirit. Yet James chiefly refers to the sick who need physical healing (5:16).”⁷

It appears that this person is sick enough that he can’t get out of bed. He’s calling for the elders to come and pray “over” him, perhaps signifying that he can’t get up. We don’t want to read too much into this, but we do want to notice that this probably isn’t telling you to call up the elders every time you get a sniffle, headache or poison ivy. But do we ever call the elders? This should be an important ministry of the church, and you should feel every right to call the elders to pray with you and anoint you.

From this text, we can make a few other observations. One is that this appears to be happening in private. At the house of the sick person, the hospital room. It isn’t a public prayer meeting of healing. And the text does nothing to indicate that these men have any special healing powers.⁸ There isn’t a specific gift of healing indicated. These are the men who are the shepherds of the church and who care about the wholeness of their people.

“The sick shall *call the elders*. Elders are the permanent local leaders of the church. The Jerusalem church had elders who served under the apostles (Acts 15:2-6, 22-23). Paul appointed elders to oversee the churches he planted (14:23, 20:17-28!). They continued Paul’s work, overseeing his churches in his absence (20:28-32).

The apostles commissioned elders to watch the flock. Peter tells elders to ‘*be shepherds of the flock that is under your care, serving as overseers*’ (1 Pet 5:2). As shepherds, elders come alongside the people to serve. As overseers, they know the needs of the people better than they knew themselves. Yet, above all, an elder is to be an example of godliness and faith (1 Pet 5:3, 1 Tim 3:2-3).

Sick men and women call the elders as a group. They do not call those with a gift for healing; rather they call all to pray for healing. James says the prayers of a righteous man are effective. Since the first qualification for an elder is holiness - not social standing or theological acumen - the prayers of elders are effective. The elders pray for healing, not for miracles. It doesn’t matter if a healing is quiet or splashy. True healings garner all the attention they need.”⁹

So the elders show up, and they pray. So far so good. But they also anoint the person with oil. What’s that all about? I’ve been to churches who had a time of prayer where the elders and leaders and their wives would go up front to pray with people. Sometimes they also take a vial of oil and anoint the person during the prayer. This is one of the verses where the Roman Catholic church derives its teaching of the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which is now called since Vatican II the “anointing of the sick.”

Both of these seem misinformed and unfounded. We must remember that this practice is a private one first of all, and elevating it to the status of a sacrament reads far too much into what is going on. Oil does not confer grace. What does it do?

I suggest, after studying this, that it has a practical aspect- medicinal. The Samaritan used oil and wine to help doctor the wounded traveler he found. Wine would help anesthetize the wound, and oil would cleanse and loosen it. We can see this as a implicit acceptance of medicine and technology for the healing of our wounds. We shouldn’t think, like some do, that going to the hospital is wrong and sinful.

Oil also seems to have a pastoral aspect - a sort of like a “prop” to stimulate faith. Jesus did this sometimes. Did he really need his own spit and mud to heal a blind man? But there is something to the physicality of things, and Jesus also seems to use these props when one of the senses has been impaired. Sight or sound is missing, so another sense may need to be accentuated to compensate. Thus, oil wouldn’t be medicinal, but showing that something spiritual is going on here.

We can also see that the oil is symbolic - oil is used in the Bible to set the person apart, in this case for the ministry of prayer. This makes sense if we are using the actual medicinal technology of the day and not oil instead. We are anointing the person to say, we are praying for you in a special way.

So let’s say we do all that. You have e coli and you’re in the hospital and you call the elders and they come and pray and anoint you with oil and... what happens?

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

⁶ Doriani, *James*, as yet unpublished, but will be a P&R book soon

⁷ Doriani, *James*, as yet unpublished, but will be a P&R book soon

⁸ I know a gal who thought/thinks her sister had the gift of healing. So they would do their healing ministry with various girls and people they knew. I think that was probably a bad idea.

