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# Introduction: Good Book Guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home, in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, students, business colleagues or teens. That's why we've designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the 'big picture' of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to apply appropriately what we have discovered to our lives. Let's take a look at what is included:

- ↻ **Talkabout:** most groups need to 'break the ice' at the beginning of a session, and here's the question that will do that. It's designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** the Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader's Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional 'follow-up' questions.
- ⋮ **Explore more (optional):** these questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to understand how the Bible relates together as a whole.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you'll keep coming across **apply** sections. Some of these have questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. Sometimes, a 🗣️ **getting personal** section is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have discovered.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God's Word—in line with His concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader's Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God's Word.

## Why study Revelation 2-3?

What message would you give to your local church if you had their undivided attention? Apart from the little niggles that frustrate us and soak up so much emotional energy – would there be a deep underlying issue that you would want to expose?

And what message would you give the wider church? What is the most important thing Christians today need to hear? What would Jesus say to His people today? Thankfully, there is no need to speculate on this question.

In Revelation 2-3 we find out what the risen Christ had to say to seven specific churches. Some of them were facing persecution – just as many Christians today face hostility. The apostle John, who passed on these messages, was himself in exile – a victim of one of the persecutions against Christians that was sweeping the ancient world at the time.

But some of these churches were also compromised. They were being pulled away from following Christ by their culture. They did not face hostility from the outside because, if truth be told, they were not so very different from the world around them.

Jesus brings a message of comfort and hope to those who are suffering for their faith. He brings a wake-up call to those who are compromised. He speaks in love of the love that really matters. Not love for the world, but a deep love for Jesus – and a desire to please Him by the way we live. He tells us what is truly important. He offers great resources to those who remain faithful. He promises great rewards to those who overcome.

To each church He says: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' These seven messages are rooted in the specific challenges faced by each congregation. But they are also a word for every church today. They are not just what the Spirit *spoke* to a church. They are what the Spirit *says* to *the churches*. They are what the Spirit is saying in our day to the churches of our day.



Ephesus: Revelation 2 v 1-7

# THE CENTRALITY OF LOVE



## talkabout

1. What are the characteristics of a mature, healthy Christian?

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## investigate

**▶ Read Revelation 1 v 9 – 2 v 1**

2. The seven messages in Revelation 2 – 3 are the words of Jesus. How is Jesus described in 1 v 9-20?

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3. What is the significance of the description of Jesus in 2 v 1?

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➤ **Read Revelation 2 v 1-7**

4. List the things the risen Christ says the Ephesians have done well.

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5. Jesus commends the Ephesians for their hard work (v 2). What would a hard-working church look like today?

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6. Jesus commends the Ephesians for their rejection of false teachers (v 2 and 6). What would this look like in your situation?

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7. Jesus commends the Ephesians for their perseverance (v 2-3). How would a persevering church be different from others?

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Verses 2-3 seem to describe model Christians. They are conscientious, doctrinally-sound church members. And yet something is badly wrong in the church at Ephesus. Jesus holds something against them: they have forsaken their first love (v 4).



8. What does it mean to forsake your first love?

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9. What does the warning in verse 5 say about conscientious, doctrinally-sound churches that are not passionate about Jesus?

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Ephesus was the gateway to Asia Minor. Much of the region's trade passed through its port. A wide road lined with columns on both sides ran from the city down to the harbour. The refinement and wealth of the empire were on full display in Ephesus. It seems that, although the church had not let their thinking be infected by worldly ideas, their hearts *had* been infected by *worldly priorities*. Amazingly, we can be proud of the good teaching in our church and yet have Jesus against us!

➔ **apply**

10. What things in church life can compete with Jesus for our first love?

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**getting personal**

If someone kept a record of the way you spend your time and money, what would they conclude about what you love most?





optional

## explore more

### Read Deuteronomy 8

- What will threaten the faithfulness of the people of Israel?
- What are they told to remember?
- What are they to do that will keep them from ignoring God (v 10)?
- What lessons are there in Deuteronomy 8 for the church in Ephesus?
- What lessons are there in this passage for the church in general, and yours in particular?

The risen Christ calls on the church to come back to its first love—Jesus Himself. They can rekindle this passion by looking back (v 5) and by looking forward (v 7).

- 11.** What does it mean to 'remember the height from which you have fallen' (v 5)?

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The promise in 2 v 7 looks forward to John's vision of the new creation in 22 v 1-5 – the new Jerusalem. The book as a whole presents a challenge for believers to choose which city they will belong to: Jerusalem, or Babylon (see 18 v 1-5). Because to choose a city is to choose a destiny.

- 12.** What does it mean for God's people to 'come out' of Babylon (18 v 4)?

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➔ **apply**

13. What difference should the vision of 2 v 7 and 22 v 1-5 make to the way we live our lives day by day?

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14. What would the risen Christ say to the prosperous church in the west?

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15. What changes do you need to make in the light of this message from the risen Christ?

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⬆ **pray**

- Use the words of Psalm 84 to shape your prayers. Encourage people to take a verse in turn and use it as a basis for a short prayer of praise or request.

