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## About the Authors

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D. A. is the author of *GOSPEL, DNA: Foundations of the Faith*, and *Bound to Be Free: Escaping Performance to Be Captured by Grace*. He and his wife, Elicia, have two daughters, Izabelle and Lola, and one son, D. A. Jr. (aka Duce).

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# *Introduction*

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Work. Sometimes we love it, sometimes we hate it, and sometimes we just get tired of loving it or hating it. We all work. Some of us work a regular job at a factory or an office. Some of us work at home. Some of us are students. Regardless, we all know that work is an inevitability in life.

The Bible defines works that are part of our life in Christ. Nothing we do can earn salvation; it's a gift from God. However, James 2:17 says, "Faith, if it doesn't have works, is dead by itself." In other words, although works can't bring salvation, once we're saved, our works show and prove our faith. And like our everyday work, our works in Christ are inevitable, and they have their ups and downs.

In Revelation 2–3 Jesus addressed the works of the seven churches in Asia Minor. Over the next six weeks we'll look at the ups and downs of those churches and draw out implications for our churches today:

Ephesus: The Church without Love  
Smyrna: The Church That Was Persecuted  
Pergamum and Thyatira: The Churches with Bad Reputations  
Sardis: The Church That Fell Asleep  
Philadelphia: The Church That Endured  
Laodicea: The Church That Turned Lukewarm

My prayer is that we'll be honest with our small groups and ourselves as we look at the highs and lows of each church in Revelation. By digging deeply into the truths of Scripture, may we learn more about who we are and who Christ is for us. May we be the ones who conquer.

## *How to Use This Study*

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This Bible study book includes six weeks of content. Each week has an introductory page summarizing the focus of the week's study, followed by content designed for groups and individuals.

### **GROUP SESSIONS**

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. This group session is designed to be one hour or more, with approximately 15 to 20 minutes of teaching and 45 minutes of personal interaction. It's even better if your group is able to meet longer than an hour, allowing more time for participants to interact with one another.

Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word, and with the video teaching by D. A. Horton.

#### **Start**

This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video segment.

#### **Watch**

This page includes key points from the video teaching, along with space for taking notes as participants watch the video.

#### **Discuss**

These two pages include questions and statements that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

#### **Pray**

This final page of each group session includes a prompt for a closing time of prayer together and space for recording prayer requests of group members.

## INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Each *Disciple for Life* small-group resource provides individuals with optional activities during the week, appealing to different learning styles, schedules, and levels of engagement. These options include a plan for application and accountability, a Scripture-reading plan with journaling prompts, a devotion, and two personal studies. You can choose to take advantage of some or all of the options provided.

### This Week's Plan

Immediately following the group session's prayer page is a weekly plan offering guidance for everyone to engage with that week's focal point, regardless of a person's maturity level or that week's schedule.

### Read

A daily reading plan is outlined for Scriptures related to the group session. Space for personal notes is also provided. Instructions for using the HEAR journaling method for reading Scripture can be found on pages 8–11.

### Reflect

A one-page devotional option is provided each week to help members reflect on a biblical truth related to the group session.

### Personal Study

Two personal studies are provided each week to take individuals deeper into Scripture and to supplement the biblical truths introduced in the teaching time. These pages challenge individuals to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to make practical application to their lives.

## LEADER GUIDE

Pages 120–31 at the back of this book contain a guide that develops a leader's understanding of the thought process behind questions and suggests ways to engage members at different levels of life-changing discussion.

# The HEAR Journaling Method for Reading Scripture

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## Daily Bible Reading

*Disciple for Life* small-group Bible studies include a daily reading plan for each week. Making time in a busy schedule to focus on God through His Word is a vital part of the Christian life. If you're unable to do anything else provided in your Bible study book during a certain week, try to spend a few minutes in God's Word. The verse selections will take you deeper into stories and concepts that support the teaching and discussion during that week's group session.

## Why Do You Need a Plan?

When you're a new believer or at various other times in your life, you may find yourself in a place where you don't know where to begin reading your Bible or how to personally approach Scripture. You may have tried the open-and-point method when you simply opened your Bible and pointed to a verse, hoping to get something out of the random selection from God's Word. Reading random Scriptures won't provide solid biblical growth any more than eating random food from your pantry will provide solid physical growth.

An effective plan must be well balanced for healthy growth. When it comes to reading the Bible, *well balanced* and *effective* mean reading and applying. A regular habit is great, but simply checking a box off your task list when you've completed your daily reading isn't enough. Knowing more about God is also great, but simply reading for spiritual knowledge still isn't enough. You also want to respond to what you're reading by taking action as you listen to what God is saying. After all, it's God's Word.

To digest more of the Word, *Disciple for Life* small-group Bible studies not only provide a weekly reading plan but also encourage you to use a simplified version of the HEAR journaling method. (If this method advances your personal growth, check out *Foundations: A 260-Day Bible-Reading Plan for Busy Believers* by Robby and Kandi Gallaty.)



## **Journaling What You HEAR in God's Word**

You may or may not choose to keep a separate journal in addition to the space provided in this book. A separate journal would provide extra space as well as the opportunity to continue your journal after this study is completed. The HEAR journaling method promotes reading the Bible with a life-transforming purpose. You'll read in order to understand and respond to God's Word.

The HEAR acronym stands for *highlight*, *explain*, *apply*, and *respond*. Each of these four steps creates an atmosphere for hearing God speak. After settling on a reading plan, like the one provided in this book in the "Read" section each week, establish a time for studying God's Word. Then you'll be ready to HEAR from God.

## **Before You Begin: The Most Important Step**

To really HEAR God speak to you through His Word, always begin your time with prayer. Pause and sincerely ask God to speak to you. It's absolutely imperative that you seek God's guidance in order to understand His Word (see I Cor. 2:12-14). Every time you open your Bible, pray a simple prayer like the one David prayed: "Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction" (Ps. 119:18).

## **H = Highlight**

After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, open this book to the week's reading plan, open a journal if you'd like more space than this book provides, and open your Bible. For an illustration let's assume you're reading Philippians 4:10-13. Verse 13 may jump out and speak to you as something you want to remember, so you'd simply highlight that verse in your Bible.

*If keeping a HEAR journal, on the top line write the Scripture reference and the date and make up a title to summarize the meaning of the passage. Then write the letter H and record the verse that stood out and that you highlighted in your Bible. This practice will make it easy to look back through your journal to find a passage you want to revisit in the future.*

## **E = Explain**

After you've highlighted your verse(s), explain what the text means. Most simply, how would you summarize this passage in your own words? By asking some simple questions, with the help of God's Spirit, you can understand the meaning of the passage or verse. (A good study Bible can help answer more in-depth questions as you learn to explain a passage of Scripture.) Here are a few good questions to get you started:

- Why was the verse or passage written?
- To whom was it originally written?
- How does the verse or passage fit with the verses before and after it?
- Why would the Holy Spirit include this passage in the Bible book?
- What does God intend to communicate through the text?

*If keeping a HEAR journal, below the H write the letter E and explain the text in your own words. Record any answers to questions that help you understand the passage of Scripture.*

## **A = Apply**

At this point you're beginning the process of discovering the specific personal word God has for you from His Word. What's important is that you're engaging with the text and wrestling with the meaning. Application is the heart of the process. Everything you've done so far coalesces under this heading. As you've done before, answer a series of questions to discover the significance of these verses to you personally, questions like:

- How can this verse or passage help me?
- What's God saying to me?
- What would the application of this verse look like in my life?

These questions bridge the gap between the ancient world and your world today. They provide a way for God to speak to you through the specific passage or verse.

*If keeping a HEAR journal, write the letter A under the letter E, where you wrote a short summary explaining the text. Challenge yourself to write between two and five sentences about the way the text applies to your life.*

## **R = Respond**

Finally, you'll respond to the text. A personal response may take on many forms. You may write an action step to do, describe a change in perspective, or simply respond in prayer to what you've learned. For example, you may ask for help in being bold or generous, you may need to repent of unconfessed sin, or you may need to praise God. Keep in mind that you're responding to what you've just read.

