Welcome to our special series
Seven Churches of Revelation
at Liquid Church.

We designed this custom Study Guide to help you understand God’s Word, engage with the Sunday sermons, and spark discussion with your Liquid Small Group.
INTRODUCTION

In a culture that’s increasingly hostile to Christianity, people often ask if the Bible is still relevant today? They say, “Pastor Tim, is God still speaking?”

I believe He is. The real question is: “Are we listening?”

Imagine if our church received a letter from Jesus Himself. What would Christ say about our passion for God? Faithful service? Endurance in trials? Would His words bring commendation… or condemnation?

The truth is: We have such a letter. Revelation-- the last book of the Bible-- contains Jesus’ final words to His Church through 7 letters to 7 churches. Over the next 7 weeks, our church is going to examine Jesus’ words to these 7 churches… and consider what He is saying to ours!

Now don’t be intimidated. Revelation is one of the most intriguing (and misunderstood!) books in the New Testament. But through careful study, we’ll see that its message is crystal-clear & full of hope: Jesus Christ is alive, glorified, and coming soon!

I believe this series Seven Churches of Revelation has the potential to revolutionize your faith.

Here’s what you can do to maximize the next 7 weeks:

- Commit to attend Liquid every week to experience the Sunday sermon
- Read God’s Word yourself-- specifically, the first 3 chapters of Revelation
- Attend a Liquid Small Group so you can discuss, share, and pray with others about what you’re learning!

I believe Jesus is still speaking in these last days-- and His words of hope & warning are as relevant today as they were in the first century. So let’s open our ears & hear what the Spirit is saying!

With hope in Him,

Pastor Tim

Tim Lucas, Lead Pastor
Welcome to SEVEN, a study of Jesus’ letters to seven of the major churches in early Christianity. Thank you so much for your dedication and commitment to facilitate your group! We hope you are as excited as we are in the Groups Department to start on this amazing journey together. As Pastor Tim has mentioned, we are changing the dial from a more experiential study like Freeway -- where the focus was on Bearing Burdens -- whereas this study will be focused on the “A” of our ABCs of Life Group - Apply the Bible. Each Sunday, one of these seven letters will be unpacked and during the week, your group will study associated scriptures and learn how to read the Bible and apply it.

Our call as followers of Jesus is to be His disciples and to continue to learn about God and His word so that we grow in Him throughout our lives. The ultimate purpose of our discipleship, of course, is that as we grow we help others grow in their knowledge and love for Jesus! That is where you come in! Our groups are meant to be places where members can ask questions, flex their spiritual muscles and fall more deeply in love with Jesus all of the time! We want to do all we can to help you as leaders create an atmosphere and environment where this can happen.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We have customized this guide so that you and your group members can take it to Sunday service with you AND then bring it to group during the week and study together. In the Sunday portion of the guide, there is background information about each of the churches; a summary of the letter; the actual scripture and a place to take notes.

The Small Group Discussion section is divided into what we hope is by now, the familiar ABCs of Groups:

- **Apply the Bible**
- **Bear Burdens**
- **Chance to Serve**

In the Apply the Bible section, we have tried to provide thought-provoking, in-depth questions about the scripture we are studying plus associated scriptures. You have freedom to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you -- you do not have to answer every single question! However, you do want to stay on topic. Please be forewarned - this study may invite questions about end times - which is NOT the focus of this study - there may be those who want to focus on this - however - while there will be some discussion throughout - it is not the primary theme of these letters -so don’t let anyone hijack your meeting! This study is focused on Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation only, so feel free to redirect discussions to this study — there is PLENTY to discuss!

Be sure to listen to the Leader Training podcast this week provided in an email from your Groups Coordinator - there will be further tips about how to use this guide and a special message from Pastor Tim.
LEADERS INTRODUCTION

A word about what we would love for you to emphasize with your group members - and that is HOW TO APPLY THE BIBLE. We know God speaks through his word, but we do have to learn how to hear him and even read the bible in a personal and meaningful way. This guide is designed to help us learn to apply scripture in three broad areas: 1) What does this scripture teach me about JESUS; 2) What does this scripture say to the CHURCH: the universal Church and more directly to Liquid Church today; and 3) What is this scripture saying to ME personally?

This may be a new concept for you and the people in your group, so we have tried to provide guidance and some appropriate responses for you as you lead your group. It is our deepest desire that at the end of the series, SEVEN, God would have spoken to all of us in profound ways and that we are more passionately in love with Jesus and His people as a result.

We will be praying for you and your groups throughout this series as Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus, in Ephesians 3:4-19:

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

We can’t wait to hear how God works - if we can help in any way, by all means please reach out to your Groups Coordinator on your Campus! If you want to share photos of your group or highlights of what God is doing, go to: https://liquidchurch.formstack.com/forms/group_highlights at any time to share all that God is doing in your group!

To God be the Glory!

Pastor Karen for the entire Groups Department
INTRODUCTION

A SNAPSHOT OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

SETTING | It’s approximately 95 AD - 60 years after Jesus died and 30 years after the events in Acts and persecution against Jesus’ followers is heating up. John, the last living apostle, is exiled from the Roman Empire to a remote island, called Patmos, because of his influence in the Jesus movement. While John sits alone in exile, Jesus appears to him in all his glory and tells John to record what he sees.

THE SEVEN LETTERS | Jesus sends letters to churches under John’s care in Asia Minor to commend, rebuke and encourage them as they await his return. Jesus wants his people to be a source of light in the world (Matthew 5:14-16, Ephesians 2:10). These letters tell them how they are doing.

GENRE | Revelation is unique in the New Testament. Scholars refer to it as an “apocalyptic literature,” which simply means it uses symbols, visions, and supernatural imagery to communicate its message (similar to Daniel and Ezekiel in the Old Testament).
SEVEN LETTERS

1. To the Church in Ephesus
   Revelation 2:1-7

2. To the Church in Smyrna
   Revelation 2:8-11

3. To the Church in Pergamum
   Revelation 2:12-17

4. To the Church in Thyatira
   Revelation 2:18-29

5. To the Church in Sardis
   Revelation 3:1-6

6. To the Church in Philadelphia
   Revelation 3:7-13

7. To the Church in Laodicea
   Revelation 3:14-22
A Snapshot of Ephesus

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, the city was very important in the context of the ancient Christian world. It 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 here that the church became one of the most significant influences in early Christianity. 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 to Patmos). Three of Paul’s letters relate to Ephesus: Ephesians and 1 and 2 Timothy. And it is thought that possibly the two letters of Peter and that of Jude originated in that region.” (Halley’s Bible Handbook, Zondervan, p. 841).

Sunday Sermon Notes
A Letter to the Church in Ephesus:
THE FORGETFUL CHURCH

SUMMARY

While Ephesus had much influence and significance, the Ephesian Church receives 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. The church in Ephesus held true to solid teaching and persevered in troubled times. They wisely protected their people from false prophets and condemned the licentious living of the Nicolaitans. However, their love grew cold. Our Lord’s warning to them speaks of the high priority of always holding onto heartfelt love for Jesus and all that he has done for us. He came to break through death, sin, despair and darkness so we could walk with him on this earth.

SCRIPTURE | Revelation 2:1-7

1To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:
These are the words of him who holds the 7 stars in his right hand and walks among the 7 golden lampstands. 2I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.
5Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.
ICEBREAKER

Q: What words or phrases best describe an average person’s perception of the Book of Revelation? What has been your perception of Revelation? What contributed, positively or negatively, to your perspective?

APPLY THE BIBLE

Background: Each week as we travel through the series Seven Churches of Revelation, we’ll look at the unique characteristics of one of the 7 churches. Because Revelation can feel mysterious and somewhat cryptic to read, it’s important to remember that these were real churches with real people who lived in real time. We’ll be exploring the 7 letters sent to 7 churches in the late first century. The letters were penned by the Apostle John but were authored by the resurrected, glorified Jesus who came to John in a vision. As you read the 7 letters, you’ll see some common threads throughout. Jesus starts each letter with, “These are the words of…” and gives a one phrase description of himself. He then gives the church a job review. Depending on the Church, Jesus will affirm, commend, warn, scold or correct these churches. His goal is to keep them on the target, of fulfilling his mission to reach the world with the Good News. Jesus’ words were written specifically to them and the real issues they faced.

This week, we’ll examine the Church of Ephesus.

Have someone read the snapshot of Ephesus.

Q: Why is this background information so important to our understanding of the church in Ephesus? How would you describe the culture in which they lived and served? What is something new you’ve learned about the book of Revelation and Ephesus either from the sermon or the introduction?

The background study of the bible is incredibly important. The biblical writers themselves understood that by knowing the context and the customs of the times and culture the reader would have a better ability to skillfully apply the Bible to their daily living. Often when we read the original context, like in Ephesus, we can understand why certain topics were addressed.

The Ephesians lived in a hostile culture. The church was small and marginalized. They also had a reputation of causing problems (see Acts 19). Yet, in this incredibly dark place, the gospel was able to take hold and transform not just individual hearts, but an entire culture.

