

How Life Works

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Let's open our Bibles today, one more time, to the book of James. We are bringing to a close our study through these five chapters. We have had a strong fall semester studying through this letter by Pastor James, the brother of Jesus, who became a believer in Christ as the Messiah after the resurrection of Christ. He became the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, and by the time we read this letter in James, many believers have scattered into other countries and other cultures and he writes to them as a pastor, as a shepherd, and we're going to look at some closing verses in chapter five today.

Some of you are here for the very first time. I've had the privilege today already of meeting people of different ages that are here as new attenders or first time attenders, and it's really fun to get to meet new folks that continue to come our way and participate in what God's doing here at Watkinsville. I'd love to meet you after the service if we've never met before. It doesn't matter if you've been here five years or five minutes, I would just love for you to say hello. I'll hang around here at the front for a little bit. You may be in the Chapel right now participating in our worship, you could work your way in this direction, or here in the Life Building and say hello before you leave. The Sunday paper is maybe in your hand. There's a connect card that's detachable on the back part of that, and I'd love for you to complete the brief information it asks for. There are guest service desk outside these doors, we'd like for you to drop those off. Let us put a gift in your hand and say hello to you before you get away.

We are rapidly winding down our corporate worship services here in the Life Building and we are headed, on December the 15th, into our new worship space. We have been in this Life Building room, in this temporary space for worship for 14 years. We know how to do temporary around here. We will have services in there, there's a little bit of a shift in service times. I hesitate to mention it too loud in here just so everybody maybe will show up early, but our service times will be there at nine and 10:30. Those service times will give us the opportunity to have a few more minutes in each of our worship experiences as well as a few more minutes between services. It'll help us, I believe, enhance what we do corporately in worship to have a few more minutes when we gather, and then it'll help us a lot in our parking lot, in our fellowship, to have a few more minutes between services. That starts at nine and 10:30 on December 15th. When we leave this room, we'll be renovating this room for student space, student ministry. Middle schoolers, high schoolers, college students. We'll do some interior renovation to this building that involves adding some walls, creating multiple spaces in this room. It'll take us maybe six to eight weeks to finish the renovations in this room and then it will be ready for a middle school space and high school space. We have Sunday classes that made upstairs in this building and they won't be hindered during the renovation time. We'll be able to continue to use this building as far as those classes go with electrical, heat and air, water, those sorts of things still functioning. The renovations will happen inside of this room. If you have preschoolers, birth through two year olds, you will begin using our new space for preschoolers on the 15th. Every other class will stay right where you are until after the first of

the year. So the only classes that will be moving on December the 15th will be our preschool classes, birth through two year old. We have 10 new classrooms that'll be used there for our preschool classes. We're going, and thank you for the way you are giving. Thank you for the flexibility that you've demonstrated. It's been almost a year of planning and construction and building and we're close, and looking forward to that day. I'm thinking about the chapel, the worship center, I'm told it was completed in 1976. Our church will be 140 years old in 2020. This is a very significant move for us in the history of our church to be headed into this new worship environment. On the eighth we'll have an opportunity to walk through that building. The doors will be open, the lights will be on, functioning. We won't sit in there, but on the eighth you'll be able to walk through, get acclimated to the room a little bit, and then on the 15th we'll gather.

Let me pray for us. Father, I bow before you right now and I thank you for your faithfulness. We've sung about it. We take great encouragement in how faithful you are. Lord, to think about a body of believers that have been meeting together in the name of Jesus, identified as Watkinsville First Baptist is a testimony of your steadfast love and your faithfulness and we give you praise today. We thank you for the privilege to gather like this in this building and in the chapel and the way that you, Lord, you have met us. You've changed lives, you've strengthened us. You've given us hope for the week ahead, over and over and over again and I give you thanks for that. Thank you for the privilege of being able to say, over and over again, let's open our Bibles. Lord, we pray that for years to come, that that would be our text. That would be our focus. So we lift up Jesus and we proclaim your word, and Lord keep us faithful in the days ahead until we see you face to face. We pray specifically for this day, Lord. It is not a just a "check the box" day. Lord, we ask you to do your work in this moment, in this hour, in the lives of people that hear the word, that sing the word, that encourage one another. And Lord, please do your work right now in our hearts and lives that you want to accomplish. I pray the enemy would have no victory in this room, no victory on this property, and that you would win in every way. And we pray this Jesus in your name. Amen.

