

Introduction to Biblical Counseling

Journaling

- I. DEFINITION: A writing process that spontaneously makes notes of selected significant past and present events, feelings and thoughts.**
- A. It has been referred to as an excellent way to begin having a relationship with ourselves for perhaps the first time (A.C. Guide, p. 89). It is getting to know in a deeper way the events, emotions and thoughts of the past.**
 - B. The adventure of journaling is just for you and absolutely no one else unless you choose otherwise. No one has the right to read your journal without your explicit permission.**

II. THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR JOURNALING

- A. The Apostle Paul used past Old Testament written history as the basis for present instructions. He referred to this process as he instructed the church in the city of Corinth.**
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 10:11 "Now these things happened to them (Israel) as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."
 - a. "These things" are recalled in verses 1-10.
 - b. "Happened to them" events that happened from time to time in the past to illustrate cause and effect of actions and relationships. There were specific results that came from specific actions. For every action, there is a reaction. As God disciplined Israel in the past so He will do as this age comes to a close.
 - c. "Example" literally means "to make an impression" like a signet ring pressed into clay. But the ring that made the impression is gone and only the impression remains.
 - d. "Were written for" (imperfect tense) these events were written down from time to time in the past. Not every event was recorded, but only those designed by God for a purpose. All 39 books in the Old

Testament had a purpose.

- e. "Our" refers to the people living "now" who are facing the closing days of God's purpose and plan for man.
- f. "Instruction" (Greek: mind + to put or place) "to place into the mind" or "to drive a point home," to make a specific point.
- g. Summary: There were historical events that happened from time to time in the past that had specific consequences and purposes for the people involved. These events were written down for us from time to time in order to impress on us certain truths and to drive home specific lessons. Journaling will help you recall things from the past that God may want you to deal with in the present, for your benefit and His glory (Matt. 5:16).

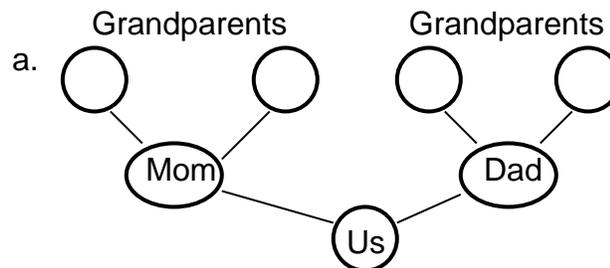
B. Paul used past written history which was very painful to many, to give others hope today.

- 1. Romans 15:4 "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction (learning), that through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."
 - a. "Whatever" - each detail of life can prove to be of value to us.
 - b. "Was written" - it took human effort to write down what God wanted recorded by means of inspiration of the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:20, 21).
 - c. "Earlier times" - these were Old Testament times, past history. It was oral history for years then God directed specific men to journal out this history.
 - d. "For our instruction" - these were written to drive home the reality of specific events and to see specific truths and learn precise lessons.
 - e. "Through perseverance" - while enduring our own present afflictions and distress, there will be times of instruction and hope for us in the trial.
 - f. "Encouragement of the Scripture" - other's past journaled events serve as a source of encouragement to us today while working on our own issues.
 - g. "We might have hope" - the past recorded events of real people will give us hope as we journal out our past. The 39 books of the Old Testament give the needed hope to work through our issues today.

Plus, we now have the benefit of all the New Testament.

C. Applications:

1. A smart man learns from his mistakes, but a wise man learns from the mistakes of others (i.e. Old Testament saints).
2. There are historical events and patterns from our past and from our parents' past from which we can identify and learn from. These historical events definitely have a practical, personal application for you today.



3. Journaling is our own personal research into the past as an opportunity for God to heal hurts, identify negative emotions, lies, habits and to glean valuable lessons while learning how to apply biblical tools to use to improve our own quality of life in Christ.

III. THE PURPOSE OF JOURNALING

A. Journaling locates past sources of emotional and physical pain that have never been worked through biblically but are still controlling your present decisions, responses, moods and hindering further growth in Christ.

