

INK & INSIGHT

Discovering the Depth of Your Soul
Through Journaling

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Why Journal?

Journaling is one of the most underappreciated aspects of caring for the soul. It helps us pause and take a step back from all that we are thinking and feeling and helps us come to understand a more objective perspective, a meta-view. This meta-view enables us to shift from our self-centeredness and allows us to be more open to external input, such as considering what God or others might say about a particular incident. Journaling helps us facilitate clear-thinking, diagnose soul symptoms accurately, and cultivate a hunger for the things that truly matter.

TIPS & TOOLS FOR JOURNALING

Journaling is ultimately about getting at the truth. Here are some basic guidelines:

STEP #1 LIST THE FACTS

Go through facts utilizing the 5 W's - Who, What, When, Where, Why.

This is where you want to review what happened with as much accuracy as possible. You can list out basic facts of the situation in chronological order. Focusing on facts halts rationalizing and self-justifying emotions. For example, rather than saying, "I felt like he was attacking me with his words so I responded in this way," just state the objective facts: "I yelled at my roommate."

STEP #2 EXPLORE

Based on some facts, you can begin to explore some questions to help you think, such as:

- Why did I say that? Why did I do that?
- What was I feeling when I did that?
- What was going through my mind?
- What were some events leading up to this incident?

STEP #3 ASK: WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT ME?

After reviewing the facts and exploring why you reacted or felt as you did, now you can ask yourself the question, "What does this reveal about me?"

Here are some questions that might be helpful:

- What does this show about what drives me?
- What does this show about what's going on inside of me?
- What does this show about my view towards...(others, God, myself)?
- What does this reveal about what is important to me?

Don't use a lot of jargon and try not to be overly dramatic in language. For example, "I feel like I don't deserve the cross of Jesus!" Try to use plain speech as much as possible.

STEP #4 WORD OF GOD

- What about the gospel addresses me at this point?
- What is true and real according to God's word?
- How does the word of God bring reproof and correction (2 Timothy 3:16) to you regarding this situation?

Often, people either go into a downward spiral of self-flagellation, or they might be satisfied with merely identifying what they did wrong and end there. If you don't go through this step, you can leave God entirely out of your struggle. Sometimes in people's reflections and repentance, they commit to never doing something again in a very self-driven way, without going through the full process of seeing themselves and their own sinfulness in light of who God is. They end up missing out on God's grace and his forgiveness pronounced through his words.

Truth may hurt, but it is always best to face the truth. God's word will be relevant and powerful when there is proper admission of and discovery of truth. By default, we have layers of self-deception, denial, rationalization, justification, etc. Writing self-reflections can slice through all of that and help you get to the truth of who you are. And of course what we want is the truth about ourselves! It's something many people do not have, nor treasure.

Above all, be honest. God wants to dialogue with us.

Isaiah 1:18 (ESV)

**Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.**

Ultimately God wants to dialogue in truth so that we can be healed and so we can be as white as snow. There is freedom when you know you have properly acknowledged, repented of and fully processed the junk inside. There is self-knowledge and, with it, a growing appreciation of the holy love and grace of God.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The goal of journaling is ultimately identifying where we are and allowing the word of God to speak to our hearts and shape us. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus talks about three kinds of soil that are NOT ready to receive the seed of God's word. This should give us insight into why it's a good idea to journal before DT. Often our hearts are like one of the three soils, and we have to do the work of getting our hearts ready to receive God's word. Journaling is the work of breaking up that soil, taking the rocks and weeds of strongholds and competing thoughts out of the soil of our hearts so that the word of God can easily take root. It's important to utilize journaling to help identify the condition of our souls.



THREE SOILS (Based on *Soul Keeping*, by John Ortberg)

HARDENED SOIL	SHALLOW SOIL	CLUTTERED SOIL
<p>People who have been hurt or disappointed. They form a protective shell. They become cynical or bitter or suspicious. The world diverts our soul-attention when it encourages us to think of ourselves more as victims than as humans.</p> <p>We are so wrapped up in the hurt we have received that we do not notice the hurt we inflict. Underneath the hardness is often fear--the fear of being rejected, looking foolish, being hurt, or of broken pride.</p>	<p>The world conspires against our souls, keeping our lives superficial. Our souls become shallow when our interests and thoughts go no further than ourselves.</p> <p>A deep soul has the capacity to understand and empathize deeply with other people.</p> <p>A deep soul notices and questions and doesn't just go through the motions.</p> <p>A deep soul lives in conscious awareness of eternity, not simply today. It notices and observes and reflects in surprising ways.</p> <p>A soul especially has depth when it is connected to God. To speak about depth means that there is more going on than what we see on the surface.</p> <p>To love deeply or care deeply or value deeply means we have devoted time and effort and thought. To suffer deeply means to be wounded at the soul level. "Depth" is an expression of spiritual vastness.</p>	<p>Our world will divert our souls' attention because it is a cluttered world. And clutter is maybe the most dangerous result, because it's so subtle. We mistake clutter for life.</p> <p>A person cluttered with externals - success, reputation, ceaseless activity, etc., may be dead internally and not even recognize it. And our world has a lot of "other things."</p>

OTHER TIPS

If you are still struggling to get started here are a few other tips!

- **Bullet List (part 1):** Sometimes it's hard to formulate thoughts and commit them to paper before the next thought pops up. A bullet list is good for getting the rough ideas onto paper quickly.
- **Bullet List (part 2):** Jot down notes as the day goes by. If your memory is bad, you can create a running list of things that happen during the day to help jog your memory the next day. This can also be done at the end of the day before heading to bed.
- **Notebook:** For consistency, buy a separate notebook (regular 8.5x11) helpful if you feel like given space in the DT notebook is not enough.
- **Turn it into a game:** This one works for those people who do well with prizes. (Think FitBit challenges.) Reward yourself after 5 consecutive entries, 10, 20, etc.
- **Timer:** Initially it's hard to keep track of time. Start with 30 minutes. Set a timer to help with focus.
- **"That's absurd":** Even if you have this thought, just write it. You might be surprised how coherent and rational you actually are.
- **Journaling for focus:** Sometimes it helps to engage in one particular type of journaling to bring focus to issues. Here are some examples:

- Gratitude journaling: For people who gravitate toward dark thoughts
- Character issues: For people who need increased self-awareness and accountability (e.g. "What does it feel like to be on the receiving end of me?" or for a bad listener, they can focus on recounting a conversation as accurately and descriptively as possible.)
- Empathy journaling: For those who need to work on their empathy more: "What does it feel like to be _____ these days?" (Pick different people each day)

- Additional Resources on the Benefits of Journaling: David, S. (2016). Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life (Chapter 5) . Penguin Life.

Ortberg, J. (2014). Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You. Zondervan.