

James 5:19-20—Part 2—How the Body of Christ Rescues The Wandering Sheep

Today we finish our study of the book of James, covering James 5:19-20.

Memory Verses:

James 1:2-4 NKJV

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Last week we looked at why God is so concerned about those who fall away—*He loves them and it's His heart's deepest desire to bring all people back into relationship with Himself and with each other*—this is what motivated Jesus to suffer and die on the cross in our place. We learned that God's heart toward His wayward creation, including His wayward children, is forgiving, merciful, gracious, kind, patient, understanding, and incredibly loving. To be effective in restoring others back into relationship with God we also must have this same attitude towards others. If we are to faithfully represent God to this fallen world and be His hands, feet, eyes and mouth, we must share His heart towards them so we can display the same kind of compassion towards them.

Early on, some of Jesus' disciples didn't have or understand God's merciful heart towards others, and when people rejected the good news, they reacted in a very unloving way.

Luke 9:53-56 NKJV

But [the Samaritans] did not receive [Jesus], because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"

⁵⁵ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "**You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ⁵⁶ For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.**" And they went to another village.

We don't want to be like James and John who had a critical and condemning attitude toward those who didn't believe or had fallen away. Notice Jesus' heart—*He came to save them and not destroy them.*

Also, we must understand God's heart towards us if we are to seek His help and confess and repent of our sins. Many people have a wrong impression of God and therefore are afraid to seek His forgiveness and restoration. I've heard people say things like, "If I went into a church, fire would come down and consume me," or, "I've blown it too badly this time, God will never take me back," or "I've sinned way to many times for God to forgive me." Never forget Romans 5:20b AMP, "*But where sin increased and abounded, grace (God's unmerited or undeserved favour) has surpassed it and increased the more and superabounded.*" What this means is that there is no sin that God is not able or unwilling to forgive. The only thing that stops us from receiving God's free gift of forgiveness is ourselves. We can choose not to by being unwilling to humble ourselves, confess and forsake our sin (repent), and submit ourselves to God.

The focus of this week's message is how we restore people back to right relationship with God and others practically—the Bible has specific instructions for different situations. We must learn to be properly equipped and trained if we are to effectively help others to return to right relationship with God and others, so we don't further incur others or cause harm to ourselves.

Again, last week we focused on *why* we seek to restore those who have fallen away. We discovered that God has always been in the business of restoring broken relationships. Ever since the garden of Eden, God has made it His responsibility to make available the way back to Him, while leaving the choice to come back to Him as our responsibility.

This week we will learn *how* to restore a sinning brother, with the main focus being on the practical considerations in different circumstances as we take a survey of the New Testament verses that talk about restoring a wayward brother (or sister). We'll pull apart these two verses and see what we can learn.

Let's start today by reading:

James 5:19-20 NKJV

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Who Needs Help?

v 19 **Brethren, if anyone among you:** Notice first who this is addressed to—*all* believers (**anyone among you**—no-one is exempt—no-one is perfect). That's why I called today's sermon, "Rescuing the Wandering Sheep." In the scriptures, sheep refer to the believers, and goats to the unbelievers (see Matthew 25:31-46).

"Read the verse and you will see that it was that of a backslider from the visible church of God. The words, 'If any of you,' must refer to a professed Christian." (Spurgeon)

None of us are perfect, and there will be times when we will wander or drift away from God as we fall into sin. This is when the others in the body come alongside and help those who have wandered away from God and are caught up in sin.

Proverbs 24:16 NLT

The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again.
But one disaster is enough to overthrow the wicked.

1 Corinthians 12:25-26 NLT

This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honoured, all the parts are glad.

What is my Responsibility?

v 19 **If anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back:** This shows the need to confront people when they are caught up in sin. The rest of the body has the responsibility to look after and care for those who have tripped up, just like parents have the responsibility to help their children when they are sick. However, there are limits and boundaries which we will look at later.

Wandering from the truth—a condition of the heart

v 19 **Wanders from the truth:** Isn't this the truth. Who of us thinks to themselves one morning, "I'm going to sin today, I'm purposely going to grieve the Holy Spirit, damage my relationships with my fellow saints, blaspheme God's holy name by my bad conduct and attitude, and make myself miserable—now what sin can I commit to make this happen?" No, rather we wander from the truth by forgetting about and taking our eyes off Jesus and we end up walking down a road that causes pain and puts us in great danger.

