

# 7 Love Letters

(from Jesus to his bride)



## Home Group Leader's Guide

February to May 2019

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW .....	3
SESSION 1: Don't Lose First Love .....	9
SESSION 2: Suffering for Jesus.....	15
SESSION 3 Don't Compromise .....	19
SESSION 4 Not Just for Show .....	24
SESSION 5 Patient Endurance .....	28
SESSION 6 Don't be Lukewarm .....	32
SESSION 7 What about you?.....	36

# OVERVIEW

**Series Passage:** *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.” Revelation 3:19*

## The “7 LOVE LETTERS” series

It is entirely possible to get love wrong. Getting love right is an ongoing challenge. Whether it is our relationships with family, partner, spouse or friends, developing richness in love all takes time, energy and requires periodic readjustment. Our love relationship with God is no exception. It could be how we relate to Jesus individually or together as a collective, part of his cherished bride, just like the churches we see in Revelation. We need to take stock and make sure are we getting our love right.

This series will help us to do just that. As we cover the six topics presented in the seven letters to the young churches we will see some are doing better than others, but Jesus is calling ALL of them to a higher level of love. His messages teach the churches what they are getting wrong and how they can do love better. As they relate to issues that could be found in churches in 2019, we can have our ears and hearts open to see how it speaks to us today. How we can get it right!

Our relationship with God is the most important of all the relationships we will ever have. How we manage it has an eternal implication. Let us not miss this opportunity to learn from scripture and make any adjustments necessary to get love right.

---

*Throughout the series we ask the question  
“What if we get love wrong?”*

---

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The seven churches addressed in Revelation Chapters 2-3 were located in Asia Minor, now known as Turkey. The letter was written some 30-40 years after the churches started (~95 AD). Although they were established by Paul, and/or perhaps Aquilla and Pricilla things has started to unravel (some more than others). Through this series we see the pressures the young churches faced.

We discover they are not unlike the challenges we face today, so we can be encouraged to make good choices in our own lives.



It was not easy to live out Christian life then. The region was controlled by Rome and the emperor, Titus Flavius Domitian, demanded all people must worship him as “Lord and God”. Refusal to do so led to severe persecution. In addition, massive temples to pagan deities, as well as controlling Jewish synagogues and powerful economic guilds (akin to strong trade unions) were inextricably entwined to control cultural and economic wellbeing. These letters show us how these factors directly or indirectly impacted the fledgling churches. How could they survive, let alone thrive with such continual opposition?

Perhaps this is why, before Jesus addresses the churches, we are awestruck by sounds and images as Jesus Christ reveals his divine nature (Rev 1:1:9-20). This picture of the resurrected Jesus lifts us up out of life’s daily challenges and leaves us with no doubt that he is the only true Lord and God. Even more reassuring is Christ’s intimate interest and proximity to his churches. He is the one standing among the lampstands, holding the seven stars in his hand. Jesus sometimes gives strong words of rebuke to his beloved, but it is always with the intent to woo his bride into genuine intimacy, to a place of honour and eternal rewards.

Each letter has a core message specific to that church. What makes it relevant is that these are still the kinds of things that can go wrong any church today:

- Lack of Love (Ephesus)
- Fear of Suffering (Smyrna)
- Doctrinal and moral compromise (Pergamum & Thyatira)
- Spiritually dead (Sardis)
- Patient endurance (Philadelphia)
- Lukewarm (Laodicea)

---

*With each message to the church comes the exhortation “to him who hears let him hear what the spirit says to the churches”. The plural “churches” means the call to “hear” applies to all Christians in all churches, everywhere, and at all times.*

---

## ABOUT THE SESSIONS

We will cover the 7 letters in the first 6 sessions. We look at each of the core messages and ask the question how can we get love right. Each of the letters has similarity outlining affirmation, correction and motivating promises. These form the basis for the Bible study section. The final session is one where we take the time to listen to what Jesus is saying to us as a Household of FAITH in 2019.

Each Session is summarised in the table below, based on the pattern in scripture that is common to each letter:

	SESSION 1	SESSION 2
<b>Church</b>	Intro & Ephesus	Smyrna
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 2:1-7 (and 1:9-20)	Rev 2:8-11
<b>Title</b>	Don't lose your first love	Suffering for Jesus
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Service, sacrifice, patience	Afflictions, poverty and slander
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Steadfastness to doctrine	You are truly rich, Faithful to Jesus
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Forgetting their first love	Don't be afraid of suffering (Smyrna)
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Cultivate intimacy with God and for each other, confess, restore what is neglected.	Be faithful for the victor's crown. Tribulation would not last long. Hidden manner and a personalised white stone

	SESSION 3	SESSION 4	SESSION 5
<b>Church</b>	Pergamum & Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 2:12-29	Rev 3:1-6	Rev 3:7-13
<b>Characteristic</b>	Don't Compromise	Not just for Show	Patient Endurance
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Living in heart of warfare (Pergamum) Love, faith service and perseverance	Their works	Good deeds, little power
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Hard work and doing more than before	A few people who have not soiled their garments	Patient endurance
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Tolerance of Jezebel spirit (Thyatira) Some follow Balaam idolatry & sexual immorality (Pergamum)	Spiritually dead	Nothing!
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Doing God's will to the end for authority over the nations. The morning star.	Be dressed in white and written in the book of life.	Hold on not to lose your crown. Be a stable pillar and receive a new name.

	SESSION 6	SESSION 7
<b>Church</b>	Laodicea	FGAM & You
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 3:14-22	Rev 1:3
<b>Characteristic</b>	Don't be Lukewarm	What about you?
<b>Jesus knows</b>	True spiritual state that is opposite to what they think	All about us
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Nothing!	This is your chance to fill in the blanks
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Self-reliance and self-sufficiency.	
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Intimate fellowship with Christ. Receive the victor's crown and sit on the heavenly throne.	

## SESSION STRUCTURE

We received very good feedback from the last series, where we changed the regular home group format so that each member had the opportunity to delve more into the scripture if they wanted to. People found that they were able to discover the richness of Scripture and the Word was able to speak to them directly. Depending on how keen your group is to study the word, **choose one or more of these approaches to study the passage in the suggested time:**

1. Research the historical background of each church looking at the city's significance, cultural norms, popular religion, wealth and economy, and famous attributes.
2. Exploring the meaning of Greek keywords
3. Read commentaries
4. Personal inspiration

For leaders, you may need to allow for 1-2 hours to prepare for each session. We encourage you to practice the study as if you were part of the group (an easy way is to use the Members Notes before referring to the Leader's Guide). This way you will also pick up the areas where people may need more coaching.

We still watch session video (5-8 minutes per session) and cover the Main Point as usual, but the word study will come before the discussion questions. Here is a reminder of the suggested format for your home group (options bolded):

SESSION ACTIVITY	TIME
Worship / Opening Prayer	5-20 mins
Welcome and Session Introduction	10 mins
Watch Session Video and read Main Point	10 mins
Summarise historical setting	5 mins
Read Scripture	5-10 mins
<b>Study the key passage (optional) OR</b>	20 mins OR
<b>Discuss one or more of the Questions</b>	20 mins
Application & pray for needs	5-10 mins
TOTAL TIME	60-90 mins

## NOTES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation (not Revelations, plural) is so different to any other biblical style that it is often totally misinterpreted or completely ignored. Being the only apocalyptic prophetic epistle, it is easy to become intimidated, afraid of, or even preoccupied by it. But we don't need to be. If we understand the context and why it was written, the whole book can become the blessing to us that God intended it to be (Rev 1:3).

Revelation is about the eternal divine God and our call to follow him in obedience and love which will bring rewards greater than we can ever imagine. The love letters in chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate this. Christ reveals himself as the divine being who is in control of every situation and circumstance. So no matter what we are going through he knows and is there to call us to stay the course.

