

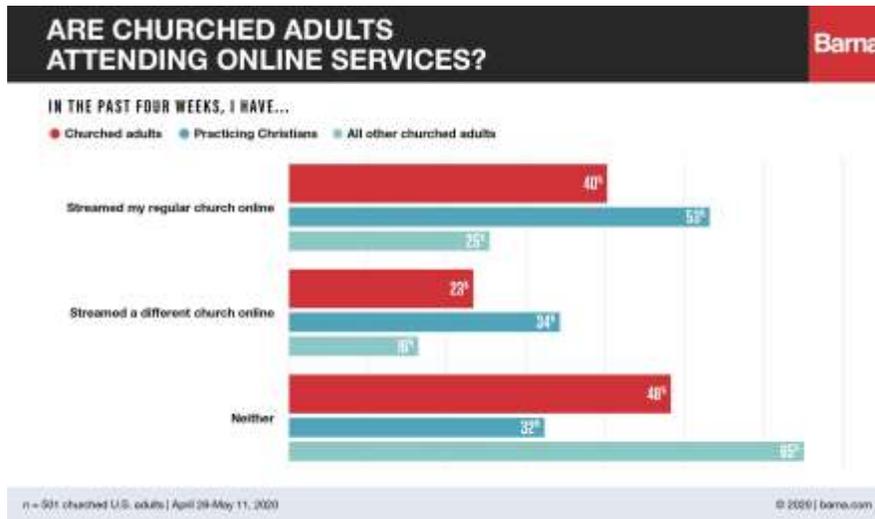
Bring Them Back

James 5:19-20

James 5:19-20 ¹⁹My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Introduction:

<https://www.barna.com/research/new-sunday-morning/>



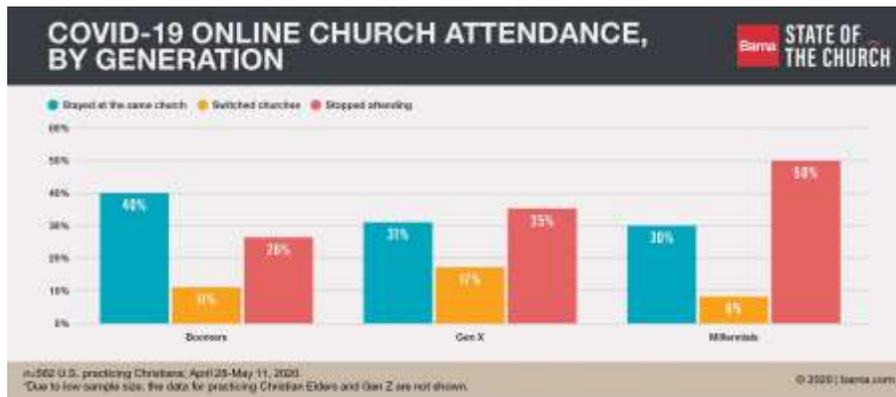
- According to Barna, 40% of those who attended church before Covid are streaming online.
- 23% have checked out other churches
- 48% have done neither

One In Three Practicing Christians Has Stopped Attending Church During (7/8/20) Covid

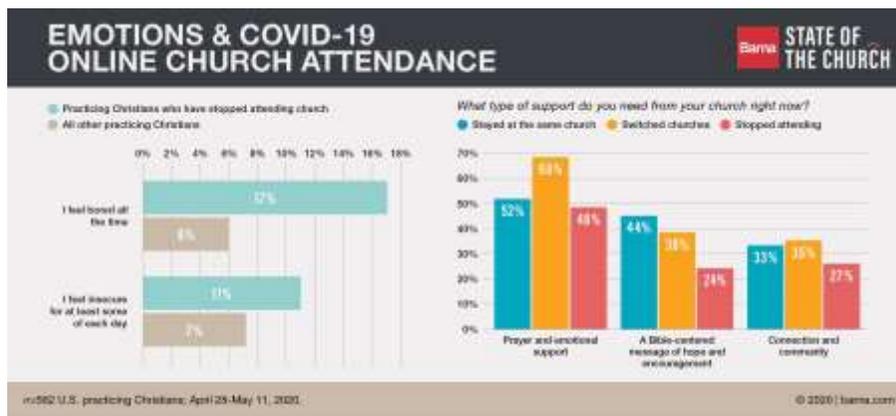
<https://www.barna.com/research/new-sunday-morning-part-2/>



- 35% only attend the same church they did before Covid
- 14% switched
- 18% view multiple churches
- **32% have stopped attending church among practicing Christians**



- **The Millennial Generation is most at risk – 50% stopped attending church**
- Insufficient data on Gen Z



- **Greatest needs: prayer and emotional support, bible centered encouragement and connection**
- So the data is showing across the country that Shelter In Place will have impact on churches
- Our **charge** is to provide prayer and emotional support, a biblical encouragement and connection
- **Those who get disconnected will be at risk of falling away**
- How do we reach out to those who are falling away.