Why do you think a person pulls away from fellowship when they have turned away from God, when they are in sin?

Jon Courson has a great answer: "Because at the heart of every problem lies a problem of the heart, I believe a person stops traveling with the body of Christ when a problem in his heart causes him to be uncomfortable in the presence of God's people."

There is a lot of insight here. When we are not walking with God ourselves, we feel shame and guilt. These feelings are only magnified when we are around people who are walking with the Lord—we see what we are missing out on and know that we are in the wrong. Thus, to avoid the pain and avoid being found out, we either close up and become distant or disappear altogether.

God's way of restoring the wandering (lost) sheep

v 19 **And someone turns him back:** This shows what the rest of the body should be doing. Since the natural inclination of the spiritual wanderer is to wander away, we, the body of Christ, act as God's hands and feet, are seeking to turn the wandering sheep back to the Shepherd of their soul.

v 19 **And someone turns him back:** Why do you think that God would use imperfect people for this very sensitive and delicate task of reaching out to those of us who have wandered away? Couldn't God just do it Himself? David Guzik says, "This shows us that God uses human instruments in turning sinners back from the errors of their ways. God does not need to use such human instruments, and sometimes He does not. The Apostle Paul—or rather, Saul of Tarsus—was not converted through any human instrument, save perhaps the prayers of the dying martyr Stephen for him. Yet no one preached to him, but Jesus decided to meet him directly."

For me personally, in my walk with the Lord there have been times when the Lord has dealt with me directly to deal with some sin. However, most of the time God used other people who were willing to come along side me to lovingly rebuke, help, and encourage me.

So, why would God use believers to help people when He could just do the work Himself or use the angels? We humans are so weak and we make so many mistakes. Surely there is a more efficient and effective way for God to bring back or restore the wandering sheep?

I think the main reason is that using us weak vessels brings God more glory than if He did all the work Himself. Think of it as an expert craftsman creating a sculpture using old and broken tools. People would go, "wow, look at the awesome statue that the craftsman was able to carve using those old, broken, and worn out tools." You see, in this case, all the glory goes to the craftsman, and not to the tools.

If, however, the craftsman used the latest technology with robots and lasers to make his statue, then people would be saying, “Wow, look what anyone can do with the great new tools we have available today.” The glory goes to the tools or instrument rather than to the artist. In a similar way, this is also why God puts His treasure in earthen vessels.

2 Corinthians 4:7 NKJV

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

2 Corinthians 4:7 NLT

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

The work of art that we are talking about here is not a statue, but rather the body of Christ, made up of individual believers who are all growing and changing into the image of Christ (we become more like God in our character). When people see the change in us they will readily come to the conclusion that it had to have been God who caused the change both individually and corporately—it should be obvious that we are powerless to change ourselves.

Since my ability is not important, all I need to do to be used by God is make myself available to God. How do I make myself available? By doing what James has already taught us—confess your sins to one another, submit to God, and draw near to God. If we cleanse ourselves from anything that is not pure, holy, good, right, and true, then we become, in a practical sense, holy and available to be used in God’s service. This is especially important when we consider just how important the job God has given the body—the restoration of the lost sheep back into God’s fold.

2 Timothy 2:21 NLT

If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honourable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

If I am fit for the Master to use for every good work, then my hands become God’s hands, my feet become God’s feet, my words become God’s words, my ears become God’s ears, my eyes become God’s eyes, and my heart becomes God’s heart. The words I say are His words, the things I do are what I see the Father doing, and I have a heart of compassion just like the Father. What a privilege to be used by God for His glory. But how do we keep ourselves pure and therefore fit and available for the Master to use? Let’s look at the next verse in 2 Timothy 2.

