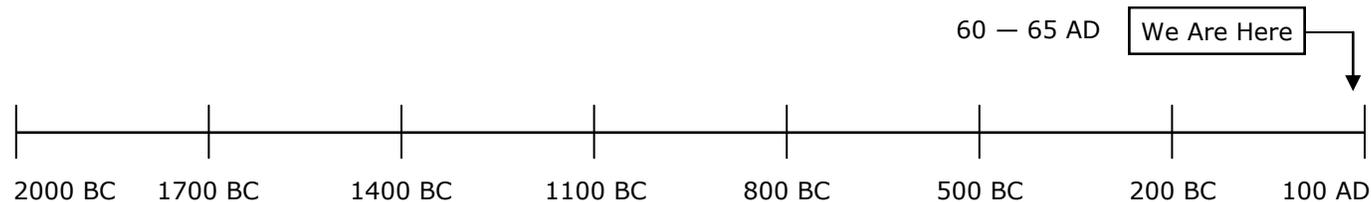


Letters of Life

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Week 50: Dec. 10-16 — *Philemon; Phil.; James; 1, 2 Tim.; Titus*

96% Complete — 15 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

Vessels (p.257)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

While there have been some weeks this year when we read several books, this week was unparalleled as it spanned six of the New Testament letters. We covered the book of *James* and then five books of Paul — *Philippians*, *Titus*, *Philemon*, and *1, 2 Timothy*. Though one would be wise to take the time to study each book thoroughly, we do not have that luxury in this review. Listed below are brief summaries of each book and themes they have in common.

James: What an incredible book — written by Jesus' brother, a prominent leader in the church at Jerusalem. While James wrote in response to persecution, he encouraged Christians not to waste suffering but to use it as a means to draw closer to God and stronger in their faith. He also emphasizes right living and wise speech, demonstrating faith with works.

Philemon: This book is a personal letter of Paul's to a friend, Philemon, who was more than likely a wealthy member of the Colossian church. It was written to convince Philemon to forgive his runaway slave, Onesimus, and to encourage him to accept Onesimus as a fellow believer. The overarching principle is that through God's love we can overcome social barriers.

Philippians: This letter was in response to a gift sent to Paul while he was in prison. He sent a note of thanks to them and encouraged their faith as well. Generally speaking, Paul emphasized the capacity we have through Christ to experience joy in our lives. Believers can have profound contentment and peace no matter what they experience.

Titus: Paul's letter to Titus is similar to *1 Timothy*, as it provides instruction to church leaders. Paul charged him with the responsibility of supervising the churches at Crete. He provided qualifications for leaders and the proper boundaries for relationships.

1 Timothy: Although this book was a personal letter, it is essentially a handbook of church administration. Timothy was one of Paul's friends; Paul sent him to counter the false teaching in Ephesus. Meanwhile, he sent this letter to encourage Timothy in his ministry.

2 Timothy: Although this letter is Paul's last (from prison), it reveals much of his heart and priorities. It was meant to pass the torch to the next generation of leaders. He encouraged them to be bold with the gospel, to be faithful to pure teaching, and to live godly lives.

- Personal Application

Though each of these six books emphasizes its own respective truths, there are some common themes between them. Here are a few that stand out:

1. **God's Church God's Way** (*1 Timothy; 2 Tim. 2:14-26; Titus 1:5-9*): It could be argued that the overarching theme of the New Testament letters is right doctrine. Paul specifically warned leaders to be on the look-out for errors and deceptions. We must be careful to do God's Church God's way, the way He prescribes in His Word. It is important for all believers to be an active part of a Bible-believing, truth-teaching local church body.
2. **The Suffering Saint** (*Phil. 1:27-30; 4:6, 7; James 1:2-4*): Although suffering is the last thing we want to consider, it can be beneficial. Suffering causes us to admit our insufficiency and to rely upon the sufficiency of Christ. Suffering strengthens our faith and clears our minds; it helps us to realign our priorities. Suffering for the sake of Christ brings great reward and allows us to give testimony of God's goodness.
3. **The Measure of Treasure** (*1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19; James 1:9-11; 5:1-6*): One of Satan's most potent weapons is greed. It is our love for wealth that is at the root of all sorts of evil. The real measure of treasure is not in how much we have but in how we use what we have. Are we using God's resources for our own pleasures, or are we using them for His Kingdom? God's money in the hands of a wise steward can do great things.
4. **What Can I Do for Others?** (*Phil. 2:3-18; 4:10-20; Philemon*): Life is *not* about me. It is about God and what He can do through me for others. We are to be a reflection of Christ, who put us before Himself. The Christian life should be marked with an ever-growing love for others and an ever-decreasing love for ourselves.
5. **What About the Change?** (*James 1:22-27; 2:14-26; 3:1-12; 4:1-10*): Serious faith will have tangible evidence — a changed life, a new perspective, an unexplainable peace and joy, words that are above reproach, deeds of good fruit, and a desire for the things of God. We must put feet to our faith and demonstrate genuine regeneration.
6. **Be Sure to Live Pure** (*Phil. 1:13-16; 4:8; 2 Tim. 2:19-22*): Jesus said that though we live in the world we are not to be of the world. Though we are not to disengage from the world, we are not to let it determine our pattern for living. The ways and wares of this world should grow less attractive to us the longer we live. We should definitely impact it more than it has impacted us. Take a minute to read the poem "Vessels" (next page).
7. **Faithful and True** (*Phil. 3:12-4:1; 4:6-5:2; 2 Tim. 1:3-18; 2:1-13; 3:10-4:18*): Although it is a joy to live the Christian life, it can be difficult at times; we still experience hardships. Paul challenged believers not to allow life to derail our faith.

The Bottom Line

That which Christ has done in our lives *internally* should be expressed in our lives *externally*.

Questions to Consider

1. Which of the six New Testament letters that we read did you enjoy the most and why?
2. What prominent theme challenged or encouraged you this week?

Vessels

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Vessels of silver, vessels of gold,
Those that are new and those that are old,
Vessels of wood and vessels of clay —
So many vessels in cabinets stay.

Despite all the sorts of vessels there are,
There's only one way to tell them apart.

When the Master prepares for the party at hand,
He looks not at luster or pride in your stand;
Substance is far from His purpose of mind,
But those who are cleansed He searches to find.

No matter the riches or glory you've had,
Despite if in splendor you're gallantly clad,
No matter what deeds have once brought you fame,
The Master sees vessels for honor or shame.

So when it is time and He opens that door,
Will He search all the cupboards and your vessel ignore?
Or have you prepared and purified too?
Will the Master be pleased? Can the Master use you?

Vessels of silver, vessels of gold,
Those that are new
and those that are old,
Vessels of wood and vessels of clay —
So many vessels
in cabinets stay.

