

“Wake Up. Keep Going. Stop Being Lame: *Sardis, Philadelphia, & Laodicea*” // Revelation 3:1–20 // *Revelation #4*¹

If I asked you, “Would you like to receive a personal letter from Jesus?” Most of you would probably say, “That sounds awesome.” The Apostle John would say, “I’m not so sure.”

We’re studying through 7 letters Jesus wrote to 7 churches in Asia Minor, and they can get pretty salty--BUT, we should read them closely, like you’d read a letter from someone you love.

I met Veronica right before I went overseas as a missionary, so we exchanged a lot of letters—not like emails but old school letters—and I didn’t just read those letters, I DEVoured them. I’d analyze the smallest details trying to figure out what each word meant. You remember what that was like?

- “Dear J.D.” Does she call everyone “dear” or is that just for me? Does she think of me as her... dear?
- I’d analyze the punctuation. “I’m thinking of you (PERIOD).” Why no exclamation point there? Does that mean she’s like, thinking of me, like concerned about me? “I’m thinking of you, poor guy.” Or does it mean like, “I’m *thinking* of you...” If she was really into me, surely there would be an exclamation point there.
- She’d sign it, “Love, Veronica,” and I’d think, “Is that like, “love” like, “love in Christ”—like “love everyone, love,” or like *LUV*, love

¹ Sources consulted: Tim Chester, *Revelation for You: Seeing History from Heaven’s Perspective* (London: The Good Book Company, 2019); Louie Giglio, “[Dear Church, I Love You, But ...](#),” April 21, 2024, Passion Church; Tyler Staton, “[Laodicea](#),” April 13, 2025, Bridgetown Church; Tim Keller, “[Letter on Discipleship](#),” June 13, 1993, Redeemer Presbyterian; Tim Keller, “[Letter on Mission](#),” June 13, 1993, Redeemer Presbyterian; Tim Keller, “[Letter on Reality](#),” June 6, 1993, Redeemer Presbyterian; Joby Martin, “[The Church in Philadelphia](#),” March 22, 2020, The Church of

I devoured every word, because I loved her. We should read these letters like that, like letters from a Savior we love and long for.²

Today we’re going to look at the last 3 of these 7 letters--the ones to the churches at Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Most of our time will be spent on that 3rd letter, the one to the church at Laodicea, because what Jesus said to them is so relevant to us--but I did want to at least visit the other two for a moment. So, first...

“And to the angel of the church in **SARDIS** write...”
(3:1) 😡

Real quick: (EMOJIS PICS) There are **7 total letters**.

- About 2 of the churches, Jesus has **nothing negative** to say: that is, the church at Smyrna, which we’ve already covered, and the church at Philadelphia, which we’ll look at here in a minute.
- Then there are **3 to whom Jesus gives a mixed review**--meaning, he offers both positive affirmation and negative critique--those are Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira.
- And finally, there are 2 churches about whom **nothing positive** is said: Sardis (you can see the angry emoji there) and Laodicea (and I’ll explain this emoji here in a minute).

To Sardis, Jesus said, vs 1, “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”

Eleven22; Joby Martin, “[Sardis](#),” March 29, 2020, The Church of Eleven22; Craig Groeschel, “[Believing in God, but Don’t Want to Go Overboard](#),” June 29, 2015, Life Church. And others as noted throughout.

² I owe this great analogy to my BFF David Platt!

The church at Sardis apparently had a pretty good reputation. If you knew someone was moving to Sardis, you'd always recommend the church. You'd say, "Solid church. Great preacher. Great ministries."

But Jesus saw something different. 'I know your (*real*) works,' he said. And you are dead.

- They were active in small groups, but behind closed doors, they gossiped and talked about each other.
- They came to church faithfully each week, but behind closed doors, they had secret sins.
- The church had a reputation for generosity, but a lot of the people still spent the majority of their money on themselves.
- They talked a big game about prayer, they knew when to say Amen and how to raise their hands in worship, but truth be told, the only time many of them ever really prayed was at church.

They enjoyed a great reputation, but measured by the private lives of their members, they were dead.

