LESSON 1 *March 28–April 3

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Reality Check



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 3:14–22; Rev. 4:9–11; Gen. 2:7; Gen. 3:8–10; Jer. 31:3, 4; John 15:1–11; Rom. 8:9–11.*

Memory Text: **" 'As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love' "** *(John 15:9, NKJV).*

How would you describe your relationship with God today? Is it vibrant and strong? Do you spend time investing in this relationship, searching His inspired Word, and talking to Him as a Friend? If so, how much time do you spend doing it?

Also, are you compelled to share with others about your relationship with God because it's the most wonderful relationship in your life? Or, instead, has your relationship with God waned over time? It's there, yes, and you check in from time to time, but to be honest, it's not as strong as it used to be. Or, perhaps, you're somewhere in between, what the Bible calls "lukewarm" *(Rev. 3:16)*.

Have you ever wondered if angels ponder why we don't live in adoration of our Savior and Redeemer, with hungry hearts and eager minds to grow closer to God every day? But, truly, a relationship with God changes *everything*—both here and into eternity.

This week, let's consider the current state of our relationship with God and what the Bible's advice is for us. Indeed, we can't move from where we are to someplace better until we take an honest reality check of ourselves and listen to the solution that Jesus describes.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for April 4.*

Our Condition

Have you ever wondered what Jesus might say if He were to describe your relationship with Him right now? Perhaps He'd say it is strong or that it has been stronger in the past. Have you ever wondered what Jesus might say if He were to describe His people in these last days? In Revelation 3:14–22, Jesus actually does describe them.

He begins by stating that He's the " ' "Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God" ' " *(Rev. 3:14, NKJV)*. A faithful and true witness doesn't lie but speaks plainly and honestly.

Read Revelation 3:14–17, where Jesus describes the spiritual condition of His people today. How well do these verses describe you personally?

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Jesus tells us, Christian individuals who live in the last days, that He knows us. We're neither hot nor cold, because, from our vantage point, we don't need anything. The days and weeks pass by, and we spend a little time with God here and there, and we think that's enough. But it's not. Instead, we actually need Him far more desperately than we realize. If only we could love and live for Jesus wholeheartedly or not at all. That would be better from God's perspective than being lukewarm. Jesus says that He'll vomit us out of His mouth because we taste as bad as we are. But He hasn't yet done this, and He asks us to make some bold choices right now.

What is His advice to us in Revelation 3:18, 19?

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In ancient times, "buying" something meant bartering or exchanging goods. Here, Jesus generously offers an exchange: our apathy for His gold, for His white garments, and for His eye salve. He wants to make us rich in His eyes; He wants to cover us with His perfect robe of righteousness; and He wants to open our eyes to see the truth of how an abiding relationship with Him will change absolutely everything. He offers us all that we need, especially because what we need, we can't provide for ourselves. He alone can, and will, but only if we are willing.

If you find it painful to look at yourself and your own spiritual condition, what hope is offered you in these verses for today?

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Rebuke, Repent, and Reward

" 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten,' " Jesus tells us in Revelation 3:19. " 'Therefore be zealous and repent' " *(NKJV)*. None of us, for even a second, could justly say that Jesus doesn't care about us or our future. How much easier it would have been for Jesus to give up on humanity and not travel the painful road He chose on this earth. It's precisely because He loves us so deeply that He rebukes us in our current state. He wants a much stronger, deeper relationship with us. He's not satisfied with our on-and-off attitudes, our "I'll come to Him when I need Him" approach.

Instead, Jesus rebukes us for our own good. He tells us to repent. But we can't repent unless we realize that there's something wrong. Yet, He's told us exactly what's wrong with us: we think we're rich, but we're actually " 'wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked' " *(Rev. 3:17, NKJV)*.

Read Revelation 3:20. What are we promised here? But what must we do to receive that promise?

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This is such a beautiful and extraordinary word picture. The God of the universe wants to sit down over a meal with you, with me. He desires mutual engagement and conversation over good food. He wants a close, abiding relationship, and Jesus invites us to have this with Him.

Jesus stands patiently waiting and knocking at the door of your heart. Perhaps you've seen pictures of this in children's books—a tall, graceful Savior, knocking gently. He doesn't barge in and force you to talk with Him. He doesn't impose on your time or your busy life. Time is short; so, if you hear Him, open the door. He will be there to step into your life.

