

# When Someone Doubts

by C.J. Mahaney

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being prepared to care for those who are tempted to doubt their faith and to show them mercy.*

**Duration:** 1:01:41

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 16:14, 2 Timothy 2:23-26, James 1:6, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 John 4:1, Jude 1:22-23

**Topics:** "Doubt"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the different forms of doubt that Christians may experience. He identifies seven families of doubt, including doubt from ingratitude, a faulty view of God, weak foundation, lack of commitment, lack of growth, unruly emotions, and hidden conflicts. The speaker emphasizes the importance of being aware of and addressing these doubts in order to resolve them. He also highlights the need to focus on the gospel and keeping oneself in the love of God, as well as the assurance provided in the doxology found in the book of Jude.

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## Transcript

Please open your Bibles to what one scholar identifies as probably the most neglected book in the New Testament. And according to this scholar, that distinction belongs to the letter of Jude. And if the letter of Jude is the most neglected book in the New Testament, then it should come as no surprise this morning that the passage we will be considering from this most neglected book is among the most commonly overlooked and neglected passages in the New Testament.

And the point of the passage and the topic of this message are therefore rarely addressed. So this morning, from an obscure letter of the New Testament and a verse that many of us are not familiar with, we're going to consider a topic that is rarely addressed. It's how we're going to roll this morning.

Title of this message is, When Someone Doubts. And I now have the privilege to read from this divinely inspired letter. I have the privilege to read from the letter of Jude.

We have the privilege to be addressed by God as I read Jude verse 22. And have mercy on those who doubt. Let's pray.

Father, though I often neglect this book, I am so grateful that you have not neglected to include it in the canon of Scripture. Lord, receive our gratefulness for inspiring Jude to write this letter and preserving this

letter, including this letter in Holy Scripture so that we might be addressed by you from this letter this morning. So Lord, address away.

Address away, Father, like only you can. Draw near. Draw near to each one present here today.

Draw near to them through the preaching of your word. Lord, I thank you that you are eager to do this. To pray prior to preaching is not some means or effort on my part to overcome some reluctance within you to bless the preaching of your word.

No, you are eager to bless the preaching of your word. You're eager to bless the preaching of your word when your church gathers to give attention to your word. So I thank you for your intention to bless.

And I proceed now, we proceed now, filled with anticipation that you will bless the preaching of your word today, that you will draw near to all who are present here today, that you will speak to all who are present here today through your word. And for this, I thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

In an article from Table Talk magazine, Scott Dever writes about entering college filled with excitement and anticipation that he would make a serious difference for the advance of the gospel on campus. Instead, he found himself unprepared for what awaited him there. He writes, I began my college years ready to conquer the world for Christ.

The reality of my journey, however, tells quite a different story. College for me was a roller coaster from incredible joys to the most debilitating doubts I ever experienced. Recalling these years once again, I joyfully recognized God's providence even through the dark valleys I walked.

The world I entered as a college student was a God-ignoring culture filled with more isms, pluralism, relativism, individualism, and more addictions, drug, alcohol, and pornography than I dreamed possible. More than that, college was a continual onslaught of objections to Christianity. Professors and students would ask, how could a book written by so many different authors contain no errors? Doesn't science disprove God? Who would believe in a book that describes floating axe heads and talking donkeys and snakes? Doesn't Christian faith preclude rationality? If God is so good, why is there so much evil in the world? Good questions, but not questions without good answers.

It was my junior year in college and unanswered questions about Christianity were fixed in my mind. I began doubting the faith. At this point in my life, I had been heavily involved in the church, teaching numerous adult Bible classes and ministering to the youth.

Even with all that involvement, I was still sinking slowly into a mire that sought to consume me. And to make matters worse, I was engaged to a wonderful Christian woman, and I was too scared to tell her or anyone else about my doubts. Debilitating doubts.

That's how Scott describes his experience in college. Debilitating doubts and paralyzing fears. Can't, can't help, can't help but wonder how many present this morning might be able to identify with Scott.

You are familiar with doubt. Perhaps these doubts have developed slowly and gradually over a period of years in your life. Or perhaps recently and unexpectedly, you have been blindsided by doubt in some form and you aren't a college student.

You've been a Christian maybe 20, 30 years. It isn't just college students who are blindsided by doubt. Actually, scripture reveals and our experience confirms that the temptation to doubt in some form is a common experience for all Christians.

All Christians, not just some Christians. Now Scott felt unique. Scott felt alone.

