

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

Jude | *Wandering Stars*

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Decorating for Christmas. One of the Christmas traditions in the Knoop house is putting the star on top of the Christmas tree. One of my favorite pictures of my dad is a picture of him holding me on his shoulders as I put the star on top of the tree... when I was 18 years old. 😊
There's a reason that we put a star on top our tree: because it reminds us of the Christmas star that led people to worship Jesus.

THE STAR IN THE *CHRISTMAS* STORY

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king,
Behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,
Saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?
For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."
~ *Matthew 2:1-2*

When they heard the king, they departed;
And behold, **the star** which they had seen in the East **went before them**,
till it came **and stood over** where the young Child was.
When the saw **the star**, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.
~ *Matthew 2: 9-10*

There was a light in the darkness that led people to worship Jesus.
But this "star in the darkness" isn't just part of the *Christmas* story...
it's also part of the *Christian* story.

THE STARS IN THE *CHRISTIAN* STORY

In Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, he says that the local church is...

[living] in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation
among whom **you shine as lights in the world**...
~ *Philippians 2:15*

Which sounds really similar to the last chapter in Daniel where it says that...

...those who turn many to righteousness **[shine] like the stars**...
~ *Daniel 12:3*

Which reminds us of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

You are **the light of the world**...
[So] **let your light so shine** before men,
That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.
~ *Matthew 5:16*

The world in which we live is dark (in so many ways), and God is calling His people to **shine like stars** – so that **our light** might lead others to Jesus – so that they might worship Him.

But here (in the second to the last book in the Bible) Jude is reminding the church about people who profess to be Christians but whose lives are contrary to the Gospel of Jesus. And in **verse 13** he calls them “*wandering stars*”. Instead of being a “**north star**” that is constantly leading people to Jesus, they’re like **schizophrenic stars** that have no idea where to shine.

As people look at their life, instead of leading people to worship the Savior of the world, these “*wandering stars*” lead people **away** from Jesus.

- They don’t shine on the incarnate Son of God in the manger
- They don’t shine on the Lamb of God giving up His life on the cross
- They don’t shine on the blessed hope of the empty tomb
- They don’t shine on the glorious truths of God’s Word

They aren’t “*Christmas stars*” or “*Christian stars*”; they’re “*wandering stars*”. And their lives are causing people to look everywhere else but to Christ.

This is the context of the book of Jude.

CONTEXT

When Jude started this letter, he had intended to focus on the salvation that all of God’s redeemed people share in common (**Jude 1–3**). But instead of relishing in our “*common salvation*”, he feels this pressing need to **remind** the church of these wandering stars **because** *they are destroying people’s lives*.

Who are these wandering stars?

They are...

- People who deny that Jesus Christ is the Lord God (**4, 15**)
- People who twist the grace of God as a license to live however we want (**4**)
- People who reject authority (**8, 11**)
- People who use their tongue to speak evil of those whom God has appointed (**10**)
- People who orient their lives according to the lusts of their heart (**7, 16, 18**)
- People who love coins more than Christ (**11**)
- People who serve only themselves (**12**)

And Jude reminds us that these people find a way to creep into the church unnoticed (**4**).

And when these “*wandering stars*” become part of the skyscape local church, they inevitably end up leading people away from Jesus.

- Instead of leading people in worship, they are actually a stumbling block (**12**)
- They sabotage the atmosphere of worship with their grumbling and complaining (**16**)
- They reject the authority of their elders and speak evil against those whom God has appointed (**8**)
- Instead of building one another up, these people are drawn to sarcasm & mocking (**18**)
- Instead of seeking to unify the church, they cause divisions (**19**)

But it's not immediately obvious that these people are "wandering stars" because they are really good at "flattering people" with their "words" (16). This is what makes them so dangerous – like wolves in sheep's clothing.¹

So, Jude writes this letter to call Christians to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (3). That's **the theme verse** of this little book: *fight for your faith (and for the faith of others) in the Gospel of Christ Jesus.*

Jude calls us to "contend/fight/exert intense effort"² because (whether you realize it or not) these wandering stars are part of a war that is going on over your heart right now. There is a spiritual war over your faith, and the Christian who doesn't "fight for the faith" is the Christian who ends up **losing the faith**.

- We have an enemy who wants to **steal** your faith, **kill** your joy, **destroy** your hope.³ When Peter said that the enemy is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking people to devour,⁴ he was writing to **Christians**.⁵ Satan wants to devour **Christians**.⁶

Christian, you need to know that...

- There is a spiritual war going on over your family.
- There is a spiritual war over your marriage.
- There is a spiritual war over your business & over your school & over your church.
- There is a spiritual war over your purity & over your joy & over your faith

And if you don't "contend earnestly for the faith" (**Jude 3**) ... if you don't engage in "the good fight of faith" (**1 Tim 6:12**), you will inevitably end up losing your faith.

