

GUIDE BOOK

Dear Church

REVELATION 1 - 3



*The Letter to
the Seven Churches*

Dear Church

The Letter to the Seven Churches

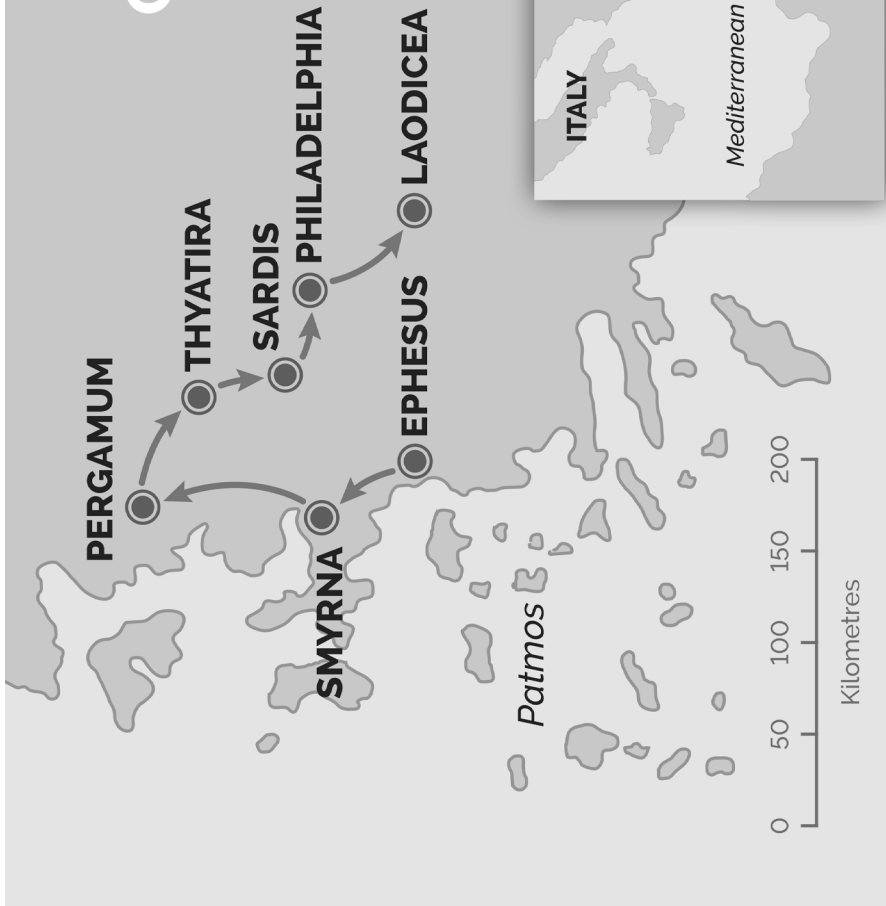
I know it's something from a bygone era, but imagine receiving an actual letter from a friend - a real paper envelope, with a real stamp on it, with your name hand written on the front. If any of us received such a letter, we'd eagerly open it up with curiosity and anticipation.

But what if that letter contains a surprise. As well as a word of greeting and sharing some general news, your friend has written to specifically encourage you with some good things they've noticed about you (how lovely, what a friend!), but then they also warn you and point out certain negatives they noticed too (how critical, I thought they were my friend!).

Now that's something like we have in the early chapters of Revelation. Often Revelation is thought of as this strange, scary book full of imagery about 'the end of the world'. But that's not a fair description of Revelation. In fact, it's the early chapters of the book which helps us to see that Revelation is a letter - a letter to real churches with real issues.

In this case, who's this letter from? The resurrected and reigning Jesus who loves His church that He died for. This is His message to seven different first century churches that were located in a part of the world which we now know as Turkey.

The Seven Churches of Revelation



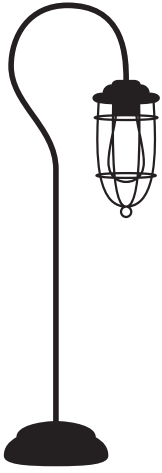
Each of these churches faced their own particular issues, but we're going to see that Jesus' letter to those seven churches is also Jesus' message to us at Christ Central. Over these seven weeks, we're going to keep 'opening the letter' of Revelation 1-3 so let's pray that we'd be ready to hear both the 'soothing word' from Jesus on how might we be doing well, but also the 'stinging word' of where we might need to repent.