Scott was neither unique or alone. He was, however, unprepared. He was unprepared for this temptation to doubt, and in his own words, he was scared to tell anyone about his doubts, leaving him quite vulnerable to his doubt.

And sadly, ignorance about doubt and fear to divulge doubts, all too common among Christians. And many of us aren't just unprepared for the temptation to doubt. We are also unprepared if someone approached us voicing their doubts, asking us for help to resolve their doubts.

We have not been sufficiently prepared to effectively serve someone who is in need of help in order to resolve their doubts. What if Scott were here today and what if he approached you after the meeting? What if he divulged his doubts? How would you react? What would you say? These few words found in this obscure letter inform us about the reality of doubt and equip us to effectively serve those for whom doubt has become a frequent companion. This passage, Jude verse 22, addresses the reality of doubt and the appropriate response to doubt.

And those would form my two points this morning, both, I trust, derived from this text. The reality of doubt. Verse 22, those who doubt.

Those who doubt. Who are those who doubt? Who are these people and why are they doubting? What are they doubting? Well, in order to discover who they are and why they're doubting, we must equate ourselves with the original intent of the author in writing this divinely inspired letter. Why did Jude write this letter? What moved Jude to, in effect, pick up his quill and compose this particular letter? In order to accurately interpret and understand and apply verse 22, we must have some understanding of the occasion of this letter, must have some understanding of all of the verses that precede verse 22 in order to rightly interpret, understand and apply verse 22 to our lives.

So why did Jude write this letter? Well, the purpose of this letter is no mystery. Jude is clear and he is explicit about the purpose of this letter at the outset of this letter. Please look at verse three, where he writes, 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.

Here's why this exhortation to contend for the faith was necessary. Verse four, for certain people, if 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. That that is clear that that is his primary purpose for writing this letter.

This letter is a call to contend. This letter is a call to contend for the gospel, a call to protect and preserve the gospel, a call to guard the gospel from false teachers and false teaching that threatened to undermine and pervert the gospel of grace. False teachers had infiltrated this church.

They were perverting the gospel of grace into sensuality. They were advocating licentiousness. They were approving sexual sin.

They had dismissed the ethical implications of the gospel. They had denied the lordship of Jesus Christ. The situation on the ground could not be more serious or more dangerous.

And therefore Jude is moved to write and exhort them to contend for the gospel. He not only exhorts them to contend for the gospel, he also exhorts them to contend with their hearts. Please look in verse 21 where we read, keep yourselves in the love of God.

Keep yourselves in the love of God. We must not only contend for the faith, we must also contend with our hearts. We must contend with our hearts because our hearts are prone to wander, prone to wander.

Lord I feel it, prone to wander. Therefore I am exhorted here, we are exhorted here to contend with our hearts. Contending for the faith is critical, absolutely critical, but it's not sufficient.

We must also give attention to our hearts and our relationship with God and surrounding this imperative to keep ourselves in the love of God are three wonderful participles exhorting us to build and to pray and to wait as means of contending with our heart. Contend for the faith, contend with your heart, and then we arrive in verse 22 where we are exhorted to contend for others. Verses 22 and 23 we are exhorted to contend for others.

We're exhorted to contend for those who have been adversely affected by the false teachers and the false teaching. Verse 22, have mercy on those who doubt. Verse 23, save others by snatching them out of the fire.

To others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. In these two verses we are being exhorted to contend for those who have been adversely influenced by false teachers and false teaching. We are observing in these verses the effect of false teaching upon the original recipients of this letter.

Some rescue operation is needed and the church here is pictured as aggressive, aggressively pursuing those who have been adversely influenced by false teachers and false teaching. And it appears there are three different groups. It appears there are three distinct groups that we are to contend for who have been influenced by differing degrees.

Verse 22, which will occupy our attention, those who are presently doubting. Second group, and it appears they are in even greater danger. Actually, as you read these two verses, as the passage progresses, the condition of those in view appears to become more perilous.

So secondly, we are to save others by snatching them out of the fire. This would appear to be individuals who have begun to engage with both the thinking and the lifestyle of the false teachers. They are being engulfed by fire, the fire of judgment, the fire of reference to hell.

They are unaware that they are being engulfed by this fire. They are unaware of how serious their condition is at present, and yet there is hope for them. The church is called to snatch them out of this fire.

And finally, and most concerning, to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. These would be individuals who have been fully seduced. They are all in in relation to the false teachers.

They are full participants and advocates, and yet even to them we are to show mercy. There is hope for them, but that mercy is informed by wisdom. That mercy must be shown with fear.

