



BNEXT BIBLE STUDY PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Life Changing Letters 3

FEATURING THE AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO SERIES

BNEXT STUDY

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A Better Way, Part 2 : Hebrews 8–13

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AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO

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STUDY **BNEXT**

William P. Campbell



Welcome to BNEXT Amazing Journey

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. This electronic version contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and place a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the mast of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

An important component of BNEXT Amazing Journey are the videos that accompany each series. To access the videos associated with this particular series, see the link below my signature.

Also we have included, in the last pages of this digital version, a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT Amazing Journey series, I hope you will consider leading others through this study material.

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,



William P. Campbell

BNEXT Amazing Journey Video Link

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Other men had the threads of truth; but Christ took the threads, and wove them into a glorious robe, put it on, and came forth clothed with every truth of God.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Introduction

It is interesting to consider how technology has improved transportation through history. From donkey and oxen (5000 BC) to wheeled vehicles (3500 BC), to the steam engine (1700 AD), to gas-powered vehicles (1890s), to airplanes (early 1900s), and finally to commercial jet airliners (1950s). It seemed there was always a better way. Who knows what tomorrow will bring?

The book of Hebrews tells us that God has provided a better way as well. This book looks back to the Old Testament and provides insight on how God has provided a better way to know Him and to embrace the eternal salvation that He offers.

Hebrews is the first of eight general letters in the New Testament. The others are James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John and Jude. Unlike the 13 letters written by Paul, most of these general letters are not addressed to a specific individual or church. The book of Hebrews, for example, does not begin with a salutation to anyone but opens with a majestic description of Christ, much like a formal Greek oration. Hebrews also lacks any direct reference to its author or its destination. The theme of the book, however, is quite clear: The Superiority of Christ. As the book of Romans lifts high the doctrines of salvation, Hebrews lifts high the author of our salvation. Many of Paul's letters focused on church problems, but Hebrews focuses on Christ, the Person. The book of Hebrews is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Covenant, based on the Law, was the initial means of knowing God; the New Covenant, based on our Savior, is a better Way.

The Author

Many names have been suggested for the author of Hebrews, including Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Clement of Rome, Silas, and Aquila and Priscilla. Arguments for the first three are the most convincing. Paul was the assumed writer in the early days of the Church—from 400 to 1600 AD—and the book was commonly called, “The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews.” The book was written from Italy, by a friend of Timothy, both facts pointing toward Paul (Hebrews 13:23-24). The expression “the righteous will live by faith” is found only in Hebrews and in two other New Testament books, both written by Paul (Hebrews 10:38; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11).

During the period of the Reformation, however, the disparity between writing style and emphasis in Hebrews with that of Paul's other letters caused much debate as to whether Paul really was the author of this book.

Barnabas was similarly considered a possible writer of Hebrews. In fact, the earliest suggestion of authorship came from the church father Tertullian, who in 200 AD quotes from “an epistle to the Hebrews under the name of Barnabas” (De Pudicitia, 20). Hebrews, rich with Old Testament theology, symbolism and quotations, was likely written by an intelligent Jew, well versed in the Old Testament. Furthermore, as with all the epistles, the author must have been respected by leaders in the early church. Barnabas fits the bill perfectly for he was a Jew from the priestly tribe of Levi, a man held in high esteem by the early church (Acts 13:1-7).

Apollos is the favorite choice as author of Hebrews for many scholars today. His name was



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Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Matthew 5:17

first suggested by Martin Luther. He was associated with Paul in the early days of ministry, “a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). Apollos was a Jewish Christian and skilled orator from Alexandria, who likely had the training and ability necessary to write the eloquent Greek found in Hebrews. Furthermore, the Old Testament quotations in Hebrews are taken from the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), rather than from the Hebrew version, which was Paul's practice.

The Reason For Writing

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were struggling to understand the full implications of their new-found faith in Christ. Did Christ invalidate the Law, the sacrifices, and the Old Testament priesthood? The recipients of this letter were tempted to revert back to their Jewish ways or to mix Jewish Law with the Gospel of grace. Hebrews demonstrates that Christianity does not strip away all meaning from the requirements of the Old Testament; rather, it replaces them with a better way:

A Better Messenger	(Hebrews 1:1-4:13)
A Better Priesthood	(Hebrews 4:14-7:28)
A Better Covenant	(Hebrews 8:1-10:18)
A Better Faith	(Hebrews 10:19-13:25)

A Better Messenger (Hebrews 1:1-4:13)

Hebrews describes Jesus Christ as superior to the messengers of the Old Covenant, including the Prophets (Hebrews 1:1-4), Angels (Hebrews 1:5-2:18), Moses (Hebrews 3:1-19), and Joshua (Hebrews 4:1-13). Christ was a better messenger than the prophets, as proven through seven great descriptive statements proclaiming with indisputable clarity His divinity and His work as our Creator and Savior (Hebrews 1:1-4.). He is also better than the angels. The word *angel* means “messenger.” Jews revered angels because they were the agents through whom the Law was given on Mount Sinai. The Dead Sea Scrolls reflect the Jewish hope that the archangel Michael would be the supreme figure in the messianic kingdom. But God never ascribed the title “my Son” to any angel. Angels are part of the created order, but Christ is the creator. Angels were sent to serve the saints according to Christ's command, as messengers of His eternal kingdom (Hebrews 1:5-14). We must be especially careful, then, not to put undue attention on the ministry of angels, lest we diminish our commitment to Christ (Hebrews 2:1-18).

Jesus is also better than Moses, the father of the Jews. Moses was part of the household of God, but Christ is the builder of the house. Moses was a servant for God, but Christ is God's son (Hebrews 3:1-6). Under Moses, the people of God became disobedient and were punished. How much greater the loss for those who refuse God's salvation today through Christ (Hebrews 3:12-19)!

Finally, Jesus is better than Joshua. Moses guided the people through the trials of the desert, but Joshua led the people into the Promised Land where they found rest. In so doing, Joshua

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being...

Hebrews 1:3a

became a type (or symbol) of Jesus. The name *Jesus* is actually the Greek version of the Hebrew name "Joshua," making the analogy even more striking. The Jews of the Old Testament found only temporal rest in Canaan. We find true peace with God through Christ, and one day we will rest forever in the glories of heaven (Hebrews 4:1-11). We would be wise to assure our entry into this rest by allowing the piercing truths of God's Word to penetrate our hearts, revealing our true thoughts and intentions (Hebrews 4:12-13). Then, as our sins are revealed, we can come to Christ, the High Priest of a new and better priesthood, that our sins might be completely forgiven.

A Better Priesthood (Hebrews 4:14-7:28)

The Old Testament priesthood was comprised of a complex system of sacrifices and rituals for the forgiveness of the sins of the people. Animals were slaughtered to bear the penalty for sins under nearly every type of circumstance. Offerings were made to God through the priest from the people's crops and possessions. Was this whole system of service, as led by the priests, now obsolete? The author of Hebrews, rather than simply writing off the Old Testament priesthood as irrelevant for the age of grace, demonstrates how the sacrificial system of the past was actually a forerunner of what was to come. Christ Himself is both the high priest who intercedes on our behalf and the sacrifice that was offered for our cleansing.

Our Lord's ministry of intercession continues, even today, for the people of God (Hebrews 4:14-16). His priesthood is of a higher order than that of Moses' brother Aaron. Christ's priesthood is of the order of Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who was blessed by Abraham through tithes. Melchizedek, whose genealogy is unknown, provides a picture of Christ, who has no beginning or end (Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:1-28). So sure are the promises of God toward us through Jesus Christ, that we should press on to maturity in Christ, and rest in His work with confident hope (Hebrews 5:11-6:18). Daily, we can draw near to God and live in His presence because Christ, our High Priest, has gone before us as our "forerunner" (Hebrews 6:19-20). Often in the ancient world, large ocean vessels had difficulty approaching shallow Greek harbors and depended on a small boat called a "forerunner" to secure the ship's anchor within the harbor. So has Christ enabled us to securely anchor our hopes in the portals of heaven.

Final Thought

The reformers Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin guided their great movement with three principles from the book of Hebrews: (1) There is no sacrifice but Calvary, (2) no priest but Christ, and (3) no confessional but the throne of Grace. If you have been seeking to please God through your own sacrifices and good works, or have been trusting your church membership to gain favor with God, think again. There is a better Way—Jesus Christ!

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series "Life Changing Letters 3," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are



for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What was the most significant insight for your life? Why?

