SOUTH TAMPA FELLOWSHIP · COMMUNITY GROUPS

REVELATION

Leader Guide

“Because Jesus reigns and will make all things right, we can be faithfully present in a broken world.”

Revelation 4–8 · October 4 to November 22, 2026

Leader Introduction

Leaders, thank you. By saying "yes" to facilitating a group, you are creating space for people to encounter Scripture, experience authentic community, and take real steps in becoming authentic followers of Jesus.

This eight-week study walks through Revelation 4–8. Revelation is often treated as a puzzle to solve, a roadmap of future geopolitics, or an intimidating book to avoid altogether. However, this series is anchored in a single, grounding reality: Because Jesus reigns and will make all things right, we can be faithfully present in a broken world.

Your role over these eight weeks is not to be an expert on apocalyptic literature, nor to have answers for every end-times debate. Your calling is to shepherd your group toward the reigning Jesus, helping them find hope, steady obedience, and courage in the actual corners where they live and work.

What Matters Most

As you lead discussions through Revelation, keep these three priorities at the center of the conversation:

- **Wonder over mastery:** Revelation is written to produce worship, awe, and perseverance, not to answer all our questions about the future. When discussion stalls or heads down rabbit holes, orient the room back to the majesty of the One on the throne.
- **Presence over speculation:** Pop-culture readings of Revelation often obsess over timeline predictions and secret codes. We are calling our groups to be faithfully present in our actual neighborhoods, workplaces, and families. If an insight does not help someone follow Jesus more faithfully on Monday morning, do not dwell on it.
- **Progress over polish:** You do not need to cover every question or resolve every tension. Real discipleship is messy. If your group spends thirty minutes wrestling vulnerably with what it looks like to trust God in personal suffering, let the conversation linger there.

What to Expect

People arrive at Revelation with significant baggage. Some bring fear and dread shaped by sensationalist media, fiction, or fire-and-brimstone sermons. Others bring rigid prophecy charts and will want to debate current events, geopolitical alliances, or particular millennial views. Still others feel completely intimidated and expect the text to be incomprehensible.

When speculation or anxiety rises in your room, do not argue. Gently validate their interest and redirect the group with questions like:

- *“How would this image have brought hope and endurance to a first-century believer facing hardship?”*
- *“What does this show us about the character and authority of Jesus?”*
- *“How does this truth help us love our neighbors and live faithfully this week?”*

Because passages like Revelation 6 address deep suffering, economic hardship, and grief, be prepared for members to surface personal pain. Remember that our pastoral staff is always available.

Our Hope for These Weeks

Our prayer for your group is that intimidation gives way to adoration. We want our people to close this study not with a perfected end-times timeline, but with an unshakable conviction that the Lamb has conquered, that evil is living on borrowed time, and that God has uniquely stationed us to be a steady, hopeful, and loving presence in every corner of our city.

Final Word

Leading a group is both joyful and weighty. You are not doing it alone. God delights to use your availability, and his Spirit is the One who brings transformation. Trust him. Celebrate small wins. Keep pointing people back to Jesus.

Thank you for stepping into this calling. Through you, God is making space for broken people to become authentic followers of Jesus, together.

Revelation Introduction

SERIES THEME

Because Jesus reigns and will make all things right, we can be faithfully present in a broken world.

Too many people avoid the book of Revelation out of confusion or dread. Others approach it as a secret code designed to predict tomorrow's headlines. But the opening word of the book in Greek is *apokalypsis*, which means an "unveiling" or "revealing." Revelation was not given to confuse us or incite panic; it was given to pull back the curtain on history and show us who is truly on the throne.

When we see that Jesus reigns supreme over heaven and earth, we no longer have to live as anxious, reactive, or defensive people. We are freed to live as a calm, compassionate, and enduring presence in a broken world.

Last year our church walked through Revelation 1–3, including Jesus' letters to the seven churches. This year opens with a brief look back at chapter 1, then picks up in chapter 4. If you missed those messages or want a refresher, you can watch them at youtube.com/@stfchurch.

Reading Revelation: 5 Practical Tools

To help you engage these chapters meaningfully, keep five simple reading tools in mind:

1. **Remember the Original Hearers:** Revelation was written by John to seven real churches in the Roman province of Asia. Before asking what an image means for us today, ask: What courage, comfort, or warning did this bring to a first-century believer facing imperial pressure?
2. **A Circle, Not a Line:** Revelation does not unfold like a straight chronological timeline or a future roadmap. It works in spiraling cycles, showing us the same spiritual realities from multiple perspectives.
3. **Weigh the Symbols, Don't Measure Them:** Apocalyptic writing uses visual symbolism to convey spiritual truths. Colors, numbers, and composite creatures carry theological meaning rather than mathematical precision. Ask what spiritual reality the image represents.