The book of Revelation starts with the phrase:

¹ The **revelation from Jesus Christ**, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who testifies to everything he saw—that is, **the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ**. ³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this **prophecy**, and blessed are *those who hear it and take to heart* what is written in it, because the time is near.

When you read those words you can see that this piece of writing is described in many ways. It is a 'revelation from Jesus Christ', it is 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ', and it is also 'prophecy'. But notice what our response should be. We're to read this letter not for curiosity's sake but for deep conviction. May we at Christ Central take to heart this message from our Lord Jesus, so that we as His church would be faithful, conquer and endure to the end.

Garnet Swann



Study 1

Dear Church

LOVE

The Letter to Ephesus

This series focuses on the letter to the seven churches (chapters 2-3), but let's spend some time in this first week on how Revelation begins.

Read Revelation 1 and then answer the following questions:

1. How is *Jesus* described in v1-8?

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2. How are the *churches* described in v1-8?

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3. How does *John* describe himself in v9?

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John was on the island of Patmos, not for a holiday, but as punishment and exile for bearing witness to Jesus. Being a Christian was costly because it was an offence to the worship of the many gods of the time, which included worship of the Caesar himself. This is the situation for John and the churches he's writing to.



Postcard from Ephesus

You can visit the ruins of Ephesus today. This harbour city was once the most prosperous and largest city of the region. You can read about Paul's earlier visit to the city in Acts 19. The pride of Ephesus was the massive temple of Artemis, the largest building in the ancient world and the first major temple made completely of marble. People revered the temple and a sacred tree that stood near by.

Read the Message to the Church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7

Fill in the details below and then share anything that particularly strikes you.

Description of Jesus
(and look back to 1:12-20 to see links to the initial vision given to John)

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Encouraging word from Jesus

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Rebuke from Jesus

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Response Called For

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Consequence of Disobedience

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Promise (also take note of Revelation 22:14-16)

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4. How is it possible for a church to hold onto hard-work, perseverance, and theological/moral orthodoxy, but also eventually lose sight of love?

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5. What are signs that we love truth over having a love for God, and a love for each other and a love for the lost? Be honest about yourself, before going to what you see in others.

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6. What makes Jesus' warning so terrifying and Jesus' promise so good?

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7. What concrete steps could you take or even the growth group take together to help grow a LOVING church?

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Extra optional bible references for this study:

Acts 20:17-19, 28-30; Ephesians 4:14-15; Romans 12:9-14



Pray

Pray for each other and our church - that while testing truth from error and guarding our church against false teaching, we would also LOVE. In your prayer, use the language of Jesus' words to the church of Ephesus.

What is it about Jesus we can praise and give thanks for?

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What is to be our response to Jesus' warning?

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What can we look forward if we conquer/are victorious?

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HE HOPE
EXPLORED

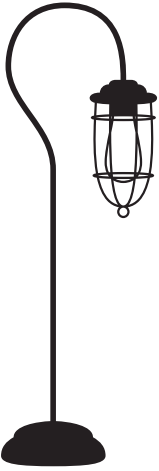
A 3 WEEK SERIES
Sundays 3pm

STARTS SUNDAY 31 JULY

christcentral.org.au/hope

HOPE is a series for anyone and everyone interested in exploring or re-exploring Jesus, or even just asking big questions in life. Whether you're brand new to Christianity or have been a Christian your whole life, HOPE provides time and space to ask questions or just sit back and listen.

Study 2



Dear Church

BE FAITHFUL

The Letter to Smyrna

We're still early in this series on the letter to the seven churches. Before we look at Smyrna, let's again read Revelation 1 and then answer the following question:

1. In the descriptions of Jesus and the churches (particularly 1:4-7) how is Old Testament imagery used?

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Postcard from Smyrna

This city was famous for its wealth, beautiful architecture and library. It had the largest amphitheatre in the region and there were temples for various gods.

