

Accessible Thought,
Reliable Teaching



The Wiersbe

BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Beware of the
Religious
Imposters

2 PETER, 2 & 3 JOHN
JUDE

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Alertness

All is not well in the professing church. There are dangerous people and dangerous doctrines abroad, and God's people need to be alert. The church is suffering from a false view of separation, as well as a false view of cooperation. Too often we are aiding the enemy and injuring the brotherhood through attitudes and actions that are contrary to God's Word.

Discernment

Peter, John, and Jude can help us exercise discernment and detect the counterfeits that have secretly entered the church. They can also help us discover the false doctrines that these apostates are teaching, doctrines that today are passing for Christian truth.

In writing this book, I find myself in a position similar to the one Jude described in the opening words of his letter. I would much rather write a book about the blessings of the Christian life, the positive elements of our faith, but when the enemy is abroad, we need a call to arms not an invitation to a picnic.

—*Warren W. Wiersbe*

How to Use This Study

This study is designed for both individual and small-group use. We've divided it into eight lessons—each references one or more chapters in Warren W. Wiersbe's commentary *Be Alert* (second edition, David C Cook, 2010). While reading *Be Alert* is not a prerequisite for going through this study, the additional insights and background Wiersbe offers can greatly enhance your study experience.

The **Getting Started** questions at the beginning of each lesson offer you an opportunity to record your first thoughts and reactions to the study text. This is an important step in the study process as those “first impressions” often include clues about what it is your heart is longing to discover.

The bulk of the study is found in the **Going Deeper** questions. These dive into the Bible text and, along with helpful excerpts from Wiersbe's commentary, help you examine not only the original context and meaning of the verses but also modern application.

Looking Inward narrows the focus down to your personal story. These intimate questions can be a bit uncomfortable at times, but don't shy away from honesty here. This is where you are asked to stand before the mirror of God's Word and look closely at what you see. It's the place to take a good look at yourself in light of the lesson and search for ways in which you can grow in faith.

Going Forward is the place where you can commit to paper those things you want or need to do in order to better live out the discoveries you made in the Looking Inward section. Don't skip or skim through this. Take the time to really consider what practical steps you might take to move closer to Christ. Then share your thoughts with a trusted friend who can act as an encourager and accountability partner.

Finally, there is a brief **Seeking Help** section to close the lesson. This is a

reminder for you to invite God into your spiritual-growth process. If you choose to write out a prayer in this section, come back to it as you work through the lesson and continue to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance as you discover God's will for your life.

Tips for Small Groups

A small group is a dynamic thing. One week it might seem like a group of close-knit friends. The next it might seem more like a group of uncomfortable strangers. A small-group leader's role is to read these subtle changes and adjust the tone of the discussion accordingly.

Small groups need to be safe places for people to talk openly. It is through shared wrestling with difficult life issues that some of the greatest personal growth is discovered. But in order for the group to feel safe, participants need to know it's okay *not* to share sometimes. Always invite honest disclosure, but never force someone to speak if he or she isn't comfortable doing so. (A savvy leader will follow up later with a group member who isn't comfortable sharing in a group setting to see if a one-on-one discussion is more appropriate.)

Have volunteers take turns reading excerpts from Scripture or from the commentary. The more each person is involved even in the mundane tasks, the more they'll feel comfortable opening up in more meaningful ways.

The leader should watch the clock and keep the discussion moving. Sometimes there may be more Going Deeper questions than your group can cover in your available time. If you've had a fruitful discussion, it's okay to move on without finishing everything. And if you think the group is getting bogged down on a question or has taken off on a tangent, you can simply say, "Let's go on to question 5." Be sure to save at least ten to fifteen minutes for the Going Forward questions.

Finally, soak your group meetings in prayer—before you begin, during as needed, and always at the end of your time together.

Knowing

(2 PETER 1)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read 2 Peter 1. This lesson references chapters 1, “Knowing and Growing,” and 2, “Wake Up and Remember!” in Be Alert. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

The Christian life begins with faith. Peter called it “like precious faith.” It means that our standing with the Lord today is the same as that of the apostles centuries ago. They had no special advantage over us simply because they were privileged to walk with Christ, see Him with their own eyes, and share in His miracles. It is not necessary to see the Lord with our human eyes in order to love Him, trust Him, and share His glory (1 Peter 1:8).

From the very outset of his letter, Peter affirmed the deity of Jesus Christ. “God” and “our Saviour” are not two different persons; they describe one person, Jesus Christ. Paul used a similar expression in

Titus 2:10 and 3:4.

Peter reminded his readers that Jesus Christ is the Savior by repeating this exalted title in 2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18. A *savior* is “one who brings salvation,” and the word *salvation* was familiar to the people of that day. In their vocabulary, it meant “deliverance from trouble,” particularly “deliverance from the enemy.” It also carried the idea of “health and safety.” A physician was looked on as a savior because he helped deliver the body from pain and limitations. A victorious general was a savior because he delivered the people from defeat. Even a wise official was a savior because he kept the nation in order and delivered it from confusion and decay.

—*Be Alert*, page 20

1. What are some of the ways we use *savior* to describe people in society today? Review 2 Peter 1:1–2. What are the unique ways the title *savior* applies to Jesus? Why is this critical to our faith?

More to Consider: When you are born into the family of God by faith in Christ, you are born complete (Col. 2:10). The false teachers claimed that they had a “special doctrine” that would add something to the lives of Peter’s readers. Why is the message from these false teachers dangerous? What happens when believers start to think they need more than what God has already given us?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 2 Peter 1 that stands out to you. This could

be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

God has not only given us all that we need for life and godliness, but He has also given us His Word to enable us to develop this life and godliness. These promises are *great* because they come from a great God and they lead to a great life. They are *precious* because their value is beyond calculation. If we lost the Word of God, there would be no way to replace it. Peter must have liked the word *precious*, for he wrote about the “precious faith” (2 Peter 1:1; cf. 1 Peter 1:7), the “precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4), the “precious blood” (1 Peter 1:19), the precious stone (1 Peter 2:4, 6), and the precious Savior (1 Peter 2:7).

When the sinner believes on Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to impart the life and nature of God within. A baby shares the nature of its parents, and a person born of God shares the divine nature of God. The lost sinner is dead, but the Christian is alive because he shares the divine nature. The lost sinner is decaying because of his corrupt nature, but the Christian can experience a dynamic life of godliness because he has God's divine nature within. Mankind is under the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21), but the believer shares the freedom and growth that is a part of possessing the divine nature.

—*Be Alert*, page 22

3. Respond to the following statement: “Nature determines appetite.” How does this apply to those who follow Christ? Those who don’t? How does nature also determine behavior?

From the Commentary

Where there is life, there must be growth. The new birth is not the end; it is the beginning. God gives His children all that they need to live godly lives, but His children must apply themselves and be diligent to use the “means of grace” He has provided. *Spiritual growth is not automatic.* It requires cooperation with God and the application of spiritual diligence and discipline. “Work out your own salvation.... For it is God which worketh in you” (Phil. 2:12–13).

Peter listed seven characteristics of the godly life, but we must not think of them as seven beads on a string or even seven stages of development. The word translated “add” really means “to supply generously.” In other words, we develop one quality as we exercise another quality.

—*Be Alert*, page 23

4. Review 2 Peter 1:5–7. What are the seven characteristics of the godly life? How do they work together to produce godliness? Choose two of them and describe how growth in one strengthens the other.

From the Commentary

Christian character is an end in itself, but it is also a means to an end. The more we become like Jesus Christ, the more the Spirit can use us in witness and service. The believer who is not growing is idle (“barren”) and unfruitful. His knowledge of Jesus Christ is producing nothing practical in his life. The word translated “idle” also means “ineffective.” The people who fail to grow usually fail in everything else!

Some of the most effective Christians I have known are people without dramatic talents and special abilities, or even exciting personalities, yet God has used them in marvelous ways. Why? Because they are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. They have the kind of character and conduct that God can trust with blessing. They are fruitful because they are faithful; they are effective because they are growing in their Christian experience.

—*Be Alert*, page 27

5. Review 2 Peter 1:8. Why is fruitfulness such an important character quality? How do we become fruitful? What is our divine responsibility with fruitfulness or any other character trait we’ve been given?

From the Commentary

Nutritionists tell us that diet can certainly affect vision, and this is especially true in the spiritual realm. The unsaved person is in the dark because Satan has blinded his mind (2 Cor. 4:3–4). A person has to be

born again before his eyes are opened and he can see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). But after our eyes are opened, it is important that we increase our vision and see all that God wants us to see. The phrase *cannot see afar off* is the translation of a word that means “shortsighted.” It is the picture of somebody closing or squinting his eyes, unable to see at a distance.

There are some Christians who see only their own churches or their own denominations, but who fail to see the greatness of God’s family around the world. Some believers see the needs at home but have no vision for a lost world. Someone asked Phillips Brooks what he would do to revive a dead church, and he replied, “I would preach a missionary sermon and take up a collection!” Jesus admonished His disciples, “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35).

—*Be Alert*, page 28

6. How are some churches today like the church at Laodicea? (See Rev. 3:17.) How can pride destroy a church? What are some ways to avoid becoming prideful?

From the Commentary

The best defense against false teaching is true living. A church filled with growing Christians, vibrant in their faith, is not likely to fall prey to apostates with their counterfeit Christianity. But this Christian living must be based on the authoritative Word of God. False teachers find it

easy to seduce people who do not know their Bible but who are desirous of “experiences” with the Lord. It is a dangerous thing to build on subjective experience alone and ignore objective revelation.

Peter discussed Christian experience in the first half of 2 Peter 1, and in the last half he discussed the revelation we have in the Word of God. His purpose was to show the importance of knowing God’s Word and relying on it completely. The Christian who knows what he believes and why he believes it will rarely be seduced by the false teachers and their devious doctrines.

—*Be Alert*, page 33

7. How does Peter underscore the dependability and durability of God’s Word in 2 Peter 1:12–21? How does a firm foundation of faith help believers with discernment? Why is discernment so important to the life of individual Christians? To the success and growth of a church community?

From the Commentary

Peter wanted to impress his readers’ minds with the Word of God so that they would never forget it! “I think it meet ... to stir you up by putting you in remembrance” (2 Peter 1:13). The verb *stir you up* means “to awaken, to arouse.” This same word is used to describe a storm on the Sea of Galilee (John 6:18)! Peter knew that our minds have a tendency to get accustomed to truth and then to take it for granted. We forget what we ought to remember, and we remember what we ought to forget!

The readers of this letter knew the truth and were even “established” in it (2 Peter 1:12), but that was no guarantee they would always remember the truth and apply it. One reason the Holy Spirit was given to the church was to remind believers of the lessons already learned (John 14:26). In my own radio ministry, I have received letters from listeners who get upset when I repeat something. In my reply, I often refer them to what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:1: “To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.” Our Lord often repeated Himself as He taught the people, and He was the Master Teacher.

—*Be Alert*, pages 34–35

8. Why was it so important for Peter to teach the idea of remembrance to the church? (See 2 Peter 1:12–13, 15.) What happens to a community when they don’t give attention to remembering? How are some of today’s greatest challenges in the church evidence of this?

More to Consider: If we did not have a dependable written revelation, the church would be at the mercy of men’s memories. Fortunately, we can depend on the written Word of God. Read 1 Peter 1:23–25 and 1 Peter 2:2. What do these passages teach us about the roles God’s Word plays in our lives? How might our understanding of God be different if we didn’t have the Bible to guide us? Would there be a church today? Why or why not?

From the Commentary

What was the significance of the transfiguration? For one thing, it

confirmed Peter's testimony about Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:13–16). Peter saw the Son in His glory, and he heard the Father speak from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17). First we put our faith in Christ and confess Him, and then He gives us wonderful confirmation.

The transfiguration also had a special significance for Jesus Christ, who was nearing Calvary. It was the Father's way of strengthening His Son for that terrible ordeal of being the sacrifice for the sins of the world. The law and the prophets (Moses and Elijah) pointed to His ministry, and now He would fulfill those Scriptures. The Father spoke from heaven and assured the Son of His love and approval. The transfiguration was proof that suffering leads to glory when we are in the will of God.

But there is a third message, and it has to do with the promised kingdom. In all three gospels where the account of the transfiguration is recorded, it is introduced with a statement about the kingdom of God (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). Jesus promised that, before they died, some of the disciples would see the kingdom of God in power! This took place on the Mount of Transfiguration when our Lord revealed His glory. It was a word of assurance to the disciples, who could not understand our Lord's teaching about the cross. If He were to die, what would happen to the promised kingdom that He had been preaching about all those months?

—*Be Alert*, page 37

9. How is Peter's inclusion of the transfiguration event (2 Peter 1:17–18) a response to those who were teaching God's kingdom would never come (2 Peter 3:3–4)? Why is his eyewitness testimony important? How might his message be

applicable to today's skeptics?

From the Commentary

In some respects, the world is getting better. I thank God for the advances in medicine, transportation, and communication. I can speak to more people in one radio program than the apostles preached to in their entire lifetimes. I can write books that can be spread abroad and even translated into different languages. In areas of scientific achievement, the world has made great progress. But the human heart is still wicked, and all of our improvements in means have not improved our lives. Medical science enables people to live longer, but there is no guarantee they will live better. Modern means of communication enable lies to travel faster! And jet planes enable us to get places faster, but we do not have better places to go!

We should not be surprised that our world is engulfed in spiritual darkness. In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord warned that there would be counterfeits who would invade the church with their false doctrines (Matt. 7:13–29). Paul gave a similar warning to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:28–35), and he gave further warnings when he wrote his epistles (Rom. 16:17–20; 2 Cor. 11:1–15; Gal. 1:1–9; Phil. 3:17–21; Col. 2; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3—4). Even John, the great “apostle of love,” warned about anti-Christian teachers who would seek to destroy the church (1 John 2:18–29; 4:1–6).

—*Be Alert*, page 41

10. Review the Scripture passages noted in From the Commentary. What do they tell us about the threat of false teachers? What do they tell us about what the apostles expected in the generations after them? How has this proven true in today's churches?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 2 Peter 1. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. Who are the “saviors” in your life—people who have rescued you from risky, dangerous, or questionable circumstances or situations? How does their role in your life help you better understand Jesus' role as Savior?

12. How do you grow in fruitfulness? What is God's job in this process? What actions are necessary on your part?

13. What does remembrance mean to you? How does remembering your past help you live in the present? What are the dangers of looking backward too much? How do you find balance between remembering and moving forward in faith?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to take a step that will help you grow in fruitfulness? Be specific. Go back through 2 Peter 1 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Idea: Take a day this week to focus on remembrance. If you have a journal, go through it and recall the circumstances you've experienced. Or go through an old calendar and recall the events of the past year. As you consider each thing, take time to think about how God showed up in each of those situations.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence) inviting God to work on

your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read 2 Peter 2. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapters 3, "Beware of Counterfeits," and 4, "Marked Men," in Be Alert.*

Beware

(2 PETER 2:1–16)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read 2 Peter 2:1–16. This lesson references chapters 3 and 4 in Be Alert. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

The picture painted in 2:1–3 is not pretty! When you read the epistle of Jude, you will find him using similar language, and vivid language it is. Peter knew that the truth of God’s Word and the false doctrines of the heretics simply could not coexist. There could be no compromise on his part, any more than a surgeon could compromise with a cancerous tumor in a patient’s body.

The theme of “deception” runs throughout the entire chapter. To begin with, these teachers’ message is false; Peter called what they taught “destructive heresies” (NIV). The word *heresy* originally meant simply “to make a choice,” but then it came to mean “a sect, a party.” Promoting a party spirit in a church is one of the works of the flesh

(Gal. 5:20). Whenever a church member says to another member, “Are you on my side or the pastor’s side?” he is promoting a party spirit and causing division. A false teacher forces you to make a choice between his doctrines and the doctrines of the true Christian faith.

—*Be Alert*, page 50

1. What are some examples of division in the church today? How does this usually play out? How do we differentiate between false doctrine/methods and simply issues of preference or taste? What are today’s greatest heresies?

More to Consider: In 2 Peter 2:3, Peter pointed out that the false teachers used “feigned words.” The Greek word is plastos, from which we get our English word plastic. Plastic words! Read Genesis 3:1–6. How did false teachers follow the same pattern as Satan in this passage?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 2 Peter 2:1–16 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper
From the Commentary

False teachers are better known for what they deny than what they affirm. They deny the inspiration of the Bible, the sinfulness of man, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross, salvation by faith alone, and even the reality of eternal judgment. They especially deny the deity of Jesus Christ, for they know that if they can do away with His deity, they can destroy the entire body of Christian truth. Christianity is Christ, and if He is not what He claims to be, there is no Christian faith.

It must be made clear that these false teachers are unsaved. They are compared to dogs and pigs, not to sheep (2 Peter 2:22). Jude described these same people, and in Jude 19 he clearly stated, “having not the Spirit.” If a person does not have the Spirit of God within, he is not a child of God (Rom. 8:9). He may pretend to be saved and even become a member or an officer in a fundamental church, but eventually he will deny the Lord.

In what sense were these people “bought” by the Lord? While it is true that Jesus Christ died for the church (Eph. 5:25), it is also true that He died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). He is the merchant who purchased the whole field (the world) that He might acquire the treasure in it (Matt. 13:44). When it comes to *application*, our Lord’s atonement is limited to those who believe. But when it comes to *efficacy*, His death is sufficient for the whole world. He purchased even those who reject Him and deny Him! This makes their condemnation even greater.

—*Be Alert*, pages 51–52

3. What are the nonnegotiable tenets of Christian faith? What are some of the finer points of doctrine that leave room for disagreement? Why do churches

divide over these finer points, even when they agree on the basic truths?

From the Commentary

False teachers are interested in one thing: making money. They exploit (“make merchandise of”) ignorant people and use their religion as “a cloak of covetousness” (1 Thess. 2:5). Our Lord was a poor man, and so were the apostles, yet they gave of themselves to minister to others. These false prophets are rich men who cleverly get others to minister to them! Micah described these false prophets in his day: “Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money” (Mic. 3:11 NASB). Certainly the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7), but his motives for ministry had better go beyond money. It has often been said that immorality, love of money, and pride have been the ruin of many people. These false teachers were guilty of all three!

They use their “plastic words” as well as “great swelling words” (2 Peter 2:18) to fascinate and influence their victims. They flatter sinners and tell them the kind of ego-building words that they want to hear (see the contrast in 1 Thess. 2:5). They will scratch the itching ears of people who reject the truth of the Bible and turn to fables (2 Tim. 4:1–4).

—*Be Alert*, page 53

4. How can religion become a tool for exploiting weak people? In what ways are false teachers merchandisers rather than ministers? What are some ways even good churches become tempted by greed? What are some practical ways to

avoid falling for that temptation?

From the Commentary

Peter saw no hope for these apostates; their doom was sealed. His attitude was different from that of “tolerant” religious people today who say, “Well, they may not agree with us, but there are many roads to heaven.” Peter made it clear that these false teachers had “forsaken the right way” (2 Peter 2:15), which simply means they were going the *wrong* way! Their judgment was sure, even though it had not yet come. The trial was over, but the sentence had not yet been executed. It would not linger or slumber, Peter affirmed; it would come in due time.

In this section, Peter proved that judgment finally does come, no matter how secure the sinner might feel.

—*Be Alert*, page 54

5. What three examples did Peter use to verify that judgment is certain? (See vv. 4–6, 9b.) Why did Peter feel the need to state the certainty of judgment? What attitude might he have been combatting with this statement?

From the Commentary

Peter’s purpose was not just to denounce the apostates; he also wanted

to encourage the true believers. He once again reached back into the Old Testament and cited two examples of deliverance.

Noah experienced a twofold deliverance. First, God delivered him from the pollutions of the world around him. For 120 years, Noah faithfully proclaimed the Word of God to people who would not believe it. He and his family were surrounded by moral and spiritual darkness, yet they kept their lights shining. God did not protect Noah and his family by isolating them from the world, but by enabling them to remain pure in the midst of corruption. Through Jesus Christ, we too have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

Abraham took his nephew, Lot, with him when he left Ur and went to the land of Canaan, but Lot proved to be more of a problem than a blessing. When Abraham, in a lapse of faith, went down to Egypt, Lot went with him and got a taste of the world (Gen. 12:10—13:1). As Lot became richer, he had to separate from Abraham, and this removed him from his uncle’s godly influence. What a privilege Lot had to walk with Abraham, who walked with God! And yet, how Lot wasted his privileges.

When Lot had to choose a new area for his home, he measured it by what he had seen in Egypt (Gen. 13:10). Abraham took Lot out of Egypt, but he could not take Egypt out of Lot. Lot “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Gen. 13:12) and then finally moved into Sodom (14:12). God even used a local war to try to get Lot out of Sodom, but he went right back (14:1–16). That is where his heart was.

—*Be Alert*, pages 57–58

6. How did God choose to deliver Noah from the judgment of the world? Why Noah? How does his story point toward our salvation in Jesus Christ? How is

Lot a difficult character to understand? What did Peter reveal about God through Lot's story?

From the Commentary

The picture in 2 Peter 2:10–12 is of proud people who try to build themselves up while they try to tear down everybody else. They show no respect for authority and are not afraid to attack and defame people in high positions.

God has established authority in this world, and when we resist authority, we are resisting God (Rom. 13:1ff.). Parents are to have authority over their children (Eph. 6:1–4) and employers over their employees (Eph. 6:5–8). As citizens, we Christians should pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–4), show respect to them (1 Peter 2:11–17), and seek to glorify God in our behavior. As members of a local assembly, we should honor those who have the spiritual rule over us and seek to encourage them in their ministries (Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1–6).

Human government is, in one sense, God's gift to help maintain order in the world, so that the church may minister the Word and win the lost to Christ (1 Tim. 2:1–8). We should pray daily for those in authority so that they might exercise that authority in the will of God. It is a serious thing for a Christian to oppose the law, and he must be sure he is in the will of God when he does it. He should also do it in a manner that glorifies Christ, so that innocent people (including unsaved government employees) might not be made to suffer.

7. What are some practical ways that our human government is a gift from God? Why is the role of government such a combustible topic of discussion in churches today? What is the godly way to discuss differences of opinion about government's role? How can trusting God's ultimate lordship answer most of those disagreements?

