

How Should We Handle Wayward Believers?

[James 5:19-20](#)

James, Day 26

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, ESV

If you live long enough as a believer, you will certainly see a number of professing Christians wander away from the truth. Within the past several years, we have seen Pastor Rob Bell deny the doctrine of hell and then wander completely away from real Christianity, the late Rachel Held Evans deny core doctrines of the Christian faith, and several Christian musicians who have denied their faith and embraced the world over Christ. Beyond these celebrity Christian apostates, we probably all know people personally who have either wandered away from Christianity entirely or have denied core doctrines of the faith.

So, what should we do?

It would be easy to say it's none of our responsibility, none of our concern. It's easy to embrace the American ideology of "live and let live" and "to each his own," but that's clearly not a biblical approach.

Instead, James 5:19-20 makes it clear that we have an obligation to do what we can to restore a wandering brother or sister to the truth. How? Well, we need to pray and seek wisdom for how to best engage them. What is needed is face-to-face, life-on-life persuasion, truly speaking the truth in love.

What is required is love with caution, compassion with conviction. Very often, people either make the mistake of being too harsh and pushing the other person away or of being too soft and potentially being pulled into the lies of the person you're trying to reach in love. You need to listen and seek to understand, but so that you can counter with the truth of Scripture and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, too often, even the best efforts are unfruitful in restoring a wandering loved one. When this happens, we need to keep praying and looking for opportunities to speak the truth, but understand that it's not always possible to restore someone who is wandering away. We can only do what is within our power to do; we must leave the rest to the Lord. But very often, God will use the words we speak and the prayers we pray to reach the wandering ones we love in His own time. So, keep praying and keep speaking the truth in love.