This metaphor illustrates the kind of relationship Jesus wants to have with each of us. But one day, when you meet Jesus face-to-face, when you cast your crown at His feet in adoration and praise with thousands upon ten thousands of others in worship to the Creator *(Rev. 4:9–11, Rev. 5:11–14)*, when you think back to your earthly trials and see that they dim into insignificance—do you think at that point you'll ever regret the time you spent with Jesus on earth?

Right now, Jesus is knocking. He is calling. You, though, have to make the conscious choice to open your heart to Him. How can viewing the Cross and thinking about what it means inspire you to make that choice?

Everlasting Love

After depicting our apathetic condition, Jesus tells us that this is something to be overcome. " ' "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" ' " *(Rev. 3:21, NKJV)*. For some of us, it may be the greatest battle we ever face—simply realizing our weak, self-sufficient condition; accepting Jesus' rebuke; repenting; and receiving Jesus' robe of righteousness over us.

What is so amazing is that Jesus understands our apathetic, lukewarm condition and identifies with us (not that Jesus was ever lukewarm). He says, " ' "To him who overcomes . . . as I also overcame" ' " *(Rev. 3:21, NKJV)*. Because He died to save us, Jesus has overcome sin and its penalty. He understands the battles of sin that we face and promises to help us.

Many people in the Bible responded to God's invitation to be in a covenant relationship with Him. This is the overarching narrative or theme of the entire Bible. When we look at some of these people, we can see that God interacted differently with them at different times.

What do these accounts teach us about how God interacts with people in various situations?

Gen. 2:7, Gen. 3:8–10 _____

Gen. 5:24 _____

Gen. 6:13 _____

Gen. 12:1–4 _____

Exod. 34:29 _____

Whether God physically walked with His children or whether He just talked with them, the truth is that He has always desired to be close to humanity. No matter what your relationship with God is like today, God wants to be close to you. We can read about this idea in Jeremiah 31:3, 4 below:

"The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt' " *(NKJV)*.

Whether your day is beginning or ending right now, God is seeking you and waiting, wanting to draw you closer to Him. He wants to build—or rebuild—your relationship with Him. If it's not happening, the fault is on your end, not His.

What are the things in your life right now that, unless overcome, can and do hinder your relationship with God?

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Abide

The disciples followed Jesus down the stairs from the upper room onto the street below. As they walked together to Gethsemane, on what was one of the most significant nights in earth's history, they probably didn't realize how poignant some of Jesus' last words to them in the upper room really were.

What did Jesus say in John 15:1–11? What does that mean for us?

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These words, spoken by Jesus Himself, describe what a close relationship with God is like. Notice the word that is repeated, not just twice but ten times: *abide*. To abide in Jesus is to live in connection with Him.

As He faces the Cross, not only does Jesus emphasize the great importance of this abiding in Him, but He clearly and simply states the practical aspects of what it looks like in our lives.

Which is: Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches. As a result of our abiding with (being connected to) Him, fruit will grow on our branches. We can't make fruit grow ourselves. Sometimes we might look as if we're abiding, but the evidence will be in our lack of fruit, and eventually our branches will dry up. If we're withered, the Vinedresser will eventually cut off the branches. Regardless of whether we bear fruit or not, our branches will be pruned.

At the same time, we all face challenges and painful moments. If we abide in Him, these moments will produce more fruit long-term. Fruit-bearing confirms who we are: His disciples. We bear fruit to bring Him (not ourselves) glory. Abiding in Jesus means keeping His commandments, which are a reflection of His beautiful character of unselfish love. Abiding in Jesus brings great joy. Abiding in Jesus means doing what He asks of us, as a response to Him. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" *(1 John 5:3, NKJV)*.

If you think about it, abiding in Jesus is one of the antidotes to our Laodicean condition *(Rev. 3:20, John 15:4)*. It's the great secret of a fulfilled and meaningful life on earth and into eternity; yet, somehow we so easily forget Jesus' counsel.

Ultimately, Jesus says to each of us, " 'As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love' " *(John 15:9, NKJV)*. The love of Jesus is the most compelling cord that draws us to Him, and when we know this love, we will be deeply moved to respond with love to God and to others.

Linked to the Vine

Abiding in Christ can sometimes feel like one of the hardest things to do. We might know that it's what we need, but the rush of life pulls us into its stream, and it all feels too hard. Following God can seem like the biggest burden ever, especially for those badgered by someone trying to get them to follow Jesus. This kind of religion can feel like drudgery because it's all about external actions rather than what's in the heart. Nothing could be further from what God desires, which is a relationship whose foundation is mutual love, not just rules; a chosen relationship (in which He first chose you) based on love and free choice.