2. Read Hebrews 1:1-4. List at least five things a person can learn about Jesus Christ from these verses. Which of these facts about Christ do you find most difficult to comprehend?

3. Read Hebrews 1:5-14, especially verse 14.

a. What is the position of angels in comparison to Christ?

b. What is the purpose of angels in relation to humans?

c. Do you think that Christians today have misconceptions about angels? Explain.

4. Read Hebrews 2:1-4.

a. What warning is given in these verses? Who is this warning for?

b. Why is this word of caution important?



Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. a. From Hebrews 2:11-18, what incredible blessings are shown to us through Jesus Christ (note especially Hebrews 2:11, 18)?

b. Do you find it difficult to live according to these truths? Why or why not?

6. Hebrews 4:1-11 describes the rest available to believers. Why do you think, in Hebrews 4:12, the author suddenly turns his focus on the effectual ability of God's Word?

What does he have to say about Scripture?

7. Read Hebrews 4:15-16. Consider Christ's being tempted. Do you think He had the ability to sin? If not, was He really tempted?

8. How are we to pray, according to Hebrews 4:16? Do you pray that way? Why or why not?

9. a. Hebrews 5 tells of Christ's role as our High Priest. Hebrews 5:11-6:1 gives reference to some of our responsibilities as priests under his command.



b. According to these verses, what should we be and do? Do you feel that you measure up? Explain.

b. What do you find reassuring about this section of God's Word?

Read aloud Hebrews 4:15-16 and take time in prayer, asking your High Priest for mercy and grace regarding your call to live fully and faithfully for God.

10. What warning does Hebrews 6:1-8 provide to those who taste, but do not partake of salvation?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. a. What assurances does Hebrews 6:9-20 provide to those who trust in the grace of God and yearn to do the will of God?

Scripture for Meditation

For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:15-16



Other men had the threads of truth; but Christ took the threads, and wove them into a glorious robe, put it on, and came forth clothed with every truth of God.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Introduction

The book of Hebrews is written more like a sermon than a letter. The author calls it “my word of exhortation” (Hebrews 13:22). Indeed, this is a book that motivates us to a better life, based on the glorious truth of who Christ is and what He has done for us. The word *better* is found 13 times in Hebrews. In our last lesson, we considered how much better Christ is than the angels and all the messengers of the Old Covenant. Let us now scan the last half of Hebrews to consider how the New Covenant is a better covenant (Hebrews 8:1-10:18), enabling us to live with a stronger and better faith (Hebrews 10:19-13:25).

A Better Covenant (Hebrews 8:1-10:18)

The word *covenant* means “promise,” or “contract.” We use covenants almost every day when we sign a lease, shake a hand, or give a verbal word of promise. However, no covenant has ever been made like the one made by God to humans! God made several Old Testament covenants, including one with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), two with Abraham (Genesis 15:9-21; 17), one on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-24), and one with David (2 Samuel 7:6-17). The great blessing in making covenants with God is that He never fails to follow through on His part of the agreement! We humans failed to keep our part of the covenants made with God throughout the Old Testament causing need for a new covenant. All of the Old Testament treaties with God foreshadowed the great, final, New Covenant, foretold by the prophets (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12). This covenant was inaugurated by a better High Priest than those serving under the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:1-6), included better promises (Hebrews 8:7-13), was initiated in a better tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1-28), and was concluded through a better sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-18).

A Better High Priest (Hebrews 8:1-6)

God created the Old Testament office of High Priest as a backdrop—setting the stage for Christ to later appear on the scene. It is fascinating to study, in depth, the clothing and ceremonial stipulations placed on the Old Testament High Priest, all of which foreshadowed the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews, rather than elaborating on these wondrous details, was most concerned to show that Christ’s work was the fulfillment of the Old Testament High Priest. Christ’s service was in a better place (Hebrews 8:1-2), with better gifts (Hebrews 8:3-4), through a better ministry (Hebrews 8:5-6). He serves us in the heavenlies, having offered Himself as the sacrifice through which He has involved us with Him in ministry as His priests.

Better Promises (Hebrews 8:7-13)

Christ’s ministry was “founded on better promises” than those in the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:6). Through God’s New Covenant, the Law was no longer written merely on stone tablets but on the human heart. The Law reflected the character of God and represented the will of God. Through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence, we are being conformed into the image of Christ and enabled to minister in His name. It is incredible to think that God, who has watched us neglect and violate covenant after covenant throughout history, decided to offer this New Covenant to us. It is even more amazing that under this New Covenant, God comes to us in person and gives us His power that we might fulfill our end of the deal!



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Matthew 5:17

A Better Tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1-28)

On Mount Sinai, God not only gave the Law to Moses, but also the plan and pattern for the tabernacle (Exodus 25:9; 40). Scholars have written countless books on the wonderful symbolism found in the tabernacle, all pointing to the grace of God that would be offered the world through Jesus Christ. The furnishings, utensils, building materials, layout, and ceremonial guidelines all foreshadow, through the use of imagery, what the New Testament explains with words – that through the sacrifice of Christ we are able to enter into the presence of God. There is much to be learned from the tabernacle, “but,” concludes the writer, “we cannot discuss these things in detail now” (Hebrews 9:5b). Rather, he emphasizes one main point: Christ serves in a new, better tabernacle. Under the earthly tabernacle, “the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper” (Hebrews 9:9). In the heavenly tabernacle, however, Christ needed to enter only once to forever save those who put their trust in Him (Hebrews 9:11-28).

A Better Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-18)

The sacrifices of the Old Testament were a mere shadow of the perfect sacrifice offered to us in Christ (Hebrews 10:1). Old Testament sacrifices were made to God year after year because they never really took away sin. (Hebrews 10:2-3). The blood of Christ, however, inaugurated the New Covenant, by which our sins are completely forgiven, forever (Hebrews 10:4-18).

A Better Faith (Hebrews 10:19-13:25)

The early Christians faced intense persecution for some three hundred years. They were mocked, imprisoned, burned as candles in the emperor's gardens, and made fodder for lions and wild beasts. The author of Hebrews exhorted believers to remain strong in their hope and remain true to God to the end. The New Covenant gave them reason for a strong, persevering faith. Some of the greatest teachings about faith in all the Bible are found in the last part of Hebrews, including exhortations about faith (Hebrews 10:19-39), examples of faith (Hebrews 11:1-40), a description of enduring faith (Hebrews 12:1-29), and practical evidences of faith (Hebrews 13:1-25).

Exhortations About Faith (Hebrews 10:19-39)

When we consider all the benefits of the New Covenant (Hebrews 10:19-21), our logical response should be to “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22a), and to encourage each other to gather for worship and fellowship on a regular basis (Hebrews 10:23-25). These private and public practices build our faith. Those who have no faith fall under the judgment of God (Hebrews 10:26-31). Those who trust in God are able to endure great persecution (Hebrews 10:32-34), and will receive wonderful rewards from God (Hebrews 10:35-39).

Examples of Faith (Hebrews 11:1-40)

What is faith? The writer begins with a simple definition: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). This definition is made alive with more than 20 examples from the Old Testament, including Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah,

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being...

Hebrews 1:3a

Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Moses' parents, Joshua, Gideon, Rahab, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Through faith these followers of God found strength to obey God, to endure hardship, to fight battles, and – through God – to work wonders. Many had only their faith to show in the end, and for such faith they were commended (Hebrews 10 11:36-39).

Enduring Faith (Hebrews 12:1-29)

The examples of faith described in Hebrews 11 surround us like a cloud of witnesses. The Greek word for *witnesses* means “testifiers,” giving emphasis to the testimony of their lives. The examples of faith in chapter 11 should inspire us to live by faith. The writer draws the picture of an athletic competition in a great amphitheater, with those who have gone before us now surrounding us, and Christ at our fore as the pacesetter. We are the competitors. Therefore, we should put aside all distractions and press on with determination—keeping our eyes on Jesus, who has endured more opposition and suffering than we will ever know (Hebrews 12:1-4). The challenges we face are part of the training, given by our loving Heavenly Father, to help us grow (Hebrews 12:5-11). We must stand strong, reject sin, and live wholeheartedly for God (Hebrews 12:12-29).

Evidences of Faith (Hebrews 13:1-25)

The proof of faith is found in our lives. If we have faith in God, it should be evidenced by our love for one another, hospitality to strangers, compassion for those in prison, honor in marriage, rejection of materialism, respect for our leaders, practicing grace rather than legalism, willingness to suffer for our faith, worship in word and deed, prayer to God, and the peace of God.