How many churches in America would fit this description? How many people *in this room* would fit that description? You have the reputation of being alive, but God doesn't evaluate your walk with him by your reputation, but by what you really are, and what you really are is shown in secret.

We're not going to spend long on this, but I just wonder if there's someone listening today to whom the Holy Spirit would right now say, "This is you."

- You've sat through a lot of sermons, but you don't consistently spend time with God each day.

- You give a little, but you are not a sacrificial giver. You couldn't point to the last time giving severely inconvenienced you or changed your lifestyle.
- There are things you watch, look at and listen to, conversations you engage in, that you'd be embarrassed to have brought to light.
- And you couldn't begin to tell us that last time you told someone about Jesus.
- When you do pray, all your prayers are focused on you. "God, I need this. And give me that. Fix this situation. And smite her for saying that."

You have a reputation of being alive, but the truth is, you are dead. To them, and to you, Jesus says: Vs 2: Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die... (It's not dead yet; but it's about to be; but wake up, there's a smoldering wick left and there's still time), if not... I will come *like a thief*, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."

There was this famous story in Sardis--every school kid knew it. For centuries the city of Sardis had been this mighty fortress that everyone thought was impregnable. Countless invading armies had tried to overcome it and been unsuccessful. But in 546, during the course of a Persian attack, a Sardinian soldier accidentally dropped his helmet over the wall. Well, later that night, after everyone had gone to bed, the soldier snuck out of his castle via a secret door in the side to retrieve his helmet. One of the Persian soldiers saw him, which revealed a secret entry into the fortress, and some of the soldiers broke in there and then opened the main gate to the fortress so the rest of the Persian army could come in and destroy it.³

Jesus says, If you don't wake up, I will come like that thief in the night. *Friend, listen: hypocrisy or secret sin is serious business.* He doesn't

³ As recorded by Herodotus, *Histories* 1.84

care what others think you are; he sees what you actually are. *It's time to wake up and stop being a fake.* And that's the whole message for some of you this weekend. It's not what your mouth says you believe that matters to Jesus; it's what your life says you believe.

4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

The imagery of soiled garments there is fascinating. You see, Sardis was famous for an expensive clothing dye that was sold there. People from all around the Roman Empire would bring these white wool garments there so they could be dyed with these dark and exotic colors. It was an expensive process, but Jesus refers to it negatively as "soiling" the garment, because he's using it as a metaphor for what had happened to these believers in Sardis. They'd been stained by the worldly culture of Sardis. Instead of standing out from the world, like a light in the darkness, they'd blended in. The salt had lost its saltiness.

- And yet, there were a few there who resisted that conformity, and Jesus says to them, "I see you. Don't give up. You college students who are choosing to date God's way even though your peers think that's insane; you young professionals struggling to do things God's way; you young parents sacrificing to have your kids here week after week even though you're exhausted; you retirees who are investing in the next generation even though society tells you that now is the time to focus on yourself and enjoy your savings... for all of you who are living differently--Jesus says. *"Keep going! I see you. It's worth it. I'll make it worth it. I'll reward you; I'll bless you."* "I'm the one who holds the crown of life and the 7 stars in his hand."

And that brings me...

Vs 7, "And to the angel of the church in **PHILADELPHIA** write..." (3:7) 😊

Go Eagles! Just kidding. That's a different Philadelphia.

(EMOJIS PIC) As I mentioned, this is one of **2 churches** about whom Jesus has nothing negative to say. What characterizes this church is their devotion to *mission*: 8 "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

Give me a little pastoral license here, if you will. I know we're not perfect, Summit, not by a long shot... but if I could be so bold, I think there's something in here for us. For 20+ years, you've sought to be faithful to the mission the Holy Spirit has given to you. Like I said, we're not perfect and we've often stumbled along in it, but I can say without caveat that this is one of the most generous, most mission-focused churches I've ever been a part of or heard of. I just got back from a trip visiting our church planting teams in Leipzig, East Germany and Trento, Italy--2 of the most secularized, lost places on the planet, and you have members there doing the hard work... just so joyful in it, and what God is doing through Summit people there is incredible. This summer we have teams visiting our church plants in Nairobi, Kenya, India, Kuala Lumpur, Thailand and Japan and several other places. We'll have more than 800 people go out on mission trips THIS YEAR. Truly, Summit, the sun never sets on your Kingdom work. And each year you now invest about 35% of your budget into global gospel expansion, which is just incredible. That now amounts to about \$20M/year. I just want to use this letter to say that Jesus sees all that and I believe it delights him.

