

## **Jude 20-24** **“How to keep from stumbling”**

“Beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. <sup>22</sup> And have mercy on some, who are doubting; <sup>23</sup> save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

“<sup>24</sup> Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

**When I first read this closing by Jude, I thought it one of the most beautiful doxologies in literature. Nothing since has changed my mind.**

**The years have helped me see this doxology’s additional benefits.**

**These verses not only exalt God; they inform us how to be victorious, to overcome.**

**We like to win and to associate with winners.**

**But lasting victory often eludes us, doesn’t it?  
Catches and traps come attached to winning.**

**The early twentieth century German scholar Otto Bauernfeind asked two vital questions about victory-winning.**

- **Is the human eye sharp enough to discern between genuine and apparent victory?**  
**In other words, we often win battles only to learn that we’ve lost the war.**
- **Can mortals achieve true victory?<sup>1</sup>**

**We often think we’ve won only to see victory disintegrate.**

**In 1912, 2000 mostly elite people boarded a huge White Star ocean liner for its maiden voyage.**

**One company executive boasted, “Not even God can sink this ship.”**



Many on board probably thought they’d forever have bragging rights about being the first to ride that enormous “unsinkable” vessel across the Atlantic Ocean.

**As you know, few survived that voyage.**

- Because the captain wanted to set a new speed record, the colossal ship was traveling too fast.
- The men on watch disregarded warnings.
- The ship had structural weaknesses and carried an insufficient number of life boats.

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<sup>1</sup> Otto Bauernfeind, *TDNT*, Vol. IV, pp 942-945 on *nike* (νίκη).

**On the night of April 14-15, the Titanic hit an iceberg and more than 1500 perished.**

**Events often blind-side us, and we stumble.**

**Can we avoid life-stumbles?**

**Jude tells us that we can.**

**Remember when the devil tempted Jesus.**

**Satan took Jesus to the Temple’s highest point:**

“‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”’”

<sup>7</sup>Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’”<sup>2</sup>



**The devil belonged to the “once saved always saved crowd,” didn’t he?**

**“Brother, you’re saved now and you can’t fall.”**

**God saves believers, but only by remaining in Christ in and obeying God can we remain saved.**

**Our text praises the only source of a stumble-free life: “To Him who is able to keep you from**

**stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy...”**

**In verses, 20 and 21, Jude explained how to remain in the Lord, who alone can save us.**

**The imperative mood of the verb translated “keep” underscores our responsibility.**

**“Building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,**

**<sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God,-- waiting anxiously<sup>3</sup> for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”**

**This past week, the message of an evening phone call brought tears to Norma’s eyes.**

**When she motioned for me to take the phone I learned that a long-time friend and a dear brother in Christ had fallen.**

**On a week when I was scheduled to speak on “How to keep from stumbling,” this beloved brother fell.**

**Complications from his fall led to his death.**

**This brother came from a unique background.**

**When I transferred to Pepperdine, I took a class from Howard Norton, who’d spent considerable time in Nigeria as a missionary.**

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4: 6,7 NIV

<sup>3</sup> The choice of the word “anxiously” in the NASB seems unfortunate. *Eager* or *welcome* express the original better. We shouldn’t be “anxious” about anything.

He told of the superstitions fostered by medicine men, by which they held people under their control. I soon met some Nigerian students, whom Norton had introduced to Christ and who had come to this country to study.



Eno Otoyoy (2<sup>nd</sup> from rt. in photo), Professor Howard Horton and Nigerian students at Pepperdine. Photo from a Pepperdine publication.

Eno Otoyoy was always upbeat, nearly always smiling, but was serious about the Lord, pursuing his studies, and also teaching others about Jesus. **After graduation we lost contact with each other.**

**When Norma I began our work with the Hollywood Church of Christ, the elders assured us that everyone who came through the doors would be welcome.**

**That does not mean that either the elders or we approved of everything folks in Hollywood did.**

**Some people misconstrue what Jesus taught about love and sin.**

**Every life comes from God our**

**Creator and is important.**

**Though God considers each person precious, that doesn't mean that He approves of everything a person does.**

**If you are unclear about what actions God disapproves, please read **Romans 1:16-32**.**

**Many Christians also seem not to understand the following truths 1 Corinthians 5 explains:**

- **In order to lead people to Jesus, we must associate with and befriend immoral folks.**
- **But when a person becomes a Christian and wears *Jesus'* name, that person must change and quit un-Christ-like behavior.**

**“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— <sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.**

**<sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.”<sup>4</sup>**

**W Wearing the name of Christ comes with conditions:**

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 NIV

- **First, we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**
- **Second, we agree to live by Jesus’ standards of love and purity.**

Many church groups now accept anyone, regardless of his/her commitment or morality.

