



3 Ways to Keep a Devotional Journal

A journal is a written record of one's thoughts, observations, ideas, and experiences. Journaling during personal devotions can powerfully reveal God's active and transformative presence in your daily life. As you write down and record your reflections on Bible reading and prayers, you can begin to discern very specific things God wants to teach you. It's easy to add journaling to your personal devotions, and there's no right or wrong way to do it. Get yourself a notebook, a blank journal, or even a devotional journal, grab a pen and get started. Alternatively, you can record your thoughts on a computer or mobile device. You can even do audio or video recordings on a smartphone. Whatever works well for you. It's as simple as that. Your journal can also be as open or private as you desire, but, having a secure place to give expression to your deepest feelings and thoughts can make it possible to know yourself and God much more fully. Here are three suggestions on how you can get the most from keeping a devotional journal.

Freestyle Journaling

Bible reading and prayer are key crosspoints of personal devotions. Use your journal to reflect on your reading, and perhaps, to record your prayers. After reading a biblical selection, consider your reaction, your thoughts, your questions. Jot them down. Pray about them. As your thoughts flow, write them down. What images spring to mind? Record them and let your thoughts push into them while you pray. Write about what God might be saying about himself in the passage, or about other people, about you. What might the scripture say that you need to do? I particularly enjoy writing down my prayers; I'm more aware that I am actually conversing with God. Every so often, I'll go back to a prayer I wrote down ten years ago or more and pray that prayer all over again. It's especially moving

in my spirit to see those old prayers and to be able to recognize how God answered them.

In addition to reflecting on God's word and prayer, you can journal about your daily life. How has God moved that day? How did you deal with the challenges the day? What scriptures or theological musings came to mind? Poke into them; explore them in the Bible. Do you think God highlighted them for you? Why? Journaling is a way to wrestle with the things of God in your daily life, and to understand what he's saying to you about your life.

Devotional-led Journaling

Sometimes you just need a little structure. A devotional can help you with Bible passage selections and guide your thoughts with reflections by the devotion's author. Subscribe to a daily devotional, like [Today](#), or pick one up at your local bookstore. You can also find devotional journals which include a written devotion and blank space for your own reflections. Devotional authors explore themes inspired by the biblical texts and grapple with real life implications. Asking some of the same kinds of questions above, in your journal record your reactions, questions, and assumptions from the reading. Be tough on yourself and on the author, letting the scripture be the standard against which you measure your reflections.

I once worked through a series of devotional journals by [Dave Wager](#), each designed to be completed in 21 days. Dave made very penetrating observations about key Bible passages, and asked tough questions of the reader. He encouraged readers to wrestle with the scriptural implications in writing. In the process, I came face-to-face with myself about how I handled God's word, shared the gospel, resisted temptation, overcame sin, and pushed through obstacles to intimacy with God. A few moments from this exercise stand out, driving home the value of the whole experience. As I journaled, my thoughts forced me to confront deep questions of sin. When the chips are down, do I really trust that God has forgiven my sin? Do I really know what true worship is? Was it possible that I could unwittingly be a false teacher? These are harsh questions. But being led by a knowledgeable and experienced author, and recording the whole process in my journals, I can point to this experience as marking key moments in my spiritual growth.

Daily Examen

Perhaps one of the most powerful ways to do a devotional journal is through a process called daily examen. Developed by Ignatius of Loyola many centuries ago, the [examen](#) guides you through a very simple series of steps at the end of your day to quiet yourself, give God thanks, reflect on his goodness, express your joy and sorrow, and let hope for tomorrow fill you. With your journal, consider in turn these five steps:

1. **Stillness.** Acknowledge God's presence. For several minutes just be quiet and listen for God. Take some deep breaths. Be present to him. After a while, in your journal, write your impressions of the moment.
2. **Gratitude.** Review your day with thanksgiving. What did God give you that day? What did he

teach you? How did you see him move that day? Write it down. Record your thanks for what he did.

3. **Reflection.** Be aware of your emotions. Reflect on your feelings and actions that day, both positive and negative. Write them out. What were your motivations? How did you resolve these situations? Did you seek Christ?
4. **Sorrow.** Ask forgiveness for sin. Considering again the events of the day, record moments when you failed to follow God's direction. Talk with God about them. Express your sorrow. Thank God for his awesome grace to carry you through should that situation arise again.
5. **Hope.** Look ahead to tomorrow. In your journal, resolve to grow and follow God's guidance. Talk to God about tomorrow, and write down any thoughts or images that come to your mind for the next day.

The practice of a daily examen will bring you closer to God. Journaling the examen will mark your journey, letting you see your growth and the tangible reminder of God's active presence in your life.

Closing Thoughts

Some of the most powerful devotional moments in my life involved the process of journaling as I conversed with God. And that's the whole idea. The three ways of keeping a journal outlined here are just a small start. You can certainly explore others. In your personal devotions, journal to listen to God and his direction for your life. Having it all written down lets you return to the thoughts, experiences, reflections, and prayers.

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