Smyrna won the bid against the city of Sardis for erecting a temple in honour of the Roman Emperor. The large population of Jews in Smyrna were recognised as an ancient nation and in being forced to pay a tax, the Jews had protected status against having to participate in civic pagan (and Caesar) worship. Christians were hated by Jews for not having to pay this tax and and were vulnerable to pressure to participate in these pagan religious practices. One of the city's emblems was a crown.

Read the Message to the Church of Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11

Fill in the details below and then share anything that particularly strikes you.

Description of Jesus
(and look back to 1:12-20 to see links to the initial vision given to John)

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Encouraging word from Jesus

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Rebuke from Jesus

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Response Called For

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Consequence of Disobedience

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Promise *(also take note of Revelation 21:5-8)*

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2. When you think of churches today who suffer slander and imprisonment, what places do you think of?

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3. As a church what makes us fearful in our own setting?

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4. What will be the signs that we stay faithful despite opposition from those around us?

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5. What makes Jesus' promise so good?

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6. What concrete steps could you take or even the growth group take together to help grow a FAITHFUL church?

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Extra optional bible references for this study: Exodus 19:5-6; Daniel 7:9-14; John 8:42-47; Mark 10:29-30; 1 Peter 3:13-17



Pray

Pray for each other and our church - that we would be FAITHFUL, even to the point of death. In your prayer, use the language of Jesus' words to the church of Smyrna.

What is it about Jesus we can praise and give thanks for?

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What is to be our response to Jesus' warning?

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What can we look forward if we conquer/are victorious?

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Compassion Sunday

Letter Writing Day

August 7

Releasing children from poverty
Compassion[®]
in Jesus' name

Come and join other Child Sponsors this coming Sunday morning, 7 August, to write letters together to your sponsor children!

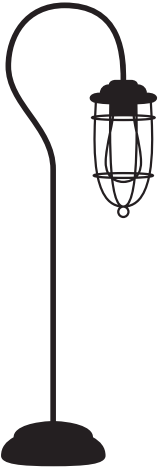


BIBLE TALK NOTES
Sunday August 7

Dear Church DISCERN
The Letter to Pergamum

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Study 3



Dear Church

DISCERN

The Letter to Pergamum

1. When people go searching for a new church, what do you think people tend to look for? From what we've seen so far in His message to the churches, how would Jesus either affirm or oppose those things we look for?

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Postcard from Pergamum

Though it was less wealthy than Ephesus or Smyrna, Pergamum was more famous in the Roman empire and it was the capital of that region. It was the civic and religious centre with many temples devoted to such gods as Zeus and Athena. In 29BC, Caesar Augustus sponsored a temple for his own worship to be constructed in Pergamum. This was part of 'the imperial cult' that spread throughout the empire. At certain times, food would be eaten and sacrifices had to be made to express loyalty to the Roman State. Emperor worship was linked to civic loyalty and patriotism. Refusal to participate was considered godless and subversive.

Read the Message to the Church of Pergamum in Revelation 2:12-17

Fill in the details below and then share anything that particularly strikes you.

Description of Jesus

(and look back to 1:12-20 to see links to the initial vision given to John)

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Encouraging word from Jesus

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Rebuke from Jesus

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Response Called For

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Consequence of Disobedience

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Promise *(also note revelation 3:12. A new name might refer to belonging and ownership - belonging to the one who will be acknowledged as the reigning king and saviour. See Revelation 19:15-16.*

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2. How is it possible for a church to stand up against pressure and be passionate for the name of Jesus, but also be accommodating to worldly influence in such matters as sexual immorality?

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3. Let's get excited and real - What does sexual integrity and faithfulness look like, as opposed to the way the world wants to influence us?

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4. What are the signs that Jesus could say this about us?

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5. Where Jesus sees good in the Ephesian church (v6), on the very same issue Jesus sees compromise in the Pergamum church (v15). We don't know anything about the specific teaching of the Nicolaitans, but still, how can we ensure we don't let false teaching and false practice into our church?

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6. What makes Jesus' warning so terrifying and Jesus' promise so good?

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7. What concrete steps could you take or even the growth group take together to help grow a DISCERNING church?