2 Timothy 2:21-22 NLT

If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honourable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

²² **Run** from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, **pursue** righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. **Enjoy** the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

Notice what Paul says we need to do to keep ourselves pure and therefore available to be used by the Master (God)— **Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.**

There are three principles here that we should take note of: Run, Pursue, Enjoy

1. **Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts:** we should think of sin like a tiger snake ready to strike—get out of there. You can try to play with the snake, but you will get bitten eventually. Do not be deceived, Satan comes to kill, steal and destroy (John 10:10).
2. **Instead, Pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace:** **Pursue:** Literally; chase down, hunt, run after, and seek the truth and obey it; be in the word each day, and seek to be submitted to the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives. Look for ways to serve others. This is the result of repentance and confession; we stop running and chasing after sin and instead run after and chase a deeper relationship with God.
3. **Enjoy the companionship (fellowship) of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts:** Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us how to enjoy fellowship with each other, "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. ²⁵ And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."
This doesn't just happen however. To effectively do this we must prepare our hearts before we come to church and during the week so we can be givers as well as receivers—we must think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. Church is a place of ministry or service, where we all give to and look after each other. **How enjoyable and beautiful it is to come to church and be encouraged in our faith by each other who have been actively thinking of ways to help us grow in our faith!** Also, we laugh with each other in the good times and cry with each other in the hard times. Those who are strong support the weak, and the mature believer disciplines the believers who are weak or immature in their faith.

What happens if I am unfit to be used by the Master?

Now, what is one of the most serious consequences of remaining in sin and not being available or fit for the Master's use?

"Along this line, can we not say that when we refuse to make ourselves available to God's service—weak and failing as we are—we in fact *rob* Him of some of His glory? He can glorify Himself through a weak vessel like you; you should let Him do it" (David Guzik).

"It may not appear so brilliant a thing to bring back a backslider as to reclaim a harlot or a drunkard, **but in the sight of God it is no small miracle of grace, and to the instrument who has performed it shall yield no small comfort.** Seek ye, then, my brethren, those who were of us but have gone from us; seek ye those who linger still in the congregation but have disgraced the church, and are put away from us, and rightly so, because we cannot countenance their uncleanness; seek them with prayers, and tears, and entreaties, if peradventure God may grant them repentance that they may be saved." (Spurgeon)

Remember though, if we are to help others, we must first have removed the plank from our own eye so we can help remove the splinter from the other person's eye. We must first confess and repent of our own sin before we can be of any use in helping others. Why is this? Jesus give us several reasons in:

Matthew 7:1-5 NLT

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. ² For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

³ “And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own?”

⁴ How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

Basically, Jesus is saying that if we try to help others with a plank in our own eye (meaning that we have not confessed and forsaken the sin in our own lives), then when we try to help others we will come across as condemning and judgemental. When a person comes across as condemning and harsh, it is because they themselves have unconfessed sin, and their guilt causes them to want to justify themselves; thus they become very critical of others. These self-righteous and critical people have not humbled themselves before God and in their pride seek to make themselves look better than others. Therefore, ***we should not try to help others unless we have a clear conscience before God and others.***

Jesus also has some very good advice for us concerning those who don’t want to be helped in the next verse.

Matthew 7:6 NLT

⁶ “Don’t waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don’t throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink. A hard thing to accept is that we can’t help people who don’t want to be helped except pray for them. We’ll come back to this concept at the end. God has given us a way of dealing with these people.

How much do I love someone?

v 20 **He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins:** “There is a blessing for the one who loves his brother enough to confront him, and who turns him from **the error of his way**. He has saved that **soul from death** and covered **a multitude of sins**” (David Guzik).

I like what David Guzik points out here, “***the one who loves his brother enough to confront him.***” Will I love my brother or sister enough to confront them? Sin is messy and painful. It is never easy to come along side someone who has spent time in the pig pen (so to speak, referring to the parable of the prodigal son)—it is smelly and hard work. It will require patience and compassion and love. It will require giving of ourselves not expecting anything in return. It’s going to take time. The person being helped will not be able to show gratitude initially. We need to be there for the long haul.

But again, remember **boundaries**—the person sinning must *want* to be helped, they must have, like the prodigal son, “come to their senses,” and have chosen to exit the pig pen. We can’t do that for someone, that is their responsibility, their decision to make. We can only help those who have truly made up their mind that they want to come back to God. How do we know? They will have confessed their sin and demonstrated a sincere desire or willingness to forsake their sins—they will be willing to take concrete steps away from the sin that demonstrate real change. Also, they will be willing to become vulnerable by being honest and making themselves accountable to others.

