

Commentary of James 5

James Chapter Five

1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ... 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter (or 'in the day of feasting').

James 5:1-6 is one section of thought, but it calls us to repent of two distinct things. Therefore I will break it up into two distinct thoughts. I will also group verses 1-3 with verse 5, and will group verses 4 and 6 since they go together.

- **4) Humbly repent of the excessive self-indulgence that wealth so easily entices you into.**
 - It is not wrong to have much wealth. What is wrong is to steward that wealth *primarily* to our own benefit. It is wrong to be enticed by that wealth into a lifestyle of excessive self-indulgence where you accumulate more than you really need. It is wrong to have wealth and then to forget that at Judgment Day we will give an account of the usage of our wealth. It is wrong to have wealth and then to miss the opportunity to be generous and underwrite the purposes of Christ in our generation. (See 1 Timothy 6:17-20 for complementary biblical guidance given to rich Christians.)
 - Note that James is not addressing all rich people everywhere. He is addressing a certain group of rich people in Jerusalem who live lives completely unconcerned about the poor. It is not clear whether James, in these verses, is addressing rich Christians in the churches (as he seemed to do in 1:10) or rich non-Christians that were doing great harm to poor Christians and to the church for that matter (as mentioned in 2:6,7). Probably the latter.
 - Verse 1 warns of the misery these oppressive rich people will face on Judgment Day. They will 'weep and wail' when God shows them how empty their lives really are, and punishes them for their misplaced confidence.
 - Verse 2 and 3 show us that these rich people have been extremely *excessive* in their accumulation of wealth. They have so much wealth that they cannot even use it. It is rotting. They have so much clothing that much of it is being eaten by moths. They have so much silver and gold that is beginning to rust.
 - In verse 3, James compares the silver and gold, which is being *eaten away* by rust, with the punishment of Judgment Day when they will experience their bodies *eaten away* by flames.

- The end of verse 3 and verse 5 speaks of how they have ‘hoarded wealth’ and how they have lived in luxury, self-indulgence and obesity. But the day of slaughter (or the Day of Judgment, see Jeremiah 12:3) is at hand. Verse 5 speaks of how they have ‘fattened yourselves’. This Greek literally means, ‘fattened your hearts’. It implies that they indulged every desire they had.
- If you’re wondering if these verses refer to you, and whether you really are amongst the rich (which is a relative term) then visit www.globalrichlist.com and take the test to see how wealthy you really are from a global perspective.
- What are you doing with your wealth? Are you using it in pursuit of the comfortable life, or in the service of Christ in this generation? Are you hoarding things? Do you have more than you need? In what areas of life can you down scale in?

4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ... 6 You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

- **5) Humbly repent of the exploitation of the poor.**
 - Now we see why James was so riled at these rich people. It was not so much their excessive self-indulgence that was getting to him, as much as their treatment of the poor.
 - In 2:6,7 James spoke of the rich who were exploiting many poor people in the churches, dragging them into court, and even blaspheming the noble name (ie Jesus) to whom they belonged.
 - These two verses show that they also did not pay them their deserved wages, and that they used their power to condemn and murder some innocent poor people.
 - These verses define injustice for us: *injustice is the misuse of power*. Money is power. Rich people have power. Poor people do not. That is why in the Bible the word ‘poor’ is often used in the sense of ‘powerless’. God wants us to use whatever money and power we have to bless those less fortunate than themselves (see 1:27). But injustice is the opposite. It is the use of power and money to break, to use, and to exploit those less fortunate than ourselves. This riles God to the depths. This injustice in itself calls out to God (v4). And added to this, the victims of injustice rightly call out the Lord Almighty for justice (v4). So both the injustice itself and those who have been treated unjustly join *in unison* as they cry out to God for justice. And God hears it. And he promises to act. Possibly in this life, but certainly at Judgment Day God will punish those who have abused their wealth and power at the cost of the poor. He will make sure that justice is done, partially in this life, but ultimately on That Day. And, it goes without saying, that the church needs to, as far as possible, work for justice in

their spheres of influence. Since it reflects the very character of a Just God.

- Are there any ways in which you are using your power and wealth at the cost of those less fortunate than you? Are there are injustices that you are aware of that you can get involved in so that justice comes to the victims?

PATIENCE IN HARD TIMES (5:7-12)

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

- **1) Wait patiently for Jesus' intervention in your hard time.**
 - The Christians to whom James was writing were going through a hard time, with many of them being exploited and persecuted by powerful people in the community. Add to this that many were poor, widowed, orphaned, and you can imagine the strain the whole faith community felt. Then of course temptations to quit or to compromise were great.
 - James tells them to 'be patient' (v7 and v8) and to 'stand firm' (v8). But what must they wait for? The answer is 'for the Lord's coming' (both v7 and v8). This refers primarily to the return of Christ where he will 'pay back trouble to those who have troubled you, and give relief to you who are troubled' (2 Thessalonians 1:6). But it can also refer to current interventions of Jesus, where he brings justice and relief in part in this life. He gives a wonderful picture of the interventions of Jesus, in this life and in the next in verse 7. He compares the suffering Christians to a farmer waiting for the land to yield its crop. There are two rains - the early autumn rains (which germinate the seed) and the late spring rain (which matures the harvest). The rain refers to the intervention of Jesus, both now (ie the early rains which bring partial help) and later (ie the Second Coming of Christ which bring complete help). As we wait patiently in our hard times, we can expect Christ to intervene like rain, partially in this life but fully in the next life. Help, relief and justice is on its way.

9 Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

- **2) Don't let hard times make you grumble against each other.**
 - The previous verses (verses 4-8) have all been about the way the Christians and the church have been suffering. And they have been comforted by the fact that Jesus is going to judge those people who have harmed, exploited and persecuted them (v4,8).

- Now James' tone changes in two ways. Firstly, he warns them that in their suffering and hardship they will be tempted to 'grumble against one another'. This speaks of a general negativity, complaint and criticism toward each other. Suffering can either make us better it can, if we're not careful, make us bitter. Secondly, he warns them that if they do give in to the sin of grumbling against each other, Jesus the judge will not only judge their enemies, but will judge them too. The fact that he is 'standing at the door' speaks of just how ready he is to do just that.
- When times are hard, we must be very careful not to let the stress of it all cause us to become nasty to the people around us. And of course, remembering that we'll be judged by how we treat each other motivates us to treat each other better.

10 Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered.

- **3) Be encouraged by the examples of those who were blessed as a result of their perseverance.**
 - James refers to the long history of the prophets, those 'who spoke in the name of the Lord'. And he refers to the unpopularity and persecution they faced. He draws attention to the fact that it is those who persevered through the suffering that came with obedience to God who are considered 'blessed'. This echoes the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:10-12.
 - But what does it mean that they were 'blessed' in their perseverance? The first and most obvious meaning is that they received eternal reward for their earthly sufferings. We see this in the fact that James speaking in the present tense when he says, 'we count them blessed'. Another meaning is that many of them accomplished great things for God, and in this sense it showed that God vindicated their suffering. A third meaning is that they were deeply happy because they knew God's presence with them even while they suffered. A last meaning is that they were blessed in the sense that 'they became famous in history' for their perseverance.
 - Hebrews 11:32-39 gives an example of the 'prophets' that James here speaks of: "32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains

and imprisonment. 37 They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. 39 *These were all commended for their faith ...*”

You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.

- **4) Be encouraged by how God has the power to turn the whole situation around.**
 - James chooses one of the most powerful examples of a person who suffers for a season but then God more than makes up for it. He refers to Job who lost everything (his children, livestock, servants, reputation, wealth and health). His wife suggested that he even curse God and die. But instead he continued to trust in God (Job 2:9,10). But after a season of perseverance God turned it all around. In Job 42:2 Job acknowledged that God can do all things, and that no plan of God's can be thwarted. He continued to trust that God was good and that God had a plan in all his suffering, and that eventually God will bring good out of all this. And he did. Job 42:10-17 tells us... 10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. 11 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver [a] and a gold ring. 12 The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. 13 And he also had seven sons and three daughters. 14 The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. 15 Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. 16 After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. 17 And so he died, old and full of years.
 - The story of Job reminds us that our suffering is temporary. And that God will eventually turn it around for good, sometimes in this life, but always in the next life - for those who trust in him.

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

- **5) Be encouraged by God's compassion toward you.**
 - James reminds us that 'the Lord is full of compassion and mercy'. His compassion is essentially 'his sympathetic understanding of human weakness and his restoration of those in trouble.' The fact that he is merciful implies that he is ready to give his compassion even to undeserving sinners.

