LETTERS TO THE CHURCH
SHADY GROVE

JANUARY 2021

Letters to the Church
Introduction

“I want to read my Bible more.” It’s one of the phrases we say in the church the most. It’s also a completely noble goal. As people who want to know Jesus better, it’s natural to want to read about Him more. The problem comes in the execution, not the intention. Actually, reading the Bible and doing so consistently is where it often becomes difficult. There are many reasons why we fail to keep it up, but one is that we start reading without direction. We jump into reading without any plan. And at Shady Grove, we want to change that.

You are about to embark on a 30-day journey reading through four books of the Bible, specifically from the New Testament: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. This is our Letters to the Church reading plan. As the title suggests, these are not books, but rather letters written to local gatherings of Jesus followers within a few decades of his resurrection. Don’t let their brevity fool you, these texts are extremely powerful and relevant, even nearly two millennia after they were first authored. It is our hope that at the end of these next 30 days, you will have a rich foundation of what it means to fully follow and believe in Jesus.

We chose these four letters because they all have the same author: the apostle Paul, and they all have a similar goal, to help their audiences maintain a central focus on Jesus. While these documents contain elementary principles regarding what it means to follow Jesus, we believe everyone, regardless of where they are on their spiritual journey, can benefit from reading these texts and applying the lessons they contain.

Thank you for engaging in this journey with us. God is going to do something great in you over these next 30 days as we get into these Letters to the Church, we guarantee it.

JANUARY 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3 **Galatians 2:20** Church Prayer 6:00 P.M.	4 Galatians 1	5 Galatians 2 Day of Fasting	6 Galatians 3	7 Galatians 4	8 Galatians 5	9
10 **Philippians 2:5** Church Prayer 6:00 P.M.	11 Galatians 6	12 Philippians 1 Day of Fasting	13 Philippians 2	14 Philippians 3	15 Philippians 4	16
17 **Colossians 3:12** Church Prayer 6:00 P.M.	18 Colossians 1	19 Colossians 2 Day of Fasting	20 Colossians 3	21 Colossians 4	22 Ephesians 1	23
24 **Ephesians 4:32** Church Prayer 6:00 P.M.	25 Ephesians 2	26 Ephesians 3 Day of Fasting	27 Ephesians 4	28 Ephesians 5	29 Ephesians 6	30
31	1	2	3	4	5	6

FASTING?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline, practiced by many in the Bible, like Moses, David, Daniel, Queen Esther, and Jesus. Fasting is giving up something, usually food, for a specified time for a specific purpose. It is generally accompanied by other spiritual disciplines like prayer and reading God's Word. "Learning to discipline our bodies through fasting will have an effect on the discipline of our souls" *. Fasting is a means to conquer the physical and open the door to the supernatural in your life. By denying your body, you can grow closer to the Lord by feeding your spirit.

Fasting is humbling one's self before God. A group fast such as that in which our church is going to participate, is for the purpose of bringing unity, healing, and guidance for the church body. There are many benefits to fasting such as:

- centers on God (Luke 2:37 Anna the prophetess "worshiped night and day fasting and praying"
- reveals what controls us
- reminds us that God alone sustains us - Matt.4:4, John 4:31-34
- helps us keep our balance in life (nonessentials, cravings, enslavement) 1 Corinthians 6:12
- effectiveness in intercessory prayer
- guidance for decisions
- increased concentration/focus on God
- deliverance from bondage
- physical well- being for our body
- revelations

It is advisable not to abstain from water if one is fasting from food. One may also choose to begin a prolonged fast by starting gradually and slowly. A 24- hour partial fast example is lunch to lunch, skipping supper & breakfast. One can drink fresh fruit juices and do this weekly for several weeks first before a longer fast. One can experience the physical as well as inner attitude benefits.

Fasting is considered a private matter between the individual and God (Matthew 6:16-18). If you are doing a prolonged fast of more than a meal, you might go about your regular duties while inwardly being in prayer, song, worship and being receptive to the Holy Spirit.

If one has health concerns, it may not be advisable to do a prolonged fast and it is best to consult with one's physician. One may choose to fast from social media, television or an hour of sleep as an alternative. It is generally something that someone would otherwise miss by abstaining and extra time is spent seeking the Lord.