We invite you to come on this journey with us with an open heart to hear what God is saying to you personally, and to us as a Household of FAITH. As you read it and learn from the sessions, let Revelation impact your emotions, spirit, perceptions, and even physical and economic wellbeing. Let's open ourselves up to let Jesus speak through this series as he did to the churches of the day. For his call remains the same to us today, to have ears to listen and a heart to know what he is saying to the churches.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The "7 Love Letters" video streaming and copies of the Leader's Guide and Member's Notes are available for download at <http://fgam.org.au/media/homegroup-materials>. You can also get a copy of the Videos on a usb stick from the church office. If you are unable to access the files or need assistance with printing notes, please let us know by contacting Megan Griffith (0422 284 404, [megan.griffith@fgam.org.au](mailto:megan.griffith@fgam.org.au)) or Ps. YC Goh (0425 799 576, [yc.goh@fgam.org.au](mailto:yc.goh@fgam.org.au)).

The 7 Love Letters Sunday preaching series will for 6 weeks from 17 February to 31 March 2019. Sermons will be available online in video (<http://fgam.org.au/media/video-sermons>) or audio (<http://fgam.org.au/media/audio-sermons>) format or via the FGAM App (available for free download for Android/Tablet or iPhone/iPad).

A Leaders Podcast on the Staff Devotion by Ps. Chris Ong, studying the Letter to the Philadelphian church is available at <http://fgam.org.au/media/leadership-podcast> or through iTunes.

*Keywords: Love • Hate • Repent • Endurance • Promise • Overcome • Intimacy*

*F.A.I.T.H. emphasis: H – Holy & Set Apart*



# SESSION 1

## Don't Lose First Love

**Key Passage:** *"You have abandoned the love you had at first."* Revelation 2:4b

### A. INTRODUCTION

The entire book of Revelation can be summed up as a call to discipleship in the light of past, present and future realities. The letters are prophetic oracles or pastoral-prophetic messages outlining the culmination of God's plan for this earth. Because Jesus is both awe-inspiring and present his words convey powerful messages of comfort and of challenge, appealing to the churches' hearts (emotions) as well as their minds (reason). The letter was not intended for private, silent reading but was intended to be read aloud in the worship services in each church in Asia (1:3, 4, 11).

The common element in each message is the call to uncompromising, first-commandment faithfulness. Witten with the realistic expectation of increased persecution in the near future, but also buffered by the certain hope of participating in the new heaven and earth that follows these temporary trials. Promised by the Old Testament prophets and guaranteed by Jesus' death and resurrection, the time will come as soon as the evil and blasphemous empire is judged and removed. Our call is to remain as faithful witnesses for as long as it takes.

### B. MAIN POINT

Before we start the session, let's pause and reflect for a moment. What happens when we get love wrong? Has this ever happened to you, or are you guilty of letting someone down from your lack of love? It is probably fair to say we have all experienced regrets associated with loving poorly and not being loved well. They are always regrettable, and in the worse cases can be irreversible. This series helps us to get love right in the most important relationship we will ever have: it's between us and God. This series can be to us a Masterclass on love. Will you open your hearts to hear what the Spirit is saying?

One of the most frustrating things that can happen in an argument is when the other person fails to see our point of view, especially when we are right! It can be infuriating and we struggle to understand how the other person can get it so wrong. This is one of the most precious things in our relationship with God. When we open our hearts to his voice we can hear what the Spirit is saying. His gentle whisper doesn't condemn us but it beckons us to see it from His perspective. It is the same for everyone, to walk with the Lord we need to be open to correction. We get some things right and some things wrong, this is what we see as we study Jesus loving words to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Jesus encourages them to get love right.

For the church in Ephesus, they were commended for many things and were true to doctrine and holding fast to their faith in turbulent times. However, they failed in being faithful to the first and most important commandment – to love the Lord they God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and to love others as themselves (Luke 10:27). Jesus calls them to repentance, not telling them off for getting it wrong, but his invitation comes with promises for those who turn back to love right.

---

*As Jesus warns, the presence of Christ will depart when well-intentioned people, zealous to find the right way, depart from the ultimate way which is love.*

---

## C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

	SESSION 1
<b>Church</b>	Intro & Ephesus
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 2:1-7 (and 1:9-20)
<b>Title</b>	Don't lose your first love
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Service, sacrifice, patience
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Steadfastness to doctrine
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Forgetting their first love
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Cultivate intimacy with God and for each other, confess, restore what is neglected.

Revelation was written around 95 AD by the Apostle John, when he was imprisoned for his faith on the Island of Patmos, Greece. Its purpose was to enable its hearers to control their fear, renew their commitment and to sustain their vision. The seven letters occurs at the start of the book, directly after the revelation of Christ the divine one, which sets the scene for what is to follow. It is a personal message to each church, but also general message speaking to Church (his bride) throughout the ages.

The Ephesian church was apostolic, dynamic and the largest of the seven. It was probably founded by Aquilla and Priscilla and later Paul (Acts 18:18-19; 19:1-10), and pastored by Timothy. Ephesus was vibrant city of ~250,000 people with one of the finest ports in the region. As such, it was home of the appointed Roman governor. It was famous for the temple Artemis (Greek name for Dianna; Acts 19:23 onwards) one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Much of the city life revolved around it – literally thousands of priests and priestesses would have been involved in pagan worship and associated practices including shrine prostitution. Its influence also extended economically as the temple was the centre for banking for kings and merchants, as well as being an asylum for fleeing criminals.

## D. READ SCRIPTURE: Revelation 1:9-2:7

Introduction to 7 Love Letters: Revelation 1:9-20

Letter to Ephesus: Revelation 2:1-7

## E. STUDY SCRIPTURE (optional)

As you answer the following questions, after reading the text, take time to absorb the truth contained in them. Ask the Spirit to help you to apply it to your own life.

Suggested links are shown below, but you are welcome to use your own:

- [https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/2/1/s\\_1169001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/2/1/s_1169001) (click on the tools button for relevant verse)
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=revelation2:1-7&version=ESV> (click on the tools to the right)
- <https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/2-1.htm> (tools are on the left or select commentary from the dropdown box at the top).

### ABOUT THE INTRODUCTION

#### 1. What do we learn about Jesus? (Read Rev 1:4-5, 17-18)

*In Rev 1:12-16, the prophet John dramatically sets the scene by describing the sounds and sights of the heavenly vision. This starting point declares that despite all that is happening to his church, Jesus truly is Lord and he will return again soon (1:3).*

	ATTRIBUTE	REFERENCE
<b>God</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Who is, who was and who is to come</i></li><li>• <i>The alpha and omega</i></li><li>• <i>The almighty</i></li><li>• <i>Seven spirits before his throne</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1:4, 8</li><li>• 1:8</li><li>• 1:8</li><li>• 1:4, Is 11:2</li></ul>
<b>Jesus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>The first and the Last</i></li><li>• <i>The living one</i></li><li>• <i>Alive forevermore</i></li><li>• <i>E.g Ruler of kings on earth</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1:17, <a href="#">Isaiah 41:4</a>, <a href="#">6</a>; <a href="#">48:12</a>.</li><li>• 1:18</li><li>• 1:18</li><li>• 1:5</li></ul>

#### 2. What do the seven golden lampstands represent (Read Rev 1:12-13, 20; 2:1)?

*The seven golden lampstands in the initial vision of John represent the seven churches. It is included in the address to the Ephesian church to highlight the closeness of Jesus to the churches. He has not left them by themselves, but rather he walks among them and knows each one intimately. We must never forget that Jesus is closely guarding and watching over us and it is to him we are accountable.*

## ABOUT THE CHURCH

### 3. What is good about the church (Read Rev 2:2-3, 6)?

*The Ephesian church was an apostolic church and the largest of the seven. Being established by Paul early on in his missionary journeys, it came with pure doctrine and was grew empowered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus commends them for their orthodox steadfast beliefs that were publicly verifiable and non-accommodating. They worked hard for the gospel and their leaders faithfully protected the flock by exposing people who claimed to be sent by God but were not.*

*The church refused to tolerate the Nicolaitans. There is debate as to what the Nicolaitans represent, but the most likely is a group of people with more liberal theology, who were breaking away from the strict standards upheld by the Ephesian church and were teaching others to do so.*

**Keywords (transliteration):** Works ([ergon](#)), toil ([kopos](#)), patient endurance ([hupomoné](#)), cannot bear those who are evil ([kakos](#)), bearing up ([bastazó](#)), not grown weary ([kopiaó](#)). Follow links for the definitions and usage.

