

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A journey through II Peter and Jude

Let's go on a journey together.

The components of a journey (trip, excursion, voyage, jaunt) are familiar to us all. We have a desire to get away from the routine of daily living and see new and exciting places. We think through the cost of money and time because taking off on a trip is never easy or cheap.

We plan the details because there is something about the unknown that always scares us, so we try to project ourselves into the daily, even hourly, component of the excursion to answer eventual questions like, "What are we doing Tuesday morning?"

Then, with those going on the trip with us, we share the hopes and wishes for a *bon voyage*. The joy of the journey is multiplied as others share in the same vision of going to another land and culture. We complete our packing, and we are off on our adventure. The journey of this book has some of the same components, even though we may not leave our hometown.

The desire for this journey through the Bible is to break out of a daily routine of not living for God as we ought and not knowing that Scripture is where we get to know God and ourselves. Basically, it is a desire for God:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God (Psalm 42:1).

The cost of this journey is time and effort. The precious commodity of time might be dearer to some of us than money. However, there is another cost for this trip through the Word of God. It demands discipline. It calls for focus. It is work.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15).

The plan for this journey is a systematic, book-by-book jaunt through the entire Bible. Over 52 weeks, Genesis through Revelation will be covered by means of teaching, reading, memorizing, praying, applying and sharing the unique contribution of every section of Scripture. Assignments will be given every week encouraging a daily focus on each portion of the Bible. This makes *The Journey* a year-long excursion into meditating upon the Word of God.

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long (Psalm 119:97).

This journey is worth sharing. It is not meant to be done alone or experienced alone. It is not designed to be a one-time expedition that is just to be endured and forgotten. The truths taught and the lessons learned, therefore, are meant to go beyond the individual student and the isolated classroom.

There is a dynamic to the study of Scripture that transforms the individual so that others also might be transformed. The experience of the Early Church is supposed to be ours:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42, 47).

The joy of this journey will provide the ultimate assessment of its value. Knowledge of Biblical facts is not the goal here. Being able to simply quote the Bible or tell someone that we have read the whole Bible is not what we are going for. The pure exercising of a discipline, even though that is commendable, is not the target. It is to experience the joy of knowing God and living for Him.

The etymology of the word "journey" is interesting. It comes from the French word *journee*, which means "a day's work or travel."

The combination of the length of a day and the expression of work as the original definition of a journey helps us to see how we are to proceed on this journey through the Bible. It will not be accomplished in one day, but will call for an almost daily effort. It will take a year to complete the journey, and it will call for a special effort and focus. Truly, a journey of a thousand miles starts, and continues, with one step.

Basically, *The Journey* is a Bible survey. There are some particular convictions that will govern the study of the books of the Bible and the lessons drawn from them. These convictions are drawn from the Reformed tradition, where Biblical truth, theological integrity and practical living converge into a life lived with joy for the glory of God. Each conviction is important to our understanding of the nature of the Word of God, its impact on our lives, and how the Biblical world and our personal worlds are connected by the work of the Holy Spirit.

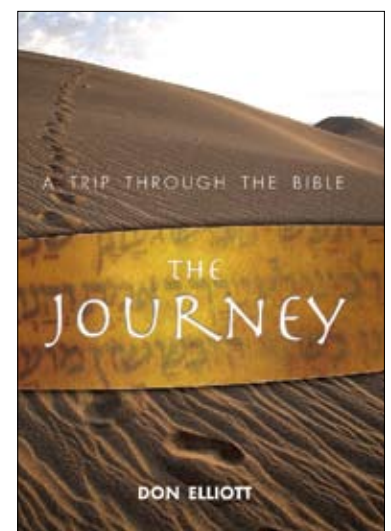
Along with Scripture, the Westminster Confession is quoted to accentuate the Biblical and theological roots of each conviction.

The Journey

The Jan./Feb. equipping section is based on *The Journey*, written by the Rev. Don Elliott and published by PLC Publications.

The staff of the Presbyterian Lay Committee has been using *The Journey* to supplement its Bible study each morning.

The book can be purchased through The Layman Online's bookstore (www.layman.org/bookstore2) or through Amazon.com.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Week One: False teachers and apologetics

II Peter and Jude share the same message. As a matter of fact, there is a scholarly debate about whether Jude had II Peter in front of him when he wrote, or whether Peter had Jude in front of him when he wrote. They are that similar. These two books have a dual purpose:

1. **To be aware of apostates** – those who had left the true faith and were teaching false doctrine and were still in the Church

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (II Peter 2:1)

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 4)

2. **To call to apologetics** – this is not “apologizing” for the faith, but defending the faith

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

Since both II Peter and Jude confront the issue of false teachers in the Church, the walk through these epistles will be done by pointing out the truths highlighted about false teachers. The characteristics of false teachers will be listed, along with the antidote to be applied to confront false teachers.

Lessons to be learned from II Peter and Jude

There will be opposition to the truth. The existence of false teachers has been a constant in the history of the Church. It never should come as a surprise that there are those who twist and tear the truth of God for their own advantage and pleasure.

