

JOURNALING



CHRISTIAN
SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

JOURNALING: CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Edition 2.0

Copyright © 2018 Spiritual Maturity

Copyright © 2013 Jen Manglos

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, without the written permission of Saddleback Church.

CSR6438



SADDLEBACK CHURCH

Published by Saddleback Church

1 Saddleback Parkway

Lake Forest, CA 92630

www.saddleback.com

Scripture quotations noted NIV are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® (NIV). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations noted ESV are from THE HOLY BIBLE, ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION® (ESV). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NASB are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations noted MESSAGE are taken from THE MESSAGE by Eugene H. Peterson. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 2000. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Dear Friend,

We are excited for you to read this series on the Christian Spiritual Practices. We have personally experienced these practices as foundational in our own times of retreat, as well as in our journeys with God. Likewise, we hope that this will be a rich resource for you in your own times with the Lord.

Our desire as a ministry is that this series would help you to further cultivate a life that is marked by abiding and fully living in Christ.



John 15:4 (ESV)

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

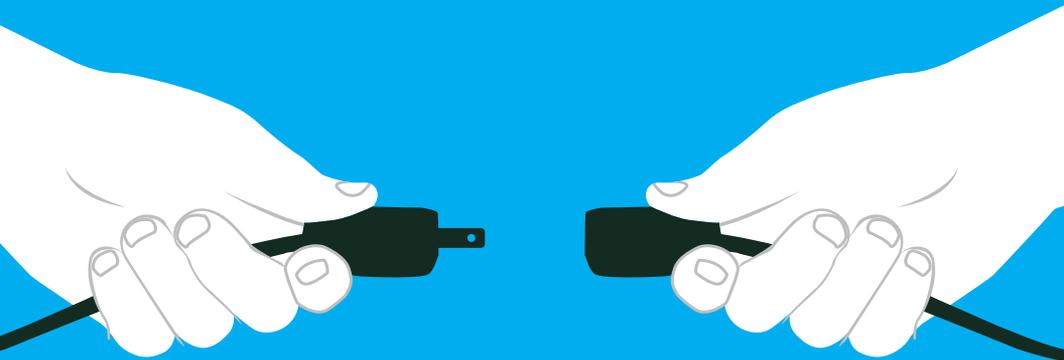
Peace to you as you continue on this journey with him.

Saddleback Spiritual Maturity Team

www.saddleback.com/retreats

CONTENTS

- 5 Letter from the Spiritual Maturity Team
- 9 Christian Spiritual Practices
- 13 What is Journaling?
- 17 Why is Journaling Important?
- 23 What Do I Journal About?
- 29 How Do I Start a Rhythm of Journaling?
- 35 Journaling Exercise
- 47 Next Steps





CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES



CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

The phrase “Christian spiritual practices” can seem a bit lofty. However, the hope for this series is that these practices would provide grounding for you as you connect with God. The word “practice” is used intentionally to acknowledge that we are all learners and will make mistakes as we grow. You will not be able to do these practices perfectly nor will these practices earn you more favor with God. Instead of seeing Christian spiritual practices as a list of things to do, envision them as an invitation into deeper relationship with God. These practices are the means of opening our hearts to God’s transforming work in light of our motivations and beliefs. In that sense then, the word “practice” points to a broader purpose, one that impacts the way we live our lives. These are not practices for the sake of practice, but a means to inform a way of life—a way of life in which we are with him at all times—abiding in his transforming love.

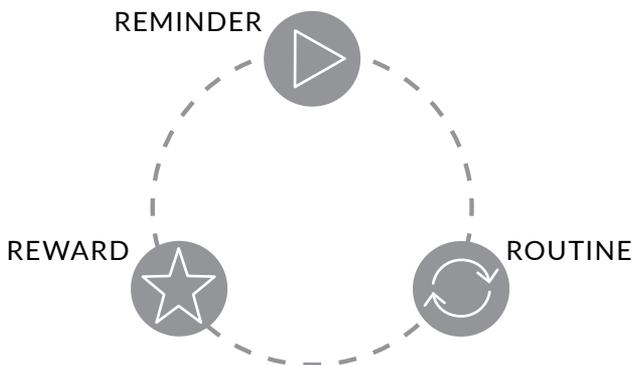
It is challenging to begin a new practice. We can be so eager to start something new, but often it proves difficult to continue practicing. When we find ourselves in this place, it is easy to give up and fall into guilt. This is not the goal of any spiritual practice. Rather, the hope is to help you discover these “unforced rhythms of grace,” as described in Matthew 11:28–30 (beautifully captured in *The Message*):

Matthew 11:28–30 (MESSAGE)

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

In this booklet, you will be exploring the spiritual practice of journaling. As you read, take time to pause and prayerfully reflect. Ask God whether this is a practice he would have you engage in. Prayerfully consider why you are drawn to this particular practice. If you find that you are cautious or nervous about embracing this practice, consider with God why that might be. There is no requirement or expectation that you say “yes” to this practice right now in your life. The content here is presented in such a way that you can explore with God whether it would be helpful in your current season of life. This booklet contains prayer prompts designed to assist you in your process of discernment. These may be helpful questions to contemplate as you consider the practice of journaling with the Lord.

THE HABIT LOOP







WHAT IS JOURNALING?



WHAT IS JOURNALING?

This may seem like a silly question to ask, as most of us have a working definition of the word “journaling.” Perhaps you kept a diary or a journal when you were younger, writing down the daily occurrences in your life or special moments that you wanted to remember. However, the deeper question here is: How do we approach journaling as a Christian spiritual practice? Again, this may be a practice that is familiar to you. You may have used your journal to write down answered prayers, describe an experience with the Lord, or write out a meaningful Bible verse.

Journaling is a Christian spiritual practice that involves recording the experience of life with God. You may notice that this definition is sparse;

it leaves a lot of space for interpretation.

This is where the fun and freedom of journaling reside. Some people enjoy journals with lines, while others like the open road of a blank page. Journals can be driven by words or give expression through drawings and images. The possibilities are almost limitless when it comes to journal formats.

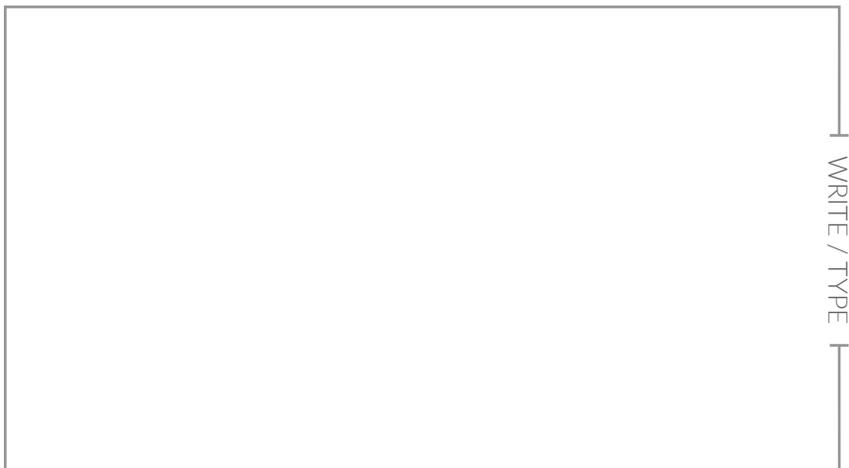
Journaling is a Christian spiritual practice that involves recording the experience of life with God.

Take a moment to pause and consider these questions:

What has been my experience in journaling?