### 4. What does the church do wrong (Read Rev 2:4-5)?

*Despite their hard work and perseverance, they were not found perfect in the Lord's sight. Holding steadfastly to the truth was not enough. They had fallen short as they lacked love.*

*What did the Jesus mean by leaving their first love and how did their hearts grow cold? Could it be they were no longer showering their affection on the Lord in worship and praise? Or did their non-compromising stance give way to lack of love to one another?*

*The call to repentance was certain. But rather than being a chiding this call to repentance presented those who listened with a great opportunity. The invitation to be restored into fellowship with God for eternity, just as God had originally intended (Gen 3:22-24).*

**Keywords (transliteration):** Love ([agapé](#)), hate ([miseó](#)), against ([aphiémi](#)), fell ([piptó](#)), repent ([metanoéo](#)). Follow links for the definitions and usage.

### 5. What are the Lord's promises and who are they given to (Rev 2:7)?

*The first promise given is negative and it applies to all the churches. Jesus calls his bride to repentance, and if they fail to act their light and ministry will be snuffed out like a lamp is extinguished. Jesus himself will remove their lampstand.*

*Those who have listening ears are those who heed the call and wooing of the Holy Spirit and repent from their lovelessness. In return, they are promised full restoration as was originally intended in the Garden. To be able "to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God". This, one assumes, also includes a full restoration of intimacy with God that Adam and Eve first experienced before the fall.*

**Keywords (transliteration):** hear ([akouó](#)), overcome ([nikaó](#)), life ([zóé](#)). Follow links for the definitions and usage.

## F. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### **1. How do you like love to be shown to you? As a group discuss times when it's worked well and other times when it was done wrong.**

*Answer Guide: This is the first time you're getting together as a group. It's good for you to break the ice and to get to know each other a little bit better.*

*Perhaps use this time to share stories about how partners, parents, best friends show love to each other. Maybe share some funny stories of wrong/different expectations in a love relationship. For example, I (Ps. Chris) took a girl to McDonald's once for a first date (I bought her a 50c ice cream cone). It didn't go down that well.*

*Each one of us have a particular way we like love to be shown to us (kind of like the Five Love Languages). What works for one person, doesn't quite work for another person.*

*In this series, we are going to learn about how God likes to be loved. We don't make up the rules of how we love God. It will set us up for discussing ways in which we can love God better.*

### **2. What do we think it means to lose the love that we had at first?**

*Answer Guide: Allow the group some time before answering to think about some of the things they did to show they loved God when they were first saved. The intensity and feelings of our love can change over time. This does not always reflect a dampening of our love or commitment. Maybe, if they are stuck, ask them to think about some of the things they used to do to express their love and devotion to God. Did they worship or pray more, sacrifice their time or energy. We should come up with one thing at least we can continue to do now that we know in our heart will please the Lord.*

*In the passage, the Ephesian church keep doing things for the Lord. That's patient endurance. However, they are now just operating on remote control. They're no longer pursuing God the way they used to. That's why Jesus asks them to "do the works you did at first". It's like when you were first dating you brought flowers to your wife, but now you don't really need to so you don't.*

### **3. What can we do to re-ignite our love relationship with God (you may even want to discuss how you can re-ignite our love relationship with each other)?**

*Answer Guide: It's best that the group comes up with ideas themselves. There are things that we need to do to "spice up" our love relationship with God. If it makes things easier, you might even want to discuss this in the context of human love relationships e.g. What things do you do to rekindle the love in your marriage?*

*If you do that (to kick start the conversation), please remember to LAND BACK on God, and how we can re-ignite our passion and love for God in a similar way.*

## **G. APPLICATION**

As we ponder on this first Session, let's take a moment to reflect on our own lives. Has the love that we first experienced as new believers waned? Have we grown cold or tired through not giving God enough time, or harbouring offence or feeling burnt out?

Perhaps take some time to pray to give this to Jesus now and embrace the opportunity for new life once again.

## **H. LOOKING FORWARD**

In session 2, we look at the relationship between love and suffering as we study Jesus words to the church in Sardis.

# SESSION 2

## Suffering for Jesus

**Key Passage:** *“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*  
Revelation 2:10b

### A. INTRODUCTION

We are studying the seven letters that were written to the churches in Asia Minor at the end of the first century, and asking the Question “How do we get love right?” Each session helps us with an area of our lives that we need to watch in our love relationship with God.

This session looks at Jesus message to the church in Sardis. His encouragement was expressed to a church that was already suffering and was about to experience even greater persecution. Jesus teaches the key to loving well is to endure the seasons of suffering. We need to dig deep to resist the urge to flee, escape or compromise. It is through patient endurance that God will be able to do his transforming work in us and we will be able to reap great reward.

---

*Loving well is a call to be fearless and resolute  
even in the face of suffering.*

---

### B. MAIN POINT

Last session we touched on what happens when we get love wrong. Similarly, it is possible to get the wrong picture of what loving God looks like. We may expect it to be smooth sailing and then become shocked when we encounter trials. Today we ask how do we respond in love when it gets tough?

Jesus wrote to the believers at Smyrna encouraging them *“not to fear what they are about to suffer”* (Rev 2:10). He was giving advice, something like you give to parents before they have children or couples before they marry... don't be surprised at the challenges that lay ahead. Don't give up it will all be worth it!

The challenges we face are actually designed to strengthen our faith and transform us (1 Peter 1:6-7). There is much more at stake than your current trials, conflicts and issues. Do not fear, suffering for the sake of your love for God will be well rewarded.

## C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

	SESSION 2
<b>Church</b>	Smyrna
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 2:8-11
<b>Title</b>	Suffering for Jesus
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Afflictions, poverty and slander
<b>Jesus praises</b>	You are truly rich, Faithful to Jesus
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Don't be afraid of suffering (Smyrna)
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Be faithful for the victor's crown. Tribulation would not last long. Hidden manner and a personalised white stone

Smyrna was a Port city with natural beauty. It was famous for longstanding loyalty to Rome and was the host city for competitive athletic games. It was heavily into ritual emperor worship. Christians there were persecuted because they would not engage in worship of the emperor. This meant they had to endure great financial deprivation and persecution. This meant that while the city was rich, the Christians in it were poor.

Opposition to Gospel in the region was so fierce that martyrdom was a real option (2:10, 13) and Polycarp from Smyrna martyred in 156 AD. To make matters worse, Jews spread lies falsely accusing them of being agitators against civil authorities (2:9) landing them in even more trouble.

## D. READ SCRIPTURE: Revelation 2:8-11

## E. STUDY SCRIPTURE (optional)

As you answer the following questions, after reading the text, take time to absorb the truth contained in them. Ask the Spirit to help you to apply it to your own life.

Suggested links include those listed below, but you are welcome to use your own:

- [https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/2/1/s\\_1169001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/2/1/s_1169001) (Scroll down for relevant verses, click on the tools button to access more)
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+2%3A8-11&version=ESV> (click on the tools to the right)
- <https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/2-8.htm> (tools are on the left or select commentary from the dropdown box at the top).



### **1. What were some of the challenges the believers at Smyrna were facing?**

*The believers at Smyrna were being challenged by cultural demands to participate in emperor worship. Some may have even traded their own identity as God's people for economic gain by joining trade guilds (akin to trade unions), who held their rituals and feasts in the temples (that also served as banks). The letter exhorts them to hold fast to God's ways and not to conform to cultural norms and expectations to avoid persecution.*

### **2. How would have the words John used to describe Jesus in v. 8 help believers to endure suffering? See also, Ps 118:6.**

*The description of Jesus as "The words of the First and the Last, who died and came to life" demonstrates that he is not asking of his followers to undergo something that he has not already gone through in his faithful witness to God. Jesus holds time and life in his hands. He has overcome. This description of Jesus would have brought great comfort to the Christians living in Smyrna. Christ who was the first and the Last, and had overcome death brought hope to those more severely persecuted.*

### **3. What is the crown of life (v. 10)? How would this term relate to the believers at Smyrna?**

*Jesus' call and invitation is extended to the believers to be faithful to Jesus even unto death with the promise they will receive the crown of life and avoid the final judgement (Rev 12:1, Matt 10:28, Luke 12:4-5). Smyrna was city where athletics were held something akin to the Olympic games. The crown was given to those who would compete and win in their respective events. This would have conveyed to them to give everything for the race that really matters. The race of life... even unto death. But that is not the real death. The second death is the one that is very real and permanent.*

The reference to two Greek words for crown. *Diadema* (royal crown) or *stephanos* (used here) joy and victory. Similar to what the Olympians earned, would have spoken strongly to the believers as Smyrna was known for the centre of athletic games.

## **F. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **1. What does suffering and persecution look like for us now?**

*Answer Guide: It might be a bit tricky having this discussion because today's Christian in Melbourne doesn't really face death or martyrdom. A good way to see what it looks like in our context is to ask: "what stops us from doing what we know we should do for God?" Why can't we speak freely about Christian topics, in what ways do we have to "hide" our Christianity.*

*Perhaps it's social pressure, perhaps it's backlash or even in some cases ... we might be prohibited by school or work laws.*

## **2. What is the correct Christian response to suffering and persecution (it's in the passage)?**

*Answer Guide: Perhaps this is a good time to talk about the Christian reaction to a Post-Christian world. In the Christian World (Australia until recently), there was little persecution for the Christian faith as the majority of Australia was Christian and built on Christian values. However, that has very clearly shifted and now Christianity is no longer the dominant belief system in Australia (with most people saying they have no religion). We have moved closer to being persecuted, and so now we need to consider what a good response to that will be.*

*In the text, the church in Smyrna is encouraged to endure and be faithful, unto death. Seriously discuss (as a group) what that means. I think it involves us continuing to pursue God faithfully, continuing to be an example of God's love and doing what's right even if there's a price to pay.*

## **3. How can we help suffering Christians around the world?**

*Answer Guide: It should be apparent to the group (especially after the first two questions) that we are not facing the worst suffering that Christians face today. Take some time to discuss the kinds of persecution our brothers and sisters face around the world. Perhaps members in your group have stories of people they know. If you'd like more information here is a good site:*

*<https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/about-persecution/>*

*Discuss ways that we can help. At FGA, we do work with Ps. Mophett in India and we also reach out to pastors via the IPIN project. Lately, churches are being persecuted in China and we are ministering to pastors to help them be faithful in these times of suffering.*

## **G. APPLICATION**

Have you been tempted to show support of the political and social status quo for economic gain or acceptance? Thinking back, and in the light of this study, how would you liked to have reacted?

How about we pray to give this to Jesus now, ask his Spirit to strengthen you and embrace the opportunity to be his witness once again on this race of life.

## **H. LOOKING FORWARD**

In Session 3 we look at ways we can fail to love God through comprise as we study the church of Pergamum and Thyatira.

# SESSION 3

## Don't Compromise

**Key Passage:** *"I am he who searches mind and the heart, and I will give to each one of you according to your works."* Revelation 2:23

### A. INTRODUCTION

This series looks at different ways we can get off track or go wrong in perceiving God's love or loving him well. This time we look at different ways we compromise. From Paul's letters, we see that Christians were not to take part in sacrificial meals held at pagan shrines but were otherwise free to eat whatever was put in front of them and whatever sold in the market (1 Cor 8:7-13, 10:20-21, Rom 14). However, some in the church at Pergamum and Thyatira seem to have taken that permitted flexibility all the way into cultural assimilation, which was displeasing to the Lord.

Some went further than just partaking in pagan rituals. They also were sexually permissive aligning with the culture of the day, and not treating their bodies as holy (1 Cor 6:19). These compromises were likened to spiritual adultery, from which repentance and forgiveness were the only cure if they were to be restored to fellowship with Christ.

### B. MAIN POINT

---

*Are we chasing the same things the world is chasing?*

---

Anyone who knows about business will tell you it comes at a cost. You need to invest time and money into building relationships, getting yourself known, promoting your product or brand. Getting along in business has always required strong relational connections and doing things the way that's expected.

Despite Jesus commending many in the churches we study today, it may have been the threat of social and economic disempowerment that led others in the congregation to follow the ways of "Jezebel". It is not clear if Jezebel refers to a literal false prophet or if it is a symbol for manipulating and threatening the believers, forcing them to compromise. Whichever it was, the result was the same - apostasy through spiritual allegiances and sexual relationships (2:24).

To clarify further, sexual immorality isn't a few ancient rules clung to by conservative persons when the rest of society has moved on. Rather, it's an understanding that they are part of the planned design of God that results in life-giving relationships from the union of a man and a woman (1 Cor 6:18-20). When we don't follow this pattern we fail in our faithfulness to Christ.

The stark warning to Thyatira was the strongest in the letters, indicates the gravity of the situation. Truth is the situation for both churches was critical but it wasn't hopeless. They were call to identify and put an end to inappropriate activity. Those who heeded the call were promised hidden manna (real food), a new name (v. 17) and the Morning Star (v. 16) revealing to us that ultimate pleasure is found in our union with Christ.

### C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

SESSION 3	
<b>Church</b>	Pergamum & Thyatira
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 2:12-29
<b>Title</b>	Don't Compromise
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Living in heart of warfare (Pergamum) Love, faith service and perseverance
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Hard work and doing more than before
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Tolerance of Jezebel spirit (Thyatira) Some follow Balaam idolatry & sexual immorality (Pergamum)
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Doing God's will to the end for authority over the nations. The morning star. Be dressed in white and written in the book of life.

Pergamum was known for its temples, particularly the towering altar to Zeus, with continual animal sacrifices. The god of healing, Asclepius was also worshiped there and attached to a temple would be a place where the sick would come with hope to receive healing from one of the sacred snakes (the origin of the medical symbol we still use today).

Thyatira was of commercial importance, attracting traders and artisans in particular. Many trade guilds (similar to trade unions), woolworkers, linen workers, garments, leatherworks, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers and bronze-smiths. Entwined with the trade guilds were religious rites and activities.

Banquets and meetings of guilders often took place within a temple or shrine where animals were offered to the gods and eaten by members of the guild. This posed serious problems, putting Christians in very difficult positions. They needed to be part

of the guild to make a living, if not it was economic suicide. Yet if they participated they would be unfaithful to the Lord.

## D. READ SCRIPTURE: Revelation 2:12-29

## E. STUDY SCRIPTURE (optional)

Break into TWO GROUPS and each can study one of the churches addressed in today's session.