And Summit, I believe **vs 8** is for us: "...Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." Don't stop, he says,

because no one is going to be able to stop you. There's so much more to do. Summit, we're watching our church plants on college campuses really take off. And it really feels like we're just getting started. And we have so many more to reach in this city, too--there's a growing movement of men reaching men here—our men's ministry is really starting to grow, and we want to see that continue. We're seeing new ministries to the HOPUD develop from inside our church. To us, I believe Jesus says, "I AM OPENING A DOOR for you and no one can shut it." Keep going, Summit: Don't stop. Because I'm gonna make it where no one can stop you!

Vs 9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. "*I see all the people who criticize you,*" he says. *Don't worry about them. They won't be able to stop you.* And when all the dust settles, it will be clear who my blessing was on. You may feel like you don't have the power to overcome those that oppose you. *I don't need you to overcome them.* Ignore them and stay focused on the task. Listen, next year, Lord willing, we're going to study the book of Nehemiah, and there's a scene in Nehemiah (6:3) where Nehemiah is up building the walls of Jerusalem like God has told him to do, and there's these two critics--Sanballat and Tobias--and they are just wearing him out, questions his motives, constantly trying to lure him into fights, and eventually Nehemiah says to them, (6:3), "*Listen, I can't come down off this wall to argue with you. I've got a job to do. I won't.*" That's how I feel. I don't have time to respond to all the comment threads on the internet. We're up here building the wall; we've got a city to reach and a lost world to bring to Jesus, I don't have time for foolish arguments. We can't—**WE WON'T**—come down off this wall.

One more thing here: 11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. 12 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

Philadelphia, like all these cities in the Roman Empire, had all these temples to pagan gods, and the number one architectural feature of these temples were these huge pillars. Pillars implied "might" and "permanence." In fact, you've seen it (**PIC**) in the ruins of many of these ancient temples, nothing remains except for the pillars.

Jesus says, "*I'll establish your work as pillars in a Temple that will never crumble.*" Summit, we call that 35% of our giving we invest in global gospel expansion here "**legacy lanes**," because that's what we're doing--building a legacy that lasts forever. Pillars in God's eternal Temple.

So, Summit, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing your labor for the Lord is not in vain. These things say the Amen, the firstborn from the dead, the first and the last. **That's the letter to the church at Philadelphia.**

And that brings us to, **last**, and in many ways, **least**: the church in LAODICEA. Before I get into this one, let me set it up with a question I want you to consider: **What makes you nauseous? What makes you feel like you need to wretch?** Maybe me just asking the question does it.

- *I've known people who got queasy **when they were nervous.** I've known others who get nauseous when they are **extremely sad or upset.** I know some who do it when they **strained really hard** in a workout.*
- ***But probably when I ask that the thing that most of you think of is something really disgusting.** Like when you mindlessly pour the milk into the glass and don't notice that it's 2 weeks past the date... until you **feel the cottage-cheesy lumps** sliding down your throat.*
- ***I always thought I had a strong stomach,** but then I had 4 babies and the requisite diaper-duty that goes along with that. I'd start changing the diaper and think, "How did (little tiny) YOU produce*

*all this?" I remember once my wife left town for something and I was on baby duty and one of the kids had a blowout and I had to call over a friend from down the road and they were like, "Has this kid not had a bowel movement in 6 weeks?" It was one of those runaway diapers where you'd **bypass the wipes**; you'd throw the outfit away and just go hold the kid up in the shower or do like I used to do with Adon: take him out to the back yard and squirt his booty down with a hose.*

