

# GRACE IN THE WORD

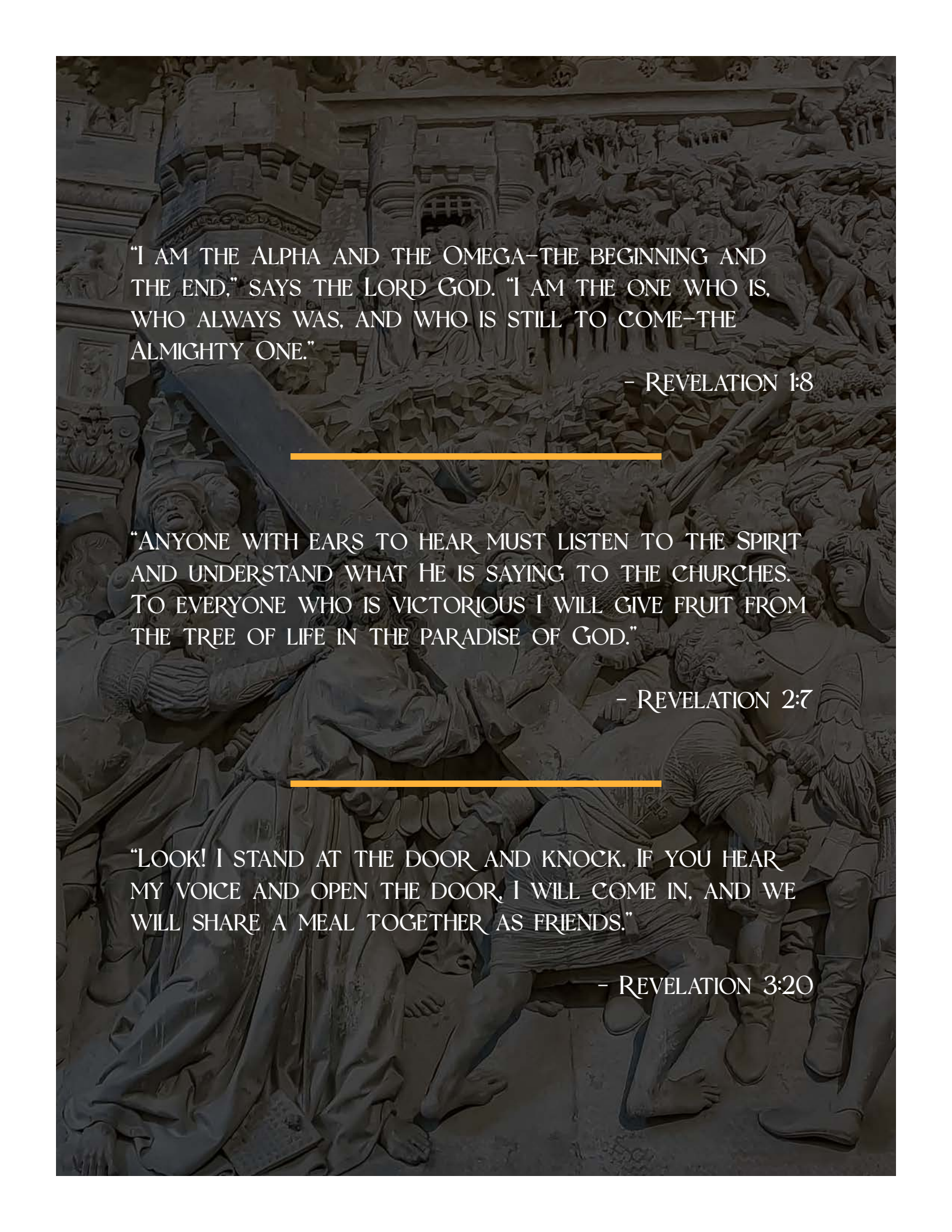
REVELATION

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LETTERS TO THE  
SEVEN CHURCHES







"I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA—THE BEGINNING AND THE END," SAYS THE LORD GOD. "I AM THE ONE WHO IS, WHO ALWAYS WAS, AND WHO IS STILL TO COME—THE ALMIGHTY ONE."

— REVELATION 1:8

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"ANYONE WITH EARS TO HEAR MUST LISTEN TO THE SPIRIT AND UNDERSTAND WHAT HE IS SAYING TO THE CHURCHES. TO EVERYONE WHO IS VICTORIOUS I WILL GIVE FRUIT FROM THE TREE OF LIFE IN THE PARADISE OF GOD."

— REVELATION 2:7

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"LOOK! I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK. IF YOU HEAR MY VOICE AND OPEN THE DOOR, I WILL COME IN, AND WE WILL SHARE A MEAL TOGETHER AS FRIENDS."

— REVELATION 3:20

# A JOURNEY THROUGH THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

## ABOUT THIS READING PLAN:

This reading plan is focused on the first three chapters of Revelation (more specifically, the second and third chapters). Chapters two and three of Revelation are letters that the apostle John wrote to seven individual churches in the area of Asia Minor. Each week this study will focus on one of those seven churches and their letter from John. Each week opens with a description of the church being addressed; it is important to know the historical context of each church in order to interpret the scripture we are reading. Each day's reading will include a passage from the letter with passages from other parts of scripture that correlate with that day's reading; and a reflection guide. The goal is to break down the important and intentional symbolism, language, and message in each letter to fully understand Jesus' message to the church and us today. We encourage you to see this not just as Jesus' message to the church corporately, but to each of us as church members individually as well. Revival in our churches begins with the people who make up our churches.

## ADDITIONAL STUDY RESOURCES:

We highly recommend that you watch [The BibleProject Revelation 1-11 Overview Video](http://TheBibleProject.com/revelation1-11-overview) at [graceintheword.cc/revelationoverview](http://graceintheword.cc/revelationoverview) and [The BibleProject's How to Read the Bible: Apocalyptic Literature Video](http://TheBibleProject.com/how-to-read-the-bible-apocalyptic-literature) at [graceintheword.cc/apocalypticliterature](http://graceintheword.cc/apocalypticliterature)

Check out the website at [graceclarksville.com/graceintheword](http://graceclarksville.com/graceintheword) and join our online community on Facebook at [facebook.com/groups/graceintheword](https://facebook.com/groups/graceintheword)

Study material in this guide was adapted from The BibleProject, ESV Study Bible, *We over Me* by Whitney Capps, "Enduring Word Bible Commentary Revelation 1 through 3" by David Guzik, *Revised Thunder & This Hallelujah Banquet* by Eugene H. Peterson, Holman New Testament Commentary Revelation by Kendell H. Easley, *The 7 Churches of Revelation* video series by Joseph Stowell, and *Teach the Text Revelation* by J. Scott Duvall.

**Name & Contact Information:**

**What is your hope for this seven weeks in God's Word?**

# HOW TO READ A BOOK OF APOCALYPTIC PROPHECY

Revelation is a book of a specific type of prophecy called an apocalypse, written by the apostle John. The majority of the book unveils the future second coming of Christ, the redemption of the world, and the final battle and destruction of evil in our world. The beginning of the book (chapters two and three) are letters of encouragement and correction for the seven churches of Asia Minor; as a means of preparing and helping them grow in complete dependence on Christ, walk in righteousness, and prepare for this future work of Christ.

These letters can offer encouragement and correction for churches today.

This genre of apocalyptic prophecy is only used in two books of the Bible. Those books are Daniel and Revelation. This genre naturally comes with much symbology, historical context, future mystery, and interpretation. Because of the complexities of this genre type, many ignore these books or rush past them, but it is essential to know how to read these books just like we would read the other books of scripture.

**APOCALYPSE**



APOCALYPTIC WRITINGS ARE A SPECIFIC FORM OF PROPHECY PREDICTING DISASTER AND DESTRUCTION. IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM ARE THE PRIMARY DEVICES USED TO COMMUNICATE THEIR TRUTH. EXAMPLES INCLUDE DANIEL AND REVELATION.

# PRINCIPLES TO KEEP IN MIND

## 1. REMEMBER THE TRUE MEANING OF 'APOCALYPSE.'

Apocalypse isn't a word for the end of the world; it means something far greater and more hopeful than that. The ancient Greek word translated from Revelation is apokalupsis or apocalypse, but the word apokalupsis means "a revealing, an unveiling, a revelation." Apocalyptic literature is a genre of unveiling truth to God's people. It gives a heavenly perspective on our earthly situation.

## 2. KNOW THE WRITING STYLE

Apocalyptic literature is written in a very symbolic and poetic style. Because of its symbolism and poetic language, it's important to note that the text is not to be taken literally. It's essential to study and decipher the actual language being used to interpret its meaning.

## 3. INTERPRETING THE SYMBOLS

People often attempt to interpret the symbols in the literature themselves or through the eyes and interpretations of others. Discernment and guidance from others can help form an idea of some of the symbols' meanings, but the most significant and reliable source is scripture itself. Sometimes scripture helps define what the symbols mean (ex. Revelation 1:1-19). It's important to look at how those symbols and imagery are used throughout the entire narrative of scripture and let that help you interpret its meaning in Revelation. Finally, sometimes the symbols and their meaning are simply a mystery to us on this side of Heaven. In those cases, it's important not to add our ideas or thoughts but lean on God's goodness and omniscience.

## 4. REMEMBER THE PURPOSE

It's important to remember what apocalyptic literature in the Bible is about, and it's the same thing the entirety of scripture is about: the means of hearing from God, knowing His greater story, and having a heavenly perspective on our earthly situation. These books speak to a future plan, yes, but they speak louder and more apparent to who God is, His plan, and what He is calling His people and church to in the present. This is the purpose of Revelation. Specifically, we are looking at what Jesus speaks to the apostle John for the churches of Asia Minor and for the 21st-century church as well.





# CONTEXT & THEME OF REVELATION

## *A Call to Holiness*

The book of Revelation is one of the most studied books of the Bible, but also the most mysterious and misunderstood. Many study the book of Revelation to determine a roadmap to the end of days, make apocalyptic predictions, or dismiss it altogether as just a book of future things they don't understand. None of those approaches quite encompass the original purpose of the book. Revelation is the unveiling of Jesus Christ, which speaks to apocalyptic truths and the future. The overall message/theme of the book is a reminder of God's beautiful plan of redemption for the church and the world that comes through Jesus.

Eugene Peterson says this about Revelation in his book, *This Hallelujah Banquet*,

*I thought Revelation was going to tell me something about the future. All I can answer is, it has. It has taken the same gospel of Jesus Christ—that God is present with us to bring us new life, to support us, and to fulfill us—and applied it to the future. There is no different gospel for the future than for the present or the past.*

Throughout this study, we will be looking at God's plan for the church. The first three chapters of Revelation are Jesus' words to the church. The church is more than just a building or organization that we attend on Sundays or from time to time for special events. The church is meant to be the home for Christ-followers. The church is a haven for the body of Christ to gather with other believers, encourage one another, teach, correct, and love one another. Church is also meant to center our worship and lead to spiritual growth, in essence, to make us more like Christ, so that we can go out into the world and share the love of Jesus.