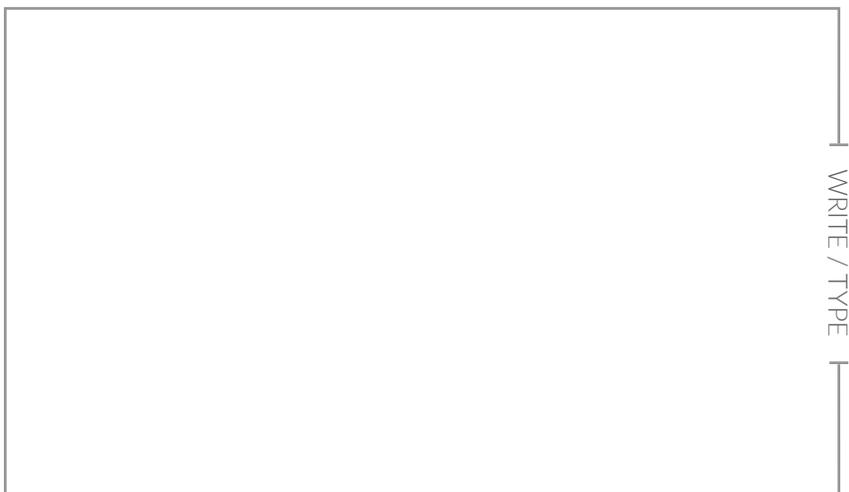
WRITE / TYPE

When have I experienced joy in journaling?

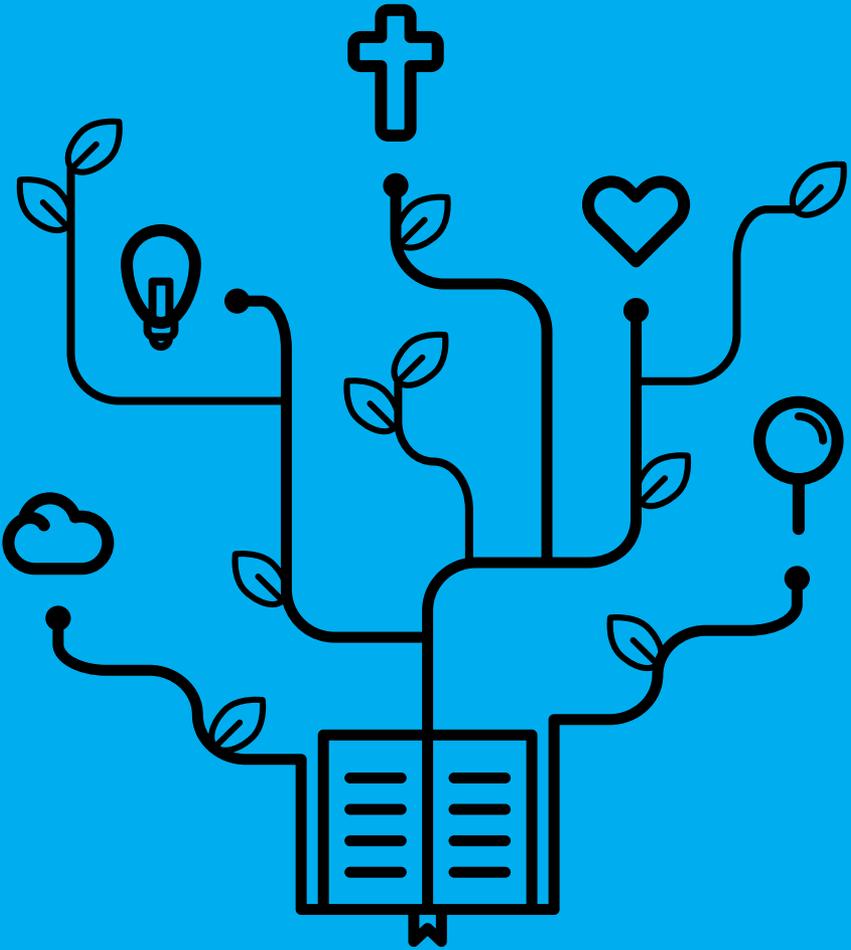


WRITE / TYPE

What are my fears in practicing journaling? Perhaps you are uncomfortable with your writing skills. Maybe you tried once, but struggled to continue practicing. Take this space to reflect with the Lord on your journaling experiences and share honestly with him.



WRITE / TYPE





WHY IS JOURNALING IMPORTANT?



