

MAKE IT

SLAVERY FREE



THE CLEWER  
INITIATIVE

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# SEVEN LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

## Introduction and Salutation

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds;

every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

So it is to be. Amen.

'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.



John wrote seven letters to the churches at a time of great anxiety and uncertainty. Each church was in Asia – on the front line of the church’s potential for sharing the Gospel in new cultures and contexts.

You are invited to “receive” seven letters to the churches during this Anti-Slavery Week – and to make them an opportunity for prayer, reflection, and the identification of appropriate action – so that you can make your contribution to our response to the evils of modern slavery and exploitation.

Modern slavery is increasing as there are more vulnerable people, a greater desire for cheaper goods and services, and complexities in business arrangements which gives scope to criminal activities that are exploiting and damaging so many of God’s precious children.

Criminals prey on people’s vulnerability, whether that’s the vulnerability of those fleeing poverty, war and famine, or the vulnerability of those marginalised within our communities. They deceive their victims with false promises of a better life and keep them trapped in slavery through debt bondage, fear and intimidation, isolation, threats to family, and violence.

You can find much more detail about all these matters on [The Clewer Initiative website](#). Throughout our letters, you will find references to various tools and resources, and at the end of this booklet there is a full list available with relevant website links.

We ask you to pray, reflect and plan action for the next year – and to put this commitment and witness in the form of a pledge in a “return” letter. This will give you a focus and targets for effective mission, and enable The Clewer Initiative to better serve the church and communities in identifying the best ways of proceeding to help us all become more slavery free in the coming months.

With thanks and blessing,

The Clewer Initiative



## First Letter: Day one

Read Revelation 2 v1-7

### **The Letter to the Church in Ephesus**

'To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what 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 is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

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**Making a response**

To you, in the spirit of the letter to Ephesus, Grace and Peace. Please celebrate your undoubted goodness and commitment. Your patience in these times of anxiety and natural disasters, including climate change, is appreciated.

But pressures are undermining your familiar structures and practices and may be diverting your faith to put a greater emphasis upon survival.

We can all do better! As you consider your calling to love God and love your neighbour as yourself, discuss or think about:

- How can your love become stronger and better targeted, especially to embrace those suffering from modern slavery?
- What practical actions could you take to ensure that your spending decisions (refreshments, cleaning equipment, services and employment contracts...) are more consciously informed by looking for ways of preventing modern slavery in the supply chains?

*Our Pledge is to*

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## Second Letter: Day two

Read Revelation 2 v8-11

### **The Letter to the Church in Smyrna**

'And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

'I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

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## Our response

To you, in the spirit of the letter to Smyrna, Grace and Peace. Clearly your struggles and testing are important. What are the challenges for the church that you face today?

The Lord longs to give you the crown of life. A calling to share in His oversight and mercy for His children.

Although you may feel poor, “yet you are rich.” The kingdom must not become a safe, protected space for existing citizens. It exists to reach out to others, especially those vulnerable and exploited. A witness which is often costly to ourselves.

- The Clewer Initiative’s *Safe Car Wash App* enables motorists to identify and report modern slavery and exploitation at hand car washes.
- An effective way to make a difference to those hidden but hurting, is to consider how you can best promote the *Safe Car Wash App*. How will you encourage your neighbours to use the *Safe Car Wash App*?
- What can you learn from the *Safe Car Wash App* about how the church might look further and give priority to those of God’s children who provide cheap goods and services?

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## Third Letter: Day three

Read Revelation 2 v12-17

### **The Letter to the Church in Pergamum**

'And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword:

'I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling-block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practise fornication. So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

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## Our response

To you, in the spirit of the letter to Pergamum, Grace and Peace. Thank you for holding fast to the name of Jesus, especially in this age of so many idolatries – aspirations, values, and practices which suit some and easily ignore or harm others.

Yet your teaching and learning will always be incomplete. We always have more to learn and more to receive.

The Lord wants to nourish you – give you manna – not simply through your gathering together for worship, but more, through your sacrificial service of others and your missionary work that brings nourishment to others, especially those who feel helpless and hurting.

- Who needs nourishing in your community?
- Are there food banks and work to help the homeless? These are some of the most vulnerable places where traffickers target potential victims with false job offers that turn into modern slavery.
- Watch our film *Charlie's Story* to hear a personal account from a homeless victim who was trafficked. What could your church do to nourish someone who's hurting like Charlie?
- How can our own church safely respond to the needs of the vulnerable? Good safeguarding practice teaches us to recognise, respond, and refer incidents of modern slavery and exploitation.

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## Fourth Letter: Day four

Read Revelation 2 v18-29

### **The Letter to the Church in Thyatira**

'And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze:

'I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practise fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call “the deep things of Satan”, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden; only hold fast to what you have until I come. To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered— even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

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## Our response

To you, in the spirit of the letter to Thyatira, Grace and Peace. Be glad of the love you share, the faith that binds you, the patience which helps you endure.

Yet the society in which you serve seems “to tolerate Jezebel” – that is, widespread sexual exploitation and oppression. Although the majority of victims of sexual exploitation are women, this also affects men.

To those “who overcome” these forces belongs the meaning and the mission of the Gospel.

- *Women in the Shadows* is a series of films and resources that shines a light on women trapped in modern slavery and exploitative conditions. Consider organising a film night during Advent where you show these films and discuss how you can support marginalised women.
- How can these insights help us better distinguish between the light of the Gospel and the darkness of abuse and suffering?
- What signs of exploitation might it be appropriate to look for in your own community?
- Are there places where you can display awareness-raising posters in your community?