Here's the point: **When something is so offensive to you that it makes you want to vomit**, it's serious. **What makes Jesus feel this way?**

Now, apart from this passage, you might say,

- "I know, it's Christians who are too political--or, at least the ones who are political in ways I don't agree with. It's "Evangelicals for Kamala" Christians or "MAGA Christians" or "those self-righteous Never Trumpers!" They make Jesus sick because obviously—you think—they make me sick.
- Or, you say. "I bet it's those Christian leaders who take advantage of people or those TV preachers who scam people out of money."
- Or, You say, "No, what makes Jesus want to wretch has to be those people who think cheesy Christian T-shirts are the way to win the world to Christ." Like, these I saw this week:
 - Yoo-Who Jesus died for, come to him
 - Mayo Light Shine Before Men and
 - Relish Sweet Jesus
 - (or my personal favorite...) Fully Vaccinated by the Blood of Jesus (This one GUARANTEED to lead to all kinds of interesting conversations). All of these shirts are available for purchase today at our Next Steps area. JK.

And yes, all of those things, to different degrees, are probably offensive to Jesus. But the one thing in the Bible Jesus says makes him

want to vomit is a lukewarm Christian--the Christian who is neither cold nor hot--and that's the subject of Jesus' final letter,

"And to the angel of the church in *LAODICEA* write..."
(3:14) 🤢

Remember, this is one of those churches about which Jesus has nothing positive to say. But—and this is important to note—he doesn't critique them for any doctrinal error or moral compromise; he has just one criticism: they've lost their passion for him. They're lukewarm.

A few things to know about LAODICEA:

- First, it was an awesome, fun place to visit. Laodicea was **extraordinarily wealthy**, you see. **Early in Rome's rule, Laodicea had burnt to the ground**, and one of the wealthiest families in the Roman Empire, who lived there, named the **Zinonads** stepped in and rebuilt it from scratch with their own money (Zinodads just sounds like a rich people name, doesn't it?). Because of this, Laodicea was literally called "*the city that died and rose again*," imagery you'll hear used in this letter.
- Secondly, Laodicea was **an important textile center**. They produced this **fine black wool** that came from a rare breed of sheep that lived in the mountains surrounding Laodicea. Clothes made from this black wool were a bit of novelty, so rich people from all over the Roman Empire came to buy it there. Laodicea was like the Saks Fifth Avenue or the Neiman Marcus of the ancient world.
- Finally, it was the **medical capital of the Roman Empire**. The surrounding mountains were filled with these **hot mineral springs**, springs which were thought to have healing qualities and people from all around came to seek healing there. Scholars say, btw, that a number of legitimate medical cures were developed

there in Laodicea. In particular, they **had developed this mineral-rich eye** salve that cured a lot of vision ailments.

The Apostle Paul had planted this church at Laodicea. In fact, fascinating--in Paul's letter to the Colossians, Paul refers to a letter that he wrote to the Laodicean church that unfortunately didn't survive, which is fascinating to me that there were letters Paul wrote that didn't make it into the canon of Scripture. Because I wonder WHY they weren't included. Maybe Paul got a little unhinged and said some cuss words in them or something and the Holy Spirit was like, "I can't put that in the Bible." Paul was like, "You thought my letter to the Corinthians was strong, you should have read my letter to the Laodiceans. I wrote it in ALL CAPS. It peeled the paint off the walls." For whatever reason, the Holy Spirit chose not to include Paul's letter to the Laodiceans in sacred Scripture. But Jesus' letter did.

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write... 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.

6 miles NE of Laodicea was the mountainous region of Hierapolis, which contained the boiling, mineral springs I told you about; **6 miles to the SE were the tall mountains of Colossae**, out of which flowed streams of ice cold water that came from the snow melting off the mountain peaks.

Well, just outside of Laodicea, these two kinds of streams flowed together into stagnant ponds of tepid water—these pools were neither hot (which would have made them good for bathing); nor were they cold (which would have made them good for drinking). They were just swampy, which made them good for nothing.

