



Chapter 7: Journaling

Learn to greatly enhance your study experience while leaving a spiritual legacy for future generations. Journaling adds yet another human sense to the overall effort of hearing God speak through His Word. The actions of listening, reading, praying, meditating, and seeking are enhanced when writing is introduced to each of these activities.

The Challenge

"I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways..."
—Psalm 119:11

Who among us does not experience a busy schedule?

Constant activities and pressing obligations make each day a challenge to read God's Word. Jobs, child care, homemaking, friends, family, and school impact our schedules in such a way that finding time to read the Word becomes a significant challenge. Because so many of us live in the "fast lane" these days, it's difficult for us to find time even to read God's Word, much less find the necessary time to reflect and meditate on it.

Yet, reading and meditating on God's Word on a regular basis is exactly what He wants us to do.

No matter how hard it seems, God wants us to rearrange our schedules and prioritize our lives in such a way that we find the time necessary to receive a blessing from His Word.

King David carried the weight of a nation on his shoulders. When he was not out fighting battles with Philistines he was in his Jerusalem headquarters making strategic plans for his country and his people. Yet, in spite of his busy schedule, he set aside time for the Word of God. Not only did he read and study God's Word, he meditated on it:

"My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word."

—*Psalm 119:148*

Meditating on the Word

If you have embarked on the *Walk with the Word Scripture Reading Plan*, you have no doubt been blessed with a simple, easy method for reading through God's Word entirely in 3 years. Most likely you are gaining valuable knowledge about the Bible from the numerous learning opportunities available through the church—the Sunday School study, the message from the pulpit, the midweek small group Bible study. It's astonishing how much we can learn about God and His plan for our lives simply by reading His Word!

Reading God's Word on a regular basis is a good thing to do. God's Word provides knowledge. Knowledge is important because it is the basis for knowing truth. Knowledge helps us to understand God's Person, God's ways, and God's interaction in human history. And God's Word helps to understand ourselves.

*But there is a difference between **reading** God's Word and **meditating** on God's Word.*

Reading for reading's sake can easily become nothing more than the accumulation of facts or a spiritual discipline that needs to be completed. One of the dangers of a Scripture reading plan which moves rapidly through the Bible is that little time will be given for reflection and meditation, much less personal application.

To meditate on God's Word means to reflect on it. To reflect on God's Word is to think something through in its entirety; to ponder, to scrutinize, to "knead" something through. It's during reflection that we come to the point of personalizing God's Word; that is, we begin to ask the question, "What does this mean to me?"

It's through meditation and reflection on God's Word that the knowledge and facts which come from our reading begin to take on real substance; that is, they become personally relevant to us. King David didn't just read God's Word. He wrote,

"I will meditate on Your wonders"
—Psalm 119:78

Overview of Journaling

Journaling is a splendid way to help us learn to meditate and reflect on God's Word, as well as make personal application.

Many people do not realize this, but David's psalms (songs) are a record of his meditation and reflection on God, His Word and His works. Throughout Psalm 119, for example, David frequently refers to God's laws, God's ordinances, His precepts, His ways, His testimonies, His commandments and His statutes. He used the gift God gave him for song by writing down his thoughts and insights. Some of the psalms are very personal, reflecting some difficult issues he was facing at the time. Other psalms are majestic and inspirational, reflecting on the wonders of God. All of David's psalms have one thing in common, however; they reflect what the Holy spirit was putting in his heart. Through the divine inspiration of the Holy spirit, David's "journals" become Scripture.

Not everyone can write psalms like David. But most of us can write something. Most of us are capable of writing at least a sentence or two about what God is putting on our hearts.

Writing what God is putting on our hearts—particularly as it relates to His Word—is what journaling is all about.

Recording one's thoughts in a journal is unlike writing in a diary. Diaries provide a detailed record of daily activities and events, what good or bad things happen to us, or what experiences we're having. Journaling is different, however. Journaling is a method of recording one's thoughts, one's feelings, one's insights into things. Whereas diaries are event oriented, journals are thought oriented. Of course, an absolute distinction between a diary and a journal does not need to be mandated. Journal entries often record events, and diary entries, thoughts.

Church history provides us with numerous examples of those who journaled: Augustine, John Wesley, David Livingstone, Amy Carmichael, to name a few. One contemporary model is Jim Elliot.

The Journals of Jim Elliot

In 1949, Jim Elliot graduated with highest honors from Wheaton College in Illinois. He was someone who journaled extensively. His complete works may be found in *The Journals of Jim Elliot*, compiled and edited by his wife and author Elisabeth Elliot.