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## Fifth Letter: Day five

Read Revelation 3 v1-6

### **The Letter to the Church in Sardis**

‘And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

‘I know your works; you have a name for being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is at the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. Yet you have still a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

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## Our response

To you, in the spirit of the letter to Sardis, Grace and Peace. Like every Christian community your works are not perfect. We all need to be watchful and be alert not to slide into spiritual complacency.

We must always remember what we have received and heard – and try to be more obedient – to “wake up” to new possibilities for mission and witness.

You have been stamped with the seal of Christ. This should give you confidence. Christ clothes you in robes of white – signs of holy living in a culture so easily swayed toward selfishness and excess.

- Modern slavery is present in all communities, from large cities to rural villages. It is evolving, and traffickers are using technology to help them entrap and exploit vulnerable people. We need to “wake up” to this heinous crime and see those who are hidden in plain sight.
- County lines is the phenomenon of children and young people getting drawn into the drug trade – making great profits for others, indulging in destructive lifestyles and very damaging to themselves.
- Learn more about county lines and think about what you can do to take action in your community. Our resource *Breaking County Lines* is available on The Clewer Initiative’s website, as well as training aimed at church communities, parents, grandparents, teachers, and foster parents.
- In 2020, there were 5,852 potential child victims of modern slavery ([source: NRM end of year summary 2020](#)). Why not set up a group in your church to study our *Children in the Shadows* resource, and think about how you can take action to prevent children from being exploited?

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## Sixth Letter: Day six

Read Revelation 3 v7-13

### **The Letter to the Church in Philadelphia**

'And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:  
These are the words of the holy one, the true one,  
who has the key of David,  
who opens and no one will shut,  
who shuts and no one opens:

'I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

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## Our response

To you, in the spirit of the letter to Philadelphia, Grace and Peace.

The Lord sets before us an open door. If we keep His word the door remains open, for us and for others called to receive new life.

Yet we can feel weak, and unequal to the task, struggling simply to survive. His “Word” is the story of serving the suffering, through struggle and at cost, for a greater gift – new life for those who give and those who receive.

We, as a church, are called to be pillars in the temple of God, strong witnesses to this way of salvation.

- To whom could we offer stronger support amongst the vulnerable and exploited – especially through our learning during this Anti-Slavery Week?
- How can we put this Word into practice by refining our own ways of working – for instance good governance around hiring agreements, partnership arrangements, the support of charities and good causes?
- If you employ a cleaning agency or contractors to do work on the building, consider the welfare of the workers. Take time to talk to the workers and hear their stories.

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## Seventh Letter: Day seven

Read Revelation 3 v14-end

### **The Letter to the Church in Laodicea**

'And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:

'I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing." You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.'

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## Our response

To you, in the spirit of the letter to Laodicea, Grace and Peace. Is your faith in need of renewal? By the Lord’s standards many of us will seem to be “lukewarm” in our witness. We so easily retreat into our own immediate agendas.

The Lord offers salve – His presence that can open our eyes, help us see what He has made, and who needs His love and mercy. The Clewer Initiative catchphrase is “we see you” – we can all learn to see slavery and exploitation better, and therefore respond more appropriately. We are in a secular culture. Our witness to the power and inclusiveness of God’s love is crucial to the advancement of the gospel.

Jesus stands at the door and invites us to see more clearly. Jesus stands at the door knocking, as He appears in all who suffer – “in as much as you did it to the least... you did it to me.”

- How can you help others in your community see better and learn how to recognise Jesus in the needs and cries of the exploited?
- Can you distribute posters, provide prayer resources, organise an art exhibition for schools on the themes of modern slavery and exploitation?
- Can you work with The Clewer Initiative to organise a Hidden Voices training course to mobilise your church community to take action?

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## Return Letter

Read Revelation 1 v4-6

### **Greetings and Praise to God**

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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## Your Response

From the churches to Jesus Christ – faithful witness, first born of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the Earth.

We give thanks for calling us to be a kingdom of priests – mediating your love and grace to others.

As we recognise and reflect upon your suffering in so many of our sisters and brothers through the evils of modern slavery, we join our prayers to your kingdom call, and we pledge ourselves to:

- Pray regularly for the victims and survivors of modern slavery
- Reflect upon how best we can contribute to sharing your love and healing power to those who are especially hurting and need healing
- Commit to pursuing the following actions between now and Anti-Slavery Day 2023:

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

We give you thanks for inviting us to offer this testimony through your grace and power.



## Resources

The Clewer Initiative <https://theclewerinitiative.org/>

Make It Slavery Free <https://theclewerinitiative.org/slavery-free>

Training from The Clewer Initiative <https://theclewerinitiative.org/training-courses>

Women in the Shadows films [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkaqIn7jUisnLLRI-QFpsbc\\_HEPFw5yPN](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkaqIn7jUisnLLRI-QFpsbc_HEPFw5yPN)

Safe Car Wash App <https://theclewerinitiative.org/campaigns/safe-car-wash>

Charlie's Story <https://youtu.be/zrJrn25ch04>

Safeguarding and modern slavery <https://theclewerinitiative.org/safeguarding>

Breaking County Lines <https://theclewerinitiative.org/resources/breaking-county-lines-downloads>

The Clewer Initiative awareness-raising posters <https://www.cpo.org.uk/clewer-initiative>

Hidden Voices <https://theclewerinitiative.org/training-courses/hidden-voices>

## Contact The Clewer Initiative

Email: [clewerinitiative@churchofengland.org](mailto:clewerinitiative@churchofengland.org)

Twitter: [Clewer Initiative \(@theclewer\) / Twitter](https://twitter.com/theclewer)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/theclewerinitiative/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/theclewerinitiative/>

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