

10 Days of Repentance 2017 Devotional Guide



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Day 1: Introduction: Gospel Explosion 2017

It's our desire to see a massive full scale revival erupt throughout the body of Christ in America! During these 10 days we are asking for another historic move of the Holy Spirit to sweep across our land and awaken a generation to wholehearted love and surrender to Jesus! It's all about a Christ-awakening, where the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to reawaken God's people back to God's Son for all that He is! We want to enter into the power and pleasure of being obsessed with the magnificence of Jesus! He is the dominating personality in this age and in the age to come! We are longing for a **Gospel Explosion**, a tsunami of revival to come crashing in on the beaches of America, for the spread of his fame, for the extension of his reign, for the increase of his gain and for the honor of his claim! May the slain Lamb receive the due reward of his sufferings. May Christ Jesus have absolute supremacy and preeminence in every sphere of society in America!

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).

A key question that we are addressing during these 10 days of prayer and fasting is this, *"What would it take to see a genuine move of God initiated and sustained in a geographic area?"*

What would it look like to see our communities transformed to the Glory of God as described by George Otis Jr,

- A neighborhood, city or nation whose values and institutions have been overrun by the grace and presence of God
- A place where divine fire has not merely been summoned, it has fallen
- A society in which natural evolutionary change has been disrupted by invasive supernatural power of the gospel
- A culture that has been impacted comprehensively and undeniably by the Kingdom of God
- A location where Kingdom values are celebrated publicly and passed on to future generations

The Power of the Gospel

We are convinced that it is first and foremost about the glorious gospel of Christ heralded and proclaimed in this generation! God is calling his church to embrace the gospel again, living grace-addicted, truth-filled, Jesus-exalting lives! The Gospel is the good news that God's kingdom power has entered human history through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

As John Piper writes, *"The Gospel is the news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous King, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy!"*

Daniel Montgomery shares three aspects of the gospel, the kingdom, the cross, and grace...

- The gospel of the kingdom is life with God under God's rule

- The gospel of the cross is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus by which God accomplishes our salvation, rescues us from his wrath, incorporates us into his people, and inaugurates his reign in the world.
- The gospel of grace is the wonderful news that God accepts us, shares his life with us, and adopts us as heirs of his kingdom not because we have earned it or deserve it, but because God chooses to give all of this freely at Christ's expense.¹

“Therefore, the gospel is not what God requires. The gospel is what God provides! The gospel is not an imperative, demanding things you must do. The gospel is an indicative, declaring things that God has done. The gospel is not about human action. The gospel is about divine achievement. The gospel is not a moralistic Do! The gospel is a merciful Done! The gospel informs, controls, and energizes all we do. Our ministry values—worship, prayer, discipleship, community, and mission—are all the fruit of the grace that God has given us in Jesus”—Sam Storms

May this gospel, this great news **EXPLODE** in our region!

The gospel is the center of the Bible, and it ought to be the center of our lives, homes, churches, ministries, spiritual disciplines, songs, parenting, marriage-everything! The Christian life is formed by the glories of the gospel, it's patterned and powered by the gospel of grace in all of life, for the rest of life! We don't worship the gospel, we worship the God of the Gospel, Jesus Christ! The gospel is God's act of turning scoundrels into saints, turning sin-seekers into people who know and find their utmost satisfaction in God! Dave Keesling put it this way, *“the gospel's simplicity is it's ability to, in a moment, change literally everything”*²

As JA Medders writes,

- We worship Jesus because *“he is the radiance of the glory of God”* (Heb. 1:3)
- We harp on the gospel because *“for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Cor. 5:21)
- Our hope is wrapped up in the truth that *“he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and by his wounds we are healed”* (Isa. 53:5)
- We center our lives on Jesus because *“we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him”* (Rom 6:9)
- We sing, pray, sacrifice, and follow Jesus because, *“there is one God and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus”* (I Tim. 2:5)
- We have confidence in life, and death because of Jesus, *“who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever! Amen”* (Gal 1:4-5)
- We walk with joy and no condemnation because, *“he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin, and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed”* (I Peter 2:24).

