

Linda Lowe, Spiritual Learning Journals for Weeks 5-7

Week 5: Spiritual Learning Journal

The Letters to Thyatira and Sardis are so different yet it is helpful to compare them and think about how these churches would have heard each other's letters.

Fill in the following chart (or create your own):

	Thyatira	Sardis
Description of Christ	Eyes like flames of fire; feet like fine brass	He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars
What Jesus speaks well of...	Their works, love, service, faith and patience	Nothing
What Jesus is not pleased with	Their last works are more than their first	Nothing
What does the Church need to do?	Hold fast to what they have until He comes	Be watchful and strengthen what remains that is about to die; remember how they received and heard; hold fast and repent
What promise is given to the one who overcomes?	Power of the nations; the Morning Star	They will walk with Him in white; clothed in white garments; will not have their names blotted out of the Book of Life; will confess their names before the Father and His angels

1. What do you think Thyatira could learn from what Jesus said to Sardis?

They could learn that the road they have been travelling on could lead to much harsher judgment and consequences. That they risk all the good they have to die and be left with nothing that pleases the Lord.

2. What do you think Sardis could learn from what Jesus said to Thyatira?

They could learn how much they have lost. How dire their circumstances are now. If they are a proud church, they have lost so much and stand to lose even more...to be of little consequence in the future kingdom since Jesus "only" promises that those who have not soiled their garments will "just" get clean white ones and not be discredited before the Father and His angels while Thyatira will be given power of the nations and the Morning Star. I don't mean to diminish these promises but just to draw a comparison with what He promises Thyatira which would imply that they would also have these white garments and support before the Father.

3. Do you think that the 7 churches benefited from hearing what the Spirit was saying to each of them? Explain your answer.

I would think so. To have the Lord make public His commendations, condemnations, directives and promises to all of them would have added emphasis to their importance to these believers, I think. They could no longer ignore the areas where Christ had issues. They are also now accountable to each other in a way. Each would be comparing their letter to the other six. Perhaps those with "better" letters would have compassion on those who are in more need of correction. Hopefully those in need of more correction would not resent those who found more favor. I am sure there was some of both here since humans will be humans.

It also reminds me of when I was in college and the first time you got any feedback on how you were doing was when you took the midterm. You are already halfway through the course and now you find out "officially" how well you are doing...whether your study methods were working or not? You may think you are doing well and getting the material, but you are not sure until the professor actually tests you. I found that pretty unsettling after being in high school where you got more regular opportunities to gauge your progress and hence more time to make adjustments. I am sure the Lord had been speaking to them individually all along since He is always working in us and with us to transform us into the image of Christ but if self-deception was really taking a hold on their minds which seems to be implied here, then a more direct approach would have been needed.

Week 6: Spiritual Learning Journal

We have just completed Jesus' letters to the 7 churches. So many of your discussions have already prepared you for this week's task. All of you have noted connections to the church today. All of you have been moved deeply by Christ's prophetic oversight of the churches.

1. This week, write a letter to the Church of America from the Lord using the structure you have come to expect: (1) a description of Jesus from the descriptions of Christ in chapter 1 (or any of the letters), (2) what Jesus would commend the church for, (3) what you think Jesus would rebuke the church for, (4) the challenge you imagine lies before us in the form of an exhortation or warning from Christ, and (5) a promise that you think the church needs to hear.
2. After you complete your letter, pray about what you have written. Then share in a sentence or two how this assignment and prayer impacted you personally.

Note to Julianne:

I am writing this letter as a concerned "sister in the Lord" to the Church of America since I feel uncomfortable trying to write a letter "from the Lord"...only He can truly judge, commend, exhort and comfort any body of believers and we are instructed not to criticize another master's servants. He is the only one that truly sees and understands each person and where they are in their walks. Just wanted to communicate that to you. I hope you understand.

- 1) My letter to the Church of America:

To my fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord in the Church of America, I write to you in the hopes to encourage you and exhort you to a higher place in the Lord by sharing my perceptions of what I see in the body of Christ in America.

First, I remind you of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God who came to the earth to show us the Father, to teach us His Word, to bring His Kingdom near to us, and to give His life as a holy, pure and acceptable sacrifice for all the sins of mankind...future, past and present...and thus open a door to the Father...direct access to His Presence and His Throne of Grace. By this, God the Father, who willing gave His Son, displayed to us forever His endless love for us...that He truly had a plan from the very beginning to save us and make right the sin that Adam brought into the world. We now have a glorious High Priest who sits at the right hand of the Father, continuously interceding for us, who the Father has glorified and placed as the High King of heaven and earth. Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection also made it possible for them to send us the Holy Spirit to take His place in our lives...to fill us, heal us, guide us, teach us, strengthen us...provide all we need to succeed here on earth and fulfill the purpose for which the Father created us.