Remember fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen any other way. Our church family will be fasting together each Tuesday in January

*Fasting and Praying-Why and How. Retrieved from: https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/13973-fasting-praying-why-how

GALATIANS INTRO

The book of Galatians has been referred to a spiritual Magna Carta, because of its beautiful explanation and defense of justification by faith alone. When we believe Jesus rose from the dead and publicly acknowledge that faith, we are made right with God and are therefore justified with him (Romans 10:9). In other words, the only way to be right with God is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to a group of churches in the region of Galatia, a Roman province in central Asia Minor, in modern-day Turkey. These churches were filled with mostly new believers and had been swayed by false teachers known as Judaizers. They taught that in order to be right with God, they must adhere to the Law of Moses, i.e., the Old Covenant. Paul wanted to make sure they understood that the Judaizers were wrong and the only thing required for salvation was faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul wanted them to know that as Gentiles that they weren't tied to any Jewish laws or traditions.

This letter is singular in its focus: following Jesus leads to freedom, not traditions and rules. That was a covenant with Abraham and his decedents but once Jesus came and established a new covenant, the covenant relationship changed. That was no longer a requirement to following Jesus, now it was all about faith in God alone. Jews who lived under the Old Covenant of Moses were bound by their laws, but when Jesus established a New Covenant, he rendered the old one obsolete. A new day had come being justified with God no longer meant following the old law. Rather, it meant following Jesus.

5 WAYS TO DIG DEEPER

WEEK 1 (January 4-8)

Pause in your reading to dig into the Bible. Below are 5 different ways to dig deeper each day. These exercises will encourage meditation. **Try a different idea each day of the week**. Remember to keep a pen and paper ready to capture God's insights.

1 Underline or highlight key words or phrases in the Bible passage. Use a pen or highlighter to mark new discoveries from the text.

2 Put it in your own words. Read the passage or verse slowly, then rewrite the main themes and topic using your own words.

3 Ask and answer questions. Questions unlock new discoveries and meanings. Ask questions about the passage using these words: who, what, why, when, where, or how. Jot down your answers to these questions.

4 Capture the big idea. God's Word communicates big ideas. Periodically ask: What's the big idea in this chapter?

5 Personalize the meaning. Respond as God speaks to you through the Scriptures. Ask: How could my life be different today as I respond to what I'm reading?

GALATIANS 1

(Monday, January 4)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

GALATIANS 2

(Tuesday, January 5: FAST DAY)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

GALATIANS 3

(Wednesday, January 6)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

GALATIANS 4

(Thursday, January 7)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

GALATIANS 5

(Friday, January 8)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

5 WAYS TO DIG DEEPER

WEEK 2 (January 11-15)

Pause in your reading to dig into the Bible. Below are 5 different ways to dig deeper each day. These exercises will encourage meditation. **Try a different idea each day of the week**. Remember to keep a pen and paper ready to capture God's insights.

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5 Personalize the meaning. Respond as God speaks to you through the Scriptures. Ask: How could my life be different today as I respond to what I'm reading?

GALATIANS 6

(Monday, January 11)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Philippians INTRO

Philippians is a book of joy in times of hardship. This is another letter Paul wrote while in prison. Yet, he still chose to write with a tone of hope instead of despair. Though he referred to his hardship often, his focus was on Jesus and the people in Philippi.

(Philippi was the first town in which Paul preached after he crossed the Aegean Sea, making this the birthplace of European Christianity. Paul's normal pattern was to preach first in the Jewish synagogue, but Philippi had few Jewish residents and no synagogue. So, Paul began his ministry at a place of prayer beside the river) The church in Philippi was launched the same way as many today: it started with a family and multiplied from there. This is also the place where Paul and Silas were imprisoned and an earthquake shook the doors open, yet they didn't escape. Because of this, the jailer was saved, and this helped fuel the start of the church*.

Philippians was one of two books that has a great explanation of Jesus. Philippians 2:5-11 provides a spectacular theological explanation of who Jesus is and His relation to God the Father.

This letter also includes themes such as humility, self-sacrifice, unity, and Christian living.

[1]Galatians thru Philemon Putting faith into practice by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Jefferey Miller, J. Hampton Keathley III, with Dr. Mark Strauss

Philippians 1

(Tuesday, January 12: FAST DAY)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Philippians 2

(Wednesday, January 13)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Philippians 3

(Thursday, January 14)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Philippians 4

(Friday, January 15)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

5 WAYS TO DIG DEEPER

WEEK 3 (January 18-22)

Pause in your reading to dig into the Bible. Below are 5 different ways to dig deeper each day. These exercises will encourage meditation. **Try a different idea each day of the week**. Remember to keep a pen and paper ready to capture God's insights.

