

Can the Saved Fall Away?

Learning Objectives

By the end of this sermon, the hearer will be able to:

- I. **Remember:** State the blessing promised to the one who restores a straying Christian. (James 5:20, NASB 1995)
- II. **Understand:** Explain why James describes the wandering Christian as a soul in danger of death. (James 5:19–20, NASB 1995)
- III. **Analyze:** Distinguish between the Christian who is drifting from the truth and the hardened apostate who ultimately rejects it. (James 5:19–20; Hebrews 6:4–6)
- IV. **Apply:** Identify a brother or sister drifting from the truth and take a concrete, immediate step toward restoring that soul. (James 5:19–20; Galatians 6:1–2)

A church can lose a brother long before anyone removes his name from the directory. The danger rarely explodes in open rebellion. It creeps in through small neglects—missed assemblies, quiet compromises, ignored warnings of conscience, sins excused instead of confessed. The heart begins its slow migration away from truth. A man can still know the hymns, still sit in the pew, still speak the language of faith, and yet be moving farther and farther from the God he once obeyed. James refuses to treat that drift as harmless. He calls it deadly. His final words are not a soft benediction of comfort. They are a charge to rescue.

Introduction

The Lie That Ruins Urgency

One of the most dangerous lies a church can believe is this: once a man is saved, nothing he does afterward can place his soul in danger. That lie weakens warning, silences correction, and trains brethren to watch spiritual collapse with folded hands.

But James does not end his letter that way.

He ends with warning.

He ends with duty.

He ends with rescue.

James 5:19–20 (NASB 1995)

“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.”

Those are not the words of a man who thinks apostasy is impossible.

Those are not the words of a man who thinks brethren are safe no matter how far they wander.

Those are the words of a man who knows that truth can be abandoned, sin can harden, and a church that loves souls must act before it is too late.

Look closely at the undeniable realities embedded in the text.

A man can be “**among you**” and still stray from the truth.

And if he is not restored, his soul faces **death**.

James is not dealing in hypotheticals to create panic. He is laying down the truth of conditional security to awaken congregational responsibility. Biblical love refuses to remain silent when a soul begins to wander toward the edge of the cliff.

Thesis

Because a Christian can stray from the truth and forfeit his soul, the love and duty of the church demand that we urgently pursue, warn, and restore the wandering before their drift becomes destruction.

I. The Danger of Straying from the Truth (James 5:19)

A. James Is Speaking About Brethren, Not Outsiders

James says:

“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth...”

Do not soften that.

Do not explain it away.

Do not hide from the plain force of the text.

The man in danger is not a pagan in the street.

He is not an atheist.

He is not a stranger to the assembly.

He is one who was **“among you.”**

James is discussing the restoration of someone who stood inside the fellowship of believers and then wandered from the truth. That alone destroys the religious fiction that says a Christian cannot depart from God so seriously that his soul is in danger.

B. Straying Begins in Small Places

The word translated **“strays”** is the Greek *planaō*.

It means:

- to wander
- to be led astray
- to deviate from the correct path

This is not a sudden mutiny against God in every case. Most often it is gradual deviation. A man does not normally abandon Christ in one dramatic explosion. Drift begins quietly.

It begins when prayer fades.

It begins when Scripture is neglected.

It begins when assemblies become optional.

It begins when sin is excused instead of confessed.

It begins when obedience becomes negotiable.

It begins when conviction becomes inconvenient.

Little by little, the path bends away from truth.

Jesus illustrated that danger in **Luke 15**. A sheep does not set out to become lost. It simply lowers its head, moves from one patch of grass to the next, and eventually looks up to find itself separated from the shepherd.

Gem

A soul is rarely lost all at once. It is usually lost by inches before it is lost in full view.

That is why churches must stop waiting for spectacular rebellion before admitting that someone is drifting.

C. Scripture Speaks with One Voice

James does not stand alone in warning that a believer can depart from the truth. The entire canon testifies to the same sober reality: righteousness must be continued, faith must endure, and hearts that turn away from God place themselves in genuine spiritual danger. The warning about wandering souls in **James 5:19–20** is not an isolated voice; it is the echo of a consistent biblical pattern.

Old Testament Interlock

Ezekiel 18:24 — The Danger of Turning from Righteousness

Ezekiel 18:24 (NASB 1995)

“But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be

remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.”

Exegesis

The setting of Ezekiel 18 addresses a false proverb circulating among the Israelites: *“The fathers eat sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge.”* The people were claiming that their spiritual condition was predetermined by previous generations. God dismantles that fatalism and declares that **each soul stands accountable before Him.**

In verse 24 the focus shifts to a man who **was righteous** but **turns away.**

The verb “turns away” carries the idea of **deliberate departure.** This is not momentary weakness but a settled movement away from the path of righteousness. The text explicitly states that the man’s former righteous deeds “will not be remembered” because he has committed treachery.

The point is unmistakable: **past righteousness does not grant permanent immunity from present rebellion.**

God does not judge a man by what he once was while ignoring what he has become.

Personal Application

Never rely on yesterday’s obedience while living in today’s compromise. A past conversion cannot protect a present rebellion.

Congregational Application

Churches sometimes comfort drifting members by saying, “Well, he used to be faithful.” Ezekiel removes that illusion. What matters is **whether a man is walking in righteousness now.**

Generational Application

Young Christians must see that faithfulness is not a past achievement but a present commitment. What we model today teaches the next generation what faith truly requires.

Ezekiel 33:12–13 — Responsibility and Consequence

Ezekiel 33:12–13 (NASB 1995)

“But as for you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, ‘The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression... When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered.’”

Exegesis

Ezekiel 33 expands the principle introduced earlier in the book. God declares that **the righteousness of the righteous man cannot save him if he turns to sin**. The text exposes a subtle spiritual danger: a man may begin trusting in his **past righteousness** rather than maintaining present obedience.

The phrase *“he trusts in his righteousness”* describes spiritual complacency. Instead of fearing God and walking carefully, the man becomes confident that his past record protects him. That misplaced confidence becomes the doorway to transgression.

The result is devastating. The text again repeats that **none of his righteous deeds will be remembered**.

This passage destroys the idea that salvation is permanently secured regardless of how a person lives afterward. God judges men based on the direction of their lives, not merely their spiritual starting point.

Personal Application

Spiritual complacency is deadly. The moment a Christian believes past obedience guarantees future safety, the heart begins drifting.

Congregational Application

Church leadership must warn against spiritual complacency. Churches that only celebrate past faithfulness without addressing present sin eventually normalize drift.

Generational Application

Future leaders must learn that faithfulness is sustained obedience, not inherited reputation.

New Testament Interlock

Hebrews 3:12 — The Warning to Brethren

Hebrews 3:12 (NASB 1995)

“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.”

Exegesis

Notice the audience: “**brethren.**” The writer is speaking to believers, not outsiders.

The phrase “**take care**” is a strong warning command. It means to watch carefully, to guard oneself, to remain alert against danger. The danger identified is **an evil, unbelieving heart.**

Unbelief in Scripture is not merely intellectual doubt. It is the refusal to trust and obey God. When unbelief grows in the heart, the result is falling away from the living God.

The phrase “**falls away**” indicates real departure. The writer is not describing imaginary danger but genuine spiritual collapse.

The context reinforces the seriousness of the warning. In the surrounding verses the writer refers to Israel in the wilderness—people who experienced God’s deliverance but later hardened their hearts and fell under judgment.

Personal Application

Guard your heart against unbelief. Drift does not begin with outward rebellion; it begins with a heart that quietly stops trusting God’s word.