WHY IS JOURNALING IMPORTANT?

The goal of journaling is to grow in our relationship with God. As such, the practice of journaling involves getting to know God and getting to know yourself. Sometimes journaling will be more concentrated on knowledge of yourself—your past, present, and future. Other times, it will be more focused on knowledge of the living God—his work, his care, and his plan.

We all can acknowledge the utmost importance of knowing God, but you may wonder why it is important to know yourself. Certainly there are those who have overemphasized the importance of knowing themselves. Life solely revolves around this person. However, this selfishness is not what it means to know yourself.

To know yourself is to rightly see who you are, with both sins and strengths, in light of who God is. Knowing oneself means getting to know one's own heart. In Proverbs 4:23, the author writes of the importance of the heart saying:



Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

However, in Jeremiah 17:9, the author describes the condition of the heart:



Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Our thoughts, words, and deeds come from our hearts, yet our hearts are “desperately sick” and deeply complex. What is the Lord’s response? Does he ask us to hide or cover up our hearts? No. Instead, he desires to search our hearts. The Lord responds to Jeremiah in verse 10 saying:



Jeremiah 17:10 (ESV)

“I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

**“Above all else,
guard your heart,
for everything
you do flows
from it.”**

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Numerous times in the Bible, various authors reference the Lord searching hearts (Psalms 139:23–24; Proverbs 16:2; Romans 8:26–27). When the Lord searches our hearts, we often become better acquainted with who we really are throughout the process.

As you examine your life you will be confronted with messy and fragmented areas in your heart that need the Lord’s intervention. You also may discover areas where he has grown and transformed you. This knowledge of yourself is not an end in and of itself, but rather is intended to point you back to God in gratitude, acknowledging that he alone is The Way. Conversely, as you grow deeper in knowing God, you may notice the ways in which your life differs from what you see in the Bible. This growing knowledge can send you to explore with God why this difference exists. So, knowledge of God and knowledge of self beautifully work together, one naturally leading to the other.



Take a moment to ask God to search your heart. Begin by slowly reading through Psalms 139:23–24, letting this passage be your prayer:



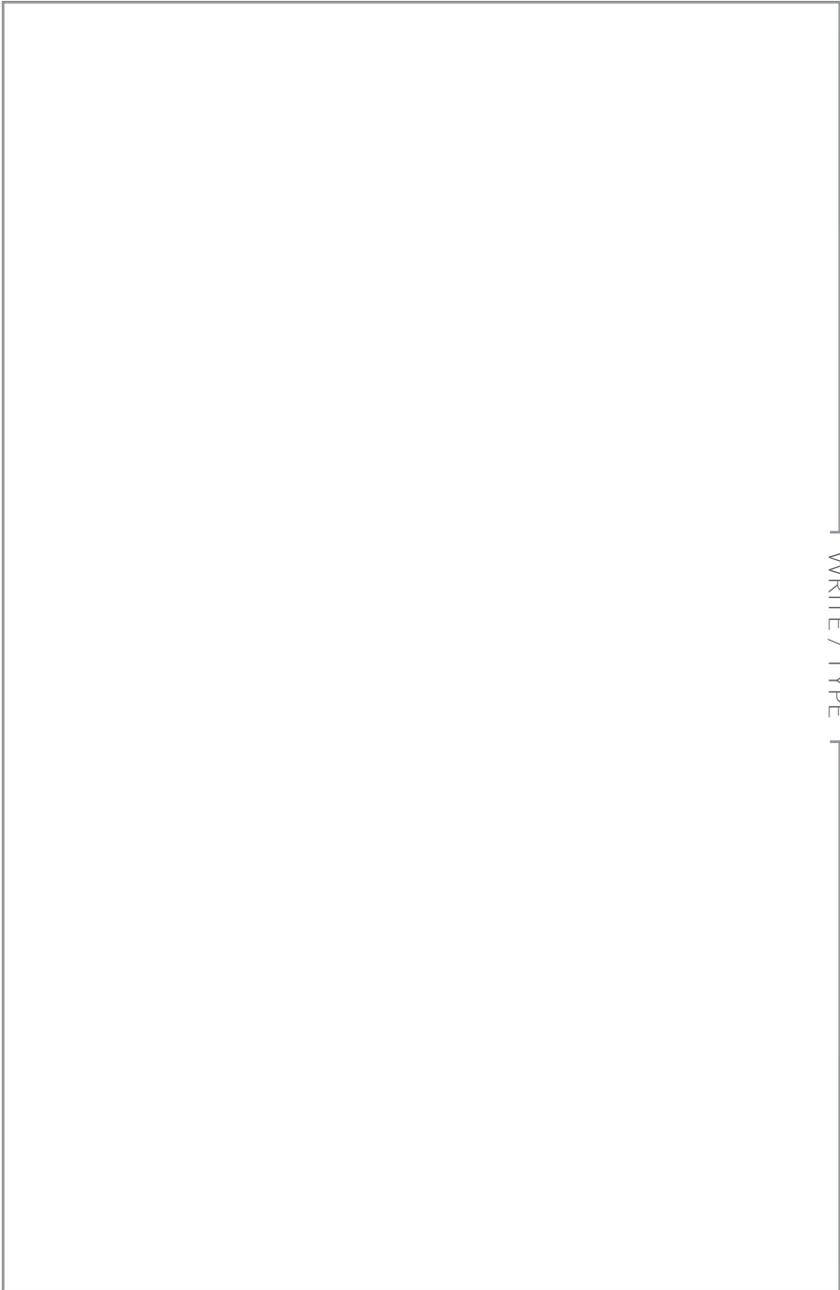
Psalms 139:23–24 (NASB)