- **I think of it like coffee:** Man, there is nothing better than a piping-hot triple shot Americano in the morning, **UNLESS** it is an ice-cold salted caramel cold foam cold brew in the afternoon. I **love hot**

coffee and I love cold coffee—but if I find a cup of coffee that has been sitting out on the counter all day, room temperature... (my coffee) the thought right now of drinking it makes me want to wretch. Right?

- **Jesus uses this image to describe the believers at Laodicea. You are lukewarm, he says**, characterized by neither the warm passion that fuels mission nor the awakening jolt of a cold plunge. **There is nothing distinctive about you.** You're the same temperature as everything around you.

What he says next is very important, because he pinpoints the sources of their lukewarmness: ¹⁷ For (the reason you're lukewarm is 'because') you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,'

- The **Laodiceans were so rich** that in A.D. 61, when there was an earthquake in the valley that measured 8+ on the Richter scale and destroyed **every city in the valley**, Roman federal funds were granted to **each city so they could rebuild**. Laodicea turned down the money. They said, "*We'll just do it ourselves so we can do it the way we want.*"
- *Listen, when you're so rich you're turning down grants from the federal government, that's pretty rich.*
- *That was Laodicea, and their wealth made them feel self-sufficient.* They didn't think they had any real needs, and (hear me) **that's always the pathway to apostasy.**

Vs. 17...(but) and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

- **Blind:** **Jesus says**, "You pride yourselves on the medical cures you provide to others, like the eye salve, but the irony is that you are spiritually blind there's nothing you can do to fix that.
- **You're naked:** "You pride yourselves on clothing everyone with this fine, black wool but the truth is in my eyes you are naked. Wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

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. There are riches and healing you are unable to provide for yourselves, and the tragedy is that your physical riches keep you blind to the fact that you don't have those things. You think you have everything, like I've heard it said, "Money can buy a house, but not a home; a bed, but not rest; medicine, but not health; information, but not wisdom; thrills, but not joy; toys, but not satisfaction; associates, but not friends."⁴ And physical riches certainly can't provide LIFE to your kids or your grandkids or your community. Physical riches can't bring the life that actually matters. You think you have everything, Jesus says, but the reality is you are poor, wretched, blind and naked. And the tragedy is, you don't even know it.

Look at what he says next: ²⁰ Behold! I stand at the door and knock. **Don't miss this:** Jesus presents himself as *OUTSIDE this church*. Their self-sufficiency has gotten them to a point that Jesus is not even present in the church anymore, and worst of all, they don't even REALIZE that he's **not there anymore!**

BTW, I always heard this verse applied to SALVATION--I even remember the Sallman (**PAINTING**) I saw depicting this growing up-- Jesus stands at the heart's door of the unbeliever and knocks. And I guess that's fine as an application, just know that specifically this verse is about the church--there are churches and Christians that are so self-satisfied that Jesus isn't even in them anymore and they don't even know it!

⁴ Full quote: "Money can buy a house, but not a home; a bed, but not rest; food, but not an appetite; medicine, but not health; information, but not

Let's get real: For some of you, my fear is that the **Holy Spirit is not really present** in your life and you don't even know it. You wouldn't recognize if he came; you don't recognize when he's gone.

- **When Christians in poorer and more persecuted parts of the world come to the US and visit churches here, they're amazed by our facilities—our lights and our screens** and our systems—they are like, 'Oh my goodness, you have people directing traffic in the parking lot—but they **often appalled** by our lukewarm-ness—by how little we pray, by how much we spend on ourselves... what we assume we can't live without.
- They are appalled at how afraid we are to identify ourselves as Christians in public or how we won't take even the smallest of stands for fear of what it will do to our reputations or business-- like not flying the pride flag in June--when some of them are literally being imprisoned for their faith.

Note: **Lukewarm does not mean 'hypocritical'**. A hypocrite is a two-faced liar: Jesus doesn't call these people hypocrites. He just says, "You have no sense of need of my presence and so you don't seek me."