Congregational Application

Hebrews continues in verse 13 by commanding believers to **encourage one another daily** so that none become hardened by sin. Mutual exhortation is a safeguard against apostasy.

Generational Application

Young Christians must see that vigilance is part of faithful discipleship. Spiritual maturity includes learning to guard the heart.

1 Corinthians 10:12 — The Danger of Overconfidence

1 Corinthians 10:12 (NASB 1995)

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”

Exegesis

Paul writes these words after recounting Israel’s failures in the wilderness. The Israelites experienced divine blessings—deliverance from Egypt, miraculous provision, and God’s presence—yet many fell because of idolatry, immorality, and unbelief.

Paul uses their history as a warning to the church.

The phrase “**thinks he stands**” describes spiritual overconfidence. It is the attitude that says, “That could never happen to me.”

Paul immediately counters that mindset with a command: “**take heed.**” The verb calls for constant vigilance and self-examination.

The warning is clear: **standing today does not guarantee standing tomorrow.**

Personal Application

Confidence in your spiritual stability is not the same as faithfulness. The moment you assume you cannot fall is the moment you stop watching.

Congregational Application

Churches must resist a culture of complacency. Spiritual accountability protects believers from the illusion that they are immune to failure.

Generational Application

Future Christians must learn humility. Faithfulness requires constant dependence on God rather than confidence in personal strength.

2 Peter 2:20–22 — The Tragedy of Returning to Corruption

2 Peter 2:20–21 (NASB 1995)

“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.”

Exegesis

Peter describes people who **escaped the defilements of the world** through the knowledge of Christ. The language suggests genuine transformation. They were

delivered from corruption through the power of the gospel.

Yet the text warns that they can become **entangled again**.

The imagery suggests someone caught in a trap or net. Sin regains control because the individual has returned to the very corruption from which he once escaped.

Peter's conclusion is sobering: **“the last state has become worse for them than the first.”**

The final verse illustrates the tragedy with two vivid proverbs:

- A dog returning to its vomit.
- A washed sow returning to the mud.

The point is not merely moral failure but **deliberate return to the life from which God delivered them**.

Personal Application

Never assume past deliverance guarantees permanent safety. A believer can return to the corruption he once escaped.

Congregational Application

Churches must take drifting seriously. When a brother begins returning to old patterns of sin, intervention is not optional.

Generational Application

Younger believers must learn that salvation is not a license to flirt with the world. The path back to corruption leads to devastation.

The Unified Witness of Scripture

The message of Scripture is consistent:

- **Ezekiel** warns that a righteous man who turns to sin will die.
- **Hebrews** warns believers against falling away through unbelief.

- **Paul** warns the confident to watch lest they fall.
- **Peter** warns that returning to corruption leaves a person worse than before.

The conclusion is unavoidable.

Brethren can fall.

Brethren can depart.

Brethren can become entangled again.

And a church that refuses to say that plainly has already begun to weaken its warnings and dull the urgency of restoring wandering souls.

D. Application

Personal Application

Do not measure your safety by yesterday's obedience while living in today's compromise. The drift begins the moment you decide a command of God is negotiable. Stop calling it a season of struggle. Call it what the text calls it: movement toward death.

Congregational Application

A congregation that refuses loving correction becomes a graveyard where wandering souls disappear quietly while everyone pretends nothing serious has happened. If we mind our own business while our brothers and sisters drift out the back doors of the church, we are complicit in their spiritual ruin.

Generational Application

When younger Christians grow up in a church that ignores drifting members, they learn a lethal lesson. They learn that faith is optional, truth carries no urgency, and the church is merely a social club that demands no accountability. We must show them that membership means fighting for one another.

II. Drift Hardened Becomes Apostasy (Hebrews 6:4–6; Hebrews 3:12)

A. Hebrews Shows Where Drift Leads

James shows the subtle beginning of the drift. Hebrews shows its terrifying destination when left unchecked.

Hebrews 6:4–6 (NASB 1995)

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

The writer describes those who have been:

- enlightened
- tasted the heavenly gift
- made partakers of the Holy Spirit
- tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come

Do not let anyone tell you that passage describes ignorant unbelievers. These are people who truly experienced spiritual privilege and blessing. Yet the text says they can **fall away**.

Apostasy is not a bad week.

It is not mere weakness.

It is the deliberate, hardened rejection of known truth.

B. Straying Is Not Yet Hardened Apostasy

That distinction matters.

James addresses the **straying Christian** who can still be turned back.

Hebrews describes the **hardened apostate** who has repeatedly resisted conviction until repentance itself is refused.

The first must be pursued immediately.

The second shows what drift becomes when nobody intervenes.

James's warning about **death** is not vague. Hebrews shows the cliff at the end of that road.

Illustration

Farmers understand scorched ground. When a field is burned repeatedly, the soil loses its ability to receive seed. The ground becomes hardened, lifeless, and unproductive. A heart that continually rejects the voice of God becomes spiritually scorched in the same way. Truth still comes, but nothing living takes root.

Illustration — How Apostasy Forms

Apostasy rarely happens in one dramatic moment. It usually begins with small decisions that seem harmless at the time.

Think about a **phone battery**.

When your phone drops from 100% to 95%, you do not panic. Nothing seems wrong. The screen still works. The apps still run. Everything feels normal.

But if you keep using the phone and never plug it in, the battery keeps draining.

95 becomes 70.

70 becomes 40.

40 becomes 15.

At some point the warning appears: **Low Battery**.

You can ignore the warning and keep scrolling. The phone still works for a while. But eventually the screen goes dark.

The phone did not die all at once.

It died because it **was never recharged**.

That is how many people drift away from God.

No one wakes up one morning planning to abandon their faith.

It starts with small neglects.

Skipping prayer.

Ignoring Scripture.

Letting sin go unchallenged.

Choosing comfort over obedience.

At first nothing seems different. Life continues. The conscience still speaks.

But every time the warning is ignored, the heart grows weaker.

Eventually the spiritual battery runs empty.

The danger is not the first drop in charge.

The danger is **never plugging the soul back into God**.

C. The Heart Never Stands Still

Hebrews 3:12–13 (NASB 1995)

“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day... so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

Notice the progression:

- an evil heart
- an unbelieving heart
- a heart that falls away

The heart never stays neutral. Every act of disobedience either softens the heart through honest repentance or hardens it through stubborn resistance.

Gem

Apostasy is not built in one rebellion, but in a thousand tolerated doubts.

Every small compromise trains the heart to distrust God.

Ignore the warning long enough, and unbelief stops whispering and starts ruling.

D. False Doctrine Must Be Rejected Here

A common objection appears whenever passages like **James 5:19–20** are read.

Some claim that if a person falls away, he must never have truly been saved in the first place.

That explanation attempts to protect a theory, but it does not fit the language of Scripture.

James writes:

James 5:19–20 (NASB 1995)

“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.”

Notice the words carefully.

James speaks of someone “**among you.**”

He is not describing an outsider pretending to be a Christian.

He is speaking about someone within the body of believers.

And if that person is restored, James says **his soul is saved from death.**

That language makes no sense if the person was never in danger.

The New Testament Consistently Warns Believers

The New Testament repeatedly addresses this danger to people who are already Christians.

Hebrews 3:12

Hebrews 3:12 (NASB 1995)

“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.”

The warning is addressed to **brethren**.

The danger is that someone among them might develop an unbelieving heart and **fall away from the living God**.

If falling away were impossible for believers, the warning would be meaningless.

1 Corinthians 10:12

1 Corinthians 10:12 (NASB 1995)

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”

Paul is not speaking to unbelievers.

