

REFUELING IN-FLIGHT

JUDE 20-25

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

American F16 fighter jets have virtually an unlimited range because they have the ability to refuel in-flight.

At 30,000 feet, and traveling at 350 mph - even two F16s can refuel at once. Aerial refueling allows these aircraft to travel farther, and reach remote targets, and attack deep behind enemy lines. In-flight refueling makes a fighter jet far more effective in its mission.

And these planes exemplify a spiritual truth we find in our text. If you, as a Christian, can learn how to refuel in-flight, you too can *fly farther, reach further, go longer, and attack deeper*. You can be more useful to God if you also have the ability to refuel in-flight.

If you have to land and take-off, land and take-off, land and take-off - you'll be limited in your impact.

Some Christians have a tough time staying in the air for long periods of time. Their faith and zeal soars on Sundays, but it crashes before they can return to church the following week. Others make it from Ladies Night Out to Ladies Night Out - or from Men's Retreat to Men's Retreat - but they too have a limited range.

Life can get busy. It's so demanding. Between work, and home, and kids there's little time to land and refuel. The thought of taking a weekend off, or a whole day, or even a Wednesday night - seems daunting.

We're all traveling at 30,000 feet and at 350 mph...

Years ago, when my kids were little, and I was up to my eye-balls in busyness, an organization called "[Promise Keepers](#)" started holding mens' rallies all across the country. It seemed like a good opportunity to get together with other men and renew our focus.

But when a friend asked me to attend the meeting in Atlanta, I had to decline. I remember telling him, "[I can't go to Promise Keepers, because I've got too many promises to keep.](#)" I didn't have time to land and refuel.

The answer for us is to learn to refuel in-flight!

As appealing as it sounds, we can't always stop everything we're doing to connect with God. We need a way to spiritually refuel in the midst of life's demands.

And God understands our dilemma... I'm sure there're times when He calls us to make room, slow down, seek a quiet

place... But He's also called us to work hard, make a living, and care for our families...

This is why He's equipped us with the ability to refuel in-flight. Even at 30,000 feet and at 350 mph we can receive from God the help and power that we need.

Jude has been talking about the false teachers in the church, and the need for believers to “**contend earnestly for the faith.**” But **battling** is never enough. We also need to be **building** healthy spiritual lives.

Remember the Hebrew patriot Nehemiah equipped his workers on the wall with **a sword** and **a shovel**.

They needed to battle the enemy, but they also needed to build strong walls. And this should be every Christian's focus. Not just battling, but also building.

This is Jude's goal in the closing verses of his letter!

As he puts it, “**keep yourselves in the love of God!**”

In the midst of the daily grind we can still maintain the feelings we had when we were first forgiven - *the flush of God's cleansing, the rush of His joy, the hush of His peace!* God loves us deeply, and has stacked up blessing on top of blessing. He wants you - He even commands you to “**keep yourselves in His love...**”

Yet on the surface, this is a strange statement indeed... “**keep yourselves in the love of God?**”

If Jude had written, “**keep on loving God**” - it would've sounded more familiar. We're all well acquainted with our biblical responsibility to love God...

In Matthew 22:36, a the Jewish scholar asked Jesus, “**which is the great commandment in the law?**” And Jesus answered him, “**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.**”

Our highest priority should be to love God. It’s been said, “**When God measures a man He wraps the tape around his heart!**” God certainly wants us to love Him.

But here’s the ironic twist, **you love God most consistently when you keep yourself in His love...**

No one has ever done more for the cause of Christ than the Apostle Paul. Paul was a Gospel-maniac. Acts tells us, **he turned the world upside down for Jesus.**

No one ever loved God more than Paul. He took beatings. He withstood jail time, shipwrecks, constant misrepresentation by false teachers - he was even deserted by his friends - yet, through it all Paul’s love for Jesus never dimmed. Despite all Paul was forced to endure his zeal never abated - his passion for God kept burning bright. His love for God never flickered.

