

Grasping
GOD'S WORD

Grasping GOD'S WORD

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as

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much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”? (Heb. 1:1-5, NIV)

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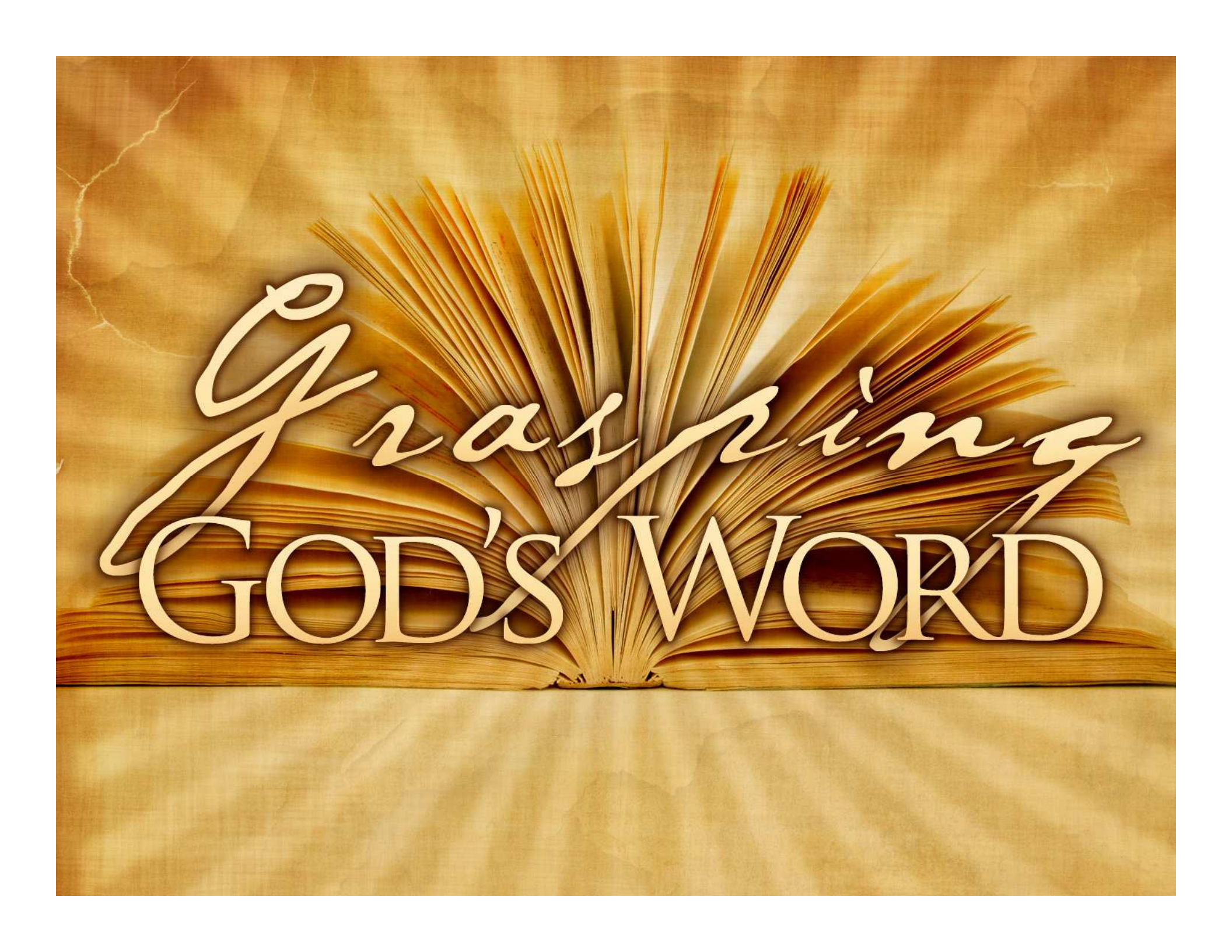
I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, You are my Son; today I have become your Father. (Ps. 2:7, NIV)

I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. (2 Sam. 7:14, NIV)

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Structure of Hebrews 1:1-4

- a. Son over prophets
 - b. Appointed heir of all things
 - c. Creator of the universe
 - d. Radiance of God's glory
 - d. Exact representation of His being.
 - c. Sustainer of all things
 - b. Sat down at Right Hand after purifying sins
- a. Son over angels



