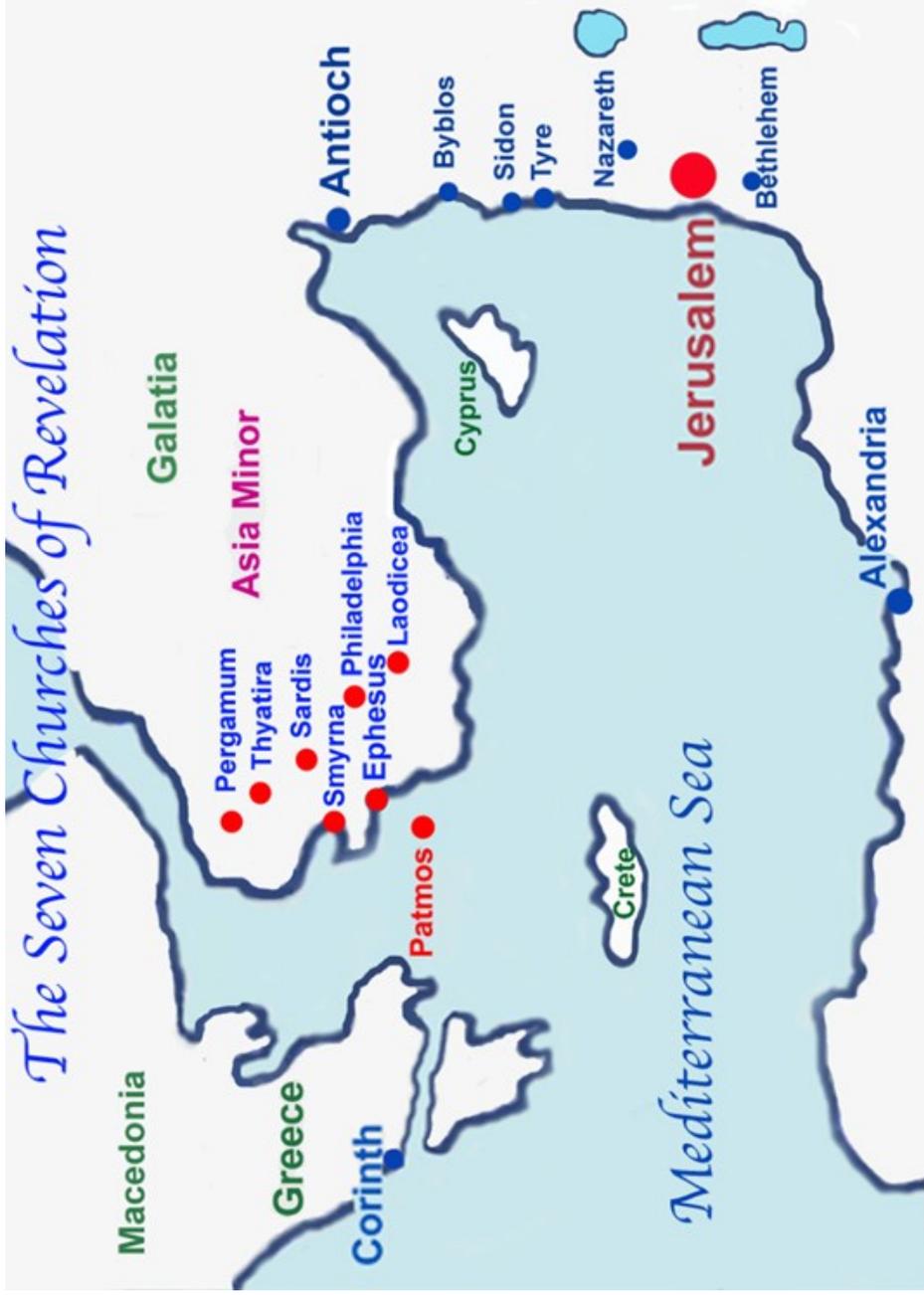


The Seven Churches of Revelation



DAN
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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

