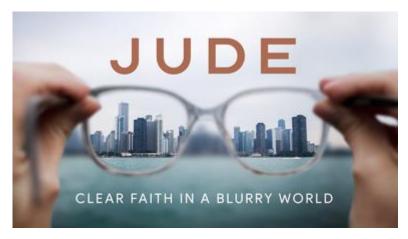


Seeing Clearly, Living Faithfully: Following God's Guidance in a Confused World

Jude 1:17-23

Tim Badal | November 26, 2023



Turn in your Bibles to the book of Jude. We are in week three of a four-week series titled "Clear Faith in a Blurry World." We have been seeing through God's Word that Jude has a word for us in the year 2023. It's a word that is aptly needed because of the many voices that have crept in unnoticed in our world, even in the life of the Christian and life of the church.

In the first two weeks we have seen how people had crept in unnoticed and as a result, people were starting to believe they were god. Then because they thought they were god, they also thought all manner of sensuality and the pursuit of pleasures was available to them. The Christians were also buying into this, believing the world's lies—the things these influencers were communicating.

In response, Jude wrote this one-page letter to people he loved, reminding them to contend for the faith. That word 'contend' is only used twice in the Bible, both times are in this letter. It literally means to agonize, to fight with all your heart, mind and soul, to fight passionately and powerfully to achieve what you're fighting for. This word conjures up the idea that we too should be fighting, and rightly so. But many of us, when we hear this word 'fight,' begin to think about taking the fight to the world, to our friends and neighbors, to social media pages, fighting in a way that is mainly external. This morning we're going to learn that this agonizing fight is an internal fight. It's a fight that begins inside each of us.

You see, there are a lot of people who think the way we will fix the world is by fighting against the world, but that's not true at all. In fact, the fight we should be having is about being better Christians, stronger Christians, faithful Christians, Christians who see far more clearly than the blurry world wants us to. We need to see clearly based on the truths of God's Word, daily putting on the lenses of God's Word so we can discern the difference between lies and truth. We've learned in these past weeks that these lies are prevalent. They come in our movies, in our music, through our social media, through the podcasts we listen to. We are inundated with voices that speak all kinds of lies to us. Little by little, phrase by phrase, moment by moment, they're telling us to move farther away from God and closer to the greater person being us, to make us happy, to bring us pleasure, to give us the place in life we're looking for. Jude is going to say to us today, "I want you to fight that."

While he's used the first two sermons of this series to remind us who these people are and what these voices are saying, he's now going to pivot to saying, "Here's how we fight. Here's how we become the type of Christians God wants us to be. These are the things we need to lean into." This morning in verses 17-23, we're going to see what it means to contend for the faith that was delivered once and for all to the saints. Follow along as we read these verses:

¹⁷ But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." ¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

In this passage, Jude wants us to get a new perspective. I'm going to call it having a "clear faith" in our blurry world. We need to change our lenses, our perspective, and to do this we have to look in three different directions.

Looking back

First, Jude tells us we need to be looking back. I also want us to be looking back. If we're going to see clearly, if we're going to live faithfully, we've got to follow God's guidance in this confused world, beginning by looking back. He says this to the church: "But you must remember..." Not 'should,' not 'might,' but, "you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions. It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.""

What Jude wants us to know right away is that we have to look back and remember something. Now, he has told us a couple times we need to remember. In fact, earlier in the letter, he's reminding us that we should have known something. There's this idea that we should know things we don't because we don't bring them to remembrance. We don't make it a priority to remember them so we will be equipped for the life we're living.

I want you to notice a couple things about what he says. He says, "I want you to remember the predictions—the prophecies—of the apostles." Right away some of you are like, "All right. We're going to talk end times. We're going to get times and dates. I'm going to get my pen ready. Let's get the charts out. What happens first—the rapture? The tribulation? The millennial kingdom? Let's go." Some of you are totally confused about what I'm saying right now. But if you've been around the church, the idea of the end times and what's going to happen in the future is an important thing. But I want you to notice that times and dates aren't the issue. Instead it's the details of the days, the kind of days, the kind of people who are going to be involved. If your end times is all about trying to figure out when Jesus is coming back, you're missing the point.

