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The Stress-Buster and Women's Ministry Motivator



"Writing, expressing can heal us. It can focus, support, and enhance our lives and well-being. Whether we laugh or we cry, whether through sorrow or joy, we can understand more about ourselves, and each other, through keeping a journal, diary, or diaries." - Doreene Clement

Nine Reasons to Journal

Everyone has a story. Your experiences, your feelings, ideas, thoughts, and dreams all combine to form your life and your journey, which is your story. And a great way to keep a record of all the things that have happened in your life is to keep a journal or diary. Usually people resist keeping a journal because they think they aren't good enough writers, that someone will read their innermost thoughts or that they have much more important things to do. Instead of thinking of a journal as a diary - a book in which you merely relate the day's events - think of it as a precious container for inner reflection, spiritual growth and emotional exploration. Writing down reflections about events experienced each day is an invaluable way to evaluate your performance, set higher standards of excellence and find new ways to solve difficult problems.

There's nothing like putting pen to paper to instill you with a sense of optimism, anticipation and excitement about your goals or aspirations. The act of writing something down always makes it more real, more concrete than merely thinking it. When you commit to writing down your thoughts and experiences, you have put them into a solid form. Let's look at some of the benefits of keeping a journal:

1. Improve your health.

Researchers like James W. Pennebaker, M.D., professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, and Joshua M. Smyth, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at North Dakota State University, are proving what journal writers have always known, journaling is good not only for the soul, but for the body as well. The first studies, examined healthy people and journaling. Researchers have found that people who write about their deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding upsetting events have stronger immunity and visit their doctors half as often.

More recently, exciting and innovative research appeared in the April 14 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. The research, conducted by Joshua M. Smyth at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, showed that writing about a stressful experience reduces physical symptoms in patients with chronic illnesses. The team monitored 112 patients with arthritis or asthma. The subjects were asked to write in a journal for 20 minutes three days in a row about either an emotionally stressful incident or their plans for the day. Of the group who expressed their anxiety on paper, 50% showed a large improvement in their disease after four months.

2. Reduce stress.

"When Michael, came home from Vietnam, he couldn't talk about his experiences. For years, he kept his feelings and thoughts clenched in his heart like a fist. Then he started writing. At first, the words poured out in great waves of tears onto the pages of his journal. Over time, he began to notice how each sentence, and each page, brought greater release and distance from the pain he had borne in silence for so many years. Vietnam began to lose its power and stranglehold on him and his life. "

Journaling has a proven benefit of reducing stress. Once you've taken time to journal, you don't carry as much of what you have written about within you. It is on the paper or in the computer. By journaling, you give yourself a powerful form of self-expression, and through that expression, you can gain clarity, release, and relief. You will feel calmer and spiritually at ease after a journal-writing session.

3. Stronger relationships.

Writing about people you know will help you understand them better and put you in touch with your own feelings about them. Be sure to give the benefits of journaling to your friends. Journals are great gifts.

4. Better organizational skills.

By structuring yourself to write regularly, you automatically develop stronger organization skills, such as list making and time management. Journaling your goals and what you want to accomplish in your life is an excellent tool to help you get those things done. You can even create a personal checklist of “things to do.” Through journaling you can actually see and better understand what you want, what is important to you, and how you feel. After organizing your thoughts you can create goals and resolutions to support what you are thinking and writing about.

5. Better focus.

Writing in a journal creates more awareness, and therefore more focus on the issues that are important to you. The routine and habit of journaling means making time for you and when you set aside time for yourself, you can feel the benefit and gain from doing something specifically for yourself.

When your thoughts are scattered and disconnected, writing about the event or issue will help bring focus and clarity. It will also help you decide on which action to take, or which option to choose.

6. Better solutions for your problems.

Writing about problems gives your right brain food for creative problem solving. God has created us in an amazing and creative way. It's amazing what happens when the creative part of your nature starts working on a problem. You'll soon find solutions bubbling up from your subconscious mind.

7. Know yourself better.

Writing can help clarify your thoughts, your emotions, and your reactions to certain people or situations. In addition, as you read back through past journals, you'll have ample evidence of the things that make you happy and those that are distressful.

Journaling is a great tool for discovery as you learn more about yourself and your God. While writing in your journal, you will find yourself identifying the values for which you stand. You will also get to know your processes - how you think, learn, create and use intuition.

8. Personal growth.

Journaling is a vehicle for expressing and creating. It will encourage integrity and will move you towards wholeness and growth - to who you really are. Seeing thoughts and actions expressed in written form accentuates their power or lack of power in our life.

9. Captures “Life’s Story.”

A journal is a catalog of truths, insights, experiences, hopes, dreams and memories. Over time, your memories become an irreplaceable treasure that can be looked at years from now, by you, or, if you wish, by others. By journaling, you will capture not only your life, but the lives of all the people that surround you. You are also creating a record that will make it easier to see patterns, changes, and shifts in your life.

Journaling tips:

- Find a time and place to write where you won't be disturbed. Ideally, pick a time at the end of your work day or before you go to bed.
- Promise yourself that you will write for a minimum of 15 minutes a day at least three or four times a week.
- Once you begin writing, write continuously. Don't worry about spelling or grammar.
- Don't censor what you write. Be honest and just write.
- If you are faced with 'blank page syndrome' and don't know where to start, try writing about:

Something that you are thinking or worrying about too much
Something that you have dreamed recently
Something that you have been avoiding
The best thing that happened today

Remember, journal writing is a gentle and safe therapy. No expertise required, no minimum time required, and you don't lose the benefits, even if you only write in your journal once a week. Just write!

(From the Ririan Project)

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