1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: 2 Peter and Jude
Theme: Persevere

Overview: Second Peter and Jude were written to believers threatened by false teachers and scoffers. In this unit, students will learn to persevere: through growth by adding to their faith, in truth by standing firm in God's Word, with hope as they look forward to the day of God, and by faith as they build themselves up in their most holy faith.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

Second Peter identifies its author as "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1), an eyewitness of the transfiguration (1:16-18). Jude was "a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" (Jude 1), one of the half-brothers of Jesus who came to faith after the resurrection.

Audience

Peter wrote his second letter to believers who had received his first one (2 Peter 3:1), likely the same exiles scattered across Asia Minor. Jude wrote "to those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ" (Jude 1), believers whose churches were being infiltrated by ungodly people.

Date

Second Peter was likely written in the mid-60s AD, shortly before Peter's death, since he knew that he would "soon put it aside" (2 Peter 1:14). Jude was probably written around the same time, and the two letters share many similar warnings and themes.

Setting

Persecution was less pronounced than in 1 Peter, but false teaching had run rampant. False teachers had slipped in secretly, perverting God's grace into a license for immorality (Jude 4), and scoffers mocked the promise of Christ's return (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

Theme

Persevere. Peter urged believers to "make every effort to add to your faith" (2 Peter 1:5), to remember the truth, and to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (3:18). Jude urged them to "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 3) and to build themselves up in their most holy faith (v. 20).

Why Study 2 Peter and Jude?

These short letters prepare believers to stand firm when the truth is under attack. This study calls Christians to keep growing so that they do not fall, to be firmly established in the truth, to live holy and godly lives as they look forward to the day of God, and to trust the one "who is able to keep you from stumbling" (Jude 24).

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: 2 Peter 1:3-11

WEEK 2: 2 Peter 1:12–2:3

WEEK 3: 2 Peter 3:3-18

WEEK 4: Jude 3-7, 17-25

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Add to your faith so that you grow and do not fall.**

STUDY: 2 Peter and Jude

THEME: Persevere

LESSON TEXT: 2 Peter 1:3-11

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

PERSEVERE THROUGH GROWTH

BY MARK SCOTT

Chuck Swindoll wrote a book entitled *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*. Sometimes the Christian life seems that way. But, even if that is the case, the believer is one step closer to what God desires. That is often the nature of Christian growth—one step at a time. There are many keys to spiritual maturity (Matthew 10:16; Luke 6:40; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:12-16; Colossians 1:27, 28).

One of those keys is perseverance. This word appears in our text today (v. 6). It literally means "to remain under." It also encompasses endurance, not giving in, or making no surrender. Sometimes we speak of the "patience of Job." He actually might not have been very patient as he wanted to argue his case before God. He was longsuffering. Perseverance relates to circumstances while longsuffering (patience) relates to people. No matter which we use, growth in Christ does not happen without perseverance.

Growth Stems from Divine Nature

2 Peter 1:3, 4

We assume that Peter wrote this general epistle to the same believers as mentioned in 1 Peter (1:1). He referred to the letter as his second one (2 Peter 3:1). The suffering and persecution elements are not as pronounced in this second letter as they were in the first. However, false teaching had run rampant and scoffing was strong (2:1; 3:3). These believers needed reassurance of their calling and they needed to be challenged to persevere through growth.

But this growth is not something Christians engender on their own. It comes from the divine power and promises of God. Any participation in the divine nature did not have its genesis in humankind. Peter reminded these elect exiles that God's power *has given* (just like Pilate gave Joseph of Arimathea the corpse of Jesus in Mark 15:45) followers everything they needed for a *godly* (well directed; reverent) life. This godly life was found in the knowledge of Jesus. Growth in this knowledge of Jesus is at the heart of why this epistle was written (3:18). Through the knowledge of Jesus believers experience the precious promises of God so that they can *participate* (have a common mind) in the divine *nature* (physics). The scholars refer to this kind of thing as *theosis* (not the deification of humankind but becoming like God). This divine nature helps believers *escape* (flee) the *corruption* (spoiling or destruction) in the world caused by evil *desires* (passions).

