

## **FGBC: Pray Jude: Pray to Persevere**

Jude 1:17-23

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I love Peter. He's an incredibly human person, and that makes at least two of us. There are lots of great Peter stories in Scripture, but probably my favorite immediately follows the Last Supper account in Luke.

Jesus has been calling out the wickedness among His disciples. He says "Sitting among us as a friend, is the man who will betray Me." Of course He is speaking about Judas. And then He thanks His true disciples: "You have stayed with Me in My time of trial. And just as My Father has granted Me a Kingdom, I now grant you the right to eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom." It's a phenomenally personal encounter.

And in this context Jesus turns to Peter. Peter is His number one guy. He's the leader of the disciples and he's been with Jesus from the very beginning. He's Jesus' friend. And Jesus loves him. And Jesus says to him:

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to Me again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:21-32)

There's something I missed here until recently, and that is that Satan had asked to sift each of the disciples, not just Peter – the Greek makes that clear – but Jesus prays for Peter that his faith won't fail, so that after he gets rocked he will return and strengthen his brothers. That's what Jesus prays.

So Jesus' prayer for Peter is a really special prayer. It's an equipping and empowering prayer, but it's also a prayer of faith. Get this! Jesus puts the success of His church into the inconsistent, reactive, impulsive, sinful hands of Peter, and then He in turn puts Peter into God's hands.

That's what faith in God looks like. Everything Jesus has taken on over the last three years of ministry including His imminent death has the potential to all be for not if Peter can't get his act together. And the one thing the Gospels make clear is that Peter can never get his act together. But Jesus has put Peter in God's hands.

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Today we are talking about prayer which is a difficult topic. It's difficult because in one sense there is probably not a single person in this room who would say they don't believe in prayer or that prayer isn't important. If you're on that boat you probably aren't here. But at the same time there is nothing easier to neglect for Christians.

So what that means we have to continually stoke the prayer fire in our hearts. And so my prayer today, is that the desire to pray, and a commitment to return to prayer would well up here. I want that for myself, and I want it for you.

So on that note please open your Bibles to the book of Jude. This is the second last book in the Bible. It's only one chapter, and we are in our second of three weeks looking at it. Jude is James' little brother who was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. And Jude is Jesus' little brother. But this is something he doesn't even mention as he writes his letter because being Jesus' little brother didn't help him at all. It wasn't until after Jesus came back from the dead that the Holy Spirit quickened Jude's heart to believe.

Alright, last week we started digging into Jude with three words he uses to describe how God is the primary actor in our faith. He says we've been *called* by Him and *loved* in the Father and are being *kept* for Jesus. These are all things that God does for us.

This means if you've got faith today it isn't because you're awesome, it's because God has called you out of your broken and sinful state and loved you when you deserved anything but and is keeping you and will keep you till the end in spite of yourself. That's grace. It always starts with God and gets extended to us free of charge.

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But grace doesn't end there, and very quickly Jude mentions that while he would love to keep writing about how we have been saved he feels compelled to urge his church and ours to watch out for a common error that slithers in among Jesus followers. He says there is a tendency among Christians to distort grace into a licence for immorality.

So Jesus feely extends forgiveness and salvation to us, and we take it as an indulgence to do what we want. After all Jesus has forgiven our past, present and future sins, so don't worry so much about how you are living. Just do what you want.

But Jude respond saying "Don't give in to this kind of thinking. That's not how grace works. That's a lie of the devil. If you've received grace from God it always results in a changed life. It's simple math. The trajectory you are on is the evidence to what has come before. If you've received grace it results in transformation; it results in fruit.

In another place Jesus says:

A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 7:17-19)

Now an orchard owner doesn't do this flippantly. If she sees a fruitless tree she's going to prune it and feed it first. But if there still isn't fruit it's going to burn. So the trajectory of your life is the evidence of whether you've been saved or not.

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Now, as I say this I'm aware that we are pretty good at seeing our continual faults, and beating ourselves down. But Jude's and Jesus' words here don't mean that if you aren't perfect you aren't saved. Perfection doesn't happen until heaven. But they do mean that you should be able to look at your life and see a progression. You shouldn't be falling into the exact sins you were falling into 5 years ago. There should be fruit, or evidence, that Jesus is at work. And that evidence comes when you work to bring your life into line with God's grace.

You see Jude's big point in this is that while grace starts with God He's given us a responsibility to contend. Jude says "I urge you to contend for the faith." Pour yourself into working it out because your faith isn't going to grow by itself.

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But what we all want to know today is "how are we supposed to contend for our faith? What does that even look like?" And since you are asking great questions, turn with me to Jude starting in verse 17, because this is where he wants to go. Jude writes:

[Read Jude 17-23]

There is a contrast in these verses between the people who turn grace into a licence for sin – people Jude says who are in the church but don't have the Spirit – and saved people. And Jude says saved people do things to persevere in their faith.