Read out loud the letter to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2: 1-7.
Q: What are your initial impressions of this church? What have they done right? What’s lacking? What will be the outcome if they continue this pattern?

Let your group share any thoughts that comes to mind.

The church has done many things well. They are a church that works hard for the spread of the gospel. They test all their leaders, exposing false leaders and pushing them away. They are an enduring church, who have not stopped enduring for Jesus. What they lack, however, is their first love for Jesus. This would be a great conversation starter for your group. What exactly does it mean to, ...“lose your first love?” Help your group understand that Jesus says, if they continue in this way, Jesus will shut down the Church. What could that mean?

CHRIST

In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. In this letter, Jesus is described as holding the 7 stars and walking among the 7 lampstands. As stated in Revelation 1, the 7 stars are angels for each church and the lampstands are the churches. Jesus is declaring his authority and oversight of these churches. He’s also expressing his deep care for them.

The book of Ephesians is a letter written from Paul to the church in Ephesus 30 years prior to Revelation. In short, the letter of Ephesians beautifully describes all that Jesus has done for them (chapters 1-3) and how they should respond to Jesus’ love and sacrifice (chapters 4-6).

Read together Ephesians 2:1-10.

Q: What had Christ done for them? How had they changed because of Jesus? What were they to become as a result? What happens when we forget or lose sight of these critical truths?

Jesus made us alive in Him. He seated us WITH Christ in the heavenly places. They were saved by grace. God made them into a work of art! This wasn’t anything that they were able to do in and of themselves, but completely a work of God. When we forget that reality, it is easy to make Christianity about achieving, performing, and doing rather than staying in a right relationship with Jesus.

CHURCH

Thirty years later, John draws the Ephesians back to their past. He tells them that they have “forsaken their first love.” He then asks them to remember how far they have fallen.

Q: What do you think happened for them to lose or forsake the love they had decades before? What’s the value of remembering or looking back?

New Testament Scholar NT Wright says, “It’s easy to let this slip. It’s easy to settle down into a vaguely comfortable existence which puts its own needs first and, sometimes, last as well. The Ephesian church needs to wake up, to remember how things used to be, to repent and get back on track.” ~ Revelation for Everyone

When we get comfortable with our relationship with God and take it for granted and go on living
our lives like we are at its center, we are in danger of losing our first love.

By remembering, and looking back it helps us to remember where we once were, when we first started to follow Christ. And once we remember, we will hopefully return to that place of intimacy and love for God.

Liquid Church is going to be 10 years old in 2017.

Q: Based on the passage we’ve read, what’s the warning for churches like Liquid? Is our lampstand in NJ permanent? Why or why not? Describe how a church can do good things, but be loveless or heartless. How may a church guard against this?

Liquid is a church that loves to work hard and serve Jesus. But even at Liquid, we can do good work and forget who we are doing good works for. We need to stay in a passionate love affair with Jesus, not just keeping right beliefs and the right behaviors. Try to get your group to share how we may guard against this practically?

Our lampstand can be snuffed out. Many churches believe the right things and do the right things, but they no longer do them for Jesus, and simply stop at an intellectual level. Jesus is calling us into a wholeheartedly love affair with Him.

We can guard against this by becoming aware of where our relationship with God has become stale. Brainstorm what that looks like practically.

ME
Keep in mind, as you compare and contrast these letters - that the Church is not a building; it’s a community of people. In the case of Ephesus, it’s not only the church that lost their love, but its people. Over time, PEOPLE can drift in their passion for Christ and in their pursuit of loving people.

Drifting happens to most Christ followers at some point in their spiritual walk.

Q: Has there been a time when you may have forsaken your first love for Christ and his people? What contributed to losing your passion for God and people? Do any of these resonate with you?

1. I grew bored. I lost interest in following God and serving the church.
2. I was wounded. Someone hurt me in the past and I’m leery of it happening again.
3. I became distracted by something else. My schedule is full of good things, but I don’t make time to pursue the best things: loving God and serving people.

Jesus told the Ephesians to repent, which means to turn around and go back to where they started.

Q: How does a person return to their first love in Christ? What steps or disciplines can help a person restore their passion?
The first step is to admit to God when you fall out of love with Him. Through confession, we make room to receive God’s power to return us to Him. (Have someone in your group read Psalm 51)

The second step is to obey Him. He invites us to return to Him, and this may mean that we need to confess and turn away from sin.

Also through practicing the spiritual disciplines of reading and meditating on Scripture, prayer, fellowship and worship we can reconnect to the heart of God.

Paul also wrote this to the Ephesians:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as God loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. —Ephesians 5:1-2

BEAR BURDENS

Go around your Group and ask if anyone can identify with doing lots of things for Jesus, but losing their passion for Jesus! Allow time for repentance and renewal in Him. You may want to read Psalm 51 as a sample prayer. Remember that repentance is simply turning FROM going in one direction (usually away from Jesus) and moving back towards Jesus - into his loving arms - a U-turn!

Have someone in your Group close in prayer, using these verses as a prayer:

God, we acknowledge that we are your dearly loved children. Our desire is to be genuine imitators of you! May your Spirit bring to our minds often this week that Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Because of that, we want to live lives of love. We want to love you and your people in a new fresh way this week. Renew our passion. Amen.

We are asking people to learn about biblical repentance this week. Throughout these letters, Jesus calls various churches to task for their lack….lack of love for him first and foremost; having our hearts filled with other things beside him; love for material things above spiritual; idolizing anything over Jesus. We know that we have been forgiven completely by Jesus’ death and resurrection, however, it pleases God our Father to search our hearts and ask for forgiveness for those things which take us away from Him. As background for you, read this parable of Jesus in Luke 18: 9-14:

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”
Jesus wants us to have the heart of a tax collector, not beaten down and humiliated, but humbled and grateful for all he has done for us! So often, we forget about HIM, just like those in Ephesus! However, when we have a posture of gratitude, we can put off those things from our ‘old self’ and put on our holiness and righteousness found in Jesus alone. When we do this, we find the true freedom to live as children of the most high God! This may take some practice for you and the members of your group, but it is big emphasis in Revelation, so we want to prepare you so that you are able to lead and model being transparent and open with your entire group. For further reading, go to James 5; 2 Corinthians 7:10, Psalm 514.

For this lesson, we ask the group to think about what it means to be passionate about Jesus - we can often do lots of good things - but can forget about Him! Help your group talk about this without judgment - recalling Romans 8:1 for everyone - “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

**CHANCE TO SERVE**

One of the best ways for your Group to become grow closer to Jesus and to one another is by serving together. There are many opportunities to serve on our Liquid website. Check out: [www.LiquidChurch.com/GroupsServe](http://www.LiquidChurch.com/GroupsServe) for local opportunities to serve. Many of these opportunities are family friendly; which is a great way to model service for your children.

Thank you for your generous and faithful hearts - Liquid Church wouldn’t be the Church we are without you! To God be the Glory!

At Liquid, we are passionate about serving. You know our heart for “getting out of our seats and into the streets!” We are working on developing local partnerships with organizations near each Liquid Campus. It would be wonderful for your group to think about this early on in your group and pick one day during this series to serve together. It strengthens your group and builds deeper relationships when you stand shoulder-to-shoulder and serve others. Ask one or two people in your group to be responsible for researching some options and present them to your group. It will be difficult for all of you to actually agree on a date/time! We are all busy - but try to get a majority of people to serve together - trust us - it will change the dynamic of your group!

Thank you for your continued dedication and care for your group - we couldn’t do this without you!
A REBORN CITY | Smyrna was destroyed in 600 BC and rebuilt in 290 BC. Because of this history, Smyrna was known as a city that died and came back to life (see Revelation 2:8).

HOMER | The Greek poet who wrote 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.

SUNDAY SERMON NOTES
A Letter to the Church in Smyrna:
THE SUFFERING CHURCH

SUMMARY

This week, we continue our series, Seven Churches of Revelation by exploring the letter written to the church in Smyrna. This was the second letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Smyrna is one of two churches that do not receive correction; instead, Jesus encourages them. In Smyrna, worshipping Caesar as Lord was a way of ensuring favor from Rome. It was patriotic and refusing to worship Caesar was unpatriotic - even treacherous. However, Jesus’ followers in Smyrna claimed Jesus as Lord, not Caesar, and they lost everything in return. They were poor, ostracized, and abused. (vv 9-10). They knew their faith would cost them their lives.

Their city - the one that had died and came back to life - the one encircled by a famous “crown of porticoes” - rejected them. However, the church grew and flourished anyway. The true Savior, the one who truly ‘died and came back to life again’ promised they would receive their own crown - ‘the crown of life’ (Revelation 2:8-10). Notice Jesus gives them no rebuke, only encouragement. The Smyrneans are living in this reality. Hunger, fear, betrayal and the threat of execution press against them on every side.

Into this reality, Christ reminds them their hope is not found in Caesar, Rome or their city; it’s found in him. They are facing execution, but Christ was executed before them - and then raised from the dead (1 Peter 3:21-23).

SCRIPTURE | Revelation 2:8-11

8To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:
These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.

11Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.
ICEBREAKER
In a sentence or two, describe one of the toughest seasons of your life.

APPLY THE BIBLE

Summary: This week, we continue our series by exploring the letter written to the church in Smyrna. This was the second letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. The Apostle John penned these letters which were delivered to him in a vision from the resurrected, glorified Jesus. In these letters, Jesus uses affirmation, warning, correction, promise and reward to help these churches stay on track with his mission for them. Smyrna is one of two churches that do not receive correction; instead, Jesus encourages them.

Q: Why is the background information so important to our understanding of the church in Smyrna? How would a travel guide describe this city? What would the attraction be? What do you think it would be like to live in Smyrna if you were a person who believed and declared Jesus as Lord?

The background study of the bible is incredibly important. The biblical writers themselves understood that by knowing the context and the customs of the times and culture the reader would have a better ability to skillfully apply the Bible to their daily living. Often when we read the original context, like in Ephesus, we can understand why certain topics were addressed and others not.

A travel guide would describe this as the city that died and came back to life. The attraction would be the crown of porticos, the Temple to Caesar, and this was where Homer was from. By declaring Jesus as Lord, you would be seen as a traitor because only Caesar could be Lord. The very fact that there was another competitive God to Caesar would be seen as a national threat.

Read together the letter to the Church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11.

Q: What are your initial impressions of the Church (either from the sermon or your own thoughts)?

Allow your group to share their thoughts.

CHRIST

In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To Smyrna, Jesus is described as the “First and the Last, who died and came back to life again” (v 8).

Q: What had Christ done for them? How had they changed because of Jesus? What were
they to become as a result? What happens when we forget or lose sight of these critical truths?

Jesus died for them on the cross. His death brought them from death to life. They were able to now live resurrected lives in Christ. It is important that we don’t forget that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not just there to save us, but His death and resurrection also sustains us spiritually. His resurrected life gives us the power for resurrection living. We can only put off sinful and deadly patterns in our lives because Jesus gave us victory over them.

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 15:1-26. Jesus was raised from the dead; because of this, we have hope. No matter what you face, the promise of new life in Christ - spiritual and physical - is offered to all who remain faithful to Christ.

Q: Why was it so important for Jesus to remind them that he is the beginning and the end of everything (the first and the last)? How would that have encouraged them in their current struggles? Twice in this passage, Jesus mentions the resurrection. Why? This would have shown that Jesus has authority over all things and people. As the people read this, they would have felt encouraged because no matter what their struggles were, Jesus was over all the powers that came against them. Since they were going to be experiencing greater persecution, they needed to be reminded that resurrection was available to them. Death was not the end.

CHURCH

“I know of your afflictions and poverty - yet you are rich!” Revelation 2:9

Q: In a political climate that demanded allegiance to Rome and declares Caesar as god, what afflictions would this church have endured? Though Jesus acknowledges their poverty, he still declares them rich. This sounds like a conflict. How could they be rich? What could Jesus be referring to?

The Romans combined religion and state to the point that Caesar had to be worshipped as god. One of the descriptions of Caesar was, “Caesar is Lord!” This put Christians in conflict with Caesar because they declared that “Jesus is Lord!” Being a Christ follower meant that you were a traitor to the state. Therefore, they would have experienced prison, ostracization, isolation and frequently, death.

While the people in Smyrna were poor materially, they were rich in Christ. He gave them salvation, holiness, hope, purpose and a future.

Contrast Jesus’ words to the impoverished Christians in Smyrna, to Paul’s words to Timothy who was serving in a church that had some significant wealth. Read together 1 Timothy 6:6-19.

Q: How does this passage put wealth and poverty into perspective?

It shows that even those who are in poverty, who have so little, can often be richer than most. And those that are rich, can actually be poor emotionally, relationally and spiritually. Poverty is not a sign of God’s judgment, but rather it is the byproduct of living in a sinful world. We don’t romanticize poverty, but often those who have so little understand their need. We must understand that even though we have things, e.g., family, jobs, homes, health, wealth, we are still NEEDY. We need Jesus!! He is our daily
manna and sustenance. We daily must surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus and ask not that our will be done, but that His be done in us and through us.

If you were able to lose all you owned, and perhaps your ability to earn more, how could you find security in this life? “Don’t be afraid of what you are afraid to suffer,” Revelation 2:10.

ME

“I know your afflictions and your poverty...do not be afraid” (Revelation 2:9-10). In other words, I know what you are going through. You are going to suffer. Do not be afraid. And Jesus was clear that Satan lurked behind these struggles (Rev 2:10). Satan wanted to tear the believers in Smyrna down so they would no longer trust, obey or turn to Christ; the Evil One wants to devour us as well. (1 Peter 5:8).

Q: Financial pressure, relationship breakdowns, overbearing temptations to sin - Satan uses these to weaken our resolve and turn our hearts from Christ. What are you facing that seems to be more than you can take? Remember that your Savior knows what you are going through. He is with you; he can help you (Hebrews 2: 18; 4:15). “The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Encourage your group to share the difficult things in their lives. This will be easy for some, far more difficult for others - give some space and time for this, but assure the group that you will have a time of prayer later in the meeting so this should not be the focus at this point in the meeting.

Have someone read Peter’s advice from 1 Peter 5:6-11. Spend a few minutes soaking up this encouragement.

Difficulty, struggle and even crisis can enter our lives at any time. The bad news is that we rarely get to choose when, where and how this will happen. But, we always get to choose how we’ll respond to trials. Smyrna seemed to be a group of people who knew how to respond to trial and pressure with faithfulness and obedience.

Q: Which of the following describes your first impulse or reaction when something bad happens or goes wrong?

Panic
Blame
Excuse
Withdrawal
Fight
Try to fix it
Complain

_____________ (Do you have another response?)
BEAR BURDENS

Briefly discuss the four statements below as a group. Share which jumps out at you right now?

I need joy while I endure intense physical suffering.
I want to experience a sense of God’s goodness in grief.
I need to find contentment in a season of shortage.
I want to experience God’s nearness and goodness when I feel abandoned and alone.

Discuss what place suffering plays in our discipleship. What good things can come to life when we are asked to struggle? As a means of encouragement, share times when you experienced significant spiritual growth through times of pain. Share these with your group and break into groups of two to pray for one another in two ways:

• For your struggles: for healing, finances, new jobs, relationships, etc.
• For you to see Jesus in the midst of your struggles and that you would experience spiritual growth during this time.

This week, we want to remind those who are going through intense periods of suffering that God is with them. He wants to comfort them and is with them in their trials. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

We suggest that you ask people to pray in smaller groups of 2-3 so that they may feel more comfortable sharing ‘hard’ things with one other person, rather than the whole group. This increases intimacy in your group and helps people practice praying. It is especially helpful if you pair people who may feel uncomfortable praying - they can help each other learn! Of course, never put anyone on the spot to pray aloud if they refuse your request. Groups are meant to be a safe place, where we can grow in grace with loving believers. If you continue to model love and support -- and PRAYER -- they will learn and grow in confidence in Christ. Thanks for all you are doing for God’s kingdom! We are praying for you!

CHANCE TO SERVE

We know that when we are going through difficult times, it can be life-giving to serve others. Take time to plan to serve together with your group. Have one member of your group be responsible to research and arrange a group serving activity, such as feeding the homeless on the Relief Bus. Check out these local opportunities at:
www.LiquidChurch.com/GroupsServe. Thank you for taking the time to give - it may mean the world to those who have so little.

Serving can take many different expressions. You may want to collect socks or hygiene items for the homeless or even go to a shelter and serve meals. Some groups use their creativity (baking, knitting, crafting, home repairs) and share that with others. Check out the website listed in your guide to research options that fit your group!

We so appreciate your sacrifice to lead your group. If you have any questions or want to let us know how it is going - please reach out to the Groups Coordinator at your campus! They would love to hear from you.
A Snapshot of Pergamum

Pergamum was Asia’s capital for almost 250 years and considered its greatest city. Its buildings towered 1,000 feet above the plain, projecting the image of a “royal city, the home of the 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 worshipped 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. Emperor worship was considered patriotic.

Response to Christ | 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 & 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 my name” but rebukes them for allowing false doctrine to go unaddressed (Revelation 2: 13-15).

Sunday Sermon Notes
A Letter to the Church in Pergamum:
THE COMPROMISING CHURCH

SUMMARY

This week, we continue our series, by exploring the letter written to the church in Pergamum. This was the third letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. The Church in Pergamum remained true to Christ and his teachings even in a culture steeped in emperor worship and satanic practices. 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 my name” but rebukes them for allowing false doctrine to go unaddressed (Revelation 2:13-15).