- A Bible survey on God's compassion reveals so much about this wonderful attribute of God:
 - He is 'the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles' (2 Corinthians 1:3).
 - He has parental compassion for us: 'As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him, for he knows how we are formed - he remembers that we are dust' (Psalm 103:13,14).
 - He has compassion on all (Psalm 145:9).
 - Isaiah 49:13 reminds us that God's compassion is like that of a mother for her child: 'The Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.' Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.'
 - His compassion leads to his interventions on our behalf. Psalm 111:3-4 tells us, 'Glorious are his deeds - he has caused his wonders to be remembered - the Lord is gracious and compassionate.'
 - We desperately need his compassion. Psalm 119:77 teaches us to pray, 'Let your compassion come to me that I may live.'

12 Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.

- **6) Be a person whose words can be taken at face value.**
 - James is clearly a student of Jesus' teachings. Here he summarizes the teaching of Jesus recorded in Matthew 5:34-37:
 - 34 I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply 'Yes,' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.
 - The meaning of this teaching is that when you make promises do not try add credibility to your promise by swearing on other things, such as 'I swear on my life', or 'I swear on the Bible', or 'I swear on my mother's life', or 'I swear to God'. But what is wrong with this? Firstly, it is manipulative. Secondly, it shows that your simple, everyday words cannot be trusted. Jesus and James teach us to be a person of our word. We should be able to answer a question or make a promise with a simple 'Yes' or 'No', without having to lean on the credibility or worth of something else.

- James and Jesus both radically discourage not being a person whose words can be taken at face value. James reminds us that to not be a person of our word will cause us to be condemned'. Jesus is ready to judge us on our speech as we have seen throughout this letter (see 2:13, 4:11, 5:9). Jesus adds that a person who is not a person of their word is like the evil one himself.
- Why does James include this mention of integrity of speech under the section on persevering well (5:7-12). There are two reasons. Firstly, it continues the theme of what Jesus will judge us for (which has been recurring in the previous verses). Secondly, we are most likely to not be a person of our word when we are under pressure.

A RICH PRAYER-LIFE (5:13-19)

13 Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray.

- **1) Give yourself to *petitionary* prayer.**
 - There are so many kinds of prayer. One of them is petitionary prayer, which simply means 'prayer for our own needs and wants'. We must not think that spiritual maturity means we no longer pray for ourselves. On the contrary Jesus taught us to pray on a daily basis for ourselves for such things as our next meal, forgiveness and the ability to overcome temptation (Matthew 11:3,4). Praying for our needs is not selfish. It is commanded. Our heavenly Father waits for us to ask him for what we need.
 - The word translated 'trouble' means 'to be at the receiving end of something unpleasant'. This continues the theme of suffering which has been explored in the previous verses (1-12). James, speaking as a shepherd, counsels us to do one more thing - to call out to God in prayer. But what can we pray for or about? We can ask for the grace we need to persevere (1:4). We can ask for the wisdom we so desperately need in the situation (1:5). We can express our trust in him as our Father whom we know is committed to doing us good (1:17). We can draw near to his comforting presence (4:8). We can humble ourselves under his mighty hand, convinced that 'he will lift us up' when the time is right (4:10). If we are being treated unjustly, we can cry out to God for justice (5:4). We can call on God's compassion and mercy toward us in our time of need (5:10).
 - This little verse lets us in on a major insight: one reason God allows us to experience pain and lack is so that we pray. In other words, the experience of everyday life and the desire to do the will of God are meant to drive us to our knees in dependence on God.
 - Of course God will not always grant us what we ask for, especially when he knows that what we ask for is not really for our best, or

because we are more pre-occupied with the gifts than with the Giver (see 4:3).

Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.

- **2) Give yourself to *praise* prayer.**
 - James is giving pastoral advice to Christians. In the previous verse he has suggested that our troubles should drive us to our knees in prayer. But what if life is fine at the moment? Well, then take it to the Lord in prayer too - but instead of petitioning God, sing songs of praise to him.
 - Sadness and difficult circumstances is an opportunity to pray, but so is gladness and wonderful circumstances. Prayer is, before anything else, the communication that keeps our relationship with God strong. And we need to learn to speak to God about everything - in both the bad and the good times.
 - There are several ways to praise God. You could sing a well-known Christian song. You could make up your own tune and simply sing heart-felt words of praise. You could read one of the praise psalms (Psalms 145-150 are recommended). You could express gratitude to God for all the good things, people and circumstances he has given you. If you have the gift, you could sing in 'tongues' to God (see 1 Corinthians 14:15).
 - Is it appropriate for struggling people to sing songs of praise? Of course. In fact most of the psalms were songs of praise written by people when they were in deep pain.

