



Characterized by Love

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WHEN
HAVE YOU
DONE
SOMETHING
CRAZY
FOR LOVE?

The
POINT >

Ground everything you do in love for Christ.

> 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.’



FOR LEADERS (15 minutes)

THE POINT // GROUND EVERYTHING YOU DO IN LOVE FOR CHRIST.

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // CHURCH

The church isn't a place or a building, but is made up of the people who belong to the family of God, and whereas under the Old Covenant, God dwelled in the temple or the tabernacle, today God dwells in His people and works through them to advance His kingdom.

Message to Leaders

The church in Ephesus didn't tolerate evil, and this is certainly a good thing. However, their actions weren't driven by love, and the church is to be characterized, above all, by love for one another and for Jesus. The church is a family, and we are to love each other in real ways.

› Engage Option 1

Place ten boxes with words to describe something people love in the front of the room. Leave one box designated for Jesus. Give each student three pieces of paper, and ask them to put a piece of paper in the boxes of the things they love most. At the end, count how many pieces each box received. Say, **“Our lives should be characterized by love for Jesus over anything this world has to offer.”**

› Engage Option 2

Place a poster in the front of the room with a large heart on it. As students enter the room, ask them to write down the things that keep their focus away from loving Christ. Say, **“When our lives are grounded in love for Jesus, God can accomplish great things through us for His kingdom.”**

› Engage Option 3

Search the Internet for “Delight Yourselves in Rich Food - Paul David Tripp.” Play the video as you begin the session. Say, **“Our love and devotion to Christ should far outweigh our love for anything else because only He can satisfy us.”**

NOTE: Always make sure you preview any video clip you show students and ensure it is appropriate for your church and ministry.

LEADER PACK ELEMENTS

If you have the optional Leader Pack, consider the following:

ITEM 1: Introduce students to the new unit by displaying the **Unit 1 Church** poster.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

THE POINT // GROUND EVERYTHING YOU DO IN LOVE FOR CHRIST.



Almost everyone will have a first-love experience. It may be a childhood crush or a teen infatuation. For some it happens very early in life, and for others, you may wonder if it's ever going to happen at all. Many people work really hard—maybe even doing crazy things—to convince the person they love to declare their affections.

When you first came to faith in Christ, do you remember how you loved Him? It's likely the affection was very strong. However, this was no childhood crush. You knew you didn't have to work to receive His love in return. But over time, many Christians get busy trying to do all the right things and may begin to think our work for Him is the most important part of our relationship. As we will see in Jesus' message in Revelation to the church at Ephesus, works can never replace genuine love for Jesus. If we lack affection for our Savior, we need to return to our first love.

THE SETTING

In the first century AD, the Roman Empire spread its military and political power across the Mediterranean world from Spain to Israel. East and west converged at Asia Minor (now eastern Turkey). Seven strategic cities were located in this region, each with a church founded early in the Christian era. Years later, as recorded in the Book of Revelation, Jesus Himself evaluated the spiritual conditions of those congregations through a vision given to the apostle John.

FACT:

Have you ever had a friend who is in “love” with a crush after only a week or two. Psychologists say the infatuation and idealization associated with a crush lasts four months.¹ But if it lasts longer, maybe it is love.



IMPART (30 minutes)

THE POINT // GROUND EVERYTHING YOU DO IN LOVE FOR CHRIST.

REVELATION 2:1-3

*“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. “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. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. **REVELATION 2:1-3***

Recently a gentleman who had never been to church in his life visited our church, and he came to faith in Jesus. Because he wanted to use his talents to serve the church, he began helping out with all kinds of repairs and projects based on his years of experience as a handyman. He preferred to serve without others’ noticing. However, after several months, his demeanor began to change—serving no longer brought him the same joy it once had. When I shared that I had noticed the change, he confessed that he initially served out of his love for Jesus. But along the way, he began to think that he had to do it because if he didn’t then no one else would. His service for Christ had morphed into tasks from a to-do list.

A similar situation happened with the church at Ephesus. Ephesus was home to the largest harbor in Asia Minor; four large trade routes converged there, and this bustling city was known as the gateway to Asia Minor. Further, Ephesus was home to the temple of Diana—the center for fertility worship—and residents and travelers alike would engage in all kinds of profane practices in offering “worship” to the pagan deity. Ephesus was full of a wide variety of pagan religious options.

In the middle of this pagan city, the church at Ephesus was made up of dedicated people committed to serving the Lord and doing their best to stay on course in their relationship with Him, despite the wickedness and temptations surrounding them. Jesus acknowledged the church for their refusing to follow evil people who might have tempted them to go astray. Further, Jesus commended their perseverance. These Christians faced very difficult circumstances due to their faith, but through it all, they endured. They were committed to Jesus, and they worked hard to do the right things.

The Ephesian believers were known for their good works, and, in a sense, we should be too. What we do for Christ and His kingdom matters. We may think our work doesn’t matter if no one is watching or if no one acknowledges our efforts. However, we must remember that God always sees what we are doing. God is glorified when we work to serve Him, and when others do notice, our faithful work points them to Christ.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 6)

- 1** In your own words, how would you describe the church in Ephesus?
- 2** When have others acknowledged the good works you do for Jesus?



IMPART

THE POINT // GROUND EVERYTHING YOU DO IN LOVE FOR CHRIST.