Suggested links include those listed below, but you are welcome to use your own:

- [https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/2/1/s\\_1169001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/2/1/s_1169001) (Scroll down for relevant verses, click on the tools button to access more)
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+2%3A12-29&version=ESV> (click on the tools to the right)
- <https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/2-12.htm> (tools are on the left or select commentary from the dropdown box at the top).

## ABOUT THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM AND THYATIRA

### 1. What is good about the church?

PERGAMUM	THYATIRA
Revelation 2:13	Revelation 2:19
<p><i>They hold fast to Jesus' name, even to the extent that someone is willing to die for their faith.</i></p> <p><i>They do the big upfront things well, but in the hidden, secret areas they compromise.</i></p>	<p><i>They are getting better and better over time. They've steadily done more and more for God.</i></p>

## 2. What does the church do wrong?

PERGAMUM	THYATIRA
Revelation 2:14-16	Revelation 2:20-23
<p><i>They do the big upfront things well, but in the hidden, secret areas they compromise.</i></p> <p><i>They've watered down their teaching and listened and believed the false teachers. Research Balaam and Nicolaitans.</i></p>	<p><i>Even though it seems on the surface that they are doing more and more, they are also becoming more watered down in their morals. It seems like they are spreading thin and dropping moral standards while growing bigger and doing more. Research Jezebel.</i></p>

## F. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Suggestion: focus on Question 1 or Question 2 as the primary topic of the night.

### **1. In what ways is your morality different from that of someone that isn't a disciple of Jesus Christ? What are some of your moral convictions?**

*Answer Guide: This should be an interesting discussion topic. Depending on the stage of life you're at, you might be tempted to talk about "other people" or "other generations". Can I suggest that you keep the discussion focussed on our own lives and our own morality.*

*It's a good time to have an honest discussion about Christian moral standards. I'm sure it'll make for lively disagreement and discussion. Here's some fuel to make the discussion lively:*

- *Can I travel overseas with my girlfriend/boyfriend?*
- *Is sex before marriage wrong?*
- *Is porn a sin? Or what kinds of movies/songs become inappropriate for a Christian to like? Etc.*

*So here's a good framework for healthy discussion of differences in standards:*

*1. Biblical Absolutes: As the name implies, these are the truth statements provided for us in the Bible. As an absolute, we mean that these concepts are true no matter when or where we live. For example, the Bible makes it clear that all of us are sinners. Biblical absolutes stand tall regardless of current culture. The Bible's insistence that Jesus is the only means of salvation is entirely accurate, even though modern thinking wants to open up other pathways to God. No matter our ideas or preferences, absolutes are absolutes – even in a culture that wants to define truth as what works for you.*

*2. Community Standards: This second level of conviction contains the rules we choose to live by in our community of faith. They are not biblical directives, but they are*

agreed upon standards that allow our place in the body of Christ to be evident. For example, most of us worship on Sunday mornings. While local churches have been doing that for a very long time, it's not a Biblical absolute, is it? We may not be able to offer chapter and verse to insist that everyone act as we do, but in our community, this is what we do. Usually, there's a good reason behind the community standard.

3. *Personal Convictions:* This third group is comprised of those things that we have personally chosen as expressions of our faith in Christ. For some of us, there are things we won't do because of our convictions. Perhaps in our area of weakness, we pick a higher standard. For example, a married man may have different rules regarding being alone with the opposite sex than a single young adult.

4. *Personal Preferences:* This final group is filled with all sorts of ideas. It's "the way we like it" category of opinions and ideas. Music styles, Bible versions, carpet colours, ministry models, and so much more offer different approaches based on what I enjoy most. And yet, while these are the lowest group on the conviction scale, they are often the largest source of conflict. You see, many of us (especially when we've taken our eyes off of God's mission) simply want things to be the way we like them.

## **2. Let's talk about idolatry. What is different about a Christian's life priorities?**

*Answer Guide:* The things we pursue become our idols. If you feel like there's not enough to talk about regarding Christian Morals, then you can shift the discussion to focus more on talking about idolatry. The same framework is helpful:

1. *Biblical Absolutes:* What are some priorities that are mandated by the Bible?
2. *Community Standards:* What do focus on at FGA and what priorities to we have as part of a local church?
3. *Personal Convictions:* What are your personal priorities (as it relates to following Christ)
4. *Personal Preferences:* What things do you like to do?

## **G. APPLICATION**

If you feel convicted about an area of compromise in your life, confess your sins to God. You may need to talk to someone about it too (essential in cases of addiction/uncontrollable compulsion), such as your home group leader, pastor or a friend you can confide in. When we confess our sins to one another (we can be healed of the shame, guilt and condemnation. Spiritual ties that bind us can be easily broken in prayer through Jesus name, and you can be set on a new path to experience the promised joy and peace (Jam 5:16).

## **H. LOOKING FORWARD**

In Session 4 we look at the truth of doing things just for show as we take a look at Jesus words to Sardis.

# SESSION 4

## Not Just for Show

**Key Passage:** *“I am he who searches mind and the heart, and I will give to each one of you according to your works.”* Revelation 2:23

### A. INTRODUCTION

We are now at the fourth session of our Love Masterclass and we have seen there are lots of ways we can get love wrong. We can lose our first love, become confused and shrink back when times get tough, or we can give in to peers and pressures, be led astray by temporary pleasures and drift away from what brings us true life.

In this session we look at the church of Sardis. Jesus exposes them for the reality they are, shallow and empty. Jesus says they are dead. But even in the dead church, Jesus knows those who belong to him. He calls them worthy and they will wear clean garments and walk with Christ.

---

*The deception of indifference*

---

### B. MAIN POINT

Most of us have discovered that things are not always as they seem on the surface. What looks good in a promotion or advertisement can end in utter disappointment when in our hands. The same is true for our faith. We can put up a strong spiritual front and go through all the motions, but underneath we are empty and void. This is so far from what Jesus wants for our lives, he hates it and sees right through our acts.

Sardis was like that and Jesus condemned them for nominal Christianity. Their reputation was alive and vibrant but Jesus knew they were shallow and empty. They were called to “Wake up, strengthen what remains, remember, obey, repent” (3:2-3).

As the actual city had fallen into the hands of the enemy on two previous occasions due to lack of vigilance, they were to be watchful to shake of their apathy otherwise, as happened to them in the natural, Christ will come with judgement when they don’t expect.



## C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

	SESSION 4
<b>Church</b>	Sardis
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 3:1-6
<b>Title</b>	Not just for Show
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Their works
<b>Jesus praises</b>	A few people who have not soiled their garments
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Spiritually dead
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Be dressed in white and written in the book of life.

Sardis was also a busy commercial and industrial city, specialising in woollen trade. It was ideally situated at the junction of 5 trade routes. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC it was recognised as greatest city in the world, and King Croesus reigned there. However, because of its geographical location it was subjected to frequent earthquakes.

The city located on an almost impregnable hill with sheer cliffs on three sides that dropped some 500 meters to the valley below. Twice Sardis had been overthrown by a sneaky surprise attack, largely through negligence and complacency, as they thought they were impenetrable.

## D. READ PASSAGE: Revelation 3:1-6

## E. STUDY SCRIPTURE (optional)

As you answer the following questions, after reading the text, take time to absorb the truth contained in them. Ask the Spirit to help you to apply it to your own life.

Suggested links include those listed below, but you are welcome to use your own:

- [https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/3/1/s\\_1170001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/3/1/s_1170001) (Click on the tools button to access relevant verses)
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+3%3A1-6&version=ESV> (click on the tools to the right)
- <https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/3-1.htm> (tools are on the left or select commentary from the dropdown box at the top).