⁹ Doriani, *James*, as yet unpublished, but will be a P&R book soon

Let's start by saying that we should pray for healing. And that we should not necessarily seek the dramatic, without secondary means sort of healing. God uses doctors and medicine too and that isn't any less of a healing. We should praise him for his work through any sort of means he chooses. And I'm going to say that we should remember that God doesn't always heal a person physically in this life. "Nowhere is a spirit of jaunty confidence more misplaced than in the sick-room. It is no time for unconditional predictions of what the Lord will do. Precious in his sight is every affliction of his people (Ps. 56:8), not just their death (Ps. 116:15), and he keeps his secrets to himself."¹⁰

"When he set out his basic attitude to the trials and joys of life in verse 13, James insisted that we should deliberately refer all life's experiences to the God from whom they come, for praise in a time of well-being and prayer in a time of difficulty, are alike acknowledgements that one sovereign hand is over them all. Even when we go to the doctor, then, our eyes are on the Lord. He alone can heal. There is no such thing as (so to speak) a 'non-spiritual' healing. When the aspirin works, it is the Lord who has made it work; when the surgeon sets the broken limb and the bone knits, it is the Lord who has made it knit."¹¹

Let's also notice that there is an aspect of the spiritual in this healing. James isn't only talking about physical healing, which we can easily see because he explicitly bring in "*And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*"

We should note here that there was a tendency in the ancient cultures to overemphasize the relationship between physical infirmity and spiritual sickness. If you got a cold, the way to get better would be to confess your sins. You wouldn't get sick if you didn't sin (there are some who still think this way, which is a natural progression from a perfectionistic outlook). However, in our day, we would have to say we underemphasize the relationship. People don't even think about a connection between the spiritual and the physical. I'm sick – I take drugs. I get sick again – I take drugs again. So often people merely mask the symptoms without dealing with the real problems. A person might be too busy and get rundown by doing too much with too little sleep. No-do's eventually won't work. A person might be wasting money on bad foods and thus be more susceptible to germs floating around. Medicating everything isn't the answer.

We want to reemphasize the connection.¹² There is a connection. Your body and your soul go together. Thus, how you're doing spiritually affects how you feel physically. And vice versa, how you feel physically affects how you are doing physically. You may not want to spend time with God because you aren't getting enough sleep. You may be depressed because you aren't exercising or eating right. You may be sinning because you are in the physical wrong place and being in another place would help tremendously.

But what happens when someone prays and isn't healed? Many in our own state of Oklahoma would say that this has to mean there has been a defective prayer somewhere in the line. Prayer of faith *have to* be answered with healed lives.

Dr. Doriani answers this false teaching better than I ever could, pulling in a bit from 5:16 to help:

"In 5:16, the word 'healed' signifies physical healing. Therefore, we should pray for one another, for healing. Some Christians grow weary of praying about physical ailments. They want to pray for 'more important things.' That is understandable, but it is still fitting to ask God to heal the body.

Other Christians claim that everyone can be healed, if they pray with enough faith. Conversely, if anyone is not healed, they can blame their lack of faith. This teaching doubles the misery for the chronically ill. They suffer their original problem and they suffer the stigma of insufficient faith.

This kind of thinking, which mars some charismatic and Pentecostal churches, makes several mistakes. First, it forgets that God numbers our days, that everyone must die. Therefore, even the most faithful disciples suffer a final illness. No amount of faith will deliver them from it.

Second, Scripture notes that certain men of great faith were not healed of illnesses. Paul worked many miracles, but he did not heal associates such as Timothy (1 Tim 5:23), Trophimus (Tit 3:20) and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25). And the Lord never relieved Paul of his own 'thorn in the flesh,' which was apparently a physical affliction (2 Cor 12:7-10).¹³

Third, James is not promising universal healing in this life. We already saw that the word 'save' can mean a physical or a spiritual deliverance. The phrase 'the Lord will raise him up' (5:15b) also has two possible meanings. The Lord can raise the sick from their beds (Matt 9:6, Acts 3:7). But in the New Testament, the Lord will 'raise them up' often refers to the resurrection on the last day (John 6:40, 6:44, 6:54; 1 Cor 15:15). The Lord raises up all the sick who believe in him – some in this life, some for eternal life. The Lord will heal all his people sooner or later. Some rise from sickness in this life, after prayer by the elders. But others rise bodily only on the last day, when the Lord raises the dead. Since he determines when he heals, we should not blame sick believers for their lack of faith."¹⁴

The prayer in faith brings into view the relationship between God's sovereignty and our prayers. "The faith exercised in prayer is faith in the God who sovereignly accomplishes his will. When we pray, our faith recognizes, explicitly or implicitly, the overruling providential purposes of God. We may at times be given insight into that will, enabling us to pray with absolute confidence in God's plan to answer as we ask. But surely these cases are rare – more rare than our subjective, emotional desires

¹⁰ Stott, 199

¹¹ Stott, 193

¹² I think you can see that connection in the way James writes. He says that the prayer of faith will *save* the one who is sick and also that we confess our sins so that we might be *healed*. Those are sort of the "wrong" words in our modern thinking.