We must fear as we interact. We must fear being contaminated by their sin because of the deceitfulness of sin, and we must hate the garment that is stained by the flesh. We must hate the sin so we relate to them with mercy, but we also are informed by this wisdom, this fear, and this hating so that we are not drawn into their sin.

We are called to contend for others. This morning we are just going to confine our attention though to verse 22, the exhortation to have mercy on those who doubt. Now we know a little bit more about these people.

Those who doubt, those who doubt in Jude are those who have been adversely influenced by false teachers. They are doubting. They are doubting the gospel they initially received is the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

And Jude, Jude is a wise pastor. Spent much time in Jude over the last year. I feel like I know Jude.

I feel like if Jude were here and appeared in the lobby that I would recognize him. I've learned much from him. He is a wise, he is, he is wise, he is humble, he is caring, he is discerning, and he is courageous.

The man is the full package. He is a wise pastor, and he is aware of those who've been adversely influenced. He is aware of those who are presently struggling with doubt.

He is aware of the reality of doubt, and he cares for those who are being tempted to doubt. He doesn't condemn them, but he is concerned about the state of their soul as evidenced by this exhortation to contend for them and to have mercy on them. Wise pastor is aware of the reality of doubt.

Wise pastor is aware of the reality of doubt. Wise pastor is not surprised by the temptation to doubt, because the temptation to doubt, temptation to doubt the trustworthiness and truthfulness of God, whether in this particular form as revealed in Jude that Jude references, or in differing forms that are revealed throughout Scripture. This temptation to doubt is common to all Christians.

No Christian is exempt from this temptation. Not the heroes of the faith throughout redemptive history. See Elijah, Job, Jeremiah, David, John the Baptist, the disciples.

Not the most mature Christian you know. Every Christian to some degree is familiar with this temptation. We shouldn't be surprised.

Shouldn't be surprised. Shouldn't be surprised by the reality of doubt. We should not be surprised by the temptation to doubt.

Here's just a few reasons why we shouldn't be surprised. This is not an exhaustive list. We shouldn't be surprised because it's a fallen world.

We live in a fallen world that is opposed to the gospel. Live in a fallen world that is opposed to the gospel we proclaim and believe. Second, indwelling sin remains.

The influence of sin remains in all of our lives. Sin remains and the sin that remains is active and it is particularly active in opposing our trust in God and His Word and our faith toward God. Next, our humanity

and the weakness and frailty of our humanity.

Satan is real. Satan is real and he is real serious about attacking our faith. We are introduced to him in Genesis chapter 3 where he is sowing doubt about the goodness of God and the judgment of God.

The strategy proved effective then. There has been no need to alter his approach. He is still whispering as God really said.

False teachers and false teaching continues to adversely influence the church. We aren't promised a full knowledge of God in this life and we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. So we shouldn't be surprised.

We shouldn't be surprised by the reality of doubt. We shouldn't be surprised by the temptation to doubt. We shouldn't be surprised by the reality of doubt or the temptation of doubt but we should be prepared.

We should be prepared for this temptation. All Christians are familiar with this temptation in some form but not every Christian is prepared for this temptation and if you aren't prepared for this temptation you will be vulnerable to this temptation and the effects of this temptation particularly if you don't tell anybody about this temptation. My historical hero Charles Spurgeon did not want his congregation surprised by this temptation and he sought to prepare his church for this temptation one particular Sunday when he tenderly addressed his congregation with these words.

It seems as if doubt were doomed to be the perpetual companion of faith. As dust attends the chariot wheels so do doubts naturally becloud faith. Some men of little faith are perpetually enshrouded with fears.

Their faith seems only strong enough to enable them to doubt. If they had no faith at all then they would not doubt but having that little and but so little they are perpetually involved in distressing surmises suspicions and fears. By the way I wish I could stop and just draw you there is just brilliant wisdom.

Spurgeon is in effect encouraging and confirming that those in his congregation who are generally converted and struggling with doubt actually their struggle with doubt is a confirmation of the presence of genuine faith in their lives. So it's just brilliantly communicated what effective pastoring. Others so now he transitioned for those with little faith because no doubt there were those present in the congregation who did not think of themselves as having little faith but having great faith and they might have indeed had great faith but that doesn't mean they're exempt from the temptation to doubt.

Others who have attained to great strength and stability of faith are nevertheless at times subjects of doubt. He who has a colossal faith will sometimes find that the clouds of fear float over the brow of his confidence. It is not possible I suppose so long as a man is in this world that he should be perfect in anything and surely it seems to be quite impossible that he should be perfect in faith.