### 1. What is good about the church (Read Rev 3:1-2)?

*There's not much that is good about the church in Sardis!*

*Mainly, they have a good reputation. Spend time talking about what this would look like in a church today? How can a church have a reputation for being alive but actually*

*be dead? I think the key is in the spiritual temperature of a church (which people can't see from the outside). How much prayer goes on? What's worship like? Is God's presence there. Do people come to encounter God for primarily for other reasons (Sunday school, social, food etc)?*

## **2. What does the church do wrong (Read Rev 3:2-3)?**

*God finds that their work is incomplete. What's missing from their work as a church? I think the clue is in the things that are "hidden". That's why their reputation is good, but in the "sight of God" which sees all (Jer 17:10, Rev 2:23), they are not complete. What could those things be?*

## **3. What are the Lord's promises and who are they given to (Rev 3:5)?**

*Christ's depiction of himself, says he is in sovereign control over the churches and the source of spiritual power.*

*With their names written in the book of life (see Ex 32:32, Ps 69:28, Dan 7:10, 12:21. Also Rev 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 15; 21:27). They would never fear any further judgement.*

## **F. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **1. Let's talk first about our closest human love relationships. What things do we do for our reputation and for show? What are important hidden things to do (that other people can't see) that make a relationship stronger?**

*Answer Guide: Maybe time for a bit of fun in the home group. If there are married or dating people in the group you can share relationship secrets and tips. If it's a whole bunch of singles, you can talk about best friends or parent relationships.*

*The idea behind this discussion topic is that there are different things we do that give us the reputation of being in love e.g. Lots of Facebook photos of us smiling and having fun. And then there are things that we do that actually strengthen the relationship e.g. Discussing difficult topics and supporting the other person when they are weak or sick.*

### **2. What about our relationship with God? What things do we do that improves our external "reputation" and what are important hidden things to do that make our relationship with God stronger?**

*Answer Guide: Take time to be honest about things that Christians do just for the sake of appearing holy. Then contrast it with things that a Christian should be doing in their private life that is hard for people to see. Where possible, encourage the group to speak from personal experience.*

Spend time highlighting good private personal habits. Talk about what your home group members do. Perhaps they give in secret. Perhaps they spend time with God every day (what does that look like specifically). Perhaps they confess regularly.

### **3. What does it mean by “Jesus will come like a thief”? (Read Rev 16:15, Matt 24:43, 1 Thes 5:2-4 and 2 Pet 3:10)**

Answer Guide: Only do this if you have time. Do a bit of a Bible study on what it means for Jesus to come like a thief. The return of Jesus Christ is likened to the coming of a thief in the night. Two passages use the wording “a thief in the night”: Matthew 24:43, *“Understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into,”* and 1 Thessalonians 5:2, *“You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”*

It will help prepare for the Book of Revelation as we will be talking about the End Times and Jesus’ sudden and unexpected return!

## **G. APPLICATION**

Each session presents great opportunities for us to have a clean slate with God. This week is no exception. We have discussed what it is like for Christians to put on a show. Let’s now, before God, own some of the things we know we have done. We just need to say sorry, and ask God to kindle the true fire of the Holy Spirit in us once again. Let’s replace complacency with zealous concern.

## **H. LOOKING FORWARD**

In Session 5 we look at the only church who is entirely commended by Jesus, the church of Philadelphia.

# SESSION 5

## Patient Endurance

**Key Passage:** *“Because you have kept my word about patient endurance.”*  
Revelation 3:10

### A. INTRODUCTION

Philadelphia is a church that only attracts praise from Jesus. We may think this means they can relax and take it easy. To the contrary, Jesus exhorts them to continue to commit their lives with patient endurance.

There is a lot of similarity between our situation at FGAM and that of Philadelphia. This letter gives us something to aim for, provides us with a vision for what we can reach. Receiving the commendation from the Lord Jesus who has ‘the key of David’: the royal key that will open, or lock, any and every door.

---

*Patient endurance produces permanent riches*

---

### B. MAIN POINT

Sometimes it is hard to tell when people are authentic, and that the lives that portray are mirrored by inward disciplines and devotions. Philadelphia is the only church that is praised without condemnation. It has attracted God’s favour. He has opened the door. It is an opportunity for to encounter heaven and opportunity for spread of the gospel (1 Cor 16:9, 2 Cor 2:12, Col 4:3).

The challenge is to overcome the threats and side-tracks brought on by those who maybe well intentioned but destroy our walk. As we follow the call to patiently endure the will be kept in (not from) the time of trouble. By remaining faithful and true to the end we will share the victors crown, being a pillar in temple (foundations secure) and able to take weight, provide support for the whole body of Christ, not falling or vulnerable should there be an earthquake.

## C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

	SESSION 5
<b>Church</b>	Philadelphia
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 3:7-13
<b>Title</b>	Patient Endurance
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Good deeds, little power
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Patient endurance
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	<nothing>
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Hold on not to lose the crown. Being a stable pillar and receiving a new name.

Philadelphia was the youngest of the 7 cities, and is one of the few cities that is still around today. The Greek meaning "one who loves his brother". The city was known for its deep devotion to Rome. It was also a city of Earthquakes.

The Philadelphian church was small, poor and harassed by pagans and Jews. Yet to God it is a great church! They will be a stable pillar. To the church at Philadelphia Jesus said, "I am coming soon " which functions as encouragement to our faithfulness and patient endurance.

## D. READ SCRIPTURE: Revelation 3:7-13

## E. STUDY SCRIPTURE (Optional)

As you answer the following questions, after reading the text, take time to absorb the truth contained in them. Ask the Spirit to help you to apply it to your own life.

Suggested links include those listed below, but you are welcome to use your own:

- [https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/3/1/s\\_1170001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/3/1/s_1170001) (Scroll down for relevant verses, click on the tools button to access more)
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+3%3A7-13&version=ESV> (click on the tools to the right)
- <https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/3-7.htm> (tools are on the left or select commentary from the dropdown box at the top).

### 1. What is the Key of David?

*The key of David appears only twice in the Bible. The first time it appears is in Revelation where it states, "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write . . . who holds the KEY OF DAVID" (Rev 3:7). The speaker is the resurrected Jesus, whom John sees in a vision, and the message is to the church at Philadelphia. The possession of this*

key by Christ is used as proof that the Being addressing the church is God, "the Holy One, the One Who is true." The second occurrence of the key of David is in the book of Isaiah the prophet where it states, "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder (Eliakim as an allusion or type of Christ); so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Isaiah 22:22, KJV).

To hold the keys is to have true authority, because he had total supervision of the royal chambers. The one who held the keys was the one who would decide who could, and who could not, enter to see the king. Through this near historical period, Eliakim would hold the keys to the House of David. Christ gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom in Matthew 16:19. But who holds those keys now? Revelation 3:7 tells us that Jesus does. These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.

## **2. What is meant by a "pillar in the temple of my God"? Refer to 1 Timothy 3:15.**

There's a clue in 1 Timothy 3:15 that we are talking about our conduct. This means how we go about living our lives, how we relate to others around us. The church in Philadelphia even though they are small, they are an example of the kind of conduct that God wants his church to have. That's why they will be a pillar and foundation.

You can discuss what pillars do. How can a church be a pillar and buttress of the truth?

Key Verse: 1 Timothy 3:15 "So that if I am delayed, you will know how to conduct yourselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth."

## **F. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **1. What's going well at your church? Take time to talk about things that FGA is currently doing that are worth encouraging. What are our strengths?**

Answer Guide: We've had many weeks of looking at the things that can go wrong with our love relationship with Christ. This week we are going to take time to focus on the things that are going right. There'll be a temptation to discuss things that we could be doing better or highlight areas of improvement BUT please **redirect the discussion towards the encouragement of things that we are doing well.**

In every relationship it's important to encourage already good works or conduct, so that it can endure the distance. What are things that FGA is good at. What are we strong at? And how can we encourage it to continue?