¹³ Paul's thorn was probably a physical ailment. See V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1984), 548-50; F.F. Bruce, Paul, *Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 135-6.

¹⁴ Doriani, *James*, as yet unpublished, but will be a P&R book soon

would lead us to suspect. A prayer for healing then, must usually be qualified by a recognition that God's will in the matter is supreme."¹⁵

This understanding of God sovereignly answering our prayers according to his own perfect and good purposes is important. God isn't bound to everything we say. We realize that he either answers our prayers or else he answers the prayers we would have made if we had known everything he does. Otherwise, we have a situation like in "Bruce Almighty" where God clicks the yes button on our prayers and chaos breaks out. Just how many people can win the lottery, after all? If this blanket answering were the case, "Indeed, if the promises really meant that we always got what we asked, as soon as we asked it, and in the measure in which we asked, we would speedily stop praying and our friends would petition us to stop praying for them. What an intolerable burden such praying would impose on our frail wisdom! And what a weight of unhelpful and mischievous answers to prayer we should pull down on our own heads and the heads of those who were unfortunate enough to figure on our prayer list!"¹⁶

Skipping over the first part of 5:16 for a minute, we note that James writes that "*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*" James will go on to show us what he means with Elijah. But James says that these sorts of prayer have great power. He reminds us of this because it's an unexpected great power. It's like looking over some land that no one wants and thinks will never produce and then finding out there is oil underneath the surface. It's like a cave that goes far back to where the gold veins are. And anyone can pray. That's the beauty of it. It's not a spiritual gift. It's not something you have to get ordained to do. You can do it in private, in your head, on paper, with great words, with mumbled and jumbled thoughts, with grand and thought-out language, with modern or ancient influences. It is working.

James illustrates what he means by using Elijah as an example. He was "*a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently.*" Huh? He was a prophet of God that is in the OLD TESTAMENT! How is that in any way like one of us? Calm down. When you look at the narrative of Elijah, you'll see that he was someone who displayed faith and commitment and then showed the depths of despair and depression. He could be brave and resolute but then he also ran for his life when he smelled danger. He was both selfless for others and filled with self-pity. That's sort of like you, isn't it? It's a lot like me. And yet Elijah was right with God. He was a righteous person, meaning he wasn't perfect by any means, but he was right with God, set apart for Him.

Is there any doubt that James wants us to pray? Let me ask you, how is your prayer life? Are you praying in your sufferings and giving praises in your victories, however large or small they may be? Are you praying for God to work in your life and in the lives of those around you? Are you praying that you would see him more fully and love him more deeply? That this Christmas season might be alive for you? That your sin might be exposed and dealt with during this new year?

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

O what peace we often forfeit; O what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry; Everything to God in prayer.

Confession

James really deals with confession under the heading of prayer and praise, but it makes sense to pull it out as a separate point. Not that it is completely separated, but it can be differentiated enough to talk about in more detail

He writes: *16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

James has talked at length about loving other people. Loving the poor and the widows. Not taking advantage of people, but caring for the downcast as God does. Here is the basis for such true relationship. Confession.

Yuck. We hate confession. It smacks against everything within us to say we're sorry, to ask for forgiveness. But the Bible says that it is of the utmost importance. First of all with God. And then, right after, as an indication of our faith with God, with each other.

Realize that this teaching takes place in the context of both a Greek and a Jewish world. The eastern way of thinking would do anything to "save face," something which is still an important concept in eastern cultures. People will go out of their way to not embarrass someone and to not be embarrassed.

And this says that that is wrong. We're supposed to admit when we've screwed up. We're to ask for forgiveness from those we've hurt. This shows our humility, our trusting in Christ instead of our reputations and also

What instructs our confession? Remember that our confession is to be for healing. For reconciliation, for fellowship renewal. So we don't confess in order to wound. We may wound, but that is in order to heal.

Here are the three main categories of confession "types":

1. The offender confesses to the one offended, whether to a human or to God.
2. We confess secret sins to God, since sins such as anger, envy, or lust offend him, even if they never lead to action. It is highly unlikely that we will accomplish anything constructive by telling someone "I envied you" or "I lusted after you."