Sometimes we might be partly connected to the Vine but not really abiding with every fiber of our being. We might go to church, pray, and do what we know is right, but inside we feel shriveled up. The truth is this: we can't make ourselves abide in Jesus any more than a branch can make itself connect to a vine. God loved us first; He made the first move. Our response is always a reaction to what God has first done for us.

If you, meanwhile, look at how a grapevine survives through winter, you'll learn a fascinating fact—the buds on the branches become dehydrated and isolated from the growing system until spring. When the soil warms up, the roots absorb water, and sap flows up through the trunk of the vine into the buds and then initiates growth. Without the sap flowing through the vine, no growth will happen.

The sap in a grapevine is like the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We might be like a dead branch, but when we choose to spend time with God, the Holy Spirit enters into us like the sap from the roots and brings us to life so that we start to grow. In the same way that we need to make a conscious choice to want to abide in Jesus, we must also ask for the Holy Spirit (the sap) to flow into our lives.

Read Luke 11:13 along with Jeremiah 31:3, 1 John 4:19, and Romans 8:9–11. What is the essential message here for us?

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It's actually the Holy Spirit who brings growth and ensures that we're thriving and connected to the Vine. We need to ask daily for the Holy Spirit, who is here with us on earth to:

- be our Comforter *(John 14:16–18)*,
- reveal Jesus to us *(John 15:26)*,
- convict us of sin *(John 16:7, 8)*, and
- guide us into all truth *(John 16:13)*.

Read this list again. How can each aspect of what the Holy Spirit does impact your relationship with God?

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Further Thought: Before we were born, God loved us; He had a plan to know us and for us to know Him. He seeks us out, like a good Shepherd, and invites us to abide in Him every day. We merely need to choose to respond to Him, and then to exchange our wretchedness and our Laodicean condition for His good gifts *(see Rev. 3:18, 19)*.

Like the slow growth of a grapevine's branches, our relationship with God might grow slowly, or it might come in bursts as a result of much-needed rain. Regardless of the pace at which we grow and the abundance of fruit that is produced in our lives, we need daily "sap," or the Holy Spirit, to ensure that we're remaining connected to Jesus.

"Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unreserved surrender to His service. The channel of communication must be open continually between man and his God. As the vine branch constantly draws the sap from the living vine, so are we to cling to Jesus, and receive from Him by faith the strength and perfection of His own character."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 676.

"How is the dry disconnected sapling to become one with the parent vine stock? How is it to be made a partaker of the life and nourishment of the living vine? Only by being grafted into the vine, by being brought into the closest relationship possible. Fiber by fiber, vein by vein, the twig holds fast to the life giving vine until the life of the vine becomes one with the branch, and the branch produces fruit like that of the vine."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 67, 1897.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Reflect back over your life. Can you identify any life events that have lulled you into a Laodicean spiritual condition? What events have drawn you closer to God?

❷ Ellen G. White talks about "a constant receiving of His Spirit." How often do you pray for the Holy Spirit? What might change if you received the Holy Spirit every day?

❸ What might change if we, as a church, were to pray for the Holy Spirit more earnestly and more regularly?

❹ Be brutally, even painfully, frank with yourself over your relationship with God. What conscious choices do you need to make in order to have the closeness with Him that He wants but that you hinder?

Summary: Before we can start growing in a relationship with God, we first have to pause to consider what our current relationship with Him is like. If it's Laodicean or if our branches are not flourishing, Jesus has the perfect solution for our spiritual condition: to abide in Him.

INSIDE *Story*

Business of Being a Blessing

Kavono Kivatsi Samwele loved playing the drums in his village in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was a good life, playing the drums while his wife sang, as he waited to become village chief.

But then Kavono, who was in his early 20s, got an idea. It would be even more fun to accompany his wife on the drums if he could write the songs that she was singing. To do that, he needed to learn how to read and write. He noticed that a Seventh-day Adventist school had opened in a neighboring village, and he enrolled in the first grade.

At the school, he learned to read and write, and he also learned about the God of heaven. As he studied, he felt called by God to become a pastor. So, he gave up his claim as village chief and became an Adventist pastor. He also had a son named Kasereka Maghulu Kavatsi.

