



# 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.*