

Revelation
The Seven Letters
to the Seven Churches

Ephesus
Recovering our first Love

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Recovering our first Love

Joshua said to the Israelites: 'Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God' (Joshua. 3:9) This is the invitation the Lord extends to us, and our churches, in these seven messages.

REVELATION 2:1-7: THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Supplies List:

- § Bible
- § Curriculum and handouts for further study
- § Large bowl(s) or basket(s) of fresh fruits and vegetables
- § Serviettes
- § Commercial hand-wipes or waterless anti-bacterial hand cleanser (2 for each person) or a few moist, scented cloths, warmed perhaps in a microwave and shared
- § Paper and pens if doing the written activity at the end.

***OPTIONAL VISUAL FOCAL POINT** (to be prayerfully eaten later!): Provide, or have group member(s) bring bowls of fresh prepared fruits and

vegetables. Locate food within view in the meeting space, so as to pique ‘appetite.’

Pass around hand-wipes and as members literally cleanse their hands, open with a blessing on the hands that prepared the food, the worship space, and the day’s curriculum, culminating with the hands of all present, who have laboured for the Lord.

Have someone read Rev. 2:1-7 aloud. (A phone call in advance often assures a smoother, more sensitive reading. Of course, this may also create “nerves,” but the reader will likely pray over the passage as well as their attitude beforehand – always a plus!) Some of the background information below *could* be presented by the same person you choose to read out the passage, but make sure you leave time for the spiritual exercises.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike the rest of the book of Revelation, which deals with future events, the first three chapters are a detailed ‘appraisal’ by Christ of a number of churches that had, by the time this vision was given, been established for thirty to forty years. Jesus stands in the midst of His churches to strengthen them, but also to challenge them: to explain how things really are – as He sees them.

So let’s not underestimate the power of Revelation 1: 3: **‘Blessed** is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it.

We are not called to do charts and time graphs of when the world will end, or to squeeze each world event into some convenient verse; but we are called to apply ourselves to this book: not just a superficial reading but to “read study apply and live by it.”

Jesus has already made this easy for us to follow. Like a four-star recipe, Revelation’s initial chapters follow an orderly pattern. First the Lord introduces Himself with a specific attribute that is relevant for His hearers. In most cases, He then praises the church before highlighting specific areas of weakness and error, and challenges to change. He closes with a heavenly commendation (I was tempted to say a heavenly carrot!): a clear and specific promise for those who love and follow the Lord wholeheartedly.

*Option: prepare the following chart as a handout.

	Christ	Commendation	Censor	Challenge	Covenant
Ephesus 2:1-7	Holds the seven stars, and who walks in the midst of the seven gold lampstands	Rejects evil, perseveres, has patience	Has lost first love for Christ	Repent, and do the works you did at first, or lose your lampstand	Eat from the tree of life
Smyrna 2:8-11	The First and the Last; who was dead and came to life	Bears suffering faithfully	None	Be faithful, even unto death	The crown of life
Pergamos 2:12-17	He who has the sharp, two-edged sword	Holds fast to the name of the Lord and does not give way in suffering	Embraces immortality and idolatry	Repent, or be struck down by the sword	Hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name
Thyatira 2:18-29	Eyes like a flame of fire and feet like brass	Love, service, faith, patience and increasing works	Tolerates immorality and idolatry	If warnings are not heeded, judgement will be severe	Rule over the nations, and receive the morning star

INTO THE PAST

Keeping in mind God's sovereignty, as described in chapter 1, we can see just how profoundly the Lord knows His people and the places where the churches were built. These messages from God to the seven churches (for that is what they really are, as opposed to simple "letters") are all about gaining God's perspective for the people and churches in question, as well as for the Church in every generation. /

According to tradition, Ephesus was where John lived before being imprisoned on Patmos. He would have travelled around the churches, which were all located on one strategic highway system, a circuit of about a hundred miles. It is no surprise that John addressed Ephesus first. His hometown was followed, moving clockwise geographically, by the other six churches. If people had felt undermined by John's imprisonment, and were struggling as a result, news of Jesus meeting with John in exile would have boosted their morale.

In a word, the Ephesian church can be summarised as still orthodox but basically an unloving fellowship. The city had a teeming population of some 250,000 people and ranked with Antioch and Alexandria as the most important in the entire region.