4. **See the Patterns:** Revelation's images describe realities that show up in every generation, not only events at the end of history. The four horsemen in chapter 6, for example, picture conquest, bloodshed, economic distress, and death, which have marked every age, including ours. Ask where that pattern shows up in the world you live in, and what faithfulness looks like there.
5. **Ask the Three Questions:** In every passage, ask the questions that frame this series:
   - *What is actually happening in heaven?* Jesus reigns.
   - *What is actually happening on earth?* Our faithfulness is being contested through suffering, deception, and pressure to compromise.
   - *What will ultimately happen?* Jesus will judge evil and dwell with his people.

How to Use This Guide

This study is designed specifically for group discussion. We encourage you to listen to the sermon, spend time in the passage, and answer the questions before you get to group. The more thought you put in before arriving at group, the better the conversations will be.

This curriculum follows a simple rhythm called **SOAP**:

- **S: Scripture.** Read the passage aloud together slowly. Pay attention to the imagery, the words that repeat, and how the passage presents Jesus.
- **O: Observation.** Explore what the text actually says. We use historical Context boxes and theological Closer Look insights to ground our understanding without getting lost in speculation.
- **A: Application.** Revelation is an intensely practical book. We will reflect together on what it looks like to show up in our daily relationships, workplaces, and neighborhoods, our "corners," with Christlike compassion, availability, and courage.
- **P: Prayer.** Close every gathering by bringing your lives, your city, and your prayers before the God who hears and reigns.

WEEK 1 · OCTOBER 4

First Things First

Revelation 1:1–8

BIG IDEA

Revelation shows us the reigning Jesus so we can live faithfully in the world we actually face.

Scripture

Revelation 1:1–8 (NIV)

1 The revelation from 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, 2 who testifies to everything he
saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud
the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it,
because the time is near. 4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to
you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,
5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the
kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made
us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and
ever! Amen. 7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who
pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen. 8 “I am the
Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

CONTEXT

John wrote Revelation near the end of the first century while exiled on the island of Patmos. His readers were seven congregations in the Roman province of Asia, in what is now western Turkey. Their situations differed. Some faced open hostility while others quietly blended into the culture around them. Across the region, cities competed to build temples honoring the emperor, who was hailed as Lord and Savior. Trade guilds held banquets in honor of patron gods, and civic festivals celebrated Rome’s power. A Christian shopkeeper or craftsman could feel the pressure to go along simply to keep working. The letters to these churches in chapters 2 and 3 keep returning to one question: how to stay faithful in the world they actually faced.

CLOSER LOOK

The first word of the book in Greek is *apokalypsis*. Our English title, "Revelation," comes through the Latin *revelatio*, which translates that word. Today "apocalypse" suggests catastrophe, but the original word means an unveiling: pulling back a curtain so something hidden can be seen. Jewish readers knew this style of writing from books like Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, where visions, symbols, and numbers communicate truths too large for plain description. Symbols in this kind of writing are meant to be weighed, not measured. A beast can signal hostile or oppressive power. Notice also whose revelation this is. The opening phrase can be read as a revelation given by Jesus, a revelation about Jesus, or both at once.

Warm-Up

When you hear the word "Revelation" or "apocalypse," what comes to mind first? Where do you think that picture came from?

Observation

1. Verse 3 promises a blessing to people who do three things. What are they? What does that suggest about why the book was written?

LEADER NOTE

Verse 3 is the first of seven blessings in Revelation, and it names **three actions**. **Read aloud:** the reader is singular and the hearers are plural, because the book was written to be read when the church gathered, likely in one sitting. **Hear:** many first-century believers could not read, so they received Revelation by listening together. **Take to heart:** the Greek word *tēreō* means to keep, guard, or hold onto. The blessing does not go to those who decode the book. It goes to those who keep it. That tells us the purpose: Revelation does not reveal the future to satisfy curiosity. It reveals the future so we can live faithfully now. If anyone has felt this book is only for experts, verse 3 is good news.

2. In verses 5–6, John describes Jesus with three titles and then names three things he has done. What are they? Which of these stands out to you, and why?

LEADER NOTE

The three titles trace Jesus' story: **faithful witness** (he told the truth about God all the way to a Roman cross), **firstborn from the dead** (raised first and ranked first, echoing Psalm 89:27, where God's king is his "firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth"), and **ruler of the kings of the earth** (he reigns now, not someday, over the very powers pressing on these churches). The three things he has done: **he loves us**, present tense; **he freed us from our sins**, past tense; and **he has made us to be a kingdom and priests** who serve God. "Freed us from our sins by his blood" is the heart of the gospel: through his death, Jesus dealt with our sin and set us free, and that freedom is already accomplished. If the group gravitates only to the titles, point them to the actions.