What happens if I continue to help someone who isn't genuine about changing?

If we continue to help those who are not wanting to change, or are not serious about wanting to change, we are making ourselves responsible for their behaviour, and they don't learn from the natural consequences of their sinful behaviour. This does not help them or us and only leads to frustration, resentment, and bitterness for the person trying to help, and extends the time the backslider remains in their sin. For the person who is not ready to repent or change, all we can do is pray for them. We can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped—their heart is hard. We must let them be, as painful as that is. This includes parents helping their kids. We must let unrepentant people experience the natural consequences of their sin so that they will be driven to come to their senses and repent. This is what the Father did in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-31. We must follow God's example. But remember that just as Jesus never ceases to pray for us, even when we are sinning, so we must never cease to pray for our brothers and sisters, even when they have strayed from the straight and narrow road.

The overall purpose of the epistle of James—restoration of fellowship with God and man

This is the last verse in James. Through the letter, James has been talking about various kinds of sins that affect the body of Christ. Now he lets us know what we should do about them and why.

v 20 **Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins:** This last verse in the book of James sums up what should happen if the rest of the letter is applied. James has been confronting those who have wandered from a living faith (they are no longer being led by the Spirit), and are now living a life of sin as they are controlled by their sinful nature.

The sins described by James include: coveting riches, succumbing or giving into temptation, gossip, an uncontrolled tongue from which comes evil speech, being unwilling to help those in need, personal favouritism, pride, friendship with the world, condemning our brothers and sisters, living independently of God (boasting about tomorrow), grumbling against one another, and making false oaths (lying). No wonder it's been a difficult book to study.

But now the sins common to man have been pointed out, they need to be dealt with. James finishes in chapter 5 by calling people to repent.

These people were still in the church—how can the church function with all this disfunction present?

Remember James' primary message—Faith without works is dead. James has taught us that our works, what we do and say and think, reveal our faith, whether it is a living faith or a dead faith. Remember a living faith means that we are living by the power and guidance of the Spirit. A dead faith means we are living by the weakness of our sinful nature or flesh—we may be acting religious but that's as far as it goes—acting, we are hypocrites.

Wisdom in restoring brothers who have wandered—forgiven sin has consequences

There is no sin too great that can't be overcome. Yet, there will be consequences for forgiven sin. A person may have been convicted of a sexual crime and therefore be on the registered sex offender list. This person may never be alone with children again for the rest of their lives, yet they can still be a part of the body of Christ. Another example; someone who was convicted as a thief would not be selected to look after the church finances, even if it was a long time ago. It's common sense. Yet we don't cut them off, rather we find other roles that they can faithfully serve in.

Let what is in the past stay in the past

What's important though, (though we must continue to take into account the practical consequences of forgiven sin) *is that what is in the past is left in the past.* Unnecessarily bringing up some sin that has already been dealt with is wrong. The person needs to be able to move on. Here's a quote from Spurgeon.

"I know of men of good standing in the gospel ministry, who, ten years ago, fell into sin; and that is thrown in our teeth to this very day. Do you speak of them? You are at once informed, 'Why, ten years ago they did so-and-so.' Brethren, Christian men ought to be ashamed of themselves for taking notice of such things so long afterwards. True, we may use more caution in our dealings; but to reproach a fallen brother for what he did so long ago, is contrary to the spirit of John, who went after Peter, three days after he had denied his Master with oaths and curses."

If a sin is brought up by someone after it has been confessed, forsaken and forgiven, it means that it was not really forgiven. The only reason a person would bring up a past hurt is because they have not actually, from the heart, truly forgiven the person. In effect, deep down they are holding a grudge. This applies in any relationship.

The key to dealing with people with an ongoing consequence of forgiven sin is to maintain an attitude of acceptance and love, all the while maintaining the necessary boundary. Our attitude towards them is what's most important—it demonstrates if there has been real or genuine reconciliation. If we don't forgive the offender from the heart, they will become discouraged. Listen to what Paul teaches concerning the brother who had initially refused to repent of sexual sin and was therefore excommunicated from the Corinthian church, but later repented:

2 Corinthians 2:6-8 NLT

Most of you opposed him, and that was punishment enough. ⁷ **Now, however, it is time to forgive and comfort him. Otherwise he may be overcome by discouragement.** ⁸ **So I urge you now to reaffirm your love for him.**

It's so important for us to reaffirm our love to those who have wandered away but have then confessed and repented of their sins.