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Extra optional bible references for this study:

Numbers 22; 25:1-3; 1 Peter 4:3-5; 2 Peter 2:1-3



Pray

Pray for each other and our church - that we would DISCERN. In your prayer, use the language of Jesus' words to the church of Pergamum.

What is it about Jesus we can praise and give thanks for?

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What is to be our response to Jesus' warning?

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What can we look forward to if we conquer/are victorious?

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BIBLE TALK NOTES
Sunday August 14

Dear Church THINK
The Letter to Thyatira

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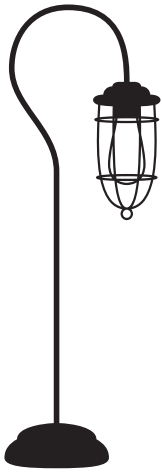
GROW is for all women: from the not-yet believer to the new believer to the long-time believer; from teens to centenarians; from all backgrounds and from all churches around Queensland. We will spend the day singing, talking, praying, sharing, eating, and of course, hearing God's Word together. This year we'll be looking at the book of Jonah.

Saturday 3rd September | 9am – 3:30pm



Register at grow.qcca.org.au

Study 4



Dear Church

THINK

The Letter to Thyatira

1. Do you tend to think that certain types of churches are healthier in certain ways, but then also weaker in other ways? What will it take for a church to become healthy in all ways?

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Postcard from Thyatira

This letter to the churches has so far followed a northward coastal route, but now Thyatira is the first of the inland churches (see map on page 2). This is the city we know least of, due in part because it currently lies underneath an existing town. It was known for its number of 'trade guilds' and those mentioned in inscriptions include – shoemakers, the makers and sellers of dyed cloth and bronze smiths. Lydia the Christian convert and trader in purple cloth was from Thyatira (Acts 16:14-15). These guilds were more than just unions, they were the centre of commercial, social and religious life. Each guild had its own patron god with frequent feasts. You can imagine this would have caused conflict for Christians.

Read the Message to the Church of Thyatira in Revelation 2:18-29

Fill in the details below and then share anything that particularly strikes you.

Description of Jesus
(and look back to 1:12-20 to see links to the initial vision given to John)

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Encouraging word from Jesus

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Rebuke from Jesus

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Response Called For

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Consequence of Disobedience

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Promise

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We don't know anything about this leader (Jezebel is a title taken from Israel's queen who led the nation into idol worship, 1 Kings 16:31-32), but we can surmise this person was a woman and falsely claimed to receive divine messages ie. 'a prophetess'. Perhaps she was part of the Nicolaitans as mentioned with Ephesus (v6) and Pergamum (v15). The reference to sexual immorality and eating meat sacrificed to idols perhaps relates to the trade guilds – participation in the religious/social activity of temple devotion was essential for keeping a job and making a profit.

2. Thyatira offers a flipside to Ephesus– Thyatira is doing well in love. But in some ways Thyatira is similar to Ephesus in that it has serious problems in the midst of real good 'works'. How is it possible for a church to be growing in love, service, and perseverance, but also tolerating the leadership of a false teacher?

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3. How does pressure to compromise Christian convictions play out in the workplace today?

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4. What makes Jesus' warning so terrifying and Jesus' promise so good?

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5. What concrete steps could you take or even the growth group take together to help grow a THINKING AND NON-COMPROMISING church?

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Extra optional bible references for this study:

1 Kings 16:31-32; Mark 13:13; Psalm 2



Pray

Pray for each other and our church - that we would THINK. In your prayer, use the language of Jesus' words to the church of Thyatira.

What is it about Jesus we can praise and give thanks for?

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What is to be our response to Jesus' warning?

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What can we look forward to if we conquer/are victorious?

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We won't have church at the Eaton's Hill Hall on Sunday 10 September. Instead, it's all happening up at Mapleton for our Church Weekend Away. We'd love it if you joined us for a weekend of fun, great Bible teaching and quality time with our church family. If you can't make it for the full weekend, why not come up for the Sunday and make a day of it!