From the Commentary

The angels are reviled by the apostates, but the apostates are not reviled by the angels! Even the angels, though greater in strength and power, will not intrude into a sphere that is not their own. The angels remember the rebellion of Lucifer and know how serious it is to revolt against God's authority. If God judged the rebellious angels, how much more will He judge rebellious men!

The suggestion in 2 Peter 2:11 is that the godly angels do not even speak against the *fallen* angels. They have left all judgment to the Lord. We will learn more about this when we study Jude, for he mentions this matter of the angels in Jude 8—9.

8. Why is speaking evil of others a sin? Why is it often so hard to leave the judgment of others to God? What then should be our response when we disagree with leaders or authorities?

More to Consider: Read Daniel 1. How did Daniel deal with an authority figure he disagreed with? What wisdom do Proverbs 16:13 and 22:11 offer us as we consider how to respond to authority?

From the Commentary

The words translated “riot” and “sporting” carry the meaning of “sensual reveling.” They also contain the idea of luxury, softness, and extravagance. At the expense of those who support them (2 Peter 2:3), the apostates enjoy luxurious living. In our own society, there are those who plead for funds for their “ministries,” yet live in expensive houses, drive luxury cars, and wear costly clothes. When we remember that Jesus became poor in order to make us rich, their garish lifestyle seems out of step with New Testament Christianity.

Not only do they deceive others, but they even deceive themselves! They can “prove” from the Bible that their lifestyle is right. In ancient times, it was expected that people would revel at night, but these people dared to revel in the daytime, so convinced were they of their practices.

—*Be Alert*, page 67

9. Review 2 Peter 2:13–14. How does this statement relate to what Peter was saying: “A person can become so accustomed to his vices that he sees them as virtues.” How is this true even today? How should we welcome those in our churches who act in ways we disagree with (or should we not welcome them)?

From the Commentary

The apostates know the right road, the straight path that God has established, but they deliberately abandon God's way for their own.

No wonder Peter called them "natural brute beasts" (2 Peter 2:12) and compared them to animals (v. 22). "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule!" warned the psalmist (Ps. 32:9). The horse likes to rush ahead and the mule likes to lag behind; both can get you off the right path. Believers are sheep, and sheep need to stay close to the shepherd or they will stray.

We have already learned one reason for the apostates' godless conduct: They want to satisfy the cravings of their flesh. But there is a second reason: They are covetous and want to exploit people for personal gain. Peter mentioned this in 2 Peter 2:3 and now develops the thought. Not only is the false teacher's outlook controlled by his passions (2 Peter 2:14a), but his heart is controlled by covetousness. He is in bondage to lust for pleasure and money!

In fact, he has perfected the skill of getting what he wants. "They are experts in greed," says the New International Version, and the Phillips translation is even more graphic: "Their technique of getting what they want is, through long practice, highly developed." They know exactly how to motivate people to give.

—*Be Alert*, pages 70–71

10. What are some ways the apostates of today's church exploit others? Are the exploitations always obvious? Why or why not? What are some practical ways to avoid being taken advantage of by false teachers or even well-meaning believers who are simply wrong about what faith asks?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 2 Peter 2:1–16. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. Have you ever felt exploited by religious leaders? Without naming names, describe that situation. How did you respond to the circumstance? What guidance would Peter have given to you for that situation? How can you discern the difference between being used by God or exploited by man?

12. What are some ways you bristle when confronted with authority? How do you know when it's appropriate to submit and when it's right to resist? What role can prayer play in those situations?

13. When have you spoken evil of others? What prompted this reaction? What would Peter say to you about this behavior? What is a more Christ-like way to

respond to those with whom you distrust or disagree?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to learn how to better respond to authority you disagree with? Be specific. Go back through 2 Peter 2:1–16 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Idea: Take a personal inventory of the authorities in your life—everyone from your supervisor at work to your small-group leader to the politicians who lead your community. How do you relate to each of them? What role does your faith play in your relationship with each of them? Think about how you can demonstrate a godly attitude in each of those relationships, then spend time in prayer, asking for wisdom as you encounter authority.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence) inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section.

Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read 2 Peter 2:17–22. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapter 5, “False Freedom,” in Be Alert.*

False Freedom

(2 PETER 2:17–22)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read 2 Peter 2:17–22. This lesson references chapter 5 in Be Alert. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

It is a frightening fact that many people who are now zealous members of cults were at one time attending churches that at least professed to believe the Christian gospel. They participated in the Communion service and saw the death of the Lord Jesus portrayed in the loaf and the cup. They even recited the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Yet today, these people will tell you that they feel free now that they have been "liberated" from the Christian faith.

At the same time, you will meet people who have rejected all religious faith and now profess to enjoy a new freedom. "I used to believe that stuff," they will boldly confess, "but I don't believe it anymore. I've got something better, and I feel free for the first time in my life."

1. According to Peter, what is “false freedom”? Where do we see that in our world today? Why are people drawn to this appearance of freedom? In what ways is “doing whatever you want” bondage rather than freedom?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 2 Peter 2:17–22 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Faith is only as good as the object. A pagan may have great faith in his idol, but the idol can do nothing for him. I have a friend who put his faith in a certain investment scheme and lost almost everything. His faith was strong but the company was weak. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, that faith will accomplish something, because God always keeps His promises. “There hath not failed one word of all his good promise” (1 Kings 8:56).

Peter used three vivid illustrations to emphasize the emptiness of the

apostates' promises.

The Greek word in 2 Peter 2:17 actually means “a flowing spring” rather than a tranquil well. It is the word our Lord used when He ministered to the Samaritan woman (John 4:14) and that John used in describing the satisfaction the saints will experience for all eternity (Rev. 7:17; 21:6). A spring without water is not a spring at all! A well is still called a well even if the water is gone, but a spring ceases to exist if the water is not flowing.

There is in mankind an inborn thirst for reality, for God. “Thou hast made us for thyself,” said Augustine, “and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” People attempt to satisfy this thirst in many ways, and they end up living on substitutes. Only Jesus Christ can give inner peace and satisfaction.

—*Be Alert*, page 80

3. Respond to the statement “Faith is only as good as its object.” How was that true in Peter’s day? How is it true today? What are some of the objects we put our faith in that are unworthy of that faith?

More to Consider: Read John 4:13–14. How might Jesus’ words have been the foundation for Peter’s message about the objects of faith?

From the Commentary

The picture in verses 17–18 is that of clouds of fog or mist being driven by a squall over a lake or sea. Clouds ought to announce the possibility

of rain, but these clouds only announce that a windstorm is coming. Jude's description is "Clouds they are without water, carried about of winds" (Jude 12). Again, there is noise, motion, and something to watch, but nothing profitable happens. The farmer sees the clouds and prays they will empty rain on his parched fields. The false teachers have nothing to give; they are empty.

The word translated "mist" means "blackness, gloom," so "the blackness of the darkness" would be an accurate translation (see 2 Peter 2:4). These apostates promise to lead people into the light, but they themselves end up in the darkest part of the darkness! The atmosphere of hell is not uniform: Some places will be darker than others. How tragic that innocent people will be led astray by these apostates and possibly end up in hell with them.

—*Be Alert*, page 81

4. Read verses 6 and 13 of Jude. How do these verses support the message of 2 Peter 2:17–18? What does 2 Peter 2:18 reveal about how false teachers are able to attract followers even though they really have nothing to give? How is this still true today?

From Today's World

It might seem like a broken record to talk about the lure of false religions, but they continue to be prevalent in today's world, despite the easy access to resources that could disprove their doctrines. Perhaps that's because there's just as much deception on the Internet as there is reliable truth. In our world today,

pretty much anyone can put up a sign that says “get your religion here,” then pick and choose truths from a variety of sources to support their message. There’s nothing more alluring than a religion that promises something “different” from and “better than” what the general public believes as orthodoxy, while pretending to be that very thing.

5. What kinds of people fall for the false religions of today? Why are people who have been “burned” by church susceptible to cults and false religions? What can today’s church do to attract followers who otherwise might be tempted to pursue a false religion?

From the Commentary

False teachers are eloquent promoters of their doctrines. They know how to impress people with their vocabulary, “inflated words that say nothing” (literal translation). The average person does not know how to listen to and analyze the kind of propaganda that pours out of the mouths and printing presses of the apostates. Many people cannot tell the difference between a religious huckster and a sincere servant of Jesus Christ.

The second reason the apostates are so successful is that they appeal to the base appetites of the old nature. This is part of their bait (2 Peter 2:14)! We must not think of “the lusts of the flesh” only in terms of sexual sins, for the flesh has other appetites. Read the list given in Galatians 5:19–21, and you will see the many different kinds of bait the apostates have available for baiting their traps.

—*Be Alert*, pages 81–82

6. Read Acts 18:24–28. How was Apollos like and unlike the apostates Peter was describing? Compare his teaching to Paul’s (see 1 Cor. 2:1–5). Why do people sometimes equate eloquence or fervency with good teaching? What are the dangers of doing this?

From the Commentary

A pastor friend of mine was assisting some missionaries in the Philippines by conducting open-air meetings near the university. Students who wanted to decide for Christ were asked to step into a building near the square, and there they were counseled and also given follow-up material to help them get started in their Christian life.

No sooner did a new convert walk out the door and past the crowd than a cultist would join him and start to introduce his own religion! All the apostates had to do was look for the people carrying follow-up material! This same procedure is often used at large evangelistic crusades: The false teachers are ready to pounce on new believers carrying decision packets.

This is why it is important that soul-winners, pastors, and other Christian workers ground new converts in the faith. Like newborn babies, new Christians need to be protected, fed, and established before they can be turned loose in this dangerous world. One reason Peter wrote this letter was to warn the church to care for the new Christians, because the false teachers were out to get them! We cannot blame new believers for being “unstable” (2 Peter 2:14) if we have not taught them how to stand.

7. Why is the freedom offered by the apostates so appealing? What makes it a false freedom? What unique responsibilities do seasoned believers have in helping new believers stay strong?

From the Commentary

You cannot set someone free if you are in bondage yourself, and these false teachers were in bondage. Peter made it clear that these men had temporarily disentangled themselves from the pollutions of the world, but then they went right back into bondage again! They professed to be saved but had never really been redeemed (set free) at all!

The tenses of the verbs in 2 Peter 2:19 are present: “While they *promise* them [the new believers] liberty, they themselves [the apostates] *are* the servants of corruption” (italics mine). They claim to be the servants of God, but they are only the servants of sin. It is bad enough to be a slave, but when sin is your master, you are in the worst possible condition a person can experience.

—*Be Alert*, page 83

8. What is a “false Christian”? What kinds of sin enslave false believers? (See 2 Peter 2:3, 10, 14.) What are Christlike ways to confront those who follow false teachings?

More to Consider: Compare the three men named in this chapter of 2 Peter: Noah, Lot, and Balaam. What set each of them apart? What kind of a person today is most like Noah? Lot? Balaam? How do we assure our lives are Noah-like?

From the Commentary

Jesus Christ came to bring freedom. In His first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, our Lord sounded forth the trumpet call of freedom and the advent of the “Year of Jubilee” (Luke 4:16ff.). But Christ’s *meaning* of freedom is different from the apostates’, as is His method for accomplishing it.

