



# Letters to the Church

L I F E   G R O U P   B O O K



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# Letters to the church

## **SERIES SUMMARY**

**If Jesus was going to write a letter to His church at Gateway, what would He say?**

Chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation contain letters of encouragement, correction and instruction for 7 churches in Asia Minor. While these letters were penned by the Apostle John thousands of years ago, the message is directly from Jesus and expresses His heart for His church in every generation.

To understand the depth of Jesus' love for His church and to ensure we understand the heart of each message, we need to understand the context of each city Jesus writes to. Each letter reveals Jesus' intimate knowledge of the physical and spiritual reality of the city and contains a prophetic promise for their future if they will listen and respond in obedience to Him.

These letters are a reminder from heaven that the people and places that influence the culture of a city do not hold lasting power over that city. There is One who was dead and is now alive forever that holds the keys to life and death and rules and reigns over every city.

Jesus knows our church and our city! Jesus loves His church in this city! Jesus sees the condition of our heart and holds a promise for our future if we will listen and obey His word.

This series will reveal the context of each historical city Jesus writes to and draws parallels with the reality of our culture today. We will challenge our cultural norms that can easily influence our walk with Jesus, and we will be encouraged by looking to the One who loves His church and holds the ultimate power over our city.

# How to use this resource

Each session begins with a summary of Jesus' letter to one of the churches in Revelation, helping you to better understand the context of each letter. Knowing some of the context, the **Discovery Bible Method** then helps—new believers and long-time Christians alike—to ask the Holy Spirit to speak through God's Word.

## LETTERS TO OUR CHURCH

These days it seems the only letters we get in the mail are bills, junk or speeding fines. Wouldn't it be a nice surprise if we opened the mail and found a letter of encouragement instead?

Each week, we will invite you to respond by writing a letter to our church here at Gateway. Just as Jesus wrote to the churches in Revelation, we hope to collect letters of thanksgiving, encouragement and blessing for all our campuses, spurring us on to continue shining a light for the gospel in our city and beyond.

We will collect these letters as a prophetic record of God's grace and His leading, then share them to remind us that He is with us!

**“Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”**

Revelation 1:17–20

# Return to your first love

## A LETTER TO A LOVELESS CHURCH

The church in Ephesus was working hard for the gospel. Jesus sees the hard work they have done to establish the church, and the way they have held firm in their doctrine and not been swayed by heresy. The church has done this in the pluralistic and highly sexualised culture of Ephesus—the centre for worshipping the Greek goddess Artemis.

In the midst of hardship, the church members had not given up on their faith or stopped serving Jesus. He saw their resilience and commended them for it. They were theologically sound. They had not given up on their faith when life got tough.

But they had lost their love for God that had once been like the love of a newly married bride for her husband. This is what the Ephesian church was once known for—love for God and people. This is what Jesus wants His church to always be known for. If this is not the case, we need to repent or we will lose our power to shine a light on what God is like in our city.

Theology in the church should always be sound. Sacrificially serving God's purposes in the church should be constant. But love must be the most defining characteristic of the local church. Without love, the church loses its light in the city.

We are a church with a long history of faithful service and sound doctrine, but we must never lose our love for God and one another. I believe this is a season where God is renewing our love for Him, particularly in praise and prayer and worship. Our ministry to the Lord must come before our ministry for the Lord.

Is your love for God as fervent as when you first put your faith in Him?

## Connect

**Share:** What do you love so much that you can't help telling people about it?

## Discovery Bible Method

**Ask:** Pray for God to speak directly to you from the key passage to the Church in Ephesus; **Revelation 2:1-7**

**Read:** Read the passage aloud. Then re-read the passage again in a different translation if possible.

Recite or re-write the passage from memory in your own words.

Re-read the passage silently one more time then ask:

1. What do you see?
2. What does this say about God?
3. What does this say about people?
4. What is God saying to you?

**Commit:** What are you going to do about it? Who are you going to tell?

**Pray:** For one another, our church and for the people you will share with.

## Letters to our church: Mackenzie campus and Gateway Online

Take some time to pen a letter to our church using the following model to guide you.

**Thanksgiving:** Give thanks for what you are seeing God do in our Mackenzie campus and through Gateway Online.

**Encouragement:** Identify ministries or people to bring before Jesus and speak hope into His future work in and through them.

**Blessing:** Pray a blessing over our campus for the years ahead.

Once you have written your letter, email it to [contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au](mailto:contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au)

# Refuse to compromise

## A LETTER TO A COMPROMISED CHURCH

Pergamum was a city of pagan worship with a giant temple for the goddess Diana, and it was one of the few cities given the power by Rome to exercise capital punishment, symbolised by the sword.

