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**WHEN HAVE
YOU HAD
A TRULY
TERRIFYING
EXPERIENCE?**

Steadfast in Difficulties

The
POINT ➤

**We need not fear because we are rich
in God's grace.**

➤ REVELATION 2:8-11

⁸“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

⁹“‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’



FOR LEADERS (15 minutes)

THE POINT // WE NEED NOT FEAR BECAUSE WE ARE RICH IN GOD'S GRACE.

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // SALVATION

God's salvation is eternal, and once we are adopted into God's family, nothing can separate us from Him.

Message to Leaders

When we are saved by God's grace, there is nothing that can change that. The church in Smyrna was mistreated in terrible ways, and we will be too. When we are faithful, even through difficult circumstances, we can know that God will reward our faithfulness.

> Engage Option 1

Select two student volunteers to come up front. Call out the names of different types of fears (e.g., arachnophobia, claustrophobia, etc.), and the first student to define the fear correctly gets a point. The student with the most points wins. Say, **"Our world is full of fear and anxiety, but we can experience freedom from fear when we live in the grace of God."**

> Engage Option 2

Decorate the room with objects representing things that cause people to live with fear and anxiety. Say, **"There are many things that can cause us to fear, but living with the grace of God means we have no reason to fear."**

> Engage Option 3

Search the Internet for "Faith is Incompatible with Fear - David Platt." Play the video as you begin the session. Say, **"If we have faith in God's promises, we have no reason to live in anxious fear."**

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 2: Display the **Faith Over Fear** poster to introduce students to the main idea.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

THE POINT // WE NEED NOT FEAR BECAUSE WE ARE RICH IN GOD'S GRACE.



THE SETTING

The aged apostle John was exiled on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea about AD 95. Patmos was off the coast of the Roman province of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). While wasting away there, one “Lord’s day,” John had a vision of the resurrected Lord Jesus in His divine glory. The Lord told His faithful friend to record the marvelous visions he was going to see. John did as he was instructed and composed what became the Book of Revelation.

FACT:

Roller coasters and haunted houses can be scary, so why do we do these things? These staged experiences may be frightening in the moment, but they trigger the brain to produce chemicals that cause excitement that can last for hours.¹

Have you ever been scared? I mean scared to the point that you feared for your life. Several years ago, I was serving alongside others on a mission trip in London. We were prayer walking one afternoon in an area that was full of mosques, and protesters were in the streets. As we walked and prayed for God to move in that area, we began hearing shouts from a group of men across the street: “Kill the Christians! Kill the Christians!” They were pointing at our little group while shouting those words.

Needless to say, that was an incredibly frightening moment for our group. We hurried and left the area immediately. But as we later reflected on what had happened, we realized that, from an eternal perspective, we really had no reason to be afraid. We’ve been told in the Bible that those who follow Jesus will face times of persecution, and through it all, God is with us.

From the message Jesus gave to the church at Smyrna, we will learn that we can stand strong in the face of fear. We truly are rich in the grace of God.



IMPART (30 minutes)

THE POINT // WE NEED NOT FEAR BECAUSE WE ARE RICH IN GOD'S GRACE.

REVELATION 2:8-9

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. REVELATION 2:8-9

Take notice of who is speaking to the church: It is Christ Himself! In a message given with great authority, Jesus reminded them that He is the first and the last, the one who was dead and came to life. Through sharing about His nature, Jesus identified with the church, helping them to understand that He too had suffered and faced rejection. He also wanted them to see that, in the end, He had been victorious.

The church in Smyrna was located in a unique city. Smyrna was a harbor city located about 35 miles northwest of Ephesus. At the time of this message, Smyrna was considered one of the grandest cities in the entire Roman Empire. It was home to spectacular architecture and was the first city to build a temple to the goddess Roma, giving it strong ties to Rome. It also contained other temples, including one dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius.

The word Smyrna is Greek for "myrrh," an ointment used specifically for anointing the dead at burial. Myrrh was one of the gifts that the Magi brought to the baby Jesus (Matt. 2:11), and it was also used to anoint Jesus when His body was placed in the tomb (John 19:39-40). Here was Christ's church in a city whose name was associated with death, and the persecution they experienced would bring them to the point of death (Rev. 2:10).

In times of difficulty, it is good to know that God has not forgotten us. Jesus said, "I know your tribulation and your poverty." Our government defines poverty in terms of falling below the threshold of income needed to cover what our culture defines as basic needs. The word Jesus used, however, is much harsher. It refers to being utterly destitute—having absolutely nothing. The church at Smyrna was desperately poor. Despite their struggles, however, they were rich because of their relationship to Jesus. The truth is that we can have an abundance of earthly resources, but they can't compare to the riches found only in Jesus.

Jesus was well aware of the difficulties they faced. Because they were hated by the people of Smyrna, the church was slandered and persecuted. But they were rich in spiritual blessings because of their relationship with Jesus and their steadfast devotion to Him.

The same spiritual blessing is ours today when we trust and follow Him. It's not enough just to be "religious." We must live continually in pursuit of a relationship with Jesus in order to lay claim to the riches of Christ.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 14)

- 1 What riches have you experienced because of your relationship with Christ?
- 2 When have you faced hardship or persecution for following Jesus?



IMPART

THE POINT // WE NEED NOT FEAR BECAUSE WE ARE RICH IN GOD'S GRACE.

