

## Week 1: Spiritual Learning Journal

### 1. Repentance

#### Scriptures:

Rev 2:5

“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

Repentance requires us to use our memories to remember what we had before we sinned or “fell”. To remember those “first works”. And there are consequences if we do not repent, i.e., Jesus will remove our lampstand. We cannot stay as we are without consequences. This is addressed to a group of believers and not to an individual. We know what we need to do to repent...recognize that we are not doing what we use to do...do the first works. Need to remember that to repent means to change your mind...to turn the other way...it is a real change of heart and mind...a deep desire to do those first works...those works we did when our faith was fresh and new. Jesus does not give us a lot of time to make up our minds to repent...He will come “quickly”.

Rev 2:16

“Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Once again, Jesus calls them to repent quickly or he will come and fight against them with the sword of His mouth. These are people who are tolerated in the church body who are blatantly sinning. Jesus will fight them the same way He will fight his enemies in the last battle (with the sword of His mouth). Failure to repent causes you to be subject to swift judgment.

Rev 2:21

“And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.[fn]

Jesus gives us time to repent. But sometimes that doesn't work.

Rev 2:22

“Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their[fn] deeds.

Lack of repentance may cause Jesus to bring sickness and tribulation on the individual. One individual can lead others to sin, too, and they will suffer the same chastisement.

Rev 3:3

Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

We are to use our memories of how we first came to believe to hold fast to our faith and repent of our sins. If we do not "watch" (watch what? Our state of faith? To keep from sin? To hold fast?) and Jesus comes, he will come in a time and way we do not know...like a thief.

Rev 3:19

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Jesus will not let us remain in a fallen state, He will rebuke and chasten...do what He needs to do to bring us back to Him. Therefore it behooves us to be zealous for him and repent so he does not have to chasten and rebuke. It implies that we CAN do this...be zealous and repent.

Rev 9:20

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

Even things sent from God to chasten and rebuke (plagues) will not lead some to repentance... they will continue to worship other gods (demons and material things that cannot see, hear nor walk). Why would a man choose to worship such things? Deception?

Rev 9:21

And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries<sup>[fn]</sup> or their sexual immorality or their thefts

Other sins were also held onto by some...murders, sorceries, sexual immorality, thefts. Pretty much all the 10 commandments have been broken and unrepented of.

Rev 16:9

And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

Even when “scorched by great heat” ...under strong physical distress...these sinners would not repent but actually blasphemed God...knowing He had power over what they were suffering from. They were stubbornly holding on to their “sin”... Was repenting not enough? Did they also need to give God the glory? It seems to imply that here if one repents, you will also give God glory. More than just changing your behavior but embarrassing God who forgives.

Rev 16:11

They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Their pain and sores did not lead to repentance but actually the opposite...blaspheming God. It reveals such a stubborn, hard heart towards God.

Questions:

- a. What do you learn about repentance?

There are churches who need to repent.

To evaluate how their present actions no longer please God by comparing them with those they did when they first heard the Gospel and were saved. Compare their current “works” with their “first works” when their faith was new and fresh and innocent. Remembering the past will help to evaluate the present.

To no longer tolerate individuals in the church that are blatantly sinning and unrepentant. Need to purify the church body. The church is judged as a whole and not just as individuals. Jesus will come and fight these individuals with the sword of His mouth which is the weapon He uses in the last battle.

Lack of repentance brings a swift response from Christ. There is no avoiding it since He will not let you stay in your sin but will chasten you like an earthly father who chastens his son whom he loves. He may actually take away your “lampstand”...your identity as a church?...your portion of the Holy Spirit?... your witness to the world around you, i.e. your “light”?

Those who are completely hardened to God’s presence:

There will be those in the last days that no matter what form of judgment comes upon them will not repent but will stubbornly hold onto their sinful ways. They will break many of

the ten commandments...and suffer greatly for these acts...and that suffering will just cause them to continue to blaspheme God and not turn to Him for forgiveness...a completely hardened heart.

b. How do these verses compare to Romans 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; and 2 Peter 3:9?

It seems that the time for the Lord's patience has run out. Perhaps because the end of the age is near and judgment is coming, the Lord is urging His children to "come clean" and correct those things that have slipped over time...to purify and sanctify in preparation for the end. The Lord could be patient, kind, and long suffering before but now time is short and quick action is needed to keep judgment from falling on these churches. The age of grace is coming to a close.

And there will be some who will not be reached by Lord's goodness and long suffering. There are people to whom God has not "granted repentance" (2 Timothy 2:25).

Romans 2:4

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

2 Timothy 2:24-26

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us,<sup>[fn]</sup> not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

c. What would be the evidence of repentance from the Bible's perspective and yours?

A change in behavior and attitude. No outward sinful behavior but also an attitude of love and appreciation for what Christ has done for us... A love for goodness, an attitude of worship that gives God the glory for it all. A change in priorities and desires where the things of God are given first place in life and a genuine love and concern for others, especially fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. An understanding and appreciation for "heavenly" things...a view of life in the face of eternity.

d. Write out a prayer to God that incorporates the need for and expresses repentance.

Father, thank you for giving us Jesus, Your only Son, to pay the price for our sin and open the door to Your presence. You desire that we all become more and more like Your Son...to be transformed into His likeness so that we can be salt and light and portray You, Father, to the world around us. Search my heart, Oh Lord, and shine Your light on those areas that fall short of Your love and standard for my life. I pray for the spirit of conviction and repentance as You reveal these sins to me so that I may turn away from them and toward You...to replace them with Your manifest goodness and love in my life and to more and more reflect Jesus in my thoughts, words, and deeds. I know that all my strength to change comes from You and to You be all the glory, honor, and praise. I ask this 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)

*Before this verse a description of the three angels who are flying around: one has the gospel to preach and is urging people to fear God and give glory to Him because the time of His judgement has come, a second is describing how the nations who have followed Babylon are drinking of the wine of wrath due to her fornication; and a third one proclaiming that those who worship the beast and his image will also drink of the wine of wrath. And then all of a sudden the patient saints are mentioned who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. So perhaps they are blessed when die because they no longer have to contend with those who are perishing...among whom they are laboring...and their works will not be forgotten. Right after this verse the one like the Son of Man on a cloud reaps with a sickle and told to reap the harvest and there is a succession of angels and events to fill the winepress of the wrath of God from the clusters of vines on the earth resulting in much blood.*

Questions: I have so many questions about this passage...what is the reason that these patient saints are mentioned here? It seems to interrupt the progression of the story being told except to give a contrast to the judgement that is being played out here.. Perhaps that is enough...or perhaps it is referring back to the beginning of the chapter where it talks about the 144,000 who are with Christ on Mount Zion to contrast their final state of being compared to the lost.

**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)

Once again, this verse is placed in the middle of a description of judgment on those that will not repent (the bowl judgments). It seems a strange place to put this. It seems to encourage us to keep watching for Him and not to focus on what is going on around us...if "garments" are symbolic of righteous of God that we are to be clothed in as children of God, this verse implies that we have a part to play in keeping our righteousness "ready" for the day of His coming. It sounds like we are being encouraged to live each day as if it were our last...to have no regrets as to how we are living if it were.

Questions: What is the significance of mentioning the garments? He is blessed if he watches and keeps his garments lest he walk naked and they see his shame. Who would see his shame? Why is this important? Does this imply that believers cannot be clothed in righteousness and thus walk around naked?

**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)

Before this verse there is praise and worship happening to the Lord God for his judgments on Babylon who had shed the blood of His servants. These came from a great multitude in heaven, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. There is also rejoicing that the time for the marriage of the Lamb has come. There will be a marriage supper and the ones invited will be blessed.

Question: What would the hearers of that time think of this? What is the significance of being invited to a marriage feast? I have such a hard time relating to this culture and time. I understand that it will be a great honor but I know I am missing something here.

**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.

This verse comes after the description of the binding of the dragon and the casting of him into the bottomless pit for a thousand years during which the souls of those who were beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God and had not worshipped the beast nor received his mark reigned with

Christ for a thousand years. This was “the first resurrection” and not everyone was resurrected to live during this time so those that were, are said to be blessed and holy and priests of God and of Christ. After this verse it is told what will transpire after the thousand years are up, i.e. Satan is released to deceive the nations all over the world to gather for battle against the saints but God destroys them with fire out of heaven and the devil is finally thrown into the lake of fire joining the beast and the false prophet who were put there before the 1000-year reign. Then comes the Great White Throne Judgment when all are resurrected and judged for their works that are recorded in books and also the Book of Life was opened to determine if their names were written in it.

Questions: Many...who exactly will be alive during the 1000-year reign? The description seems pretty specific to those that were beheaded during the tribulation for defying the beast. Where are the other believers like us who lived prior to that time? And there seems to be two things used for the Great White Throne judgment: Works and if your name is in the Book of Life. If your name is in the Book of Life, doesn't that mean you are a follower of Jesus? Does that mean there will be believers who are part of this Great White Throne judgment? I was taught that we were not part of this. It seems that whether or not your name is in the Book of Life “trumps” whether or not your good works count for anything since only those whose names are written there will escape the lake of fire. So what is the significance of including judgment for works?