Final Thought

The world is full of religious people. Those who strive to please God by good impressions and good works are living under the mandates of the Old Covenant. Those who come to God by placing their faith in the death, resurrection and saving grace of Jesus Christ have found a better way...the way of the New Covenant. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series “Life Changing Letters 3,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. **PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.**



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Why is it important to you that God has provided for us a new and better covenant?

2. Read Hebrews 8:1-2. If time allows, also consult a Bible Dictionary and Hebrews 9 to learn more about the purpose of the earthly tabernacle. Describe, if you can, at least one way that the tabernacle of the Old Testament gives us greater understanding of Christ's work on our behalf in the heavens.

3. From Hebrews 8:7-13, contrast the New Covenant with the Old Covenant. In what way(s) does the New Covenant benefit us today?

4. A call to action toward God is found in Hebrews 10:19-23, and Hebrews 10:24-25 show our obligation toward the Church.

a. What does Hebrews 10:24 challenge us to do?

b. If you can, list three people you would like to encourage toward more active fellowship, based on Hebrews 10:25.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. a. Define "faith," in your own words. Compare your definition with that found in Hebrews 11:1.



b.. Why is faith important (see Hebrews 11:6)?

Now read aloud Hebrews 12:1-13. What promises or commands in this portion of Scripture especially speak to your situation?

c.. Do you feel that your faith needs to become stronger? Talk about it.

Why?

6. Skim Hebrews 11, highlighting one or two of your favorite examples of faith. Why did you choose this person(s)?

8. Hebrews 12:14 makes a strong statement about holiness. Try to understand and explain this verse in your own words.

7. Finish this sentence: "I feel like giving up on life when...."

9. What do you think is meant by a "bitter root," in Hebrews 12:15?



10. a. How does the example in Hebrews 12:16-17 illustrate this problem (See also Genesis 25:29-34; 27:41)?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Read Hebrews 12:28-13:6 and record a short prayer of confession, supplication, or thanks to God based on these truths.

b. Do you know someone with a root of bitterness in his or her life?

c. What might you do to help that person?

Scripture for Meditation

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6



...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33b

Introduction

In all the Bible, the book of James offers the most striking challenges to live out the Christian faith. There are over 50 imperatives in this book. James did not suggest—he commanded. Chock-full of maxims on right living, some have titled James “the Proverbs of the New Testament.” The book is of the same fabric as the Sermon on the Mount. One cannot read James without being pushed at every turn toward a more genuine Christianity.

James, the Writer

The book begins, “James, a servant of God...” (James 1:1). James was a common name at the time of writing, a variation on the name Jacob. Who was this James? One option is James the son of Zebedee, a fisherman working in tandem with his brother, John—not unlike fishing partners Peter and Andrew. Soon, all four would be in the business of fishing for men (Matthew 4:17-22). This James was known for his quick temper, and would be the first martyr among the twelve disciples (Mark 3:17; Acts 12:1-2). A second option is James, the son of Alphaeus, a disciple of Jesus, about whom very little is known (Matthew 10:3). Some people think this was actually not another James at all, but a reference to Matthew. See Mark 2:14). The most likely candidate for author of this book is James, the brother of our Lord (Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3). James was technically a half-brother, because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. James and his brothers did not believe in Jesus during His three-year ministry (John 7:1-5; Mark 3:31-35). After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to James, and he became an ardent follower of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7).

James was soon recognized as a pillar in the Church (Galatians 2:9). He moderated the great church council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). James was raised in Jewish tradition and steeped in the Old Testament. He developed an effective ministry to Jewish Christians and wrote this letter to “the twelve tribes who are scattered among the nations” (James 1:1). This refers to the tribes of Israel, Jewish Christians in the early Church who were scattered because of persecution. Tradition has it that James was martyred in 62 AD, cast from the heights of the temple when he refused to renounce Christ.

The Book of James

The book of James endures, challenging those who follow Christ everywhere to live and walk out an authentic faith:

Face Trials	James 1
Demonstrate Love	James 2
Control the Tongue	James 3
Live Humbly	James 4
Seek Heavenly Riches	James 5

Face Trials (James 1)

James shows us purpose for trials (James 1:1-8), perspective on trials (James 1:9-18) and the perfecting of trials (James 1:19-27). The purpose of trials is to build perseverance in our faith, which



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And the God of all grace,
who called you to His
eternal glory in Christ,
after you have suffered
a little while, will Himself
restore you and make you
strong, firm and steadfast.

1 Peter 5:10

leads to wholeness and completeness in our lives (James 1:3-4). This is not only true of some trials, but of “trials of many kinds,” and thus recognizing this truth creates “pure joy” as a centerpiece in the Christian’s life (James 1:2). Often, however, we do not believe that God is working for good through the testing and temptations that we must endure daily. When we lack understanding, we should pray to God, who gives wisdom to all who believe.

A godly perspective recognizes that one day soon, when Christ returns to judge the world, temporal things will disappear; only the time we spent obeying God will remain. The prideful and rich will be humbled, and those living humbly before God will be exalted (James 1:9-11). Those who have suffered for the Lord will have special rewards. Perspective is especially needed when we are tempted. The question is sometimes asked, “If God made me, and if I am naturally tempted to sin, then who can blame me for yielding to temptation?” We must remember that we humans first turned from God and therefore we have inherited a sin nature. Lustful desires come from within. By turning to God for help, we can overcome (James 1:13-18).

With such a perspective, we can enjoy the perfecting work of trials in our lives. Central to James’ thought, the Greek word *telios* speaks of “spiritual maturity” or “completion.” The purpose of trials is for our spiritual growth to maturity (James 1:4). When we accept this perspective, maturity reveals itself in the way we respond to God’s Word (James 1:22-25) and in the way we act toward one another (James 1:19-21; 26-27).

Demonstrate Love (James 2)

The crowning evidence of genuine Christianity is sacrificial love. Such love should be manifest both inside (James 2:1-13) and outside (James 2:14-26) the Church. Inside the Church, we must be careful to treat each person fairly, equally, and without partiality. If we favor rich and influential people over the poor and unknown, we are mocking the command of God to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (James 2:8). By so judging others, we will be judged (James 2:12-13). Outside the Church we must demonstrate our faith by works of mercy and kindness. Faith without such attesting works “is dead” (James 2:26).

Some people think that James and Paul have opposing views of faith. A careful study of this book, however, reveals that James and Paul are describing two sides of the same coin. Paul’s focus is on our standing before God. James’ focus is on our standing before the world. Paul spoke of the need for our souls to be justified by faith. James tells of the need for our faith to be justified by deeds. The first is the root; the latter is the fruit.

Control the Tongue (James 3)

Another sign of genuine Christianity is the right use of our words. James explains the need to control the tongue (James 3:1-12), and the way to control the tongue (James 3:13-18). We need to control the tongue because it has the ability to do great good, or great harm. Solomon said, “The tongue has the power of life and death...” (Proverbs 18:21). James likened the tongue to fire, which has unlimited potential to bless or to destroy. A word of truth and encouragement may begin an avalanche of blessings, spreading from person to person. A bit of gossip or slander can cause irreparable harm, traveling like a deadly pestilence. By our words, we reveal our

...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:17b

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverb 18:21

hearts. Nature demonstrates this truth: “Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water” (James 3:11-12). The way to control our speech is to look to God for wisdom, that His truth might become the fountain of our lives through which words honoring God will flow readily from our lips (James 3:13-18).

Live Humbly (James 4)

A more subtle characteristic of genuine Christianity is humility. James shows us the reason for humility (4:1-10) and the result of humility (James 4:11-17). The central reason that we need to be humble is that, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6b). Only a fool would want to be opposed by God. And, all of us could use a little more grace from God. The more mature we become in our faith, the more humble we become before God. The result of humility is a gracious attitude toward others, and a sober attitude about the future (James 4:11-17). Those who lower themselves before the Mighty God find it hard to look down on others and have no need to set their hopes on the distant mirage of prideful, self-made plans.

Seek Heavenly Riches (James 5)

The riches of this world do not easily distract those who live genuine lives before God. We should be ever perceptive about the temporal nature of mammon (James 5:1-6), and ever striving to build God's eternal kingdom through patience (James 5:7-12) and prayer (James 5:13-20). Consider Elijah, “a man just like us,” to recognize the potential of a life concentrated on heavenly treasures (James 5:17-18).