2. James identifies 4 groups:

- Is anyone **suffering**? You have the responsibility to pray (13a)
- Is anyone **cheerful**? You have the joy to sing (13b)
- Is anyone **sick**? You have the responsibility to call the Elders (14-15)
- V. 19 If anyone **wanders** – the Church has the responsibility to bring them back in

3. Lifeguard – my only other job other than being a pastor was a lifeguard/swim teacher in my high school and college years. Being a lifeguard and serving at the church has 3 similarities:

- **Prevent** accidents and dangerous situations
- **Rescue** – reach, throw, row, go
- **Save** – the goal

James shares 3 realizations for the church to minister to those who walk away from the faith.

I. Prevent: The Heart Is Prone To Wander (19a)

^{19a} My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth

- "My brothers" – James is clearly addressing Christians
- "among you" – again, specifying those in the local church
- "**wanders**" = πλανηθῆ, *planēthē*
 - The word "Planet" comes from this word – a celestial body wandering in the universe
 - passive in form and might mean "has been led astray" (Dan McCartney, *James, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 263)
 - The way it is worded is opposite from an intentional
 - Ie/ **Yosemite** in 8th grade – led a group astray heading up to Yosemite Falls
 - Having climbed to Yosemite Falls as a 7th grader in the Honor Society field trip, I thought I knew the path as an 8th grader.
 - I led a group off path through big boulders and difficult terrain.
 - We made it to the top learning we missed the entrance to the path by 50 yards
 - I led the group astray – not intentionally
 - But I missed the mark
 - Sin is missing the mark of God's righteousness – intentionally or unintentionally

WHO WANDERS?

- **Heretic – point out, avoid (Rom 16:17)**
 - Gr. *haíresis* = "choice", a chosen belief
 - Teaching that is contrary to the Scriptures and the teaching of the Apostles
 - Allison: "*Heresy* ... is anything that contradicts sound doctrine. It is false belief that misinterprets Scripture or that ignores some of the teaching of Scripture, or that incorrectly puts together all the teaching of Scripture. The church is to shun heresy and seek to correct its errors." (p. 24)
 - **2 Peter 2:1** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be **false teachers** among you, who will secretly bring in **destructive heresies**, even **denying the Master** who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.
- **Apostate**
 - Gr. *Apostasia* – falling away from the faith, defection, abandonment, desert

- Sinclair Ferguson: "Apostasy is the old, vigorous word to describe this abandonment of Christ." ("Apostasy And How It Happens," Ligonier)
- Samuel Miklaski: "The abandonment or renunciation of Christianity, either voluntarily or by compulsion." (*The New International Dictionary Of The Christian Church*, p. 57)
- Apostasy is essential unbelief in the guise of religion (Num 14:11; Heb 3:12,19; Jude 5)
- Apostasy is expressed through disobedience to God and the Word of God (Num 14:22; 2 Chron 24:17-19; Heb 3:18; 4:11)
- Apostasy differs from heresy. Heresy espouses false doctrines. Apostasy rebels from sound doctrine.
- Some heretics might be wrong about some doctrines, but still be accurate about Christ and salvation
- E.g. Joshua Harris, a former evangelical, mega-church pastor and popular author who divorced his wife, left the pastorate and forsook Christ. It's one thing to kiss dating goodbye, but it's another thing to kiss Christ goodbye.

Harris: "I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is 'deconstruction,' the biblical phrase is 'falling away.' By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian. Many people tell me that there is a different way to practice faith and I want to remain open to this, but I'm not there now." <https://www.instagram.com/p/B0ZBrNLH2sl/>

2 Timothy 3:5-9 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also **oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.** 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

1 John 2:19 **They went out from us, but they were not of us;** for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

Hebrews 3:12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to **fall away** from the living God.

Hebrews 6:4-6 ⁴For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt

- **Fleshly/Carnal**

1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

- A "**Fleshly Person**" is a believer who operates in the mind and the power of the flesh

Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

- Paul states that he's carnal
- *carne* is Latin for meat/flesh (ie/ chili con carne)
- Gr. *sarx* – flesh
 - this term is used to refer to the body as well as the sin nature
 - when this term is used in contrast to the spirit – then it refers to the sin nature
 - Rom 7:14 – the law is *spiritual* – so this is talking about the sin nature
- *sarx* describes one ruled by our bodies, not by our spirit
- ruled by our impulses, not by the Scriptures
- "*sarx* ... came to mean man as a fallen being whose desires even at best originate from sin and are stained by it. Thus, *sarx* came to mean all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God's grace in his life. In this respect *sarx* is synonymous with 'the natural man' or 'the old nature.'" (James M. Boice, "Galatians", *Expositors Bible Commentary*, p. 494)