Something was wrong. Some in the church held to false teaching that promoted immorality and idolatry - and this was permitted! **Idolatry and Immorality** are two areas the church of Pergamum had allowed to invade their belief system. **Idolatry** is giving anything more prominence, significance or importance than our devotion to Jesus. **Immorality** involves sexual activity that goes beyond what God intended for human relationships. Immorality says, “God is withholding. Find more.”

**SCRIPTURE** | Revelation 2:12-17

12 To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:
These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. 15 Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.
ICEBREAKER
How would you summarize the highs and lows of this past week?

APPLY THE BIBLE
Summary: This week we explore the letter written to the church in Pergamum. This was the third letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. The Apostle John penned these letters which were delivered to him in a vision from the resurrected, glorified Jesus. In these letters, Jesus uses affirmation, warning, correction, promise, and reward to help these churches stay on track with his mission for them. Pergamum receives both praise and correction.

Q: Why is the background information so important to our understanding of the church in Pergamum? How is this city different from Ephesus or Smyrna? What’s unique about this city?
This city was the first to have a Temple dedicated to a living emperor (Caesar Augustus). Another name for Augustus was the “Son of God”. Also, this city is prized for being a center of culture and knowledge.

Read together the letter to the Church in Pergamum in Revelation 2:12-17.

Q: What are your initial impressions of the Church (either from the sermon or your own thoughts)?

CHRIST
In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To Pergamum, Jesus is the one described as the one with the sharp two-edged sword (v 12). The imagery of a two-edged sword is also found in Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 1:16.

Q: Read these passages together and discuss why God would describe himself this way. Why would it be helpful or important for the Church of Pergamum to see God as someone holding this type of sword?
Pergamum was a dark place. A place where the throne of Satan lived, where blind patriotism competed against the gospel. Jesus has the sword in His hand that can defeat the darkness. Jesus had power over this city, and He was at war with the forces of darkness and He is to eventually overwhelm them and protect His church.
CHURCH

The church of Pergamum receives both praise and correction.

Q: How did Jesus affirm them (v. 13)? What do you think it was like living as a Christian in this city? What kinds of things happened to Christians there? What needed correction in this Church? What were they tolerating? What had infiltrated their church community? Why was this wrong?

Jesus affirmed this Church because they would not deny His name, even amid the cultural pressure all around them. Living as a Christian must have been difficult, especially because Christians were perceived as anti-patriotic and seen with great skepticism. However, they had let false teaching infiltrate their church, and because of this they started to compromise on the truth. Most likely, they wanted the church to worship not only Jesus, but Caesar. When we do this, we risk compromising our truest identity. But Jesus is the ONLY way of salvation, and compromising our faith in Christ can shipwreck our lives.

At Liquid, two of our core values are: Grace Wins and Truth Is Relevant.

Q: In light of the struggles at Pergamum, how important is it for us to balance these two core truths? How can we practice this?

We want to reach out without selling out! Grace and Truth can seem like they are contradictions, but rather they are two sides of the same coin. Grace enables us to be open to others, to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, to show authenticate mercy and forgiveness on those who sin against us. But we must also be ruthless in protecting the truth of who Jesus is. Jesus alone is God and deserves our worship and allegiance. Any compromise of that must be resisted. There are some doctrines (essential teachings) that we cannot compromise on, but we can also have opinions that will not have definitive answers until we meet Jesus. It is important that we are unified on the essentials but have liberty on the non-essentials.

Satan is mentioned several times in this passage.

Q: How is he described in regards to Pergamum? Have you ever thought of Satan and his presence in this way? When and how? What pressures would a church in the “city of Satan” experience?

He is described as the ruler of Pergamum. John tells us that this is where his throne is and that he dwells there. Let your group discuss this and share their thoughts on Satan and how he is at work in the world. If Satan dwelled in your city, He would use every dirty trick in the book to steal, kill and destroy the church. He is a liar, one of the best. It is a miracle that this church was able to hold on as well as it did.

ME

Satan is known as a great deceiver.

Read together 2 Corinthians 11:12-15. In this passage, Paul passionately describes his approach to handling people who are disguising themselves as apostles but really are not.

Q: Discuss how he describes and relates Satan
to this situation.

One of the names of Satan is DECEIVER. He is a liar and often masquerades as an angel of light, or as something that is supposed to be good, charming and beautiful. It is a mask, hiding a vicious marauder underneath. Paul makes every effort to undermine their efforts of taking the true gospel forward.

Idolatry and Immorality are two areas the church of Pergamum had allowed to invade their belief system. Idolatry is giving anything more prominence, significance or importance than God. Even good things, like our families, jobs and serving at church! These things can become idolatrous when we elevate them over our devotion to Jesus.

Immorality involves sexual activity that goes beyond what God intended for human relationships. Immorality says, “God is withholding. Find more.”

**Q:** In what ways do people build idols today? Does idolatry always seem or look bad? Explain.

Pastor and author Tim Keller says that the human heart is an idol making factory. In other words, we can make anything into an idol. In our culture we often make success, sex, and acquiring more things - idols. Idolatry may not look bad from the outside looking in, but it is really in the heart. When we envy the possessions of others, or give more focus on our families and jobs, even serving than on loving God and being loved by Him, we can enter into idolatry. Our behavior may look good to others and it may even be the right thing, but the motives may be very different and destructive.

To those who remain faithful, Christ promises three things: hidden manna, a white stone and a new name (Revelation 2:17). The hidden manna is Jesus himself, the ‘bread of life” (John 6:48-51) and symbolizes all the blessings of knowing Christ (Ephesians 1:3). The white stone probably alludes to the stones awarded to victors in Roman athletic contests, which gave them access to the awards banquet. In the same way, Christ promises those who overcome will enter an eternal victory celebration.

The new name is perhaps the most intimate reward here - it’s something just between us and God. Throughout Scripture, God has a habit of giving people new names as a way of granting them a new start, a new identity, and a new future. Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel and Saul became Paul. While we do not yet know what our new name will be, we do know it will uniquely reflect his special love for us. God knows us better than anyone ever will, and he delights in this relationship. Whatever our name will be, we are assured of God’s eternal salvation and blessing.

**Q:** What does it mean to be given a “New Name” by Christ himself? Can you help one another guess what their new name may be? Have some fun and encourage one another with possible new names!

Theologian NT Wright has some additional interesting background information on this verse. He writes:

Pergamum’s great buildings were made of a black local stone. When people wanted to put up inscriptions, they obtained white marble on which to carve them. This was then fixed to the black
buildings, where it stood out all the more clearly. In addition—and this may tie in with the ‘hidden manna’—there was a custom of guests at a feast being given a stone with their name on as a ticket of admission. What name, then, is written on the stone? Is it a new name for the person concerned, or is it ‘the new name’ of Jesus the Messiah, as opposed to the ‘old names’ of the local and imperial gods and goddesses?  NT Wright.

A new name is the admission into eternal life. And that name is actually the name of Jesus the Messiah. He is who has given us a way to enter into life eternal through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Our old idols are broken and King Jesus is the true and rightful ruler of our lives.

BEAR BURDENS

Discuss how does Satan disguises immorality in our culture? Can you think of a time when you have bought into cultural lies?

It’s been said that the best way to spot counterfeit currency is to have studied intently the real thing.

Q: How does this principle apply to avoiding being deceived into idolatry and/or immorality? How can you spot a lie of Satan? What are some areas in your life that you recognize as being weak or vulnerable in respect to being deceived by Satan? Would you share this with your group so that they can pray that Jesus’ truth penetrates your heart?

Break up into smaller groups to read these passages together and discuss how these principles can help us avoid being caught up in Satan’s deceptions.

Read these passages as an encouragement to one another:

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:12

Q: What is the power of community in this respect? Would you consider becoming an accountability partner with someone in your group?

We know that our enemy, the evil one, prowls like a lion waiting to destroy us. Peter gives us this warning in his letter -- Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8. We must learn to be aware of Satan’s schemes and one way to do that is to be in the Word of God, reading the Bible, praying, growing closer to God. We also want to remember that as followers of Jesus, we can have victory over the evil one. We can sometimes over-attribute Satan as the cause for us to sin or mess up. We have to remember Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. When we know Jesus as Savior, we are given the Holy Spirit who is always there to help, guide and direct us, we must learn to listen to His voice.

As we do this, we begin to grow in what the bible calls, discernment, in other words, growing in
wisdom and understanding of God’s truth. Often, when we are just learning about Jesus, having wise counselors and those with more spiritual maturity, it is helpful to ask questions, bounce ideas and to pray for us. It is helpful to have people who love Jesus in our lives to be able to call when we feel attacked. Help members of your group break into smaller groups of two or three to cultivate deeper relationships. They may want to share areas of struggle and ask their partner to hold them accountable to change. That may mean texting one another, meeting up for coffee to check in to see how things are going, and especially checking in at group to see how they are doing. Explain that accountability ‘partners’ as they are sometimes known, does not mean policing the other person - but rather standing side-by-side in the trenches as we grow together in the love of Jesus!

Thank you for your leadership and hard work in caring well for your group and building a safe community where your members can learn to grow in their spiritual maturity!