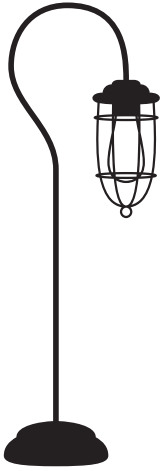


BIBLE TALK NOTES
Sunday August 21

Dear Church WAKE UP
The Letter to Sardis

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Study 5



Dear Church

WAKE UP

The Letter to Sardis

1. Do you tend to think that certain types of churches are stronger and healthier in certain ways, but then also weaker in other ways? What will it mean for a church to become healthier in all ways?

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Postcard from Sardis

Sardis was located on the top of a mountain ridge and was at the centre of past military campaigns in the time of the Persians and Greek kings. Considered impregnable, famously the city was overrun when the cliffs were left unguarded and gates were opened for invading armies. In the time of this letter, it was a prosperous city, in part coming from garment manufacture. There were many religious temples in Sardis. Their unfinished temple to Artemis rivalled the temple in Ephesus. Sardis lost to Smyrna in its bid to erect a temple in honour of the Roman Emperor. Much of the religious life in Sardis revolved around nature worship, fertility cycle and bringing life out of death. Sardis also had a large Jewish community and one of the largest synagogues was built there.

Read the Message to the Church of Sardis in Revelation 3:1-6

Fill in the details below and then share anything that particularly strikes you.

Description of Jesus

(and look back to 1:12-20 to see links to the initial vision given to John)

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Encouraging word from Jesus

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Rebuke from Jesus

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Response Called For

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Consequence of Disobedience

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Promise *(also take note of Revelation 6:9-11 & 7:13-17)*

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2. The church in Sardis has a good name for itself. It seems well known for being a vibrant, living church, yet in reality there are many who are spiritually dead. They need to wake up. What might it look like to deceive others (and even ourselves) that we're spiritually alive when in fact we're dead?

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3. What does it mean to "wake up"? (v2)?

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4. Read Matthew 24:42-44. The same imagery of 'a thief in the night' is used to describe the coming of Christ. What does it mean to be vigilantly watching for the return of Christ? (Think also of the history of Sardis – defeated from failing to guard the cliffs at night)

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5. There are still a small number of individuals in Sardis who are living for Christ. What is the promise and comfort there for those who walk in this way?

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6. What concrete steps could you take or even the growth group take together to help be a LIVING church?

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Extra optional bible references for this study:

Romans 13:11; James 2:14-17; Matthew 24:42-44



Pray

Pray for each other and our church - that we would WAKE UP. In your prayer, use the language of Jesus' words to the church of Sardis.

What is it about Jesus we can praise and give thanks for?

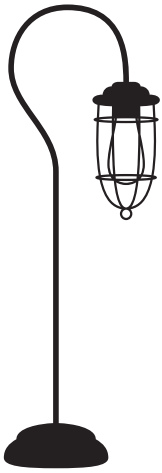
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What is to be our response to Jesus' warning?

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What can we look forward to if we conquer/are victorious?

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Dear Church

KEEP GOING

The Letter to Philadelphia

1. Who or what is it in our lives that brings the real temptation to give up on living for Christ?

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Postcard from Philadelphia

Philadelphia was a relatively new frontier city. It was known as the 'gateway to the east' in terms of ongoing 'missionary' efforts to bring Greek influence to that region. It was an agriculturally prosperous city (grapes were its speciality), but still life was very uncertain because of regular earthquakes – both Sardis and Philadelphia were destroyed in AD17 and so then had to be rebuilt. Because of seismic activity, the local population would frequently flee their homes and be forced to live outside the city. For Christians there was a further layer of uncertainty. Like in other parts of the Roman empire, after 70AD, Jews were exempt from participating in emperor-cult worship practices by virtue of paying a temple tax for the Temple of Jupiter in Rome. This was a much-resented price of freedom and Jews would complain to authorities about Christians, resulting in persecution and punishment for followers of Jesus.

Read the Message to the Church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-13

Fill in the details below and then share anything that particularly strikes you.

Description of Jesus

(and look back to 1:12-20 to see links to the initial vision given to John)

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Encouraging word from Jesus

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Rebuke from Jesus

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Response Called For

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Consequence of Disobedience

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Promise *(also take note of the description given on the 'new name' on p18, and also read Revelation 21:1-4.)*

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2. In what ways does our church look weak and insignificant as you think about culture and influences around? With that awareness, what sort of temptations and unhelpful frustrations do we need to be mindful of?