Growth Continues with Human Effort

2 Peter 1:5-9

The opposite of faith is non-faith—not actions in conjunction with faith. So the call in this paragraph is to *make every effort* (mentioned also in verse 10 and meaning "to give all diligence") for growth. There are some things that believers are to add to their faith. The word "add" is an important one. Part of the word is where we get the English word *choreography*. It refers to what a teacher supplied to students and meant "to furnish abundantly." Peter connected these seven virtues to faith to ensure Christian maturity. It is best not to second guess this list. The virtues do not have to progress or be clustered. It seems in this case, it is just a list of seven virtues. He listed *goodness* (what gives worth), *knowledge*, *self-control* (temperance and mentioned as fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23), *perseverance*, *godliness* (piety and devoutness: the fourth century historian, Eusebius, actually bears the name of this virtue), *mutual affection* (*philadelphia* refers to love of family and friends), and *love* (*agape*—benevolent good will toward another).

When these seven virtues are dynamic and increasing in believers, they will ensure people are not being *ineffective* (idle or slothful) and *unproductive*. Verse 9 states what happens when these virtues are dormant. Spiritual blindness and spiritual amnesia set in. We end up with shut (blinked) eyes and cannot remember being cleansed from past sins. To not grow is to go backwards. Human effort is a necessary ingredient for perseverance.

Growth Results in Rich Welcome

2 Peter 1:10, 11

When Heaven and earth cooperate, good things happen (Philippians 2:12, 13). Peter appealed for the second time for the believers to make every effort to *confirm* (make firm) their calling and election. Christians do this by participating in the divine nature and working at it wholeheartedly.

Peter gave two results that can be expected when this is done. First, the believers will *never stumble* (fall in such a way as to forfeit their salvation). Second, the believers will receive a *rich welcome* (exodus) in the final kingdom. Much more than human effort is required to receive this rich welcome. That takes the grace of God, the blood of Jesus, and the help of the Holy Spirit. But the eternal kingdom is worth all the perseverance.

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EVERYDAY DISCIPLESHIP

BY DAVID FAUST

At times, growth seems almost effortless. The other day a friend of mine rescued a baby rabbit. She's been feeding it with an eye-dropper, and the bunny gets noticeably bigger every day. The rose bushes in front of my house burst into bloom on warm summer days with minimal support from me. My 2-year-old granddaughter's body keeps getting bigger, her vocabulary keeps expanding, and new facets of her personality show up every day. Growth is inevitable in the world God designed.

Spiritual growth, though, requires intentional effort. That's why Peter says, "Make every effort to add to your faith," and then he goes on to list seven qualities Christians should pursue: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Spiritual growth has no age restrictions. Peter doesn't say, "If you're a teenager preoccupied with school and friends, you can wait till you're older to deepen your faith." He doesn't say, "As a busy adult juggling responsibilities at work and home, you're exempt from pursuing God." Nor does he say, "When you're old and set in your ways, you're no longer expected to change and grow." Everyday discipleship should be a priority in every stage of life. If we open our eyes, we'll find God's mercies "are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23).

Every day there's something to learn about the Lord and about the Bible. Every day there's more to learn about the natural world, about yourself, and about others. What if, as you go through the day, in your mind you silently ask every person you encounter, "What can I learn from you?" You may never need to say those words out loud, but with that question in mind, you might be surprised how much you can learn from your neighbor, your coworker, the child who lives on your block, the restaurant server or grocery clerk, and others who interact with you.

Every day there's something to do. If you don't stay busy with positive activity, the devil will whisper ways to fill the void. Goodness, self-control, and perseverance don't grow in a vacuum. Soul muscles gain strength from flexing in the real world of relationship and responsibility. Yes, faith grows when we sit alone praying and studying Scripture; but it also grows when we do our jobs, solve problems, endure hardships, and help others.

Every day there's someone to serve. We mature spiritually when we practice what Jesus called the greatest commandments—to love God and love our neighbors. A friend of mine was sick for weeks, but while recuperating he befriended the hospital staff and prayed for the nurses who cared for him. Another friend, healthy himself, stays home a lot because of his wife's illness, but he fills the hours by sending hand-written encouragement notes to others.

Every day there's something (and Someone) to believe in. We don't pursue spiritual growth in a vain effort to impress others or prove ourselves worthy of God's blessings. In Christ, grace and peace are already ours in abundance (2 Peter 1:2). "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life" (v. 3). Ahead of us there is "a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (v. 11). Until that day comes, let's be everyday disciples, growing in faith, hope, and love.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- How important do you think it is for an architect or builder to have top quality tools, materials, and training to complete a masterful work?
- How do you explain why some people accept Jesus and are baptized into him, but yet quickly depart from the faith?

Read 2 Peter 1:3, 4

1. Verse 3 makes no qualms about it: Jesus gives us *theias dynameōs* (divine power, or miraculous godly force) for everything (yes, everything!) that we need in our lives. Do you feel equipped to live your fullest Christian life? Why or why not? How do you resolve how you may feel with the truth of this Scripture?

