

# JOHN'S LETTERS

LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S LOVE

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First published in Great Britain in 2017

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-911272-42-7

Designed by Diane Warnes

Printed in the UK

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## INTRODUCTION TO JOHN'S LETTERS

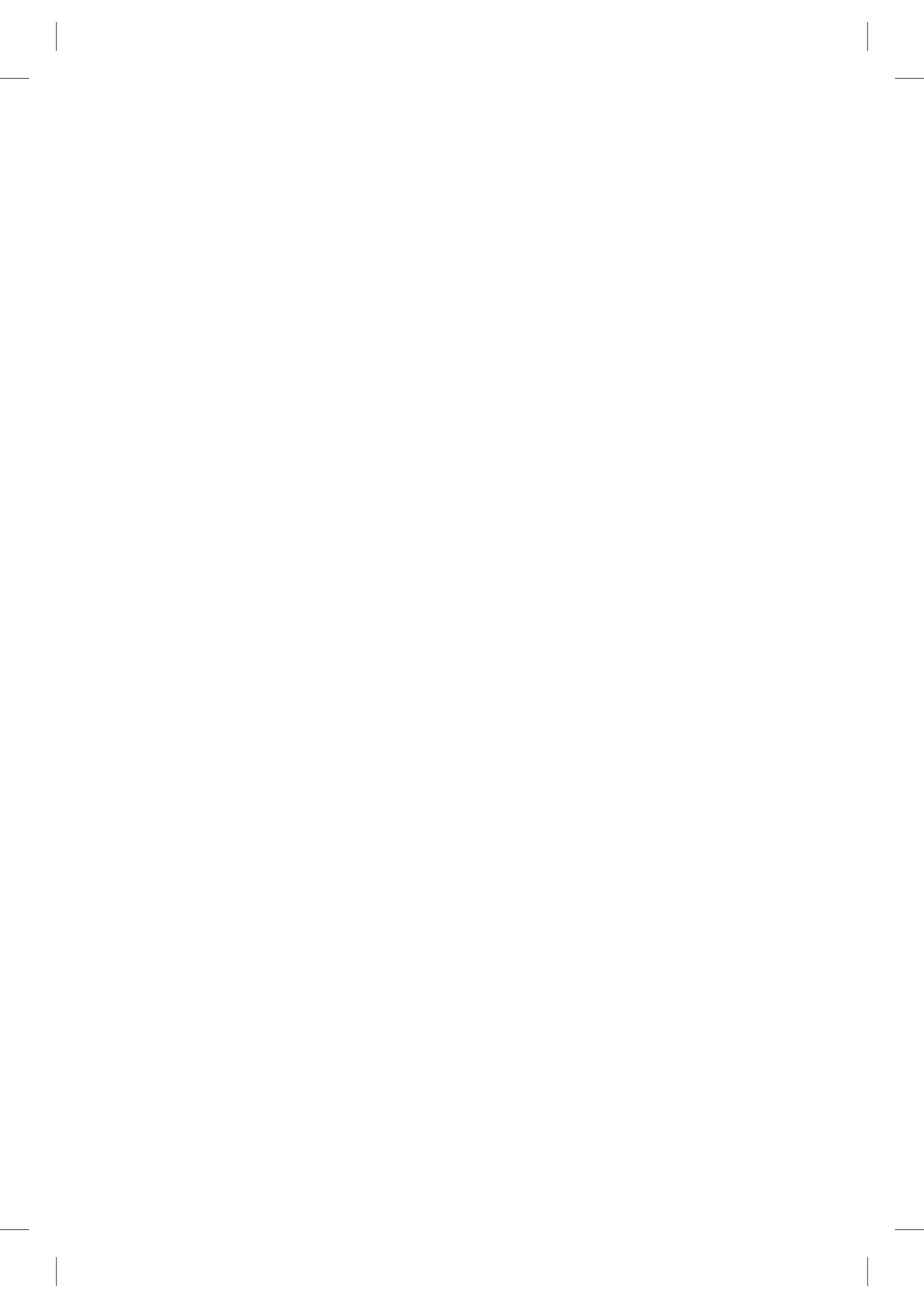
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As John's Gospel comes to a close we read of John, Peter and five other disciples fishing on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus calls out to them from the shore (see John 21). Tenderly Jesus reminds His disciples of the time He originally called them to be fishers of men by repeating the miraculous catch of fish (see Luke 5:1-11). He reminds them of His continuing ability to provide through supplying another bread and fish meal by the Sea of Galilee (just like the feeding of the five thousand in John 6:1-15). He reminds Peter of his devastating denials of Christ by having another charcoal fire burning (see John 18:18). This poignant moment became a conversation where Peter, in front of the other disciples, was reinstated three times to a position of leadership in the flock of Christ's people. Fishing for men and feeding the flock – this was their commission as they followed the risen Christ.

