

Keep Yourself in the Love of God

by C.J. Mahaney

To keep ourselves in the love of God, we must contend for the faith, build ourselves up in our most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, and wait for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Duration: 38:24

Scripture: Jude 1:20

Topics: "Faith Maintenance", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

This sermon addresses the scenario where a believer humbly acknowledges a diminished affection for the Savior, a decreased appetite for Scripture, and a sense of distance from God. The focus is on the letter of Jude, emphasizing the need to contend for the faith amidst false teachings and to keep oneself in the love of God. The sermon highlights the importance of building up in faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, and waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ as essential means to maintain a vibrant relationship with God.

Transcript

What if after the service, a friend, a friend you knew to be genuinely converted approached you and honestly and humbly acknowledged the following. They honestly and humbly acknowledged to you that their affection for the Savior has diminished over the past few months. They honestly and humbly acknowledged to you that their their appetite for Holy Scripture, their appetite for preaching is no longer as pronounced as it once was.

Humbly acknowledged to you that their soul seems dull and God seems distant. That they are more aware of the apparent absence of God than they are of the immediate presence of God. If you were approached by someone after the meeting honestly and humbly acknowledging this depleted and distressed state of soul, what would you say? What would you say to them? How would you care for them? How would you counsel them? Perhaps some are even thinking, I am them.

Well, it might surprise you to hear that if I was approached by someone humbly acknowledging those realities of soul, I would direct them to this letter. I would direct them to the letter of Jude. There are many reasons this might surprise you.

One reason it might surprise you is one scholar identifies Jude as probably the most neglected book in the New Testament. So, if this evening you happen to be numbered among those who have neglected this divinely inspired letter, if you are unfamiliar with this postcard from the past, it will be my joy this evening to

introduce you to this letter or remind you of some of the content of this letter. And I pray, I do pray, that the Spirit will awaken an appetite in your soul for this letter for there is much grace in this letter, particularly for those who are familiar with a diminished affection and passion, particularly for those who are familiar with a dullness of soul.

May you in particular find fresh grace in a neglected book of the Bible this evening. Verses one and two form an introduction. Sinclair Ferguson writes that these two verses, this introduction to this letter, are one of the sweetest openings and introductions of any book in the Bible.

Verses three and four announce the primary purpose of the letter. There we read, beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the Saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.

So beginning in verse three and concluding in verse 19, we have the main body of this letter, and verses three and four announce the main purpose of this letter. Jude is calling the original recipients of this letter to contend for the faith, to contend for the faith, to contend for the gospel. For false teachers have infiltrated the church.

False teaching is influencing the church. This could not be more serious because the gospel is being distorted. The gospel, the grace of God, is being perverted.

So this, this exhortation at the outset of this letter forms really a unique call to action, a call to contend for the gospel and to defend the gospel where the gospel is being threatened. The church has been uniquely entrusted by God with the authoritative, fixed, final body of saving truth, the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. No additions to the gospel, no subtractions from the gospel, no alterations of the gospel, no adjustments to the gospel can be tolerated.

And those who receive the truth of the gospel and respond to the truth of the gospel must contend for the truth of the gospel whenever false teaching and false teachers threaten the gospel. When necessary, the church must contend for the gospel and for the original recipients of this letter it was necessary for them to contend for the gospel. But, in verse 20, a transition takes place.

A transition takes place. Beginning in verse 20, Jude turns our attention away from false teachers and teaching and he draws attention to our hearts. We must not only contend for the faith, beginning in verse 20, he draws attention to our hearts and he exhorts us to contend with our hearts.

In contending for the gospel when and where necessary and appropriate, we must not, in the midst of contending for the gospel, we must not neglect attending to our own hearts. We must daily contend for the truth of the gospel in our hearts. We must, in verse 21, keep yourselves in the love of God.

This is the imperative. Keep yourselves in the love of God and this imperative is accompanied by the appropriate participles revealing the means of fulfilling and applying this imperative to our souls, to our lives. Keeping yourselves in the love of God is our responsibility.

