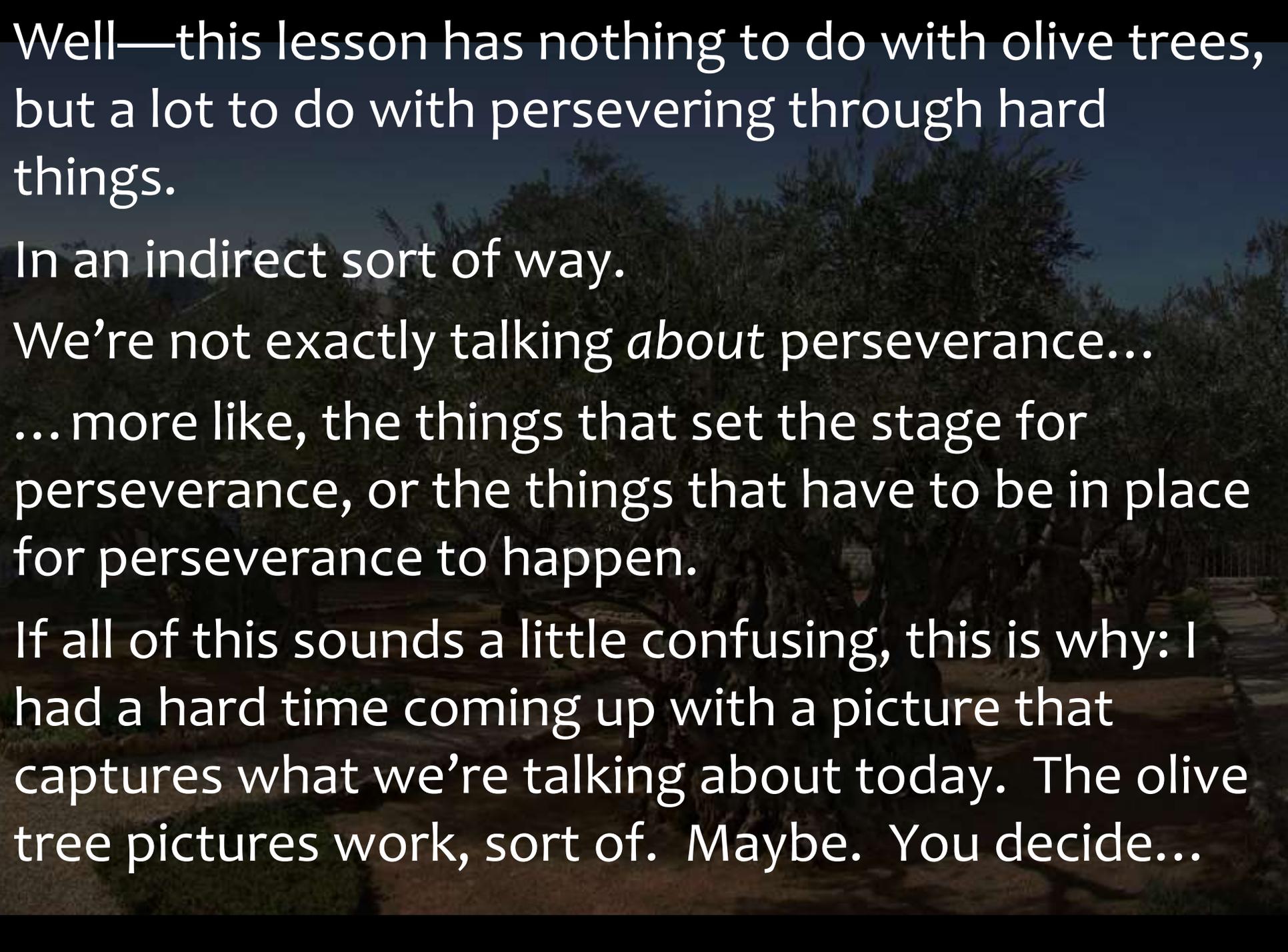
A photograph of olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane, with a path leading through them. The trees are dark green and have a gnarled appearance. The path is made of dirt and leads towards the background. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

These are olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the Mt. of Olives, just outside of the old city of Jerusalem—many of these trees date back to the time of Christ: He walked among these very trees.

They have persevered. In spite of all that's happened among and around and to them, they're still growing.

- There's an olive tree on the island of Crete that is estimated at around 3000 years old.
- And there's one in Bethlehem that, according to the Smithsonian, may be somewhere in the neighborhood of 4000-5000 years old.



Well—this lesson has nothing to do with olive trees, but a lot to do with persevering through hard things.

In an indirect sort of way.

We're not exactly talking *about* perseverance...

...more like, the things that set the stage for perseverance, or the things that have to be in place for perseverance to happen.

If all of this sounds a little confusing, this is why: I had a hard time coming up with a picture that captures what we're talking about today. The olive tree pictures work, sort of. Maybe. You decide...

We've been working our way through Jude's short letter, and we're almost done. One more lesson after this, in case you're counting.