On October 28, 1949, Elliot wrote these prophetic words in his journal:

"One of the great blessings of heaven is the appreciation of heaven on earth. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Six years later, at the young age of twenty-eight, Jim Elliot and four missionary comrades were martyred by Auca Indians on the Curaray River in the jungles of Ecuador. Though Elliot was only twenty-eight when he died, he left for his wife, his only child Valerie, and all the world a legacy of how God moves in the heart of a man through His Word.*

Perhaps most revealing in *The Journals of Jim Elliot* is a man in whom the Word of God permeated every thought. Not a decision was made that did not resound with the counsel of God's Word. It is through his journals that we gain insight into the spiritual character of the man.

Most of Jim Elliot's journal entries were brief and reflected his thoughts about a particular section of Scripture. For example, this entry from September 9, 1948:

"A verse stands out this morning in 1 Chronicles 12:8: Men who wish to do great things for a rejected king must be 'separated,' 'shielded' (in the hold), 'strong,' 'skilled,' 'fearless' (as a lion in face) and 'swift.' This makes for a good outline (for teaching)."

And this entry from December 10:

"Psalm 62. Thankful for two new aspects of truth shown me this morning, Father. Oh, that every day brought something new. Make it so, I pray. Psalm 62:1,2 and 5,6: The first describes the rest of the soul's waiting in silence upon God, who is my salvation. The second beseeches the soul to rest so upon God, who is my expectation. The first is settled; rest in salvation is secure and that is enough. 'I shall not be greatly moved' (perhaps a little wavering). The insertion of expectation has removed any question of being moved.... Teach me what that means, Lord Jesus."

And from December 13:

"Psalm 65: Immanuel! Oh, the glory of a God who can come to those He loves. Struck just now with the tremendous meaning of the incarnation. Think of it, thy God a wizened, weak babe in a manger of straw. The Almighty Jehovah—all of Him, in swaddling clothes. And there is not the aura in that stable which the artists paint there. No, it was dark and the straw was prickly; the night, chill, God, born of woman! O Jesus, my Immanuel, how grateful I am that Thou art no less with me in common places than in more elevated ones."

Because Jim Elliot journaled his thoughts as he poured over the Scriptures, a legacy was left for generations of how God "spoke" to him through the Word. From his journals, a living legacy was left for us to know the inner thoughts of a deeply committed Christian.

Journaling is a time-tested and proven method of recording how God interacts with us in our everyday lives, as well as how we ourselves interact with Him. Journaling can be for the purpose of recording observations in Scripture, reflecting how God is dealing with us, or for recording our prayers. Regarding Scripture, journaling serves the useful purpose of assisting us in taking time to reflect and meditate on God's Word.

*(The entire story of the mission and martyrdom of the five missionaries in Ecuador is vividly told in Elisabeth Elliot's *Through Gates of Splendor*.)

Creating a Word Journal

Journaling is an excellent way to get in touch with what God wants to teach us personally from His Word.

When we sit before the Word of God, we come with an expectancy that God has something to say to us. We pray beforehand asking, "Lord, what do You have for me from Your Word today?" There is the expectancy that the Holy Spirit will reveal to our spirits some truth the Word has for us personally, beyond simply gaining information or insight. This process of personal revelation (theologically referred to as "illumination") through the Word is facilitated by journaling, for the reader purposes to write down that which the Spirit is speaking to the heart through the Word. (For more information about how to hear God speaking through His Word see the page so titled on the web site.).

(Some Bible scholars and teachers object to this approach to Bible reading. They contend that it is improper for the reader to ask the question, "What does this mean to me?" when reading Scripture. They argue that to interpret Scriptures correctly, we must instead ask the question, "What was the author's intent in writing this?" and we must take into consideration to whom the author was writing before making an interpretation. This objection is a valid one if the discussion

involves proper methods of interpretation of Scripture. But interpreting Scripture is quite different from personally applying Scripture. The Bible was written for us; for each and every believer who comes face-to-face with the Word of God. Exodus 12:26 states, "*And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' you shall say....*" [See also Exod. 13:8, Deut. 4:9; 6:20.] That someone might make an inappropriate application is possible, but because there is a risk does not mean that no attempt at personal application should be made at all!)

Sometimes God speaks to us concerning personal issues we are dealing with, or emotional struggles that overwhelm us. Other times, the Lord provides a specific answer to a problem we are dealing with. Or, the Word may open our minds to something we're failing to do as a Christian, or as a parent, or as a son or daughter. One of the benefits of journaling is that it slows the reading process down, allowing time for meditation and reflection, recording what God is telling our hearts through His Word.