Jesus says something more negative to this church than he does to any of the others. He doesn't say *I'm disappointed with you or upset with you*. He says, "*You make me want to vomit.*" That's something **personal and visceral** about his reaction. (I mean, not to be gross, but vomiting is not usually a conscious choice, right? You don't say, "You know, that is so gross I choose to vomit in protest." No, you see something and it's like you can't control it. Your body viscerally reacts w/ disgust.)

wisdom; thrills, but not joy; associates, but not friends; servants, but not loyalty; flattery, but not respect."— Pat Williams, *What Are You Living For?: Investing Your Life in What Matters Most*

So why? Why do you think Jesus has such a visceral response to lukewarmness?

- Because Jesus didn't go to a cross to create lukewarm followers. He didn't allow himself to be stripped naked and have nails put into his hands and feet so you could play church on the weekend or sit at home or, even worse, drop in every week from your couch in your pajamas. The only kind of reaction appropriate to what Jesus did is full on worship.
- Listen: **Only 2 reactions to Jesus really make sense**--utter rejection (this is a total scam), or total worship. This whole story is either the worst scam ever pulled on humanity--I mean, urging people to put their hope in a carpenter from Israel and give up their lives for him--that's either the worst scam ever, or it's a true story that calls for your complete and utter devotion. **I've asked you before:** You come home and there's a friend on your front porch who tells you that while you were out, someone came to collect a debt you owed and he paid it for you.
- The one thing people in the NT **never were was "bored" with Jesus**. They either passionately hated him or passionately loved him. Yet, "bored" is **what so many of us are**. We're lukewarm. And it makes Jesus want to vomit.

Listen: it's extremely significant that Jesus closes these 7 letters on the theme of lukewarmness—because that's how he opened these letters, remember? In the first letter, the one to the church at Ephesus, Jesus mourned the Ephesian believers for having lost their first love. He commended that church at Ephesus for many things: their doctrinal faithfulness, their missional faithfulness, their pastors were awesome, Mary, Jesus' mother, was a member there--they had so many things going for them, but they'd lost their love and passion for Jesus. And now here we are again--returning to that same theme.

⁵ Adapted from Craig Groeschel, "Believing in God, but Don't Want to Go Overboard," Revelation 3:15-20 and Francis Chan, *Crazy Love*. 91ff.

Listen: the fact that this same theme bookends these letters means that: **Jesus sees the GREATEST immediate threat to his church not as doctrinal or moral compromise, but lukewarm passion for him.**

Losing your first love.

When we went through the letter to Ephesus, I gave you 5 signs you'd lost your first love. **Do you remember what they were?...** Me neither. So, let me end our study of these letters with **3 signs that you're lukewarm**.⁵ There will probably be some overlap.

1. Lukewarm Christians... don't pray that much

- This is the primary thing Jesus points to in this letter. Because they feel so rich and self-sufficient, they don't pray.
- We usually attribute prayerlessness to lack of discipline. If I asked you if you are happy with your prayer life, and you said, "No," and I said, "Well, what keeps you from having the prayer life you should?" you'd probably say, "I just lack self-discipline. I get so busy in the day, I just forget. There's not enough time in the morning; I'm too tired at night."
- But that's not the real reason. The real reason you don't pray is PRIDE. You don't see God's help as that essential. You are "rich," "needing nothing." That's why you don't pray.
- The single-best book on prayer I've ever read is **Paul Miller's A Praying Life**. In it he says, **"If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you really need in life. You'll always be a little too tired, a little too busy. But if, like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how busy you are, no matter how tired, you will find the time to pray."**⁶
 - Think of it like breathing: I'm never too busy or too tired to breathe. I don't require accountability partners to remember to breathe. None of my buddies has to call me up at 11am

⁶ *A Praying Life*, 37.

each morning or when I'm traveling and say, "Now, J.D., just wanted to hold you accountable on your breathing. You made a vow to 'breathe more in 2025.' And I'm holding you accountable." No... I breathe instinctively because my body craves air, so no self-discipline is required.

