

INTRODUCTION

A Personal Note

For years I have wanted to write a Bible Study on the seven churches of Revelation. As I began to finally write this study, I soon realized what an overwhelming and challenging task I had taken on. The book of Revelation is filled with symbolism and information about the end times, which we don't fully understand or even agree on. Yet, as difficult as this book is, there are many lessons for life in these seven letters that are relevant to us today, and we should pay close attention to what Jesus wanted to communicate through them.

The study is titled, "Rekindle the Fire." Most of these churches had strengths in certain areas, and yet were displeasing to God in other areas. Some had lost their passion and zeal for Christ. My prayer is that regardless of where you are in your relationship with the Lord today, that you would never become complacent and apathetic in that love relationship with Him; that you would always be rekindling the fire in your heart for Jesus Christ. I pray that our passion and zeal for Him would never flicker or die out.

There is always a concern about writing a study that may become too academic. I pray that you would not just learn more head knowledge, but that as you spend time studying His Word, you would fall more in love with Jesus and long for the day when you will spend eternity with Him face to face.

In light of His imminent return, let us live lives that would please Him every day until He returns. Keep the fire going, and, if need be, rekindle the fire of your passion and love for Christ.

Rekindling the fire in my own life,

Crickett Keeth

How to Make the Most of This Study

This study is designed to help you consistently spend time in God's Word. Yes, you could probably do all the lessons in one sitting, but you will gain more from the study if you do it day by day, taking time to reflect on each day's passage and main thought(s). It is important to ponder and meditate on Scripture, allowing God's Spirit to speak to you and work in you through His Word.

Each week is divided into five days, and each day is divided into four sections. "Looking to God's Word" and "Looking Upward" direct you to the Scripture for that day, guiding you through observation and interpretation questions. **"Looking Deeper" is optional.** It is for those who want to go further in their study of the lesson. It will direct you to other related passages to deepen your personal study. This section is not required and will not be discussed in your small group time unless the group as a whole decides to include them. However, if you have time to go deeper, this section can enhance your personal study. "Looking Reflectively" is designed for application and reflection on the lesson. Each day I have given a "*nugget*" on which you can meditate throughout the day. This area of the study is designed to take the head knowledge and make it heart knowledge.

The Word of God changes lives. I pray that each of us will see life change as a result of His Word working in us.

WEEK 1: THE SETTING

Many of us tend to shy away from the book of Revelation – partly because it’s hard to understand, and partly because it can be a bit frightening if one is not sure of his salvation. However, the book of Revelation is filled with bright hope for the future for those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In this study we are only going to look at the first three chapters of this book. My prayer is that these chapters would whet your appetite for the rest of the book and that you would not quit reading at the end of Chapter 3.

This week we will look at the setting and lay the foundation for what lies ahead in the seven letters. I have enclosed a map at the beginning for you to refer back to each week so that you will have a picture of where each church is in relation to the others. I have also included a chart that you may find helpful to fill in each day as you study a section of the letter. There are times I will ask you to compare or contrast letters and the chart will be helpful for you to refer back to.

Don’t get discouraged if the passages are hard to understand. We will take each section verse by verse and look at various interpretations. Focus on what God wants to teach you through His Word. Together, let’s rekindle the fire in our hearts for Christ as we study these letters to the seven churches.

DAY 1: THE INTRODUCTION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 1:1-3

1. The author identifies himself four times in the book of Revelation. Who wrote this book (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8)?

2. List the five personages in verses 1-4 in the “chain of communication” of this revelation; i.e., God the Father to ...

3. What do we know about the author from these passages?

Matthew 4:18-22

Matthew 17:1-2

Mark 10:35-37

Mark 14:32-33

John 19:26-27

4. What was the purpose of this revelation?

5. What should be the readers' (and our) response to this revelation and why (v. 3)?

II. Looking Upward

6. "Blessed is he who reads... hears... heeds" these things (v. 3). What is the difference in reading, hearing, and heeding? Which is most difficult for you and why?

7. The angel told John in 1:3 that "the time is near," and yet we are still waiting today to see this prophecy in the book of Revelation fulfilled. How do you explain that to someone who is skeptical, and what Scripture would you use to support your answer?

8. If you knew Jesus were to return tomorrow, how would you spend your remaining time on this earth? Are there any relationships to reconcile, wrongs to right, people to share Christ with?

III. Looking Deeper

Revelation 1:3 is the first of seven beatitudes in the book, beginning with the word, “Blessed.” It means much more than happy. The word, “blessed” describes the favorable circumstance God has put a person in.¹

List the other beatitudes.

Revelation 14:13

Revelation 16:15

Revelation 19:9

Revelation 20:6

Revelation 22:7

Revelation 22:14

How would you summarize who is blessed and why?

IV. Looking Reflectively

We don't know the exact day Jesus will return, but we know He will. Live every day as if He's coming tomorrow.

Are you ready for His return? If not, what do you need to do to be ready?

DAY 2: THE SALUTATION

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 1:4-8

1. To whom did John write this letter? List them. (Revelation 1:4, 11)

¹ Ken Barker, *Zondervan NASB Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 1849.

2. What three titles are ascribed to Jesus Christ in verse 5a and what is the significance of each title? (Also look at John 18:37, Colossians 1:17-18, and Revelation 19:16).

3. What three “things” describe His relationship with us in verses 5b-6?

4. What does it mean that “He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God”? (See also 1 Peter 2:5, 9 and Rev. 5:10.)

II. Looking Upward

5. Verse 7 is considered by many to be the key verse of this book. What is it referring to and why would it be the key verse?

6. Which attributes of God are evident in this passage? Which attribute most encourages you today and why?

III. Looking Deeper

Jesus referred to Himself in verse 8 as “the Alpha and Omega...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” Why are these names and descriptions especially appropriate for the theme of this book?

According to Isaiah 11:2, what is one possibility of whom or what the “seven Spirits” mentioned in Revelation 1:4 refer to? (You may also want to look at a commentary or Study Bible.)

IV. Looking Reflectively

“There are two hundred and fifty-six names given in the Bible for the Lord Jesus Christ, and I suppose this was because He was infinitely beyond all that any one name could express.”²

He alone is worthy to be praised.

Take some time to praise Him for who He is and for what He has done, using today’s verses to guide you.

DAY 3: THE PATMOS VISION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 1:9-16

1. Where was John when he received this revelation and why was he there?
2. In what three areas was John a fellow-partaker? What does it mean to be a partaker in these things?
3. Describe what John saw and heard when he turned to see the voice that was speaking to him.
4. Which attributes of God does John’s description of Christ emphasize?

II. Looking Upward

5. In what ways have you shared in “the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance” of Christ?

² Billy Sunday, in a sermon, “Wonderful,” quoted in The Real Billy Sunday.

6. How would you describe Jesus Christ to a non-believer?

III. Looking Deeper

How does the description of Christ in Revelation 1:12-16 depict Him as both a priest and a judge? (See also Leviticus 16:1-4 and Hebrews 4:12-13.)

IV. Looking Reflectively

It is hard to adequately describe Jesus Christ in all His glory.

Fall on your knees and worship Him in light of these verses.

DAY 4: THE RESPONSE

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 1:17-20

1. What are some possible reasons why John fell at His feet like a dead man when he saw Him?
2. Which attributes of God does Jesus' description of Himself point to?
3. What does it mean that Jesus has the "keys of death and of Hades" (v. 18)?

4. What do the seven lampstands and the seven stars represent (v. 20)? Who are the angels of the seven churches?

II. Looking Upward

5. What causes you to fear God or to fall before His feet?

6. How does the fact that He is the first and the last, the living One, alive forevermore, holding the keys of death and Hades impact your life personally?

III. Looking Deeper

The number “seven” occurs 54 times in the book of Revelation. In the Bible, it is associated with completion, fulfillment, and perfection.³ How do these verses support that association?

Genesis 2:2

Exodus 20:8-11

Leviticus 14:7

Acts 6:3

³ Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 2013.