Journaling does not have to be pages and pages of stream of consciousness, although for some, that may become a wonderful source of inspiration or creativity. Most people, however, have tight schedules and can afford to write only a brief paragraph or two. Even one sentence is worthwhile if it reflects what the Word has inscribed on the heart.

The key to good journaling from the Word is to record what God's Word is saying to your heart.

The point in journaling, however, is write *something* down. That way, more thought will be given to a key word in the chapter or a particularly meaningful verse. The secret to journaling is to find the verse or phrase that has particular meaning to you at the moment, and write about what it means to you.

By doing this, the Word of God becomes personally meaningful and applicable and the reader comes away with the rightful impression, "God spoke to me today."

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path."
—Psalm 119:105*

Leaving a Legacy

*"The unfolding of Your words gives light;
It gives understanding to the simple."
—Psalm 119:130*

A "legacy" is defined as "a gift...left to someone..." and "anything handed down from the past, as from an ancestor." Jim Elliot's journals are a legacy for generations to come. Any believer who journals leaves a spiritual legacy, and parents can leave a lasting spiritual legacy for their children.

Take, for example, a Christian parent. Children learn most of their spiritual values from their parents; therefore, parents are to be role models for the way they want their children to grow up spiritually. As the child grows and learns spiritual truths from the parent, they also learn about the Bible. As they grow older and desire to learn more about the Bible on their own, they have an abundance of commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias and other helps to explain the Bible.

There is an abundance of commentaries on the Bible, but there are no spiritual commentaries on you, the child's parent.

Thus, a child is left without a written record of how God and His Word touched the lives and hearts of his or her parents.

Practically speaking, parents and children are not together enough for the child to know how God is working in every facet of the parent's life. Even families who have daily devotions together are rarely

exposed to the parents' inner thoughts. Children are usually not aware of their parents' personal struggles, tough decisions, burdens of prayer, and occasional crisis that the parent must endure, much less how God provides answers, guidance and comfort from His Word. Children are often protected from such trials and afflictions, as well as personal temptations that the parent might face. Therefore, children rarely have an opportunity to see how exactly and in what manner the Word of God is "fleshed out" in the life of the parent. In other words, there is no recorded spiritual commentary on the parent.

This is where leaving a legacy through journaling comes in. As parents journal daily how God's Word speaks to the heart, a legacy is left for their children. Wouldn't it be a surprise—and a great value—if on graduation day, or as a wedding present, parents presented to their son or daughter a spiritual commentary on how God spoke to them over the years of their growing up? Done consistently through the Bible, a complete commentary could be presented that would remain long after the parent passed away.

And what about future generations? What a blessing it would be for that son or daughter to show the journal to their own children and say, "Here is a spiritual commentary on the spiritual life of my parents and how God spoke to them through the Bible."

For the next Christian generation, few things would be of greater treasure than the spiritual legacy of their parents' walk in the Word.

Leaving a legacy through journaling is not difficult. Here's how one parent describes his habit of journaling:

"I get up before anyone else in the house. I help myself wake up by fixing a fresh cup of coffee and taking a shower. Then I spend some time praying for my family, my work, and special prayer needs. Then I open my Bible and read one chapter of the Old Testament. I then pick out one subject or one verse or one phrase or even one word that touches my heart, and then I write about it. (I sit at a computer which makes editing easy.) Sometimes I do a little commentary on the verse, and add

my own insights into what it means. But then I make sure I explain why the verse means a lot to me personally, and how it touches my heart. (Time is short before I go to work, so I only write a paragraph or two, except on weekends when I have more time.) Then I repeat the procedure from the New Testament and do the same thing. I'm about halfway through the Bible now and I've written over 500 pages! I always back up my work, and every month I print out a hard copy so I'll have that just in case. (One day, I'll put it all on a CD.) I plan to present it to my children on their wedding day, in the form of a bounded book. There may be three or four volumes!"

This man's children are going to receive a great blessing some day that will be with them for the rest of their lives!

Sample Journal Entries

Sample journal entries by others who have journaled through Walk with the Word (initials fictitious):

"Someone said something to me yesterday that really hurt me. Then God spoke to me through his word. Genesis 45:7: 'And God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance.' There is so much in this verse. Joseph could have been justified by the world's standards to have them killed or even thrown into prison. But what did he do? He forgave them. Why, the truth is that he forgave them a long time ago. This is what God calls me to do. When I harbor bad feelings about someone I only hurt myself."

SR, February 3

"Today I read that 'David inquired of the Lord.' I suddenly realized how many decisions I make every day, really important ones, without inquiring of the Lord. No more just saying 'Yes' when someone asks me to do something. First I'm going to inquire of the Lord! Is it something he wants me to do?"

RR, January 6

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