- Or to use Jesus' imagery here: if you're somewhere and you realize you're naked, you don't need someone to urge you to get clothes. If you actually showed up somewhere naked (it's not a dream, you're not going to be like, "Well, what do you know??? I'm naked!") No one is going to say, "You know, you really should wear clothes more." No, you're going to be self-motivated, no self-discipline or accountability required.
- The reason you don't pray is you don't realize how desperate you are for God's help, how truly naked you are without it. You say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing'... you don't realize that in God's eyes you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.
- Paul Miller again: "A praying life isn't simply about a morning prayer time; it is about slipping into prayer at odd hours of the day, not because we are disciplined but because we are in touch with our own poverty of spirit, realizing that we can't even walk through a mall or our neighborhood without the help of the Spirit of Jesus."⁷
- When you say, "God, I can't do my marriage right without your supply of power. I can't raise these kids without your guidance. I can't face the temptations of this day without your strength. I won't make the right decision, or say the right words, or love my friends the right way apart from your Spirit doing those things through me, so I'm here crying out for your help."
- **Prayerlessness is a sign of lukewarmness.**

2. Lukewarm Christians... minimize their sin

- Lukewarm Christians aren't really that serious about their private sin for two reasons. **First**, they are not terrified of being separated from God's power. When you know how desperate you are for God's power, you're scared of doing anything that would cut you off from it.
 - I think of it like air in a SCUBA tank. When I'm underwater, I stay constantly aware of how much air is left, because I don't want to be in any situation without it. The reason you are casual about sin is you don't realize how desperate you are for God's power.
- **The second reason a lukewarm Christian isn't scared of sin is because, truth be told, they are just not driven that much by a love for Jesus.**
 - You see, the lukewarm Christian avoids sin because it makes them look bad or feel bad, not because they love Jesus. Their lives may look pretty good morally, but that's not the same thing as love for Jesus.
- **Think of it like this: if the only reason I stay faithful in my marriage is that I don't want all the problems that unfaithfulness would bring into my life (and it would bring a lot of problems, for sure, but if that is the primary reason I am faithful), is that really love for Veronica?** In a good marriage, my main reason for wanting to be faithful would be I love her and I want to honor her and I want not to hurt her, not simply how much an affair would embarrass me or bring hardship into my life.
- In the same way, if on a date, I'm always asking, "What is the minimum amount I can put into this and pull off the evening?"
 - What's the cheapest meal I can buy her? Can we do Wing Stop again? Is she gonna want to get dessert? I don't want to pay for that.
 - What's the minimum I have to talk with her?
 - What's the maximum I can flirt with the waitress before Veronica gets irritated?

⁷ A Praying Life, 56.

- If that's all I'm thinking about, is that love? No. If I'm motivated by love, I'll want to draw close. I'll want to please her and delight her. The question is not, "What's the minimum here," but what can I do to please and delight her?
- When **you're not in love with Jesus**, you are always thinking, "How close can I get to sin and still be ok?" If you're in love with Jesus, you ask, "What's the most I can do to glorify him?"
- **Francis Chan** says: "Lukewarm Christians don't really want to be saved from sin, only from the penalty of their sin."

Lukewarm Christians minimize their sin. And this leads me to the last point, which is probably the most haunting...

3. Lukewarm Christians... only turn to God when they need something

- I see it all the time: Some sudden need, some life-scare, brings someone running back to God: You lose your job. Yet get divorced, or your spouse threatens to leave you. You start having problems with your kids. You have a pretty significant health scare. And so you come back to church and you get serious.
 - And honestly, **hear me: that's fine**—God often uses a need to bring you back to him. As I always say, "*Sometimes God puts you flat on your back so you will at last be looking the right direction.*"
- But here's the question: are you just trying to use Jesus to fix something in your life—or are you coming to him because you realize he is your life?
- You see, because here's what I see happen: if all you're doing is using Jesus, the moment the problem is fixed--the health scare goes away; you get your job back; your spouse agrees to give you another chance--you'll drift back to your old ways.

- See, your coming to Jesus was never about Jesus, it was about using Jesus to get something else you really wanted.

