

The Practice of Journaling

I. Purposes of this session:

- A. To open our hearts to God through the practice of journaling
- B. To share with each other what transpires for us as we pray in writing

II. Suggested procedure:

A. Opening

1. **Light the candle** to symbolize God's creativity and presence. Invite God's presence with you as you explore writing as a form of prayer.
2. **Explain the process** Journaling is a spiritually healing way of connecting with God and with yourself through writing. A journal is a tool of self-discovery, a mirror for the soul, a place to capture ideas and insights, a friend and confidant. A journal is a place where you can explore your life journey and your faith journey, giving regular, prayerful attention to your spiritual growth.

B. What you'll need

You are encouraged to use pen and paper. When we write with our hands, we slow down, taking time to listen. The physical act of writing and the sound of pen on paper are helpful to some. If you use pen and paper, make the journal portable and easy to use. Choose a pen that feels familiar and comfortable. Select paper that you'll enjoy writing on. Do what works for you. If you choose to use computer, choose a program with which you are comfortable.

C. Write!

The heart of the practice of journaling is the writing! Write regularly—every day if you're able. Forget the rules of grammar and punctuation. Forget your fears. Forget what your English teacher told you about the right way to write. Write down your observations, feelings, and ideas. If you don't know what to write, begin by writing "I don't know what to write" and see what follows!

There are many books of spiritual exercises for journal writers. Here are a few exercises that you may find to be helpful.

1. Morning Pages.

In her books *The Artist's Way* and *Walking in the World*, Julia Cameron made this form of writing popular. She encourages the writer to write anything and everything on three pages of paper each morning. Make it a prayer, a plea, a complaint. Just write it each day.

2. Gratitude Journal

Respond to a questions like "For what three things am I thankful today?"

3. Answer questions like:

What do I desire? What am I yearning for?

Where do I see God today?

What am I hoping for?

4. Have a conversation with yourself or another person—a biblical character, Jesus, a fictional character, a friend, real-life legend, or a family member!

5. Record your goal and then several small steps you plan to take to achieve the goal.

D. Allow at least ten minutes for writing. End the time with “Amen” and ask participants to slowly leave their prayer and return to this time and place. The group will wait in silence until all are ready.

E. Invite each to share what happened as they wrote – What was it like to do this kind of writing? What did they notice? What surprised them? It may be not much of anything happened, it may seem strange or silly, or it may be quite dramatic or powerful for the person. Whatever happens is what happened - there are no right and no wrong answers.

F. Respond to each person’s sharing with a simple “Thanks” or “Thank you.” Once everyone has had a chance to share, invite conversation about this form of praying.

G. Thank all who participated. You might end the session with some form of spoken prayer before you extinguish the candle.