2. Consider the great and precious promises of Jesus, not only for our past salvation and our present struggles, but also for a future time when he will return again. How does his glory and goodness achieve these promises?

3. How does Jesus help us "participate in the divine nature" and escape "the corruption in the world caused by evil desires"?

4. Roles matter. There is Jesus' part but there is also our part to consider. Discuss what role we have in participating in godliness and escaping evil.

Read 2 Peter 1:5-9

5. This passage is like stair-stepping upward in maturity as we build upon each sequential characteristic. Where do we start as believers? Where do we end? How does each step tie together?

6. Many of us have known people who accepted Jesus and were baptized, but soon departed from the faith. What is the hazard of not growing in maturity in increasing measure? Why do you think Peter used the phrase "nearsighted and blind" to describe people lacking in these qualities?

Read 2 Peter 1:10, 11

7. How can you make your calling and election sure? "For if you do these things . . ." (v. 10). List the things in all these passages that Peter is telling believers to do.

8. Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-17. As Christians, we build our works on the solid foundation of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Brainstorm what makes up works like gold, silver, jewels, and wood, hay, or straw. Discuss how to make your kingdom work last for eternity. Will your works survive the fire?

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Jesus, you are our great and mighty foundation—immovable, indestructible, solid, and true. Holy Spirit, equip us with your power and help us to move forward in maturity from faith to absolute Christlike love so that we'll never become blind to your sacrifice for us and we would receive the rich welcome awaiting us in Heaven.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Firmly establish yourself in the truth, because there will be false teachers.**

STUDY: 2 Peter and Jude

THEME: Persevere

LESSON TEXT: 2 Peter 1:12–2:3

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 17:1-9; John 14:25-27; 2 Timothy 3:1-4, 10-17

PERSEVERE IN TRUTH

BY MARK SCOTT

"Close" works if the game is horseshoes. But for rocket science and neurosurgery close is not good enough. There is another area where close is not good enough. It is the truth of Christian doctrine. Almost every book in the New Testament says something about false teaching or false teachers (Philemon would be an exception). We must persevere to grow in Christ (last week's lesson), but we must also persevere in truth.

This text follows on the heels of last week's text. Once Peter reminded his readers of their calling to be partakers of the divine nature, he got down to the main content of his second letter, namely warning the believers of how the truth of God's message stands opposite the claims of the false teachers and scoffers. The truth would help them not just be close but be spot on.

The Memory of God's Truth

2 Peter 1:12-15

So much of life is relearning. If we could just remember half of the things that we are supposed to already know. Christians can sometimes have spiritual amnesia. So three times in these verses Peter called the believers to "remember." First he wanted to *remind* them of the true calling they have in Christ (1:3-11). Peter admitted that they already *knew* (*oida* is a strong word for "know") and were *established* (to stand or set fast) in the truth.

Second, Peter wanted to *refresh their memory* of the truth while he had opportunity. Peter admitted that he was not long for this world. His *tent* (tabernacle, body or life; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1) would soon be put aside (John 21:18, 19). Finally, Peter wanted to ensure that after his *departure* (exodus) they would *make every effort* (give all diligence) to remember the truth of the gospel. Our memories are muscles that must be exercised regularly to work truth down deep into the fiber of our beings.

The Voice of God's Truth

2 Peter 1:16-18

For Peter, God's truth wasn't a collection of fairy tales or *cleverly devised stories* (myths). His perseverance in truth was rooted in a gospel narrative which was a preview of the resurrected glory and majesty of Jesus Christ. Peter referred to the transfiguration (Matthew 17; Mark 9; Luke 9). Jesus "took off his mask" for a brief moment and let Peter, James, and John see who he really was.

In that moment the disciples heard a voice from the *Majestic Glory* (from Heaven). The Father's audible voice was only heard three times during Jesus' earthly ministry (his baptism, the transfiguration, and the week of his death in Jerusalem). So this was clearly a high water mark for Jesus—and Peter. He quoted the specific line, "This is My Son, whom I love (beloved); with him I am well pleased" (v. 17). Mountains seem to bring out the actual voice of God (Exodus 19, 20; 1 Kings 19:9-14; Psalm 29; Isaiah 2:3). The God of truth has a voice.

