

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE®

## ADULTS Personal Study Guide

SUMMER 2021 | CSB

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### STUDY 1:

*The Church God  
Desires*

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### STUDY 2:

*Elijah: Living Outside  
the Comfort Zone*



LifeWay | Adults

# HOW TO BE RICH

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Everyone desires to live a better life, and our culture teaches us that the good life comes with riches. While prosperity might help us live more comfortably, a house full of stuff doesn't make us better people or even happier people.

A life in Christ does promise riches, but these are riches far different from what the world offers. A rich life full of peace, forgiveness, and joy is far better than the fickle riches of the world. God loves you and desires to give you an abundant life, but His offer is not automatic. It calls for an exchange.

The only thing you can give God is your sin, but the moment you come to Him with your sin seeking His forgiveness, He exchanges your sin for His forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus died on the cross to take away your sin, and He rose again to give you life—an eternal life with Him that includes the riches of His peace, joy, and contentment.

If you would like a new life in Christ, repent of your sins and put your faith in Him. Admit to God you are a sinner and ask Him to forgive you. Turn from the sin that has kept you from God and accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness. Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Express your repentance and faith by praying something like this:

**“Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I’m sorry for all the wrong I’ve done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”**

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith. Be baptized as an expression of your faith.

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# WELCOME

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We all remember last summer. It was a summer that hopefully only comes around every hundred years—or more! It was the summer of the pandemic and nothing was normal. Sports leagues were canceled. Vacations weren't able to happen. For many people church gatherings weren't able to occur.

We are hopeful for much improved circumstances for us all this year. If nothing else, I will have finished a doctorate and my wife will have achieved her next level of nursing. And maybe, just maybe, we'll have graduated another of our kids. But near the top of our list is that our groups at church will have grown together through another year of challenges, each one teaching us important lessons about what it means to do life together in Christian community.

Some of those lessons we'll glean as we filter our lives through the Bible studies in this book. The first study will teach us much about the early church and how to avoid some of the pitfalls they experienced. In the second study we'll travel back in time to walk with Elijah as he rides a spiritual roller coaster, but one that was safe and certain because of the One who was there with him guiding him through it all. We hope you'll join us for both of these studies as we grow together!

