



Leadership Letter *Time to journal?*

For the past decade, doctors and psychologists have been taking notice of the health benefits of reflective writing. They note that wrestling with words to put your deepest thoughts into writing can lift your mind from depression, uncover wisdom within your experiences, provide insight and foster self-awareness. Similarly, a recent news article discussed the benefits of confessional writing, where one is freed to "explore the depths of the emotional junkyard."

Journaling is a process I personally look forward to every morning – I am curious to find out what I am going to say. I don't have a clear journal entry to write before my fingers touch the keyboard but I know I am going to unlock some thoughts that are buried in the jungle of words in my mind. For me, journaling frees me to think.

We live in the communication age with 1.7 billion active monthly users of Facebook, multiple other social networking platforms, the ability to find out anything by googling it or asking Siri, the constant daily influx of emails with high expectations of immediate response and on and on it goes. And yet, are we really benefitting from all this communication and is it causing us to learn and grow more? Having all this communication at our fingertips and having more 'friends' than we could ever spend time with doesn't necessarily bring wisdom. Wisdom comes from reflecting on what is taking place in our lives in the presence of the Holy Spirit. As we journal those reflections, the process can bring understanding and meaning to our lives. Journaling is a way of paying attention to ourselves and to what God has to say to us.

There is no right way to journal. Everyone needs to find their own rhythm. You don't have to journal every day or every week but a growing number find it very beneficial to journal regularly. Let me share some of the benefits that I have found in journaling in recent years.

1. I discover what I think: Some people find out what they think by talking to themselves, others by sitting quietly, but me – I need to write. My mind gets full very quickly with a few thoughts that then tend to go around in circles. So journaling is a way to move me out of being stuck. In order to free my mind up, I need to write those thoughts down so that more can flow. Many of the leadership letters that I write, come from excerpts out of my journal.

But then I recall all you have done, O Lord; I remember your wonderful deeds of long ago. (and then obviously wrote this down) Psalm 77:11

2. I help myself solve problems or make decisions: When approaching a situation, I tend to write down the facts I know, my positive ideas, the pros and cons, my positive and negative feelings, and soon without doing much thinking at all, the answer has become clearer.

You take no delight in sacrifices or offerings. Now that you have made me listen, I finally understand—you don't require burnt offerings or sin offerings. (Understanding comes from dialogue and listening) Psalm 40:6

3. I am able to be honest with the facts and feelings: On some of those troublesome days, it's helpful to just say it like it is, or perhaps say it how it feels. Writing can then become an objective tool to help me sift through the over reactions and perceived stories that I can easily believe.

My enemies shout at me, making loud and wicked threats. They bring trouble on me and angrily hunt me down. My heart pounds in my chest. The terror of death assaults me. Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can't stop shaking. Oh, that I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest! (David lets it all his feelings out) Psalm 55: 3-6

4. I record meaningful moments: Many use a journal for recording their every day life and events – and if you do, this is a great way of keeping those memories. I don't tend to do that but instead focus on significant conversations, special events or things that have grabbed my attention. Usually there is something to learn or take note of. Throughout the Psalms, David shares his victories and high points (as well as his down days and struggles)

You gave me victory over my accusers. You appointed me ruler over nations; people I don't even know now serve me. Psalm 18:43

5. I am able to express my gratitude: A while back, I was asking the Lord how I could develop more positivity in my life. Through my daily devotions, I started reading many verses on thanksgiving. So I decided to start the day by writing down 10 things I can be thankful for. Each day I press in to discover new aspects to be grateful for. I find the first 6 or 7 come easily and then I have to dig a little deeper for the last 3 or 4. It's been a good habit for me to develop.

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High. For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord; I sing for joy at what your hands have done. How great are your works, Lord, how profound your thoughts! Psalm 92: 1, 4-5

6. I discover YWT (Your word today): I know God always has things to say, so I take the opportunity of asking him what he would like to say to me today and then wait with my fingers ready on the keyboard to type what I hear. At first it took me a little while to get into the zone but the more you practice, the more fluent you become. It's like writing your own prophetic word every day.

