

LETTER 1 **EPHESUS**



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE **EPHESUS: THE FORGETFUL CHURCH**

Revelation 2:1-7

WORSHIP

Jesus begins His words of assessment to the Seven Churches, recorded by John, with the church in the large, significant, strategic port city of Ephesus. Let's begin our time together by praying the powerful prayer of the apostle Paul for this same church, probably written about 30 years earlier and recorded in **Ephesians 3**.

"For this reason—the eternal purpose God has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him- I bow my knee before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through God's Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

FELLOWSHIP

In what way has your understanding of the incomparable love of Christ—its breadth, length, height or depth—been strengthened by the events of 2020, including CoVid 19 and its far-reaching impact on all our lives?

DISCUSSION

While Jesus' letter to Ephesus begins with several commendations for the Ephesians' works, labor, patient endurance, zeal for the truth, perseverance for Jesus' name's sake and refusal to grow weary—while living as Christians in a pagan, perverse culture—there comes a stern rebuke, with dire consequences if they don't repent, for "forsaking their first love." In spite of their doctrinal integrity, abandoning, neglecting, dismissing, or letting grow cold the heartfelt love they had for Jesus and for one another at first was so grievous to Jesus that it put their light and even the very existence of their ministry at risk. The word used for love is *agape*, a little-used word in Greek thought that was adopted by the New Testament writers and infused with the unique meaning of the overwhelming dimensions of God's love as demonstrated in Jesus.

Read Revelation 2:1-7 together. As we try to apply this warning to ourselves, let's look at what other scriptures say about this love, how they explain what exactly it is and how we know if we have it. Our goal is keeping the fire of first love for Jesus and one another not only alive, but growing, being purified and able to draw others around us to the love of God in Christ. Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, IF you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

1. The book of 1 John has much to say about love, stating that "God is love" (1 John 4:16), that "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19), and that "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:9-10). Our love of God is a response to His love.

What is your understanding of God's love for you and your response to His love?

2. 1 John also describes how love is to rule our relationships. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us." (1 John 4:11-12). The NT is full of admonitions to love- love God, our neighbors, our enemies, one another in the church, and the poor and oppressed.

What are some practical ways we can demonstrate love for one another?

Does it seem possible for love to be perfected, to be made more full and complete, in us?

Have you experienced that as you've grown in Christ?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Paul affirmed the primacy of love repeatedly. 1 Corinthians 13 describes the permanence and preeminence of love and its characteristics.

Describe one of love's traits that you are working on and how that looks in your daily life.

4. Jesus had much to say about love- love of God and neighbor are the greatest commandments and fulfill the Law (Matt.22:37-40). Several times in John 14, Jesus linked obedience to love, saying "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (v.15); "Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me" (v.21); "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love Him, and We will come and make Our home with him" (v.23).

How do these words of Jesus challenge you to know and obey His word, even when it's costly?

5. Jesus also said, in John 15:7-10, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you...If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love..."

What does abiding mean to you?

Jesus demonstrated for us how He abided in His Father, through time spent alone in prayer and communion with Him. How are you growing in the time you spend with God, in the Word, prayer, reflection, meditation, journaling and worship?

LETTER WRITING CHALLENGE

Write a love letter to God this week

PRAYER

O Lord, we are your people, the sheep of Your pasture. We can only truly love because You first loved us. We are Your bride, to be in everlasting love with You. And yet, so often we fail—fail to love You, our neighbor, our enemies, our fellow believers, even our family. Oh God, forgive us; wash us and cleanse from our self-centeredness and lack of love. You are the One who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love You and keep Your commandments. We are desperate for You; we can't fulfill the law of love apart from Your guidance and grace. Help us daily humble ourselves and learn to love the way You love. Fill us with the knowledge of the breadth, length, height and depth of Your love, the love that is in You and abides in us by Your Spirit. Help us learn to yield to that love, to choose the way of love and let it be made whole in us, that all the world may know You are the One and only Savior and lover and anchor of our souls. Amen.