

WEEK 1 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (a)

What one thing have I learned from this lesson and/or class discussion that caught my attention and has the potential to impact my personal or spiritual development? One thing that I learned from this week's teaching is that the Jewish people did not know who Jesus was and did not recognize Him even with all the prophecies that He fulfilled. Now, actually studying the Book of Matthew helps me as a 21st Century Gentile understand who Jesus was based on Old Testament prophecies that have there with fulfillment in the New Testament. However, quite frankly, I'm still at a loss to understand how or why the Jewish leaders, and people in general, did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. They were supposed to have been waiting and looking for Him, and in light of the prophecies culminating in all the signs, all the miracles, and all the teachings Jesus did during His three years of ministry---there is no denying who He was.

Although I know the Gospel of Matthew was not specifically written to me, I love the way he begins the story with the genealogy of Jesus to **LET ME KNOW** (a Gentile) who this person is, the One the Jews call the Messiah, the One they have been looking for ever since Jehovah God, in the Garden of Eden, said in the 3rd Chapter of Genesis, (after Adam and Eve disobeyed God).

¹⁵ "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

We see in Genesis, chapter 12, God beginning preparations to redeem fallen man when He says:

²¹ "Also for Adam and his wife the LORD made tunics of skin, and clothed them."

Then years later, God called this man Abraham and made a promise to him saying,

¹ "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.
² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.
³ I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Now, they had this Bible in prophecies that were orally passed down through history from one generation to the next. They had a systematic process which ensured conveyance of these prophecies, almost word-for-word. I realize that they were not trying to organize or come up with ways of structuring themselves. God chose them to be His people as He had promised Abraham years before. He told them who they were (His own people); how they were to live (separated and consecrated unto God), and what they were to do (witness to the world, the heathen, the Gentiles) of the love, mercy and goodness of God). He provided for them---not just food and clothing, but land, victories in battles where they reaped the benefits/spoils, and so much more.

I love the way Mark and Luke supplement's Matthew's Gospel. By reading the synoptic Gospels and John Gospel, side by side completes the story of the events in Jesus' life---they fill in gaps for one another, and present Jesus from different perspectives. I like what our Instructor said that "John's Gospel completes the four-fold perspective of the Apostles testimony about Jesus," since John's perspective shows a different side of the Messiah, the man called Jesus, that the other Gospels did not specifically address the fact that Jesus was God in the flesh---the Word.

I agree with Craig Keener in the video, the New Testament Editor for the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, "Basically everything in the Bible addresses a cultural situation. Sometimes they are situation specific, so, we need the context, the literary context, the background---(whether from outside the Bible or from elsewhere within the Bible) it is something that really opens up the text in a fresh new way. Sometimes people get frustrated because the Bible seems like a foreign book to them, but often it seems foreign because of the figures of speech, the images, and customs and so on. But when we explain those, then the Bible becomes intriguing again and people are able to get what the Bible was addressing."

I understand this because when I was first born again, I was told to read the Gospel of John in the NT portion of the Bible, since I was a NT believer. However, what I found was I had to read the OT as well in order to shine light on things referenced in the NT. The NT tends to refer to many things in the OT, therefore, it should be required that every believer read the whole Bible---although I believe the Book of Ephesians is a better place to start for new believers to start. It took me a while to understand the word "Israel," that the Bible sometimes referred to Israel as a person who was previously named Jacob, or sometimes referred to a place called "Israel", or to a people called "Israel" whose God is the Living God. It was very confusing since I was reading the Bible for the first time on my own.

Learning that the Apostles told stories about Jesus, without anything being written down, as they journeyed all over, but that what they told eventually became what we call the Word of God today---is just so amazing. This course expounds on the origin of God's people, the Book known as the Bible, as well as our Savior, Himself---to bring the whole story into perspective, well, that's amazing. The Book of Matthew clearly defines who Jesus is, and without question, presents Him against the background of the Old Testament prophecies which are fulfilled in the New Testament by Jesus, Himself.