And Paul explains why in 2 Corinthians 5:14. He writes, “**For the love of Christ compels us.**” In other words, ***His love for me made me love Him in return!***

Love is a powerful motivator. It’s amazing what love will cause a person to do! Over the years my love for my family caused me to made enormous sacrifices...

Imagine, because of my love for my wife I stopped eating potato chips in bed... Out of love for my boys I gave up

season tickets to Georgia football so I could afford Little League registration... And because of my love for my daughter I owned both a dog, AND... a cat!

Even in the nuclear age scientists have never made a bomb more powerful and life-changing than love!

1 John 4:19 speaks of our relationship with Jesus, “**We love Him because He first loved us.**” The reason you and I love God at all is because He first loved us.

Lloyd Ogilvie writes, “**Our love is always a response to God’s love... Our longing to abide in Christ is the echo of His persistent call.**” God is always the initiator!

The Holy Spirit casts the bait, and reels us in. It’s His hook in our mouth that creates our allegiance, not vice versa. “**We love Him because He first loved us.**”

Did you hear of the neutron that walked up to the concessionaire at the ball park. The neutron ordered a Diet Coke. When the man handed him the soft drink the neutron asked him, “**How much do I owe ya?**” He answered, “**Aw, no charge.**” (*No charge for a neutron!*)

Well, we lose our charge, our spark for God - the electricity in our relationship - *when we lose touch with His love for us.* This is why the key to the Christian life is **to let God love you! Keep yourself in His love.**

At times Christians get down and depressed. We think we’re the scum of the earth, and that God could never love the likes of us. Well, let me encourage you... *you are the scum of the earth! I’m also the scum of the earth... but God loves us any*

way! Write this down in the margin of your Bible... **God loves scum!**

His love is called “**grace**” because it’s a **gratuity**. It’s not a part of the payment for a commodity, or service; instead it’s a benevolence from the heart of the Giver.

You don’t do anything to earn or merit God’s love.

You were the object of God’s love before you were a gleam in your daddy’s eye, or a thought in your mama’s mind. And since you’ve been born you’ve done nothing to *add to* or *take away* from God’s love for you!

His love is unconditional. God doesn’t love us because we’re lovable - its His nature to love!

Last week, I said that **God is more than love**.

And that is certainly true - God is holy, and righteous, and just, and even angry with the wicked - both the OT and the NT tells us, “**Our God is a consuming fire...**”

But none of these characteristics diminish God’s love for us. Great among His traits and His attributes - *and what most draws us to Him* - is His love for us.

One of my favorite hymns is titled “**The Love of God.**” It was written by Frederick Lehman, published in 1917.

Lehman said his inspiration for the third verse of his hymn came from a message he found scrawled on the wall of an insane asylum. It was next to the bed of a patient who discovered God’s love just before he died.

He’d penned these words, “**Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on**

earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.” The oceans and skies combined can’t contain the volume of God’s love!

Psalm 30:5, “For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.” It’s been said, “God soon turns from His wrath, but He never turns from His love.”

So please, do the heart of God a favor and **let God love you!** This is how you refuel in flight. Even while you’re in the grinder called daily life and up to your eyeballs in responsibilities - *even if you’re not actively loving God at the moment* - you can let God love you!

The spigot of God’s blessing is always open. His love flows down to us in waves of abundance.

All that God is waiting on is for us to position ourselves so that we can receive His love. As Jude says, “*put yourself and keep yourself in God’s love.*”

Think of a football game... the quarterback goes back to pass. He drops the precise number of steps.

He arcs the ball perfectly - it sails through the air in a tight spiral - it descends to the exact spot mapped out by the coaches. *The QB has done his job, but now it’s up to the receiver to get to where he’s supposed to be.*

Success now depends on the receiver being in position to catch the pass. *And this is the key to our success.* God loves

us and wants to bless us. He's done His job. Now it's up to us to receive His love.

On a Roman cross Jesus took all our sin on His innocent shoulders, and died in our place. He paid the penalty for our sins in full. He nailed sin to the cross.