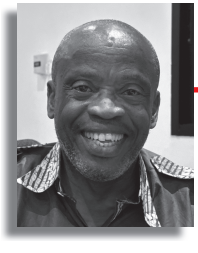
As a boy, Kasereka accompanied his father on pastoral trips and felt called also to engage in mission. But his talent was in entrepreneurship, so he went into business, establishing a farm, expanding into fishing, and then opening a clothing store. His businesses grew into a thriving empire.

Kasereka did not forget the Bible truths he learned from his father, and he returned a 10 percent tithe. After marriage, the couple's first tithe amounted to US$10,000. Kasereka's wife, the daughter of a church evangelist, said they also needed to give an offering of 10 percent. Kasereka had long been uncertain about how much to give for offering, and her appeal persuaded him. The couple gave another $10,000 for offering. After that, they regularly gave a 10 percent tithe and 10 percent offering, and they never lacked anything. "When you help the church, you get a blessing back," Kasereka said.

Seeking to do his part to proclaim Jesus' coming, Kasereka distributed copies of *The Great Controversy* to fellow business leaders and government officials. He opened an orphanage. He sponsored orphans and others in their studies, including helping them obtain master's degrees and doctorates.

As he sought to bless others, blessings always returned to him. He put more than 100 people through graduate school, but many of the graduates couldn't find work because of a lack of highly qualified jobs in the country. So, Kasereka ended up hiring them to work for him, and their skills proved to be a blessing to his businesses.

"You cannot outgive God," he said.



Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, will support projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere in the East-Central Africa Division. Thank you for your generous offering to help proclaim Jesus' soon coming.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

Part I: Overview

Key Texts: *Revelation 3:14–22, John 15:9, Jeremiah 31:3*

Study Focus: *Rev. 3:14–22.*

In this lesson, we will confront the reality of our current spiritual condition as a church. This reality concerns us both corporately, as God's people, and personally, as individuals. Our analysis of our condition will be conducted in light of the apocalyptic message to the church of the Laodiceans. This message comprises the seventh, and final, letter to the churches in Asia Minor, as found in the book of Revelation. The seven letters, contained in chapters 2 and 3, are prophecies that cover the history of the Christian church, from the period of the early church to the time of the end. God Himself addresses His church in these letters.

Of course, the seven churches of "Asia" do not refer literally to contemporary churches, which, obviously, are far more numerous today than in John's time. Rather, in the tradition of the Old Testament prophecies *(Dan. 2, 7, 8; Jer. 6:2)*, the book of Revelation employs figures to convey its eschatological message. Specifically, the literal churches, with their historical and geographical characteristics, are used as symbolic representations of prophetic truth. By way of example, a cursory glance at the progression of the Lord's movements on behalf of His church, as portrayed in the seven letters, suggests that the literal coming of the Lord advances nearer and nearer:

1. *Ephesus:* The Lord "walks" *(Rev. 2:1, NKJV)*.
2. *Smyrna:* The Lord "was dead, and came to life" *(Rev. 2:8, NKJV)*.
3. *Pergamum:* The Lord admonishes His people to " 'repent, or else I will come to you quickly' " *(Rev. 2:16, NKJV)*.
4. *Thyatira:* The Lord earnestly urges His people to hold fast to what they have " 'till I come' " *(Rev. 2:25, NKJV)*.
5 *Sardis:* The Lord warns His people that if they don't hold fast and repent, " 'I will come upon you as a thief' " *(Rev. 3:3, NKJV)*.
6. *Philadelphia:* The Lord exclaims, " 'Behold, I am coming quickly!' " *(Rev. 3:11, NKJV)*.
7. *Laodicea:* The Lord states the proximity of His position relative to the heart of His people, announcing, " 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' " *(Rev. 3:20, NKJV)*.

The message to the Laodiceans marks, therefore, the crucial moment when the coming of the Lord is the closest: He now knocks at the door of the heart. He awaits our response to His gracious invitation to give Him entrance that He may abide with us *(read also Col. 1:27)*.

Part II: Commentary

Introduction: The letter to the church of Laodicea is a prophecy that predicts the spiritual condition of God's people in the last days and urges them to respond accordingly. The Author of the message is designated by three titles, which refer to human history from the end to the beginning, following the effect-cause-effect sequence that is typically Hebrew. The first title is "the Amen" *(Rev. 3:14)*, the word that concludes Christian prayer and expresses the eschatological hope of the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation *(2 Cor. 1:20)*. The title "faithful and true witness" refers to God's presence during the continuous course of human history. "The beginning of the creation of God" refers to the Creator who began history. These titles hearken back to the description of Jesus Christ, as seen in Revelation's introductory vision of the Son of man, who is portrayed as "the faithful witness" and "the first begotten of the dead" *(Rev. 1:5)*.