Another thing I didn't know was that the term "Gospel" was commonly used for announcing Caesar's deeds. I agree it's interesting that they chose that terminology since it spoke of military victories in campaigns led by Caesar, and that messengers were used to go ahead of Caesar and his entourage to the city to announce or herald his victorious campaigns. But given the reason for its use, I can see why this word would be adopted to refer to our Lord's arrival and John the Baptist being the forerunner or messenger, one crying in the wilderness of the Messiah's arrival. The Gospel is identified with spoken proclamation. Again, as I've learned, for the early church, the Gospel was not necessarily a written gospel, but rather a word on target; a word spoken to attentive ears; a word spoken to human needs; and a word to be spoken by interpretation and challenge.

Moreover, I learned in that "The Gospel can never be frozen; it's dynamic because people change; however, while the gospel never changes, **it adapts by re-telling the truth of Christ in ways that new cultures can understand!**" Now, I can understand that, and as I share the Gospel with others, as our Instructor, Julianne says, "where the Gospel is proclaimed, Christ is present. The Gospel continues to remember and testify to the Church's encounter with Christ." What a profound and timeless statement. God is so good. He wants everybody to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as a result of hearing the Gospel and inviting Him into their hearts.

The last thing I learned from this study this week is how the Christians and the Jews separated or went in different directions. For Christians, we dwell in Christ and Christ lives in us through the Holy Spirit. For the Jew, it's about reading and obeying the Torah. The Jews, as a group of people, are still waiting for their Messiah, today, even though Messiah has come and is living in the hearts of true believers, through the Holy Spirit, which includes me.

As I speak honestly with the Lord, I share with Him what it is about these insights that touches me so deeply and/or challenges how I am living my life. Do I learn something about the Lord I never saw before, about myself, about my life circumstances that need to be addressed? Every day I'm challenged with how I live my life---whether I'm living for Jesus or living for myself. I'm not obsessed about it, but I do try to make sure I don't think more highly of myself than I ought to think, I self-check myself. My God is so loving and merciful that I don't want to do anything that's not pleasing to Him. I want to be like the Berean's open-minded towards the Scriptures and receive God's message eagerly.

As I listen to the Lord without judgment, I let the Spirit draw me closer to Him. I thank Him for this gift of insight and Presence.

WEEK 1 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (c)

What have I changed my mind about because of this week's lesson and/or discussion? What is the basis or reason for this change of mind? What impact do I anticipate this change of mind could have on my spiritual life or the way I study Scripture?

Well, I have not changed my mind about anything in particular based on this week's class, however, I do have a better understanding of some things related to the Jewish people and what they possibly expected in terms of their Messiah, which when He presented didn't necessarily meet with their expectations. I think we can get so set in our ways and thinking that we can't see the forest for the trees.

Since I can be somewhat dogmatic about what I think and believe, sometimes to my own detriment, this can be seen as a "wake up" call to me to allow God to show me how He wants me to believe and the attitude with which I pursue understanding the word and application of the same in my everyday life.

So, I anticipate this change of mind about how I see, process and apply things will have a major impact on my spiritual life as well as the way I study Scripture. I don't want to be hardhearted about what I think, I want to be available, flexible and malleable for God to use. I want God to show me my heart from His perspective and shape it for the work He has called me to.

WEEK 2 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (a)

What one thing have I learned from this lesson and/or class discussion that caught my attention?

I learned several things from this class that I didn't know.

First, I learned how Matthew believed Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior, to the point that he methodically addressed issues, concerns and questions that any Jewish Priest, Scribe, Pharisee or Sadducee (for that matter) could or would have regarding the expected Messiah. Using the Old Testament prophecies, He left no stone unturned in this endeavor and provided evidence that demanded a verdict by his people.

Secondly, convinced as I am that the Jewish people should have known who Jesus was, King Herod was rather certain who Jesus was even as a baby or young child that he gathered information from the religious leaders who knew the Scriptures and prophecies of Messiah, the Royal Son of David, and he acted on that knowledge. His actions proved he was threatened by "He who is born King of the Jews." Even if these same religious leaders had not previously been aware or known about the coming Messiah from the Royal Son of David, once Herod made his inquiry, they became well aware of the Scriptures and OT prophecies pointing to Jesus, in order to respond to Herod. Although the religious leaders were also troubled about this possibility, they chose to act otherwise, in unbelief, and set the religious tone for the rest of Jesus' earthly life, which would culminate in His crucifixion.