## **Brian Gass**

Content Editor, *BSFL Adults*

 @RBrianGass



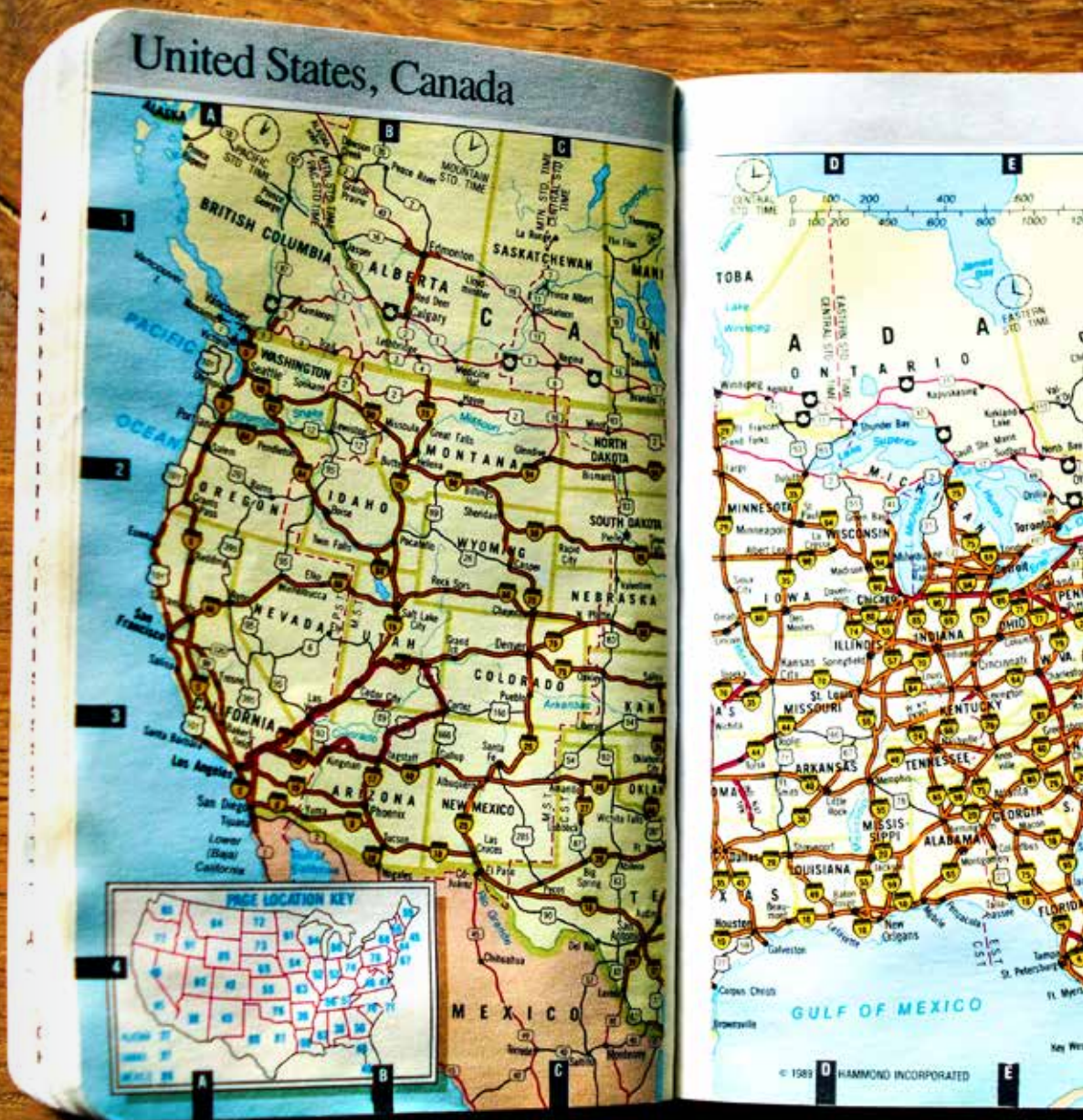












## THE CHURCH GOD DESIRES

I love road trips—whether it's packing up the vehicle to travel to a certain, pre-planned destination or just getting in the car and going wherever it takes you. Over the years, our family has planned road trips that have taken us through forty-eight states. My favorite trips were those that included touring historical sites all across this great country of ours. We have so much to learn from history, and visiting all of these historical places has brought history to life for me.

I invite you to join me on a journey to visit the seven churches that Jesus delivered messages to in the Book of Revelation. These were historical first-century churches, yet Jesus' messages still apply to our individual lives and our churches today. So let's take a virtual road trip through time to see what God has to say to us.

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### RANDY FIELDS

Randy serves as the lead pastor at New Covenant Baptist Church in Grass Valley, Calif. He has a heart for missions around the globe and loves leading teams overseas to share the message of Christ.

How “The Church God Desires” supports the Discipleship Plan (see page 129):

**Live Unashamed.** Churches stand strong in their communities as the believers in those churches stand strong. Together, we are the body of Christ and we display Christ to the world around us. As we apply Jesus’ messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 to our own churches, we present a clear picture of the One we love and serve.

## **The Church God Desires**

Session 1	<b>Characterized by Love</b> Revelation 2:1-7
Session 2	<b>Steadfast in Difficulties</b> Revelation 2:8-11
Session 3	<b>Uncompromising with Truth</b> Revelation 2:12-17
Session 4	<b>Strong in Purity</b> Revelation 2:18-29
Session 5	<b>Vigilant Against Complacency</b> Revelation 3:1-6
Session 6	<b>Faithful in All Things</b> Revelation 3:7-13
Session 7	<b>Sufficient in Christ Alone</b> Revelation 3:14-22



# 1

## Characterized by Love



### QUESTION 1:

*When have you done something crazy for love?*

## THE POINT

Ground everything you do in love for Christ.



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Everyone has had a first love in life. Do you remember yours? It may have been a childhood crush or a teen infatuation. Some call it puppy love. For some it was very early in life, for others it may have happened later on, and many of us worked hard, maybe even doing crazy things, to get the person to reciprocate and love us back. As I look back on my first love from childhood, it occurs to me that throwing rocks at her in order to get her to love me may not have been the smartest thing to do!

When you first came to faith in Christ, do you remember how you loved Christ? Unlike a childhood crush, you knew you didn't have to work to receive His love in return. Over time though, we get busy doing 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 cannot replace the need to keep our first love in the right place. We need to return to our first love for Christ.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## REVELATION 2:1-3

<sup>1</sup> “Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus: Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup> I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. <sup>3</sup> I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and you have not grown weary.”

Several years ago a gentleman came to faith in Jesus. Before long he was serving in a variety of places around the church. He was a kind man who developed a heart of gold when it came to serving. He preferred to serve without people noticing. However, after several months, his demeanor began to change because serving no longer brought him the same joy it initially did.

On one occasion, we had a conversation in which I told him how much I appreciated his hard work in helping to make the church a better place. He confessed that, when he first came to know the Lord, he served out of love for Jesus. Along the way, though, he began to think he had to do it because if he didn't 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 literally at the crossroads of civilization. Home to the temple of Diana, it was the center for fertility worship. Ephesus was a city full of pagan religions.

The church at Ephesus was full of dedicated people who were serving the Lord and doing their best to stay on course in their relationship with Him in spite of all the evil options and temptations available to them in the city. Jesus acknowledged the church for their good works and for staying the course. Their perseverance and endurance were commendable. The Ephesian believers were known for their good works.

### QUESTION 2:

***Based on these verses, how would you describe the church in Ephesus?***



What we do for Christ and His kingdom matters. We may think our work doesn't matter if no one is watching or acknowledges it, but God sees what we are doing. We need to be known for our good works. Our faithful work points others to Christ. Our faithful service strengthens and builds up the church.