He is warning those who **think they stand**.

Standing believers are told to remain vigilant because **falling is possible**.

A warning against an impossible event is not a warning at all.

2 Peter 2:20–21

2 Peter 2:20–21 (NASB 1995)

“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.”

Peter describes people who had **escaped the defilements of the world** through the knowledge of Christ.

Yet they can become **entangled again** and overcome by sin.

Peter even says their **last state becomes worse than the first**.

That description does not fit someone who was never changed.

It describes someone who truly left corruption and then returned to it.

Hebrews 6:4–6

Hebrews 6:4–6 (NASB 1995)

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit... and then have fallen away...”

The text lists blessings that belong to genuine believers:

- enlightened
- tasted the heavenly gift
- partakers of the Holy Spirit
- tasted the good word of God

And yet the passage still speaks of the possibility that such people **fall away**.

Why the Objection Fails

The idea that a fallen believer was “never truly saved” collapses under the weight of these passages.

Scripture repeatedly speaks about:

- **brethren who may fall away** (Hebrews 3:12)
- believers who must **take heed lest they fall** (1 Corinthians 10:12)
- those who **escaped the world and became entangled again** (2 Peter 2:20)
- people who shared in spiritual blessings and **then fell away** (Hebrews 6:4–6)

If every warning refers only to people who were never truly saved, the warnings lose their meaning.

A danger that cannot actually occur is not a real warning.

The Force of James’s Warning

James does not treat the wandering Christian as spiritually safe.

He says that restoring him will **save his soul from death**.

That is not theoretical language.

That is rescue language.

James closes his letter with a sober reminder:

Souls can wander.

Souls can be lost.

Souls must be restored.

And a church that replaces those warnings with comforting theories has weakened one of the very safeguards God gave His people.

E. Application

Personal Application

Every resisted conviction either softens your heart through repentance or hardens it toward destruction. If you are resisting the truth right now, you are scorching the soil of your soul. Stop assuming you will always want to repent later.

Congregational Application

A church that refuses to warn drifting members slowly normalizes spiritual decline. We become conditioned to apostasy, treating it as unfortunate instead of sinful. Silence is not mercy. It is surrender.

Generational Application

If our children hear us quote James but watch us ignore wanderers, they will not believe James's warning about death. They will believe our silence. Future leaders are shaped by what the present generation tolerates.

III. The Work and Glory of Restoration (James 5:20)

A. Restoration Is the Duty of the Church

James says:

“and one turns him back”

The duty does not belong to elders or preachers alone.

James does not say, “if leadership eventually addresses it.”

He does not say, “if the church feels comfortable.”

He says, “**one turns him back.**”

That responsibility belongs to the body.

The Greek verb *epistrephō* means:

- to turn back
- to restore
- to bring someone back to the right path

This is not passive concern. It is active restoration. It is an intentional effort to recover a soul from destruction.

Gem

Love does not watch a brother wander toward death and call silence compassion.

Your silence toward a drifting brother is not kindness. It is complicity dressed up as politeness.

B. Restoration Requires Courage and Gentleness

Galatians 6:1–2 (NASB 1995)

“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness... and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

Gentleness does not mean weakness. It means strength governed by humility. The goal is not humiliation. The goal is restoration.

Luke 15:3–7 shows the shepherd seeking the lost sheep.

Ezekiel 33:7–9 shows the watchman warning the sinner.

Restoration means you go. You open the Bible. You warn. You plead. You call for repentance. You do not remain comfortably silent while a soul drifts toward death.

C. What Is at Stake Is a Soul

James says:

“he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

That is not social embarrassment.

That is not salvaging reputation.

That is spiritual death.

If the drifting Christian is not restored, the end of that path is destruction. But if someone intervenes and turns him back, the outcome changes. The soul is saved. The sins are covered.

D. Covering a Multitude of Sins

That language reflects the reality of forgiveness and restoration. It echoes the biblical truth found in **Proverbs 10:12** and is consistent with God’s merciful character.

When a wandering Christian repents and returns, the sins that marked his drift are forgiven and no longer define his standing before God. Where death was approaching, mercy now writes **covered** over a heap of rebellion.

Added Gem

If we refuse to go after the wanderer, we silently agree with his road toward death; when we do go, God writes “covered” over what could have ended in condemnation.

E. Kingdom Victories Are Often Quiet

The final verses of James do not celebrate eloquent preaching, large platforms, or impressive programs.

They celebrate something quieter, harder, and infinitely more valuable:

the rescue of a wandering soul.

Some of the greatest victories in the kingdom happen far from the pulpit—across a kitchen table, in a living room, over a phone call, in a hard conversation where one

Christian loves another enough to tell him the truth and bring him home.

F. Application

Personal Application

Who is the person you know that has begun drifting from the truth? You know their name. You have seen their absence. You have noticed the signs. What concrete step will you take this week—visit, call, letter, honest conversation—to move toward them rather than away from them?

Congregational Application

A church that actively practices restoration preserves the spiritual health of the whole body. A church that allows names to fade from attendance and memory without pursuit is quietly training itself to live without brothers it will answer for.

Generational Application

When younger Christians see older believers praying over wanderers, visiting them, pleading with them, and rejoicing when they return, they learn the true value of fellowship and the cost of real love. They learn never to treat a straying soul as “gone” while breath remains.

Conclusion

James does not end with a polite farewell.

He ends with a rescue order.

A Christian can stray.

Drift is real.

Apostasy is possible.

Souls are at stake.

The doctrines of men may tell you that the saved are secure regardless of how they live. The word of God tells you otherwise. If God says a brother's soul must be saved from death, then walking away from truth is not a harmless detour.

But the final word of James is not despair.

It is restoration.

When a brother turns a wandering Christian back to the truth, he saves a soul from death and covers a multitude of sins.

Few works in this church will matter more on Judgment Day than the souls you refused to let drift into the dark without a fight.

Invitation

If your own heart has begun to drift, stop now.

Do not take one more step down that path.

Do not assume tomorrow will give you another opportunity.

Do not let quiet drift turn into hardened rebellion.

Return while your heart still hears His voice.

Return while repentance is still possible.

Repent.

Return.

Come back to the truth.

And if you know a brother or sister who is wandering, do not remain silent for another week. Go to them in humility. Open the Scriptures. Warn them. Pray with them. Walk with them. Turn them back.

You may save a soul from death.

If you need the prayers of this church to be restored, or if you need to put on Christ in baptism for the remission of your sins, do not wait. Come right now while we stand and sing.

