

SESSION 7

SUFFICIENT IN CHRIST ALONE

Leader pages on pp. 128-131

THE POINT:
GOD PROVIDES ALL WE
NEED AS WE PURSUE
CHRIST DAILY.

REVELATION 3:14-22

¹⁴ "Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation: ¹⁵ I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

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¹⁸ "I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent.

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²⁰ **"See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.** ²¹ To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Originator of God's creation (v. 14) – Jesus is the arche which in Greek indicates a chief position. This is a title shared by God the Father (Rev. 21:6), indicating that God started everything and will end everything.

Lukewarm (v. 16) – Because water in Laodicea was piped in,

it was neither hot or cold. The lukewarm water was thus not useful. Spiritual worthlessness was nauseating to Christ.

Repent (v. 19) – The only way Christ would give spiritual sight and make believers spiritually rich was for us to stop going through the motions spiritually.

WHAT HELPS US TO BE CONSISTENT IN OUR PURSUIT OF CHRIST?

Tammi Terrell and Marvin Gaye's duet, "Aint Nothing Like the Real Thing" was remade by Aretha Franklin. Don't get me wrong, I adore the Queen of Soul, but there ain't nothing like the real thing. I so enjoy the original duet and the ebb and flow between Tammi and Marvin. Aretha's version does not give me the same energy. I want the real thing.

Ray Charles did a remake too—Coke used it for one of their commercials some years back. My sentiments were the same. Much like how I agree Pepsi and Coke can't be compared because Pepsi is the real deal, Ray's version of "Aint Nothing Like the Real Thing" was not the real deal. On the rare occasion when I decide to have a Pepsi, Coke can't take its place. I can't help thinking about the precious original duet.

Some churches also look authentic on the outside, but when you "taste" what they're actually doing, you might find it is not the real thing. That was the case of the church in Laodicea. Christ's admonition to them speaks to us today.

Turn from Self-sufficiency //

Revelation 3:14-17

Jesus' last message was to the church located in Laodicea. Unlike the other letters, Jesus gave them no words of encouragement or commendation. In fact, it was quite the opposite. He spoke sternly as He told them they were neither hot nor cold. This was a phrase the people would have understood well since Laodicea did not have a good water supply to the city itself. Just ten miles to the east were the cold, pure waters in Colossae, and six miles to the north were the hot, therapeutic springs of Hierapolis. Laodicea was wealthy enough to create a system to pipe in needed water, but by the time it arrived, it was lukewarm—neither refreshing nor therapeutic. All the money and time they had used to build the water system was useless. Jesus desired that the church either be a cold, life-giving drink of water or a hot, healing mineral bath. Those are useful, but the church in Laodicea was doing nothing life-giving or helpful.



THE POINT: GOD PROVIDES ALL WE NEED AS WE PURSUE CHRIST DAILY.

The heart of the problem was their self-sufficiency. Laodicea was known for its wealth. It was the financial and banking center of the whole region. It was so rich that, after an earthquake in 17 A.D. that damaged the city, it refused any financial help from Rome. The city rebuilt itself entirely from its own money.¹¹ Apparently, that self-sufficient attitude also was in the church; they relied on themselves rather than on God. Self-sufficiency is the opposite of faith.

Jesus set the record straight. “You don’t realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.” They may have been wealthy and (as we shall see) proud of the wool and eye salve they produced, but they were destitute in the true wealth and things they needed that come only through trusting Christ.

HOW DOES OUR CULTURE’S ATTITUDE TOWARD SELF-SUFFICIENCY DIFFER FROM CHRIST’S PERSPECTIVE?

Jesus’ words carry a warning for His people today. We have myriad resources available to us so that if we are not careful, we can rely on them, causing us to become lukewarm in our relationship with Christ. If we are not trusting and relying on Him for all that we are and all that we have, we are useless. “The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5). We would do well to frequently do a self-check to see if we are depending on ourselves or on Christ.