C.S. Lewis defines the church in *Mere Christianity* in this way,

*The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose.*

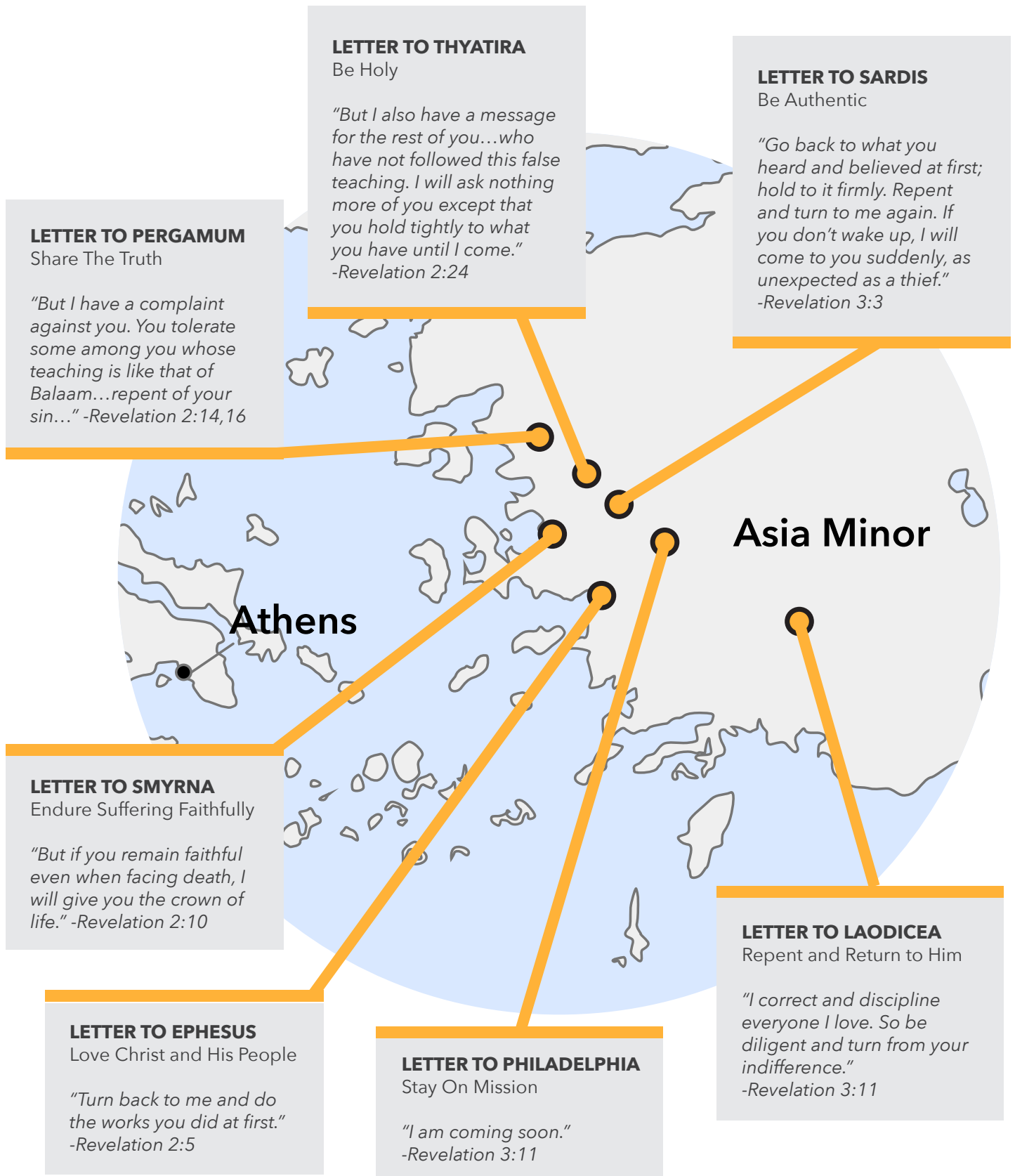
As you walk through this study, remember this quote that **the church exists for nothing else but to draw us into Christ**. When we think of church this way, we understand the importance and urgency with which John writes Jesus' message to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Before Christ unfolds any other part of His plan for the world, Jesus wants John to speak on His behalf to the church, His bride.

This book is written by John the apostle who walked with Christ during His three-year ministry on earth and faithfully continued this ministry after His ascension into heaven. John is writing this book while in exile on the island of Patmos in Greece around 95 AD. The emperor Domitian launched a massive and extreme campaign to persecute the Christians, so John is in the same place as the churches he is writing to. These churches are being persecuted by the government, the Jewish leaders, and the pagan believers.

What Jesus speaks to John is an encouragement and wake-up call for him as much as the churches John is writing to. So the overwhelming tension of these chapters and letters is persecution to believers and the compromises believers make amid persecution. The theme of the messages, though, is for these churches to turn back towards holiness. This is the call of the churches of Revelation and the 21st-century churches today.

Our hope as you work through these letters is that you will understand what Jesus' words meant historically for these churches so that we can accurately apply what Jesus' words mean for us in the church today.

# THE MESSAGE FOR THE 7 CHURCHES OF REVELATION



# PRAYERS & REFLECTIONS

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## BEFORE YOU READ GOD'S WORD TODAY, SEEK HIS HELP WITH THESE 5 PRAYERS:

1. God, give me wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.
2. God, let any knowledge I gain serve to help me love You and others more and not puff me up.
3. God, help me see something new about You I've never seen before.
4. God, correct any lies I believe about You or anything I misunderstand.
5. God, direct my steps according to Your Word.

\*\* Prayers from *The Bible Recap* Reading Plan by Tara-Leigh Cobble \*\*

## TIPS FOR APPROACHING SCRIPTURE:

- Pray before you read (use the prayers above)
- Read the words in proper context, taking into consideration when it was written, to whom it was written, what was happening when it was written (a good study bible is helpful, we recommend the ESV Study Bible)
- Look for God's character and faithfulness to His people
- Look for themes that point to Jesus
- Look for anything repetitive, unusual, confusing, hopeful, comforting, challenging
- Once you are finished reading, take a few minutes to meditate on what you have read:
  - Narrow down what you've read to just one or two main thoughts.
  - What did I learn about God in these passages?
  - How can I praise God for what this says about him?
  - What did I learn about the human heart in these passages?
  - What behavior/emotions come when I forget these things about God?
  - What is God revealing to me today that I need to listen to?
  - What sins do I need to confess in light of what God revealed today?
  - What is one next step I can take in light of what I have read today?



# WEEKLY CHECKLIST

## WEEK ONE- THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

- Day 1 // Revelation 1:1-8, Exodus 3:1-15
- Day 2 // Revelation 1:9-20, John 17
- Day 3 // Revelation 2:1-7, Acts 19:17-41, 1 Peter 5:10
- Day 4 // Revelation 2:4-5, Luke 10:27, Matthew 5:43-48, 1 Corinthians 13:13
- Day 5 // Revelation 2:7, Genesis 3:22-24, Matthew 5:12, Revelation 22:1-21
- Day 6 // Reflection Day - Revelations 2:1-7
- Day 7 // Rest Day

## WEEK TWO- THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

- Day 1 // Revelation 2:8-11, John 16:33, Psalm 34:19
- Day 2 // Revelation 2:8-11, Job 19:25-27, Psalm 22:23-24, Romans 8:18
- Day 3 // Revelation 2:8-11, Luke 12:13-21, Matthew 6:19-21, James 1:2-4
- Day 4 // Revelation 2:8-11, Philippians 1:21, Revelation 21:4
- Day 5 // Revelation 2:8-11, 1 Corinthians 15:58, John 16:33
- Day 6 // Reflection Day - Revelation 2:8-11
- Day 7 // Rest Day

## WEEK THREE- THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

- Day 1 // Revelation 2:12-17, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Timothy 2:23-26
- Day 2 // Revelation 2:13, Proverbs 21:21, Hebrews 10:23
- Day 3 // Revelation 2:14-15, John 14:6, Numbers 25:1-2 and 31:16
- Day 4 // Revelation 2:16, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Acts 3:19, Hebrews 4:12
- Day 5 // Revelation 2:17, John 6:41, Isaiah 62:1-5, 1 Peter 2:4-13
- Day 6 // Reflection Day - Revelation 2:12-17
- Day 7 // Rest Day

## WEEK FOUR- THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

- Day 1 // Revelation 2:18-29, Proverbs 15:3, Psalm 33:13
- Day 2 // Revelation 2:20-21, Matthew 24:11, 1 Kings 16:31, 21:23-25, 1 Corinthians 5
- Day 3 // Revelation 2:22-23, 1 Samuel 16:7, Jeremiah 17:10, Proverbs 20:27
- Day 4 // Revelation 2:24-27, Hebrews 10:23, 2 Timothy 2:8-10
- Day 5 // Revelation 2:26-29, Matthew 28:16-18, 2 John 1:9
- Day 6 // Reflection Day - Revelation 2:18-29
- Day 7 // Rest Day

## WEEK FIVE- THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

- **Day 1** // Revelation 3:1-6
- **Day 2** // Revelation 3:2-3, Matthew 24:42-43, Romans 13:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Revelation 16:15
- **Day 3** // Revelation 3:3, Psalm 105
- **Day 4** // Revelation 3:4, Hebrews 3:14, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:3-6
- **Day 5** // Revelation 3:5, 1 John 3:1, Galatians 2:20, Romans 8:15
- **Day 6** // Reflection Day - Revelation 3:1-6
- **Day 7** // Rest Day

## WEEK SIX- THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

- **Day 1** // Revelation 3:7-13, Psalm 33:18, 1 Peter 3:12
- **Day 2** // Revelation 3:8, Deuteronomy 28:1-14, John 10:9, John 14:15, Psalm 119:105
- **Day 3** // Revelation 3:8-9, Genesis 37:18-36 and 50:18-20
- **Day 4** // Revelation 3:10-11, John 14:2-3, and Luke 13:32-33
- **Day 5** // Revelation 3:12-13 and Galatians 2:9
- **Day 6** // Reflection Day - Revelation 3:7-13
- **Day 7** // Palm Sunday - Matthew 21:1-11

## WEEK SEVEN- THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

- **Day 1** // Revelation 3:14-22, 2 Corinthians 1:20, and John 17
- **Day 2** // Revelation 3:15-17, Matthew 21:12-22, and 2 Timothy 3:5
- **Day 3** // Revelation 3:18-19 and Matthew 26:14-16
- **Day 4** // Revelation 3:20-21, Luke 12:35-40, Matthew 26:17-30, 36-50
- **Day 5** // Good Friday - Revelation 3:21, Colossians 2:1-15, Matthew 26:59-68, Matthew 27:15-31, 33-36
- **Day 6** // Reflection Day
- **Day 7** // Resurrection Sunday - Matthew 28:1-10, Matthew 28:18-20



# WEEK 1

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN EPHESUS

# LOVE CHRIST AND LOVE PEOPLE

Ephesus is probably the most recognizable of the seven churches we will read about in Revelation. Ephesus is an area that played a big part in the New Testament. It's where Paul ministered for three years (Acts 19:1, 19:10, 20:31), Timothy worked there, and Paul wrote a letter to this church that became the book of Ephesians in the New Testament. Ephesus played a big part in the Roman Empire as well.

Ephesus was the Roman capital of Asia Minor. It was a port city that brought in significant goods and boasted over 250,000 people. Ephesus was a hub of business and was home to many diverse religions. It was also the location of the temple of Artemis (also known as the Temple of Diana), which was a significant temple full of thousands of priests, priestesses, and worshipers. The temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and was so vital to the area that it was the center for business and commerce.

This was an area with many pagan religions, practices of sorcery, and pressures to worship these pagan gods. More specifically, the emperor, Domitian, had a statue of himself constructed that was roughly 22-25 feet tall to be worshiped. In addition to these regular practices, pressures, and temptations for the church in Ephesus to overcome each day, the area also carried a large Jewish population. This led to much turmoil, arguing, and fighting within the church.

