

Week 1: Spiritual Learning Journal

1. Obedience:

a. What I learn about obedience from these passages:

If you read the Bible and do what it says in it, you will be blessed. It is one thing to read the word or hear the word, but that it has to be in your heart for you to really know what it means. The end time is coming soon, so it is important that we know the Word and apply it to our lives so we will be as prepared as we can be when Jesus comes back. It is important for us to know that we cannot hide anything from God. He sees and hears all and most importantly he knows our thoughts and our heart. He knows about all of our deeds, our hard work, and our love, faith, and perseverance, and he knows if we are true or if we are false and where we are from where we started. Also, no matter what, we will always fall short of being obedient because we live in a fallen world and we are sinners, but Thank God Jesus was slain and with his blood we were purchased and redeemed righteous. God is true and his judgements are just and without having a relationship with Jesus, God will condemn people for their sins. The Rider on the White Horse is the Word of God and out of his mouth comes a sharp sword that can strike down the nations. This just continue to speaks to how ever powerful the Word is. Especially since the end time is near, we must continue to remember what we have heard and what we have received and make sure that we obey it and repent if we have not. Since we know Jesus as Christians, no one can snatch us out of the Father's hands because we are saved and his Children. We are to do Jesus' will until he returns.

b. In 1 Peter 1:13-25, it says to prepare our minds for action and to have self control and to set our hope fully on the grace that Jesus will reveal to us. We need to be obedient and holy children and not conform to this world. Jesus' precious blood paid for our sins and we should live life here as strangers in fear. We should not care about the perishable things but have our minds set on eternal life. The Word of God will last forever.

c. Dear Heavenly Father, I continue to pray for you to give me strength to be obedient to your word and to be convicted by the Holy Spirit if I am ever wavering. I pray that you help me to keep your commands. I pray that you take away urges and desires or impure or unclean thoughts that I may have, and I pray for ways to get out of situations that will not bare fruit in my life. This I pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Week 2. Spiritual Learning Journal Questions

Exploring “**intertextuality**.” In Biblical studies, those who study Scripture in schools across the world use technical terms they will all use to explain common things they see within a biblical text. **Intertextuality** is used to describe how a biblical text’s meaning is shaped by another text. For example, when we discussed the name of God as “the one who was, who is, and who is to come” many commentators refer to Exodus 3:14 where God first identifies Himself to Moses by the name “I AM.” It is a literary device that creates interrelationships between different biblical texts and can generate understanding in separate works based on those shared meanings. “**Intratextuality**” is used to describe how a biblical text’s meaning is developed within the same Biblical text. From beginning to end, Revelation is a carefully crafted message with later parts continually building on earlier parts. For example, the descriptions of Jesus in the messages to the 7 churches in Rev. 2-3 build on the vision of Jesus in Revelation. And the remainder of Revelation constantly builds on, fleshes out, and drives home each of the messages to the churches in Rev. 2-3. Recognizing these regular inner-connections between things will help you discover the message of Rev. 4-22 which would have spoken loud and clear to the original audience.

Let’s look at the following two examples and choose either one or both (A or B, depending on your time and interest) to explore:

A. What does “**blessed**” mean in the following contexts, and what are the reasons for being considered blessed?

The Greek term **Makarios** (blessed) refers to “being especially favored, blessed, fortunate, happy, and privileged.” *For John, the blessing is pronounced on humans privileged to receive divine favor in a variety of situations recorded in Revelation.*

1. Read through the following verses in your favorite Bible:

Rev. 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from their hard work; for their good deeds follow them!" (NLT)

16:15 "Look, I will come as unexpectedly as a thief! Blessed are all who are watching for me, who keep their clothing ready so they will not have to walk around naked and ashamed." (NLT)

19:9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." And he added, "These are true words that come from God." (NLT)

20:6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them, the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with him a thousand years.

22:7 "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the words of prophecy written in this book." (NLT)

22:14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes. They will be permitted to enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life." (NLT)

2. Using the chapter and sectional headings, consider the context. What is going on in the verses or paragraph sections just before this blessing and what is going on in the verses or paragraph sections following the blessing? How does considering the surrounding context give you insight into what being blessed means?

Before this blessing, it is talking about the 144,000 who have His name and His father's name written on their foreheads, and it also talks about the mark of the beast, and how if someone has the mark on their forehead or on the hand that they will be tormented forever and ever. After this blessing, there is a warning to not add or take away anything in this prophecy, for there will be consequences. Jesus ends by saying that he is coming soon. I think being blessed means that you are highly favored and that people all around can see God in you and God working through your life. I think blessed people fear God and keep his commandments and ask for forgiveness when they have fallen short, but thank God our God is mercy and just and has a lot of grace, because we all need it!!!

C. Summary statement: What did you learn about the importance of recognizing inner connections within a biblical text is for understanding a particular book of the Bible? Explain briefly.