This doesn't mean that we will lose our salvation,⁷ but...

- we can lose our **confidence** in this faith
- we can lose our **joy** in the faith⁸
- we can lose our **testimony** for the faith
- we can lose our **unity** in the faith
- we can lose our **devotion** in the faith
- we can lose our **love** for the faith⁹

¹ Matt 5:17.

² ἐπαγωνίζομαι

³ John 10:10.

⁴ 1 Peter 5:8.

⁵ 1 Peter 1:1–2.

⁶ Indeed, the Christmas Story is Jesus coming to do battle against the enemy so that we may have abundant life (John 10:10).

⁷ Jude makes that clear, as does the rest of the Bible.

⁸ Psalm 51:12.

⁹ Rev 2:4.

And when this happens, the church ends up looking like...

- *like* the children of Israel who lost their faith after God miraculously rescued them (5).¹⁰
- *like* the angels who traded the blazing glory of heaven for unending darkness (6).¹¹
- *like* the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who gave themselves over to the depravity of their culture instead of giving themselves over to Christ (7).¹²
- *like* the dreamers who live according to their own ideas instead of according to God's Word (8).
- *like* those who stab one another in the back (11).¹³

So **THE WARNING** (here in Jude) is that the One who came as a baby in a manger is coming back “with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment” on those who reject the faith (14–15).

Church, the threat to our faith is real. It's heavy. It's constant. It's deceptive & alluring & subtle. And it is so easy for “wandering stars” to become pretty lights that distract us from coming to the Savior of the World and from worshipping Him with all that we are and with all that we have. And it's easy for us to become wandering stars ourselves.

So, the threat to our faith is very real. But so is our hope!

Jude ends this letter with one of the greatest promises in the entire Bible: our God is “able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (24).

Because...

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

~ 1 John 4:4

That's the letter of Jude.¹⁴

So now, I want us to listen to this letter together, and then we'll close by making 3 quick applications.

RECITE JUDE

APPLICATIONS

1. **Fight:** fight for your faith in Jesus (3); build yourself up in your faith (20).
2. **Rest:** rest in God's promise to preserve your life in Jesus Christ (1, 24).
3. **Reach:** reach out to those who are struggling in the faith (22–23).

FIGHT FOR YOUR FAITH

...I found it necessary to write to you, exhorting you to **contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.**

~ Jude 3

¹⁰ God had just decimated the most powerful nation on the planet (through undeniable miraculous which He performed right in front of their eyes), but **they didn't believe** that God could finish what He started by giving them victory in the Promised Land (Num 13:1–14:10).

¹¹ Isa 14:12–15; Rev 9:1; 12:4; Mark 8:38; 9:25.

¹² Gen 18–19.

¹³ Gen 4:1–8.

¹⁴ There is an enemy who seeks to get into the church & into our homes, and his aim is to **steal our focus, kill our faith, and destroy our testimony**. But *Immanuel* has come that we may have life, and that we may have it in abundance!

Illustration: two basketball hoops in the school playground – one regulation height, one short

- As a young teenager, there was a strong temptation just to play on the short one because it was easier. I didn't have to work as hard. I could do all kinds of different dunks, and I felt like Michael Jordan.
- The problem (*in basketball and in the Christian life*) is that when we settle for lower standards (because it's easier and so we don't have to work as hard), we quickly lose the ability to compete at the level that we are supposed to. Our muscles get used to aiming lower than we should.

Like it or not, basketball players are called to compete on a 10' hoop. And the more you get comfortable playing on a shorter hoop, the harder it is to compete at the level that you are supposed to.

The same is true in the Christian life.

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, then you know it's not easy!

- Having a **good marriage** is hard. Being a **faithful spouse** is hard.
- Raising **godly children** is hard. **Submitting to authority** is hard.
- **Sexual purity** is hard.
- “**Walking in the light**” at your school or at your workplace can be hard.
- Being joyfully content with the role that God has called you to is hard.
 - Like being a mom. Or singleness. Or chronic health problems.
- **Prayer** is hard work. **Studying your Bible** is hard work.
- Being a Christian is hard.

And because it's hard, there is a temptation to lower the standards to make it easier on us. We don't like the feeling of falling short (**Rom 3:23**), and so we lower the standard in our heart and in our homes and in our churches so that we can feel better about our sin.

When the Word of God quits being our standard – and we start playing at the level of our culture around us – what happens is that, instead of shining for Christ, we end up settling with the culture. We use the grace of God as a license to sin, and...

- We *settle* for our addictions.
- We become *complacent* in our marriage.
- We become *passive* in our parenting.
- We become *lethargic* in our relationship with Jesus.
- We become *casual* Christians.

But this isn't the life that God has called you to – or that Jesus has rescued you for. **You were created for more** than complacent, passive, lethargic, causal Christianity. You were created to know God, and to treasure God, and to walk in the light of God ... but the only way this happens in this world is if you FIGHT for your faith.