3. In verse 7, what will Jesus' coming look like, and who will see it? Why would that matter to people who feel overlooked or overpowered?

LEADER NOTE

What it will look like: he comes with the clouds. **Who will see it:** every eye, including those who pierced him. Both phrases come from the Old Testament. Coming with the clouds echoes Daniel 7:13, where one like a son of man receives authority over every nation. Those who pierced him echoes Zechariah 12:10, where God's people mourn in repentance over the one they pierced. That background answers the second question. For the **overlooked**, his return is public, so unnoticed faithfulness will be vindicated. For the **overpowered**, the people who crucified Jesus did not get the last word, and neither will those pressing on these churches. That frees believers from needing to win now or settle scores themselves. So the mourning may include repentance; this is hope, not gloating. If the group drifts toward timing, redirect: verse 7 is about who, not when.

4. In verse 8, God speaks for himself. How does he describe himself? Why might those words matter coming right after the promise in verse 7?

LEADER NOTE

How he describes himself: the Alpha and Omega, the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, and the Almighty. Alpha and Omega are the first and last Greek letters: God stands at both ends of history. The middle phrase echoes God's name to Moses in Exodus 3, "I AM." Almighty means ruler over all. **Why it matters after verse 7:** a promise is only as good as the one who makes it. Here God signs his name to it: the one who started history, rules it now, and will finish it. The "seven spirits" in verse 4 are often read as the Holy Spirit, with seven signaling fullness. It is a symbol to weigh, not a detail to solve. If someone asks why the world looks like this if God is Almighty, don't rush to resolve it. The series will take that question seriously.

5. Look back over verses 4–8. What does John say is already true, and what does he say is still coming? Why do you think he puts them in that order?

LEADER NOTE

Already true (vv. 4–6): grace and peace are given, Jesus loves us, he has freed us from our sins, and he has made us a kingdom and priests. **Still coming (v. 7):** Jesus will return, and every eye will see him. **Why this order:** read on its own, verse 7 could sound frightening. The whole earth sees him and mourns. Coming after verses 5–6, the one on the clouds is someone the church already knows: the one who loves them, freed them, and made them his kingdom. For the church, his return is good news, even as verse 7 says others will mourn. The order also shows what the future rests on. Jesus is already the firstborn from the dead, so his people's future follows from what he has already done. If the group gets stuck, ask how verse 7 would sound if it came first.

Application

1. Verse 5 calls Jesus the ruler of the kings of the earth. Think about the pressures in your life right now, at work, at home, or in the news. What feels like it's in charge? What would change if you really believed Jesus already rules over it?

LEADER NOTE

What feels in charge: everyone lives as if something is. For John's first readers it was often Caesar, on coins and temples. For us it is usually quieter: a boss, a bank balance, a diagnosis, a child's choices, the news cycle. Naming one is not a confession of failure. Anxiety about real pressures is human. **What would change:** believing Jesus rules does not remove the pressure, but it changes its size. You still have the hard conversation with your boss, but their approval is not the final word. You still check the balance, but it doesn't get to set your mood for the day. Some may answer honestly that nothing feels in charge and life just feels chaotic. Welcome that. It is exactly the experience Revelation was written to meet.

2. Think about what you named in the last question. When does that pressure usually hit hardest? What is one small thing you could do in that moment to remember that Jesus rules over it?

LEADER NOTE

When it hits: most pressure has a pattern. Help people name a specific moment, like opening the banking app, scrolling the news, or walking into a hard meeting, rather than "all the time." **In that moment:** the practice should be small enough to do on the spot. Someone anxious about money might pray 1:5–6 before checking their balance. Someone who dreads the news might read verse 8 before scrolling. Someone who spirals at night might keep "ruler of the kings of the earth" on a note by the bed. The goal is not to make the pressure disappear but to **remember who rules over it**. A small practice kept beats an impressive one abandoned by Wednesday. If someone can't think of anything, let the group suggest one small step.

3. In the Bible, priests served God by praying for people and helping them draw near to him. Verse 6 says Jesus has made all his followers priests. Who in your corner could you pray for this week? What is one way you could show them God's care?

LEADER NOTE

"Priest" means different things to different people, often a church leader set apart from everyone else. Verse 6 means something simpler. In the Old Testament, priests prayed for people and helped them draw near to God, and in Exodus 19 God called all of Israel to that role. Verse 6 says Jesus gives it to **every follower**, not a special few. **Who to pray for:** help people land on one real person, not a category, like a coworker who seems overwhelmed or a friend who has gone quiet. **Showing God's care:** keep it simple, a text, a coffee, or a "How are you really doing?" Answers aren't required. Some may feel they have little to offer. That's honest, and it isn't disqualifying. Jesus gave them this role; they don't have to earn it.

Prayer