



# JESUS

HAS SOMETHING TO  
SAY TO HIS CHURCH

**STUDY GUIDE**



**LIFE CENTER**

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# INTRODUCTION

You're starting on a journey that has roots that go back two thousand years, yet still has a timeless message for today. The foundation of this message is that Jesus has something to say to His church. These words from Jesus were personal messages written to seven unique churches that were forming in the early days of the church — in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.



These letters are filled with layers of symbolism, cultural nuances, and timeless wisdom. These first-century churches faced challenges, but they received corrective direction from Jesus and promises that have moved beyond the past and through history to our present time.

Each of these letters conclude with the same statement, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

This isn't just a look at the past, it's an effort to gain the understanding that Jesus is in a continuous conversation with His church. How is Jesus inviting His church to listen and learn? How can we apply what Jesus is saying to our lives individually, but more importantly to the life of our church?

# WEEK 1

## Stay Passionately in Love with Jesus Church of Ephesus

Of the seven churches listed in Revelation, Ephesus was the most prominent in terms of theological significance and economic prosperity. It was a rich, proud, and busy port city with an agora (public marketplace), public baths, a library, and a theater that could seat approximately 25,000 people.

Ephesus contained one of the largest buildings in the world in that day. The temple of Artemis (or Diana) was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

**Population** | Over 250,000.

**Religion** | Home of the great Temple of Artemis, the center for worship of the goddess Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Roman).

**Economy** | The commercial center of Asia Minor in the First Century, Ephesus was not only significant to the broader culture at the time, but the city was also very important in the context of the ancient Christian world. Ephesus played a key role in the early years of the Christian movement.

**Response to Christ** | Paul had his most successful ministry in Ephesus. So many people became followers of Jesus there that the church became one of the most significant influences in the Christian movement at that time. It was known as the mother church in Asia Minor.

**Writings** | While in Ephesus, John wrote his gospel, three letters, and possibly the book of Revelation (after his return from Patmos). Three of Paul's letters relate to Ephesus: Ephesians and 1 & 2 Timothy. It's also possible that the two letters of Peter and that of Jude originated in that region.

With all of this influence and significance, the Ephesian church received a strong warning from Christ (Revelation 2:1-7): *"I know your hard work [...] but you have forsaken your first love."* The Ephesians were commended for doctrinal knowledge and zeal, but they lacked one thing— devotion to their first love.

## SCRIPTURE

“Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus: Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup> I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. <sup>3</sup> I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup> But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” Revelation 2:1-7 CSB

## MEMORY VERSE

“He answered, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” Luke 10:27 CSB

## OPENING

- Describe a time you fell in love, perhaps with your spouse, or a favorite pet, or a particular hobby or place in the world.
- Describe a time when you found yourself passionate and enthusiastic about a particular goal or activity and eventually lost interest.

## DISCUSSION

- What good things characterize the church of Ephesus?
- How do you think their strengths may have led to their failure?

## APPLICATION

- How do you maintain your passion for God while juggling a busy life and responsibilities?
- What practical steps can you take to Love Well in your relationships both inside the church and in your communities?

# WEEK 2

## Stay Strong in Times of Testing Church of Smyrna

Smyrna was one of the most influential cities in Asia Minor. Known today as Izmir, Turkey, it was a prominent port city with a proud tradition of literature, religion, and zealous allegiance to Rome. As you study Christ's letter to Smyrna, keep the following in mind:

**A Reborn City** | Smyrna was destroyed in 600 B.C. and rebuilt in 290 B.C. Because of this history, Smyrna was known as a city that died and came back to life (Revelation 2:8).

**Homer** | The Greek poet who wrote the ancient epic poems The Iliad and The Odyssey was born in Smyrna.

**Roman Allegiance** | As Rome came to power, Smyrna quickly showed support. It was one of the first cities in Asia Minor to construct a temple to worship the emperor Caesar.

**Economy and Culture** | Smyrna was known for fine wine, science, medicine, and the beauty of its buildings. Its hilltop was encircled by public buildings with elaborate column-laden entrances, famously known as its "crown of porticoes."

**Endurance** | Smyrna was the last city to fall to the Turkish Empire and adopt its religion (Islam), showing the people's strength and endurance.

**Church Leaders** | Two of John's disciples, Ignatius and Polycarp, ministered in Smyrna. Ignatius wrote four letters from here as he traveled to Rome to be martyred. Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna until he was martyred as well.