I think I shall be quite safe in concluding this morning that there are some here who are full of doubting and fearing. Sure I am that all true Christians have their times of anxious questioning. The heart that hath never doubted is not yet learned to believe.

Yes there may be timid ones here those who are always of little faith and there may be also great hearts those who are valiant for truth who are now enduring seasons of despondency and hours of darkness of heart. Spurgeon assumed that he would be quite safe in concluding that there were those present who

were full of doubt and fear. Even great hearts with colossal faith who are now enduring seasons of despondency and hours of darkness of heart.

I'm going without assumption perhaps that's you. And in this most unexpected way all of the busyness that has accompanied this morning and the noise and the interaction has actually delivered you to this moment where now you are aware God is drawing near to you and giving personal attention to your soul because he cares. So whether you arrived with little faith and very aware of doubts and fears whether you walk through the door with genuinely great faith but it's been a season of despondency and darkness doubt is a reality and it's a temptation that we must be prepared for because at some time we will all be numbered among those who doubt and in light of the reality of doubt and the temptation to doubt anticipating this temptation God comes to us in this verse.

God provides for us in verse 22. He provides mercy. He provides mercy in the form of those who've been prepared to care for us so that we can turn to someone when we are dogged by doubt we can divulge our doubts and we can see receive mercy from them.

Think of what these words must have meant to someone in the original congregation who was struggling with doubt in the midst of all that was taking place. The influence of the false teachers and false teachers. Think of what it must have meant to those individuals when this letter was read aloud in the assembly and they heard these words and have mercy on those who doubt.

I pray it means the same to you and has the same effect on you. The reality of doubt and what we read at the outset of this verse is the appropriate response to doubt. God's provision for doubt.

The appropriate response to someone who doubts. The appropriate response to someone who doubts. So given the reality of doubt, given the common temptation to doubt, how do we care for how do we contend for those who are tempted to doubt? It's real clear isn't it? We're called to have mercy and have mercy and have mercy on those who doubt.

I mean mercy in a word describes the appropriate disposition of our heart if someone like Scott informs us about their doubt. This verse, actually the entirety of this letter, informs how we can wisely and skillfully care for those who doubt, be it a new Christian or an old Christian, be it a spouse or a child. How can we have mercy? How can we communicate mercy to those who doubt? A few recommendations.

Number one, by remembering and acknowledging the mercy we have received. By remembering and acknowledging the mercy that we have received. One can't have mercy on others if one isn't aware of the mercy they have received from God.

And if you are a Christian this morning, the explanation for why you are a Christian is solely because God, being rich in mercy, had mercy on you. That is the sole explanation for why you are a Christian if you are a Christian. Because you and I were richly deserving, not mercy, we were richly deserving the full fury of his righteous wrath in light of our sin, in light of our rebellion, in light of our offenses against him.

That is what we richly deserved. But oh, thank God this morning that he is rich in mercy. And thank God that in the mystery of this wealth of mercy, he turned his attention to sinners like you and I. And he made us objects of his mercy so that we who were dead in our trespasses and sins, who were in rebellion against him and richly deserving his wrath, were instead made alive together with Christ because of his substitutionary sacrifice on the cross.

By grace you have been saved. Yes, indeed. In verse 2, Jude prays that the mercy they have received and the mercy that is revealed in 1B to those who are called, beloved in God, much loved by the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

Jude prays in verse 2, may mercy, Jude prays that the mercy they have received, the mercy revealed in 1B, the mercy they have received would be freshly multiplied in their lives. And then look at verse 21 where we read, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. This letter is peppered with references to mercy.

Christians are described in verse 21 as waiting for, we have not only received mercy, we have not only become objects of mercy, now as we turn our attention to the future, the past judgment against our sin has been resolved. And now we turn our attention to the future and what do we await? We await mercy. Aren't you glad you are waiting for mercy? Those who have received mercy and those who are waiting for mercy should be very eager to show mercy to anyone who divulges they are doubting.

If you remember the mercy of God in your life, if you acknowledge the mercy you've received, should make a difference in your soul, should provoke you to be eager to show mercy, should protect you from responding self-righteously or impatiently with those who doubt. Listen, if you aren't aware of mercy, you will be vulnerable to self-righteousness. If you aren't aware of mercy, you will be vulnerable to be impatient with those who doubt.

But the mercy of God should have a humbling effect on us so that when someone divulges their temptation to doubt, our response isn't, how could you or why would you? No, instead our response is, how can I help you? Because God has been merciful to me. If you remember the mercy of God and acknowledge the mercy of God, you won't scold someone who acknowledges doubt. You'll care for them.