1. Revisiting past history will not change that history, it just alerts you to what has yet to be healed.
2. The past that has not been worked through biblically is always present and is reflected in the words we say, the actions we display, and the attitudes we convey.

B. Journaling confirms to yourself the reality of past painful events that you have just wondered about. It helps us see and face realities we may have ignored (suppressed or repressed) in the past.

1. Often there is a personal doubt that the past events actually happened. That lingering doubt results in a continuing uncertainty and prevents a resolving of the issues. It is one tool to reduce second guessing yourself.

2. Denial serves as a strong self-defense tool that prevents our processing because it will not allow us to acknowledge the events, to feel the pain and to go to God for the healing of the emotions of those events.

CHRISTIAN DENIAL:

Denying God access to a hurt that He wants to heal for our benefit and His glory (Matthew 5:16) CML

- a. Avoid dealing with one's personal pain can lead to many personal and interpersonal relationship problems.
 - 1) As wounded people, we will tend to wound those around us.
 - 2) What we grew up with was normal to us.
 - 3) Often the current issue is not the issue, but a response to a past event.
 - b. Avoidance also leads to many mental problems.
 - 1) Past anger turned inward can result in depression.
 3. View your journal as an "x-ray" to reveal things that you normally would not have remembered or to confirm things that you have long suspected happened. Journaling will reduce denial and increase reality which opens you up to the riches of God's grace and comfort (II Cor. 1:4).
 4. God will only give you grace if you live in truth (I John 1:5-10). Jesus came full of both grace and truth (John 1:14).
- C. Journaling uncovers past events and beliefs about the past that have been forgotten for years.**
1. When you start writing in your journal, certain events or emotions will begin to surface that may have been "stuffed" for years. One memory may trigger another event. No memory or emotion is ever buried dead. They just rattle around in our memory bank causing additional hurt in the present. They can even manifest themselves physically (ulcers, heart problems).
 - a. King Ahasuerus sleeplessly laid on his couch and called for his book of

records of the Chronicles (journals) and had them read to him. He had to be reminded that Mordecai had not been rewarded for uncovering a plot to assassinate him. That journal reminder and subsequent reward for Mordecai was the beginning of events that led to the deliverance from annihilation of the Jews (Esther 6:1-14).

D. Journaling can help you make sense out of your personal history by giving it meaning, value, and perspective so that now you may experience the "freedom" Christ promised you by biblically processing them.

1. Gal. 5:1, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (of past events)."

E. Journaling identifies specific unresolved issues to be worked through from a biblical perspective. As you write, you will be exploring your past and discovering the events and people that have left an emotional imprint on you.

1. Identify events and people who need to be granted forgiveness (send them over to God. The Greek word "forgive" literally means "to send away") (Ephesians 4:32).
2. Identify actions for which you need to be forgiven (be released from them) (Matthew 5:23-24).
3. Identify painful events on which you need to place a new value or meaning.
 - a. Genesis 50:20, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."
 - b. "My dad did not leave the family because I was a bad son. He had an affair with another woman."
4. Identify new biblical tools to work through personal problems in order to be able to help others process their problems. God has been equipping you for a people helping ministry already.
 - a. II Corinthians 1:4, "Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."
 - b. "Comfort," hope when hopeless, strength when weak.

5. Discover childhood "lies" that you believed to be true but have not been corrected with the truth.
 - a. "My parents' divorce was my fault."
 - b. "I can't do anything right."
 - c. "No one could really love me."
 6. Identify the unbiblical survival tools which you learned as a child, and purpose to give them up.
 - a. I Corinthians 13:11, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things."
 - b. Manipulation, lying, controlling, performing, pleasing.
 7. Uncover idols of the heart; people that you still perform for to gain their approval today, even ones that are deceased (dead).
 - a. Matthew 10:37, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."
 8. Finish feeling the emotions in the grief process: 1) denial 2) anger 3) bargaining 4) sadness 5) acceptance. There may be events you need to finish "weeping" over.
 - a. Ecclesiastes 3:4, "A time to weep, a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance;"
- F. Journaling integrates your past history into a form that makes sense to you and can be used to help others experience the same comfort you have received (II Corinthians 1:4).**

IV. PROCEDURE // How?

A. When it comes to the procedures for journaling, it's important to know there are none! The following are just suggested guidelines.