Word Study Table

WORD	LANGUAGE	MEANING	SERMON INSIGHT
<i>planaō</i>	Greek	to wander, go astray, be led off-path	Spiritual drift begins as movement away from revealed truth
<i>epistrephō</i>	Greek	to turn back, restore, return	Restoration requires active, intentional intervention
<i>alētheia</i>	Greek	truth, revealed reality	Straying is a departure from what God has revealed as real and binding
<i>parapiptō</i>	Greek	to fall away	Hebrews describes hardened apostasy, not a harmless stumble
<i>thanatos</i>	Greek	death	Unrestored straying ends in real spiritual death

Tool for Song Leaders

TITLE	AUTHOR	MAIN MESSAGE	REASON IT FITS THE SERMON
Yield Not to Temptation	Horatio R. Palmer	Resist temptation and remain faithful to Christ	Reinforces the sermon's warning that small compromises lead to spiritual drift
Softly and Tenderly	Will L. Thompson	Christ calls sinners and wanderers to return	Fits the restoration theme of James 5:19–20 and the invitation to return
Jesus Is Tenderly Calling	Fanny J. Crosby	Jesus invites the wandering soul to come home	Emphasizes the call to return before the heart hardens

TITLE	AUTHOR	MAIN MESSAGE	REASON IT FITS THE SERMON
Almost Persuaded	Philip P. Bliss	The danger of delaying obedience to Christ	Supports the warning that hesitation and delay can lead to spiritual loss
Trust and Obey	John H. Sammis	Faith must be expressed through obedient living	Aligns with the sermon's emphasis on continued faithfulness, not complacency
I Must Tell Jesus	Elisha A. Hoffman	Dependence on Christ in times of struggle	Encourages believers to turn back to Christ rather than drift away
I Need Thee Every Hour	Annie S. Hawks	Constant reliance on Christ for spiritual strength	Reinforces the sermon's call to vigilance and daily faithfulness
Bring Christ Your Broken Life	W. D. Armstrong	Christ restores the broken and fallen	Fits the theme of restoring a wandering believer
O to Be Like Thee	Thomas O. Chisholm	The pursuit of Christlike character	Encourages ongoing spiritual transformation rather than spiritual drift
Take Time to Be Holy	William D. Longstaff	Spiritual growth requires deliberate devotion	Warns against neglecting prayer, Scripture, and obedience—the roots of drift

Scripture Reference Table

PASSAGE	CONNECTION
James 5:19–20	Primary text: the reality of drift and the mandate to restore the wandering

PASSAGE	CONNECTION
Hebrews 6:4–6	Warning regarding the terminal destination of drift—hardened apostasy
Hebrews 3:12–13	Warning against unbelief, falling away, and the hardening deceitfulness of sin
Galatians 6:1–2	The apostolic command and method for restoring a brother overtaken in trespass
2 Peter 2:20–22	The severe danger of returning to corruption after escaping it
1 Corinthians 10:12	Warning against presumption and spiritual overconfidence
Ezekiel 18:24	Former righteousness does not excuse present rebellion
Ezekiel 33:7–9	The watchman’s responsibility to warn the sinner of death
Ezekiel 33:12–13	Turning from righteousness leads to death
Luke 15:3–7	The shepherd seeking the lost sheep, illustrating wandering and rescue
Proverbs 10:12	Love covering transgressions, echoing James’s language of covering sins

Can the Saved Fall Away?

James 5:19–20 (NASB 1995)

Series: *Living the Word: Faith in Action*

“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.”

— James 5:19–20 (NASB 1995)

```

<div class="wrap">
  <!-- METADATA -->
  <section style="background:#f9f6ed; text-align:center;
padding:1.5rem;">
    <strong>Theme:</strong> Conditional Security & the
Church's Duty to Restore<br>
    <strong>Key Verse:</strong> James 5:19–20<br>
    <strong>Storage Key:</strong> james-5-can-the-saved-
fall-away-study-v1
  </section>

  <!-- INTRODUCTION & THESIS -->
  <section id="intro">
    <h2>Introduction & Thesis</h2>
    <p>A church can lose a brother long before anyone
removes his name from the directory. James refuses to treat
spiritual drift as harmless. He calls it deadly.</p>

    <div class="blank">
      Because a Christian can
      <input type="text" class="mini" data-k="intro-
blank-stray-1" placeholder="stray from the truth">
      and forfeit his soul, the love and duty of the
church demand that we urgently
      <input type="text" class="mini" data-k="intro-
blank-pursue-1" placeholder="pursue, warn, and restore">
      the wandering before their drift becomes
destruction.
    </div>

    <h3 style="margin-top:2rem;">Learning Objectives</h3>
    <ol>
      <li>State the blessing promised to the one who
restores a straying Christian. <textarea data-k="intro-note-
objective-1" placeholder="Write James 5:20 blessing here...">
</textarea></li>
      <li>Explain why James describes the wandering

```

```

Christian as a soul in danger of death. <textarea data-
k="intro-note-objective-2" placeholder="Explain the
danger..."></textarea></li>
    <li>Distinguish between the drifting Christian and
the hardened apostate. <textarea data-k="intro-note-objective-
3" placeholder="Distinction from Hebrews 6:4–6..."></textarea>
</li>
    <li>Identify a brother or sister drifting and take
a concrete step toward restoration. <textarea data-k="intro-
note-objective-4" placeholder="Name the person and the
step..."></textarea></li>
</ol>
</section>

<!-- SECTION 1 -->
<section id="point1">
    <h2>I. The Danger of Straying from the Truth (James
5:19)</h2>
    <p>James addresses not outsiders but those who are
<strong>"among you."</strong></p>

    <div class="blank">
        The Greek word translated "strays" is
        <input type="text" class="mini" data-k="point1-
blank-planao-1" placeholder="planao">
        and means to wander, to be led astray, to deviate
from the correct path.
    </div>

    <p>Drift begins in small places: prayer fades,
Scripture is neglected, assemblies become optional, sin is
excused.</p>

    <div class="blank">
        A soul is rarely lost all at once. It is usually
lost by
        <input type="text" class="mini" data-k="point1-
blank-inches-1" placeholder="inches">

```

before it is lost in full view.

</div>

<h3>Cross-Reference Summary</h3>

<p>Ezekiel 18:24, Ezekiel 33:12–13, Hebrews 3:12, 1 Corinthians 10:12, and 2 Peter 2:20–22 all testify that a believer can turn from righteousness and place his soul in danger.</p>

<h3>Personal Reflection</h3>

<textarea data-k="point1-textarea-drift-1" placeholder="Describe signs of drift you have seen in yourself or others..."></textarea>

</section>

<!-- SECTION 2 -->

<section id="point2">

<h2>II. Drift Hardened Becomes Apostasy (Hebrews 6:4–6; Hebrews 3:12)</h2>

<p>James shows the beginning of the drift. Hebrews shows its terrifying destination when left unchecked.</p>

<div class="blank">

Hebrews 6:4–6 describes those who have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have

<input type="text" class="mini" data-k="point2-blank-fallen-1" placeholder="fallen away">.

It is impossible to renew them again to repentance.

</div>

<p>Straying is not yet hardened apostasy. The first can still be restored; the second shows what unchecked drift becomes.</p>

<div class="blank">

Apostasy is not built in one rebellion, but in a

thousand

```
<input type="text" class="mini" data-k="point2-blank-tolerated-1" placeholder="tolerated doubts">.
```

```
</div>
```

```
<h3>Personal Reflection</h3>
```

```
<textarea data-k="point2-textarea-hardening-1" placeholder="How does this passage challenge any notion of unconditional security?..."></textarea>
```

```
</section>
```

```
<!-- SECTION 3 -->
```

```
<section id="point3">
```

```
<h2>III. The Work and Glory of Restoration (James 5:20)</h2>
```

```
<p>The duty does not belong to elders or preachers alone. James says "and one turns him back."</p>
```

```
<div class="blank">
```

```
The Greek verb
```

```
<input type="text" class="mini" data-k="point3-blank-epistrepho-1" placeholder="epistrephō">
```

```
means to turn back, to restore, to bring someone back to the right path.
```

```
</div>
```

```
<div class="blank">
```

```
He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from
```

```
<input type="text" class="mini" data-k="point3-blank-death-1" placeholder="death">
```

```
and will cover a multitude of sins.
```

```
</div>
```

```
<h3>Galatians 6:1–2 Command</h3>
```

```
<p>Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.</p>
```

```

    <h3>Personal Application</h3>
    <textarea data-k="point3-textarea-action-1"
placeholder="Name a brother or sister you know who is
drifting. What concrete step will you take this week?...">
</textarea>
  </section>

<!-- WORD STUDY -->
<section>
  <h2>Word Study</h2>
  <table class="table">
    <thead>
      <tr><th>Word</th><th>Language</th>
<th>Meaning</th><th>Sermon Insight</th></tr>
    </thead>
    <tbody>
      <tr><td>planaō</td><td>Greek</td><td>to
wander, go astray</td><td>Spiritual drift begins as movement
away from revealed truth</td></tr>
      <tr><td>epistrophō</td><td>Greek</td><td>to
turn back, restore</td><td>Restoration requires active,
intentional intervention</td></tr>
      <tr><td>alētheia</td><td>Greek</td>
<td>truth</td><td>Straying is a departure from what God has
revealed</td></tr>
      <tr><td>thanatos</td><td>Greek</td>
<td>death</td><td>Unrestored straying ends in real spiritual
death</td></tr>
    </tbody>
  </table>
</section>

<!-- FINAL REFLECTION -->
<section>
  <h2>Final Reflection & Invitation</h2>
  <p>James ends with a rescue order. Souls can wander.
Souls can be lost. Souls must be restored.</p>