In the Bible, freedom does not mean “doing your own thing” or “having it your way.” That attitude is the very essence of sin. The freedom that Jesus Christ offers means *enjoying fulfillment in the will of God*. It means achieving your greatest potential to the glory of God. The Quaker leader Rufus Jones, paraphrasing Aristotle, said, “The true nature of a thing is the highest that it can become.” Jesus Christ frees us to become our very best in this life, and then to be like Him in the next.

The apostates brought their followers into bondage by means of lies, but our Lord brings us into freedom by means of truth. “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). He was speaking, of course, about the truth of the Word of God. “Sanctify them through thy truth,” He prayed; “thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

—*Be Alert*, pages 84–85

9. Where do we go to discover the truth about ourselves, our world, and our God? What happens to us when we face this truth honestly? How does this truth direct us in everyday living?

From the Commentary

Peter called these apostates “natural brute beasts” (2 Peter 2:12) and then ended the warning by describing them as pigs and dogs! But he was not simply showing his personal disdain for them; rather, he was teaching a basic spiritual lesson.

It is very important that we understand that the pronoun “they” in this entire paragraph (2 Peter 2:17–22) refers to the false teachers and not to their converts. It is also important that we remember that these teachers are not truly born-again people. Jude described these same people in his letter and stated clearly that they were “sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 19). It is not *profession* of spirituality that marks a true believer but *possession* of the Spirit of God within (Rom. 8:9).

But these apostates did have a “religious experience”! And they would boldly claim that their experience brought them into fellowship with the Lord. They would be able to explain “the way of righteousness” and would use the Word of God to support their teachings. If they had not experienced some kind of “religious conversion,” they would never have been able to get into the fellowship of the local assemblies.

—*Be Alert*, page 86

10. In what ways was the apostates’ experience false? What kind of religious experience did they have? Why is it sometimes difficult for Christians to accept people into their community if those people have previously taught falsely? How can the Holy Spirit help us discern a proper response to those who claim a conversion experience?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 2 Peter 2:17–22. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. Faith is only as good as its object. What are some objects you've put your faith in that weren't so reliable? What are some things you do to focus your faith on Jesus?

12. Have you ever fallen for a false religion or followed a teacher you later learned was teaching false truth? What appealed to you about that teaching? How did you discover the truth and turn away from the false teaching? What are some ways to safeguard your faith?

13. Do you ever have trouble trusting others' conversions to faith? If so, what makes you cautious about people who once believed things you know to be

false? What does it cost to give them the benefit of the doubt? How can God's Word direct you when you're unsure how to respond?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to learn more about why freedom in Christ is better than any other kind of freedom? Be specific. Go back through 2 Peter 2:17–22 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Idea: The best defense against false teaching and the influence of false teachers is knowing what you believe. Spend some time with a close friend or mentor going over the basics of faith—the nonnegotiable, foundational truths. If you discover areas of uncertainty, work together to shore up your understanding of faith so you can stand strong when confronted with anyone who might preach a false gospel. Also, pray for wisdom in reaching out to those who are captured by false teaching.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence) inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read 2 Peter 3. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapters 6, "Scoffing at the Scoffers," and 7, "Be Diligent!," in Be Alert.*

Diligence

(2 PETER 3)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read 2 Peter 3. This lesson references chapters 6 and 7 in Be Alert. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

It is possible to have a pure and sincere mind and yet have a bad memory! Peter wrote this second letter primarily to awaken and arouse his readers (2 Peter 1:12–15). It is easy for Christians to “get accustomed to God’s truth.” Eutychus went to sleep listening to Paul preach (Acts 20:7–10)! Our heavenly Father sacrificed so that we might have the truth of the Word and the freedom to practice it, but too often we take this for granted and become complacent. The church needs to be aroused regularly lest the enemy find us asleep and take advantage of our spiritual lethargy.

Because God’s Word is true, we must pay attention to it and take its message seriously. New converts must be taught the Word and

established in the doctrines of the faith, for new Christians are the apostate teacher's primary targets. But older Christians must also be reminded of the importance of Bible doctrine and, in particular, the doctrines that relate to the return of Christ. Prophetic teaching must not lull us to sleep. Rather, it must awaken us to live godly lives and to seek to win the lost (Rom. 13:11–14).

What the Bible teaches about the day of the Lord was not invented by the apostles. The prophets taught it and so did our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:2).

—*Be Alert*, page 94

1. Review 2 Peter 3:1–4. Why did Peter emphasize the unity of the Word of God? In what ways were the scoffers denying the truth of the prophetic books? Why is it important to keep all the Scriptures in perspective when trying to discern God's plan?

More to Consider: Read Jude 14–15; Isa. 2:10–22; 13:6–16; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Joel; Amos 5:18–20; Zeph.; Zech. 12:1–14:3. What do these passages teach about the coming judgment? Why is it important to listen to the Old Testament prophets, even in light of all we know from the New Testament?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 2 Peter 3 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just

something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Prophetic students seem to fall into three categories: those who believe the church will be raptured (“caught up together,” 1 Thess. 4:13ff.) *before* the day of the Lord; those who see this event taking place *in the middle* of the day of the Lord, so that the church experiences the first half of the tribulation; and those who believe the church will be raptured when the Lord returns *at the tribulation’s close*. There are good and godly people in each group, and our differences of interpretation must not create problems in fellowship or in sharing Christian love.

Not only does the Word of God predict the coming day of the Lord, but it also predicts the appearance of the very scoffers who deny that Word! Their presence is proof that the Word they deny is the true Word of God! We should not be surprised at the presence of these apostate mockers (see Acts 20:28–31; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3).

A scoffer is someone who treats lightly that which ought to be taken seriously. The people in Noah’s day scoffed at the idea of a judgment, and the citizens of Sodom scoffed at the possibility of fire and brimstone destroying their sinful city. If you have tried at all to witness for Jesus Christ, you have no doubt met people who scoff at the idea of hell or a future day of judgment for this world.

Peter made it clear that false teachers cultivate “the lust of uncleanness”

(2 Peter 2:10) and allure weak people by means of “the lusts of the flesh” (v. 18). If your lifestyle contradicts the Word of God, you must either change your lifestyle or change the Word of God. The apostates choose the latter approach, so they scoff at the doctrines of judgment and the coming of the Lord.

—*Be Alert*, pages 95–96

3. Why do the apostates scoff at the coming judgment? What is their argument against Jesus’ second coming? In what ways are they willfully ignoring a great deal of evidence?

From the Commentary

How did Peter refute the foolish argument of the apostate scoffers? “God does not interrupt the operation of His stable creation!” they argued. “The promise of Christ’s coming is not true!” All Peter did was remind them of what God had done in the past and thus prove that His work is consistent throughout the ages. Peter simply presented evidence that the false teachers *deliberately* ignored. It is amazing how so-called thinkers (scientists, liberal theologians, philosophers) will be *selective* and deliberately refuse to consider certain data.

—*Be Alert*, page 97

4. Explain Peter’s refutation of the scoffers. What events did he cite to support his claims? Why these particular events? How might these events help convince the scoffers of the truth?

From the Commentary

Not only were the scoffers ignorant of what God had done in the past (2 Peter 3:5), but they were also ignorant of what God was like. They were making God in their own image and ignoring the fact that God is eternal. This means that He has neither beginning nor ending. Man is immortal: he has a beginning but not an ending. He will live forever in either heaven or hell. But God is eternal, without beginning or ending, and He dwells in eternity. Eternity is not just extended time. Rather, it is existence *above and apart from time*.

Peter was certainly referring to Psalm 90:4—“For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.”

—*Be Alert*, page 99

5. Review 2 Peter 3:8–10. How were the scoffers ignorant of what God was like? Why do people tend to make God in their own image? Read Psalm 90:4. How did Peter reference this in 2 Peter 3:8–10? Why is this insight important?

From the Commentary

God’s “delay” is actually an indication that He has a plan for this world and that He is working His plan. There should be no question in anybody’s mind whether God *wants* sinners to be saved. God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). First Timothy 2:4 affirms that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” These verses give both the negative and the

positive, and together they assure us that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11). He shows His mercy to all (Rom. 11:32), even though not all will be saved.

It is worth noting that God revealed this same longsuffering in the years before the flood (1 Peter 3:20). He saw the violence and wickedness of man and could have judged the world immediately; yet He held back His wrath and, instead, sent Noah as a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, God patiently waited while Abraham interceded for the cities, and He would have spared them had He found ten righteous people in Sodom.

—*Be Alert*, pages 100–101

6. What is “longsuffering” (2 Peter 3:9)? If God is longsuffering toward lost sinners, why did Peter write, “The Lord ... is longsuffering to us-ward” (KJV) or “us” (NKJV)? How is God’s longsuffering significant to believers and nonbelievers alike?

From the Commentary

The purpose of prophetic truth is not speculation but motivation; thus Peter concluded his letter with the kind of practical admonitions that all of us must heed. It is unfortunate when people run from one prophetic conference to another, filling their notebooks, marking their Bibles, drawing their charts, and yet not living their lives to the glory of God. In fact, some of the saints battle one another more over prophetic interpretation than perhaps any other subject.

All true Christians believe that Jesus Christ is coming again. They may differ in their views of when certain promised events will occur, but they all agree that He is returning as He promised. Furthermore, all Christians agree that this faith in future glory ought to motivate the church. As one pastor said to me, “I have moved off the Planning Committee and joined the Welcoming Committee!” This does not mean that we should stop studying prophecy, or that every opposing viewpoint is correct, which is an impossibility. But it does mean that, whatever views we hold, they ought to make a difference in our lives.

—*Be Alert*, page 107

7. Respond to the following statement: “The purpose of prophetic truth is not speculation but motivation.” How does this prove to be true in Peter’s second letter? How does “be diligent” summarize what Peter wrote? What sort of diligence was he calling for? How is that message appropriate today as well?

From the Commentary

Because we do not know the day or the hour of our Lord’s return, we must constantly be ready. The believer who starts to neglect the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) will gradually develop a cold heart, a worldly attitude, and an unfaithful life (Luke 12:35–48). If he is not careful, he may even become like the scoffers and laugh at the promise of Christ’s coming.

This expectant attitude ought to make a difference in *our personal conduct* (2 Peter 3:11). The word translated “manner” literally means

“exotic, out of this world, foreign.” Because we have “escaped the corruption that is in the world” (2 Peter 1:4), we must live differently from the people in the world. To them, we should behave like foreigners. Why? Because this world is not our home! We are “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Peter 2:11) headed for a better world, the eternal city of God. Christians should be different, not odd. When you are different, you attract people; when you are odd, you repel them.

—*Be Alert*, page 108

8. What does “readiness” look like in the actions of believers? Why is it important that our conduct in this time is characterized by holiness and godliness? Why is it sometimes difficult to live that way in light of the “end times” we’re in?

More to Consider: When Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh, his message was clear: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4)! How does the story of Jonah help us better understand the relationship between God’s plans and man’s service?

From the Commentary

Second Peter 3:15 ties in with verse 9, where Peter explained why the Lord had delayed fulfilling His promise. God had every reason long ago to judge the world and burn up its works, but in His mercy, He is longsuffering with us, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). This is the day of salvation, not the day of judgment. ...

