Small Group Guide: The Portrait of Apostasy

Based on the Book of Jude

Before You Begin

Encourage group members to read the entire letter of Jude before gathering. It is a short letter and can be read in just a few minutes, but reading it in full will give everyone a stronger foundation for the discussion. Consider reading it in more than one translation.

Key Takeaways

1. Apostasy is a real and present danger. The Greek word apostasia means to defect, revolt, or fall away. It describes someone who once believed but has rejected God's will in order to pursue their own. This is not an ancient problem only. It is a pattern that repeats throughout history and into the present day.

2. God uses history as a warning. Jude points to three Old Testament examples: Israel in the wilderness, the fallen angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah. In each case, people or beings who had been given an extraordinary gift from God rejected that gift and faced serious consequences. These stories are not just history. They are mirrors.

3. Ancient errors show up in modern forms. Jude identifies the way of Cain (pride and self-will), Balaam's error (greed), and Korah's rebellion (rejection of God-given authority). These same spiritual traps exist today in our culture, in our churches, and in our own hearts.

4. The false way of life is empty. Jude describes ungodly people as clouds without rain, trees without fruit, wandering stars. The life they offer looks appealing from a distance but has nothing real to give. God's way, by contrast, offers life that is truly life.

5. This is a life and death matter. Jude's letter is not about hating the ungodly. It is about caring enough for people, both inside and outside the church, to stand for the truth so that lives can be saved.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. Before this sermon, had you ever heard the word apostasy? What did you think it meant, or what does it mean to you now?

2. The pastor encouraged everyone to read Jude in full and in different translations. Did anyone do that this week? What stood out to you?

Going Deeper

3. Jude begins by saying, "Though you already know all of this, I want to remind you." Why do you think reminders are so important in the Christian life? What happens when we stop reminding ourselves of what God has done for us?

4. The pastor described how Israel stood at the edge of the promised land with an incredible gift before them, and yet they turned back out of fear and unbelief. He asked: "What is your Egypt? What are you allowing to distract you from looking forward to God?" Take a moment to reflect on that question. What pulls you back toward old ways of living?

5. Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1:12-17 describe him as the worst of sinners who received mercy. How does remembering where we came from and what God has done for us protect us from drifting away from him?

6. The pastor described three ancient errors that Jude identifies:

    - The way of Cain: pride and self-will over God's will
    - Balaam's error: greed and the love of money
    - Korah's rebellion: rejection of God-given authority

7. Which of these do you think is the most common trap in our culture today? Which do you find most personally challenging?

8. The pastor made the point that Jude's letter is not about hating ungodly people but about caring for the church so that it can stand and serve God's mission of saving lives. How does that reframe the way we think about contending for the faith?

9. Jude describes false teachers as shepherds who feed only themselves. What does a self-serving approach to faith look like in practical terms? What does a genuinely others-focused faith look like by contrast?

10. The pastor referenced the parable of the prodigal son and said that the father was waiting for the son to come home. He connected this to the idea that God is waiting for those who have wandered to return. Have you ever experienced a season of wandering? What did coming back look like for you?

Reflection and Application

10. The pastor said: "You need to pray for yourself to stay hungry for God, to stay passionate for God, to keep yourself guarded and contend for the faith in your life." What does

staying hungry for God look like in your daily routine right now? Is there anything that has been crowding that out?

11. Jude warns that worship can become hollow, that people can find themselves just going through the motions. On an honest scale, how would you describe your engagement with God right now? What would it look like to move from going through the motions to genuinely encountering God?

12. The pastor noted that in all three of Jude's historical examples, there were also people who remained faithful. Joshua and Caleb trusted God when others would not. How can this group encourage one another to be the ones who trust God, even when the voices around us say otherwise?

Practical Applications

This Week, Choose One:

- **Read and reflect.** Read through the entire letter of Jude once each day for seven days, using a different translation at least twice. At the end of the week, write down two or three things that stood out to you that you did not notice before.

- **Examine your reminders.** Think about the spiritual rhythms in your life: church attendance, communion, prayer, reading Scripture. Ask yourself honestly whether these have become hollow habits or genuine encounters with God. Choose one rhythm this week to approach with fresh intentionality and an open heart.

- **Identify your Egypt.** Spend time in prayer asking God to show you honestly what pulls you back toward old ways of living. Write it down. Share it with a trusted person in this group or with a close friend, and ask them to pray with you and check in with you.

- **Pray for someone who has wandered.** Think of someone you know who once walked with God but has drifted away. Commit to praying for them by name every day this week. Consider whether God might be calling you to reach out to them.

- **Study one of the three ancient errors more deeply.** Choose either the way of Cain (Genesis 4, Hebrews 11:4), Balaam's error (Numbers 22-24, 2 Peter 2:15), or Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16) and read the full account. Come back next week ready to share one thing you learned.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your time together by praying specifically for:

- Gratitude for the gift of salvation and the price Jesus paid

- Hunger and passion to pursue God rather than drift from him
- Wisdom to recognize spiritual traps in your own life and in the culture around you
- Those in your lives who are living the empty way of life Jude describes, that they would come home to God
- The church, that it would stand firm in the faith and serve God's mission of saving lives

Next week the group will continue in the letter of Jude. Come prepared having read the full letter again and reflecting on what it means to stand firm while also reaching out to those who are wandering.