```

```
<textarea data-k="final-textarea-invitation-1"
placeholder="If your own heart has begun to drift, what must
you do today? If you know a wanderer, what will you do this
week?..."></textarea>
```

```
<p style="margin-top:2rem; font-weight:600;">Few works
in this church will matter more on Judgment Day than the souls
you refused to let drift into the dark without a fight.</p>
```

```
</section>
</div>
```

```
<div class="wrap" style="text-align:center; padding:2rem
1rem;">
  <button onclick="saveAll()">Save Progress</button>
  <button class="print-btn" onclick="window.print()">Print
Study Guide</button>
  <button onclick="clearAll()"
style="background:#777;">Clear All Answers</button>
</div>
```

```
<div class="footer">
  Living the Word: Faith in Action • James 5:19–20 Study
Guide v1 • Congregational Autonomy • A Cappella • Scripture
Alone
</div>
```

```
<script>
  const STORAGE_KEY = "james-5-can-the-saved-fall-away-
study-v1";

  function saveAll() {
    const data = {};
    document.querySelectorAll('input[data-k],
textarea[data-k]').forEach(el => {
      data[el.getAttribute('data-k')] = el.value.trim();
    });
    localStorage.setItem(STORAGE_KEY,
JSON.stringify(data));
```

```

        alert("Progress saved to localStorage.");
    }

    function loadAll() {
        const saved = localStorage.getItem(STORAGE_KEY);
        if (!saved) return;
        const data = JSON.parse(saved);
        document.querySelectorAll('input[data-k],
textarea[data-k]').forEach(el => {
            const key = el.getAttribute('data-k');
            if (data[key]) el.value = data[key];
        });
    }

    function clearAll() {
        if (confirm("Clear all answers?")) {
            localStorage.removeItem(STORAGE_KEY);
            document.querySelectorAll('input[data-k],
textarea[data-k]').forEach(el => el.value = '');
        }
    }

    // Auto-save on change
    document.addEventListener('input', e => {
        if (e.target.matches('input[data-k], textarea[data-
k]')) {
            saveAll();
        }
    });

    window.onload = loadAll;
</script>

```

Preaching Outline

Can the Saved Fall Away?

Text

James 5:19–20

Primary supports: **Hebrews 6:4–6; Hebrews 3:12–13; Galatians 6:1–2**

Learning Objectives

- I. **Remember:** State the blessing promised to the one who restores a straying Christian.
- II. **Understand:** Explain why James treats the wandering Christian as a soul in danger of death.
- III. **Analyze:** Distinguish quiet drift from hardened apostasy.
- IV. **Apply:** Identify a drifting brother or sister and take a real step toward restoration.

Opening Hook Paragraph

A church can lose a brother long before his name ever disappears from a directory. Men do not usually run from Christ in one loud act of rebellion. They drift. They drift through neglected prayer, ignored truth, tolerated sin, and a conscience they keep pushing aside. James does not treat that drift as harmless. He treats it as deadly. And he ends his letter, not with soft comfort, but with a rescue order.

Thesis

Because a Christian can stray from the truth and forfeit his soul, the church must urgently pursue, warn, and restore the wandering before drift becomes destruction.

Pulpit Outline

I. A Christian Can Truly Stray from the Truth

- **Key phrase:** “If any among you strays from the truth”

- James is speaking about one **among you** — not a pagan, not an outsider, not a visitor at the edge.
- The danger is inside the fellowship.
- **planaō** — wander, go astray, move off the path.
- Drift is usually quiet before it is public.
- Neglected prayer.
- Neglected Scripture.
- Missed assemblies.
- Excused sin.
- Obedience becomes negotiable.

Gem:

A soul is rarely lost all at once; it is usually lost by inches before it is lost in full view.

- **OT pressure:** Ezekiel 18:24; Ezekiel 33:12–13
Past righteousness does not excuse present rebellion.
- **NT pressure:** Hebrews 3:12; 1 Corinthians 10:12; 2 Peter 2:20–22
Brethren can fall. Standing men can fall. Escaped men can become entangled again.
- **Personal:** Stop measuring safety by what you used to be while living loosely now.
- **Church:** A congregation that ignores drift becomes a graveyard of quiet apostasies.
- **Generational:** If children see drift treated lightly, they learn truth carries no urgency.

II. Drift Hardened Becomes Apostasy

- **Key phrase:** “save his soul from death”
- James shows the beginning of the road; Hebrews 6 shows the cliff at the end.
- Hebrews 6 is not describing curious outsiders.

- Enlightened.
- Tasted the heavenly gift.
- Partakers of the Holy Spirit.
- Tasted the good word of God.
- And yet the text says they can **fall away**.
- Apostasy is not a rough week.
- Apostasy is hardened rejection of known truth.
- The straying Christian can still be turned back.
- The hardened apostate has resisted conviction so long that the heart has become fixed against repentance.

Illustration:

A phone battery does not die at 95 percent. It dies because it keeps draining and is never recharged. That is how many souls drift. The danger is not the first drop. The danger is ignoring the warning until the screen goes dark.

- Hebrews 3:12–13 — unbelief grows, sin deceives, the heart hardens.
- Every act of disobedience does one of two things:
 - softens the heart through repentance
 - hardens the heart through resistance

Gem:

Apostasy is not built in one rebellion, but in a thousand tolerated doubts.

- False doctrine must be rejected here.
- “He was never really saved” does not fit James 5, Hebrews 3, Hebrews 6, 1 Corinthians 10, or 2 Peter 2.
- A warning against an impossible danger is not a warning at all.
- James says the wandering one is **among you**.
- James says his soul must be saved from **death**.

- Scripture gives real warnings because the danger is real.
- **Personal:** Stop assuming you will always want to repent later.
- **Church:** Silence is not mercy when a soul is hardening; silence is surrender.
- **Generational:** If this generation shrugs at drift, the next will plunge into apostasy faster.

III. The Church Must Restore the Wandering

- **Key phrase:** “and one turns him back”
- James does not assign this duty only to elders or preachers.
- He says **one** turns him back.
- Restoration belongs to the body.
- **epistrephō** — turn back, restore, bring home.
- This is not passive concern.
- This is pursuit.
- This is warning.
- This is pleading.
- This is opening the Bible and calling for repentance.

Gem:

Love does not watch a brother wander toward death and call silence compassion.

- Galatians 6:1–2 — restore in gentleness.
- Gentleness is not weakness.
- Gentleness is strength under control.
- Luke 15 — the shepherd goes after the lost sheep.
- Ezekiel 33:7–9 — the watchman must warn.
- “Will save his soul from death”
- That is not embarrassment.

