



THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting*

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THE BASICS OF JOURNALING

Journaling fascinates most believers who are exposed to it. The writing and preaching of those who have kept spiritual journals are filled with tremendous spiritual insight. Deep faith and ongoing transformation characterize the lives of those who kept a spiritual journal.

In past centuries, it was commonplace for believers to keep a spiritual journal. The journals of some believers have been turned into books. Believers today can profit from the discipline of past saints who recorded the ups and downs of their relationship to God. Even the Bible contains examples of God-inspired journals. Many of the Psalms record David's relationship with the Lord. Lamentations is a divinely inspired journal of how Jeremiah felt about the fall of Jerusalem.

In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we are going to focus on the discipline of spiritual journaling. I want to encourage and challenge you to keep a spiritual journal. If you are journaling

now, it my hope and prayer that you will gain fresh insights and encouragement concerning this beneficial spiritual discipline. If you have never done this or started and then quit, I pray that the Holy Spirit will enable you begin keeping a record of your amazing journey with God.

What Is A Spiritual Journal?

A journal is a book in which a person writes down things. It is often synonymous with a diary. A journal is a book in which you keep a record of the events of your life, of your different relationships, of your response to things. It is a quiet and silent space where you reflect on your life-its meaning and direction. A journal can be used for a variety of things: to record history, to reflect on the events of your life, to write out goals, to gather materials for writing and speaking.

There has been a renewed interest in journaling in the secular world. Yet, a Christian keeps a "spiritual" journal. It is a place to record the ways and works of God in your life. Your journal can include a variety of things: an account of daily events, a diary of personal relationships, a list of prayer requests, and a notebook of insights into Scripture. It is a place where you can keep a record of your progress in faith and holiness. Through a journal you can hold yourself accountable. A spiritual journal is a place to record the ups and downs, the ins and outs of your relationship to God.

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THE BASICS OF JOURNALING

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What Are The Benefits of Journaling?

Why should you keep a record of the ups and downs, the ins and outs of your relationship to God? The practice of journaling is not commanded in the Word of God. Although it is not commanded, it certainly is modeled. An example of this is the book of Psalms. There are several benefits to keeping a spiritual journal.

Keeping a spiritual journal will help you in understanding and evaluating yourself. Keeping a spiritual journal does not guarantee that you will overcome self-righteousness or conceit. Yet, it will give you an opportunity to see yourself as you really are. The simple discipline of recording the events of your day and your reaction to them will cause you to examine yourself much more thoroughly than normally. This thorough examination will help you battle against pride and self-righteousness.

If you are to be a victorious Christian, useful to God and to others, you must know yourself. You must know your temperament, your gifts, your strengths, and your sins. This is not an easy process. In **Romans 12:3**, the believer is urged to have a balanced self-image, "For I say, through the grace, given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." Too many times a believer is blinded to his or her strengths and sins. He or she fails to see the wrong motives or lack of faith.

A journal then can be used by the Holy Spirit to teach you about yourself. As you look back over the events of your life and your response to them, He can show you your gifts, strengths, and sins. He can show you an area of weakness or sin, insight into your motives, clear guidance for a decision, or the emptiness of a path that has been chosen. He can turn your journal into an altar for seeking God.

Think of a spiritual journal as a mirror in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Through it He can reveal His perspective to you concerning your attitudes, thoughts, words, responses, and actions. Since you will be held accountable by God one day concerning these things, evaluating them by any

means is wise. The Holy Spirit can use a spiritual journal to teach you about yourself.

Another benefit of keeping a spiritual journal is that it will enable you to remember the Lord's works in your life. Believers are prone to forget what the Lord has done in their lives. We fail to remember how God has answered prayer, provided a need at the right time, or powerfully worked in our lives. Having a spiritual journal gives you a place to record these wonderful works of the Lord. A spiritual journal can prevent a believer from forgetting the works of the Lord.