Search me O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

You may specifically ask God to search your heart in light of what you have just read. Use the lines below as needed.

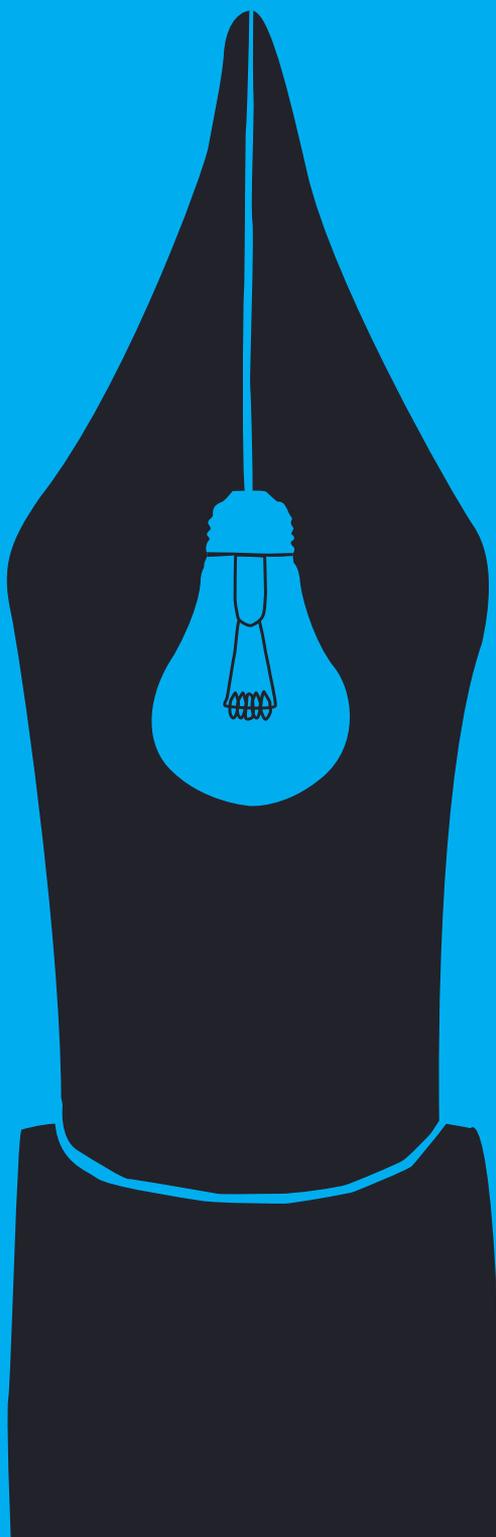
WRITE / TYPE

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing or typing. It occupies the lower half of the page.



