

SESSION 2: THE VALUE OF LETTERS

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

If you had to recommend one book from the Bible that helped people to become healthy disciples,

- which book would you choose?
- why would you choose it?
- if you had to choose one verse or (short) passage to sum up the message of the book, what would it be?



***‘SPEND A POUND ON THE HOLE,
AND A PENNY ON THE PLANT’***

READ

This old gardening saying also holds fast for Bible study. To help us multiply into healthy disciples, we are going to spend our time looking at one particular New Testament book: 1 Peter, but, of course, the previous exercise shows quite clearly that it's not the only place we can look for guidance. In fact, it is essential that we don't confine all our understanding to one book or theme; we need 'the full counsel of God' if we are going to multiply healthy disciples.

Nevertheless, detailed study of individual books is very important and for this series we are going to concentrate on 1 Peter. However, before we do, we need to do some background study. We need to spend a pound on the hole!

WHY LETTERS?

There are at least five letter writers in the New Testament.

Discussion: Can you remember them all and why might there be six?

Have you ever considered why God chose letters and not some other form of document as a way of communicating His truth to His children?



READ:

Letters, particularly between private individuals, were far from common in the first century. They were a very costly and time consuming way of communicating and most were official documents. Letters the length of those included in the New Testament were almost unheard of elsewhere.

Letters were normally written on scrolls (often by a scribe rather than the actual author, who would dictate the letter) and were always delivered by hand to their intended recipient(s). This why the writer's name comes first, so that when the scroll was unrolled the reader(s) could see whose message they were reading.

After the writer's name would come the name and title of the person to whom the letter was sent, accompanied by a list of their titles, honours and achievements.

This presented an interesting dilemma for the New Testament letter writers: the vast majority of first century Christians came from very humble backgrounds and so did not have titles or occupy official positions (many of them were slaves). So, the writers had to choose how to address them.

This produced some of the most wonderful descriptions of God's people in the entire New Testament.

Discussion: Look at Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 2 Peter 1:1, and Jude 1:1.

What do each of these ways of addressing God's people teach us about who we are?

Finally, look at 1 Peter 1:1 and 2.

What can we learn from Peter's greeting about who we are as Christians?

What challenges are there in it?

For the next session:

Many of the New Testament letters were written because the writers were unable to visit the recipients in person. Paul, in particular, often expressed extreme frustration at being prevented from doing so. Letters, then, were often seen as a (poor) 'second best' for actually re-visiting churches, particularly those where the writers had close relationships with church members. Yet, out of this, the New Testament letter writers have unknowingly blessed countless Christians throughout the ages with their teaching and instruction.

We will not know the true value of any of our decisions and actions until we stand before our Father in heaven, but can you already think of any examples where you have felt frustrated at not being able to do the thing you intended to do, but in the long run it resulted in greater blessing and glory to God?