I mean the entire Bible to me is like an intricate puzzle, and the more you move things around or study, the more you are able to figure things out. And as Pastor John and many others say, the Old testament is the New Testament concealed and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. I think it is very important in particular to understand the Old Testament because we see so many parallels in the New Testament and even throughout different books, it really is so fascinating and we will never be able to really understand how in depth it really is, but with time and diligence we can figure out what God wants us to figure out.

Week 3: Spiritual Learning Journal

This week focuses on the historical background of the Roman Empire as it would have affected the believers in these 7 churches. After you have watched the videos and listened to the PowerPoint discussions, answer the following questions.

1. Do you see any similarities between what 1st c. believers faced with the Roman Empire and what we Christians struggle with today? Explain briefly.

Revelation has been described as resistance literature, "a thorough-going prophetic critique of the abuse of power." Yet, it is not a document that simply stands against something! Like all biblical prophecy, it promotes true worship of the one true God, expressed not merely in worship songs and religious ceremonies, but also in faithful living.

Yes, I believe there are many similarities between what believers have faced back then and what believers are facing today. Like I said in my discussion post, especially in

today's world with the ability to have social media blasting you practically every second of every day and then if you are not on social media you are seen as old fashioned, weird, not normal, or an outcast, etc. I really like to just think of the verse that we are in this world but we are not of this world. Back then, if you did not fit into the culture you could suffer death, and now, in America we might not experience death from not fitting in with the culture, but culture and society could make it feel like death in a social context.

2. Considering the description of Jesus to the Church in Ephesus (Rev. 2:1), "These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands," what would be the impact of that description to someone from that church? In other words, does the description tie into the message as you understand it?

This makes me think about how Jesus says we cannot have two masters and that we cannot love two things because one will always win out and it always has to be Jesus otherwise we will have idols built up in our lives.

3. Take time to write out a prayer to the Lord expressing what the Spirit lays on your heart from studying Jesus' message to Ephesus. If you want to keep your prayer private, simply share how writing out your prayer and lifting it up to Jesus impacted you.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for everything that I have learned in this class in the first three weeks. Please let me apply this knowledge and these lessons to my daily life. Lord, please help me continue to follow you and to let the culture and the cares of this world to fade away so I can follow you and stay on the path you have set before me. Lord let you will be done in my life. Teach me your ways and help guide me to becoming more like Jesus in all that I do. Lord let me be the light in the darkness, the salt of the Earth, let everyone that comes into my path know that there is something different about me besides the fact that I don't have social media, but that there is something different in how I present myself and that flow that comes from me and let everyone see you in me. Let everything I do glorify you Lord, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Week 4: Spiritual Learning Journal

Part of growth is facing our challenges with an honest look at who we are and what thoughts are

attempting to take us captive. It is tempting to look for the comforting words of Christ that show He is

for us than at the warnings that may be a word against us in our present condition.

1. In what way/s do you see yourself and/or the church today in Jesus' message to the Church at Smyrna? To the Church at Pergamum?

The Church at Smyrna was facing a lot of persecution, and I know in many countries around the world Christians are facing persecution. And even here in America, Christians are persecuted on another level. We are persecuted by this world because of the times and the culture. We easily stick out to people of this world and can be easy targets for them. It can be tempting to just do things to try to fit in with other people. For the Church at Pergamum, God told them to repent, and I think this is even more relatable to us. I know a lot of churches now are watering things down and even changing things so they can have influence and get people into their doors. Churches are flying rainbow flags, etc. when they should be teaching the Word and telling people that yes God loves you, but God is also a judge and everyone will have to give account of their life in the end.

2. Of what specifically should we as a community of believers comprised of all churches repent?

We must repent. The Church needs to teach the Word and all aspects of the Word. It cannot just send you with feel good messages and completely leave out all of the parts about God being an eternal judge and how we have responsibilities.

3. In what ways does the Spirit redirect our lives to get us back on the right path? Do you find places where you tend to resist the Spirit?

This is something that I often talk to my best friend about. If I haven't mentioned it yet, or if you haven't yet figured it out, my best friend is Kristina Sinitsin, who is taking this class. We actually met at Abundant Life on a mission trip to Honduras and our bond is stronger than sisters. In this friendship, she helps keep me accountable, and I help keep her accountable. We both have different battles that we face but we also have a lot of the same hurts and similar experiences. I have talked to her about how I get a great sense of conviction. For example, if I am doing something I know I shouldn't be doing, or even thinking about it. I forget who said it, I think it was Pastor Vlad, the Holy spirit is like the bumps on the center and the side of the road. The holy spirit helps you stay going straight on God's path for your life, and when you start to get off course, the Holy Spirit guides you back.

4. What reorienting path needs to be taken for the church to be faithful to Christ?

I think the reorienting path that the church needs to take to be faithful to Christ is to just walk by faith and get our heads out of all of the media, negativity, and living in this world mentality.

If you have time, write out a prayer that expresses your heartfelt experience from studying these letters to Smyrna and Pergamum. Do you have something to praise God for? Do you have something you would like to confess to God?

What has stirred my spirit is just the immense magnitude of our God. I have been so highly favored as a child of God, and I am looking forward to seeing what else he has in store for my life.