And if you turn that cross a little sideways, you'll see that Jesus is now the "X" that marks the spot. He's the location on the field of life where the love comes down.

That's why if you turn from your sin, and depend on Jesus for the life He intends for you; then He'll send down His love. You'll receive His blessing and mercy.

And once you get in that place, ***stay put please!***

Won't you give God some time to work? Why not string together a few weeks, or months, or even years of humility, and repentance, and dependence on God, so He can heap up blessing, and truly impact your life.

My oh my, since the cross of Jesus, heaven has been showering blessing. His love is like a rainstorm!

Yet too many of us are like folks running to their car, dodging raindrops. We don't want to get *too wet, and have to change* - so we keep an umbrella - rather than looking up into the rain and asking God to drench us!

Brothers and sisters, the spigot is always open - His love is always flowing - our receiving of God's love is a matter of us remaining in the proper position!

Station your heart, refuse to move, and a stream of blessing will pour out from the Father to His children.

As the country preacher put it, “the key to victory is to stay under the *spout* where the blessings come out!”

Are you under the blessing spout? Do you “Keep yourself in the love of God?” We refuel in-flight when we maintain an attitude that can receive His love.

Hey, put a rock under a water fountain, and it won’t absorb the first drop. But put a sponge under that fountain, and it’ll soak up water until it overflows.

The issue is not the flow of water, but the material’s absorbency. Likewise, God is faithful to pour out His love, but it’s up to us to soak it in! Our job is to sustain the kind of attitude that sops up the love of God!

And Jude tells us how in verse 20. He gives us three attitudes of the heart that will keep us in God’s love.

First, “building yourselves up on your most holy faith.” Second, “praying in the Holy Spirit.” And lastly, “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Write it down: **Build up** your faith... **Open up** to God’s Spirit... **Look up** for the return of Jesus...

This is how you stay spongey, and receptive to the love of God: **build up... open up... and look up...**

First, Jude tells us, “building ourselves up on our most holy faith.” You can be as busy as necessary, but while you’re at it, focus on **building up** your faith.

The Bible tells us that faith is the essence of our part of the equation in a relationship with God.

Hebrews 11:6, “without faith it is impossible to please (God) ...” Romans 14:23 adds, “whatever is not from faith is sin.” Faith is the way we relate to God.

Ephesians 2:8, we’re saved by grace *through faith!*

At a retirement party for basketball great, Larry Bird, his former Celtics coach, KC Jones, told a story from Bird’s playing days... Once in the waning seconds of a game he was on the sideline diagramming a play...

Bird shook his head and blurted out, “Coach, just get the ball to me, and get everyone else out of my way.”

KC barked back, “*I’m the coach on this team, and I call the plays.*” Then he turned to the other players and said, “*Get the ball to Larry, and get out of his way.*”

And this is how you win in the Christian life - get the ball to Jesus and get out of the way! You rely on His intervention - believe in His abilities - have confidence in His willingness. You set the play up for Jesus - have faith; then get out of the way and watch Him work.

Yet I can hear some of you saying, “*Pastor Sandy, that’s great but my faith is weak.*” That’s why Jude tells us to build up our faith. Feed your faith. Add substance.

Faith is like a muscle – feed it, and exercise it, and it’ll grow. Paul tells us in Romans 10:17, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

When the great evangelist, DL Moody, read this verse it changed his life forever. He recounts the moment, “I prayed for faith and thought that some day faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come.

One day I read Romans 10:17, 'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.' I had (up to this time) closed my Bible and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since."

Even in the busiest life a person can find time for his Bible. *On the bus, on your lunch hour, in between classes - read it, listen to it - there's an app for that.*

Chinese Christians have a saying, "No Bible - no breakfast." Before they start their day, and eat their Wheaties, they feed on the Wheaties of God's Word.

You stay in God's love by staying in God's Word.