There always is a need to stand for the truth. The godly call in the face of false teachings is to stand and be faithful. The temptation is to overlook the false teachings or to run from them. Contending for the faith is a call for the Christian.

Theme verse

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

Questions for reflection:

1. Do you experience opposition to the truth of God’s Word in the church today? Where? How? From whom?

2. How do you respond to that opposition?

3. Who is teaching the truth of God’s Word and how are you sitting under their instruction?

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Week Two: False teachers and apologetics

For each observation about false teachers, there is an antidote. Think of it as Biblical medicine for counteracting the effects of poison or disease. God does not leave us defenseless in the face of false teachings in the church. Nor does God ever say that the church will be free of false teachers in this world. The reality of false teachings calls us to Biblical responses. We must know the truth in order that we can recognize error and then we must faithfully respond.

Reality: False teachers are more interested in personal gain than telling the truth.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (II Peter 2:1-3)

Antidote: The way to fight false teachers is with the truth of Scripture:

Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (II Peter 1:20-21)

Jude puts the same truth this way:

“Contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

The “faith” Jude refers to is not the verb “to believe,” but the noun referring to a body of truth or, specifically, the Biblical apostolic faith.

The first line of attack against false teachings in the Church is for us to be Biblical. Preach the Word. Teach the Word. Proclaim the truth.

Reality: False teachers are interested in getting more than in giving.

These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; (Jude 12)

These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage. (Jude 16)

Antidote: We are to give ourselves to God. The most important thing to do in the light of false teachers getting money, power, influence and attention in the Church is for us to give ourselves to God.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. (II Peter 1:5-7)

Questions for reflection:

1. Are you able to distinguish truth from error when you hear it from the pulpit, the lectern or in the classroom?
2. When you recognize error in teaching how do you respond? How might you respond?
3. How might you become more Biblically literate in order to be better prepared to both recognize and respond to false teaching in the church?

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Week Three: False teachers and apologetics

For each observation about false teachers, there is an antidote. Think of it as Biblical medicine for counteracting the effects of poison or disease. God does not leave us defenseless in the face of false teachings in the church. Nor does God ever say that the church will be free of false teachers in this world. The reality of false teachings calls us to Biblical responses. We must know the truth in order that we can recognize error and then we must faithfully respond.

Reality: False teachers' personal lives are marked by immorality.

... They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! (II Peter 2:13-14)

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 4)

Antidote: Let them follow their sinful desires. Let us be sure we do not. We are called to holiness and righteousness.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (II Peter 3:18)

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, (Jude 20)

Reality: False teachers lead people away from God, rather than closer to God. They are blasphemous – anti-God.

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant (II Peter 2:10-12)

Antidote: Jude 21: "Keep yourselves in God's love."

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (II Peter 1:10-11)

Questions for reflection:

1. What distinguishes a life that is marked by immorality from a life of righteousness?
2. What measure do you use to determine whether or not a thought, word or deed is moral or immoral?
3. What experiences do you have with false teachers who have lead people away from God?
4. What does it mean to "practice the qualities" of our calling and election?

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Week Four: False teachers and apologetics

So, what is to be done as believers in the light of false teachers? Generally, it is a call to be faithful and persevere (II Peter 1:3, 4). Specifically, Jude gives three commands in Jude 17-23: remember, remain and reach out.

Remember:

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. (Jude 17-19)

- Remember the truth of Scripture.
- Remember the prophecies of Scripture that recall the truth that false teachers always have been with God’s people and always will be with God’s people. It even will intensify in the last days.
- Remember the unity of the Church. Do not let them divide the Church.
- Remember who have the Spirit of God.

Remain

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life (Jude 20-21).

- Build yourselves up in your most holy faith; grow and mature.
- Pray in the Holy Spirit, which is a reference to true prayer. Do not just utter words toward the ceiling. Really communicate with God as the Spirit leads in one’s prayer life.
- Keep yourselves in God’s love. God’s love should be the truth one clings to no matter what else happens.
- Waiting for God to take us to heaven and to judge the false teachers (Jude 14, 15 and II Peter 3:4-9).

Reach out

And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. (Jude 22-23)

The three imperatives in this passage are have mercy, save, and show mercy. Each is directed toward a different group of people.

- Have mercy on those who are victims of false teaching. Many in the church come by their heretical beliefs honestly. They have been taught untruth by false teachers.
- Some are open to yet being saved. We are called to evangelize them with the saving truth of the Gospel. Yes, there is a place for evangelism in the church because there are those who are unconverted.
- Finally, we must guard against callousness. It is very easy to be so upset with unBiblical behavior that one loses sight of the need to show mercy to those who are genuinely blinded, deceived and lost. Hate the sin, but deeply and compassionately love the sinner.

Questions for reflection:

1. Reflect on the reality that “You cannot remember that which you do not know.” Ask yourself, “How well do I know God? How well do I know God’s will? How thoroughly do I know God’s Word?”
2. Read John 15 and consider what it means to remain or abide in God’s love.
3. What does it mean to be called to evangelize the church? (For further study: read Darrell Guder’s *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*)