Geographically, the Ephesians were proud of the fact that they lived in 'The first and the greatest metropolis of Asia.' It was certainly the greatest port in the continent. The road from the Euphrates and from Mesopotamia reached the Mediterranean by way of Colosse and Laodicea. For people visiting Asia, Ephesus was the inevitable gateway. It was also the highway to Rome. Ignatius called Ephesus 'The Highway of the Martyrs' because martyrs were brought from Asia along it to be thrown to the lions in the Roman Arena.

I The letters are addressed to 'the angel of the church.' Are these 'angels' human or angelic? There has been considerable debate about this. If we go with the line that there is an angel 'allocated' to each church (rather like a guardian angel), we know that whenever a representative of the Host of Heaven is at hand, people are caught up in the glory of Heavenly worship, and in a profound awareness that God really does know every detail of a situation. This understanding would imply the continuity between the ministry of Heaven and our work on Earth.

It is at least as likely, however, that *angelos* is meant to be understood in the other meaning of the word: as the 'messenger' who brings God's word to each church: either the courier who delivers it or, more likely, the God appointed chief elder in the city. After all, angels are not placed in leadership positions in or over the church. The ultimate responsibility for the spiritual state of the church depends on us (humans!).

It was certainly the busiest marketplace around, and it's quite likely that the description in Revelation 18:12-13 (of the world trading order being overthrown) is inspired by the bustling marketplace of Ephesus – termed by some as the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.

Today this former hub of ancient civilization lies six miles from the sea, its once vibrant harbour a marsh clogged with weeds – a place where water forgets where it's going. The harbour in Ephesus had always struggled against the sediment brought down by the river in its headlong rush to the sea, and later lost the battle and silted up. Formerly thronging streets are now a waste, a desolation.

Spiritually, the heart of many of the people in the church had silted over with the cares and affairs of this world.

Demographically, six main tribes made up the population of Ephesus, including the original natives of the country before the Greeks arrived. There were also direct descendants from the original colonists in Athens, as well as others who were Jewish.

Recreationally, Ancient Greece was famous for its sports, and Ephesus annually staged the most famous games in Asia, which drew spectators from all over the Province.

Religion

The fabled Temple of Artemis, the centre of the cult worship of Diana of the Ephesians, made this a pre-eminent centre of pagan religion – but this was also a hub of crime and immorality. Heraclitus, one of the most famous ancient Greek philosophers (until Socrates and Plato), was known as the Weeping Philosopher because he explained that no one could live in Ephesus without weeping at the immorality to be seen on every side.²

² The Temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Considering that her image was a 'squat,' black, mini-breasted and, by no means beautiful figure, you might wonder why people were seduced into worshipping one of the most sacred images in the ancient world (so ancient that no one knew its origin). Acts 19 spells out how precious the Temple was to the people of Ephesus. There were also temples to the godhead of the Roman Emperors, Claudius and Nero, to which would later be added temples to Hadrian and Severus. In addition, the city was renowned for its amulets and charms, supposedly infallible remedies for anything from sickness to ensuring success in any undertaking. People came from all over the world to buy them.

Hundreds of sacred prostitutes, plying their trade via the Temple, increased the city's reputation for evil. Any criminal who committed any crime was considered safe if he could get within 200 yards (a bowshot) of the Temple courts.

Can you imagine more unpromising soil for sowing the seeds of Christianity? And yet it was in Ephesus that the Early Church saw some of its greatest triumphs. Paul stayed longer here than anywhere else (Acts 20:31), and the closeness to his Ephesian elders is shown by the Ephesian farewell to them in Acts 20:17-38. Paul says that he fought with wild beasts here (1 Cor. 15:32), but he also built, quite possibly, his finest church. Where evil is greatest, the light shines brightest . . . As several have commented: ‘[Few places better prove the conquering power of the Christian faith](#)’ (Barclay), and ‘[Nowhere did the Word of God find a kindlier soil, root more deeply or bear fairer fruits of faith and love than here](#)’ (R. C. Trench).

It is in Ephesus that we find Aquilla, Priscilla and Apollos (Acts 18:19, 24, 26), and Timothy later served as Bishop of the church to which Paul had directed his splendid epistle.

Hard Work and Endurance Right at the start, the Lord Jesus praises the church in Ephesus for their toil. The Greek word used here for *labour* means ‘to work to the point of sweat and exhaustion.’ The believers had toiled hard in the face of a society that opposed the radically different aims and ideals that they had come to prize.