But Jude gives us another way to keep ourselves in the love of God. In verse 20 Jude tells us, "praying in the Holy Spirit." Here's another must for us. You refuel in-flight by **opening up** to the help of the Holy Spirit.

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven He promised His disciples He would send them "another Comforter."

In the Greek language, two words are translated "*another*." It can mean another of a *different type* - or another of the *same type*. In this instance Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "*another Comforter*" of the **same type!**

The disciples had just spent three years with Jesus. Now the Holy Spirit will pick up where Jesus left off.

And they can expect the *same agenda, same love, same nature* from the Spirit they saw in Jesus. It was now up to the disciples to learn to trust and follow the Holy Spirit, just as they were called to follow Jesus.

The Bible tells us that as Christians we need to be “in the Spirit”... *live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, worship in the Spirit, rejoice in the Spirit, and here pray in the Spirit.* This is not about doing more, or adding to your schedule - it’s about **how** you do what you do.

As you live, **are you leaning into the Holy Spirit?**

When I pray, do I look to the Holy Spirit to guide my thoughts about issues, and burden my heart with His concerns... Am I open to the Spirit’s help when I pray?

If He prompted me to praise the Father with an unknown tongue would I obey? Romans 8 tells us God’s Spirit intercedes when we don’t know how to pray as we ought. Are we open to His inspiration?

Once a father was having problems with the turn signals in his automobile He asked his teenager son to help. Dad said, “Son, get behind the car. If the blinkers come on shout “yes’. If not, shout “no.” *Simple enough.*

Well, when it came time for the boy to respond, he shouted out, “yes... no... yes... no... yes... no...”

Sometimes kids and dads have communication problems, and this happens in our relationship with our heavenly Father. Thus, we need His Spirit to intercede for us. The Spirit helps us discern God’s yes and no.

And then the final way to keep ourselves in God’s love is found in verse 21, “**looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.**” Along the journey through this life we

refuel in-flight by **looking up** to our destination. Never forget, we'll see Jesus face to face.

Here is not home. Our eternal house is with Jesus.

Did you hear of the new business start-up? A friend of the owner sent flowers to congratulate the new outlet on its grand opening. But when the flowers arrived, it came with a note. It read, "Rest in peace."

The man who sent the flowers was upset. He called the florist to complain about the mix-up. The lady replied, "Sir, I'm sorry about the mistake, but rather than be angry enjoy a good laugh. Somewhere there's a funeral going on that just received flowers attached with a note, 'Congratulations on your new location.'"

One day we'll all get a new location! And you'll spend far more time there, than you did here. This world is just a pit-stop compared to the permanency of heaven.

If you've ever been on a long journey, no matter how enjoyable the trip, it's always good to get back to the folks you love. We'll keep ourselves in the love of God when we realize we're headed home to see Jesus.

And verse 22, "On some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." Here Jude lays out **two types of evangelism**.

There're people who hear about the love of Jesus and immediately follow. They're drawn by God's love.

It's Romans 2:4, "do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

Some folks are drawn to Christ by *the sweet-smell of love* - others though run to Him to escape *the sulphur-smell of hell...* Famous preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, wrote, "I have seen a far larger number surrender to Christ when I've been preaching on the terrible results of neglecting salvation than when dwelling on any other theme." Some folks are wooed by God's love, but other people need to have the hell scared out of them.

It reminds me of the New York cab driver, and the pastor. Both died and went to heaven at the same time.

They were in heaven's lobby when an angel walked in and took the taxi cab driver on a tour of heaven. The pastor had to wait. And he was ticked off. *Why did he have to wait, while a cab driver got special attention?*

Finally, the angel came to usher him in. The pastor couldn't help it. He had to ask, "I've loved people all these years and I've faithfully preached week after week. Why was he given special treatment over me?"

The angel replied, "Pastor, when you preached people listened, but when that New York cabbie drove people prayed." And that's the idea here. There are people so bogged down in sin, that it takes some good old-fashioned fear to shake'em up and wake'em up!

Jude closes his letter in verse 24 with a song of praise - a doxology. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from

stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.”