All of these pressures existed daily for the believers and church in Ephesus. This is why Jesus began His encouragement to the Ephesians through John's letter emphasizing overcoming the evil practices and false witnesses surrounding them. He corrects them on the issue they're currently facing—hard hearts toward God and others. They have turned away from their first love. Their daily struggle and stress have led them to lose their heart for God and His people (especially those they disagreed with). In a way, Jesus is calling this church at Ephesus to renew their marriage vows...return to the love you first had when you committed your life fully to me. This is the struggle, encouragement, and challenge for the church in Ephesus and one we can all relate to and take to heart as the 21st-century church today.



WEEK 1  
**EPHESUS**

## JESUS'S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS:

I see your hard work and worship in the face of opposition. I see you calling out false teaching and adhering to sound doctrine, but in your pursuit of being right, you have become the wrong kind of people. You have forgotten how to love. Love is what will turn people's hearts to me.

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*They weren't hurting anybody, and they were helping many. But they weren't at their best. In a word, they were lazy. They were working day and night, doing good deeds, teaching the truth, opposing falsehood, impressing themselves and one another with their industriousness— all because they were too lazy to love. Love is not what we do after we get the other things done, if we have any energy left over. Love is what we do, period. I need people who will love— love Christ, be loved by Christ, love your neighbors, be loved by your neighbors.*



# WEEK 1

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## DAY 1 - MONDAY

| *Revelation 1:1-8, Exodus 3:1-15*

**REFLECTION:** Write down Revelation 1:8

Reflect on who God is and His power, strength, knowledge, love, and care to share Himself with us. Let these words permeate through whatever struggles, doubts, or fears you may currently face. Let them be a comfort and take time to pray and thank Him for this.

### I AM WHO I AM

"I Am" statements are essential. "I Am" is used to identify who we are, how we feel, what we represent, what we believe. "I Am" is a personal and identifying statement. These two words are most important when used by God, as in Exodus 3:1-15 and Revelation 1:8. The omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (all-present), and omnipotent (all-powerful) God of the universe loves and cares about us, His creation, enough to disclose to us who He is, what He is for, and what He will always be. This is a revelation that is given throughout the pages of scripture and powerfully in this final book of the Bible. Remember the heart of the book of Revelation. Jesus begins this prophecy by identifying who He is for a reason because the heart of this revelation is for His creation to know Him and follow Him more closely.

# WEEK 1

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

| *Revelation 1:9-20, John 17*

**REFLECTION:** Reflect on John's description of Jesus in the Revelation passage. What do you observe about John's reaction to Jesus and Jesus' reaction to John?

Reflect on Jesus' Prayer in John 17. Jesus prays this prayer shortly before his crucifixion. Jesus prayed for His disciples who would carry on His ministry on Earth and for all future believers who would continue to spread the message of His love.

What stood out to you in this prayer about Jesus' love for the church?

### A CLEAR VISION OF JESUS

It's interesting how John began Revelation. He gave us his prologue (vv. 1-3), his greeting and doxology (vv. 4-8), and then closed with the apocalyptic vision of a blazing Jesus (vv. 9-20). Chapters 2 and 3 feature the letters to the seven churches. Then in chapter 4, we pick back up with more apocalyptic imagery, this time in the throne room of God.

Consider how encouraged the weary and persecuted churches must have felt after picturing the power and authority of their resurrected Savior. The call to persevere and to be pure is energized by a clear vision of Jesus. If we lose sight of who He is, His power and authority, we may begin to lose the confidence that keeps us moving forward. Sanctification is tied to the Savior. Without a powerful portrait of Jesus, these letters are mere bedtime stories. But with a clear vision of Christ, the church can find the motivation to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27).

Written by Whitney Capps- *We Over Me*

# WEEK 1

## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

| *Revelation 2:1-7, Acts 19:17-41, 1 Peter 5:10*

**REFLECTION:** Think back to a time when you suffered for Christ. How does suffering offer a more significant opportunity to allow Jesus to be Lord of our life?

### SUFFERING FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

The tension that the Ephesian church experienced is not new (Acts 19:23-41). This was a city full of spiritual, religious, political, and economic tensions. The temptation for the church was to conform or be isolated. They could be kept from buying into the commerce and being a part of the community if they refused to conform to the culture, their gods, and their political worship. The church in Ephesus stayed strong through these challenging circumstances. They rebuked the pagan worship and lifestyle. For that decision, they suffered. Suffering is never easy (it's why we ignore books of the Bible like Job and Lamentations), but it is part of the life of a true Christ-follower.

Walking in step with Christ means stepping out of culture and society; it means standing out, being different, and potentially being ignored, rebuked, judged, and persecuted. The Bible speaks a lot about suffering for the sake of the gospel. It says clearly that suffering builds endurance (Romans 5:3-5), makes us steadfast in our faith (James 1:2-4), and is a means for joy because it means we are following the righteous path. Suffering is a natural result of following Christ in this world and can be a catalyst to growing closer to Christ. Remember His promise to those who suffer and hold close to the encouragement He gave to the Ephesian church for staying steadfast in their suffering.

# WEEK 1

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## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

| *Revelation 2:4-5, Luke 10:27, Matthew 5:43-48, 1 Corinthians 13:13*

**REFLECTION:** Write down your favorite verse from the above reading.

What do you think it means to love?

How can we be known for our love for God and people rather than be known for what we are against?

### LOST LOVE

A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Have I not often reminded you that almost any disease may be hopefully endured except disease of the heart? But when our sickness is a disease of the heart, it is full of danger; and it was so in this case; "Thou hast left thy first love." It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and to deliver us from it. Oh, in any man, in any woman, any child of God here, let alone in the church as a whole, if there be a leaving of the first love, it is a woeful thing! Lord have mercy upon us; Christ have mercy upon us: this should be our solemn litany at once. No peril can be greater than this. Lose love, lose all. Leave our first love, we have left strength, and peace, and joy, and holiness.

Written by C. H. Spurgeon- A Sermon October 24th, 1886



# WEEK 1

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## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

| *Revelation 2:7, Genesis 3:22-24, Matthew 5:12, Revelation 22:1-21*

"When we return to loving God and the world for which he died, we return to Eden."  
Eugene Peterson - *This Hallelujah Banquet*

**REFLECTION:** Set an alarm on your phone for 10 minutes. Close your eyes and sit in silence. Simply ask God one thing: "help me hear your Spirit." Write down anything you felt you heard, experienced, or learned about God in this time.

### LISTEN TO THE SPIRIT

I find the most powerful directive that Jesus gives to the church in Ephesus at the beginning of verse seven. "...listen to the Spirit..." Our call as Christians and the church should be to listen to the Spirit in everything. When we listen to the Spirit, we find direction in walking with the Spirit (following the ways and desires of the Lord).

Revelation repeatedly talks about receiving eternal life (the tree of life, the crown of life, the white stone, the morning star, etc.) Eternal life is the believer's reward; it's a life of being able to finally, fully and completely, listen to the Spirit. This is single-handedly, though, the thing we neglect the most as believers, slowing down to be still and listen to the Spirit. As Jesus wraps up His words for the church of Ephesus, He encourages them to listen to His Spirit. Why? Because when we listen to the Spirit, we hear God's wisdom, we learn His plan, we see His love for us and the world, and we can echo these things back to Him and His people.

# WEEK 1

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## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

Revelation 2:1-7

**REFLECTION:** Write down a verse that stands out to you from this week's reading of Revelation 2:1-7. Why did you choose this verse?

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 1:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
  - What do you think God is saying to you in this letter? What do you think God is saying to the church?
  - How can you begin to love God and His people more every day?
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## DAY 7 - SUNDAY REST DAY

*Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed. Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.*



# WEEK 2

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN SMYRNA

# ENDURE SUFFERING FAITHFULLY

Smyrna is the next church in our study. Smyrna is a city that still exists in the East. Today it is known as Izmir and can be found in the country of Turkey. However, it looked slightly different in the Ancient East than today. Smyrna was a port city located roughly forty miles northwest of Ephesus. It was known for its magnificent agriculture, as a center for trade (they were the exclusive seller of Myrrh, hence the name Smyrna), and as a center for learning and culture. Smyrna was a prosperous city.

Smyrna was also known as a city of devout worship to the emperors of the old and current rule. There was a famous street in Smyrna called the “Golden Street,” and it held massive and beautiful temples to gods like Cybele, Apollo, Asklepios, Aphrodite, and Zeus. It even boasted as being the first city with a temple to Dea Roma, the goddess, mascot, and spirit of Rome. Worship to Dea Roma led them to worship the former emperors of Rome and ultimately the current emperor, Domitian. Worship of Domitian as lord became a requirement in Smyrna, and the ancient world, to show one’s political allegiance to Rome.

The Christians in Smyrna felt tremendous pressure every day to worship this emperor. Refusing to do so would restrict their access to most jobs, the thriving markets, and simple civil interactions. On top of these pressures, the Jewish community was rich in this area. They were known to be a significant means of persecution for the Christians, even going as far as reporting their lack of worship to the Roman authorities. With all of these pressures, struggles to daily survival, and persecution, the church in Smyrna was suffering. This is why Jesus directs His letter to the church in Smyrna to the truth of where their real riches lie and the encouragement to endure suffering. This faithful church is one of only two of the seven churches to which Jesus does not speak a correction/condemnation. This speaks to their strength and faithfulness as a church that we should all admire and seek to model.



WEEK 2  
SMYRNA

## JESUS’S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA:

I see the persecution, poverty and slander you are facing because of your allegiance to me. Do not be afraid of this suffering, be faithful and I will give you life.

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*Jesus, in effect, says to the suffering, ‘I know. I know everything that is taking place. I know from my own experience, and I know because I am with you in your experience. I suffered. I died. We are not isolated. We are not separated either from God or from his people. He knows and he is with us.*



# WEEK 2

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## DAY 1 - MONDAY

| *Revelation 2:8-11, John 16:33, Psalm 34:19*

**REFLECTION:** Take a moment and write down the encouragement and hope seen in the three passages above.

### HOPE IN SUFFERING

There's no shortage of passages in the Bible that cover the topic of suffering. Why is that? It is because scripture speaks to the human condition. It speaks to our earthly struggles, including times (sometimes extended periods) of suffering. We experience hurt, sickness, confusion, mistakes, betrayals, and loss in life. At times even following Christ can lead to more suffering (which seems so counter to the ways of this world), but here's the beauty of scripture- it speaks far more to the hope we have for overcoming suffering.

It's hard to find a passage in scripture that talks about suffering that doesn't end with hope. Why? Because the message of scripture isn't one of suffering but of hope. Revelation is actually about hope being fulfilled. This is what Christ calls the church of Smyrna to hold on to, and it's the same message for us today. Hold on to hope; no matter what you're dealing with today, hold on to hope.

# WEEK 2

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

| *Revelation 2:8-11, Job 19:25-27, Psalm 22:23-24, Romans 8:18*

**REFLECTION:** Spend some time reflecting on suffering in your own life and in the lives of others. What do these verses have to say about suffering? What would happen if we saw suffering as something God can use for our good and for His glory?

### SUFFERING'S HIGHER PURPOSE

One thing I love about Scripture is that it isn't simply a feel-good story, edited with only the highlights and heroes. No. There's more than a little bit of suffering. And I'm glad to see the example in Scripture—to know I'm not the only one who goes through hard times. Because if we're not careful, we'll only see suffering as a punishment, as a rebuke from God because of our disobedience...God's goodness or grace toward us is unmerited, meaning we don't deserve or earn it. He isn't kind toward us because we are worthy; He is kind to us because He is worthy. This matters because if blessing isn't about us, then suffering isn't either. When we walk through those times, we need to remember, if blessing is meant to show us that He is worthy, suffering is meant to show us He is trustworthy, He will be with us. He will teach us. He will refine us— for our good and His glory.

Suffering has a higher purpose. It reveals something about God to the world. Job didn't suffer perfectly, but he did suffer well. When we suffer well—remaining steadfast, hopeful, faithful, and teachable, it is evidence to the world that God is more valuable and trustworthy than wealth, health, and even family. Perhaps suffering well means that we don't lash out at others in our difficulty. It may mean staying the course in a difficult job or consistently showing up to worship even amidst our pain...Suffering is inevitable and hard, but it's not forever. And it's not hopeless. Jesus' message to Smyrna was that He could see their suffering, and to Him it was a prime example of rich, abundant faith. Let's not miss this. Jesus was pleased. The church at Smyrna did not receive a rebuke. Jesus honored their suffering and perseverance.

Written by Whitney Capps- *We Over Me*

# WEEK 2

## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

| *Revelation 2:8-11, Luke 12:13-21, Matthew 6:19-21, James 1:2-4*

**REFLECTION:** What do you believe wealth looks like? Why do you think Jesus wrote to the impoverished church of Smyrna and referred to them as being rich?

### YOU ARE RICH

Jesus tells the church in Smyrna, “I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich!” This may have felt confusing and misleading. But see, that’s the thing about suffering. In the middle of it, we can’t see how God is working. He is always working, even in our suffering. The question is, how will we react to our suffering. Will we suffer well? Does our suffering lead us to lean into our relationship with the Lord, or does it lead us to push God away? Suffering well looks like leaning into Jesus and leaning not on your own understanding. It looks like clinging to His promises amid hard circumstances. You see this idea that our suffering can lead to being rich is true if in these hard seasons we choose to lean into our relationship with the Lord. It can be a rich time of growth in our faith, a time of finding joy and hope in Jesus alone. In Luke 12:21, we see Jesus say, “Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.” This rich relationship with God is so much more valuable than any earthly pleasure, comfort, or riches. As hard as it is for us to imagine, suffering can genuinely make our relationship with Jesus richer. Times of suffering can produce real good in us—it’s a perfect opportunity for our joy and endurance to grow. If we open our hearts to the work that God can do through times of suffering, we will walk away from those hard seasons with a deeper, richer faith, and that is worth more than gold.

# WEEK 2

## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

| *Revelation 2:8-11, Philippians 1:21, Revelation 21:4*

**REFLECTION:** Write down everything you can think of that brings you life—things you like to do, places you like to go, the food you like to eat, etc. These are all things that probably make you feel more alive and aware of the gift that is life. These are small glimpses and tastes into what ultimate fellowship will one day look like with Christ. This is the crown of life. A life lived fully in the presence of Jesus. A life of richness and joy we can only glimpse in these small ways while on earth. Take time to thank God for giving us life. Ask for strength to pursue the crown of life in Him.

### CROWN OF LIFE

The crown was the symbol of the city of Smyrna. The battlements above the city resembled the points of a crown. The crown was even on their coins. Jesus uses this symbol of the reward of eternal life with Him as a crown intentionally. The church of Smyrna knew the significance of this. Their suffering was so great that for them, the reminder of the crown, the plenty, the rewards and freedoms the people around them were experiencing was nothing compared to the “crown,” or reward of eternal life, that He had for this faithful church.

In this life, it is important to remember this truth. Our reward is not found in this life but in the life to come. We get a glimpse of this glorious treasure in this life through God’s goodness and blessings for us in things like a good meal, intentional conversation, a relationship of love, the beauty of nature. We see it even more, though, in our own time and relationship with God. Remember the crown He has prepared for us, and experience the small taste of that reward on earth as you draw near to Him, even in your suffering.



# WEEK 2

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

| *Revelation 2:8-11, 1 Corinthians 15:58, John 16:33*

**REFLECTION:** The idea of suffering feels scary. When we are walking through times of suffering, we are often filled with fear and anxiety. Reflect on Revelation 2:10. Jesus knows that suffering can bring about fear in His people, but He offers something if they remain faithful. What we fear the most may be the very place where God wants to meet us in a profound way.

Take extended time to pray and ask God to help you keep fear from holding you back from pursuing what the Lord has for you.

### DON'T BE AFRAID

Jesus tells the church at Smyrna that suffering is coming for them, yet He says, "Don't be afraid." We don't want to suffer, it is not a pleasant thought, but we are never promised a life free from suffering. We live in a fallen world, and bad things will happen to us. For many of us, knowing this truth can cause fear and anxiety. The good news is that Jesus offers freedom from fear, this doesn't mean that we won't ever be afraid, but it does mean that we can be free of being paralyzed by that fear. That fear doesn't have to hold us back and keep us from walking in the freedom that Jesus offers. We can face trials and tribulations knowing that Jesus is right there with us every step of the way. In John 16:33, Jesus says, "take heart, because I have overcome the world." This should bring peace to our hearts, knowing that He is in control.

# WEEK 2

## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

Revelation 2:8-11

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 2:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What do you think God is saying to you in this letter? What do you think God is saying to the church?
- How can you begin to lean on God in your day-to-day suffering?

### HIS LOVE > MY FEAR

Suffering is a megaphone for what we believe. Suffering reminds us and declares to a watching world that nothing, no thing, compares to being seen, known, and loved by Jesus. This is meant to be the message of the church. His love is better than life. I think that message is more easily forgotten, or at least muted, in seasons of ease and comfort. In seasons when we forget or fail, the letter to Smyrna is a tender but powerful reminder that Jesus sees our suffering, and He intends to sustain us through it for His glory.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

## DAY 7 - SUNDAY REST DAY

*Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed. Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.*



# WEEK 3

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

## SHARE THE TRUTH

We continue our study of the seven churches in Revelation by looking at Pergamum. Pergamum was roughly 70 miles north of Smyrna. Located on a high granite hill, it rested higher than any other city or area around it for miles. It was metropolitan, committed to learning and research, and was known for its medical knowledge. Pergamum boasted more temples to the mythic gods than the other cities, including Zeus, Dionysius, Demeter, Athena, and Asclepius.

The temple to Asclepius, the god of healing, was particularly popular because it drew people from all of Asia Minor seeking help and healing. One healing ritual was placing the sick into a dark room and releasing snakes to crawl over their bodies as they slept. Snakes even became a symbol on their coins. The modern medical symbol of a snake wrapping its body around a staff is called the Rod of Asclepius. (also see Numbers 21:4-9).

With all of these pagan and imperial cult influences in Pergamum, it is not surprising that Jesus referred to this place as the "city where Satan has his throne" (Revelation 2:13). The struggle for the church in Pergamum would be sharing the gospel, the truth, about Jesus being the only true God and Savior for all in the midst of an overly populated area of worship for these mythic gods and emperors. The Christians knew the threat of death for sharing this truth because the bishop of the church in Pergamum, Antipas, was martyred in AD 92. The temptation for this church was to compromise their teaching of truth by allowing others to teach about false gods and worship the emperor. However, this is exactly what Jesus is calling the church in Pergamum to do- to share the truth, no matter the cost.



## WEEK 3 PERGAMUM

### JESUS'S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM:

You are living in a city where the influence and the power of Satan are rampant, be on guard for that influence. Do not compromise the truth for the culture around you. Be people who speak the truth, live the truth, and share the truth.

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*Truth is not simply what we say but what we live. Truth is not just the right answers but a right life. Christ is our comprehensive, personal truth to be expressed in gestures, actions, and conversations when no one is watching.*

# WEEK 3

## DAY 1 - MONDAY

| *Revelation 2:12-17, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Timothy 2:23-26*

**REFLECTION:** What do you think sound biblical teaching looks like? Pay attention to the first things that come to mind. Is it a certain style? A preference? Or is it the content of the message?

Why is sound biblical teaching so vital for the church? What is the best way to determine when teaching is false?

### SPEAK TRUTH

The overall message of this letter to the church in Pergamum is to focus on sound biblical teaching, rebuke false teaching, and to preach the true gospel. This is a powerful message for the church at this time in Pergamum and still is for us today. The church is meant to stand out from culture and society as a beacon of truth and righteousness, which isn't possible if truth and righteousness are compromised for comfort and relevance.

Teaching that is biblically sound should be the most important thing a believer looks for in assessing their commitment to the church body. Discerning biblical teaching has nothing to do with how charismatic, funny, or entertaining the pastor is, but instead with how dependent they are on the truth of God's Word. The best way for us to discern the true gospel from a false one is by being in scripture ourselves. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true.* We will not know if a church's teaching is sound if we haven't studied the scripture ourselves. When we submit to churches that teach truth above all else, we should be inspired to go out and be the church that speaks truth to the world.



# WEEK 3

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

| Revelation 2:13, Proverbs 21:21, Hebrews 10:23

**REFLECTION:** List some ways that God has been faithful to you. List some qualities of what it looks like to be faithful to God. What are some steps you can take to grow in your faithfulness to God?

### STAY FAITHFUL

Eugene Peterson says, *"Truth is not simply what we say but what we live."* The church had gotten complacent in their faithfulness to Jesus. Faithfulness to becoming more like Jesus is the core of becoming the church that God can use to be a light to the world. When those outside the church see a faithful body of believers that love like Jesus, it is appealing to them. It feels like something they want to be a part of.

*A church is composed of persons who live in a particular town, eat food bought in the local markets, work at jobs provided by the economy, and speak a language in common with others in the region. But it is comprised of something quite apart from the conditions of piety, culture, and politics, namely, the person of Jesus Christ. God makes the church. The Holy Spirit breathes on the chaotic and random population, 'without form and void,' and makes a people of God, a church. Each of the seven churches, and every church since, is defined by the living Christ. A church only has being in relation to Christ. Apart from Christ, these churches would have location but no identity...There is no church apart from Christ...*

Written by Eugene H. Peterson - *Reversed Thunder*

# WEEK 3

## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

| *Revelation 2:14-15, John 14:6, Numbers 25:1-2 and 31:16*

**REFLECTION:** What are false teachings you have heard or witnessed in the church/culture that you are tempted to believe/follow?

What is appealing about that teaching? How is that teaching harmful to the gospel and living for Jesus?

### CORRUPTED GOSPEL

The king of Moab, Balak, was fearful of Israel's might, power, and their God. So he sent for the prophet Balaam, hoping Balaam would curse God's people. The Spirit of the Lord intervened and prevented Balaam from cursing Israel; instead he blessed them. When Balaam could not do what Balak wanted, Balaam developed a plan that would be Israel's downfall (Num. 25:1-2; 31:16)...

Understanding this passage lends context to our reading of Jesus' conviction of Pergamum. Evidently, there were some, not all but some, who were allowing paganism to corrupt the gospel. God's people were to remain pure, but their faith was being polluted by bad theology...we have professing believers (today) who like Jesus and affirm His teachings on love and acceptance, but they bristle at the idea that Jesus might be exclusive or divisive. We live in a culture where people want "Jesus +" or "Jesus -" rather than the Jesus of Scripture. Compromise is subtle and seductive. It usually begins with our own discomfort with some part of God's Word. We can't get Jesus without the Old Testament. We don't get Jesus without the law. They tolerated teachings that were not consistent with the whole counsel of God's Word and the ministry of Jesus.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

# WEEK 3

## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

| *Revelation 2:16, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Acts 3:19, Hebrews 4:12*

**REFLECTION:** Think about the decisions you've made this week. Did you consult anyone before you made those decisions? We are called to place our whole lives under the authority of the Lord. Who gets to tell you how to live?

In what area of your life do you need to turn back (repent) toward God? Spend intentional time in prayer asking for forgiveness and then reflect/write down how you can actively begin to seek repentance towards that thing in your daily life.

### WHO IS MY AUTHORITY

Jesus introduces himself in this letter as the one who has "the sharp double-edged sword". This image of Jesus as a sword is a powerful reminder to the people. The sword was significant to the church at Pergamum. The governor of Pergamum had been given the right to bear the sword by Caesar which means he was given the power over who lived and who died. Jesus established His authority as the one who is actually in charge, not Caesar, not the governor. We tend to forget who is in charge. Often we either want to be our own authority, or we look to false teachers to be our authority. Jesus reminds the church that they must repent from this arrogance and place their lives back under His authority. The second reason this image of Jesus as a sword is powerful is because it points back to Hebrews 4:12, "The Word of God is...sharper than any double-edged sword...it exposes our innermost thoughts and desires." Jesus is reminding the church, and us, that he sees the things going on in our hearts. When we try to be our own authority, it leaves us vulnerable to false teaching and temptation to do whatever feels right in our own eyes. This is what Jesus was warning against; it's a warning that we should heed as well. Who gets to tell you how to live? If you haven't placed every aspect of your life under His authority, Jesus says repent and turn back. There is great reward for the believer who submits their whole lives to the authority of Christ.

# WEEK 3

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

| Revelation 2:17, John 6:41, Isaiah 62:1-5, 1 Peter 2:4-13

**REFLECTION:** Take a moment and reflect on how you want to be seen by those you love. Now take a moment and think about how they would describe you.

The truth is that despite your flaws, brokenness, mistakes, and sinfulness, Jesus sees you through a lens of love. Read 1 Peter 2:4-13, finish this time by writing how Jesus sees you (based on His Word and not on your feelings).

### REWARD FOR THE STRUGGLE

This offer in Revelation 2:17 for those who hear what the spirit is saying and are victorious is significant. Jesus says he offers manna from heaven and a white stone with a new name written on it. These are symbols of provision, protection, and redemption. Despite our brokenness and sin, there is hope for those who repent and turn back to the Lord. We are credited righteousness by the blood of Jesus, which means we are His beloved children.

Eugene Peterson says this in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*The hidden manna is the food that God gives to his people, the nourishment that keeps them going. The stone with the new name written on it is the identification that Christ gives us as his people. He will sustain us, and he will identify us as his own. A most appropriate reward for being victorious in the struggle! The battle is not between good and evil but between truth and error. To fight it well means to throw one's life on the side of truth, to discern between what is right and what is spurious.*

# WEEK 3

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## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

Revelation 2:12-17

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 3:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What do you think God is saying to you in this letter? What do you think God is saying to the church?
- How can you begin to teach the truth to those around you and fight the temptation to compromise this truth?

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## DAY 7 - SUNDAY REST DAY

*Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed. Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.*





# WEEK 4

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN THYATIRA

## BE HOLY

Thyatira is the smallest of the seven cities. It was located about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum and on the same path toward the city of Sardis that we will study next week. It was a city known for its wool and textile production. Trading thrived in this area, which led to numerous robust trading guilds that carried great importance in Thyatira.

These guilds played significant roles in the economy, social life, and religious practices of Thyatira. One of the routine practices of the trading guilds was to have vast and rich feasts to honor their deities. If you were part of these trading guilds, you were expected to be a part of these feasts. If someone refused to be part of the feast, they would be removed from the guild, isolated from the community, and banned from trading.

Like with other churches, these pressures led the church in Thyatira to struggle with whether to compromise their beliefs to be part of society or to hold firm to their faith, which meant suffering the struggles of isolation and poverty, and persecution. This small church was given the longest letter from Jesus. The heart of Jesus' letter to the church in Thyatira is to encourage and remind them to be holy despite their potential exclusion from society and trade.

It seems this church was being tempted to stray from holiness by a prophetess in their midst who Jesus compares to Jezebel. They were tolerating this woman encouraging sexual impurity and idolatry. This letter includes a warning against this influence and an encouragement to those who are standing firm in their faith and continuing to pursue holiness.



## WEEK 4 THYATIRA

### JESUS'S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA:

I see you and that you are trying to remain faithful to me. You love, serve, and work hard. You live in a world where work is valued above all else. The world's way looks attractive, and some are sneaky about leading you astray. Don't be deceived to become like the world. I offer you something infinitely more abundant than the world can ever offer.

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*While many believers seem to want to retreat from society, there is no way to be a Christian except in the world. But though the world is inevitable for the Christian life, it certainly is not helpful to it. Often it is seductive to Christ's purposes. And it always contrasts with them.*

# WEEK 4

## DAY 1 - MONDAY

| *Revelation 2:18-29, Proverbs 15:3, Psalm 33:13*

**REFLECTION:** Read Revelation 2:18-19 again. What do you think it means to be seen by the Lord?

This letter shows us that God sees and knows all, the good and the bad, and he loves us anyway. Although this is true, it doesn't give us the freedom to just ignore the sinfulness in our hearts. When God calls us out on what he sees, he's doing it because He loves us enough to warn us when we're about to do something unwise.

How do you begin to see God differently, knowing He sees you fully and completely?

### CAUTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Though Thyatira wasn't as committed or demonstrative in their worship of the Roman Emperor, the city was still distinctly pagan, particularly involved in worship of Apollo, the sun god. Apollo was the son of Zeus, the reigning king of all Greek and Roman mythological gods and goddesses. When Jesus introduced Himself as the "Son of God" in verse 18, it served as a potent reminder of His authority and the impotence of the false gods Thyatira revered. His introduction included a mention of His "eyes like a fiery flame" and "feet...like fine bronze" (Rev. 2:18). He wanted the church to be reminded that His gaze is piercing, seeing all that is taking place, and He will quickly pursue and tamp down evil.

Jesus' accompanying words of encouragement to the church at Thyatira demonstrated His love for them and their love for Him. They were faithful and true, growing in love and devotion to Jesus.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

# WEEK 4

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

| Revelation 2:20-21, Matthew 24:11, 1 Kings 16:31, 21:23-25, 1 Corinthians 5

**REFLECTION:** What are some cultural things that you see churches conforming to or tolerating?

We can't tolerate the things that scripture calls sin in the name of making the gospel more appealing. Jesus says we are to be people and churches that practice grace and truth in confronting sin.

Randy Alcorn writes in his book the *Truth and Grace Paradox*:

*Truth without grace breeds a self-righteous legalism that poisons the church and pushes the world away from Christ. Grace without truth breeds moral indifference and keeps people from seeing their need for Christ. Attempts to 'soften' the gospel by minimizing truth keep people from Jesus. Attempts to 'toughen' the gospel by minimizing grace keep people from Jesus. It's not enough to offer grace or truth. We must offer both.*

How can we (as the church) teach or correct these messages with love instead of conforming?

### WARNING TO STAND

Despite all the good Jesus saw in the church at Thyatira, there were significant problems...The center of the corruption at the church at Thyatira was a woman Jesus called Jezebel. This may not have been her literal name, but a title that clearly represented a self-styled prophetess within the church, after the pattern of Jezebel in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16-21 and 2 Kings 9:30-37)...This "Jezebel" at the church of Thyatira wasn't really a prophetess, she only claimed to be one. Yet, it seems the Christians there received her as a prophetess, and that is why Jesus gave them this warning...

Because of the strong trade guilds in Thyatira, the sexual immorality and the eating of things sacrificed to idols was probably connected with the mandatory social occasions of the guilds. Perhaps a Christian was invited to the monthly meeting of the goldsmith's guild, and the meeting was held at the temple of Apollo. "Jezebel" would allow or encourage the man to go - perhaps even using a "prophetic" word - and when the man went, he fell into immorality and idolatry...Christians were expected to stand in the face of this kind of pressure.

Written by David Guzik - *Enduring Word Revelation 2*

# WEEK 4

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## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

| *Revelation 2:22-23, 1 Samuel 16:7, Jeremiah 17:10, Proverbs 20:27*

**REFLECTION:** Take a moment and write out a prayer to God, thanking Him for knowing your heart. Next, write how you want to turn your heart to Him, and finally, end this written prayer by asking Him to help guard your heart against giving into the culture around you.

### UNDIVIDED HEARTS

To understand what Jesus means in this letter, we need to look back at the story of Jezebel in I Kings. Jezebel was sneaky in her deception. Her heart was not pure. She wasn't trying to dismiss the things of God altogether. She just wanted them to worship God alongside a false god, knowing that it would eventually lead them down a destructive path. Jesus doesn't want a divided heart; He wants our whole heart. We think we can cling to worldly things and worship them alongside God, but it just doesn't work that way. We think we can worship God and still do whatever we want. That's the spirit of Jezebel. That's the spirit that infiltrated the church at Thyatira. We want Jesus to be a part of our lives, but we don't want to give him all of our life. We want Jesus, but we don't want Him all up in our business. We want Him to bless our lives, but we don't want Him to mess with our lives. But that's not the way of Jesus. He wanted the church at Thyatira to give him their whole devotion, and He wants the same from us. He refuses to share us, His Bride, with any other lovers.



# WEEK 4

## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

| *Revelation 2:24-27, Hebrews 10:23, 2 Timothy 2:8-10*

**REFLECTION:** We all make small compromises that we know are not honoring to God. Take some time to reflect on some compromises that you have made over the years. Ask God to show you where you need to hold more tightly to your convictions.

What steps can you take to hold more tightly to the things that honor God?

### HOLD TIGHT

One of my favorite things in high school was to go tubing at the lake. When tubing behind a boat, you hold on to an inflatable raft while laying flat or kneeling. As the boat begins to pull the raft, the key to success is to hold on. No matter what. Whatever direction the boat turns and whips you around, you hold on. Usually, the ride would begin soft and gentle, but eventually, the driver would speed up, swerve around, and sometimes even do a donut. The longer you held on, the harder it was to keep going, but the longer the ride, the more fun it was.

The Christian life is a lot like holding onto a tube in the middle of a vast body of water. At first, it feels fun and easy, but as life goes on, we begin to feel the pressures from the world around us to let go, compromise, and sink into the norms of the world around us. Jesus' message to the church in Thyatira is a reminder that holiness is the ride they have been called to and hold on because the world is trying to get them to let go of that. Jesus is calling them and us to be holy by not compromising our beliefs and walking with Christ in order to conform to the comfort of this world. It can be a rough ride, but Jesus promises that it is worth it, so we keep holding on. He will honor and reward those who hold on.

# WEEK 4

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

| *Revelation 2:26-29, Matthew 28:16-18, 2 John 1:9*

**REFLECTION:** What is an area of your life that you find challenging to give God authority over? Why?

How might trusting and following Him faithfully in that area lead you to a better life and relationship with Him?

### FAITHFUL TO THE END

Even when there is the immoral and idolatrous influence of a Jezebel, Christians can overcome and keep Jesus' works until the end. We must not become overly discouraged at immorality and idolatry around us, even among Christians. God's work will still go on through His overcomers. Jesus promised that His people will reign with Him. Here, there is a special promise to those who overcome the threat of immorality and idolatry. To them, Jesus offered a share in His own kingdom...Jesus includes this here to give hope to the faithful Christians of Thyatira, who felt overwhelmed by the immorality and idolatry all around them. Jesus reminds them, "You're on My winning team." Jesus offered them a reward greater than the kingdom. He offered them the reward of Himself, because He is the Morning Star (Revelation 22:16).

This is a letter that applies to everyone. It applies to those who are like Jezebel, who lead others into sin. It applies to those who follow the teaching of a Jezebel, and follow others into sin. It applies to those who permit a Jezebel to work her wickedness. Finally, it applies to the faithful who must hold fast.

Written by David Guzik - *Enduring Word Revelation 2*

# WEEK 4

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## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

Revelation 2:18-29

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 4:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What do you think God is saying to you in this letter? What do you think God is saying to the church?
- How can you begin to strive towards God's holiness amid temptation to compromise and conform?

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## DAY 7 - SUNDAY REST DAY

*Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed. Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.*



# WEEK 5

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN SARDIS

## BE AUTHENTIC

The fifth church in our study of the seven churches of Revelation is Sardis. Sardis was located roughly 35 miles from Thyatira. It was a city of wealth known for its carpet industry and minting coins. It was also an area that was no stranger to regime change. Although it had impenetrable, solid walls, it was conquered by the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. In AD 17, a severe earthquake struck, destroying the city. They became financially dependent on the Roman Empire for reconstruction, which meant that the Roman Empire gained even more control and influence over this area.

Like the other cities we've studied, Sardis had many pagan gods and cults, a strong Jewish presence, with the Christian church and believers stuck in the middle. Sardis was heavily polytheistic (worship of many gods) and had a thriving Jewish community. The Jewish community in Sardis had the most prominent ancient Jewish synagogue outside Palestine. There was incredible wealth and influence here, but this might be because of serious compromises the Jewish people in Sardis were making. There's evidence that the Jewish community in Sardis held Roman citizenship, which was incredibly rare. This means the Jewish community accommodated the pagan and Roman culture, and many believe that the Christian church in Sardis was guilty of this, too. This is why Jesus' rebuke for them is strongly focused on their lack of spiritual authenticity (Revelation 3:1, "...you have a reputation for being alive- but you are dead...").

This church was marked by its reputation of being in a wealthy city, and they became overconfident in their military strength. They weren't persecuted or enduring difficulty like the other churches we've studied so far. This led them to be full of pride in their standing. They boasted of being a thriving booming church, but Jesus tells them differently. The true condition of the church is that they are barely holding on, and they need to "Wake up...go back to what you heard and believed at first." This church needed a spiritual awakening.



## WEEK 5 SARDIS

### JESUS'S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT SARDIS:

I know the works you are known for and your reputation, but that is not important to me. You are relying on the traditions of your past and forgetting about me in your present. You are blessed, but you are not using your blessings to honor and serve me. What you say and do inside your church doesn't ring true once you go out into the world. Live up to your reputation and be authentic. You are not being obedient to the Spirit, wake up!

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*The world is one single whole. It's holy. We divide it into areas marked out for God and areas marked out for ourselves. We call churches sacred and playgrounds secular. We have places where we pray and others where we play. But our compartments desecrate the way things are supposed to be; the earth is the Lord's. All of it. That is the holiness test: discovering the presence of the holy Christ and the movements of the Holy Spirit in these everyday faces we encounter in and out of church, playing and praying together through the whole life that Christ gives us so abundantly.*



# WEEK 5

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## DAY 1 - MONDAY

| *Revelation 3:1-6*

**REFLECTION:** What do you think defines a thriving/healthy church? What do you think defines a thriving/healthy Christian?

What do you think defines a church that needs an awakening? What do you think defines a Christian who needs an awakening?

### DEAD OR ALIVE

Too often churches measure spiritual health by numbers, buildings, and programs. But just because we have a lot of people coming to our churches doesn't mean we're being effective for the kingdom of God. We might be the popular place to be, but are we making disciples?

The people outside the church, and sadly enough also the people inside the church, might have been fooled by reputation and appearances, but Jesus knew the true condition of the church. Sardis was asleep, but their situation wasn't hopeless. Jesus told them to wake up and strengthen what was about to die. He called them to remember and repent.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

# WEEK 5

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

| *Revelation 3:2-3, Matthew 24:42-43, Romans 13:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Revelation 16:15*

**REFLECTION:** What are the five things Jesus calls the church in Sardis to do in vv 2-3?

Which of these things seem to resonate with you the most personally? Why?

### KEEP WATCH

It's important to remember Sardis' history. It's a city known for its impenetrable walls, but it was conquered three times. That's because their walls looked unstoppable but were weak on the inside. They were wealthy people with many blessings, including a seemingly strong military. They were overconfident in their strength, so they weren't prepared for the enemy's attacks. The Persians made it through because they saw a soldier use a secret passage on one part of the wall. Later, the Persians retook this city when they saw an unprotected section of the wall.

As good and protected as this city looked on the outside, they were not as strong or protected on the inside. Jesus reminds the church of Sardis that they are following in this same history within the walls of their church. They are focused on their reputation, good works, and prosperity in the region, but they gained this favor because they compromised their beliefs to fit in with the community, the Pagan believers, and the government. In this letter, Jesus is calling the church in Sardis to wake up and return to what their mission is: to passionately equip and lead disciples for Jesus. He tells them to "Go back" or remember what they heard and believed about Jesus in the beginning. He's calling them to stay on mission, living for Christ and equipping others to do the same. If they do not, then like the history of Sardis, He will come to them when they least expect it and destroy them.

# WEEK 5

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## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

| *Revelation 3:3, Psalm 105*

**REFLECTION:** Reflect on how you have seen and experienced God in your life and spiritual journey. List some moments and ways God has been faithful to you. Maybe it was through direction, deliverance from something, or blessings you have received.

### REMEMBER

A friend of mine recently shared something she heard from a pastor: "When you get hysterical, get historical." That phrase has stuck with me. Jesus is calling this church to "go back to what you heard"--in essence he is saying remember the goodness of the Lord. Psalm 105 is an excellent reminder of God's historical pattern of goodness. In this Psalm, we see how faithful God was to the Israelites throughout history. This idea of looking back and noticing God's goodness in collective history and in our own history is key to helping us in our current circumstances. If we can move forward with certainty that God is good, then we can trust him more fully and trust that His ways are better than ours. It helps us more easily repent of the ways that we try to take control of our own lives and allows us to more quickly turn back to Him as our ultimate authority. Looking back helps us remember that He is always for us and actively working for our good and His glory.

# WEEK 5

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## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

| *Revelation 3:4, Hebrews 3:14, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:3-6*

**REFLECTION:** What do you think it means to walk with Jesus? When you are walking with someone, it indicates a deep connection. How can you make walking with Jesus a more familiar and natural practice in your life?

Take time to go on a walk with Christ. Maybe that is a literal walk outside where you focus on simply listening and talking to Him. Perhaps it's sitting in your favorite chair or driving to work in complete silence to hear and speak with Him but take time today to walk intentionally with Christ.

### WALK WITH ME

The Christians in Sardis who forsook the sinful compromise of their city would be rewarded with a closer, more intimate walk with Jesus. This reward is ultimately a better motivator than the fear of punishment or ruin from our sin. The pure can have greater intimacy with God not because they have earned it, but because they are simply more interested in the things of God. God promises to reward that interest: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8).

Written by David Guzik - *Enduring Word Revelation 3*

# WEEK 5

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

| *Revelation 3:5, 1 John 3:1, Galatians 2:20, Romans 8:15*

**REFLECTION:** What does it mean that you belong to the Lord? How does this impact the way you see God and your life?

Write down the last part of Revelation 3:5, "I will announce before my Father and His angels that they are mine." Now write under that, "I am HIS." Take intentional time to pray and thank God for this truth. Specifically, ask Him to help you see yourself as a chosen child of God, adopted into His family, and to live as if that is true.

### ADOPTED INTO HIS FAMILY

The story of the Bible is the story of adoption. We are all adopted into God's spiritual family as chosen children of the Most High King. We are welcomed with open arms and feel the love of His family. In this way, the Bible directly uses adoption as a picture of what God has done for us. This adoption language would have had a deeper meaning for the Christians in that day. In the Roman world, adoption was a significant and common practice. If a man had no sons or felt that his sons were unworthy, he would have to adopt someone he thought would make a worthy son. A father could disown his natural-born son, but an adoption was irreversible and permanent.

Once adopted, the adoptee would have all his debts canceled, his crimes pardoned, and he would receive a new name. He would now be entitled to all the rights and benefits of a son. When we come to faith in Christ, we are adopted into the family of God. Our debts are canceled, our sins pardoned, and we are given a new name. We get to call God our "Abba Father" and we are given all the rights that heirs of a King are entitled to. We did nothing to deserve or earn these rights, but we get access to them because we are his beloved chosen children. This adoption into His family is not because we are worthy, but is all the more meaningful because God adopts us when we are completely unworthy.

# WEEK 5

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## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

Revelation 3:1-6

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 5:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What do you think God is saying to you in this letter? What do you think God is saying to the church?
- What do you think it would look like for you to be authentic in your faith in Jesus?

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## DAY 7 - SUNDAY REST DAY

*Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed. Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.*





# WEEK 6

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

## STAY ON MISSION

The church in Philadelphia is the sixth church and youngest city in our study of the seven churches in Revelation. It was also known as a prosperous city, which probably had a lot to do with its location on a major highway that connected Europe to the east. However, that prosperity was challenged when the same earthquake Sardis suffered in 17 AD struck Philadelphia. Unlike Sardis, this earthquake devastated Philadelphia to far more extraordinary lengths.

The Roman Empire forfeited Philadelphia's required economic tribute to the empire for five years to help them rebuild. This was a help, but the city was hoping for more help that never came. This led to the city of Philadelphia feeling abandoned and neglected by the empire of Rome. This feeling only grew when emperor Domitian ordered Philadelphia's rich vineyards to be ripped up and removed so as not to compete with the Roman vineyards. The wine was the leading trade in Philadelphia, so this devastated their economy.

This, along with the prominent Jewish community that excommunicated Christians, led to the church in Philadelphia feeling very excluded from Rome and the people in their city. Jesus speaks to the city in Philadelphia with tenderness, praise, and a reminder that He was with them and that they were part of His family. Like Smyrna, Philadelphia is the only other of the seven churches that Jesus doesn't address with a rebuke but only with praise, love, and encouragement. This church might have been small and seemingly weak, but when faced with hard circumstances, they were found faithful. Jesus' call to this church is for them to continue running the race before them with perseverance.



## WEEK 6 PHILADELPHIA

### JESUS'S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA:

I know all that you have endured and you have been found faithful. The synagogues have closed their doors to you, but my door is always open to you. I know that you feel neglected and forgotten, but you are the ones I love because you have persevered. I will protect you, just hold on and don't give up. Stay on mission proclaiming the gospel to all who will hear.

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*:

*John detected a tendency in his Philadelphia congregation toward taking it easy. They had been through persecution and martyrdom and were now settling down to enjoy the comfort of their shepherd Lord. But it wasn't retirement time yet.*

# WEEK 6

## DAY 1 - MONDAY

| *Revelation 3:7-13, Psalm 33:18, 1 Peter 3:12*

**REFLECTION:** Reflect on Revelation 3:7-8. What do you think it means to be “seen”? Do you feel this way in your relationship with God? Why or why not?

Take a moment and write/reflect on these words: “God sees me, knows me, and loves me.” End this time by praying and thanking God for this truth.