For centuries, if a Gentile wanted to be saved, he had to come by way of Israel. This same attitude persisted even in the early church (Acts 15). Paul made it clear that *both* Jews and Gentiles stand condemned before God and that both must be saved by faith in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, saved Jews and Gentiles belong to the one body, the church. The church is a “mystery” that was hidden in God’s counsels and later revealed through the New Testament prophets and apostles (see Eph. 3).

—*Be Alert*, pages 111–12

9. Review 2 Peter 3:15–16. Why did Peter make reference to Paul’s writings? What “new thing” was Jesus doing at this time in history? How was God’s longsuffering important to all Gentiles (non-Jews)? How is it important to our world today?

From the Commentary

The word translated “beware” means “be constantly guarding yourself.” Peter’s readers knew the truth, but he warned them that knowledge alone was not sufficient protection. They had to be on their guard; they had to be alert. It is easy for people who have a knowledge of the Bible to grow overconfident and to forget the warning, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

What special danger did Peter see? That the true believers would be “led away together with the error of the wicked” (literal translation). He is warning us against breaking down the walls of separation that must

stand between the true believers and the false teachers. There can be no communion between truth and error. The apostates “live in error” (2 Peter 2:18), while true believers live in the sphere of the truth (2 John 1–2).

The word *wicked* (2 Peter 3:17) means “the lawless.” Peter’s description of the apostates in 2 Peter 2 reveals how lawless they are. They even speak evil of the authorities that seek to enforce God’s law in this world (vv. 10–11)! They promise their converts freedom (v. 19), but that freedom turns out to be lawlessness. ...

The stability of the Christian comes from his faith in the Word of God, his knowledge of that Word, and his ability to use that Word in the practical decisions of life.

One of the great tragedies of evangelism is bringing “spiritual babies” into the world and then failing to feed them, nurture them, and help them develop.

—*Be Alert*, pages 114–15

10. What are the four “beloved” statements in 2 Peter 3 that summarize what Peter wanted to get across in this letter (vv. 1, 8, 14, 17)? What was Peter’s main fear about the Christians he was addressing? What does it mean to fall away from steadfastness? How does this happen even to strong believers?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you’ve explored thus far in this study of 2

Peter 3. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. How do the words of the Old Testament prophets speak to you? How do their prophecies of Jesus' second coming and the end times affect your daily faith walk? How do you line up the prophecies in the Old Testament with the revelation in the New?

12. Do you feel ready for Jesus' return? If so, what gives you this confidence? If not, what is holding you back from being ready? What role does the Holy Spirit play in preparing us for Jesus' return?

13. Have you ever fallen away from your faith? If so, what prompted that? What are ways you could have prevented that falling away?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to take action to be ready for Jesus' return? Be specific. Go back through 2 Peter 3 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Idea: Peter preached the importance of diligence in study and also in preparation for Jesus' second coming. What are some ways you practice diligence in your own life? Consider all the places where your faith intersects with daily routine, such as work, caring for your family, interacting with friends and neighbors, spending time online, and so on. If you find areas where you're lackadaisical rather than diligent about growing your faith, decide a course of action to change that. Practice good habits wherever your faith life matters most so you can grow closer to God and discover His will for your life.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence) inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read 2 John. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapter 8, "A Faithful Family," in Be Alert.*

Faithfulness

(2 JOHN)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read 2 John. This lesson references chapter 8 in Be Alert. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

The apostate teachers not only invaded the churches, but they also tried to influence Christian homes. Titus faced this problem in Crete (Titus 1:10–11) and Timothy faced it in Ephesus (2 Tim. 3:6). As goes the home, so goes the church and the nation; thus the family is an important target in Satan’s war against truth.

This brief letter was written to a godly mother and her children. Some Bible students have concluded that the “elect lady” refers to a local church and that “her children” are the believers fellowshipping in the church. “Thy elect sister” (2 John 13) would then refer to a sister church that was sending Christian greetings.

While it is true that John does address a group in this letter (note the

plural in 2 John 6, 8, 10, 12), it is also true that he addresses an individual (vv. 1, 4–5, 13). Perhaps the solution is that a Christian assembly was meeting in this home, along with the family of the “elect lady,” so that John had both the family and the congregation in mind (see Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2).

—*Be Alert*, page 123

1. What was the primary focus of the second letter of John? Why was he concerned that the woman not let anything false into her house or the church? What might those “false things” be? Why is this kind of diligence just as important today?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 2 John that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

John used the word *truth* four times in his salutation, so it is an important word. Basically, it means “reality” as opposed to mere

appearance, the ultimate that is the basis for all that we see around us. Jesus Christ is “the truth” (John 14:6) and God’s Word is “truth” (17:17). God has revealed truth in the person of His Son and in the pages of His Word. He has given us “the Spirit of Truth” to teach us and to enable us to know truth (John 14:16–17; 16:13).

The truth is not only an objective revelation from the Father, but also a subjective experience in our personal lives. We cannot only know the truth, but we can “love in the truth” and live “for the truth’s sake.” The truth “lives in us, and shall be with us forever” (NASB). This means that “knowing the truth” is much more than giving assent to a body of doctrines, though that is important. It means that the believer’s life is controlled by a love for the truth and a desire to magnify the truth.

—*Be Alert*, page 124

3. How is the truth John referenced both an objective revelation of God the Father and a subjective experience? What does it mean to “know the truth”? In what ways is knowing the truth more than simple assent to doctrine?

More to Consider: Read Eph. 2:4, 7–9. What do these verses tell us about God’s grace? How does this apply to the woman and her children addressed in John’s letter (2 John 3)?

From the Commentary

When you receive grace and mercy from God, you experience His peace. “Therefore, being justified [declared righteous] by faith, we have

peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). God is not at war with lost sinners; it is sinners who are at war with God (Rom. 5:10; 8:7). God has been reconciled to sinners because of Christ’s work on the cross. Now sinners must repent and be reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–21).

It is significant that at the very outset of his second letter, John affirmed the deity of Jesus Christ. He did so by joining “the Lord Jesus Christ” with “God the Father.” Suppose 2 John 3 read, “from God the Father, and from the prophet Amos.” You would immediately respond, “Amos must not be joined with the Father’s name in that fashion! It makes it appear that Amos is equal with God!”

—*Be Alert*, page 125

4. Why did John make a point to join the Son and the Father in this letter? What false doctrines might he have been targeting with that emphasis? What happens to our faith when we deny that Jesus is also God?

From Today's World

The Internet has brought information to everyone’s fingertips, though much of it is suspect at best, and simply wrong at worst. This applies also to matters of the faith. While there certainly were plenty of false sources of truth before the Internet age, the accessibility of information (and ease of publishing it or altering it online) has made the pursuit of truth a much more difficult endeavor. Not only do curious seekers have to sort through loads of information to find what they’re looking for, they have to determine whether or not that information is true. This

leads to all kinds of wrong thinking.

5. It doesn't take much these days to collect data to support whatever views you want to have about matters of the faith. How could this lead to heresy? What are the dangers of searching for answers solely through our modern portals? How can the wisdom of others add depth to our search for truth? Ultimately, our source of truth is God's Word. How can we reliably use the Internet to better understand God's Word, rather than twist it into false truth?

From the Commentary

If our homes and churches are to be true to Christ and oppose the false teachers, we must know the truth. How do we learn the truth? By carefully studying God's Word and allowing the Spirit to teach us; by listening to others who are true to the faith; and then by practicing what we learn. We must not only learn the truth with our minds, but we must also love the truth in our hearts and live the truth by our wills. Our total persons must be yielded to the truth.

—*Be Alert*, page 126

6. Why is the parents' role so important in helping children and young adults know and love the truth? What practical implications does this have for families? What are some things churches can do to support the family's role?

From the Commentary

To “walk in the truth” means to obey it, to permit it to control every area of our lives. This paragraph opens and closes with an emphasis on obedience, walking in the truth. It is much easier to study the truth, or even to argue about the truth, than it is to practice it! In fact, sometimes zealous Christians disobey the truth in the very way they try to defend it.

—*Be Alert*, page 127

7. What does it mean to be zealous? What are some ways that zealous Christians sometimes disobey the truth in how they defend it? Paul was zealous as a Jew, then equally zealous when he became a Christ follower. How can a zealous nature promote truth? How do we know what to be zealous about in matters of faith?

From the Commentary

John’s joy was that the elect lady’s children were walking in truth. John did not know all of them, however; the literal translation is “some of thy children.” Somewhere in his travels, John had met some of her children and learned of their obedient walk with the Lord. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4). We have no reason to believe that John was hinting that others of the children had gone astray after the false teachers. If by “children” John was including the members of the “house church,” then it is possible that some of them had left the fellowship and joined with the deceivers.

—*Be Alert*, page 127

8. How is God honored when people obey His Word? What are other ways we can honor God? What does it mean, in practical terms, to “walk in truth”?

From the Commentary

John argued that God has commanded us to walk in truth and love. The word *commandment* is used five times in these few verses. God’s commandments focus “the truth” on specific areas of life. “The truth” can be vague and general if we are not careful, but “the commandments” make that truth specific and binding.

—*Be Alert*, page 128

9. Underline every time John used a variation on the word “commandment.” Why is this significant in John’s letter? Where do the commandments come from? Just what are these commandments? What should our response be to these commandments (1 John 5:3)?

More to Consider: False teachers try to make God’s commandments appear harsh and difficult, and then they offer their converts “true” freedom (2 Peter 2:19). What makes this a false argument? Are God’s commandments harsh and unbearable to believers? Why not? What implications does this

have for believers today who are confronted with promises of a better religion that's based on similar lies?

From the Commentary

From encouraging truth, John turned to opposing error. He joined his voice with Peter's to warn that there are deceivers in the world. The word *deceiver* implies much more than teaching false doctrine. It also includes leading people into wrong living. John has already made it clear that truth and life go together. What we believe determines how we behave. Wrong doctrine and wrong living always go together.

Where did these false teachers come from originally? "For many deceivers have gone out into the world" (literal translation). They went out from the church! At one time, they professed to believe "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), but they turned from that faith and abandoned the truth and the church. "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

It takes constant spiritual vigilance to protect a family or a local church from the insidious attacks of false teachers. One very successful pastor told me, "If I took my eyes off this work for twenty-four hours and stopped praying, it would be invaded before we knew it." He was not emphasizing his own importance (though godly pastors are essential to spiritual churches) but the importance of diligence and vigilance.

—*Be Alert*, pages 130–31

10. Review 2 John 7–11. What does it mean to abide in truth? How is that different from simply knowing the truth? What does spiritual vigilance look like

in practical terms?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 2 John. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. What are some of the lies you've let slip into your faith life? Why is it so easy to let lies infiltrate our lives? What can you do to prevent false doctrine from tainting the truth?

12. If you had a family that taught you about God's love, how did that inform your faith today? If you're a parent, how are you passing along the truth to your children?