CHANCE TO SERVE

When we serve others, especially those who are less fortunate, it helps us to prioritize those things which are most important in our lives. Check out these opportunities to serve at: www.LiquidChurch.com/GroupsServe. Working together in smaller outreaches reminds us of how blessed we truly are and bonds us together. Plan to serve soon and have fun! We want to say THANKS for giving of your time, energy and resources for those who are the lost and have the least!

Have you assigned someone in your group to be responsible for outreach research? When we delegate responsibilities to others in our group, it helps them 'own' the group and feel as though they are a part of it. Leading means learning how to identify strengths in others and building them up. We don’t have to do it all!

As always, we cannot thank you enough for your dedication, service and love for Jesus and his people! We are praying for you!
A SNAPSHOT OF THYATIRA

Thyatira was an uneventful city with very little mention in antiquity. This city did not share the glamour 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. Christians who refused to participate faced isolation and suffered economically.

THE APOLLO CULT | Thyatira housed a major cult of Apollo, the Greek god of the arts, the sun and prophecy. The emperor was linked to Apollo and was likely worshipped 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 he led her to the Lord.

SUNDAY SERMON NOTES
LETTER 4 THYATIRA

A Letter to the Church in THYATIRA:
THE WAYWARD CHURCH

SUMMARY

This week, we explore the fourth letter (of 7) written to the church in Thyatira. Thyatira seems split: some need strong warning, while others receive affirmation for their faithfulness. Thyatira was commended for their sense of true dedication. However, they had compromised in critical area of their lives, many lived a licentious life and eat food sacrificed to idols (they chose idolatry).

SCRIPTURE | Revelation 2:18-29

18 To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:
These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, 25 except to hold on to what you have until I come.’

26 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— 27 that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father. 28 I will also give that one the morning star. 29 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
ICEBREAKER
When have you felt strong peer pressure? How did you handle this social pull?

APPLY THE BIBLE
Summary: This week, we unpack the letter written to the church in Thyatira. This was the fourth letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Thyatira seems split: some need strong warning, while others receive affirmation for their faithfulness.

Q: Why is the background information so important to our understanding of the church in Thyatira? How is this city different from previous churches we’ve studied? What’s unique about this town?

This city is more of a blue collar town. It is home to a variety of unions and guilds of those who are in the trades like bronze and textiles. It was a center of great commerce.

Read together the letter to the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2:18-29.

Q: What are your initial impressions of this church (either from the sermon or your own thoughts)?

CHRIST
In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To Thyatira, Jesus describes himself as “whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.” Then he says, “I know.” The eyes may be an image of Jesus having the ability to see and know all. The feet are images of authority and action.

Q: Why would Thyatira need to see Jesus with this perspective?

They would have related to the bronze feet, since bronze making was prominent in Thyatira. However, they needed to also understand that Jesus SAW all things. And His sight could pierce through the cloud of confusion and hiding. Jesus saw both those that were doing well and needed affirmation, but also was quite aware of their sin and who was engaging and those who were not.

CHURCH
The Church of Thyatira receives both praise and correction.

Q: How does Jesus affirm them? What progress had they made? What do you think it was
like living as a Christian in this city? What pressures may they have felt? What needed correction in this church community? Why was this wrong? What progress have you seen in Liquid’s community? How do you respond if you see correction is needed?

He affirms their faith, their service and their love. He also affirms those who have held onto their testimony, who haven’t been swayed by the false teaching. They have done greater works than before, so they are growing in their impact.

This was a hard city in which to be a Christian. So much of commerce and government in the ancient world was tied to pagan worship. In Thyatira, it was specifically tied to Apollo who was the sun god. This seemed to have forced them to compromise and allow sexually immoral behavior to spread in the church. These acts came through a false prophet. False teaching is dangerous to the church.

Regarding the question about Liquid, we want to encourage positive discussion, but also be open about opportunities for change. Be cautious if some in your group begin to share anything inappropriate. We want to keep this discussion on the higher level, not mentioning specifics or names of people. Try to steer the conversation to how we can personally affect change, rather than disparage any individuals or ministries. WE, individually and together, can be part of growth as a church. It starts with US, individually!

ME

The people of Thyatira most likely faced enormous pressure to “fit in” financially, socially, and religiously. Our culture sends out messages constantly.

Q: In our culture, who or what are the messengers and what are the messages? Which are subtle and which overt? Which conflict with obedience and faithfulness of the way of God?

Broadly speaking, our culture sends lots of messages. Sexual immorality is rampant, the compromise of truth, as well as consumerism and greed that put ourselves first while allowing the poor and the oppressed to suffer.

One reason we compromise is because we believe that the consequences of our sinful actions will not come into play. We believe that they either won’t happen, we can avoid them, or they won’t be that bad and will be worth the risk.

Q: What’s broken in this thinking? What’s missing?

The consequences of sin will always find us. Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death.” Whether now or later, eventually your sin will find you and you will experience their consequences.

There are only two groups mentioned here - those who need to repent and those who need to keep going. Read Philippians 1:3-6, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (v. 6).

Q: Which group are you in? Is Christ calling you to repent or to keep going?

We are often blind to our own shortcomings. We pray as we are instructed in Psalm 139: 23-24:
Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

God will show us places He wants us to grow and change, when we ask Him! Encourage your group to be open to the Lord’s leading!

I will repay each of you according to your deeds (Revelation 2:23). Keep going….to those who are faithful, “I will give authority over the nations…I will give him the morning star.” (v 26;28). While we don’t know exactly what this means, we do know it is going to be “REALLY GOOD” in the end. Keep going. Your journey is not static. Your quest is to continue growing in faith and perseverance!

❤️ BEAR BURDENS

God loves it when we are faithful under pressure. To those who haven’t compromised under temptation, he says hold on to what you have. He doesn’t add anything to their list. He draws them back to their good deeds, love, faith, service and perseverance. He says, “Keep going!”

Q: How does Jesus’ encouragement resonate with you today? What situations do you need encouragement to “keep going?” Any areas of compromise surfacing with you that you need to repent of? [Remember, repentance means making a u-turn]. Are you willing to pray with your group a prayer of repentance? Would you be willing to ask someone in your group to hold you accountable for that U-turn?

You may not want to do it today, but pray that you would have the courage to ask for prayer in future group meetings. Remember we are called to this in James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

We want to encourage those who are turning to God in the midst of their struggles - it is so very difficult to stay faithful when it feels as though the world is spinning out of control or crumbling around us. When your group members share their difficulties, ask someone to pray for them right at that time. If you can point them to Jesus and use scripture, your group members can take that home with them and pray throughout the week!

If there has been areas of compromise, we don’t judge! Celebrate that they are learning to have the courage to be open and transparent - they are learning to come out of the darkness and into the glorious light of Jesus! This is where real freedom begins! We want to come alongside our friends, encouraging and reminding them that nothing can separate us from Jesus’ love (Romans 8: 35) and that he always welcomes us back when we turn back to him! (Luke 15).

♀ CHANCE TO SERVE

As Jesus draws us back to good deeds, consider serving together as a group! Rather than
meet one night, find an outreach that works for your group at:

www.LiquidChurch.com/GroupsServe  Jesus is glorified by our love, faith, service and perseverance. Remember - He says, “Keep going!” Thank you for your continued service and love for others - you are appreciated!

Have you found an outreach that fits your group? Need some fresh ideas? Reach out to your Groups Coordinator to brainstorm unique ideas for your group!

Thank you for your leadership! Your service is a gift to our Church. If you want to share any highlights or even pictures of your group meeting or serving, go to: https://liquidchurch.formstack.com/forms/group_highlights and share what is happening! It will encourage us to hear how God is at work.
THESE ARE THE WORDS OF THE SON OF GOD, WHOSE EYES ARE LIKE BLAZING FIRE.
—REVELATION 2:18
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.

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.

Sardis sat high on a plateau, protected by ridges up to 1500 ft high, which created a sense of security and complacency. However, in 549 BC, 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 – like they were asleep. Over 300 years later, the Syrians did the same thing! This may be why Christ says “Wake up!” (Revelation 3:2) People of Sardis would have understood this well.

In AD 17, an earthquake destroyed the city. Rome sent relief aid; but the city, now saddled with debt, never recovered.
LETTER 5 SARDIS

A Letter to the Church in SARDIS:

THE SLUMBERING CHURCH

SUMMARY

This week, we continue our series by exploring the letter written to the church in Sardis. This was the fifth letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Sardis lived in the past. It had a reputation for wealth, affluence and culture; but after the big earthquake in AD 17, it was reduced to nothing. They tried to prop up their reputation for life and vibrancy, but they were dead and dependent on Rome. It appears that this church had no lack of money, resources or talent. They weren’t experiencing serious persecution, and they had no issues with false doctrine. On the outside, everything seemed fine – perhaps even thriving. But Jesus says, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead…I have not found your deeds complete” (Revelation 3:1-2). This seems to be a form of spiritual sleepwalking – people who look awake but whose souls are asleep. When we spiritually sleepwalk, our heart is asleep, but our mind and body go through the motions. Jesus says, “Wake up!” He doesn’t just want our energy; he wants devotion in your heart to him. He hates when we do things - even good things – just to look good for others.