It's your responsibility. It's my responsibility. God doesn't do this for you.

It requires effort. Secure in justifying grace, dependent upon empowering and sanctifying grace, we are called, we are responsible to keep ourselves in the love of God. This requires effort on our part.

Effort, not earning. Effort that is motivated and empowered by the grace of God. It's our responsibility.

John Owen writes, God works in us and with us, not against us or without us. This is our responsibility. And Jude provides us, I love, I love the wisdom of God revealed in the Word of God.

I also love the kindness of God that is so evident in this passage because Jude provides us with three means by which the reader can keep himself in God's love. So, how? How? I'm commanded to keep myself in the love of God each day. How can I keep myself in the love of God? How can I remain aware of God's love? How can I cultivate affection for God? How can I do so each and every day? First, build yourselves up in your most holy faith, verse 20.

Build yourselves up in your most holy faith. That phrase, most holy faith, is yet another expression for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The faith that we are to contend for in verse 3 is what we preach and apply to our own hearts as the most important means of keeping ourselves in the love of God.

So, the first and the most important way we keep ourselves in the love of God is to grow in our understanding of the gospel. The first and the most important way we keep ourselves in the love of God is to remind ourselves of the gospel each and every day. The first and most important way we keep ourselves in the love of God is to preach the gospel to ourselves each and every day.

So that as you contemplate the gospel, as you meditate upon the gospel, as you preach the gospel to yourself and receive the gospel in your soul, your awareness of the love of God increases and your affection for the Savior grows. So, there's really only one question then, unasked and unanswered. How much time do you devote each day to building yourselves up with the most holy faith by preaching the gospel to yourself each and every day? How much time? Oh man, this is, by the way, this is just a pure joy.

It is a pure joy to bring this command, this gracious command, this wise command with these means to your attention this evening. What a joy to give you this assignment. Here's your assignment this evening.

Master the content of the gospel. That's your assignment. Master the content of the gospel and then daily review and rehearse each day the content of the gospel, preaching the content of the gospel to your soul as the most important means of keeping yourself in the love of God so that each and every day you are aware of the love of the Father and growing in your affection toward the Father.

And we need to do this each and every day. We need to do this each and every day because each and every day we have the tendency to forget the gospel. Each and every day we experience opposition in the form of temptation and sin.

Each and every day we experience condemnation and the fiery darts of the evil one. Each and every day, to differing degrees but to some degree, we experience trial and suffering and each and every day we must keep ourselves in the love of God by preaching the gospel to ourselves. Because if we neglect to do so, if we fail to preach the gospel to our hearts, this will have an effect on our hearts.

This fine little book, The Gospel Primer, Milton Vincent writes the following. The Gospel Primer was written to assist us in this practice of preaching the gospel to ourselves each and every day. And Milton writes the

following, there is simply, he writes, no other way, no other way, no other way, no other way to compete with, listen, the forebodings of my conscience, the condemnings of my heart, and the lies of the world and the devil than to overwhelm such things with daily rehearsings of the gospel.

Well, Milton got that right. There is no other way. Each day you will experience the forebodings of your conscience.

Each and every day, to differing degrees, you will experience the condemnings of your heart. Each and every day you will encounter the lies of the world and the devil. You can expect to experience tomorrow forebodings from your conscience, condemnings from your heart, and lies of the world and from the devil.

So, what should your response be? How should you prepare for the forebodings of your conscience, the condemnings of your heart? Here's how you prepare. Here's how you enter into the day. Here's how you respond.

You overwhelm such things with daily rehearsings of the gospel. You just overwhelm them. Shouldn't be surprised when your conscience speaks, convicts you should respond.

Shouldn't be surprised when there are forebodings. Shouldn't be surprised when you experience condemnation. You're not left helpless.

You're not left hopeless. Oh no. Preach the gospel to yourself and overwhelm such things with daily rehearsings of the gospel.

That's how you keep yourself in the love of God. And please, please notice this is a corporate activity. This is a corporate activity.