It's been about 18 months ago when, not just our country, but our entire world was captivated by an event that was going on in the country of Thailand. In June of 2018, 12 teenagers and their soccer coach left practice on what they thought would be a one hour cave excursion. The coach had been in this cave before and he thought it would be a quick way to do something with the team, a fun experience for them. They entered that cave on June the 18th, I believe, in 2018 and floods came, the rains came, and it shut them off to the rest of the outside world and they were trapped and people actually did not know where they were for a time being. They only knew that this team and their coach was missing. They thought it would be an hour. They took a rope for climbing, they took some flashlights and batteries, but no extra food, no extra water. They would be and out and done with it, but they were trapped. Local officials started trying to rescue them. Their Navy seals were brought in trying to rescue them. They came up with lots of different plans and different thoughts, but those trapped were two and a half miles deep in away from the entrance. There were places in that cave that were completely cut off by water and the only way to move from one section of the cave to another section of a cave was to go underneath the water and swim for distances to be able to get up into an area where it was open and not flooded with water.

They thought that maybe somehow they could get word to them through divers to just help the individuals swim out of the cave in the areas of water. They learned that several of the kids did not know how to swim. Then they thought, well, we can send trainers in that will teach them how to swim. And they would teach them how to swim and bring them out, and they were concerned about a level of anxiety and panic that might happen as they began to try to swim out of the cave. Other rescuers were brought in. People from countries all over the world, including the United States, went there to try to help rescue them. Eventually they were rescued, and the story goes that when the divers would go, they would take oxygen tanks with them and provide additional oxygen for them, but then when it came time to get them out, they took them one by one by one. Slightly sedated, I'm told, and ferried those individuals from one diver to the next diver, from one diver to the next diver and then to the next diver and then the next diver over a path of two and a half miles until they were all safely home. It was a dramatic rescue experience.

The last two verses of James call us to be a part of a rescue mission. The last two verses of James chapter five you have a pastor, you have a shepherd that cares deeply for believers. And you see his shepherding heart, you see his concern come out as he writes to believers that are scattered because of the persecution of their faith. We've taken this book of James and we've looked across these five chapters to talk about how life works, and specifically how eternal life works in every life. James speaks about how our faith works. When our faith is in Jesus Christ we received the gift of eternal life and that gift of eternal life is not something that we receive when we take our last breath here on this earth. Eternal life is something that we receive when our faith is in Jesus Christ. And so today to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, that means that in some way, you and I are already experiencing a taste of eternal life. And that eternal life works in everyday living, and over time it permeates every facet of our life, every room of our life. As we discover more of life and we experience more of life, eternal life is there impacting, changing, making a difference.

It affects how we live. Eternal life works in every day life by impacting every area of our life. There is no secular life and spiritual life. There is no church life and work life. We can talk about those to get some sense of location, but there's not a different set of rules for those arenas of life. If we know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and believe we're going to heaven one day when we die, that life is to be a part of every area of life that we live. Specifically, these last two verses of James speak to us about how we are to be involved in the life of other believers. Oftentimes we talk about personal salvation. We talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and it's true that we need our personal sins forgiven. We need a personal faith. Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and we trust him. Someone else's repentance does not cover our personal sin, but in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that is played out in the context of corporate life of believers. You do not find anywhere in the New Testament a picture of lone ranger salvation. You don't find a person who's isolated from the church family. The writings of the New Testament are written into a context that we will experience eternal life in and with the lives of others. And so when we gather together like this, maybe we've lived out here separately in our individual lives, we're a family. We're a body of believers where Jesus Christ is the head, and we worship him, gather in his name, followers together as a church family.

So let me make this statement based on the last two verses of James. Eternal life works in our life by us being willing to work in the life of others. Eternal life works in our life by us being willing to work in the lives of others. Look at these last two verses of James five.

"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."

"My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back," There's no missing the fact that James cared deeply for these people. I believe these last two verses show us the intent of James actually writing this letter. It seems to be his intent from verse one of chapter one until this last that he actually was doing whatever he could from a distance through the writing of this letter to shepherd, to care, to make sure that truth was known, to make sure that truth was being lived, to make sure that their faith was producing works, and to make sure that if there was this temptation of wandering from the truth, that from his position he could do what he could to bring them back. He not only did that through the writing of his letter, but he did that through the instruction that other believers, who have the gift of eternal life, are to be involved in the lives of others and bringing them back if they were to wander.

