

Small Group Discussion Guide

Revelation 3:14-22

“Healthy Desperation”

Based on Sunday's
Sermon 5/17/2026

Background

Not unlike Wall Street, Laodicea was a major banking center of Asia Minor. This meant that it attracted people of means. Money flowed freely through its streets, reflected in its buildings, its businesses, and, yes, in its church. It boasted a thriving textile trade, with coveted garments woven from a special wool found only in Laodicea. Besides these things, which pumped money into Laodicea's economy, the city was also famous for its medicine. In fact, some of their coins were minted with the faces of famous physicians from their city. They were especially known for Phrygian powder, a substance mixed with water and used as a salve to treat ailments of the eye. It's no surprise that Christ's message to Laodicea refers to their wealth, their clothing, and their healing ointment (3:17–18).

In spite of everything it had going for it, Laodicea had one major problem. It lacked a supply of good water, which eventually led to an abandonment of the city. One scholar writes, “For all its wealth, it could produce neither the healing power of hot water, like its neighbor Hierapolis, nor the refreshing power of cold water to be found at Colossae, but merely lukewarm water, useful only as an emetic (an agent that induces vomiting).” Jesus rebuked the church at Laodicea because they were neither cold nor hot. He intended to spit them out of His mouth—unless they repented (3:15–16).¹

Similarly, the book of James addresses the issue of those who profess to have faith but fail to demonstrate it in their works. James calls such fruitless faith “useless” (Jas. 2:14). Christ expressed disdain for the same type of sin in Laodicea: The works of the Christians there were done solely in the flesh and therefore were halfhearted, insincere, and self-indulgent. They reflected nothing of the love that comes from Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.²

Discussion Questions

Getting Started

1. What is something that you tasted thinking it was hot or cold, but had to spit it out because it was lukewarm?

Observation

2. Read Revelation 3:14-22. What titles does Jesus use for Himself in verse 14, and what do they emphasize about His authority to speak to the church?

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Revelation*, vol. 15, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 81.

² Ibid, 83.

3. How does Jesus describe the spiritual condition of the Laodiceans in verses 15–17? List the contrasts between how they see themselves and how He sees them.
4. What specific counsel does Jesus give in verses 18–20, and what images or metaphors stand out?

Interpretation

5. What does Jesus mean by calling the church “lukewarm”? How does the historical water situation in Laodicea deepen this metaphor?
6. Read John 15:5. Why is self-deception such a central issue in this passage? What does it reveal about the danger of spiritual complacency?
7. How should we understand Jesus’ statement, “Those whom I love I reprove and discipline”? What does this teach us about the nature of His correction?
8. Read Acts 4:23-41. What do we learn about prayer and dependence upon God from this passage?

Application

9. Where might believers today be tempted to say, “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing”? How can we guard against that mindset?
10. Jesus invites the church to “open the door” to Him. What does opening the door look like in the rhythms of daily discipleship?

Prayer List: