

**FAITH THAT WORKS - PART 13:**  
**“A FAMILY THAT PURSUES”**  
**JAMES 5:19-20**

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**Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone. I'm Jeff - one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

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**Sermon Series Introduction**

We're currently in Part 13 (the final part) of our sermon series called “Faith That Works” - Where we're going through the book of James together.

The title of today's sermon is “A Family That Pursues.”

Before we begin, let me pray for us.

<prayer>

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**Introduction**

“Do you think it's possible for a person to walk in a straight path?”

This was the question that some researchers had. And in order to figure out the answer, an experiment was set up. They placed a man in the middle of the forest (they equipped him with GPS so that his steps could be tracked) - but he wasn't given a map or anything else that could help him on this journey. He simply had to do his best to walk in a straight path for a given amount of time (and then afterwards, they'd check the GPS data).

What they found was that the man actually started off walking in a straight line (at least for some time), but then his steps would start wandering away from the path that he should be on. And he even started turning, and he ended up walking in circles or loops (without him realizing it - in the moment, he thought he was going straight!).

It's the same with our lives. We can find ourselves wandering away from the right path (even going in circles). And over time - even without realizing it - we end up very far away from where we should be.

But today, James reminds us that we're not alone in our walk. And that, as a church family, we have brothers and sisters who are walking alongside us. And so this means that whenever one

of us wanders from the right path, other brothers and sisters can pursue us to bring us back to the right path.

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### **The One Thing**

As a church family, let's pursue one another when any of us wanders from the truth.

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### **Scripture Introduction**

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to James 5:19-20.

These are the final two verses of James' letter. So I want to invest a bit of time to recap what's happened thus far.

James has been writing to his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who've been scattered throughout the Roman Empire in the first century. These Christians were facing trials of various kinds. We don't know exactly what's been happening, but we can imagine that it must not have been easy for them because they may be going through heavy persecution at this time.

And over time, it seems like they're getting unsettled.

- Some started to question God, even blaming God (and maybe even blaming one another) for the hardships that they've been facing.
- And brothers and sisters seemed to be losing patience with each other (they're slow to listen, quick to speak, and quick to anger).
- And some were losing control of their tongues and their words (quarreling & fighting with one another), grumbling against each other, and causing division instead of unity.

It's not a picture of what God's family should be like.

And so James has been encouraging them to remain steadfast in the faith that they say they have - He reminds them that it's actually when our faith is tested, that it'll be purified and strengthened. So throughout his letter, James has been saying, "Brothers and sisters, show me! Show me - by your works and the way that you live - that your faith is alive, and not dead!"

But James is aware that not everyone in the church may be living out their faith. There may be some whose actions do not match the faith that they say they have.

So now, as James concludes his letter, he points our eyes to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ - Just as we're to show - by our works - that our faith is alive, we're also to watch over our fellow church members - and that by their works, their faith is alive...

So that's where we are today. I'll read James 5:19-20 for us. This is how James concludes his letter...

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### **James 5:19-20 (ESV)**

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

This is God's Word.

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### **Overview**

- I. A family member that wanders (v. 19a)
  - II. A family that pursues (vv. 19b-20)
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### **I. A family member that wanders (v. 19a)**

Let's look at verse 19(a) - James says, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth..."

That word "wanders" - It implies that you're straying away from something - that there's a certain standard or a certain path that we should be on, but then we're no longer on that path, and moving away from it.

That makes sense, right? If there's no right path that we should be on, then there's no such thing as wandering. It'd be like this past week where a lot of us were on holiday. Maybe there's no place that we need to be at and we're just walking around (or just "jalan2") in the mall. But imagine if we actually needed to be somewhere - at the office - but then we're at the mall instead. Then we've wandered away from where we actually should be, and we're somewhere else instead.

So then if "wandering" implies that we must be moving away from something, then the question is: what are we wandering from?

And James tells us... wandering from "the truth."

Notice how James is saying this - He's not saying "a truth", he's not saying "my truth", he's not saying "your truth"; he's saying "the truth."

So now the question is: what is "the truth" that James is talking about here?

The good thing is that we don't need to rely on our own understanding and try to guess what James means here. Because back in chapter 1, verse 18 - he already told us: "the word of truth."

The truth that James is talking about is the Word of God. Not merely what he thinks is true, not merely what his friends think is true, not merely what the world says is true, but what God says is true.

