

## 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?

I absolutely loved the line above, "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". As I grow and mature both in age and in my relationship with God, I have come from a place of being obsessed with His comfort and grace to really embracing obedience to Him. I am loving seeing how the first few churches we've learned about have needed different types of encouragement or correction, or often both! I think that zooming out like that and seeing a bit of ourselves in each of the churches is so valuable. There are so many encouragements and corrections that apply to our own Church today because modern America is so vastly diverse.

2. Of what specifically should we as a community of believers comprised of all churches repent? Purely in my own opinion, I think we should repent of our obsession with engulfing ourselves in social/political/economic and current event causes and plights. Seeing the collective Church take sides, stances, and strict opinions on the cares of this world bothers my spirit. If we really believe what we read in the Word, and if we really believe in who we are and who God is, then politics and social divides shouldn't be our fight. Ideally, I believe we're supposed to be one of the few safe places, and a shining example to the distraught world.

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?

I find that the Spirit can sometimes be tricky in the ways it redirects us. For me, at least, I find that He appeals more to my natural sensibilities (ie. He gave me a brain and expects me to steward and use it properly!) than He does through flashing lights and smoke and Oz-like moments. I find that He gives me **opportunities** more often than direct answers or immediate provision.

I find that the only places I am aware that I may tend to resist the Spirit is when I'm weighing out a moral/ethical/social decision. I know that I have an absolutely huge and inclusive heart, more so than most Christians would find to be allowable. So I often have to weigh out whether it is Him or my own preconceived guilt that I may not be holding His precepts strictly enough when I'm trying to make a call on whether something is ok with me or not.

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

In the last few months, I more deeply studied the Torah. And now, diving in to Revelation, I have seen so clearly how necessary it is to be **obedient** to the Lord. I wouldn't presume to have any answers or suggestions for a path the church needs to take, but I know that (especially in our post-covid world) we have had an awesome opportunity to recalibrate ourselves. I think it's paramount to return to the awe, wonder, reverence, and worship of who our God is. And that

should lead us to a new level of obedience and relationship with Him. That would probably be a good way to start to reorient ourselves.

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.

I pray that I have enough humility, reverence, and obedience to You that I can hear both Your encouragement *and* Your correction. As it says in the Psalm, create in me a clean heart so that I can hear and serve You, so that I can in turn teach others Your ways.