There is a picture of concern here and I want to describe this concern that James demonstrates in five ways. Number one: there is a family concern. There's a family concern. He says in verse 19, "My brothers." If you think it seems like I keep hearing that phrase. The reason for that is that in five chapters, 15 times, James addresses his audience as 'my brothers', or 'brothers' or 'my dear brothers.' It was James writing to his faith family, and his concern for them was a family concern. It was a body of believers concern. How beautiful. Think about this, that we have the privilege to be a part of a local church, a body of believers, that have been saved by the grace of God. Not perfect people. Our sins covered by the blood of Jesus, and the opportunity is here for us to be among people that care for one another. Where there is a mutual concern for the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

You think about the picture here is that among teenagers that there would be mutual concern for one another. Among men, there would be mutual concern for one another. Among women, there would be mutual concern for one another. Among Sunday classes and small groups and fellowship meetings and Bible studies and corporate gatherings like this for worship, that we would be interacting with people where we know we are under the banner of Jesus Christ. This is family and there is concern for one another. James says, "My brothers," not only is this a family concern but it is a universal concern. He says, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders." He's speaking about wandering from the faith and the truth, he's thinking about someone being brought back. He's speaking from family concern. I think we can relate to that. If somebody in our family is missing and what it does in our heart. Now, he says the universal concern and that is when he says, "If anyone among you." He showing us that there is not a single person in the family of faith that is you meet immune are off limits to wandering, or erring, or drifting, or straying.

It's prideful for us to think we would never drift. It's prideful for us to think that we would never err. It's prideful for us to think that we would never stray from the truth. That's what James writes. He says, Hey family. Hey brothers. Hey sisters. Listen, anyone of you, anyone of you, don't lose sight that it could be any one of you. There's a universal concern in this picture. This universal concern is over this idea of wandering and it shows us a practical concern. James' concerned was a practical concern. He says, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back", the Greek word "wander" there is a word that means to drift, to stray. It means to fall away. It means to err when it comes to truth. It's a greek word that the root word of it, we get our word planet from. The root word of "planao", we translate and get the noun planet. It is a picture of something that's in the sky, in the heavens. When they say planets, there's this thought of movement. One time you look up and there's the light there, and another time you look up and the light is over here. It's this picture of wandering in the heavens, and this word here is a descriptor of that, of drifting.

It's not a hard right turn to the left or the right, it's not a sudden change of course. It is just kind of momentarily, over time, drifting. Straying. Do you know that in our nation today that there is a drift? There's a straying when it comes to gathering together as believers. It's tracked. Today, the average attendance of a regular church attender is 1.6 times per month. A regular attender of church, on average, comes 1.6 times a month. Regardless of if you want to argue with those numbers, measured in the same way 20 years ago, the average attendance of a church attender was 3.2 times a month. In the time that I've been pastor here at Watkinsville, the average attendance of an attender at church has gone from 3.2 to 1.6 times a month. Why is that a big deal? It's a big deal because Hebrews tells us to, "Not forsake the gathering of yourselves together as some are in the habit of doing, but consider how you may spur one another on to love and good deeds." I would offer to you that the first evidence of drifting toward error and wandering from the truth doesn't show up in some statement you make about your beliefs, but in some show you demonstrate with your behavior. It starts with just gathering as believers. If this is your one point sixth time to be here this month, Hey, change the numbers. We don't have to be a church that plays into trends. We can be a church that's just faithful to obey the word of God.

The practical concern for James, he says they wonder from the truth, drift from the truth. Truth that has to do with doctrine. It has to do with things like, I believe in the Virgin birth. I believe in the Trinity. I believe in God, the father, God the son, God the Holy spirit. We can believe in the atonement. We can believe in justification by faith alone. We can get our doctrine right, but as you read from James one through James five what you see in his mind, truth is doing. Truth is not just a creed. Truth is not just a statement of beliefs, but for James, his understanding of faith and belief was something that could be seen in our behavior. It shows up in how we live. And when James writes to them, this practical concern was that you say you believe in Jesus Christ, but here's what it looks like. It looks like how you use your words. It looks like how you go for wisdom. It looks like how you handle your wealth. It looks like how you deal with worldliness. It looks like how you deal with trials and temptation. It looks like how you care for those that are widowed are those who are orphaned. It looks like how you show partiality to people or not. His practical concern was that people would wander from the truth and their behavior would give it away. Their faith is not real or they were straying from their faith.

