# SEVEN LETTERS TO SEVEN CHURCHES

Copyright 2017 by Manna Imprint.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Published by Manna Imprint.

Copyright and use of the curriculum and template are retained by Manna Church.

All Scripture quotes are taken from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2016). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. The ESV® text has been reproduced in cooperation with and by permission of Good News Publishers. Unauthorized reproduction of this publication is prohibited. All rights reserved.

Content by Jonathen Fletcher.

Design by Michael Barefoot and James Richardson.

Editing by Katharine Floro.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9976960-3-5 Printed in the United States of America.



Get your group thinking about the week's topic.



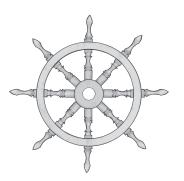
#### WATCH VIDEO

Each video session provides teaching from Michael Fletcher. Play the DVD or stream videos on RightNow Media.<sup>1</sup>



#### DISCUSS & APPLY

Talk through the content and find ways to apply your insights practically and creatively: from your head, through your heart, to your hands.



<sup>1</sup>Gain free access to RightNow Media at www.rightnow.org/Account/Invite/Manna

### CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION
WEEK 1   EPHESUS 9
WEEK 2   SMYRNA 19
WEEK 3   PERGAMUM
WEEK 4   THYATIRA
WEEK 5   SARDIS 43
WEEK 6   PHILADELPHIA 51
WEEK 7 I LAODICEA
HOST INFO

# SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION



### INTRODUCTION

bout sixty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the young Church was facing hard times—and they were only getting harder. The Roman emperors began to demand worship from their subjects, and hostility toward Christians was on the rise from many directions. The temptation to compromise their faith was, for some, becoming too great. In this time of persecution and hardship, the book of Revelation was born.

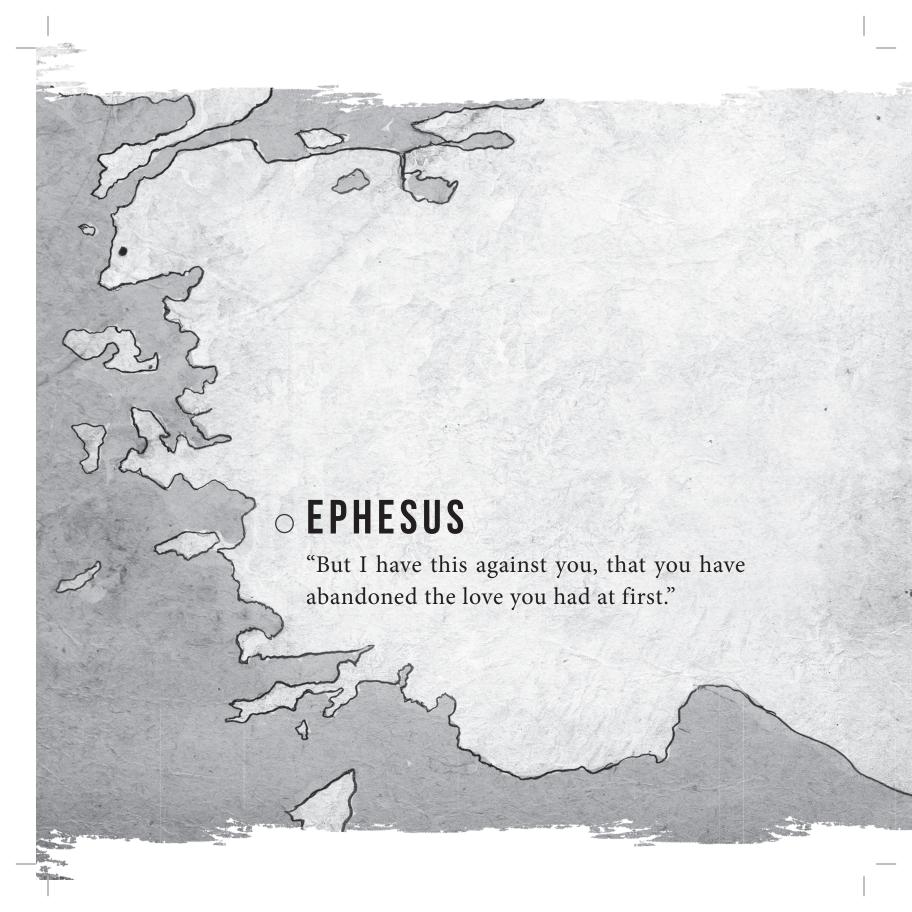
John had received a vision of Jesus, sixty years after His death and resurrection. In the first chapter of Revelation, Jesus instructs him to record this vision and send the book to seven churches throughout the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey)— Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

John writes no passive missive. He has no calm suggestions or academic agenda. He is speaking to churches living on the brink of uncertainty, at risk of destruction. His rebukes are sharp; his encouragements are steely and resolved. Though to us the book of Revelation may seem to be a cryptic collection of apocalyptic prophecies, to these seven churches it delivered urgent and practical messages—and the words John had for them

remain full of meaning and application for us today. As you gather in your small groups, we hope that you'll dig deeply into these verses as you seek to understand what they were saying two thousand years ago, and what they are saying to you today. You'll come to understand in a new and exciting way God's heart for His church, in John's day and in our own.

