

Good News For the Lukewarm



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Are you finding your temptations stronger, your resistance weaker, your affections for Christ strangely dimming? Are you in a season when God's Word seems uninspiring and your prayer life is weak and anemic? Are you ever afraid you've slowly become lukewarm?

If so, this message is for you. There is hope for believers who are falling into a spiritual lukewarmness. There is a power available to you — and there is a Savior working on your behalf to pluck you from dullness of spirit and bring a revival fire.

Most of us know Jesus' famous words about lukewarm Christians. In Revelation 3, where he addresses the seven churches, there doesn't appear to be a lot of good news for these folks. In fact, it seems to be pretty much all bad news:

"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15–16).

Christ is talking specifically about the church of Laodicea. Evidently this church had become very complacent in their faith. This passage in Revelation has become so well known that the word "laodicean" actually appears in the dictionary. It signifies one who is mediocre, halfhearted, not fully into what they're doing.

This is one of the most powerful passages in all of Scripture.

Indeed, this verse speaks a clear warning to every generation in the church. Those described as lukewarm here are *people who claim God's nature without living a life that reflects that nature*.

Lukewarm people claim to be in God's inner circle but don't bother to obey his commands. When Jesus says, "I know your works" (Revelation 3:15), he's talking about the way they live. The lukewarm quote the Bible but still behave like the world. They want the benefits of being identified with Jesus but won't submit to his claim on them.

Such people aren't "cold" at all. Coldhearted people lead worldly lives without apology. They party, drink and carouse, and it doesn't surprise anyone because they have no allegiance to God. "Cold" people are just what they appear to be — and they don't pretend to be what they aren't.

But lukewarm people lead fraudulent lives, which is how they do harm to the gospel. They claim to be of God but are led by worldly appetites. This becomes a ruinous testimony — worse than the cold person who admits, "I don't care about God."

Please don't mistake me here: I'm not saying there is no forgiveness for the sins of the lukewarm. Jesus has made his cleansing provision available not only to the hot but also to the lukewarm and the cold. He is available to wash away sin from any of us. God's wrath against sin was fully satisfied at the Cross, setting us free from all guilt.

Yet we're not just forgiven. Jesus also imputed his righteousness to us. He put his Spirit within us, giving us righteous power over sin. However, lukewarm believers don't allow God's righteousness to affect them — and that's

their tragedy.

You see, the lukewarm have experienced the purifying, all-consuming fire of God's presence. They've heard about Christ's quenching of wrath through his shed blood. Yet they accept these glorious truths with a yawn. Christ looks on them and says, "Your lukewarmness is farther from my heart than any coldness."

Every Christian who reads this passage is to examine his heart for lukewarmness.

Over my years as a pastor I've observed several signs in believers who grow lukewarm. All these signs may seem overly familiar to you, but read them in light of Jesus' words about "knowing our works" and see if any relate to you:

Prayerlessness. There's a joke among pastors that the easiest way to make a Christian feel guilty is to ask about their prayer life. But in reality a halfhearted prayer life reveals something about any believer. That person's works — or lack of them — reflect a condition of his heart. Prayer is a godly work that springs from a Spirit-filled heart. And it's one of the first things that goes missing when a heart is lukewarm.

Being unstirred by God's Word. Reading God's Word is meant to awaken, move and rouse us. Yet sometimes when we read Scripture it's as if we're reading any other book. It either interests us or it doesn't, and if we're bored we set it aside.

An encounter with the living Word of God isn't meant to be an escape, like other casual reads. It has the opposite effect: It leads to transformation. The heart that opens itself to the power of God's Word is changed. But the lukewarm heart isn't transformed because it never allows itself to be examined.

Disobedience to God's Word. How tragic when a lukewarm heart finally gets a glimpse of holy truth. The Holy Spirit breaks through and convicts the believer, who realizes, "No more lukewarmness for me. I'm giving my all back to the Lord."

The lukewarm believer has a different response. He's like the man described in James' epistle: He looks at himself in the mirror and sees his condition — but when he walks away he quickly forgets what he's seen. He conveniently overlooks that being called to Christ is an all-consuming passion.

Little regard for the lost. When the lukewarm believer is shown reports of the lost and the desperate — whether in his backyard or overseas — he remains unstirred. Even as he considers his unbelieving loved ones he isn't bothered.

Is there a cry in your soul for those you know who are wandering in darkness? Does the light of Christ break through in your prayer times to show you their true condition? When you see the pressing need of the destitute in other nations, does a spiritual ambition awaken in you? Do you have a fire to see the lost, the blind, the deprived come to know Jesus' love?

Irregular gathering with other believers. The lukewarm believer goes to church not to be transformed but because it serves him to go. Gathering together with other believers for God's glory has no significance to him. He chooses to go whenever he wants with only his convenience in mind.

But David understood the significance of being in God's house among his people. He declared that a single day in God's presence was better than a thousand elsewhere. David even said he would be glad to serve as a door-keeper just to be there. That ought to mean something to us. It was spoken by a man with authority over tens of thousands!

