



**“The Home Stretch”
— Dear Church—
Small Group Plan**

Every noble work is at first impossible.
— Thomas Carlyle —

Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance.
— Samuel Johnson —

*Jesus did not come to explain away suffering to remove it.
He came to fill it with His Presence.*
— Paul Claudel —

*But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ,
so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*
— 1 Peter 4:13 —

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- What has been the typical American’s experience with suffering?
- Have you ever known a Christian who suffered for their faith? Explain.

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

FOLLOWING

Revelation 2:8-9

⁸ *“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

- What was the hardship that the Smyrna church was experiencing?
- Why are they described as both rich and poor?
- Why do these people continue to follow Jesus even in the face of persecution and suffering?
- How would it feel to be facing death and to hear from one who “came to life” (v. 8)?

FEARLESS

Revelation 2:10

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.

- On what basis can Jesus say, “Do not be afraid”? Why does he have credibility?
- Which do you think is most difficult, physical, verbal or emotional persecution? Explain.
- Why is Jesus careful to point out that Satan is the architect behind all fear and suffering?

FAITHFUL

Revelation 2:10

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

- Did Jesus mean be faithful until you die, or be faithful even if it brings your death? What is the difference?
- Does your thought of dying ever obscure your view of the life that follows?
- How do you manage it?

FOCUSED

Revelation 2:11

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

- In the gospels Jesus often said, “He who has an ear, let him hear.” What does he mean?
- What are some of the obstacles that pull our focus away from our fearless, faithful following of Jesus?
- What is the “second death”?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- What is the power of fear?
- How have people used fear to gain or maintain power?
- Why is fear an effective tool against some, but not against others?
- How have you resisted fear in your life?

- Today, when we describe someone as being “faithful unto death” what do we usually mean? How does the story of Smyrna change your view of “faithful unto death?”
- In the week ahead what tactic will Satan most likely use to bring fear to your heart, distraction to your course, and confusion to you focus?
- Close by thanking God for a clear awareness of the “crown of life” that awaits those who endure. Praise and thank Him for his steadfast love and mercy.