Before you dive in, take a look at the Session Blueprints on page 4. They'll give you a bird'seye view of how each group session should flow, but remember: this workbook is a guide, not a straitjacket. If your group responds to the lesson in an unexpected way—if you think of a better question than the ones in the workbook if you never get past the first question or two each session, don't worry! We believe with all our hearts that relationships are the most important part of our lives, and your group is first and foremost about relationship. Take every opportunity to invest in each others' growth. If this happens to be your first time hosting (or co-hosting) a group, we invite you to take a look at page 69 for some pointers to help you hit the ground running.

Thanks so much for joining us on this journey! We're glad you're coming with us.





SESSION 1

THE LOVE YOU HAD AT FIRST



READ REVELATION 2:1-7

t the time Revelation was written, Ephesus was among the world's great cities—an economical and political powerhouse situated on the coast of modern Turkey, the gateway of its region. Jesus commends the church at Ephesus for their patience and endurance in resisting false doctrine and rampant immorality—but their determination to remain steadfast has cost them something just as important.

John starts this letter with a reference to Jesus, holding stars and walking among lampstands. This image is taken from the vision recorded in the previous chapter, and serves as a reminder of Jesus' victory on the cross: we see Jesus in glory, because He has already conquered. Though John is about to give the Ephesians directions for the future, this introduction offers certainty that the final victory is not in question.

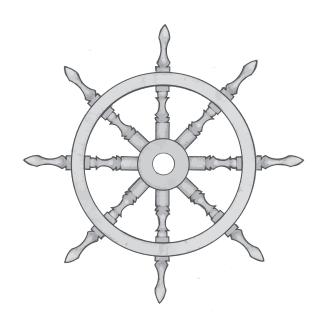
In verses 2–3, the church is commended for their steadfast loyalty. They haven't been swayed by false doctrines or fallen into the rampant immorality of the surrounding culture, as other churches have. But in verse 4, we learn that this stalwart attitude has let love fall by the wayside. Jesus rebukes the church for neglecting to love as they should, and in verse 5 supplies the antidote: remembering the love they once had. The letter closes in verses 6–7, as Jesus praises them specifically for their refusal to follow a heretical sect and charges them to continue in perseverance and in love.

It is worth noting that Jesus' reference to "removing the lampstand" (v.5) was no idle threat; the church in Ephesus ultimately disappeared, with only ruins to be seen today.



#### REVELATION 2:1-7 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: "The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. <sup>2</sup>I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup>Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."



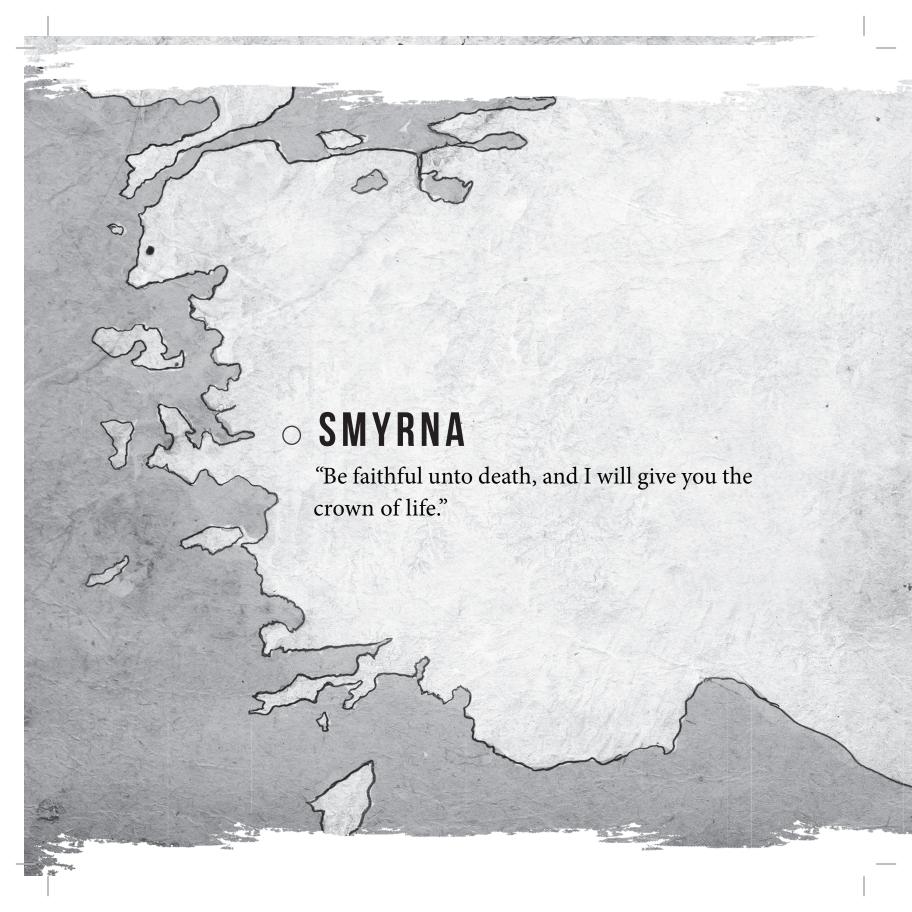
DISCUSS & APPLY

- 1. Read Matthew 23:23. Do you see any parallels between the attitude of the Pharisees and the situation in the Ephesian church?
- 2. Why is it so important for love to come first, even before good works or correct beliefs? How do we balance these three things?
- 3. Do you think believers in the U.S. face any of the same cultural pressures that the church in Ephesus did? How so?
- 4. In what areas might you need to renew "the love you had at first"? How can you go about doing this?
- 5. As a group, one of the best ways to share the love that Christ freely gave us is to freely give it to others. Begin to plan an outreach that the group can conduct within the next seven weeks to show your community that Christ's love is free, no strings attached. Turn the page for some ideas to get you started.



