

*How To Stay Close When Your Friends Drift*

*Jude 1:17-25*

*Bellevue Baptist Church*

*September 6, 2026*

I invite you to open your Bible to the book of Jude. If this book were compared to a breed of dog, Jude would have to be a bulldog. Short and stocky. These twenty-five verses are thick and there's so much here to explore.

In week one, we were introduced to Jude himself, the sender of the letter. A bond-servant of Jesus Christ. As a former skeptic and the half-brother of Jesus, he addressed his friends as those who were called, loved, and kept by God, and he challenged them to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. That was week one.

Then in week two, we explored Jude's warning about false teachers—those who had quietly slipped into their fellowship, like a bug through the back door, these misguided teachers were causing theological drift and loosening the moral standards of the men and women. They were saying that grace gives us license to sin. That was week two.

Now we come to the final section of the letter, which addresses these practical questions:

- How do I remain anchored when others are being pulled away by the current of culture?
- How do I keep following Jesus when people around me are deconstructing their faith?
- How do I avoid becoming cynical when people I look up to walk away from what they once believed?

If you've ever wrestled with any of these questions, then today's text is for you. Let's begin in v.17 and read through the end.

**<sup>17</sup> But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> They told you, "In the end time there will be scoffers living according to their own ungodly desires." <sup>19</sup> These people create divisions and are worldly, not having the Spirit.**

**<sup>20</sup> But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. <sup>22</sup> Have mercy on those who waver; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.**

**<sup>24</sup> Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen. Jude 17–25**

As I said before, this passage is about:

## How to Stay Faithful When Your Friends Drift

Jude has several things to say on this. First off,

### 1. Remember what you've been taught. (vv. 17-19)

Look at verse 17: *But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Remember what was predicted? Well, what was predicted? What did the apostles say? They said that scoffers would start to show up. Verse 19 says that problem people will try to join the church. Watch out, v. 19:

*"These people create divisions and are worldly, not having the Spirit."*

You heard that right—one of the tell-tale signs of person void of the Spirit—they like to stir things up. They like to magnify disagreements. They like to get people all worked up about stuff that won't really matter on the other side of heaven.

You know what I'm talking about—the person who always has a sense of urgency about the latest thing on their mind. They are all over the map in their outrage. One week it's the exact sequence of end-times events. The next week it's whether the thermostat should be set at 68 or 72. One week it's whether coffee should be allowed in the sanctuary. The next week it's whether we should say Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost.

People who truly have the Holy Ghost are those who promote harmony, not discord. Beware of those who like to raise issues that create camps—people who like to take sides and take shots at the opponents.

But then Jude says that they are *worldly*. As Jesus modeled for us by taking up the towel and washing his followers feet, there is something heavenly about service. Worldly people don't want to serve, they want to boss people around and tell them where to serve.

Philippians 2 says: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.* That's the mindset of a Spirit-filled person. They don't stir people up, they calm people down. They don't seek power, they seek positions of service.

In 1 Timothy, Paul warns the church about promoting a new convert to a position of authority, until they have shown over time that they have a heart that wants to be helpful. "Don't rush people into positions of leadership," Paul says. A servant's heart is more vital than eloquence or charisma.

Jude's first instruction is remarkably simple: When church is healthy, and new people start flowing in, remember the apostles said: some will be scoffers. Trouble-makers. Don't get near a tree that has no fruit, no matter how tall it is.

This will protect the church from drifting—being wise about who gets to teach.

Now, another way to prevent our own drifting, says Jude...

## **2. Strengthen your walk with God. (v.20-21)**

<sup>20</sup> *But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,* <sup>21</sup> *keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.*

Notice the phrase: *Build yourselves up in your most holy faith.* Underline that.

Jude is talking about building spiritual strength. He's talking about becoming increasingly biblical in the way you think. In the old days, we called this doctrinally sound. Build spiritual muscle by filling your mind with truth.

In our kitchen, Lynley hung this piece of art that regularly reminds us of this.

(Image: When the roots are deep, you need not fear the wind.)

The stronger your understanding of Scripture becomes, the less likely you are to be blown away when a Christian you adored goes apostate. The less likely you are to be devastated when human beings act like human beings. Don't build your faith by drafting off other cars. Own your growth.