<pause>

I have a confession - Before I became a believer I thought Christians were "not very smart". I was thinking, "Really? Really? You guys are just gonna believe things and do things just because that's what a book tells you to do?" (Though ironically, at the time, I was in college and literally studying from books).

Over time, I came to learn that this book is not just like any other book. This book is the Word of God. And the Word of God is the truth.

- It's not relative truths about what I think is right and wrong, or what other people think is right and wrong.
- But it's the absolute Truth about what God says is right and wrong.
  - Because who else would be more worthy to determine what's actually right and wrong?
  - Shouldn't it be the God who created the universe, and everything and everyone in it, and who is perfectly good and righteous? Out of every living being on Earth & in Heaven, if anyone should define the truth, then shouldn't it be God?

And what I came to learn is that the truth contained in this book is actually for our own good, and for His glory (and there's nothing higher than Him).

So my conclusion was: then not only should we believe and do what God's Word says, but that's the wisest thing that we can do.

<pause>

But friends (and kids/teenagers), be careful - this is not what the world teaches! This is not what movies and social media are gonna teach you.

What the world teaches is that you should define your own truths (don't let anyone - not even God - define your truths for you).

- Just be who you want to be!
- Do what makes you happy!
- Make your own path!

That may be ok if you want to start a new business, but not if you want to follow Jesus.

And if we wander from God's Word and make our own path, the world is not gonna warn us that we're going the wrong way. No, the world is gonna cheer us on to keep going. We won't be labeled as a "wanderer" but as a "trailblazer." Not as someone "straying away" but as a "pioneer."

The world is not gonna tell you that you're wandering. It teaches us that there's basically no such thing as wandering because you can define your own path. But no, because there's such a thing as absolute truth, then there is such a thing as wandering.

So friends, let's not be misled by the world's teachings, but let's be clear about one thing: What's the truth? God's Word is the truth.

<pause>

Now, the next question is: Who can wander from the truth?

Let's look at verse 19 again - James says, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth..."

So he's saying that anyone can potentially wander from the truth.

And when James says "My brothers" here, he's referring to his fellow Christians. So Christians can wander from the truth.

And when he says "among you" he's referring to a specific group of Christians in a local church (Remember, that's actually what he was just talking about in the previous passage - he was talking about a local church, and how church members should go to their elders for prayers, and how they should also be praying for one another). So what he's saying here is that anyone in a local church can wander from the truth - so not only the newest members, but also those who've been a member for some time. And this also implies that even the elders and deacons can wander from the truth.

Now, knowing our church members, I know that none of us want to wander from the truth. We want to live out God's Word faithfully, and we want to do what God's Word says. I really do think that that's what we desire.

But church, I think we also know that wanting to do what God's Word says... Is different from actually obeying what God's Word says.

Again, this is what James has been talking about throughout his letter - he's basically been saying, "Hey, you say you know God's Word, well don't just be hearers of God's Word, but doers

of God's Word. If you say that you have faith, then show me! Show me - by the way that you live - that your faith is alive, and not dead."

Church, have we been living out God's Word?

Well, let's go to God's Word now and let's reflect on how we may actually be wandering from what God says.

Let's consider Ephesians 4:32, which says this:

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

- Church, amidst the conflicts that we may be having with each other, have we forgiven one another as God in Christ has forgiven us?
- Or have we gradually wandered from what God's Word says, and just been ignoring the other person, not talking to them (and then justifying to ourselves that that's the same thing as how God has forgiven us)?
- God's Word is clear here that we should forgive and reconcile with one another as God in Christ has forgiven and reconciled with us.

And let's consider Matthew 5:28-29, which say this:

"But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.

For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell."

- Church, how serious are we about sin and sexual immorality?
  - Jesus here doesn't literally mean that we should tear off a part of our body, but he's using hyperbole to emphasize the seriousness of sin.
  - Is this how we view our sins? Or are we wandering from what God's Word says and trying to justify ourselves, saying - "Well, it's not that bad" / "I'm not really hurting anyone" / "It just happens once in a while."
- God's Word is clear here that we should run away from anything that'd cause us to sin, whether it be sexually explicit material or something else.