Keep yourselves, plural, in the love of God. Build yourselves up, plural, thinking in the context of the church. So, don't don't read this as simply addressing you as an isolated individual.

No, no. Read this command as if addressed to you in the context of this church. This is to be our common practice together when we gather together as a church and there isn't a more effective way to build each other up when we are together than to remind each other of the gospel.

So, whether it's this evening in this corporate context, whether it's in a small group context, whether it's in casual conversation, if you're wondering how to build up someone who needs to be built up, look no further. There is no more important or effective way you can build somebody up other than overwhelming their conscience and condemnation with a rehearsing of the gospel and then observing the effect in the form of an edified soul. Have we not experienced that this evening? Oh, yes we have.

Regardless of how you drove onto this property, regardless of the state of your soul when you came into this sanctuary, we have been singing to each other the content of the gospel. So, if you arrived not particularly aware of the love of God, certainly during this service you have become aware. That is no mystery.

How did you become aware? Became aware because through song we were singing the gospel to each other. As a result of that, we were all freshly affected by the gospel and we leave by the grace of God different. Well, that content, the gospel, and this practice building yourselves up when together is to permeate our corporate gatherings, our small group gatherings, and casual conversation as a means of

keeping ourselves in the love of God.

Second, praying in the Holy Spirit. Praying in the Holy Spirit. An awareness of God's love simply cannot be sustained without prayer, and a relationship with God cannot be maintained or cultivated apart from prayer.

So, Jude commands, divinely inspired, commands us to pray. Independence upon the Spirit, pray to God the Father. In and through Jesus Christ, pray to God the Father.

At the beginning of the day, pray. And throughout the day, pray. Let there be structured times of prayer.

Let there be spontaneous times of prayer. I have a normally a structured time of prayer at the outset of the day, and then I seek to just pepper my day, my schedule throughout the day, with moments of prayer. Love the wisdom of Charles Spurgeon when he said, I always feel it well to put a few words of prayer between everything I do.

Why? Why pray? Well, there's many reasons to pray, but one, so that you might keep yourself in the love of God. Listen, this understanding of prayer as a means of keeping yourself in the love of God will transform your perspective of prayer and your practice in prayer. Pray.

Pray at the outset of the day. Pray throughout the day. You're not a cordless drill, okay? I can have a wonderfully rich time at the outset of the day.

It can seem like a distant memory by two o'clock later that day, because if I have functioned as self-sufficient throughout the day, well, no wonder I am burdened by cares in the late afternoon of the day. Therefore, though I am grateful for structured time, there must also be spontaneous time, because it's so easy at 4.30 or 6.30 to no longer be aware of the love of God. If I study my life, a reason might be, how often did you pray throughout the day? So Jude provides us with these two wonderful means.

Build yourself up with the most holy faith, preaching the gospel to yourself each and every day. Secondly, pray. Third, wait.

Waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. I want you to know, whenever I come across this word wait, the word wait or waiting is all over the Bible, I don't find my heart normally immediately resonates with this word. Okay, I find waiting a challenge.

I didn't develop my waiting skills growing up, and actually I live most of my life doing all I can to avoid waiting. I do, I'm serious about not waiting, so I take lines seriously and I study lines. So this morning when I arrived at the airport, I am delighted to see that there doesn't appear to be a line.

Not only does it not appear to be a line, an agent appears to have just opened up for me. It's all unfolding. The blessing of God, so that I can finish this process and devote myself to far more important tasks like preparing this message in order to serve you.

And so I begin to move toward this individual and somebody comes from the right. They were not in line. There's like, there's like stuff, there's order here, there's these lanes we're all supposed to function in, and you're supposed to, even if nobody's in line, you're supposed to walk through the line in all these different ways.

And I did that, and they didn't do that. And not only did they not do that, this is, they're pushing a cart and it has like a hundred bags on it. I just, it's two people, but they have a cart and it's just filled with bags.

And then as I stand behind them over here, I'm saying, of course, they're international travel. Oh, who is surprised at this? This, this is a, this is gonna take a long time. I study lines.