What Jesus wants us to know and what Jude is wanting to communicate here is the type of world we're going to live in. There are going to be scoffers. There are going to be people devoid of the Spirit. There are going to be people who follow their ungodly passions. If you want to know if we're living in the end times, just ask, "Am I around people who sound like this? Am I around grumblers, malcontents, people following their own sinful desires? Are there loud-mouth boasters, showing favoritism to gain an advantage? Is that the type of world we're living in?" The resounding answer is, "Yes! We are living in last days."

The apostles predicted this. They prophesied about this. What we have here is a full-throated endorsement in verse 17 that we need to be people of the Word. Notice how he emphatically writes, "You must." Every one of us is to be an individual who remembers the Word of God, rehearsing it over and over again.

We will know we are cared for.

Why is this important? Because through the Word of God we know we are cared for. Twice in this passage, four times in this letter, Jude reminds us that God loves us. Why do we need to know this? If we don't understand God's love for us—how deep and profound His love is for His people—then we will fall to every lie of the devil. If we don't understand God's love and care, the temptations around us will lead us to believe that God doesn't have His best for us, that He's trying to limit us, that He's trying to keep us from a place of joy and satisfaction. If the devil can get us to think God doesn't love us, that's the first step toward getting us to love ourselves.

However, if I know and understand that the God of the universe loves me and has loved me from before the foundation of the world (John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4), and that He loved me even in my sin—that while I was a sinner, Christ died for me (Romans 5:8)—then I can believe I am now kept in the love and mercy of God. If I know this, then what temptation can the world tempt me with?

It's when our knowledge of God's love for us grows cold that we become susceptible to sin. It's the very thing the devil used in the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). "Did God really say...? Could it be that God doesn't love you as much as you think He does? Is He trying to keep something good for you away from you?"

You see, when we don't understand that God loves and cares for us, that He's there for us, we will become more and more susceptible to temptation and sin. This book of Jude reminds us over and over again that God loves us. This is God's love

letter to us. Twice in this passage we are called 'beloved.' This is a two-part word that says, "You are being loved." Wherever you're at right now, Christian, you are being loved. It's what Jude is telling us when he says we're beloved by God the Father, so as a result, mercy, peace and love are being multiplied to us exponentially.

God longs to lavish His love on you. He did this by sending Jesus Christ, the indescribable gift of heaven. He did this to show His unsurpassed love for us. The more we understand His love, the things of this world will grow strangely dim, as the songwriter says. We need to look into God's eyes and see His love. We need to recognize that if God loves us, then His plans—even His parameters—are good and right.

We will not be caught off guard.

There's a second reason why we need to remember the predictions and prophesies of the apostles which is so we will not be caught off guard. The people of Jude's day are grumblers and malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They're loud-mouthed boasters. They're showing favoritism. They crept in unnoticed. They were people who followed their own ungodly passions and scoffed at Christians. They caused divisions. They were worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

Notice what Jude does here. He's drawing reminders from the Old Testament of stories of what happened to those types of people, then he urges them to remember what the apostles said. Why? So that when we run into these people, we won't be caught off guard and so it won't freak us out.

I can't tell you how many people here at the church have come to me, freaked out about our world today. "What is the world coming to? What's going to happen to us? Is it going to get worse? What am I going to do when I lose my job? What am I going to do when I've got to move my kids here and there? What about this? What about that?" Brothers and sisters, remember the predictions of the apostles. These days were predicted to come, so we don't have to freak out.