¹ Daniel Montgomery, *Proof*

² Byron Paulus, *OneCry*, 140

- Jesus is our great reward and love because, *“in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace”* (Eph 1:7)
- We go on gospel mission because *“the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’* (I Tim. 1:15)³

Hunger

The process of transforming revival is triggered when our appetite for God’s presence through the gospel of grace trumps all other hungers. As Leonard Ravenhill wrote, *“The only reason we don’t have revival is because we are willing to live without it.”* He was famous for exposing our idol-driven lives when he stated, *“Are the things you are living for worth Christ dying for?”*

True revival experienced by many throughout human history was always accompanied by extraordinary conviction of sin, fear of God and his judgment, revelation of God’s love and mercy, confession, deep repentance and people inquiring, as on the day of Pentecost, *“What must I do to be saved?”*

God is especially attracted to an environment of humility, brokenness, desperate spiritual hunger, repentance, grace-empowered obedience, and urgent united prayer. Duncan Campbell summed up revival well when he wrote, *“Revival is when men in the streets are afraid to speak godless words for fear that God’s judgment will fall! When sinners, aware of the fire of God’s presence, tremble in the streets and cry out for mercy! When (without human advertising) the Holy Spirit sweeps across cities and regions in supernatural power and holds people in the grip of terrifying conviction! When every store becomes a pulpit, every heart an altar, every home a sanctuary, and people walk carefully before God! This, my beloved, is truly REVIVAL FROM HEAVEN!”*

Revival is Jesus-centered! It is gospel driven! (Acts 19:10, 17). Revival challenges the status quo and changes the spiritual atmosphere until a community is ‘Saturated with God.’

Extraordinary Prayer

It goes without saying that prayer is the incubator and furnace of revival. As AT Pierson wrote, *“There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer”*

Revival is preceded by extraordinary prayer. As Matthew Henry remarked, *“When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing he does is set them a-praying!”*

Edwin Orr, one of the great scholars of revival was asked once, *“Does prayer make revival happen? He responded, ‘No... but it does make it possible’”*

As A.W. Tozer wrote in an article entitled, There is no Limit to Revival: *“There is no limit to what God could do in our world if we would dare to surrender before him with a commitment that says, ‘O God I hereby give myself to you, I give my family, I give my business, I give all I possess. Take all of it Lord—and take Me! I give myself in such measure that if it is necessary*

³ J.A. Medders, Gospel Formed, 26-27

that I loose everything for your sake, let me loose it. I will not ask what the price is. I will ask only that I may be all that I ought to be as a follower and a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ”

Let's position our minds and hearts before the bonfire of God's all-consuming Son, the Lord Jesus, asking for greater revelation of who He is, where He is headed, and how He is blessed. Let's ask the Lord of the Harvest to thrust out laborers into the harvest fields of our region (Matt. 9:37). Let's ask for a glorious **Gospel Explosion** to erupt for his renown!

Day 2: Why do we need to Surrender and Repent?

The “Obscured Jeopardy Syndrome” is the state of not fully understanding the gravity of the current condition. This syndrome prevails in communities where serious ills are not readily discernible. The primary symptom is a false sense of security, and the only remedy is to ask God to help us see things as they really are. His revelation helps us to avoid superficial assessments based on how circumstances are affecting us personally and what prior experience has taught us is normal, and enables us to see broader dimensions that will shake us from complacency.⁴

Here are some staggering statistics that should provoke us to seek the Lord to heal our land...⁵

- Less than one quarter of all born again adults consciously strives to make worship part of their lifestyle...for most people, worship implies attending a church service that includes music and preaching.
- In a typical week, fewer than 10% of parents who regularly attend church with their kids read the Bible together, pray together (other than at meal times) or participate in an act of service as a family unit. Even fewer families – 1 out of every 20 – have any type of worship experience together with their kids, other than while they are at church during a typical month.
- When evangelicals and non-evangelical born again Christians are combined into an aggregate class of born again adults, their divorce figure is statistically identical to that of non-born again adults.”
- In a recent study of Christian families, only 59% of students said they feel emotionally close to their mother and only 35% said they feel relationally close to their father.
- 1 out of every 11 adults (9%) identified prayer as the most fulfilling spiritual activity they undertake, while Bible reading was named by 7% and helping other people was listed by 6%. Interestingly, just 3% mentioned the maintenance or enjoyment of their relationship with God as their greatest source of spiritual fulfillment and only 1% said their relationships with other believers was their source. Less than one percent listed worshipping God as their means of fulfillment, and a similarly miniscule number claimed that leading someone to Christ was their major source of satisfaction.
- More than 20 million children live in a home without the physical presence of a father
- 3 million dollars are spent every second on internet pornography in America...every 39 seconds a new internet pornography site is developed. America leads the world with

⁴ George Otis Jr. <http://www.sentinelgroup.org/>

⁵ Jason Hubbard, Stats researched and referenced in doctoral dissertation *Beholding Glory in the Cross*, chp 1

89% of pornographic web pages worldwide, it is epidemic and killing the home, the church and the nation (One Cry, 56)

- Mark Laaser reports that about 67% of all Christian men struggle with pornography, and 40% of pastors view pornography. In a similar study, 57% of pastors say that addiction to pornography is the most sexually damaging issue to their congregation, while 47% of Christian families said pornography is a problem in their home.
- According to David Olson, established churches in America are declining in attendance by 2% each year. Weekend attendance at Christian churches has stayed virtually the same from 1990 to 2007.
- Fifteen hundred pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout or contention in their churches. Four thousand churches begin each year, but over seven thousand churches close. 40% of pastors polled said they have had an extra-marital affair since beginning the ministry. 95% of pastors do not regularly pray with their spouse.⁶ 80% of pastors surveyed spend less than 15 minutes a day in prayer.
- Only 5% of churches have an organized prayer ministry in their church
- 1 million babies are aborted each year in America.

Hope of Revival

Samuel Davies reminded us that from his vantage point of the Second Great Awakening, *“that there are eras when only a large outpouring of the Spirit can produce a public general reformation.”* He witnessed firsthand how revival and awakening brought a cultural change that nothing else could accomplish. The pastor of St. John’s-Wood Presbyterian church declared after the Welsh revival, in which 100,000 people came to Christ in nine months in 1904-1905 that *“the mighty unseen breath of the Spirit was doing in a month more than centuries of legislation could accomplish.”* As Dutch Sheets writes, *“Let it be said of our generation that when a nation teetered on the edge of destruction, having lost the ancient path of truth and righteousness, we answered the divine call to war for its restoration”*—*Appeal to Heaven*

Declaration of National Spiritual Emergency⁷

With heavy hearts, we recognize that the church in America is in a state of spiritual emergency. Like the churches warned in Revelation, we have become lukewarm and compromised and the light of our witness has grown dim. We confess that despite access to more resources and biblical teaching than any other group of believers in history, we are not characterized by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. And we acknowledge our lack of widespread impact for Christ on our lost and disintegrating culture. But God is waking us from our slumber, and mobilizing us to pray earnestly for revival. Together we desire to travel the narrow road of brokenness, humility and repentance. In desperation for God, we cry out for the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit in our day. We believe that true revival is the only hope to reverse our spiritual recession and enable us once again to display the beauty of Jesus Christ and his gospel throughout the world.

Because we believe that only Christ can save, heal, and revive, we pledge to:

Turn: in humble repentance by the grace of God, to turn from every sin God reveals to us.

Pray: with urgency for spiritual awakening

⁶ Ted Rose, *Pastors Need Prayer*

⁷ Byron Paulus, *OneCry*, 130

Unite: with other believers in spreading the hope for Christ-centered, gospel-driven revival!

Lord, send revival and let it begin in me!

Name _____

Day 3: Introduction to the 7 Churches of Asia

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him (Jesus) to show His servants--things which must shortly take place. He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John... 19 Write the things which you have seen...and the things which will take place after this” (Rev. 1:1, 19).

The Book of Revelation is called the “revelation of Jesus” because it reveals His heart, power and leadership in preparing the nations for God’s glory. The Father’s purpose in giving us this book is to reveal the beauty of Jesus. It is secondarily a book about “events” in the End-Times. If we read Revelation right, it causes us to adore Jesus and to trust His leadership as we see His dramatic plans in the End-Times. His wise loving plans include combining God’s sovereignty (in manifesting His love and righteousness), human responsibility and satanic rage. This book is very dear to Jesus and is a great gift from Him to us. We see Jesus’ majesty as a King and a Priest (Rev. 1), as a Lion and as a Lamb (Rev. 5). In Rev 2 and 3 we hear His counsel to prepare us as His beloved Bride.

In approximately 90 AD, Jesus appeared to John who was in prison on the Island of Patmos to reveal Himself in a way what would equip the Church to walk in full obedience as overcomers (Rev. 2-3). His prophetic messages instruct us on how to best prepare for His coming. No one knows more about how to prepare Jesus’ Bride than Jesus. We prepare by growing in love, encountering the majesty and love of Jesus. We grow in love by obeying His commands, heeding His warnings and believing His promises. Jesus promised us 22 eternal rewards in Rev. 2-3 (2:7, 10, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). These letters equip us to persevere by being anchored in eternity with confidence that our choices will be rewarded in eternity. When suffering is seen in God’s light, it loses its power to intimidate.

3 Key Things to Consider:

- 1. Jesus likes to show us what He is doing:** In Amos 3 we are told God does not do anything until he first reveals his secrets to His servants. This is what Jesus is doing here. Why, so we can pray, so we can be ready, so we can learn, because...
- 2. There is a blessing for those who pay attention:** In these verses we are told there is a blessing to the one who not only hears, but does what is written in this book of prophecy.
- 3. The time is short:** Let me be as bold as the author. The time is short. Jesus is coming back, He is coming for His Church, and the time is short. Each day the time gets shorter. Everything written from this point forward is with this sense of urgency.

4. Before you read these each day pray... God help me to see the urgency in this, and give me the courage, ability, and heart, to get myself into alignment with what you are doing in my city... BECAUSE THE TIME IS SHORT!

Studying the 7 Letters: The Common Elements in the Letters

A. **Revelation of Jesus:** Jesus emphasized a specific aspect of Himself that was most needed in the situation of each Church. Each message begins by Jesus calling attention to some aspect of His majesty as seen in Rev. 1. Each aspect of Jesus heart has potential promise or punishment.

B. **Affirmation for faithfulness:** Jesus gave affirmation before correction (Ephesus, Pergamos, and Thyatira). Two churches received no affirmation (Sardis and Laodicea).

C. **Rebuke for compromise:** five churches received a rebuke and two did not (Smyrna and Philadelphia). Jesus' correction is not rejection. Jesus spoke of having something against three specific churches: Ephesus (Rev 2:4), Pergamos (Rev. 2:14) and Thyatira (Rev. 2:20).

D. **Exhortation to respond:** Jesus gave actions that He required often with an element of warning. Jesus warned them most about *compromise* (immorality and idolatry which is sorcery, 1 Cor. 10:20-22), *heresy*, *passivity* (distraction with their increased blessing) and *fear* (persecution). He warned of losing our first love (Ephesus), fear of suffering (Smyrna), doctrinal compromise (Pergamum), moral compromise (Thyatira), spiritual deadness (Sardis), need to hold on (Philadelphia), and lukewarmness or indifference (Laodicea).

E. **Promise for overcomers:** as incentive for diligent faithfulness to Jesus. Insight into rewards is essential to equip us to stand in pressure.

Sixteen Descriptions of Jesus (Rev. 2-3)

In Rev. 2-3, we are given 16 different facets of Jesus' heart which reveal His personality and ministry to the Church (holding the 7 stars is mentioned twice). This gives us unique insight into Jesus' heart to see what is needed to prepare us for the glory and crisis in the End-Times.

"To...Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands..." 8 To...Smyrna write, "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life..." 12 To...Pergamos write, "These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword" ...18 To... Thyatira write, "These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass" ...3:1 To...Sardis write, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars" ... 7 To...Philadelphia write, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David" ...14 To...the Laodiceans write, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God" ... (Rev. 2:1-3:14)

We prayerfully study these truths as we confess them to God in faith to resist Satan's attack of temptation and stand firm in the gospel under pressure of suffering or persecution. Jesus holds the seven stars (leaders/overseers) as His promise to anoint, direct and protect them. He walks in the midst of the candlesticks (church; Rev. 1:20) in His deep involvement with us. As the "First" he is the uncreated God who is before all things and the source of all goodness. He can give to us all that we lose in persecution. He is the "Last" or is the purpose for all and he has the last word on everything. He was "dead and came to life" after He experienced the suffering of a cruel death. He understands our humanity and suffering and possesses power over death knowing the way to victory. He has zeal to fight for us against all that opposes us with the sword of His mouth. He is fully God with eyes like fire to impart holy love and removed all that hinders love.

He is the Morning Star that fills our lives with brightness. His feet are like fine brass that judges all His enemies. He has the seven Spirits or the authority to release the diverse ministries of the Spirit to equip and revive us. He is holy, reliable and powerful (Rev. 3:7-13) and has the key of David to open and shut all necessary doors. He is reliable and powerful as the Amen whose promises are sure (Rev. 3:14-22). He is the Faithful and True Witness telling us the truth that sets us free!

Spend time today reflecting, praising and praying through Revelation 1:12-18.

"Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man (ascended Lord Jesus), clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'"

Day 4: The Church of Ephesus

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ² 'I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶ But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'" Rev 2:1-7

The first letter John is tasked with writing is to the church in the city of Ephesus. This city was a popular city. The Apostle Paul spent three years in this city, the longest stay in any city he planted a church. He passed the baton off to a young pastor by the name of Timothy, and under Timothy's leadership the church is said to have reached upwards of 50,000 people.

In the verses above we are confronted with what most Bibles refer to as the loveless church. I have heard many sermons on this loveless church. It wasn't until I read the letter a bit more closely, and praying for Jesus to remove any bias that would interfere with what this was saying that I found something deeper.

Jesus paints a picture of Himself here, the one who holds the seven stars in His hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands, and it is significant to what He is about to say. Revelation 1:20 tells us what this picture is. The seven stars are the seven angels, or messengers of the churches, and the seven lampstands are the churches themselves. The picture Jesus is painting here is that He is walking about the churches and sees what is happening.