### FOUND FAITHFUL

If you have ever felt insignificant, and I think we all have, this letter is for you. It reminds all of us that being seen and loved by Jesus is most important. Being seen and loved by Jesus is enough.

The church at Philadelphia was a group of Christ-followers who may have felt invisible. Some scholars believe that they had likely been expelled from the local synagogue. It's hard for us to understand their plight, living in an age that would have been unimaginable to first-century believers. If we leave a church, there's likely one around the corner or within driving distance that will meet our needs and welcome us warmly. But our first generation brothers and sisters didn't experience church like that. The Philadelphian Christians had nowhere to go. They were alone...They may have been low in numbers, influence, or resources, but despite that, and in the face of opposition, they remained faithful.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

# WEEK 6

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

| *Revelation 3:8, Deuteronomy 28:1-14, John 10:9, John 14:15, Psalm 119:105*

**REFLECTION:** Write down the words from verse eight, "I have opened a door for you..." What do you think that means?

### AN OPEN DOOR

This small but mighty congregation had not embraced heresy or fallen into disobedience as other churches had done. They remained loyal and obedient. For that, Jesus rewarded them with an open door.

What was the open door? Scholars differ on the answer. Some say it was an open door to further ministry- that the reward for their faithful service was more opportunity to serve faithfully. Others think it was an open door into heaven. While the Jews may have closed the synagogue doors to these Christians, the entry into heaven was wide open to them.

No one closes a door that Jesus opens. No one. The church at Philadelphia may have been pushed around a bit, but they were still standing strong. They may have been shut out, but they were not shut down. They were not going unnoticed by the One who counts the most--neither is your church and neither are you.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

# WEEK 6

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## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

| *Revelation 3:8-9, Genesis 37:18-36, Genesis 50:18-20*

**REFLECTION:** Have you ever experienced God's love and kindness in the midst of persecution?

What does it mean to you that God loves you even in the hardest of circumstances?

### HIS LOVE IS GOOD

Reread Genesis 50:19-20. Joseph is talking to his brothers who had sold him into slavery. He fully understands persecution and the sustaining love of God in the midst of what was meant for evil. God will always have a purpose and hope in what we may experience, however difficult it may be. He will always be faithful to bring greater good. We will never fully comprehend the love that God has for us. It would have been easy for Joseph to be upset with God and walk away from the Lord. The same is true of this church at Philadelphia, and even for us today, when things look bleak: it makes sense to think God has abandoned us. Staying the course and trusting God's goodness and love is hard, but ultimately more fulfilling than any other thing the world offers.

# WEEK 6

## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

| *Revelation 3:10-11, John 14:2-3, Luke 13:32-33*

**REFLECTION:** Write down Jesus' words at the beginning of Revelation 3:11... "I am coming soon." What encouragement do you feel around these words?

How can believing these words change the way you live for Jesus today?

### ALREADY NOT YET

We live in what many theologians call "the already but not yet"... Jesus has already come, and He will come again. There is beauty in knowing that Jesus is coming again soon, yet for some, these words might be frightening. The Bible reminds us that this fact should not scare us but encourage us. What does that mean for us? First, it means that we have a real hope. If things are hard and feel hopeless, you can be encouraged because Jesus is coming soon. Next, it means we should live with expectancy and even an urgency looking forward to His return. This doesn't mean we stop working, stop planning, or just throw up our hands and go live in the wilderness waiting for him to come back. This simply means that we live ready for His return whenever it may be and we share the good news with others who may not know Him. Luke 13:32-33 tells us that "since you don't know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert!" It's important that we guard our hearts against worldly influence and keep ourselves focused on the things of the Lord. Jesus' reminder that He is "coming soon" is an encouragement to this church and to us to persevere, stay alert, hold on to the things that really matter, and faithfully share the good news of the gospel until His return.



# WEEK 6

## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

| *Revelation 3:12-13, Galatians 2:9*

**REFLECTION:** What do you think it means to be a pillar of the church? If you are a Christ-follower, have you ever thought of yourself this way? How should this change the way we view our role in the church?

### YOU ARE A PILLAR

A pillar is a mark of stability, support, and strength and its purpose is to make a structure stable, strong, and unshakable. To be a pillar of the church means much the same, it's a mark of stability, support and strength. Each individual in the church that is growing in stability and strength makes the whole church body stronger. Each pillar supports the other pillars that make up the whole. When the storms and trouble come, the pillars keep the structure from collapsing under the weight.

This symbolic language is helpful for us to understand our role and purpose in our church. Each pillar (member) has a critical part to play as they support other members of the body. We are as the body of believers, the household of faith. It's important that we belong to a church, because we need that body of believers (pillars) that can support us in hard seasons and be our strength when we are weak.

Jesus builds his temple one pillar at a time. In the Old Testament, the presence of God inhabited a man-made temple, but now the dwelling place of the Lord is his church, and the church is NOT a man made building. The church is the people of God; His presence now dwells within His people. I Corinthians 3:16 says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God?" (1 Cor. 3:16). The world might shake and collapse around us, but the church (the people of God) can stand firm on the word of the Lord.

# WEEK 6

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## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

*Revelation 3:7-13*

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 6:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What do you think God is saying to you in this letter? What do you think God is saying to the church?
- How can you begin to stay on the mission God has given to you (the church)?

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## DAY 7 - PALM SUNDAY

*Read Matthew 21:1-11*

"Many people that day reveled in seeing the celebrity but missed seeing the Savior. On that glorious Palm Sunday, Jesus came riding in as a popular hero. But within days, He would be the suffering Servant - sacrificing Himself for the sake of the world and setting the example of cross-bearing and death to self for His followers. He wasn't the warrior king they expected, and yet the people cheered for Jesus just the same. Jesus knew that some of the people who were there that day, waving their branches, swept up in the frenzy of emotion would turn on Him within a few days."

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*



# WEEK 7

A LETTER TO THE  
CHURCH IN LAODICEA

## REPENT AND RETURN TO HIM

Laodicea is the final of the seven churches in Revelation. This church, located about 100 miles east of Ephesus and 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia, was a major commercial city. Like Philadelphia, Laodicea was found on a main Roman road, which brought in a lot of trading and goods. It was a banking center known for manufacturing soft, black wool garments and its medical school specializing in eye diseases. This thriving city was hit by an earthquake in 60 AD that essentially destroyed everything in the city, but unlike Sardis and Philadelphia, this city declined financial support from Rome because it was so prosperous that it could afford to rebuild itself.

Despite these benefits, the city did carry a significant weakness. Laodicea's closest water sources lay far outside of the city. Its two water sources were a hot spring in Hierapolis (about 8 miles north) and snowcaps a few miles to the south. This meant Laodicea was forced to create a piping system to bring water to the city. It was an engineering feat for this time to have miles of clay piping bringing in water for an entire city. However, since the water had to travel so far, it was warm and tepid by the time it reached the city. It was disgusting to drink.

These three defining pieces of Laodicea- their wealth, their pride of goods and medical expertise for healing eyes, and their tepid, lukewarm water all play into Jesus' important words to this church. This church seems to have become proud like Laodicea. They relied on their own work and goods, which has caused them to become proud, "lukewarm" in their faith, and blind to what Christ is calling them to. Their wealth and prosperity led them to become a consumerist society. They were more influenced by their culture than by Jesus.

Laodicea was the only church of the seven mentioned in Revelation where the Christians weren't persecuted for their faith. They, much like us today, had the freedom to worship openly without fear. This comfort and ease lulled them into complacency or what Jesus calls being "lukewarm". He saves his harshest words for this church that had it relatively easy, yet struggled to give God the glory for their prosperity and success. He is encouraging them to go "all in" on their commitment to Him.



## WEEK 7 LAODICEA

### JESUS'S WORD FOR THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA:

Your wealth, prosperity, and comfort have lulled you into thinking that you are rich, but you are in spiritual poverty. I stand patiently at the door knocking waiting for you to open it. When you open the door and invite me in, you will find a life filled with abundance and riches far deeper and richer than what you have now.

Eugene Peterson says it this way in *This Hallelujah Banquet*;

*We cannot be lukewarm spectators before such a Christ. We can be only passionate participants or ice-cold deniers. We can keep him at arm's length for only so long—his persistent knocking rouses us to respond. The moment we do, he is in and we are head over heels in love, invaded by our Lord, somersaulted into a life of praise by the power of the Resurrection.*

# WEEK 7 - HOLY WEEK

## DAY 1 - MONDAY

**I** *Revelation 3:14-22, John 17, 2 Corinthians 1:20*

**REFLECTION:** As we enter Holy Week leading up to Resurrection Sunday, let's focus our hearts on Jesus' love for us in His final days on earth. John 17 is a beautiful prayer of Jesus over His people. What does it mean to you that Jesus prays for you?

How can we remember His love and trustworthiness during this Holy Week?

What does it mean that all the promises of God are fulfilled in Christ?

### YES AND AMEN

Jesus opened the letter by describing Himself as the "Amen" (V. 14)...I grew up hearing the "amens" of the senior saints that filled the wooden pews of my childhood church. It never occurred to me to wonder what the word means. Context clues told me that this is how the family of God says "That's good" or "That's right." Let's go back to the Old Testament to get another clue on the meaning.

The title "God of truth" in Hebrew is "élohiym amen." So literally, the name is "the God of the Amen," which means God is completely true and trustworthy. Here in Revelation 3, that name is applied to Jesus. He is the incarnate truth. But the name has a richer meaning. In 2 Corinthians 1:20, Paul wrote that "every one of God's promises is 'Yes' in him [Jesus]. Therefore, through him we also say 'Amen' to the glory of God." Through Christ, all God's promises are fulfilled and satisfied. He is the Amen because He confirms all that God has said. Everything He says is true, trustworthy, and backed by His God-given authority. The last title for Christ in verse 14 helps us understand why He has authority.

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*

# WEEK 7

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

Revelation 3:15-17, Matthew 21:12-22, 2 Timothy 3:5

**REFLECTION:** Reread Revelation 3:17. List what the Laodiceans think of themselves?

List what Jesus says about them?

The people of Laodicea were much like those that Jesus experienced in the days leading up to His crucifixion. People who eventually let their pride and power consume them to the point that they couldn't see the Savior who was there to refresh their souls standing right in front of them. In Matthew 21, we see him address the money changers in the temple for bringing consumerism into God's house. In this passage, we also see Jesus curse the barren fig tree, which symbolized Israel and its fruitlessness. They looked good on the surface, but they were not bearing fruit. Jesus wants a church and a people that are all in. Jesus was all in, He gave his very life for us! It is offensive to Him when His people are half-hearted/lukewarm in their devotion to Him.

How do we begin to deceive ourselves into thinking our relationship with Jesus is something it's not? How can you begin to evaluate your relationship with Jesus to check on your "temperature" of faith?

### ARE YOU IN OR OUT?

It's not surprising that this sense of pride and power infiltrated the church. According to Jesus, the Laodicean church believes that they are rich and need nothing (v. 17). Historical records affirm their perspective, but Jesus does not. Their confidence has made the Laodiceans comfortable. But Jesus' words disrupt their comfort.

Perhaps the most well-known charge to the church at Laodicea: They are lukewarm. They are neither hot nor cold. Some equate "hot" with spiritual fervor, and "cold" with total spiritual indifference. If that's the case, it means Jesus would prefer them to be either totally committed to Him or totally opposed, rather than hanging around somewhere in the middle...