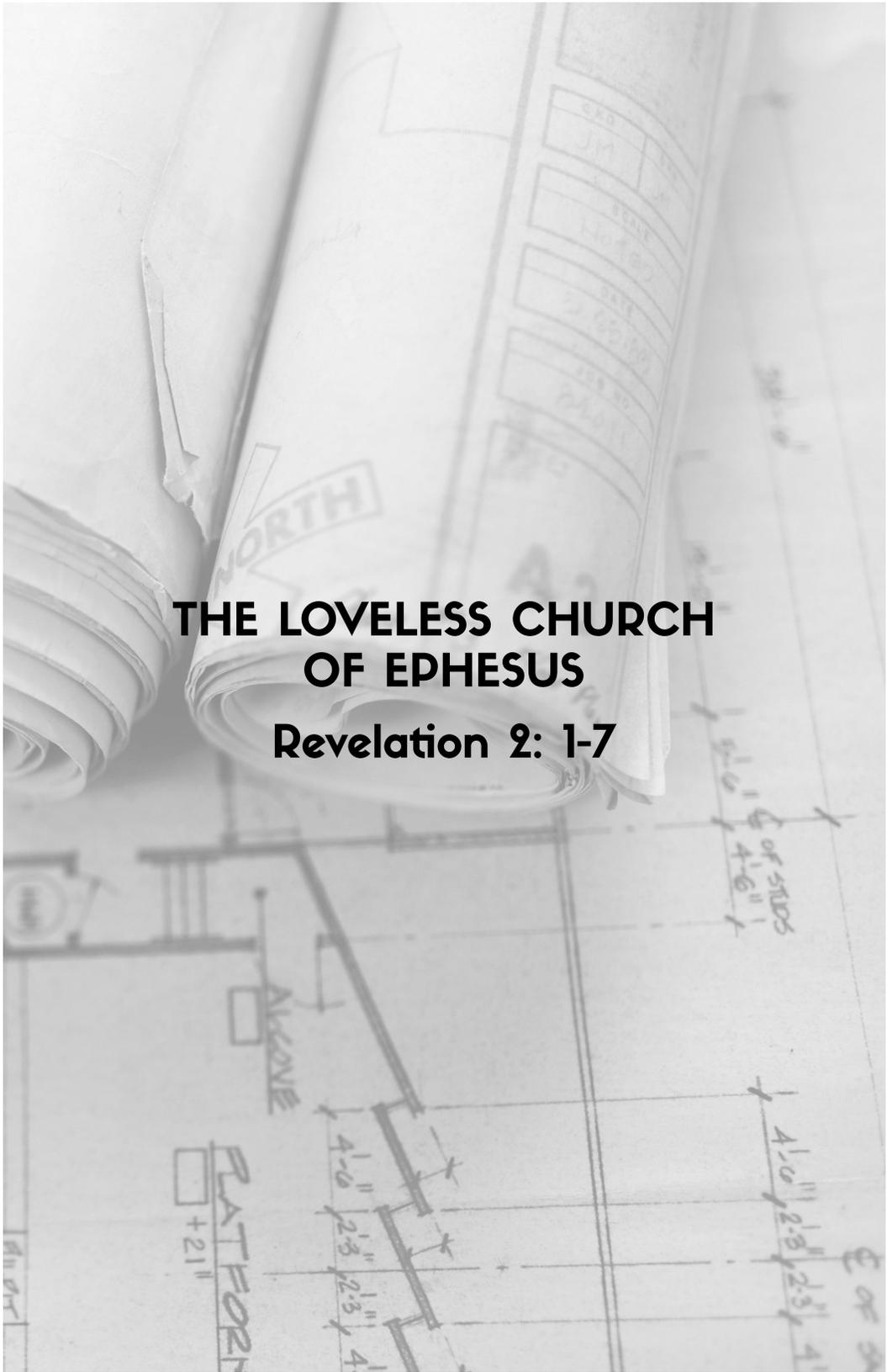
After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, His followers were persecuted by Jews who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the King from the line of David whom God promised to give His people to reign over them forever. Even after many of them fled the persecution that was happening in Jerusalem, they were still persecuted throughout the entire Roman Empire not only by Jews, but also by the Greco-Roman society. Christians would not worship the Roman Emperor or any of the gods that many people prayed to for protection and blessing. Because of that, if anything bad happened in the community, the Christians would often be blamed.

Most likely, all the original followers of Jesus were killed for their faith during this time except for John who was exiled to the island of Patmos just off the coast of the provincial area of Galatia, Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. It is during this exile that Jesus came to John in a vision with a message for seven churches that were in that area.

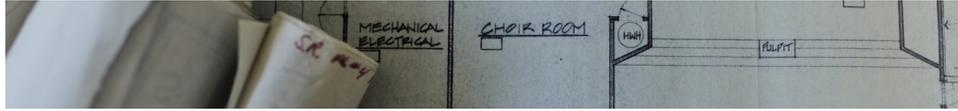
Judgement is a major theme in the book of Revelation, and it begins with 'the household of God' (1 Peter 4:17). As we look at Jesus' message to His churches, we will see that He gives encouragement as well as correction, warning as well as hope. Jesus' words are very sharp and direct. He does not pamper His people because He loves them too much for that! He loves Sun River Church too much for that and he loves you too much for that as well.

We pray that through this series Jesus Himself will meet us, strengthen us where we need to be strengthened for the struggles we face in our time, AND convict us where we need to repent and change our ways, because we want to be HIS church, faithful and useful to accomplish HIS mission.

[Bookmark our webpage for this series which includes a printable study guide, introduction videos, and links to the weekly sermon: sunriverchurch.com/current-series](http://sunriverchurch.com/current-series)



**THE LOVELESS CHURCH
OF EPHESUS**
Revelation 2: 1-7



01

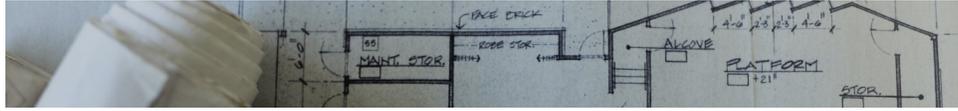
CHURCH OF EPHEBUS

OVERVIEW

Ephesus was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia; it was a busy seaport, had a thriving commerce, and was the center of worship of the fertility goddess Artemis (Diana in Latin). The temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. (You can find some pictures online.)

Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus along with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18-19) and a church was established. Sometime later Timothy also ministered there (1 Tim 1:3) and at the time John wrote this letter, it was one of the most important churches in the Roman Empire.

⇒ Read Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus from Revelation 2:1-7.



02 CHURCH OF EPHESUS

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

Answer the following questions from Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus.

- ⇒ Did the church in Ephesus do anything right? If so, what were the things Jesus mentioned?

- ⇒ Did the church in Ephesus do anything wrong? If so, what were the things Jesus mentioned?

- ⇒ Did Jesus give the church in Ephesus a warning? If so, what will happen if they don't change their ways?

- ⇒ Did Jesus give the church in Ephesus any words of hope? If so, what will happen if they are victorious?



03

CHURCH OF EPHESUS

REFLECT: SUN RIVER CHURCH

- ⇒ Think about the words of encouragement that Jesus gave to the church in Ephesus. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Ephesus, would Jesus have reason to encourage us in the same way?

- ⇒ Think about the words of rebuke and warning that Jesus gave to the church in Ephesus. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Ephesus, would Jesus have reason to rebuke and warn us in the same way?

- ⇒ Our understanding of victory is shaped by stories that we believe represent what is good and right. These can be true stories from our culture and family as well as fictional stories we read and watch. If we want our understanding of victory to be grounded in truth, we need to see how it lines up with Jesus' description of victory in his message to each of the churches (as well as how He demonstrated victory through his life, death and resurrection). Given the rebuke and warning to the church in Ephesus, what would it mean to 'conquer'? What would that same type of victory look like for Sun River Church?



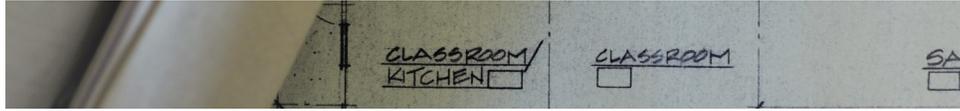
05

CHURCH OF EPHESUS

SUMMARY

Jesus said He is 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' (John 14:6). The church in Ephesus is an example of a church that pursued the truth of sound teaching but did not pursue Him and love Him as being The Truth. Good works, accurate doctrine, steadfast commitment, and hating evil are NOT substitutes for loving God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and loving others without hypocrisy. May we not only hold fast to doctrinal truth, but also love and be known for our love of Jesus and others.

⇒ Take some time personally and as a group to practice confession and repentance. But also remember God's abundant grace and forgiveness. Include a time of thankfulness for the certain hope that we have.



06

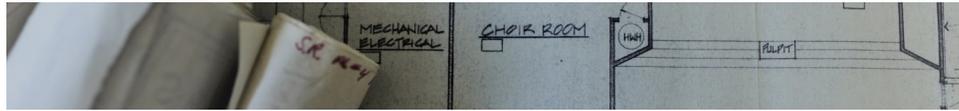
CHURCH OF EPHESUS

GROUP DISCUSSION

- ⇒ v1 Christ *holds the seven stars* (angels/messengers) means that they are under his control. He walks *among the lampstands* (churches) means that He is present in their midst and aware of their activities.

- ⇒ How aware are we of Jesus' presence in our lives and when we gather as a church? What would help us be more aware? Share with the group one thing you will do this week to help increase your awareness of Christ's presence.

- ⇒ v4 If we ever abandon the love that we had at first, how do we rekindle it? Share with the group one thing you will do this week that you want to remember to do out love for God and others rather than any other motive.



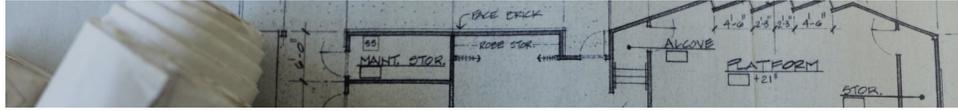
01

CHURCH OF SMYRNA

OVERVIEW

Smyrna was another important city in the province of Asia. It had a famous stadium, a library, and one of the largest public theaters at the time. It also had a very strong allegiance to Rome. Citizens not only worshipped the Caesars as gods but also worshipped the city of Rome itself personified as a goddess (Dea Roma). We don't know when the church in Smyrna was started, but it is likely that it happened during the time that Paul lived in Ephesus which was only 35 miles away. It became a well-organized church with elders and deacons. Polycarp, who was discipled by the apostle John himself, became the bishop of Smyrna in the early second century A.D. Because Christians refused to worship Caesar and Rome, they were severely persecuted. Polycarp was martyred by being burned at the stake and pierced with a spear.

⇒ Read Jesus words to the church in Smyrna from Revelation 2:8-11.



02

CHURCH OF SMYRNA SCRIPTURE REVIEW

Answer the following questions from Jesus' words to the church in Smyrna.

- ⇒ Did the church in Smyrna do anything right? If so, what were the things Jesus mentioned?

- ⇒ Did the church in Smyrna do anything wrong? If so, what were the things Jesus mentioned?

- ⇒ Did Jesus give the church in Smyrna a warning? If so, what will happen if they don't change their ways?

- ⇒ Did Jesus give the church in Smyrna any words of hope? If so, what will happen if they are victorious?



03

CHURCH OF SMYRNA

REFLECT: SUN RIVER CHURCH

- ⇒ Think about the words of encouragement that Jesus gave to the church in Smyrna. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Smyrna, would Jesus have reason to encourage us in the same way?

- ⇒ Notice that Jesus did not rebuke the church in Smyrna. What does that say about the role suffering can play in making our lives more pleasing to Him?

- ⇒ For the church in Smyrna, what would it mean to conquer? What would that same type of victory look like for Sun River Church?



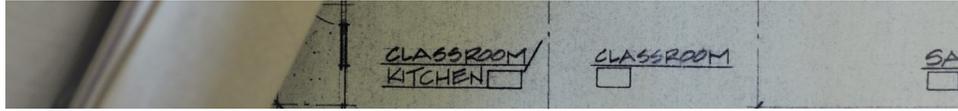
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CHURCH OF SMYRNA

SUMMARY

Jesus said he is 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' (John 14:6). The church in Smyrna is an example of a church that looked to Jesus as their ultimate source of life. Suffering, poverty and slander did not stop them from being faithful to the way of Jesus even if it brought them more suffering (v10). May we also train our hearts to see all kinds of trials and persecution as opportunities to trust Him and grow in endurance and perseverance.

⇒ Take some time personally and as a group to practice confession and repentance. But also remember God's abundant grace and forgiveness. So, include a time of thankfulness for the certain hope that we have.

