

# How Do I Start *Journaling* as a Spiritual Discipline?



*by Sophia Bricker*

In recent years, many Christians have rediscovered spiritual disciplines. These practices are not a way to earn salvation. Nor are they legalistic rules that believers must follow. Instead, Christians have used spiritual disciplines throughout history to grow closer to Christ, open themselves to His transformation, and mature in their faith. One of these spiritual disciplines is journaling, which encourages Bible reading, prayer, and meditation.

Maybe you are interested in journaling as a spiritual discipline. Deciding where and how to begin can feel overwhelming, especially if keeping a journal is new to you.

In this article, we will look at a few important reminders about journaling as a spiritual discipline and then consider practical steps to start writing.

## What Is the Focus of My Spiritual Journal?

Journaling as a spiritual discipline is different from other types of journaling. Although a person can include thoughts about their day and events in their life, the purpose of a spiritual journal is to cultivate spiritual growth.

Typically, Christians use a journal to keep a record of what God is teaching them in Scripture, write out prayers, and meditate on biblical truths.

When writing in a journal, believers can choose one specific focus or many. My journal includes written prayers, my reflections on a Bible passage, and poetry I have written to God.

I also keep a record of how the Lord answers my prayers and have often jotted down inspiring quotes from devotional books. Regardless of what you choose to include, just ensure that those things draw you closer to Christ and motivate spiritual growth.

***What will be the focus of your spiritual journal?***



# Who Am I Writing For?

There are spiritual journals that we can read from Christians in history, such as *The Journals of Jim Elliot* and *The Journal of John Wesley*.

The Puritans also had a long tradition of keeping journals or spiritual diaries. We can learn a lot about the spiritual disciplines of prayer and journaling from these works. Some believers kept journals with the belief that people could read their writings one day. Jim Elliot mentioned this in a journal entry from 1948: “What is written in these pages I suppose will someday be read by others than myself. For this reason, I cannot hope to be absolutely honest in what is herein recorded” (*Elisabeth Elliot, The Journals of Jim Elliot*, p. 11).

Although we can read various journals from believers in the past, we should write for Christ, not the eyes of others. I am not downplaying the role our journals can play in leaving a spiritual legacy for our family, friends, or others.

Believers today benefit from the journals of people like Jim Elliot and others. However, journaling is most beneficial when we can honestly express ourselves to God without worrying about what others will think if they read our words.

Scripture says that God searches the heart (Jeremiah 17:10). He knows our motives, and we can ask Him to help us determine our motives for journaling (Psalm 139:23).

We should examine ourselves regularly to ensure we are journaling for the right reasons — not the approval of others or to gain merit from the Lord.

As I mentioned earlier, the practice of keeping a spiritual journal can help believers grow spiritually, but it is not required. Believers should exercise discernment about whether any practice encourages or hinders their relationship with Christ.

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# Which Format Should I Choose?

After carefully and prayerfully thinking about the reasons for beginning the spiritual discipline of journaling, it is time to start journaling.

The first thing to do might seem simple: find a journal. However, for some believers, the format they choose could affect the practical effectiveness of this spiritual discipline.

Here are a few options:

**1. Print journal:** Using this type of journal, a person follows the traditional route with pen and paper.

Depending on individual preference or specific needs, you might choose a standard spiral-bound notebook or another simple notebook. This way, you can stay focused on the words of Scripture you copy and meditate on.

Another option you could choose is a classic leather-bound journal. This is a good choice if you want your record of prayers to be held in a special place but without distracting art or designs.

However, you might prefer a notebook/journal with an artsy or inspirational design with wider pages to jot down extra thoughts, dates of answered prayers, or drawings.

Regardless of which type of print journal you choose, make sure that it fits your situation and purpose.

**2. Digital journal:** In the modern world, Christians regularly use technology for their daily devotional time with God. Many people choose to read the Bible online or on an app. Since you may already interact with Scripture in this way, having a place on your computer or phone to jot down thoughts, prayers, and Bible verses is convenient.

One way to start a digital journal is to use Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or another word processor system.

If you worry that a digital format does not have as many creative options, remember that these systems have various fonts, sizes of fonts, colors for fonts, highlighter tools,

and design tools. A digital journal can be as creative or basic as you choose.

There are also Bible journaling apps that you can find for your phone or other devices. Many of these apps combine Bible reading with an option for keeping a journal, which is convenient for believers who prefer doing their devotional time with a device.

Before downloading any app, make sure to read about the details and compatibility requirements to decide which one is the best option.

**3. Journaling Bible:** This option may appeal to those who desire to jot down thoughts and notes in their Bible as they are reading a passage or verse.

***Which format do you think would be best for you?***



A journaling Bible is designed with a large margin section beside the text of Scripture to provide room for writing, drawing, and coloring. Numerous options exist from a variety of translations, such as the NIV, ESV, NKJV, or NLT.

When using a journaling Bible, be sure to use pens and markers that do not bleed through the pages. Special journaling pens and marker sets are sold in bookstores and online.

## What Are Some Ideas for Starting?

Once you have a journal in the format of your choice, you can begin the spiritual discipline of journaling. A good place to start is to write down your thoughts about what you read from the Bible each day.

You could also write down any questions you have about the passage. Remember, though, that the entry does not have to be long or elaborate.

Another way to start journaling is to write out a prayer to the Lord in your journal. Again, there is no required length for prayers. I have written prayers in a few sentences or used multiple pages in my journal when talking to God. Do not let empty pages intimidate you.

As you write down your thoughts about a passage from the Bible, you will find that it often helps you think deeply about Scripture.

Also, the process of writing out a prayer forces you to slow down and stay present while talking to God. Many believers find this helpful since they may struggle with staying focused when praying.

## How Often Should I Journal?

Like the length of journal entries, there is no set time or schedule for journaling that you must follow.

Most people find spiritual journaling helpful if they do it regularly and intentionally, but this looks different for each person.

Some Christians may choose to write every day, while others write a couple of times a week or once a week.

For example, I find that journaling is more beneficial to me when I have extended time to reflect on Scripture and what God has been doing in my life. Thus, I try to journal several times a week but allow myself flexibility.

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Sometimes my journal engagement is as simple as reviewing previously written prayers. Other times, I write multiple pages about what the Holy Spirit wanted me to see in my daily Bible reading.

As you continue to write, you will find what best fits your rhythm of life. Allow the time that you journal to draw you closer to the Lord and to think deeply about His Word.

Following a set of assumed rules or requirements will not produce spiritual growth, but a

longing to grow in love for Christ through the practice of journaling will bring spiritual fruit.

# Why Does This Matter?

Journaling is a spiritual discipline that can help believers engage more with Scripture, meditate on passages, and pray. Although keeping a journal is not a requirement for believers, the process of journaling as a spiritual practice can encourage spiritual growth. Some Christians are not familiar with keeping a spiritual journal, which is why considering the focus and motive for writing, as well as dealing with practical matters of journaling, is important. In all things, may we strive to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

***Your turn! Jot down some journaling ideas that this guide has sparked in your own heart and mind...***



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