- Conduct random acts of kindness by paying for someone's meal, coffee, gas, laundry, etc.
- Provide a meal for a family outside your small group.
- Provide practical help for someone in need: yard work, fixing something inside a home, an oil change, clothing, etc.
- Prayer walk a neighborhood.
- Volunteer at a local food bank, soup kitchen, or other charitable organization.
- Participate in an outreach with your local church.
- Contact The Fayetteville Dream Center and assist with any projects they are working on.

- Adopt a family for Christmas.
- Provide a meal to first responders in your area.
- Serve at a nursing home.
- Conduct a water bottle giveaway.
- Serve free coffee and snacks at the emergency room.
- Throw a block party for your neighborhood.
- Other:



# SMYRNA SESSION 2 FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH



READ REVELATION 2:8-11

he church in Smyrna is in particularly difficult straits. Slander and poverty have already attacked them, and John writes to tell them that even worse persecution is coming soon. But John also has words of encouragement from Jesus for the believers at Smyrna—in fact, he has nothing but.

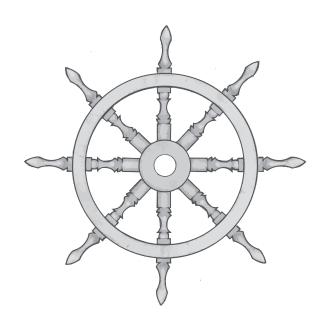
John presents Jesus in verse 8 as the one "who died and came to life." This image is intended to inspire a church that is presently enduring considerable suffering of its own—poverty, false accusations, and antagonism from the Jewish community (many of whom would have been friends or family of the Smyrna believers). Very soon, their lives may be on the line.

In verses 9 and 10, John reminds the believers that their persecution is spiritual in origin; Satan is their real enemy. The "ten days" mentioned in verse 10 most likely indicate a brief period of time, rather than a literal ten days. For this difficult but short season, John encourages them to continue in faithfulness, keeping in mind the eternal reward that their perseverance in Christ will win for them in the future (v.11).



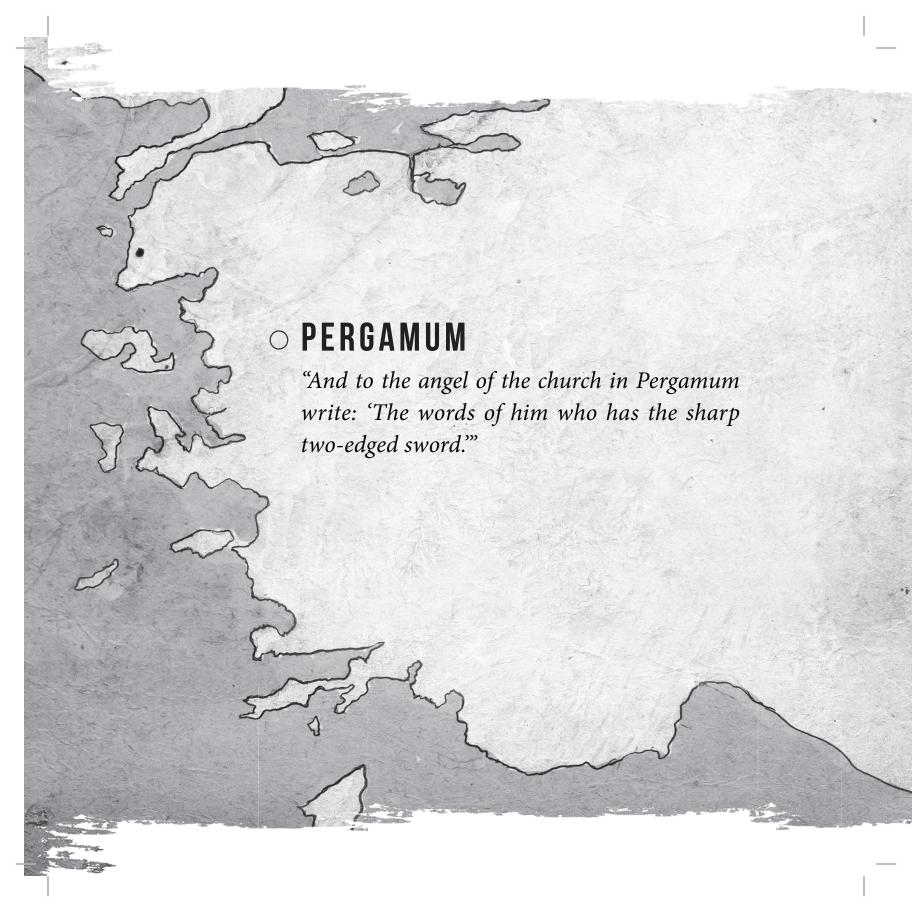
#### REVELATION 2:8-11 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup>And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: "The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. <sup>9</sup>I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup>Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."