Final Thought

One of the most exacting and challenging messages recorded from the lips of Christ was the “Sermon on the Mount.” The book of James is filled with allusions to this sermon. James is not easy reading, any more than Christianity is meant to be easy living. But what do we expect? As genuine china is perfected through the kiln, as gold is refined in the fire, and as diamonds are formed under pressure, so must we face the challenges of life and Biblical exhortations like those in James if we wish to grow as genuine Christians.

Spending Time With God

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Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What section in the book of James stands out as especially important for your life today? Why?

2. Read James 1:2-8. How should we face trials?

How does God promise to help us in our times of difficulty?

3.a. From James 1:13-18, what is the source of our temptations?

b. What would you say to a person who claims it is okay to sin because God created him/her with strong desires in that direction?

c. How Biblically correct is the phrase, "The devil made me do it!"?

4. Read James 1:22-25.

a. Do you find it easy to read the Bible or to hear a good teaching from God's Word, and yet do little in response? Explain.

b. How might you improve in this area?



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 3 | GENERAL LETTERS

LESSON 3

Genuine Christianity | James

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. In a sentence, summarize James' main point about favoritism (James 2:1-8). In what ways do you see partiality in your church and/or life?

8. What are the main causes of and solutions to an uncontrolled tongue (James 3:13-4:10)?

9. Read James 4:13-17. In what ways do you tend to fall into the "I have a plan" trap?

6. Read James 2:14-26. Are works necessary for our salvation? Explain.

How should we view the future? Explain.

7. From James 3:5-12, rate the control factor on your tongue, from 1–10 (10 being perfect control). Do you think you have been improving in this area in recent years?



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LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 3 | GENERAL LETTERS

LESSON 3

Genuine Christianity | James

10. What does James have to say about those who are both rich and greedy (James 5:1-6)?

12. What promises about prayer do we find in James 5:13-18? Take some time to confess sins, and to pray for special needs.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. a. Describe the hope that ought to keep us faithful, even when life is difficult (5:7-11). Is patience one of your strong points?

b. What encouragement do you find in these verses?

Scripture for Meditation

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4.



“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

Introduction

The three most prolific epistle writers in the New Testament were Paul, Peter, and John. Paul wrote most eloquently on faith, John on love, and Peter on hope. Some have referred to Peter as the “Apostle of Hope.” Peter wrote to suffering Christians about the blessed hope of our Savior’s return that they might find strength to persevere. Hope is an unshakable confidence in God’s promises for the future, providing purpose and enthusiasm for today.

The Author

Early references to 1 & 2 Peter assume Peter’s authorship: Polycarp, who was a disciple of John; the historian Eusebius; church fathers Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen all regarded Peter as the author of both books.

Some modern scholars, however, claim Peter could not be the author of 1 Peter, arguing that an uneducated fisherman would not be capable of producing the book’s refined Greek. The book of 2 Peter was written in a less polished style and better fits the language of the common man. What scholars overlook is Peter’s own statement in 1 Peter 5:12: “With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly...” The phrase *with the help of* can also be translated “through,” or “by means of.” In Peter’s day, it was common for a secretary to improve the writing style and quality of a letter before sending it out; perhaps that is exactly what Silas did for Peter (Acts 15:22-29).

Modern scholars also argue against Peter’s authorship on the basis that the references to suffering in 1 Peter link it to the horrific reign of Domitian (81-96 AD), which occurred after the Apostle’s death. Again, they overlook the fact that Peter lived during the persecutions unleashed through Nero (54-68 AD)—a fitting context for this letter of comfort and hope.

The Purpose and Place of Writing

Peter wrote to show the strength hope provides in every facet of the Christian life: Hope in Salvation (1 Peter 1:1-12), Hope in Growth (1 Peter 1:13-2:12), Hope in Submission (1 Peter 2:13-3:12), Hope in Suffering (1 Peter 3:13-4:19), and Hope in Service (5:1-14).

Peter closes his epistle with reference to the place of writing: Babylon (1 Peter 5:13). Was he referring to the ancient city of Babylon, then just a small town on the Euphrates River? Or, did he use the term symbolically for Rome (Revelation 17:9-10)? Another possibility was the military post in Egypt, known as Babylon. While we cannot be sure of the place of writing, we can be assured of the inspiration of this book for it was placed in the holy canon of Scripture.

Hope In Salvation (1 Peter 1:1-12)

Peter, like James, wrote to Christians who were “scattered” through persecution. He reminded them that despite their sufferings on earth, the hope of their salvation could not be shaken. This salvation was determined by the Father, provided through the Son, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Salvation is not only for our past sins and our future redemption, but a “living hope” for today (1 Peter 1:3). If we place our faith in God’s promises, hope secures our hearts with the knowledge



Watch Amazing Journey Video
“Surprised by Suffering”

May Your unfailing love
rest upon us, O LORD, even
as we put our hope in You.

Psalm 33:22

of God's protection, now and forever. We can be confident that we have an "inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven..." (1 Peter 1:4). Our true home and treasure is not on earth, but in heaven.

Salvation is rooted in the past, experienced in the present, and brought to completion in the future. For this reason, suffering makes sense. Our faith is being refined, like gold, that it might be purified until the Lord's return (1 Peter 1:6-7); then will our hope and faith be united in Him who is love. John Calvin wrote, "Hope is nothing else but the constancy of faith."

The prophets spoke by faith about the hope of our salvation, "trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Peter 1:11). So wondrous is this Christian hope of salvation that, "Even angels long to look into these things" (1 Peter 1:12b).

Hope in Growth (1 Peter 1:13-2:12)

As the start of a succession of imperatives, Peter urged readers to "... set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:13c). Our spiritual growth is inseparably linked to our hope. When we remain focused on our hope, our lives become aligned with the purposes of God. Peter gave one of the strongest calls to holiness in all the Bible: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). How can we justify settling for anything less, when we consider the cost God has paid for our redemption? The word *holy* means "to be set apart." When set apart for God, we grow in our love for one another (1 Peter 1:22). Peter urged spiritual growth for each individual: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). He also called for growth together, as "living stones...being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood... a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:5,9). As the light of the sun urges plants to stretch heavenward by nourishing their upward progress, so our hope in Christ causes spiritual growth.

Hope in Submission (1 Peter 2:13-3:12)

Growth in our relationship with God leads to depth in our relationships with one another. Peter urged us to "submit" to each other that we might reflect the loving nature of Christ. Submission, which sometimes feels impossible, can be natural and effectual because of our hope in the Lord. Christ submitted to the authority of His Father, obeying to the point of suffering and death (Philippians 2:5-8). As a result, Jesus was raised to a position of honor, far above all everyone and everything (Philippians 2: 9-11). We can share in His glory if we learn to follow in His humility: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4). Peter exhorts us to submit to authorities (1 Peter 2:13-25), submit in marriage (1 Peter 3:1-7), and to submit to one another in Christian fellowship (1 Peter 3:8-12).

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...

1 Peter 3:15a

Hope in Suffering (1 Peter 3:13-4:19)

Christians living under Nero's rule experienced the beginnings of persecution against the church—persecution that would continue for the better part of the next 300 years. Their hope in the Lord's salvation and soon return sustained them through it all. As Isaac Watts once said, "Hope thinks nothing difficult; despair tells us that difficulty is insurmountable."

Peter wrote that we should, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). Today, this verse is often quoted as a motivator for personal evangelism. When we picture Christians being asked to deny their Lord or die, the verse takes on even richer meaning. Whether we suffer a great loss or small offense, we must be willing to testify for the Lord. In so doing, we are identifying with Christ, who suffered on our behalf (1 Peter 4:1). This same Christ will reward us - a promise and hope which should bring joy into every trial we face (1 Peter 4:13).

Hope in Service (1 Peter 5:1-14)

Service without hope of reward is drudgery. Peter reminded us that our service for Christ will be rewarded richly - we will share in our Lord's glory (1 Peter 5:1). Peter urged elders to shepherd the flock with great care, for soon the "Chief Shepherd" will appear, to place upon their heads an unfading crown of glory. With this hope in mind, let us serve God with humility, and He will lift us up in due time.

Final Thought

Gordon Johnson described how during World War I, a British commander was preparing to lead his soldiers back to battle. They'd been on furlough, and it was a cold, rainy, muddy day. Their shoulders sagged because they knew what lay ahead of them: mud, blood, possible death. Nobody talked, nobody sang. It was a heavy time. As they marched along, the commander looked into a bombed-out church. Back in the church he saw the figure of Christ on the cross. At that moment, something happened to the commander. He remembered the One who suffered, died, and rose again. There was victory, and there was triumph.