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make them well; the Lord will raise them up.

- **3) Give yourself to *healing* prayer.**
 - God is a God who heals people. People are broken by their own sins, by the sins of others against them, and by the fact that this whole creation is in a sense 'broken' because of human sin. Jesus is the Healer who undoes the damaging effects of sin in our lives.
 - What does it mean to be 'sick' (v14)? The word can be translated to speak of both physical and spiritual sickness, helplessness and weariness.
 - When we are sick we should call the elders of the church to pray over us. They will also anoint us with 'oil'. What does this oil mean? Some people believe it refers to a broadly-used medicinal oil that was massaged into a person. If this is correct, then this verse wonderfully shows that the use of medicine is not incompatible with also seeking God's miraculous touch. Most likely however it is a symbol of the Holy Spirit's presence and healing power. The oil itself does not have power. It merely acts as an aid

to faith in the unseen healing power of the Spirit. In Mark 6:13 we see that the disciples also used oil in this way when 'healing people'.

- Verse 15 is meant to fill us with faith in God's ability to heal people and to raise them up.
 - Does this verse mean that only elders can pray for the sick. Obviously not - in Mark 6:13 we see that all the disciples were ready to 'anoint people with oil and heal them'. The value of getting the elders to pray for us is that we should make contact with them as our shepherds, especially at our most personally vulnerable times. Notice however that it is not the elders who make the initiative toward the sufferer, but the sufferer who makes initiative toward the elders.
 - All the main phrases James uses (ie 'sick', 'make them well' and 'raise them up') can be used of a person who is either sick physically or a person who is deeply struggling emotionally, mentally, spiritually or even circumstantially. Probably James left it vague for the broadest possible application to as many people as possible. This verse speaks powerfully of how the Holy Spirit is ready to touch and restore broken people. And that he does this as people pray with faith for them in a time of prayer.
- **4) Give yourself to *faith-filled* prayer.**
 - Verse 15 speaks of a certain kind of prayer, 'the prayer of faith'. James has already spoken of the need to pray with lots of faith and no doubt (1:6).
 - James is probably echoing again the teaching of Jesus in Mark 11:22-24: "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and do not doubt in your heart but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.'
 - Whether we're praying for ourselves, for another, or a situation - we need to learn to pray the prayer of faith. Here are some practical guidelines to pray the prayer of faith: First, when praying discern the will of God in the situation through sensitivity to the Spirit and through remembering the character and promises of God described in the Scriptures. Second, once you know the will of God in the situation then simply ask God to do it. And keep on asking him to do it, until such time as a supernatural assurance comes that it will be done. This supernatural assurance is described as 'the gift of faith' in 1 Corinthians 12:9. Third, start to thank God for what he will do.

If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

- **5) Give yourself to *grace-mediating* prayer.**

- Verses 14 and 15 speak of Christians who are struggling for many reasons. One of the most common struggles of Christians is that they have sinned, whether once or repeatedly, and are now plagued with a sense of shame and guilt.
- James has already made it clear how we need to ‘come clean with God’ in humble submission, confession and repentance (see 4:6-10). But now he adds an insight: sometimes we need other Christians involved in our restoration. We may have asked God to forgive us, but for whatever reason, we don’t yet *feel* forgiven. The wonderful promise is that ‘if they have sinned, they will be forgiven’. The experience of forgiveness comes from Jesus, but is mediated through the loving prayers of fellow-believers.
- Verse 16 lets us in on an important practice as Christians: owning up to our sin-struggles to other Christians. This speaks of life in a community where it is safe to be honest and vulnerable about our weaknesses and sins. Amazingly, even the act of confessing our sins to other Christians breaks the power of that sin. This is because the power of sin is in its secrecy.
- When someone does confess their sin to us, the next thing to do is to pray for them, inviting God to reveal his restorative grace to them and in them. This practice of having someone, or even more than one person, praying for another on an issue illustrates the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:19: ‘If two of you agree on anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.’ We have a wonderful promise: ‘they will be healed’. This means God will so intervene for good in this person either while we pray for them, or after we pray for them.
- Notice that verse 14 started with the elders doing the praying, but verse 16 speaks of all of us involved in this ministry-time prayer. James is making it clear that all of us, not just the leaders, need to be ready to minister to each other in prayer.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