And so we are going to focus in on verses 20 and 21 which say: "Dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love." And there are two things here. The first is general, you build yourself up in your faith, and the second is specific, you pray in the Holy Spirit.

Now building yourself up in your faith is anything you do to encourage the perseverance of your faith. One thing you are doing is coming to church because that helps you persevere. And Jude stresses perseverance because it doesn't matter how you start your faith journey, it is ending well that counts.

So the Apostle Paul told Timothy:

Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you (1 Timothy 6:12)

The picture is don't plan to just throw a few punches – don't attempt to live your life to the bear minimum standard for salvation – go for the knockout. Finish the fight by holding tightly to what God has called you to. And similarly Jesus encourages us: Hey ... everyone will hate you because you are My followers. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:13)

So perseverance is central to the Christian life. And it's something we do. While grace starts with God – He calls us and loves us and keeps us – you build yourself up in your faith. You keep yourself in God's love. So God does it and you do it.

Now here's what this looks like: On one hand, yes, God is the decisive actor. If He doesn't call you to faith you aren't coming. But if you then turn around and say, "well, since God is the keeper of my soul for eternal life, then I don't need to keep myself in the love of God" it negates anything God may have done. It would be the same as a deep sea diver saying "Since God is the decisive give of life, I don't need to check my scuba tank. I don't need to worry about breathing, God is going to give me life."

The problem with that is that breathing is the means God has provided to persevere in life. So grace then is God's work of offering abundant life to us and sustaining our joy, but the means of that grace is our keeping ourselves in His love. And this is something we need to do – we have to build ourselves up in our faith.

And this brings us to the second and the specific thing Jude speaks of. Jude says we build ourselves up in our faith through prayer in the Holy Spirit. But what does it mean to pray in the Holy Spirit? Who is the Holy Spirit?

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Well, the Spirit is by far the most elusive member of the Trinity. So there is one God, but He is three persons. He is Father, Son and Spirit. And of the three persons we know the least about the Spirit. But what we do know is that His role is to point towards Jesus and the Father. His job is to bring us into a relationship with God. And to do that He empowers and enables us to worship. Let me show you this from a few different texts.

The first one is in Ephesians where Paul admonishes us:

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. (Ephesians 6:18)

What I want you to notice here is that prayer in the Spirit isn't a specific kind of prayer – it isn't praying in tongues or something like that – rather it is the way we are always supposed to pray. There isn't an option for Jesus followers not to pray in the Spirit. We are supposed to do it at all times and on every occasion everywhere.

But this doesn't mean that any words we manage to jumble together in prayer are in the Spirit. So the second passage I want to look at is an amazing one in John 14 where Jesus makes us an incredible offer. But His offer is tied to our connection to His Spirit. He tells His disciples:

You can ask for anything in My name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it!... And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit (John 14:13-17)

This is one of the most Trinitarian texts in the Bible. Jesus is longing to bring glory to the Father, and to accomplish this He asks the Father to give us another Advocate. And the “another Advocate” that Jesus speaks of is very specific. What Jesus is saying is there is another Spirit just like Me. In fact our two Spirits are so similar that they are the same. The Holy Spirit is Jesus’ Spirit. And so when we pray in Jesus’ name we are praying in the Spirit that Jesus has asked the Father to give us.

So this passage extends an invitation interact with the Trinity. And the Holy Spirit is the path we do this through. Praying in the Spirit is how we pray in Jesus’ name.

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Now Paul tells us that when we are doing this there are all sorts of benefits to it and one of the principle ones is that Jesus’ Spirit enables us to pray when we don’t know what to pray. In Romans Paul says:

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. (Romans 8:26)

So have you ever been in a spot where you had no idea what to pray? Has your heart ever been so heavy or so uncertain or so wrapped in weakness that any word you can think of is just wildly insufficient?

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I remember sitting in Children’s hospital with Jaxon. He was born with a heart condition and was bleeding out of his bowels. And week after week things seemed to improve just enough to give us hope before crashing back down again. And it was a terrible roller coaster for a parent. And I tried to pray but every word was hollow.

But Paul says in times like these the Spirit intercedes for us. If we will quiet our hearts in prayer God will actually pray to God for us. Do you think that prayer is going to get answered? And so praying in the Spirit means prayer prayed in weakness that is helped by the Spirit.

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And so here we have the coming together of the two sides of grace. On one hand God is the one who calls and loves and keeps us, and on the other we are called to contend for our own faith and persevere in prayer. But the kind of prayer we are called to is prayer in Jesus’ Spirit. So once again Jesus is enabling us to do it.