Rely on Christ// Revelation 3:18-19

Even though Christ had given them a stern warning, He also offered a plan to bring them back to being a people useful to Him. I am thankful that, even when we mess up—and mess up big time—He is right there with a way for us to turn back to Him. That was exactly what Christ desired for the church at Laodicea, so He called them to “buy” three things from Him:

- **Gold.** The Laodiceans knew about money and gold because they were the financial banking center for the region, but they needed Christ’s “gold refined in the fire.”
- **White clothes.** Laodicea was known for its production of very soft, fine quality black wool. Much of the city’s wealth came from its production. They may have had some of the



DIGGING DEEPER REFINED GOLD

In the refining process, gold is heated to an extreme temperature until the slag or the impurities come to the top. Those impurities are then scraped off and discarded. This process continues until the gold is pure. When one goes through God’s refining process, our impurities are brought into focus so that He can remove them from our lives. Of course, this means we must have a desire and a willingness to allow the process to happen in the first place. Even though the people of the church in Laodicea had every worldly possession imaginable, their lives needed to be purified so that they could be found rich in Him. Laodiceans really needed to see their need for refinement. So do we! However, going through the fire can be scary and painful.

What can we as believers do to ease our fears about experiencing refinement from God?

finest clothes available at that time, but God saw them as shamefully naked because they had not clothed themselves with what mattered. They needed the white clothing of righteous, pure, and holy lives.

- **Ointment.** Laodicea was known for its school of medicine and a special eye ointment called Phrygian powder. It helped with many eye defects when applied around the eyes. Here was a church in a city that was known for helping people see, yet they themselves were blind. They could not see God's plans and desires for their own lives. The church at Laodicea had been blinded to spiritual things and the things that mattered to God; the very things that were most important for them to see.¹²

I love the fact that Christ assured them of His love for them. That's the reason He disciplined them. God's "rebuke and discipline" is always for the purpose of bringing His children back to Him and into a deeper walk. "He does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:10b-11).

HOW DOES GOD USE DISCIPLINE TO REFINE OUR FAITH?

The remedy when we wander from God is the same as it was for the Laodiceans: "Be zealous and repent." *Repent* in the Greek carries the idea of changing one's mind or purpose. We repent when we turn around and go the other direction. We don't just turn from something; we turn to Christ, running into His arms for the true riches, clothing, and sight only He can provide.

Seek Fellowship with Christ //

Revelation 3:20-22

The church at Laodicea had pushed Jesus out of the picture. Perhaps it wasn't intentional, but by their complacency and self-reliance, they had become satisfied with relying on themselves. Even though Jesus had spoken harsh words to this church, He had not forsaken them. He stood at the door knocking, seeking to restore fellowship with them.



JESUS HAS EXTENDED AN INVITATION TO PERSONAL FELLOWSHIP. HOW OFTEN DO YOU TAKE HIM UP ON THE OFFER?

Even though the Laodicean church had turned its back on Him, He was ready and willing to come in and dine with them. We usually approach dining and eating with others casually, but it was different in that culture. You didn't invite just anyone in to share a meal. Such an invitation implied close friendship. "I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me," presents a picture of an intimate relationship, the very thing Christ desires with those He loves. This is a picture of God seeking us and desiring a relationship with us.

THE POINT: GOD PROVIDES ALL WE NEED AS WE PURSUE CHRIST DAILY.

WHAT CAN BELIEVERS DO TO ENTER INTO DEEPER FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS?

Christ's desire for the Laodicean believers—and for us—was for them to be victorious. In order to be counted as a victor, though, each of us must respond individually to His invitation to let Him enter our lives and live in intimate fellowship. When we do so, we become victors, and Christ extends an incredible promise to us: “To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.” This throne is the victorious throne of Christ Himself.

We are victorious because Jesus Christ was victorious over sin and death. Jesus' death on the cross removed our sin, and His resurrection made possible eternal life with Him. We did nothing to gain victory, but Christ made it possible for us to experience an intimate, eternal relationship with Him.

DID YOU KNOW?

Today's cultural happenings marginally resemble the 1960's. In other ways, the multifaceted changes have become a unique phenomenon.

- More women of color are pursuing legislative offices.¹³
- Opportunities for diversity have become more prevalent in most cultural institutions.
- Many Americans are finding the rapid racial change disturbing because so many have been unaware of America's disparity between races, and they simply don't know how to handle what feels like guilt, looks like apathy, and sounds like confusion.

Jesus was clear and direct with the Laodiceans. He does not tolerate middle of the road actions. Once the facts have been given, a decision must be made. This is not only a challenge for us spiritually, but also as we consider today's current events.

- **Make a list of those spiritual truths and commands over which you continue to straddle the fence.**
- **Identify any cultural discoveries that require a decision of your allegiance.**
- **How do each of these lists impact the eternal aspect of your life?**

LIVE IT

How can you pursue Christ daily, relying on Him rather than yourself?

We have countless resources available to us. But if we aren't careful, we can rely on them, causing us to become lukewarm in our relationship with Christ. It's a relief to know that Christianity is not a works religion! Even so we would be wise to frequently do a self-check to see if we're depending on ourselves or on Christ. We need only be willing and unafraid. Here's how:

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- **Trust God.** Who or what do you turn to for happiness and security? Are you trusting these things and people over and above God? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the power to trust God.
- **Focus on one day.** Matthew 6:11 says, “Give us today our daily bread.” Pray the Lord's Prayer every day this week, focusing on your constant need for Christ.
- **Take someone along.** Share with someone how you plan to make Christ first in your life and the specific steps you are planning to take to get you there. They may want to join you on the journey.

DAILY READINGS

1. COVERED YET EXPOSED // REVELATION 3:17, HOSEA 12:8

Jesus calls out the church at Laodicea and bluntly tells them, “You are not fooling Me. Sadly, you think your riches and lavish lifestyle cover the fact that you don’t know what you believe about Me. They don’t and neither do they cover your sin!” That is a very loose interpretation of Revelation 3:17 as well as a picture of the behavior in Hosea 12:8. These folks had every tangible covering, yet what mattered remained fully exposed. All the riches of the world are unable to hide the true state of our hearts. Sin has a way of rising to the top. Yet, when are ready Christ provides a way back to Him.

We must reject tangible riches and other material excesses and follow Christ.

2. WHIPPED INTO SHAPE // PSALM 94:12

After a workout, the body can feel as if it has been literally whipped or physically disciplined. In reality it has. But it is short-lived pain that produces long-lasting benefits when combined with consistency. The same is true concerning the discipline we receive from God. He “whips” us when we step outside of His law. God’s whipping is meant to allow us to see the error of our ways and increase our understanding of His expectations. Today’s verse refers to the disciplined man as a blessed man.

God’s discipline not only corrects us but reminds us of His love and grace.

3. IT’S OPEN // REVELATION 3:20

At the sound of a light tap on our door, Mom always yelled, “It’s open!” When I was a girl, no one locked their front doors in my neighborhood. Neighbors were free to come and go. We considered each other as family. But times have changed, fears have increased, and doors are not only locked, they are bolted! Somehow, this earthly distrust has spilled over into our spiritual lives so that we have locked

Jesus out as well. We don’t often acknowledge His presence, which is with us all the time (Matt. 28:20). Oh, how He desires to be acknowledged so that He can guide or comfort us!

Jesus is knocking at each of our bolted doors, longing to share spiritual supper with us. Are any open?

4. PERFECT BRIDE // HOSEA 3:1-5

Hosea married a prostitute. Apologies, but there aren’t any delicate ways for conveying that truth. Gomer constantly turned to the streets seeking the comfort of another man’s arms. After many occasions of infidelity, long past the beauty of her youth, and after her body has been used and abused, God instructed Hosea to go and buy his wife back. Through Hosea and Gomer’s relationship, God was portraying the wandering and adulterous nature of His people and His willingness to take them back. He does the same for us when we turn away from Him. He always welcomes us back.

At great cost He washes us with His Word, showers us with His righteousness, and claims us as His perfect bride.

5. WHAT GOD WANTS // EPHESIANS 5:27

As we bring this unit of study to a close, let Ephesians 5:27 be your takeaway: So that He might “present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.” Above all else, God wants to reconcile us to Himself. The beautiful thing about this is He does the work to make us spotless, wrinkle free, holy and spotless. On the days when you can only see your pain, doubt or fear, remember this truth: What God wants is you! His cleansing has set us free from the people we were and has set us apart for Himself.