## REVELATION 2:4-6

<sup>4</sup> **“But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.**

<sup>5</sup> **Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.**

**Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”**

Let's go back to the conversation with the gentleman from my church. As we continued to talk, we discovered he had not grown bitter and resentful of serving because of the lack of recognition. His attitude toward his service had changed because Jesus wasn't his first love anymore. He had forgotten what it was like to serve just because of his love for Jesus.

Jesus scolded the church at Ephesus for that very thing: they had lost their first love. While they were still doing good things, remaining strong, and staying committed to not tolerating evil, they had replaced their top priority of loving Jesus with a focus on the lists of things they knew they had to do.

Jesus' indictment that the Ephesian church had abandoned their first love is a warning to us all. We would benefit from a periodic self-examination. Have I lost my first love?

It can be easy to forget what it was like when we first came to Jesus. The overwhelming sense of love for what Christ did for us through His salvation settles in and we start to take it for granted. The Ephesian church had done that, and Jesus called them to remember how far they had fallen. In other words, they needed to take a look back at the moment they had first come to Christ and remember that love and joy.



The Ephesians were told to repent, turn around, and return to the love they had at first and the works they were doing. Keep in mind that the Ephesian church was a good church, doing many good and commendable things. But any work we do should be done out of love for God and a desire to please Him because of the great gift of salvation He has given to us at the enormous price of His own life. We are to work and serve with a love that keeps Him in first place. Our good works are to grow out of our love for Him.

When we get our priorities out of order, we no longer are able to share and shine the light and love of Christ effectively to those around us. That's why Jesus told the church at Ephesus He would remove their lampstand unless they repented. In other words, their witness in that community would no longer be one that pointed people to the love of Christ. No longer would their individual lives proclaim their love for Christ through their words or actions.

I can't help but wonder how many churches today (the people of God, not the buildings) are standing in the same place as these early believers in Ephesus. Do we understand how important it is that we honor Christ and love Him with everything we have? Do we understand how that love—or absence of love—impacts our witness and relationships with others?

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to get things out of order in our lives, getting lost in serving others out of routine and habit rather than out of love. In those moments, repentance is needed in our lives to keep the main thing the main thing. In order for our lives to be characterized by love, our love for Jesus must be kept in first place.

### QUESTION 3

***How can we keep love for Christ as the highest priority of our life?***



## REVELATION 2:7

**<sup>7</sup> “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”**

As kids, we likely all experienced times when an adult accused us of not listening. 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 are honest, all of us at one point or another can be found guilty of not listening. Failure to listen in most any situation brings about negative consequences.

### QUESTION 4:

***What are some ways our church is like the church at Ephesus?***

Jesus reminded the church at Ephesus to be sure and 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. Listening implies more than just hearing the words. Listening means we hear the words and act on them. We see this in relation to God.

God hears our prayers and acts on them. In turn, as we hear God's word to us, we are

to act on it. As my mom said to me many times as I was growing up, it's not just about listening to what you are being told, it's then taking what you hear and acting on it.

So what good would come about if the Ephesian church repented and began to apply what the Spirit was telling them to do? They would ultimately dwell as victors with Christ forever. Those who truly followed Christ, not just in words or deeds, but with Christ as their first love, would experience the real victory of Jesus and share in 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?” While the company no longer uses it in their ads, I think the words are very appropriate for those who follow Christ. When it comes to the Spirit speaking into our lives and asking us “Can you hear me now?” what is your response going to be? Let's take to heart what we hear in this message and live as conquerors!

### QUESTION 5:

***What are some practical ways our group can demonstrate love to others?***

## RENEWING YOUR LOVE

*Circle the words that describe the way you felt when you first came to know Jesus as your Savior. You can also add your own words to the list. Then answer the question.*

**Joy   Love   Excitement   Peace   Adoration   Comfort**

**Amazement   Satisfaction   Relief   Awe   Other: \_\_\_\_\_**

Which of these words apply to you today?

If necessary, ask the Holy Spirit to renew your love for Christ.

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*“As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you.  
Remain in my love.”*

JOHN 15:9

## LIVE IT OUT

How will you ground everything you do in love for Christ?  
Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Listen.** Take some time each day to spend alone with God. Read Scripture, and as you read, ask God to help you hear what the Spirit is saying. Resolve to obey and act on what you read.
- ▶ **Love.** Make a list of ways God has revealed His love to you. Pray and express your love to Him in return. Ask God to help you love Him in return and to keep that love in the forefront of everything you do.
- ▶ **Return.** Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many believers got out of the habit of attending a worship service or Bible study group. With a mindset of “return to your first love,” graciously encourage others to come back to sharing life with the body of Christ through worship and group study.

Most of us can remember what puppy love felt like. The deep and enduring love of Christ goes well beyond that. Let’s encourage one another to love as He loves!