Husbands, consider Ephesians 5:25-26, which say this:

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word"

- Husbands, have we been faithful in being the spiritual leader in the family? Have we been committed to our wives' sanctification? Have we been intentional in leading family worship and initiating spiritual conversations?
- Or have we been putting that off now because of other things that we think are more important?
- God's Word is clear here that one important way that husbands are to love their wives is to be committed to her sanctification.

Church, let's consider Hebrews 10:24-25, which say this:

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

- Have we been neglecting to gather together as a church?
  - Maybe it's the first time that you've gathered here in a while or you've been gathering here on and off.
  - I'm glad that you're here with us today. But is there a reason why you haven't been gathering regularly as God's Word says? Have you been justifying yourself, saying, “Well, I've been busy or tired” / Or “It's just a few Sundays anyways”
  - God's Word is clear here that we're to regularly gather with one another as a local church - that that's how we can faithfully obey the “one another” commands, like “stirring up one another” & “encouraging one another.” But then how can we faithfully do those things if we haven't been gathering together?
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- A picture that the Bible gives of someone wandering from the truth is like a sheep that has wandered away from the flock.
  - The Bible doesn't see this sheep as a “trailblazer” sheep or a “pioneer” sheep, but as a lost sheep.
  - The Bible assumes that if you're a Christian then you are living out God's Word in the context of a local church with other Christians (or with other sheep).
    - In fact, what we see time and time again is that when someone stops gathering as a church, then it usually means one of two things:
      - Either that person is in sin, or about to be in sin.
      - So church, let's not neglect to gather together as God's Word is clear about this.

And as we've been going to God's Word, it may be clearer to us now that anyone of us can be tempted to wander from the truth.

But as we just went through various passages from God's Word, I hope we can also build up this Christian instinct of going to God's Word again and again to see what God's Word has to say. That we're not merely doing things just because it's what the elders said or because it's what our friends said or because it's what that famous pastor said or because it's what another church said... But let's build up this Truth-centered instinct to always go directly to God's Word to see what God has to say.

<pause>

And one more thing about wandering that I think is important for us to realize. Is that when we wander from the Truth, ultimately we're not only wandering from God's Laws, but we're wandering from God Himself.

When we try to make our own path, then what we're essentially saying is not only, “No, I don't need God's Word to tell me what to do” but what we're saying is, “No, I don't need you, God.”

It's like the lyrics to the song "Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing" that says - "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it / Prone to leave the God I love." So not only are we prone to wander from the truth, we are prone to wander from the God we love...

First, "A Family Member That Wanders." Second...

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## **II. A family that pursues (vv. 19b-20)**

Let's look at verse 19 in its entirety - James says, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back"

Someone brings him back...

So the next question is: Who is this "someone" who James says should bring back the one who's wandering?

Well, in context, the "someone" is from "among you" - which we know was in reference to the local church. So what James is saying here is that members among a local church should be the one to pursue a fellow member who's straying from the truth.

And notice that this "someone" is generic and can be anyone from the church - It doesn't necessarily have to be the elders, or the deacons, or only those who've been members for some time. No, the responsibility falls on each and every member of a local church.

And this checks out - Because, remember, we just looked at Hebrews 10 - It's the members who should gather together and spur on one another, and encourage one another, and now to watch over & pursue one another. And this also makes sense - because if we remember that even the elders can wander from the truth - then it's fitting why it's all the members who should be pursuing one another & bringing one another back.

And bringing one another back to what? To the truth. Not merely bringing them back physically so that we can gather together as a church (though that's also good), but - more than that - bringing them back to God's Word - Helping them see the error of their ways so that they'd repent and turn away from their sins, and turn toward God. So that's the kind of bringing back that we're talking about here - it's repentance and faith (it's the turning away from sin & turning toward God).

<pause>



Now, some of us may be asking: Really? Do we really have to do this? That sounds like a lot of work and a big investment of my time and energy... Why is it my responsibility for what another member decides to do with their lives?

That's actually a good question: Why should we pursue one another? Well, this really depends on how we understand church.

If we think that merely "go" to church in order to take-in a service (and to have a certain experience) - just to take-in a sermon and listen to songs - then this pursuit of one another wouldn't really make much sense to us. Because then we're basically here for our own enjoyment.

But if we understand church - in accordance with what God's Word says a church is - then it's so much more than just a service. A church is a family of brothers and sisters in Christ - It's a gathering of those who were once sinners, but have since been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and are now adopted into God's family as His children.