"If a man write little, he had need have a great memory."

Francis Bacon

Unless you have a "great" memory, you need to record the marvelous works of God in your life! A spiritual journal can help you with this.

A spiritual journal gives you a place to record God's works in your life. It gives you the opportunity to write down what God is doing in your life. By doing this, you will not forget what He has done in your life. You can be like Asaph in **Psalms 77:11-12**, "I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember your works of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of all Your deeds."

Not only will a spiritual journal enable you to remember the works of the Lord, it will also encourage faith and prayer. When you look back and see what God has done for you and how God has answered your prayers, it will strengthen your faith to trust Him for the future. It will encourage you to pray because He has answered you powerfully in the past. As you remember God's works in the past, it prepares you to face the challenges of tomorrow with faith and prayer.

A spiritual journal can assist you in expressing your thoughts and feelings to the Lord. There are times when it is very difficult to share our thoughts and feelings with others. Even when we

have an intimate relationship to someone, we cannot always tell others what we are thinking or feeling. Yet, the thoughts and feelings are so strong that we must find a way to share it with someone. Your heavenly Father is always willing and available to you. The Word of God says in **Psalm 62:8**, "Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah." A spiritual journal can help you "pour out your heart before Him." You can unashamedly pour out your feelings and thoughts to the Lord.

You may be wondering, "Why would writing in a journal help you express your thoughts and feelings to the Lord? Why not go ahead and talk with Him about the thoughts and feelings you are having?" Writing out your thoughts and feelings in a spiritual journal slows you down. It forces you to think deeply about God, His ways, and His works. Because you slow down, it causes you to think and feel more deeply. It enables you to think through your circumstances and your feelings and responses to those circumstances. This in turn makes you better able to talk to God with both mind and spirit. It will help you better express to God what you are thinking and feeling.

Keeping a spiritual journal can be a help to guidance and decision-making. As Christians we desire that our lives be in line with the will of God. We know that God's will is for our best. In some areas of our lives we have clear guidance from the Word of God. For example, we know that we are not to murder or covet. But in many specific areas of our lives, discerning the will of God is difficult. What we should do is often not as clear. An example of this is whether to take a particular job or to turn it down and stay at a present job.

When you are faced with decisions, a spiritual journal can help you sort things out. You can write down Scriptural teachings or principles that apply to your decision. You can write down the pros and cons of the decision. By doing this, you can then pray and weigh the alternatives. You can call on the Holy Spirit to give you guidance as you go through this process. By doing this, you can gain perspective on the decision and be open and yielded to the Spirit's leadership.

Not only will this help you make decisions, it will also give you strength to carry them out. You will have a record of the process. You will be able later to recall the reasons why you made your

choice. Being able to look back on how you made your decision gives you a significant advantage. When things get difficult because of the decision, you can look back and see how God guided you through the process. Your journal can then be a record of how God guided you and can give you strength to live out what God has called you to do.

"But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

James 1:22

Journaling enables you to move from being a hearer of the Word to a doer of the Word. As God speaks to you through hearing and meditating on the Word, you can record what He speaks to you. You can write down what God wants you to know or what God wants you to change. This will help you hear and do the Word!

Keeping a spiritual journal can help you monitor your goals and priorities. A journal is a good way to keep a record of things that you want to do and to emphasize in your life. There are some that put a list of goals in their journal and review it on a daily basis. There are other ways to do this. Yet, the key is to keep a record of the goals that you want to accomplish. A journal allows you self-accountability. It enables you to see the progress or lack of progress that you are making toward your spiritual goals.

Some may feel that this is legalism. And it could be easily abused. There is always a danger of turning the spiritual disciplines into a dead routine that creates guilt rather than living exercises that produce obedience and godliness. Yet, the fact of the matter is that you have to have a certain amount of discipline if you are going to make progress toward spiritual maturity. Paul declares that he "pressed" toward the mark or goal of Christlikeness (**Philippians 3:12-16**). It does not happen by accident or coincidence. A believer must strive toward spiritual maturity. There also has to be a certain amount of accountability. By keeping a spiritual journal, you can record spiritual goals and

priorities. Then you can hold yourself accountable by reviewing these goals and priorities daily, weekly, monthly, or annually.