## SCRIPTURE

<sup>8</sup> “Write to the angel of the church in Smyrna: Thus says the First and the Last, the one who was dead and came to life: <sup>9</sup> I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup> Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup> Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will never be harmed by the second death.”  
Revelation 2:8-11 CSB

## MEMORY VERSE

*“You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* 1 Peter 1:6-7 CSB

## OPENING

- If you found yourself with some extra money, what would you like to do?
- Describe a time when you were resilient in the midst of a challenging time.

## DISCUSSION

- What problems is the church of Smyrna facing?
- What does this passage teach about suffering and affliction?

## APPLICATION

- In our society why do you think that our emotions are sometimes dependent upon our financial situation? How can we change our outlook in life so that we are not dependent solely on our financial situation?
- How do you maintain faithfulness and resilience in your spiritual journey when facing afflictions and financial hardships?
- In verse 9, what do you think the phrase: “you are rich” is in reference to?

# WEEK 3

## Live Above Reproach Church of Pergamum

Pergamum was Asia's capital for almost 250 years and was considered its greatest city. Its buildings towered 1,000 feet above the plain, projecting the image "of a royal city, the home of authority."

**Population** | Between 120,000 and 200,000.

**Education** | Home of the second-largest library in the world with some 200,000 volumes (second only to Alexandria, Egypt). Pioneered the use of parchment as a writing material.

**Economy** | Because Pergamum was not a port city nor on a major trade route, it was known more as a center of culture than commerce.

**Religion** | Home of emperor worship and the first temple to a living emperor (Caesar Augustus). The emperors brought peace and stability, so people worshiped them as "lord and god" or "lord and savior." Citizens in the Roman Empire were required by law to offer sacrifices to the emperor as a show of allegiance to Rome.

**Response to Christ** | Emperor worship was considered to be patriotic, so when people in Pergamum began to follow Jesus, their patriotism was questioned. For Christians, the titles of Lord, God, and Savior were exclusively reserved for Jesus. Christians in Pergamum were in danger every day.

**Knowledge and Wisdom** | Because of its impressive library, Pergamum was a center of learning. However, even in the church, this learning did not necessarily result in wisdom. Jesus commends them for remaining true to His name but rebukes them for allowing false doctrine to go unaddressed.

## SCRIPTURE

<sup>12</sup> “Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum: Thus says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword: <sup>13</sup> I know where you live—where Satan’s throne is. Yet you are holding on to my name and did not deny your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death among you, where Satan lives. <sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> So repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Revelation 2:12-17 CSB

## MEMORY VERSE

“Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.” 1 Peter 3:16-17 CSB

## OPENING

- What are some situations people face in which they are tempted to make a compromising decision?
- How would you define Integrity? And how would you define having integrity towards God?

## DISCUSSION

- What pressures were the believers in Pergamum facing?
- What does the phrase: “the one who has the sharp double edged sword” mean?

## APPLICATION

- How do you navigate through situations that might lead you to compromise your faith?
- What are some practical steps to ensure your faith remains solid and true to God’s word?

# WEEK 4

## Keep Making Improvements Church of Thyatira

Thyatira was an uneventful city with very little mention in antiquity. This city didn't share the glamor of Ephesus or Pergamum. Here are a few details as you consider Christ's letter to this church:

**Trade** | Thyatira was a blue-collar labor town that served as a trade city. It was built upon trades, guilds, and crafts. In fact, trade guilds (or unions) served the area as the center of commerce. So, John's description of Jesus' feet as "like burnished bronze" (Revelation 2:18) may have been familiar to a town with bronze guilds.

**Unions** | Trade unions dominated societal life. They had monthly meals and a strong pull on members. Plus, each union had a Greek god associated with it. Faithful worship was meant to ensure prosperity of the trade. Naturally, Christians who refused to participate faced isolation and suffered economically.

**The Apollo Cult** | Thyatira hosted a major cult of Apollo, the Greek god of the arts, the sun, and prophecy. The emperor was linked with Apollo and was likely worshiped in the city as the human embodiment of Apollo.

**The Church** | Perhaps one of the first people from Thyatira to put their faith in Christ was a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple cloth. We read about her conversion in Acts 16:14 when the Apostle Paul visited Philippi (where she lived at the time) and led her to the Lord.