13. What are some ways you obey God's Word in your daily life? What does it mean to be diligent in your faith? What are the obstacles to maintaining a diligent faith?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to obey the truth in some area of your life? Be specific. Go back through 2 John and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Idea: One of the emphases in this short letter is the importance of teaching your children about God's love. Take stock of the things you currently do to grow your children's faith. Then come up with at least three new ideas for teaching them the truth of God's Word. You could create a regular family prayer time, go on hikes and talk about God's role in creation, or visit the elderly or underprivileged and practice the kind of servant nature Jesus exhibited when He walked the earth. Be as creative as you want, but make a point to teach your children well. If you don't have children, consider using the time to share your faith in some other

community—friends, coworkers, etc.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence) inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read 3 John. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapter 9, "It's the Truth," in Be Alert.*

The Truth

(3 JOHN)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read 3 John. This lesson references chapter 9 in Be Alert. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

The battle for truth and against apostasy is fought not only in the home (2 John) but especially in the local church, and that is where 3 John comes in. This little letter (the shortest New Testament epistle in the original Greek) gives us a glimpse into an early assembly, its people, and its problems. As you read this brief letter, you find yourself saying, “Times have not changed very much!” We have similar people and problems today!

—*Be Alert*, page 141

1. One of the key words in this letter is *witness* (3 John 3, “testified”; 3 John 6, 12, “report, bear record, record”). What is the significance of this in the context

of the letter? Respond to this statement: Each Christian is a witness, either a good one or a bad one. How can good witnesses help the faith? How can bad witnesses hinder it?

More to Consider: This letter was addressed to Gaius, one of the leaders of the assembly. But John also discussed two other men in these verses—Diotrephes and Demetrius. What does this letter tell us about the diversity of people in a particular congregation? How is this true today? Which of these people do you want more of in your local church? How do you grow people to be that sort of person?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from 3 John that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

There is no question that the apostle John dearly loved Gaius! He called him “the well beloved” in his greeting, and “beloved” in 3 John 5. It is unlikely that these were merely formal terms, like our “Dear Mr. Jones.” (We may not even know Mr. Jones personally!) Third John 4

suggests that Gaius may have been one of John's converts, and, of course, those we lead to faith in Christ are especially precious to us. However, the beloved apostle looked on all the believers as his "little children" (1 John 2:1, 12, 18), so we must not press this too far.

—*Be Alert*, page 142

3. What made Gaius such a great example of a man of God? Who are the Gaius people in your church today? What role do encouragers like Gaius play in the life of the church?

From the Commentary

It is clear that Gaius was a man whose spiritual health was evident to all. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Physical health is the result of nutrition, exercise, cleanliness, proper rest, and the disciplined order of a balanced life. Spiritual health is the result of similar factors. We must nourish ourselves with the Word, and then "work out" that nourishment in godly exercise (1 Tim. 4:6–7). We must keep ourselves clean (2 Cor. 7:1) and avoid the contamination and pollution that is in the world (2 Peter 1:4; James 1:27). While exercise and service are important, it is also important that we rest in the Lord and gain new strength through fellowship with Him (Matt. 11:28–30).

—*Be Alert*, page 142

4. Why is a balanced life (exercise and service, but also rest and fellowship)

important for believers? How do we find a balanced life? (See Scripture passages in the excerpt above.) How does a balanced life honor God?

From Today's World

Churches today are not that much different from the church of John's time when it comes to the diversity of characters willing to serve. The early church counted on its members to provide for one another and others in the community, just as today's church does. And the early church had both good and bad members—equally zealous in their tasks, whether helping or harming the goals of the church. One of the biggest differences between the church of today and the church of yesterday is that the number of serving opportunities today typically far exceeds that of the early church.

5. How does serving in the church bring out the best and the worst in people? What are the greatest challenges for church leadership today in organizing and distributing human resources? What can today's church learn from John's letter about how to deal with different types of church members and leaders?

From the Commentary

Gaius was recognized as a man who obeyed the Word of God and “walked in truth” (see 2 John 4). Some of the brethren had made several visits to John, and they had joyfully reported that Gaius was a glowing example of what a Christian ought to be. In my own pastoral

experience, I must confess that I have often been a bit on edge when people have said to me, “Is Mrs. ____ a member of your church?” Or, even worse, “I know one of your members quite well!” John never had to fear when Gaius’s name came up!

—*Be Alert*, page 143

6. What made Gaius such a good testimony? What habits or actions did he take to present himself as a good testimony? What lessons does his example provide for today’s church?

From the Commentary

In this day of fear and violence, it is not easy to welcome strangers into our homes. Of course, in the early church, traveling ministers carried letters of recommendation from their own assemblies (Rom. 16:1); so it is important that we know something about the people we plan to entertain. However, it does take faith and love. As much as my wife and I enjoy sharing our home, we must confess that there have been times when bidding our guests good-bye brought a sense of happy relief! For the most part, however, our guests have truly been “angels unawares” whose presence was a blessing in our home.

Gaius not only opened his home, but he also opened his heart and his hand to give financial help to his guests. The phrase *bring forward on their journey* means “to assist on their journey.” This could have included providing money and food as well as washing and mending clothing (see 1 Cor. 16:6; Titus 3:13). After all, our faith must be

proved by our works (James 2:14–16), and our love must be expressed by deeds, not just words (1 John 3:16–18).

—*Be Alert*, page 144

7. What was Gaius’s motivation for his practical ministry to the saints? (See vv. 6–8.) What exactly is “practical ministry” in this example? What are examples of practical ministry today?

From the Commentary

It seems like many churches have members who insist on “being boss” and having their own way. I must confess that sometimes it is the pastor who assumes dictatorial powers and forgets that the word *minister* means “a servant.” But sometimes it is an officer, perhaps a longtime member of the church, who thinks he or she has seniority rights.

Our Lord’s disciples often argued over which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom (Matt. 18:1ff.). Jesus had to remind them that their model for ministry was not the Roman official who lorded it over people, but the Savior Himself, who came as a humble servant (Phil. 2:1ff.). During my many years of ministry, I have seen the model for ministry change, and the church is suffering because of it. It appears that the “successful minister” today is more like a Madison Avenue tycoon than a submissive servant. In his hand he holds a wireless telephone, not a towel; in his heart is selfish ambition, not a love for lost souls and for God’s sheep.

—*Be Alert*, page 146

8. In what ways was Diotrephes motivated by pride? Contrast him to John the Baptist (see John 3:30). What is the proper and biblical way to deal with the Diotrephes people in our churches today?

More to Consider: The phrase “prating against us with malicious words” (v. 10) means “bringing false and empty charges against us.” What Diotrephes was saying about John was sheer nonsense. What does this story tell us about the dangers of rumor and speaking ill of others? What are some examples of this kind of dangerous speech in the history of your church? How does speaking badly of others—especially when what is said is false—damage the ministry of the church? What is a believer’s responsibility when he or she hears malicious words about someone in leadership?

From the Commentary

The church members who received John’s associates were dismissed from the church! Again, it was guilt by association. Diotrephes had neither the authority nor the biblical basis for throwing these people out of the church, but he did it. Even religious dictators have to be careful lest the opposition become too strong!

The New Testament does teach church discipline, and these instructions ought to be obeyed. But church discipline is not a weapon for a dictator to use to protect himself. It is a tool for a congregation to use to promote purity and glorify God. It is not a pastor “throwing weight around” or a church board acting like a police court. It is the Lord exercising spiritual authority through a local church in order to rescue

and restore an erring child of God.

—*Be Alert*, pages 148–49

9. In what ways was Diotrephes a “church dictator”? How can we identify this type of person in the church? Why are such people dangerous to a church’s health?

From the Commentary

According to the dictionary, an exemplar is “an ideal, a model, an example worthy to be imitated.” Demetrius was that kind of a Christian. John warned his readers not to imitate Diotrephes. “If you want to imitate an example, then follow Demetrius!”

But is it right for us to imitate human leaders? Yes, if they in turn are imitating Jesus Christ. “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example” (Phil. 3:17). “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). You and I cannot see God, but we can see God at work in the lives of His children. The godly life and dedicated service of another believer is always an encouragement and a stimulus to me. By our good example, we can “consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24).

—*Be Alert*, pages 149–50

10. What made Demetrius a man worth imitating? What role did submitting to authentic spiritual authority play in this circumstance? What role does it play in

today's church?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of 3 John. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. When have you been an encourager like Gaius? What makes it easy for you to play that role in ministry? What makes it difficult to play that role?

12. What are your greatest ministry strengths? Do you teach? Do you encourage? Do you offer hospitality? If you aren't sure what your best roles are in the church, what can you do to discover them?

13. Working with difficult people is a fact of life. What are some positive examples when you had to work with someone difficult? What are some examples of failed working relationships? What can you learn from John's letter to help you better work alongside difficult or wrong-minded people?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to be more of an encourager like Gaius? Be specific. Go back through 3 John and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Idea: It's encouragement time! This week, choose four or five people in your church—or outside of it—who could use some encouragement. Then do something specific for each of those people to encourage them in the faith. Be as creative as you want, but be sure to offer encouragement that's appropriate and customized to each person. And remember, this isn't about you—it's all about them.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence) inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read Jude 1–16. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapters 10, “A Call to Arms!,” and 11, “Meet the Apostates!,” in Be Alert.*

Apostates

(JUDE 1–16)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read Jude 1–16. This lesson references chapters 10 and 11 in Be Alert. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Since the author of this epistle was the brother of James, this would make him the half brother of our Lord Jesus Christ (see Mark 6:3). Our Lord's brothers in the flesh did not believe in Him while He was ministering (John 7:5). But after the resurrection, James was converted (see 1 Cor. 15:7), and we have every reason to believe that Jude was also saved at that time. Acts 1:14 informs us that "his brethren" were part of the praying group that was awaiting the Holy Spirit; 1 Corinthians 9:5 states that "the brethren of the Lord" were known in the early church.

So much for the identification of the author. Why did Jude write this letter? To warn his readers that the apostates were already on the scene!

Peter had prophesied that they would come (2 Peter 2:1–3; 3:3ff.), and his prophecy had been fulfilled. Apparently Jude wrote to the same believers who had received Peter’s letters, intending to stir them up and remind them to take Peter’s warnings to heart. You will discover a number of parallels between Jude and 2 Peter as you study this fascinating but neglected letter.

—*Be Alert*, page 157

1. What are some ways that the book of Jude is a call to arms? What exhortations did Jude give (v. 3)? How is it also a quiet devotional letter?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from Jude 1–16 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Verses 1 and 2 talk about “the army.” The Captain of the army is Jesus Christ, and the soldiers He commands are people who share a “common salvation” through faith in Him. Jude called them *saints* (Jude 3), which

simply means “set-apart ones.” He addressed them as *sanctified*, which, again, means “set apart.” (Some manuscripts read “beloved in God the Father.”) Perhaps there is an echo here of 1 Peter 1:2 where all three persons of the Godhead are seen to be involved in our salvation.

Certainly salvation begins in the heart of God and not in the will of man (Rom. 9:16).

The mysteries of God’s sovereign electing grace are beyond us in this life and will never be understood until we enter His glorious presence. For that reason, we are wise not to make them the basis for arguments and divisions. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God” (Deut. 29:29).

—*Be Alert*, page 158

3. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14. What does this passage say about being “set apart” by God? How do God’s choosing and God’s calling go together? What special blessings do God’s set-apart soldiers receive (Jude 2)? What is the value of each of those blessings? (See also 1 Peter 1:2 and 2 Peter 1:2.)