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Help us believe the intensity, the eternity of the love that has found us. Then love will cast out fear; and our troubled hearts will be at peace, trusting not in what we are but in what Thou hast declared Thyself to be.”⁴ – A.W. Tozer

When we realize all that God is, we should respond with a reverential awe and worship Him.

Take some time to reflect on your own view of God and your response to Him. Do you have a reverential awe for God? If not, why?

DAY 5: THE DOCTRINE

I. Looking to God’s Word

Re-read Revelation 1

1. There is quite a bit of doctrine in Revelation 1. What do you see concerning each doctrine in these verses?

- A. Soteriology – the doctrine of salvation (vv. 5-6)

- B. Christology – the doctrine of Christ (vv. 5, 8, 17-18)

- C. Eschatology – the doctrine of end times (vv. 1, 3, 7)

- D. Trinitarianism – the doctrine of the Trinity (vv. 4-5)

II. Looking Upward

2. What are some lessons for life or personal application that you can draw from this chapter?

⁴A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper, 1961), 104.

3. What made the biggest impact on your life from Revelation 1?

III. Looking Deeper

Read: 2 Peter 3:8-15

Describe the coming day of the Lord.

What is Peter's exhortation to his readers concerning the return of the Lord?

What similarities do you see between the messages in this passage and Revelation 1?

IV. Looking Reflectively

It is good to understand and recognize doctrine, but if we don't apply it personally, it is just head knowledge, not heart knowledge.

*"It will be vain to become occupied with 'sevens,' 'hundred-forty-four-thousands,' 'six-sixty-sixes,' the restoration of the Roman Empire, the person of the antichrist, the two wild beasts, the 'millennium,' or even the new Jerusalem; unless, along with God the Father, who has subjected all things unto **Him, Christ** is ever before our eyes!"⁵*

That is why we have spent much of this week worshipping Jesus Christ. Is your focus on Him more than anything else?

⁵William R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1935), 31.

WEEK 2: EPHESUS - THE LOVELESS CHURCH

Jesus sent a personal message to seven first century churches in Asia Minor. Even though these messages were sent to specific churches of that time, they can also apply to the church today. We can learn from each of these messages and heed the warnings of Jesus so that we might avoid the problems that they fell prey to.

We begin with the church at Ephesus. At the time this letter was written, Ephesus was a major city of Asia Minor and a seaport. Paul had visited Ephesus around A.D. 53, about 43 years before this letter in Revelation was sent to them.

Ask God to open your heart to hear what He wants to say to you through the message to the church at Ephesus.

DAY 1: JESUS AND THE CHURCH

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:1–7. Today our focus is on verse 1.

1. How is Jesus described in verse 1 and what does this description imply?

2. As you read Paul's farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:25-32 some 43 years earlier, what was his exhortation to them? What was he most concerned about for this church?

3. According to Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:3-7, what were some earlier issues in the church of Ephesus?

II. Looking Upward

4. How would you recognize a "false teacher" in the church today?

5. How can we protect our church from being “led astray” by false doctrines?

6. God is in control of all that happens in and around us. How have you seen His sovereign hand at work in your life recently?

III. Looking Deeper

What warnings and descriptions are we given in these passages concerning false teachers?

Matthew 7:15-16

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

2 John 7

IV. Looking Reflectively

Be on guard against false teachings. Stand strong on His Word.

Are you grounded in God’s Word?

How susceptible are you to being pulled away from the truth?

DAY 2: THE COMMENDATION

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:2-3, 6

1. What was the church at Ephesus commended for?
2. In light of Paul's farewell message to the elders of this church in Acts 20:28-32, which you read yesterday, how has this church done over the years in following Paul's exhortation?
3. What does it mean that one "cannot tolerate evil men" and why would that be considered a strength? How would you define an "evil man" today?

II. Looking Upward

4. What is the balance between not tolerating an "evil man" and loving the sinner? How do we work this out in a practical way in our lives?
5. This church was commended for their perseverance and not growing weary. Is there currently a situation in your life that is causing you to grow weary? If so, how are you handling it?
6. How does one practically persevere and not grow weary?

III. Looking Deeper

We don't know who the Nicolaitans are. There are several viewpoints but they are simply speculation. What do we know for sure about the Nicolaitans based on the Scripture itself in Revelation 2:6 and 2:14-15?

Jesus commended them for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which He also hates (2:6). What else does God hate according to these verses?

Proverbs 6:16-19

Jeremiah 44:2-4

Zechariah 8:17

Are you guilty of any of these things in your life?

IV. Looking Reflectively

God desires for His children to persevere and not grow weary, to exhibit spiritual discernment, and to hate what He hates.

Which of the commendations mentioned in verses 2-3 would He be able to commend you for?

DAY 3: THE CONCERN

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:4

1. What is the criticism of the Ephesian church? Why is that surprising in light of how Paul concluded his letter to the Ephesians more than 30 years earlier (Ephesians 6:24)?

2. What was He referring to when He said, "... you have left your first love"?

Read Mark 12:28-31

3. What does it mean to "love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength"?

4. According to these verses, how do we show our love for Christ?

John 14:15, 21, 23

John 4:19-24

II. Looking Upward

5. What are some possible causes of someone leaving his first love? What would be some warning signs that one is moving in that direction?

6. What role, if any, do emotions play in loving Christ?

III. Looking Deeper

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-4

In a similar way, as Jesus was concerned about the church at Ephesus, Paul was concerned for the Corinthian church and their relationship with Christ. Describe Paul's concern for the Corinthians.

What does it mean to be led astray from "the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ"?

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Beware of anything that competes with loyalty to Jesus Christ. The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service to Him.” --Oswald Chambers⁶

“The Divine Lover still sorrows when His love is unrequited, and pines for our continuing, deepening, maturing adoration.”⁷

Have you ever left your first love? If so, describe the process of how it happened. How did you rekindle your first love?

Are you in danger of leaving your first love now? What are some potential areas in your life that could cause you to leave your first love?

DAY 4: THE INSTRUCTIONS AND WARNING

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:5

1. What are His instructions to the church at Ephesus?
2. Why would it be important to remember from where they had fallen?
3. What is repentance and why is it necessary? What is the difference between remorse and repentance?

⁶ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour & Co., 1935), Jan. 18.

⁷ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* (Mill Hill, London: Monarch Books, 2003), 28.

4. What is He implying when He says, “or else I ... will remove your lampstand out of its place”?

II. Looking Upward

5. What “deeds” might fan the flames of your love for Christ and others?

6. What are some principles we can draw from Revelation 2:1-7 concerning how we should confront others in an area of concern?

III. Looking Deeper

Read John 15:4-6

What similarities do you see in this passage and the warning to the church at Ephesus?

Read Hoses 6:6

Why would this be true?

IV. Looking Reflectively

*"The church that loses its love will soon lose its light, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be."*⁸

*"One cannot stand erect spiritually and see one's sin as God sees it. It has to break the heart. Has yours been broken?"*⁹

⁸Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 572.

⁹Dan DeHaan, *The God You Can Know* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 22.

Does your love for God need “rekindling”?

Is there something in your life that you need to repent of?

DAY 5: THE PROMISE

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:7

1. There is disagreement among scholars as to what this verse means. Some believe that the “overcomers” are a special class of believers. However, I agree with the view that the “overcomers” are all believers. How do these Scriptures support the second view that He is referring to all believers?

1 John 4:4

1 John 5:4-5

Revelation 21:5-7

2. What insight do we gain from these passages concerning the “tree of life which is in the Paradise of God”?

Genesis 2:8-9

Genesis 3:22-24

Luke 23:43

Revelation 22:1-2

3. So, what exactly is He promising to those who overcome when He says, “I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God”?

4. Why might this promise be especially relevant to the Ephesian church?

II. Looking Upward

5. As you look back over the letter, how would you summarize His message to the church at Ephesus?

6. What are some lessons for life that you can draw from this passage that can be applied in your own life?

III. Looking Deeper

In this world, we will have many adversaries, and yet Jesus promises us victory to overcome them all as we abide in Him as overcomers. According to these verses, who or what are our adversaries and what are the means for overcoming them?