If that's what our understanding of what a church is, then being part of a church is active (not passive), we're not just here to take-in an experience, but we're here to actively help one another follow Jesus (that's basically what these verses and Hebrews 10 are about). We're here for one another's spiritual good, we're here because we love God and we love His people, which means that we care for each other. We want to make sure that we're all faithfully walking in the truth together because we want to see each other persevere till the end, and see one another in Heaven.

Then if that's how we understand what a church is, then of course we should be pursuing one another when one of us wanders away!

<pause>

If we don't have that kind of care for one another, then the kind of attitude that we're showcasing is more like the attitude of Cain.

Now, are we familiar with the story of Cain and Abel? Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve. And it's a tragic story - Because Cain killed his brother, Abel. And when God asked Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain said, "I [don't] know; am I my brother's keeper?" / "Is it my responsibility to watch over my brother?!"

That's the kind of attitude that we'd be showcasing - like Cain, a wicked brother.

<pause>

But if we lovingly pursue after one another & going after the ones who are wandering, then we'd be showcasing the character of Jesus.

Because Jesus Christ is the one who is fully God, and... fully man - and yet he left his heavenly throne in order to pursue lost brothers and sisters - Because his mission was to bring his lost sheep back home.

That's the heart & character of our Lord and Savior - He cares for those who are wandering.

And so if we pursue one another, then this means that the kind of character we're showcasing is not those of Cain's, but those of Jesus.

<pause>

And isn't this what it means to be followers of Christ? We follow Jesus and his example.

And as followers of Christ, I don't think we can say that we're becoming more and more like Christ if we're not growing in our love for those who are wandering. Because that's the kind of heart that Jesus had.

And I think that as we grow in our desire to pursue fellow members, I think what'll naturally happen is that we'll also grow in our desire to pursue those who are not even Christians and those who've never even heard of Jesus before. Both come from the same heart.

- (1) Discipling is helping fellow Christians to follow Jesus
- (2) Evangelism is helping non-Christians to know Jesus

Both are important, and both come from the same heart to pursue the lost. But I just want us to be clear that what James is talking about here is in the context of discipling. But as we're focusing on pursuing fellow members (I also don't want us to forget the importance of pursuing non-Christians either). So I want us to be clear on that.

<pause>

But now, regarding members, how do we even begin to pursue one another? How should we even start?

Well, the very first step is to know who "one another" is, right? Who are the members who make up our church? Because when the Bible talks about the "one another" commands of loving one another, forgiving one another and pursuing one another, the "one another" is in the context of the local church.

So first step - let's get to know who "one another" is by praying through our Members Directory.

- For those who are not members, our Members Directory is basically a booklet with the names and photos of all of our members who have covenanted together as one local church.

- And I'd encourage us to pray through the Members Directory because that's a great way of naturally memorizing everyone's names. What Pastor Eric and I do is to pray through 1 page per day (so since today is the 6th, we'll pray for the members on page 6, then tomorrow we'll pray for those on page 7, and so on). So I'd encourage us to do that too.

And as you go through the directory, if you notice that there are those who you haven't talked to at all, please say hello to them and talk to them after Sunday Celebration. And please get to know one another by going to dinner together after Sunday Celebration or by setting another time to meet.

And when you meet, of course it can be good to talk about hobbies, food, travel, work, and those sorts of things. That kind of light conversation is also needed to build friendship. But I'd encourage us to go deeper, and have spiritually-oriented conversations.

Basically, help one another to be more aligned with God's Word - these are the kinds of questions that'll help us determine how our brothers and sisters are doing regarding their relationship with God, and how they may be wandering. So can ask each other questions like:

- What are you reading in the Bible these days?
- What stood out to you from the sermon? [And regarding the sermon, I'd encourage us to focus on the content of God's Word that's preached - not always about the quality of the sermon (though the pastors are always happy to receive feedback), but when sharing with one another, please share your takeaways from God's Word]
- And when talking about your struggles and what you should do, don't forget to always point each other back to God's Word (not always to what the pastors said or what a famous person said, but - again - build up the Christian instinct of always going back to God's Word).

So even before pursuing one another, we can get to know one another first and how we're doing spiritually.

<pause>

Now, let's look at verse 20 - the final verse of James' letter - He says, "let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

Earlier, we mentioned that Jesus' mission was to pursue his people & bring his lost sheep back home. Well, how did he do that?