Listen carefully to the sermons on Sunday. Take notes. Do further study. Use Sunday morning as a springboard for further exploration. Take Scripture seriously.

And I would say this—take it or leave it—but the best way to learn anything is to teach it. This sermon you're hearing right now—it didn't magically appear last night. It is the product of hours spent reading Jude, studying the background of Jude, examining the precise words Jude chose, comparing passages, asking questions, writing down my thoughts, then rewriting them, then rewriting them again to capture the core essence.

The teacher almost always learns more than the student. In fact, I would bet my life that if you ask our Life Group leaders about the greatest benefit of teaching, most of them would not mention first what happens in the classroom. They would testify to what happened in their heart during the hours of preparation. I don't care if its 5th graders, 10th graders, or 75 year old students, when you have a classroom expecting solid teaching, that pressure will make you more solid.

Now some of you are thinking, "But I'm not a teacher." That's okay. Not everyone has the gift of holding a room. Not everyone is called to teach, I get it, but everyone is called to grow. So, how can you move beyond a surface-level reading of Scripture? How can you push yourself to go al deeper?

Because I've noticed that when people drift away from the faith, it doesn't happen overnight. It is usually because they stopped growing spiritually, for a long period of time. And slowly, the world's ideas begin replacing God's ideas.

Jude says the antidote is simple: Build yourself up. And then he immediately adds: *"Praying in the Holy Spirit."* In other words, spiritual strength requires more than intake. It requires hours of conversation with God, cultivating a relationship.

Strong Christians are people who know God's Word and regularly speak with God in prayer.

Then Jude says: *Keep yourselves in the love of God.* That's an interesting phrase because earlier in the letter Jude addressed the people as those that ARE loved by God. Now, here he tells us to remain in that love. The idea is not that God will stop loving you.

In other words, we have an obligation to remain close to God, by limiting our exposure to godless people. I'm not talking about relationships we form for the purpose of winning people to Christ. I'm referring to becoming "yoked" with unbelievers, spending increasing amounts of time with those not guided by the Holy Spirit.

I have seen a lot of solid people drift far from God this way. They become close friends, or they enter a dating relationship with a charismatic, worldly person, and soon they are tempted to make all kinds of compromises. Each of us should be wise in this—relating to both believing and non-believing people, but being wary of any person who is slowly pulling you away from the Lord.

As the old saying goes, "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future." Stay inside the love of God by watching the way relationships are affecting your affections for God.

And finally, Jude says we are to be: *Waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.* Faithful Christians never lose sight of the finish line. They remember that this world is not their home. They remember that Christ is coming again. They remember that eternity is real. They remember that a Christian must keep on going even when those we love leave the race. We are responsible to others, but we are not responsible for them.

So how do you stay faithful when your friends drift? You remember what the Scriptures warned—that some of this would happen. Not everyone makes it to the end. But as for you—strengthen your walk with God. You keep your eyes fixed on eternity.

Now, let's move on to the third point Jude makes...

### **3. Help others find their way back. (v. 22-23)**

Personally, I find this section to be most insightful of all the verses in Jude. Here we are told to be spiritual first-responders—that we have been called to try to rescue people from the path of self-destruction. V.22...

<sup>22</sup> *Have mercy on those who waver; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.*

Did you catch that? Not all drifters are the same. Like an intake nurse in the emergency room, we have to diagnose the situation before deciding on the treatment. First...

### **The Three Types of Drifters**

- **There are those who need compassion. (v.22)**

Verse 22 says: "Have mercy on those who waver."

These are people who are wrestling with doubts. They're not false teachers. They're not trying to lead anyone astray. They're simply struggling to believe what they've been taught. Every follower of Jesus eventually walks through a season like this—when God seems distant and non-existent.

Sometimes our inner questions are intellectual. "Can I really trust the Bible?" "Is it compatible with science?" "How could a loving God let the holocaust happen?" These are legit questions.

Sometimes the wrestling match with God is more personal. "God, why don't you answer my prayers like other people get their prayers answered?" "Why do you love me when I don't see much to love?"