More to Consider: How does the belief that we’re set apart affect the way we share our faith with others? What obstacles can this create in our dialogue with nonbelievers? How does the reality of our special blessings from God impact our ability to overcome those obstacles?

From the Commentary

We have already noted that Jude set out to write an encouraging letter

about “the common salvation.” The name *Jude* (Judah) means “praise,” and he was anxious to praise God and rejoice in the salvation God gives in Jesus Christ. But the Spirit of God changed his mind and led Jude to write about the battle against the forces of evil in the world. Why? Because it was “needful” for the church.

I must confess that I sympathize with Jude. In my own ministry, I would much rather encourage the saints than declare war on the apostates. But when the enemy is in the field, the watchmen dare not go to sleep. The Christian life is a battleground, not a playground.

—*Be Alert*, page 160

4. What is the enemy that Jude identified? (See v. 4.) Why did he shift gears and start to talk about this enemy? What does this suggest about the challenges the church was facing?

From the Commentary

How, then, should the church respond to the presence of this insidious enemy? *By earnestly contending for the faith.*

“The faith” refers to that body of doctrine that was given by God through the apostles to the church. The word *doctrine* is found at least sixteen times in the Pastoral Epistles alone. Paul admonished both Timothy and Titus to make sure the believers were being taught “sound doctrine,” which means “healthy doctrine,” doctrine that promotes the spiritual health of the local church. While individual teachers and preachers may disagree on the fine points of theology, there is a basic

body of truth to which all true Christians are committed.

This body of truth was *delivered* (Jude 3) to the saints. The word means “to be entrusted with.” The church collectively, and each Christian personally, has a stewardship to fulfill. “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak” (1 Thess. 2:4). God committed the truth to Paul (1 Tim. 1:11), and he shared it with others, such as Timothy (6:20). He exhorted Timothy to entrust the Word to other faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2). You and I would not have the Word today were it not for faithful believers down through the ages who guarded this precious deposit and invested it in others.

—*Be Alert*, page 163

5. Respond to this statement: “The church is always one generation short of extinction.” How does this relate to what Jude was saying? How is this still true today? What does it mean to contend for the faith?

From the Commentary

Like the apostle Peter, Jude reached back into Old Testament history and gave three examples of God’s victory over those who had resisted his authority and turned from the truth. Peter referred to the fallen angels, Noah, and Lot (2 Peter 2:4–9) and followed the historical order. He also emphasized God’s deliverance of the righteous as well as His judgment of the ungodly. Jude, however, did not mention Noah and the flood, but instead used the nation Israel as his example.

The point Jude was making is that *God judges apostates*. Therefore, the

false teachers who had crept into the church would also one day be judged. Their seeming success would not last; God would have the last word.

—*Be Alert*, pages 164–65

6. What three examples of God’s judgment did Jude offer? (See vv. 5–7.) What do these examples teach us about God’s judgment? Why was that important to the readers of Jude’s letter? Why is that important today?

From the Commentary

Jude was not content simply to remind his readers to pay attention to what Peter had written. He wanted to add his own words of warning by describing what the false teachers were like and what they would do to the church. The Spirit of God led Jude to describe the characteristics of the apostates, reinforcing Peter’s words and, at the same time, adding information. Jude 8–16 and 2 Peter 2 parallel and supplement each other.

—*Be Alert*, page 173

7. Why did Jude offer this seemingly needless repetition of Peter’s warnings? (See Paul’s words in Phil. 3:1 for a possible answer to this.) What are some other messages that bear repeating in order to assure that believers are moving in the right direction? When does repetition start to lose its effectiveness in ministry?

From the Commentary

All authority comes from the throne of God, whether it is authority in the home, the church, or the state. Those who exercise authority must first be *under* authority, accountable to God. But the false teachers reject divine authority and set themselves up as their own authority.

The *cause* of their rebellion is found in the word *dreamers* (Jude 8). These people live in a dream world of unreality and delusion. They believe Satan's lie, "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5). Having turned away from God's truth, they feed their minds on false doctrine that inflates their egos and encourages their rebellion. Jude 10 informs us that the apostates are ignorant people who do not know what they are talking about! Jude echoed Peter's description of these men as "brute beasts" (2 Peter 2:12, 22). Animals live by natural instinct, and so do the apostates. When men rebel against God, they sink to the level of beasts.

—*Be Alert*, pages 173–74

8. What is "divine authority"? Why would false teachers reject divine authority? What do they have to gain by doing this? What is the benefit to the local church when leaders and teachers not only acknowledge divine authority but also teach it?

More to Consider: Read Gen. 4; 1 John 3:11–12; Gen. 3:21; Eph. 2:8–10; and Heb. 11:4. How is the way of Cain an example of religion without faith? How does his story illustrate what Jude was warning against?

From the Commentary

Jude 12 and 13 present six vivid pictures of the false teachers and help to explain why they are dangerous to the church.

(1) Filthy spots (v. 12a). Peter called them spots and blemishes (2 Peter 2:13). The Greek word translated “spots” can also mean “hidden rocks.” The mariner who is unaware of the hidden rocks can quickly wreck his ship. The pilot must always be alert, for waters that look calm and safe can contain treacherous reefs. Spiritual leaders must constantly be on guard.

(2) Selfish shepherds (v. 12b). The word translated “feeding” means “shepherding.” Instead of shepherding the flock and caring for the needs of the people, these apostates only take care of themselves. Jude may have had in mind Isaiah 56:10–12 and Ezekiel 34, where the prophets condemned the political and spiritual leaders of the nation (“shepherds”) for exploiting the people and caring only for themselves.

(3) Empty clouds (v. 12c). Clouds that promise rain, but fail to produce, are a disappointment to the farmer whose crops desperately need water. The apostates look like men who can give spiritual help, and they boast of their abilities, but they are unable to produce. “Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift [a gift he does not give] is like clouds and wind without rain” (Prov. 25:14). They promise liberty, but they can only give bondage (2 Peter 2:19).

(4) Dead trees (v. 12d). The picture is that of an orchard in autumn, the time when the farmer expects fruit. But these trees are fruitless! “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16). Those who teach and preach the Word have the responsibility of feeding others, but the false teachers have nothing to give. Not only are they fruitless, but they are also rootless (“plucked up by the root”); this is why they are “twice

dead.” What a contrast to the godly man in Psalm 1:3!

(5) Raging waves (v. 13a). I personally do not enjoy being *in* or *on* the ocean (I am not a good swimmer). However, I do enjoy sitting *by* the ocean and contemplating its grandeur and power. But I certainly would not want to be either in or on the ocean in a storm! There is great power in those waves, as many a mariner has discovered. But Jude compared the apostates to “raging waves of the sea” not because of their power but because of their pride and arrogant speech.

(6) Wandering stars (v. 13b). Jude was not referring to fixed stars, planets, or comets, because they have definite positions and orbits. He was referring to meteors, falling stars that suddenly appear and then vanish into the darkness, never to be seen again. Our Lord is compared to a star (Rev. 2:28; 22:16), and Christians are to shine as stars in this dark world (Phil. 2:15). Fixed stars can be depended on to guide the traveler through the darkness, but wandering stars can only lead him astray.

—*Be Alert*, pages 177–80

9. What are the practical dangers these six types of false teachers present to the church? How are these dangers still in evidence in today’s church? What should our response be to these kinds of false teachers?

From the Commentary

All that we know about Enoch from Scripture is found in Genesis 5:18–24; Hebrews 11:5; and verses 14 and 15 in Jude. He is called “the

seventh from Adam” to identify him as the *godly* Enoch, since Cain had a son of the same name (Gen. 4:17). In a society that was rapidly being polluted and destroyed by sin, Enoch walked with God and kept his life clean. He also ministered as a prophet and announced the coming judgment.

Bible scholars tell us that this quotation is from an apocryphal book called *The Book of Enoch*. The fact that Jude quoted from this nonbiblical book does not mean the book is inspired and trustworthy, any more than Paul’s quotations from the Greek poets put God’s “seal of approval” on everything they wrote. The Spirit of God led Jude to use this quotation and make it a part of the inspired Scriptures.

When Enoch originally gave this message, it is possible that he was also referring to the coming judgment of the flood. He certainly lived in an ungodly age, and it seemed that sinners were getting away with their evil deeds. But Enoch made it clear that judgment was coming and that the ungodly would get what was coming to them!

—*Be Alert*, page 182

10. Review Jude 14–15. Why might Jude have included this reference to Enoch’s prophecy? How might that prophecy relate to the judgment Peter wrote about in 2 Peter 3? How is that important for us today?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you’ve explored thus far in this study of Jude 1–16. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these

things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. In what ways is Jude a “call to arms” in your life? What are some of the ways you play a role in the army Jude referred to?

12. In what ways are you a steward of your church community? What does it mean to carry some of the responsibility for keeping the church alive? What challenges does your church community face today? Is there a role you can play to address those challenges? If so, how will you do this?

13. What sort of false teachers have you encountered in your faith journey? What dangers did they pose to your church? To your own faith?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to help someone who is influenced by the false teachers that threaten the church today? Be specific. Go back through Jude 1–16 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Idea: The claim that “the church is always one generation away from extinction” is a frightening possibility. How well is your church teaching and training the generation to come? Talk with church leaders about the impact your church is having on young adults and teenagers. Ask how you can help, then commit to making a practical difference in the generation to come. You don't have to teach or lead small groups (unless that's your gifting)—even just committing to daily prayer could be a good option. But do something so the church has a bright and hopeful future.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence) inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read Jude 17–25. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapter 12, “You Don’t Have to Stumble,” in Be Alert.*

Standing Firm

(JUDE 17–25)

Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read Jude 17–25. This lesson references chapter 12 in Be Alert. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

I read somewhere that the Great Wall of China was penetrated at least three times by the enemy, and each time the guards were bribed! A strong defense depends on strong people, and this applies to spiritual battles as well as military contests. If the church is to oppose and defeat the false teachers, then all of us in the church must be strong and able to “stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). There is always the danger of stumbling (Jude 24), and a stumble is the first step toward a fall.

In this closing paragraph, Jude addressed his beloved readers and gave them four instructions to follow if they would stand firm and resist the apostates.

1. Why is it sometimes difficult to “stand firm” against the teachings and influence of apostates or false teachers? What is it about false teachers that appeals to believers? Why do they get any followers at all? How is this similar to the way cults are formed?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from Jude 17–25 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

From the very beginning, Satan has attacked the Word of God. “Yea, hath God said?” was his opening thrust when he led Eve into disobedience in the garden (Gen. 3:1). Once we begin to question God’s Word, we are vulnerable to Satan’s other attacks, for only the truth of the Word can protect us from the lies of the devil. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20).

While our Lord had many disciples, He selected only a few to be *apostles*. The word means “one who is sent with a commission.” In order to qualify, a believer had to be a witness of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:21–22; 1 Cor. 9:1). The apostles lived with Christ during His ministry, learned from Him, and were sent by Him into all the world to carry the good news of salvation.

—*Be Alert*, pages 187–88

3. Respond to this statement: “Where there is the authentic, the counterfeit will appear.” How is this true in Jude’s letter? How is this true today?

More to Consider: Jude mentioned the words that were “spoken” by the apostles, because originally there were no New Testament epistles. Over the years, inspired letters were written by Paul, Peter, and John; we have these letters in our New Testament. We also have a record of some of their sermons in the book of Acts. We no longer depend on tradition, since we have the completed Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New.