SCRIPTURE | Revelation 3:1-6

1To the angel of the church in Sardis write:
These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. 3Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

4Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. 6Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION
SARDIS: THE SLUMBERING CHURCH

ICEBREAKER
Have you ever sleepwalked? Tell a few stories of when you’ve been awakened suddenly. What happened? How did you respond?

APPLY THE BIBLE
This week, we explore the letter written to the church in Sardis. This was the fifth letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Sardis receives both praise and correction. It appears that they had no lack, were not under persecution, nor were they accepting false doctrines. The Church in Sardis was active, perhaps even busy! There was an energy people loved. The other churches in the area may have looked at them with admiration. Therefore, Jesus’ words can seem shocking! Sardis was full of respectable (but ultimately disobedient) Christians. They were spiritually complacent, working more to maintain their reputation than to serve God.

Q: Why is the background information so important to our understanding of the church in Sardis? How is this city different from previous churches we’ve studied? What’s unique about this town?

When we can understand what the church of Sardis was up against, we can see how Satan attacked that church and even crippled it. This was a city known for creativity and opulence, but was destroyed because of arrogance. This could also describe many cities and countries in our time as well.

Read together the letter to the church in Sardis in Revelation 3:1-6.

Q: What are your initial impressions of this church (either from the sermon or your own thoughts)?

CHRIST
In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To Sardis, he’s described this way: “The words of him who holds the 7 spirits of God” (Revelation 3:1). This description of Christ may seem odd to us, but in the Bible the number 7 represents completeness or fullness. So the “7 spirits of God” represents the fullness of the Holy Spirit himself.

Q: Why would this church need to be reminded about the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

The Spirit is the one who makes the church alive. Since the Church is dead, it needs a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit, so the power and authority of Christ can once again shine in that dark place.
John Stott writes, “So Jesus reminds the Church of Sardis that…Christ has the Holy Spirit…it is He who can animate our dead works and make them pulsate with life. He can rescue a dying Church and make it a living force in the community.”

Notice how the Spirit of God is at work in us. Without the Spirit’s work in your life, you are powerless to change. Stott concludes, “He dwells within you; but does he fill you? You possess Him; but does He possess you?” (p. 95)

Q: How would you answer Stott’s questions - does Christ fill you; does He possess you? Discuss as a group how you could work towards growing in this area.

As a leader, you may have to help people understand what it looks like to hear from the Holy Spirit, be led by the Spirit vs. doing things in our own flesh. Some supportive scriptures:

Romans 8:26
Like wise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

1 Corinthians 2:13
And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Ephesians 1:17
...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him...

CHURCH

The Church of Sardis doesn’t receive praise; they are quickly corrected.

Q: However, reading between the lines, what had been good in their past? What was once going right in Sardis? What was wrong? What was missing? What would the outcome be if they didn’t ‘wake-up’?

They had at one time heard and received the gospel. And that gospel was faithfully being preached. But over time, and probably through more and more persecution and resistance they started to grow complacent (like the city itself). If they did not wake up, Christ would come soon and take away their lampstand.

This is a huge warning to us as well. We must remember that God looks at our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7). He doesn’t want just energy; he wants devotion. He hates when we do things - even good things – out of a sense of tradition, duty or obligation.

Q: How would you define complacency?

Complacency is when we are self-satisfied and feel no need to continue or learn. The Christian is not called to be complacent, but to care for our hearts like we care for a garden. Gardens need to be tended constantly or else they will fall into disrepair.

What are signs of spiritual complacency in a church setting?

1Stott, John, “What Christ Thinks of the Church,” p. 94
In a home or marriage or relationship setting?  
How about a group setting?

**ME**

If you think about it, it’s sort of amazing that God would bother to write a letter to a church that is virtually dead. Why bother? Jesus offers grace and provides a plan for their renewal—“Wake up! Strengthen…Remember…Obey…Repent” (*Revelation 3:1, 3*). He points them back to what they received – the Gospel that was preached and the Spirit that was sent. But there is an urgency to act! There is a limit to this. God wrote them a letter, but the time will run out. He will return…“like a thief” (*Revelation 3:3*).

**Q:** What about you? What is the condition of your heart?

Have someone pray David’s prayer in *Psalm 139:23-24* for the group:

> “Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
> Try me and know my thoughts!  
> And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
> and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Ask the Lord to reveal this to you daily.

**BEAR BURDENS**

Discuss ways our hearts can go to sleep. In what spiritual areas can we go through the motions without engaging fully (heart, mind and body)? What’s the outcome for the spiritually asleep person?

Jesus says, “Wake up!”

Pray together for areas of our soul that need to be “woken up!”

*By now, we hope you and your group are growing in discernment, wisdom, and asking the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and turn in repentance. Help your group continue to share places in their hearts where they continue to struggle, continue to settle for less than God has for them or continue to compromise in areas where God is calling them to more! Where is He calling YOU to WAKE UP?*

*Thank you for modeling humility and transparency for your group. Sometimes, as leaders, we must be the first one to share hard things we are struggling with, which can actually break a group wide open from staying “on the surface” and allow your group to move to the next level of depth and biblical community. Be sure you are encouraging when someone shares for the first time and there is no judgment! Don’t have answers or solutions for them right away or let them off the hook -- allow them to recognize that the Holy Spirit is convicting them of something they likely need to change -- and encourage them for being brave enough to speak up! Pray for them (or have someone else in the group pray for them) and remind them that in they know Jesus as Savior of their lives, they are*
already forgiven — acknowledging this will be the first step in freedom!

♀ CHANCE TO SERVE

One way we can “wake up our hearts,” is by serving others. When we do this out of simple devotion to Jesus, with no expectation of thanks or return, we honor and glorify Him by our deeds. Consider signing up to serve together as a group this week. Some outreaches have waiting lists, so sign up soon! Go to: www.LiquidChurch.com/GroupsServe for more information. We appreciate all you do to advance the Kingdom through your service!

Some in your group may indeed be ‘waking up’ through this study -- encourage this as God works in and through your group members. One way to encourage this is to serve others -- often service awakens our love and devotion to others and to Jesus. We hope you have been able to find service opportunities which fit into your group life and schedule.

Your love and care for the people in your group is inspirational. We are praying that you are encouraged by this study and all the Lord is doing. Remember that you are part of God’s Kingdom work. Thank you!
He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says.  
—Revelation 3:6
A Snapshot of Philadelphia

Philadelphia was founded to be a center of Greek culture and language, an outpost for spreading Hellenism to the regions of Lydia and Phrygia. Here’s some background to this city:

**Trade** | Philadelphia benefited from its location at the juncture of several important trade routes, earning the title “Gateway to the East.” Leather and textile businesses provided much income to 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 threat of an earthquake.

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

**Religion** | Their chief god was Dionysus, who was worshipped 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 a traitor.
LETTER 6 PHILADELPHIA

A Letter to the Church in PHILADELPHIA:
THE ENDURING CHURCH

SUMMARY | Revelation 3:7-13

This week, we explore the letter written to the church in Philadelphia. This was the sixth letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Believers in Philadelphia were facing persecution all around them, much of it from the Jewish population of the city. Like Smyrna, this Jewish opposition was so fanatical that Christ calls it a synagogue of Satan. They “claim to be Jews though they are not, they are liars” (Revelation 3:9). The fierceness of this opposition probably tempted these Christ followers to keep their faith private – to hold their peace and mind private. Perhaps some church members counseled discretion rather than boldness, that they should avoid trouble when their beliefs ran against the grain of culture.

SCRIPTURE | Revelation 3:7-13

7 To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:
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. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. 13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
ICEBREAKER
Share a time when you have felt as though it was “you against the world.” What did that feel like? Did you hold your ground or did you give in to pressure to conform to others?

APPLY THE BIBLE
This week, we discuss the letter written to the church in Philadelphia. This was the sixth letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Philadelphia is one of only two in Revelation that receives no rebuke or correction (the other is Smyrna). Instead, in the midst of severe persecution and opposition, and in light of his return, Jesus offers comfort. He encourages them, “Hold onto what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).

Q: Why is the background information so important to our understanding of the church in Philadelphia? How is this city different from previous churches we’ve studied? What’s unique about this city?

The background can help put ourselves in the shoes of the early church and understand what they had to deal with as the church was growing. This is an agricultural city and was a major trade route in the ancient world. As a result, financially, it was considered a rich city.

Read together the letter to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-13.

Q: What are your initial impressions of this church (either from the sermon or your own thoughts)?