- That is not reputation.
- That is spiritual ruin if left unchecked.
- “Will cover a multitude of sins”
- The point is forgiveness through repentance and restoration.
- Where rebellion was growing, mercy can write **covered**.
- Some of the greatest kingdom victories never happen in public.
- They happen in living rooms.
- Phone calls.
- Hard conversations.
- One Christian refusing to let another die quietly.
- **Personal:** Name the drifting person and move toward him this week.
- **Church:** Healthy congregations do not merely teach truth; they pursue the wandering.
- **Generational:** Let the next generation see that fellowship means responsibility, not convenience.

Conclusion Drive

- James does not end with a polite farewell; he ends with a rescue order.
- A Christian can stray.
- Drift is real.
- Apostasy is possible.
- Souls are at stake.
- The church has no right to sit still while brethren move toward death.

Invitation Drive

- If your own heart is drifting, stop now.
- Do not take one more step down that road.

- Repent while your heart still hears His voice.
- Return while repentance is still possible.
- If you know someone wandering, quit postponing the hard conversation.
- Go. Warn. Plead. Turn him back.
- If you need restoration, or need to put on Christ in baptism for the remission of sins, come now.

Key Word Study Box

TERM	MEANING	WHY IT MATTERS
<i>planaō</i>	to wander, go astray	Drift is real movement away from truth, not harmless fluctuation
<i>epistrephō</i>	to turn back, restore	Restoration requires active pursuit, not distant concern
<i>parapiptō</i>	to fall away	Hebrews 6 describes hardened departure, not temporary weakness
<i>thanatos</i>	death	James warns of real spiritual death, not mere discomfort

Key Cross-Reference Box

REFERENCE	WHY IT MATTERS
Ezekiel 18:24	Past righteousness does not excuse present rebellion
Ezekiel 33:12–13	Former faithfulness will not deliver a man in present transgression
Hebrews 3:12–13	Brethren can develop an unbelieving heart and fall away
Hebrews 6:4–6	Shows the terminal end of drift when resistance hardens

REFERENCE	WHY IT MATTERS
1 Corinthians 10:12	Standing men must take heed lest they fall
2 Peter 2:20–22	Returning to corruption leaves a man worse than before
Galatians 6:1–2	Gives the spirit and method of restoration
Luke 15:3–7	The shepherd seeks the wandering, not merely notices him

Preaching Outline

Text:

Title:

Big Idea:

Purpose / Aim:

Introduction:

•

Can the Saved Fall Away?

Text

James 5:19–20

Primary supports: **Hebrews 6:4–6; Hebrews 3:12–13; Galatians 6:1–2**

Learning Objectives

- I. **Remember:** State the blessing promised to the one who restores a straying Christian.
- II. **Understand:** Explain why James treats the wandering Christian as a soul in danger of death.
- III. **Analyze:** Distinguish quiet drift from hardened apostasy.

IV. **Apply:** Identify a drifting brother or sister and take a real step toward restoration.

Opening Hook Paragraph

A church can lose a brother long before his name ever disappears from a directory. Men do not usually run from Christ in one loud act of rebellion. They drift. They drift through neglected prayer, ignored truth, tolerated sin, and a conscience they keep pushing aside. James does not treat that drift as harmless. He treats it as deadly. And he ends his letter, not with soft comfort, but with a rescue order.

Thesis

Because a Christian can stray from the truth and forfeit his soul, the church must urgently pursue, warn, and restore the wandering before drift becomes destruction.

Pulpit Outline

I. A Christian Can Truly Stray from the Truth

- **Key phrase:** “If any among you strays from the truth”
- James is speaking about one **among you** — not a pagan, not an outsider, not a visitor at the edge.
- The danger is inside the fellowship.
- **planaō** — wander, go astray, move off the path.
- Drift is usually quiet before it is public.
- Neglected prayer.
- Neglected Scripture.
- Missed assemblies.
- Excused sin.
- Obedience becomes negotiable.

Gem:

A soul is rarely lost all at once; it is usually lost by inches before it is lost in full view.

- **OT pressure:** Ezekiel 18:24; Ezekiel 33:12–13
Past righteousness does not excuse present rebellion.
- **NT pressure:** Hebrews 3:12; 1 Corinthians 10:12; 2 Peter 2:20–22
Brethren can fall. Standing men can fall. Escaped men can become entangled again.
- **Personal:** Stop measuring safety by what you used to be while living loosely now.
- **Church:** A congregation that ignores drift becomes a graveyard of quiet apostasies.
- **Generational:** If children see drift treated lightly, they learn truth carries no urgency.

II. Drift Hardened Becomes Apostasy

- **Key phrase:** “save his soul from death”
- James shows the beginning of the road; Hebrews 6 shows the cliff at the end.
- Hebrews 6 is not describing curious outsiders.
- Enlightened.
- Tasted the heavenly gift.
- Partakers of the Holy Spirit.
- Tasted the good word of God.
- And yet the text says they can **fall away**.
- Apostasy is not a rough week.
- Apostasy is hardened rejection of known truth.
- The straying Christian can still be turned back.
- The hardened apostate has resisted conviction so long that the heart has become fixed against repentance.

Illustration:

A phone battery does not die at 95 percent. It dies because it keeps draining and is never recharged. That is how many souls drift. The danger is not the first drop. The danger is ignoring the warning until the screen goes dark.

- Hebrews 3:12–13 — unbelief grows, sin deceives, the heart hardens.
- Every act of disobedience does one of two things:
 - softens the heart through repentance
 - hardens the heart through resistance

Gem:

Apostasy is not built in one rebellion, but in a thousand tolerated doubts.

- False doctrine must be rejected here.
- “He was never really saved” does not fit James 5, Hebrews 3, Hebrews 6, 1 Corinthians 10, or 2 Peter 2.
- A warning against an impossible danger is not a warning at all.
- James says the wandering one is **among you**.
- James says his soul must be saved from **death**.
- Scripture gives real warnings because the danger is real.
- **Personal:** Stop assuming you will always want to repent later.
- **Church:** Silence is not mercy when a soul is hardening; silence is surrender.
- **Generational:** If this generation shrugs at drift, the next will plunge into apostasy faster.

III. The Church Must Restore the Wandering

- **Key phrase:** “and one turns him back”
- James does not assign this duty only to elders or preachers.
- He says **one** turns him back.
- Restoration belongs to the body.

- **epistrephō** — turn back, restore, bring home.
- This is not passive concern.
- This is pursuit.
- This is warning.
- This is pleading.
- This is opening the Bible and calling for repentance.

Gem:

Love does not watch a brother wander toward death and call silence compassion.

- Galatians 6:1–2 — restore in gentleness.
- Gentleness is not weakness.
- Gentleness is strength under control.
- Luke 15 — the shepherd goes after the lost sheep.
- Ezekiel 33:7–9 — the watchman must warn.
- “Will save his soul from death”
- That is not embarrassment.
- That is not reputation.
- That is spiritual ruin if left unchecked.
- “Will cover a multitude of sins”
- The point is forgiveness through repentance and restoration.
- Where rebellion was growing, mercy can write **covered**.
- Some of the greatest kingdom victories never happen in public.
- They happen in living rooms.
- Phone calls.
- Hard conversations.
- One Christian refusing to let another die quietly.

- **Personal:** Name the drifting person and move toward him this week.
- **Church:** Healthy congregations do not merely teach truth; they pursue the wandering.
- **Generational:** Let the next generation see that fellowship means responsibility, not convenience.