The Message of God's Truth

2 Peter 1:19-21

Peter reminded his readers that the actual voice of God was not ultimately located in the apostle's memory alone. This prophetic *message* (word) was mediated through the person of Christ and was written down in the Scriptures. The message was completely *reliable* (firm, fixed, and certain) and therefore attention must be paid to it. Peter likened the message to a light shining in a dark place, to the dawning of a new day, and to the *morning star* (eternal day or light bringer, namely Jesus—see Revelation 22:16) existentially rising in the human heart.

This message had its genesis in God himself. The message was not a contrivance of people. No *prophecy of Scripture* (prophetic voice which is the Bible) sprang up from the prophet speaking for God. Scripture did not originate as a product of the human will. Scripture developed progressively as God spoke through the prophets who were *carried along* (to bear up with) by the Holy Spirit. The message is uniquely God's.

The Way of God's Truth

2 Peter 2:1-3

In contrast to the inspired prophets there were *false prophets* (Old Testament?) who were not close to the truth. These false prophets of the old covenant were the same as the false teachers of the new covenant. Peter affirmed three things about them. First, they *introduced . . . heresies* (Acts 15:5; 1 Corinthians 11:19). These are marked out in the rest of chapter 2. These caused them to deny Jesus and bring destruction on themselves. Second, their followers were depraved and caused the way of truth to come into *disrepute* (blasphemy). Third, their greed caused them to *exploit* (trade; commercialize) people through lies.

Peter admitted that these false teachers stood condemned, and their destruction was ongoing. Close sometimes is enough, but it does not help us persevere in truth.

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GET REAL

BY DAVID FAUST

It's become common lately for people to speak about "their truth." I consider *truth* a synonym for *reality*, so it sounds strange to hear someone say, "This is my truth." Of course, all of us have different backgrounds and experiences, but it's dangerous when our subjective views determine what is real for us, regardless of what God or anyone else considers right and true.

What does it mean to describe something as real? Why do we call property "real estate"? My wife and I don't call our modest house an estate. Why would anyone buy an unreal estate? And where would you get it—from an unrealtor?

A bit of research solves the puzzle. Some say the "real" in real estate comes from the Latin *rex* ("royal" or "king") because kings owned all of the land in their kingdoms. However, it's more likely the expression comes from the Latin *res*, "things"—an archaic way of referring to land, buildings, or other materials fixed to the land.

The Real Thing

We use a variety of terms to describe reality. **Authentic** means something is verified, supported by evidence, not fictitious or counterfeit. The Greek *authentikos* meant "original, primary, first hand," or "one who does things himself."

Genuine comes from the Latin *genuinus*, which meant "native, natural" (like *genus*, a biological classification of organisms). The Oxford Dictionary suggests an interesting alternative—that *genuine* comes from *genu* ("knee") and is derived from the Roman custom of a father acknowledging his paternity of a newborn child by placing the baby on his knee.

Sincere means "pure, unadulterated." According to an often-cited legend, this word comes from the Latin compound *sine cere*, "without wax." Ancient sculptors would work for years to carve a statue out of marble. Frustrated when cracks appeared in their creations, unscrupulous sculptors would fill the imperfections with wax so the statues looked flawless, but in time, the wax would dry out and flake, and the cracks would reappear. To avoid misleading the public, top quality artwork was certified *sine cere*, "without wax," so buyers could be sure no hidden flaws would cheapen the value of their purchase.

True comes from the Old English *triewe*, which meant "faithful, trustworthy, honest, steady in adhering to promises and friends, characterized by good faith."

If something is true it conforms to reality, and we don't define reality, God does. The Greek *aletheia* ("truth") appears more than 100 times in the New Testament. Jesus assured his disciples that following him leads to knowing the truth, "and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Jesus claimed to personally embody the truth, insisting, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He prayed, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). During Jesus' trial, Pilate asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Ironically, the answer was staring Pilate in the face.

While respecting one another's unique perspectives, feelings, and opinions, let's be clear: all truth is God's truth, and we ignore biblical absolutes at our own risk. His Word is authentic, genuine, and sincere. The gospel of Christ is rooted in historical facts, eyewitness testimony, and reliable accounts written by apostles and prophets who, "though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Let's plant our feet on the solid real estate of God's Word.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- In a court of law, how important to an event are eyewitness accounts?
- If you were a military commander, which would be worse: a full attack on all sides or a mutiny?

Read 2 Peter 1:12-15

1. Do you ever struggle with believing your salvation? The "things" Peter reminds believers is that they have been called and chosen by God. Talk about why, in his final communication, Peter wanted every believer to remember this.

2. Many prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus' birth, life, and death. Outline the tenets of what Peter taught here about prophecy. How does this help you better understand the accuracy and factuality of the Old Testament prophets?

