

## *Journaling 101*

On our Journey to Intimacy with Christ, one of the key components in helping men get to this place is Journaling. This is a foreign concept to most men. They either think this practice is something for women, who have kept diaries since they were little girls or they feel it is something for creative writers or those who have a lot to say. However, we believe Journaling is a gift from God to men. As you know, men are famous for internalizing most of their thoughts, keeping them hidden in the deep recesses of their hearts. Journaling is a way to help men get those issues out of their heart and onto the altar before God. Many men have told us what a release it has been to write down on paper their innermost thoughts. Think of the Bible. The Bible is one big Journal, a collection of writings by real men dealing with real life, inspired by their faith in our supernatural, powerful God. Read a few Psalms and some of Paul's letters and you'll see a full range of emotions and revelations as these men of faith before us recorded their walk with the Lord. In all the cases, the Lord instructed them to write and the Holy Spirit inspired their words. They left a legacy for us, and we're forever grateful, for they help us on our Journey. As God begins to touch a man's life, and he begins to see God at work in his life, the activities and circumstances of life become very noteworthy. Similarly, if we keep a journal, our children someday may benefit from reading our triumphs and our struggles in this life of Faith. In a book called, "Letters from Dad", a man describes how after his father's death, he was going through his father's garage, longing for a memory of his Dad. When all he could find was his Dad's fishing rod and some old lures, he realized what he really wanted was to hear from his Dad. He wished his Dad had written some things down. So, he started an entire ministry to men, inspiring them to write letters to their children and their wives in a very special way. In this technological age of high-speed communication, written words have been lost. Even in recent history, great men in this country's past like pilgrims, pioneers, and patriots all regularly wrote letters and journaled. Today, most of our thoughts and reflections about life are condensed into brief e-mails, which are deleted into cyberspace before they have a chance to sink into consciousness. There is a power in the written word on paper. If you are married, try sending your wife a card versus an e-mail and see which one you find to be more meaningful. God wants us to slow down, be still for a few moments with Him, and just like He instructed countless men from Moses to Paul, He wants us to write down the revelations He gives us. You'll find that God wants to minister to you through this in a very profound way. Just try it.

### **How do I get started?**

You simply need a pen, some paper and your Bible. You can use a spiral notebook or you can use a fancy leather-bound journal. It's entirely up to you. However, we discourage the use of an electronic journal. Those computer files are too easily lost and many times, you will be inspired to write something when you have no access to a computer. Do whatever is most comfortable for you, because this is very personal. Now, let's talk about what should go in your journal. Remember, this is not a

creative writing exercise nor is this an English assignment where grammar and spelling matter. It's not poetry or storytelling. There are no grades for handwriting or for content, for that matter. Think of journaling like an expression of worship. Just as there are various worship forms which appeal to different personality types, men will approach journaling differently. Some men are the creative types who love to write long sentences with imagery and analogies, whereas some men feel more comfortable organizing their thoughts into Bullet points. It doesn't matter. It's your journal. All that matters is that you are putting your heart on paper.

### **A Letter to God**

It all starts with a blank sheet of paper. The hardest part of journaling is getting started. Most men look at that blank sheet of paper, and feel it amply represents what is going on in their brain. They can't think of anything to write- they go blank. Start by writing a letter to God. (Dear God,) Remember, He knows everything about you, but He enjoys it when His children talk to Him. Talk to Him. Tell Him what's on your heart. Tell Him about your struggle with journaling. Tell Him what you're worried about. Tell Him "Thank You" for the blessings in your life. Tell Him your dreams, your fears. Many have described journaling as nothing more than another form of Prayer. However, there's something about writing it all down. It's as if we're laying it all on the table, so He can deal with it. It might start slow, but you'll find, as you begin to open up your heart, a tremendous flow begins. You'll discover all sorts of things inside of you that you didn't know were there.