In light of these glorious truths, I ask you to consider where you are in your walk with Him... Are you striving to grow in your faith? Are you putting Him first in your life...giving Him priority over all things? Is He the first thing you think of in the morning when you wake or the last thought at night before you

fall asleep? Is He the source of your strength? Your reason for living? Your focus? Or have you let these things "slide"...have you let other lesser things take first place in your life? Do you feel a hunger for more of Him deep inside you? Do you hunger for a deeper, more intense and real fellowship with Him? If not, why not? If so, what are you doing to feed that hunger? You are faithful in giving and service. Many of you respond to the call to help those in need whether they be in continuous need such as the poor among us or have been victims of disasters of many kinds all over the world. You give and give and I am sure the Lord sees your heart in this and is pleased. But these acts of kindness and service are not enough. The first thing the Lord wants from us is our hearts...for us to recognize our place as His children...beloved and blessed and gifted... to be shining lights and channels for His love and mercy and grace to each other and this fallen world....to bring His presence into our spheres of influence so that all can see and experience the love of the Father and respond that that love. But, in order to fulfill this call, we need to seek Him first and foremost...laying all before Him...acknowledging that He is Lord over all the areas of our lives. By seeking this, we allow Him to increase our capacity to be that channel for His Spirit to move through us to those around us.

This all takes time...truly a life-long pursuit...we never arrive since He is truly eternal and His love, mercy and grace always and forever have more for us to experience, learn, and grow in our ability to let flow through us. I encourage you to take the time to evaluate where you feel you are in this process. Are you still "in the game"? Are you weak and tired? He sees where you are and wants to strengthen and refresh you. You just need to come to Him and let His Spirit convict you of your sins and grant you the spirit of repentance so you can once again be in close fellowship with Him. He will fill you with His Presence and lead you into worship where the streams of living water will start to flow through you again...refreshing you and flowing from you to others around you.

Please do not let your life end with regrets. We will all be called to give an account of what we did with what He gave us in this life. How would you answer that question now? There is still time while you draw breathe to repent and return to Him...to change direction and walk that path He has for you. Do not wait...do it now. There are brothers and sisters around you who want to walk this out with you and support you with prayer and fellowship. Ask the Lord to guide you to them... Find that special place in the Body of Christ that He has designed for you. You will find true joy, happiness, and fulfillment as you walk out His plan for you.

2) How does this letter make me feel?

I think I have wanted to say this to so many of my brothers and sisters in Christ over the years. I remember once my mom asked me what it meant to "grow in the Lord" and I didn't know how to answer her question. That really upset me since I realized that I was not really understanding why Christ had made me, saved me, and filled me with His Holy Spirit. I didn't understand what He wanted to do inside of me and, if I could not even answer my own mom's question, how was I going to be able to help others? Part of the reason behind this lack is that I was not getting the teaching I needed to understand who I am in Christ... I had spent too much time in the conventional church under motivational, human-based teaching. God was so faithful to keep me growing in the knowledge of His Word since I was regularly listening to teachings from good Bible-based teachers so my foundation in the Word was

growing and pretty good for the situation I was in. But taking that knowledge and internalizing it... owning it...knowing how to apply it to my life...to my understanding of my identity... That took a change in churches to one that was focusing on growing in the Spirit, growing in faith, growing in worship, growing in faith...and a faith that went beyond Sunday mornings. Looking back, I can see that this really had to wait until I was in an environment to embrace that identity. If it happened while I was still in the conventional church, I would have just been extremely frustrated and it may have led to sin...to leaving a commitment that I had made...to causing damage to the unity of my marriage. God is so good...He sees it all and knows it all... He truly finds a way when there seems to be no way.

Week 7: Spiritual Learning Journal

Choose one of the 7 churches that have impacted you the most and review their struggles and pressures. Consider the task Christ put before them so that they can overcome.

1. **What impact do you think this opening vision would have had on this church after receiving their letter? For example, would it be comforting? Explain.**

In **Numbers 11:1-2**, the Israelites who had just been freed from the exploitation and oppression of Pharaoh began to complain in the desert. God was angry and the fire of his anger consumed the outlying part of the camp. And Scripture says that “the people cried out to Moses, and **he prayed to the LORD**, and the fire abated.”

1 Samuel 12 records the last judge’s farewell to the people after establishing a king with a warning and a promise: “If you will fear the LORD and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well; but if you will not heed the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king,” (1 Sam. 12:14-15). ***In other words, we get the leaders we deserve.*** Yet, **Samuel prayed for the people** reminding them, “For the LORD will not cast away his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. Moreover, as for me, *far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.* Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king,” (1 Sam. 12:22-25).