Read 2 Peter 1:16-21

3. Have you ever wondered if (or have you been taught) the Bible is just a fairy tale, metaphor, or an old self-help book, or that Jesus was just a "good teacher"? List four reasons for proof of Scriptural truth given in this passage (see verses 16, 18, 19, and 21).

4. Peter was an eyewitness to Jesus' transfiguration. Read Matthew 17:1-9. Can you imagine, under Holy Spirit inspiration, as the ink flowed from his pen, what the apostle was remembering in this passage? Read John 14:25-27. Discuss what role the Holy Spirit has in reminding us of what we have been shown and taught and how we can have peace in what we know to be true.

5. What is your favorite verse in this passage? Write it on a notecard, make it your screensaver, and memorize it this week.

Read 2 Peter 2:1-3

6. In the apostle Peter's last words to the church, consider the huge threat he warned believers about in this passage. Discuss which is harder to overcome—an external or internal attack—and why.

7. Read 2 Timothy 3:1-4, 10-17. What will people be like in the last days? Discuss how Paul warned Timothy of coming heresy and persecution and what solutions he gave to help Timothy overcome.

8. Brainstorm practical ways to guard against false teaching and create a game plan to equip yourself against false teachers in the upcoming month.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Lord, give us assurance of faith based on God's Word and not on cleverly invented stories. Draw us into Scripture so that it colors our language and thoughts so thoroughly and establishes us in the truth so deeply that when false teachers and heresy come, we will not be exploited but be fully equipped to respond with biblical rebuke and correction in wisdom.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God.**

STUDY: 2 Peter and Jude

THEME: Persevere

LESSON TEXT: 2 Peter 3:3-18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Peter 1:13-16; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

PERSEVERE WITH HOPE

BY MARK SCOTT

"We think we got it all," said the doctor as he left the family in the surgical waiting room. Members of the relieved family say, "Well, you want to get something to eat in the cafeteria?" You have got to be kidding. The family is willing to go eat based on a doctor saying, "We think we got it all"? Yes! Why? Because we are, by nature, creatures of hope. In fact, we persevere in hope because hope does not disappoint us (Romans 5:5).

A favorite agenda of false teachers (who are mentioned at the beginning and ending of this text and dominate the second chapter) is that they love to derail hope. As Peter closed his second letter to these elect exiles, he reminded them of their future. In today's text Peter used several "hope" words and phrases—*last days* (v. 3), *coming* (v. 4), *day of judgment* (v. 7), *day of the Lord* (v. 10), *day of God* (v. 12), *speed its coming* (v. 12), and *looking forward* (vv. 12, 13, 14)—this last phrase implied "with eager expectation."

Hope Mocked

2 Peter 3:3-7

Peter wanted his readers to *understand* (know) that in the last days (since Pentecost, Acts 2:16, 17) *scoffers* (mockers or imposters) will come scoffing. Their scoffing was motivated by *evil desires* (passions or lusts). The content of their scoffing was naturalistic and deistic. Since the beginning of creation and the death of the *ancestors* (fathers), the world ran naturally without God's intervention.

But the false teachers who mocked hope forgot the word, the world, and the water. God's word was the impetus for the creation of the world (Genesis 1:3—and 8 times following in the first chapter). God used the incredible substance of water in creation. The earth was *formed* (stood up with) by water. But water was later used in the destruction of the world through the flood (Genesis 6–9). Peter used word, world, and water to counteract hope being mocked. But water will not be used to destroy the world a second time. This time it will be fire that will be *reserved* (stored or treasured up) for judgment.

Hope Realized

2 Peter 3:8-10

Peter reminded his *dear friends* (beloved) that their hope was clearly realized in the Lord and in particular in four truths about him. First, while God created time, he is not bound by it. One day might as well be one thousand. The past and the future are all present to God (Exodus 3:14; Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 1:8). Second, God's delay does not mean cancelation. The scoffers must realize that God's seeming slowness is really his *patience* (longsuffering) in wanting people to come to repentance.

Third, when God does come it will be sudden and unexpected like a *thief* (from which we get the word "kleptomaniac"). Finally, God will destroy the *elements* (rudimentary things of this world) and purify the universe by fire so that everything will be *laid bare* (found or discovered). Since God controls all of this, hope can only be realized in him.