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

Question: How do we obey the words of this prophecy or “keep” that as the NKJV states this verse? What I have gleaned from the book is to stay faithful and true to the Lord...to be an overcomer...to continue to faithfully follow Jesus and His teachings. Is there more here?

**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)

I guess this verse answers my question to a degree. It makes it sound so easy...it is comforting to know that there was only one perfect person who ever lived on this earth and that we are all in the process of sanctification...working out our faith with fear and trembling...

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?

I included this part in the sections above.

B. Several times throughout Revelation John describes God as the “one who is and who was and who is to come” (1:4).

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

**Rev. 1:4** 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, (NRS)

**1:8** "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, **who is and who was and who is to come**, the Almighty. (NRS)

**4:8** And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, **who was and is and is to come.**" (NRS)

**11:17** singing, "We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, **who are and who were**, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. (NRS). *Note that this verse and the next has only 2 of the elements of being.*

**Revelation 16:5** And I heard the angel of the waters say, "You are just, O Holy One, **who are and were**, for you have judged these things; (NRS)

2. Using the chapter and sectional headings, consider the context. What is going on in the verses or paragraph sections just before this title is used and what is going on in the verses or paragraph sections following the mention of God in this way? How does considering the surrounding context give you insight into (a) why God is described in this way and (b) why John varies the name from 3 elements to 2 elements of being?

**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.

No verse can stand alone without risking almost certain misunderstanding. Context is crucial to truly glean the meaning of any verse. Such misunderstandings lead to wrong thinking and, if left unchallenged, to many errors in our beliefs thus undermining our faith and walk with the Lord. It may take a little more time and energy, but it is so worth it to get a fuller picture, but I also come up with more questions. This is definitely a life-long endeavor. I also had a very hard time gleaning anything from the context on the topic of “blessed”. I don’t know why.

### 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.*

The struggle that the first century Christians faced in Ephesus has a lot of similarities to our struggle today since we all are faced with the challenge of staying true to the Lord in the face of trying to create a prosperous life for ourselves and our families. The Ephesian Christians had a more difficult time of it, I think, since their resistance to emperor worship and all the ways it infiltrated their lives would have been much more apparent to their fellow Roman citizens that we may experience today, at least in the U.S. Their non-conformity would have appeared to be treasonous and subversive resulting in criticism and persecution by those around them who would have felt threatened. Today, we can resist sharing our beliefs or confronting the beliefs of non-believers and thus stay "hidden" but our way of life does not directly threaten our government because we believe in actively supporting our leaders even if we do not necessarily agree with their politics as long as that support does not cause us to violate our faith. The inner battle would have been very similar, though. Are we doing what pleases God? Are we fulfilling His purpose and plan for our lives? How much of what we choose to say and do is due to fear and how much to prudence? Are we missing opportunities to spread the Gospel and reveal the love of the Father to those around us by our choices? I think this will be a life-long challenge.

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?

The Ephesian believer may have seen a similarity in the portrayal of Jesus here to that of emperor worship in that He appears in an awe-inspiring if not truly frightening vision...powerful and intimidating, surrounded by golden lampstands giving Him His own "temple". He is also knowledgeable of their activities and commends them. As for His criticisms, He communicates that there would be consequences if not addressed and corrected. From what I have heard here about emperor worship, these appear to be similar traits. Jesus is presenting Himself in a way they would be able to relate to but then takes it up a notch, emphasizing His superiority over the emperor and whatever threat he may have to them. So like Jesus to meet us where we are at and then show us more of Him.

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.

Father, it is so easy to become too focused on this natural life and miss what is truly important which is my love for You and how that love is expressed in my everyday life. I pray that the Holy Spirit would give me eyes to see where I have lost my first love...where the world has crept into my life and pushed You out. Convict me and help me to truly repent and find my way back to those first things that please You. My sole desire is to please You and follow You all the days of my life and fulfill Your plan for me. You are my life! You are faithful, forgiving, patient and ever present...hearing every prayer...guiding my thoughts, my words, my steps, my prayers. I am trusting in Your love and wisdom to bring me through to the end in a way that brings glory, honor, and praise to You. 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: There are many churches in the world who are being actively persecuted for their faith. They are dealing with real threats to their lives and their families. I remember Pastor Vlad's testimony of how he held to his beliefs while growing up in the former Soviet Union and when faced with having to serve in the army and their requirement to take a vow of allegiance. How he respectfully but firmly followed the Lord in his refusal to take that vow and how the Lord brought him through. Not every persecuted believer has such an outcome and this letter reveals that death may be in the cards for some. The most important thing in the Lord's eyes seems to be our faithfulness under all circumstances that come our way. His promise to reward us should point us toward what is truly important...where we will be spending eternity. This life is just a drop in the bucket of eternity but it is such a challenge to remember that and keep our thoughts on heavenly things.