Thirdly, as a result of the class reading and discussion on the Baptism of Jesus, and comparing the four Gospels side by side, to observe similarities and differences, I learned that Jesus had to be baptized first by John the Baptist to set the stage for His inclusion with His brothers, us, in all things. Water baptism was the venue that God used to bring about "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit," not just for Jesus, but for all those who would believe on the Son of God. This event opened the door for all believers to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, which can be followed by speaking in other tongues, allowing us to communicate with God through the Spirit, using a language that our unseen enemy, the Devil, cannot understand.

So, what have I learned from this lesson that has the potential to impact my personal or spiritual development?

Do I learn something about the LORD I never saw before, about MYSELF I never saw before, about my LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES I need to be addressed? For a deeper reading and understanding of the Word of God, I should bring to the table investigative questions, including who, what, when, where, why and how. Take time and think about what the Scripture means, in general, and what it means to me. Don't just look at the surface of the Scriptures but dig deeper to get at the meat of the Word. Stop reading the Word like it's just a novel and treat it like it's life's handbook. Couple my reading with prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open my eyes to the wondrous things in the Word.

As I speak honestly with the Lord, I share with him what it is about these insights that touches me so deeply and/or challenges how I am living my life. I thought I was already doing these things, but this class is showing me just how far off base I have been.

WEEK 2 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (c)

What have I changed my mind about because of this week's lesson and/or discussion? What is the basis or reason for this change of mind? What impact do I anticipate this change of mind could have on my spiritual life or the way I study Scripture?

The way I study the Bible because I need to understand the stories I'm reading. They are there for more than just casual reading. Not that I take the Word casually. It is my lifeline.

WEEK 3 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (a)

What one thing have I learned from this lesson and/or class discussion that caught my attention and has the potential to impact my personal or spiritual development? The Sermon on the Mount wasn't meant to be left in my mind as a good sermon but that Jesus was giving His church a new perspective and directive to live by. Do I go to church just to hear another sermon? What did I do with the sermons or messages I have already heard? Do I consider myself a disciple of Christ, and if so, am I obedient to what He has said?

I'd like to think I'm a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ since I accepted Him as my Savior, and because I read the Bible, attend church, serve in different ministries at ALCC, and make contributions to different charity causes. But, do these actions make me a disciple of Christ? Am I trying to live as under the law?

Lord, thank You for showing me what I'm doing. Create in me a clean heart and renew in me a right spirit. Help me to live as one called by the Savior, no matter the assignment. Your will be done in my life, Lord, in Jesus name!

In this week's "Narrative As Text", I've learned something new. What is it? "Traditional Teaching, Vicious Cycle/Judgment, and Transforming Initiative." I see **Traditional Teaching** as something that's been taught for a long time (patterns) and as such, it's ingrained in our way of thinking and doing things---our way of life.

But Jesus gave us a new way of thinking, a new directive, he changed this pattern in the Sermon on the Mount. "But", the word used to stop me dead in my tracks and hear something different, Jesus teaching, but if I continue doing things as always---the **Vicious Cycle/** "I say to you..." This vicious cycle brings about **Judgment**, if I continue to do the traditional teaching in the way that I have in the past. The word "But" changes how I see and should respond to the situation. "But" doesn't change the teaching but it supersedes the traditional teaching, holding me to a higher standard. As an old friend once said to me, "Your belief does not serve you well," and that was because they were trying to keep me in the world.

It appears that we can get caught up in making sure we maintain our traditions even though they allow for "stuff" to happen that's not addressed by the teaching itself. Or, our take on the teaching. What Jesus is teaching is that "**Transforming Initiative**" states the issue, tells us how to address the situation, why we are addressing it, and gives the end result. Thank you, Lord, for showing me this through Julianne's teaching. Praise God! Hallelujah!!!! Break-through for me! Glory to God! Now to apply this word in my life.

WEEK 3 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (c)

What have I changed my mind about because of this week's lesson and/or discussion? What is the basis or reason for this change of mind? What impact do I anticipate this change of mind could have on my spiritual life or the way I study Scripture? Well, what I just learned about Traditional Teaching, Vicious Cycle/Judgment, and Transforming Initiative. To be dogmatic in my approach doesn't necessarily change others, but how I approach in love and understanding can make a world of difference in bringing souls to Christ. I'm more approachable to others when I allow the Holy Spirit to guide and lead me, and in turn, then, I call hear them, and they can hear what I have to say. Just because I'm right about a matter does not mean I can share it with others any ole way. My attitude as a believer and representative of the Lord Jesus Christ speaks volumes even before I open my mouth.