Hope Lived

2 Peter 3:11-18

A biblical understanding of eschatology is how the future impacts the present. Since the physical world as we know it will undergo a purification of fire before the new Heavens and new earth appear, believers are called upon now to live holy and godly lives. As Shawn McMullen put it, "We've come home to holiness even as we pursue it" (*Coming Home to Holiness*, 140). Christians must be prepared to die, but they need to plan to live—because they just might live. One of the best ways to enjoy the present is to look forward to the day of God. Can we really *speed* (hasten) its coming? Scholars debate this. Can holy living and evangelistic work bring about the return of Christ (Matthew 24:14)? Even if God alone has fixed that day (v. 36; Acts 17:31) and nothing we do can hurry it along, living in a counter-cultural way to the world is still our best witness. Looking forward to a new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells is the best way to live now. Looking forward helps us to be spotless, blameless, and at peace in the present.

Then one apostle talked about another. Peter confirmed that the apostle Paul wrote some things that were *hard to understand* (difficult, obscure, ambiguous). False teachers distorted what Paul wrote. Peter knew the false teachers would do the same thing to what he wrote so he warned his readers to *be on guard* (like a soldier at his post) so as not to fall away. The key to not being taken in by false teachers would be to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. This is persevering in hope.

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LOOKING FORWARD

BY DAVID FAUST

Three times in three short verses, the apostle Peter talks about looking forward. Christians "look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:12). "We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth" (v. 13). Then Peter declares, "Since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (v. 14).

Looking forward. Don't you like the sound of that phrase? It reminds us to be hopeful and trust the Lord as we head into the future.

Faith Appreciates the Past

We won't know where we're going if we don't know where we've been. The Christian faith is rooted in historical facts. It's important "to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets" and the Lord's commands given through his apostles (2 Peter 3:2). Scoffers deny God's intervention in human affairs, forgetting that in the past God deluged the world in a great flood (vv. 3-6). History provides the theater and the stage where God acted out the drama of redemption. He intervened directly in human affairs when his Son, the Living Word, became flesh and dwelt among us. We have much to learn from the real-life stories of the Old Testament and the exciting progress of the gospel recorded in the history book we know as the book of Acts.

However, while we must learn from the past, we can't live there. We have to keep thinking ahead. Jesus' first-century followers were constantly looking forward. They believed in the resurrection of the dead and God's final judgment. They believed in Jesus' return and "the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Like Abraham, by faith they were "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

Faith Anticipates the Future

We need to be forward-thinking as we age. Growing older doesn't mean we must stop dreaming and stop growing. Someone rightly advised, "Pursue your passion, not just your pension!" What new steps of faith will you take in the next season of your life?

Our families need to be forward-thinking, preparing our children and grandchildren to love God and make wise decisions in the years ahead. Married couples must bathe the future in prayer and talk openly about uncomfortable topics like aging, estate planning, even funeral wishes. "The noble make noble plans, and by noble deeds they stand" (Isaiah 32:8).

Our churches need to be forward-thinking. No matter what victories or struggles their church has experienced in the past, every congregation needs to ask: What new challenges does the Lord want us to tackle? How can we reach the next generation with the gospel and raise up new leaders? What new adventures lie ahead for our church?

Are you looking forward, or mainly just looking in the rear-view mirror? Jesus warned potential disciples not to be like a farmer who starts plowing his field and then looks back. To plow a straight furrow, the farmer must fix his eyes on what's ahead. Living on this side of Jesus' empty tomb, we can look forward to the future with faithful anticipation. After all, "There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off" (Proverbs 23:18).

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- Have you ever been teased or mocked for your faith?
- How would you describe what it means for you to be holy?

Read 2 Peter 3:3-9

1. Were you ever surprised when you were persecuted or mocked for your faith? There will always be those who scorn us for following Christ. What does this passage say will happen to those who mock true faith in God?

2. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12. What encouragement and hope do you receive from this passage to persevere when you have difficulties living a Christian life?

Read 2 Peter 3:10-13

3. What is the "day of the Lord"? Describe or draw it in detail. Answer the questions: Who? What? When? Where? How? Discuss what Peter says a believer's response to end times should be. Is this normally our attitude?

4. Read 1 Peter 1:13-16. The word *holy* means to be set apart, and in verse 16, it conveys the idea of being separate from infirmity, impurity, and sin. Using the text, describe the practical ways Peter gives us to live holy lives. As New Testament believers, wrestle with this question: Is holiness external, internal, or both?

Read 2 Peter 3:14-18

5. The Greek word, *spoudazó*, means to make haste, to be eager and earnest, and is used four times in the three chapters of 2 Peter. In verse 14, what is Peter pleading with believers to make every effort to do? Discuss the urgency of the apostle's message for us today and consider whether or not you are being as diligent to live a blameless life as you should. What needs to change?