There is no way a church can advance except by going ‘all out’ for Christ. Let’s be under no illusions: we can expect no real progress without being prepared to put our back wholeheartedly into what we are doing (Deut. 4:29, Col. 3:23-24). It is so often when we cry out with *all* our heart that the Lord comes in power.³

In Norman Grubb’s inspiring biography of the Welsh miner, *Rees Howells, Intercessor*, we discover a man who believed that he and the team that he led needed to be as fervent and persistent in their work of intercession during the vital years of the Second World War as any soldier serving on the front line. The accounts of how prayer shaped crucial issues that affected the progress of the war makes essential reading for would-be intercessors! In other words, work can be mental, or prayerful, as well as physical!

Christ praises the Ephesians for their steadfast endurance. John uses here one of the really great Greek words: *hupomonē*. Far removed from the

³ When Hillsongs launched their church initiative in London, they brought Australians over; they simply did not consider the Christians over here dedicated enough to do the hard work that would be necessary to accomplish the purposes they believed the Lord was asking of them. Perhaps Australians are the new pioneers and role models as regards worship and outreach!

dogged patience which merely accepts things when trouble comes, *huponomç* is rather the courage to endure hardship and loss in such a way as to overcome them and turn them to spiritual benefit.

Yes, we are called to enjoy the Lord's presence – but the call to follow Christ is not so laid back and casual that we can afford to constantly put our feet up and lounge around. Nothing of eternal value will be accomplished if we do. **What areas is the Lord calling you to work hard in?**

***Option: Pause a moment and think of people who have exemplified *huponomç*, who have allowed suffering, as it were, to reach its highest redemptive calling. They have become better rather than bitter, as a result. Quietly name a few aloud. These are Saints we will one day feast with in Heaven. Take a moment to pray for the fruit of such *huponomç* in your life. If your minds go blank here, perhaps take a couple of “famous” people for starters, and then a couple closer to home to kick start your thoughts on this.**

Members might partake of the provided fruits and vegetables at this point, perhaps breaking into smaller groups and retelling a story of someone they have known personally who modelled this brand of Godly courage. Or the food may be reserved for the end of the gathering to “seal” the time together.

INTO THE WORD

In Ephesus, as in our own day, the devil used the culture of the times to try to infiltrate the ranks of the people of God. Back in Soviet days, government agents would frequently spy on the congregations, just as they do to this day in many parts of China, and in many other places as well. In Ephesus, it was the Jews who were causing the most problems by seeking to limit the freedom Christ gives His people by insisting that they follow the letter of the Law. These “legalists” followed Paul, from city to city, decrying his work and stirring up both the crowds and the authorities against him.⁴

⁴ Others, as we shall be seeing, here and elsewhere, tried to twist grace into a licence to sin (cf Gal 5:13). We are called to be compassionate but not gullible. Thriving Ephesus, on the highway to everywhere, was particularly vulnerable to the ‘beggars and hangers-on who preyed on the charity of the Christian congregations and who lived a comfortable life by moving from church to church’ (William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1. The St Andrew Press).

2:4 Too orthodox by half! A journalist recently declared that church is the most boring place in the UK at the moment. Considering all the secular alternatives there are, we just can't allow this to be the case – and neither is there any need to, for the Spirit delights to make our worship experiences fresh and inspiring. But if our spiritual vitality has been sapped away, then there is every risk that our worship will degenerate into mere orthodox routine! This is what happened in Ephesus. The church had taken its stand against falsehood, but in the process it had lost something vital. Jesus' stinging words are also a lament: *I have these things against you, that you have lost your first love.*

Think of the Lord's grief in chapters 2 and 3 of Jeremiah, where He pours out all that He has done for His people, and how He thought that they would love Him in return, only to be dismayed when they wandered away to follow the inclinations of their hearts.

Perhaps it was the very eagerness of the Ephesians to be orthodox that had made their once fervent hearts hard. When we become overly aware of others' faults, judge them, and become critical, we cannot love as Jesus loves.⁵ Rigid orthodoxy carries a price tag: there are churches that are sound and orthodox, but which have all the winsomeness of a chunk of granite.

Praise God for earnest toil and for heroic endurance. But Paul warns that unless love is present and primary, something is seriously awry (cf 1 Cor. 13). As William Barclay reminds us,

All the orthodoxy in the world will never take the place of love.

