

JOURNALING

Encountering God Through Attentive Writing



Journaling

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“A journal is the story of your life with God. It is a way of documenting the lessons God has taught you as well as the experiences he has brought you through.” Andy Stanley

We must be intentional if we want to be attentive to the moving of the Holy Spirit. When we allow ourselves to live in the moment we often sense God’s whisper of guidance, encouragement, caution or conviction. Purposely putting God’s whispers to pen and paper has been a tried and true tradition that aids us in encountering God.

- John Wesley (1703-91), historical English cleric, theologian and evangelist who was a leader of a revival movement within the Church of England known as Methodism practiced the discipline of journaling.
- C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century kept a journal.
- Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), American revivalist preacher, philosopher and theologian played a critical role in shaping the First Great Awakening.
- Henri Nouwen (1932-96), Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian most known for his work rooted in psychology and pastoral ministry avidly journaled and readers of his books are the spiritual beneficiaries of this discipline.
- Bramwell Booth (1856-1929), was an avid journaler and one of his journals has been published. Here is an excerpt: “Rather dreary and weary this evening. When all our doings are done, how little we do! – and yet how great the result may be it the Master will but take into His hands our barley loaves and little fishes and bless them!” (Jan. 20, 1922)

A journal is where you record written, daily happenings, but a spiritual journal is so much more than a diary for its focus is on the relationship between you and God. It is a tool for self-discovery, an aid in helping you to concentrate, and a private space of quiet and solitude for you to express to God the uniqueness of your spiritual journey.

“Journal keeping is a highly intentional reflection on the events of our days. It differs from a diary by its focus on why and wherefore

rather than who and what. The external events are springboards for understanding the deeper workings of God in the heart. One special value of a journal is the record that it keeps – a personal Ebenezer (a tangible reminder of God’s power and protection), if you will. We can turn back to the pages of our personal history with God as often as we like and see the issues we have struggled with and the progress we have made.” Richard Foster

What are the benefits of keeping a spiritual journal?

- Help process your thoughts and emotions
- Help you process gratitude
- Increases your self-care
- Write out challenges
- Record self-discoveries/spiritual revelations
- Records areas of growth and answers to prayer

A spiritual journal may include:

- Inspirational quotes
- Life milestones
- Affirmations
- Prayer requests
- Scripture verses

Preparation:

Preparation is the key to maximizing your time with God. Having a proper place for your daily time with Him and the proper tools readily available help you make the most of your quiet time with God; certainly this includes the discipline of journaling.

You may want to consider a set place where you have quiet time with God and a time for spiritual journaling. This would consist of a place to sit, proper lighting and possibly a receptacle such as a basket or storage box to keep all your “tools” for your quiet time with God. which would hold your Bible,

- Journaling format supplies:
 - Journal, notebook, online, printed free prayer journal pages from the web
 - Bible
 - Favorite translations/paraphrases (this could include access to Bible Gateway –www.biblegateway.com/)
 - Related resource reading

- o Pens, pencils, highlighters
- o Calendar/notebook
- o Bookmark(s)
- o Spiritual formation reading material

Choose your journaling method:

- Write your thoughts to God.
- Re-write scripture in your own words.
- Write reflections that have caught your attention from scripture or a devotional thought.

Moving Forward:

- Give yourself grace to change methods after a week to provide opportunity to find the method that works for you.
- Commit to a certain number of days per week (does not have to be every day, but journal at least once a week).
- Write down exactly what you are thinking. There is nothing wrong with following a certain order such as A-C-T-S (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication), but do not feel bound by any set style, write what is on your heart.
- After a set number of journal entries read what you have written and ask yourself the following questions:
 - o Is this method of journaling helpful to me?
 - o If not, why do you think you are not sensing any spiritual significance?

Journal questions/statements for reflection:

- What are you thankful for?
- Write about the place you call home.
- Five things you would like to do more.
- Write down a quote that has caught your attention and why.
- How have you sensed God speaking to you today and how did you respond or resist?
- What was the best thing that happened this week
- Write something you are stressed about.
- What holds you back?
- What in your life right now could you do without?
- How have you changed in the past year?
- Write down a regret.
- What do you feel strongly about?

- How do you relax?
- What small things make you happy?
- Write a letter to your teenage self.
- What do you need to be content?

Examples:

- **Personal Reflections on Scripture:**

- o Psalm 91:1 – *“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High...”*
 -Your Word promises when I draw close to You, You are there. I want my drawing close to be a permanent dwelling place.
“...will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”
 -I need rest from incessant hard emotions. Dry my tears. I don’t want to bottle up my emotions in any way, but I want Your help to control them.

- **Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading) Journaling** (3 movements of reflection)

- o Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG) *“Are you tired: Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”*
 - THINK – what tires me, wears me out?
 - PRAY - Lord, I acknowledge that I sometimes run ahead of You without consulting with you in this area. Show me how to wait on You.
 - LIVE – What “triggers” can I put in place to make sure I slow down to include you in this area of my life, i.e. -
 Breath
 Invite the Lord into the issue – “I am waiting on You, Lord.”
 Rest in the idea that God’s timing is perfect.

- **“Find Yourself in the Story” Journaling**

- Luke 24:13-17 – *“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, ‘What are you discussing together as you walk along?’”*
 - This is the Easter evening account of Jesus appearing to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Place yourself inside the story as one of the disciples and journal some of the following:
 - What are you feeling?
 - What has captured your attention?
 - What is your reaction to the “stranger” that joins you?
 - Is the conversation captivating and why?

In journaling the experience of a Bible character in an account you can always include sights, sounds, smell....anything that will add to helping you imagine the Lord speaking to you through the Bible account.

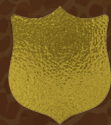
Find a freedom in writing to God, with God, for God through journaling. This can become a written record to help you grow in intimacy with Him as you reveal yourself to one another through the writing.

- **Prompts for Spiritual Journaling (from NIV Lifehacks Bible)**

- This week I was most blessed by...
- My favorite passage of Scripture is...
- The area where I need to put more trust in God is...
- One lesson I learned from Scripture this week is...
- An aspect of God’s character he recently revealed to me is...
- I find I feel God’s presence most when...
- God is leading me to make the following changes...
- An act of obedience God is prompting me to take is...
- My enthusiasm for the gospel is increased when...
- Sometimes I get angry with God about...

- o I feel most distant from God when...
- o My calling in life is...
- o My spiritual gifts are...
- o What brings me the most joy in life is...
- o I'm eager for God to...
- o Three ways I want God to transform me are...
- o An area of my spiritual life where I need to seek God's guidance is...
- o Journaling has helped my spiritual formation by...
- o The most significant area of my life that is not finding a way into my journal is...
- o Two ways I can apply the gospel in my life are...

"Write in a book all the words I, the Eternal, the God of Israel, have said to you." Jeremiah 30:2



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