The letter shifts. Jesus praises them, and tells them they have done many great things, but then accuses them of lacking one thing. They have lost their first love. This is why the church is called the loveless church, but is this the only problem? They were doing great things that were advancing the Kingdom of God. I'm sure many people were coming to Christ. This indictment to me is not just one of losing love, but rather losing motivation. The people have gotten busy. Ephesus is the busy church, and as a result they have forgotten WHY they do WHAT they do.

Has this ever happened to you before? Have you ever found yourself so busy that you have forgotten why you are that busy to begin with? Has your walk with Jesus become more about checking things off the list than about the passionate love He has for you, and the response we give back to him? I am all for doing things, but not at the expense of hearing Jesus tell me that I am so busy I no longer have time for him.

What I love about Jesus so much is that He doesn't just leave the church hanging. He says that he sees and knows, then gives them the remedy.

- 1. Remember:** Remember the place you were when this all started? That's the place Jesus wants us to remain. I was six when I accepted Jesus, but I was passionate. I loved Jesus, and things were simply that simple. Do you remember? Jesus wants us to realize that our capacity to do anything for Him is equal to proximity to Him.
- 2. Repent:** Repent simply means to have a change of mind, heart, and direction. The church had forgotten who they were, and stopped doing what they had done early. Jesus is telling them to get back to that. Turn back toward Jesus. Get close to him again.
- 3. Repeat:** Jesus tells the church to get back to their first works. For Ephesus this meant evangelism, counteracting the wickedness of their city, burning their books of witchcraft. What is that for you? Do you need to read your Bible like you never have before again? Maybe you've stopped sharing your faith and need to start doing that again? It's time to get back to the basics, receiving Jesus' love for you and loving him by loving others with his love!

There is a reward offered at the end for the Church if they can do this. It is for the church that overcomes. To me this is the best reward of the seven. Jesus promises eternal life with Him and found in Him! Honestly that is the best gift we can receive.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. **What has you so busy that it eats away at your time with Jesus?**
2. **What is Jesus calling you back to?**
3. **What is Jesus asking you to repent of?**
4. **What does Jesus want you to do?**

Day 5: The Church of Smyrna

⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:’ ⁹ “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.””
Rev 2:8-11

There are two things I want to say right up front. This one bothers me. This one also happens to be one of two churches Jesus has nothing to say anything negative about. That still does not take away from the fact reading this letter is depressing to a degree. Let me see if I can sum this up about the way many of see it. *“I know things are really rotten for you right now. You’re poor. People are going to put you in prison, and some of you might very well die. Hang in there, and I will make sure you don’t die a second time...”*

Things like this serve to remind me, as if life itself doesn’t, that following Jesus is not always sunshine and rainbows. However, I also have fallen in love with this letter for a few reasons.

Jesus knows: When Jesus says he knows, he isn’t just telling the church he is aware of what they are going through, but that he KNOWS. The Greek language uses two words for now. One word means that a person is cognitively or mentally aware of a thing. The other word, and the one here, means intimate, experienced knowledge.

Jesus has been through it too: Jesus knows because he has been through it. He said it himself, “I am the first and the last, he who was dead and came to life.” The reason Jesus can say to this church “I know things stink,” is because he has been through exactly what they are going through. Yes some may die, but Jesus did that and isn’t asking them to walk a path he hasn’t been on first.

Jesus is there: No matter what path Jesus asks you to take, Jesus has walked it first, and is with you through it. What amazes me is that we can be fickle people. We love Jesus when things are awesome, but when things are not awesome, we like to blame him. The comfort that is written in this very depressing situation is that Jesus is there. He didn't lead you through something hard to leave you there, but to get you through it. Just trust Jesus, he knows the way.

The people in Smyrna had it rough. They suffered persecution if they became Christians. Their wealth and livelihood were taken from them if they were discovered. Jesus identifies that it is Satan who is doing this to them and that it is going to continue for a while, but there is an end in sight. This serves as a reminder that our problems are never what they seem to be. Things happen, people offend us, our bosses can be difficult, and we can suffer unjust cruelty at the hands of people. If you turn on the news you know this to be true. While everyone is trying to diagnose the problem, typically the problem is never about the problem.

Jesus uses the word test. Can I suggest that the problems you face have more to do with your relationship with Jesus than they do about whatever the problem is. Stop right now and think about a problem you have had recently, or one you are going through. Have you asked Jesus what he wants to do IN you because of this? Have you asked him what he wants to do THROUGH you because of this?

The solution Jesus offers isn't the most inspiring here. Hang on... see it through. I can't make it sound any different than that. What I can do is promise that Jesus knows, Jesus has been through it too, Jesus is there, and the problem isn't the source, of the trouble. I can also promise you that Jesus is telling us that if we can hang on, there is an end in sight, one that ensures we never have to endure the troubles this life has to give us anymore.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **How does Jesus knowing what you are going through help you?**
2. **What does Jesus want to do you in your life because of this?**
3. **What is Jesus showing you about yourself because of what you're facing?**
4. **Have you truly given the situation to Him?**

Day 6: The Church of Pergamum

¹² "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶ Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁷ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To

him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”
Rev 2:12-17

Pergamum was a wicked city. There are two separate occasions Jesus mentions this as the city in which Satan dwells. Now I can't imagine how bad a city would need to be in order for Jesus to say that, but clearly it is bad. Jesus really has only one thing good to say about this particular church and the rest of it is bad. The people of this church remained faithful when Antipas, the leader of the church, was martyred. Tradition holds he was baked alive in a giant roasting pan. Thinking about that makes me shudder. Yet in the face of all this, they stayed true to following Jesus. This was likely because of the problems in the church.

Jesus starts the letter by referring to the fact he has a two-edged sword. We know from Hebrews 4:12 and 13 this is both God's Word, and Jesus himself. The picture we get of Jesus is that of judge, and not just any judge, but the one who judges things according to His Word.

Look at the issues he lists. The church is allowing compromise in the area of worship, sexual purity, and false doctrine. The reason we see Jesus pictured as someone who will judge according to His Word is because the church in Pergamum isn't keeping it that well. This church's situation comes down to the fact that people compromised somewhere. The example of Balaam is given who told Balak how to get the Israelites to curse themselves when God wouldn't allow Balaam to do it. Compromise led to sin, and sin led to God handing down a consequence that lasted for 10 generations. Compromise is a serious issue to God, and He is telling the church to deal with it.

Compromise is subtle: Often you aren't aware when you are faced with a compromising decision. This is why during the era of the holiness movement the church shunned anything innocent that could lead to sinful behavior. It wasn't that one thing was inherently evil, just that it could lead to other decisions that could lead to sin.

Compromise is justifiable: You can find yourself compromising because it can be justified. Many people have used Paul's idea of all things to all people to compromise other things the Bible marks as wrong in order, to win some souls for the Kingdom of God. The problem with that is as Christians we are not called to look, act, and smell, like the fish Jesus called us to catch.

Compromise is attractive: Compromise can seemingly avoid conflict and that's attractive. The only problem with this is that it puts you into conflict with God, the Bible, and in some cases your friends. Ultimately compromise leads to something none of us want. *Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. (Rev. 2:16)* Jesus is clear. He will judge compromise and fight against it with His Word. Whatever we seek to compromise, Jesus will ultimately show us where it is wrong, why it is wrong, and give us one option. Repent. That is the ultimate remedy, but what does that look like here? What if you find yourself in a compromising situation? Do what Joseph did. When Potiphar's wife grabbed his shirt and trapped him, Joseph ran from the situation and lost his coat. Keeping his integrity cost him a cloak and freedom, but he was able to say he never compromised.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **Have you allowed compromise into your life? Identify it?**
2. **What are things you can do now to avoid compromise later?**
3. **What is Jesus telling you to do to get out of the compromise you are in?**
4. **What does the Bible say about the compromise you face?**

Day 7: The Church of Thyatira

¹⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: ¹⁹ “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. ²⁰ Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²² Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. ²⁴ “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—²⁷ ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Rev2:18-29

When a church refuses to deal with compromise it will eventually become a corrupt church. This is the same for any person. If we ignore compromise eventually it will corrupt our character. This was the problem in the church of Thyatira. Jesus tells John to write this letter to them because of one woman, Jezebel. I’m not going to get into whether this was the woman’s name or just that this woman behaved like Ahab’s wicked wife Jezebel. What I know is that either way, she was no good.

Again, Jesus praises the faithfulness of this church. He applauds the fact their works are greater than when they started. The big problem is the woman who is convincing people that idols and having sexual affairs are okay. Right... this is being taught as okay by someone who seems to have the authority to do so. If this church had dealt with it when they could have it would not be at the point where Jesus is threatening to kill the woman and her followers with death. (This is not me being funny... look at it... Jesus says he will kill them with death.) Jesus gives this warning because there are those who are not following this woman. He tells them, hold onto what you have, and don’t do what she is doing. What is Jesus doing here, he is giving them space to turn their back on her.

I want to be careful how I say this, but I'm not sure there is a delicate way to do so. Jesus is coming after the corrupt church, the ones that have allowed compromise to lead people into sin under the guise of Christianity and claiming his name. It doesn't matter whether it is a church or a person; Jesus is going to deal with it. Yet in all of this His grace is amazing. He says, *"I gave her time to repent..."* The way I read this I hear sadness in Jesus voice as he laments... *"I gave her time, but she didn't."* Even in the middle of corrupt situations, even when we have allowed compromise to corrupt the image Jesus wants us to reflect, his grace is still there. His grace is evident in the space he gives for repentance. His grace is evident when he offers a warning to those who aren't following corruption.

The heart of God has always been focused on redemption. You may find yourself in a place where you know that you have let something into your life that has blown way past compromise, and Jesus is still there asking you to turn to him. It might be someone you know, a loved one that used to follow Jesus, but has since turned their back on him. Jesus wants us to know his grace and his reach is ever present in the direst of situations. The solution Jesus offers is repentance. I have already defined that word as having a change of mind, heart, and direction, but practically what does that mean? Think about taking a full 180 degree turn. It's like walking north, stopping, turning, and then walking south.

Corruption leads us away from Jesus. The solution for compromise is very simple, but that doesn't make it easy. Stop whatever it is that is pulling you away from Jesus. Turn around and face Jesus again. Start doing the things that will lead you back to him. I find that when I neglect my Bible reading, my time in prayer, I feel distant from Jesus and more susceptible to sin. To him who overcomes I will give them the morning star... Jesus. The one that overcomes gets me. Jesus is the prize, so live in a way that makes you win the prize.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. Are there areas in your life where you are drifting away from Jesus?**
- 2. What do you need to do to start walking back toward him?**
- 3. Who do you have in your life that will help you do these things?**

Day 8: The Church of Sardis

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. ⁴ You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. ⁶ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Rev 3:1-7

Sardis is not in a good place as far as Jesus is concerned. The way Jesus introduces himself in this letter also scares me a bit if I am honest. Jesus declares he has the Seven Spirits of God, in other words, I am God. He also reminds us that he holds the messengers of these seven churches in his hand. Jesus is asserting his Lordship over the church.

Jesus begins to scold the church. You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead. This is a stunning rebuke. The church could be compared to the church in Ephesus. Many good things were happening. The church was well known in the community. They had a good reputation, and likely had other churches talking about them. Yet Jesus sees past all of that. The truth remains that while we often look at the outward appearance, God is still looking at the heart. When He looks at this church, he finds that it is dead.

This is the ultimate result when we do not deal with the issues outlined in the other churches. When we lose sight of our motivation, compromise is possible. If we do not deal with compromise in our lives, our character will be corrupted. Corruption leads to death. The end result is that these issues can kill our relationship with Jesus.

However, Jesus promises to the overcomer that he will not blot their name out of the Lamb's Book of Life. Regardless of your theological leanings the fact Jesus himself even suggests this is possible should make you stop and go through every single reflection question again to take stock of your relationship with Jesus. Once again Jesus walks through a similar solution. First, remember. Second, hold onto what you still have. Third, repent.

Watch: This means to be alert and vigilant. Another way to say this is to stay awake and pay attention! Paying attention means that we must be intentional about what we do and how we spend our time. We can float through life, spend it like we have all the time in the world, or we can spend our time with the understanding we only have limited time.

Strengthen what remains: Jesus is suggesting that we can choose to be intentional. When he said this to the church there were things that were wrong, about to die. He said their works were not perfect, but he didn't say they were doomed. Even if we find things in our life or walk with God at this point in the process, by the grace of God, we can always make intentional choices to walk closer to Jesus. Maybe if Jesus were writing this letter today, he would have told the church that they were on life support, and it was time to start fighting. Jesus promises that the one who succeeds in this will be clothed in white garments. Even if they were defiled at one point, Jesus will make them white, and personally present us to God the Father and acknowledge that we are his.

Let me encourage you that if you are at this point in your walk it isn't too late. According to church history Ephesus didn't listen and the church ceased to exist. Sardis, the one that was about to die, they listened, did what Jesus told them to, and they thrived. It is never too late make things right with God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. Are there any parts of your relationship with Jesus that on life support? List them out.**

2. What image are you projecting to those around you... is it accurate?
3. Identify the one thing Jesus wants to you to strengthen in your walk with him?
4. What are ways that you can choose to be more intentional in how you spend your life?

Day 9: The Church of Philadelphia

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’”: ⁸ ‘I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹ Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ¹² He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. ¹³ ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’” Rev 3:7-13

Jesus has nothing bad to say about this church. Everything he says is incredible. When you read through this letter to Philadelphia you get the impression this is the ideal church. The church isn't immune to problems. We see from reading this letter that they dealt with persecution. People were lying about them, and yet none of the problems they faced caused them to waiver in their faith, or disobey God in anyway. Jesus tells them that he has the key of David. He can open and close any door and it has to stay that way, and then tells them they have an open door. This is exactly what Jesus is looking from us, so let's walk through what they did so we can emulate it.

Rely on Jesus: Jesus makes an interesting aside in the letter, “for you have a little strength.” This church has earned the highest praise of any of the seven churches and points out that it wasn't because of what they could do. The phrase “little strength” in Greek is small ability. When we recognize that we have little ability it brings us to a place where we rely on Jesus, even for the smallest of things. We need to rely on Jesus for everything, especially when it doesn't seem like that big of a deal. I've learned that if I can't trust Jesus with something small, I cannot trust him with something big.

Do not Compromise: This church did not compromise. They stayed true to God's Word. We cannot compromise. Let's not forget the previous three churches we looked at leading up to this. Compromise eventually leads to death, but more practical than that, Jesus cannot do great things with people who are willing to compromise, and he certainly does not open a wide door of endless possibility to those who do. Make the decision now to be faithful to God's Word. Never

let the Bible out of your sight, and do not waiver from what it teaches. There will be pressure, and people may lie, but the benefits of not compromising are worth it all.

Be Faithful: Under the pressure to deny Jesus and compromise, this church did not deny Jesus. They remained faithful to him. This serves as a reminder that Jesus is looking for people who will be faithful to him regardless of the things which are happening around them. This is more than just about compromise, but about continuing to choose Jesus and make him first every single day.

Don't give up: Jesus points out that this church persevered. This is the hardest part about following Jesus. When things look bleak, or when they don't seem to go our way, it is easy to quit. Let me encourage you, NEVER GIVE UP! Do not quit until you get to the destination. The destination is ultimately what Jesus promises here. *"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."* Live with the destination in mind, and when you feel like quitting, let the hope that there is a destination keep you pushing ahead.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. **Where are some areas you need to rely on Jesus more?**
2. **What are ways you can stay faithful and not compromise**
3. **What helps you to keep going when you feel like giving up?**
4. **If Jesus told you he was opening a door for you that no one could shut what would you do?**

Day 10: The Church of Laodicea

"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ 'I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²² 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' " Rev 3:14-22

Of all the seven letters to the churches this one is likely one I have heard the most sermons from. In general Jesus has nothing good to say about this church. They are lacking in passion, and based on what Jesus says, they are indifferent. The description of Jesus in this letter only adds to the rebuke which follows. *"I am the Amen,"* he says, *"the True Witness..."* This description serves to remind us that Jesus calls things as he sees them. There is a reason for this. Jesus

knows we can never achieve what he wants us to unless he first shows us where we are. In this case, he is showing an indifferent church just how wrong they really are. In verse 17, Jesus says the church considers itself to be rich and in need of nothing. This reminds me of one of my favorite proverbs where Solomon prays and asks God to give him neither wealth nor poverty, so that he doesn't curse God for being poor, nor abandon his reliance on God because he is wealthy. This can be a trap for any of us. It is amazing to me how many people need God when things are bad, but when things are seemingly good, we don't need him. The perceived wellness of this church caused them to be blind to the real state of their church and lives. In fact, Jesus tells them they are wretched, poor, miserable, blind, and naked. God help us to never get so indifferent that what we perceive determines our need for God.

The solution Jesus offers is rather interesting. Repentance is part of it, but there are three items he discusses to solve their current spiritual reality.

Gold refined in the fire: This first item deals with purity, integrity, and transparency. On a practical level Jesus wants us to be aware that these things are more important than physical wealth. Jesus was the one who asked "*What does it profit a man if he gain the world and lose his soul?*" On another level Jesus is telling the people of this church they need to submit to the refining process. When gold, silver, or any metal is refined, the heat causes the impurities to rise so they can be scraped off. Jesus wants to refine us, but we have to let him.

White Garments: Once the refining process has happened, it needs to be evident outwardly. Spiritually the people of this church are naked, uncovered, and embarrassing. Jesus tells them to cover themselves up, and put on purity. Jesus wants us to be free from the sin and shame that "being naked" brings. The word picture here is a clear reference back to the garden when Adam disobeyed and knew he was naked. We cannot cover ourselves with anything other than what God provides through the gospel of grace!

Eye Salve: Why eye salve? I will be honest this one always escaped me until I became a dad. When my kids were born the nurses put ointment on their eyes. I was curious, so I asked them why. The whole point was to keep an infection from setting in. One of the potential effects of the infection was blindness. Jesus prescribes eye salve so we will be able to see our reality from his perspective. We need to pray that what we see lines up with what he sees. After all this life is a walk WITH Jesus.

Jesus wraps this up by telling the church to be passionate and repent. Then, comes a verse we like to use for salvation. However Jesus is speaking to Christians. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.* Jesus really wants to walk with you, to have a relationship with you, and spend eternity with you. Will you let him?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **Identify any areas in your life which your walk with Jesus may be indifferent.**
2. **What are the things Jesus wants to purify in you?**
3. **What are you doing to see things from God's perspective?**
4. **How are you strengthening your relationship with Jesus?**