2:5 Remember! Spiritually, remembering what God has done can be really precious and powerful concept. It is so important that we write down or record the things that God does for us and says to us in an easily retrievable form. At the time, it's easy to think we will never forget. We cry out to the Lord to set us free from some particularly pressing problem, and then barely a week later we are hard pressed to remember the issue preoccupying us. Our

⁵ In our own day, some years ago, a man who had written a brilliant book exposing a cult next turned his attention on other Christians. Scouring the preaching and the writings of famous men and women of God, he highlighted the odd paragraph here and there that either the teacher had not properly grasped, or had explained somewhat ambiguously. The author then went on to imply that the whole of that person's ministry, in consequence, was unsound. As a result of the book, *The Seduction of Christianity*, the sale of charismatic books dropped dramatically in the United States. In most cases, all it really came down to was quoting a teacher out of context or 'majoring on minors' - and ignoring 99 per cent of really helpful material in those authors' publications.

memories are so short. Yet calling to mind what God *has* done for us often becomes a springboard for faith.

This remembering brings us to the second point that Jesus makes here, which is **‘Repent.’** Again and again, we are encouraged to let the spirit of repentance come upon us. It is healthy and clean. Remorse – a counterfeit of true repentance – leaves us bound and knotted up; by contrast, repentance, no matter how deep, fuelled by godly sorrow, can bring lasting freedom to our souls – and added strength to the corporate well-being of the Church.

Worse, we turn to forbidden paths to inject some spice in life. Godly sorrow is a goodly fruit; and repentance is an exceedingly positive thing. Remorse can drive us to despair, but repentance fills us not only with the joy of being forgiven but with a great drive to commit ourselves more fully to the work of God. He loves to give us things to do!

Do you struggle to overcome your pride and stubbornness and to embrace repentance? If you do, the chances are that you will find yourself blaming other people instead.

It is easy to become angry and embittered because we are nursing a grievance, ‘blaming the shortcomings of others rather than seeking to address a fault which is our own. (Barclay)

2:5b ‘I will come to you’ Because this phrase is in the present tense, it refers not to the Second Coming, but rather to a *spiritual* coming. In this case the context makes it clear that it will be more in judgement than in blessing. A congregation may continue to exist without effectively shining any light into the darkness – in which case it is in danger of having its lampstand removed: in other words, its unique blessings and opportunities taken away from it.

The Lord is more than capable of doing this. The example of Nebuchadnezzar being driven out to eat grass reminds us not to underestimate the Lord’s power to humble the proud (Daniel 4, esp. v. 37).

2:6 Can ‘hating’ be of God? We are so used to associating hatred with dangerous emotions that we go to extreme lengths to avoid any trace of it in our own life. We know only too well the damage it can cause! We must remember, however, that it was prophesied of Jesus that *You loved righteousness and hated wickedness, and therefore Your God has exalted You* (Hebrews 1:9).

What we are speaking of here is ‘pure’ hatred – the heart of God toward all that is unholy. We may need to adjust our thinking, for the Risen Christ praises the Ephesian Christians for *hating* the Nicolaitans.

We must balance this, of course, by saying that God hates the sin rather than the sinner, but let’s not underestimate the damage that sin can cause in the household of God. God’s holy anger is ever kindled against sin. The more passionately we love, the more we must hate anything that threatens to hinder or distort that passion.⁶

Notice that these things were happening *inside* the church. It’s not that the perpetrators of these excesses were trying to destroy Christianity; they were trying to realign it to suit the desires of their own flesh. We are always being torn between legalism (overly rigid orthodoxy) and license (indulging base emotions that we are called to resist). Many people identify the Nicolaitans with the followers of Nicolaus, who was one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6:5. Even good people can fall into these traps!

It is all too easy for a godly person to take a truth and push it too far, in which case it becomes a deadly counterfeit as well as heresy. Error is simply that – an error. But heresy is often a truth that is pushed so far it becomes dangerous. In other words, those who preached the freedom of Christ had made an important discovery, but then, as today, pushed the truth too far and reaped the problems we come across in these letters. No wonder Paul tells Timothy (1 Timothy 4:16) to guard his life and doctrine closely.

Paul had warned strenuously that after his departure wolves would come in who would devastate the flock (Acts 20:29). Both Paul and John heeded Jesus’ command to judge people by their fruits (Matt. 7:15), and urged that doctrine, counsel and lifestyle be judged accordingly (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 John 4:1). Although this message from God may sound like a rebuke, it is a *kindness* when God shows us how things really are – and what we can do to put matters right.

***Had the Nicolaitan view of the world triumphed,
‘the world would have changed Christianity
and not Christianity the world.’ (Barclay)***

⁶ “Nicolaitans” is a symbolic name, meaning ‘conquering the laity’. This group claimed a superior status that permitted (and may even have encouraged) idolatry and immorality. Its disciples held to the teachings of Balaam, ate things offered to idols, and committed fornication. We will meet the same problem in the church at Thyatira, where the wicked Jezebel caused Christians to commit fornication and to eat things offered to idols.

