

NOT WITHOUT HOPE

Last Week, we saw John come face to face with Jesus in his full God-ness. This Week, we're hitting the first stop in the postal route of *Revelation*. To check out the map of the route, scan the QR code. We're reading the letter to the church at Ephesus. As we discussed in Zero Week, generally each one of these churches has done some things right and some things wrong.



All churches have successes and failures—just like us as believers. As we examine each of these letters, our desire is to learn from their mistakes. Each church failed in faithfulness in different ways. We must learn from them to avoid the traps into which they fell.

Sometimes we look at our mistakes and say, "That's just how I am. I'll never be better." That's a lie Satan wants you to believe. Every single time we open Scripture, God's letter to us, we are offered an opportunity to learn and grow. God accepts us just as we are, but he does not intend to keep us that way. By his Holy Spirit, God shows us different things in his Word to help us grow. We must continue to grow in faithfulness. We must continue to pursue our "first love."

REVELATION 2:1-7

¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

² "'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ephesus was the second largest city in the Roman Empire. It sat at the junction of four main highways making it "the market of Asia."

Ephesus housed one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of the goddess, Artemis. This temple stood on a platform larger than 2 football fields and had 100 55' tall marble columns. Much of ephesian life and commerce centered on Artemis worship. The Apostle Paul planted the ephesian church, writing years later to encourage believers in their fight.

DISCUSSION

Aside from Jesus, what is something those who know you would say that you love?

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

1. Describe the one who dictated the letter. (1b)
2. What did Christ commend? (2-3)
3. What one weakness did Christ identify? (4)
4. What rewards does Christ promise for obedience? (7)

5. In your opinion, summarize their biggest problem(s) versus what Christ values.

INTERPRETATION

6. To what degree, if any, do you think you have drifted in your love for God, other believers, or those who do not know the Lord?

APPLICATION

Keeping Jesus as first priority isn't easy and it isn't comfortable. It means trusting Christ's character and surrendering our loves. If you have questions, talk to your coach today.

STUDY NOTES

THE NARROW WAY

Matthew 7:14 says, *“The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”* The Bible has a lot to say about remaining on course and not turning to the right or to the left. Faithfulness means following a narrow path, and as the video in the QR code shows us, it can be really difficult to stay on when the path is narrow.



If you watch the video, some people do better than others. We might say that some people stay faithful longer. However, for all the attempts we see, only one person made it across. Why? Because faithfulness is hard!

Today, as we open the letter to **the church in Ephesus**. It's very clear, they're one of the best. They were good at many things. Unfortunately, where they fell short was in the most important thing.

CHRIST'S GLORY IS REVEALED BY OUR LOVE

The commendation list for the church at Ephesus was quite impressive. Before listing their accolades, John recorded the Lord's words, *“I know your works.”*

Imagine a D1 or pro scout coming up to you after a game saying, “I've been following you for a while. I know your works.” Mind-blowing, right? Well, the Bible clearly states Christ not only watches every minute of our lifetime, but he cares how we play. We will continue to see this idea throughout our study, but it's important. Christ knows us—all of our ups and downs.

So what did he see at Ephesus? ***I know... your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.*** Wow, what a list! The Ephesians endured in toil and fought for truth. Unlike so many of us, they have not let weariness keep them from the fight.

At this point, the Ephesian Christians are probably feeling pretty good about themselves. However, that's about to change.

The Lord went on to say, ***“But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.”*** This must have felt like a gut-punch. They maintained their walk on the narrow path in their *religious duty*, but they lost their *relational intimacy*.

Perhaps this describes where you're at right now. You've grown up in church. You know how the game is played. Yet, in your heart of hearts you know you're not feeling it. You might even struggle to believe it's all real. You've experienced camp highs or conference passion, but that's gone. The good news is that Christ didn't just leave the Ephesians there. He won't leave you there either.

OUR LOVE CAN FALTER AND BE RESTORED

The first thing Christ called the Ephesians to do was ***“Remember therefore from where you have fallen.”*** The second thing was to ***“repent, and do the works you did at first.”*** Remember and repent often go together. If you're in a place where you feel like you've drifted, like you're just going through the motions, you may need to find a space to get quiet and remember. Remember when you trusted Christ for the first time. Remember his faithfulness in your life. Remember how he's used you to be his hands and feet. Remember all of that and then repent.

In running, we often talk about the “will wall.” It's that moment when your body is saying, “I just can't keep going.” However, if you just keep putting one foot in front of the other, you'll get your wind, and you'll be fine. When God calls us to be faithful, to pursue our first love, we sometimes hit a “will wall.” Until we surrender, until we repent, we will stagnate.

“Repent” is a word a lot of people don't like. It literally means “to turn back.” Jesus wants the Ephesians to return to the “works they did at first.” They needed to reclaim their list of accolades. More than that, they needed to pursue intimacy with Christ and share him with others—loving Jesus and loving lost people go hand in hand. This was true in their past, but Jesus offered a dire warning if it failed to become their future.

Jesus said, ***“He who has an ear, let him hear [i.e. “Y'all listen up!”] what the Spirit says to the churches.*** Notice here that he's talking to “the churches,” not just the Ephesians. What he's going to say is for us too!

To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” Jesus doesn't need our efforts. He wants our hearts. He wants to stay our first love.

We all encounter seasons of life where the narrow way seems difficult or maybe even impossible. We cannot rely on our past—but we must remember it and celebrate it. In remembering the Lord, our hearts can turn back to him in repentance. No matter how far we've fallen, how many times we've messed up, we can turn back to our first love.