

7 Love Letters

(from Jesus to his bride)



Home Group Member Notes

February to May 2019

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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 we are 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?

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.

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
Church	Intro & Ephesus
Passage	Rev 2:1-7 (and 1:9-20)
Title	Don't lose your first love
Jesus knows	Service, sacrifice, patience
Jesus praises	Steadfastness to doctrine
Jesus condemns	Forgetting their first love
Jesus' Invitation	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 (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)

	ATTRIBUTE	REFERENCE
God	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1:4, 8• 1:8• 1:8• 1:4, Is 11:2
Jesus	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1:17, Isaiah 41:4, 6; 48:12.• 1:18• 1:18• 1:5

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

ABOUT THE CHURCH

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

Keywords (transliteration) may assist your research: 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)?

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)?

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.

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

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

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 get's 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
Church	Smyrna
Passage	Rev 2:8-11
Title	Suffering for Jesus
Jesus knows	Afflictions, poverty and slander
Jesus praises	You are truly rich, Faithful to Jesus
Jesus condemns	Don't be afraid of suffering (Smyrna)
Jesus' Invitation	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 (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?

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

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

F. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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

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

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

If you'd like more information here is a good site:

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

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 compromise 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
Church	Pergamum & Thyatira
Passage	Rev 2:12-29
Title	Don't Compromise
Jesus knows	Living in heart of warfare (Pergamum) Love, faith service and perseverance
Jesus praises	Hard work and doing more than before
Jesus condemns	Tolerance of Jezebel spirit (Thyatira) Some follow Balaam idolatry & sexual immorality (Pergamum)
Jesus' Invitation	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 (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

2. What does the church do wrong?

PERGAMUM	THYATIRA
Revelation 2:14-16	Revelation 2:20-23

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?

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

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
Church	Sardis
Passage	Rev 3:1-6
Title	Not just for Show
Jesus knows	Their works
Jesus praises	A few people who have not soiled their garments
Jesus condemns	Spiritually dead
Jesus' Invitation	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 routs. In the 6th century BC it was recognised as greatest city in the world, and King Croesus reigned there. However, because of it's geographical location it was subjected to frequent earthquakes.

The city located on an almost impregnable will with sheer cliffs on three sides that dropped some 500 meters to the valley below. Twice Sardis had been overthrown by a sneaky surprise attached, 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 (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)?

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

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

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?

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?

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)

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
Church	Philadelphia
Passage	Rev 3:7-13
Title	Patient Endurance
Jesus knows	Good deeds, little power
Jesus praises	Patient endurance
Jesus condemns	<nothing>
Jesus' Invitation	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 (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?

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

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

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
Church	Laodicea
Passage	Rev 3:14-22
Title	Don't be Lukewarm
Jesus knows	True spiritual state that is opposite to what they think
Jesus praises	Nothing!
Jesus condemns	Self-reliance and self-sufficiency.
Jesus' Invitation	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 (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)?

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

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?

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

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
Church	Intro & Ephesus	Smyrna
Passage	Rev 2:1-7 (and 1:9-20)	Rev 2:8-11
Title	Don't lose your first love	Suffering for Jesus
Jesus knows	Service, sacrifice, patience	Afflictions, poverty and slander
Jesus praises	Steadfastness to doctrine	You are truly rich, Faithful to Jesus
Jesus condemns	Forgetting their first love	Don't be afraid of suffering (Smyrna)
Jesus' Invitation	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
Church	Pergamum & Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia
Passage	Rev 2:12-29	Rev 3:1-6	Rev 3:7-13
Characteristic	Don't Compromise	Not just for Show	Patient Endurance
Jesus knows	Living in heart of warfare (Pergamum) Love, faith service and perseverance	Their works	Good deeds, little power
Jesus praises	Hard work and doing more than before	A few people who have not soiled their garments	Patient endurance
Jesus condemns	Tolerance of Jezebel spirit (Thyatira) Some follow Balaam idolatry & sexual immorality (Pergamum)	Spiritually dead	Nothing!
Jesus' Invitation	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
Church	Laodicea	FGAM & You
Passage	Rev 3:14-22	Rev 1:3
Characteristic	Don't be Lukewarm	What about you?
Jesus knows	True spiritual state that is opposite to what they think	All about us
Jesus praises	Nothing!	This is your chance to fill in the blanks
Jesus condemns	Self-reliance and self-sufficiency.	
Jesus' Invitation	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?
2. With which of the Christian churches do you feel most relevant to FGA?
3. What is Jesus saying to us that we need to do about it?

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) or to Chris Ong (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.