

General Letters

(God's True Story)

Introduction

If you got a letter from someone special would you read only a small part of it and then put the letter away? No! You would read the whole letter from start to finish.

Review. Open your Bibles to the Table of Contents. Which books are called *The Gospels*? (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Which book tells the history of the early church? (Acts.)

Last week we learned that Paul's letters were written to specific churches or to specific individuals. Which letters did Paul write to churches? Which letters did Paul write to individual men?

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You for inspiring the people of old to save and preserve these wonderful letters that are now the books in our Bible. They give us all the information we need for life and godliness. Please help us to treasure the wonderful messages there for us from You. Amen.

Memory Verse:

For the word of the Lord is right. (Psalm 33:4a)

Lesson

The last seven letters in the New Testament were not written by Paul. Instead of calling these books by the names of the people to whom the letters were written, these books are called by the names of the men who wrote them—James, Peter, John, and Jude.

Though these books were written by men, God watched over every word they wrote (2 Timothy 3:16). And He has seen to it that these books have been preserved through hundreds of years because they contain God's message to us today.

James

James is a very practical book. It is a book that explains not just *what* to believe, but *how* to live the life of a believer. James is all about putting our faith into action. It encourages us to:

- Turn from temptation to sin
- Tame our tongues (that is, be careful what we say)
- Patiently pray

One of the most important verses is this:

James 1:19

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

First Peter

First Peter was written during a time when Christianity had been outlawed! Anyone who claimed to be a Christian could be tortured, imprisoned, or even killed simply because he believed in God and believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Christians were being thrown into lion's dens for being believers and followers of Jesus.

Since Peter was writing at such a time, you might think he would have been depressed or at least scared. But when you read 1 Peter, you hear hope in Peter's message, not discouragement. You hear confidence and, if you listen really closely, you even hear joy!

Peter wrote this letter to encourage Christians who were suffering for their faith.

1 Peter 1:3

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation.

Peter was a man that was truly looking forward to the Lord's return.

1 Peter 1:13

So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.

Peter thought that the end of the world was coming any day!

1 Peter 4:7-8

The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. (8) Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.

Second Peter

In Peter's second letter he warns the people about false teachers. False teachers had been coming into their church gatherings and telling people that Jesus wasn't really coming back again and that they didn't have to be responsible for their actions.

If you were being persecuted for your faith and someone told you that faith in Jesus wasn't really important, then you would probably think, "What's the use in being a follower of Jesus?" So, Peter wanted to set the people straight.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

He says that the Lord doesn't want to come back and end the world until everyone has a chance to become a believer. But, don't be fooled by how long it's taking Him to return. He *is* coming back!

2 Peter 3:10

But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements

themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

Peter told the people that Jesus is coming back, so we ought to live every day as if this might be the day.

2 Peter 1:5-8

In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, (6) and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, (7) and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. (8) The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter knew what he was talking about when he encouraged other Christians to keep the faith. He himself had been beaten and jailed for being a Christian, and he was eventually killed for his faith. But Peter knew that faith in Jesus is the most important thing in life, and he had grown to the point that nothing could shake his faith in Jesus. Next time you feel like it's hard to be a Christian, remember Peter.

John's Letters

John not only wrote the Gospel of John, but he also wrote, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, as well as the book of Revelation.

John wanted to encourage people to live righteously and to love each other.

1 John 3:18-20

Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. (19) Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. (20) Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.

Talk is cheap; it's easy to say we are believers in Jesus and not really let Jesus be our Lord. We need to show people we love them with our actions. It will be how we treat others that really shows people that Christ is living in us.

1 John 4:11-12

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. (12) No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

Jude

Jude was probably one of Jesus' brothers. He wrote his letter to persuade people to encourage each other to keep their faith.

Jude 1: 20-22

But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, (21) and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love. (22) And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.

Just like you would encourage someone to run a race well, we are to cheer each other on to keep living your life in a way that pleases God.

God wants us to know how we should live as Christians. In these letters, He has told us everything we need to know.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we love Your word! It is so precious to us. You are so awesome to inspire them to write down all the things that were on Your heart. The messages Your word contains are still powerful in our lives today, too. Reading Your word is like reading a love letter from You to me. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Postman

Print the names of all the "letter" books—Romans through Jude—on separate envelopes. Put all the envelopes in a "mail" box. Pass the box around, letting the children draw one or more envelopes at random. The number of envelopes they draw will depend on the size of your class. When all "letters" have been distributed, pretend you are the postmaster and ask the children bring you the letters in the order they appear in our Bible. If necessary, children can look at their Table of Contents or a Bible Book poster. But, encourage them to try delivering the letters without having to look.

Ask-It-Basket

Write the review questions on separate pieces of paper. Wad them up into balls and put them in a decorated basket. Ask each child to choose a question to answer.

Memory Verse Review

As a group, recite the memory verse a few times, removing one word from the whiteboard each time until the entire verse is gone. Then, divide the class into two teams. Draw a vertical line down the middle of the white board (or have two separate white boards). At "Go!" let one child from each team come to the whiteboard and print the first word of the memory verse. As soon as the child is finished, he runs back to his team and tags the next person in line. The next person goes up to the whiteboard and prints the next word, and so forth. The first team to finish the memory verse in the correct order wins.

Or, use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. Which books are called *The Gospels*? (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).
2. Which book tells the history of the early church? (Acts.)
3. Which letters did Paul write to the church at Corinth? (1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians)
4. Which letter was written to the churches of Galatia? (Galatians)
5. Which letter went to the church at Ephesus? (Ephesians)
6. How many letters did Paul write to the church at Thessalonica? (2)
7. How many authors wrote the last 7 letters in the New Testament? (4)
8. Peter wrote his letters during a time that Christians were being persecuted for following the ways of Jesus. What does it mean to be persecuted? (Anyone who claimed to be a Christian could be tortured, imprisoned, or even killed simply because he believed in God and believed that Jesus was the Messiah.)
9. Why is it surprising that Peter doesn't sound discouraged or scared in his letters? (People were being put to death for believing in Jesus, yet Peter was hopeful.)
10. During Peter's life, what did the false teachers try to tell the Christians? (That Jesus wasn't really coming back again and that they didn't have to be responsible for their actions.)
11. If you were being persecuted for your faith and someone told you that faith in Jesus wasn't really important, what might you think? (That there was no point in following Jesus.)
12. Why did Peter know what he was talking about when he encouraged other Christians to keep the faith? (He himself had been beaten and jailed for being a Christian. He was eventually killed for his faith.)
13. What 5 books did John write? (Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation.)
14. What does John encourage us to do to one another? (Love each other; show people we love them with our actions)
15. Who was Jude to Jesus? (Jesus' brother)

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