- If you want to **raise your children up in the Lord**, you have **fight against passivity**. And you have to **fight against discouragement**. And you have to **fight against self-doubt and fear**. And you have to **fight against the current of a secular society**. And you have to **fight against selfishness**.
 - Why are so many kids are growing up in front of a television? Because it's easier.
 - Why so many kids are growing up without consistent discipline? It's easier.

- And this is true for every other part of the Christian life.
 - If you are going to forgive, you have to **fight against bitterness**.
 - If you are going to love your neighbor, you have to **fight against selfishness**.
 - If you are going to be involved in the great commission, you have to **fight against complacency and passivity**.
 - If you are going to show Christian hospitality, you have to **fight against all kinds of fear and insecurities**.

Church, this world is drowning in darkness. And the only way people's eyes will be opened to see the Light of the World is if Christians will stand and say, *"By the grace of God, I will fight for the faith in my home. And I will fight for the faith in my church. And I will fight for the faith in my school and in my workplace and in my neighborhood. By the grace of God, I will live my life according to the standard of His Word."*

REST IN YOUR FAITH

Even as you fight for your faith, Jude helps us to rest in the promises of God over your life.

- This Christian life is a struggle, and you are going to make 10 million mistakes along the way. You are going to struggle in your flesh every day of your life until Jesus comes back to take His people home.
- But Jude **starts and ends** this letter by reminding us of the promises of God over our life:

START

- Before you ever called out to God, God **called** you (1).
- God is the one who **sanctifies** you (1).
- And God is the one who has promised to **preserve** you in Jesus Christ until the very end (1).

END

- Our God (who calls us & sanctifies us & preserves us) is able to present us faultless in His presence (24).
 - There is absolutely no chance in the universe that we could ever be faithful enough to stand in the presence of God without fault – if it was up to us.
 - But it's not. On the day we stand before God, our righteousness will be determined by God, and He is able to *"present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy"* (24).

REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING IN THE FAITH

Right before the benediction, Jude ends his letter by calling God's people to reach out to those who are struggling in the faith.

And he says that there are two ways that we reach out to people:

1. On some people, we are to **show compassion**. They don't need lectures from Christians or discipline from the church; they need to feel the merciful and gracious heart of our Father. They need people who will come alongside them in their struggle and speak hope and healing into their struggle. These are the people who are already broken by their sin.

Example: I remember a time (when I was particularly broken over a specific sin in my life) that I scheduled a meeting with the president and the dean of the school. Because of the nature of my sin, they had every right to kick me out of school, and I expected that that's exactly what they were going to do. But when I had finished sharing, instead of kicking me out, both men got out of their seats, knelt on the floor, and prayed for me. In that moment, they made a distinction, and they chose to deal with me with compassion.

2. On others, we are to deal with their sin as if they were running straight toward a blazing fire with no concern for themselves or anybody else. Compassion doesn't work with the person who is hardened in their sin. In fact, it often has the opposite effect: it makes them feel like their sin isn't that big of a deal.
 - In dealing with this verse, **John Calvin** said, "*it would not be enough to beckon with the finger, or kindly to stretch forth the hand*" to somebody who is running toward the fire.¹⁵ Compassion isn't going to get their attention. No, in that instance, you scream, "**This is going to kill you!**"

Example: I remember sitting at the corner booth in a McDonalds at 5am in the morning with some of my closest Christians friends, and one of them looked me in the eyes and (with a heart full of love) said, "*Jeremiah, your choices are going to destroy you*" [paraphrase]. "*You have a snake in your heart*" [not a paraphrase]. That morning, my brother in Christ used fear to save me and to pull me out of the fire. He could tell that I was entrenched enough in my sin that compassion wasn't what I needed in that moment.

So, whether you make the distinction that a person needs to feel the compassion of the Father or the fear of judgment, Jude closes this letter by telling us (not only to fight for our own faith) but to fight for the faith of others. ***Who do you know in your own life who needs you to fight for their faith?***

CLOSING

In this world, covered in the darkness of sin and doubt and fear and shame and anxiety and bitterness and unbelief... may we not be stars that wander.

1. But may God give us grace to fight for our faith – and for the faith of others.
2. May God give us confidence and assurance in our salvation because He is able to preserve us and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory.
3. And may God give us boldness and joy to shine our light on the Lord Jesus Christ so that many would come (*like the wise men*) from places that are spiritually far away to worship Immanuel, God with us, the Savior of the world: Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ ... *When there is a danger of fire, we hesitate not to snatch away violently whom we desire to save; for it would not be enough to beckon with the finger, or kindly to stretch forth the hand. So also the salvation of some ought to be cared for, because they will not come to God, except when rudely drawn...* ~ **John Calvin**