

## Listening

# Prayer Tool: How to Journal

## What?

Journaling is the simple practice of writing down thoughts and prayers. This prayer tool will help you hear God's voice as you journal.

## Why?

"Sit in the companionship of God— the one who shows up and can be seen." Dallas Willard

## Bible references:

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Luke 2:19

"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always" 1 Chronicles 16:11

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## A quick introduction to Journaling

A simple but profound way of learning to understand the voice of God is through the discipline of journaling – the recording of the ways and works of God in our lives.

Journaling, for those who need reassured, is a legitimate way of praying, as essentially it facilitates an ongoing correspondence of our heart with our Heavenly Father. It allows for our inner, often subconscious, thoughts to become part of our conscious awareness, bringing new perspective and allowing us to assess our inward convictions and heart-condition.

For this reason, journaling is a great discipline to establish in your life, particularly when you are young, as it develops within you the beautiful but underrated quality of 'life-long learning'. This is an approach to life marked out by a relentless and holy curiosity, a heart eager to discover the grace-filled movements of God throughout every season of your soul.

## Learning from Mary

When we meet Mary the mother of Jesus, we learn the importance of reflection and the principle behind journaling. Luke tells us that, "Mary treasured these things in her heart" (Luke 2:19, 51). We are given the impression Mary's heart was sacred space - a receptacle of Heavenly insight; an interior prayer room built around humble and holy inquiry.

This speaks to us of a heart-posture required for Spirit-led journaling - a pursuit to understand the ways of God and an open heartedness to receive His direction in our lives. From this place Mary simply noted, recorded and paid attention to God's work in everyday life. So should we.

Often there are also things going on in our lives 'under the surface' which only come to our attention when we take time to 'give voice' to and process what we are experiencing in our bodies and hearts. This is the real genius of journaling and the crucial distinction from keeping a diary. A diary is a record of the events of life. Journaling goes deeper, affording us an opportunity to be 'naked' before God, and in so doing leads us into a healthy process of self-awareness and reflection.

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## Do it: How to Journal

### "Dear God"

Start each journal entry with a personal address to God - Father, Jesus, Lord, Holy Spirit - this provides a prayerful context for what you are about to write and frames all you are processing in intimate and relational dialogue.

### Date

Don't forget to write the date at the top of the page. This is important when you are reflecting on your journal to see interesting connections, threads of themes, and divine coincidences!

### Thanksgiving

Begin by thanking God for steadfast love and care, the fact you have been given this particular day as a gift. It's now been scientifically proven that people who keep a 'gratitude journal' feel physically better about themselves and life in general.

### Scripture

Write down a word or scripture you are savouring today. Mull over this for a while and write/draw/paint any further reflections that proceed from your heart.

## **Write**

Tell God the things that are on your heart, weighing on your mind. It may be a mixture of pondering future decisions, asking for wisdom, off-loading negative thought patterns, expressing worship, processing, or praying for some important issues.

Some parts of what you write may feel like random and spontaneous thoughts, and other parts may contain devotional or even theological musings. Artistic licence is a fundamental principle of journaling. Diagrams, doodles, and even bad spelling are all allowed!

## **Psalm**

Write your own Psalms – expressing your own heart-felt worship, disappointment, discouragement and desire for guidance.

## **Notice**

Pay attention to how God may begin to whisper to you, bringing insight and discernment.

## **Record**

We really do forget even some of the most inspirational moments so it is super important to record key moments; events, prophetic words, conversations; so you can go back and read over them.

## **Goals**

A journal is also a good place to record some of the goals you feel God is giving you for your life, or where you design your own 'rule of life.' Putting them in your journal allows you to chart your progress.

## **Reflect**

Take some time to read back over your journal – not necessarily in great detail, but more in a cursory way, once a month or even once a term. Notice the growth, the trajectory on your life, any key transitions that are happening or any similar words that have been said. Give thanks to God for prayers answered and direction you have discerned.

## **Journal in the first person**

Invite the Father to speak more specifically and begin to write in the first person. Don't worry this always feels blasphemous the first time you do it but be gentle with yourself and write what you think the Father is saying to you.

It would make sense if it always starts with something like; [Insert your name], I love you, I am your Father, I am for you, I am coming after you. This might be all you need to hear (it often is!), but be open to the Spirit whispering more words over you, affirming you with His love, empowering you with His courage, speaking peace into difficult situations. Write those words down.

## **A word to the extroverts!**

For those of us who find our energy mostly from being around people, the thought of journaling can seem like a slow way of dying! Don't be discouraged! Feel free to 'journal' your thoughts externally over cups of coffee and car journeys with good friends.

However, remember that often we only remember a fraction of the way God is speaking to us so it might to a good idea of finding some ways to record what God is saying to you - notes on your phone, voice memos, short videos. Find your own way; but the important thing is to treasure those moments, become a discerner of the heart, recognise the often surreptitious nature of the Spirit of God.

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## **Books on Journaling**

Many heroes of the faith inspire us towards this discipline:

- Confessions - Augustine
- George Fox's Journal - George Fox
- Dorothy Day, Selected Writings - Dorothy Day
- Letters by a Modern Mystic - Frank Laubach
- Markings - Dag Hammerarskjod
- The Road to Daybreak - Henri Nouwen