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? (NKJV)

Three Causes Of Wandering:

- **Lost Spiritual Direction**

- We've allowed idols in our life: success, security, sex, stuff
- James addressed the sins we need to keep out: Favoritism, bad tongue, judging others, loving the world

- **Lingering Emotional Apathy**

- We've lost our first love for Jesus like the Church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:4

- **Lapsed Mental Discernment**

- James addressed the problem of being doubleminded man being unstable in all his ways (James 1:8)
- We allow

- Charles Spurgeon: "Discernment is not a matter of simply telling the difference between right and wrong; rather it is telling the difference between right and almost right."
- John Murray: "The difference between truth and error is not a chasm but a razor's edge."

- **Prone to wander**

- Hillsong composer Marty Sampson "I'm genuinely losing my faith.. and it doesn't bother me." <https://www.christianpost.com/voices/reaching-out-to-a-hillsong-leader-who-is-renouncing-his-faith.html>
- Ie/ Robert Robinson lost his father when he was a boy and roamed the streets of England with a gang. As 17, he listened to George Whitefield, a Methodist Evangelist, preach on Matthew 3:7 ("O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"). 3 years later, after struggling with the conviction of sin, he trusted Christ as his Savior. 2 years later, at 22, in 1757, he writes the hymn "Come Thou Fount."

- The chorus springs:

*Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.*

- In Robinson's last stanza, he penned

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love
Take my heart, O take and seal it
Seal it for thy courts above.*



- Robert Robinson died on June 9, 1790. Had he left the God he loved? A widely-told, but unverifiable, story says that one day as he was riding in a stagecoach a lady asked him what he thought of the hymn she was humming. He responded, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then."

<https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/did-robert-robinson-wander-as-he-feared-11630313.html>

- Do you feel your heart wandering during this time of Covid?
- Were you wandering from God even before Covid and it's been amplified since?
- Who do you know that is wandering? Will you go to them?
- James tells us the value in rescuing the wanderer next ...

II. Rescue: The Church Is Responsible To Reach (19b-20a)

^{19b} and someone brings him back, ^{20a} let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering

- James has challenged the church to pray in the last few sentences/verses
- Part of our prayer is for those who have wandered
- “brings him back,” “brings back” = ἐπιστρέφω (*epistrephō*)
 - “repent”
- Jesus seeks the lost (Luke 15) sheep, coin and lost/prodigal son
 - Luke 15:4-7 Jesus left 99 of His sheep to seek the lost sheep

Luke 15:4-5 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

- We confront with God’s Word
- We plea with love
- Ie/ Childhood friend: Chris
- **Connect with the disconnected**
 - Individually – reach out to someone you haven’t seen online for awhile
 - As a fellowship – keep folks connected
- **Correct with gentleness**

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

- **Overtaken** in a trespass – matches James’ description of the wanderer
- We must make sure we’re **spiritual** – taking the log out of our eye before removing a speck in some else’s eye (Mt 7)
 - Ie/ see spouse’s and kids’ mess but not see your own
 - The fruit of walking in the Spirit includes gentleness
- **Restore** – word used to reset broken born – painful but necessary
- **Gentleness** – there are some who take an overbearing approach to confrontation
 - Some churches have an “in your face” confronting style that can have the tendency to lack gentleness
- **Warning** – guard yourself from temptation

Q: How are we going to rescue and reach out if we’re not in physically in church?

- Good old fashion personal contact

III. Save: The Soul Is Redeemed From Sin And Death (20b)

^{20b} will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- This is not inferring that the wandering Christian
- **"Death"** could refer to **physical death** – sin that leads unto death

1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is **sin leading to death.**

1 Corinthians 11:30-31 ³⁰ For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

- **"Death"** could also mean an empty quality of life without God which is **spiritual death**
- **"Save his soul"** is preventing the wanderer from the effect of sin
- **The stakes are high.** This is not a game. We can't just hit restart and the whole system resets and refreshes.
- People we love are making poor choices in defying the Lordship of Christ and are walking away. They need to be sought, they need to repent, they need Christ's forgiveness!
- Thereby **"cover[ing]" a multitude of sins**
 - Not hiding someone's sin, but the freedom of forgiveness is implied

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins.

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins.

Psalms 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.

Conclusion:

- Connect to Christ through His crucifixion and resurrection.
- Remain vibrantly connect to church and fellowship.
- Reach out to disconnected wanderer to bring them back.

Discussion:

1. Do you know of a "wanderer" to "bring back?" What are effective ways to bring them back without the extremes of ignoring them or being over-bearing?
2. When are we most vulnerable to wander from Christ? How can we guard ourselves from wandering? Is our relationship with Christ genuine?
3. How does restoring a wanderer cover a multitude of sins?