God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to you; unending love, O Lord, is yours. Surely you repay all people according to what they have done. Psalm 62:11

7. I release my spirit and soul to meditate: I usually spend some time in a book of the bible and read a chapter a day. As I focus on a particular phrase that pops out of the chapter, I start writing down reflections on the words or phrase. Sometimes it turns into a prayer response, an action that I need to take, or an application of some

sort in my life. These meditations become not only a blessing to my own life and relationship with the Lord but also a resource for sharing with others.

Help me understand the meaning of your commandments, and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds. Psalm 119:27

8. I gain perspective as I muse over my jottings: In re-reading my journal from time to time, I discover recurring themes, patterns of experience, regular issues arising and begin to identify a clearer perspective of what is happening in my life and how I need to change.

Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. Habakkuk 2:2

9. It provides an emotional outlet: Like many men, I tend to think more than I feel and don't tend to talk so much about my emotions. However, writing allows me to begin to label those emotions and discover more clearly how I am feeling and what I need to do with those feelings. The writers of the Psalms express all kinds of emotions including loneliness, joy, even frustration with God. This following Psalm reads like a journal:

'To you, Lord, I called; To the Lord I cried for mercy: "What is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me; Lord, be my help." You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.' Psalm 30:8-12

The psalmists through their journaling walk away from their words with a clearer sense of reality. And their words have been a source of encouragement to countless lives.

10. It reduces stress: Journaling can help you reduce mental clutter and stress. We can often feel overwhelmed with so much to do, and so many loose ends to tie up. However, when we actually write down those things in black and white, we can see clearly what is needed and rather than have this vague mountain of work, it becomes a straight forward doable list.

O God, listen to my cry! Hear my prayer! From the ends of the earth, I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety, for you are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me. Let me live forever in your sanctuary, safe beneath the shelter of your wings! Psalm 61:1-4

So journaling seems to fall into a number of categories depending on your style and desire:

a. Writing your story

- i. Events in your life and family
- ii. Documenting your memories
- iii. Picture journal

b. What's happening right now

- i. Unedited thoughts, reactions and feelings
- ii. Making sense of what is happening
- c. Evaluation & debriefing**
 - i. Things I am processing and need to make decisions on
 - ii. Lessons being learned
 - iii. Growth in spirit, soul and body
 - iv. Daily, weekly or less regular 'Examen' (Ignatius exercise in debriefing)
- d. Dreams & desires**
 - i. Calling and vocation
 - ii. Identity and who you are becoming
 - iii. Ideas about the future
- e. Thoughts & ideas about specific things**
 - i. Brainstorming ideas
 - ii. Identifying what to plan
 - iii. Preparation for speaking
 - iv. Quotes
- f. Meditations**
 - i. Personal response to something you see
 - ii. Response to something you read
- g. Prayer journal**
 - i. Record requests, prayers and answered prayer.
 - ii. Conversational prayer response

If you are only using one or two of the categories above in your journaling, how about trying some different areas and see how they can encourage you in new ways. Allow the creativity of your life to unfold as you write. Each blank page is calling you to fill it with your thoughts, reflections, evaluations, meditations, conclusions, repentance, honest appraisals, prayers and musings. Again, as Philippians encourages us, 'whatever you have received, heard or seen (*through your journaling*), put into practice and you will experience God's peace and progress in your life.'

My wife prefers to have a paper journal where she can write her thoughts, paste in pictures and memories and have a hands on approach. She finds journaling helpful to sift through and get to the bottom of internal attitudes or behaviours as well as external relationships and circumstances that are squeezing in. These can feel overwhelming. Often as she writes the Lord gives her a symbol or metaphor that brings some hope and something to hold on to. So as she puts words on paper, to the feelings and facts of life, somehow they can more easily be brought as a sacrifice to the Lord and trust the Lord to bring resolution and help.

I also have a whole shelf of journals from years gone by but I have just transitioned to a digital journal. I use **DAY ONE** and have, to my surprise, really enjoyed it. I love especially the search facility to be able to find an entry very quickly and easily. There are many apps out there, so experiment and find out which one works for you.

May I encourage you into this very worthwhile spiritual discipline of journaling. You won't regret it.

Until next month

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