REVELATION 2:4-6

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 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. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **REVELATION 2:4-6**

Let's go back to the conversation with the man from my church. As we continued to talk, we discovered that he had not grown bitter and resentful of serving because of the lack of recognition. His attitude had changed because he was working out of obligation rather than from a heart of love. Jesus scolded the church at Ephesus for this very thing—they had lost their first love. While they still were doing good things and refusing to tolerate evil, they had replaced their top priority of loving Jesus with a focus on the lists of things they knew they had to do.

The Ephesians were told to repent—which means specifically to “turn around”—and to love Jesus as they first had. Again, keep in mind that the Ephesian church was a good church who was doing many good things, but their motivation was wrong. Any work we do should be driven by our love for God and as a response to the great gift of salvation He has given.

This message to the Ephesian church mentioned a group of people called the Nicolaitans. While we don't really know much about this group, we know that their influence wasn't good. They were likely mixing elements of Christianity with practices and teachings from the pagan culture of Ephesus. Verse 6 tells us that not only did the church at Ephesus hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, but so did God. If God hates something, we'd better take notice!

When we get our priorities out of order, we are no longer able to shine the light of Christ effectively to those around us. That's why Jesus told the church at Ephesus that unless they repented, He would remove their lampstand. In other words, if they didn't return to loving Christ first, their witness throughout the community would no longer be one that pointed people to the love of Christ.

There are many Christians and churches today who love Jesus above all. However, there are certainly some who have allowed their love for Jesus to fade, replacing love for Him with the things of the world. If we are followers of Christ, we must love Him with all we are. Our love for Jesus—or absence of love—impacts not only our relationship with God, but our witness to others.

Jesus' criticism of the Ephesian church is a warning to us all. It can be easy to get things out of order in our lives—getting lost in serving others out of routine or obligation rather than out of love. When this happens, we must repent and return to loving Christ above all. In order for our lives to be characterized by love, Jesus must be kept in first place.

Failure to listen well often brings about negative consequences.
#BSFLtheChurch



DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 7)

- 3** How can we keep love for Christ as our highest priority?
- 4** How would you describe the connection between love and serving others?
- 5** Why do we sometimes lose our passion for Christ?



REVELATION 2:7

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.’ **REVELATION 2:7**

As young children, we were likely all accused of not listening at least once. (Even as teens, chances are you hear this from time to time!) Maybe our parents told us something to do and we didn’t do it. Maybe a teacher shared an important piece of information that would help us pass an upcoming test. Maybe a pastor gave a message that would help keep us on track in our relationship with God. If we’re honest, all of us can be found guilty of not listening. Failure to listen well often brings about negative consequences.

Jesus reminded the church at Ephesus to be sure to listen to what the Spirit was saying to them. But the truths He taught were not just for them. They are for all who are willing to listen: “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.” Listening implies more than just hearing the words—it means we hear the words and act according to what we hear. We see this in the ways God relates to us: “This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15). God hears our prayers, and inasmuch as they are in line with His good purposes, He acts on them. In the same spirit, as we hear God’s Word to us, we must act on what He says.

The Lord told the church at Ephesus that many of the things they were doing were good. However, it wasn’t enough—they weren’t motivated by love for God or others. Jesus called the church to repent and pursue Christ with their whole hearts. If they would, Jesus promised a great reward. Those who truly followed Christ, not just in words or deeds, but from the heart, would share in Jesus’ victory and receive the gift of eternal life that only comes through Him.

One cell phone company used this slogan for many years: “Can you hear me now?” We’ve all been talking on our phones and experienced a drop in service, and many of us have used these same words. Today, the Spirit—who continually speaks into the lives of God’s people—is asking, “Can you hear me?” Return to Jesus with your whole heart! We must listen. And when we live according to the things He says, we will live as conquerors in Christ Jesus.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 7)

- 6** List some ways your church is like the church at Ephesus.
- 7** What practices have helped you hear and follow the Holy Spirit?
- 8** How does the promise of eternal life motivate you to love and serve Jesus?



LIVE IT OUT (10 minutes)

THE POINT // GROUND EVERYTHING YOU DO IN LOVE FOR CHRIST.



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // CHURCH

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The church in Ephesus didn't tolerate evil, and this is certainly a good thing. However, their actions weren't driven by love, and the church is to be characterized, above all, by love for one another and for Jesus. The church is a family, and we are to love each other in real ways.

>CHRIST

The greatest way Jesus demonstrated His love for us is through His dying on the cross.

9 List a few ways Christ has shown His love to you specifically.

10 How does your life show that you love Jesus?

GOD

JESUS

HOLY SPIRIT

BIBLE

SALVATION

CREATION

CHURCH

PEOPLE

FAMILY

COMMUNITY
& WORLD



LIVE IT OUT

THE POINT // GROUND EVERYTHING YOU DO IN LOVE FOR CHRIST.

› COMMUNITY

Read 1 John 4:19-21.

11 Why is it so important that we show love to other people?

12 How are you actively showing love to others in your life?

13 List three specific things you will do to improve in showing love to others.



› CULTURE

John 13:35 teaches that the world knows that we are followers of Jesus by the ways we love others.

14 How do your good works point others to Jesus?

15 How will you intentionally show love to a lost person in order to help them come to know Christ?