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Unit 4

The Interpretive Journey New Testament

- 14. Letters
- 15. Gospels
- 16. Acts
- 17. Revelation

NT – Letters

- Introduction

- As in the ancient world, letters play an important role in our lives today

Business

Personal

Medical

Legal



New Testament Letters

Pauline

Romans

1, 2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

1, 2 Thessalonians

1, 2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

General

Hebrews

James

1, 2 Peter

1, 2, 3 John

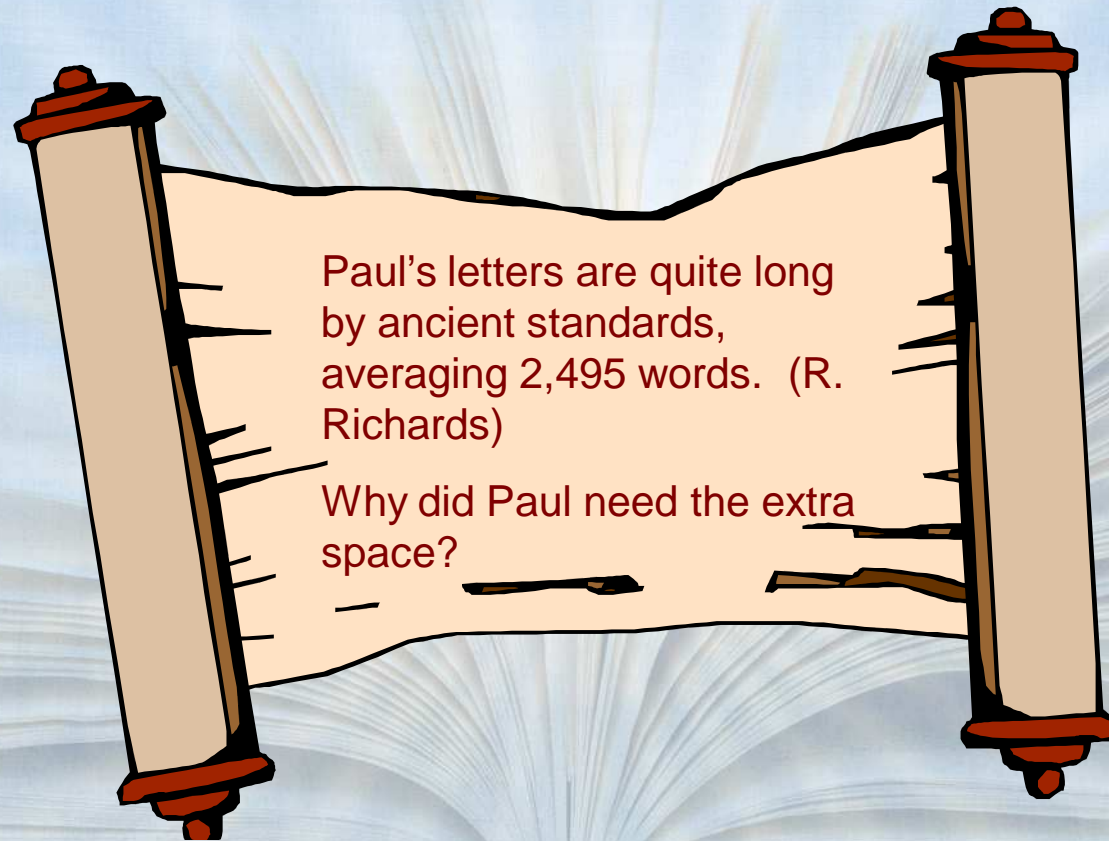
Jude

**Name
from
recipients**

**Name
from
writer**

Characteristics of NT letters

- Comparable to other ancient letters



Paul's letters are quite long by ancient standards, averaging 2,495 words. (R. Richards)

Why did Paul need the extra space?

NT includes more informal, personal letters (like Philemon) as well as more formal letters (like Romans)

Characteristics of NT letters

– Authoritative substitutes for the author's personal presence

- Substitute for personal presence
- Authoritative substitute
(Christ's representatives)

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Eph. 2:19-20, NIV)

Characteristics of NT letters

- Authoritative substitutes for the author's personal presence
 - Substitute for personal presence
 - Authoritative substitute
(Christ's representatives)
- Situational – written to address specific situations or problems in the churches
 - To clarify an issue (Thessalonians)
 - To address a doctrinal problem (Colossians)
 - To confront the ethical behavior of readers (James)

- Implications of the occasional nature of letters

- Never meant to be read as exhaustive dictionaries of doctrine
- Be careful not to conclude too much from any one letter

Galatians – freedom

1 Corinthians – obedience

- Reconstruction the original situation that called for the letter in the first place

Reading a NT letter is a lot like listening to one end of a phone conversation.



– Carefully written and delivered

- The actual job of writing down a letter was normally assigned to a trained scribe or secretary (*amanuensis*).