Julianne's prayer for this week's class says, "Father, **TEACH** me what it means to live out these Beatitudes in my daily life. **SHAPE** my attitudes according to Your desire and **MAKE** me a woman or man after Your own heart!" I believe that is exactly what God is doing in me and my classmates---Teaching, Shaping and Making us disciples.

WEEK 4 - JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (a)

What one thing have I learned from this lesson and/or class discussion that caught my attention?

Watching the video of the women with the issue of blood was really powerful. It allowed me to see how cruel people can really be. I know that Satan is real and that there are demons in this universe whose job it is to do all they can to “kill, steal and destroy” humans in any way possible, 24-7, while at the same time helping us to think we are “good” people (as James says, “double-minded in all our ways”).

I use to be more sensitive to the fact that the enemy uses people to accomplish his evil deeds, however, as I’ve grown older and seen all kinds of negative things that people do to other people, I don’t think my heart is as sensitive as I’d like to think it is. I tend to dismiss things or turn away from the truth and chalk it up to the fact that “that’s the way it is today.” A little insensitive, if you ask me. The ironic thing is I’m not talking about someone else---I’m talking about myself---me. Shame on me! What happened to all my “reading and practicing of the Word” and believing I’m a child of the Most-High God? Don’t get me wrong, I am a child of the Most-High God! I do read and practice the Word of God in my life, but on the other hand, how many times have I fallen or reverted back into my ‘old self’ nature way, I can’t even count them.

What Jesus said to us, “*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the Prophets,*” seems to be more of a great desire or goal---something we all can aspire to; because, practicing the same is another issue all together. But then I realize, that’s in the flesh. As Paul tells me, “If you walk in the Spirit,” Naomi, “you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

So, what have I learned from this lesson that has the potential to impact my personal or spiritual development?

It’s all a process and it takes time for me to become the individual that God has planned me to become. Yes, just like there is a growth chart for new born babies and how they will progress from one stage to the next, I believe God has a growth chart for me and for every believer (child of God). And, because God didn’t make us robots or cookie-cutter images, there are things quite unique about each of us that require different things, approaches and applications. God has mercy and grace for all people because He loves us. When God the Father looks at me He sees the blood of Jesus, His Son, His robe of Righteousness that makes me accepted in the Beloved. Therefore, as Paul admonishes us to be “imitators of Christ”, I believe as I look at others/all people, I can look at them and see Jesus as the person standing in front of me instead of random individuals, then I can respond to that individual with mercy, grace and love. How would I see or treat that person if he or she were really Jesus Christ?

As I hunker-down with the Word of God and go into my secret place with the Holy Spirit, God can and does reveal my heart, what’s hidden, what’s lurking there that’s not pleasing to Him. Application has a lot to do with my growth progress. If I’m waiting for God to reveal the next step when I haven’t applied the previous step---oh well, I guess we’ll be here for a while.

Now, what does this have to do with the women with the issue of blood? Well, how different am I than the people who shunned and ostracized the woman in this scenario; where have I fallen short and turned away from someone who needed my assistance? Or that I felt was different than me? When did I help someone else since “I’m a good person?” Have I picked and chosen people to show the love of Christ to so I can check off my good deed for the day list, so to speak? What’s my motive behind what I do?

I have to do what God’s word says and let my light so shine before men that they will see my good works and glorify my Father which is in heaven. It’s imperative that since I’m filled with the Light of God, that I share that Light with those I come in contact with, otherwise, the result is insensitivity to other people situations due to my own prejudices, hurts, emotional issues and ignorance. Then, as I totally yield to God, I will see that “all things work together for good to those who are the called according to His purpose” no matter what the assignment is.

As I speak honestly with the Lord, I share with him what it is about these insights that touches me so deeply and/or challenges how I am living my life. Since Jesus has identified with me (and all mankind) and I have placed

my faith and trust in Him, I don't need to worry about failing Him, because as I yield to the Holy Spirit who lives in me to take the next step, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I need to be fully persuaded that what God says in His Word I can trust in that He will do it, so therefore, I can step out in faith without having all the pieces.