Conclusion Drive

- James does not end with a polite farewell; he ends with a rescue order.
- A Christian can stray.
- Drift is real.
- Apostasy is possible.
- Souls are at stake.
- The church has no right to sit still while brethren move toward death.

Invitation Drive

- If your own heart is drifting, stop now.
- Do not take one more step down that road.
- Repent while your heart still hears His voice.
- Return while repentance is still possible.
- If you know someone wandering, quit postponing the hard conversation.
- Go. Warn. Plead. Turn him back.
- If you need restoration, or need to put on Christ in baptism for the remission of sins, come now.

Key Word Study Box

TERM	MEANING	WHY IT MATTERS
<i>planaō</i>	to wander, go astray	Drift is real movement away from truth, not harmless fluctuation
<i>epistrephō</i>	to turn back, restore	Restoration requires active pursuit, not distant concern
<i>parapiptō</i>	to fall away	Hebrews 6 describes hardened departure, not temporary weakness
<i>thanatos</i>	death	James warns of real spiritual death, not mere discomfort

Key Cross-Reference Box

REFERENCE	WHY IT MATTERS
Ezekiel 18:24	Past righteousness does not excuse present rebellion
Ezekiel 33:12–13	Former faithfulness will not deliver a man in present transgression
Hebrews 3:12–13	Brethren can develop an unbelieving heart and fall away
Hebrews 6:4–6	Shows the terminal end of drift when resistance hardens
1 Corinthians 10:12	Standing men must take heed lest they fall
2 Peter 2:20–22	Returning to corruption leaves a man worse than before
Galatians 6:1–2	Gives the spirit and method of restoration
Luke 15:3–7	The shepherd seeks the wandering, not merely notices him

Can the Saved Fall Away?

Text

James 5:19–20

Primary supports: **Hebrews 6:4–6; Hebrews 3:12–13; Galatians 6:1–2**

Learning Objectives

- I. **Remember:** State the blessing promised to the one who restores a straying Christian.
- II. **Understand:** Explain why James treats the wandering Christian as a soul in danger of death.
- III. **Analyze:** Distinguish quiet drift from hardened apostasy.
- IV. **Apply:** Identify a drifting brother or sister and take a real step toward restoration.

Opening Hook Paragraph

A church can lose a brother long before his name ever disappears from a directory. Men do not usually run from Christ in one loud act of rebellion. They drift. They drift through neglected prayer, ignored truth, tolerated sin, and a conscience they keep pushing aside. James does not treat that drift as harmless. He treats it as deadly. And he ends his letter, not with soft comfort, but with a rescue order.

Thesis

Because a Christian can stray from the truth and forfeit his soul, the church must urgently pursue, warn, and restore the wandering before drift becomes destruction.

Pulpit Outline

I. A Christian Can Truly Stray from the Truth

- **Key phrase:** “If any among you strays from the truth”

- James is speaking about one **among you** — not a pagan, not an outsider, not a visitor at the edge.
- The danger is inside the fellowship.
- **planaō** — wander, go astray, move off the path.
- Drift is usually quiet before it is public.
- Neglected prayer.
- Neglected Scripture.
- Missed assemblies.
- Excused sin.
- Obedience becomes negotiable.

Gem:

A soul is rarely lost all at once; it is usually lost by inches before it is lost in full view.

- **OT pressure:** Ezekiel 18:24; Ezekiel 33:12–13
Past righteousness does not excuse present rebellion.
- **NT pressure:** Hebrews 3:12; 1 Corinthians 10:12; 2 Peter 2:20–22
Brethren can fall. Standing men can fall. Escaped men can become entangled again.
- **Personal:** Stop measuring safety by what you used to be while living loosely now.
- **Church:** A congregation that ignores drift becomes a graveyard of quiet apostasies.
- **Generational:** If children see drift treated lightly, they learn truth carries no urgency.

II. Drift Hardened Becomes Apostasy

- **Key phrase:** “save his soul from death”
- James shows the beginning of the road; Hebrews 6 shows the cliff at the end.
- Hebrews 6 is not describing curious outsiders.

- Enlightened.
- Tasted the heavenly gift.
- Partakers of the Holy Spirit.
- Tasted the good word of God.
- And yet the text says they can **fall away**.
- Apostasy is not a rough week.
- Apostasy is hardened rejection of known truth.
- The straying Christian can still be turned back.
- The hardened apostate has resisted conviction so long that the heart has become fixed against repentance.

Illustration:

A phone battery does not die at 95 percent. It dies because it keeps draining and is never recharged. That is how many souls drift. The danger is not the first drop. The danger is ignoring the warning until the screen goes dark.

- Hebrews 3:12–13 — unbelief grows, sin deceives, the heart hardens.
- Every act of disobedience does one of two things:
 - softens the heart through repentance
 - hardens the heart through resistance

Gem:

Apostasy is not built in one rebellion, but in a thousand tolerated doubts.

- False doctrine must be rejected here.
- “He was never really saved” does not fit James 5, Hebrews 3, Hebrews 6, 1 Corinthians 10, or 2 Peter 2.
- A warning against an impossible danger is not a warning at all.
- James says the wandering one is **among you**.
- James says his soul must be saved from **death**.

- Scripture gives real warnings because the danger is real.
- **Personal:** Stop assuming you will always want to repent later.
- **Church:** Silence is not mercy when a soul is hardening; silence is surrender.
- **Generational:** If this generation shrugs at drift, the next will plunge into apostasy faster.

III. The Church Must Restore the Wandering

- **Key phrase:** “and one turns him back”
- James does not assign this duty only to elders or preachers.
- He says **one** turns him back.
- Restoration belongs to the body.
- **epistrephō** — turn back, restore, bring home.
- This is not passive concern.
- This is pursuit.
- This is warning.
- This is pleading.
- This is opening the Bible and calling for repentance.

Gem:

Love does not watch a brother wander toward death and call silence compassion.

- Galatians 6:1–2 — restore in gentleness.
- Gentleness is not weakness.
- Gentleness is strength under control.
- Luke 15 — the shepherd goes after the lost sheep.
- Ezekiel 33:7–9 — the watchman must warn.
- “Will save his soul from death”
- That is not embarrassment.

- That is not reputation.
- That is spiritual ruin if left unchecked.
- “Will cover a multitude of sins”
- The point is forgiveness through repentance and restoration.
- Where rebellion was growing, mercy can write **covered**.
- Some of the greatest kingdom victories never happen in public.
- They happen in living rooms.
- Phone calls.
- Hard conversations.
- One Christian refusing to let another die quietly.
- **Personal:** Name the drifting person and move toward him this week.
- **Church:** Healthy congregations do not merely teach truth; they pursue the wandering.
- **Generational:** Let the next generation see that fellowship means responsibility, not convenience.

Conclusion Drive

- James does not end with a polite farewell; he ends with a rescue order.
- A Christian can stray.
- Drift is real.
- Apostasy is possible.
- Souls are at stake.
- The church has no right to sit still while brethren move toward death.

Invitation Drive

- If your own heart is drifting, stop now.
- Do not take one more step down that road.

- Repent while your heart still hears His voice.
- Return while repentance is still possible.
- If you know someone wandering, quit postponing the hard conversation.
- Go. Warn. Plead. Turn him back.
- If you need restoration, or need to put on Christ in baptism for the remission of sins, come now.