DISCUSS & APPLY

- 1. Think back to a time that you had to endure suffering. What gave you strength in that situation? What is your perspective on that experience now?
- 2. Why do you think that John starts by reminding the church of Jesus' death and resurrection?
- 3. We know that the church in Smyrna was financially poor. What does John mean when he says they are rich? How does one become rich in this sense?
- 4. In verse 10 John talks about suffering as a form of testing. What does suffering test in us?
- 5. In verse 11, Jesus says: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." What do you think it means to have an ear to hear? How do we learn to "listen" spiritually?



# PERGAMUM

SESSION 3

THE TWO-EDGED SWORD



READ REVELATION 2:12-17

Pergamum was the imperial capital of its region, a center of Roman government—and everything that went with it, such as the imperial cult (the worship of the emperor as a god) and all the most fashionable pagan vices. While John has high praise for the faithfulness that the Pergamum believers have shown in enduring persecution, they have been less successful in resisting their city's more sinister temptations.

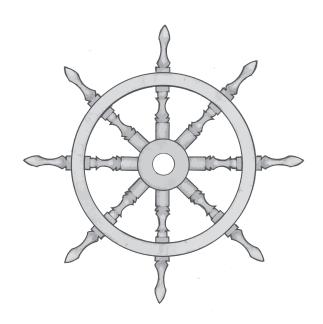
In verse 12, John introduces Jesus as "the one who has the sharp two-edged sword". The sword is an image of judgment. In some respects the believers in Pergamum have shown commendable faithfulness—they have held true in the face of violent opposition, which we learn in verse 13 has included the martyrdom of leaders such as Antipas. But they have been blind to the danger that the idolatrous, immoral culture of their city poses to their faith. In verse 14, Jesus compares their failure in this regard to "the teaching of Balaam," who was a Canaanite prophet of Old Testament times. When the people of Israel were preparing to invade the land of Canaan, Balaam advised the Canaanite king Balak to tempt them with idol worship and immoral behaviors, in order to lead them off-course and prevent them from conquering the land. This, Jesus warns, is the same strategy being used against the Pergamum believers.

But the sword is also an image of victory. The letter closes in verse 17 with a reminder that if the believers repent of these sins and persevere, they will conquer in Christ.



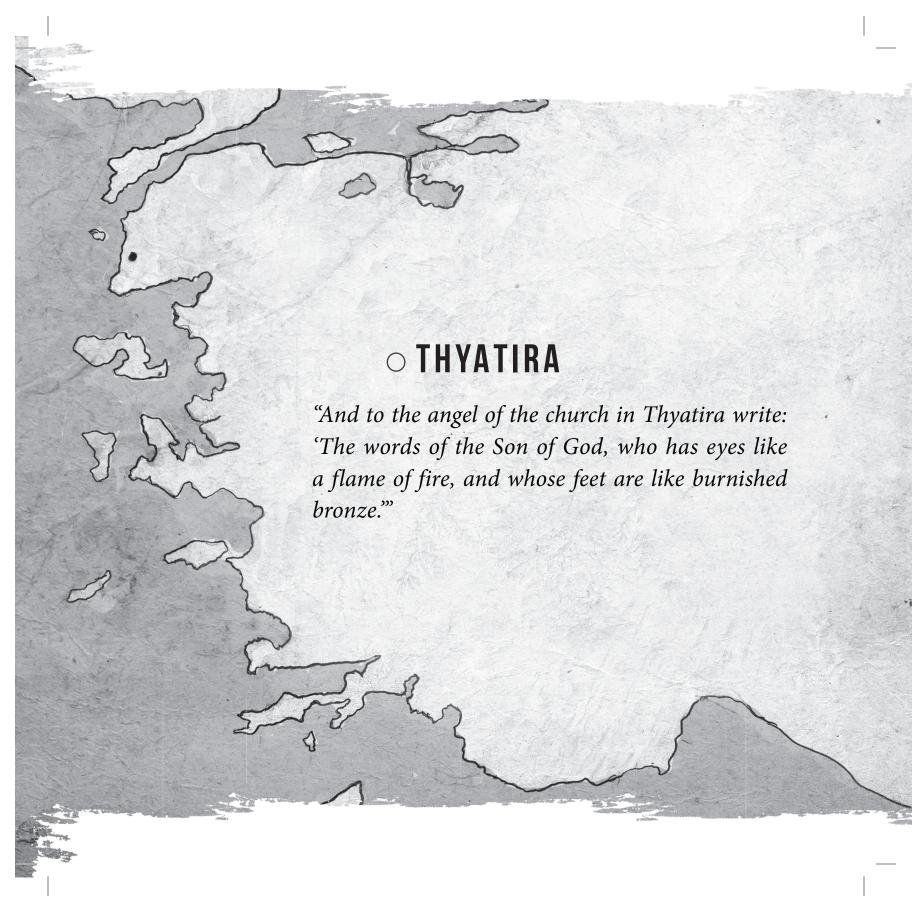
#### REVELATION 2:12-17 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup>And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. <sup>13</sup>I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup>So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup>Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."