The letter to the church of Laodicea involves three principal figures: (1) the messenger, who is the angel of the church of Laodicea *(Rev. 3:14)*; (2) the Author of the letter, who is Jesus; and (3) the people who receive the message. The message itself is divided into four sections. First, God is presented as the Judge who knows *(Rev. 3:15)*. Second, attention is directed to God's people, who are unaware of their true condition *(Rev. 3:16, 17)*. Third, the Lord responds to their plight and counsels His people as to the remedy *(Rev. 3:18)*. Fourth, the letter reveals the extent of God's love for His people *(Rev. 3:19–21)*.

We shall look more closely at each section in the commentary that follows.

Section 1: The Judge of the People. In this first section, the Lord confronts His people with a diagnosis of their condition. But even before He diagnoses them, He reminds them of His omniscience: " 'I know your works' " *(Rev. 3:15, NKJV)*. In the Psalms, David begins his prayer of confession with this same awareness: "O LORD, You have searched me and known me" *(Ps. 139:1, NKJV)*. The people cannot escape God's eyes: "Where can I go from Your Spirit?" *(Ps. 139:7, NKJV)*. God is perceived as the Judge who can see everything *(Heb. 12:23, 2 Tim. 4:1, Prov. 5:21, Prov. 15:3)*. There is no evading or deceiving the penetrating eye of the great Judge, who is also our Creator: "For You formed my inward parts" *(Ps. 139:13, NKJV)*; and "He who formed the eye, shall He not see?" *(Ps. 94:9, NKJV)*.

Significantly, in the tradition of the ancient Hebrew prophet Micah *(Mic. 1:10–16)*, John plays on geographical place names, which imbue the biblical text with deep spiritual significance. Thus, the name Laodicea, which means "justice of the people," reminds God's people that He will do three things for them: (1) He will deliver a favorable and just verdict on their behalf in the day of judgment; (2) He will avenge them against their enemies; and (3) the meaning of the name Laodicea, "justice of the people," reminds us of Christ's substitutionary work to save His followers

from the wrath of a just and holy God against sin. The just requirements of the law have been fulfilled through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Thus, God can mercifully deliver His people from sin's penalty. In the fullest sense, then, as the One who commutes their death sentence by accepting the penalty Himself, Christ stands in as the "justice of the people."

Section 2: The People's Condition. God's first charge against Laodicea concerns their religious profession. They are "neither cold nor hot" but lukewarm *(Rev. 3:15, 16)*.

God's people claim to be "rich" *(Rev. 3:17)*. That is, they are wealthy in Bible truth; they are "the remnant," after all. They think that they are the *laos dikaios*, "the righteous people" (ironically, another meaning of the name "Laodicea"). Yet, they are guilty of a fivefold deficiency: they are poor, wretched, miserable, blind, and naked. They believe that they see; they claim to have great spiritual understanding. They boast about the great truths of which they are the custodians. Yet, they are unable to see their own condition or their true need: they are destitute of the Holy Spirit. They are not sanctified by the truths they profess. It is their self-assured claim and their inability to see their need that produces and nourishes their pride and their lack of humility: thus, they boast that they "have need of nothing" *(Rev. 3:17)*. Nor do they feel the need to learn anything, to grow, to change, or to realize the cause of their miserable condition. As a result, they do not feel the need of repentance.

Section 3: The Lord's Counsels. Considering the people's condition, God's counsels to Laodicea are a direct response to their three needs. The first need concerns their profession of faith, which is compared to lukewarm water. Lukewarm water is repulsive to drink. For this reason, God warns His people that He will "spue thee out of my mouth" *(Rev. 3:16)*. That is, He will vomit them up, just as ancient Israel in Old Testament times had been warned *(Lev. 18:25)*. The fact that the Laodicean people are neither cold nor hot further indicates their delusive thinking that they are rich in God's favor while, on the contrary, they are spiritually impoverished.

God's advice, then, to Laodicea is first to buy from Him gold refined in the fire. This small detail about the quality of the gold has significant implications: it suggests that God's people should not content themselves with cheap gold, amalgamated with dross. Nor should they settle for false gold, which has only the color and the appearance of genuine gold. By these symbols, the Lord warns His people against a false and superficial religion. Thus, God urges His people to buy the genuine article from Him.