¹⁵ Moo, 244

¹⁶ Stott, 199

3. We confess private sins privately to the one or the few we offended. We confess public sins (which offend many), publicly. For example, if a leader propounds heresy, deceives his people, or misuses public funds, public confession is apt.¹⁷

Remember too that when you confess, you shouldn't expect your relationship to be automatically restored to its prior intimacy. Think of the prodigal son when he came to his senses. He realized he had sinned against heaven and against his father and came to his father asking to only be restored to the status of a servant. His father did more than that, but the son realized that damage had been done. We come humbly and ask for forgiveness.

John MacArthur writes: "Maintaining open, sharing and praying relationships with other Christian will help keep believers from bottoming out in their spiritual lives. Such relationships help give the spiritual strength that provides victory over sin. And they also provide godly pressure to confess and forsake sins before they become overwhelming to the point of total spiritual defeat."

Are you confessing your sins? Are you approachable? We're instructed in the Bible to even go to someone who we think thinks we've wronged him or her. We're to come to God and say to him, "God have mercy on me, a sinner." So likewise we do with others, showing we understand God is still at work on our lives.

Reclamation- Wandering from the truth – to death!

19 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 finishes his whole book with these two incredible verses.

He says that there is a very real possibility that there will be people in the church who will wander from the truth. It is your job to bring them back, and you have to realize that what you're saving them from is *death*. Not just error, not just bad times, but death.

"James' point rather is this, that within every fellowship there are those whose profession is not real and whose attachment to Christ is not yet a saving faith. Their true condition, as still held by sin and death, becomes evident to the caring eyes of those who watch within the fellowship. Departure from the truth, and from the life that accords within the truth, gives a revealing testimony to how things really are and calls forth a spirit of concern in every truly Christian heart."¹⁸

What observations can we make about this?

First, if you can wander from something, then there must be a place to wander from. There is truth. There is a standard. John Piper writes this: "The point here is simply (and yet profoundly and controversially) that there is truth. And since there is truth, there is error. And since there is truth and error, there is a way to walk that is called sin, namely, to walk out of sync with the truth, and in sync with error.

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, 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.

Notice the four key words. In verse 19 a person is straying from the TRUTH. Then in verse 20 this person is called a SINNER, his sin is called ERROR, and this is described as his WAY. '...he who turns a sinner from the error of his way...' So there is truth. And there is a way to live that is out of sync with that truth. And that way is error and sin."¹⁹ So, are you with me that someone can wander from the truth? Now you have to see, as James has been teaching all throughout the whole book that if we understand the truth, that has to affect our lives. "'Truth' and 'godliness' belong together. It is impossible (in Scripture) to make 'truth' a mere matter of holding some propositions or creedal 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 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."²⁰

So wandering from the truth will look like something in life. It isn't just a theoretical proposition. It isn't sitting around wondering about the divinity of Christ, though that may be a part of it. So what is wandering from the truth. Now's when I get to stepping on toes.

Wandering from the truth is dating a man you know isn't a Christian. Wandering from the truth is sleeping with your boyfriend and saying it's okay because God gave you those feelings and you wouldn't have them if they were wrong. Wandering from the truth is a month or a semester or a year without Bible teaching or true fellowship. Wandering from the truth is time away from the church. Wandering from the truth is shying away from authentic relationships because they hurt too much. Wandering from the truth is refusing to change when you are wrong. Wandering from the truth is deciding to go after career at the expense of family and God. Wandering from the truth is many things.

None of them look very scary at first. Proverbs 14:12 says, *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.* That's why it's *wandering*. It's a one-degree adjustment, and then another. And then we're facing ninety

¹⁷ John Stott, *Confess Your Sins* (Hodder, 1964), 12.

¹⁸ Stott, 212

¹⁹ Piper, sermons online on this text

²⁰ Stott, 210

degrees from where we started. It's a small decision. It's a "month-off." It's a distancing of a relationship that's perfectly justifiable in separation from anything else.

But you put it all together and you are headed for destruction. Death. Death is not good in this case. It's a big deal. Now, I must insert here that true Christians will never be lost. Your assurance of salvation should be lost, you should wonder if indeed you are a Christian and you should repent. Spurgeon puts it this way, to paraphrase him: A true Christian is like a person on a ship. The person will reach the destination. He will never go overboard or fall off. But he may get sick, stumble on the deck, fall and break every bone in his body and spend the whole trip in the infirmary.²¹

Are you stumbling toward death? Wandering? When you take stock of you semester, what do you see? What about your roommate? What about the person next door to you? What about the guy in your Bible study who stopped coming after the second week? What about the professing Christian in your class or club or the ultimate Frisbee team?

