



A Worship Discussion Guide for Individuals, Groups & Families for the week of January 26, 2025

Read the Bible passage aloud in your group meeting. This is a worship discussion guide, and our reflections and applications are grounded in Scripture. You do not need to work through the whole guide. Decide which points would be most helpful for your meeting, and use them as a starting point for your time together.

Warm Up *The Letter to the Church at Smyrna*

- Why is it difficult to trust Jesus while we are suffering? What must you believe to repent while suffering?

Each of the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3) will follow a similar pattern:

- Jesus addresses each particular church through her resident **messenger** [angelos]
- Jesus **reveals Himself** by one of the names or images found elsewhere in John's vision (typically, from Revelation 1)
- Jesus **reflects back His work** in the church
- Jesus calls the church to **repent** [metanoeo] and **listen**
- Jesus **renews hope** and **affirms a future** for the church using titles and images found in the final chapters of Revelation

- The ancient city of **Smyrna** was thriving city in modern Izmir, Turkey, 35 miles up the coast from Ephesus.
- A busy seaport with a population of 250,000 (*about the size of Norfolk, VA*)
- A temple to *Dea Roma* (Rome personified as a goddess) was built in 195BC. Smyrna was the first Roman city with a dedicated temple for the cult of emperor worship (Tiberius, AD26). By the reign of Domitian (AD81-96) emperor worship was compulsory, and once a year citizens had to burn incense of the altar to the god Caesar or face the threat of death.
- Ancient sources tell us Smyrna had a significant, wealthy, and powerful Jewish population.
- The early church father, Polycarp, served as the Bishop of Smyrna for many years. Polycarp was a disciple of John, and was martyred in AD155 at age 86 for refusing to pay homage to the emperor (*Martyrdom of Polycarp*).

Revelation 2:8-11 *Do Not Fear Suffering*

⁸“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.’

- How does Jesus introduce Himself to the church in Smyrna? Why is this significant? Read the verses below from Revelation 1 and Isaiah for more insight.

“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. But He laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”

--Revelation 1:17-18

*“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
‘I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god’.”*

--Isaiah 44:6

*“Listen to me, O Jacob,
and Israel, whom I called!
I am he; I am the first,
and I am the last.”*

--Isaiah 48:12

⁹“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. ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹He 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’.”

- The congregation at Smyrna is living under oppression and constant pressure. What afflictions do they face?
- Jesus reflects back to Smyrna the ways they are like Him. In what ways does this church reflect the glory of Christ? (9-10a)
- How might the political and religious climate of Smyrna fuel church's tribulation?
- Elsewhere Scripture teaches that, since our Lord was made perfect through suffering, so shall His followers ([Hebrews 4:10](#)). Can you give an example of how Jesus uses suffering to make us like Christ?

“Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering of Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy and token of his grace... Not recognition, but rejection, is the reward Christians get from the world.”

--Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

- How does Jesus call the church at Smyrna to repent? (10a)
- What is repentance?

- What must you believe to repent of fear?
- How does Jesus renew hope for this church (10b-11)? Read the verses below from *Revelation 20* for more insight.

*“Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the **second death** has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”*
--Revelation 20:6

*“Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the **second death**, the lake of fire.”*
--Revelation 20:14
- Why can it be difficult to trust Jesus while we are suffering?
- What happens in your soul when you are suffering. How would you describe it?
- Pray together in response to God's Word. Ask the Holy Spirit for grace to repent of fear and turn to Jesus in the midst of suffering. Pray for Christ's suffering people.

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Questions? Contact Pastor Kevin Greene, kevin@wepc.org