Failure to reaffirm our love and acceptance will often result in the repentant person being overcome by discouragement and then leaving the church.

The saint who has repented will often be struggling to fight off satan's condemnation—the last thing they need is to be condemned and constantly reminded of their sin by those who are supposed to love and support them.

This is a tragedy beyond words and a heinous crime when it's the brethren who cause the downfall of one of their own—I can't begin to imagine just how grieved and saddened God is when one of His own children is treated so poorly by His own body.

God takes forgiveness very seriously. Remember that if we we refuse to forgive, then we will not be forgiven; “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15 NLT). If we really understand the magnitude of how much God has already forgiven us, then there is no reason why we should not be willing to forgive others who have sinned against us.

Other guidelines and wisdom as specified by other scriptures that talk about restoring the wandering saint.

Galatians 6:1-3 NKJV

Brethren, if a man is **overtaken** in any **trespass**, you *who are spiritual* [mature] **restore** such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

What can we learn from these verses in Galatians?

1. **Trespass** (Greek *Paratoma*) = sin, blunder, slip, a false step—not an intentional sin.
2. **Overtaken** (Greek *Paralombono*) = like a wolf chasing and overtaking a deer.
3. **Restore** - mend or set a broken bone. Tense is to keep on restoring.
4. We help them by gently and humbly helping them back onto the right path.
5. We must take care that we don't fall into the same temptations ourselves (due to exposure to the sin, thus only “*you who are spiritual*” or mature are to help).
6. By sharing each others burdens we fulfil the law of Christ (to love each other).
7. It takes humility to help a struggling brother (v 3).

Ephesians 4:1-3 NLT

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. What can we learn from these verses in Ephesians? We have been called by God to:

1. Be humble and gentle
2. Be patient with each other
3. Make allowance for each others faults because of your love
4. Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit, binding ourselves together with peace (so that our prayers will not be hindered—See 1 Peter 3:7).

Up to now, we have been talking mainly about those who wandered away, those who didn't intentionally or wilfully sin. The goal for these people is maturity. Consider that church is not just a hospital, but also a school to learn the scriptures. As a hospital, we care for hurting people so they will heal. But this means problems and mess. But there needs to be balance—we need to help people heal by cleaning them up—we teach them the word of God and help them to apply it. The aim is for the weak person to become strong so that they can help others.

What to do with the wilful or intentional sinner—the steps of church discipline

Imagine that someone in the church, **who professes to be a Christian**, started living with their girlfriend or boyfriend, and they really didn't care what the bible says or what anyone else thought. Do we just accept that blatant sin in our midst or do we do something about it? What does the bible say (Remember that this only applies to those who profess to be a Christian—generally speaking, non-believers are welcome to come and observe and learn)?

1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 4-7 NLT

I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you—something that even pagans don't do. **I am told that a man in your church is living in sin** with his stepmother. ² You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. **And you should remove this man from your fellowship.**

...⁴ *in the name of the Lord Jesus*. **You must call a meeting of the church.** I will be present with you in spirit, *and so will the power of our Lord Jesus*. ⁵ **Then you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns.**

⁶ Your boasting about this is terrible. **Don't you realize that this sin is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough?** ⁷ **Get rid of the old "yeast" by removing this wicked person from among you.**

There is a different way of dealing with the wilful or intentional sinner, who is very different from the person who was only "overcome" or "caught up" in sin (Galatians 6:1). In the case of wilful sin, if it is allowed to continue, the prideful attitude will infect and affect the whole congregation much more than if someone just slipped up. The proud, unrepentant, hard hearted, and wilful sinner must not be allowed to carry on in fellowship, but must be sent away. If they are not willing to receive instruction, and choose to persist in sin, then give them over to Satan—they must be excommunicated from the church. Why? They must experience the consequences of their sin—for the sake of their own restoration. They will eventually come to their senses. For example, the prodigal son was not supported by the father. Importantly, 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 shows us that they will usually come back (if they were a true believer in the first place).