You'll comfort them and you'll wisely and appropriately exhort them. We have mercy on those who are tempted to doubt by remembering that we have received mercy and we are waiting for mercy. Second, help those who doubt understand the difference between doubt and unbelief.

Help those who doubt understand the difference between doubt and unbelief and Lord, help CJ go faster. Josh, you know, actually, I think the only hope for me, and this is the only hope, and this thought just came into my mind, so I'm not attributing it to any kind of spirit-inspired inspiration is, let me just, when I have this privilege to preach, I just get two parts. So rather than trying to fit the sermon into the first one, I just do it in two parts.

We'll get back to you and talk about that later. It's so frustrating to me to look and see where I am in this. Help those who doubt.

It's not helping interacting right now, is it? It's not like you're holding me up. Help those who doubt understand the difference between doubt and unbelief. Help them understand this difference.

I think there is a critical difference. I think it's a common assumption among Christians that doubt and unbelief are synonymous. But I think, I think, if you do a careful study of Scripture, I think that careful study would indicate otherwise.

Now, please understand, I trust you do understand, if you aren't familiar with me, I'm not a scholar, not a scholar, don't have formal education, which I did, but I know a lot of smart guys, and I have my own personal smart guy in the form of Jeff Purswell, the Dean of the Pastors College. This is what I say, if you

can't be a smart guy, hire a smart guy to work for you. And that's what I've wisely done because I want to serve you.

I think, I think this distinction is a critical one. I'll explain to you in just a moment why I think it can be a difference maker. Listen, typically, typically when the New Testament is referencing unbelief, it is speaking of disbelief.

Unbelief is a refusal to believe. It is a refusal, it is a rejection, a refusal to believe, a rejection of God and His Word. Doubt is different.

Doubt involves an uncertainty, a questioning, a wavering. Someone is perplexed, they are distracted. Those Jude identifies as doubting here are questioning, they are questioning whether the faith they've received at the inception of their Christian life was indeed normative.

They are questioning because they find themselves uncertain, having been adversely influenced by false teachers and false teaching. But this would be different than a refusal to believe. This would be different than a rejection.

This would be different than a resistance. This would be different than a defiance. Doubt weakens faith, but the presence of doubt doesn't mean there is the absence of faith.

I think there is a fundamental difference between the unbelief that characterizes a non-Christian, someone who clearly does not believe. They do not have faith. There's a difference between unbelief as relates to the non-Christian and the Christian who doubts and at times wavers in their beliefs, struggles to believe.

They aren't refusing to believe, they are struggling to believe. One scholar writes the following, doubt in the New Testament is an affair of the believer rather than the unbeliever. And I often think I create my own confusion by the broad and careless way I use the word unbelief because at times in an attempt to just humble myself, I want to acknowledge a deficiency in my trust in God in a particular area.

And so I'll say something like, I'm in unbelief. I mean, here's more precisely what I mean when I say that. I mean, I'm struggling to trust God in a particular area or in relation to a particular promise or in relation to a particular command.

In scripture, unbelief would involve a refusal, a rejection, a defiance. Well, that wouldn't accurately describe what's going on in my life by the mercy of God. That wouldn't accurately describe my struggle.

Now, I am not abandoning my fundamental allegiance to Christ. I'm not abandoning my fundamental trust in the gospel for the forgiveness of sins. I'm not abandoning any of those things, just struggling with a particular area in a particular moment with a particular promise.

I am tempted to or succumbing to doubt, not unbelief. Now, please don't misunderstand. You're on the risk of being misunderstood.

I run the risk of being misunderstood. I do not mean to imply. I do not mean to imply.

I am not implying that doubt isn't serious. Doubt is serious. Doubt is serious.

Doubt is sin. And doubt is always portrayed in scripture as serious and sinful and detrimental. It is not cool to doubt.

When I am doubting, I am exalting my perceptions and my opinions and my feelings over the truth of God's word, over his gracious promises, over his wise commands. So when I make this distinction between doubt and unbelief as a means of having mercy on those who doubt, this distinction isn't meant to in any way trivialize doubt. We must not minimize doubt, ignore doubt, trivialize doubt.

Doubt is serious. Doubt is sin. Doubt is to be opposed.

Doubt is to be fought. Doubt is to be addressed. Doubt is to be resolved.

But we are to have mercy on those who doubt. We are not to condemn the one struggling with doubt. And the one who is struggling with doubt should not condemn themselves.

