

Praying Through the Letters

What if a loved one sent you a shoebox full of letters?

It's most likely not a question of if you would read them, but how. Would you grab the one on top and skim it quickly in order to get to the next, or would you savor one each day, re-reading your favorite lines over and over?

Would you scan them from beginning to end, study the opening and closing, and then get to a more in-depth analysis of the precise tone and language used in the letter?

Whatever your method, you probably would eventually read every last word so you wouldn't miss out on any important information.

What do the letters written in the Bible have to do with us today? Why is such a large portion of the New Testament written in the form of letters? First, think about the word *testament*. Merriam Webster defines *testament* as "a covenant between God and the human race, a tangible proof or tribute, an expression of conviction, a creed: a brief authoritative formula of religious belief, a set of fundamental beliefs, a guiding principle."

The New Testament is giving testimony to God through His people, guiding them through authoritative writing to address specific behaviors, stating beliefs with conviction as an everlasting written contract with God. The believers keep in contact in order to keep in contact with God.

Think about social media. Christians write to other Christians regarding real and specific circumstances to inform, clarify, encourage and strengthen one another. They promote the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the process, other Christians are also inspired and may even receive instruction as they read the interactions. Perhaps non-Christians are drawn to the appeal of a more lovingly productive, positive and fruitful life that lasts throughout eternity.

While Facebook is our convenient way of communicating at a distance, letters were the most expedient, effective and long-lasting method of bridging the miles between believers from the '40s to the '90s. While "the '40s to the '90s" may make you wonder about radios and television, the letters of the New Testament were written from about 46 A.D. through the 90s A.D.

Why did the apostle Paul write letters to the Romans? Paul was presenting the way to be saved. This is something all people need to know.

Why did Paul write to the Corinthians? He wanted to teach believers how to live for Christ. This is a perfect letter to follow the letter to the Romans and to promote our own progression and development as believers.

Why did Paul write to the Galatians? To remind believers of God's grace. To the Ephesians? To strengthen their faith. To the Philippians? To deepen their joy. To the Colossians? To remind them of Christ's sufficiency. To the Thessalonians? To encourage them in the midst of persecution by reminding them Christ will return soon.

To Timothy? To bring up a leader in the faith. To Titus? To teach how to oversee the church. To Philemon? To demonstrate tactful forgiveness and reconciliation. Why was a letter written to the Hebrews? To present the superiority of Christ and the sufficiency of faith in Him.

Why did James write a letter to Christians everywhere? He wanted to promote good works prompted by faith. Why did Peter write letters to Christians everywhere? To encourage those who suffer. Why did John write letters to Christians everywhere? To promote love between Christians and to warn against loving worldliness. Why did Jude write a letter to Christians? To urge them to defend the truth.

These are all concepts that we can all take to heart and incorporate into our lives. Let us put them into practice, beginning with prayer.

Praying Through James' Letter

James wrote this letter from Jerusalem as a leader of the Christian church around 47 A.D. James' letter is full of ways to be obedient in good works: avoiding worldliness, pursuing purity and patiently awaiting Christ's return by finding meaning and purpose in suffering. Our difficulties refine us, strengthen our faith and prepare us to minister to others. As we hold on to God through the "exams of life," He helps us succeed by becoming better and not bitter.

In addition to this perspective on suffering, we must develop a Christian worldview in all subjects, knowing that every good gift is from above. We must control our tongues to avoid angry quarrels, speak the truth and not slander or judge one another. We must demonstrate the genuineness of our faith through our words and our works. We are to look after one another's spiritual health, loving others as ourselves.

We should seek God's direction in all planning. We are called to pray in faith for physical healing, for relational restoration, for wisdom and even about the weather, believing God will answer. Let us share our concerns and joys with one another, confess our sins to one another and faithfully pray for one another, knowing that "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man [or woman] availeth much" (James 5:16, KJV).

Dear heavenly Father,

Thank you for James, one of your servants and a brother of Jesus. Please prompt us to keep his reverent attitude. Fill us with joy as we continue to persevere. Keep our faith strong. Make us mature and complete so we do not lack anything. Please give us much wisdom.

Lead us to give generously as You do, without finding fault. Give us belief, and take away our doubt. Thank You for every good and perfect gift You've given us. Thank You that You do not change. Train us to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry. Thank You for giving us life and for planting Your Word in us. Lead us not into temptation.

Empower us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Bless us in what we do. Thank You that Your perfect Word gives freedom. Remind us to keep tight reins on our tongues. Make our religion pure and faultless as we look after orphans and widows and keep from being polluted by the world.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen.*

*Excerpt from Praying through the Letters (Westbow Press, a division of Thomas Nelson) by **Gina Turner**. Turner is an author whose experience of God's strength and guidance through losses of health and children led her to write her second book, Praying Through the Letters, which was published this year. The book is available on , on Amazon and through Barnes and Noble.*