6. How does verse 15 go hand-in-hand with verse 9? Recall a circumstance from your life when you were thankful for these spiritual truths and write a prayer of thanks for God's patience during that time.

7. Are you at all surprised at Peter's commentary about the apostle Paul? Why do you think Peter placed these affirming sentences about Paul here, in his final words to the church?

8. What stumbling blocks or points of sin do you have in your life—addictions, behaviors, thoughts, actions, or words? Consider what steps you can take this week to get the spiritual, emotional, and physical help you need to live a spotless and blameless life and be at peace.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Jesus, thank you for this powerful teaching in the last words of Peter. Help us to make every effort to live holy and godly lives as we look forward to the Day of the Lord. Amen.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Build yourself up in your most holy faith.**

STUDY: 2 Peter and Jude

THEME: Persevere

LESSON TEXT: Jude 3-7, 17-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: James 4:1-10

PERSEVERE BY FAITH

BY MARK SCOTT

Jesus had four half-brothers. If they are listed in birth order, Jude (or Judas) would have been number three (Mark 6:3). We know the most about James (Book of James; Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 2:8, 12). We know virtually nothing about Joses (or Joseph) and Simon. During Jesus' earthly ministry none of these brothers believed in him (John 7:5). But Jesus' resurrection changed everything for at least two of these brothers, James and Jude (Acts 1:14).

The two half-brothers whose names are attached to their New Testament epistles referred to themselves as "servants" of Jesus Christ (James 1:1; Jude 1). We might expect them to lean on their nepotism as "brothers." But they recognized by this point that Jesus was not just their brother. He was the Son of God. They, like any others, would have to have "faith in God" (Mark 11:22). And Jude called believers to persevere in that faith.

Undermining Faith

Jude 3-7

As harsh as the epistle sounds in places, Jude addressed his hearers as *dear friends* (beloved) three times (vv. 3, 17, 20). He cared for these who "were called" (v. 1) that they not allow their faith to be undermined by certain individuals. Evidently Jude wanted to write about salvation. Who would not? What a glorious subject. But necessity demanded that Jude shift gears. Instead he wrote to *contend* (agonize; fight for; strive) for the "once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith" (literal). This label (*The Faith Once for All*) became the title for the systematic theology book that Jack Cottrell wrote, published by College Press (2002). The faith referred to here essentially became the doctrine of what we call the New Testament. And it can be undermined for God's holy people.

False teachers rarely come in the front door. They usually *slip in secretly* through a side door or window. These false teachers who are causing Jude to change his intended message are labeled as *ungodly*. They *pervert* (put in another place) God's grace for *license* (wickedness) and worse, they deny Jesus in his power and lordship. Jude exposed the false teachers by citing three Old Testament examples. The people of the exodus were the first example. They did not persevere in faith and were destroyed, and this was after they had been delivered by the Lord (actually the text says "Jesus") himself. Second were the fallen angels. It might be difficult to know the timing of when this happened, but Jude affirmed that they were being kept in darkness (some kind of nether world) for the great Day. Finally, Sodom and Gomorrah are mentioned as examples of people who try to undermine faith by their sexual immorality and perversion.

Edifying Faith

Jude 17-23

Jude gave other biblical examples of undermined faith in the section between verses 8-16 (e.g., Cain, Balaam, Korah). The angel Michael and the patriarch Enoch had to stand in the gap for righteousness. Jude countered the false teachers by calling the believers to an edifying faith. He took the Christians back to the word of the apostles about these *scoffers* (same word in 2 Peter 3:3). The false teachers follow wicked passions. They are divisive and follow their *natural instincts* (physics). He even said that they did not have the Holy Spirit (cf. Romans 8:9).

Several things lift up God's people in their faith. These would include *praying in the Holy Spirit* (which probably means asking the Lord for anything in line with the Holy Spirit's wishes) and doing whatever is necessary to stay in the love of God. Showing mercy to doubters and saving others who are steeped in sin also edifies the body. The old phrase of "hating the sin but loving the sinner" (though, in the Bible, sin is always punished in the sinner) probably applies with the phrase "hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." Prayer, love, and mercy all keep Christians in the fight, and when other believers see these things it edifies them.