As the troops marched along, he shouted out, "Eyes right, march!" Every eye turned to the right, and as the soldiers marched by, they saw Christ on the cross. Something happened to that company of men. Suddenly they saw triumph after suffering, and they took courage. With shoulders straightened, they began to smile as they went. (*Preaching Today*, Tape No. 82, "Finding Significance in Obscurity.") In Christ we too have hope, a source of strength for our journey.

Spending Time With God

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SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 3 | GENERAL LETTERS

LESSON 4

Our Strong Hope | 1 Peter

SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.

How should this knowledge affect the way we live?

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide.

a. What would your life be like without hope in Christ?

3. Read 1 Peter 1:6-7. Explain why we should accept, and even give thanks, for our trials.

b. What could your life be like if your hope in the Lord were stronger?

4. From 1 Peter 1:10-12, tell how the prophets of the Old Testament and the angels of God have viewed our salvation.

2. a. If you suddenly received an inheritance of 1 billion dollars, how would your lifestyle change?

Do you think the blessings we now experience in Christ surpass those offered to believers of the Old Testament? Explain.

b. Read 1 Peter 1:3-5. What exciting words does Peter use to describe the inheritance awaiting us in heaven?



Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Read 1 Peter 1:13-2:3, which discusses “holiness.” From 1 Peter 1:17-21, why should we be holy?

8. Describe a time when you were treated unjustly for your faith.

What consolation can you find from 1 Peter 2:19-25?

6. Based on 1 Peter 1:13-14 and 2:2-3 how can we be holy?

9. What guidelines are provided in 1 Peter 3:1-8 for wives?

For husbands (1 Peter 1:3:7)?

7. In 1 Peter 2:13-17 how does Peter say we should view our government? How do his words challenge you?

Do you think any of these directives should be adjusted for our modern western culture? Explain.



10. Read 1 Peter 3:15-16. What do you find most challenging about these words?

13. According to 1 Peter 5:5-7, why should we walk humbly before God? Take time to pray for the grace to receive truths from this study with a humble heart.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. What is Peter saying in 1 Peter 4:1-2?

Can you relate to this teaching somehow through personal experience? Explain.

12. Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. Find one exhortation from these verses that you would like to carry with you through this week. Which did you choose? Why?

Scripture for Meditation

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

1 Peter 5:6-7



See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy... rather than on Christ.

Colossians 2:8

Introduction

In his first letter, Peter combated troubles from outside the church; his second letter combated troubles within it. First Peter tells of our strong hope and was written to comfort the saints amidst fierce testing. Second Peter tells of our solid faith and was written to instruct the saints amidst false teaching. While fierce testing has been known to purify the church and make her strong, false teaching has been known to confuse the church and make her weak. We must not underestimate the importance of 2 Peter—the danger of twisting the truth can be a greater threat to the church than the danger of persecution. As we study this epistle, let us ask ourselves if we are personally receiving sound Biblical teaching, that we might develop a solid faith.

The Author of 2 Peter

In recent centuries, scholars have challenged the genuineness of 2 Peter, pointing to the different writing styles between the two books (1 and 2 Peter) and the fact that 2 Peter was not as well known or recognized by the early church. It should be noted that there are some similarities in vocabulary and style between the two letters and that the use of scribes can account for variations in the final form of these letters. Furthermore, although 2 Peter was not as well known by the early church, it may have been accepted and used as Scripture as early as the close of the first century. The fact that this book was so carefully scrutinized before becoming fully accepted by the early church can be used as an argument in support of this book's authenticity today. The book of 1 Clement seems to have alluded to its use by the church (95 AD). Eusebius acknowledged that most Christians accepted it as Peter's letter (265-340 AD). It was affirmed as genuine Scripture by the councils of Laodicea (366 AD), Hippo (393 AD), and Carthage (397 AD).

The text itself points to Peter as the author—he identified himself as the writer of this letter at the start (2 Peter 1:1). Referring to this as his second letter (2 Peter 3:1), Paul as a brother in the Lord (2 Peter 3:15), his own situation in the present (2 Peter 1:12-15), and gave witness to the transfiguration of the Lord in the past (2 Peter 1:16-18; cf. Matthew 17:1-5). Thus, the testimony of the letter itself joins hands with the testimony of history to assure us that 2 Peter is to be accepted—unconditionally—as God's inspired Word, almost certainly written by Peter himself.

The Focus of 2 Peter

2 Peter was written sometime after 1 Peter, near the end of this Apostle's life (2 Peter 1:12-15). Peter was martyred during the reign of Nero—thus we can place the date of writing between 65 and 68 AD. As a person's life draws to an end, the things that are most important often become the most prominent, and to Peter, nothing could be more important than knowing God through Jesus Christ. The word *knowledge* and its cognates appear some 16 times in this book. Knowledge of the truth is the bedrock of a solid faith, and Peter wanted to be sure the churches under his care kept their foundation firm so they could weather any storms looming on the horizon. Aware of the growing danger of false teachers, Peter urged believers to grow in their faith (chapter 1) and protect their faith (chapter 2) until they saw the culmination of their faith (chapter 3).



Watch Amazing Journey Video
"Seven Steps to Success"

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

Growth in the Faith (2 Peter 1)

The book opens, Simon Peter. The apostle used both his original name, *Simon*, and the name given him by Jesus, *Peter*—which means, “rock” (Matthew 16:18). Jesus looked beyond Peter’s problems to his potential, helping him move from failure to faith, and Peter wrote to those who “have received a faith as precious as ours” (2 Peter 1:1b). This great evangelical pillar of the Church reminds us that our faith is in the same God, and that we, too, can move beyond our problems to fulfill our potential in Christ. The same supply of divine blessing is available for all that believe! God’s “...divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

How do we attain such knowledge? Through the “very great and precious promises” of God. By knowing the Scripture we can “...participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:4b). These astounding verses carry us near the very throne room of God, like a golden stairway into Christian maturity. Peter described seven steps—seven essential qualities of deepening spirituality. The platform for this stairway is faith itself (2 Peter 1:5). If we do not have faith in Christ for our salvation, we have no salvation at all.

The first step to be climbed is *goodness*, meaning “virtue,” or “excellence made possible by God’s energy.” The second step is *knowledge*, referring to the moral and spiritual discernment that arises from a keen understanding of God’s Word. To this knowledge, we are to add “self-control, and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love” (2 Peter 1:6-7). If we are in the process of developing such qualities, we can rest assured that our lives will be productive and fruitful for God. However, if we are not growing in these seven aspects of Christian character, we are spiritually myopic—unable to recognize the great price Christ paid to cleanse us from past sin (2 Peter 1:8-9). Peter, aware that his execution was imminent, sought to remind believers again and again of these important truths, derived from God’s unchanging Word (2 Peter 1:19-21). By knowing God’s Word, we can grow in our faith.

Protection of the Faith (2 Peter 2)

Peter devoted a large part of his letter to describing the danger and ultimate destruction of false teachers. He wrote with wording similar to that found in the book of Jude. Writers borrowing from each other was a common and acceptable practice in that day (Jude 1:8-19). Peter listed more than 25 characteristics of false teachers so that people could identify them easily. They will “secretly introduce destructive heresies” (2 Peter 1:1b).

Heresy has been described as truth pushed to an extreme—sound doctrine made sour. It is like arsenic dripped into a drink, a little bit of poison mixed with a lot of good juice—more fatal than a whole bottle of well-marked poison left safely on the shelf. Peter warned that such heretics will go as far as to deny “the sovereign Lord who bought them” (2 Peter 2:1c). When we add our own requirements to God’s free gift of salvation, we reject the gift altogether. In this way, these false teachers were “bringing swift destruction on themselves.” Nevertheless, “Many will follow their shameful ways” (2 Peter 2:1d-2a).

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Matthew 7:15

God's story, which cannot become exhausted through a whole lifetime of Bible study and teaching, becomes dull to those who seek glory for themselves. False teachers make up their own doctrine that they might have their own following. Indeed, God is closely following them and He keenly observes their work—they will not escape His judgment. Even as God judged the fallen angels in the ancient past, ungodly people in Noah's day, and Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's time, so will these false prophets meet their doom (2 Peter 2:9). Peter exhorts us to, "be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position" (2 Peter 3:17b).