And I'm speaking now from pastoral experience. In my pastoral experience, those who don't understand this distinction are more vulnerable to this misunderstanding. And I think they're more vulnerable to condemnation.

This distinction between doubt and unbelief is actually helpfully addressed in this fine book titled *God in the Dark, the Assurance of Faith Beyond the Shadow of Doubt* by Osginus, which is available in the bookstore. And I commend to you for your further study. The author writes the following about this distinction and how critical it is to understand this distinction.

This distinction, he writes, is absolutely vital, the distinction between doubt and unbelief, because it uncovers and deals with the first major misconception of doubt, the idea that we should be ashamed of doubting because doubting is a betrayal of the faith and a surrender to unbelief. No misunderstanding causes more anxiety and brings such bondage to sensitive people in doubt. Now, as I reflect back, I have been involved in some form of pastoral ministry for 37 years.

I am quite familiar. I'm quite familiar with the genuine Christian who is ignorant of this distinction and the effect of this misunderstanding in the form of anxiety and fear and condemnation upon their sensitive souls. I think this would actually explain what I observed in my most recent conversation with someone who was tempted to doubt.

As I was interacting with this individual after a Sunday meeting, they spontaneously, abruptly revealed doubt in their life, the presence of doubt in their life. And immediately after revealing doubt and acknowledging doubt, tears filled her eyes. And as I began to interact with her and seek to respond to Jude's exhortation to have mercy on her, one of the things I did was help her understand this distinction between doubt and unbelief, because she was assuming that the presence of... Here's what was happening.

She was paralyzed by condemnation because of doubt. Paralyzed! She assumed this was a betrayal of the faith, a surrender to unbelief, wondering... She didn't understand how the temptation of doubt was common to all Christians. She didn't understand this distinction between doubt and unbelief.

Because she wasn't aware of this distinction, she felt ashamed, condemned, and wondered about the genuineness of her conversion. I attempted to express mercy to her, help her understand the difference between doubt and unbelief. By God's grace, it seemed to immediately help.

I wanted her to experience conviction about her doubt, but not condemnation. I didn't want her to associate her doubt with unbelief. I wanted her to address her doubt from Scripture and resolve her doubt,

but not be condemned because of her doubt, not question the genuineness of her faith because of this temptation to doubt.

Third, we have mercy on those who doubt by helping them discern the nature of their doubt. We have mercy on those who doubt by helping them discern the nature of their doubt, because doubt assails us all in different forms, and so it's very wise for us to discern the specific ways someone is prone to or vulnerable to doubt. Here's what I've discovered.

Most who are tempted to doubt haven't given any specific attention to their doubt, and so we serve them by helping them to do so. Having mercy on those who doubt involves helping them to discern the nature of their doubt, the occasion of their doubt, because the temptation can take many forms. Actually, in the letter of Jude, it takes two distinct forms.

Theological would be one form. The original recipients were quite obviously being influenced by false teachers and false teaching. They were denying the truth of the gospel in verse 4. They were denying the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ in verse 4. So their temptation to doubt certainly had this theological component to it, but it also had a moral component, and some doubts are moral at their root.

Actually, what is most characteristic about the false teachers identified in Jude is their appeal to the flesh. Study for yourself. It's their appeal to sensuality.

They're perverting the grace of God into sensuality. Verse 4, verse 7, verse 8, verse 15. Listen, our sinful hearts, our tendency to crave sin can have a corrosive effect on our trust in God and His word.

So doubt isn't strictly or solely an intellectual issue because our hearts are active with cravings that are influenced by remaining sin, and those cravings can weaken one's faith and introduce doubt and draw us away from truth, causing us to question God's word in relation to a promise or a command. Tempting one to doubt the promises of God, the wise command of God, the blessings of obedience. Listen, here's another way this book will serve you.

In the second section of this book by Oz Guinness, he has what he just calls Part 2, seven families of doubt. He wants to help us to diagnose the nature of our doubt, the occasion of our doubt, so that we might address our doubt. We might alert to it and address it since it comes to us in different forms and in different ways, and we all aren't prone or vulnerable in exactly the same way.

So, chapter 3, doubt from ingratitude. 4, doubt from a faulty view of God. 5, doubt from weak foundation.

6, doubt from lack of commitment. 7, doubt from lack of growth. 8, doubt from unruly emotions.

9, doubt from hidden conflicts. It'll help you to discern your doubt so that you can address it and resolve it. Here's what I've discovered, and this would just be from my experience as a Christian and the privilege I've had to serve this church, the unspeakable privilege to serve this church and Sovereign Grace for, can it be? I guess it is 37, 38 years.