What does 1 Corinthians 5:4 tell us about how to excommunicate someone (telling them to leave the church and cease all fellowship until they choose to repent)?

1. We do it according to Jesus name or nature (1 Corinthians 5:4)
2. It is in the presence of the church (1 Corinthians 5:4, Matt 18:17)

The bible gives clear guidelines on conflict resolution in the church. Jesus said in:

Matthew 18:15-18 NLT

"If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offence. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

Notice the steps Jesus laid out:

1. Go and meet personally with the person who has sinned against you and point out the offence. If the other person is humble and confesses, then you have won your brother back. But if not, go to step 2 (Most of those who did not intentionally sin will need no further persuasion to repent after this loving one on one confrontation).
2. Take one or two others with you and try again. If the other person is humble and confesses, then you have won your brother back. But if not, go to step 3.
3. Take it to the church (meaning the core group, those who actively involved in serving in the church or official church members—definitely not just whoever happens to be there at a public Sunday morning service—as Paul said, call a meeting), and if they still refuse to listen, if they are still unwilling to repent, then we must cut off all fellowship with them. We must not even eat with them (1 Corinthians 5:11).

Why must the unrepentant brother be cut off from fellowship (excommunicated)?

This is an important question which must be answered. Many see this as being unloving and judgemental. I'll give four main reasons why excommunicating an unrepentant sinner is necessary.

1. We need boundaries

Remember what I said before about boundaries. If we keep helping those who refuse to help themselves, they will become dependant on us and are very unlikely to change. Why would they? They get to do whatever they want, and we are left cleaning up their mess and paying their bills.

Therefore, the loving thing to do is to force them to clean up their own mess, and therefore they learn to take responsibility for their own decisions and actions. Also, we must let them see where their sin leads and what Satan's true intentions are (2 Corinthians 5:5). They will soon see that the sin that they loved will only lead to a life of pain and misery.

2. Understand that sin separates us from God

If we allow a person who is wilfully sinning to remain in fellowship, coming to church each week and treating them like any other believer, then they won't understand that their sin has separated them from God—they will think that everything's okay with their relationship with God.

3. Sin spreads and hurts others

The unrepentant believer will negatively influence others in the church and the sin will spread like a cancer. One of the purposes of excommunicating the unrepentant believer is to protect the other believers, especially the immature or new believers who can easily be caused to stumble.

4. Sin in the camp (or in the church) destroys unity

If there is unconfessed sin, the members are no longer agreed or in harmony with each other, and so Jesus is no longer present among the church (Matthew 18:19-20, Revelation 3:20). ***Where there is no purity there is no power.*** The Church as a body loses its effectiveness and power to serve, they are no longer a light in a dark world. Consider the example we have in the book of Joshua—it only took one man's sin to corrupt and weaken the entire nation.

Joshua 7:1-12 NKJV

But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for **Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel.**

² Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai. ³ And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few." ⁴ So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. ⁵ And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; **therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.**

⁶ Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. ⁷ And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord God, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!" ⁸ O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? ⁹ For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

¹⁰ So the Lord said to Joshua: **"Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? ¹¹ Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them.** For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. ¹² **Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.**

The important point here is that, just like God wasn't with the Israelites while they were sinning (even if it was just one of them), so He won't be with us if we don't deal with the sin in our midst. God told Joshua to get up and deal with the sin—so must we—only then will we experience victory. This applies individually and corporately as a church.

Conclusion

- * Why God is so concerned about those who fall away—*He loves them and it's His heart's deepest desire to bring all people back into relationship with Himself and with each other*—This is what motivated Jesus to suffer and die on the cross in our place.
- * We will only be effective in helping others return to God if we are walking with God.
- * We are all responsible for helping each other.
- * No-one is immune from wandering away—there are no "super christians".
- * We can only help those who are willing to confess and repent.
- * Those who continually refuse to repent after going through the steps of church discipline will need to be excommunicated for their own good and for the good of the church.
- * Sin in the church destroys unity—our prayers will not be answered (**purity = power**).
- * The whole point of James' epistle is that a dysfunctional or sinning church is a powerless church and confession and genuine repentance characterised by godly sorrow is the only cure (This applies to marriages and individuals as well).

Remember these promises from James 4:8-10 NKJV:

"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."