

Journaling: Create your own sacred writings

By Kathryn Haueisen



Journaling is an ancient way to reflect on the world around us, within us. Writing or drawing a few pages a day often opens up pathways to new thoughts, new insights and new energy. The pen is often the key that unlocks the door to a hidden world of peace, beauty and a renewed sense of being protected by a good, generous and gracious God.

To be sacred means to be set aside for God's purposes. Journaling is one way to set aside time and attention to reflect on God's presence and purposes.

Why journal?

There are many good reasons to start a journaling habit. Here are just a few:

- Journaling enhances creativity and can help reduce anxieties.
- Often those who journal find that doing so brings them emotional energy, healing and increased clarity about their day-to-day decisions.
- It's very private. Because you don't share your journal with anyone, no one's going to comment on what you write or on your handwriting, spelling or grammar.
- It's a helpful record over time. Occasionally reviewing old journal entries can help track emotional and spiritual growth.
- When you write down your ideas and goals, you have a much higher chance of actually doing the things you want to accomplish.
- Journaling can be one way to pray.
- Journaling is a way to sort through options when faced with an important decision.
- Several health benefits have been attributed to keeping a journal. So keeping a personal journal can be one way to participate in the *Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls* initiative.

Ways to use a journal

You really cannot do journaling wrong. Not a writer? Use your journal to draw images that come to you. Make lists of things you'd like to do in the next month or year, or places you'd like to go or books you'd like to read. Try your hand at poetry. Maybe you want to write new words or verses to a favorite hymn or song.

Pick a favorite Bible passage and write about what it means to you. Write letters to people you care about, expressing your gratitude and appreciation for them. You may or may not ever actually send those letters, but chances are you'll feel good about yourself and the other person.

Use your pages to summarize the previous day, noting the high and low points and your feelings about them. Or imagine what the next 24 hours will bring your way and how you feel about that.

How to begin

- Get a clean notebook or make one with a binder and sheets of blank paper. Or purchase a special journal from your local bookstore or stationery store.
- Set aside a specific time each day to do your journaling. If you think you'll have difficulty doing this at home, find a quiet place away from home—a library, coffee shop, city park or quiet location where you work.
- Any pen or pencil will do, but consider buying a special pen with your favorite color ink or new

colored pencils or crayons if you prefer to doodle and draw rather than write.

- Always record the date and the place where you are writing your entry. This will help you see patterns and progress when you review your journal later.
- Do not share your journal with anyone for at least the first 90 days. This includes your spouse, your best friend, your mother and even any mental health professional you may visit. This is your time to let your mind wander through your pen. You need total freedom to write or draw what you are really feeling and thinking without outside influence.

Journaling as prayer

Mount Carmel Ministries in Alexandria, Minnesota, is credited with suggesting the "TRIP" outline for prayer, which lends itself beautifully to the journaling habit.

- "T" is for listing things for which you are *thankful*.
- "R" is for *recording* any regrets you may have.
- "I" is for *intercession*—recording the names of people you want to remember in prayer and what you want to pray for on their behalf.
- "P" is for *planning* what you want to accomplish over the next day or week. Keep the list of things you plan to do short—no more than six items per day. This will increase your chances of actually accomplishing what you set out to do and that will increase your overall sense of well-being.

How to Use This Resource

Journaling is a personal exercise, so this resource is primarily for individual use by those who are curious about journaling and seeking guidance on how to get started. You might, though, have a small group of women interested in journaling use this resource as a guide to getting started and then meet periodically, not to discuss what each is journaling about but to share how it's going—share tips, inspiration, encouragement and success stories. There are a few questions at the end that could be discussed by a small group planning to start journaling and provide support to one another.

Use your journal to prepare for difficult conversations and situations

Try a dialogue with a person or situation in your journal. Assign yourself an initial, such as "M" for "me." Assign a different initial for the person or a situation that's troubling you. In a sentence or two, describe the situation. For example: "I'm struggling with someone at work and the awkwardness between us." Then start the conversation on paper as you imagine it might go if you were actually talking to that person.



M: I'd like to talk about something that's been troubling me.

C (colleague at work): Oh? What's that?

This dialogue format allows you to reflect on situations from a different point of view. Your unscripted, subconscious mind can come up with some pretty creative solutions to the things that trouble us when we provide an outlet for it to do so.

Questions for reflection alone or with others

- How do you think you might benefit from regular journaling?
- What concerns do you have about keeping a journal?
- Where and when do you visualize yourself taking time to write or draw in a journal?

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What you put in your journal becomes your own personal sacred writings. Journal entries are sacred in the sense of being set aside for a holy purpose. That purpose is helping you become the very best person you can be as one created in the image of a creative and caring God.

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Additional resources

How to Keep a Spiritual Journal: Guide to Journal Keeping for Inner Growth and Personal Discovery, by Ron Klug. Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

Prayer Journaling Day by Day to Improve Your Faith: Journaling Keeps Track of Your Prayers and Answers, by William E. Slater. iUniverse, 2008.

At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability, by Ira Progoff. Penguin Group USA, 1992.

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