



## **Getting started with Letters NOT from Paul**

The letters that the Lord has preserved for us in His Word really are letters – they were written with a particular purpose, to a particular people, in a particular place. Because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, we have the privilege to benefit from them today.

These letters to the early church are there to encourage believers in our Lord Jesus to live in the light of His cross. The circumstances differ, but the two big challenges that the early church faced were (1) suffering and (2) the danger of false teaching.

Putting ourselves in the shoes of the original readers helps us to recognize the significance and weight of what’s being said. It’s also easier to then see how it applies to us today.

### **James**

Written to a group of suffering Christians, James reminds us that God demands our total allegiance. We must be whole-hearted rather than double-minded. Parts of James are often misunderstood, and seem to be placing the emphasis on our works. But, understood correctly, James is not denying grace - he’s simply explaining that faith is always shown in works. You can’t have one without the other.

*“When the Word of God is truly appreciated and obeyed, it manifests in believers right words, true wisdom and righteous works.”* (D. Moo in Proclamation Bible)

### **1 Peter**

Again, written to suffering Christians, scattered across a region which is now Turkey. Living as exiles in a hostile world, Peter reminds them to keep their eyes on the prize. To live pure and holy lives in the face of opposition, they must remember who they are and the hope they have.

## 2 Peter

Peter's second letter is a warning against false teaching. He reminds believers of the destruction and judgement that will come on the false teachers, and gives them an antidote to their poison. The antidote is the knowledge of God.

*1v3 "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness."*

We must stick firm to the true good news of Jesus, as we are known by God, know God and grow to know Him better.

## 1-3 John

Again the background for these letters is the sad reality of false teachers who came from the church, causing some concern within the church. John writes to reassure the believers that *"you can know you are Christians because you believe Jesus is the Christ, you recognise your sin and you love fellow Christians."* (M. Casement in Proclamation Bible).

These three short letters don't have the tight linear structure of Paul's writings; instead John circles around some of the same themes that appear in his gospel – things like love, light and belief.

## Jude

Jude has an emphatic and sobering condemnation for false teachers. Using several examples from the Old Testament, and some from outside the Old Testament, Jude reminds Christians of the terrible judgement coming to false teachers and urges them to contend for the faith, building themselves up in their faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping themselves in God's love as the way for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring them to eternal life (v20-21)

We might not face all of the same blatant heresies, but similar strands of false teaching are always rearing their head in our churches and our hearts, so these short letters are crucial for keeping us on the right track.

We might not face such severe suffering, but even lesser opposition can cause us to think and act in the wrong ways, so these letters are crucial in helping us respond rightly to pressure.

## Reading schedule:

Read 1 chapter a day and you'll finish these books with time to spare!



Here are some questions the Bible wants you to ask of itself. Use these to help you as you read your way through this month's book: (please don't feel like you have to fill in every question in loads of detail. These are a guide to help you learn from what you are reading.)

- What did you learn about Jesus and what it means to trust him? (Luke 24:45-47)
- What did you learn about yourself? (James 1:23 & 2 Tim 3:16-17)
- How were you corrected or rebuked or equipped for every good work? (2 Tim 3:16-17)
- What did you learn from the book that will help you keep going as a follower of Jesus? (Romans 15:4)
- What did you learn that will help you serve and build up the church? (Eph 4:11-16)
- What have you learnt that helps you love the Lord your God with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your mind? (Matt 22:37-40)
- What has helped you love your neighbour as yourself? (Matt 22:37-40)



## RBT Grow Group is on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March

Bring along some things from your reading of these books to share with others.

### **Some RBT reading ideas:**

- Meet up once a week to read it with a friend.
- Listen online at [Biblegateway.com](http://Biblegateway.com)
- Write down a verse that struck you that day.
- Encourage someone by texting them a thought from what you've read.
- 

### **Grow 1:1 questions to unlock the passage:**

**What** does this teach me about God?

**How** does this point me to the Lord Jesus and His cross?

**What** does this teach me about myself?

**How** does this help me to pray?

**What** difference will this make to my week?