I don't know a better way to illustrate it than this. From time to time—and this shows the sad state our Chicago sports are in—I will go to YouTube and watch game seven of the Cubs World Series win. It's quite amazing that as I watch it now, it's very different than how I watched it live. I have to be honest—I did not enjoy the Cubs World Series championship run. I was exhausted by the time it was done. I had wanted something for so long and it was actually happening, but my emotions were spent. I remember in game seven everything looked so great, then everything fell apart. I remember the first time I ever gave up faith in the Cubs was when that guy hit his home run. I said, "I'm done. I'm so done. I'm so tired of this. I'm tired of the opponent winning all the time." I began to write off my love and affection for a team I'd grown up with.

But here's what I didn't know in that moment. There were still innings to be played. There was still time on the clock. The last out had not been recorded. Even in nine innings, the outcome would not be determined. But in the end, the Cubs won.

So now I watch the game because I've been there. I've seen it. I've done it. Now I sit there with a Coke in my hand and some chips in my lap, casually eating. The guy hits a home run and I say, "Hit it as far as you want. Hit it to the moon, Rajai Davis. I don't care. Cleveland fans, go ahead and cheer." Remember LeBron James up in that skybox? He was clapping and doing all this. I can now say, "LeBron, you celebrate all you want." All because I know it's already won. The game is over.

Brothers and sisters, that's a poor illustration of what we have. We have this Book. This Book just told us in Jude that Jesus is coming with ten thousands of His holy ones to execute judgment. He's coming back. We've won the war. The victory is ours. So you don't have to freak out. You don't have to worry. God says, "Surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20). I will not leave you or forsake you (Genesis 28:15; Deuteronomy 24:31, 31:6, 31:8). Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). We are more than conquerors in Him (Romans 8:37).

We've got to stop worrying. We've got to stop fretting. "Oh, look what the devil's doing here." "Look what our country's doing there." Let the world go up in tumult. Let the mountains quake and roar. Let nations rise up against nations. Here's all we need to know: Jesus Christ says, "I'm coming back and I will take care of you until then." The reason why the Scriptures are written is to keep us from being caught off guard, so we can stop freaking out. So let's rehearse some of these Scriptures we have this morning, some prophecies of the apostles.

• Acts 20:29-30: "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things." Do we have people speaking twisted things today? You bet. Are

- they within the church? You bet. He says, "You're going to recognize them by their fruit, so be ready for it. Don't be surprised by it.
- In the next Scripture, Matthew 7:15, Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Do you think Jesus was telling the truth? The answer is yes.
- How about 2 Peter 2:1-3? "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies." Are there destructive heresies in our world today? Yes! They're on places called Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook and Twitter. They're on your media in your movies, in your TV shows. They're there. You're telling me people are going to go back? There are people who are "denying the Master who bought them"? Yeah. Are there going to be people who follow their own sensuality and blaspheme the truth? Well, that's what we're seeing. And Jude is saying, "Remember, Peter told us this." "And in their greed they will exploit you with false words." Notice what Peter says next. "Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." God is aware of this.
- Finally, we see this in 2 Timothy 3:1-5: "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty." Are there times of difficulty right now? You bet. Paul told Timothy, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, plan on it. There will be a season in time when "people will be lovers of self." Do we have lovers of self today? Yeah. "Lovers of money." Yeah. "Proud." Yes. "Arrogant." Yes. "Abusive." Yes. "Disobedient to parents." Yes. How about "ungrateful"? Yes. Even the week of Thanksgiving? You bet. "Unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power." Is that our world today? The answer is a resounding Yes!

So we don't have to be surprised. We don't have to be caught off guard. God's Word is here to tell us we're cared for, to keep us from being caught off guard, and third, to cause us to not be a casualty.

We will not be a casualty.

These things were written—this Book was written—so you wouldn't shipwreck your faith, so you wouldn't believe the lies. But it begs the question this morning: how much are <u>you</u> in this Word? It's an emphatic 'you.' Not your kids. Not your wife. Not your husband. Not the person sitting down the aisle from you. You. How much are you in this Book? You say, "Well, that's why I go to this church, Tim." You preach it. Well, that's great. But there's no way I can preach a powerful enough sermon in one hour to take care of the rest of the 167 hours in your week.

I've had people—God bless them, who are honest—who tell me they went to their phones and looked at the amount of time they involve themselves with the voices of this world. They said it was tens of hours each week. Your phone will tell you that. How much time are you sitting in front of the TV, listening to the voices of this world? Do you want to be a casualty? Then devote yourself to this Book. The early church saw miracles. They saw people saved. Why? Because they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Day after day, they gathered together. Why? To talk about this Book. To fellowship around this Book. To rejoice in this Book.

Do you want to not be caught off guard by the voices of this world? Do you not want to be a casualty of the voices of this world? Then listen to the voice of truth. You've got to look back. God has written a Book—a love letter to you—to remind you that you are loved by God, He has seen all this stuff coming from a mile away, so He has written this so you will not fall prey to it. You've got to look back.

Looking up

We also have to look up. If we want to see clearly, it involves looking up. Jude continues in verse 20 with, "But you..." Again, that's an emphatic 'you.' "But you, beloved, building yourself up in your most holy faith..." He says the way to not fall prey to the voices of the world around us is to be actively building. The idea here is one of building a house. The Greek is a compound word that literally joins the words 'building' and 'house.' You're not building something theoretical; you're building a structure, something you can see, something you can grab hold of. Your faith is not a theoretical thing; it is a real thing. It's something that is seen and felt by you, it's seen by others and it is seen by God.

You are to be building this faith. It's a continual building. It's done in the present tense, which tells us this is an ongoing effort. You don't reach a certain age and stop building your faith. There are some retired folks who are downsizing, not only their house, but their faith. "Well, the kids are gone, so we don't need to be as involved in church as we used to be. We don't need to be involved with the people of God." They downsize their faith, the footprint of their faith. Jude is saying, "No, you continue to build it up." Every day you're building. Every day you're growing this thing.

I like what the Amplified Bible says here: "But you, beloved, build yourselves up on the foundation of your most holy faith. That is, continually progressing, rising like an edifice, higher and higher."

The goal of the Christian should be to involve himself or herself with the voices that make building your faith more productive. Sadly, we read the Word, we put bricks upon bricks, then just go into the world. Through our movie watching, music, what we're listening to or who we're following, we take bricks away. We sometimes even take a hammer and destroy the bricks. The bricks are here—the foundation, the house—for our protection. It's here for our wellbeing. So what Jude says here is, "I want you to build brick by brick."

It brings to my mind the child's toy, Legos. My boys all enjoyed putting things together with Legos. I'm thankful for the makers of Legos because they have given us two things we needed to be successful. They provided a box of Legos and a picture of what those Legos were going to build. But always in the box was a piece of paper with step-by-step instructions on how to build that structure. Step one, put this Lego with this one. Step two, put this together with that. Little by little, step by step, clarity was brought to what you were building. "Oh, now I see what they're doing. Now it's making sense."

Brothers and sisters, your faith is like a bunch of Legos that God has provided. The treasures of your salvation have been poured out from heaven. You have your faith in front of you like a table of Legos pieces. What God did in this Book was to give you a step-by-step process for building the most beautiful heavenly faith known to man. It is a faith that enables you to be salt and light in the world, a faith that causes you to shine like stars in a dark and depraved world. It's a faith that causes people to stop and wonder, "What makes you different than me? What makes your life so different from mine? What gives you hope, joy and peace that passes all understanding? I want to know that." That's the kind of faith God wants you to be building, so He has given you the materials and the instruction manual. The question is will you follow it?

Here's what you can do; my children did this from time to time. "I'm going to try to build it on my own." They would end up with the most warped houses or the oddest looking cars. There were always pieces left over, right? When you try to build this faith on your own, you will build something warped, something odd. It might look kind of like the model, but it won't look like the original.

What did God do? God sent His written Word and He also sent the living Word—Jesus Christ. He said, "This is the kind of faith I want you to build. This is the kind of life I want you to be building." The process of sanctification—the process you're in right now as a Christian—is building a life that looks like Jesus. God sent the box and the box was Jesus in human flesh. Jesus said, "Follow Me."

In your life, your building is the perpetual, ongoing and daily pursuit of Jesus. Then brick by brick, day by day, you will start looking a little bit more like Jesus. So let me ask this question, then I'll move on. Do you look more like Jesus today than you did six months ago? Now, I want you to be serious about this. If you call yourself a follower of Jesus Christ, then as you're building your faith, six months ago there should have been more pieces. You should only have been on page 35 of the instruction manual and now you're on page 62. Now more than ever, the picture on the box is clearer than it was before. Are you growing? Are you building? Jude gives us a couple ways this is done.

We pray in the Holy Spirit.

First, we pray in the Holy Spirit. We don't have to make this difficult. There's a lot of debate about what Jude meant here. Do we have to pray in some angelic tongue? Do we have to pray some very specific words? He doesn't say anything about that. He simply says we need to pray.

When I see the word 'pray' in the Bible, it always means to me that what God requires is beyond our ability. Therefore, you need to lean into the Holy Spirit. You cannot build your faith on your own. You need someone to come alongside you. You need a helper. Ding, ding, ding, You need the Holy Spirit, Who is called the Paraclete—Helper, One Who comes alongside you.

Prayer means I'm waking up daily and praying to the Lord in a very simple way. It doesn't have to be some profound theological jackpot prayer. I'm just praying, "Lord, I can't do this without You. I can't build this faith. I cannot be like You. You've said You sent the Holy Spirit to help me, so let the Holy Spirit fill me. I invite the Holy Spirit to fill me today." Then I'm going to live out His fruit. I'm going to go after spiritual things, not worldly things. I'm asking the Spirit to enable and empower me for victory, not defeat. I can't build my faith without the Holy Spirit.

So invite the Holy Spirit every day and into all places of life. At school, be in prayer. At work, be in prayer. At home, be in prayer. In your marriage, be at prayer. With your neighbors, be at prayer. When you're on vacation, be praying. Why? Because we are at all times to be building this faith and we can't do it apart from Him. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). We can't do it without Him, so pray.

We keep ourselves in God's love.

This word 'keep' is one of Jude's favorite words. He uses it four times in this letter. In verse one, he tells us we are kept for Jesus Christ. Then later he says the demons are kept in gloomy dungeons and chains. Now he's telling us we are to keep ourselves in the love of God.

So what does this word 'keep' mean? What are we to do with the love of God? The word 'keep' literally means to stay inside the boundaries, to stay in your lane. The angels that are kept in gloomy dungeons and chains are there because they left their proper position, their proper dwelling, according to verse six. That's not the right way to keep. When you start leaving the proper parameters that God's Word has given you, you're not keeping yourself in His love.

Here's what the world says: "The boundaries that God has created? Forget them." For example, God has created us to be either male or female. The world says, "Forget that. Gender is a spectrum."

The proper boundaries of sexuality? Now you can do what you want with whomever you want, when you want and how you want. The boundaries are gone. The world says you don't have to stay in your lane. You don't have to keep your position. You can do what you want. Why? Because you're god. God is the One Who chooses the parameters, so if you're god, then you can do what you want. That's what these people did. They turned away from the grace of God—all His goodness, love and kindness to you as His creation—and they said, "We'll do what we want, when we want, how we want." So God wrote a Book and in it He's telling us how to live. In it He tells us how to love. In it He tells us how to live our lives and how to stay in our lane. The devil has said since the beginning, "The reason why God created these rules is because He wants to keep us from having fun." But that's a lie and you're being tempted by that lie each day. The world says, "God is keeping you from your best life." That's a lie and it's leading people to destruction.

God has given you this Book because He loves you. God has given you these parameters because He knows what's best for you. God knows in the end that if you want to build the thing that's on the box, you've got to follow the directions. The devil, since the beginning, has counterfeited everything God has created. You need to keep yourself in God's love. It's the idea of rowing in the same direction. You're rowing with your heavenly Father, wanting to go in the right direction.