Grace is amazing, but, as Philip Yancey's book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* makes clear, we are never to abuse it. We must always keep in mind the Lord's hatred of sin. There are always those who claim that we must be "like" the world in order to "reach" the world. This is a misreading of Paul's command that we must become 'all things to all men'; we are to be so deeply *in* the Lord that we can go into the world without being *of* the world in our inclinations and desires.

Paul urges us to *Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature*' (Col. 3:5). Then it is safe for us to go into the most sordid places in the world to rescue those whom Satan has taken captive – just as Youth With A Mission have established their Amsterdam centre in the red light district.

In making the Gospel accessible and attractive to people, we must not gloss over the cost involved. If we find that we are loving the world, its wealth, and the kudos that come from obtaining success or status too much, we must be prepared to lay it all down to follow Christ. He does not necessarily make this easy for us. is jealous for our love and needs to know that we are willing to put Him first.

2:7 The Tree of Life and the great Reward. The Risen Christ now makes His great promise to those who overcome. 'Overcomes' is military terminology, suggesting combat against the forces of the Evil One. Those who remain faithful in the midst of both persecution and doctrinal error give proof to their faith. This is a primary emphasis in Revelation.

Jesus promises that those who overcome will be allowed to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. In Scripture, the Tree of Life is compared to wisdom that is given to those who lay hold of it (Proverbs. 3:18). Hope fulfilled is also a fruit of the Tree of Life (Proverbs 13:12), indicating that the work of our hands will be rewarded. A wholesome tongue is also thus described Proverbs 15:4). In other words, the Tree of Life describes anything that is the source and outcome of a godly life, the idea being that the Lord will restore all the joys and qualities that were lost in the Fall.

Paradise was originally a Persian word, to describe the Garden of God: pleasant parks and meadows and flower gardens with animals roving around. It is the word used in the Greek translation in the Old Testament for the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8; 3:1) and the word used when Jeremiah says, 'Plant gardens and eat the fruit of them' (Jer. 29:5). It describes a garden beautiful beyond compare, the place where Jesus promises the penitent thief fellowship with Him the very day of their deaths (Luke 23:43).

This oasis almost certainly does not represent the full extent or reality of Heaven, but it is certainly a part of it, and the Lord wants us to hold the image of the hope of eternity uppermost in our hearts. Where Christians are suffering from loss, pain or poverty – which is a high percentage of the world’s believers – the hope of Heaven is especially near and dear. It is here in the West that we are in danger of making *this* world our idol. May the Lord restore the balance!

INTO THE PRESENT

The Lord Jesus’ great concern for the Church in Ephesus was that they not lose their first love (Rev. 2:4f). How do you lose your first love in a marriage? It usually happens gradually – almost imperceptibly. It happens if you don’t spend time with your beloved, thinking about her, praying for her, being with her. In the same way the enemy rarely attacks our faith head-on, but rather step-by-step, getting people stuck in a rut of the comfortable and the familiar, until gradually the sparkle, and the willingness to take risks, disappears.

How are we doing in this respect? Let me pose a few questions while you take a silent, mental inventory.

Do you remember those early days of being in love? How nothing was too much trouble if you could just grab a few more minutes with your beloved?

Or, if you’ve not had a romantic relationship, do you remember falling in love with a hobby, an idea, a vocation or a place? Recall your passion, your immersion, and your efforts.

There is a strong implication here that the excitement of following Christ was waning compared with those days when no sacrifice was too great. Once the honeymoon period ends, does our love cool, as it does in so many marriages? John knew all about the love of God; he also knew that the best of us can inadvertently lose our cutting edge. And without love we are as nothing (1 Cor. 13:8).

Remember the once-thriving harbour of Ephesus, and the dead-end bog it is today. As we have seen in this study, when pure love isn’t flowing freely in a church, or an individual, it backs up and grows stagnant; it lies wide open to obstacles, such as narrow-minded outlooks, counterfeit movements, even heresy. You may be reluctant to believe this could be happening to you – as individ-

uals or as a church. Remember the heights you once reached! If works and service have become more important than love for the Lord – heed the warnings signs!

***Option:** Lead a time of prayer for the wider church to recover its first love for Jesus, and hence its fruitfulness. Record the insights the Lord gives as to how this can come about. Close by sharing the fresh fruits and vegetables and passing around more hand-wipes afterward.

