



Good Shepherding-Part 3

Caring for the Wandering Sheep of Your Church

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It's good to worship God who created us and created all things. I thought of that when we were singing about the creation of the universe. It's amazing when you look up at the stars at night. There's a lot on the planet of course that's changed but it's neat to think that the people in the book of Genesis, in Exodus, out in the wilderness wanderers, they were looking up at the same star patterns that we look up at. If you're like some backyard astronomer or you like stargazing, well, you know, I've been into that a couple of times in my past, just a little bit bought a cheap little telescope. It's fun to learn to identify what's up there in the sky and see these star patterns every night. They're called constellations of course. Maybe you don't know this but the word constellation comes from a Latin compound word "con" or "com," meaning together and "stellation" is from "stella" which is the Latin word for star. There are stars that are together. So we, you know, we build these little dot-to-dot images up in the sky and we learn where the Big Dipper is, which is part of a bear, Ursa Major, and you see the little W in the sky, that's Cassiopeia and, you know, you've got the North Star connected to the Little Dipper and you start to learn some of these things and they become familiar to you once you learn the patterns of looking up at the stars and seeing all the constellations. But every now and then you'll recognize that that star pattern that you see is all of a sudden changed. I mean it's odd how that happens and you look up and you see the addition of another star. Well, that wasn't there before. It actually makes that constellation look a little different. And then in a few days it goes away and it's not there anymore. Well at least that's what people thought. Of course they're not stars at all if you know anything about astronomy. Those are planets that come and go. It's Saturn and Jupiter and Mars and Mercury even early in the morning.

Those are not stars, they're planets. And planet you might need to know is a word that's just derived from a Greek New Testament word. Of course the Bible is written in Greek, the New Testament was at least and that language became the basis for so many of our English words and the word for planet is just a transliterated word which really means a wandering star. That's what it means. I mean it's the verb to wander, *planaó*. It's to go and come and then you leave, you come and then you go. The planet, the wanderer. Well there's a book of the Bible that talks about wanderers. Two verses at the end of the little book of James that speaks of wanderers not as stars, so to speak, that come into a constellation and leave but people that are transients that come into churches and they're there for a while and then they leave. It's not just an observation, some indicative observation of how the church works. Here is a book that says, listen, you folks who are a regular part of the church, you're fixtures in the church, like a constellation, a team of stars, a faithful group of people who meet together in the body of Christ in the flock, if you will, of God's pasture. If you are a Christian that is your commitment to be assembling together faithfully. Well occasionally there are people that wander in and then they wander out and the end of the book of James says you should care about those people. As a matter of fact you should see just what's at stake with the wanderers that come and go in your church.

I'm not talking about the visitors. I'm not talking about the people that come and check your church out and then move on. I'm talking about people who you know who may have sat in church with you for years. Maybe in your small group for months and months on end. People who you've known in ministries you've been a part of or maybe in a discipleship relationship and they seem so solid and then they go away and we don't hear from them anymore. That's what the last two verses of the little epistle of James, the letter of James, the half brother of Jesus, tells us about in James Chapter 5



verses 19 and 20. I'd love for you to take your Bibles this morning and to turn and just look at this very brief explanation of what's in peril and what's in danger in these people's lives and how we ought to respond. So very simple outline this morning. This is one of those sermons that is not hard to understand at all. It's a very simple message. It may not be traditional on Palm Sunday and certainly we're not into a liturgy and I'm a bit of an iconoclast, a little nontraditional. But we're just going to sit here and talk as a church family about what we can do between now and Easter. Easter is a time not only to invite your neighbors and your coworkers and your friends the church, which is great because they're much more apt to come on Easter. But it's a time for us to add one more element to our thinking about who we bring to church on Easter.

And that's the people identified in this passage. A very important group of people. We need to understand them and not just go, "oh yeah, Fred used to be a part of our group, bailed out, not here anymore." We ought to think about them with a little bit more compassion and a little bit more insight. Take a look at this passage with me, James Chapter 5 verses 19 and 20. James talks to us as a family. He refers to us with that familial word, my brothers. "If any among you, that means they're here with us, wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering saves his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Read that again. "My brothers, if any among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back," here's this physical sense of leaving and coming back. Then let him know if you do that, if you bring a sinner back from his wandering... I'm not talking about someone who's done some kind of transplant and maybe they've gone and taken a job in Texas or they moved to Nebraska or whatever. We're talking about people that have wandered, not just from the church that you're a part of, but what the church is about. The Bible calls the church the pillar and foundation of the truth. It's the place where God's people come together and assemble. It's their church family. And people who have been a part of that family, apparently, and are no longer a part of that family, it says if you bring that sinner back from his wandering, "whoever brings the sinner back from that wandering will save his soul from death," not yours, the one who goes to get them, but the one you're bringing back "and will cover a multitude of sins." Let's try to unravel that.

And if you want to highlight it, the word wanderers in verse 19 and the word wandering in verse 20, that's the word, if you had a Greek New Testament open, you'd see the word there, you should recognize it, it's the word planet. The one who wanders into the constellation and wanders out. The one who comes into a group who seems filled with people who are in it for the long haul and they're not in it for the long haul. And this whole passage about inspiring us to bring them back, get them back. Something very practical here as the pastor of Compass Bible Church a week before Easter, we've got some wanderers to bring back. Bring back, not just to the building, not just to our programming, not just to our church but to what the church is all about. Bring them back to the truth. Let's understand this first of all by looking at verse 19 and thinking about who these people might be. I want to be as practical and as specific as I can be. Who is it among us who was here but has wandered away? They've wandered from the truth, they're no longer singing about the truth, they're no longer sitting under the teaching of the truth, they're no longer talking about the truth in small groups, they're no longer studying the truth in good Christian books, they're no longer reading their Bibles. Who are those people? And I need you to think about those. Now if you're new to the church you may not know anybody in this particular church. But there may be even in your family some people have said I'm a part of the Body of Christ, I go to church, I'm a part of this thing called Christianity and they wandered away. Think of someone, if you would, identify them. I'm going to talk about a constellation in the New Testament, you could think of this.