The Culmination of the Faith (2 Peter 3)

A faith that is growing and enduring will one day be richly rewarded. While the world finds security in stocks, bonds, homes, and boats—things that will soon pass away—a solid faith will endure forever. Peter encouraged Christians to keep the faith by holding onto their hope. We must trust the Lord's promise that He will return one day soon, despite the words of the scoffers (2 Peter 3:1-7). Such scoffing will not deter those who understand the patience of the Lord (2 Peter 3:8-10). On the contrary, we who know the Lord will be careful to prepare for the His return (2 Peter 3:11-18).

Final Thought

There are significant parallels between 2 Peter and 2 Timothy—the last books written by Peter and Paul, respectively. Both men knew they would soon die a martyr's death (2 Peter 1:13-15; 2 Timothy 4:6-8), and both wrote about things that were most important to them. It is in these two books that we find the most concise and clear statements about the inspiration of God's Word in all the New Testament (2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), for knowing and believing the Scripture is crucial to our faith. Further, both men warned extensively about false teachers (2 Peter 2; 2 Timothy 3:1-9), for the truth of God's Word is ineffectual if twisted with fine-sounding half-truths.

If you were composing your final words for those you love, what would you write about? Would encouraging them to study the Scripture and to listen to sound teachers be on your priority list? More important, are you personally heeding the wisdom found in 2 Peter for your life today? If so, then your faith will be solid.

Spending Time With God

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Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What would your life be like without hope in Christ?

What could your life be like if your hope in the Lord was stronger?

2. Read 2 Peter 1:3. Restate this verse in your own words. On a scale of one to ten how much do you really believe and live these truths through the course of an average day?

3. a. What assurance about the promises of God do we find in 2 Peter 1:4?

b. What practical steps can you take to make God's promises a more integral part of your life?

4. a. Do you see a natural progression in the list of Christian virtues found in 2 Peter 1:5-7? Explain.

b. Are these qualities of spirituality natural byproducts of faith, or do they require effort on our part?

c. What promise is given for those who are growing in these graces (2 Peter 1:8-11)?



Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Read 2 Peter 1:12-15.

a. What is the benefit of learning, reviewing, and teaching the Christian essentials again and again?

b. How well do you follow Peter's example in this regard (i.e., in teaching your children, teaching Sunday School, in your own personal Bible study, etc.)?

6. Is there a danger in receiving most of our spiritual nourishment from Christian books and speakers, rather than from regular, prayerful Bible study (2 Peter 1:19-21)? Explain.

7. 2 Peter 2:1-22 reveals Peter's perspective of false teachers. What is their method (2 Peter 2:1-3)?

What is their end (2 Peter 2:4-12)?

What is Peter's attitude about these false prophets (2 Peter 2:13-22)?

Why do you think his convictions ran so deep in this regard? Do yours?

8. In what ways (if any) have you personally experienced scoffing from the world for your faith in Christ (c.f.: 2 Peter 3:3-4)?



9. How can you answer those who question why the Lord has not yet returned (2 Peter 3:5-10)? Do you typically think in these terms?

If you lived according to these truths more fully, how might your own life be affected (2 Peter 3:11-14)?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. What do you think Peter meant when he wrote, “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation...” (2 Peter 3:15a)?

Does this give you perspective on the suffering in the world today? If so, how?

11. Read 2 Peter 3:15b-16. Do you find some of Peter’s writings difficult to understand? If so, which?

How might it be easy to twist these writings in a way that brings confusion, hurt, and spiritual destruction to others?

12. What central truth from the book of 2 Peter do you think is most needed for Christians today? Why?

Scripture for Meditation

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:14



The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son, and they will call Him **IMMANUEL** – which means, **God with us.**

Matthew 1:23

Introduction

The apostle John was known as the “one Jesus loved” (John 20:2). He sat nearest Jesus at the last supper and lived close to the Lord until his last day. He “walked” with the Lord, meaning he maintained a close and abiding relationship with God. John then wrote to teach us how to stay on course with the Lord, as well. We can generally outline 1-3 John as follows:

1 John: Keeping on Track

2 John: Keeping Pace

3 John: Keeping Together

1 John: Keeping on Track

The true test of whether or not we are following God is our conduct. John states, “This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:5b-6). In his first epistle, John tells us that the path our Lord trod was marked by light, life, love, and truth. Before teaching us about the right path, however, John introduces us to the right Person—our guide, Jesus Christ.

When God Walked Among Us (1 John 1:1-4)

Before a faithful guide takes a group on a wilderness excursion, he may do advance work, first experiencing for himself the trails and the trials the group will encounter. John opens his first letter telling us that Jesus has walked the course of this world for us, that He might guide us. To connect with our reality, Jesus came as a real person. John saw Christ with his eyes and touched Him with his hands (1 John 1:1). He walked with Jesus for several years and could testify first-hand against the heretical notion that Christ did not inhabit a real body. This false idea about the Savior arose through one of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries—Gnosticism. Our Savior, fully human while yet fully divine, struggled along the winding rock-laden course of this world that He might lead us safely through. Such knowledge should bring great joy to every believing heart (1 John 1:4).

Walking in the Light (1 John 1:5-2:6)

One basic rule of camping is: Bring a flashlight. It is not safe to take emergency night runs without a light to illuminate the pathway. If God is with us, He will be our light. John proclaims that “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Those who are true followers of God, therefore, can “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7a), in contrast to those who walk in the darkness of sin and self-deception.

The Greek word for *walk* can be translated “ordering your life according to,” or “patterning your behavior after.” John did not suggest that Christians never sin. He taught, rather, that those who claim to be without sin altogether are deceiving themselves (1 John 1:8, 10). Try as we might, we will sometimes stumble and fall over rough protrusions on the trail of life. Our normal course, however, should be to walk in righteousness and holiness. If we stumble in the darkness, we



Watch Amazing Journey Video
“Five Tests of Faith”

...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

John 8:12

need only confess our sins and God will not only forgive us but cleanse us (1 John 1:9). This wonderful reconciliation with God is ours through Jesus Christ, who died as “the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2:2a) and who sits at the right hand of the Father as our Advocate—our defense attorney (1 John 2:1).

Walking in New Life (1 John 2:7-29)

In the physical world, life arises because of light. If the earth were suddenly robbed of the sun's light, it would become as lifeless as a meatball in the dark corner of a freezer. So it is in the spiritual world. The light of the Son, Jesus Christ, brings us new life. John describes the stages of growth connected with this new life: from childhood to young adulthood, to life as mature adults (1 John 2:12-14). One's ability to keep a good pace when moving through life's corridor depends largely on stature, physique, size, and stamina. Children in the faith—those in the beginning stages—know the rudimentary and essential truths of God's forgiving grace (1 John 2:12). Youngsters in the faith learn to confront and combat evil and the evil one (1 John 2:13b). The Fathers of the faith are those who have grown beyond doubt to a deep and settled relationship with God...they really “know” God (1 John 2:14). Those who are growing and living according to the new life in Christ can walk away from the old life in the world. They will love God more than the world, with its lusts, cravings, and desires (1 John 2:15-17). They will continue in the way of life despite the false teachers that surround them (1 John 2:18-29).

Walking in Love (1 John 3)

John writes in chapter three to describe our motivation: love. When love is their driving force, people have been known to walk great distances. In searching for a lost friend or family member, for example, one puts vital energy into each step. God's love toward us is introduced with these striking words: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). As children of the God, who is love, it is our nature to love others. This is not to say we will never fall into negative or hateful words or actions. It goes against God's nature within us, however, to maintain such a pattern of life. “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death” (1 John 3:14). God's love is described by the word *agape*, a self-giving love, not dependent on feeling, or on the worthiness of the one loved. The best definition of this love is found in the example of Christ Himself: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). Such love motivates us to go the distance for God.

Walking in Truth (1 John 4)

A common hiking error is to inadvertently take the wrong trail. John urges us to watch where we walk by discerning truth from error. We need to “test the spirits,” rather than naively accept every teaching from every teacher that comes our way, “because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1c) . Those who deny the full humanity or the full deity of Christ are against the true Jesus and are thus led by the spirit of “antichrist” (1 John 4:2-3). We need not fear such false teachers, for God, who lives in us, is “greater than the one who is in the world,” and will keep us on the right path (1 John 4:4).

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

John 15:12+

Walking with God (1 John 5)

This final chapter can be viewed as a summation of all that has gone before. In Chapter 5, John pulls together the strands of truth from the previous chapters and unites them in the grand concept of walking with God. We must walk in the light, not allowing sin to rule our lives (1 John 5:16-21). We must walk in new life, the rich and eternal life that only God can provide (1 John 5:11-15). We must walk in love, obeying the commands of God to love one another (1 John 5:1-5). We must walk in the truth, standing fast in right doctrine (1 John 5: 9-10). In so doing, we find ourselves walking with God. The one who once walked among us, through Jesus Christ, will now walk with us by the Holy Spirit.