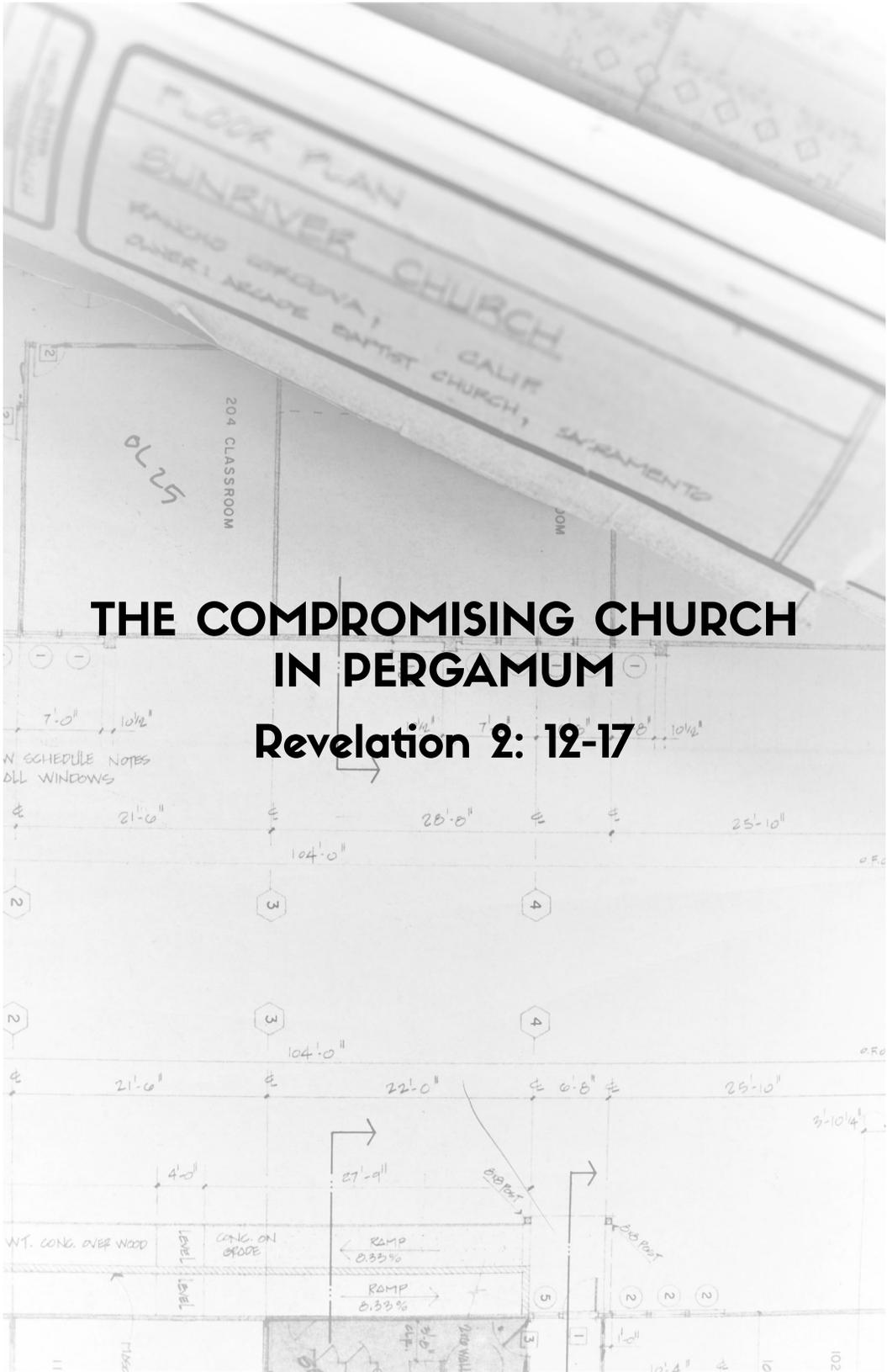


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CHURCH OF SMYRNA GROUP DISCUSSION

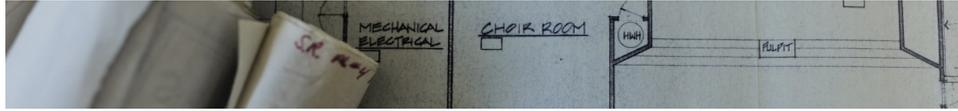
- ⇒ v10-11 Jesus reminds his followers of the reality that Satan is behind some of their suffering. How is Satan the architect of their suffering? How is Satan the architect of some types of suffering today?

- ⇒ God is the one who allows Satan to put people through suffering in order to be tested. The word tested (peirozoa) means to try to learn the nature or character of someone or something by submitting it to thorough and extensive testing. What does this definition say about the purpose of God behind this type of suffering? How has some suffering you experienced in the past brought about spiritual growth in your life?



THE COMPROMISING CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

Revelation 2: 12-17



01

CHURCH OF PERGAMUM OVERVIEW

The city of Pergamum was known for its devotion to worshipping the Greco-Roman gods and goddesses. It had a great altar to worship Zeus as well as a famous shrine of Asclepius, the god of healing. Many people from around the world would come to be healed. Some referred to Asclepius as the 'Savior'. The citizens of Pergamum considered themselves civilized and educated, having a large library given by Anthony to Cleopatra. One of the most well-known physicians, Galen, was from Pergamum. Not much is known about the church in Pergamum except from what was written about it in Revelation.

⇒ Read Jesus words to the church in Pergamum from Revelation 2:12-17.



03

CHURCH OF PERGAMUM

REFLECT: SUN RIVER CHURCH

- ⇒ Think about the words of encouragement that Jesus gave to the church in Pergamum. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Pergamum, would Jesus have reason to encourage us in the same way?

- ⇒ Think about the words of rebuke and warning that Jesus gave to the church in Pergamum. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Pergamum, would Jesus have reason to rebuke and warn us in the same way?

- ⇒ For the church in Pergamum, what would it mean to conquer? What would that same type of victory look like for Sun River Church?



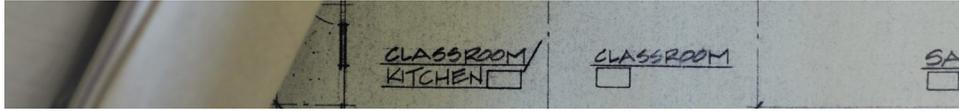
05

CHURCH OF PERGAMUM

SUMMARY

Jesus said He is 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' (John 14:6). The church in Pergamum is an example of a church that was faithful to The Way even during times of severe persecution. However, they were in danger of compromising The Truth as some people were following false teaching. When we compromise the truth in our teaching in order to be more acceptable to the world around us, we lose our authenticity as followers of Jesus. May we be faithful to our identity in Christ by sharing The Truth and loving people without being people-pleasers.

⇒ Take some time personally and as a group to practice confession and repentance. But also remember God's abundant grace and forgiveness. Include a time of thankfulness for the certain hope that we have.



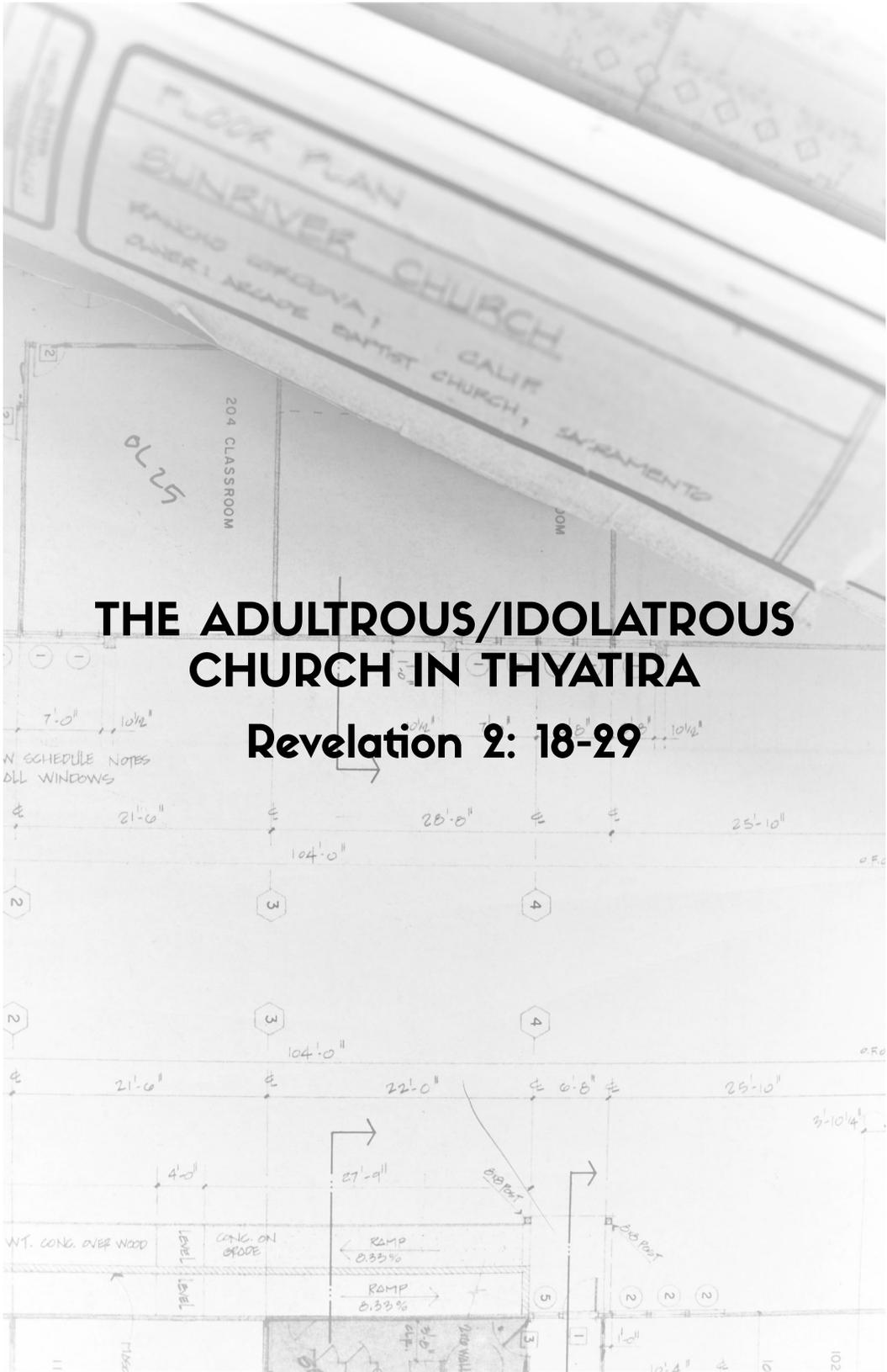
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CHURCH OF PERGAMUM

GROUP DISCUSSION

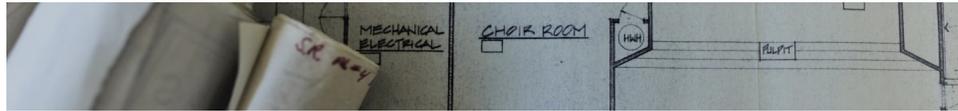
⇒ How does false teaching creep into a church? How does it compromise their identity as God's people?

⇒ What circumstances cause you to compromise the truth? How does it affect your identity as a follower of Christ? What should you do about it? What are some things that would help you grow in this area?



**THE ADULTROUS/IDOLATROUS
CHURCH IN THYATIRA**

Revelation 2: 18-29



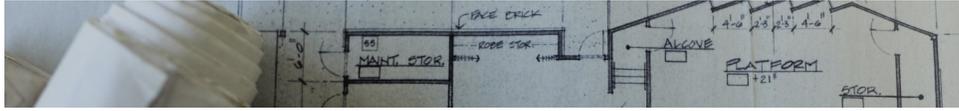
01

CHURCH OF THYATIRA

OVERVIEW

The city of Thyatira was not as well-known as the other six cities mentioned in the first part of Revelation. We do know that it had many trade guilds such as potters, tanners, weavers, bakers, slave dealers, and dyers. Lydia, who became a believer in Philippi, was from Thyatira and sold purple cloth (Acts 14:16). Every member of a trade guild was expected to participate in worship of the god who was associated with that specific trade. Christians were under economic and social pressure to be a part of that worship. This may be one of the reasons for their 'tolerance' that Jesus condemned.

⇒ Read Jesus' words to the church in Thyatira from Revelation 2:18-29.



02

CHURCH OF THYATIRA

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

Answer the following questions from Jesus' words to the church in Thyatira.

Did the church in Thyatira do anything right? If so, what were the things Jesus mentioned?

Did the church in Thyatira do anything wrong? If so, what were the things Jesus mentioned?

Did Jesus give the church in Thyatira a warning? If so, what will happen if they don't change their ways?

Did Jesus give the church in Thyatira any words of hope? If so, what will happen if they are victorious?



03

CHURCH OF THYATIRA

REFLECT: SUN RIVER CHURCH

- ⇒ Think about the words of encouragement that Jesus gave to the church in Thyatira. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Thyatira, would Jesus have reason to encourage us in the same way?

- ⇒ Think about the words of rebuke and warning that Jesus gave to the church in Thyatira. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Thyatira, would Jesus have reason to rebuke and warn us in the same way?

- ⇒ For the church in Thyatira, what would it mean to conquer? What would that same type of victory look like for Sun River Church?



04

CHURCH OF THYATIRA

REFLECT: INDIVIDUAL

- ⇒ Would Jesus have reason to encourage you personally in the same way He encouraged the believers in Thyatira?

- ⇒ Would Jesus have reason to rebuke and warn you personally in the same way He rebuked and warned the believers in Thyatira?

- ⇒ Think again about what it would mean to conquer for the church in Thyatira. What would that same type of victory look like in your own life?



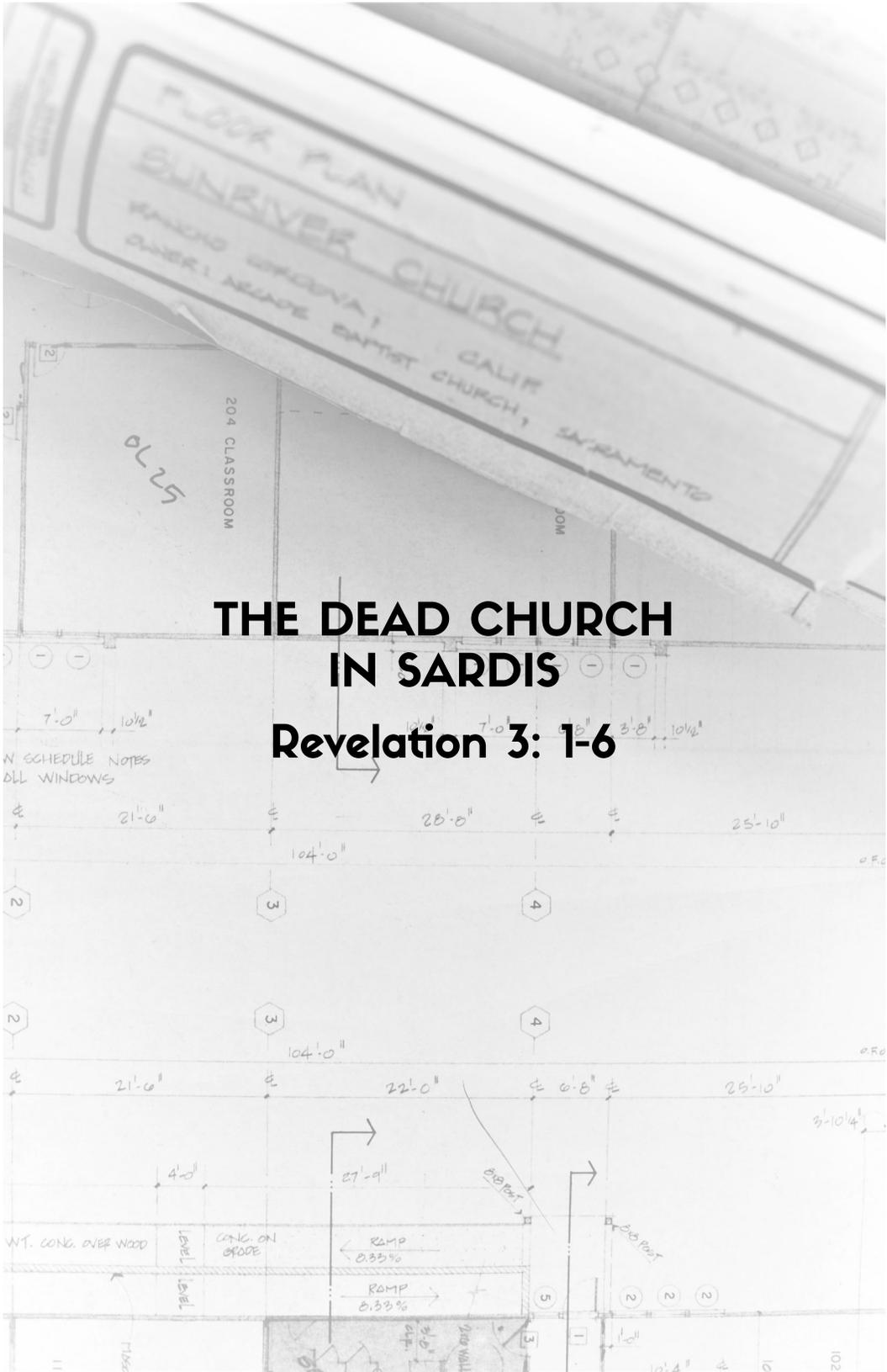
05

CHURCH OF THYATIRA

SUMMARY

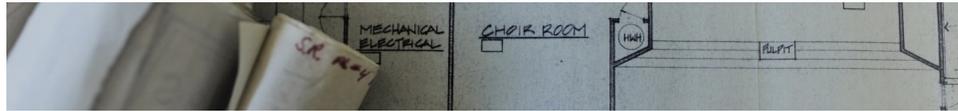
Jesus said He is 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' (John 14:6). The church in Thyatira is an example of a church that had continually increased their good works: love, faith, service and endurance. But some strayed from 'The Way' and 'The Truth' because they allowed false teaching by a false prophetess to lead people into worship of false gods. We cannot follow the ways of the world while trying to follow the way of Jesus at the same time. May we repent of any idolatrous ways and hold fast to Jesus Christ, our only true and living hope.

⇒ Take some time personally and as a group to practice confession and repentance. But also remember God's abundant grace and forgiveness. So, include a time of thankfulness for the certain hope that we have.



THE DEAD CHURCH IN SARDIS

Revelation 3: 1-6



01

CHURCH OF SARDIS

OVERVIEW

The city of Sardis was located on top of Mount Tmolus, a 1500 foot high hill with cliffs on three sides, which made it a strong military fortress. However, because it was considered impenetrable, the defense of the city could become lax. Twice in its history, it was overtaken by enemies who stealthily climbed up the cliffs and were able to open the city gates from the inside. (Once in 549 BC by the Persian King Cyrus and once in 216 BC by the Grecian King Antiochus the Great.) In 17 AD an earthquake destroyed the city, and Rome built a new town at the foot of the hill. So even though the city had a glorious past, by the time John wrote Revelation, it was in decline. Many citizens of Sardis worshipped the mother goddess, Cybele or Artemis (Mother Earth) who was believed to have the power of restoring the dead to life.

⇒ Read Jesus' words to the church in Sardis from Revelation 3:1-6.



03

CHURCH OF SARDIS

REFLECT: SUN RIVER CHURCH

- ⇒ Think about the words of encouragement that Jesus gave to the church in Sardis. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Sardis, would Jesus have reason to encourage us in the same way?

- ⇒ Think about the words of rebuke and warning that Jesus gave to the church in Sardis. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Sardis, would Jesus have reason to rebuke and warn us in the same way?

- ⇒ For the church in Sardis, what would it mean to conquer? What would that same type of victory look like for Sun River Church?



04

CHURCH OF SARDIS

REFLECT: INDIVIDUAL

⇒ Would Jesus have reason to encourage you personally in the same way He encouraged the believers in Sardis?

⇒ Would Jesus have reason to rebuke and warn you personally in the same way He rebuked and warned the believers in Sardis?

⇒ Think about what it would mean to conquer for the church in Sardis. What would that same type of victory look like in your own life?



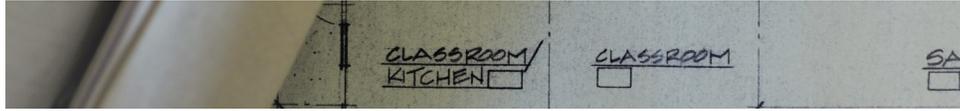
05

CHURCH OF SARDIS

SUMMARY

Jesus said He is 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' (John 14:6). The church in Sardis is an example of a church that did not have true 'life'. It was dead. Its good reputation was not a measure of how well it was doing in God's eyes. We need to continually ask Him to evaluate how well our activities are accomplishing His purpose for the church. May we be a church that always looks to Jesus as the source of our life and is ready to learn from Him.

⇒ Take some time personally and as a group to practice confession and repentance. But also remember God's abundant grace and forgiveness. Include a time of thankfulness for the certain hope that we have.



06

CHURCH OF SARDIS

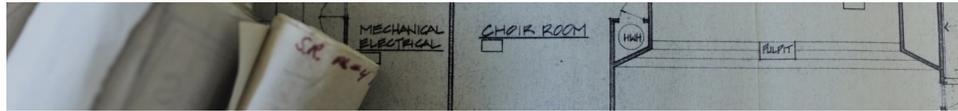
GROUP DISCUSSION

- ⇒ How or why is a church's reputation important?

- ⇒ What do you imagine the church in Sardis looked like in order to have the reputation of being alive?

- ⇒ What does a church today look like that has a reputation of being alive, but is actually dead?

- ⇒ What does it look like for a church to really be alive?



01

CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

OVERVIEW

The city of Philadelphia (meaning 'brotherly love') was founded in 189 BC by the king of Pergamum who gave it that name because of his brother's loyalty to him. The region around Philadelphia was volcanic which meant that it was prone to earthquakes. But it also made the soil fertile for growing grapes and the city's residents worshipped the god of wine, Dionysius. It had a strategic location at the intersection of some major trade routes which made it a city of commercial importance earning it the title 'the gateway to the East'. The city also became a center for spreading the Greek language and culture to the interior of Asia Minor. But the church could use this as an 'open door' (v8) to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

⇒ Read Jesus' words to the church in Philadelphia from Revelation 3:7-13.



04

CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

REFLECT: INDIVIDUAL

⇒ Would Jesus have reason to encourage you personally in the same way He encouraged the believers in Philadelphia?

⇒ Think again about what it would mean to conquer for the church in Philadelphia. What would that same type of victory look like in your own life?



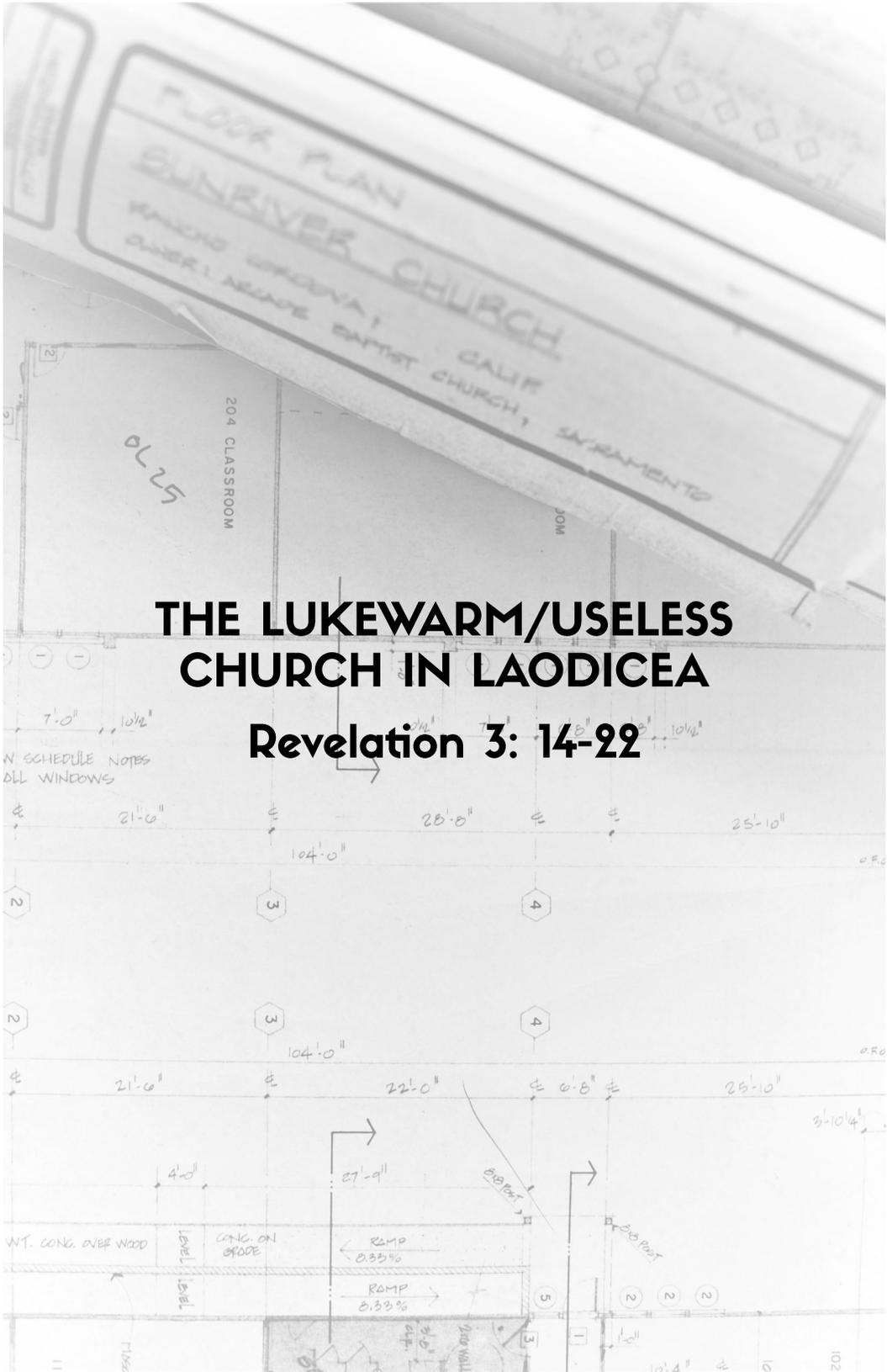
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CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

SUMMARY

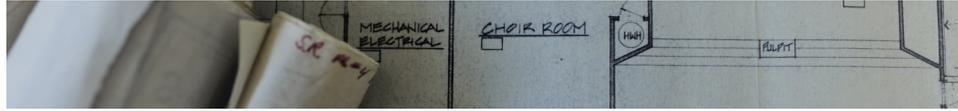
Jesus said He is 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' (John 14:6). The church in Philadelphia is an example of a church that had little power on their own but did not deny Christ even through persecution. They were faithful to witness about Him as 'The Way' and they kept 'The Truth' by obeying His word. Their faithfulness gave them true life with Christ. May we be a church that is faithful in all these ways as well.

⇒ Take some time personally and as a group to practice confession and repentance. But also remember God's abundant grace and forgiveness. Include a time of thankfulness for the certain hope that we have.



**THE LUKEWARM/USELESS
CHURCH IN LAODICEA**

Revelation 3: 14-22



01

CHURCH OF LAODICEA

OVERVIEW

The city of Laodicea was located in the fertile valley of Lycus which provided good pasture for sheep. The variety of sheep bred there had soft, glossy black wool that was famous in the region. Since the city was along the major trade route in the area, this textile industry flourished. Laodicea also had a well-known medical school. One of their products was a salve made from oil mixed with Phrygian powder, a type of porous rock that was crushed. The commercial prosperity then caused the banking business to become prominent as well. The city had so much wealth that they did not need financial help from Rome to rebuild after a major earthquake. However, one of Laodicea's weaknesses was that it did not have a good water supply. They had to build aqueducts to bring in water from the nearby cities of Hierapolis and Colossae. The church in Laodicea was probably started by one of the people Paul trained in church planting, perhaps Epaphras. Paul himself may have never visited the church, but he did write them a letter (Col 4:16) that has been lost in antiquity.

⇒ Read Jesus' words to the church in Laodicea from Revelation 3:14-22.



03

CHURCH OF LAODICEA

REFLECT: SUN RIVER CHURCH

- ⇒ Jesus did not encourage the church in Laodicea for anything that they were doing. How does a church go through the motions of spiritual activities without living in a way that glorifies God?

- ⇒ Think about the words of rebuke and warning that Jesus gave to the church in Laodicea. If you compare Sun River Church with the church in Laodicea, would Jesus have reason to rebuke and warn us in the same way?

- ⇒ For the church in Laodicea, what would it mean to conquer? What would that same type of victory look like for Sun River Church?



04

CHURCH OF LAODICEA

REFLECT: INDIVIDUAL

- ⇒ Would Jesus have reason to rebuke and warn you personally in the same way He rebuked and warned the believers in Laodicea?

- ⇒ Think again about what it would mean to conquer for the church in Laodicea. What would that same type of victory look like in your own life?

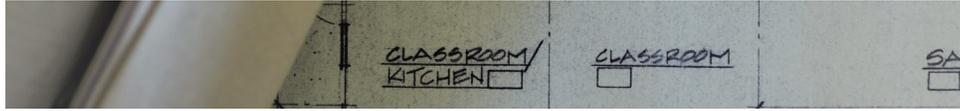


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CHURCH OF LAODICEA SUMMARY

Jesus said He is 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' (John 14:6). The church in Laodicea is an example of a church that followed their own way and could not see the truth of their poor condition. They had enough spirituality to think they didn't need anything, but their lives were not fully surrendered to Christ. The result was that they could not see the ways they needed to be changed by Him and they were not able to bring others into a relationship with Him. May we be a different kind of church, one that is constantly aware of our spiritual vitality and one that is exceptionally useful to fulfill His mission.

- ⇒ Take some time personally and as a group to practice confession and repentance. But also remember God's abundant grace and forgiveness. Include a time of thankfulness for the certain hope that we have.



06

CHURCH OF LAODICEA

GROUP DISCUSSION

⇒ v17 What are some ways to prevent spiritual blindness?

⇒ v20 Are there any 'doors' in your life that you don't want to let Jesus in to? What would 'letting Him in' look like practically?

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