**In this book or in your journal, record your personal application of each passage of Scripture. You may want to write a brief explanation-and-application summary: "The verse means \_\_\_\_\_, so I can or will \_\_\_\_\_."**

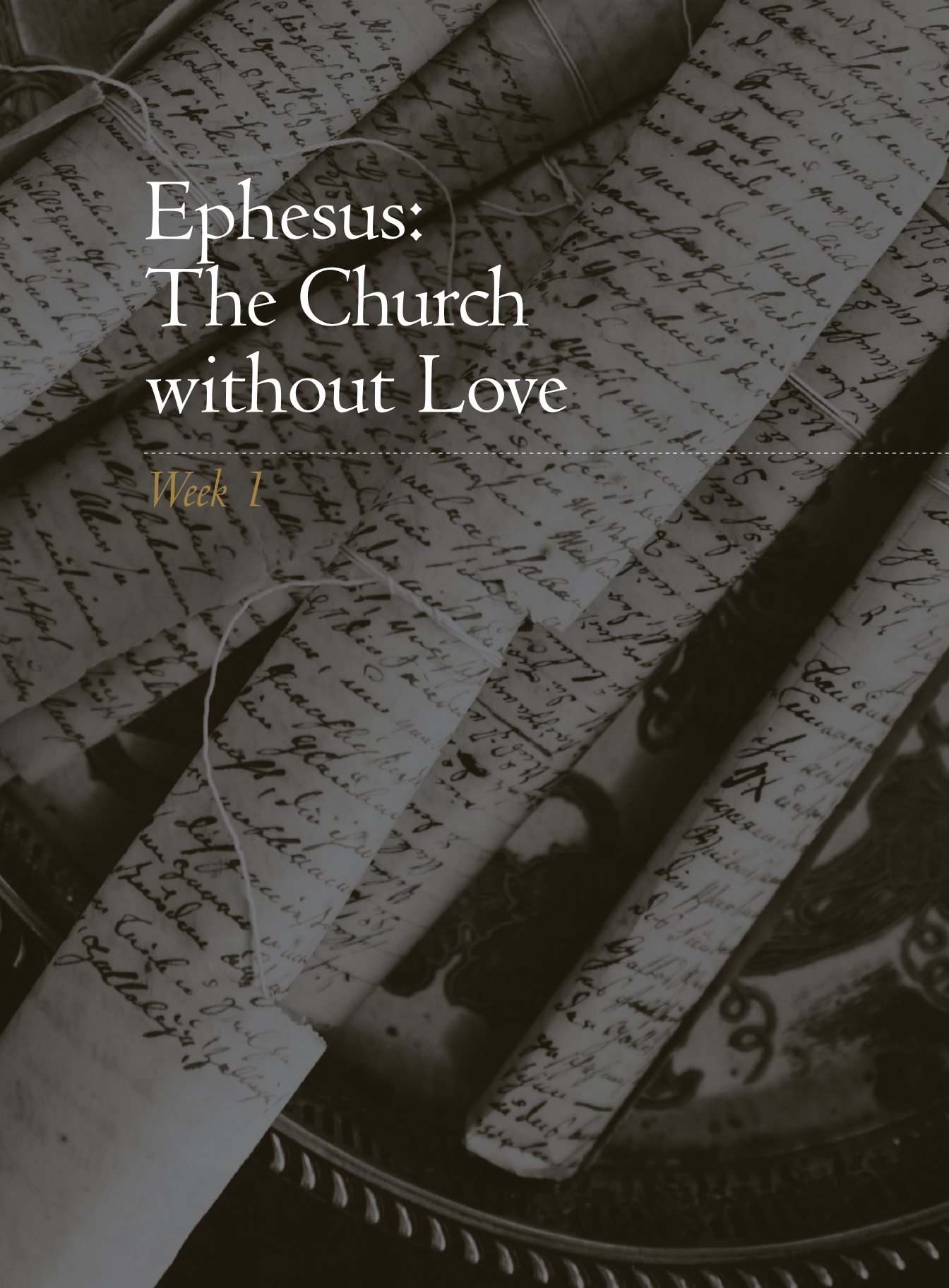
*If keeping a HEAR journal, write the letter R, along with the way you'll respond to what you highlighted, explained, and applied.*

Notice that all the words in the HEAR method are action words: *highlight, explain, apply, respond*. God doesn't want us to sit back and wait for Him to drop truth into our laps. God wants us to actively pursue Him instead of waiting passively. Jesus said:

Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find.