We've been studying the Gospel of Luke, we're going to get back to that the week after Easter, Lord



willing, we'll get into Chapter 17 of Luke. As we go through Luke what you may not remember from week to week is though Dr. Luke wrote it all out under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, it was the Apostle Paul who was his traveling companion. And really the apostolic authority of that book comes through the Apostle Paul because the Apostle Paul and Luke, the physician, these guys were tight and there was a third one in that group. His name was Demas. If you study Philemon, the little book of Philemon or you study the Epistle to the Colossians, you hear about Paul speaking of his two buddies, Luke and Demas. Luke and Demas. It was Paul, Luke and Demas. Paul, Luke and Demas. But then in the very last book that Paul wrote, in Second Timothy, he says in that book it really pains me, Timothy, to report to you and here's how he puts it, in Second Timothy Chapter 4, that Demas has deserted us, he's gone and he's gone to Thessalonica.

And then he gives us why. Really, I didn't read all of that as I quoted it for you. It's Demas who has deserted us, he's deserted me, specifically he says, having loved the present world, he went on to Thessalonica. He went off to the city to go have his fun and do his thing and he was more attracted to the things of this world than he was to sticking together in this team of trying to serve God and love God and promote the truth. He is not about us anymore. Maybe you've heard me quote this passage quite often from this platform, it's First John Chapter 2 verse 19. First John Chapter 2 verse 19 that simply says this, "They went out from us," you know this passage? "Because they're not of us." If they would have been of us, an organic part of who we really are, they would have really been one of the stars in the constellation, they would have, here how the ESV translates it, they would have continued with us but they went out from us to prove that they're not all of us, right? They went out from us because they're not really of us. If they would have been of us then they would remain with us but they are going out, it showed something about who they were. Now a lot of people in that thought theologically and kind of dust their hands off, "Well there you go. You know Jim came in. He was a part of us and now he's gone. I guess he's not really one of us." Well I guess that's the accurate assessment of the situation but it's not where the story ends. I mean really when it comes to our responsibility, we see it in this passage, to first of all identify who those were that were among us and then is going to cause us to go out there and get him back.

So if you're taking notes we to identify the wanderers and I want you to identify the wanderers in your life and to think those through. Instead of just writing down "identify the wanderers" it might be good for you underneath that to think through some that you know. Who are the people who used to be a part of your small group, used to be a part of this church, used to be a part of the ministries that you were involved in, used to serve with you in the Sunday school classes that you taught, used to be a part of what you did in terms of the ministry in the church. Maybe last year or two years ago they were helping out with the eggtravaganza or the kids, you know, marketplace on Easter but they're not here anymore. Now, I'm not talking about the people that moved, not talking about the people who move as long as those people that have moved to another place are still in the church.

There's still a part of the truth, they still practice the truth, they still speak of the truth, they still sing of the truth, they are still taught the truth from week to week. They are still a part of the body of Christ.

Unless you think I'm reducing Christianity to attending church I certainly understand that's not the case. But I am saying what it proves when people say I'm done with the church, which many people try to say, I'm still good with God but I'm done with the church, is that really is a non-sequitur. Something doesn't follow. It doesn't make sense biblically because as imperfect as the church is God calls every Christian to not forsake the assembling of themselves together as is the habit of



some. As a matter of fact we ought to be doing this all the more, stirring each other up to love and good deeds, meeting together, habitually coming together as a church, all the more as you see the day approaching. And I guarantee you right now we see the day of Christ's return approaching much more than we did 70 years ago, much more than we did seven hundred years ago and the Bible says we need the church more now than ever. We need one another in these relationships where we're encouraging one another and stirring one other on in the organization that Christ built. He built the church. He designed the church. He set the church up. He delivers his instructions about the church. He wants people to be involved in the church.

And the reality of that is if they're not imbibing in the truth, if they're not connecting in the truth that is disseminated, that's the basis for keeping one other accountable within the church, then we've got a problem. Because you can have a faith in God as some people often say but if you know anything about the Epistle of James to his followers, these people that are scattered all throughout Asia Minor, he says this, you know there's a kind of faith that people have that produces no works, no obedience in their lives at all. And he asked the rhetorical question in James Chapter 2 verse 14, he says can that faith save you? Can you have a faith that you say you have in God, a belief in God, but in reality it doesn't produce any change in your life? It doesn't produce an obedience. You have a love for God but you don't keep His commandments.

Some of the most basic commandments are simply just being connected to the body of Christ. Of course the answer to that is no and he enlist the example of demons. Demons believe the facts. Demons have no doubt affirming the truth of God. It's just that that is not a transformative belief in their life. It hasn't changed the way they lived their lives.

And so for us to identify those wanderers is to think about people who have left the circle of the church that you're a part of and they're no longer connected with the body of Christ. And I'm not even saying that there aren't people that have left this church and haven't moved to Nebraska, they're still in the same house and they've gone to another church because they don't like the crazy pastor at Compass Bible Church. I can understand that. That's fine.

I'm not talking about people who say, well don't like the policies there or don't like the worship there, don't like the preaching there, I don't like whatever, fine, there can be people that leave our church. I just want to make sure that the people that used to be in your small group are in a church being taught the truth, speaking of the truth, singing the truth, discussing the truth, submitting their lives to the truth. That's fine. This is not the only church obviously that teaches the truth in South Orange County. So I'm just concerned of the people in your life that you can identify and you say, yes, they're no longer connected with the body of Christ, the manifestation of God in this world, they've just wandered away. Brothers if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and I guess before we leave that simple identification in your mind of who those people are and I hope you've got a few faces that have come through your imagination, a few names that have popped into your mind.

Maybe you should understand why they leave the church. Remember when Jesus told the parable of the soils? He says there are four soils. The first soil and the fourth soil, we kind of think, well that's the way it usually is, either you respond well to the Gospel or you respond negatively to the Gospel. If you're the person that responds negatively to the gospel and you stiff-arm people and say I don't want to hear about Christ, I don't believe all that stuff about Jesus dying on the cross for me. You got those people and they're described as the seed that falls along the path and the birds come and take it away. And so those people are never going to be a part of your small group.