The Church in Pergamum lived under the powerful reign of an emperor and threat of his sword, but they belonged to another Kingdom whose King needs no other sword than the words of His mouth.

Jesus knows they live in a hostile place of pagan worship, and they have seen one of their leaders martyred, yet they have not renounced their faith.

However, they were a church that had become divided by deceptive teaching, leading to idolatry and immorality.

If we're honest, it is not as difficult to follow Christ today as it was in first-century Pergamum. Yet we are also surrounded by the temptation to compromise God's word with the current thinking of our culture, leading to idolatry and immorality.

It is better to read God's word, repent and receive His blessing now than compromise with our culture and be judged by Him in the future. His living word is like bread that nourishes our soul and is sharper than a two-edged sword to judge the hidden thoughts and intentions of our heart.

Choosing to feed on God's word and allowing His truth to penetrate the hidden crevices of our heart will give us victory over darkness and the strength to live a life without compromises.

## Connect

**Share:** Do you ever decide to ignore your GPS navigation and just follow your nose? How often does it result in you getting lost or stuck?

## Discovery Bible Method

**Ask:** Pray for God to speak directly to you from the key passage to the Church in Pergamum; **Revelation 2:12-17**

**Read:** Read the passage aloud. Then re-read the passage again in a different translation if possible.

Recite or re-write the passage from memory in your own words.

Re-read the passage silently one more time then ask:

1. What do you see?
2. What does this say about God?
3. What does this say about people?
4. What is God saying to you?

**Commit:** What are you going to do about it? Who are you going to tell?

**Pray:** For one another, our church and for the people you will share with.

## Letters to our church: Ormeau campus

Take some time to pen a letter to our church using the following model to guide you.

**Thanksgiving:** Begin by giving thanks for what you are seeing God do in our Ormeau campus.

**Encouragement:** Identify ministries or people to bring before Jesus and speak hope into His future work in and through them.

**Blessing:** Pray a blessing over our campus for the years ahead.

Once you have written your letter, email it to [contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au](mailto:contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au)

# Receive a new name

## A LETTER TO A FAITHFUL CHURCH

Philadelphia is one of 2 churches in the book of Revelation that Jesus had no rebuke to give to but only encouragement. There is no rebuke and no call for repentance, but there is an exhortation to hold onto their faith and not let anyone distract them from faithfully fulfilling their future.

Philadelphia was a city constantly threatened by earthquakes and had been rebuilt after destruction. Often the only thing left standing was the pillar in the temple. Jesus is saying that whatever shaking they might experience, they will stand to the end if they hold on to Him.

Jesus recognises their faithfulness to Him in the midst of their struggle and He will bless their faithfulness in time. Nothing goes unnoticed by Jesus. When we feel weak and under pressure, He gives us strength to endure. Jesus sees His church and He will bless His church.

The city had also been renamed by the emperor, but Jesus has given them a name that no one can change. They are His children; His church; His bride; His beloved.

Jesus has given you a new name that no one can change, and He has given keys to His Church to unlock the power and resources of heaven for the glory of God. When God opens an opportunity for your future, no one can close it. When God closes a door on your past sin, no one can open it.

We have been given a new name and keys to the Kingdom to build His church in this city. Our faithfulness to serve God in this city does not go unnoticed in heaven. To God be the glory!

## Connect

**Share:** Did you ever want a different name growing up? If you couldn't keep your name, what name would you choose?

## Discovery Bible Method

**Ask:** Pray for God to speak directly to you from the key passage to the Church in Philadelphia; **Revelation 3:7-13**

**Read:** Read the passage aloud. Then re-read the passage again in a different translation if possible.

Recite or re-write the passage from memory in your own words.

Re-read the passage silently one more time then ask:

1. What do you see?
2. What does this say about God?
3. What does this say about people?
4. What is God saying to you?

**Commit:** What are you going to do about it? Who are you going to tell?

**Pray:** For one another, our church and for the people you will share with.

## Letters to our church: Redlands campus

Take some time to pen a letter to our church using the following model to guide you.

**Thanksgiving:** Begin, giving thanks for what you are seeing God do in our Redlands campus.

**Encouragement:** Identify ministries or people to bring before Jesus and speak hope into His future work in and through them.

**Blessing:** Pray a blessing over our campus for the years ahead.

Once you have written your letter, email it to [contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au](mailto:contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au)

# Resurrect what is dying

## A LETTER TO A DYING CHURCH

Sardis was a city of past splendour but present decay. The citizens were living off past fame and the same spirit had infected the church. Death had become a preoccupation for the people of Sardis, building a huge cemetery on a hill that could be seen from miles around.