Number four, there's a personal concern. He says, "My brothers," that's family concern. "If anyone," it's universal concern. "Among you wanders from the truth," it's practical concern. "And someone brings him back," that's a personal concern. For someone to bring someone back it means you got to go in the cave and get them and bring them out to where they need to be. A rescue mission for us as believers of Jesus Christ is not to just sit back and say, "Man, I hope it works out for them." "I wish they would come back." "I wish they wouldn't be off in that area of life." The personal concern that shows up in a family is that you go to them. You go to them and you bring them back. You care enough to go after them, and to care for others always costs something. Sometimes we hesitate in going after those that are drifting or fallen away or wandering off away from the family, or away from the faith because we think it would be awkward. We think we might offend. We think it might come across as judgmental. But to care for someone who's drifting and wandering, it's like Matthew's gospel that speaks of the 99 and one. And when the one strays, you go after that one and bring them back to the flock. Personal concern involves people like you going to someone who has strayed. It involves me going to someone that has drifted away. It's personal. I don't want to venture too deep into this, but I do want to say to you that bringing someone back from their wandering, bringing someone back from their error of living, does not mean that you fire off a Facebook post or a Twitter rant.

For the life of me, I just, I don't want to read too much into this, but I'm thinking that if James was writing in November of 2019 and he said, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, fire off a Twitter rant to them. Say it to the world that they're living in error, in hopes that you can embarrass them or shame them or call them to repentance in the social network of the world. It's not biblical. It's not caring. It's not bringing back the one that has drifted. To show personal concern means that we are willing to die to ourselves and go to someone and do what it takes to bring them back, and that's the fifth one. It is a valuable concern. It's family concern, a universal concern. It's practical. It's personal. Someone brings one back. "Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death," not the one who's doing the bringing back. The one who is being brought back will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. The work of us making an attempt to restore a brother or sister in Christ is valuable work. Souls hang in the balance. Sin is there that needs to be confessed and forgiven, and there needs to be restoration within the church family. James shows us that what you're dealing with is life and death when people began to drift from the truth and the way. Listen, if we see someone that we have identified as a brother or sister in Christ, we don't need to sit around and battle back and forth over the theological implications of whether or not they've lost their salvation or still have their salvation. What we do need to figure out is we can do in knowing them and loving them and caring for them to get in their life so that somehow, some way, by the grace of God and the supernatural spirit of God, that their hearts could be changed by him, convicted by him and sin covered by him. We don't change hearts. We don't change lives. We don't forgive sin, but we do have a call on our life to act towards someone with love and compassion. To go for them, to be an agent of God's use.

We say we believe in the eternal security of the believer, and I do and I believe that, but how does God keep you eternally secure? One of the ways that God keeps us eternally secure is that he puts brothers and sisters in our lives that care enough for us, that when we are straying,

we will go to them and be involved in God calling them back to truth. It's a valuable concern. The beautiful picture is here that if you're sitting in this room today and maybe you sense in your own spirit that, "I have drifted." "This message is for me." "I've been wandering." "I'm hiding in a crowd, but I'm just not living it. I'm not believing it." Here's the beautiful message for you. The spirit of God has you in this room on a day when we're talking about a subject like this, and the glorious grace of God is this, that every sin you've ever committed, that you know about and that you don't even know about can be covered by the blood of Jesus.

And that word "cover" is such a powerful word. It is a word that describes covering something to such an extent that it can't be seen again. It's like the word that's used in Genesis six where the pitch was placed on the arch of the covenant to keep the wood from showing through, bleeding through, grinning through. You know it as painting a room and you've put some paint on a wall and you think, "Man, it looks so awesome." And you come back through in about four days and you'd walk by that room and you go back and look again and you think, "Wow, that red is grinning through." "That yellow's bleeding through." The good news of Jesus Christ is that when our faith is in him, our sins are covered and they don't grin through again. They're paid in full. His blood is sufficient to cover a multitude of sins.

So let me ask you this question with a couple of minutes left here. Who's missing? Who's missing? Who's drifted. Who's missing from your small group? Who's missing from your youth group? Who's missing from your Sunday class? Who used to sit by you here in 10:15 service? Who's missing? Who drifted? Ask the spirit of God right now to put somebody on your heart. Lord, is there a name? Is there a face? Is there a person? I haven't seen them in weeks. I have seen him Lord, but I know how they're living. What do you do? I know what I do. It's easy for me to make excuses. Let me give you a way forward. Number one, pray for them. It's right in the context of James. This isn't just church speak. This isn't just preaching speak. This is in the context of James where he says, just a couple of verses up, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another." Pray for them. God put a face in your mind, God put a name. Maybe he does it tomorrow. Pray for them. "Lord, I want to pray for, blank. I ask you God to call them back. I ask you to convict them, show them the consequences of their sin. Show them that it is a dangerous place to be. Show them, Lord, that their soul is hanging in the balance. Show them, Lord, that their sins can be forgiven. Lord, I pray you'd give me opportunity to speak to them. Father, give me courage to go to them. Let them be receptive. Tender their heart." Pray for them.

Number two, contact them. Text them. Call them, phone them. Go by and see them. Contact them, pray for them, contact them. "Hey, just had you on my heart this morning. Just want to say hello." "Hey, just stopping by. You know what, we used to sit together? You know what, we used to go together? You remember when we used to read the Bible together?" Just contact them. Number three, ask them. Ask them. "How are you?" "I've missed you." "Where have you been?" "What's going on? Did you get hurt in some way? Is there something I can do? I really want you here. I really am concerned. How can this change? What would it take?" Pray for them. Contact them. Ask them. Number four, listen to them. This is the context of James. He says, "Be quick to listen. Slow to speak." Be quick to listen. Listen to them. Hear what they say. Ask the second question. Don't already have it made up in your mind what you're going to say or do. Listen to them. Number five, confront them. Oftentimes, if you've prayed for someone,

you've reached out to someone, you've asked them about themselves, you've listened to them. The caring thing to do is to confront them. That is not number one. "Hey, I know this may sound judgmental. I'm sorry if it does. Forgive me if it does, I care about you. This is headed in a bad place, brother. There's a way out. There's a way back."

Number six, stay with them. Stay with them. I mean, if they resist, don't write them off. "I'm done here." "I tried." Check the box. No, it's family. Stay with them. Keep going back. You say, "I might offend them. I might drive them away." They already are away. Stay with them. Number seven, love them. Love them.

Galatians 6:1 shows us that kind of love. Paul writes about this, he says, "Brothers," It sounds like James, but it's Paul. Paul says in Galatians 6:1, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted." It's family, it's universal, it's practical, it's personal. Love them. When we're talking about eternal life, it affects every area of life. And when we're talking about eternal life, it's not only to impact our life, God has designed it for that to play out in the context of a body of believers where eternal life impacts every one of us.

I want to ask you to bow your heads with me. Have you received the gift of eternal life? Why not today? Jesus Christ died for you to cover a multitude of sins, your sins, and you could turn from whatever you've been trusting in and come to Jesus. Lord Jesus, forgive me. I believe you. I trust you. I want you to be my savior and Lord. You put the cry of your heart in your own words and call out to Jesus to save you. What you receive from him is eternal life and we begin to live it. I want to ask you who does the Lord needs you to go to? Who does the Lord want you to go to in the family?

Father, I pray today that you would give us wisdom and strength, courage, fill us with your spirit. I pray, Lord, we'd have a spirit of humility, not pride. Help us today. Lord. Can I say one thing before we dismiss? In both rooms, Chapel, sanctuary. If you're in this room and you'd say, praise the Lord. I'm not drifting right now. Can I ask you to do one thing for the future? Would you go ahead, right now, and just decide in your heart that if you ever do drift, the most caring and compassionate thing that could happen in your life is for a brother or sister to come after you. You need to decide that now. Sin whacks us out in the brain and we'll start believing that the good guy is the bad guy. Decide today that when the good guy comes for you that you need him. You need her. Because the soul is hanging in the balance. God help us be a family that loves one another. Amen.