

Week 11 - Preservation of the Saints

The Power of God for ALL Your Life

Learning Objectives

- Be encouraged by the examples of those who persevered in Scripture.
- Understand the difference between doubt and unbelief, helpful ways to address doubt in your own life, and how to care for others who are doubting.
- Be assured of God's promise of salvation and eternal security for everyone who is a follower of Christ.

Pray for your time together as a group.

? Think of a time when you had the choice to quit something or to keep going. What did you choose and, looking back, how do you feel about that decision?

Read Out Loud: In this study we'll talk about facing doubt in our lives as believers, and how God's promise of salvation can take root in our hearts and help us persevere in following Him.

Read Out Loud: Jude 1:1-4 (NIV)

¹Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,

To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

²Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

³Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. ⁴For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

? In vs. 1, Jude describes believers as those who have "been called, are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ." What stands out to you from this?

Possible Answer: God is the primary actor - He called us, He loves us, and He is keeping us.

? What does it mean to pervert the grace of God into license for immorality? (vs. 4) How have you experienced that in your own life and/or seen it in the lives of others?

Possible Answer: Believing that my sins are all forgiven so it doesn't matter what I do/how I live; minimizing or disregarding certain commands in the Bible (i.e. commands to abstain from sexual immorality, indulging excessively in food, alcohol, because they are "outdated/ not relevant to today").

? In vs. 4, Jude describes people who live in licentiousness as those who deny Jesus as Lord. How is this unbelief different from the doubt that believers experience?

Possible Answer: Unbelief is living as if Jesus is not Lord; doubt is normative - struggling with uncertainty/questions about God, lack of understanding. Left unchecked, though, doubt can become unbelief.

? What are examples of faith from Scripture that have encouraged you during times of uncertainty or doubt?

Possible Answers: David facing Goliath, trusting in God's mercy after his sin of adultery; Noah building the ark, Abraham leaving home to follow God, trusting in the promise of a son, offering to sacrifice Isaac; the apostles preaching in the midst of opposition/persecution in Acts.

Several people throughout Old and New Testament history were commended for their faith and yet were deeply flawed. They experienced times of doubting and struggled with sin, but they still persevered. For some examples, see Hebrews 1, Genesis 12-15, and 2 Samuel 11.

Leader's Note: You may need to identify if your group is familiar with these stories (both above and in the sidebar) or if you'll need to spend a little time reviewing these references.

? As people who have put our hope in Jesus as Savior, we can wait in confidence for eternity in heaven.

What are some of the things we put our hope in (or are tempted to put our hope in) besides Jesus?

Leader's Note: This could be big picture/salvation thoughts or short term/daily things.

Possible Answers: Career, money, acceptance of others, marriage, health, being "good enough" for God/others.

"True Christians can have radical and serious falls but never total and final falls from grace." - R.C. Sproul

Read Out Loud: 1 John 1:6-10 (NIV)

⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

? Optional: What does it mean to have fellowship with Jesus and one another? How can we grow in this as a church or as a small group?

Possible Answers: Prayer, time in the Word, corporate worship, small group, intentional time with other people (listening, encouraging, caring for other people); as a small group: checking in with each other, spending time together outside of normal small group night, acts of service for each other.

? Do you believe that Jesus' forgiveness, grace, and sacrifice are big enough for all of the sins we should be condemned for? How does this belief compare to the messages we hear from other religions or the culture at large?

Possible Answers: Common for us to learn that there are "bad people" and "good people" growing up - the bad people are those who break the law by stealing, killing, etc. Everybody else is considered good. Other messages from culture: what is right to you is right - no need to repent because there is no such thing as sin; or, there is no hope for you if you're one of the "bad people"; Other religions teach us that we have to work our way to God - our salvation is based on how good we are, not how merciful God is.

? Are there areas of your life that you feel you are still working to somehow achieve or maintain your salvation/righteousness in God's eyes? How do you fight against the lie that you need to earn your salvation?

Possible Answers: Reminding myself of the Gospel, that Jesus + nothing = everything. Sharing this struggle with those who can point me to the truth.

Read Out Loud: Jude 1:17-25 (NIV)

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

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

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

? What are helpful ways to walk alongside/care for someone who is doubting their faith?

Possible Answers: Reach out to them and ask them to share more about what they're thinking/questioning; listen without judging or dismissing their concerns; point them to promises about perseverance (e.g. Ephesians 1:13-14, Philippians 1:6, John 6:37-47); praying for them.

? What do the promises in vs. 20-25 say about God's relationship with His people? What do they say about His desire for His people?

Possible Answers: God is merciful and He's faithful to His promises; He desires for us to grow in our faith and to help others too.

Read Out Loud: John 10:14-18, 25-30 (NIV)

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." ...

²⁵ Jesus answered, "... The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

? What does this passage tell us about Jesus' relationship with the Father? Why was this important for the Jews to hear? Why is it important for us?

Possible Answer: He and the Father are one - they are both God - He does everything that the Father commands - this was important for the Jews to hear because it showed that Jesus' authority came from God the Father - it's important for us because we can trust that the words from Jesus are the words of God and that they have divine power.

? What do you find encouraging or comforting in this passage?

Possible Answer: Promise of eternal life, never to perish, no one will snatch them from my hand, confidence, security.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Are there sins you've committed in the past - or feel stuck in currently - that you believe are unforgivable? Have you talked to someone about them? Have you confessed them to God?

? What are the things that are keeping you from feeling 100% confident in your salvation?

Leader's Note: Here are a few free online resources that are helpful in understanding this doctrine:

<https://www.9marks.org/article/does-regeneration-necessarily-precede-conversion/>

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-irresistible-grace/>

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-perseverance-saints/>