Victorious Faith

Jude 24, 25

Jude concluded his short one-chapter epistle with one of the most elevated doxologies in the Bible. Jude praised God as the one who could keep believers from stumbling in their faith and to *present* them (make them stand) to himself *without fault* (blameless) and with great joy. Help from stumbling takes place in this world. Standing before the Lord himself takes place in the world to come. Jude ascribed to *God our Savior* (a reference to the deity of Jesus?) four qualities that are also eternal, namely *glory*, *majesty*, *power*, and *authority*. What else can be said but amen?

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SPIRITUALLY DISCERNED RELATIONSHIPS

BY DAVID FAUST

Jesus was (and is) a relational leader. He took time for children others tried to shoo away. He showed kindness to lepers and others society regarded as outcasts. He healed a man with a long-term disability who had spent decades lying limply by the Pool of Bethesda. He brought spiritual freedom to a fellow tormented by demons who lived in a cemetery and terrorized those who passed by. Jesus accepted dinner invitations from despised tax collectors—and from self-righteous Pharisees.

Not only was Jesus a relational leader; he modeled spiritual discernment as he dealt with people. He knew when his disciples needed to step away from the crowds for private, in-depth conversations. He answered sincere inquiries, but he avoided verbal traps and recognized when questioners were trying to trip him up. He was flexible and interruptible, but he refused to be detoured when it was time to set his face toward Jerusalem.

Jesus didn't evaluate the worth of others by their looks, socio-economic status, or religious reputation. He broke with cultural norms by talking with a Samaritan woman who had been married five times. He was generous with his time and his healing touch, but often slipped away for times of private prayer.

The People Around You

Do you exercise spiritual discernment as you interact with others? Jude's epistle mentions different kinds of people you're likely to encounter.

Scoffers will try to tear you down. "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires" (Jude v. 18). That's why Jesus' disciples need the shrewdness of serpents and the innocence of doves (Matthew 10:16). He calls us to be kind without being gullible, fair without being foolish, open-minded without being naïve. "Do not believe every spirit," John warns, "but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). We must stand firmly against false doctrines that distort "the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude v. 3).

Friends will build you up. Three times in his short letter (vv. 3, 17, and 20), Jude refers to fellow believers as *agapetoi* ("dear friends" or "beloved ones"). What a blessing it is when God places individuals in your life who share with you the riches of his selfless *agape* love! That's the kind of friendship David shared with Jonathan, Jesus shared with John "the beloved disciple," and Paul shared with Timothy and Titus. Always be on the lookout for potential partners to travel with you on your spiritual journey, "building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit" (v. 20).

Seekers need your help. Are there individuals in your circle of influence who are searching for spiritual guidance and asking honest questions about God and the Bible? Do you know any half-hearted drifters and back-sliding Christ-followers who would benefit from gracious but straightforward reminders about their accountability to God? "Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear" (vv. 22, 23).

The Lord will be with you always. God "is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (v. 24). No inter-personal relationship is more important than your connection with him.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- How dangerous is "fake news" to governments, corporations, and individuals in our world today and how can it color critical choices and decisions?
- Have you ever doubted your faith in Jesus Christ?

Read Jude 3-7

1. The short book of Jude is packed with warnings about apostasy, the act of embracing false beliefs and turning away from God's teachings. What are the means and way apostasy enters the church? Explain in simple terms what it means to "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality."

2. Cite other warnings in the New Testament about false teachers and false teaching (feel free to do a quick concordance or online Bible search). According to verse 4, why should we not be surprised when false teachers appear?

3. Why did Jude use the Israelites who refused to enter the promised land, fallen angels, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of those who are condemned to suffer for eternity? Look for categories or patterns in each of the three to identify similarities to and differences from one another.

Read Jude 17-25

4. Describe four characteristics of "scoffers" (false teachers). What are practical ways to build up our faith and counterbalance the influence of false teaching on a believer's life?

5. It's not often we get perspectives from two half-brothers of Jesus in one Bible study! James and Jude have unique perspectives when it comes to not believing the truth of Christ since neither of them were believers during Jesus' lifetime. Read James 4:1-10. What does the apostle say is the source of any division in the church? Talk about what we are to do if we are the ones who are double-minded and doubting.

6. Jude lists three godly ways to interact with doubters and mockers. What other ways might we add to this list? Consider why three forms of the word *mercy* (compassion) show up in verses 21-23.

7. Do you have people who love you enough to hold you accountable to right doctrine and biblical teaching? Three times Jude used *agapetoi*, or "dear friends," in his short letter. Discuss what roles godly, Christian friends play in helping us persevere, standing up against false teaching, and building up our "most holy faith" in Jesus.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following doxology from Jude as a guide: "To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!"

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.