Lukewarm Christians only turn to God when they need something. It's like we live with Jesus mostly in **time-out**. Anybody in here ever get put in **timeout** when they were a kid? You did something obnoxious and got on your parents' nerves and had to go sit in a room or stand over here or in the corner until your parents were ready for you to come out again. This is what we do with Jesus. You keep him in timeout until you need him. Then you run to him--"Oh, JEEesus, come out and help me..." And he does, and then when you don't think you need him anymore, you say, "Back in timeout!" Or if you sin real bad, you think that gives him license to come out of timeout and clobber you with punishment, so after you sin you run to church and ask forgiveness and make an offering and then say, "Safe, Jesus, I'm safe. I got forgiveness and now you can't punish me, so... **back in timeout.**"

See, your relationship with Jesus has little to do with love and worship and gratefulness toward him. You're just using him.

- It's like what **Flannery O'Connor** said of one of the characters in one of her novels. She was talking about a religious guy and said, "*He avoided sin as a way of avoiding Jesus.*"⁸
- Jesus didn't die for you to use him. He died to call out a people who would be as passionate for him as he was for them. He sought a bride, not a group of religious slaves who obey him so they can go to heaven. His passion for you calls out for your passion for him.

3 signs that you are lukewarm: 1. You don't pray that much. 2. You minimize your sin. 3. You only turn to God when you need something.

⁸ Said about Rayber in Flannery O'Connor's novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960).

I can tell you with pretty good accuracy what a lukewarm Christian looks like because in many seasons in my life I have been one.

Even **after becoming a pastor**. There has been a tendency, for example, to let my ministry-work replace my relationship with God.

- I would **study the Bible to preach**, not read it and devour it like a love letter from Jesus to me.
- ***I heard a statement one time by Pastor Craig Groeschel that really smacked me in the face: “You’ve become a full-time pastor and a part-time follower of Jesus.”***
- ***Would that phrase describe you? “You’ve become a full time mom/businessman/student and a part-time follower of Jesus.”***⁹

Listen, it’s **not a coincidence** that Laodicea was wealthiest, with the best resources, best singers, best facilities, funniest preachers, and biggest budgets, and **they were the ones** that are lukewarm.

Pride and self-sufficiency always breed lukewarm passion.

On the other hand, the poor, the desperate, those consumed by guilt and brokenness—they know they need God and they cling to him. You could no more separate them from God than you could separate a scuba diver from his air tanks or you from your clothes, because you know, “Apart from him, I can literally do NOTHING.”

VAMP

I told you Jesus had nothing positive to say to the church at Laodicea, but this passage does end with an invitation: ¹⁸ ...If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. 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.

⁹ Thanks for help on this section to Craig Groeschel, Ibid.

Good news... **He wants to come in!** He wants to fellowship with you, and he brings in so much joy with him when he comes in!

- Listen, there is no **one more miserable on earth** than the half-committed Christian. They’re just enough into Jesus to be miserable in the world, and just enough into the world to be miserable in Jesus. You’re a Christian who comes to church on and off, but you never get to experience the joy of his presence and his pleasure.
- **Make up your mind!** It’s like Charles Spurgeon said: If you’re going to be saved, be saved 100%. Or if you’re going to be lost, be lost 100%. Some of you are like a person standing on a dock with one foot in a boat. Has that ever happened to you? You are on the dock with one foot in the boat and one foot on the dock and it starts to float away and you’ve got to make a decision fast! In or out? With Jesus or not?

The one place you can’t stay is straddling the middle. ***It’s nauseating to Jesus and miserable for you.***

Friend, ours is a Jesus that deserves more than lukewarm devotion: He died for us. When we were blind he gave us sight; when we were naked and poor he clothed us with his own flesh and poured out on us the riches of his mercy. ***When you realize that, what more can you say? Were the whole realm...***

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.”

He’s ready to come in and make his home with you. Will you let him in?

Altar**Salvation / Coming back to him**

Need to repent of your lukewarmness. For some of you this will be an extremely, life-defining moment. It's a big step. A huge step. A line in the sand, and I want to give you a chance to do it.