

FIELD-TESTED SERMON RESOURCES

# SERMON SERIES

TRUSTED | BIBLICAL | FIELD-TESTED

Thank you for downloading this sample PDF from our Sermon Series line of resources.

When you stand up in front of students to proclaim the Word of God, you need trusted, creative, and biblically solid content. YM360's Sermon Series are exactly what you're looking for!

Field-tested, from-the-trenches of youth ministry, YM360 Sermon Series are complete detailed sermon outlines, discussion questions, and graphic packages designed to help you lead students closer to God through proclaiming His Word.

## SERIES OVERVIEW FOR SEVEN LETTERS: A Message from Jesus to His People

The book of Revelation can be a mystery. The first thing your students think about when they hear "Revelation" is probably the end times or all the things concerning Jesus's return. Because of this, this book can often be written off and forgotten, but it contains life-changing truths that affect your students' lives right now. We are already prone to wandering away from God, and there are many challenges in this world that can potentially derail our spiritual lives. However, Jesus has given us the tools we need to recognize and avoid these obstacles so that we can grow in our faith.

## "SEVEN LETTERS" COVERS THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES AND PASSAGES:

- **Session 1 – Your First Love (Revelation 2:1-7) |** In our busy culture, it's easy to get caught up in many things that distract us from building our relationship with God. The church in Ephesus had fallen into the same trap. God commended them for their good works, but He wanted more than their service; He wanted their hearts. Just like the church in Ephesus, we all need to return to our first love.
- **Session 2 – The Right Voice (Revelation 2:12-29) |** Have you ever listened to the wrong advice that led you into trouble? There are many voices in the world vying for our attention, and listening to the wrong ones can lead us astray. However, when we listen to the truthful voice of the Holy Spirit, we are consistently guided toward Jesus and His love for us.
- **Session 3 – A Wake-Up Call (Revelation 3:1-6, 14-22) |** The churches in Sardis and Laodicea were blind to their spiritual states and unaware of their impending spiritual disaster. If we're not careful to listen to the Holy Spirit's voice, we can wander from the truth and find ourselves in dangerous situations. We need a wake-up call before it's too late. Like these two churches, we must test ourselves and remember our desperate need for Jesus every day.
- **Session 4 – Pass the Weight (Revelation 2:8-11, 3:7-13) |** Even when we are faithfully following Jesus, we will inevitably face tribulation. It can be tempting to believe that God has abandoned us in those moments, but we can take heart because Jesus has overcome the world. Because of this fact, we must cast our burdens onto Jesus, for He is willing and able to carry them.

## "SEVEN LETTERS" IS PART OF YM360'S SERMON SERIES LINE OF RESOURCES AND IS IDEAL FOR:

- Any large group setting
- Mid-week youth service
- "Master teacher" format

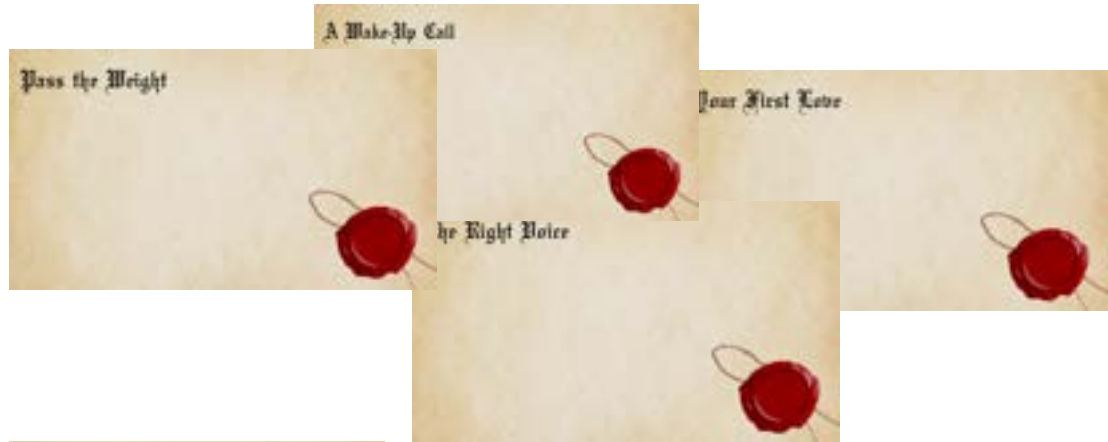
# BACKGROUND SLIDES, PROMOTIONAL ARTWORK, AND MORE. . .

