

Journaling Workshop

Intro (15 minutes)

- Wendy McFarland
- At Heritage 18 yrs
- Two girls, 13 and 9
- Elementary, turned Preschool Teacher
- Avid Journaler for a lot of years—will tell more of my story in a minute

Pray....

Introductions: what made you decide to sign up for this workshop? What are you hoping to get out of it? Do you journal, or have you journaled in the past? What kind of journal, how has it helped, not helped, etc. (Go around, write down what people are hoping to get out of it....)

My Story (10 minutes)

Zoe asked me to lead this workshop because she knows I journal a lot. I've never really been taught how to journal, so all I can share is what works for me, and some information I found online when I started looking around for resources. I started keeping a diary when I was in sixth grade. I kept one off and on through high school and college. When I really started growing with the Lord, after college, I journaled much more frequently, writing my prayers, praises, questions, what I was learning in scripture, and so forth. It became an important tool for me in my communication with God. I'm quiet and don't talk a lot, but can process in my journal more quickly and effectively sometimes even than talking to Him, because I can pour my heart out on paper much more easily than speaking. So I talk to Him on paper.

I was recently reading a book by Joni Ekerdt, who said, "The discipline of remembering is so important to the Lord – and to us." She quoted Deuteronomy 4:9, which is on the top of your paper, and says, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen." I wanted to give you a list of verses where we are told to remember and not forget what the Lord has done, but there were just way too many to list! But there are a few listed there on your paper....

We all have memories. Some make us laugh. Others make us cry. However, it's nice to recall the past, especially with someone who was present when the memories happened. After the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, the Lord told Joshua to choose 12 men, one from each tribe, to take 12 stones from the Jordan where the priests were standing. They were to place them in a pile as a memorial at their campsite that night. Gathering another 12 stones, Joshua piled them in the Jordan where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant were standing. Later, Joshua tells the Israelites, "In the future your children will ask, 'What do these stones mean?' Then you can tell them, 'This is where the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' For the Lord your God dried up the river right before your eyes, and He kept it dry until you were all across..." (Joshua 4:21-23).

God knows how important it is to remember His faithfulness to us. To remember things He has shown us, or ways He has worked in our lives and through our circumstances to show Himself to us. And to share with others our testimony of His faithfulness. It helps build others' faith as well when we share our own stories. There is an article I'm giving you about "Six Ways to Fight Spiritual Amnesia," to help us not to forget. There are several ways listed, but journaling is one

way to do that. I don't know about you, but I have trouble remembering I did yesterday, let alone what happened two weeks, or two months, or two years ago! We are human. We are forgetful. But when you journal, you can look back and remember what He has done. This builds our faith and helps us in our hard places.

Some of you may have heard me tell this story before, but it's worth repeating. Four years ago I was laying in an ultrasound room because they had seen something suspicious on my mammogram and were looking further into it. It was dark, I was alone, I was crying, and scared. As I laid there, what came to mind were the words, "It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure." I kept saying it to myself over and over, laying there. It calmed me down a bit, and reassured me of God's presence with me. I didn't know where it came from or how I knew those words. I was pretty sure it was a Bible verse, but I didn't know what verse or why I knew it. But they were words of comfort and peace to me in that hard moment. Later I looked them up, and found them in Psalm 18, verse 32. "It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure." So I was diagnosed with cancer two days later, and walked through the hardest summer of my life, but Jesus was by my side, and I journaled a LOT during that season. I even have sent a digital version of that journal to people who have walked through cancer or other difficult circumstances. But that verse continued to run through my mind over and over through every scary procedure or at night when I would lay in bed with "what ifs" trying to derail me. "It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure." That verse, and lots of others, helped me through the hard journey.

After treatment was over, and things calmed down, I was looking through some old journals, as I do from time to time (and we'll talk more about that later). And I saw my verse written there, "It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure." I had read it that morning, it stuck out to me, so I had written it down in my journal, and beside it I wrote, "I want to remember this when I go through hard things." A simple prayer, written on a random page in a journal, THREE YEARS BEFORE cancer. And the Lord answered that prayer, laying in an ultrasound room, bringing that verse back to mind. Three years before, He was preparing and equipping me to walk the hardest journey He'd had me on, and because of my journal, I could look back and see that. I could remember His faithfulness.

According to the psalmist in Psalm 111:2, (written at the top of your paper,) those who "delight" in God's works "ponder" them.

To delight in something requires stopping and noticing it; attending to it, treasuring it—as you would a photograph of your young child. Indeed, a good description of what you do with that photograph in your hand is to ponder it.

Although "ponder" can sound passive or abstract to us, the original Hebrew word is active, eager, and brimming with life. It means to seek out with care, to search after, to inquire, to examine, to interrogate. ("Study" is how it is rendered in Ezra 7:10: "For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.")

That's what biblical remembering looks like. Actively, earnestly, deliberately reflecting on God and thinking carefully about what he's said and done. Rehearsing, recalling, and relishing his story and our role in it. Thanking him, praising him for rescuing us, and for giving us the gifts and opportunities we've had for success and service. Acknowledging who we are and whose we are.