Or . . . skip to the interactive options below.

INTERACTIVE: INTO THE HEART

***Option 1:** The following can be done as a written activity during group time, a mental inventory as the questions are asked, a discussion in pairs (prepare a handout) or, as an optional take-home assignment for further reflection (handout).

Check yourself by filling in the blanks:

§ When I wake in the morning I find myself thinking about...

§ Do I look first to my own comfort and self-interests or to the well-being of others and the work of Jesus Christ?

§ How willing am I . . .

a) to notice what people are up to?

b) to go the extra mile to help someone?

c) to pray if I wake early, or in the middle of the night?

d) to reach out to people

(visit, send an e-mail, invite them to something . . .)

Option 2: Guided Meditation When God puts His finger on something and tells us to repent, it is crucial that we respond to it. Just as John in Revelation addresses the seven churches, clockwise, so we too can observe unforgiveness at work in our life by prayerfully considering the circles of our relationships: family, friends, church and colleagues at work, and so on.

Note: Leading a group ‘stretch’ just prior to this next part is helpful, especially if it involves tensing and relaxing the major muscle groups – but any stretching is good after so much listening. As you or a selected volunteer leads the guided meditation, allow time to personally imagine each stage; this helps the one leading to “time” the suggestions more

optimally for listeners. Note that the leader's experience may be less vivid, simply because of leading it.

Let's be seated again. In the next 3-5 minutes, we'll invite the Lord to show us if we have 'ought' against anyone in our spheres of influence. You may be surprised to discover a hidden grudge or festering resentment. Even when we keep short accounts with the Lord, it's surprising how much putting right there is to do!

Just a note here before we begin: This may be an easier mode of worship for some, but I urge you all to give it a try, trusting the Holy Spirit to lead you . . . Above all, do what works for you. This is your time.

To open your heart to hear God's voice, first get comfortable where you are sitting. Close your eyes. Gradually, as you are able, tune out all distracting noises. Good. Take several deep, even breaths. Be sure to exhale fully. God has so designed our bodies that deep breathing automatically sends life-giving oxygen to our hard-working muscles. Even as His Spirit now brings our imaginations into submission to God, and our souls into rest.

Picture a room where you feel safe, protected. A peaceful place. It can be an actual room, or one you now invent in your mind's eye. What colours and shapes do you see there? . . . How is it furnished? Are there windows? If so, what kind, and are they open or closed? What's the view like? . . .

Focus more closely on the room. What's the light like? . . .

Is there a fragrance here? If so, how would you describe it? . . .

Is anyone else present? If so, whom? . . .

What is he or she doing?

Are any animals present? What are they doing? . . .

How do you interact with them? . . .

See yourself approaching a low table and stroking its surface.

Is it warm to the touch? Or cool and smooth? . . .

Seat yourself quietly, patiently, as one who waits . . .

Now imagine that Jesus enters this room and seats Himself beside you. What do you do? . . .

If you feel comfortable moving closer to Him, as did John of old when he leaned against the Saviour – laying his head against Jesus' chest – do so. . . . Again, breathe deeply.

Perhaps something in the room feels threatening to you, even as Judas was also present with John at the Last Supper (on the

verge of betraying his master). If so, can you identify it? . . . Remind yourself that nothing can harm you here. Focus more closely on Jesus. John talked quietly to Jesus, despite any unease in the room or his soul. Imagine yourself doing the same, talking to Jesus, listening to Him. What do you say to Him? . . . What do you need to get off your chest? . . . How does He look at you when you say it? . . . How does He answer?

Savour the moment a while longer. When you feel ready, take a last look around the room you've imagined. You can return here at any time, in your imagination, to meet with Jesus. Or to simply sit near Him, absorbing His love and expressing your own.

As people open their eyes, reassure them if they do not feel as though they have experienced anything much. This is but one way to draw closer to God; it may not be the best way for them.

Encourage them to write down what did or did not happen, and how they feel about it. Remember Revelation 1:19: *Write, therefore, what you have seen.*

***Option 3: Close with these words from Psalm 130.**

Out of the depths I cried to you O Lord;

O Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins,

O Lord, who could stand?

But with You there is forgiveness;

therefore You are feared.

I wait for the Lord,

My soul waits,

And in His word I put my hope.

My soul waits for the Lord

more than watchmen wait for the morning.

O Israel, put your hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord is unfailing love

And with Him is full redemption.

He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

www.ruachministries.org/teaching/revelation.htm