

Sunday Bible Study Lesson: James 5:19-20
July 26, 2020

Some years ago, The History Channel aired a program entitled, "The Man Who Predicted 9/11" about a man named Rick Rescorla. He was the 62-year-old head of security at the Morgan Stanley Bank, whose offices were situated high up in the South Tower at the World Trade Center. After the first attempt to bomb the World Trade Center in 1993 failed, Rescorla believed that the terrorists would try again. He met with several security consultants on the possible threats and methods the terrorists could use such as bombing the buildings with an aircraft. Rescorla was so convinced that Osama Bin Laden would use jet planes to try and destroy the World Trade Center that he developed an evacuation plan for the bank. The plan and its preparation were hugely unpopular with the Morgan Stanley staff, many of whom thought Rescorla was crazy.

On September 11, 2001, American Airlines Flight 11 hit World Trade Center Tower 1 at 8:46 am. Rick Rescorla ignored building officials' advice to stay put and began the orderly evacuation of Morgan Stanley's 2,800 employees on 20 floors of World Trade Center Tower 2. Rescorla sang *God Bless America* and other songs over his bullhorn to help evacuees stay calm as they left the building. Rescorla had most of Morgan Stanley's 2800 employees as well as people working on other floors of WTC 2 safely out of the buildings by the time United Airlines Flight 175 hit WTC 2 at 9:07 a.m.

After having reached safety, Rescorla returned to the building to rescue others still inside. He was last seen heading up the stairs of the tenth floor of the collapsing WTC 2. His remains were not recovered. As a result of Rescorla's actions, only 6 of Morgan Stanley's 2800 WTC employees were killed on September 11th, 2001; including Rick and three of his deputies who followed him back into the building.

The remainder of this very moving broadcast focused on Morgan Stanley Bank employees who praised and acknowledged Rick Rescorla for saving their lives from total destruction that day. Many felt so guilty and apologetic they had thought Rick foolish to keep preaching and standing for what he believed would happen if they were not ready. Those interviewed said they would never forget Rick Rescorla. He was their hero.

James concludes his letter with a message to believers about rescuing others. In **James 5:19**, what action does James tell believers to take regarding a believer who has strayed from the truth?

The person who is in need is the believer who is involved in sinful conduct. This person has experienced salvation; however, he or she is behaving in a sinful manner. In **verse 19**, from what has the sinner strayed? _____

The person who needs rescuing has wandered or drifted away from the straight path of righteousness. People can stray from the truth in their beliefs, and they can stray from the truth in their actions. James tells us that the response of healthy believers is to “turn back” the wayward believer. The Greek word for “turn back” (epistrepho) means to turn around and head in the opposite direction--a 180-degree reversal.

It is a serious matter for one believer to go to a fellow believer in an effort to show him/her the error of his/her ways. Not every believer is equipped with the right attitude to approach one who has wandered from the truth. In **Galatians 6:1-2**, how does Paul describe the person who is a good candidate for restoring the wayward believer? _____

With what type of spirit should a person approach a wayward believer?

Based on Paul’s description, describe the believer who would not be a good candidate for intervening in the life of a wayward believer.

What does Jesus command us to do in **Matthew 7:3-5**?

How would Jesus’ words influence our attitude and our approach to reaching out to a wayward believer?

The person who intervenes in the life of a wayward brother or sister in Christ must first examine his or her own life. He or she must also be spiritual, gentle, wise, and humble. Rescuing a fellow believer takes patience and perseverance as well.

On the other hand, the person who intervenes should **not** be arrogant and harsh and should not have a holier-than-thou attitude. No one should not relish the idea of confronting another believer.

In **James 5:20**, what are the results of turning a sinner back from the error of his ways?

First, James says that when we turn a sinning believer from the error of his way, we “save his soul from death.” In this verse, James refers to “death” in the sense of what sin does to human life rather than ultimate destruction or lostness. In *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Harold Songer notes that this section of the verse means, “he shall deliver such a wayward Christian from the deadly result of his sins. What James is stating is that the destructive power of sin will be thwarted because the wayward Christian will turn away from the error of his way” (p.139).

Second, James says that turning him back from the error of his way will “cover a multitude of sins.” Chuck Swindoll says, “Not only does a person’s confession of sin bring forgiveness for the wayward path he or she took, but it also prevents that person from continuing farther along that dead-end path of sin and death” (*Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary*, 134).

He goes on to say that the intervention of loving Christians who have acted in love will not only save that wayward person from accumulating more sin and making a greater mess of this life, but it will also spare the church from the damage done by a wayward brother or sister.

Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary tells the story of a young man who, after straying far from the Lord, was finally brought back by the help of a friend who loved him unconditionally. When he was finally restored, Dr. Hendricks asked him what it felt like when he was straying from God.

The man answered, “It seemed like I was being pulled farther and farther out to sea, into deep water. And all my friends were standing on the shoreline hurling accusations at me about justice, condemnation, and sin.” Then he added, “But there was one Christian brother who actually swam out to get me, and he wouldn’t let me go. I fought him, but he withstood my fighting. He grasped me, put a life jacket around me, and managed to pull me to shore. By the grace of God, he was the single reason I was restored--the man refused to let me go.”

Application:

Is God speaking to you today about rescuing a brother or sister who has strayed?

1. If you are considering whether to get involved in the life of a wayward believer with a word of encouragement, relief, or correction; check your motives first.
2. Examine your own heart.
3. Immerse yourself in prayer.
4. Make sure you are acting under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit.
5. Make sure you are acting out of genuine love and compassion for that person.
6. Plan to persevere. The wayward person may respond negatively toward you with harsh resistance.
7. Be ready to be patient as you endure a long process.
8. Refuse to let go.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, open my eyes to those who have strayed and need to be rescued and restored. Please fill me with compassion and love for them, and if your Holy Spirit leads me to intervene in a person’s life; let me respond to your leading. Help me to examine my own life before I take any action on behalf of another person. “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 129:23-24 NIV). Give me humility, patience, and perseverance. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