But then Jesus spoke to Peter of how he would one day get to give his life for Christ, as he had longed to do before he denied his Lord so blatantly. At this point Peter and Jesus were walking along the beach, and Peter turned around and saw John. So Peter asked about John's future: 'Lord, what about him?' (John 21:20-21). Jesus' answer – 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?' – provoked confusion as rumours spread that John would not die, but that is not what Jesus had said. As it turned out, though, John did live for about three decades longer than the rest of the disciples. Most of them had been on the 'Peter path' – a path that led to martyrdom as they followed Christ. John was to walk the 'John path' – a path that led to death in his old age.

As we turn to John's three letters we are reading the words of an old man. He had been with Jesus, but about six decades passed by before he wrote the letters we have in our Bibles. In them he writes to believers in churches that he knew well. In the first letter John seems to be writing to believers that were hurting because some of their number had pulled out of the church with their own brand of super-spirituality that actually was not truly Christian at all. These departing ones had been very critical of those that remained.

So John writes with the wisdom of age and the authority of experience – specifically the experience of being with Jesus during His ministry years, His death and His resurrection. It is with that experience in view that John writes to comfort and encourage the flock of God. Let's turn to these special letters to experience that comfort and encouragement even today.



**J**ohn launches his letter with a sentence crafted to invite his readers into the greatest privilege of all: fellowship with the Trinity!

He begins almost cryptically, diving in with a description of something very tangible. As awkward as the grammar feels, it does push us to notice the senses he is describing – hearing, seeing, touching. He and those with him heard it, saw it, observed it closely and even handled it for themselves. What is he referring to? Actually, the question is not what is he referring to, but who? He is writing about his experience of ‘the Word of life’ – that is, Jesus, the Christ.

Some people were struggling with the idea that the Son of God had actually taken on real, physical flesh. They were gripped by a false idea that the physical is a lower realm to be shunned, while the spiritual realm is what life is all about. John wanted them to know that Jesus really did come literally, physically – He could be touched.

John began his Gospel with a lot of the same ideas: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth’ (John 1:1, 14).

The writers of the New Testament books were eyewitnesses of something that really happened. It is easy for us, from a distance, to treat the Bible as if it is an ancient myth. But the Son of God actually came into this world, and what the Bible describes actually happened.

Here’s the great news: Jesus did actually come, and really die, and literally rise from the dead; this means that **we can actually have eternal life, and really have fellowship with the Trinity, and literally enjoy life as it was intended to be enjoyed.**

## REFLECTION

*Ask God to reveal more of the wonder of fellowship with the Trinity during these days in 1 John.*

**A**s we've already seen, John wrote this letter to underline the great wonder of the Christian message: we can have fellowship with the Trinity.

John's ultimate goal is not to look back to the time of Jesus being on the earth, but rather to give assurance to the believers who would receive his letter in the present. In order to give assurance in the present, he had to look back to the fact of Jesus' coming into the world to be one of us.

The Son of God becoming one of us was a critical step in God's plan. There are many reasons why Jesus had to become a human, and we will explore more later. For now let's ponder just two of them:

1. To reveal the Father–Son relationship to us. Jesus is described as 'the Word of life' – He communicates the very nature of life itself. Since He reveals it, John and others can proclaim the message of eternal life. In John 17:3 Jesus Himself defined eternal life: 'that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent'. If it weren't for God choosing to reveal Himself in His Son Jesus Christ, then we would not be able to know Him.

2. To share the Father–Son relationship with us. Jesus did not simply come on a revelation mission; He also came on a relational mission. God so loved the world that He gave us His Son. Jesus so loved the world that He gave us His relationship with His Father! In 1 John we will explore what it means to have relationship with the Father and His Son by the Spirit – that is, to have fellowship with the Trinity!

John was so thrilled by this good news that he wrote about it in order that he would have complete joy as his readers too came to share in what he was so enjoying. **The good news is so good it simply has to be given away.** And when it is, our joy will not diminish, but will only grow!

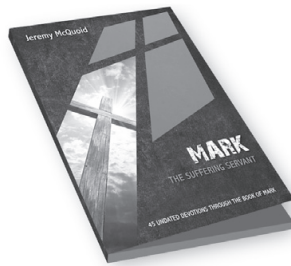
## REFLECTION

*If you struggle to give away the message of Jesus to others, think about the difference it would make to stop feeling pressured to proclaim the gospel, but instead to grow more and more thrilled with the gospel so that it overflows to others. Pray that this would be true for you.*

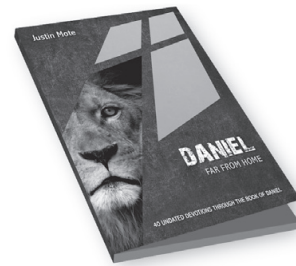
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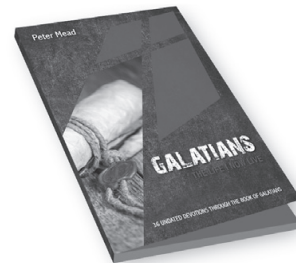
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