John 16:33

Galatians 5:16-17

Ephesians 6:10-13

1 Peter 5:8-9

IV. Looking Reflectively

“The cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled, but we have to get near enough to it for its sparks to fall on us.”¹⁰

Is your love for Jesus an undying love or is it “dying out”?

¹⁰ Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, 33.

WEEK 3: SMYRNA - THE SUFFERING CHURCH

Smyrna was a seaport city about 35 miles north of Ephesus. It has been described as the most beautiful of the seven cities. Today it is called Izmir, Turkey. Scripture does not give us any information concerning the founding of this church, nor is it mentioned in the book of Acts. Presumably, this church was founded during Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).¹¹

“The Greek word translated ‘Smyrna’ was used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to translate the Hebrew word for myrrh, a resinous substance used as a perfume for the living (Matthew 2:11) and the dead (John 19:39). Its association with death perfectly pictures the suffering church at Smyrna. Like myrrh, produced by crushing a fragrant plant, the church at Smyrna, crushed by persecution, gave off a fragrant aroma of faithfulness to God.”¹²

This was a message meant to encourage them in light of what they were facing presently and were about to face in the future. The church at Smyrna was to undergo some intense persecution and tribulation. Jesus wanted to encourage them to stand strong, even if it meant physical death.

Be encouraged as you study the message sent to this church. Ask God to strengthen your faith so that you can endure the suffering in your own life more victoriously.

DAY 1: THE DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:8-11 (Our focus will be on verse 8 today but read the entire letter to get an overview.)

1. How is Jesus described in verse 8 and which attribute(s) of God does His description emphasize? (Notice the similarities to the description of Christ in 1:17-18).

2. Why would this description of Christ be especially encouraging for this church?

¹¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Revelation 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 69.

¹² *Ibid.*, 69-70.

3. How do these verses affirm Christ's equality with God?

Isaiah 41:4

Isaiah 44:6

Isaiah 48:12

4. How do these verses help us understand the meaning of Christ as He "who was dead, and has come to life"?

Romans 6:8-9

Hebrews 2:14-15

1 Peter 3:18

II. Looking Upward

5. Which attributes of God most comfort you in the midst of trials and why?

6. Have you experienced suffering in your life where it was difficult for a time to stand firm? How did you handle the situation?

III. Looking Deeper

How would these verses encourage you in the midst of tough times?

Hebrews 2:17-18

Hebrews 4:14-16

Hebrews 12:3

IV. Looking Reflectively

“When fear grips the human heart, and our very life is threatened, nothing can bring tranquility like faith in Him who is both the first and the last.”¹³

Take some time to praise God for who He is in light of the Scripture you read today.

DAY 2: THE COMMENDATION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:9

1. What three things did Jesus mention that He was aware of concerning the church at Smyrna?

2. What does He mean when he refers to their being rich in the midst of poverty? How does 2 Corinthians 6:10; 8:9 and James 2:5 shed light on this?

¹³ Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, 44.

3. Why are these blaspheming Jews referred to as a “synagogue of Satan”? (How does Romans 2:28-29 relate to this?)

Note: Jesus' use of the strong term blasphemy, which was usually reserved for hostile words against God, indicates the slander's wickedness, intensity, and severity.¹⁴

II. Looking Upward

4. In what ways are you rich in Christ? (Ephesians 1 is a good reminder of our riches in Christ.)

5. How have you seen God use trials and suffering in your life?

6. How would you encourage someone who is being persecuted for his faith or going through a tough time?

III. Looking Deeper

Look at the conversation between Jesus and the Jews in John 8:31-47. List reasons why those Jews were not considered “real Jews” in Jesus' eyes.

How does this compare with the strong terminology Jesus uses in Rev 2:9?

¹⁴MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary*, 71.

IV. Looking Reflectively

God is very much aware of all that is going on in your life and is not surprised by anything.

Is there something difficult going on in your life today? God knows and He cares for you. Hand over those difficult and overwhelming situations to the One who knows and cares. Rest in His presence.

“Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.” - Psalm 37:7

DAY 3: THE ADMONITION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:10a

1. What did the future hold for the church at Smyrna and what would be the purpose?

2. Christians are not exempt from suffering. What are some reasons God allows suffering in our lives?

Romans 5:3-5

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Hebrews 5:8

Hebrews 12:4-11

3. They already were in the midst of tribulation (v. 9) and Jesus had no rebuke or condemnation for them. Why would there be a need to be tested further?

4. What do these verses imply about persecution and the believer?

John 15:20

Philippians 1:29

2 Timothy 3:12

II. Looking Upward

5. Why does God allow Satan to bring tribulation in our lives if God is ultimately in control? (Look also at the story of Job in Job 1.)

6. How do you respond to suffering and tribulation? What helps you endure?

III. Looking Deeper

How would these verses encourage you to persevere in the midst of tribulation and suffering?

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

1 Peter 5:10

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Suffering either gives me myself or it destroys myself. If you receive yourself in the fires of sorrow, God will make you nourishment for other people.” – Oswald Chambers¹⁵

As believers, we should expect persecution and suffering in this life. Allow it to deepen your relationship with Christ, not push you away from Him.

How have you “suffered” on this earth?

Spend some time thanking Jesus for what He endured for us.

DAY 4: THE INSTRUCTION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:10

1. What two instructions did Jesus give them concerning the upcoming tribulation?
2. How is it possible to not fear impending tribulation and suffering? What Scriptures come to your mind concerning this?
3. When Jesus refers to “the crown of life,” is He referring to eternal life or to a reward for those who are faithful through tribulation on this earth? Explain your answer.

¹⁵ Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, June 25.

4. What additional insight do these verses give concerning the “crown of life”?

1 Corinthians 9:24-25

James 1:12

II. Looking Upward

5. What does it mean to “be faithful until death”?

6. In 1 Peter 4:12-19, what are some “lessons for life” concerning suffering?

III. Looking Deeper

The “crown of life” is one of several “crowns” mentioned in Scripture. What are the other “crowns” and to what are they referring?

1 Thessalonians 2:19

2 Timothy 4:6-8

1 Peter 5:4

Rev. 4:4

According to Revelation 4:9-11, what are “crowns” ultimately for?

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Faith and fear are opposites. They cannot coexist. Faith banishes fear.”¹⁶

We are called to be faithful, even if it means death.

Is there anything in your life that is causing you to be fearful? Give it to the Lord, trust His hand, and look ahead to the blessings that await you eternally.

DAY 5: THE PROMISE

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:11

1. What does He promise to the one who overcomes?
2. According to Revelation 20:14-15 and 21:8, what is the “second death” and who would experience it?
3. What else do we learn about those over whom the second death has no power according to Revelation 20:6?
4. Why would this promise be especially encouraging for the church at Smyrna?

II. Looking Upward

5. How would Jesus’ words in Luke 12:4-7 encourage someone about to suffer for his faith?

¹⁶ Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, 43.

6. Do you fear God more than people? Are you a God pleaser more than a people pleaser? If so, how is that evident in your life?

III. Looking Deeper

Read 1 Peter 5:6-11

What similarities to Revelation 2:8-11 do you see in this passage?

Read Revelation 12:9-11

Satan had plans to cast some of the Smyrna church into prison. How is Satan described in this passage and how does he work against believers?

How do believers overcome him?

IV. Looking Reflectively

We can have confidence as believers that we will spend eternity with God and not face the second death.

Are you secure concerning your eternal destiny? If not, talk to your small group leader or teacher and we will be glad to answer any questions. If so, pray for those who don't know Christ and don't have eternal security.

"You and I and our congregation may not be a Smyrna church just now. But we do experience our own pressures, suffering, and afflictions. And whenever we do, the vision of Jesus standing among us in all His glory, and the words of promise He speaks, will sustain and guide us."¹⁷

Ask God what He wants to teach you from this letter to the church at Smyrna. What is one area in your life you may want to focus on?

¹⁷Richards, L., *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987), 1075.