They may come and visit once, they hear what's going on here and they're done. Then there's the fourth soil and that fourth soil it bears fruit because there's good soil there, there's a change, there's something that happens in that person's life and they produce fruit some 30, 60, 100-fold. Smile at me if you remember this parable. First soil and fourth soil and that would make life really easy if that's the only two responses we had to the gospel. But there are two soils in between. Soil number two and soil number three. In soil number two Jesus says in the parable of the soils is that they received the word, they embrace it immediately with joy. They sing songs with us, they listen to sermons, they take notes, they may memorize some Bible verses, they drag their kids to Awana, their kids get involved in the youth groups. They are all about this thing and it seems like they're changed people.

But, Jesus says, then persecution arises because of the word and they immediately fall away. They leave, they wander from the truth. Not that they weren't exposed to the truth, not that they couldn't articulate the truth to you, it's not that they weren't even actively involved in studying the truth. It's that when that truth started to cause them problems in their lives, they said, "I've had enough of this."

Christianity is too hard, it's too costly. Christianity is going to be too demanding in terms of me not fitting in in this world and it's really starting to impinge on my reputation. It's starting to kind of mess up my career path.

It's kind of harsh in my life in some way that just makes me not think that I can do this anymore, it's too hard. I don't like being part of this group that is considered the narrow-minded Bible thumping. I don't want to be a Jesus freak and they bail out. Then there's the third soil. It's not that Christianity becomes too difficult.

It's in their mind that there's an attitude toward wanting to have fun and fulfillment and somehow it harshes that part of my life. It impinges on that part of my life. In other words, he says people have a love for the world, the cares of this world and that third soil becomes unfruitful, so that one doesn't last either. Little different reason. One is persecution and the other one is, well, they just love the world as John kept saying to us in First John Chapter 2. It's all these desires that seem to conflict with Christianity when it comes to my desires and Christ's prohibitions, I'd rather do what I want rather than what the Bible says and so they say, well I'm not having as much fun as I used to have. So I want to go out and have fun and I just want to live my life and I don't want Christianity to be the straight jacket on my social life. So they leave.

So I guess in that sense I guess it's good for us to recognize that there are some people that bail out of church which is simply the expression of their relationship to the truth because they find Christianity either too hard or they find Christianity too restrictive. And those two things are helpful for us thinking through maybe something of those people that you know that used to be a part of your small group, part of your ministry, part of your church, sat next to you, sang songs who are no longer here. That's very common and Jesus warned us about that. There may be more reasons but those are two good categories to start with. Too hard, too restrictive.

Christianity is costing me too much. Christianity is keeping me from the fun. But once you identify those wanderers, it's important for us to think through what this passage says, James Chapter 5 verse number 20. We need to know that if a sinner comes back from his wandering, now here's the positive statement, if you do that for someone you'll save their soul from death and you will cover a



multitude of sins. That's supposed to be an encouragement to us. That if you were to take someone who's wandered away from the truth and you were to actually successfully get them back, that that soul was in peril, the kind of peril that is described by the word death, their soul is subject to death. And there is a multitude of sins that if you were to bring them back you'd cover those.

That's the word in the Old Testament, by the way, to atone for. There is to be a great forgiveness of many sins. That would be great. But I think I have the motivation that we should have before we just get to the most basic and simple exhortation from this passage is to look at that and say well what if we were to flip that around and maybe this would be a motivation for us that will stem from a heart of compassion and not just a heart of duty when it comes to going after the wanderer. But what we need to see is if I don't get them back their soul is subject to death and if I don't get them back they'll have a multitude of sins to answer for and God's grace will not cover those sins. And that's a chilling thought. That there are people you know who sat in small groups with you, talking about the Bible, discussing sermons, maybe even you did some kind of ministry with them on some kind of short term missions trip. But now, right now, they're no longer a part of anything that is visible in terms of the Church of Jesus Christ, the preaching of the truth, the involvement of the truth.

They are frankly disobeying a simple command to always be associating, assembling together and those people, according to this text, are in peril. Their very soul is in peril and they're multiplying their sins. I think that should give you a sense, as you put yourself in their shoes, of what a tragedy this is from God's perspective. Number two on your outline if you're taking notes I'd love for you to put it down this way. Very simply, you need to fear for the wanderers. You need to identify them and then you need to start to fear for them.

You need to think, oh man, how bad is this for them? What does God think about the person that was here and then they wandered away? That's a bad situation and it's one that should give us pause. We ought to think about and we ought to say, wow, you're right. If I saw someone that was in danger I would want to step in and help because I just have, you know, normal human compassion for people.

You need to recognize the kind of peril that people are in when they're a part of the Church of Jesus Christ and they walk away. Let me turn you to a passage in the New Testament, it's chilling. Second Peter Chapter 2. Find this passage if you would. Second Peter Chapter 2. And I want to show you that Jesus says something so rattling and so jarring in terms of what it's like for his view of people who were once here and are no longer here. And again that's just a sign of being indicative of what's going on in terms of the relationship of their heart with the truth. Follow that. I'm not reducing Christianity to church attendance. I'm not doing that. What I am saying if you love the Lord Jesus Christ you're going to do what he says and if you do what he says, you're going to be a part of the body of Christ, the flock of God, you are not going to wander from the flock. You may change churches, you may move across the country but you're not going to leave the Church of Jesus Christ.

Verse 20. Second Peter Chapter 2.

"For if after they," talking about people here that wandered away, "have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Now think about what's being said right there. You've got some people that have, here's the phrase, "escaped the defilements of the world." How? "Through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus." That sounds like a



Christian doesn't it? They seem to know the Lord and they've escaped from the defilement, the dirt, the complicating factors, the sowing and reaping, all the stuff that seems to go with all the sin of this world.