I think I am most vulnerable to doubt. This would be my personal experience, observation, be my pastoral experience. I think we are most vulnerable to doubt when we encounter severe or prolonged trial and suffering.

I think that's when we are. I think when this occurs, severe suffering, prolonged suffering, severe and prolonged suffering, I think we are tempted in those moments to ask, to cry, to groan, to complain, and to say, Why, Lord? Or, How long, O Lord? I think in these seasons we are most vulnerable to doubt. Spurgeon had a great statement in order to comfort his people and prepare them for doubt and protect them in doubt.

He talked about that when we cannot trace God's hand, we must still and can still trust His heart. It's just a wealth of wisdom. So often my trust is informed by my ability to trace.

I don't have any problem trusting when I'm tracing. If I can trace, Oh, yeah, I see what you're up to there. I get it there.

I'm good to go there. As long as I perceive, clearly perceive God's purpose in the midst of trial and suffering, I got no problem trusting. But there are times and there are seasons when what is happening and why it's happening and the purpose for which it's happening is a mystery.

Christian, get comfortable with mystery. There's certainty and there's mystery, and there's more than sufficient certainty in Scripture to sustain us in the midst of mystery. But there will always be mystery in relation to God and your circumstances and your life.

And when you cannot trace His hand, when it doesn't make sense, you can still trust His heart and know that He's sovereign. He's good. He's wise beyond your understanding.

And He does not explain everything to you, nor is He obligated to. He is more interested in your trust and your worship. And He is trustworthy and truthful and good.

And though you can't perceive what's going on, He's at work doing good, working all things together for the good. As John Piper said, God's work in the midst of your trial and suffering, doing a thousand things only He can see. I mean, when I first heard John say that, I just said, Oh, Lord, you know, just show me a couple of them.

OK, I don't. I love it. I love the fact I'm greatly comforted.

You're at work doing a thousand. Can you give up five? OK, no, no, CJ, we have a different purpose for you. Here's the purpose for you.

My wonderful wife, caring for my soul, having mercy on me in the midst of doubt in my life, sent me this verse this past week. Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. That is often where I feel like that's where I am.

It's just dark. What do you do? Trust. Finally, we have mercy on those who doubt by assuring them with the gospel.

Jude begins this letter at drawing attention to the gospel. He roots his letter. And the recipients of this letter in the gospel, one be called beloved, kept for Jesus Christ, he reminds them of God's mercy in verse two, this is really the most effective way we can show someone mercy who is tempted to doubt as an assault on their doubt and a means of assurance.

The content of one be simply cannot be improved upon. They need to experience mercy, peace and love. Mercy, peace and love is found in the content of one V. Listen, listen, it is wise and necessary for you to

be aware of the temptation of doubt, to be alert to the temptation of doubt, to address this temptation to doubt, to resolve this temptation doubt.

But I don't want you to be preoccupied with the temptation to doubt. I want you to be preoccupied with the gospel. I want you to be preoccupied with what we read in one be called beloved and kept for Jesus Christ.

Often, often we are vulnerable to doubt simply because we haven't been keeping ourselves in the love of God. I haven't been building ourselves up on the most holy faith found in one be. So these are just a few of the appropriate responses to those who doubt and have mercy on those who doubt church church.

This is what we are supposed to be known for. We are supposed to be good at this. And the good news for me this morning, having this privilege to address you is you are good at this.

You are good at this. Our pastors are good at this. Our small group leaders are good at this.

The average church member, if there is an average church member in covenant life is good at this. So I want to encourage, here's what I can do. I want to issue an encouragement to those who are dogged by doubt, to those who can relate to Scott, to those who are hesitant to divulge their doubts.

Here's what I want you to know this morning. Mercy awaits you when you do. In fact, if you're wondering what happened to Scott, let me tell you what happened to Scott.

He divulged his doubts. He went to his pastor and he went to his friends and he shared his doubts with them and they addressed them and helped him to resolve them from scripture. And he's living happily ever after as a result of divulging his doubts.

And you will too. And this mercy, this mercy is related to people, comes through people. Find yourself some people.

They're all over the joint. Divulge your doubts. They'll have mercy on you.

It'll make a difference in your life. If you are an original recipient of this letter, it is a most difficult and unsettling time. Just pause with me and try to think through what's happening, the occasion of this letter.