“I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.”
(Rom. 16:22)

- Customary for the author to add a final greeting in his own handwriting

“I Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.” (1 Cor. 16:21)

- Cosenders played a significant role

“Paul, Silas and Timothy, ...” (1 Thess. 1:1)

- Delivery depended on trusted letter carriers

“Tychichus will tell you all the news about me.” (Col. 4:7)



– Intended for the Christian community

- Meant to be read aloud again and again to the church

“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” —Revelation 1:3

- Meant to be exchanged with other churches

“After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.” —Colossians 4:16

- **Form of NT letters**

Standard form of a contemporary letter

Date

Name
Address

Greeting,

Body of the letter

Closing & signature

Standard form of a NT letter

Introduction

Writer
Recipients
Greeting

Body of the letter
(largest section
focusing on the
specific situation)

Conclusion (a variety
of elements normally
ending in a grace
benediction)

How to interpret a NT letter

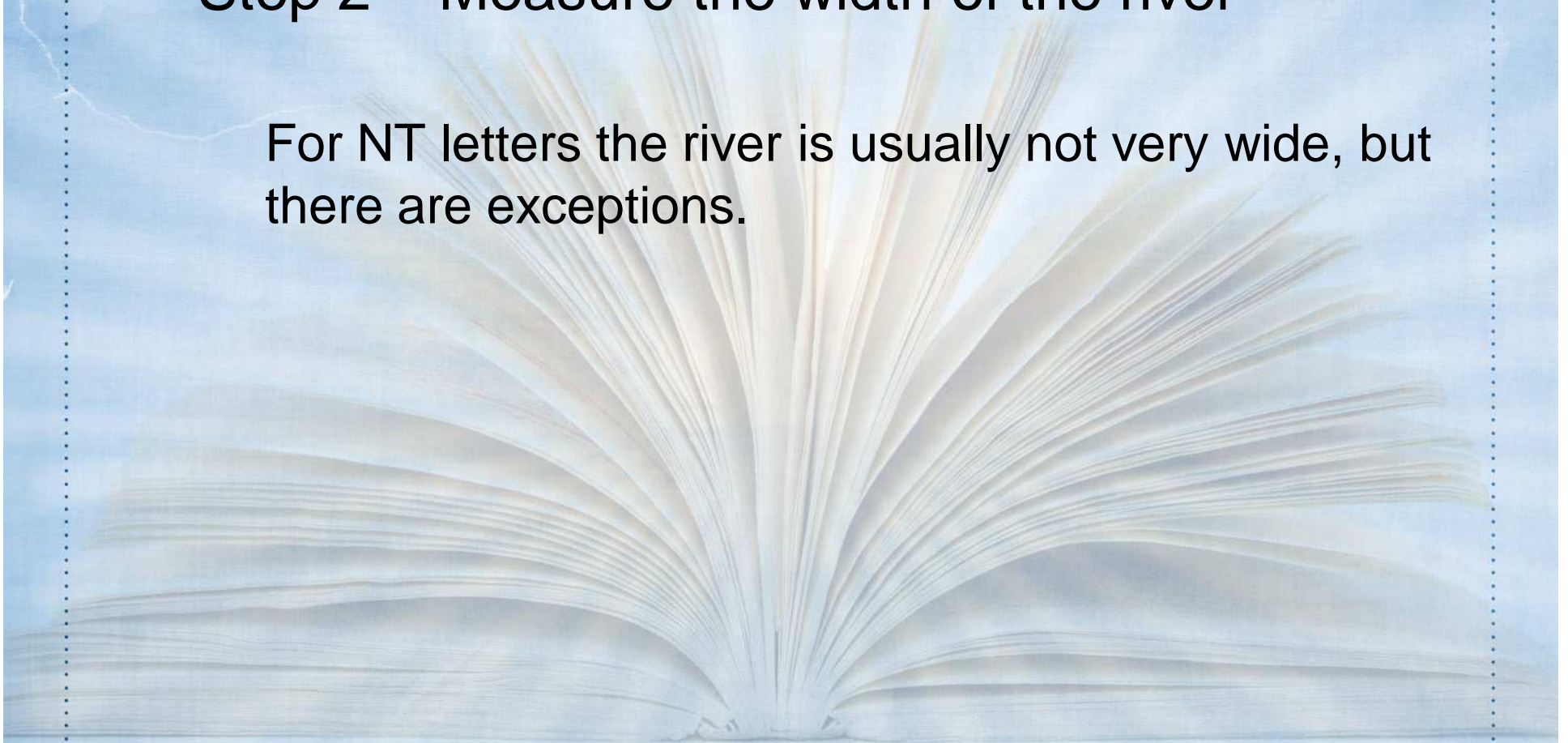
– Step 1 Grasp the text in their town

- Read the letter from beginning to end, the way letters are meant to be read. This will give you a sense of the big picture.
- Reconstruct the historical-cultural context of the biblical writer and his audience.
- Identify the literary context of your particular passage.
- Determine the meaning of the text for the biblical audience (observe, observe, observe!)

How to interpret a NT letter

– Step 2 – Measure the width of the river

For NT letters the river is usually not very wide, but there are exceptions.