B. Notebook

1. Acquire a three-ring, loose-leaf notebook which may be the best type

because pages can be rearranged, plus additional articles or notes can be added.

2. It can be an actual journal with gold edges and a lock.
3. We do not suggest electronic tools because they are very hard to keep secret and they can be “hacked” into.
4. You can use blank page journal books for this process.

C. Paper

1. Lined notebook paper is preferred. Only write on one side of the paper. This will allow you to add forgotten details or additional situations on the reverse side if you recall them later.

D. Neatness

1. This is not an issue. This journal is for you; it is not a term paper. Writing the material down is more important than neatness or spelling. Plus, thoughts might come so fast you may have to write fast.

E. Content

1. Start writing your earliest memories which may include:
 - a. Occasions of emotional or physical pain inflicted by anyone.
 - b. Times of being shamed, embarrassed, disappointed, rejected, neglected.
 - c. Events you resented happening.
 - d. Parental behavior (i.e., alcoholism, spouse abuse, times of abandonment).
 - e. Sibling conflicts.
 - f. Death.
 - g. Divorce.
 - h. Significant losses and hurts.
2. Welcome events although they may seem petty or silly to you now as an adult, but were very real at a very impressionable age. List all of the vows

or promises you made to yourself as a child or youth and the events surrounding them.

- a. These must be identified, renounced and new truth affirmed.
3. You may just want to list the objects/situations about which you are angry or fearful about instead of a diary type of journal. Do not sanitize or whitewash events! Recall them as best as you can. Remember, God only gives grace for the truth (John 1:14; Ephesians 5:13).
4. Express yourself in poetry, stories, in all the spectrums of emotions (sad, glad, mad, etc.), laugh, cry, dream. Draw pictures, scribble, write a book, design a lecture, write imaginary letters to parents, siblings, people you love and even those you may currently hate. There are no trivial matters, they're all important.

F. Pray

1. Ask God to reveal any hurtful events. King David prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way (literally, "way of pain") in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Psalm 139:23-24; cf. Rev.1:10; I Cor. 2:10; Hebrews 4:13).
2. If you have a hard time getting started, just go to the top of the page and note the day, date, time and place. Then consider answering any of the following questions:
 - a. Who am I? What have I been? What am I becoming?
 - b. What do I like and why do I like it?
 - c. How do I feel about myself, spouse, family, siblings, work, school, church, God or clubs?
 - d. What do I not like? Why?
 - e. What is the happiest thing that ever happened to me?
 - f. What is the saddest thing that ever happened to me?
 - g. What is the one thing I don't like to talk about? Why don't I like to talk about this?
 - h. What emotions have I had to stuff? Why can't I express them? What would happen to me if I did?

- i. What is working in my life now? What is not working in my life now?
- j. What have I thought others have thought about me?

G. Timing

1. Budget certain blocks of time to do this (i.e. two hours Thursday at 7:00 p.m.). Avoid mulling over it all day. If thoughts, or events pop into your mind, quickly jot them down and refer back to them at your designated time of journaling.

H. Security

1. Remember, no one should read this without your permission.
2. It would be a violation of a major boundary for anyone to read your journal without permission.
3. It is your responsibility not to leave your journal out as a source of temptation to others to read.
4. You may have to resort to extreme measures to hid it, lock it up, or keep it with you.
5. If it is not safe, you will not feel spontaneous to write in it.
 - a. You may find yourself editing or sanitizing it out of fear someone else will read it.
 - b. This fear will keep you from allowing God's Spirit to guide and direct you because of the fear of exposure (John 16:13).
 - c. You will find yourself hiding your real feelings, dreams, hopes and hurts. If this were to happen, the value of a journal just evaporated.

V. Keys for Success

- A. Purpose to heal your past hurts, identify lies and replace them with truth.**
- B. Understand the purpose for journaling.**
- C. Select your own procedure to journal.**

D. Ask God to direct the journaling process.

E. Make time to do it.

F. Keep your notes safe.