Do you care? Do you care about yourself? Do you care about others?

James leaves us with a tremendous promise here. He says that we have to go after these people. We cannot allow them to wander into their own death. Like a person sleepwalking off the cliff of the Grand Canyon, we need to try to stop her.

Here's something odd about this passage. We're told to do things that God does. "Surely these are only things God can do? Only God can forgive sins, save us from them and give us the gift of repentance...? 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 concern and effort we are called to expend in our spiritual concern for those in spiritual need. 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."²²

Piper puts the same thought this way: "What's the subject of the verb, 'will save'? Who is the saver in this verse? It's the church member who goes after the straying brother. 'He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him.' It's like Paul saying, 'I became all things to all men that I might by all means save some' (1 Cor. 9:22).

Eternal security is certain for God's elect. But eternal security is a community project. When a fish is caught did the hook catch it, or the bait, or the line, or the pole, or the fisherman, or the current in the sea that led the fish to the vicinity, or the boss back home that told the man to take the day off and go fishing. The answer is: all of the above.

And so it is in the new covenant community. Covenant security is not a mechanical automatic thing. It depends on God, and God uses means; so it depends on means - like going after each other when we are straying into sin."²³

Now let me assure you that I realize this isn't a load of fun. It's not very often the sleepwalking person appreciates that he was tackled. He just doesn't understand how close he was from danger. But I don't want my three year old walking so close to the edge. She might not fall off, but she might! I want to keep her close and safe. I want to rebuke her when she approaches danger and comfort her when she comes back from the cliff.

And when someone does that to me, I want to be quicker to repent, to return, to be thankful; and slower to go back to the same place, slower to love the wrong.

The Bible says that there are people within the visible church, people who profess Christ with their mouths, to whom God will say, I never knew you (Luke 6). That there are those who are spiritual but who actually are children of the devil (John 8). He also says that there are those who sin and return to him because they just can't take how awful sinning is. That the true nature of their hearts, the heart that has the Spirit and Christ himself dwelling there, will eventually get sick of sin and seek repentance.

Can you relate to any of this? Are you there? Are you wandering or know someone who is?

Jesus: the righteous man, saves from death, the covering

Let me remind you of something. If the prayer of the righteous accomplishes much, then wouldn't the prayer of the more righteous accomplish more? And the most righteous accomplish the most? Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for you. He prays for us.

How can we be saved from death? Don't we all deserve it, even from just one little sin, much less the billions we commit every week? How then can we be saved? Who is it that will stop us from destruction? Jesus says he came to seek and save the lost. Lost sounds a lot like wandering. That he gave his life as an atonement for sins. A covering. In a small sense we cover the sins of others, we save them. But we know that it's ultimately Jesus who is the covering, the sin offering, the propitiation, the blood sacrifice.

He is the priest who prays, the physician who heals, the righteous person, the covering.

"These final thoughts of James unite several themes of his epistle. To pursue a sinner to win him to Christ is a proper response to a trial (1:2-12). It is a form of kindness to a brother (2:14-26), a proper use of speech (3:1-12), and it leads people to

²¹ "While Christians may sin, sin will not be their continual, unbroken practice; it will not characterize their lives. A sinner, on the other hand, is one who continually, habitually practices sin. Such people John declared to be children of the devil, not of God." MacArthur

²² Stott, 214

²³ Piper, sermons online on this text

humble themselves before the Lord (4:6-10). James summons us to do the word and reap the blessings (1:22-25). One more time, James reminds us that sin leads to death and that the gospel, the word of truth, saves the soul (1:15, 21).²⁴

Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health, *Donald Whitney*²⁵

1. Do you thirst for God?
2. Are you increasingly governed by God's Word?
3. Are you more sensitive to God's presence?
4. Do you have a growing concern for the Spiritual and Temporal needs of others?
5. Do you delight in the Bride of Christ, the Church?
6. Are the spiritual disciplines increasingly important to you?
7. Do you still grieve over sin?
8. Are you a quicker forgiver?
9. Do you yearn for heaven and to be with Jesus?
10. Are you more loving?

²⁴ Doriani, *James*, as yet unpublished, but will be a P&R book soon

²⁵ Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001