

Journal Writing

Since Biblical times journal writing has been recognized as an aid to spiritual growth. In the book of Psalms, the power of the pen opens a storehouse of deep feelings and thoughts. Psalm 60 scribes a lament of defeat. Psalm 45 celebrates a marriage, and the writer poetically calls his tongue the pen of a ready writer. Psalm 42 records a person's longing for God and a tribute to God.

In like manner, journal writing offers us a way to encourage and enrich our spirituality. By providing space in which to reflect and listen at a deep level, journal writing helps sweep away anxieties, fears, guilt and resentment, and brings us into a centered atmosphere of quietness and peace.

Journal writing also prepares us to receive thoughts from God, spiritual thoughts. In the Old Testament, the prophet Habaakkuk wrote, "*And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reprovved. Then the Lord answered me and said, Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets*" (Habaakkuk 2:1-3). Recording words we receive from God is apparently very important. By writing the words in a journal, we are more likely to remember later what God has said to us and done for us.

Some reasons to journal

1. Discover what we believe, the principles by which we live our lives.
2. Record spiritual insights, revelations, and encounters with God to enhance the meaning of each spiritual experience.
3. Open up deep wounds to the healing power of God.
4. Assist us in relating to the inner life deep within us, making record of who and what we are, our hopes and dreams, allowing the inner depths to come to the surface.
5. Help us articulate on paper our dreams and deep yearnings.
6. Make a record of things we request from God.
7. Assist us in sorting out various difficulties and problems we face, in order to discover possible solutions.
8. Offers a safe place to reveal our most personal feelings—hurts, disappointments, fears, anxieties, joys—without embarrassing us or others. Expressing in a journal the feelings that overwhelm us provides a little emotional distance from them.
9. Helps unblock the personality and clear out destructive emotions, discharge energy, and release fears, resentments, and guilt.
10. By recording affirmations or healing thoughts, it helps renew our mind by filling it with positive thoughts of faith, hope, and love.
11. Facilitates release of inner creativity and imagination through poetic expression.
12. Helps put us in touch with a deeper dimension of reality and provides a place to record creative insights and thoughts.

Getting started with journal writing

1. Determine what kind of journal you wish to keep.
2. Purchase or assemble a suitable journal book.
3. Keep your journal in a private location.
4. Put a date on every journal entry.

Tip: sign your name

Signing your name on the bottom of each journal entry makes it a significant act of self-affirmation. Use a nickname, use your initials, anything that uniquely represents *you*. This act can bring closure to events you write about, sometimes even to seemingly intractable issues.

Cautionary note

Keep track of whether your journal writing is leading you to a place of more wholeness and makes you more able to love and share God. If the experience appears to be destructive to you, stop journal writing and immediately see a spiritual counselor.

Types of journals

Meditation journal—record of insights from your meditations

Dream journal—record of your dreams

Spiritual life journal—record of your significant spiritual experiences

Affirmation journal—record of your favorite affirmations.

Gratitude journal—record of things for which you are especially thankful

➤ Journal exercises

1. Write about times when you sensed Grace at work in your life.
2. Record the ways in which you resist or reject Grace.
3. The miraculous can be seen by paying close attention to things we usually simply take for granted. Notice what you see happening around you, then write in your journal what you observe:
 - a. Write down one thing God has done for you.
 - b. How has God been there for you? How has He not been there for you?
4. Record ideas on how religion or spirituality might help you.
5. Write a prayer, a poem, a letter, or a psalm to the Giver of Grace.
6. What in your life have you discovered is valuable to you, what do treasure most? What has given you great satisfaction?
7. Write about what it costs you personally to become intoxicated from alcohol or other chemicals.
8. Describe an experience where you felt very close to some powerful spiritual force that raised you out of your self.
9. How might religion or spirituality help you with...?