1 Underline or highlight key words or phrases in the Bible passage. Use a pen or highlighter to mark new discoveries from the text.

2 Put it in your own words. Read the passage or verse slowly, then rewrite the main themes and topic using your own words.

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Colossians INTRO

The letter to the Colossians gives us an awesome portrait of Jesus: who He is, His purpose for us, and how we can respond to Him. Again, this is yet another document authored by the apostle Paul from prison. As in other letters from this series from prison, Paul mentioned the suffering he endured as a way of pointing back to Jesus' strength.

Paul's purpose in writing Colossians was threefold: to express his personal interest in the Colossians, to warn them against reverting to their old pagan vices, and to counteract a particular theological heresy that was being promoted within the church at Colossae.

Colossians provides us with a deep dive into the theology of Jesus. Colossians 1:15-20 is a great picture of why Jesus is central to our faith. Paul sets this picture early, giving us a foundation for what he writes throughout the remainder of the text.

[1] [1]Galatians thru Philemon Putting faith into practice by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Jefferey Miller, J. Hampton Keathley III, with Dr. Mark Strauss

Colossians 1

(Monday, January 18)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Colossians 2

(Tuesday, January 19: FAST DAY)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Colossians 3

(Wednesday, January 20)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Colossians 4

(Thursday, January 21)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Ephesians INTRO

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is often used as an onramp for new believers for two reasons: 1) those new to faith were his primary audience and 2) he laid a clear foundation of the Christian faith. He chose not to address specific problems within the church but instead focused on how his readers should imitate God and what it meant to follow Jesus.

This is one of the letters Paul wrote while in jail or under house arrest in Rome. The fact that he wrote this at that time spoke to the love He had for the Ephesians. Even though he was under cruel Roman supervision, you wouldn't know that be the case due to tone of the letter. Instead of wallowing in his imprisonment, he chose to write with joy, enthusiasm, and hope.

Paul wrote this letter with a focus on our relationships with God and each other as well as how to guard against drifting away. He wrote this great roadmap for those who are new in their faith and to show how our relationship with God changes our priorities and how we choose to interact with each other.

[1] [1]Galatians thru Philemon Putting faith into practice by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Jefferey Miller, J. Hampton Keathley III, with Dr. Mark Strauss

Ephesians 1

(Friday, January 22)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

5 WAYS TO DIG DEEPER

WEEK 4 (January 25-29)

Pause in your reading to dig into the Bible. Below are 5 different ways to dig deeper each day. These exercises will encourage meditation. **Try a different idea each day of the week**. Remember to keep a pen and paper ready to capture God's insights.

1 Underline or highlight key words or phrases in the Bible passage. Use a pen or highlighter to mark new discoveries from the text.

2 Put it in your own words. Read the passage or verse slowly, then rewrite the main themes and topic using your own words.

3 Ask and answer questions. Questions unlock new discoveries and meanings. Ask questions about the passage using these words: who, what, why, when, where, or how. Jot down your answers to these questions.

4 Capture the big idea. God's Word communicates big ideas. Periodically ask: What's the big idea in this chapter?

5 Personalize the meaning. Respond as God speaks to you through the Scriptures. Ask: How could my life be different today as I respond to what I'm reading?

Ephesians 2

(Monday, January 25)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Ephesians 3

(Tuesday, January 26: FAST DAY)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Ephesians 4

(Wednesday, January 27)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Ephesians 5

(Thursday, January 28)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

Ephesians 6

(Friday, January 29)

Thoughts/Insights/Notes: _____

NEXT STEPS

Congratulations! You have completed our Bible reading journey through the Letters to the Church. We trust that God has given you new insights from His word and your walk with Christ is deeper for having spent this time studying His instruction to the early church. In these letters we have learned God's heart and mission for His church.

What is next? We encourage you to continue reading and studying God's word every day. The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are about the life of Jesus and His interaction with those around Him. There is a great app "The Bible App" you can download for free to your mobile device or tablet. This app includes almost any version you would desire and also includes hundreds of reading plans based on Books of the Bibles and themes to dig deeper into God's word.

It is also best to walk this journey with others. Get involved in a small group or Sunday School class. Ask for someone to mentor you and look for others to journey with you as you dig deeper into God's word.

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'[a]" Matthew 4:4