Jude is telling us how to refuel in-flight - **build up** your faith, **open up** to the Spirit, **look up** to Jesus, **shake up** the people around you... Now He tells us how to **stand up** and be a strong, confident Christian.

Here’s a wonderful refrain, *worth our examination!*

It begins, “**Now to Him who is able...**” One of the most fascinating Bible studies you can do is to look for all the places where it talks of what God is able to do.

Daniel 3:17 - Shadrach, Mesech, and Abednego told the King that God is able to deliver them from the fiery furnace...

Matthew 3:9 - John the Baptist said God is able to make *children of Abraham* out of *stones*...

Romans 4:21 - God is able to perform what He’s promised... **Ephesians 3:20** - God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

2 Corinthians 9:8 - If we give to God, He is able to bless us to the same proportion in which we gave...

Hebrews 2:18 - God is able to help us when we’re tempted... And **Hebrews 7:25** - God is able to save to the uttermost those who come to Christ...

The story of the Bible is that **God is able!**

And Jude adds to this list of marvelous things that *God is able* to accomplish. Verse 24, God “**is able to keep you from**

stumbling, **and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.**”

As a pastor I see folks who come to Jesus, that are so fragile. They're hanging on by a thread. They come in desperation, and weep, and ask for His forgiveness.

Yes, they leave happier, smiling - there's a bounce in their step - a song in their heart. Yet you know they're going home to the same problems they left behind when they came to church - the same burdens that got them searching still exist. Tomorrow they'll have to face the same temptations that brought them here today.

Is there any hope for a new believer - a babe in the Lord? Will they still be walking with Jesus next week? Or will they get sucked back into the web of sin?

Why do we have any confidence at all that you or I will still be living for Jesus next week - or the week after - or in the following years and decades to come?

It's because **God is able to keep us from stumbling!**

If we hold onto to Jesus - *and the issue is not so much you loving God, as it is keeping yourself in His love...* if you do that, you'll make it through the tough spots and down the rocky roads - you'll survive the slip ups and stumbles, and you'll arrive at God's throne!

As Jude says, **“God is able to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy!”**

I know I'm not able. I'm sure you know you're not able. **But God is able! And my faith is in His abilities, not my own! God is able! And how do we know?**

Well, Jude has been teaching us how to refuel in-flight... **build up** your faith, **open up** to the Spirit, **look up** to Jesus, **shake up** the people around you, **stand up** as a confident Christian... for *nobody **stacks up** to our Lord and Savior, Jesus, in greatness and glory.*

He closes his letter, “to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.” Remember, Jude was Jesus’ half-brother. He too was Mary’s boy, and Joseph’s son. The two boys played in the sandbox together.

But there was no doubt in Jude’s mind, that there was a vast difference between him and his brother.

More than his sibling, Jesus was Jude’s “*God and Savior, Who alone is wise.*” And to Him “*be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.*”

In a world where truth is based on how we feel at the moment. Where everything is arbitrary. Where people self-identify as whatever they please. In a world that rejects any kind of objective truth... *let every man who disagrees with Jesus be a fool - for He “alone is wise.”*

The wisdom of Jesus eclipses the wisdom of men.

Let Jesus alone be famous. Give Him all the glory and majesty. Usher everyone else to a backseat.

Bow before the Master. His hands hold all dominion and power. The galaxies - known and unknown are His domain. His strength extends from *nuclear energy*, to *weapons of war*, to *the engineering of miracles*, to *the power of love*. All dominion and power belongs to Him.

And not only is all this true of Jesus in the halls of heaven, His domain reaches into the here and now.

Today belongs to Jesus, just as much as forever.

Marvel at Him, bow before Him, trust in Him.

And learn to refuel in-flight. He wants you living for Him 24/7. **Build up** your faith, **open up** to His Spirit, **look up** to His coming, **shake up** people around you, **stand up** as a confident Christian - and realize nobody, I mean nobody - **stacks up** to our living Lord, Jesus.