## EVERY SERMON SERIES FROM YM360 COMES WITH:

- **Detailed Sermon Outlines** – Every Sermon Series comes with detailed sermon outlines. Teach them "as is" or adapt them to suit your specific ministry context.
- **Discussion questions** – Questions are designed to foster conversations, help students think critically about the teaching, and wrestle with how these Biblical truths impact their complicated and ever-changing lives. You can use these discussion questions to facilitate small groups after your large group teaching or even create handouts for students to work through the message as you go.
- **Title and Background slides** – These are designed to be dropped into your favorite presentation software to help you build a creative environment around your sermon. Use them as a backdrop for song lyrics, Scripture passages, teaching points, and any illustrations you choose to display.
- **Artwork for promo and social media** – Social media images, web banners, and a printable poster file are included. Perfect for newsletters, websites, social media platforms, or print them off for posters and bulletin inserts.
- **Logo (including native logo design files)** – We include a logo file and the native design files to allow you to use the logo in ways you see fit.
- **100% downloadable and adaptable**

Each YM360 Sermon Series comes with title and background slides, promotional art (including Instagram images), and logo treatments. Here is what to expect.

**BACKGROUND AND  
TITLE SLIDES**



**PROMOTIONAL  
ARTWORK**



**INSTAGRAM  
IMAGES**



**LOGO  
TREATMENT**



NOTE: Each YM360 Sermon Series also comes with the native files of the logo in case you want to replicate the design for other uses.

## **Seven Letters Sermon Series | Session 1: Your First Love**

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**How To Use A YM360 Sermon Series** | YM360 Sermon Series are designed for use by a communicator in a large group setting. Each series download provides various elements such as a detailed sermon outline, suggestions on illustrations or images, Scripture passages, background information, and application points that you can use to craft a message that speaks to your students in your specific context.

This series download also includes discussion questions that can be used to facilitate small groups after your large group teaching or even create handouts for students to work through the message as you go. These questions are designed to foster conversations, help students think critically about the teaching, and wrestle with how these Biblical truths impact their complicated and ever-changing lives.

Make sure to leverage the series logo, title slide, background slides, and social media artwork this YM360 Sermon Series provides for promotion and message support. We've even included the native design files to allow you the freedom to use the logo in any way that meets your needs.

This YM360 Sermon Series was created to be suitable for all types of churches and ministry environments. It was intentionally designed to provide you with everything you need while also allowing you the freedom to make it fit your particular ministry context. Nobody knows your ministry like you do. Therefore, we encourage you to make any adjustments to this series you feel are necessary to best fit the needs of your students, church, or ministry context.

**A Prayer Before You Prepare** | Lord, as culture continues to change and drift away from You, may we be steadfast in Your truth and love. Help us to view the world through the lens of Scripture, not view Scripture through the lens of the world. Remind us of Your faithfulness through the ages and help us cling to You all the days of our lives. May these next four sessions in Revelation help us look forward to Your return and empower us to share Your love with those around us. As I prepare, give me opportunities to live out what I am teaching. Let humility, compassion for my students, and zeal for You guide me as I teach and lead the next generation. In Jesus's name, Amen.

## Seven Letters Teaching Guide | A One-Page Glimpse Of Everything You Need To Prepare

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**Series Snapshot** | *Seven Letters* is a four-session sermon series that will call your students to carefully examine their current spiritual life and walk with Jesus. By walking through the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, your students will be challenged to see the potential dangers in their lives and equipped to overcome them to grow in their faith.

**Series Overview** | The book of Revelation can be a mystery. The first thing your students think about when they hear “Revelation” is probably the end times or all the things concerning Jesus’s return. Because of this, this book can often be written off and forgotten, but it contains life-changing truths that affect your students’ lives right now. We are already prone to wandering away from God, and there are many challenges in this world that can potentially derail our spiritual lives. However, Jesus has given us the tools we need to recognize and avoid these obstacles so that we can grow in our faith.

- **Session 1 – Your First Love (Revelation 2:1-7)** | In our busy culture, it’s easy to get caught up in many things that distract us from building our relationship with God. The church in Ephesus had fallen into the same trap. God commended them for their good works, but He wanted more than their service; He wanted their hearts. Just like the church in Ephesus, we all need to return to our first love.
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### Seven Letters Series | Session 1

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**Large Group Teaching Summary** | In our busy culture, it’s easy to get caught up in many things that distract us from building our relationship with God. The church in Ephesus had fallen into the same trap. God commended them for their good works, but He wanted more than their service; He wanted their hearts. Just like the church in Ephesus, we all need to return to our first love.