WEEK 4: THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM - THE COMPROMISING CHURCH

Pergamum had served as the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor for over 25 years and was an important religious center for a number of pagan cults. It was the first city in Asia to build a temple to Caesar and it became the capital of the cult of Caesar worship.¹⁸ Of Pergamum an ancient writer said it was “given to idolatry more than all Asia.”¹⁹

The book of Acts makes no mention of the founding of this church. According to Acts 16:7-8, Paul passed through the region of Mysia, where Pergamum was located, on his second missionary journey, but there is no record that Paul either preached the gospel or founded a church there during that time. Most likely, Paul founded this church during his ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19:10) when the gospel was preached throughout Asia.²⁰

Many writers have noted that "Pergamum" comes from the Greek word *gamos* that means marriage. This letter pictures a church married to the world rather than to Christ.²¹

The church at Pergamum was surrounded by a pagan culture, just as we are surrounded by an increasingly godless culture. As you study this letter, be attentive to what God wants to teach you through His Word.

DAY 1: THE DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:12-17 (Today we will focus on verse 12 but read the entire letter to get an overview of the message and the church.)

1. Jesus describes Himself as the “One who has the sharp two-edged sword.” What two things is the “sword” symbolic of according to these verses?

Ephesians 6:17

Revelation 2:16

¹⁸ MacArthur, *MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson: 2006), 1965.

¹⁹ C.F. Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), Re 2:12.

²⁰ MacArthur, *NT Commentary on Revelation*, 84.

²¹ Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Revelation,” in *The Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable* [CD-ROM] (May 2004 Edition), 33.

2. How does Revelation 19:11-16 support this symbolism and purpose of the sword?

3. Why is this description of Christ especially appropriate for this church?

4. Describe the Word of God in Hebrews 4:12-13.

II. Looking Upward

5. How does the Word judge the intentions and thoughts of the heart?

6. Can you give an example of a time when God's Word convicted your heart of an attitude or action?

III. Looking Deeper

What do you learn about Jesus as the Judge in these verses?

1 Corinthians 4:5

James 4:12

James 5:9

How do these verses impact your life personally? What personal application can you draw from the truths of these verses?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Jesus Christ is the one and only Judge. It is not our place to judge others.

Are you presently judging someone else? If so, confess it.

Jesus knows the true motives and intentions of our hearts.

Take some time today to ask God to search your heart and to show you sin and wrong motives in your heart that you may not be aware of. Allow His Word to penetrate your heart. (Psalm 139:23-24)

DAY 2: THE COMMENDATION

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:13

1. What did Jesus commend this church for?
2. How would you summarize this commendation in one word?

Note: "Where Satan's throne is" is referring to the fact that Satan "ruled" from Pergamum as it was the official center of emperor worship in Asia.²²

²² Barker, *Zondervan NASB Study Bible*, 1851.

Note: Antipas was the first martyr of Asia. According to tradition he was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle during the reign of Domitian.²³

3. According to Ephesians 6:10-18, how are we able to stand firm for Christ? List the specifics that we are instructed to do.

II. Looking Upward

4. Are you taking full advantage of what God has made available to you in order to stand firm?

In which of the areas of Ephesians 6 are you strongest?

In which areas do you need to improve in order to stand firm against the schemes of the devil?

5. Pergamum was a place where Satan ruled. In what areas of our society today are we allowing Satan to rule or gain power?

6. What are some examples of ways we may “subtly deny” Christ?

²³ Ibid.

III. Looking Deeper

In Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold before which the people were to fall down and worship. Whoever would not fall down and worship would immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. As you read Daniel 3:12-30, what observations do you make about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and their steadfast faith in the midst of tribulation?

How did their steadfast faith impact Nebuchadnezzar?

IV. Looking Reflectively

It's possible to hold to the truth in the midst of Satanic power.

“Revelation prohibits us loving our lives more than His gospel; it summons us to follow the model of Antipas as faithful witnesses, no matter what the cost.”²⁴

How are you doing in the area of steadfastness and faithful witness for Christ?

What “cost” are you being asked to pay for the sake of Christ?

Meditate on 1 Corinthians 15:58. *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”*

²⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 129.

DAY 3: THE CRITICISM

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:14-15

1. What was Jesus' concern or criticism about this church? How does the church at Pergamum differ from the church at Ephesus (2:2)?

Note: *The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-25. Being fearful of the Israelites because of what they had done to the Amorites, Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse them. After trying unsuccessfully three times to curse Israel, Balaam came up with another plan. He decided to corrupt them by his counsel. He counseled them to have Moabite women seduce Israelite men into intermarriage, resulting in the blasphemous union of Israel with fornication and idolatrous feasts.²⁵*

2. What do we learn about Balaam and his teaching from these verses?

2 Peter 2:15-16 (The story of the donkey and Balaam is found in Numbers 22:21-35).

Revelation 2:14

3. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-8, we read about a similar situation in the Corinthian church. How was the situation similar to the church at Pergamum?

How should the Corinthians have responded?

Paul rebuked them for becoming "arrogant." Why would arrogance keep them from dealing with the situation appropriately?

²⁵ MacArthur, *MacArthur Study Bible*, 1965

4. We are not to follow teachings contrary to God's Word, nor tolerate those who do. How does Paul instruct Titus in Titus 3:9-11 concerning those who are not teaching truth and trying to undermine the believers' faith?

II. Looking Upward

5. Jesus rebuked this church for tolerating those, like Balaam, who were undermining people's faith. What are some stumbling blocks we need to be on the lookout for which could potentially undermine our faith?

6. In what ways does the world tempt us to compromise with our values and integrity?

III. Looking Deeper

Jesus rebuked this church for tolerating those who were following the false teaching promoting idolatry and immorality. Instead, they should have confronted them. The church at Pergamum failed to obey the biblical mandate to practice church discipline. According to Matthew 18:15-18, what is the proper way to practice church discipline?

Why do some churches, like Pergamum, shy away from this?

Have you seen church discipline exercised in your church? If so, what were the results?

IV. Looking Reflectively

We are not to turn a “blind eye” to wrong doctrine in the church. Jesus wants His church to stand firm on the truth of His Word and to confront those who don’t.

Moral integrity is essential to the spiritual vitality and health of a church. If it is compromised, the church is in serious danger.

Are you aware of anyone around you who is teaching false doctrine? How are you dealing with it?

Are you turning a “blind eye” to someone in the church who is blatantly disobedient and compromising with the world?

DAY 4: THE INSTRUCTIONS AND WARNING

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:16

1. What is Jesus’ instruction to the church at Pergamum?
2. What is His warning and what does it mean?
3. Compare and contrast His instruction and warning to the Pergamum church (2:16) with the instruction and warning to the Ephesian church (2:5).

4. Why were the warnings appropriate for each specific church and its shortcomings?

II. Looking Upward

5. Those who were following the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans were to repent. They were not to be corrupted by immorality and idolatry. How do we see these two areas in our society today?

6. How do we as individuals and as a church balance being “in the world” but not “of the world”? How do we protect ourselves from being pulled into the world’s way of thinking?

III. Looking Deeper

How does Paul’s message to the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 relate to Jesus’ message to the Pergamum church?

What was the decision by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:20, 29 regarding things contaminated by idols and immorality?

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Compromise with the world draws divine discipline.”²⁶

Are you compromising with the world in any way? If so, how?

“We need to make sure that we are influencing the world with the kingdom’s values, not embracing the world’s values where they conflict with those of the kingdom.”²⁷

Are there areas where you are embracing the world’s values instead of kingdom values? If so, follow the instruction to this church: confess and turn away from it.

DAY 5: THE PROMISE

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:17

1. What three things did Jesus promise to the one who overcomes?
2. We don’t know for sure what the “hidden manna” is referring to, but in light of John 6:31-35, 47-58, what is one possibility?
3. Scholars differ on the meaning of the “white stone.” This is perhaps the most difficult to interpret of all the rewards in Revelation 2 and 3. Warren Wiersbe gives two possible explanations: “In those days, a white stone was put into a vessel by a judge to vote acquittal for a person on trial. It was also used like a ‘ticket’ to gain admission to a feast.”²⁸ How would these two explanations apply to a believer in a spiritual sense?