2 John: Keeping Pace

The only book in the Bible addressed to a woman, 2 John, begins: “To the chosen lady and her children...” (2 John 1:1). Some scholars think this lady is actually John’s symbolic address to a church, and that the children are church members. It is more likely, however, that the Apostle was writing to a mother and her family. Either way, this shortest book in the Bible teaches us to keep pace with the Lord by uniting truth and love (2 John 4-6). Truth without love results in halting legalism. Love without truth results in wandering liberalism. A person who emphasizes one of these important virtues, while neglecting the other, hobbles on one foot, unable to move swiftly along the path of God’s purpose. As with Christians of long ago, we need to watch out, for false teachers, and to keep both feet on the ground.

3 John: Keeping Together

Wilderness hiking expeditions often rely on the safety found in a group. In the Christian life as well, we are encouraged not to go it alone. We should support and help one another on the journey of faith—we are called to extend hospitality. When Christ commissioned His disciples, He told them to travel in pairs from town to town, dependent on other believers for their basic needs (Mark 6:7-13). 3 John is a letter of commendation to Gaius, an elder who excelled in such support for the saints (3 John 1). Gaius not only welcomed friends, but opened his home and heart to Christians who were strangers (3 John 5). The words, “We ought therefore to show hospitality...that we may work together for the truth” (3 John:8) are as important for our day and our lives, as they were for Gaius and his church. If we are to walk with God, let us also walk together.

Final Thought

Before societies became industrialized and the automobile commonplace, people would walk great distances nearly every day. As a result, the average person remained trim and fit. In today’s world, many people do not exercise regularly; they become out of shape and overweight. In the spiritual realm, we need to make it our practice to walk with God. If we keep pace with Him, we will be spiritually healthy. Ask God to show you, based on the truths in 1 John, whether you are merely talking the walk or whether you are truly walking the talk.



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 3 | GENERAL LETTERS

LESSON 6

Walking With God | 1, 2, 3 John

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series “Life Changing Letters 3,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What one insight most encouraged or challenged you about your faith?

2. Read 1 John 1:1-4. Why do you think John's words in verses 1-3 provide a basis for the joy of which John speaks in verse 4?

3. Is John teaching that we must be sinless in 1 John 1:5-10? Explain.

Read 1 John 2:1-2. What solution has God provided for our sin problem?

4. a. What challenge is placed before us in 1 John 2:3-6?

b. If Jesus came as a guest to your home or to your church, would your behavior change?

c. If so, how?



Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. 1 John 2:7-11 shows the disparity between loving God and hating others (see also 1 John 4:7-11).

a. Do you find this teaching easy to accept? Why or why not?

b. How is this a litmus test for real Christianity?

6. Read 1 John 2:15-17. What are the three ways in which we become overly engrossed in the world (1 John 2:16)?

Can you see a parallel between these three areas of spiritual distraction and the three temptations of Christ (Matthew 4:1-11), and/or the three areas of temptation in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6)? Explain.

7. John warns about the spirit of the antichrist. What is the identifying mark of this spirit (1 John 2:18-19; 22-23)?

What help does God give us in discerning such a spirit (1 John 2:20-21; 27)? If you can, share an experience in which God has helped you so discern the antichrist spirit in someone claiming to be Christian.

8. Read 1 John 3:1-3. What great truths are explained in these verses? Which truth most encourages your faith?

9. Do you have confidence when you pray? Read 1 John 3:19-22. What gives us confidence in prayer? (1 John 5:14-15.) What do you think John means when he states that "God is greater than our hearts"? Why is this important?



Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. On what basis should we love even the unlovely (1 John 4:19)?

From 1 John 4:17-18, how does John describe the relationship between loving God and fearing God?

When you think of the coming day of God's judgment, what emotions are stirred within you?

11. Based on 1 John 5:3-5, what is the key to a victorious Christian life?

From 1 John 5:11-12, what is the critical factor in receiving God's gift of eternal life?

12. From 1 John 5:13, is it possible to know with certainty that we have this life? How do John's words in his Gospel (John 20:31) supplement this thought? If you are comfortable doing so, tell where you would rank your personal sense of confidence that you have God's gift of eternal life, a scale of 1-10 (ten being perfect).

Scripture for Meditation

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

1 John 3:1a



For our struggle is not
against flesh and blood,
but against the rulers,
against the authorities,
against the powers of this
dark world...

Ephesians 6:12a,b

Introduction

The Christian Church has always honored those who were able to stand against spiritual error and defend the faith. Jude was one such individual. He wrote against false teachers with a conviction and clarity that has sparked renewal in many a congregation and has served as fuel on the fires of reformation at key points in the history of the Church. People today give broad berth to Biblical error; Jude would have none of it. His pen lays down such plain language, straight thinking, and graphic denunciation of spiritual error that it sounds out of step and overly caustic to the modern ear. A careful reader, however, finds in this short letter the very passion of Christ, denouncing those who twist God's truth about the way of salvation.

Contending for the Faith (Jude 1-4)

Who was the author of the book of Jude? Numerous options have been proposed, but one prominent name has risen to the top through the test of time and logic: Jude, the brother of Jesus. When we read in Jude 1, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James," the first impression is that he must be referring to James, the brother of our Lord (Matthew 13:55; note that *Judas* is an alternative rendering of the name "Jude."). None of the other characters named Judas in the Bible claimed James as their brother (John 14:22, Acts 9:11, Acts 15:22).

Jude moves from a heart-warming introduction to a startling call for emergency response as he tells the purpose for his letter: "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

Intending to write a general treatise about our common salvation, Jude's plans were knocked off course by a surprise attack against the saints. He quickly engaged his mental energies in a search and find mission against theological foes. He exhorted and urged his readers to join forces in contending for the faith. The Greek word "contend," is *epagonizomai*—"to defend earnestly; to contend about a thing, as a combatant." Those who doubt the earnestness of Jude's appeal need only look at the striking content of his letter—these are fighting words.

No truth can or ever will be more important than "the faith": the core collection of essential doctrines and beliefs taught by Christ. These truths were carefully transmitted by writing and word of mouth from person to person, and from generation to generation. Unchanging as the immutable God who first taught this body of truth, our faith must remain intact. It was "once for all entrusted to the saints." (Jude 3c).

The Fate of False Teachers (Jude 5-11)

If people could see the consequences of bad choices before they made them, the world would be a different place. Sin pulls people down the easy slope of self-gratification until they slip over the edge of caution into the cavernous pit of consequences. Jude showcases three historic examples of the fate of those guided by error. The first is that of the Egyptian army that sought to prevent the Israelites from escaping their bondage as slaves in Egypt. God's judgment upon them was swift (Exodus 14:26). The second analogy relates to fallen angels, whom God "kept



Watch Amazing Journey Video
"God's Keeping Power"

Not everyone who says to Me “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 7:21

in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day” (Jude 6). The third demonstration of God’s judgment on wickedness is that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 7; Genesis 18:20; 19).

In Jude 8-10, the writer upbraids those who reject authority by pointing to an example apparently taken from an apocryphal book titled *The Assumption of Moses*. The word *apocrypha* is derived from a Greek word meaning “hidden,” and refers to religious texts that were generally written at the same time as Scripture but were not embraced as part of the divinely inspired canon. In the Western world, the term *apocrypha* has generally come to refer to the 14 books describing the history of the Jews during the 400 years between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament. These books are embraced by Catholics as inspired by God but of lower prophetic value than that rest of the Bible. Protestants view these same books as good historic and religious writings but not Scripture. The book to which Jude here refers, *The Assumption of Moses*, is not one of these 14 books, but an earlier source of information.

In the same way, Jude quotes from the apocryphal book of *Enoch* in Jude 14-15. By making reference to these extra-biblical sources, Jude no more confirms their divine authority than did Paul suggest Greek philosophers and poets were sent by God when he quoted their words (Acts 17:28, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Titus 1:12).

In a single short verse (Jude 11), Jude highlights three spiritual renegades who turned from the way of God. Cain was a murderer (Genesis 4:1-11), Balaam a lover of money (Numbers 22-24, 2 Peter 2:15, Revelation 2:14), and Korah the leader of rebellion (Numbers 16). Cain was forced to become a wanderer, and Balaam and Korah both met with untimely deaths (Genesis 4:12, Numbers 31:8, Numbers 16:31-32). Sin is a bad companion.