DISCUSS & APPLY

- 1. Pergamum was dealing with the dual sins of idolatry and immorality. In what ways are we dealing with those sins in our culture today? How do you resist?
- 2. Read Numbers 25:1–9 and 31:16. How did the Midianites lead the children of Israel astray? What was the result of Balaam's advice to King Balak?
- 3. In what ways does God discipline His people? How has God disciplined you in the past? How would you advise someone to repent of sins like immorality and idolatry?
- 4. How should a believer guard against false teaching? Do you think the same rules apply to everyone?
- 5. We learned that the "white stone" in v.17, which was an invitation in ancient times, symbolizes our salvation and relationship with Jesus. Would you say you are confident that Jesus has saved you? Why or why not? How can we be certain of our salvation?





SESSION 4

HE WHO SEARCHES MIND & HEART



READ REVELATION 2:18-29

hile Thyatira was a less influential city than the other six cities John addressed, the church there faced much the same pressures—emperor worship, cultural opposition, and similar problems. But even as he compliments them for the way they've handled these challenges, John issues a stiff warning: there is a dangerous false teacher in Thyatira, and the King is not amused.

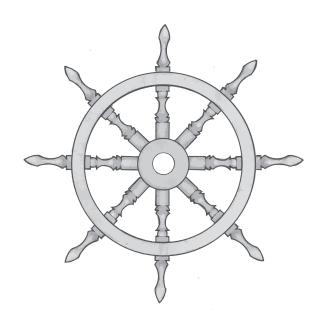
The Jesus Whom John pictures in verse 18 is awesome and fearful—eyes of "flaming fire" and feet of "burnished bronze." It is the picture of a righteous King Who perceives not only deeds, but motives. He has praise for the Thyatirans; unlike the church in Ephesus, this church has grown more loving, more faithful, and more generous over the years.

But Thyatira has also failed where Ephesus excelled—they have not resisted the heretical teachings of "Jezebel", a self-proclaimed prophetess (v.20). Like the original Jezebel recorded in 1 Kings, she is leading some of the believers into the pitfalls of idolatry and sexual immorality—and also like the original Jezebel, she will be condemned, along with those who follow her. But those who repent and remain true to the real King will receive authority (v.26–29).



#### REVELATION 2:18-29 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup>And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: "The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. <sup>20</sup>But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup>I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. <sup>22</sup>Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, <sup>23</sup>and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. <sup>24</sup>But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. <sup>25</sup>Only hold fast what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup>The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup> and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup>And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."



DISCUSS & APPLY

- 1. Thyatira presents an interesting conflict, where love abounds but accountability is lacking. How do we love others and still deal with sin in their lives?
- 2. How should we deal lovingly with someone who demonstrates unrepentant sin?
- 3. Read John 8:1–11. Why must we balance love with truth? How does Jesus perfectly illustrate this balance?
- 4. The believers in Thyatira risked losing their jobs unless they compromised their faith. What kinds of compromises does our culture expect us to make in order to "do business"? How can we navigate these conflicts in a loving but faithful way?
- 5. Jesus calls Himself "the one who searches mind and heart". How can we identify places in our lives where our hearts and our deeds don't match? What steps can we take to correct those areas? Do you think this is something we can do alone?



# SARDIS

SESSION 5

WAKE UP



# **NAVIGATE THE TEXT**

READ REVELATION 3:1-6

he situation in Sardis is both sad and sobering: while these believers look like they're doing fine from the outside, the God who sees the heart knows that on the inside they're on the verge of death. But even for Sardis, there is still hope—Jesus has not abandoned them, and there are still believers left in this church who have not abandoned Him.

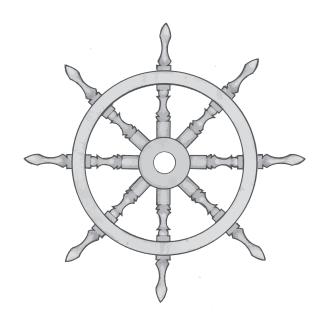
In verse 1, Jesus is pictured holding the seven spirits of the seven churches and the seven stars that were mentioned in John's vision in Revelation 1. Although Jesus is about to rebuke the Sardis believers sternly, He wants them to know that He has not abandoned them. He holds the churches in His hands, and He knows and cares about their status.

Unfortunately, we learn in verses 1 and 2 that, spiritually speaking, the church in Sardis is at death's door. Although they have a reputation of being a vibrant church, the reputation has outlived the reality; their works, Jesus says, are incomplete. Echoing Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, Jesus threatens to come "like a thief in the night" and take them by surprise—except for the few believers there who have continued to live in holiness and purity (v.5).



#### **REVELATION 3:1-6 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: "The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. 4Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. 6He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."



