

# How to Journal

by Bill Hybels

Over the *years*, as I traveled and spoke at churches and conferences, I occasionally met leaders who somehow seemed to avoid the daily slide into artificial Christianity. Whenever I could, I asked what their secret was. In almost every case, they said "journaling"—the daily process of examining and evaluating their lives in written form.

Now if you think I heard that and ran right out to buy a journal, you're dead wrong. I thought the idea was ridiculous. I envisioned the saints of antiquity, with fragile parchments and ink-dipped quills, waxing eloquent in the flickering light of a candle. People who had time for that were not like me. They didn't have my schedule or live with my kind of pressure. Besides, blank sheets of paper scared me. I'm not the "deep" type; I haven't had an original thought in my life. What would I write?

Still I had to admit that too often I repeated the same mistakes again and again. Too often I went to bed with regrets about my actions. Too often I made decisions inconsistent with my professed values. In a rare moment of honesty, I faced the fact that I was living under the tyranny of an unexamined life.

At that time I was chaplain for the Chicago Bears. Occasionally before the Monday morning Bible study, I'd join them at Halas Hall while they watched films and did post-game analysis. They would go over every play of the previous day's game so they could learn from their mistakes and not repeat them in the next game.

Finally I understood. The journalers were simply telling me to do a post-game analysis! How could I expect to be conformed to the image of Christ without evaluating my mistakes and progress? How could I grow without examining my character, decision-making, ministry, marriage, and child rearing?

Maybe journaling was for me.

I was still worried about facing a blank sheet of paper, but a well-known author offered a simple suggestion: Buy a spiral notebook and restrict yourself to one page a day. Every day start with the word "Yesterday." Write a brief description of people you met with, decisions you made, thoughts or feelings you had, high points, low points, frustrations, Bible-reading--anything about the previous day. Then analyze it. Did you make good decisions, or bad? Did you use your time wisely or waste it? Should you have done anything differently?

Evaluating my day would help me avoid repeating mistakes. But writing for five or ten minutes would also slow down my pace. I knew I needed that. I'm a morning person, and when I get to the office at 6:00 A.M., I'm ready to roll. The phone starts ringing, the adrenaline starts pumping, and there's no stopping me. If journaling could slow me down, I would be ready to really connect with God.

I decided to try it. My first journal entry says this: "Yesterday, I said I hated the concept of journals, and I still do. But if this is what it takes to rid myself of inauthentic spirituality, I'll do it. If this is what it takes to reduce my RPMs enough to talk and walk with Christ, I'll do it. I'll journal."

And I have—nearly every day. I've never written anything profound, but in simple terms I've chronicled the activity of God in my life, relationships, marriage, children, and ministry. I've also worked through feelings, confronted fears, and weighed decisions. And I've slowed down enough to meet with God.

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