Many churches leaders act greedily, idolize fame, and they carry bitter grudges.

**Now, a little Hollywood Church of Christ history. As area neighborhoods changed, folks of many nations and backgrounds attended services.**

**One black family had started attending when we began our ministry in Hollywood.**

**Soon, Korean families joined us and many from the Philippines; also some Native Americans.**

Folks from Central and South American, African, Asian, and European countries came.

**I recall the thrill at one Bible study in our home when natives of Germany, Denmark, and Egypt all read Scripture with their unique accents.**



A sampling of the wonderful variety at a home Bible study.

**Age and attrition eventually led to the loss of four of the five previous elders.**

**The church asked me to serve as an elder.**

**Not long afterward, the church added Celso Dacanay, a mature and tested Christian, who had immigrated from the Philippines with his family.**

**A few year later, Eno and LaVera Otoyo began attending services.**

**Eno earned a Doctor of Education Degree from Pepperdine University.**

He was a counselor at an L.A. public high school.

**LaVera worked as a school counselor in matters related to the court system.**

**They had also started an extensive mission effort and school for children in Nigeria.**

The Otoyos and Blairs discovered that after being out of touch for years, they lived on the same street only four blocks from one another.

**We also learned that Eno and Bob had both married Texas ladies.**

**Eno and LaVera became deeply involved in the Hollywood church efforts to evangelize and reach all nations for Christ.<sup>5</sup>**

**In the meantime, Fred Kleyn, the last of the original five elders retired; he and Beverly moved out of the area.**

**The church asked Eno to serve as an elder.**

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<sup>5</sup> In coming weeks, we'll try to relate some of those efforts. The Hollywood church of Christ became an all-nation, all-race church in the early 1960s with little fanfare. In the 1950s, Wade Ruby preached often on loving and accepting people of all races.



We joked that “to qualify as a Hollywood church elder (Celso Dacanay, Eno Otoy, Bob Blair), you had to be short, be baldheaded (or nearly so), and have an “o” in your name.”

As you can see, Eno was far more qualified than Celso or Bob on the “o” qualification.



LaVera and Eno at their and the Blairs' favorite L.A. Chinese restaurant.

### Recall Jude's godly advice?

“Building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

<sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God,-- waiting anxiously<sup>6</sup> for the mercy

of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”

Eno and LaVera dedicated their lives to this counsel.

**For decades, they devoted themselves to the Hollywood church's mission for Christ.**

**They eventually moved to Virginia to be nearer their beloved daughter Akon and her family.**

**LaVera died in 2019.**

Though age and some physical factors slowed him, Eno continued to spend as much time as possible in Nigeria encouraging and attempting to strengthen the school and missions in his native land.

**The Hollywood church continued to help raise and collect funding.**

**His faith in our Creator never lapsed.**

On July 22, 2023, Eno died of a fall in his native Nigerian village, yet Eno never fell or stumbled in dedication to Christ his Savior and Lord.

“<sup>24</sup> Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

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**Special note:** We gave richly-deserved attention to the service Eno and LaVera gave to the advancement of God's Kingdom. Few know of the strong support the Hollywood church gave to missions in Mexico and Latin America. The HCC originally supported Harris Goodwin in Mexico City. Harris was an associate minister of the Hollywood Church. In 1963, when Harris began the Mexico City mission, the church hired Bob Blair as a fulltime co-minister with Dr. Wade Ruby. The Baxter Institute was named after Leta Baxter, a longtime member of the Hollywood church. Dan Coker joined Harris in the work, which first, the West End Church of Christ in Nashville, and later the Garden Oaks Church of Christ in Houston sponsored. Hollywood also supported efforts in Tijuana and Calexico-Mexicali, where Dr. Robert Nichols established a free orthopedic clinic for Mexican children.

<sup>6</sup> The choice of the word “anxiously” in the NASB seems unfortunate. *Eager* or *welcome* express the original better. We shouldn't be “anxious” about anything.