- **6) Give yourself to *effective* prayer.**
 - This verse reveals two potent insights into prayer:
 - First, there are degrees of effectiveness in prayer. Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the arm of God. James is spurring us on to learn how to pray prayers that find the nerve, and actually move the arm of God. Some of our prayers will be more effective than other prayers. This however must not be taken to be a mechanical view of prayer, where we are able to manipulate God through technique or through certain words. Jesus reacted badly toward this approach in prayer (see Matthew 6:7).
 - Second, the main factor that determines how effective our prayers are, is the level of our relationship with God. James tells us that ‘the prayers of a righteous person’ are effective. Practically speaking, a person who has a close, submissive

relationship with God is ‘a righteous person’. This is in contrast to what James taught in 4:3, where the prayers of Christians who have a poor relationship with God (full of compromise and idolatry) are highly ineffective. We have already seen in our commentary on ‘the prayer of faith’ (v15) that we cannot pray in faith until we discern the will of God in a specific situation. The best way to discern the will of God in any situation is to walk close to God in all situations. It is as we develop our friendship with God that we more quickly discern and desire his will. And as we discern it, and desire it too - we pray it. This is beautifully described in 1 John 5:14,15: ‘This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.’

17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

- **7) Give yourself to *earnest* prayer.**
 - James in 5:11 gave us an example of how God powerfully acted in response to Job’s perseverance. Now he gives an example - of Elijah - of how God powerfully acted in response to Elijah’s prayer.
 - James reminds us that Elijah was an ordinary person just like us, and yet God answered with dramatic power. James is telling us that we too can expect similar results to our prayers.
 - James draws main attention to the ‘earnestness’ of Elijah’s prayer. He prayed with all his heart. He gave it everything he had. He did not pray casually, but whole-heartedly.
 - James summarizes the following verses: 1 Kings 17:1 Now Elijah ... said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." 1 Kings 18:1 After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land." 1 Kings 18:41-45: And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.
 - From these verses in 1 Kings we learn more about the way Elijah prayed:

- *He saw himself as partnering with God in this world (17:1).* We will never understand what prayer is for until we understand that we're on a mission with God.
- *He knew the specific will of God for the situation at hand (18:1).* God has already told him that rain was coming, so when he prayed for rain he could simply say to God, 'God, you said it would rain. Let it rain.'
- *He prayed earnestly.* He prayed with his face in the ground between his knees. This speaks of whole-hearted, give-it-everything-you've-got prayer.
- *He prayed perseveringly.* He sent back his servant seven times before the answer came.
- *He prayed until supernatural assurance came.* He prayed until he saw a little cloud, the size of a man's hand. This can be used as a picture of how we need to pray until we discern that God has already started to act in response to our prayers. We pray until we have the assurance that the answer to our prayer is already on the way.

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

- **8) Bring wanderers back to God.**
 - It was customary in ancient letters such as this one to summarize the message of the letter at the end. This is apparently what James is doing here. James has been writing to Christians who are in all kinds of sin - anger, cursing, partiality, neglecting the poor, fighting, selfishness, idolatry and more - and he has warned that 'sin when it is full-grown will result in death' (see 1:15). James has written this letter in an attempt to bring sinning, wandering Christians to repentance.
 - What is this 'death' that he speaks of? It does not mean the loss of salvation, but rather the consequences of one's sin, both in this life and in the Judgment to come. This reminds us of Paul's warning in Galatians 6:8: 'Those who sow to please the sinful nature, from the nature will reap destruction.' This also echoes the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 7:13 that 'broad is the road that leads to destruction and many take it.' It speaks of a Christian who slowly but surely has veered off the road of life (obedience to Christ) and is journeying down the road of destruction (disobedience to Christ).
 - What does it mean 'to cover over a multitude of sins'? James is speaking figuratively of how, when we confess our sins and turn back to Christ, he is ready to forgive us and 'cover over our sins'. His grace will restore us, and wipe our slate clean. We get a new start.

- We need to be ready to do all we can to help all wandering Christians to come back to vibrant faith in and tender-hearted obedience to Christ. And of course, one way to draw wandering Christians back to Christ is through prayer (which has been the theme of the last several verses). We know that James did not only try to draw wanderers back through his letter-writing and his pasturing of people, but also through prayer. We have a quote from an ancient source about James: 'He was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel.'