Knock, and the door will be opened to you.

**Matthew 7:7**



# Ephesus: The Church without Love

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*Week 1*

Sometimes we don't understand a movie until the end. Good storytellers take us on a journey, revealing a little at a time but not unveiling everything until the very end. Once we see the ending, the rest of the story makes sense. The Book of Revelation is a perfect example of this truth.

The apostle John wrote the seven letters recorded in Revelation 2–3 to specific churches in specific locations in ancient Asia Minor. These churches existed two thousand years ago, but the Storyteller—God Himself—gave them and us a glimpse into the future through His revelation to John. We know this because throughout the seven letters Jesus used the phrase “the one who conquers.” Jesus used future tense to help the churches understand their present tense.

Our only hope to be conquerers is to look at Jesus, the One who conquered sin and death for us. In Him we can look out at our mission field—wherever that may be—with confidence, knowing we can conquer because of the victory given to us in Jesus' finished work on the cross.

We'll begin by looking at the church in Ephesus. The Ephesian Christians were excellent theologians. They stood firm against false doctrine and fake Christians, and their perseverance was apparently on point. Though the surface looked shiny, Jesus knew they were rotting from the inside; they had forgotten how to love. This was the loveless church.

When Jesus told the church that He's “the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands” (Rev. 2:1), He was telling them that He's intimately close to them. Jesus holds the entire church—the universal body of Christ—in His hand, and as He promised His disciples in Matthew 28:20, He's still with us. He was so near to the Ephesian believers that He could clearly see their outward works, and with perfect knowledge as God in the flesh, He could also see their hearts.

# Start

---

**Welcome everyone to session 1 of *Letters of the Revelation*. Use the following content to begin your group session together.**

We mentioned in the introduction to this study that work is an inevitability in our daily lives, both as everyday citizens of this world and as believers in Christ. Through the letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, we'll see again and again that Jesus noticed the works these churches were doing but almost always had corrections and promises for them.

**Tell the group where you work and why you chose to work there.**

**Do you love what you do? Why or why not?**

We often don't work from pure love for our jobs. Often we work to support our families or ourselves or to gain experience for a better job down the road. But even when we love our jobs, we can get bored with them after a few years of the daily grind. The truth is, anything can become familiar and grow stale, like a once-delicious loaf of bread.

We see this tendency in our own lives and in the lives of others. Successful athletes often retire, even when they have a few more years of tread on their tires, because they lose their love for the game. Sometimes friendships or relationships end because people struggle to love one another. We can even get tired of our favorite desserts!

In this session D. A. Horton will introduce us to Jesus' message to the church in Ephesus and will highlight the importance of renewing our love for Jesus.

**Read Revelation 2:1-7 in preparation for the video and then watch video session 1.**



# Watch

---

**Use the space below to follow along and take notes as you watch video session 1.**

## **Realities in the Seven Letters**

1. Jesus was actually speaking to seven literal churches that were in existence at the time of the giving of His revelation to the apostle John.
2. Jesus is actually speaking about how we can walk in the victory that He has secured for those who are part of the body of Christ.

Jesus' warnings to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation can give us hope and clarity regarding principles that we can apply so that we can be those who conquer in this life because of the victory that's been given to us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is omniscient. He knows not only our words and our deeds. He has full, exhaustive knowledge of even our innermost thoughts that we never express to anybody else.

## **Corrections for the Church in Ephesus**

1. Remember.
2. Repent.
3. Return.

The reward for loving your Savior with all you have is an eternal, uninterrupted, intimate fellowship with Him.

## Discuss

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**Use the following statements and questions to discuss the video.**

The most basic question we can ask when reading the letters of Revelation is “What’s Jesus saying to me through these letters to the churches?” The beginning of the book helps us answer this question.

**Read aloud Revelation 1:1-3.**

As we see in this passage, this message is introduced as a revelation, an unveiling from God Himself through Jesus. As with all Scripture, God wants to tell us something directly through these words. If we heed these words, knowing Jesus could return at any moment, we’ll be blessed (see v. 3).