Jude tells us to have mercy on people who are walking through seasons of doubt. They don't need criticism. They don't need a lecture. They need kindness, and a safe space to say some things out loud that are scary.

They need someone who will lovingly remind them that doubt is not the same thing as unbelief. Christians sometimes assume that everyone who struggles is rebellious. Jude says otherwise. Some people aren't rebelling. They're wavering.

And when someone is wavering, what they need most is someone who is stable.

Now Jude moves on to discuss the second type of drifter.

- **There are those who need intervention. (v. 23)**

For these, Jude intensifies the language. He writes: *"Save others by snatching them from the fire."*

This is a picture of a firefighter running into a burning house. There is someone who needs to be rescued. Pulled out. This person is in grave danger.

Most of us have watched someone we love go down a path of self-destruction. It may be an addiction, a beguiling relationship, a destructive pattern.

Someone has to love them enough to tell them the truth. Someone has to risk the relationship. Someone has to say, "I'm concerned about where this path is headed. As it's been said:

*Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.*

A year ago, famous actor Anthony Hopkins published his life story. In it, he tells on himself—the ways he's behaved both good and bad. And he's honest about moments when he needed rescue. Like so many people under pressure, he found himself more and more dependent on alcohol to get him through the day.

He writes:

**"The truth was that every bit of news, good or bad, was an excuse to drink. My small triumphs called for a drink: *Let's celebrate! We deserve it!* When I felt lonely, the only way to break down the barricades between myself and others was booze: *Let's loosen up and have fun!*" –Anthony Hopkins**

And on and on it went: his dependency growing each day like an untreated cancer.

Hopkins writes that one night he drove from one location to another, so intoxicated, that he woke up the next day and couldn't remember how he got home. Suddenly it hit him. He could have killed someone. He could have wiped out a family. He could have destroyed innocent lives. And in that moment he realized something drastic had to change.

Thankfully, it did. The reason I mention that story is because every one of us knows someone headed down a dangerous road. Maybe they're addicted. Maybe they're compromising morally. Maybe they're making decisions that are slowly destroying their marriage, their family, or their future. And if we truly love them, there may come a moment when the Holy Spirit says: go into that house and see if you can pull them out of the fire.

There are moments when mercy looks like intervention.

Finally, Jude mentions a third group.

- **There are those who need careful restoration. (V.23)**

The third group is actually the most interesting because Jude combines compassion and caution. V. 23...*Have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.*

These people are different from the doubters and different from the endangered. These people have made mistakes, but they are not beyond hope. The church should never become a place that shoots its wounded. Some Christians become so committed to truth that they forget compassion. Have mercy, Jude says, but mercy mixed with healthy fear.

Fear of what? Not fear of the person. Fear of the sin that has captured the person. Galatians 6:1 says:

***Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted. Gal 6:1***

Help people, but don't assume you're immune.

When Jude says that we should hate even the garment defiled by the flesh, he draws a picture of a person pulling someone out of the mud. The challenge is to do it, without getting yourself all dirty. Pull the person up without getting down in the dirt. Today we might say: Love the sinner. Hate the sin. Care for the person. Reject the behavior.

In all three of these scenarios, Jude says that we are called to be spiritual first responders, but don't become so consumed with the spiritual condition of others that you neglect your own.

And no matter how many family, friends, or Christian leaders fall into moral failure, keep your confidence in God's ability to hold you, so long as you keep your life close to Him.

**Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy, <sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.**

**Jude 24–25**

What a beautiful doxology that is. Jude's letter has been filled with cautions and warnings, ominous tones, but it ends on a high note, with the focus landing where it should—on the glory, majesty, and power of Jesus Christ.

Now, with my time remaining, let me raise some questions that rise from the text.

**A Seasoned Christian Asks:**

**What if the person drifting is one of my own children?**

One of the most humbling parts about being a parent is that we cannot control the way our children perceive God. We cannot force them to select our worldview.

There are three main worldviews, and variations of these:

*Theism. Pantheism. Atheism.*

Theism is the belief that God exists apart from the world, but is involved with and holds up the world. Pantheism is the belief that God is the world. He is the Universe. He is Mother Nature. Powerful, but impersonal. Atheism is the belief that there is no God. Everything you see is a result of cosmic accidents.