Remembering is deliberate attention.

Forgetting doesn't take special effort. It just happens, it's our gravitational pull.

If we don't attend to God's words and works we lose our delight in them. We lose our way, we lose perspective. We forget who we are and whose we are.

We need to remember.

Remember to remember.

What's the difference between a diary and a journal?

- A diary is about "what"--events that happened.
- A journal is about "so what," and "what now"
- Looking inside yourself, how events affected you

Don't think of journaling as keeping a diary. Just have a notepad handy when you read your Bible each day, and when God highlights a Scripture to you, copy it into your notepad/journal. Maybe that Scripture applies to something you've been praying for such as a job or a financial need. Write the prayer request next to the verse. Over time, go back over your journal and continue to claim those verses in prayer. When the answer comes, go back and record the date.

Go Through Handout (20 minutes)

Why journal?

- Build our faith
 - we see God's faithfulness in our past
 - Psalm 77:11--find other verse about remembering,
 - how far we've come, growth, trust that God will do it again
- Record spiritual growth
 - like pencil marks on a kitchen doorway—you can look back and see where you were a month ago, a year ago, and how you have changed and grown.
- Draw closer to God
 - any time spent with Him pleases Him and will only benefit us! A journal can be conversation with Him. This is one of the main reasons I journal, is to be in conversation with Him. I write, I stop, I listen....I write some more.
- Track prayer requests
 - helps us remember to actually pray, and to see God's answers--builds faith, invitation to praise
- Slow down to take time with God
 - when? Early morning, lunchtime, before bed--even just short snippets--start small (observations, questions, short prayers, etc)
 - journaling helps me stay focused—if I'm just sitting, praying, my mind wanders. Writing keeps my mind focused on Him.
- Release stress, anger, pain, worry, etc.
 - helps us find peace, not overreact, release hurt in painful memories, etc in a safe place, without saying something we wish we hadn't to someone or sharing too much.
- Process what God has done/is doing
 - acts as a "rearview mirror" to look back.

- safe place to process hard or hurtful things
- records spiritual thoughts and realizations so they're not forgotten
- "I want to write down what I learn, so I don't have to relearn it later."
- Sift truth from lies
- Sometimes I'll write something, how I feel, and seeing it in black and white reminds me, "Wait a minute, Wendy, that's not true." I see that it's a lie, or that I have some sort of expectation I shouldn't have, or see that my thinking is flawed and doesn't line up with what God says about me.
- Gain understanding about yourself
- like an "archeological dig," discover what's beneath the surface—looking under the hood of a car. Why do I feel that way? Who told me that? What's going on here?

Types of Journals

- Prayer journal
- list with two columns or sections (see printable one-- mothersniche.com, also see bookmark)
- Quotes journal
- always good to include your own reactions, thoughts to what you're reading
- Gratitude journal
- Ann Voskamp's Joy Dare--3 things every day--three red things...three warm things...etc
- Bible study journal
- rachelwojo.com for printable ones--also see bookmarks
- Combination of any of the above--whatever works for you!
- Personally, I combine all of these into one
- often put bubbles around verses, so I can look back quickly and see them

How to Get Started Journaling

1. Set a consistent time in a quiet place. Invite the Holy Spirit in.
2. Make a commitment to stick with it—set a reasonable goal (once a week, every day for a month, etc.).
3. Date each entry—I read something that said there are two rules for journaling. Number 1 is date each entry. Number 2 is "Don't make any other rules."
4. Write from feeling, not from fact. Don't just record what happened in your life. Write down how your experiences affected your heart and emotions. Write to God. Ask Him questions. Be truthful. Don't edit yourself or worry about someone seeing it. Remember, God delights in your presence and attention, not your mastery of writing! Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, handwriting, etc.
5. Periodically review your entries –"harvest" your journal.

Online Resources to help get started

- A Closer Walk with God: A Guide to Spiritual Journaling:
<http://acloserwalkwithgod.blogspot.com/2006/10/guide-to-spiritual-journaling.html>
- Six Beginner Tips for Writing a Spiritual Journal
<https://healthyspirituality.org/six-beginner-tips-for-writing-a-spiritual-journal/>
- How to Encounter God through Spiritual Journaling
<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/how-to-encounter-god-through-journaling-11579830.html>
- How to Keep a Spiritual Journal
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/journaling/#course-introduction>

Books about Spiritual Journaling

Journal Keeping: Writing for Spiritual Growth—Luann Budd

Journaling as a Spiritual Practice—Helen Cepero

There are lots more....these are just two I have read and could recommend.

Other methods/helps—*I've attached some descriptions and examples in your packet and we will try some in a few minutes*

- prompts
- lament
- lectio divina
- picture yourself in the story
- examen
- two way journaling
- listing lies and truth

Time to Practice.....(30 Minutes)

-10 minutes each

- Prompts
- Lectio Divina
- Picture Yourself in the Story

Sharing/Questions/Closing (15 minutes)

- Email address is in your packet if you have any questions, feedback, etc
- Pray