Do I learn something about the LORD, MYSELF or about my LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES I never saw before? I believe God is allowing me to build on what He has already shown me in His Word; however, it may not have been clear or it didn't have an impact on me at the time, but as I enter into different phases of my walk with the Lord, teachings of the Word becomes clearer, more in focus, in my life, and I have to decide how I see things and how to respond. Also, what God may have tolerated or allowed me to get by with in the past is not so at this time; I'm held to a higher standard as I grow and develop into the person I'm becoming. Not that God didn't have a standard at first, the standard has always been there, however, I see His mercy and grace working in the process of my development; therefore, to whom much is given, much is required.

Maybe, at first, I didn't think about how the people were so cruel to the woman with the issue of blood, and just saw it as a custom, a part of the law, but as I grow in the Lord, I can see what I don't want to be like as I look at how people treat others coupled with situations I've encountered in my own life. But, even in her situation, she had compassion for someone else---the blind man sitting outside her door---when she came out side she gave him something to eat to help sustain him for that day. She sympathized with him and acted on her feelings with compassion by reaching out to him with provision. God is showing me to look at things through He's lens (the Word of God). This woman was a human being that God used to show me how I would want to be treated and how to treat others regardless of how tough things maybe in my own life. Every situation can be used as an assignment as a part of my growth and development process.

Yes, I need to pray more; I did at one time, for years, then I got away from entering into prayer early in the morning with the Lord, and it's been a struggle to get back there. I talk to the Lord throughout the day, but its still different. Therefore, **As I listen to the LORD without judgment, I will allow His SPIRIT to draw me closer to HIM. I thank HIM for this gift of insight and PRESENCE.**

Thank You Lord, for Your patience and long suffering; for loving us (me) so much that You refuse to allow us (me) to stay where we are in our growth development. Praise You for Your plans for my/our life, even at 70 years old, which are good and not evil. I feel like the Centurion, I can't wait to see what You are about to do next in my/our life, in Jesus Mighty name.

WEEK 4 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (c):

As believers, God has called and commissioned us to be His hands extended in this world wherever we go. He has gifted us with everything that we need to proclaim the same message that He gave the first disciples, because people are the same and need the same things. We all need salvation, therefore, we are to minister out of hearts filled with compassion; heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. The commission is not new, however, what I'm learning as a result of this class, is clarifying and equipping me further through the Gospel of Matthew. People are living, dying and going to eternal separation from God if we don't get over ourselves and do what God has called us to do.

WEEK 5 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (a)

What one thing have I learned from this lesson and/or class discussion that caught my attention? As I speak honestly with the Lord, I share with him what it is about these insights that touches me so deeply and/or challenges how I am living my life. Do I learn something about the LORD I never saw before, about MYSELF about MY LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES that need to be addressed?

In this week's discussion, I notice the comments and or questions Julianne, our Instructor, made or asked us, the students regarding our discussion posts. Although I struggled with answering some questions poised for us to comment on (which is nothing new for me since I tend to over think things, anyway), I see that I learn a lot from the questions that she raised to each student in an effort to cause us to dig deeper, go beyond the surface, expand our thinking, look beyond what we see surface wise. Sometimes she gives little snippets or stories as examples to explain her point---which helped me understand what she's looking for. Sometimes she asked pointed questions, such as "When considering human conditions, what stands out to you?" "Does Matthew hint at anything that might be the cause of this brokenness...?" She will also indicate what she finds fascinating about a point in the class reading. When she asks a question like "Do you see what I mean?", I realize I am being taught how to learn, which I need.

This class is providing something I'm been looking for, how to study the Word, not just to gather facts, but so I can be the best I can at sharing the Word of God with others.

As I listen to the LORD without judgment, I will allow His SPIRIT to draw me closer to HIM. I thank HIM for this gift of insight and PRESENCE.

WEEK 5 – JOURNAL - LEVEL 1 (c):

What have I changed my mind about because of this week's lesson and/or discussion? What is the basis or reason for this change of mind? What impact do I anticipate this change of mind could have on my spiritual life or way I study Scripture?

I don't know if I've changed my mind about anything this week related to the teaching. However, I feel everything I'm learning is like it's new, even though I've been saved for 43 years and have tried to live a life pleasing to God during most of that time. This class has opened up my understanding to the Scriptures allowing the Holy Spirit to show me many things, not just about the Word of God, itself, but about me, my attitude, my walk with Him.

I thank God that He's the God of a 2nd chance.