How to interpret a NT letter

– Step 3 – Cross the principlizing bridge

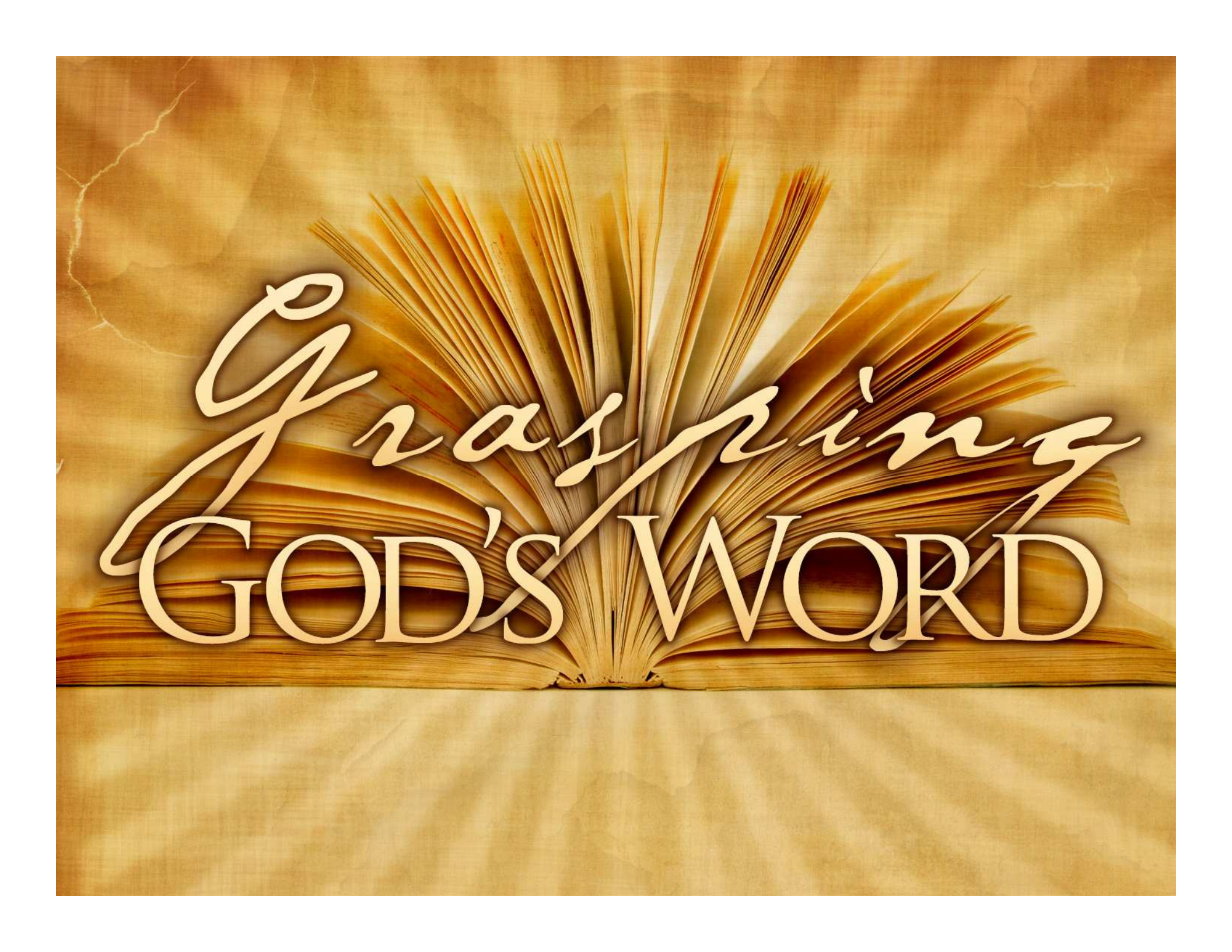
- Look for the broader theological message reflected in the text. To find theological principles in letters ask yourself the following questions:
 - Does the author state a principle?
 - Do you see a principle in the surrounding context?
 - Do you see a reason behind a particular command or instruction?

How to interpret a NT letter

- Does your theological principle satisfy the following criteria:
 - It should be reflected in the biblical text
 - It should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation
 - It should not be culturally bound
 - It should be consistent with the teaching of the rest of Scripture
 - It should be both relevant to both the biblical audience and the contemporary audience
- Step 4 – Grasp the text in our town

Conclusion

- Provide a window into the struggles and victories of the early church
- Serve as authoritative substitutes for church leaders who could not always minister in person
- Written to address specific situations and meet the practical needs of believers
- Meant to be read from beginning to end, the same way you would read a personal letter today
- Use the Interpretive Journey to help you hear God speak to you through NT letters.



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