And if you think that's a Christian, I'd say it looks like a Christian. I could call people up on this platform right now and they could give their "testimony" and usually testimonies talk about how Christ has changed their lives. Now here's the thing, I could call up a lot of people who used to be here, who could talk about the way God has changed their lives. But it's the kind of change as I often try to distinguish, it's a change from the outside in as opposed from the inside out. In other words the inside of their lives remains unchanged. But the externals of their lives are changed. Why? Because of the knowledge of OUR Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In other words, Christ and his teaching and the truth of Christ changes the way we live. Association with the Church of Christ and people who are taught the truth, it changes the way they live. Unfortunately, they are not changed organically from the inside out. They are not regenerate people. So they escape the defilement for a time and then, according to this passage, they are again, rest of verse 20, entangled in them, in the defilements of the world and they're overcome. We're not talking about a stumbling saint here. We're talking about these defectors, these people that were here and now they're just back to their old life. They've been entangled in them and overcome and look at what God says through the pen of Peter. "The last state has become worse for them than the first." What do you mean?

Because again, if I think through people and I can think of several families right now, I can bring them up on stage at one point in their past and they can testify how, you know what, before I came to church, before I heard about Christ, my life was a mess. My kids were this, I was on drugs, I had this problem, I was a philanderer. Great. They come here and say my life has changed. And then I can run the clock forward and if I can ever get them to come back, I mean, I could take them, you know, as they walk down the shopping mall. I could say, hey, tell me about your life now and if they are honest they would say it's just as bad as it was before. They're not living for Christ, they're not escaping the defilements of the flesh. They're indulging in them. And then I'm thinking well, it doesn't seem worse. No, you're right it's not worse. It's the same kind of thing that was true of them 10 years ago. They had this period of five years or six years with us and now they're gone and they're living just like they did before.

And their kids are a mess and their lives are a mess and their marriage is a mess and they're like, yeah, I've gone and my... Why is that worse? Verse 21. It would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. There's something about the knowledge and understanding of the truth that now makes their sins, to use the phrase from James Chapter 5 verse 20, multiplied. Not only is it multiplied in terms of more sin in my life, it's a worse kind of sin in my life. Because now I'm sitting with a kind of knowledge I didn't have before I ever came under the exposure of the truth in the Church of Christ. That's a serious thing. And it's a very consistent principle throughout the Bible. Look at the illustration now, verse 22. What the true proverb says has happened to them. A dog returns to it's own vomit. And the sow, the pig, after washing herself returns to wallow in the mire. Now think about that, all the vomit of the dog, if I can just be gross for a second, you're not still eating your donut, right? All the vomit of the dog is in the belly and then it comes out. It's really gross. And then the dog is so stupid he goes over and licks it back up and now it's back in there. So it's bad, it goes out and then it's bad and it comes back in. Or the pig. The pig is dirty, it's in the mire, it's wallowing. Then the pig gets washed up, gets a little lipstick on perhaps and then back into the mire and back into the grossness. And I'm asking the question, it's the same problem.



You're right it is the same problem. You just ate the vomit that you puked up. You're right, it's the same vomit and the pig, same slop, same mire, but it's worse. Why? Because now you have the knowledge of what it was to be clean. Now you have the knowledge of what it was to have that out of your life. Now you have the knowledge of knowing what the truth said about what the gospel is and what it demands of your life. And you've dabbled in it, you've had some benefits from it, and then you walked away from it.

I mean that, the Bible says consistently throughout the scripture, is far worse to sin with knowledge than to sin without it. To sin with the instruction of scripture than to sin without it.

And so we've got to stop and ask ourselves the question. Wow, the people I used to be with in my church, in my group, in my ministry, now that they are away you're telling me God sees their sin as worse than the coworker and the neighbor who has never darken the door of an evangelical, truth-teaching church. I'm saying absolutely. God sees that as perilous. That's a multiplication of sin and you want to talk about accountability on the day of judgment, that's a bad, bad thing. Now, I'm just going to ask you do you have the compassion for people that would see someone walking into a dangerous situation and not reach out and say, hey, stop, don't do that. Someone walking toward, you know, a fiery building, he's just kind of strolling into the wrong direction. Hey, don't do that. Someone walking down a path that leads off a cliff and not reach him and say, hey, wait, don't go there. I mean I think compassion in your heart should be much like Jesus in Matthew Chapter 9 who looked at the crowd and said look at them, they're like sheep without a shepherd. And Jesus is said in that passage to have compassion for them, "splanchnon." He feels it in his gut. I just want you to stop and have a little bit of a feeling of empathy for those who've wandered from the truth knowing what God thinks of sinners who have been instructed in the truth and know the way of righteousness and have chosen to reject it. It is far worse than people who you know in your family and in your office and in your neighborhood who have never sat through a single Bible teaching sermon in their lives. It's far worse. And you and I should be moved with compassion or, as I put it, with fear for what's coming on the day of their judgment, that not only they have more sins to answer for but they have a greater responsibility to the way of righteousness that they have rejected. This is much like in Hebrew 6, which confuses a lot of people. But in that passage after saying there's a lot of people that are tasting and sampling and being involved in things in the church and having all kinds of benefits from it and then they walk away. And he gives the illustration of land that drinks up the rain, it keeps pouring on it, instead of producing a useful crop that can be continually tilled by the owner and brought back and harvested, instead it does nothing but starts to bear thorns and thistles and like the bad soil is no good.

So I was fearful about that in your life. But though we speak this way in your case we feel sure of better things. Things that belong to salvation. Therefore he says, verse 11, each of you should desire to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope firm until the end. Which, by the way, as long as I'm talking about the book of Hebrews which is filled with these kinds of warnings, let me just make this crystal clear to you so that we understand the theology of those who have left. Because you're going to want to use a word, if you're not well taught, I don't mean to be condescending, but if you're not well taught, you're going to use the word "backsliding."

You say I know who you're talking about. You talking about my kid, my kid. He grew up in church, he went to Awana, he earned the badges, he went on the missions trips and then he went to college and became the typical party animal that every other kid was. And you know what, now, he's working on his marriage and he's got his third kid on the way. And you know he's just a backslidden Christian.



I'm all about you getting him back into the way of truth. I'm all about you getting him back into the church. But what we need to understand is something that Hebrews is trying to make crystal clear to us starting in Chapter 2. Let's turn to Hebrews real quickly if you would. I mean, I could go to Chapter 2. I want to take you to Chapter 3 for sure and for the sake of time let's just go to Chapter 3 for starters.