Sardis had a significant wool industry and the people had become preoccupied with their outward appearance, but most were unconcerned with their inner purity before Christ and their outward morality in a pagan society. There were a few who had remained faithful to Christ and unstained by their culture.

Jesus implores them to wake up before it is too late. Just like the temple the city had begun building but remained unfinished, they had abandoned the work of Christ in their city before it was finished. Their situation was dire but not hopeless. Jesus can resurrect what is dying and bring new life to what is decaying if they wake up and grow stronger in their faith.

They were to repent of their spiritual lethargy and hold fast to the power of the gospel and their mission to shine a light for the gospel in their city.

In ancient cities the names of citizens were recorded in a register until their death, when their names were then erased from the book of the living. Jesus is reminding them that if they hold fast to their faith in Him, not even death will separate them from His life.

Jesus can bring to life what is dead and breathe new life into what is decaying and unfinished. Maybe you have put on hold the work of Christ in your life and in our city.

Jesus is saying it is time to wake up and finish what you started because He is not finished with you yet.

## Connect

**Share:** How would you want to be remembered? What words would you want family and friends to use to describe your character?

## Discovery Bible Method

**Ask:** Pray for God to speak directly to you from the key passage to the Church in Sardis; **Revelation 3:1-6**

**Read:** Read the passage aloud. Then re-read the passage again in a different translation if possible.

Recite or re-write the passage from memory in your own words.

Re-read the passage silently one more time then ask:

1. What do you see?
2. What does this say about God?
3. What does this say about people?
4. What is God saying to you?

**Commit:** What are you going to do about it? Who are you going to tell?

**Pray:** For one another, our church and for the people you will share with.

## Letters to our church: Logan campus

Take some time to pen a letter to our church using the following model to guide you.

**Thanksgiving:** Begin, giving thanks for what you are seeing God do in our Logan campus.

**Encouragement:** Identify ministries or people to bring before Jesus and speak hope into His future work in and through them.

**Blessing:** Pray a blessing over our campus for the years ahead.

Once you have written your letter, email it to [contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au](mailto:contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au)

# Revive your relationship

## A LETTER TO A COMPLACENT CHURCH

For all its wealth, Laodicea had terrible water that induced vomiting, so they built a 10km aqueduct that brought both hot and cool water from the south. By the time it arrived, the water from hot springs was lukewarm and water from cool reservoirs was also lukewarm. They knew well the distaste of lukewarm water and the desire to spit it out.

First-century Christians would not have understood hot and cold as spiritual temperatures. The point Jesus was making was that they weren't living as God intended and their sin was distasteful to Him.

Their worldly wealth had made them complacent, and they had lost their humility and hunger for God. They couldn't see their spiritual poverty because they were so comfortable in their physical surroundings. Laodicea was renowned for and had become wealthy by making black glossy woollen clothes and eye ointment known as "Phrygian powder". The products that had made them wealthy were not going to cure their spiritual poverty. Only close relationship with Christ could do that. Nothing else will undo our spiritual bankruptcy.

Even though they had no redeeming qualities that Jesus recognised in them, He still loved them and wanted intimate fellowship with them. He invited them to repent and open their heart to draw close to Him again.

Complacency leads to death but humble faith in Christ leads to life. Jesus reminds them that He humbled Himself and was obedient to death on a cross, but the Father raised Him up and seated Him on an eternal throne. If they accept the invitation to sit and eat with Him, they too will sit on an eternal throne in glory with Him.

We live in a wealthy, comfortable city. It is easy to get complacent and lose our humility and hunger for God. We can't be complacent. The call to follow Jesus is to humbly die to our desires and live for Christ and His purposes. Revival in a city starts when the church in the city revives their humility before God and their hunger for God.

## Connect

**Share:** What is something you've eaten that's been so distasteful that you had to spit it out?

## Discovery Bible Method

**Ask:** Pray for God to speak directly to you from the key passage to the Church in Laodicea; **Revelation 3:14–22**

**Read:** Read the passage aloud. Then re-read the passage again in a different translation if possible.

Recite or re-write the passage from memory in your own words.

Re-read the passage silently one more time then ask:

1. What do you see?
2. What does this say about God?
3. What does this say about people?
4. What is God saying to you?

**Commit:** What are you going to do about it? Who are you going to tell?

**Pray:** For one another, our church and for the people you will share with.

## Letters to our church: City campus

Take some time to pen a letter to our church using the following model to guide you.

**Thanksgiving:** Begin by giving thanks for what you are seeing God do in our City campus.

**Encouragement:** Identify ministries or people to bring before Jesus and speak hope into His future work in and through them.

**Blessing:** Pray a blessing over our campus for the years ahead.

Once you have written your letter, email it to [contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au](mailto:contactus@gatewaybaptist.com.au)



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