**In what ways have the words of Scripture recently taught you something about God? What did you learn?**

**How has reading God’s Word helped you learn more about yourself?**

**How often would you say the impact of God’s Word on your life in the past still influences the way you live for God today? Select one answer.**

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Always

D. A. said Jesus promises that we’ll have victory in this life through the victory He achieved in His life, death, and resurrection. Specifically, the way to gain this victory is through rekindling our first love—the love



we had for Jesus at first. This is the lesson Ephesus had to learn. The church was doing good works, but it was doing them with wrong motivations.

According to the video, what does it mean for Jesus to have full knowledge of our works?

Why is it important for Jesus not only to know our hearts but also to push us toward repentance?

D. A. used the example of marriage to demonstrate the importance of keeping our love fresh and alive. As Christ's bride, the church is called to listen to the voice of our Husband, who's calling us to keep our love for Him fresh and alive.

How do the acts of remembering and repenting help us keep our love for Jesus alive?

Why is it important not only to say we once loved and believed in Jesus but also to continually keep that love kindled?

What are your hopes or expectations for this study of the seven letters of Revelation?

May this week's study help us renew the love we had for Jesus when we first committed our lives to Him.

**Conclude the group session with the prayer activity on the following page.**

# Pray

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**Conclude the group session with two actions.**

1. Consider the group's responses to the truths of Scripture and pray for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives in the ways we've seen in God's Word.

**In what ways do you need to listen to God telling you to hear His words (see Rev. 1:3)?**

**How will you think or act differently as a result of what God has revealed in His Word?**

2. Pray for one another, particularly for God's help in applying the biblical truths studied and discussed during the group session. Ask God to reveal Himself and speak clearly to each person during the next six weeks.

## **Prayer Requests**

**Encourage members to complete "This Week's Plan" before the next group session.**

## *This Week's Plan*

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**Work with your group leader each week to create a plan for personal study, worship, and application between group sessions. Select from the following optional activities to match your personal preferences and available time.**

### **Worship**

- ☐ Read your Bible. Complete the reading plan on page 20.
- ☐ Spend time with God by engaging with the devotional experience on page 21.
- ☐ Connect with God every day in prayer.

### **Personal Study**

- ☐ Read and interact with “Work, Work, Work” on page 22.
- ☐ Read and interact with “Rekindled Love” on page 26.

### **Application**

- ☐ Memorize Revelation 2:4-5.
- ☐ Identify someone in your life who'll speak the truth and help you fight the temptation to grow cold against God.
- ☐ Connect over coffee with someone in the group. Discuss your thoughts on this week's study and your expectations for the group going forward.
- ☐ Start a journal. This week record at least five ways you try to earn God's love through works. Then pray that God will help you rest in His unearned grace.

# *Read*

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**Read the following Scripture passages this week. Use the acronym HEAR and the space provided to record your thoughts or action steps.**

**Day 1:** Revelation I

**Day 2:** Revelation 2:I-7

**Day 3:** James 2:I4-I8

**Day 4:** Mark 12:28-34

**Day 5:** Hebrews II

**Day 6:** I Corinthians I3

**Day 7:** Revelation 2I-22

## *Reflect*

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### SERVE FROM A HEART OF LOVE

Any good leader will tell you it's important for employees not only to do their jobs well but also to have a passion for what they do, for the people they do it with, and for the people they do it for. The best employees clock in and out each day for more than a paycheck. They spend their workdays advancing the goals and the mission of their employers.

In a similar way, God desires that we serve from a heart of love. He wants us to love the mission to which He calls us, not just stay busy working. Read these words by the apostle Paul:

If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

In this passage Paul said when we serve without love, we say nothing, we are nothing, and we gain nothing. Everything we do must come from genuine love—for God and for others. We serve not from obligation, satisfaction, or recognition but because of the great love God has demonstrated to us.

Read I John 3:16-18 and reflect on the questions that follow.

**How has God's love for you shaped your love for Him?**

**How does this love shape the way you serve God and others?**

## *Personal Study 1*

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### **WORK, WORK, WORK**

“Get saved and then get to work.” This phrase is said either explicitly or implicitly in many churches. Once people place their faith in Christ, they’re often given a list of rules—works—to follow. Read the Bible. Pray. Go to church gatherings on Sundays. Volunteer. You know the drill. Get to work, and when you’re tired, work some more. But surely there’s more to following Jesus than a to-do list.

From the onset of the letter to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2, it seems that the Ephesians were doing all the right things—seeking to live in purity, rebuking false teachers, and laboring through hardship. Jesus even commended the believers for these things. Paul’s beautiful letter to the Ephesians, decades before this was written, likely laid a deep foundation for their theology and identity. They knew right from wrong, and they knew how to work hard for the Kingdom. Read Jesus’ words to the church:

Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus: Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

**Revelation 2:1-7**

Notice that Jesus included both compliments and rebukes. He praised them for their strong doctrine, their defense of the faith, and their good ethics. Although Jesus was sincere in these compliments, the Ephesian believers were by no means perfect. They were practically running a theological training school—let's call it the first seminary (see Acts 19:8-10)—and they were standing firm against cultural pressures, but their love for Jesus had grown cold. They focused on the important work they were doing but forgot why they were doing it.

Read these words about Kingdom work from the Book of James:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed," but you don't give them what the body needs, what good is it? In the same way faith, if it doesn't have works, is dead by itself. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works. You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder.

**James 2:14-19**

In this passage circle the words *faith* and *works* every time they appear. Then underline the questions James asked.

Record the pattern you notice in these words and questions.  
What response was James trying to elicit from his readers?

James was telling his audience that simply believing God is real doesn't save anyone. Even Satan and his demons know God exists. James took it a step further, saying works are an integral part of showing and proving that we truly love God. Want to know whether your faith is legitimate? Compare it to the command Jesus said is the greatest:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. ... Love your neighbor as yourself.

**Mark 12:30-31**

This was the question the Ephesians needed to answer. Did they love God with their hearts and souls or just with their minds and strength? Jesus would provide the answer. He was so intimately near and involved in the lives of the Ephesians that He was able to say, “I know your works, your labor, and your endurance” (Rev. 2:2). Right off the bat, we see that these brothers and sisters got to work. It would be hard to say they had no faith if we merely looked at all the shiny fruit hanging from the vine. But Jesus sees the roots too. He sees our work for what it is—good (motivated by love) and bad (motivated by performance).

**If you looked at your own life, what might Jesus find commendable about your works?**

**In what ways do you think your work for God demonstrates a lack of love for Him?**

This is a busy congregation; they were doing a lot of work to defend the Christian faith and to maintain external purity. They toiled through hardship and maintained their endurance—finishing the work they set out to do.

Jesus also commended the church for their good theology and willingness to remove false teachers from the congregation. Like Jesus, they hated “the practices of the Nicolaitans” (v. 6). Not much is known about the Nicolaitans, but some early Christian sources link them to sexual sin and eating meat sacrificed to idols. They were people who claimed to be Christians but abused God’s grace. Their works weren’t from faith but from their desire to indulge in sin. The Ephesians didn’t tolerate the Nicolaitans’ hypocrisy.



**Are you comfortable recognizing and calling out sin in others' lives?  
In what ways can confronting sins in others be beneficial?**

No doubt it can be good to recognize sins in others. In I Corinthians 5 Paul scolded the church for allowing someone to walk around in sin unchallenged. He even went so far as to recommend that they kick the man out of the church. The Ephesians followed Paul's actions with the Nicolaitans. Yet the Ephesians didn't recognize their own hypocrisy. They had become programmed machines, going through the motions but disconnected from the reason they existed in the first place. They knew the right doctrine but struggled to love the God they were created to work for.

Because we're all created in God's image, our good deeds are truly useful only if they're connected to His holy character. Yes, faith without works is dead, but works without living faith in God are also worthless:

Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

**Hebrews 11:6**

**List any ways your fire for God has dimmed since you first placed your faith in Christ.**

Jesus pointed out that works are good as long as they're truly motivated by faith and love. The Ephesians' works, however, were ultimately motivated by something other than love. Yet Jesus didn't leave the Ephesians, and He won't leave us. As we'll see, He provides us with grace and encouragement to love Him passionately, and He promises that we'll live in His grace for eternity.

**Close your study time in prayer, asking God to help you serve Him and others from genuine love for Jesus.**

## *Personal Study 2*

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### **REKINDLED LOVE**

In personal study I we looked at Jesus' words about the works of the Ephesians. On the one hand, they were doing good things for the Kingdom—protecting truth and persevering in difficult times. On the other hand, however, their works were missing something important—love (see Rev. 2.4).

Jesus could have stopped with the compliments. He could have been happy with the Ephesians' good works. But He didn't stop there, because their works weren't coming from the right motivation.

**Why was Jesus' one critique more important than the several positive qualities about the Ephesian church?**

**Why did Jesus want the Ephesians not only to do good works but also to remember their love for Him?**

**In what areas of your life are you most prone to be motivated by something other than your love for Christ?**

Years before Jesus spoke this message to the Ephesian church, Paul had warned them not to forget why they did good works:

You are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

Paul told the church in Ephesus that good works are a result of our faith in Christ. We're created to do good works for His glory, not our own. If we do good works for our own benefit, they lose their power. But if we do them because of our love for Christ, they reveal the gospel's power.

**Why is it powerful to think about our works as something God has already “prepared ahead of time for us to do” (v. 10)?**

**List ways this truth changes the way you view your works in Christ.**

Jesus didn't just tell the Ephesians to return to their love for Him. He told them how to do it:

Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

**Revelation 2:5**

When my wife and I were preparing for marriage, we often talked about planting a church and living our lives on mission together. We poured much of our lives into our plans. Over time the mission became bigger than our love for each other. In the same way, Christ's bride, the church, can focus on mission so much that our love for Him grows dim. Thankfully, Jesus gave us two ways to renew our love for Him.

First, Jesus told the Ephesians to remember. Many times in Scripture, God reminded His children about the works He had done for them. Reflecting

on God's faithfulness in our lives strengthens our love for Him. When the Ephesians reflected on the love they had for Jesus at first, they would be able to see all He had done in them and for them.

Second, Jesus told the Ephesians to repent. If they didn't, they would have their lampstand removed; they would no longer shine light on Ephesus as Christ's representatives. To repent is to turn away from sin and turn our eyes back on Christ—to return to the fundamentals of following Him. The only chance the Ephesians had of returning to their love for Jesus and of continuing their ministry in Ephesus was to remember Him and rely on Him.

**Look back on your life and list ways God has been faithful to you.  
Who in your life can help you regularly remember and repent?**

As the letter to the church in Ephesus concluded, Jesus promised:

Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

**Revelation 2:7**

Jesus told the Ephesians what would happen if they returned to their first love. The promise Jesus made is powerful, even for churches today: those who conquer—who win the fight against a stale, loveless faith—will be given “the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” This tree of life shows up in two other key places in Scripture:

The LORD God said, “Since the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever.” So the LORD God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

**Genesis 3:22-23**

The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him.

**Revelation 22:2-3**

The tree of life was in the middle of the garden of Eden before sin entered the world (see Gen. 2:9). When Adam and Even disobeyed God and introduced sin into the world, they lost their access to the tree of life because the consequence of sin isn't life but death (see Rom. 6:23). Yet after Christ returns and destroys sin and death, God's people will once again have access to the tree of life. One day God will return the world to the way it was in the garden of Eden—but even better. We'll feast on the fruit of the tree of life for eternity.

**Identify stark differences between God's relationship with people in Genesis 3 and with people in Revelation 22.**

The church in Ephesus was at a crossroads. If they returned to their love for Christ, their doors would remain open, and the light would shine out; if they continued working without a supreme love for Jesus, their doors would close. The point is simple: if you love your ministry, theology, or good deeds more than Christ, you've lost your first love and need to repent.

Right now we're still under the curse of Adam and Eve, so the tree of life isn't available to us, and death is still inevitable. However, Jesus told the Ephesians and us that maintaining a passionate love for Him will allow us to eat from the tree of life for eternity. For those who love Christ, the promise of Revelation 22 is still available. May we remind not only ourselves but also the whole world of this glorious truth.

**Close your study time in prayer, asking God to keep your passion for Jesus burning brightly.**