**Key Takeaway** | Return to your first love.

**Scripture Focus** | Revelation 2:1-7

**What You May Need** | *Optional Illustration: Personal Story, Optional Illustration: Personal Story*

### I. Introduction

- A. Revelation. What's your first thought when you hear that? Dragons? The end of the world? Crazy stories that are beyond your wildest imagination? Maybe even a little fear? Uncertainty about the meaning of Revelation can leave you nervous or anxious about the future, and you might be wondering if there's anything in this book that can impact your life right now...I'm here to tell you that there is! The first few chapters contain letters written to seven churches with encouragement and ways they can grow in their faith. So in this new series, *Seven Letters*, we're going to take a look at those letters to see how they can help us grow in our faith right here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But first, let's get a little background info on Revelation.
- B. Revelation was written by John, one of Jesus' disciples, around 95 AD (about 65 years after Jesus's resurrection). He begins in Revelation 1:1-2 by saying, *"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw."*
- C. John had been exiled to the island of Patmos as a punishment for being a Christian, but God did not let that time go to waste. He sent an angel to John with a message from Jesus and told John to write down everything he heard and saw. Before Jesus ascended back to Heaven, He promised that He would one day return, and a significant portion of this vision has to do with the things surrounding His return. Just as we do now, Christians in John's day lived with hopeful expectation of that great event because life was not easy for Christians living under Roman rule. The imperial cult (worship of the Roman emperor) would persecute anyone who claimed that "Jesus is Lord" rather than "Caesar is lord," so countless Christians were suffering for their faith.
- D. Faithful Christians are under pressure to conform to the world, and some are compromising with it. The temptation to turn away from Christ and join with the world shows up clearly in some of the letters to the seven churches, and Christians today face that same struggle. But in this session, we're going to see what it looks like to recenter our focus on Jesus and remind ourselves that He is the most important thing.

### II. Tension

- A. ***Optional Illustration: Tell a story about getting so busy with a project/activity that you forgot why you even started.***
- B. Have you ever done something like this? Started a project, activity, or hobby with good intentions only to become so overwhelmed and carried away that you begin to resent it? Or you don't even remember why you started in the first place? It's so easy to fill our lives with constant activity. And the ironic thing is that these activities can be "good" things! Sure, there may be some time-wasting activities, such as scrolling on social media for hours or binge-watching a show all day, but we can also fill our time with good things like serving the church or giving our time to those in need.
- C. However, it's also easy to get so caught up in whatever we're doing that we forget why we started in the first place. We may have started doing more chores around the house

## Seven Letters Sermon Series | Session 1: Your First Love

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to help our parents out of love for them, but after a while, doing chores becomes a burden, and we lose sight of why we started. We may have started serving somewhere in the church out of love for Jesus and other people, but after a while, it can become just another thing that we do. Just another part of our routine. We're still faithful to show up and do what we're asked, but the passion and excitement that we once had about it aren't really there anymore.

- D. That's the kind of situation that we step into in this first letter. The church at Ephesus had lost sight of their initial motivation behind the things they did. They were doing good things, but the love they once had was no longer there. They needed to be reminded that God wants more from them than just the things they can do. That INSTEAD OF LETTING BUSYNESS CLOUD THEIR VISION AND PURPOSE, THEY SHOULD RETURN TO THEIR FIRST LOVE.

### III. Scripture

- A. Read REVELATION 2:1-7

1. *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.  
a) **NOTE: Pause and remind students that Jesus is the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven lampstands.***
2. *I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."*

- B. In this letter, we basically have a "good news/bad news" sandwich. Jesus starts with the good things they're doing before pointing out what they need to work on. I'm sure you've received feedback from a parent, teacher, coach, or friend in the same way. It always helps to know you are doing something well before hearing the areas where you need to improve.
- C. In the first couple of sentences, Jesus highlights their good works, service, and patient endurance. He recognizes that they are skilled at determining whether someone is truly an apostle or not, and He commends them for not growing weary in doing good. But in verse 4, He brings up their weakness. THEY HAVE ABANDONED THEIR FIRST LOVE. They are distracted and busy doing all the "Christian things" but have forgotten the true reason for their work. Busyness clouded their vision and purpose. Does this sound familiar? We do this too!
- D. Jesus mentions their good works, service, and patient endurance because those are great strengths of the church, but HE DOESN'T JUST WANT THEIR SERVICE; HE WANTS



## Seven Letters Sermon Series | Session 1: Your First Love

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THEIR HEARTS. There are so many stories in Scripture where people were going through the motions, but their hearts were so far from God. They were doing what they thought was right, carrying out religious traditions, but missed the fact that those traditions were meant to draw them close to their heavenly Father. The church in Ephesus had fallen into the same trap...and so do we.