You ask, "But Tim, what happens if I don't row in the same direction all the time? It says in verses 14 and 15 that Jesus is going to come and execute judgment on all their deeds and all their ungodliness. That's who I am." No. You're a child of God who is called by God, beloved by God, kept by Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ comes back, do you know what's going to be there for us? Mercy. So knowing that He's got you, knowing He's able to sustain you, knowing He's able to save you, then you can know without a shadow of a doubt that you are kept in God's love as you wait for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, which leads to eternal life.

What is left for the unbeliever? Judgment, a conviction for all their deeds. God is going to come and address them. But when He comes, child of God, He is going to bring you mercy and eternal life.

Looking out

Then what are we to do? We're to look around. In verses 22 and 23, we're told we can't just focus in on ourselves. As we wait on the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that He will bring in His second coming, we are to show mercy to others. "And have

mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh."

Let me close with this. A life that is building itself in the most holy faith is one that looks out for the faith of others. There are three people we're to be on the lookout for: those who doubt, those who are in danger, and those who are defiled. In other words, we're to look around for the ignorant, the intrigued and the invested. Let's talk about these real quickly.

Those who doubt

Some of you are new to the faith, just starting to say no to the things of this world. You're starting to buy into the things of God. But the world is coming back. Your old friends and your family are saying, "This is bunk. This is old stuff. Don't follow this." If this is you, we need to be merciful to you.

There are times, young Christian, when you're going to make mistakes. You're going to choose wrongly. We need to show mercy to you.

Is it any surprise that the advent of technology is most readily involving and deeply impacting the youngest among us? Social media has had its greatest effect on the younger generations. So as a church, the older men and women need to be careful, kind and merciful to those who doubt, to those who are struggling, who are asking questions.

Those in danger

How about people in danger? Maybe they're intrigued. The text tells us we need to be merciful to them, saving them by snatching them out of the fire. Maybe a better word instead of danger is dabbling. Maybe you're here today, but tonight you're going to watch some ungodly thing while you're streaming. You know what you're looking at is wrong. You know what you're listening to is wrong. But it feels so right. It piques your interest, so you're dabbling in it. "Well, I'll just look at it now, then I'll ask for forgiveness later. I'll just do this now in private; nobody will ever know." You're intrigued by it.

Jude says you're in danger, so the church's job is to snatch you from the fire. So brother or sister, ask for help before it's too late.

Those who are defiled

Jude says if you don't get help, you'll be defiled. You'll be stained by the flesh. The idea of stain is that of an indelible mark.

I was recently involved with a church leader outside of our church who dabbled with sin that has now left an indelible mark on his life. He lost his ministry and his marriage is in crisis. No doubt his kids are wondering if he really believed all the things he said. His church is teetering and may not stay open. We're to rescue these people and have mercy on them. The Bible says, "Be careful that you don't fall to what they are falling into." In my interaction in this situation, I was struck with great fear of how God works. That guy no doubt thought his sins were just his own, that nobody would ever know. But they were exposed in the most incredible ways, even supernatural ways.

At one time while this was all going on, I said to Amanda, "I stand in fear of God, because only He could have orchestrated what went down with this man and how it was all found out." I said to myself, "Be careful, Tim. You could go there as well." So as we fight for the faith of others, be careful first and foremost to build your own faith.

In the situation of emergency in an airplane, we are reminded by the attendants that the oxygen masks will come down. What do they always say, especially if you're sitting by a child? "Put on your mask first." Church, build your faith. Build it and build it, so that your faith is strong. Parents, so you can build the faith of your children. Grandparents, so you can build the faith of your grandchildren. Pastors, so you can build the faith of your church. Small group leaders, so you can build the faith of your group. Youth leaders, so you can build the faith of the youth. Sunday school teachers, so you can build the faith of those in your class.

We not only build the faith so we can stand presentable before God, but we also build the faith so others might remain pure.