

Lyfe guide to journaling

Journaling is the practice of keeping a kind of spiritual diary. It is a way of focussing the mind, recording some of your God-story so that you can look back and hopefully be encouraged in times to come, and clarifying what it is you most want to talk to God about. It can help us grow in self-awareness too. Richard Foster says, “Keeping a spiritual journal can provide the time and the structure for exploring our lives—our thoughts, our feelings, our dreams, our relationships with others and with our God, our gifts, our beliefs. It can increase our awareness of God’s leading and action in our lives.”

Many great spiritual leaders through the ages- among them John Wesley, George Fox, and Leo Tolstoy who filled 13 volumes- have kept journals that have come to light after their death and been a source of inspiration to others. Who knows- perhaps yours will be a posthumous classic too?

A journal doesn't need to be a leather bound notebook, destined for eventual publication. It could be a scrappy exercise book, a lined A4 pad, a ring bound sketch book. And in these days of technological wizardry you could journal on your phone, your ipad or your laptop just as easily.

Here are some ideas of the sorts of things you could put in your journal:

- You could write about the people and situations you have most on your mind, bringing them to God, and writing down your prayers about what is going on.
- You might want to write down Bible verses that have struck you particularly. Writing them down will help you memorise them too.
- You could copy quotes from books you are reading that have inspired you in your walk with God, so that you have them easily to hand when you want to refer back to them.
- You could write down things you think God has been saying to you lately (see the lyfe guide to listening to God)
- You could list the things you have to thank God for- the big and small ways he has provided for you, the ways you have felt his love, the good things in life, all of which are from his hand.
- You could keep track of the prayers that you have seen answered. We all go through times of doubting God's faithfulness. When the Israelites fell into this they would recount what God had done for them in the past (see for example Psalm 78). It is easier to do this if you have some examples written down to remind you.
- You could write your anxieties, needs and feelings, as a way of releasing them to God and asking for his help to carry your burdens.
- You could jot down what you can remember from talks you heard at church, or notes from podcasts or reflections on interesting conversations you have had.
- If you are more visual than verbal, you could sketch or paint images that capture all of the above.