Here's the outline of Jude's short letter we're using:

v. 1-4—Jude's introduction and purpose: Contend for the faith

v. 5-16—Jude's sober warning and encouragement: The ungodly will be judged

v. 17-25—Jude's exhortation and exaltation: *Keep yourselves in the love of God—He will keep you*

Theme: Contend for the faith with confidence—God will judge those who are distorting it. Key verse: v. 3.

Ok—so Jude *wanted* to write a letter about... what?
But instead, he wrote the letter we have in our Bibles which is about... what?

The majority of his letter (v. 4-16, and we could probably include v. 18-19 in there as well) is a description of the character, danger, judgment, and destiny of “certain people” (v. 4) who were teaching Christians that sin—once you’re forgiven—is no problem, anything goes. They “pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” Jude says that “the gloom of utter darkness” has been reserved for them forever.

Jude crams all of his exhortation, instruction, and imperative (“do this...” verbs into v. 17-23.

How do they contend for the faith? That’s what Jude tells them in these verses. Short, to the point.

- Apparently contending for the faith is not something that takes a seminary degree to do.
- Apparently contending for the faith is not something that only pastors can do.
- Apparently contending for the faith is something that even little kids can do. What he says in v. 17-23 is not rocket surgery.
- Contending for the faith is to be the work of every Christian in every age. Let’s explore...

But here's an interesting question: if Jude's reason for writing was to appeal to his readers to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints," how are they supposed to do that?

- The vast majority of his letter doesn't tell them to do anything.
- In v. 4-16, 18-19 there are no imperative verbs—nothing that tells them to do anything. Just descriptions, etc.

So what are they supposed to do? How do they "contend for the faith?" And what are we supposed to glean from this little letter? How do we "contend for the faith" in our day?

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

John Calvin on Jude v. 21-23—“He shews the manner in which they could overcome all the devices of Satan, that is, by having love connected with faith, and by standing on their guard as it were in their watch-tower, until the coming of Christ. But as he uses often and thickly his metaphors, so he has here a way of speaking peculiar to himself, which must be briefly noticed.”

So let us, along with the eminent Dr. Calvin, briefly notice the metaphors which Jude “often and thickly” uses...

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

This is how Jude exhorts his “beloved” (v. 1, 3, 17, 20) to respond to the false teaching they’re hearing. And what he tells them to do is very basic Christianity, which should be encouraging to us. We can do what he is exhorting his readers to do here. He essentially tells them to do three things:

1. Remember that false teachers will always be around – v. 17-19
2. Cultivate your relationship with God – v. 20-21
3. Go after the straying ones – v. 22-23

That’s it. Basic stuff. Any believer can do that. Can you do more than that? Sure. But not less.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Remember that false teachers will always be around – v. 17-19

This is the first thing Jude tells his readers to do, his first instruction in contending for the faith—you should not be surprised that there are false teachers. And he gives them a strongly-worded exhortation to keep remembering that: “...you *must remember...*”

- Jude again—as he began his letter—expresses his strong love for them. They are “beloved” to him—he emphasizes his strong personal concern for them. Jude is a shepherd of the sheep.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Remember that false teachers will always be around – v. 17-19

Jude tells them to remember “the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Prophecy?

Maybe. But probably more along the lines of shepherds who cared deeply for the sheep—they could see what was coming.

- There have always been false teachers around—Jude points to Balaam and Korah in v. 11, two notorious OT individuals who worked hard at swaying God’s people and distorting His commands.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Remember that false teachers will always be around – v. 17-19

Jude tells them to remember “the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The predictions of the apostles... let's see a few:

- Let's start back *before* the apostles—Matt. 7:15-20; also Matt. 24:11, 24.
- Acts 20:28-31
- 1 Tim. 4:1
- 2 Tim. 3:1-5
- 2 Peter 2:1-3

The quote in v. 18—where's that in the Bible?

- It's not—probably just a quoted oral warning.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Remember that false teachers will always be around – v. 17-19

Jude says that, according to his quote, these “scoffers” will be one of the characteristic marks of the “last time.” What is this “last time?”

Take a look at Acts 2:17—the “last days,” or last phase of redemptive history, began with the coming of Christ (1 Pet. 1:20). Also:

- 1 Cor. 10:11 It should be no surprise to us that
- 2 Tim. 3:1 false teaching is widespread.
- Heb. 1:2 Distortion of sound doctrine will
- James 5:3 continue until the end. It is
- 2 Pet. 3:3 characteristic of this last age.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Remember that false teachers will always be around – v. 17-19

In v. 19 Jude identifies the ones spreading error in his day with the “scoffers” predicted by the apostles. He gives a threefold description:

They “cause divisions”—how?

- Think of the implications of v. 4, 8 16.

They are “worldly people”—meaning what?