False teachers have effectively infiltrated this church. The actual tone of Jude's letter, it's severe in tone. If you read the entirety of the letter, the primary content of the letter is severe in tone as he addresses the appropriate righteous judgment of God upon the false teachers.

And actually, he does in effect a little tutorial for the original recipients and he takes them through a history of God's judgment in the Old Testament. We don't have time to read this, but beginning in verse 5 and continuing, he identifies God's judgment upon the false teachers, upon...no, that's right, he starts out with the unfaithful Israelites, I'm getting it in the order in my mind, unfaithful Israelites, transitions then to the rebellious angels, then he goes to Sodom and Gomorrah, then he goes to the false teachers, then he goes to Cain and Balaam and Korah. So that's past history.

So you got past history and you got present reality in the form of the false teachers who are unsettling the church. Then you've got look, these are people. So it shouldn't be difficult for us to imagine that, you know, the original recipients knew who these people were.

They were initially genuinely converted together. And now, look at the landscape of this church. Some are doubting, some are indulging and need to be snatched out of the fire.

Some are full participants and have become advocates. Jude writes and says, contend, you must contend. You must contend for the faith, you must contend with your heart, and you must contend for others.

This is difficult work. It involves effort. It is tiring.

It is wearying. It is frightening. It requires perseverance.

One could, well, it's not difficult to imagine some among the original recipients thinking the following, will I make it? I mean, if all those guys didn't make it, an old testament history passed. And if different people don't appear to be making it. And oh, this wise pastor anticipates their need for assurance.

And boy, does he provide them with assurance. He provides them with assurance in the form of this magnificent doxology. And one can't appreciate this doxology if one, or fully appreciate it, if one divorces it from all that precedes it.

So having some awareness of all that precedes this doxology, now prepare your heart to feel the full force and effect of this doxology. Imagine you are one of the original recipients and you are in need of assurance and your eyes fall upon verse 24. Or in the public assembly, somebody concludes by reading now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling.

Notice here, Jude concludes this letter, not with a benediction, but with this magnificent doxology, providing the original recipients, this massive assurance from God they were in need of. And he wants to root their contending in the grace of God. He wants to root their confidence to contend and persevere ultimately in the faithfulness of God to preserve those he has called and loved.

Yes, we are called to persevere. We are called to keep ourselves in the love of God. But we are only successful in our keeping ourselves in the love of God because we are being kept by the preserving grace of God.

Because I am kept, I can keep, I can persevere because He is preserving me. I can contend for others without fear that I will stumble or fall away because He is able to keep me from stumbling. Puritan Richard Sibbes says, as we say of the mother and the child, both hold.

But the safety of the child is that the mother holds him. What child doesn't know that experience? What child doesn't know the experience of holding your mom's hand? You are walking somewhere, something happens, pavement becomes uneven, you lose your balance. There is a momentary fear that you are going to fall.

Then mom's grip tightens. And in that moment, the child receives an assurance. And if the child is paying attention, the child realizes, you know, it is important for me to hold.

But ultimately, my safety is I am being held by another. Well, listen, when you come to verse 24, feel the grip of the Father on your soul and life because it is fixed. Listen, I try each day by the grace of God to keep myself in the love of God.

I try to hold each and every day, but each and every day I weaken each and every day. I am flawed. My grip does not remain consistently tight each and every day.

But I am comforted by this passage that when my grip weakens, His never weakens. He is able to keep me from stumbling so that I can contend and persevere without fear. And then He is going to present me blameless before the presence of His glory.

Sinners like you and I, so full of blame for our innumerable sins, will be not only preserved in this life, we will not only be able to sing in this life through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. It is grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home. But then on that last day of final examination and evaluation, He will present us blameless before the presence of His glory.

Let me tell you something. On that last day, you will never be more aware of your sin than you are on that last day because you will be standing before the Holy One who dwells in unapproachable light. You will never be more aware of your sin, and you will never be more amazed by the grace of God than you are on that day because you are going to be presented blameless on that day.

And what explanation do we have for that? How could God present someone so corrupt and so sinful, blameless on that day? Well, only through Jesus Christ, the One who suffered as my substitute in my place, bearing my sin, absorbing the wrath that I deserved so that I might be forgiven of all my sins and not only preserved in this life, but presented blameless on that last day with great joy. I guess so. The joy on that day is going to exceed any joy you have in this life.

And then Jude transitions to worship. Some of these guys, that's what happened. They're instructing, they're exhorting, and then they cannot instruct or exhort any longer.

And so they transfer the glory to God because the One who preserves and the One who presents is the One worthy of glory.

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