²⁶ Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, *Nelson’s New Testament Survey* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 615.

²⁷ Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 128.

²⁸ *Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, Rev 2:12.*

4. Scholars also differ on the meaning of the “new name.” In light of Isaiah 62:1-5 and 65:15, what is one possibility? In light of Revelation 22:3-4, what is another explanation?

Note: Regardless of which view you hold concerning the “hidden manna” and “the white stone with a new name,” one thing is certain. The promises revolve around the Lord Jesus Christ and they are well worth the wait. We may experience a small glimpse of these promises in this life, but the fullness of these promises will not be grasped until we see Him face to face!

II. Looking Upward

5. How does Christ nourish you and sustain you spiritually on a daily basis?

6. In the Bible, names reflected one’s character. If God were to rename you based on your character, what would you want it to be and why?

7. How do these three promises to the overcomers encourage you to view life from an eternal perspective rather than from a temporal, earthly perspective?

III. Looking Deeper

God gave new names to several people in the Bible. What are their new names and why were they given those names? What promises did He give them when He renamed them?

Genesis 17:5-6

Genesis 17:15 -16

IV. Looking Reflectively

“The Pergamum church faced the same choice that every similar church faces. It could repent and receive all the blessedness of eternal life in the glory of heaven. Or it could refuse to repent and face the terrifying reality of having the Lord Jesus Christ declare war on it. Maintaining the path of compromise ultimately leads to judgment.”²⁹

I pray that we would be a church that takes a strong stand for God’s truth, refusing to compromise with the world.

What is one “lesson for life” that you can apply to your own life from this letter to the church at Pergamum?

²⁹ MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 91.

WEEK 5: THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA - THE TOLERANT CHURCH

Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities, but the one that received the longest letter. It lay about 45 miles to the southeast of Pergamum and was famous for its textiles, especially the production of purple dye and its trade guilds.³⁰

This church was doing many things well, but they were being led astray by someone teaching false doctrine. Evidently a woman claiming to be a prophetess had been influencing some in this church to join the local trade guilds without which a tradesman could not work in Thyatira. This meant participation in the guild feasts that included immoral acts and the worship of idols.³¹

Sometimes the pressure of “fitting in” with the world is overwhelming, but we are to stand firm in our faith, trusting God to provide and to take care of us. We are also to stand firm on the truth of God’s Word and not tolerate those who disregard and distort it. As you study this letter to the church at Thyatira, be open to what God wants to teach you through the message to this church.

DAY 1: THE OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:18-29

1. What is your overall impression of this church?

2. This is the only time in the book of Revelation that the expression “Son of God” appears.³² What does this name infer and what are some possible reasons why it is used only with this church?

³⁰ Tom Constable, *Expository Notes on Revelation* [CD-ROM], 33.

³¹ Beasley-Murray, *George Raymond*. *The Book of Revelation. New Century Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 89-90*

³²Barker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 1146.

3. Christ is described in 2:18 as “the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze.” (See also 1:14-15.) Flame-like eyes suggest discerning and severe judgment. “Burnished” means highly reflective.³³ Why would this description of Christ be appropriate for this specific church?

4. The founding of the church at Thyatira is not mentioned in the Bible. However, as a note of interest, according to Acts 16:14, who is from Thyatira?

II. Looking Upward

5. What do these passages reveal to us about the character of God?

Genesis 16:13

Jeremiah 11:20

Jeremiah 17:9-10

Jeremiah 20:12

Acts 1:24

Acts 15:8

³³Constable, *Expository Notes on Revelation* [CD-ROM], 33.

6. In what situations in your life does it bring comfort to know that God sees and knows your heart?

When does it bring anxiety?

III. Looking Deeper

As you read Psalm 139:1-16, list all the ways that God sees you and knows you.

IV. Looking Reflectively

“A church may feel satisfied with itself, have a good reputation in the community, or even with other churches. But the penetrating eyes of the Lord Jesus see it as it really is.”³⁴

As God searches your heart and mind today, what would He find? What does your heart and mind dwell on?

As God looks at us with His penetrating eyes which see all things, would He be disappointed with us as a church? Would He be disappointed with you as an individual? If so, why?

³⁴ MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary*, 97.

DAY 2: THE COMMENDATION

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:19

1. What did He commend this church for and why are these qualities so vital to spiritual growth?
2. Compare and contrast this commendation with the commendation to the church at Ephesus (2:2).
3. What similarities with the commendation to Thyatira do you see in Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:11-12?

II. Looking Upward

4. How are the qualities of love, faith, service, and perseverance related?
5. In which of these qualities are you the strongest? In which are you the weakest?
6. What can you do to strengthen where you are weakest?

III. Looking Deeper

How does Paul's commendation of the Colossian church in Colossians 1:3-8 compare to the commendation of the church at Thyatira?

In 2 Peter 1:1-9, what qualities does Peter encourage believers to pursue and why?

IV. Looking Reflectively

The Christian life should never become stagnant, but always dynamic and growing as we become more like Christ.

In what ways do you see progress and growth in your walk with God?

Thank Him for all He is doing in your life. If you feel you are stagnant in your walk, be honest with God and ask Him to "rekindle the fire." What steps do you need to take?

DAY 3: THE CRITICISM

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:20-23

1. What is His criticism of this church and how does it compare/contrast with His criticism of the church at Pergamum in Revelation 2:14-15?

2. What does this passage tell us about the woman “Jezebel”?

3. It is most likely that this woman’s name was not Jezebel, but she was called by that name because of the similarities to the Jezebel in the Old Testament.

A. What do we know about the Old Testament Jezebel from these passages?

1 Kings 16:30-31

1 Kings 18:4

1 Kings 18:19

1 Kings 19:1-2

1 Kings 21:25-26

2 Kings 9:22

B. How are the two women similar?

4. What will be the results for her and for those who follow her if she continues in her lack of repentance? What lesson can we learn from this?

5. What is the purpose in His judgment and why would that be important?

II. Looking Upward

6. There are those in the Thyatira church who are not only tolerating Jezebel, but they are also engaging in the sinful acts she is encouraging. How does a believer get to that point where he/she becomes so easily swayed by lies and sin?

III. Looking Deeper

Jezebel refused to repent and there would be consequences. Paul addresses repentance in Romans 2:4-11.

List the attributes of God in this passage and how they relate to repentance.

What are the results of an unrepentant heart?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Knowing that Christ will judge us for our deeds should bring fear to those who teach and practice false doctrine, but comfort and hope to those who love God and follow Him wholeheartedly.

Is He pleased with your deeds?

Are you causing another believer to stumble in any way?

Is there an area in your life where you are unrepentant?

Ask God to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24). Confess any unconfessed sin (1 John 1:9).
Meditate on Romans 2:4.

DAY 4: THE INSTRUCTION

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:24-25

1. What is His instruction to the faithful "remnant" in the church and what does this instruction mean?

2. What are some possible meanings to the phrase, "the deep things of Satan"?

3. We looked at Ephesians 6:10-17 when we studied the letter to the church at Pergamum and you listed practical ways to stand firm. Look at this passage again and describe the struggle we are up against as long as we are on this earth.

II. Looking Upward

4. What are some lies that the "world" and Satan convey to us that are contrary to God's truth? Why do we sometimes believe them over God's Word?

5. How have you experienced spiritual warfare in your life? How did you overcome it?

6. How do we in a practical sense “hold onto” or “hold fast” to what we have until He comes?

III. Looking Deeper

In Revelation 2:25, they were instructed to hold fast what they have until He comes (NASB). The NIV says, “Hold onto what you have...” What do these verses have to say about “holding fast”?