CHRIST
In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. Jesus describes himself to this church as the one “who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open.” (Revelation 3:7). His language refers to Isaiah 22 where Eliakim receives authority from the kingdom of Judah in negotiations with Assyria. In this act, Eliakim prefigures Jesus as the head of God’s household, the church (Hebrews 3:6). It is Jesus who has the keys, not only of “death and Hades,” (Revelation 1:18), but also of salvation. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Davidic King who would rescue the whole world from sin, death and evil. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, the door of salvation is all about Jesus, and how Jesus uniquely accomplishes it.

Scripture is clear that Jesus alone holds these keys, which means he alone is the gateway to
God. There are no others.

**Q:** Have you placed your faith and trust in Jesus, the “one who holds the key?” If so, share what it means to serve Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life?

This is a great opportunity for members of your group to share their testimonies! It is a wonderful way for your group to get even closer to one another. Everyone’s story will be different; and that is actually beautiful! You have the opportunity to point out to the very diverse members of your group that while each of you are so very different, you are each made in the image and likeness of God! (Gen 1:26) This is a pretty amazing God if we reflect him in some way and we are all so different!

In the guide, we ask if people have made a decision to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives. This is a great opportunity for your group members who have been “on the fence” to commit their lives to Jesus! While there is no right or wrong way to become a Christian, here are some guidelines for you in case this is the first time you have been privileged to come alongside a first-time follower of Jesus!

We like to keep it simple here at Liquid so we have ABCs to guide people to faith in Christ as well:

**The ABC’s of Becoming a Christian**

Becoming a Christian (or Christ follower) is the single most important decision you can make in life-- even more important than deciding who to marry! By starting a relationship with Jesus, you can have 100% confidence that:

- God has forgiven your sins
- Your future in Heaven is secure
- You have God’s Spirit inside of you forever

Starting a relationship with Jesus Christ isn’t complicated, but it does require a sincere heart. The Bible makes salvation as simple as A-B-C:

**A . . . Admit Your Sin.**

I realize sin isn’t a popular word in our culture, but it’s reality in this broken world. God created you and me for perfection, but we’ve all fallen short of God’s holy standards. In other words, we’re part of the problem. The Bible says:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

Salvation begins by A = Admitting Your Sin.

**B . . . Believe in Jesus.**

On the cross, God dealt decisively with our sin once and for all. Out of his radical love for you, God the Father sent his only Son Jesus to die as a substitute for your sin. Jesus demonstrated his power over sin and death by living a sinless life and rising from the dead!

You can receive eternal life by simply putting your faith in Christ’s death and resurrection:

To all who received him-- who believed in his name-- he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

Salvation is based on B = Believing in Jesus.

**C . . . Commit to Follow Christ.**

Becoming a Christian is not a one-time event. It’s a whole heart commitment to live the rest of your life for the glory of God. Jesus was resurrected back to life and wants to live his life through you.
When you trust in Jesus, he puts his Holy Spirit inside of you. The Spirit gives you a new power to live for Christ, love others like Jesus, and obey God’s will.

Salvation concludes with C = Committing to Follow Christ.

If you’re ready to start a relationship with Christ, you can pray this simple A-B-C prayer:

Heavenly Father, I come to you with a humble heart. I admit that I’m a sinner and need a Savior. Thank you for sending your son Jesus to live and die on the cross in my place. I believe his death and resurrection were for me. Jesus, I surrender my life to you and invite you into my heart through faith.

Forgive my sin. I turn from it now. Save me and fill me with the Holy Spirit. Thank you for eternal life and the promise of heaven. Jesus, I love you and commit to follow you all of my days.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Be sure that you celebrate! Some suggested language:

Congratulations, I have exciting news: You’ve officially joined the family of God! Through simple faith in Christ, you’ve passed from death to life and have the assurance of spending eternity with God in heaven.

No matter what you’ve done or where you’ve been, you can know for certain that your sins are now completely forgiven (past, present, and future) and God’s Spirit lives inside you!

This is just the beginning. As a new Christian, your next step is to find a Bible-based, Christ-centered church like Liquid and join other believers in the adventure of learning God’s Word and following Jesus together! You will want to consider being baptized – Liquid will be holding Baptism classes this Spring - encourage your group member to sign up on-line.

As a group, you will want to help your new “family-member” as they take the steps necessary to follow Jesus. Remind them that as soon as they go back home, or to their jobs, or back into “life” the evil one (Satan) will try to make them think that they made a wrong decision or that they are too unworthy -- that Jesus couldn’t possibly forgive them! Remind them of this amazing truth in:

Ephesians 1: 7-8

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight...

It’s all about Jesus - He purchases our redemption and forgives all of our sins - past, present and future! What a Savior, what a friend!

If you haven’t, ask your group leader if they would explain the good news of the gospel to you. Today could be the beginning of a new life with Christ!

**CHURCH**

The Church of Philadelphia doesn’t receive correction; Jesus comforts them. In the midst of severe persecution and opposition, and in light of his return, Jesus offers comfort. He encourages them, “Hold onto what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” (Revelation 3:11).

We may not understand all that God is accomplishing through our “troubles,” but we do
know he offers to comfort us in them. And he promises that “we can comfort those in our trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). Our troubles become a channel of comfort for others.

Q: Have you experienced Jesus’ comfort in the midst of trials? If so, share this with your group. If you haven’t or if you are experiencing severe trials right now, share this with your group and ask them how you can experience Jesus’ comfort today.

There are many places throughout scripture where God assures us that he is with us no matter what we are going through. Sharing some of these scriptures can be very encouraging for those who are experiencing suffering.

- Psalms in general are a great place for us when we are experiencing trials. It is where people are real with their struggles, despair, heartache and all emotions. Most of them resolve by pointing to God for comfort in the middle of trials.
  - Psalm 23 (a familiar psalm, although often read at funerals, it is a promise that when we are in the ‘valley’ God promises to be with us.
  - Psalm 46 reminds us that God is our refuge and strength, and ever present hope in times of trouble.
  - Psalm 56 tells us that God actually collects our tears in a bottle - he knows our agony and our pain and wants to comfort us.

- Isaiah 43 reminds us that God is with us as the waters rise, he will not allow them to overwhelm us, he tells us that we are precious in his sight -- that we do not have to fear.
- 2 Corinthians 1 reminds us that Jesus comforts us in all our afflictions.
- The book of James reminds us that our suffering has a purpose and God does not allow us to endure alone.
- In 1 Peter 4, Peter reminds us that when we suffer (for standing up for our faith) we are sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and that ultimately, God’s glory will be revealed.

Today, ask the Lord to help you be more aware of those around you who are experiencing trials and troubles. Commit to graciously sharing with them what God has done for you.

ME

A consistent theme in Jesus’ letters to these churches is, “This world isn’t all there is. I have so much more for you.” For those who overcome and remain faithful, Jesus has promised incredible rewards. (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21). To those in the church in Philadelphia, Jesus promises, “I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God” (Revelation 3:12). This would have been particularly significant to those in earthquake-prone Asia-Minor; pillars were the last things standing when everything else falls.

Q: What significance does eternity have in your life today?

This is a great time to talk with your group about our future hope. We do not live for all that earth has for us, but know that we shall live FOREVER when we put our faith in Christ! Hopefully this
truth helps us hold loosely to this world -- living well for today - but understanding that this world is not our ultimate destination. Help your group understand this - it is a difficult concept for sure..... perhaps you can read Paul's astounding words in Philippians 3:12-21:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

❤ BEAR BURDENS

Discuss what is threatening to shatter your world right now? What battles are you facing? In the midst of your “earthquakes” and the spiritual battles that beckon you to compromise, remember this: “Stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13).

Share your “battle” now with the group and ask them to pray with you to help you believe that God will give you the power to stand now and in eternity.

Hopefully, you and your group have grown in trust for one another and will be able to share the ‘battles’ they are currently facing. Gently help them distinguish from battles they have created, or battles they experience because they are choosing to trust God and not compromise their faith. There is a BIG difference! Often part of growing in Jesus understanding that we are sinners and we are sinned against, but Jesus loves us either way and is always moving towards us in grace and mercy.

Pray with gentleness and love if someone in your group shares a very personal ‘battle’ and remind them of their great value and love in Jesus.

👁 CHANCE TO SERVE

One way to share all that God has done for us is to serve others who are in need. Have you gone out to make a difference in our world? Take a look at our website to find opportunities for your group to share Jesus’ love with others. Check out: www.LiquidChurch.com/GroupsServe for ways you can serve Christ on the streets!

We’d love to hear your reports on how your group was able to serve during SEVEN. Please let us know how it went! If you haven’t been able to yet, be sure to make a commitment soon.
Thank you again for your service to Liquid, you are so special to us. If you were privileged to lead members of your group to Jesus - please let us know. We would love to be able to pray with you (and them) as they begin this amazing adventure with Jesus. Be sure they consider baptism this spring. Sign ups can be found at: http://liquidchurch.com/life-events/baptism/

We are so grateful for all you do!
I AM COMING SOON.
—REVELATION 3:11
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 60 AD.

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, 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 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 worshipped 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.