Hold this fact to your heart where you keep the truth about God’s love for safe keeping.



Trusting God When Life Hurts

BY W. DIANE BRADEN

Let's face it, sometimes life hurts. In my lifetime, I have experienced some of the most horrific situations, but none were worse than what Jesus endured for our salvation. He took more abuse than we could fathom, enduring the cross to the point of death. But he conquered it all through His resurrection.

Each trial I have experienced has made me better. At the time of the encounter, I didn't feel that way. But afterward, the trial helped me to develop spiritual muscles that prepared me for the next trial.

One trial that occurred many years ago is a good example of how God uses trials. As a young woman, I experienced the loss of four family

members at once. An accident killed my brother, sister in-law, and two of my nephews. A niece was the only survivor, but she had a long road of recovery ahead of her. Our entire family was devastated. How could we rise up from this fall?

Through prayer, I asked God, "why." It took many years of grief and loneliness, but I finally realized God is in control of all things. I had to trust that if He allowed the accident to occur, then it was His will and He would be glorified.

My family and I learned to lean and depend on God on a deeper level than we had before. I personally realized there were times that I had allowed my brother to be my "savior" instead of Christ. I often ran to him in times of crisis,

but now I couldn't. As a result of him not being around, my dependence on God became a constant and my spiritual walk grew enormously. Specifically, my heart changed for the better. I also walked in greater authority, empathy, and love for others.

Some of the trials I have experienced pierced my heart like a knife and seemed never ending like the separation from my husband Ron. However, God came through on that one as well. He completely restored our marriage after ten years of separation precisely to the date.

God had a divine plan in all of it and orchestrated our reconciliation. Through prayer and fasting, I began to see the destiny God had for our marriage. The Holy Spirit revealed the need for marriage ministry that leads others to the perfect will of the Father for marriages; equips and reconciles husbands to wives.

Shortly after our marriage was restored, we experienced the sudden loss of my mother. That fateful day, she and I spoke in the afternoon but within the early hours of the following morning, she was gone to be with the Lord. I was devastated. How would my sisters and I make it without her? But God carried us during those dark days and brought us to the light of a beautiful sunrise.

Then my husband Ron was diagnosed with cancer. We asked ourselves how we would get through this. His diagnosis came at a time when we were beginning to live our best life together. Falling to my knees, I cried out to God, "Help me to be a safe haven and tower of strength for Ron." But physically, I too, had begun to deteriorate due to stress.

That's when we began to feel the impact of the prayers of others. We felt everyone's prayers and love. Through it all, we both continued to cry out to our never-failing heavenly Father. We've learned that victory is always the outcome because of who we are in Christ. We also learned that in some seasons fruit and a plentiful harvest is produced, but its during the pruning seasons when we must trust God as our Father. If we endure, we will come forth as pure gold (Zech. 13:8-9).

My dad was one of my greatest encouragers. He always had a godly perspective on life and the challenges it brought. He counseled Ron and me through many obstacles and was elated with all that God was doing in our lives. Several years ago, during the Christmas holidays he decided to travel to California to visit family. My dad arrived in California, rented a vehicle, and was tragically killed on Christmas Eve. I was devastated once again but had to handle the arrangements of bringing my dad back home, planning a service, and handling affairs. It was then that I had to trust, lean, and depend on God to carry me and guide me through this maze of grief to peace and comfort. He did. Just as He always does. Even in the most painful and difficult trials, a spiritual metamorphosis of change still takes place.

The most recent hurt my family and I experienced was the sudden, unexpected death of my 28-year-old niece. It seemed she had her whole life ahead of her as a recent grad school graduate. Then, she was gone. My sister, brother in-law, and nephew modeled how to trust God when things don't go as planned. They walked this road with the anticipation that they will see her again.

I continue to pray for the joy that comes in the morning. And I see the light glimmer that will soon ignite into a full sunrise for all who grieve. For TRUST is the key:

T - Take Up Your Cross

R - Rely on His Truth

U - Understand His Promise

S - Stand in Faith

T - Turn It Over to God

Yes, life brings testing and trials, but it pales in comparison to the love of our heavenly Father. He gets us through the unimaginable and makes us better for it.

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