10. If we write down each day the two or three most important events we experienced, it helps show us what we value most and gives us insight into who we are and what we are all about. Try it.
11. Journal about defining moments in your life: crises, problems, turning points in your life's journey.
12. Write down healing words or thoughts you received from God or your Higher Power.
13. If you have a pressing question, write it down. (If you don't have a question, ask your Higher Power if you need to be asking a question, which can elicit God's response) Rapidly write whatever thoughts you have, then listen to see if anything keeps repeating, if patterns develop.
14. If you have unfinished business in your life, journal about it. What do you need to do? With whom? Issues of loss, abandonment, addiction, family, love, and others, can sometimes be resolved this way.
15. Journal about a significant theme, such as: thanksgiving, confession, love, faith, fear, hope.
16. Write about new ideas or insights you have received.
17. Write down various emotions you experience during the day, describing what triggered them, how you felt, and what it means to you.
18. Reflect on moments where you felt free, joyful, energized, happy, or made a delightful discovery.
19. Record in your journal your times of experiencing pain, struggles, gray moods, disappointments.
20. Journal about things that have given you direction in your life.
21. Note the ten most important, memorable events of your life, the critical moments that pop up when you muse about your past.
22. Journal about your most significant or life-changing experience.
23. Write about the forces that have the greatest impact on your life.
24. Journal about the friendships that have been most helpful to your growth and development as a person.
25. Write a psalm or poem that celebrates your birth.
26. Write down your five favorite words and why you chose them.
27. Journal about who or what you live for.
28. Write about the most significant people in your life. Who has influenced your life most?
29. Note the kind of music you have played during your life, and see if you notice any patterns in the music you listen to.
30. Journal about how God/Higher Power has been there for you.
31. Write about when you felt most alive. What were you doing?
32. Record how you have come to where you are in life—your marriage, family, children, social life, career, spiritual life, other significant elements of your life.
33. Journal about your relationship to your family members, especially your parents.
34. Describe how you view your relationship to the world around you—your world view.
35. Journal about what you need. Finish the following sentence: I lack...

36. In what or in whom do you put your trust; what/whom do you look to for security?
37. Write about the degree to which you put your trust in: family, social standing, personal power, marriage, money, job, home, stable business, protected environment, church, pastor or priest, friend(s), country.
38. Answer this question in your journal: how pleased are you with yourself?
39. Reflect in your journal about what parts of your life are maturing, how you see your life becoming increasingly more whole and complete.
40. Write down some of the boundaries in your life, both outer and inner, that restrict you. Are you in a box? Do you have God in a box? What boundaries do you need to extend or even break out of completely?

Journal writing as a letter

Writing letters can be a spiritual intervention to help resolve issues of guilt, express our feelings and thoughts to God, and as a tool for forgiveness. Usually this type of letter is never actually mailed. The simple act of writing a letter to others or to God enables us to get things off our chest, to reveal our innermost feelings, questions, and thoughts.

➤ Exercise: write a letter to God ...

1. Expressing your deepest fears and questions.
2. Describing who you are and how you see yourself.
3. Listing all of your mistakes and failures.
4. Telling Him what you emotionally feel and think about Him.
5. Requesting His help and guidance.
6. Asking for forgiveness.
7. Describing how you felt emotionally that day.
8. Enumerating all the ways you have been hurt.

➤ Exercise: write about these special topics...

1. A letter to God about how you feel about hearing Him.
2. A letter to God from one who is in exile.
3. A letter to God from one who wants to enter the promise land.
4. A letter to God telling Him what you want, what you need.

➤ **Exercise: write a letter to a friend describing your experiences with Grace**

➤ **Exercise: create the following list...**

- People and things to whom you want to write.
- People you are angry at, or with whom you have an agreement.
- People you didn't thank, but wish you had thanked.
- People who disappointed you.
- People to whom you want to apologize or confess something.

➤ **Exercise: write a letter...**

- Of joy to honor loved ones.
- Of apology to someone.
- To someone to whom you need to say goodbye.

(The aforementioned material is taken from Segalove, Ilene. *Unwritten Letters*.)

Examine Your Present Situation In Life

Goal: to help you define in a precise way what it is that you seek in life.

➤ **Exercise: explore your innermost issues...**

Indicate in your journal your innermost feelings, negative and positive, your defining moments, critical choices, etc., by responding to the following suggestions:

1. List your current problems, conflicts, and worries.
2. Make an inventory of your fears and phobias.
3. Write down areas where you lack confidence.
4. Note relationships causing you unrest and personal conflicts with others.
5. List your difficult circumstances.
6. Name your health problems and concerns.
7. Make a list of your emotional needs and concerns about them.

9. List unresolved conflicts—about your past or present.
10. Identify questions you are asking about yourself, partner, children.
11. List any other life situations you are now in?
12. What life salutations do you want to find yourself in, one year from now, five years from now, ten years from now?
13. Name your ten deepest desires or hungers in your heart.
14. List your hopes for the future. List your long-term goals.
15. Specify your short-term goals toward which you are now planning.
16. Are you currently in a life-threatening situation?
17. What questions are you asking?
18. What prayers are you praying?

➤ Exercise: renumber the above list *in order of their importance to you*.

Notes

Some of the ideas for this section were derived from the following key sources:

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