If I go in the store, I don't just obtain an item and make my way casually to the front. No, I stand back, survey, just watch people, okay? I was reading about a guy, this guy, this guy did research. He did research and he concluded, at the conclusion of his research, that the shorter line is often faster.

So that's some, it's just unbelievable to me. Some guy in the academic world, somehow it appears, got a subsidy to do research about which line is the fastest, and he concluded that the shorter line is the quickest line. Just, just ask me, okay? Just ask.

You don't need higher education for that, and if that is the purpose and function of higher education, I don't want higher education. Of course, the shorter line is the fastest line, unless the Lord is after your soul, and it's about sanctification, and then he will make sure that the shortest line becomes the longest line for yours. I don't, I don't like to wait, I don't like to wait, okay? Many is the occasion over the years where I'm stuck in traffic, I turn around, somebody with me says, you are now going the wrong way, and I say to them, at least we're moving, pal.

That's exactly right, yes, we are going in the opposite direction of our destination, but we're moving, and they're not moving. Here's something I've discovered about waiting. What you're waiting for makes all the difference.

What you're waiting for makes all the difference. Please pray for me, providentially tomorrow, I have to go to the DMV. Yes, yes, I just shared, and I know what awaits me there.

I have to have my license renewed, I must go to, in effect, waiting hell in order, it will be a challenge to my soul. Now listen, contrast that with this, recently taking my wife out to a favorite restaurant. It's a restaurant that won't take reservations, and so when we arrive, I am informed that it will be 45 minutes.

Place is packed, there isn't even room to sit down. They hand me one of those little devices that lights up when you win. I take it in my hand, and I walk over, and I want you to know it is not difficult at all to wait 45 minutes or more with Carolyn for the purpose of honoring her for the unselfish way she serves me with a meal she doesn't have to cook that she loves.

See, I'm standing there, I'm looking in her eyes, I know that in a matter of 45 or more minutes, we'll be at a table in that adjoining room, and we will be making romantic memories. It's no problem to wait. Aren't you glad we are waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ? Aren't you glad we are not waiting for judgment? Aren't you glad we are not waiting for condemnation? Aren't you glad we are not waiting for wrath on that final day? What you wait for makes all the difference in the experience of waiting, and this anticipation of no condemnation being pronounced over one's life because of the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross as our substitute, dying for our sins, satisfying the wrath of God.

This anticipation of that day and eternity future makes its way from the future into our lives today and transforms our lives. Those who those who wait for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ keep themselves in the love of God. I love the simplicity of these three means of keeping ourselves in the love of God.

Building, praying, waiting. It isn't complicated. You don't have to be unusually gifted to build, pray, and wait.

I mean, in this passage, one size really does fit all. Growth is not complicated. Growth is not mysterious.

There is no secret formula. There is no secret formula awaiting to be discovered. Don't you wonder if there is? Don't you at times think there is? We all have this impulse.

I was reading about a Kansas high school student who got a perfect score on his ACT and his SAT. Got a perfect score on both. 36, 2400.

He didn't have really an answer for why he scored so well or so it appeared. Here's his response when interviewed. It's weird, he said, before I took the two tests, I checked out a couple of books from the library.

I expected it to be this big secret that all the smart people had, that I just had to read, but I found out there's not a secret formula. And then, obviously, you have to pay attention in class. When I read that, that was a bit of a disappointment to me, all right? Because when I was in high school, I thought there was a secret formula.

There must be a secret formula, some form of cliff notes out there, which if one reads it, then one will improve one score dramatically on the ACT or the SAT. Who knew you had to pay attention in class? Because I want to do something other than pay attention in class. I want a secret formula.

I want an experience that exempts me from what I read here in this passage. So we all have this impulse, assuming there's some secret formula. Jude's here this evening to say there is no secret formula.