Deuteronomy 11:22-23

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

1 Timothy 6:12

Hebrews 10:23

IV. Looking Reflectively

“The one thing that keeps the conscience sensitive to Him is the continual habit of being open to God on the inside.” – Oswald Chambers³⁵

Be careful. Don't be subtly deceived by the practices and teachings of the world and Satan which are contrary to God's Word.

³⁵Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, May 13.

What things in your daily life are you exposed to or involved with that might subtly distract or pull you away from a closer walk with the Lord? Yield these to the Lord and allow Him to have control.

Hold fast to Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word.

Are you holding strong or are you wavering? Meditate on Hebrews 10:23. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful” (NIV).

DAY 5: THE PROMISE

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:26-29

1. In verse 26, as Jesus begins to lay out the promises to the one who overcomes, what is different this time from all the previous verses addressed to the one who overcomes? What are some possible reasons why He included this in this letter?

2. What two things does Jesus promise to the one who overcomes?

3. According to Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6; and 22:5, what does it mean that He will give them authority and that they will rule?

4. In Revelation 2:28 He promises the “morning star” to those who overcome. According to Revelation 22:16, who is the morning star?

5. What exactly is He promising? (See also 1 John 3:2-3.)

II. Looking Upward

6. How does your life reflect the morning star?

III. Looking Deeper

The quote that Jesus used in Revelation 2:26-27 is from Psalm 2, a Messianic Psalm which tells how the Father gave the Messiah the rule over the nations of the world. This psalm is frequently quoted in the New Testament, where it is applied to Christ as the great Son of David and God's Anointed.

What do you learn about His future reign from these passages?

Psalm 2

Revelation 11:15-18

Revelation 19:11-16

IV. Looking Reflectively

No matter how dark life gets on this earth, we can always look forward to the hope of our future.

Are you ready for His return?

Ask God to show you an area of your life that needs refining and polishing in order to more fully reflect His radiance and glory to the world. Ask God to make you willing for Him to work in your life as He needs to.

Spend some time praising Him in light of today's lesson.

WEEK 6: THE CHURCH AT SARDIS - THE DEAD CHURCH

Though the details are not recorded in Scripture, it is believed that the church at Sardis was most likely founded as an outreach of Paul's ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19:10). It was located about thirty miles south of Thyatira in the fertile valley of the Hermus River. Its location on a hill some fifteen hundred feet above the valley floor made the city very secure. The hill on which Sardis was built had nearly perpendicular walls on three sides and the city could only be approached from the south via a steep, difficult path. Its seemingly secure location caused the inhabitants of Sardis to become overconfident and on two occasions the city was conquered. Overconfidence and complacency led to defeat as they let their guard down.³⁶

There are many lessons to be learned from the letter to the church at Sardis. May we learn from their mistakes and avoid their shortcomings.

DAY 1: THE OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:1-6

1. How would you describe this church and why?
2. What does the description of Jesus in verse 1 emphasize?
3. Why is this description especially appropriate for this church?
4. In Isaiah 29:13, God addresses some characteristics of spiritual "deadness." List the characteristics. How are these characteristics evident in some churches today?

³⁶ MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Revelation*, 110-111.

II. Looking Upward

5. What do you learn about God and His character from this letter to Sardis?
6. What is one personal “lesson for life” that you can apply in your own life from this letter?

III. Looking Deeper

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church he characterizes three types of people in 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3. How do the three types of people differ?

Which of the three types of people do you see in the church at Sardis and how?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Outward appearances and actions do not necessarily reflect the state of the heart. One can appear to be spiritual on the outside, but dead on the inside. God alone knows the true state of the heart.

Take some time to evaluate your spiritual condition. Are you alive and vibrant for the Lord?

Are any of the characteristics of Isaiah 29:13 that you listed under question 4 true of your life today? If so, confess them and ask God to rekindle the fire in your heart.

DAY 2: THE REBUKE

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:1-2

1. What was His rebuke to this church?
2. What does it mean that “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead”?
3. What does it mean that their deeds were not found completed in the sight of God? Does this mean they needed more works, or that there was something missing from their works, or both? (Consider 1 Cor. 3:12-15).
4. How is the church at Sardis like the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:27-28?

II. Looking Upward

5. How does a church become a dead church and what would be some symptoms?
6. Do decreasing numbers indicate a dying church or ministry? Explain your answer.

III. Looking Deeper

What observations concerning “spiritual aliveness” can you make from these passages?

John 6:63

John 7:37-39

John 15:5

Describe the Spirit-filled life according to Ephesians 5:15-21.

IV. Looking Reflectively

“We can sing the hymns, led by choir and band or orchestra. We can recite the creed, say the confession, and join in the prayers, while our mind wanders and our heart is far from God.”³⁷

“No matter what its attendance, no matter how impressive its buildings, no matter what its status in the community, such a church, having denied the only source of spiritual life, is dead.”³⁸

Is your church in danger of becoming a dead church? Why or why not?

Are you drawing “life” from the Holy Spirit, or are you looking to other sources?

Meditate on John 6:33: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.”

³⁷ Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, 85.

³⁸ MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Revelation*, 112.

DAY 3: THE EXHORTATION AND WARNING

I. Looking to God's Work

Read Revelation 3:2-3

1. List the five commands or imperatives He gave to this church.

2. Jesus exhorted them to “strengthen the things that remain.” What “things” would be vital to the life of a church to prevent it from dying? How would a church strengthen those things?

3. What is He implying when He says, “I will come like a thief...”?

4. What similarities do you see between this exhortation and the exhortation to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:5? How is the condition of these two churches similar and yet different?

II. Looking Upward

5. How does a person or church “wake up”?

6. Jesus exhorts them to remember what they have received. How does one get to the place where he forgets what God has given?

III. Looking Deeper

As Moses addressed the sons of Israel near the end of his life, he challenged them to choose life over death. As you look at his words from Deuteronomy 30:15-20, list all that he commands them to do.

According to verse 20, what do you need to do in order to choose life?

IV. Looking Reflectively

If you sense that your spiritual life is “drying up” or “dying,” don’t just sit there. Do something about it now!

Do you need to “wake up”?

If your spiritual life is vibrant, what do you need to do to keep it that way?

DAY 4: THE COMMENDATION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 3:1b, 4a

1. What are two things this church was commended for?

2. What is meant by the phrase, “... who have not soiled their garments”? Does it mean they have not sinned? (Look also at James 1:27.)

3. How would these promises encourage a “remnant” of faithful believers in a dead church?

Malachi 3:16-18

1 Corinthians 15:58

Hebrews 6:10-12

II. Looking Upward

4. How is it possible to have a “good” reputation and yet be “dead”?

5. How does one remain strong in the faith when he/she is the only Christian in his/her environment?

6. In what ways have your “garments been soiled” by the world around you?

III. Looking Deeper

The main commendation for the church at Sardis was that there were a few faithful ones who had not “soiled their garments.” As you read the words that David penned during a difficult time of his life in Psalm 34, how would these words encourage the righteous and those faithful to the Lord?

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Once a week at least take stock before God and see whether you are keeping your life up to the standard He wishes. Paul is like a musician who does not need the approval of the audience if he can catch the look of approval from his Master.” – Oswald Chambers³⁹

It is possible to stand strong for Christ in a world that doesn't.

What is your reputation outwardly? Does it **accurately** reflect the state of your heart?

Are you in a situation where you feel “spiritually alone” without much support? Remember that He is always there and is aware of your situation.

Meditate on Isaiah 41:10.

DAY 5: THE PROMISE

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:4-6

1. What three things does He promise to those who have not soiled their garments and who overcome?

2. According to these passages, what is the significance of being clothed in white?

Revelation 3:18

Revelation 7:9-17

³⁹ Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, March 17.

Revelation 19:7-8

3. Some have taken the promise in Revelation 3:5 that He “will not erase his name from the book of life” to mean that one can lose his salvation. How do these verses refute loss of salvation as a possible meaning?

John 10:27-29

Romans 8:35-39

Ephesians 1:13-14

Hebrews 13:5

4. In Revelation 3:5, what does it mean that He will “confess” (NASB) or “acknowledge” (NIV) his name before the Father? (Look also at Matthew 10:32.)