Elsewhere in Scripture we are told to “walk by the Spirit,”<sup>1</sup> and “Put to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> And “Confess that Jesus is Lord by the Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> And “Worship by the Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> Life in the Spirit is what it means to be a Jesus follower. Every aspect of the faith is done in connection with and empowered by Jesus’ Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:16

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:13

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:3

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 3:3

So let's end by just looking practically at how we do this – how do you make sure you are praying in the Spirit?

There are two answers that I want to encourage us with today.

The first is that we can know we are in sync with the Spirit when we are coming to God in weakness. In other words, when we come before the Father acknowledging that we are broken sinners who have no claim on His favor outside of Jesus' grace we know we are praying in the Spirit.

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Jesus once told a parable about two men who went to the temple to pray.<sup>5</sup> You know this story. The first was like any good upstanding God follower – probably a Baptist. He attended church all the time and gave generously to the poor and served on all the committees and never missed bringing something to potluck. He was a great guy that everyone respected and thought was saved. And the other was a drug addicted drunkard with a string of broken relationships and no social credibility.

And both these guys showed up at the temple to pray. And the first guy looks across at the second and was really encouraged. "If there are just two of us here praying God is going to be a whole lot more impressed with me than he is with that guy. I've done everything right. God's going to hear my prayer."

The second guy is different. He isn't impressed with himself or his credibility because he knows he doesn't have any. He knows he's a wreck and he doesn't attempt to hide it as he prays. All he says is "Forgive me, for I'm a sinner."

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And Jesus turns around and says: God's not impressed when people think they're impressive. God's impressed when people know they aren't. It's people who know they aren't impressive that know they need a Saviour. And that's what God wants from you.

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Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with the words:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)

What He is saying is the blessed people who get saved are the people who come to God with humble hearts. Poor in spirit is the opposite of rich in spirit or proud.

And so it is only when we come to God aware of our brokenness and desperate for His help that we are praying in His Spirit. And this is true whether you are a drug addict prostitute today, and so obviously broken by everyone's standards, or whether you are a church attending doctor with your life totally in order by everyone's standards. The reality is that before God we are always only one thing – sinners in need of a Saviour.

And it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to see that, and so we are praying in Jesus' Spirit when we come before the Father acknowledging our need of Jesus.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 18:9-14

The second answer for how to pray in the Spirit is to pray scripture. 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy tells us that “All scripture is God-breathed” and so if you intertwine your life with the word of God, meditating on it, memorizing it and reading it, then your prayers are going to be shaped by scripture which are the Spirit’s words.

So get into the Bible. Read the Bible. We are the wealthiest people who have ever lived in the sense that we have access to scripture like no other people in history. So do something with your wealth. Get the Spirit into your heart by reading the words He inspired.

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Today I’ve got a couple Bible reading plans printed out that you can look through on the meditation table over there. It’s the beginning of the year so grab one and make this year a year of getting God’s word into your heart.

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One thing I’ve added to my prayer life this year is meditating on the verse of the day. I get my verse of the day from the Youversion Bible app. And I just read it out loud over and over again for 5 to 10 minutes. And while I’m doing this I’m praying God’s words back to God. It’s one way to do it.

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I want to end with one final challenge, and that is to pray together. Every week we have pre-service prayer here at 10:10. So come and pray with us for 10 minutes that God would move. And then from time to time we do a prayer vigil as a church. So this coming Friday we are going to have a 12 hour prayer vigil. And I want to encourage you to come out and pray for one of the 12 hours. This is a joint Lighthouse and Fort George event, so there could be some people there you haven’t met before. But the challenge is to come out and pray for an hour for our church and for the world.

Now if you’ve never done this before, or if you’ve never managed to pray for more than 5 minutes we’ve got some tools to assist you in this process so it won’t be super painful – but don’t avoid things just because they are painful anyway – do them because they’re right. So we put together a sheet of things to pray that will easily take an hour.

Also, I should let you know that we have mostly done this prayer silently – and so people sit and pray by themselves together, but there is no rule about this. And so I want to encourage you, if you show up and there are other people in the room ask them if they would like to pray out loud together for some of the time. Maybe finish your prayer together. Praying out loud can be a great encouragement. Of course if you hate this idea there’s no rule saying you have to do it. Just come and pray.

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Only hours before Jesus was arrested, He told Peter that He had been praying for him that his faith wouldn’t fail, and that God would use him to strengthen his brothers and sisters. Jesus thought prayer was enough to change reality such that inconsistent Peter might become the rock of His church. And in other places Jesus tells us that He prays for us on a daily basis – Jesus talks to Father about you, on your behalf. And He calls us to join Him in this endeavor. So decide to contend for your faith by praying to Father, by the power of Jesus’ Holy Spirit, in order that your faith wouldn’t falter.