At the same time, a spiritual journal can help you with the other spiritual disciplines. Just as you can monitor your goals and priorities, a journal can help you maintain other spiritual disciplines like prayer, fasting, Bible study, giving, and witnessing. In your journal, you can record your progress in these matters. The journal can be a reminder that you need to practice these things. It is easy to let these things slide. Unless we labor to grow spiritually, our progress in the faith will be very slow. Unless we find practical ways to cooperate with the Holy Spirit against our tendency to be spiritually lazy, we will not build ourselves up in the faith. If we are to grow and mature as Christians, we must practice the spiritual disciplines. When I use the term "spiritual disciplines", I am referring to things like Bible study, prayer, fasting, giving, witnessing, and solitude. **1 Timothy 4:7** states that the believer is to "exercise yourself rather to godliness." Through the practice of these disciplines we can grow spiritually. Your journal can help you keep a record of your exercise of these disciplines.

Not only will your journal help you maintain the other spiritual disciplines, it will also create a joy and desire in you concerning these things. When you look back and see the Scripture that you have memorized and your meditations on those Scripture, it will fill you with joy and give you a desire to continue in this. When you review your record of people with whom you have shared the gospel, it will produce inexpressible delight. When you see how God is working in your life, it will bring joy to your heart and renew your commitment to pursue spiritual maturity.

As I review my journal, God creates a hunger for fasting in my heart and life. Fasting is a difficult spiritual discipline. Yet, when I look back at how God has blessed, how God has spoken, and how God has worked, it is sheer joy for me. It intensifies my desire to fast. Your journal can bring you the same joy and delight.

Sometimes the journal can be used of God to bring conviction to your heart. As you look at your lack of progress, it should convict you and motivate you to pursue spiritual maturity. God stands ready to forgive you and to empower you. If not used

rightly, a journal can produce guilt and despair in a believer. A believer can look at his or her lack of progress and feel guilty. It can cause the believer to despair of any possibility of spiritual growth. But, that is not the purpose of a spiritual journal. Rather than giving in to guilt and despair, let it motivate you to cry out to God for mercy and grace. Let it move you to depend on the Spirit and labor for spiritual maturity.

A spiritual journal allows you the opportunity to create and preserve a spiritual heritage. Keeping a spiritual journal is not just for you. It is for the generations that come after you. It gives you an opportunity to speak even after you are gone. It will enable you to share with your descendants and others the faith that you had and lived out. Many spiritual journals of past believers are now classics that are read by Christians across the world. Your journals may never be published or read by Christians across the world. Yet, your children and family will. They can have a living record of your relationship with God. This could provide spiritual encouragement and help to your children and your family even after you have entered into eternity. Never underestimate the power of a written record of your faith. This can provide you with a powerful spiritual impact. You have the opportunity to teach and model your faith now. Yet, even when you have gone on to be with the Lord, your journal can still testify to a life of faith and obedience. You can help in transmitting the faith to the future generations of your family (**Deuteronomy 6:4-7; 2 Timothy 1:5**).

Using a spiritual journal can help you clarify and articulate the insights or impressions that God gives you. Writing down the insights that God gives you will enable you to remember them and put them into practice. Too many times we forget the insights or impressions that God grants to us. If you will write down those impressions or insights, it will be easier to remember them. If you do not write them down, it will be difficult to remember them at the end of the day. At the same time, writing these things in a journal can help you better articulate what the Lord is speaking to you. An old saying declares that thoughts disentangle themselves when passed through the lips and across the fingertips. As you write these things down, it gives you a clearer understanding of them. According to Francis Bacon, reading makes a man