



WEEK 6

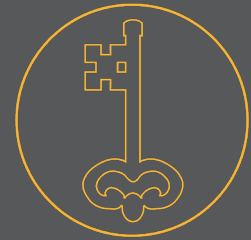
A LETTER TO THE
CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

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.

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WEEK 6

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

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)?

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*