### **2. In your love relationships (either with God or with others), what are things that are going well? Take time to give encouragement and focus on the building the positive aspects of your relationship.**

Answer Guide: This question doesn't imply that only the positive things need to be focussed on. In fact, many weeks have now been spent on talking about negative aspects of how we can show love wrongly. Today, we want to build the positive and

*do like Jesus does in His letter to the church in Philadelphia. He encourages the church and builds them up.*

*Perhaps if there are couples in your group, you can talk about things that the other person does that builds the relationship well. Focus on encouragement and building up.*

*Perhaps you can talk about things in your own walk with God that are so helpful. Things that you think you're doing well, that you'd like to continue doing.*

### **3. How can we practically encourage the patient faithful enduring continuation of healthy habits in our own home?**

*Answer Guide: Talk about how you can encourage the people in your home who are doing the right thing. Perhaps discuss love languages and how we show love (Look up Five Love Languages). Perhaps have a practical application for your home group where you have a ladies night (where men can encourage the ladies) and then a men's night (where the ladies can encourage the men). How can we honour one another better?*

## **G. APPLICATION**

Solution is to re-invite Jesus into it's corporate life which will necessitate a rejection of the idolatries that have impoverished, denuded and blinded the church (3:18). They needed a complete makeover. Call to replace complacency with zealous concern.

## **H. LOOKING FORWARD**

In session 6 we look at the result of being self-sufficient and becoming lukewarm.

# SESSION 6

## Don't be Lukewarm

**Key Passage:** "Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot or cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." Revelation 3:16

### A. INTRODUCTION

The church that was in deep trouble drew from the Lord the most intimate and loving promise. Just 30 years after the church was established, the spiritual condition of the Laodicean church had deteriorated to such a state that Jesus had nothing to commend them for. Instead they received the sternest reprimand. How could this happen?

From the letter we can infer that the decline of the church was attributed to its material wealth and their luxurious life-style. It seems that the self-sufficient and independent attitude of the city had rubbed off on the local believers. They ended up with unprecedented self-deception, instead of being rich and visionary, a source of healing, and well dressed, their true spiritual condition was "poor, blind pitiful and naked". Jesus found their tepid religion nauseating (3:16) and intolerable.

---

*The deception of self-sufficiency*

---

### B. BACKGROUND

	SESSION 6
<b>Church</b>	Laodicea
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 3:14-22
<b>Title</b>	Don't be Lukewarm
<b>Jesus knows</b>	True spiritual state that is opposite to what they think
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Nothing!
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Self-reliance and self-sufficiency.
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Intimate fellowship with Christ. Receive the victor's crown and sit on the heavenly throne.



Laodicea was the seventh church visited by the messenger who delivered the letters on foot. It was arguably one of the richest commercial centres in Asia Minor. They were fiercely independent. When the city was devastated by an earthquake in AD61, unlike Philadelphia and Sardis, they refused help from Rome for the rebuild. They had it all, or rather they thought they did.

Being the wealthiest city in the area, they were particularly famous for excellence in black wool, and chief medical centre for the Phrygia region. They were particularly famous for eye salve that was exported far and wide.

The church was established in 60s during Paul's Ephesian ministry (Acts 19:10), probably by Epaphras (Col 4:12-14). But Paul felt it was part of his oversight (Col 2:1) and asked the Colossian Christians to convey his greetings.

## C. MAIN POINT

Luke-warmness is not a metaphor for indifference or being a middle of the road church. It is not on the spectrum of two extremes (hot versus cold). Both hot and cold water are useful and beneficial but lukewarm water is disgusting to taste and unpalatable.

Despite that Jesus had no praise for this church, the Laodicean Christians were still sought after by Jesus their faithful friend and husband to be. Proof he is the Amen – Faithful and true witness. God offered them true riches that cannot be purchased with things of the world. Likewise, Jesus calls and woos us today (Isaiah 55:1-2).

Dining and feasting was a common symbol of intimacy both performed and spoken of by Jesus in the gospels. The picture of Christ knocking at the door is simple but profound representation of grace and freewill in action. He is willing but waiting for us to respond. We must open the door from within. What awaits is fellowship over heavenly food, providing a strong bond of affection and companionship.

## D. READ SCRIPTURE: Revelation 3:14-22

## E. STUDY SCRIPTURE

As you answer the following questions, after reading the text, take time to absorb the truth contained in them. Ask the Spirit to help you to apply it to your own life.

Suggested links include those listed below, but you are welcome to use your own:

- [https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/3/1/s\\_1170001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rev/3/1/s_1170001) (Scroll down for relevant verses, click on the tools button to access more)
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+3%3A14-22&version=ESV> (click on the tools to the right)
- <https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/3-14.htm> (tools are on the left or select commentary from the dropdown box at the top).

## 1. What does “lukewarm” mean in the passage (read Rev 3:15-16)?

*Do some study into what it means to be a lukewarm church and discuss what it really means. For Laodicea it was so bad that Jesus would want to spit them out of his mouth! Discuss what this means.*

*But how could Jesus say, I could wish that you were cold? We know His deepest desire is that we are hot, with an on-fire love for Him (Rev 3:19, where the word zealous is associated with this same word hot). Yet if they would not be hot, Jesus prefers cold rather than lukewarm. "So the Lord is saying, 'If instead of being lukewarm, you were so cold that should feel that coldness, then the very feeling of your need might drive you to the true warmth, but now in your luke-warmness, you have just enough to protect yourselves against a feeling of need.'" (Quote from Donald Barnhouse)*

## 2. What does the church do wrong (read Rev 3:17-18)?

*Because of their material wealth they don't need anything but in reality they are desperately poor. They need to repent and turn to Jesus, buying from Him the true riches they need. But they don't see that the shallowness of their riches neither do they see the value in being desperate for God.*

## F. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### 1. What does it mean to be a self-sufficient Christian? What are the signs of self-indulgence, self-confidence and self-satisfaction? How can we stop it from happening to us?

*Answer Guide: I find scenarios are helpful in answering this question. Take time to talk about the lives of your home group members (again remembering that it's not helpful to talk about "other" people). What things do we do that keep God out?*

*Perhaps we like to figure out things our own way and so there's little room for a step of faith? When was the last time we stepped out beyond our own strength?*

***You should definitely have a discussion about safety and risk.*** So many Christians take action to be safe. Safe financially (so they never give much to the kingdom), safe with their time (so they always have lots of time to watch TV and play sports to recharge, but not enough for the kingdom) etc.

### 2. What can we do to make our love life with Jesus HOT this year?

*Answer Guide: If the primary problem of being lukewarm is to do with self-reliance, then we must see that God is calling us to greater steps of faith and reliance on Him in this letter.*

*Take time to discuss what reliance on God looks like for your home group members. It's not just simply praying prayers and then going about with life as if you don't need God's response. It's not having our plans made up and then ensuring that there's no room for God to disrupt it.*

*What is it like to have the owner of the house knock on your door? What areas can God speak in to your life and how would he even do that? Have an honest discussion in your home group.*

## **G. APPLICATION**

Key Verse: Romans 2:4. "Or do you think lightly of the riches of his kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

Similar to the Laodiceans, it is easy to be deceived about our spiritual state. Just in case it applies to you, we invite you to say a prayer together. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can get back on the right path and love God well. We invite you to say this prayer together.

*Dear Father God,*

*We acknowledge that we have not gotten things right. We have become complacent, compromised and pursued our own pleasures rather than Jesus.*

*We say we are sorry. We ask your forgiveness for these things (pause and confess anything specific that comes to mind). Lead us Holy Spirit in a way that pleases you. Cleanse us by your blood and we shall be clean. Fill us with love for you once again.*

*Thank you for your mercy. Thank you for your grace. We love you and want to walk with you in fullness again.*

*We pray through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

## **H. LOOKING FORWARD**

Next session we will spend time reviewing the recipe for Love that is outlined in these letters. We will take the time to look at our own lives and FGAM, and how it applies to us today.

# SESSION 7

## What about you?

**Key Passage:** *“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and obey what is written in it, because the time is near”*  
Revelation 1:3

### A. INTRODUCTION

This session summarises the Masterclass of love learnt through the previous six sessions. As we recap of the letters to the churches, we are reminded that Jesus is not absent but speaks to us today.

While each church received a message reflecting its own situation, there was one overarching challenge. Whether or not people would compromise Christ’s standards for an easier or pleasure-filled life. Or would they be a faithful witness both to Jesus and follow in Jesus’ (and John’s) steps?

This is the bridegroom calling out his bride to prepare herself for future together and forever. This is the ultimate “fairytale” ending which is not a fairytale at all.

### B. MAIN POINT

In the series so far, we have seen that the Lord Jesus is not dead, absent, hidden, or silent. He is very present among his Church and speaks through his prophet to the distress and crisis of each situation. This is a revelation that comes ultimately from God (Rev 1:1-3).

Each letter in Revelation 2-3 has a core message specific to that church. What makes it so relevant, is that these are still the kinds of things that happen in any church today:

- Lack of Love (Ephesus)
- Fear of Suffering (Smyrna)
- Doctrinal and moral compromise (Pergamum & Thyatira)
- Spiritually dead (Sardis)
- Patiently enduring (Philadelphia)
- Lukewarm (Laodicea)

With each message to the church comes the exhortation *“to him who hears let him hear what the spirit says to the churches”*. Having written the plural “churches” means the call to hear applies to all Christians, everywhere and at all times. We are the bride of Christ, let’s make ourselves ready to love truly and faithfully.

## C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (REVIEW)

The seven churches addressed in Revelation Chapters 2-3 were located in Asia Minor, now known as Turkey. The letter was written some 30-40 years after the churches were established (~95 AD). Although they were established by Paul, and/or perhaps Aquilla and Pricilla things has started to unravel (some more than others). Through this series we have seen the pressures the young churches faced.

It was much harder to live out Christian life then. The region was controlled by Rome and the emperor, Titus Flavius Domitian, demanded all people must worship him as "Lord and God". Refusal to do so led to severe persecution. In addition, massive temples to pagan deities, as well as zealous Jewish synagogues and economic guilds (akin to strong trade unions) were powerfully entwined to control cultural and economic wellbeing. The letters show us how all of these directly or indirectly impacted the fledgling churches.

Perhaps this is why, before Jesus addresses the churches, we are awestruck by sounds and images conveyed when Jesus reveals his divine nature (Rev 1:1:9-20). This picture of the Lord Jesus Christ lifts us up out of life's daily challenges and leaves us with no doubt that he is the only true Lord and God. Equally reassuring is Christ's intimate interest and proximity to his beloved bride. He is the one standing among the lampstands (churches). Jesus sometimes gives strong words of rebuke to his beloved, but always follows with an genuine opportunities true intimacy, honour and power.

## D. READ SCRIPTURE: Revelation 2 & 3

## E. STUDY SCRIPTURE (Optional)

We invite all the home groups to reflect and answer the **Discussion Questions** in the next section. You may like to refer to the summary below for your discussion:

	SESSION 1	SESSION 2
<b>Church</b>	Intro & Ephesus	Smyrna
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 2:1-7 (and 1:9-20)	Rev 2:8-11
<b>Title</b>	Don't lose your first love	Suffering for Jesus
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Service, sacrifice, patience	Afflictions, poverty and slander
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Steadfastness to doctrine	You are truly rich, Faithful to Jesus
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Forgetting their first love	Don't be afraid of suffering (Smyrna)
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Cultivate intimacy with God and for each other, confess, restore what is neglected.	Be faithful for the victor's crown. Tribulation was short term. Hidden manna & an inscribed white stone.

	SESSION 3	SESSION 4	SESSION 5
<b>Church</b>	Pergamum & Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 2:12-29	Rev 3:1-6	Rev 3:7-13
<b>Characteristic</b>	Don't Compromise	Not just for Show	Patient Endurance
<b>Jesus knows</b>	Living in heart of warfare (Pergamum) Love, faith service and perseverance	Their works	Good deeds, little power
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Hard work and doing more than before	A few people who have not soiled their garments	Patient endurance
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Tolerance of Jezebel spirit (Thyatira) Some follow Balaam idolatry & sexual immorality (Pergamum)	Spiritually dead	Nothing!
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Doing God's will to the end for authority over the nations. The morning star.	Be dressed in white and written in the book of life.	Hold on not to lose your crown. Be a stable pillar and receive a new name.

	SESSION 6	SESSION 7
<b>Church</b>	Laodicea	FGAM & You
<b>Passage</b>	Rev 3:14-22	Rev 1:3
<b>Characteristic</b>	Don't be Lukewarm	What about you?
<b>Jesus knows</b>	True spiritual state that is opposite to what they think	All about us
<b>Jesus praises</b>	Nothing!	This is your chance to fill in the blanks
<b>Jesus condemns</b>	Self-reliance and self-sufficiency.	
<b>Jesus' Invitation</b>	Intimate fellowship with Christ. Receive the victor's crown and sit on the heavenly throne.	

## F. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### 1. Which of the messages to seven churches do you identify with and why?

*Answer Guide: There are really no set answers for this. I'm keen for the home group to have an honest discussion. Would be good to feedback to us which church letter was most relevant.*

*First century meaning of "martyrs" was a witness. We are not likely to be called to death as an end in itself but we are certainly called to faithful discipleship. But we must know, understand and reject all that defiles. True discipleship is costly. We are to follow in the example Jesus himself set. Let us love Jesus well, with all our heart.*

### 2. With which of the Christian churches do you feel most relevant to FGA?

*Answer Guide: There are really no set answers for this. I'm keen for the home group to have an honest discussion. Here are some pointers that may help your discussion*

- *Which letter is most applicable to FGAM? (it is ok if it is more than one)*
- *What is the prophetic significance of the letter (e.g. what is he warning us about? How should we respond?)*
- *Where have we patiently endured?*
- *What ways does God favour us?*
- *There will come a time when persecution increases. Are we prepared for it?*
- *There will come a time where people will come to us looking for God, are we ready for them?*
- *We have the opportunity to be a pillar to the wider body of Christ. How do we sure up our foundations?*

### 3. What is Jesus saying to us that we need to do about it?

*Answer Guide: Talk about what we can do after this session. It's our prophetic year, and I think it's a great time to get our walk with God back on track! What do we need to do to love God well as a Household of FAITH?*

*Christ desires a church characterised by fullness of good doctrine and loving practice, faithfulness and fearlessness, devotion to Jesus but not to the state and a preference for the poor rather than the rich (Matt 7:15, 21, Rev 18:4, Matt 28:20). What adjustments do you need to make, if any?*

## G. APPLICATION

Pray together as a group for yourselves and for FGA that we will love God well.

We would love feedback from you about how you see us as a church. Please write to our senior leaders ([slt@fgam.org.au](mailto:slt@fgam.org.au)) or to Chris Ong ([chris.ong@fgam.org.au](mailto:chris.ong@fgam.org.au)).

Alternatively, if you would like to speak to a pastor directly for your own concerns or walk with Christ please do not hesitate to be in contact with them directly or call our church office on 9296 5200 during business hours.