

# How Can I Know?

## Lesson 11: Falling Away and Coming Home: Restoration -- James 5:19-20

Every congregation has them, the empty places where someone used to sit. A man who once sang with tears in his eyes, gone now for two years. A woman who taught the children, who drifted after a season of grief and never came back. A young person raised in the faith who quietly walked away. We do not always talk about them, but we know their names, and something in us aches when we remember. They were ours. They belonged. And now they are somewhere out in the far country, and we are not sure they will ever find their way home.

We have spent ten lessons building biblical assurance, learning that the faithful Christian truly can know he is saved, that he can rest in God's love without fear. But honesty requires us to face the other side of the road, and James does not flinch from it: "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). Notice the words. Among you. Wanders from the truth. Save his soul from death. James is talking about real believers who can really wander, and about a wandering that really imperils the soul.

This is the truth that answers, gently but firmly, the comfortable error of 'once saved, always saved.' Scripture takes seriously what that teaching cannot: that a child of God can abandon the faith, that the warnings of the New Testament are written to believers, and that the danger of falling away is real. To pretend otherwise is not kindness; it is a false comfort that leaves the wandering unwarned and the faithful confused. James loves us too much to lie to us about the stakes.

And yet, look at how the whole letter ends. Not with a threat, but with a rescue. The last word of James is about going after the one who has wandered and bringing him home, about a soul saved from death and a multitude of sins covered. The door is not locked. The far country is not the end of the story. This closing lesson holds both truths together: the sober reality that we must remain faithful, and the beautiful hope that the wanderer can always come home. Read these two verses, and let them make you both watchful and full of hope.

**Group Discussion:** James speaks plainly about someone 'among you' who 'wanders from the truth' and needs to be brought back (5:19-20). Why do you think the church often finds it hard to talk honestly about believers falling away? How does facing this reality actually deepen, rather than threaten, a healthy assurance?

**Personal Reflection:** Think of someone you have known who once walked with God and has since wandered, or examine your own heart for places where you have begun to drift. What pulls a believer away from the truth a little at a time, and where do you sense that pull in your own life?

Read James 5:19–20

## Study Questions

1. James writes, “if anyone among you wanders from the truth” (5:19). What does it tell us that James addresses this warning to those ‘among you,’ and what does the word ‘wanders’ suggest about how falling away usually happens?
2. Falling away usually begins not with a dramatic decision but with small, unguarded drifts. Where do you sense even a slight pull away from the truth in your own life right now, and what would it look like to address it before it grows?
3. James says the one who wanders must be ‘brought back,’ and he honors the person who does the bringing (5:19–20). What does this teach about the church’s responsibility toward those who have strayed, and why can we not simply leave the wanderer alone?
4. Is there someone you know who has wandered from the faith whom God may be calling you to gently pursue? What has held you back from reaching out, and what would a humble, loving first step look like?
5. James says bringing back a wanderer will “save his soul from death” (5:20). What does it mean that a soul can be saved ‘from death’ here, and what does this reveal about the seriousness of wandering from the truth?

6. Many believers carry shame that keeps them from returning to God after a season of wandering, fearing they have gone too far. If you have ever felt that way, or know someone who does, what does the gospel say to the fear that one cannot come home?
7. How does this closing truth about wandering and restoration actually relate to assurance? How can a believer hold both genuine confidence in his salvation and a healthy watchfulness against falling away, without sliding into either presumption or fear?
8. The whole letter of James ends not with a threat but with a rescue. How does ending on the note of restoration shape the way you understand God's heart, and how might you become someone who helps bring wanderers home rather than merely lamenting their absence?
9. Scripture warns that a child of God can fall away and must remain faithful, directly answering the teaching of 'once saved, always saved.' Drawing on James 5:19–20 and the wider New Testament, how do we present this truth faithfully, and how does it call the wanderer home rather than drive the faithful to despair?
10. Look back across this closing lesson and the whole study on assurance. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses, and the single truth from this study on "How Can I Know?" that you most need to carry forward.

## **Now or Later**

**Reflect on these passages:** Luke 15:11–24, the father who runs to meet the returning prodigal; Galatians 6:1, restoring the one caught in sin with a spirit of gentleness; Hebrews 3:12–14, exhorting one another daily lest any be hardened; Hebrews 10:23–25, holding fast our confession and stirring one another up; 2 Peter 1:10–11, making your calling and election sure so that you will never fall.