Chapter 3. Hebrews Chapter 3, let's go to verse 12. Hebrews Chapter 3 verse 12. Just so you understand the theology of what these people are. Who they are.

Verse 12. "Take care brothers, lest there be any of you with an evil unbelieving heart."

Now wait a minute. If you're in the church and if your life is cleaned up and you're being spared the defilements that are in the world then you have a good heart. No, no, no. There are people that have clean lives and a bad heart.

The Pharisees did, right? There are a lot of people that have a good exterior, they have the advantages of sitting under the truth, interacting with the truth, talking about truth, singing about the truth, but their heart is not right with God. They're the people who have knowledge in their head about God but they don't have a changed heart. He says you ought to take care brothers. Again, here's a word, just like James.

You ought to have this kind of shepherding concern for the people around you. Lest there be any of you with an evil, unbelieving heart. What kind of unbelief?

Not that they don't believe the truth in terms of their mental assent or they wouldn't be in the group. Well, they believe it in their head but they don't have the kind of belief that produces salvation, the kind of belief that produces fruit. What would this unbelieving heart, this evil heart do for people that are in the church? Well, it would lead them to fall away from the living God. That's what we're talking about here.

So what should we do? Same things James 5 is telling us to do. Exhort one another every day as long as it is called today. It's kind of a poetic way of saying every day is a good day for you to bring a wanderer back to the truth. Make sure that none of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Here's the deceitfulness of sin. Christianity's too hard, Christianity is too restrictive, Christianity is no fun. You shouldn't be a part of that. They think that somehow it would be better to gain the whole world and forfeit my soul than to be willing to lose the whole world and gain my soul. That's a foolish thing. Sin will deceive you into thinking that's a good deal.

So we've got to help people not see that. Exhort one another every day, encourage them, confront them, do whatever you have to do as long as it's called today, as long as there's a chance for them, as long as you can get them back on the path that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Now, note this super carefully, verse 14, great theological statement. For we have come to share in Christ. Is that future tense? No. It's completed tense, perfect tense. For we have come to share in Christ, in other words, we have come to share it. We are real Christians. We have a believing heart. We have a regenerate heart, not an evil heart, not an unbelieving heart. If, here's the condition, we hold our original confidence, that excitement we had, that commitment we had, the resolve we had



to follow Christ, firm to the end.

That's the repeated theme of the book of Hebrews.

The longevity proves the reality of the present. My future performance in hanging in there in the Christian life is proving the reality of where my heart is right now.

It doesn't say this. Read this now. It doesn't say we WILL come to share in Christ if we hold our confidence firmly to the end. Tenses are very clear. We HAVE COME to share in Christ if we indeed hold our original confidence firm unto the end. So I know this, if you're in for the long haul, it proves the reality of your conversion. The people that have wandered away from the truth...

I'm not talking about having a bad Saturday afternoon. I'm talking about the people that I just described who may be your son working on his third kid, struggling through his marriage, hasn't darkened the door of a church or said a Bible verse or picked up his Bible since he was in Awana.

That's the guy I'm talking about. Don't say he's on a little spiritual hiatus. According to this passage, those are the people that need to have their souls saved from death and those sins need to be covered because right now they're not covered.

So if you're treating your wayward friend or your wayward family member who's living apart from the truth to be as someone who you know is fine with God if he were to be killed the car accident, that it would be OK.

I mean, you really need to fear for them because if they don't hold their confidence firm unto the end it proves the absence of a kind of saving faith in their heart. Identify the wanderers and then fear for the wanderers. As uncomfortable as that is on Palm Sunday, I need you to think that way and have the compassion that Christ had to see people who walked away from the shepherd and to start praying earnestly that the Lord of the harvest would send more laborers out into the harvest, not just to take the non-Christian in your office who's never really heard clearly the gospel but those that have, those that have even given the gospel to other people, who have wandered away from the truth.

Once you identify them, once you fear for them, that's verse 19 and 20. Let's go back to the middle of verse 19 in James Chapter 5. Now, I know this is not given to us as a command but clearly it's implied. And that is the encouragement here is if someone brings him back, whoever, verse 20, brings back a sinner from his wandering. I guess that's where we're left in this passage. You identify those that were once among us and wandered away. Then you fear for what's at stake because you know it can all be reversed. Their soul cannot be in imperiled danger of spiritual death and they can have all their sins covered. That's exciting. What should I do? Go get the wanderer as we read in Hebrews 3. Go get them. Number three on your outline if you're taking notes, it's the very simple outline. Go get the wanderers. Identify them, fear for them, go get them, bring them back, bring them back. Now, not everyone's going to be responsive when you try to go bring him back but you need to give it your best. You need to say I'm going to do it. Now, all I can do is preach to you but I'm hoping that you've identified some faces and names in your mind.

I hope you start to think about the reality that's worse for those people who were once with us and have walked away. They need to be back in this church next Sunday more than anybody does because they're responsible for the truth that they know.



Boy, do they need a new and fresh encounter with the truth. I'm going to work with you. Next week I'm gonna try to bring a message that is going to affably appeal to people in that regard. But now I need to do some work between now and next Sunday and I need you to go out and get them. I need you to bring them back. How do you do that? It's a good question. Let me take an example of Jesus Christ going after a wanderer and let's build a little template here. Let's get four or five things on a piece of paper here under number three that will help us say, here's what I need to do this week for somebody that's wandering. OK? Turn with me to John 21. It's a good example of a wanderer though you might not think of him as such.

But Peter, certainly at this particular point in Biblical history had wandered away from Christ and his calling. Peter should have been out preaching and instead he was back to fishing. Now remember Jesus said you're done with fishing. No longer shall you be catching fish but I'm going to make you a fisher of men. You're going to go and work for me now. Here's your calling. So Peter leaves his nets and he follows Christ.

Christ dies for him, rises from the dead, and now he's been commissioned to go preach the gospel and instead he's out fishing again back to his old lake. I'm sure he went to the same place. He may have even picked up the same boats or borrow the boats that he sold or maybe they were still in the family. He is out fishing and God, of course, in his providence, skunks his fishing trip that night. Nothing.

He directs all the fish away from the nets of Peter.

Jesus shows up to go after a wanderer. Verse 9. When they got out on to land because they identify Christ there on the shores, what did they find? They found a charcoal fire in place with fish laid out on it and bread.

And Jesus said to them bring some of the fish that you've caught. Now, Peter had caught some fish because Jesus allowed him to at the very end after he told him to throw the nets out on the other side and Peter said, I don't want to do it, we haven't caught anything all night we were... No, do it. He does it and he catches fish. How many in this passage? I guess Peter's so into this, he counted them, 153, and they're not dinky fish, they're large fish. Verse 11.

Verse 12. Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. Now, I can't give you a description in the scripture and bring it to you with the authority of a prescription in the scripture.

But I can tell you here's a good template for us if you want to, just in terms of responding well to the exhortation of your pastor, go out and get some wanderers this week. I would recommend that you follow the pattern of Christ. And though it may seem too specific to have you take it as an authoritative statement, let me tell you this. I would love to see you follow the pattern of Christ and go after a wanderer that you've identified that used to be with us, is no longer with us, they're not in another church, they're not sitting under the truth, they wandered away from the truth and make an appointment to have a meal.

That's all I'm saying. It doesn't even have to be breakfast. How about that? Make it dinner, have it be lunch, a mid-afternoon at Starbucks will work, something. Sit down with them over some food. And again I can't say that with the authority of scripture but let me just say it is a Scriptural principle, food. It's interesting how that's always used by Jesus and in the early church as a great



medium of doing things spiritually in people's lives and here he proves that again. Come and have breakfast. So if we're taking some sub notes let's call this letter "A". Plan a meal with a wanderer. Matter of fact, I'd love for you to take your phone and start texting right now.

Find that person and say, hey, let's get together this week. Can you do breakfast before work on Tuesday? How about we meet for lunch on Wednesday? Can you do Thursday night at my house? Let's grab a pizza on Friday. Let's get together.

And let's talk. Plan a meal.

That's the easy part. Drop down to verse 15. Here's where it gets harder, when breakfast is over. John 21:15. "When they had finished breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'" Do you love me more than these? Now before we explain what this could possibly mean, let's jot this down, letter "B". We need to ask some probing questions about their love for Christ.

You need to have a meal with someone who is a wanderer and then you need to ask them simply some probing questions about their love for Christ.

You're probably going to get the response that Jesus got. Verse 15, second half. He, Peter, says to him, Jesus, "yes Lord, you know that I love you." That's probably what you're going to hear. You going to say, so tell me, do you still love Christ? Tell me, do you love Jesus Christ. Tell me about your love for God. They're going to say, "yeah, I don't go to church, not a part of that anymore. You're right I'm not the kind of zealot I was. I still love God." But this is a probing question.

Look at how he words it. Do you love me more than these? Now that little demonstrative pronoun "these" has got to point back to an antecedent, or it has to have an implied antecedent somewhere in the context.

And it's hard for us to figure this out. It could mean one of several things. Let me give you three options. He's just dragged out 153 large fish. This was his old life. He's got nets, he's got boats, he's got a fishing experience all night and now he's got a great haul of fish. This was his old life. He'd lay those fish out like, you know, denarii coins on a cart to sell to the people who were going to buy them from him. This was his life.

The nets, the fish, the smell of the Sea of Galilee. You know, all of this was his life. And maybe he's saying, "Do you love me more than these? All this?" I mean this was your life and I got to think it was a lot easier than being called to be a preacher. I mean a lot of people said, oh thanks man, that's great. They didn't sit there and feel like you were attacking them and preaching and jamming your religion down their throat and calling them sinners. I can see why you'd like that more than you'd like me. "Do you love me more than you love these?" Perhaps it's that or maybe it's the people that were there. I guess that's just a subset of loving these things but maybe he was saying, "more than these people? Your love for all these people?"

Could be.

Or maybe it was, if you know your Bible well, that it was Peter who seemed to often stick his foot in his mouth and I hate to say that disparagingly about Peter because he says a lot of the things we would say if we were there. But when Jesus started talking about people running away when the



shepherd was struck down there, Peter goes, "oh no, I would never do that."

And then he starts comparing his love for Jesus the way that the other disciples love Jesus and he says this "even if every other disciple were to fall away, I would never fall away."

And so maybe it's not "do you love me more than you love these people or things." "Do you love me more than these people love me?" Certainly, grammatically that's one of the options that is possible here. Either way I can understand the embarrassment and guilt he might feel that he didn't live up to his own declarations and expectations. I can also understand his love for the world. It's a lot easier to live in the world than it is to live for Christ.

I understand all those things but he's asking probing questions about his love for Christ.

That takes some prayerful thought but to come to a conversation over a meal with a person that used to be a part of this place who used to fellowship with us. It doesn't have to be this place, they're not in any place studying the truth, talking of the truth, singing of the truth, living the truth. Asked them about their love for Christ.

See what they say.

Like I said they'll probably say, "well yeah, sure." It is a change in words by the way. Jesus used the word "agape."

Do you love me? Then he use the word "phileo" in response and some people will make too much of that distinction but it is a distinction. He does use a different word here and maybe it is some guilt that he has. "Well, you know I said I was going to agape you more than anybody else. Well, you know, I phileo you."

I mean, maybe. Either way, look at Jesus' response which will be the third point for our little template here. He goes, find them. "Feed my lambs." That agrarian lamb analogy is not the fishermen fish analogy. I wanted you to be a shepherd not a fisherman. I wanted you to fish for people, not for fish.

I wanted you to do what I told you to do all the way back to that Matthew 16 statement. I want to build my church and I'm going to build it on you and the Gates of Hell are not going to prevail against it. You are going to be the quarterback of the early church. You are going to be my spokesperson and you were all for it. I want you to get back to what I told you to do.

Feed my lambs. Well, I don't know how much silence there was between verse 15 and 16.

But later in this post-breakfast conversation he said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I phileo. I love you."