### SCRIPTURE

<sup>18</sup> "Write to the angel of the church in Thyatira: Thus says the Son of God, the one whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze: <sup>19</sup> I know your works—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. <sup>20</sup> But I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives my servants

to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. <sup>22</sup> Look, I will throw her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great affliction. Unless they repent of her works, <sup>23</sup> I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works. <sup>24</sup> I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven't known "the so-called secrets of Satan" — as they say—I am not putting any other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> Only hold on to what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup> The one who conquers and who keeps my works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations—<sup>27</sup> and he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will shatter them like pottery — <sup>28</sup> just as I have received this from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 2:18-29 CSB

## MEMORY VERSE

"Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person." Colossians 4:5-6 CSB

## OPENING

- As a teenager, what person or group influenced you the most? How would you describe the influence?
- When have you seen your influence impact the lives of others?

## DISCUSSION

- What does scripture list as the strengths and weaknesses of this church?
- How should a believer respond to temptations according to verse 23?

## APPLICATION

- Which of the qualities in verse 19 best describes your relationship towards God?
- How do you maintain a balance between upholding your beliefs and building a bridge of love to those who may not share your beliefs?

# WEEK 5

## Let Your Reputation Match Your Label Church of Sardis

Sardis does not exist today. In fact, of all seven churches, Sardis and Laodicea are the only ones that don't exist. However, Sardis had a rich history including power, wealth, and prominence (to the point of arrogance). Here's some background to this city:

**Economy and Wealth** | Sardis was the capital city of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, strategically located on the communications route between Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum. It was famous for affluence and creative culture, such as arts and crafts, and was the first to mint gold and silver into coins.

**Power and Arrogance** | Sardis was the home of King Croesus who was legendary for his wealth, prosperity, and arrogant pride. In fact, Croesus' arrogance contributed to the destruction of his kingdom when he preemptively attacked the Persian armies.

**Downfall** | Sardis sat high on a plateau, protected by ridges up to 1,500 feet high, which created a sense of security and complacency. However, in 549 B.C., one of Persia's soldiers figured out how to climb the highest ridge (by watching a Lydian soldier) and staged a surprise attack. It was as though Sardis wasn't even paying attention. Revelation 3:2 contains a message to "Wake up!" — the people of Sardis would have understood this well.

**Devastation** | In A.D. 17, an earthquake destroyed the city. Rome sent relief aid; but the city, now saddled with debt, never recovered.

## SCRIPTURE

*“Write to the angel of the church in Sardis: Thus says the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before my God. <sup>3</sup> Remember, then, what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent. If you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you have no idea at what hour I will come upon you. <sup>4</sup> But you have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their clothes, and they will walk with me in white, because they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> In the same way, the one who conquers will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before my Father and before his angels. <sup>6</sup> Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Revelation 3:1-6 CSB

## MEMORY VERSE

*“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works.”* James 2:18 CSB

## OPENING

- Have you ever been part of a group that had a better reputation than performance?
- How do you react when someone’s words don’t match up with their actions?

## DISCUSSION

- What is the contrast between reputation and reality for the church in Sardis?
- What is the only hope for the survival of the church of Sardis according to Revelation 3?

## APPLICATION

- How do you live a life that isn’t just a reputation, but is a genuine relationship with God?
- What practices or habits can help develop a spiritual vitality?
- How can you support those in the church with this pursuit?

# WEEK 6

## Seize the Opportunities Church of Philadelphia

Sardis does not exist today. In fact, of all seven churches, Sardis and Laodicea are the only ones that don't exist. However, Sardis had a rich history including power, wealth, and prominence (to the point of arrogance). Here's some background to this city:

**History** | Philadelphia was founded to be a center of Greek culture and language, an outpost for spreading Hellenism to the regions of Lydia and Phrygia.

**Trade** | It benefitted from its location at the junction of several important trade routes, earning it the title "gateway to the East." Leather and textile business provided much income for the city.

**Geography** | The city was located in a volcanic region whose fertile soil was ideally suited for its well-known vineyards. The downside to living in such an area, however, was the increased risk of an earthquake.

**Devastation** | A powerful earthquake finally hit the city in A.D. 17, causing significant damage as aftershocks continued for 20 years. The city was eventually rebuilt through financial aid from Caesar Tiberius.

**Religion** | Their chief god was Dionysus, who was worshiped to ensure a productive grape and wine harvest. Jewish believers risked excommunication and disenfranchisement from the synagogue when they trusted Christ. Non-Jewish believers risked being branded as traitors.