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3. In our church, what will be the signs that we've pursued 'faithfulness' over 'success'?

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4. The persecuting Jewish people as 'the synagogue of Satan' has been a term used before (see the church of Smyrna in 2:9). What's your reaction to this term? We might think of this as 'extreme language' but why are these words of Jesus an overall message of hope?

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5. What makes Jesus' promise so good?

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6. What concrete steps could you take or even the growth group take together help grow a church that **KEEPS GOING**?

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Extra optional bible references for this study:

Isaiah 49:22-23; 60:14; Hebrews 13:14



Pray

Pray for each other and our church - that we would KEEP GOING. In your prayer, use the language of Jesus' words to the church of Philadelphia.

What is it about Jesus we can praise and give thanks for?

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What is to be our response to Jesus' warning?

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What can we look forward to if we conquer/are victorious?

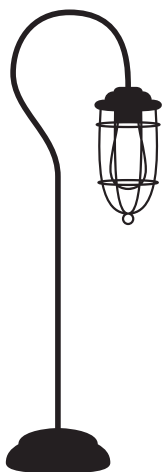
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BIBLE TALK NOTES
Sunday September 4

Dear Church GET SERIOUS
The Letter to Laodicea

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



Dear Church

GET SERIOUS

The Letter to Laodicea

1. In terms of stories and pop culture, can you think of an instance when someone's high opinion of themselves does not match reality of what others can properly see?



Postcard from Laodicea

In the circuit of the message to the seven churches, we now come to the last, Laodicea. This church was initially established by Epaphras, along with the sister churches of Hierapolis and Colossae (Colossians 1:7, 4:12-16). Unlike most of the other churches of Revelation 2-3, the problem with this church is not false teaching or external persecution, but a vomit-inducing (!) false pride about themselves. Like other cities we've looked at, Laodicea was prone to seismic activity and damage. There are several features of this city/region worth noting. 1) Laodicea was a prosperous trade and banking centre. Without drawing on financial aid from Rome, Laodicea was able to fund its own rebuild after an earthquake in 60AD. There was much civic pride about its wealth and independence. 2) It was a garment manufacturing city, one of its products being soft, raven-black wool. 3) Laodicea had a famous school of medicine, with one of its well-known cures being a medicinal eye ointment. 4) Laodicea had no water supply of its own. Nearby Hierapolis had a famous hot mineral-laden spring for healing purposes, but quite undrinkable. Nearby Colossae was known for its cold pure drinking water.

Read about the Message to the Church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22

Fill in the details below and then share anything that particularly strikes you.

Description of Jesus
(and look back to 1:12-20 to see links to the initial vision given to John)

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Encouraging word from Jesus

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Rebuke from Jesus

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Response Called For

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Consequence of Disobedience

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Promise

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2. Looking back to the other six churches, why might we say the church of Laodicea is the worst?

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3. Pride and spiritual blindness is a deadly condition. What will be the signs that it is your problem, and a problem for all of us at Christ Central?

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4. In a practical way, what will repentance from pride in wealth and achievement look like in you, and for us all at Christ Central?

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5. What makes Jesus' warning so terrifying and Jesus' promise so good?

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6. What concrete steps could you take or even the growth group take together for our church to GET SERIOUS?

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Extra optional bible references for this study: Colossians 1:15-16; Luke 6:24-26; Luke 12:16-21; James 5:1-6; Ezekiel 16:36



Pray

Pray for each other and our church - that we would KEEP GOING. In your prayer, use the language of Jesus' words to the church of Philadelphia.

What is it about Jesus we can praise and give thanks for?

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What is to be our response to Jesus' warning?

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What can we look forward to if we conquer/are victorious?

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This coming weekend is our Church Weekend Away. On Sunday 11 September, there we won't be as a church at the Eatons Hill School Hall. Instead it will all be happening up at Mapleton. If you can't make it for the full weekend, why not come up for the Sunday and make a day of it.



CHRISTCENTRAL
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH