

PASTOR'S NOTES

ADVICE FROM JUDE: 3. SERVE OTHERS.

The Book of Jude in the Bible is a short letter written to Christians. In the 25 verses he offers three pieces of advice, the third I am writing about here.

Early in his letter, Jude jumps into the concern that has him writing in the first place:

“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”

He goes on and on about these godless men, describing their evil in verses 8-16. So you might ask, "Where is he going with this? What is his point?" Certainly he wants to elicit fear and cause us to be more alert. This is appropriate when there is a danger near that not everyone seems to notice. But in the next verses, 17-19 he tells us first to remember that these things are nothing new, and we should not be shocked. Then in verses 20-21 he tells us to build up our own faith. Ask yourself each day, *what am I doing to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Am I in worship and prayer, both privately and with others? Am I involved in some kind of service to others? Am I learning about the Bible and faith from someone else? Am I teaching what I have learned about faith to someone else?*

After telling us to build up our own faith, he says:

“Be merciful to those who doubt; others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” Jude 22-23

I believe this is ultimately where Jude has wanted to take us all along, but most people get stuck in the beginning of his letter, and stop at verse 16, the complaints. We are good at complaining, the world is truly messed up. We have to decide to move past the complaints. Jude suggests two steps: 1- don't be shocked, and 2- keep yourself in the faith. Only then we can take the third step that makes us useful to our Lord in His work: serving others.

Did you notice that? We have been *blessed by God*, but until we take this third step we are of *no help to God*.

Jude lays out three kinds of actions towards our brothers and sisters at risk:

Show mercy to the doubters. Almost all of us have had to work through doubt on the way to faith. We need to let people figure out their own answers to faith questions. This doesn't mean leaving them alone to figure it out, but sharing our own doubts and our journey to faith. Literally millions of people have left the faith over the years because in their church experience they did not feel allowed to question or doubt.

Snatch others from the fire. There are times when we may have to use force to pull someone from danger: protecting our children, the person attempting suicide, the addict overdosing, a person threatening others. These are usually extreme situations (unless you are in an emergency profession), and this “snatching” is a temporary fix. Continuing to try to impose our will on someone will lead to resentment and make them less motivated to see things our way. So we need to go to the third way.

To others show mercy, mixed with fear. This is a combination of the first two, and for most of us, these “others” are the largest group with which we have contact. Many people we know, including family and friends, are in real danger- both in this life and the next. But we can’t just snatch them to safety. 2 *Timothy 2:24-26* says the Lord’s servant uses kindness and gentleness in persuading people, and reminds us that it is the devil who has taken them captive. The devil is the real evil. Now “kind, gentle,” “tenderhearted, forgiving” (*Ephesians 4:32*), “patient, generous, faithful, self-controlled” (*Galatians 5:22-23*) may seem like weak responses for some of the people we know. And yet, that’s where we start. If any of us were off of the faith at some time, or in danger, I would bet that those words probably describe the people who had the most positive impact on our lives.

Jesus had the ability to look past the sin in people’s lives to the person He loves. He lives the example he tells of the prodigal son’s father who embraces his son when he returns (*Luke 15:20-24*). This does not mean that the father approved of what his son had done, or that there would be no need for further discussion. But first he communicates his love; and not “I love you, but...” The time for addressing the other issues comes later. If it sounds to you like we are resigning ourselves to their life continuing as it is, perhaps to a degree we are.

There is the possibility that those we love the most will still be lost, by their own choice. And for everyone you might think is a lost cause, there is a mother, father, sister or brother who is still praying for them, and a Savior who paid His life to save theirs. We cannot fix anyone. The Holy Spirit can fix anyone, but even God does not force the fix. God has to watch His children stumble and fall. And because He feels our pain, He suffers through it. So how can we expect it to be any different for us? The more we become like Christ (which is my goal and prayer for all of us), the more we will hurt for others. So be it.

2 *Timothy 2:24-26*, *Ephesians 4:32* and *Galatians 5:22-23* tell of the attitude we need. With that in mind, sharing the doubts, fears, and joys of our own faith journey is our best tool in serving others. This is what He has given us; this is what best brings people to choose Christ for themselves. And if you doubt that, you might have to go back to *Jude 17-21* and cover those steps again.

In Christ,

