



## **Group Discussion Guide**

*For group meetings from August 30 afternoon through September 6 morning*

From the English Standard Version introduction to Revelation:

*“The revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1) was probably written by the apostle John while in exile on the island of Patmos, off the coast of present-day Turkey. It was addressed to seven actual churches. Revelation begins with letters from Christ himself to these churches, letters that include commendation, criticism, and comfort.*

### **Revelation 1**

John introduced the letter and explained how he received the revelation. He wrote to the seven churches in Asia and reminded them of who Jesus is and what he had done for all who believe. John also stated that Jesus is in fact coming again. In more detail, John described how Jesus appeared to him among seven golden lampstands, holding seven stars in his hand. Jesus explained to John that the seven stars were the seven “angels” which are commonly believed to be the pastors of the churches, and the lampstands were the seven churches.

### **Revelation 2**

In his message to the church at Ephesus, Jesus told the church leader that this group of believers generally did not tolerate evil, identified false teachers and exemplified endurance. However, he told them they have one major fault: they had walked away from the love they had when they first began following Christ. Jesus commended this church for standing against the Nicolaitans, a group that is not clearly defined in Scripture but apparently was wrong in its belief and practice.

The church at Smyrna received commendations for enduring through difficult circumstances. This is the one of the two churches out of the seven that did not receive a rebuke. Jesus also encouraged these believers to have courage as they faced trials.

Jesus commended the church at Pergamum for being faithful in the midst of an evil culture. However, he rebuked this group because some among them chose to live immorally and some followed the teachings of the group known as the Nicolaitans, which was referenced in the letter to the church at Ephesus.

The church at Thyatira was commended for its love, faith, service and endurance. However, this church was sharply rebuked by Jesus because within this group of believers, a woman was leading a large movement of immorality. Many within the church followed her. She is identified as “Jezebel,” which could be her real name or could be the name Jesus gave to her because of how similar she was to the wife of Ahab (1 Kings 16:31-33). Jesus promises that she will be punished, as will those who follow her and refuse to repent.

### **Revelation 3**

The church at Sardis received no commendation from Jesus. Instead, he told them they were thought of as being alive, but in reality, they were dead. Jesus instructed this church to wake up and repent of its evil. Jesus does not describe their sin in great detail. It must have been under the surface, otherwise the church would not have been able to maintain its reputation as being alive.

Jesus spoke to the church at Philadelphia and commended them for keeping his word and not denying his name. He told them that he would deliver their enemies into their hands. This church did not receive a rebuke from Christ, who also promised them he would deliver them from the great trials that were to come.

The final message is addressed to the church at Laodicea. Jesus did not commend these believers and issued a rebuke for their lukewarm attitude about the things of God. He told them they had allowed their material prosperity to cause spiritual poverty. Jesus reminded them that he was knocking on the door of their hearts, and that if the people would open their hearts to him, he would commune with them once again.

### **Ephesians 3**

Paul outlined the mystery of the gospel; the truth of Christ crucified for sin and resurrected in victory, which once was a mystery but now had been revealed. He told the Ephesian church that God's plan was to use the church to reveal His wisdom of unity among Jews and Gentiles to spiritual beings. Paul prayed for these believers to be strengthened through the Holy Spirit, and that their deep roots of faith would enable them to stay grounded in the love of Christ. He acknowledged that God is able to more than any believer can ask or even think.

### **Ephesians 4**

Paul expounded on the unity believers enjoy in Christ and told the believers in Ephesus to walk worthy of their calling as disciples of Jesus. This included humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness. He appealed to the power of God to give unity through Holy Spirit, and through the realization that all believers are part of the same body and follow one Spirit, one Lord, one faith and one baptism. He then shared how each believer has a role to play in the church, which has unity and diversity at the same time. Members have different gifts to be used in different ways to serve God and accomplish His work. As this happens, all members grow in maturity of faith and the overall body is strengthened. He shared practical ways that this plays out in life as believers focus on the new life they possess through the power of Christ.

## Discussion Questions

1. Many believers have been intimidated by reading, interpreting and applying the book of Revelation. What does it mean to you to know that this book begins with some very practical teaching that Jesus gives to seven actual churches?
2. What can you learn about trusting God from reading Revelation chapters 1-3?
3. Which of the commendations hit home with you the most? Which of the rebukes hit home with you the most?
4. As we who have trusted in Christ are “rooted and grounded in love” (Ephesians 3:17), we are able to comprehend the greatness of the love of Christ, and truly know his love. How does this change us?
5. Paul describes what it means to walk in a way that is worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:2-3). How would you describe this in your own words? What challenges you the most as you seek to walk in this way?
6. We each have the responsibility to put off our old self, renew our minds in the power of the Holy Spirit, and put on the new self (Ephesians 4:20-24). Paul states the new self is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. How does this truth change the way you think about yourself? About the power available to you to help you live according to God’s commands?