



# Journaling...

## God's Spiritual Cross-trainer

by Charles Stone

**A**thletes understand that quality equipment helps them perform at their peak. Although equipment varies from one sport to the next, every athlete requires good shoes. Since many people enjoy several sports, shoe manufacturers created a shoe style called a "cross-trainer," for use in multiple sports.

Journaling—writing down our own experiences with God—can serve a similar spiritual purpose. In his book *Spiritual Journaling: Recording Your Journey Toward God*, Richard Peace describes journaling as a spiritual cross-trainer that helps as an "aid to other spiritual disciplines." It becomes a powerful tool the Holy Spirit can use to develop Christlikeness when we exercise spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, and fasting.

Although the Bible doesn't command us to journal, several of its writers modeled this practice. The Psalms often give us David's journaling as he wrestled with deep spiritual issues. Job struggles with the question of evil in his journal—the book that bears his name. Jeremiah's journal, Lamentations, records his agony over Jerusalem's fall. And Solomon pens his search for happiness in his journal of Ecclesiastes.

Journaling's simplicity and profound potential to create spiritual change eludes many Christians. If journaling is new to you, or if you've tried it and become discouraged, consider the following practical benefits:

Try it and you'll discover its power to change your life.

### Journaling softens our hearts.

Every farmer knows he must till the soil to soften it before he plants the seed. In the same manner, we often need our hearts softened. Hosea said, *Plow up the hard ground of your hearts* (Hos. 10:12 NLT). When softened, our hearts respond more readily to the Spirit's promptings.

### Journaling sifts truth from error.

As a child, I remember helping my mom bake cakes. She let me sift flour through her aluminum can-like sifter. When I rotated the handle, the sifter removed the lumps from the flour. Just as lumps were interspersed throughout the flour, sometimes we unintentionally mix lumps of lies in our self-talk such as: "I'm a rotten person"; "God is mad at me"; or "I'm worthless." When we journal and put these thoughts on paper, it's easier to sort out truth from error. Then we can counter them with God's truth and experience a more biblical outlook on life.

### Journaling slows our pace.

My first driving experience, at age nine, on the Model-T at an amusement park disappointed me. Expecting to burn rubber when I floored the gas pedal, I barely reached five miles per hour. My dad later explained that a device called a governor kept the engine from running at full capacity. Many Christians run their lives at full capacity with life's "gas pedal" pushed to the max. Journaling acts like a governor to slow our frenzied pace and force us to listen to the Holy Spirit's voice.

### Journaling builds faith.

Few of us remember what God taught us last week, much less last year. Journaling builds our faith when we record God's faithful acts so that we can refer back to them, reminding us of His continued faithfulness. We read, in Psalm 77:11, *I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.*

### Journaling releases pain.

I still remember the staccato hiss from my mother's pressure cooker, when she cooked fresh green beans. After she locked the main top into place, she placed a small metal cover over the pressure release valve. This allowed the pressure to slowly release. Similar emotional pressure can build up inside us to the point that we want to explode at others. Journaling provides a spiritual pressure release valve for our pain, that can prevent that explosion. David encouraged this when he wrote: *Pour out your hearts to him* (Ps. 62:8).

### Six simple guidelines for effective journaling:

- Get a notebook.
- Set a consistent time, in a quiet place.
- Make a commitment to stick with it.
- Date each entry.
- Write from feeling, not from fact. Don't just record what happened in your life. Write down how your experiences affected your heart and emotions.
- Periodically review your entries, to discover spiritual trends in your life.

Journaling offers many spiritual benefits. Try it and you'll discover its power to change your life. ■

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