### SCRIPTURE

<sup>7</sup> "Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia: Thus says the Holy One, the true one, the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and who closes and no one opens: <sup>8</sup> I know your works. Look, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because

you have but little power; yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup> Note this: I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> Because you have kept my command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown. <sup>12</sup> The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never go out again. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God—the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God—and my new name. <sup>13</sup> Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:7-13 CSB

### **MEMORY VERSE**

“But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, because a wide door for effective ministry has opened for me—yet many oppose me.” 1 Corinthians 16:8-9 CSB

### **OPENING**

- Describe a time when you were locked out.
- When have you recently experienced an act of faithfulness or kindness?

### **DISCUSSION**

- What challenges do you see the church in Philadelphia facing?
- How is this church able to persevere? How would you describe their enemies? How does their reward fit their faithfulness?

### **APPLICATION**

- When have you faced some closed doors in your life (career, relationships, schooling?) What’s been your response to these closed doors?
- How can we recognize and make the most of the open doors that God gives us? What about the open doors He gives to our church?

# WEEK 7

## Bring Jesus to the Table Church of Laodicea

Laodicea was one of three cities in the Lycus River Valley (with Hierapolis and Colossae). Named after Antiochus II's wife, Laodice, it was known as "Laodicea on the Lycus" to distinguish it from six other cities of the same name. Here are a few details as you consider Christ's letter to this church:

**Wealth** | Laodicea was an extremely rich city. The people so prided themselves on their financial independence that they refused Roman financial aid after an earthquake devastated the city in A.D. 60

**Medicine** | Laodicea had a School of Medicine, so it was the chief medical center of the region. One of its graduates wrote an influential textbook on the eye (still in use in the Middle Ages), and the city was also known for its eye salve.

**Textiles** | The city was renowned for its soft, raven-black wool, supposedly produced by sheep that drank certain water. This wool was used to make garments for the upper class of society.

**Water** | The city's major weakness was its water supply. Because the waters of the Lycus were undrinkable, they received their water through an aqueduct built by the Romans. But by the time the cold water arrived from Colossae, or the hot water from the springs in Hierapolis, it was lukewarm.

**Religion** | The major god worshiped in Laodicea was Zeus, the "Father of Gods and men." In April 2011, the head of a statue of Zeus was unearthed in excavations at this city.

### SCRIPTURE

<sup>14</sup> "Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation: <sup>15</sup> I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So,

because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. <sup>21</sup> To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 3:14-22 CSB

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Revelation 3:20 CSB

## **OPENING**

- What's your favorite choice of drink? Do you prefer hot or cold beverages?
- If you could invite any famous person for dinner, whom would you ask? Why?

## **DISCUSSION**

- How does Jesus view this church and how does the church view themselves? Why do you think they do not align?
- How would you describe Jesus from what you see in the letter to this church?

## **APPLICATION**

- How would you describe your current "spiritual temperature"? What are some warning signs that your faith might be cooling off?
- How can you support one another in times of spiritual challenge, and how do you maintain a place of vulnerability and authenticity within your relationships? How comfortable are you sharing personal challenges and struggles?

# LIFE GROUP GUIDELINES

**1. Make Room for the Holy Spirit:** When someone is sharing something deeply personal and/or painful, there can be a tendency to try to make them feel better about themselves or the situation. Often this will cause people to stop sharing, and results in their not going as deep as they might have gone. Resist the temptation to rescue people. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide the person into repentance and ultimately freedom. You may want to take time later to ask if you may offer some advice. (John 14:15-16)

**2. Confidentiality:** Prevent gossip that only values the story; Jesus always valued the person above their story or their sin. (Proverbs 16:28)

**3. Crosstalk:** Be considerate of others as they are sharing. Don't have side conversations. Trust is built in the moments when everyone feels like they are being listened to and heard by the entire group. Treat others in the group as you would want to be treated. (Mark 12:30-31)

**4. Use Humor Responsibly:** Fun is an essential part of Life Groups; however, when meeting keep sarcastic comments or jokes to a minimum to allow for a safe atmosphere where sharing is encouraged. (Ephesians 5:4)

**5. Give Everyone a Chance to Share:** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Encourage everyone to participate in group discussions. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

**6. Use "I" Statements:** During small group, we want to hear your personal thoughts and perspectives. Using "I" statements to answer discussion questions allows you to speak for yourself rather than generalizing by using terms such as "them," "the church," "us," or "we." (Matthew 7:3)

**7. Fight for Relationships:** Relationship reaches a whole new level when conflict is resolved in a healthy manner. When conflict or sin issues arise between group members, commit to fight for the relationship and discuss the struggle with the person you are in conflict with or seek Godly counsel. (Hebrews 12:14-15)

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