He's going to take that, run with that, get back to this. "Then tend my sheep." Jesus doesn't own any sheep. These are people. There are people for you to serve, as a people group for you, a flock to be a part of.

You've got a role to play there. Get back and tend my sheep.



And he said a third time, "Simon, son of John." Now he shifts the Greek word for love here. "Do you phileo me?" Some people can make too much of that word shift. Some people say it's merely a synonym but it is a change in the grammar here.

"Simon, you phileo me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him a third time, do you phileo me? Now he's either grieved because he said the word phileo and asked him that or because it's the third time. Either way these probing questions about God's love were too much for him particularly when it's followed by this.

"Lord you know everything. You know that I love you. I phileo you." Jesus said to him, here it is again: "Feed my sheep." The third thing I want to say is have a meal, probing questions about do you love Christ, tell me about your love for God. Here's the third thing. OK? Bring him back to God's commands. Bring him back to God's commands. Do what Jesus... What is the will of God for the wanderer? Is it to be a wanderer? No, it's to be in a church. Am I reducing Christianity to going to church? Of course I'm not. But you can't say that you understand what it is to relate to the shepherd and you're not a part of the flock.

So you can start there if you want. You know the Bible says don't forsake the assembling yourselves together and the closer we get to the day, you ought to be more involved in the church, not less involved in church. You're less involved in the church. You need to be involved in the church.

That would be one thing to say. You could ask them about their time in the word. How is your relationship with the Scripture? The Bible says let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

The Bible says study and show yourself approved unto God. The Bible says you need to have the word of God in your life. You need more of the word.

How's that going? Is there more of that or less of that?

Take them back to the scripture. How about this? Everyone is supposed to, much like, I mean to be very specific with what Jesus is doing with Peter, he's telling about his role in the flock. Does this wanderer that you're thinking about as you sit there in your mind at that dinner or that breakfast or that Starbucks, when you think about that person, are there not things that Jesus wants that person to be doing to serve him in the body of Christ. Of course. I mean that's what the Bible says. Peter goes on to later write this: "we all ought to be good stewards of the very grace of God. We ought to be employing our gifts and serving in the church." Does not Jesus Christ want that person serving in the church?

Yes. Is he doing that if he's a wanderer? Of course not. Remind them of that. Call them back to God's commands.

And by the way, all Jesus is trying to do here is make that comparison that I threw out early in the sermon and that is if you love me you will keep my commandments. And what was Peter doing here? Not keeping his commandments.

Talk about the love of God and then talk about the commands of God. Over a meal, have a meal, make a date, talk about love for Christ, talk about obeying Christ.



Then something real insightful takes place in the next verse. Verse 18. Jesus says with his set up here in Greek, the word Amen, translated truly, truly, truly. He says that twice. Not because he stutters because he's trying to say I need you to hear this man. Here is the truth. I say to you that when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted to go. You were free, you felt free.

But when you are old you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.

Now that's pretty cryptic but thankfully John clarifies for us what's going on. Parenthetically, he says in verse 19 "and this he," Christ "said to show by what kind of death he," that was Peter, "was to glorify God." Now there's a strange juxtaposition of words, to glorify God and death, a death where I'm dressed and taken where I don't want to go. How is that going to glorify God? That's called martyrdom is it not?

When someone dies because they're so committed to Christ they're not willing to deny Christ, they're willing to serve Christ even if it cost them their lives, that's a martyr.

And he's describing the martyrdom of Peter right here. Now what's he doing?

He's saying I know at one time you were free. Now he's Christ and he knows the future. You're not Christ as you sit there, you know, having pizza with that guy.

So you don't know how this is going to turn out. But you can at least do what you can do as it relates to this theme and that is this, I put it this way, letter "D". You ought to remind them of the cost of following Christ. In other words, yeah, you're right, to be a faithful servant of Christ, it will cost you, it may even cost you your life. Now when someone's dealing with the cost of Christianity because it's either too restrictive or too hard, all I'm telling you to do is don't go there and say it's going to be easy, God will make it easy. God will make it fun for you. I'm sure it was hard for you before and I know that's why you bailed out but it'll be fine, it will be easy, it's easy for all of us to be Christians. Don't do that.

Matter of fact, do just the opposite. Tell that wanderer it is hard to be a Christian and I hope you're sitting here as a faithful fixture, a constellation, in the body of Christ and you can say, for me to stay faithful to Christ has been very hard.

And to enter the Kingdom of God as Paul said to all those young churches he visited we must enter the Kingdom of God through many tribulations. Or as Jesus puts it John 16, in this world you will have tribulation. Just be honest. I know it's hard to be a Christian. It's hard to be faithful to Christ. I get that, there's a lot of sacrifice involved. I mean at least you can go there. The reason this is an odd juxtaposition of negative and positive is because if he were willing to be faithful to death, which Jesus knew he would be, that would be an amazing thing. He would glorify God by being so obedient to his calling. Talk about tending sheep and feeding the lambs, man, he'd be doing it, even if it cost him his life. Now I can't know how this conversation is going to turn out as I sit down with a wanderer but I at least want to remind them, yeah, it's hard, to follow Christ is costly.

Bottom of verse 19. We didn't finish the verse. Let's look at it. "And after saying this he," Jesus, "said to him," Peter, "follow me." Point of decision right there, follow me.



Letter "E" if you're taking notes that way, you need to clearly exhort them to follow Christ even if the conversation is not going well, at least end with compassion in your heart by saying, I just met with you because I want you to follow Christ.

They may say, "Oh, I am, I am" and you know they're not but just say I'm just here meeting with you because I love you and I want you to follow Christ, obey the Lord. You say you love him. That means you obey him. Not for me, not for my church's sake, but because you say you love him. Follow him.

This is one of these sermons, it's so simple.

I sat and prayed with the pastors this morning, I wonder what percentage of our church this morning will do what this passage is basically calling us to do, to go after the wanderer.

And again, I can't bring the biblical authority to this simple list but I just wonder in terms of a great template following the example of Christ I wonder how many of us could just simply make a meal appointment, talk about their love for Christ. Talk about the call to follow Christ in terms of the commands.

Remind them of the costs and then just end with that simple call, "and I just want you to follow Christ. Let's start with this week. Bible says don't forsake the assembly. Just come to church with me this weekend." I would hope the percentage is high.

And again we've got nowhere in this message if you didn't start by identifying the wandering. If you slept through that part, I'm just going to tell you at least go home and sit there and prayerfully say, who are the wanderers that I know? Spend some time, that sobering time of wondering what it would cost them if they continued on that path and then see if you couldn't be motivated by this simple sermon to say, hey, I can go after a wanderer. I'm going to text them right now and make an appointment. I'm going to call them just to have lunch with them.

I found out this week the U.S. government spent about \$2 billion last year trying to rescue seals, whales, bald eagle eggs. Two billion dollars of your taxpayer money. In South Orange County I know I'm surrounded by animal lovers. I love the taste of animals too.

I'm just kidding. We can edit that out.

I'm all for animals. But I did some research to find out what animal lovers, who really love animals, think about that \$2 billion. Do you think I was surprised by what I found as I did a little research on that? Do you think that the animal lover Web sites, run by the real animal lovers, think the U.S. government is spending enough per year, on animals, saving endangered animals? I think they think we're not spending enough. And I found one that intelligently laid out a list of all the things that we should be doing and what it would cost us. So I was ready for this. I got my calculator out of my drawer and I said OK. Here's what it added up to. The government right now spends two billion dollars of your tax money trying to save endangered animals. According to this list the aggregate of this list was, according to these activists, animal activists, they think we should be spending eighty-one billion dollars on protecting endangered animals in our country. Eighty-one billion. So we're just at two right now. We need \$81 billion. So as long as I had my calculator out I did some more math. So how much more should the average household be spending in taxes to give the government the money to take care of all these endangered animals? A lot of people in our country.



It came down to what seems like, I don't know, a manageable number until you want me to write the check. \$627 per household to kind of make up for this deficit.

So come April 15th, which is fast approaching, what we need to do is to cough up another \$627 and then at least that animal activist group would say, oh, that's good, that's what we need.

And then I looked at the median income of Americans. I said how much extra overtime work would this be for people to put that 700 bucks, six to seven hundred bucks, in the till for the government to save the endangered species.

That's about 23 extra hours of overtime work for the average American to put those six to seven hundred dollars in the till. And then I thought these people that are lobbying for this, that are sending stuff in the mail to you to get you to give money, they fully think that's completely reasonable. I mean really it just comes down to 50 bucks a month, comes down to two hours a month. I mean that's not a lot. Can't every American just step up and do that?

And I thought, you know, I can understand that.

But what I can't understand is how people that love to save animals can't recognize as I sit here as a person among people who say we love people. For the sake of Christ we see the endangered problem is not just being animals, the real endangered problem is the souls of men and women made in the image of God. And I just thought, I just wonder are they more zealous for their cause than we are for ours? I just wonder if I said, listen, it's going to cost about 50 bucks a month to be someone who goes after the endangered souls and tries to bring them back. If I said, look it's going to take you about two extra hours a month if you really got serious about bringing people that were wandering back to the fold so that they can at least be exposed to the truth and hopefully come to a real penitent, transformative experience with the Holy Spirit and be safe and endure to the end. I just wonder if we would spend two extra hours a month or 50 bucks a month to see that happen.

I would hope we would, particularly knowing what's at stake.

I know I quoted these lyrics back in December but they bear repeating in a sermon like this.

I don't think the author back in 1869, Fanny Crosby, in any way came up with these lyrics without reading James Chapter 5 verses 19 and 20 when she wrote the words "rescue the perishing. Care for the dying. Snatch them in pity." Do you have that? "From sin and the grave. Weep over the erring ones. Lift up the fallen. Tell them of Jesus, mighty to save. Though they were slighting him, still he is waiting. Waiting the penitent child to receive. Plead with them earnestly." That's our job. "Plead with them gently." Be diplomatic. "He will forgive if they would only believe." What kind of belief? Demonic belief? Simple mental assent? Saving faith belief, real belief. "Down in the human heart crushed by the tempter. Feelings lie buried that grace can restore. Touched by a loving heart." That's yours. "Awakened by kindness. Cords that were broken will vibrate once more. Rescue the perishing, duty demands it. Strength for your labor, the Lord will provide. Back to the narrow way patiently win them. Tell the poor wanderer a savior has died."

In a world filled with people that think they've been there and done that particularly those that have spent time in churches, biblical, Bible-teaching churches, it's time for us to catch the heart of this Crosby who said it's time for us to care enough for them in pity and compassion to go out and rescue the perishing. Of course that great refrain "rescue the perishing, care for the dying. Jesus is



merciful." He'll take that defector with a penitent heart and he will save him. Jesus is merciful. Jesus will save. May that be something that takes up at least two hours of our schedule between now and next week.

Let's pray. God help us be more serious about those that we've known who have sat there in our midst, open Bible, singing songs about the truth and now they're out on the golf course this morning. They're having brunch somewhere. They haven't been to church in months. Some of them haven't been to church in years. For every face, every name that came to mind of the people in his congregation I pray that we be moved to action to patiently, lovingly, diplomatically, gently reach out to them this week. Have a meal, pay for a lunch, meet for breakfast, talk about the love that we should have for Christ and how that means we'll obey him. And start with the most basic things, "on this Easter won't you come to church with me?"

And then next week as we think about this message of the good shepherd from John 10, I pray it would be something your spirit would work in this room and many people be brought to a place of recommitting themselves by the power of your spirit to being a part of the body of Christ, not just with their mind and their mental faculties but with their heart and their soul. Save them, forgive them. Let them have an encounter with the truth they've never had before. For all those people who are going to say to us I've been there and done that, let them realize there's something more, something different, something deeper that really, when it gets hold of our heart, changes us to where we would never bail out. Let us be fixtures, constellations in the Church of Jesus Christ and help us to go after those wanderers who have come in and have gone out. Give us success in this this week with the right heart, the right motive. In Jesus name. Amen