An indifference toward apathy in the church. A lukewarm Christian doesn't care whether his brothers or sisters are lukewarm, too. He's content to sing worship songs with them and hear sermons without allowing anything to sink in. If he had his way, nothing about his church would ever change. He could care less whether it becomes a vibrant servant-body to the community.

As you read these traits of lukewarmness, does something awaken in you? Are you stirred by those things that may describe your life? We all need to plead with God to stir us toward his concerns. He's ready and waiting to restore our godly passion.

If you knew something could transform your life for God's glory, would you seek it?

My wife and I have a game we play every so often. It goes like this: Imagine you could host any five people for dinner, including anyone past or present. You make choices knowing these people could have an influence on your life like no others. You would get to know their heart and have them speak into yours. If this could happen, who would your choices be?

Over the years our lists have included many amazing spiritual people (though mine have also included a sports figure or two!). Wouldn't that be a great thing? To drink deeply from the wells of those who could help your life to be conformed to Christ's very likeness?

You've made your list and sent out the invitations, and now all your guests say they're able to come. So you start planning that perfect meal and the perfect atmosphere in which to serve it. You're getting excited because you realize you're about to have one of the most meaningful times of your life.

Yet as the special evening approaches, something in you resists. Other desires begin popping into your head: "I really want to finish that amazing book I'm reading. I've just got to see what happens." Finally, your urge to be distracted grows so strong you decide to skip the dinner. Later, as your spouse entertains your guests, you sit idly in the next room, pulled away from something that could have transformed your life.

That is exactly what a lukewarm heart does. It kills real passion! It overtakes any "hot" zeal we have for the things of God.

That's exactly what Jesus' warning to the Laodiceans is about. His message isn't one of condemnation but of hope, love, grace and power. He's saying, "There is good news for you. Yes, your condition has become loathsome to me — but I'm calling you out of your lukewarmness right now. I'll supply you with all power to make it happen."

That's right — Christ wasn't writing off the lukewarm. He was warning them in order to bring them back to himself — to reignite their relationship with him.

What exactly is Jesus' good news to the lukewarm?

The first part of Christ's good news to the Laodiceans is summed up in the phrase: "*Would that you were cold or hot!*" (Revelation 3:15, my italics). Some translations of this phrase read, "*I would rather you be...*"

You may say, "That sounds like a mere suggestion." Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus is Lord of the universe — and he is expressing his desire. When he says, "I would rather you be...", we can know he's about to call on every available resource on our behalf. If he wants our lukewarm heart to be on fire for him again, he'll release an all-out campaign to see it happen. And Jesus' plans don't fail.

"So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (*Revelation 3:16*). Jesus has a distaste over our lukewarmness. It's like vinegar in his mouth, a bitter gall that's so horrible it causes a gag reflex to kick in. If we persist in our lukewarmness, that sour taste will cause him to spit us out.

Yet that isn't the final word in this passage. Next we read: "*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent*" (3:19). It is Christ's love that causes him to speak to us in these terms. Here is the gospel of grace reaching out to even the most lukewarm among us.

Simply put, Jesus is telling us that even when we've become lukewarm his love is stirred into action. His rebuke is redemptive, his aim in disciplining us restorative. Jesus' love can awaken the most mediocre commitment. And he offers us this: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (3:20).

The church fathers called this aspect of God's nature "forbearance." And the reason for his forbearance is love. Yet Jesus has even more to say to the lukewarm. He offers a reward to all who would respond to his warning: "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21).

Hear what your Savior is saying to you: He wants your full affection. He wants the Song of Solomon to be the story

of your relationship with him. He wants you to yearn for him when he seems far away and to delight when he's near. He wants to so fill you with his love that you're moved to action — to do his works gladly with a full heart.

This has been God's heart since the Old Testament. He declared then, "It is not my desire that any be cast away or lost." And now in Revelation he's reminding us, "I plan ways to bring back *all* from their lukewarm condition."

Could there be any better news for lukewarm believers? The ones the rest of us judge so easily as being halfhearted? Jesus doesn't stop at exposing their sin — he gives them the remedy.

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see" (*Revelation 3:17–18*).

Note Jesus' counsel to us here. He says he has "gold refined in the fire" — and we are to buy it from him. He's telling us, "I know you don't have the power to restore the fiery hot flame of God in your hearts. That is my work to do in you. Now, let me do my work in your heart."

Yet there is also a dire seriousness to Jesus' warning here. In short: *Don't take God's offer for granted*. Search your heart — don't wait for your pastor or friends to approach you. A lukewarm Christian can seem to others like he's on fire, because he worships and shows an outward affection for Jesus. His disobedience goes unseen to all but the Lord.

Have you grown lukewarm? Do you lack the "want to" for your godly passion to be restored? I have two words for you: *Simply knock*. Then keep knocking. Your heart is precious to him — he said so — and he has promised to bring you back to himself. He has declared his love for you even in your lukewarm state. And his warning to you is the surest sign of his love.

Let this message awaken you. Let it open your ears to his invitation: "Come through this door I have opened before you. I have all the resources you need. And I want you to sit next to me and enjoy my glory."

Let this glorious truth awaken you in spirit — revive you in heart — and impassion you to be about his good works again. Amen!

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