### **A Historical Record**

Another way to start journaling is the "Lewis and Clark" approach. You probably know this by now, but life is an adventure. Just as these great adventurers, Lewis and Clark, you can use your journal to record the events of your life. As with all journal entries, write the date at the top of the page, to give each day its place in time. Talk about what's going on in your life. Write down your day's events and the challenges you're facing right now. It's strange, but it helps to sort out your thoughts on paper. Again, it helps you bring your life before God. As you grow in your Faith and as God sees you through challenging times and situations, it is important to write these events down. Your Faith will grow, as you take time to reflect upon your life and how God truly is working things out and guiding your steps. Many times, as you begin to write down these miracles and "God sightings" in your own life, a sense of gratefulness begins to overcome you and your journal becomes a prayer of thanksgiving. You may find that you begin by just describing the events of life, and by the end, the Holy Spirit is speaking through you in a powerful way. Many men have commented that when they have gone back to read some of their journal entries, they can't believe they actually wrote the words they're reading. Someday, your journal will be a great testimony to our loving, powerful God who gets involved in our everyday lives. Perhaps, one day, after you're long gone from this Earth, your great grandchildren will find one of your journals in a dusty box in the attic. They'll read

with great interest as they learn about their great grandfather. They'll see that he was a real man with real struggles, but they'll also see how his Faith got him through life.

### **Revelation from God's Word**

We mentioned that you should always have your Bible close by as you journal. God's Word is living and active and He reveals Himself to us through It. As you spend time reading God's Word, He will guide you to all sorts of wisdom to help you tackle your day. It's important to carve out quality time with the Lord, for the more slowly and deliberately you approach God's Word, the more it will speak to you. You'll discover the endless treasury of gems God has provided for us in this timeless Journal called The Bible. It has power, authority, wisdom, conviction, love and grace. In the beginning of John, it says "The Word was God". So, reading scripture is listening to God, and this practice is critical in finding your way to the Inner Chamber with Christ. You'll find, at times, that the Spirit carries you away to a place of unique clarity and perspective. These are great times to write down the things you are seeing and learning, for once we get back into the real world, it's easy to forget what God was showing us. It's been proven that we remember things better once we've written them down. Again, how you record these revelations, whether they're in bullet form or in paragraph form, it doesn't matter. This is your journal. However, it's important to write down your thoughts. If God is speaking to you through His Word, your journal entries can be thought of as your response. You have begun a dialogue with God, and you are one step closer to intimacy with Him.

### **A Prayer Form**

As was stated earlier, many think of journaling as nothing more than another form of Prayer. Just as it can often be more meaningful for you to pray out loud rather than in silent, a written prayer has the extra blessing of being a treasure to keep. When we pray, the Holy Spirit begins to align our hearts with the Father's heart, and you'll be amazed at the words which begin to flow out of you. In your journal, you can write words of praise and adoration for the King. You can ask for forgiveness and write out your desire to repent of those things keeping you from Him. You can pour out thanksgiving. You can ask Him for guidance and wisdom. You can record your concerns for others, as you seek to intercede on their behalf. Since these things are recorded, you'll be able to look back upon them someday and see how God answered your prayers.

### **Share Your Journal**

Your journal is extremely personal. As a matter of fact, the more vulnerable and honest you can be in your journal, the better. You are not compelled to share this with anyone, and you don't even have to save your journals for your children. However, we have found in Journey Groups, when men are bold enough to share some of their journal entries with the other men in the group, untold blessings are created. God wants to say something to you and through you. One of the greatest way the Holy

Spirit speaks is through God's children who allow that Word to be spoken through them. Many of your journal entries will be from the Holy Spirit, and the words need to be shared with others. Oftentimes in our Journey groups, men are hesitant to share. Perhaps, they feel their words are not profound enough or they worry about being judged by others. None of this is true. When men share from their journals, the body of Christ is edified and a stronger bond is built between men.

### **It's Your Journal**

Once you get in the practice of Journaling, it's very addictive. You will develop your own preference and style. Whether you write letters to God, historical records, Scriptural insights or Prayers, the main thing is that your relationship with God will deepen through it- Guaranteed! However, just as with all other attempts to draw close to God, the enemy will try to keep you from this practice. It will be a challenge to sit down and make the time to do this. He will distract you and torment you, but mostly, he'll make you feel as if you have nothing to say to God. What a lie! Journaling has truly been a breakthrough experience for many men. Even for men who have walked with God and studied Scripture for many years, journaling has unlocked a part of their heart which they didn't even realize existed. As we said before, we believe journaling is a gift from God for men. Great men of faith who came before us did it. Let it help you become a great man of faith.