Each of these is a faith system. It takes faith to believe that Jesus was the Son of God sent to earth to save sinners and create an eternal home for those who surrender to him. Theism requires faith because you're choosing to believe something you don't full understand.

The same goes for pantheism. It takes an enormous amount of faith to believe that God and the Universe are the same—that water, wind, and mountains are the Higher Power in and of themselves. Pantheism requires faith because you're choosing to believe something you don't full understand.

And of course the same goes for atheism. People say atheists have no faith—no, it takes a lot of faith to believe that the universe began as one big accident, that human beings are a result of blind mutations multiplied over millions of years. It takes a lot of faith to believe that something came from nothing, that primordial soup and long spans of time could spawn a planet pre-conditioned for life, with mindboggling complexity and design. Atheism requires faith because you're choosing to believe something you don't full understand.

Now, what do you do when you have raised your child to be this (the theist) and once he leaves the house, he chooses “this” (atheism). Because the dream of every Christian parent is that their children would walk in light of Scripture.

In 3 John 4, the apostle wrote:

***I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in truth. 3 John 4***

And every parent in the room understands exactly what he meant. We are often only as happy as our saddest child. When our children are walking with God, there is tremendous joy. And when they drift, there is tremendous concern. We know they won't find lasting peace apart from Christ. We know that. But we also know that human beings often have to learn some things for themselves.

So what do you do when a child drifts? I don't have a silver bullet. I don't have a magic formula. But let me offer three thoughts.

### **When Your Grown Child Drifts**

- **Prayer is your greatest weapon.**

Ultimately, what you want is for the Holy Spirit to speak to your son or daughter. Not you. The reason is simple. If the message comes from you, they may reject it simply because it came from you. The Holy Spirit can reach places in the human heart that no parent can reach.

Not long ago, I was reading *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers, and one passage stopped me in my tracks. Chambers wrote:

**Only the Holy Spirit is in a position to point out what is wrong in someone, because only the Holy Spirit can do so without causing pain. When humans criticize, they only succeed in weakening and wounding. –Oswald Chambers**

That rings the bell of truth, doesn't it? The Holy Spirit can say things I cannot say. He can convict without humiliating. He can expose without crushing. He can awaken a heart in ways no sermon, lecture, or parental speech ever could. So when a child begins drifting, the first response is prayer. Not panic. Not manipulation. Prayer.

- **If confrontation is necessary, make sure your own house is in order.**

In other words, don't confront your child if they can point out some major inconsistency in your walk with Christ. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 7 about removing the plank from your own eye before addressing the speck in someone else's. If you confront your child about something ungodly, be prepared for them to ask:

"What about you "What about that area of your life? "What about that inconsistency?"

If there is unresolved hypocrisy, deal with it. If there are broken places that need attention, address them. One of the most powerful things a parent can say is: "I was wrong." Children are far more likely to receive loving correction from parents who are actively submitting themselves to Christ. The goal is not perfection. The goal is credibility.

- **Don't force what only God can accomplish.**

Years ago, I read a book called *It Starts at Home*. In it, the authors described three stages of a children's development, and wise parents learn to adjust their approach as their children grow.

**The Imprint Stage, birth to 7:** Children largely receive what you teach them. They absorb, imitate, memorize, and believe. This is the season to teach.

**The Impression Stage, roughly 8 to 13:** Children begin asking questions and testing what they've been taught. That's not necessarily rebellion; it's development. This is the season to discuss.

**The Coaching Stage, 14 and up:** Your child is increasingly forming his or her own convictions. Your influence still matters enormously, but coercion becomes less effective. You're moving from control to counsel, from directing to coaching.

The principle is simple: as children grow older, our approach has to grow with them. We teach when they're young, discuss things as they mature, and we coach them as they move toward adulthood.

Here's the principle:

**With younger children, authority carries the relationship. With older children, relationship carries the authority.**

This is why I say—don't force what only God can do. As your child gets older, the only influence you have comes from healthy, positive, relational capital. And this might mean that you can't keep saying everything you want to say because you've said it before and it hasn't helped.