God's second piece of advice concerns the garments of His people. Because they are naked, God counsels them to buy also "white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed" *(Rev. 3:18)*. Elsewhere in Revelation, John tells us that the New Jerusalem, the Lamb's bride, is "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" *(Rev. 19:8)*. Because our righteousness

is, at best, "as filthy rags" *(Isa. 64:6)*, we need the righteousness of Christ to cover our nakedness, as illustrated by the white raiment. The whiteness exemplifies purity, representing God's imputed and imparted righteousness. Because His people are unable to see their true condition, God recommends that they anoint their eyes with "eyesalve" to restore their vision. Then they may become aware of their nakedness and their dire need of the divinely appointed remedial agencies.

Section 4: The Lord's Love. God's diagnosis of His people's true condition is designed to awaken within them a sense of their genuine helplessness, and hopelessness, apart from Him *(Rev. 3:15–18)*. Then, in verse 19, God expresses the infinite measure of His love.

The prophet Jeremiah uses the same language when He refers to God's "everlasting love" *(Jer. 31:3)*. The Hebrew *'olam*, which is generally translated "everlasting," refers to more than a chronological quality or long duration. This term is an idiomatic way of expressing the idea of great intensity. That is, God's love is so intense and so great that it is beyond measure. It is like the infinite character of eternity itself. The eternity of God's love is thus revealed to His people in order to awaken within them a positive response to His chastening: " 'Therefore be zealous and repent' " *(Rev. 3:19, NKJV)*.

At this moment, immediately after His words of pastoral exhortation, the Lord's discourse becomes more personal. So far, God has addressed Laodicea collectively as His people, as the aggregate church of the last days. Now, in verse 20, He suddenly turns to each believer within that church as the unique individual whom He loves personally and with whom He entertains a distinct relationship. It is significant that in the apocalyptic repetition of the number seven, the verb "I love," in the first person, is followed by seven more verbs that express the Lord's intense and personal love for each one of us *(Rev. 3:19–21)*: (1) " 'I rebuke,' " (2) " 'I chasten,' " (3) " 'I stand at the door,' " (4) " '[I] knock,' " (5) " 'I will come in to him,' " (6) " 'I will dine with him, and he with Me,' " and (7) " 'I will grant to sit with Me on My throne.' "

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: Ask for a volunteer to reread the message to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14–22. Then discuss the following activities and questions with your class.

God's Critiques of His Church:

1. **"You are neither cold nor hot"** *(Rev. 3:15, NKJV)*.
   A. Find cases in which this prophecy has been fulfilled in the church and within your own personal experience.

B. What can you do to address the problem of lukewarmness without falling into fanaticism?

2. "You say, 'I am rich . . . and have need of nothing' " *(Rev. 3:17, NKJV)*.

A. List cases in which your church, in the past or in the present, has boasted, to its detriment, of spiritual, material, or missiological wealth and achievements.

B. How does God's counsel to the Laodicean church help guard against this prideful attitude?

God's Demands

3. " 'Buy from Me gold refined in the fire' " *(Rev. 3:18, NKJV).*

For Reflection: In Revelation 3:18, Christ makes an appeal that goes against human tradition and the human effort to reach truth. The immediate application of this counsel concerns the need to look for God's revelation and to search the Scriptures seriously. We must not search just to find there an argument to defend our system of truth, as in the case of a series of proof texts. We also must take joy in the discovery of truth that will surprise, challenge, and disrupt entrenched ideas, ultimately leading to repentance and our transformation into the image of God. The search for gold refined in the furnace of affliction also refers to the love and faith that are developed amid the challenges and sufferings that come with the choice to walk with God.

1. What does God's counsel to dress in "white garments" *(Rev. 3:18, NKJV)* mean to you in your spiritual journey?
2. What must you do to acquire these white clothes?

Activity:

God's Love

Ask your students to keep a journal this quarter, recording stories in their lives in which they experienced God's love. Have them consider or reflect on the following questions and write down their responses:

1. When were you chastised by God?
2. When did you cry at the foot of the cross?
3. When did you hear God knocking at the door of your heart?
4. When did you joyfully respond to His appeal?
5. Did you experience a special moment with the Lord in the midst of the intimacy of prayer?
6. Have you ever clearly seen the Lord's hand in some particular event in your life?