In order to bring back his people, Jesus was willing - to not only sacrifice his time and energy - but to sacrifice his own life. Because Jesus knew that sin needs to be punished - of course, it should be punished. If God was truly good and righteous, then He needs to punish sin (or else it would be an injustice to allow evil to roam without any consequence).

But Jesus also knows that if his people were lost, then that means that they've wandered from the truth and have committed a multitude of sins (all kinds of sins against God). But because God is not only just, but is also loving and gracious, He chose to take this punishment himself. And Jesus became our substitute - he died on the cross in our place, and took on the punishment that we deserved.

When he did that, our multitude of sins were covered by his blood. Imagine our past, present, and future sins being covered by Jesus' blood (like a giant blanket). So now, our sins are no longer seen and no longer counted against us, but instead, we're seen as clean and righteous in God's sight. And by "us" who I mean are those who repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. For us - whose faith is in Jesus - it's as if we've walked along the right path perfectly & it's as if we've never wandered from God's truth.

Which means that Jesus saved our souls from eternal punishment in Hell, and he provided the way for his lost people to go to their eternal home in Heaven.

Friends, this is the Gospel (or the Good News) of Jesus. This is the Gospel that unites those who believe as brothers and sisters in Christ.

And when members point wandering members back to the Gospel truth (and help others in their turning back - again, repentance and faith - the turning away from sin and turning toward Jesus), then they played an active part in assuring that person of their salvation - not because they themselves have messianic powers, but because they're the ones who pointed the wandering person to the one who can save.

And for this member who repented and turned back to Christ, they can be confident of their salvation. And the church is also able to be more confident in the credibility of this person's profession of faith. Because essentially - by their repentance - they've shown that their faith is truly not dead, but alive.

<pause>

So now, the big question is really: How? How do we pursue a member who's wandering?

Well, this responsibility and privilege that we've been given as members is not easy. I have to be honest, it can take a lot of hard conversations - because it's not comfortable to point out another person's sin.

And we need to be aware of the risks - our conversations with this fellow members may cause strain in our friendship. But at the same time, this is when we need to address our fear of man - Because what's more important to us: our personal relationship with this person or the eternal state of their soul?

When we really think about what's at stake, then I think it becomes clearer when it's between Hell vs. them not liking you.

So do pray for your own heart and pray for the other person's heart, and then you'll just have to go and have that difficult conversation with them. And if you're the one being pursued, let's be gracious and listen to what our brothers and sisters have to say - at the end of the day, we care for one another and watching over one another's souls.

By God's sovereignty, out of all the ways that He can go about watching over His people & bringing them back to Him, He chooses to work through His people themselves.

<pause>

Now, one final question we may have is: What if the wandering person doesn't turn back, then was my pursuit all for nothing?

The answer is: No, it was definitely not for nothing. You just never know how God will work in that person's heart - maybe he'll turn back some time in the future. Or maybe after more brothers and sisters talk to them about it.

But even if that person doesn't turn back, then... that's ok. We're definitely gonna be sad about that. But the ultimate aim of our pursuit is not for the salvation of man, but for the glory of God. Not for the salvation of man, but for the glory of God.

Brothers and sisters, be comforted and encouraged in knowing that - in your pursuit - God was glorified. Because you've showcased the character of Jesus. You've brought sin (that was once hidden) into light. You've clarified what it means to be a Christian to that person & you helped portray the Gospel in our church family more accurately. So praise the Lord for that.

This world may measure success by visible results. The world has taught you that if there's no fruit now, then it's meaningless. But that's not how God sees things. God is pleased when He is glorified - even when there's not yet visible fruit.

The world may say that you're foolish and have failed in your pursuit. But we continue to do what the world says is foolish because that's what our God - in His Word - says. And we delight in glorifying God - even when there's not yet fruit.

And if the Lord wills, and there is fruit, then we give Him the glory.

### **Conclusion**

And brothers and sisters, this is how James' letter ends.

Throughout his letter, James has been saying, "Show me! Show me that your faith is alive by your works and the way that you live!"

And now, James closes his letter by saying, "Church, show me! Show me that your faith is alive by the way that you pursue one another!"

Not for your own glory, not for the glory of your own local church, but for the glory of God!

Let's pray

<prayer>

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