If you fail to attend to your heart, if you fail to be attentive to your relationship with God, if you fail to obey this gracious command to keep ourselves in the love of God by preaching the gospel to ourselves, praying, and waiting, well, the consequences upon our soul and in our lives are inevitable. They won't be immediately obvious, but if we persist in this pattern of neglecting our soul, neglecting to apply this imperative and these means of grace to our soul, well, the consequences will eventually become obvious, will eventually become obvious. There will eventually be some crisis of soul, possibly some spiritual collapse.

My wife grew up in Florida, and it's not uncommon in Florida for there to be a sinkhole, that somebody's home is just swallowed up. Just suddenly, the entire home falls into the earth. Listen, it is not uncommon for a Christian to experience a spiritual sinkhole.

I have. I mean, it appears abrupt, but there were warning sounds. There were warning signs.

Over more than 30 years of pastoral ministry, I have had many individuals approach me humbly acknowledging the depleted state of their soul. They are rightfully concerned about the state of their soul, the dullness of their soul as they perceive it, and this is normally what I do. I listen, I ask a number of questions, and some of the questions are informed by this passage in Jude.

I say to them, have you been preaching the gospel to your soul each day? They respond, no. Are you praying with any consistency? Are you living in anticipation of mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ? Don't really think much about heaven. My brother, my sister, why are you perplexed that your soul is dull? It's not a

mystery, and my brother, my sister, let there be hope for God has provided a means of great building and praying so that you might, by grace, keep yourself in the love of God.

So, if you if you are familiar with a depleted soul, a dull soul, a soul that is distressed and cast down, here's what I want to say to you and your soul in conclusion. Remember that underneath you are the everlasting arms. Look quickly with me in verse 1 B. Jude writes to those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.

Now look quickly in verse 24. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling. God's love for you, his promise to keep and preserve you do not change.

You see, this imperative, keep yourselves in the love of God, it follows the indicative, those whom God has called and loved are kept for Jesus Christ, and following this imperative, Jude will again return to celebrate and remind the original recipients and us this evening that he is able to keep us from stumbling, providing a massive assurance to our unsettled souls. So when I have, through neglect or disobedience to verses 20 and 21, become less aware of God's love, when there is diminished affection for God in my soul, this does not alter God's love for me, nor his fierce commitment to preserve and keep me. Here's good news for us all this evening.

His love for you, his love for me, his love for us, is not like our love for him. His love is fixed. My love for him is flawed.

His love is fixed. My love for him fluctuates. I do not perfectly obey and apply verses 20 and 21 to my life each and every day, so I need to be assured each and every day that by God's grace I will persevere because he has promised to preserve me, and I apply verses 20 and 21 to my life assured of preserving grace and secure that he will keep me, and he will keep me from stumbling, and when my grip upon him weakens for whatever reason, his remains fixed.

Richard Sibbes in his classic work *The Bruised Reed* said, as we say of the mother and the child, both hold, but the safety of the child is that the mother holds him. That is exactly right. What parent doesn't know that experience of walking along with your child, something happens, pavement becomes uneven, child stumbles, child's grip momentarily weakens, you can feel the fear in the child.

What a joy it is as a parent to bring immediate assurance your grip is fixed, and the child is reminded that ultimately they are dependent not on their grip, but on the grip of the parent, and Jude wants us to receive this assurance that ultimately our grip is not dependent on our ability to flawlessly keep ourselves in the love of God, no, ultimately it's dependent upon God the Father's promise to keep us. So we receive this massive assurance as we respond to this command to keep ourselves in the love of God by building and praying. Let's pray.

Father how kind of you to give us this letter, and Lord I pray that, well I pray that if we have neglected this letter that we will neglect it no more for there is a wealth of grace revealed in this letter, and I pray that grace has made its way to the hearts of all present this evening. Lord thank you for this gracious and wise command to keep ourselves in the love of God. Thank you for the means by which we can keep ourselves in the love of God.

May we by grace take advantage of those means, and may we do so fully assured that the one who called us loves us, and the one who loves us and calls us will keep us. He will keep us from stumbling and

present us blameless before his glory with great joy. Lord since you're the one who preserves, since you're the one who presents, receive all the glory from us and our gratefulness in Jesus name, amen.

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