And remember the way Jude ends his letter: *"Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling..."* Put your trust in Him. The Author of the story is still writing.

**A Good-hearted Skeptic Asks:**

**Why does Christianity place so much emphasis on doctrine?**

That's a great question because, if we're honest, the word *doctrine* doesn't exactly get people's hearts racing. It sounds dry. But the Bible treats doctrine very differently. In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul tells a young pastor:

***Watch your life and your doctrine closely. 1 Tim. 4:16***

Why? Because your life is always connected to what you believe. Actions are the fruit. Beliefs are the roots. When people drift from God, they rarely wake up one morning and announce, "I've decided to ruin my life." Instead, they begin believing lies.

One piece of doctrine that we see throughout scripture is God's omniscience, which means that He sees all. David celebrated this truth in Psalm 139: *"You have searched me, Lord, and you know me... You perceive my thoughts from afar."* When that doctrine fades, we face temptations. disappear when temptation enters the room. The Bible teaches that God sees all things.

Think about what that means. God sees me when I'm sitting in church. God sees me when I'm sitting alone in my living room. God sees me when I'm traveling for work. God sees me when nobody else is watching. God sees me when I'm scrolling through my phone. God sees me when I'm alone in a hotel room. There is no corner of the universe where I can hide from Him.

Believing in this doctrine will keep you from drifting. A sad example of this can be seen in the life of Ravi Zacharias.

For decades, Ravi was one of the most gifted defenders of Christianity in the world. His books helped countless people. His testimony influenced atheists, skeptics, and seekers. Many people came to faith through his ministry. But after his death, disturbing details emerged about a secret life he had been living. Somewhere along the way, Ravi started living as though God didn't see that second phone he carried in his pocket. As if God couldn't hear those secret conversations he was having. As if God couldn't see the inappropriate relationships he was initiating—all the while he was publishing best selling Christian books and speaking in churches all over the world. That's why Christianity emphasizes doctrine, because what we believe eventually becomes how we live.

## **A Student Asks:**

### **How can I tell if someone online is a false teacher?**

That's a really important question because today, you can listen to thousands of Bible teachers from around the world. Sometimes church people will come to me and say, "Everybody's listening to this preacher. I've started listening. How do I know this teacher is legit?"

And I'll warn you: false teachers rarely lead with their strangest beliefs. The heresy is normally subtle and takes a while to come to the surface. You have to hang around for a while before the weird stuff appears. So practically speaking, let me give you three suggestions when you find a Bible teacher online that you enjoy.

### **When you find a fresh Bible teacher online...**

- **Ask a mature believer you trust to check them out.**

One of the great gifts God gives us is wise counselors. Send the link to a parent, a Life Group leader, or someone you know walks closely with God. Ask them, "I've been listening to this person. What do you think?" Ask someone to vet it before you swallow it hook, line, and sinker.

- **Be like the Bereans and compare what they teach to Scripture. (Acts 17:11)**

In Acts 17, Luke praises the Bereans because they listened carefully to Paul's teaching and then examined the Scriptures daily to see whether what he said was true. Think about that. Even the Apostle Paul wasn't offended when people checked his teaching against Scripture. The Bereans understood that the Bible is the authority, not the teacher. That's still true today. Every preacher, every podcaster, every author, every YouTuber, and every pastor must be tested against God's Word.

- **If the person is solid, soak up all you can.**

Preaching is truth delivered through personality. God uses different people in different ways. Just as it's healthy to have different kinds of books on your reading list, it's healthy to learn from a variety of faithful Bible teachers.

In some ways, that's part of the beauty of having four Gospels. We don't have one account of the life of Jesus; we have four, written by four different men with different backgrounds and perspectives. Matthew had been a tax collector. Mark was a close associate of Peter and wrote with an eyewitness's perspective nearby. Luke was a physician and careful historian. John was a fisherman and one of Jesus' closest disciples.

They're all telling us the same truth about the same Jesus, but they don't all sound the same. And that's part of the gift. God doesn't erase personality when He communicates truth; He uses it, and the more we hear solid biblical teaching, the more likely we are to detect the counterfeit teacher.