

Keeping a Spiritual Journal with Moses and Job
A Christian Personal Growth Path

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Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that journal-keeping is an excellent tool for spiritual growth and personal development. There are many fine books on the mechanics, psychology, and spirituality of journal-keeping, but there are few which use Biblical characters as guides for deriving optimum benefit from journal-keeping, and which seek to integrate the inspiration of God's word with common sense.

The Biblical heroes Moses and Job are excellent models for journal-keeping because they are so human. We will ask: How can the attitudes, actions, and experiences of Moses and Job enrich our journal-keeping experience? We will focus on aspects of the lives of Job and Moses that are relevant to journal-keeping.

Grass Roots Whole-Person Development

It has been shown by Ira Progoff, Morton Kelsey, George Simons, and others that journaling can contribute greatly to personal development. They have also explored the potential of journaling as an aid to the interpretation of dreams and other manifestations of the subconscious mind. As a practical supplement to their efforts, we will explore the potential of journaling as a tool for ventilating, discerning, and motivating. Journaling can be a mirror and catalyst in our spiritual journey. We will consider how Moses and Job can help us grow, heal, and maintain spiritual and emotional health.

Structure of the Book

Because this book is devoted to inspiring and assisting the practice of journaling, the largest section of the book contains blank or briefly annotated pages on which to begin or continue our journal journey. The annotated pages highlight themes discussed within the book that the reader may find helpful for journaling. The first section of the book presents a foundation for keeping a spiritual journal, as well as pointing out the creative possibilities offered by Moses, Job, and lectio divina.

The less complicated we make our journaling, the longer we will be able to keep at it. Journaling should take away a veil, rather than add one. Let us begin our journey.

Chapter One -Why Keep a Spiritual Journal?

The individual can come up with many reasons why journal-keeping is impractical. One could look at the intangible nature of the results and argue that it is a substantial waste of time and energy. We could argue that a journal is appropriate primarily for 'religious' people, especially those gifted at writing. We could excuse ourselves as being incapable of rendering an interpretation of our journal entries. We could reason: Isn't it better just to pray and read Scripture?

Journaling need not take away from the physical, spiritual, and psychological necessities of life. If journaling is important to us, we can make the time and effort to incorporate it into our schedule.

The first question that comes to mind involves how to keep a spiritual journal. From a grass roots perspective, the answer is simple: be honest, natural, and enthusiastic. Strive to obtain a balance between the practical and the spiritual, the objective and the emotional.

There is no magic formula or method. Each person must strive to find an approach with which they are comfortable. This would include the timing and amount of time devoted to journaling, the type of journal we will keep, and the nature of our writings. Will they be in the form of a diary, a conversation with God, perhaps a conversation with a Biblical figure with whom we can identify, or simply a letter to God or ourselves? We need to determine the purpose of our journal in order to converge our efforts towards this general or specific goal.

When we look to our journal for healing and growth, it is essential that we form a bond with a spiritual director, confessor, or counselor. We don't necessarily need to discuss the journal with them, but because our journal may unearth painful memories from the past that lurk in our subconscious, it is important to establish a relationship and keep lines of communication open.

A personal diary is a recording of events and feelings that can serve as a spiritual journal if we conduct a dialogue with God about those experiences and emotions. If we record our intuitions on how God is present in our lives in both a general and specific way, our diary becomes a spiritual journal as well. There need not be a dichotomy between our human perspective on life and our perception of God's activity in our life. Ideally, we will try to integrate them and discern a common flow which leads to a more harmonious relationship with God. God wishes to be our companion and friend, rather than adversary and critic.

It is essential that we resist the urge to imitate the journal-keeping habits and style of anyone else, including the saints. The saints would be the last ones to urge us to imitate them mechanically. It is fine to learn and appropriate practices and attitudes which suit you. It is another thing to copy them as if another's path to holiness is necessarily ours.

Because Christ works through our human nature when we cooperate with Him, we can trust the integrity of our efforts if we integrate our journaling with prayer and reflection. The key is not how long or often we journalize, but how honest and in tune we are with God and ourselves when we journalize. We can offer our journal writings to God as a gift of ourselves.

We must also determine the extent of our commitment to journal-keeping. Do we want to make daily or periodic entries? Without being scrupulous, we should develop an approach that works for us, and stick with it. As with all endeavors of our Christian vocation, our concern should be with the integrity of our efforts. After fulfilling our responsibilities as best we can, we leave the results in God's hands. We don't always know how God wishes to use us, so it's best to keep our eyes and ears open for His word and will.

Enjoying our Journal

Journal writing should not be a chore. At times it may feel like a duty, but it should not be a drudgery. When it becomes so, it's time either to take a break from it or to rethink our approach. Generally, journal writing should flow rather than be forced. There will be dry days for journaling just as in prayer and Bible reading. When dryness occurs, we simply journal as best we can, resist unnecessary anxiety, accept the dryness as part of life and God's plan, and move on.

There should be an element of fun, discovery, and renewal in journaling. A journal can be a catharsis and revelation of our emotional and spiritual movements. Journaling brings into the open what lay hidden. Gradually, we find ourselves, our feelings, and other persons easier to understand. Once we become comfortable with journal writing, we will look forward to it as a special time with God and ourselves.