A Description of False Teachers (Jude 12-13)

Having proven from history the horrific fate of those who know not God, Jude turns the edge of his righteous indignation into a stylus from which he creates a poetic description of these infidels. If example doesn’t awaken the reader to the enemy under the mask, perhaps a composite sketch will do the job. Jude ransacks God’s created order, from heaven to earth, in search of adequate similes. These counterfeit Christians are “clouds without rain,” full of empty promise and leaving scorched and barren lives under their wispy influence. Such spiritual vagabonds are like “autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead” (Jude 12). Further, “they are wild waves of the sea,” driven by winds of wickedness as they destroy unwary vessels, “foaming up their shame” (Jude 13). They are “wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever” (Jude 12b). The picture could not be bleaker, nor the lives of phony Christians sadder.

Predictions About False Teachers (Jude 14-19)

The fate of deceiving teachers is not only exemplified in history but confirmed in prophecy. Quoting from the apocryphal book of *Enoch* (Jude 14-15) and the apostles of our Lord (Jude 17-18), Jude confirms from both extra-Biblical and Biblical sources the coming judgment of God for those who confuse and divide the Church. *Enoch*, described in Jude 14-15, Genesis 5:19-24, and Hebrews 11:5, was a godly man who so walked with God that when his time came he was

“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Matthew 16:6

Then they understood that He was not telling them to guard against the yeast... but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Matthew 16:12

brought straight home to heaven—he did not experience bodily death. Jude quoted from the book of Enoch because it was apparently received as a reliable source by many readers in his day, even as other apocryphal books are counted trustworthy by Catholics in our day. The quote from the Apostles (Jude 17-18) seems either to be a loose rendering of another text (e.g., 2 Peter 3:3, Acts 20:29, or 1 Timothy 4:1-3), or a quotation that was remembered by the Christian faithful and passed on through word of mouth. In both the quote from Enoch and that from the apostles, Jude's point is that respected and godly leaders from the Old and New Testament spoke clearly about the coming destruction of those who deny God.

Standing Strong (Jude 20-24)

Finally, Jude turns his focus from false believers to true followers of Christ. These he encourages to grow strong in faith, to keep serious in prayer, to trust deeply in God's love, and to hope persistently in the bright future offered to all of God's people (Jude 20-21). Those who so stand for the Lord should also reach out to people who are weighed down by doubt and sin, being careful not to be influenced by their ungodly practices (Jude 23-24). Finally, Jude leaves us with a benediction that magnifies God's sustaining grace and power; this marvelous blessing has been proclaimed in Christian worship through the generations and embraced with confidence by those who contend for the faith:

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 24-25).

Final Thought

It is one thing to have faith; it is quite another to contend for the faith. Think of people around you who do not know Jesus Christ, who by their lives and words lead others astray. How can you influence them to rethink their direction and turn their hearts toward heaven? The first thing you must do is to pray for them. Next, you can focus on strengthening your own walk with God (Jude 20-21). As you come to be strong in your understanding and to trust more fully in God, you will find yourself extending a hand of loving help to those who stumble over the rough edges of doubt as they wander from the path of God's blessing (Jude 22-23). Those like Jude who are close to Christ will find it natural, right, and even necessary to contend for the faith.

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series “Life Changing Letters 3,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. PRAY, ASKING GOD FOR SPECIAL INSIGHT INTO HIS WORD.



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 3 | GENERAL LETTERS

LESSON 7

Contend for the Faith | Jude

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What one insight most encouraged or challenged you about your faith?

2. In Jude 1 the author (who is believed to be a brother of Christ) calls himself a “servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.” Why do you think he minimized the fact that he was the Lord’s brother?

3. Read Jude 13-4. From verse 4, why did the saints need to contend for the faith?

4. In Jude 5-7, we find three graphic examples of God’s judgment on sin. Which speaks most powerfully to you? Why?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Jude says these false teachers took the “way of Cain” (Jude 11). From Genesis 4:1-11, how would you describe Cain’s way(s)?

6. a. Jude compares false teachers with those rushing “for profit into Balaam’s error” (Jude 11—referring to Genesis 22-24.).

b. What did Balaam do that was wrong (See Revelation 2:14.)?



SERIES

LIFE CHANGING LETTERS 3 | GENERAL LETTERS

LESSON 7

Contend for the Faith | Jude

c. What motivated Balaam (See 2 Peter 2:15.)?

c. What is the main point being made in Jude 14-16?

7. Read Jude 12-13. Which of these vivid images connected with false teachers speaks most loudly to your heart and soul? Why?

9. If you can, describe a situation in which you recently sought to “contend for the faith.”

8. In Jude 14, Jude quotes an apocryphal book (the book of *Enoch*; some apocryphal books are accepted by Catholics as Scripture and by Protestant Christians as good resources but not inspired Scripture.) What else can we learn about *Enoch* from:

a. Genesis 5:19-24?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. How can we stand strong in our faith based on Jude 20 - 21?

b. Hebrews 11:5?



11. How can we help others stand strong (See Jude 22-23)?

12. Write out Jude 24-25. What part of this great benediction most encourages you to trust God for strength as you seek to contend for the faith? Why?

Scripture for Meditation

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

Jude 3



BNEXT Amazing Journey Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide section is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others, but of aiding them along the way. The purpose of this Leader's Guide is to aid you in your role as facilitator. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

The BNEXT Study / Amazing Journey includes a weekly video of 15–20 minutes in length. The video provided is on a flash drive, so make sure you have USB-compatible technology. Please review the video *before* each class. Here's a materials checklist:

- TV or computer with a USB 2.0 (or faster) port
- For larger groups, a projector is needed (and may even enhance a small group experience)
- Amazing Journey videos (on USB flash-drive)
- This Participant's Guide (one per participant)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The BNEXT study series' are versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, which includes time for group discussion and video viewing. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to watch the video together. Alternately, the flash-drive videos may be made available for each small group, in which case, after the opening and welcome time, everyone can move to groups and remain there until the end of the day's session.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- A hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word.
- A commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end.
- The ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach.
- A willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Participant's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson and be thinking about how to present the questions to the class. You should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions: Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions, before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facilitator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. These lessons are designed to easi-

ly be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion," or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor, or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our Bible

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT Amazing Journey* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/.

The first class is unique in that the participant will not have anything to prepare. Use this time for getting to know one another and to introduce the BNEXT lesson format. There is an 18-minute BNEXT introduction video that accompanies this first lesson. Before showing the introduction video, we recommend:

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (10 minutes)
 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: “Tell us something unique about yourself.” Or perhaps, “What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?” Or, “This first lesson will provide an overview of the Bible. How comfortable are you with the Bible as a whole? Do you think you can benefit by learning more about each of its books and sections?”
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Handout materials and give an overview (7 minutes)
 - a. Discuss the format of BNEXT Amazing Journey:
 - Reading of a specific book(s) or chapters of a book of the Bible.
 - Lesson commentary and questions (at least the Devotion and Discussion questions, and ideally, more) to be completed individually through the week.
 - Meet weekly to watch a 20-minute video and to go

through the Discussion questions (and if time allows, the Digging Deeper questions).

- b. Review the “Rules of Engagement” (found in the front of this Participant's Guide).
 - c. Ask if there are any questions.
3. Discuss the study you will be doing (15 minutes)
 - a. Inform class of how many weeks you will be meeting to cover the study and what date will be your last date for this study.
 - b. Ask the group, “What do you know about [insert study's Bible book(s) name(s) such as Genesis].
 - c. Ask the group, “What do you hope to have answered about (Genesis)?”
 4. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey Introduction and Overview video (18 minutes)
 5. Video discussion (5 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are one or two participants who have a comment on the video or who may have learned something new from the video.
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief to allow others to respond.
 6. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 7. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (5 minutes)
 - a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).

- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are about to watch a video on the Exodus from Israel: “Why do you think the Exodus was important?”, or “From what you know about the Exodus, how does it relate to the work of Christ on the cross?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.
 - c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” in the front of this Participant's Guide.
 2. Discuss lesson questions (20 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss. These are the questions they have been encouraged to complete on their own prior to the class.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote good discussion.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
 3. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey video (about 20 minutes)
 4. Video discussion (10 minutes)

Ask what participants may have learned or found interesting in the video.
 5. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 6. Dismissal