II. Looking Upward

5. How does this letter to the church at Sardis encourage and/or exhort you in your walk with God?

6. What observations concerning salvation and eternal security can you make from 1 Peter 1:3-9?

III. Looking Deeper

Read aloud Revelation 7:9-17 and write down what you have to look forward to in the future. Spend some time praising Him as you meditate on these verses.

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Does it make any sense to say that salvation is offered as a solution for our sin and then to turn around and teach that salvation can be taken away because of our sin as well?”⁴⁰

Do you have any concerns or fears that your name might be erased from the book of life? Rest in the assurance that you cannot lose your eternal security if you have truly trusted in Christ as your Savior (1 John 5:13-15). Thank Him for His death on the cross for you.

Using 1 Peter 1:3-9, spend some time thanking Him for your salvation.

⁴⁰ Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security, Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 181.

WEEK 7: THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA - THE FAITHFUL CHURCH

Philadelphia was located on a hillside about 30 miles southeast of Sardis. It was founded by the king of Pergamum around 190 B.C. The town received its name from his nickname, "Philadelphus" or "brother lover." This king had a special devotion to his brother, Eumenes II. The city stood in a wine-producing area and was the so-called gateway to central Asia Minor. The modern name of this town is Alasehir. Because it experienced earthquakes from time to time, more of the population than normal chose to live outside the city walls.⁴¹

If I could choose one church to be a part of out of these seven churches, it would be the church at Philadelphia. My prayer is that we would be a "Philadelphia" church in today's times.

DAY 1: THE OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:7-13

1. As you read this letter, what stands out to you about this church? What is your overall impression?
2. In the previous five letters, the description of Jesus had come from the vision recorded in 1:12-18. However, in this letter, the description is not drawn from that earlier vision. It has distinct Old Testament features. How is Jesus described in verse 7?
3. "The key of David" seems to refer to Isaiah 22:20-23, where the key of the house of David was given to Eliakim, who then had access to all the wealth of the king.⁴² So what is Jesus implying in Revelation 3:7 when He says He "has the key of David"? (See also Hebrews 3:5-6.)

⁴¹ Constable, *Expository Notes on Revelation* [CD-ROM], 40.

⁴² John F. Walvoord, "Revelation" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1983), 939.

4. Jesus is also described as He “who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.” How do Isaiah 43:13 and 46:9-11 clarify the meaning of this description?

II. Looking Upward

5. Jesus is described as holy and true. How would you define these attributes and why are they often paired together?

6. Which of His attributes in verse 7 most encourages your heart today and why?

III. Looking Deeper

How did Isaiah respond to God’s holiness in Isaiah 6:1-8?

IV. Looking Reflectively

*“The deepest thought a person can ever have is his conception of God’s character.”*⁴³

How do you view God’s character? What difference does it make in your life?

Meditate on 1 Peter 1:15-16: “...but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in your behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’” (NASB).

⁴³ Dan DeHaan, *The God You Can Know*, 38.

How are you doing in the area of “personal holiness”? How do you respond to God’s holiness?

DAY 2: THE COMMENDATION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 3:8-10

1. What four things does Jesus commend this church for?
2. Why would having “a little power (strength)” be a positive and not a negative? What might He be implying here? (See also 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.)
3. What are the circumstances within which they had to persevere?
4. How is this church similar to the church at Smyrna in Rev. 2:8-11?

II. Looking Upward

5. The church at Philadelphia was commended for its obedience. Can you obey Christ without loving Him? (See also John 14:23-24) Explain your answer.
6. What are some circumstances in your life today in which you must persevere? How does this passage encourage you to press on?

III. Looking Deeper

Read Hebrews 12:1-4

What are some principles from this passage that can spur you on to persevere in the midst of difficult or trying circumstances?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Numbers and personal strength are not what matter in the scheme of accomplishing God's work. He is sufficient to accomplish His purpose.

Spend some time being honest with God about your life circumstances and how you are dealing with situations that are overwhelming or trying.

Entrust your life to Jesus Christ. Ask Him to strengthen you and to work in and through you as He chooses to accomplish His purpose.

DAY 3: THE PROMISES

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:8-10

1. What had God done for this church because of their faithfulness (v. 8)?
2. According to 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; and Col. 4:3, what is one possible meaning of the phrase, "I have put before you an open door which no one can shut"? What would be another possible meaning according to Acts 14:27?
3. Because of their faithfulness and obedience, what did Jesus promise this church?

4. In verse 10, why would the “hour of testing” (NASB) or “trial” (NIV) be referring to the Great Tribulation and not just an isolated, temporary period of testing?

II. Looking Upward

5. What “open doors” has God put before you?

Have you made the most of the opportunities He has opened up for you or have you ignored them? How have you used your gifts and talents wisely for His glory?

Are we as a church making the most of the open opportunities God has given to us for ministry? If not, what do we need to do?

6. What do you learn about God’s character from His promises here?

III. Looking Deeper

Jesus promised that some of the very Jews who were persecuting the Christians would come and bow down at their feet and know that God had loved them. The following Old Testament passages describe the future day when unbelieving Gentiles will bow down to the believing remnant of Israel. What imagery do these passages give concerning bowing at someone’s feet and the implications of it?

Isaiah 45:14

Isaiah 49:23

Isaiah 60:14-15

IV. Looking Reflectively

Being faithful to the Savior is worth it. The end results far outweigh the present discomforts and challenges.

Meditate on 2 Corinthians 4:17 – “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison...”

Are you focused on the momentary, light afflictions or the eternal glory to come?

DAY 4: THE EXHORTATION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 3:11

1. In verse 11, He states that He is coming quickly. How does this “coming” differ from the “comings” He refers to in the previous letters (Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3)?

2. What insight does this give concerning this church?

3. Jesus exhorts them to “hold fast what you have, so no one will take your crown” (NASB). He is not referring to salvation here, but to rewards (1 Corinthians 9:24). According to the parable in Luke 19:12-24, what is one possible meaning and cause of someone “taking your crown”?

4. It could also refer to rewards lost because of negative influences that can hinder us in the race of life. What are some negative influences that could cause you to lose your “crown”? (If you need help thinking of things, you might want to look at Matthew 13:22 and 1 John 2:15-16.)

II. Looking Upward

5. He instructed the churches at Thyatira and Philadelphia to “hold fast.” What makes it difficult for you to “hold fast”?

6. Are you in danger of “losing your crown” because of any of the reasons mentioned above?

III. Looking Deeper

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 speaks of the time when Jesus will return. What instructions does Paul give concerning how we are to live until then?

How does this passage encourage you in light of the end times?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Because He is coming quickly, make the most of every opportunity.

“Above all, we must be faithful to Him and see the opportunities, not the obstacles. If we miss our opportunities, we lose our rewards (crowns), and this means being ashamed before Him when He comes.”⁴⁴

Meditate on 1 John 2:28.

Will you stand with confidence or shrink away in shame at His coming?

⁴⁴ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Rev. 3:7.

DAY 5: THE PROMISES FOR THE OVERCOMER

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:12-13

1. What does Jesus promise to the one who overcomes?

Note: His promise to make them “a pillar in the temple” of God is a promise that believers will be honored in the New Jerusalem, referring to the custom of honoring a magistrate by placing a pillar, in his name, in one of the temples in Philadelphia.⁴⁵

2. When you think of a “pillar,” what words come to mind? Why would this symbolism be especially meaningful to a city that was subject to destructive earthquakes?

3. What does the promise that “he will not go out from it anymore” imply for the believer?

4. What three names does Jesus promise to write on the overcomer? What does having the three names “engraved” on us imply?

Note: We all have questions about the new heaven and earth and the New Jerusalem. To be honest, we can speculate, but we just don't totally understand everything at this point. Don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out the future that awaits the believer. Just know that it will be worth it.

⁴⁵ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 2018.

II. Looking Upward

5. According to Galatians 2:9, who had the reputation of being “pillars”? ”His pillars are faithful people who bear His name for His glory.”⁴⁶ In what ways are you bearing His name for His glory?