DISCUSS & APPLY

- 1. How can a person or a church have a reputation of being alive but actually be dead?
- 2. Have you been through a time in your life when you were spiritually dry? How did you break out of that season?
- 3. Sardis illustrates how important it is to be in authentic relationship with others. The believers there were blind to each others' problems; only Jesus could see the decay. How can we build transparency in our relationships so that others can help us see when we need revitalization?
- 4. Read 2 Corinthians 13:5. How do we go about examining ourselves? If we find dead areas in our lives, how can we "strengthen what remains"?
- 5. This rebuke, while strong, is still laced with hope. What can we learn from this passage about how to deliver a strong but loving rebuke?



# PHILADELPHIA

SESSION 6

AN OPEN DOOR



# **NAVIGATE THE TEXT**

READ REVELATION 3:7-13

od is on the move in Philadelphia. Although these believers are facing stiff opposition from the Jewish population in the city, and although their resources are few, they have held firm to Jesus. Because of their perseverance and passion, something out of the ordinary is about to happen in their city.

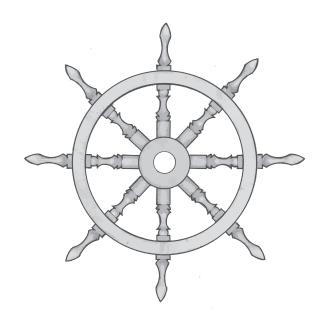
The introductory image of Jesus in verse 7 comes not from John's vision earlier, but from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 22:22). He has the "key of David"—the "keys to the city" as we might say today—and He has authority to shut doors and open them. The door He has opened in Philadelphia represents unfettered access to the Kingdom of God. This church hasn't had much to work with, but they have kept Jesus' word, enduring patiently and acknowledging Him faithfully (v.8).

There is a fundamental shift of favor taking place in Philadelphia. We can infer from verse 9 that the local Jewish congregation has been maligning the Philadelphian church, claiming that they alone have access to God and that the Christians do not. With the reiterated image of the open door, Jesus is telling them that the truth is the opposite. Not only do the Philadelphian Christians have free access to God, but the Jews who are opposing them will come to know God truly through their ministry. While their situation might look tenuous on the surface, Jesus affirms to this church that their footing is eternally secure.



#### REVELATION 3:7-13 (ESV)

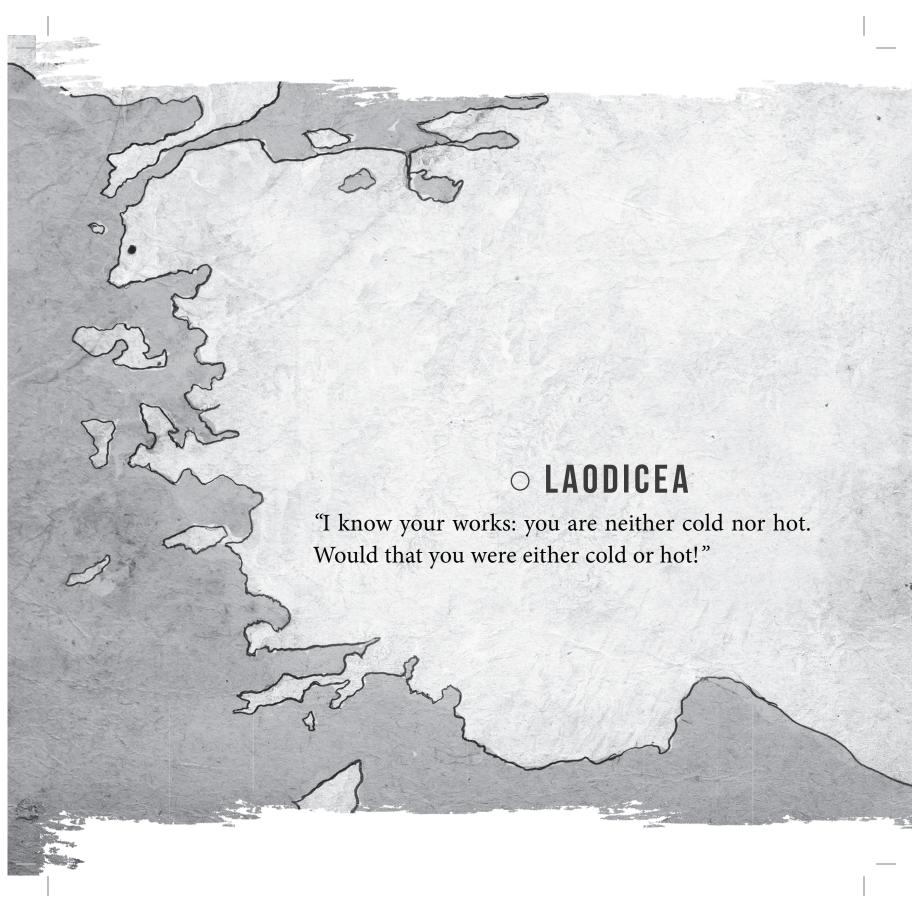
<sup>7</sup>And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: "The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. 8I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup>Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie-behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup>Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. 11I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. 12The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. <sup>13</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."



DISCUSS & APPLY

- 1. The Philadelphians had little power, but they remained true. Have you ever experienced a situation where you felt overmatched? How did you hold fast?
- 2. Would you say that positive (pleasant) or negative (difficult) experiences are more likely to build our faith? Why? What steps can we take to build our faith?
- 3. How is 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 illustrated in Philadelphia?
- 4. How have you experienced God's protection in your life?
- 5. Philadelphia's open door is the opportunity to reach their unbelieving Jewish neighbors with the Good News of Jesus. Do you have any open doors in your life? How about as a group? How can you use those doors to help others?