Ephesians 6:18 reminds us, “Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.”

Colossians 4:2, “Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.”

1 Timothy 2:1, “I urge you, first, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf and give thanks for them.”

Always remember **1 John 2:27**, “But you have received an anointing, the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don’t need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true -- it is not a lie. So just as he has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.” *Be aware of this anointing as you complete the following task:*

2. **Write out an intercessory, heartfelt prayer for this church knowing that there is a church or churches out there struggling with similar problems and in need of a similar correction. Trust God for these brothers and sisters you never met, for one day you may see them in heaven and this prayer was instrumental in helping them overcome!**

1. What impact do you think this opening vision would have had on this church after receiving their letter? For example, would it be comforting? Explain.

I am thinking of my prior church and what one of the seven in Revelation best describes my impression of them. I don't know if there is an "exact" fit but the closest is Pergamos, I think. My prior church was really into the annual ham loaf dinner, chicken barbeques, rummage sales, summer concerts, but was not interested in small groups that focused on Bible study or classes that focused on a deeper life in the Spirit or being open to what more the Holy Spirit would want to do in and through them that was beyond their current experiences. This was very sad to me since after many pastors who came out of very liberal seminaries where they were taught that they could pick and choose what to believe and teach out of the Scriptures and did not actively seek the gifts of the Spirit, we finally were blessed with one that believed in the whole Word of God and was baptized in the Holy Spirit and earnestly sought to grow in the gifts. Unfortunately, even though he has made some inroads with a few of the members of the congregation, there is a long history of resistance, and I am not sure if there is enough time before he is reassigned to another church to make a lasting impact.

The one issue that bothers me the most here was their willingness to believe in more than one way to God.... This seems so basic to me. If you are a born-again believer, how can you believe this or even entertain the thought? They did not seem to grasp that salvation is not about how "good" a person is but whether they believe that Jesus was the Son of God and died for them, taking their punishment on Himself. I have had numerous conversations with members to try to determine why they would believe this, and my conclusion is that they lack a strong foundation in the Word. This makes sense since very few participate in Bible study groups or show an interest in learning more. There is definitely no confrontational teaching that would cause them to question this belief. I was a strong advocate for annual adult Sunday school classes each year to review the foundations of our faith but there was not enough interest to make this happen.

I fear there are a lot of denominational churches who reflect this type of culture. The members believe they are Christian and that Christ is their Savior but have compromised on key tenets of the faith and do not even realize their error. They also have not confronted the lordship of Christ issue in their lives, thus they struggle with the consequences of sin that they allow in their lives and are missing out on going deeper with Him or knowing what a victorious life in Christ looks like while at the same time keeping busy with good works, fund raisers, and humanitarian pursuits.

So, how do I think this type of church would respond to this fourth chapter in Revelation? I think they would be shocked. To be confronted with the reality of who God is in all His majesty and splendor...that this was not just a "story" or allegory to read and ignore... Would they wonder how differently they would have lived if they had taken this in as truth? How would this majestic, all powerful, King view the choices they have made in their lives? Perhaps some would also feel regret...that they missed this and wasted all this time when there was so much more to experience and learn and grow in if they had given Him first place in their lives.

2. **Write out an intercessory, heartfelt prayer for this church knowing that there is a church or churches out there struggling with similar problems and in need of a similar correction. Trust God for these brothers and sisters you never met, for one day you may see them in heaven and this prayer was instrumental in helping them overcome!**

Father, I lift up these brothers and sisters in the Lord who are living out their lives blind to the truth of Your Majesty and Lordship over their lives. I pray that You would have mercy on them...that You would grant them the spirit of conviction and repentance that they may see the error of their ways and be able to repent and turn back to You, making You first again in their lives. For those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, I pray that they would remember what it was like when they first gave their lives to You and cried out to You for mercy. Help them to remember that moment when You responded and gave them a new heart. Help them go back to that time of awe and humility and gratitude...and see how You would have them live now in the light of that truth. For those who may think they are born-again but are not, I pray that you would grant them saving faith...open their eyes to their true need for You and Your gift of salvation. I pray You would give all of them a deep hunger to know You better...a deep hunger for the Word...a deep hunger for fellowship with the Holy Spirit. And I pray You would provide the resources and teachers they need to feed this hunger. I bind the enemy who is deceiving these precious people...that he would no longer be able to blind them to Your truth...and I pray for a release of Your light into their hearts and minds...strengthen their inner spirit man so they can choose You over everything else. I know all things are possible with You, Lord. I know You love these people more than I can ever imagine and Your desire is for them to grow in faith, knowledge, trust, and love in You. Please make this happen in Jesus' Name. Amen.