For the Church at Pergamon: I am sure in the persecuted countries today there are people that hide their faith out of fear. Who can really blame them? Have we been tested that way? In what ways are we tested? Even if our tests are not as severe as those the church at Pergamon and other cities in the Roman Empire faced, do we pass them? Are we even willing to face disapproval or rejection of our faith from those around us when we dare to share our beliefs? Do we let opportunities pass us by to reach out with the gospel to those that are hurting around us? Just even to "open the door"? My husband who had a passion for evangelism would say that he would take an opportunity if offered to broach the topic of God and Jesus with whoever he met to see if there was an openness to discuss. If not, he would change the subject but he was willing to see if the Lord had something there for him to pursue. I am not that brave but have felt a "push" from the Lord at times to share where I spend my time and my priorities to see if there may be some curiosity. And I am more and more willing to state my faith in God and His provision and presence when faced with a trial. I come out of a church background where our faith was a "personal" matter so evangelism did not get much traction. This "old dog" is slowly learning "new tricks"... This new season of my life is giving me more time to meditate on my faith...what pleases God...how to align myself with His plans and purposes...to learn how to have "the mind of Christ" active in my life.

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

I believe we need to repent of not trusting God and taking advantage of the opportunities He gives us to share our faith/our testimony in our sphere of influence. To not addressing the blatant sin in our lives that we accept because culture accepts it. Of not striving to let the love of the Father shine through how we live our lives so that it can draw others to Christ. Of not evaluating our priorities to see what would please Him and advance His kingdom but settling for momentary pleasures and benefits.

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?

The Spirit has so many ways to redirect our lives! I think He truly tries to get us to do this ourselves...to partner with Him as He works to make us more like Christ... but He is willing to up the pressure if we choose to ignore Him or resist. The end result is what matters the most to Him. When we sin, there are consequences, and we should be learning from experiences but we need to be always listening for His voice and perspective on what we are experiencing and not our own human interpretation. He also brings special people into our lives to help file off the "rough edges". He leads us to anointed teachers and preachers who have words for us that will help us see our issues and His path. He opens doors and closes doors.

Letting His peace and joy rule in my heart is one of the places where I tend to resist the Spirit. This is not "intentional" but a learned practice I developed over the years of my life. I grew up with parents that were opposite in how they viewed the world. My father was a "glass half full" guy and my mom was a "glass half empty" gal. They balanced each other pretty good, though. I leaned toward my dad's point of view until I heard a teaching on how important how we see a situation can be. We can focus on the negative or focus on the positive. The situation doesn't change but the negative approach saps you of your strength and creativity and ability to hear from God while the positive approach energizes you and helps you see possible outcomes and invites our very positive God to speak to us. I have intentionally been striving for the positive approach and found it amazing!

Trusting in His Word regardless of what my analytical brain tells me is also a constant struggle. My brain ruled for too long without opposition, but I am getting there. I am surrounded by people who exhibit a much greater faith and trust in Him than I have ever experienced, and the Lord has directed me to teachers who are constantly testifying to His faithfulness and power and love. I know that this is possible for me as well, so I am going to persevere and pursue Him for the rest of my life.

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

Keep to the mission as Christ laid it out for the first believers. Spread the Gospel and make disciples. Resist ungodly distractions both inside and outside the church. Hold love in the highest esteem. Pursue the Holy Spirit and focus time, energy and talent on learning, discussing, and sharing God's Word. I just heard a teaching from Bill Johnson where he noted that Jesus totally emptied Himself and was filled

with the Father and this is an example He set for us to follow. To empty ourselves and let the Holy Spirit flow through us, directing our thoughts, filling us with His Presence, managing our emotions through that presence. Quite a challenge and life-long pursuit since He will always be revealing more and more of Himself to us if we continue to pursue Him and His love. How powerful the church would be if more and more believers took up this challenge.

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?

If you would like to keep your prayer secret, then just write out a sentence or two about what you have learned this week that has stirred your spirit and made you want to know God or his Word even more.

Father, I come before you to repent of the many ways that I have fallen short of Your best for me. For not listening and following as You have guided me. Wash me clean of my sins with Your Precious Blood. Create in me a pure heart. Give me eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to receive Your Word for me each day. Help me to continue to press into You...to seek You... I know You are always working and never stop and You will complete the work You started in me. Help me to keep the things of heaven always in my mind as the context for living. My desire is to be a channel for Your love and mercy and grace. Help me to cleanse that channel and remove any obstruction to that flow so the Father's love can be shed abroad in my sphere of influence. To You be the glory, honor, and praise! Amen.