6. Do you know without a doubt that you have eternal security with Christ in heaven? What do you base it on? If you are not sure, feel free to talk to your small group leader. If you do have assurance, spend some time thanking God for all He has done for you.

III. Looking Deeper

Read Revelation 21:1-7, 22-27

How does this passage describe the new heaven and earth and the New Jerusalem?

What can we look forward to as believers?

⁴⁶Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Rev 3:7.

IV. Looking Reflectively

Be constantly reminded that this is not our home. We are just passing through. Our permanent home awaits us and it will be beyond anything we can ever imagine.

As you anticipate spending eternity in “heaven” with Jesus Christ, what excites you most and why?

WEEK 8: THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA - THE LUKEWARM CHURCH

The New Testament does not record anything about the founding of the church at Laodicea. However, like most of the other six churches, it was likely established during Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). The city of Laodicea was one of a triad of cities with Colossae and Hierapolis and was the southernmost of the seven cities. It lay about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia and 90 miles east of Ephesus.

Laodicea was a wealthy town that was known as a strategic banking center. They used their own wealth to pay for the reconstruction of the city after a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60, rejecting offers of financial aid from Rome. The city was also famous for the soft, black wool it produced and its ancient medicine, particularly an eye salve. All three industries – finance, wool, and eye salve – came into play in this letter. Laodicea's water supply was also relevant to the message in this letter as the water had to travel several miles through an underground aqueduct before reaching the city. Therefore, the water arrived foul, dirty, and tepid – lukewarm, just like the people in the church.⁴⁷

As you study this letter, ask God to speak to your heart through the message to the church at Laodicea.

DAY 1: THE DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST AND OVERVIEW

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:14-22

1. How does this letter differ from the previous six letters? What is not included in this letter that is found in the other six?

2. What do the titles, "the Amen" and "the faithful and true Witness" signify in verse 14?

⁴⁷ MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Revelation*, 135- 136.

3. How do these verses give clarity to those titles?

Isaiah 65:16

John 14:6

2 Corinthians 1:20

Revelation 19:11

4. The NASB reads that He is the “Beginning of the creation of God.” What insight do these verses give to help you understand the meaning of that phrase?

John 1:1-3

Colossians 1:15-18

Hebrews 1:2

II. Looking Upward

5. In what situations of life are you most encouraged by His faithfulness and truth?

6. If you truly rested in God’s faithfulness and truth, how would that impact your life?

III. Looking Deeper

This is not the first time we read about the church at Laodicea. What do we know about this church from these verses?

Colossians 2:1

Colossians 4:12-17

IV. Looking Reflectively

We can always rest in God's faithfulness and truth, regardless of our life situation.

Spend some time today worshipping Him for these attributes. Meditate on Lamentations 3:22-23. Personalize this verse to your own life.

DAY 2: THE CONCERN

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:15-17

1. Describe this church.
2. What insight does verse 17 give us concerning the state of the church?
3. What is He implying by the term "lukewarm"?
4. Why would God prefer that they (and we) be either hot or cold, but not lukewarm?

II. Looking Upward

5. How would you recognize a lukewarm individual or church?

6. The Laodicean church was guilty of self-sufficiency. In what areas of your life do you lean toward self-sufficiency instead of looking to Christ's sufficiency?

III. Looking Deeper

When He describes them as "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked," what is He referring to?

How does the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22 relate to this church?

IV. Looking Reflectively

There is always the tendency to rely on our own sufficiency and believe we can handle things on our own. God continues to put me in situations where He shows me I am insufficient. I don't like to be reminded of it, but it is so necessary. My tendency is to want to take care of things myself and not have to depend on someone else. Jesus Christ wants us to depend on Him. When I don't, I am frustrated and fruitless. When I do, I find it so encouraging and uplifting to see His power in my weakness. He gently reminds me that yes, He is enough. He is sufficient.

Jesus Christ alone is our sufficiency. Do you live as if that is true?

Take some time today to reflect on your life and ask God to show you an area in which you are depending on self or others or things for your sufficiency instead of Christ.

Are you lukewarm, hot, or cold in your relationship with the Lord today?

DAY 3: THE COUNSEL

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:18

1. What three things does He advise them to “buy” from Him and why?
2. Instead of real gold, they should buy “gold refined by fire.” What does that mean? (Look at Luke 12:21, 1 Timothy 6:17, and James 2:5 to prompt your thinking.)
3. Instead of the black garments popular in Laodicea, they were to “buy from Me white garments.” According to Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 7:9-11 and 19:7-8, what does He mean?
4. What is He alluding to with the “eye salve to anoint your eyes so you may see”? (Look also at Acts 26:15-18, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, and Ephesians 1:18-19.)

II. Looking Upward

5. Is He talking to believers or nonbelievers here? Explain your answer.
6. How can you “buy” gold refined by fire, white garments, and eye salve in the way Christ meant?

III. Looking Deeper

How does Isaiah 55:1-3 relate to His message to the church at Laodicea?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Look to Jesus as the source of life and fulfillment, not worldly things that have no eternal value.

We are all in danger of putting our trust in the wrong things for fulfillment and satisfaction in life. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to do that?

DAY 4: THE COMMAND

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:19-20

1. What are some possible reasons why He interjects “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline” at this point in the letter? How is it related to what He was just saying and is about to say?

2. Is Revelation 3:20 a gospel invitation to come to Christ or an invitation to intimate fellowship with Him? Is this verse directed to an individual or to the church; to unbelievers or believers or both? Explain your answer.

3. What does Jesus mean that He “will dine (or eat) with him, and he with Me”?

II. Looking Upward

4. How do reproof and discipline play a role in loving someone? (See also Hebrews 12:6-11.)

5. In Revelation 3:19, why is it necessary for them to be “zealous” (NASB) or “earnest” (NIV) along with repentance in their situation?

III. Looking Deeper

Read Ezekiel 18:30-32

What instructions does God give Israel concerning their sin and why?

What do you learn about God from this passage and how does it relate to the church at Laodicea?

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ.”⁴⁸

How do you view repentance?

⁴⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 2:248.

Jesus desires intimate fellowship with us.

Is your relationship with Christ growing in intimacy, or is He standing outside, waiting for you to involve Him in your life? Do you desire intimate fellowship with Him; and if so, how are you bringing it about?

DAY 5: THE PROMISE

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:21-22

1. What does it mean that the overcomer (or believer) will sit down with Him on His throne? (See also Luke 22:28-30, Romans 8:16-17, and Revelation 20:4-6.)

2. What insight do these verses give concerning Jesus overcoming and being seated with the Father on His throne?

Hebrews 1:1-4

Hebrews 8:1

Hebrews 12:2

3. Even though this promise will be fulfilled in the future, how does it give us hope in the challenges and stresses of life today?

II. Looking Upward

4. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of the church in the world today and why?

5. What lessons can we learn from the church at Laodicea that would make us more effective?

6. We are instructed to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” What would hinder you from listening to the Spirit and the messages to these seven churches?

III. Looking Deeper

Paul prayed for this church years before this letter was written to the Laodicean church. What does he pray for them according to Colossians 2:1-3?

How is this church doing in relation to what Paul prayed for them years earlier?

IV. Looking Reflectively

I long for the day when I will see Jesus face to face and will be free from the power of sin. I long for the day when we will see Him sitting on the throne and we will bow down at His feet to worship Him. I don't want to disappoint Him, although I know I already have in so many ways. How grateful I am that He is a God who is merciful and forgives and gives us a second (and third and fourth...) chance. He offers us great hope for the future. In the meantime, as we continue our struggle on this earth in our fleshly bodies, let us press on to obedience out of love; let us take to heart the admonitions and exhortations to the seven churches of Revelation. If you sense that you are growing apathetic or lukewarm in your love for the Lord and commitment to Him, acknowledge it and allow Him to “rekindle the fire” in your heart.

Spend some time today reflecting on this study and how God has most spoken to you through these letters to the seven churches.