Jesus was condemning their ineffectiveness. They had grown lazy and comfortable. This is the only place in the New Testament where the word lukewarm is used. It carries a sense of being barren and unusable. At Laodicea, there was no spiritual fervor changing and healing lives. Neither was their church a place where souls were refreshed. They were just lukewarm. Tepid. Useless."

Written by Whitney Capps - *We Over Me*



# WEEK 7

## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

Revelation 3:18-19, Matthew 26:14-16

**REFLECTION:** Take time and reflect/write an answer to this question: why do you think Jesus had to die for us?

In the Matthew passage, we see Judas betray Jesus for a fairly small amount of silver. Judas' betrayal of Jesus is a reminder of our own betrayal of Jesus when we choose sin over righteousness. To the church at Laodicea, Jesus describes following and depending on Him as buying gold from Him instead of seeking the lesser riches of this world.

Eugene Peterson says it this way:

*He (Jesus) had nothing derogatory to say about their money or their fine clothes or their medicines. But he mercilessly stripped from them the illusion that any of these things have any eternal value.*

Where have you found yourself choosing the instant comforts/riches of the world (silver) over the eternal comfort/riches Jesus offers (gold)?

### REAL RICHES

The change in the Laodiceans had to begin with understanding their spiritual poverty. As long as we believe we can meet the need for wealth, clothing, or sight ourselves, we can never receive them from Jesus. We must seek these things from Jesus instead of relying on them ourselves.

...If they received from Jesus His riches, His gold – beautifully refined in the fire – then they may be rich. If they received from Jesus the pure, righteous covering He gives, then they would be clothed, and no longer would the shame of your nakedness... be revealed. The merchants of Laodicea were famous for a glossy black wool they used to make beautiful garments. Jesus says, "I know the beautiful black that the world can clothe you in. But I have white garments, that you may be clothed."

If they received from Jesus the healing of their spiritual sight, they would then be able to see. Buy from Me: How can we buy these things from Jesus? We don't earn them through our good works. Instead, Jesus would say, "All this self-sufficiency must be expended in the labour of getting from Me (Jesus) these absolute necessities." (Alford)

Written by David Guzik - *Enduring Word Revelation 3*

# WEEK 7

## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

Revelation 3:20-21, Luke 12:35-40, Matthew 26:17-30, 36-56

### REFLECTION:

*As we receive the sacrament (the Lord's Supper), we are receiving Christ. We are responding to his knocking at the door of our lives. We are saying yes to his request to come "into" us, to enter our interior lives and sup with us. As we take in the bread and wine, we are taking the whole Christ into our lives.*

-Eugene Peterson *This Hallelujah Banquet*

Take time and reflect/write an answer to this question: how do you think your life would look if you let the whole of Christ into your life?

How can we begin to do that?

### A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

The imagery of a door being opened is used twice in Revelation 3. Jesus uses this imagery as an encouragement because this church had been closed out from the synagogue and society. He wanted to show them that His door is always open for them. The image is a reminder of His joy and acceptance of them. He opens the door for His people to know Him and live with Him. The image for Laodicea is a little different. For Laodicea, Jesus is the one knocking on a door. Jesus reminds the church in Laodicea that they have closed Him out of their lives. They have depended upon themselves, their wealth, status, and ability.

We fall into this trap as Christians all the time, especially in our modern western culture. We are dependent upon our conveniences, our wealth, and our ability. We have replaced our Savior with our comfort. The beauty of what Jesus says to Laodicea and us is that He is still at the door of our hearts knocking to come in, to be Lord of our lives again. It's up to us to open the door. To let Him in, to let Him rule, and to be subject to His beautiful and providential rule.

# WEEK 7

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## DAY 5 - GOOD FRIDAY

**I** *Revelation 3:21, Colossians 2:1-15, Matthew 26:59-68, Matthew 27:15-31, 33-66*

**REFLECTION:** Write down your thoughts on Jesus' sacrifice. What stands out to you?

What do you think it means to let God in to be the Lord of your life?

### RETURN TO ME

Jesus speaks these words to these churches from experience... He loved people so much that he was willing to suffer and die for sharing the truth. He lived a holy life fully submitted to His Father's will. He never rested on His previous works and good deeds. He continued to share the truth and point people to the Father while being persecuted, mocked, ridiculed, abandoned, betrayed, and killed. Jesus is our perfect example of staying on mission and finishing well. We've spent seven weeks hearing Jesus tell these churches and His people how to follow in His example; this section concludes with a call to return to HIM.

Jesus is calling the church in Laodicea to come back to Him. He is calling us to do the same. He is calling them to let Him be Lord of their lives. It's a question we should be asking ourselves every day: is Jesus Lord of my life? When we allow Him to be Lord of our lives, we truly live the way Christ has called us to. We begin to live in step with Jesus, we begin to find dependence in Him, and we begin to see the freedom of His salvation in our lives every day. Living for Jesus means dying to ourselves- it means dying to be the lord over our own lives and submitting every detail of our lives to the only one capable of being the LORD, the only one who has died to save us, King Jesus who sits at the throne at the right hand of the Father.

# WEEK 7

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## DAY 6 - SATURDAY REFLECTION DAY

Look over the following verses from our study of Revelation 1-3.

*All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. -Revelation 1:5*

*Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. -Revelation 2:5*

*I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown. -Revelation 3:11*

*I correct and discipline everyone I love. -Revelation 3:19*

*Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. -Revelation 3:22*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 7:

- Write down what you learned about God through this study.
  
  
  
- Write down what you learned about yourself and your relationship with God through this study.
  
  
  
- What is a next step you believe God is calling you to after this study?

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## DAY 7 - RESURRECTION SUNDAY

Read Matthew 28:1-10, 18-20

# NOW WHAT?

As we've moved quietly through these letters from John to his beloved congregations, we have voluntarily submitted to an examination by Christ. We've considered the deep insights and questions posed by these letters to first-century churches. As we know, Christ "stood" in the midst of each congregation and examined its works, then commended or condemned the Christians in those seven cities, depending on what the examination revealed. But what of us? My prayer and hope are that we have been caught by the intense seriousness of our Lord's words and have been impressed by their relevance to us. Christ is examining us in specific ways, and we have been given warm words of commendation, sharp reproofs, and urgent promises. It is nearly two thousand years after these original words were written. But the testing is still needed. Particularly, the testing of our commitment.

- Eugene Peterson - *This Hallelujah Banquet*

When God's people become distracted, they are easily led astray. They become less effective at being what God called the church to be - the light of the world, the city on a hill. If we have learned anything in this study of the Seven Churches, it's that churches will never be perfect because they are made up of broken people who are not perfect. The good news is that when we put our trust in Jesus, He comes to dwell within us - just as He promised the church at Laodicea, and just as the Apostle Paul declares in Galatians 2:20, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

When we focus our lives back on Jesus, seek to know Him more, and allow Him to be the Lord of our lives, His spirit works in mighty ways through us and through our churches. We are transformed. Our churches are transformed. The world is transformed.

Our churches grow when each of us is individually growing. Our churches change when each of us is individually changing. Our churches return to holiness as each of us returns to holiness. Revival in our churches starts with revival in each of our hearts. What a beautiful picture it is when the bride of Christ, the church, is radiant because Jesus is shining brightly through each individual that makes up the church.

**We, as the church, are God's plan to bring His redemption and hope to the world.** He doesn't have a plan B, so let's be people who:

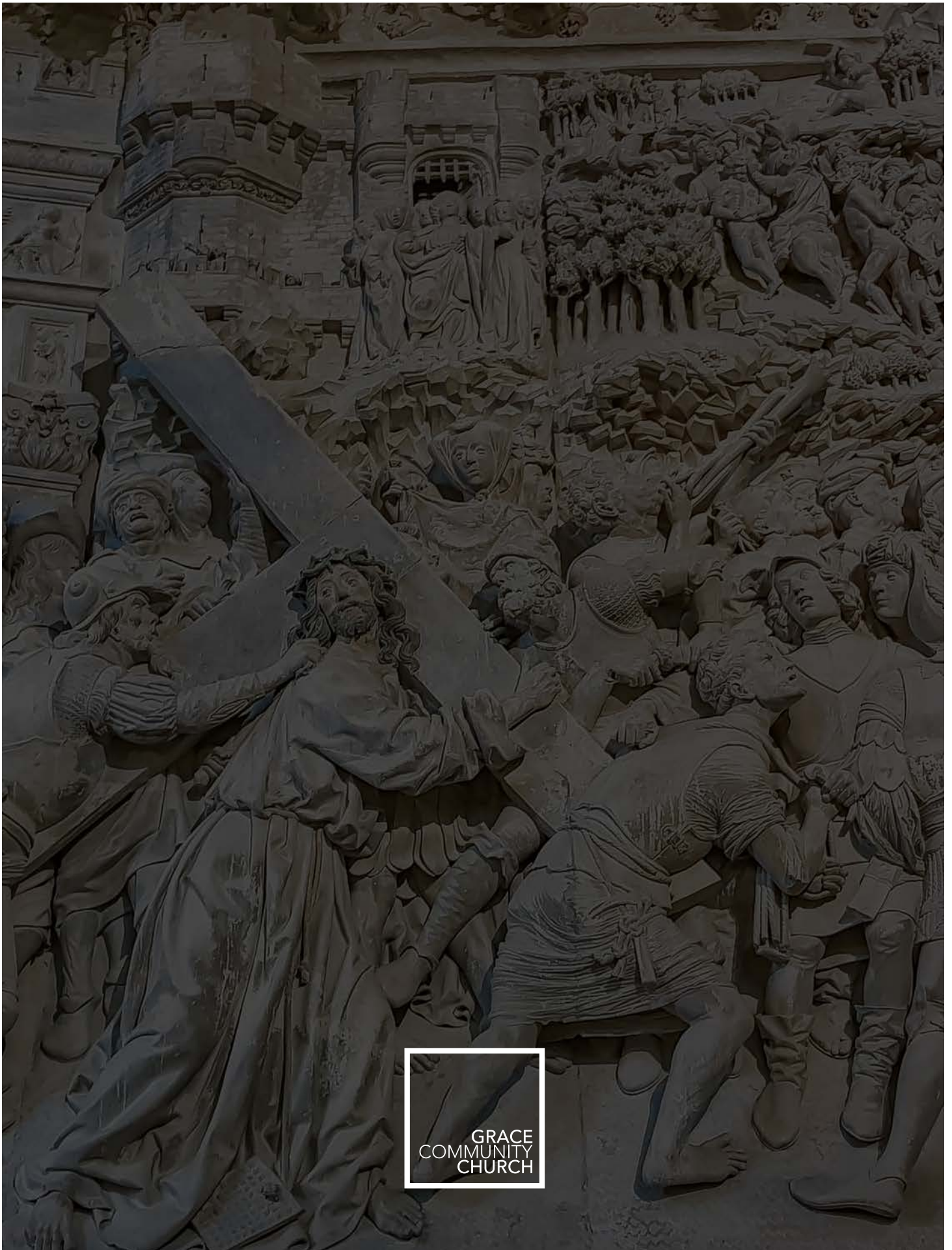
- Love Christ and His People
- Endure Suffering Faithfully
- Share the Truth
- Strive for Holiness
- Live Authentic Lives
- Stay on Mission
- Repent and Return to Him

Let's strive to live in a way that makes the church one that is truly Christ's beautiful Bride. Our groom is coming, let's get ready.

*"And I saw a holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." Revelation 21:2*

To the church at Grace, stay in God's Word; it will be your guide.

**Christy Crosby - Outreach Director**



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