REVELATION 2:10

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. **REVELATION 2:10**

Recently, my 12-year-old daughter twisted her ankle while playing soccer, and by the swelling and bruising that appeared almost immediately, we knew the injury was either a pretty bad sprain or a relatively severe break. I scooped her up, gently placed her in the front seat of my wife's van, and drove straight to the ER. When the doctor walked into our room after having reviewed the X-rays, he confirmed the worst—her ankle was badly broken. When he threw out the words surgery and rehab, I could see fear and panic sweep over my daughter. However, after more X-rays, it turned out that she didn't need surgery. Instead, she spent a month in a boot and was soon back to her active ways. The fear was totally unwarranted.

The church in Smyrna had faced difficult trials, tribulation, and persecution in the past—and there was still more to come! But Jesus told them not to fear what they were going to face. Over and over in Scripture (about 365 times), we are told not to be afraid. The church in Smyrna needed those words of encouragement—persecution would indeed come and they would be tempted to fear. Not only did the pagans hate the Christians, so did the Jews, and they sought to have them thrown in prison—even killed!

The most well known case is Polycarp, who pastored the church at Smyrna several years after they'd received this message from Jesus. When the Roman Proconsul demanded that Polycarp deny Jesus and proclaim that Caesar was lord, Polycarp refused. Despite threats that he would be burned at the stake, Polycarp remained bold in his position that Jesus is the only true Lord. These were Polycarp's words to the Proconsul: "You threaten me with fire which burns for a little while and is soon extinguished. You do not know the coming fire of judgment and eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. What are you waiting for? Do what you wish."²

Polycarp remained unwaveringly faithful and did die as a martyr. Many of those in the church at Smyrna remained faithful as well. Christ promised those who remained faithful to Him, even if it cost them their lives, would receive the crown of life. While the church at Smyrna may have wanted a message of deliverance, they received a message of endurance—the encouragement to keep on pressing on.

Hardships will come our way. We must be faithful to Jesus no matter the cost. If we prove willing to follow, even to the point of death, then we will receive the victor's crown.

Hardships will come our way. We must be faithful to Jesus no matter the cost. #BSFLtheChurch



DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 15)

- 3** Where do you see religious persecution in our community or around the world?
- 4** When have you faced a hardship that tempted you to fear?
- 5** How do hardship and suffering strengthen our faith?



REVELATION 2:11

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.' **REVELATION 2:11**

You may not be familiar with the old story of a man who was applying for a job with the telegraph company. As he entered the office, he saw the sign instructing him to fill out the application and take a seat until he was called in for an interview. He did as instructed and sat down among several other applicants. After a brief moment, the man stood up and walked through the door where the interviews were to take place. Almost immediately, he returned to the lobby with the manager's announcing to the other candidates that the job had been filled. The other applicants became upset and complained that they were never even given an interview. The manager told them that if they had been listening, they would have heard the telegraph ticking out a message: "If you understand this message, come into the office and the job is yours." It pays to listen!

Jesus' words to the church in Smyrna ended the same way His message to the church in Ephesus did: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." He wanted the churches to be sure to not just hear the words but take them to heart. Undoubtedly, you've been asked by your parents, caregivers, or teachers, "Do you hear what I'm saying?" People ask this because they want to make sure we understand their words clearly, and because a proper understanding is so important to the ways we live them out. The most important part of listening isn't the hearing, but acting on the words we are given.

For the church in Smyrna, the instructions Jesus gave them were incredibly important. They would receive an eternal reward (or not) based on their hearing and following Jesus' words.

Jesus finished this letter by telling them that there was no need for them to fear death. Unless Jesus returns in our lifetime, we will all face physical death. Jesus was not referring to physical death, but a second, final, and eternal death that comes after the judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). That judgment will be a time of separating those who faithfully followed Jesus during their lives on earth from those who rejected Him. We may not know when or how we will die in this life, but those who know Christ and have eternal life in Him will never experience spiritual death (v. 6).

As we endure in Christ, we do not have to live in fear of death. This message was given to the church in Smyrna, but it is a message that is still relevant to us today. Hear what you have been told in this passage. Stay strong; stay faithful in your relationship with Christ no matter the cost, and the victory will be yours in the end.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 15)

- 6** When do you sometimes struggle to listen?
- 7** What are the consequences of failing to listen to your parents? Teachers? To Jesus?
- 8** How can God use our living faithfully through hardships to point others to Jesus?



LIVE IT OUT (10 minutes)

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LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // SALVATION

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When we are saved by God's grace, there is nothing that can change that. The church in Smyrna was mistreated in terrible ways, and we will be too. When we are faithful, even through difficult circumstances, we can know that God will reward our faithfulness.

>CHRIST

9 Though we may be poor in this life, if we know Jesus, we are eternally rich. Make a list of all the ways you are rich because of God's grace in your life.

GOD

JESUS

HOLY SPIRIT

BIBLE

SALVATION

CREATION

CHURCH

PEOPLE

FAMILY

COMMUNITY
& WORLD

Spend time in prayer thanking God for all the blessings He has given you.



LIVE IT OUT

THE POINT // WE NEED NOT FEAR BECAUSE WE ARE RICH IN GOD'S GRACE.



› COMMUNITY

When we face difficult circumstances, the encouragement of others can help us to focus on the good things God has given us.

10 Who do you know who may be anxious or afraid?

11 How will you commit to helping them walk through their difficulties this week?

› CULTURE

Eternal life is a gift of God given to those willing to hear what the Spirit says. Today, we come to understand who has open ears when we share the gospel and see the ways others respond.

12 Who do you know who is an unbeliever and you will commit to sharing the gospel with?

13 Who are you finding is open to believing the gospel and following Christ in faith?

Continue sharing the gospel week by week, and the Spirit will speak through you to draw others to Jesus.