Key Word Study Box

TERM	MEANING	WHY IT MATTERS
<i>planaō</i>	to wander, go astray	Drift is real movement away from truth, not harmless fluctuation
<i>epistrephō</i>	to turn back, restore	Restoration requires active pursuit, not distant concern
<i>parapiptō</i>	to fall away	Hebrews 6 describes hardened departure, not temporary weakness
<i>thanatos</i>	death	James warns of real spiritual death, not mere discomfort

Key Cross-Reference Box

REFERENCE	WHY IT MATTERS
Ezekiel 18:24	Past righteousness does not excuse present rebellion
Ezekiel 33:12–13	Former faithfulness will not deliver a man in present transgression
Hebrews 3:12–13	Brethren can develop an unbelieving heart and fall away
Hebrews 6:4–6	Shows the terminal end of drift when resistance hardens

REFERENCE	WHY IT MATTERS
1 Corinthians 10:12	Standing men must take heed lest they fall
2 Peter 2:20–22	Returning to corruption leaves a man worse than before
Galatians 6:1–2	Gives the spirit and method of restoration
Luke 15:3–7	The shepherd seeks the wandering, not merely notices him

Preaching Outline

Can the Saved Fall Away?

Text

James 5:19–20

Primary supports: **Hebrews 6:4–6; Hebrews 3:12–13; Galatians 6:1–2**

Learning Objectives

- I. **Remember:** State the blessing promised to the one who restores a straying Christian.
- II. **Understand:** Explain why James treats the wandering Christian as a soul in danger of death.
- III. **Analyze:** Distinguish quiet drift from hardened apostasy.
- IV. **Apply:** Identify a drifting brother or sister and take a real step toward restoration.

Opening Hook Paragraph

A church can lose a brother long before his name ever disappears from a directory. Men do not usually run from Christ in one loud act of rebellion. They drift. They drift through neglected prayer, ignored truth, tolerated sin, and a

conscience they keep pushing aside. James does not treat that drift as harmless. He treats it as deadly. And he ends his letter, not with soft comfort, but with a rescue order.

Thesis

Because a Christian can stray from the truth and forfeit his soul, the church must urgently pursue, warn, and restore the wandering before drift becomes destruction.

Pulpit Outline

I. A Christian Can Truly Stray from the Truth

- **Key phrase:** “If any among you strays from the truth”
- James is speaking about one **among you** — not a pagan, not an outsider, not a visitor at the edge.
- The danger is inside the fellowship.
- **planaō** — wander, go astray, move off the path.
- Drift is usually quiet before it is public.
- Neglected prayer.
- Neglected Scripture.
- Missed assemblies.
- Excused sin.
- Obedience becomes negotiable.

Gem:

A soul is rarely lost all at once; it is usually lost by inches before it is lost in full view.

- **OT pressure:** Ezekiel 18:24; Ezekiel 33:12–13
Past righteousness does not excuse present rebellion.

- **NT pressure:** Hebrews 3:12; 1 Corinthians 10:12; 2 Peter 2:20–22
Brethren can fall. Standing men can fall. Escaped men can become entangled again.
- **Personal:** Stop measuring safety by what you used to be while living loosely now.
- **Church:** A congregation that ignores drift becomes a graveyard of quiet apostasies.
- **Generational:** If children see drift treated lightly, they learn truth carries no urgency.

II. Drift Hardened Becomes Apostasy

- **Key phrase:** “save his soul from death”
- James shows the beginning of the road; Hebrews 6 shows the cliff at the end.
- Hebrews 6 is not describing curious outsiders.
- Enlightened.
- Tasted the heavenly gift.
- Partakers of the Holy Spirit.
- Tasted the good word of God.
- And yet the text says they can **fall away**.
- Apostasy is not a rough week.
- Apostasy is hardened rejection of known truth.
- The straying Christian can still be turned back.
- The hardened apostate has resisted conviction so long that the heart has become fixed against repentance.

Illustration:

A phone battery does not die at 95 percent. It dies because it keeps draining and

is never recharged. That is how many souls drift. The danger is not the first drop. The danger is ignoring the warning until the screen goes dark.

- Hebrews 3:12–13 — unbelief grows, sin deceives, the heart hardens.
- Every act of disobedience does one of two things:
 - softens the heart through repentance
 - hardens the heart through resistance

Gem:

Apostasy is not built in one rebellion, but in a thousand tolerated doubts.

- False doctrine must be rejected here.
- “He was never really saved” does not fit James 5, Hebrews 3, Hebrews 6, 1 Corinthians 10, or 2 Peter 2.
- A warning against an impossible danger is not a warning at all.
- James says the wandering one is **among you**.
- James says his soul must be saved from **death**.
- Scripture gives real warnings because the danger is real.
- **Personal:** Stop assuming you will always want to repent later.
- **Church:** Silence is not mercy when a soul is hardening; silence is surrender.
- **Generational:** If this generation shrugs at drift, the next will plunge into apostasy faster.

III. The Church Must Restore the Wandering

- **Key phrase:** “and one turns him back”
- James does not assign this duty only to elders or preachers.
- He says **one** turns him back.
- Restoration belongs to the body.

- **epistrephō** — turn back, restore, bring home.
- This is not passive concern.
- This is pursuit.
- This is warning.
- This is pleading.
- This is opening the Bible and calling for repentance.

Gem:

Love does not watch a brother wander toward death and call silence compassion.

- Galatians 6:1–2 — restore in gentleness.
- Gentleness is not weakness.
- Gentleness is strength under control.
- Luke 15 — the shepherd goes after the lost sheep.
- Ezekiel 33:7–9 — the watchman must warn.
- “Will save his soul from death”
- That is not embarrassment.
- That is not reputation.
- That is spiritual ruin if left unchecked.
- “Will cover a multitude of sins”
- The point is forgiveness through repentance and restoration.
- Where rebellion was growing, mercy can write **covered**.
- Some of the greatest kingdom victories never happen in public.
- They happen in living rooms.
- Phone calls.
- Hard conversations.
- One Christian refusing to let another die quietly.

- **Personal:** Name the drifting person and move toward him this week.
- **Church:** Healthy congregations do not merely teach truth; they pursue the wandering.
- **Generational:** Let the next generation see that fellowship means responsibility, not convenience.

Conclusion Drive

- James does not end with a polite farewell; he ends with a rescue order.
- A Christian can stray.
- Drift is real.
- Apostasy is possible.
- Souls are at stake.
- The church has no right to sit still while brethren move toward death.

Invitation Drive

- If your own heart is drifting, stop now.
- Do not take one more step down that road.
- Repent while your heart still hears His voice.
- Return while repentance is still possible.
- If you know someone wandering, quit postponing the hard conversation.
- Go. Warn. Plead. Turn him back.
- If you need restoration, or need to put on Christ in baptism for the remission of sins, come now.

Key Word Study Box

TERM	MEANING	WHY IT MATTERS
<i>planaō</i>	to wander, go astray	Drift is real movement away from truth, not harmless fluctuation
<i>epistrephō</i>	to turn back, restore	Restoration requires active pursuit, not distant concern
<i>parapiptō</i>	to fall away	Hebrews 6 describes hardened departure, not temporary weakness
<i>thanatos</i>	death	James warns of real spiritual death, not mere discomfort

Key Cross-Reference Box

REFERENCE	WHY IT MATTERS
Ezekiel 18:24	Past righteousness does not excuse present rebellion
Ezekiel 33:12–13	Former faithfulness will not deliver a man in present transgression
Hebrews 3:12–13	Brethren can develop an unbelieving heart and fall away
Hebrews 6:4–6	Shows the terminal end of drift when resistance hardens
1 Corinthians 10:12	Standing men must take heed lest they fall
2 Peter 2:20–22	Returning to corruption leaves a man worse than before
Galatians 6:1–2	Gives the spirit and method of restoration
Luke 15:3–7	The shepherd seeks the wandering, not merely notices him