- They thought of themselves as spiritually elite, as the *pneumatikoi*—the ones who were the spiritual aristocracy... but Jude says, no, you are the *psuchikoi*—flesh-dominated, physical life only, with no spiritual life at all.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Remember that false teachers will always be around – v. 17-19

In v. 19 Jude identifies the ones spreading error in his day with the “scoffers” predicted by the apostles. He gives a threefold description:

They are “devoid of the Spirit”—meaning what?

- They were not the elite spiritual class—rather, they did not possess the indwelling Spirit at all.
- Barclay: “The truth about these so-called intellectual and spiritual people was that they desired to sin, and they twisted religion into a justification for sin.”

Be discerning: false teaching is characteristic of our age.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Cultivate your relationship with God – v. 20-21

Remember again what Jude is doing here: he is telling us how to protect ourselves from being led astray—this is how to contend for the faith.

Michael Green on v. 20-21: “And now he launches out on some highly compressed Christian instruction, which, if followed, would preserve his readers from contamination by the false teachers.”

Yeah—“highly compressed” is right. Jude packs a huge amount in a small space: there is much food in these four clauses to chew on for a long time.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Cultivate your relationship with God – v. 20-21

“building yourselves up in your most holy faith...”

Paul raises the same concern in Col. 2:6-8. How do you recognize, refute, and resist error?

- By becoming doctrinally strong. There is no other way. We cannot be biblically illiterate.
- It is a daily, ongoing imperative, and it centers squarely on the Word of God.
- See Acts 20:32, and Paul’s emphasis in his letter to the Ephesians in 4:11-16. Also 1 Thess. 5:11.
- Think about the implications of Peter’s words in 1 Pet. 2:2, and John’s in 1 John 2:14.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Cultivate your relationship with God – v. 20-21

“...praying in the Holy Spirit...”

Is this praying in tongues? Is that what it means?

Easy answer: No. Not even close. Remember: this is one of the ways that you cultivate your relationship with God and contend for the faith so that you are not susceptible to false teaching.

- This is prayer that is consistent with the will of God—the Spirit’s will.
- The Spirit intercedes for us “according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26-27). So: pray for others according to the will of God (as revealed in Scripture).

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Cultivate your relationship with God – v. 20-21

“...keep yourselves in the love of God...”

What in the world is *that* supposed to mean?

Take a look at John 15:9-11.

- Jude is saying the same thing shorthand.
- This is abiding in His love—staying in the place where you grasp and respond to His immense love. Then you won't be swayed by error.
- Notice that Jude says they are loved by God (v. 1), then he prays that his readers would increasingly enjoy that love (v. 2). In v. 21 he is telling them to stay there.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Cultivate your relationship with God – v. 20-21

“... waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Don't we already have mercy? Do we need more?

Notice 2 Tim. 1:18—same thought there. It is an awesome mercy that sinners are justified, adopted, and granted eternal life with God Himself. When Christ returns, when we enter in to the full experience of eternal life, it will be by mercy alone.

- So this is keeping the fire of expectation burning.
- One of the ways we cultivate our relationship with God and resist false teaching is by watching for our Lord's return—see 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 4:7.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Go after the straying ones – v. 22-23

What is happening in these two verses?

- It is Galatians 6:1
- But behind all that, it is Matthew 18:10-20

This is the Good Shepherd seeking His straying ones through you. Calvin: “He adds another exhortation, shewing how the faithful ought to act in reprovng their brethren, in order to restore them to the Lord. He reminds them that such ought to be treated in different ways, every one according to his disposition: for to the meek and teachable we ought to use kindness; but others, who are hard and perverse, must be subdued by terror.”

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Go after the straying ones – v. 22-23

Remember this: protection from going astray is not done in isolation, but in community. Sir John Seeley: “When the power of reclaiming the lost dies out of the Church, it ceases to be the Church.”

- Some are attracted by evil, doubting the Lord and His Word, wavering—invite them to coffee, get your Bible out, and lovingly warn and restore.
- Some are nearing judgment—too close—getting a little singed. Don't mince words here: warn clearly. When there is the danger of falling in to a fire, we grab hold and don't let go.

Contending for the faith – v. 17-23

Go after the straying ones – v. 22-23

Remember this: protection from going astray is not done in isolation, but in community. Sir John Seeley: “When the power of reclaiming the lost dies out of the Church, it ceases to be the Church.”

- Others are very hard—exercise great care here, because you may end up being affected, or defiled, by their sin.
- Here, you hate the sin and everything connected with it, but still treat the sinner with mercy, as God has treated you. Mercy and fear at the same time.
- Use great caution, with much counsel, when you confront this person.

“The spiritual survival and prosperity of us who love Christ, especially in times of growing apostasy, requires the utmost perseverance and care. We must be defensive—remembering what Scripture teaches about the presence of false teachers. And we must also be proactive—diligently practicing the disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and obedience as we eagerly anticipate Christ’s return. Finally, we must exercise bold discernment in taking the offensive and reaching out to apostates and those influenced by their heresies. The Christian life has always been a pilgrimage and a spiritual battle, but its end will be triumphant.” – John MacArthur