

# The Gift of Journaling

There are very few spiritual habits as difficult to develop as journaling! Most people make numerous attempts to build the habit over the course of numerous years before it sticks. Once people build the habit, however, and see the immense graces that come from using a prayer journal, they tend to continue the practice for the rest of their lives! Here are some practical suggestions that help to maintain the gift of prayer journaling—

There are numerous “forms” of journaling and no “right” way to do it. For example, some people use their prayer journal simply as the place to make a few notes at the end of their personal prayer time, expressing the affective movements—the movements of the heart—that took place during prayer; this might be just a few sentences noting the most important elements of that day’s encounter with God. Other people use their prayer journal to write letters to God, and even letters *from* God. This style of journaling will usually take place *during* prayer, rather than at the end, and will often encompass entire pages, rather than just a few sentences. Also, it will feel more like a “stream of consciousness” style of writing, where they are not overly concerned with spelling and proper punctuation, but rather, simply writing everything that comes to their mind and heart, trusting that the Spirit will pierce through their words in certain places.

Regardless of the style of journaling you embrace, here are some important, practical suggestions to make this spiritual gift more fruitful—

- Make sure that your journal entries focused primarily on the interior movements of your heart, rather than on details of your day, which is the focus of a diary.
- Be completely honest in your journal. If you purposefully omit things in your journal it’s usually out of fear... God desires to visit with you about that fear!
- Keep your journal in a safe place so that others will not be tempted to read it.
  - If your spouse knows that you’re journaling, talk to him or her about how sacred your journal is and ask him or her to respect your privacy by not reading it.
  - For those of you who are tech-savvy, keeping a digital journal adds a beautiful layer of protection from wandering eyes!
- Date every journal entry.
  - You might be surprised that God will occasionally invite you to go back and read a particular journal entry, which is easier to find if they are dated.
  - By dating each entry, including the one on the day you attend spiritual direction, you can easily track how the weeks have unfolded.
- Review your prayer journal before going to spiritual direction. Pay attention to common “themes” that come up in your journaling day after day, or week after week.