- E. James 1:14-16 says, *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*
- F. **Optional Illustration: Tell a story about being led astray by something you desired. It could be friendships, relationships, jobs, money, etc.**
- G. James understood how crafty the enemy is and that sometimes our desires can be used against us. Right off the bat, we might think of desires that lead us to bad or dangerous choices, such as drug addiction or sexual immorality. And that’s certainly possible, but many times our desires lead us to good choices, such as wanting to be healthy, have a good community of friends, or make a difference in the world.
- H. But what happens when the enemy influences our desires? Can he turn good desires into obsessions or take us down a path that God never intended? Absolutely. THE ENEMY CAN TAKE OUR GOOD DESIRES AND TWIST THEM INTO SOMETHING DESTRUCTIVE. For example, caring for the poor and oppressed is a God-given passion, but the enemy can twist those desires and cause you to work so hard that you burn out or forget why you even started. Your focus might have been on bringing glory to God in the beginning, but somewhere along the way, it became about making a name for yourself. Or maybe you felt like you had to earn God’s love. Maybe you thought that if you helped enough people, God would love you more. You got so deep in the work of saving others that you lost your initial motivation. You forgot who you are and whose you are. You lost sight of your first love, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

### IV. Application

- A. Just as the church at Ephesus had areas they needed to work on, we do too. With that being said, I think we need to consider a couple of things as we try to return to our first love, Jesus.
- B. IDENTIFY & GUARD YOUR DESIRES
  - 1. God gives us good and perfect gifts. They might be talents and abilities, specific people in our lives, or other blessings that He wants us to use for His glory. He gives you and me everything we need to live well, love others, and bring glory to God. Further on in the passage I read a few minutes ago from James, he even tells us that we are a kind of firstfruits, which means the best of the harvest. We are God’s masterpiece (Ephes. 2:10). In other words, we are God’s prized possessions, and in turn, God is our first love. That’s how He created us. WHEN WE SEEK LOVE AND SATISFACTION OUTSIDE OF GOD, WE ARE LEFT BROKEN, HURTING, AND WANTING MORE.
  - 2. So, where are you seeking fulfillment and purpose but coming up empty? Is it service and hard work like the church in Ephesus? Is it approval or relationships?

Is it success or status? Are you focused on climbing the imaginary ladder of popularity? Or is it something else? None of these things are inherently bad, but they can be destructive when they become our main focus and goal. As I said earlier, when the busyness of chasing after these things clouds our main vision and purpose, we stray from our devotion to Jesus. We abandon our first love.

3. When you're able to identify your desires, you become more aware of how the enemy may use them against you. And as you get better at being ready for that, you can equip yourself with truth that combats the lies the enemy tries to tell you.

### C. RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE

1. However hard we try to not get distracted by our desires and the things that we do, it will inevitably happen at some point. So what should we do when we get there? The same thing every time – we have to return to our first love. We should constantly remind ourselves that Jesus should be our true motivation for doing the things we do. When we stray away from Him, we should remember all that He has done for us and the great love He has for us.
2. If your serving becomes draining and exhausting, return to your first love by asking Him to remind you why you serve and the joy it brings to your soul. Remember that we serve in response to God's love, not to earn it.
3. Are you trying to find love and approval in relationships? Remember that God created you to love Him first and foremost and then love others from the outpouring of His love. There is a void in our hearts that only He can fill.
4. Whatever trap you have fallen into, know that it's never too late to return to God, your first love. Revelation 2:5 implores us to "*Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.*"

## V. Gospel

- A. Many times, to remember why you do what you do, to return to your first love, you must go back to the beginning. Notice that in verse 7, Jesus mentions the tree of life. Do you remember where the tree of life first appears in the Bible? If not, the tree of life was in the Garden of Eden way back in Genesis, where the story of humanity begins.
- B. In Genesis 1-2, God created the entire universe and said it was good. He also made humans in His image and said they were VERY good. Everything was perfect and beautiful, and God provided all that Adam and Eve needed. He was their first love, and they displayed that love by spending intentional time together walking in the garden. Can you imagine that? You live in paradise, and God physically walks and talks with you every day. What a gift! But one day, a serpent prompted Adam and Eve to question their first love.
- C. One question changed everything. "Did God *really* say that you couldn't do this?" The serpent caused Adam and Eve to doubt God's goodness in a few simple words. This question made them wonder if there was something better outside of what God said and designed. And just like that, they abandoned their first love. They disobeyed God and introduced sin into the world. Because of that, their previously perfect relationship with God was now broken. And the only thing that could fix it was a perfect, sinless life, which we could never do.