It's not too late to plan an outreach as a group! See page 16 for some ideas to get you started.



# LAODICEA

SESSION 7

NEITHER COLD NOR HOT



# **NAVIGATE THE TEXT**

READ REVELATION 3:14-22

he final church to which John writes is in Laodicea, a wealthy and influential city. But prosperity has gone to the Laodiceans' heads. Though they need God desperately, their sense of security has convinced them that their works are good enough. But as John is about to tell them in no uncertain terms, Jesus isn't interested in "good enough".

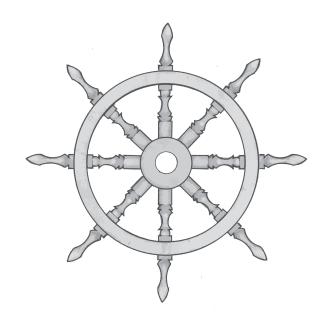
In verses 15 and 16, Jesus accosts the Laodiceans for being "lukewarm". This is a reference to the waters at Laodicea, which were brackish, not good either for drinking (cold springs) or for bathing (hot springs). Like lukewarm water, the Laodicean church has become useless. Safe, wealthy, and comfortable, this church has forgotten that it needs God at all. Jesus' call for them to be "either hot or cold" is not a request for them to either go all in or abandon Him entirely; He is calling them to potency.

Instead of relying on their own resources, Jesus commands the Laodiceans to find full dependency on God, who is the source for "gold refined by fire" and "white garments" (v.17–18). They need a spiritual salve for their eyes. This rebuke is particularly stinging, since their region was famous for producing a powder that helped people with eye trouble. While these are sharp reprimands, still God stands at the door waiting, inviting this church and all the churches to fellowship with Him (v.20).



#### REVELATION 3:14-22 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup>And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. <sup>15</sup>I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup>So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup>I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. <sup>19</sup>Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup>Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. <sup>21</sup>The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."



DISCUSS & APPLY

- 2. What does Jesus mean in verse 19 when He says, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline"?
- 3. Have you ever been tempted to give God less than your best? How did you overcome that feeling? Where do you see room for improvement?
- 4. How do we "buy gold" and "white garments" (v. 18) from God?
- 5. In what ways does God "knock on the doors" of our lives?

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Hemer, Colin J. *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting.* Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Livonia, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Dove Booksellers, 2001.
- Hughes, Robert B., and J. Carl Laney. *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. The Tyndale Reference Library. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001.
- Ladd, George Eldon. *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.
- Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- Witherington III., Ben. Revelation: *The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

# THREE SIMPLE GOALS

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

#### MEET

Prioritize building relationships. Life-change happens best in the context of relationships.

#### **MENTOR**

Life is a journey, and everyone is at a different place on that journey. Help people take just one step further in their faith.

#### **MULTIPLY**

Multiply disciples by inviting people to your group and/ or by conducting an outreach as a group. Multiply leaders by sharing ownership.



### **HOST INFO**

Thank you for responding to the opportunity to host a Small Group. Whether you are hosting for the first time or for the hundredth time, we believe that you will be blessed as you serve.

**BE YOURSELF.** God wants you to use your unique gifts and temperament, so lead in a way that fits you and in a way that is best for the group. When you don't have an answer, admit it; when you make a mistake, apologize. Honesty and friendliness go a long way.

**SHOULDER-TAP TO GROW.** A shoulder-tap is when you personally invite someone into your group. Begin by shoulder-tapping your family, neighbors, coworkers, friends from church, etc. If you and your group members do this, then your group will have everyone who is supposed to be there.

**SHARE OWNERSHIP.** Don't try to do it alone. You may be perfectly capable of opening up your home, bringing the food, and leading the discussion each time you meet, but when you allow others to help, you give them an opportunity to grow in their faith and gifts.

**PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME.** Before each meeting, preview the session and write down your responses to each question.

**PRAY FOR YOUR GROUP MEMBERS.** Heart transformation only happens when God is involved. Commit to pray for your Small Group meetings and for each group member.

**BREAK UP INTO SMALLER GROUPS IF YOUR GROUP GETS TOO BIG.** If your group has more than ten people, we strongly encourage you to have the group gather in discussion circles of five or six people. A small circle encourages quieter members to participate and gives everyone a greater opportunity to be heard.

## **HOST FAQS**

#### WHO IS IN CHARGE?

Most groups have an official Host—a person who coordinates and facilitates the group meetings. The Host may lead the group's discussions personally, or may take turns with other group members. Ideally, as the group matures, members will share the leadership of the group. We have discovered that healthy groups rotate Hosts and homes on a regular basis. Shared ownership in the group ensures that all members grow, give their unique contribution, and develop their gifts.

#### **HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD MY GROUP HAVE?**

Minimum is you +2. Think of gathering a few friends, not necessarily having a full house. You might choose to meet with another couple who would enjoy walking through this study.

#### SHOULD OUR GROUP MEET BEFORE THE SERIES BEGINS?

Yes! A get-to-know-you party is a fantastic way to begin building relationships.

#### **HOW DO I STRUCTURE EACH MEETING?**

The goal of Small Groups is not only to discuss, but to build relationships. Your group should seek to follow the session order for each week as laid out in this study guide. We also recommend incorporating a meal or refreshments, a time to just hang out, and periodic gatherings outside of the scheduled group meetings.

#### HOW MUCH TIME PER WEEK WILL THIS STUDY TAKE?

The group meeting time can be anywhere from 1½ hours to as long as you'd like.

#### DO I HAVE TO PRAY ALOUD?

If you're not comfortable praying aloud, just ask if someone else would like to start and end the group in prayer. However, we encourage you to step out of your comfort zone.

#### **HOW LONG WILL THIS GROUP MEET?**

As the Host, please commit to meet for the duration of the seven-week study. At the end of that time, you can decide whether you and your group want to continue meeting. If your group wants to continue but you'd like a break from hosting, we encourage another member of the group to take a turn in this role. If you find that the group doesn't seem to be connecting for you, don't give up. This can be a result of personality conflicts, life stage differences, geographical distance, levels of spiritual maturity, or any number of things. God often uses uncomfortable situations to teach us, so we encourage you to stick with it for the seven weeks! At the end of the study, decide whether to continue with this group or find another.

#### DO I NEED A LOT OF BIBLE KNOWLEDGE TO HOST?

No, you do not. You will enjoy learning along with everyone else in the group.

#### HOW DO WE HANDLE THE CHILDCARE NEEDS IN OUR GROUP?

There are a number of ways to approach this issue. You may try one option that works for a while and then adjust over time. Some possibilities:

- Have the adults meet in the living room or dining room and share the cost of a babysitter (or two) who can watch the kids in a different part of the house. This way, parents don't have to be away from their children all evening if their children are too young to be left at home.
- Use one home for the kids and a second home (close by or a phone call away) for the adults.
- Rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson or care for the children, either in the same home or in another home nearby. This can be an incredible blessing for kids.
- Let group members make their own arrangements for childcare.

No matter what decision the group makes, the best approach is to dialogue openly about both the problem and the solution.



#### LIFEGIVING MARRIAGE

A six-week study by Michael and Laura Fletcher

The design for marriage was formulated by God in the Garden of Eden...before sin came into the human race. God intended it to be an awe-inspiring, intimate, fruitful, joyous relationship—in short, life-giving! Marriage should be a source of joy to both husband and wife, and a source of strength, confidence, and encouragement to all the members of the family. This six-week study is designed to help us rediscover God's design for the LifeGiving Marriage.

#### THE KINGDOM

A six-week study by Michael Fletcher with Jeff Christensen

An angel imposter: cloaked in darkness and armed with pride and greed. A coup: devastation prevails on the planet, and poisons the soul of man. A divine revolutionary: filled with power and light, armed with truth, clothed in humility. It's a story of violence and peace—of intrigue and romance—of revolution and redemption. It's a story as ancient as time itself...and this all-encompassing epic includes us all.

These studies and more available at www.RightNowMedia.org or at the Manna Church World Café bookstore. Visit https://www.rightnow.org/Account/Invite/Manna to gain access to Right Now Media.



#### BUILDING SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS

A book and seven-week study by Michael and Laura Fletcher

Our quality of life is largely measured by the success or failure of our relationships. We all hunger for lasting, life-giving relationships with our spouses, parents, children, coworkers, friends, and others around us—but these relationships can be a struggle to establish or even maintain. Whether you want to increase intimacy in your current relationships, develop new ones, or repair those that have been damaged, the seven practical keys in *Building Successful Relationships* can draw your heart and the hearts of those around you closer together.

#### OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO CHURCH GROWTH

By Michael Fletcher

Passionate about church growth, Michael Fletcher understands the obstacles pastors and church leaders face as they reach 100-200 and 700-800 member barriers. He lays out clear, practical steps churches can follow to achieve the growth they desire. His strategies have proved effective not only in his church, which has grown dramatically, but also across the nation.

E-book also available on Kindle and Amazon

#### **HOW TO GET PROMOTED**

By Michael Fletcher

If you want to get promoted, ask advice from the person who makes the decision! Michael sought the expert advice of 31 successful business leaders, entrepreneurs, pastors, and military leaders—people who make and break careers. Their surprising insights, combined with the clear teaching of Scripture, make this book a must-read for anyone wanting to get ahead in life. Soundly biblical, unashamedly practical, and sometimes in-your-face, *How to Get Promoted* will prepare you to go to the next level!

#### **BEYOND RECONCILIATION**

By Michael Fletcher with Larry Jackson

We hear many Christian leaders preaching the need for racial reconciliation in our country—but we don't see much real change taking place in our churches. Why do so few people experience true friendships with brothers or sisters of a different cultural background? Why are so few churches multi-ethnic? The fact is that the message of reconciliation is only the starting point. In sharing their own story of an extraordinary covenant friendship across cultural boundaries, Larry and Michael shed light on the perspectives, leadership, and initiative that can produce hope and lasting reconciliation.

Available for purchase at the Manna Church World Café bookstore

_			_
_			