A SNAPSHOT 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:

SUNDAY SERMON NOTES
A Letter to the Church in LAODICEA:
THE LUKEWARM CHURCH

SUMMARY

This week, we conclude our series Seven Churches of Revelation by exploring the final and seventh letter written to the church in Laodicea. It seems that the congregation in Laodicea was filled with self-satisfied churchgoers. They said, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need anyone or anything” (Revelation 3:17). And they were right – materially speaking. They lived in a prosperous banking center, located in a rich, agricultural region at the center of several key trade routes. Laodicea was rebuked because they imagined their spiritual wealth mirrored their city’s material wealth. Jesus calls for repentance in v. 19 and he follows up with a gracious invitation in v. 20:

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” Eating speaks of fellowship, communion and intimacy. To those who repent and have this close connection to him, Jesus promises a seat on his heavenly throne (Revelation 3:21). Jesus doesn’t just want to save you – He wants to know you!

Scripture | Revelation 3:14-22
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14To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:
These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.
15I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.
19Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.
21To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
ICEBREAKER
At a restaurant, do you typically prefer ice water, hot tea, or room temperature water? Why?

APPLY THE BIBLE
This week, we conclude our study by exploring the letter written to the church in Laodicea. This was the seventh and final letter written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Laodicea receives a huge correction and an intimate invitation.

Q: Why is the background information so important to our understanding of the church in Laodicea? How is this city different from previous churches we’ve studied? What’s unique about this city?

It helps us understand what the early believers were facing and how they thought about the trials that were coming their way. This is a city that is known for its wealth, its medical school and its financial independence from Rome.

Read together the letter to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22.

Q: What are your initial impressions of this church (either from the sermon or your own thoughts)?

CHRIST
In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To the Church in Laodicea, he identifies himself as “the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Ruler of God’s Creation” (Revelation 3:14). These words communicate some powerful truths about Jesus.

- Jesus is the Amen because he is the One who confirmed all of God’s promises (2 Corinthians 1:20).
- Jesus is the faithful and true witness because his testimony is completely trustworthy, accurate, and always reliable (John 12:49-50; John 14:6).
- Jesus is the ruler of God’s creation because through his power all things were created (John 1:1-2; Hebrews 1:1-2).

Q: Why do you think these descriptions would be important for the people in the church of Laodicea to hear? Which ones are important for us to think about today? Explain why.
They had lost their centering on Jesus, and their zeal and passion. They needed to be reminded that no matter how “successful” they were, they had no success unless it was in Christ.

You may want to discuss the state of the Christian church in the USA and even here in NJ and what is most important for us to remember. As always, we want to keep the conversation positive and pointing towards Jesus. If people begin to use specific names or the discussion become disparaging, you should step in and redirect the conversation. You could offer to pray for our country together as a group.

CHURCH

The Laodicean Church doesn’t receive any affirmation; Jesus corrected them immediately. The city and the church boasted of their wealth and independence. “You say, I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing” (Revelation 3:17). But Jesus called them wretched, poor and pitiful. What is alarming is the fact that the people of Laodicea didn’t see themselves as Jesus did.

Q: How does this happen to a church? To a country? What factors contribute to a group of people losing an accurate self-awareness? What happened in Laodicea?

When people start to drift from their identity and values, we find ourselves in this place. The church in Laodicea had done this. It had drifted away from the anchor of Christ and because of this, it had lost sight of what was truly important.

Jesus called them lukewarm; this is a reference to water. They knew the refreshing power of cold water and the cleaning and medicinal power of hot water. In comparison, lukewarm water was useless.

Q: How would you describe a lukewarm church? (Don’t mention any church names, just give descriptive statements).

• A church that is more concerned about the needs of those inside the walls than those on the outside.
• A church that is no longer passionate about holiness (being like Jesus).
• A church that is no longer learning.
• A church that is judgmental.
• A church that is complacent.
• A church that is more concerned about doing things without a focus on Jesus.
• A church that is cruel to those who are hurting.
• A church that doesn’t speak against cultural sins such as racism, mercy and oppression of the marginalized.

Jesus tells them three things they need in order to get back on track. He tells them to buy his refined gold, to put on white clothes to cover their nakedness, and to apply salve to their eyes so they can see.

Q: How do these three things connect with history? What is the spiritual meaning to each
of these?

This is a city known for its financial independence. They also made a raven-black wool for the upper elite and they were also famous for making eye salve. Jesus is telling them that they need the spiritual version of these things in order to be realigned with Him. To hold on to their riches in Christ, the things that will last forever.

The spiritually “blind, bankrupt and naked” Laodiceans obviously had no resources to buy from Jesus gold, garments or salve for their eyes. They did not realize they did have a need — the grace from Jesus who opens our eyes, clothes us in his own righteousness, and makes us rich in mercy and grace. Here are scripture references for all three of these:

- **Blind:** When Paul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:18 the bible tells us that something like scales falls from his eyes:
  - And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.
  - We sing Amazing grace, I once was blind but now I see - John 9:40-42

- **Naked:** Isaiah 61:10 - I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

- **Rich:** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2: 4-10

**ME**

Think about the word, “lukewarm.” Lukewarm water is hot water that cooled, or cold water that, over time, stopped being refreshing.

**Q:** What are some of the characteristics of a lukewarm Christian? Describe how a passionate follower of Christ can become lukewarm? Why did Jesus use such strong language?

In the Greek, Jesus will actually vomit out what is lukewarm. We can become lukewarm through discouragement, theological compromise, spiritual laziness and complacency. If we stay in this state we can actually become cut off from Christ and the life He gives to us.

**BEAR BURDENS**

Jesus disciplines those he loves like a loving parent corrects a disobedient child.

**Q:** Tell of a time when you experienced Jesus’ discipline or correction. Did it feel like love?
Jesus invites the wayward Church to open the door of fellowship with him. “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (Revelation 3:20). In the ancient world, dining together was the ultimate symbol of friendship and love.

**Q:** Is God knocking on any doors in your life? Here are some options to discuss:
- Your beliefs
- Your habits
- Your friendships
- Your finances
- Your marriage or dating life
- Your home or family
- Your emotional world

*What would it look like for Jesus to enter into that room and dine with you?*

**SUMMARY**

Pray together and ask the Lord to reveal all areas of your life he wants you to surrender to him. Has the Holy Spirit been speaking to you throughout the 7 weeks of this study? What have you heard Him say to you? As a reminder, here is a summary of the way the Churches have been described in these letters.

- Forgetful (Ephesus)
- Suffering (Smyrna)
- Compromising (Pergamum)
- Wayward (Thyatira)
- Slumbering (Sardis)
- Enduring (Philadelphia)
- Lukewarm (Laodicea)

What have you learned about Christ, your relationship with Jesus, about the universal Church and specifically, Liquid throughout this study? What changes will you make in your life as a result of this study?

Discuss these changes with your group and ask for direction and guidance in taking the necessary steps to change.

**COMMUNION**

Take time as a group to celebrate all God has done in your heart through this study and share Communion together. Praise Him for His faithfulness!

*We want to end SEVEN making sure that we have given people EVERY opportunity grow closer to*
Jesus by putting off the old and putting on the new! In the guide, we ask if Jesus is knocking on any doors in our lives? It is important to stress that Jesus knocks because he is pursuing us and loves us and wants so much more for us! We want to remind ourselves and our group members that Jesus calls us to a banquet feast, however, we all too often settle for crumbs under the table than all that Jesus has for us. Review the letters to the churches and the characteristics of each of those churches. Ask your group members to share which one they resonated with the most. Invite them to repent, praise God or seek his face as appropriate.

Celebrate what God has done in members of your group together and end the evening with communion. This is a sacred time for you and your group and you will want to conduct this with love and sobriety.

Suggested scripture:

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

... the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Allow a few minutes for people to pray silently and confess what is on their hearts to Jesus and ask for his forgiveness. Then take the bread off of the cups and say:

This represents Jesus’ body, broken for you. And eat the bread together.

Then take the foil off of the juice cup and says this represents Jesus’ blood, shed for you. And drink the cup together.

Rejoice together and praise God for his goodness, love for us and for this study! Thank you so much for your willingness to lead and kingdom service! You serve on the front lines of ministry and we do not take this lightly. We know our church will be different as a result of your sacrifice.

You are so very important to us -- we cannot wait to hear your stories of life change from your group! You can go to https://liquidchurch.formstack.com/forms/group_highlights at any time to share all that God is doing in your group! Thank you for leading so faithfully. To God be the Glory!

chal---NE TO SERVE

If your group hasn't had an opportunity to serve together, consider giving to those who are unable to have a meal together: Relief Bus, St. Peter’s Haven Food Pantry, Community Food Banks, Elijah’s Promise; or help children who don’t have homes: Elijah House, Buddy Ball, Family Promise or Eric Johnson House. Check out: www.LiquidChurch.com/GroupsServe to find an outreach that suits your group! You will gain far more than you give. Thanks for putting your faith into action!
To find a Small Group in your area or stage of life, visit www.LiquidChurch.com/Groups