- D. Thankfully, God deeply desires a relationship with us. He longs to be with us, so He sent His only Son, Jesus, down to Earth to do what we never could. Jesus lived that perfect, sinless life and offered His own life up in place of ours. He died an excruciating death on a cross and took all of our sins and the punishment for them on His own shoulders. However, 3 days later, Jesus rose from the grave, having defeated sin and death forever and for everyone who would believe in Him.
- E. Now, because of Jesus's sacrifice, we can have a relationship with God again. We can have salvation from our sins and eternal life. All we have to do is repent of (turn away from/ask forgiveness for) our sins, confess that Jesus is the Savior we desperately need, and commit to following Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Jesus frees us from the punishment of our sins and gives us the gifts of a relationship with Him and eternal life in Heaven.

### VI. Conclusion

- A. The enemy does to us the same thing he did to Adam and Eve every day. He entices us to wander about life outside God's ways, take matters into our own hands, and seek our purpose and joy in other places. The enemy uses our own desires and passions to draw us away from our first love.
- B. We all get lost or off track from time to time. We get caught up in so many things that distract us from building our relationship with our first love. Taking a break from the busyness of life is a necessary step in the life of a Christian. We all need time to reflect on what we are pursuing and our motivation behind it. If loving God, bringing Him glory, and inviting others into His family are not the primary motivators, then we should reconsider how we are spending our time.
- C. Ask God to search your heart. If He reveals things that you need to shift or leave behind, ask Him for a willing spirit to change your priorities. May we learn from the church in Ephesus to never abandon our first love. And if we do, may we listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings to return.
- D. Let's pray.

## **Seven Letters Sermon Series | Session 1 Discussion Questions: Your First Love**

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**Seven Letters Series Overview** | The book of Revelation can be a mystery. The first thing your students think about when they hear “Revelation” is probably the end times or all the things concerning Jesus’s return. Because of this, this book can often be written off and forgotten, but it contains life-changing truths that affect your students' lives right now. We are already prone to wandering away from God, and there are many challenges in this world that can potentially derail our spiritual lives. However, Jesus has given us the tools we need to recognize and avoid these obstacles so that we can grow in our faith.

**Large Group Teaching Summary** | In our busy culture, it’s easy to get caught up in many things that distract us from building our relationship with God. The church in Ephesus had fallen into the same trap. God commended them for their good works, but He wanted more than their service; He wanted their hearts. Just like the church in Ephesus, we all need to return to our first love.

**Key Takeaway** | Return to your first love.

**Scripture Focus** | Revelation 2:1-7

### **Seven Letters | Session 1 Discussion Questions**

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You can use these discussion questions to facilitate small groups after your large group teaching or even create handouts for students to work through the message as you go. These questions are designed to foster conversations, help students think critically about the teaching, and wrestle with how these Biblical truths impact their complicated and ever-changing lives.

#### **Get Them Talking | An Optional Opening Question To Get Students Talking**

1. What’s your go-to activity to pass the time? How much time do you spend on that every week?

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Read Revelation 2:1-7 & James 1:14-18. What does this teach you about God? What does it teach you about yourself?
2. Why do you think it’s easy to forget the initial reason you start doing things? How are you guilty of this in your own life?
3. What are some good desires that God has given you? How can you use them for His glory? How does the enemy try to twist your desires into something destructive?
4. What do you think happens to make us lose our passion for following God? Do you think it happens all at once or over time?
5. What do you think it means for God to be your “first love”? What do you think it looks like to abandon your first love? What are you tempted to turn to instead of following God? Why do you think it’s that thing?
6. How does knowing who God is – His character and His promises – help you to love Him? Is it hard to believe that God truly wants your heart and not just your service? Why or why not?
7. Is there someone in your life who sets a good example of loving God and keeping Him first? What traits or habits do they have that help them stay close to God? How can you imitate them?

## **Seven Letters Sermon Series | Session 1 Discussion Questions: Your First Love**

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8. What do you think it means to identify and guard your desires? How can you take steps to do that this week?