Whenever somebody offers you a “new revelation,” test it by what the apostles wrote and by what Jesus Christ taught. You will soon discover that the “revelation” is a lie.

From the Commentary

The false teachers want to divide the church and lead people out of the true fellowship into their false fellowship. “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after

them” (Acts 20:30). Their appeal is usually, “We have a deeper knowledge of the Word that your church doesn’t have! We have a better understanding of prophecy, or of the Christian life, than you do.” They offer a “higher quality” religion than that of the apostles.

Not only do false teachers divide the church, but they also deceive the church, because they are “sensual, having not the Spirit.” The word *sensual* means the opposite of “spiritual.” This is the way Paul used it in 1 Corinthians 2:14–16, where it is translated “natural.” (The Greek word is *psukikos*, which means “soulish.”) Because the false teachers do not have the Spirit of God, they must function on their natural “soul power” alone.

—*Be Alert*, page 189

4. What is “soul power”? What happens to a church when God’s people can’t discern between “soulish” ministry and the true ministry of the Spirit? How does religious showmanship negatively impact the church? What is the “false fire” in the church today? (See Lev. 10.)

From Today’s World

Today’s church is a wide and varied thing. On one edge you have hyper-conservative believers who hold fast to doctrine that they claim is inerrant and unchangeable. On the other, you have progressives who continue to examine and unravel familiar doctrines in search of new revelation and understanding. Between these two extremes you can find all shapes and sizes of doctrine with a few key areas of universal agreement spread widely across that middle. The

folks on the conservative edge question anything that doesn't fit in their understanding and call it bad theology or heresy. Those at the other edge call the conservative theologies outdated and shortsighted.

5. Why are some quick to say that anything unfamiliar is false teaching? Are they right? What is our role in today's church when it comes to examining Scripture? What are the nonnegotiables in faith? How can churchgoers hold fast to those things while still exploring what it means to live the Christian faith in the twenty-first century?

From the Commentary

The Christian life must never stand still; if it does, it will go backward. A house left to itself falls apart. The apostates are in the business of tearing down, but each Christian must be involved in building up—first, his own spiritual life and then his local assembly.

The foundation for our Christian life is our “most holy faith” (Jude 20), which is the same as “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). There is a sense, of course, in which our faith in Jesus Christ is the basis for our growth, but even that faith depends on what God has revealed to us in His Word. Subjective faith depends on objective revelation of truth.

The Word of God is certainly central in spiritual growth. I have yet to meet a strong, fruitful Christian who ignores his Bible. We must daily spend devotional time in the Word, seeking the mind of God. We must also study the Word regularly, in a disciplined way, so that we better understand what it teaches. The gifted Chinese preacher, Watchman

Nee, used to read through the New Testament once a month. This becomes apparent when you read his books, for you are struck with his wonderful insights into God's Word. The members of the Chinese church used to have a saying, "No Bible—no breakfast!" If we followed that motto in America, I wonder how many Christians would go hungry.

—*Be Alert*, page 190

6. Where does the power for building the Christian life come from? (See v. 20.) What are some ways the church is "standing still" (and therefore going backward)? What are some ways we can turn that around? What does a true commitment to building the church look like for the individual believer?

From the Commentary

What does it mean to "pray in the Holy Spirit"? (Note the contrast with Jude 19—"having not the Spirit.") It means to pray according to the leading of the Spirit. It has well been said, "Prayer is not getting man's will done in heaven—it is getting God's will done on earth." This agrees with 1 John 5:14–15.

As Christians, we may pray in solitude (Matt. 6:6), but we never pray *alone*; the Spirit of God joins with us as we pray (Rom. 8:26–28) because He knows the mind of God and can direct us. He can give us wisdom and knowledge from the Word (Eph. 1:15ff.). He can also help us approach the Father through the access we have in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:18). We worship God "in the Spirit" (Phil. 3:3), and the Spirit

motivates us to pray, for He is “the Spirit of grace and of supplications” (Zech. 12:10).

—*Be Alert*, page 191

7. Prayer is always an important part of our faith lives. What message did Jude give us about prayer? How does the Holy Spirit help us in our prayer lives? If prayer feels dry, should we wait until we feel the Holy Spirit moving us? Why or why not?

From the Commentary

To love God means much more than to enjoy a special kind of feeling. Of course, as we grow in grace, we do experience deeper fellowship with the Father (John 14:21–24), and we do have times when He seems very near. The Bible compares this with the love of a husband and wife (Eph. 5:22ff.). Any happily married couple can tell you that love deepens over the years.

But it takes more than ecstatic feelings to make a successful marriage—or a successful Christian life! There must also be obedience and mutual concern. “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected” (1 John 2:5). “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love” (John 15:10). We grow in our love for God as we listen to His Word, obey it, and delight in doing what pleases Him. That is how we keep ourselves in God’s love.

God’s love is a holy love; it is not shallow sentiment. “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Ps. 97:10). To love God is to love what He loves and

hate what He hates! We please Him by doing those things that He commands. It is the dedicated, separated Christian who enjoys the deepest fellowship with the Father in the family (2 Cor. 6:14–18).

We build our Christian life on the foundation of faith and through the motivation of love. But we also need hope: “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” The believer’s eyes must be lifted heavenward. “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). “Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12).

—*Be Alert*, page 192

8. How do we build our Christian life? What is the foundation? What is our motivation? What role does hope play in our life of faith?

More to Consider: The word translated “looking” (Jude 21) means “earnestly expecting.” It describes an attitude of life that is motivated by the promise of our Lord’s return. How is the “earnestly expecting” of the apostates different from the expectation of God’s people? How does the promise of deliverance from this evil world color the hope of those who love God? What hope do nonbelievers count on?

From the Commentary

What should be the attitude of the growing Christian toward those who are being influenced by the apostates? Jude instructed his readers to

exercise discernment and to act on the basis of that discernment. He described three different kinds of people who need spiritual help. The first are those who doubt (v. 22). These are the people who are wavering. They are probably the “unstable souls” Peter wrote about (2 Peter 2:14). These people are converted, but they are not grounded in the faith. Our responsibility is to have mercy on them, or show compassion toward them, by seeking to lead them away from the influences of the apostates. This kind of ministry demands a great deal of love and patience, and we must keep in mind that immature believers are like little children who think they know right from wrong. If you say no to them, they will only rebel and become more stubborn!

The second kind of people who need help are the burning (v. 23a). Apparently these are the people who have left the fellowship and are now a part of the apostate group. They need to be snatched out of the fire! The angels took Lot by the hand and pulled him out of Sodom (Gen. 19:16), and sometimes that must be done in order to rescue ignorant and unstable believers from the clutches of false teachers.

The third kind are the dangerous (v. 23b). The phrase *with fear* means “with caution.” In trying to help those who have erred, we must be careful not to be trapped ourselves! Many a would-be rescuer has been drowned himself. When an unstable believer has been captured by false doctrine, we must be very careful as we try to help him, for Satan can use him to defile us. In trying to save him, we may be stained or burned ourselves!

The principle Jude was laying down was that stronger believers must never think they are beyond satanic influence. Even while serving the Lord and seeking to rescue one of His children, we can become defiled by those we want to help. The Old Testament Jews had to be very careful to avoid ceremonial defilement, and this included even their

clothing (Lev. 13:47ff.; 14:47; 15:17). If a “clean” person touched an “unclean” garment, then he was defiled.

—*Be Alert*, pages 193–95

9. What are the best ways to draw each of these groups of people away from false teachers? How can the church exercise spiritual discernment? What is each individual’s responsibility in discernment?

From the Commentary

This well-known benediction contains a wealth of spiritual truth for the believer to receive. If we want to keep our feet on the ground spiritually, walk straight, and not stumble, then we must yield ourselves fully to the Savior. He alone is able to guard us, but we must “keep [ourselves] in the love of God” (Jude 21). He is *able* if we are *willing*!

—*Be Alert*, pages 195–96

10. What is the final message of Jude’s letter? What is the significance of Jude’s teaching that believers are preserved and can’t be lost? How does that truth affect the way we live out our faith lives? How does this final message address our daily walk?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of Jude 17–25. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. What are ways you stand firm against false teaching? Do you know your “weak spots” when it comes to discerning good doctrine from bad? What are some ways you can grow your understanding so you won't be tempted to follow a false leader?

12. What are some examples of overt showmanship in your church experience? How do you know when someone is putting themselves above God in their ministry or worship? Have you ever focused more on your own soul than the Holy Spirit's role in your life? What role does pride play in those situations? How do you battle pride?

13. One of Jude's messages was the importance of drawing people away from false leaders. But this is no easy task. Have you ever engaged in conversations with people who believe in false teachings? What was that experience like? Why is it difficult to draw people away from false teaching? What role does your personal relationship with Jesus play in those sorts of conversations?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you'd like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It's better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don't try).

Do you want to more fully yield yourself to Jesus? Be specific. Go back through Jude 17–25 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Idea: Among other things, Jude emphasized the importance of prayer in building a strong faith foundation. Be intentional with your prayer life this week. Ask God for wisdom as you seek to become more diligent in your faith life. Then continue that vigilant prayer life into the next week and the next and the next.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence) inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've noted in the Going Forward section. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the Going Forward section. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*

Summary and Review

Notes for Small Groups: This session is a summary and review of this book. Because of that, it is shorter than the previous lessons. If you are using this in a small-group setting, consider combining this lesson with a time of fellowship or a shared meal.

Before you begin ...

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- Briefly review the notes you made in the previous sessions. You will refer to previous sections throughout this bonus lesson.*

Looking Back

1. Over the past eight lessons, you've examined four books of the Bible: 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. What expectations did you bring to this study? In what ways were those expectations met?
2. What is the most significant personal discovery you've made from this study?

3. What surprised you most about these books of the Bible? What, if anything, troubled you?

Progress Report

4. Take a few moments to review the Going Forward sections of the previous lessons. How would you rate your progress for each of the things you chose to work on? What adjustments, if any, do you need to make to continue on the path toward spiritual maturity?

5. In what ways have you grown closer to Christ during this study? Take a moment to celebrate those things. Then think of areas where you feel you still need to grow and note those here. Make plans to revisit this study in a few weeks to review your growing faith.

Things to Pray About

6. The books in this study primarily speak to the issue of being alert and aware of all the things that can challenge your faith. As you reflect on this theme, ask God to give you discernment and wisdom so you can build a solid faith foundation.

7. The messages in these books include freedom, faithfulness, diligence, false doctrine, the future health of the church, and standing firm in your beliefs. Spend time praying for each of these topics.

8. Whether you've been studying this in a small group or on your own, there are many other Christians working through the very same issues you discovered when examining 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. Take time to pray for each of them, that God would reveal truth, that the Holy Spirit would guide you, and that each person might grow in spiritual maturity according to God's will.

A Blessing of Encouragement

Studying the Bible is one of the best ways to learn how to be more like Christ. Thanks for taking this step. In closing, let this blessing precede you and follow you into the next week while you continue to marinate in God's Word:

May God light your path to greater understanding as you review the truths found in 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and the book of Jude and consider how they can help you grow closer to Christ.

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