A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for journaling. It occupies most of the page below the header.

WRITE / TYPE





WHAT DO I
JOURNAL ABOUT?



WHAT DO I JOURNAL ABOUT?

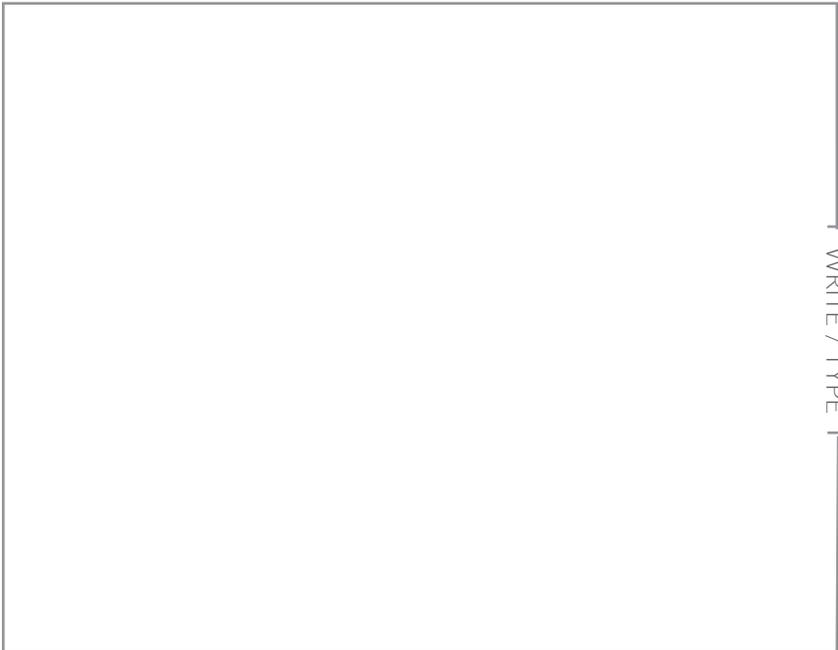
The thought of starting a journal may be overwhelming. What do I write about? The simple answer is anything. However, it may be helpful to choose a particular format to help shape what you are writing about in your journal. Below is a list of common journaling styles that you may want to consider for your own practice:

- **Free-style:** Freely writing what you are thinking and feeling in the moment.
- **Season of life:** Reflecting on a specific season of life, (i.e., moving to a new community).
- **Question prompted:** Responding to set questions each day. Some questions that could be asked:
 - Where does God seem most obvious in my life?
 - Where does God seem most quiet?
 - How am I experiencing prayer with God today?
 - What has come easily in loving God? What has been a challenge in loving God?
 - What has come easily in loving my neighbor? What has been a challenge in loving my neighbor?
- **Prayer:** Listing out prayers for self and others, with updates on developments and answers. Also includes written-out prayers expressing one's thoughts and feelings, similar to the Psalms.

- **Bible verses and quotes:** Recording Bible verses that have been meaningful or are a reminder of God's truth. Quotes from books are also used as an encouragement in life with God.
- **Bible study:** Notes and insights from studying the Bible.
- **Art:** Drawings, scribbles, and images cut out from magazines, etc., in order to express experiences, thoughts, and prayers to God. At times, words are not enough and it can be freeing to communicate visually.

There may be times when you feel as though you have nothing to write about. On those days, pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and values, and let these questions inform your journaling:

- What does this experience today remind me of?



WRITE / TYPE



- How do I feel when I think about this occurrence?

WRITE / TYPE

- What thoughts ran through my head when this happened?

WRITE / TYPE

- What was my priority in that moment?

WRITE / TYPE

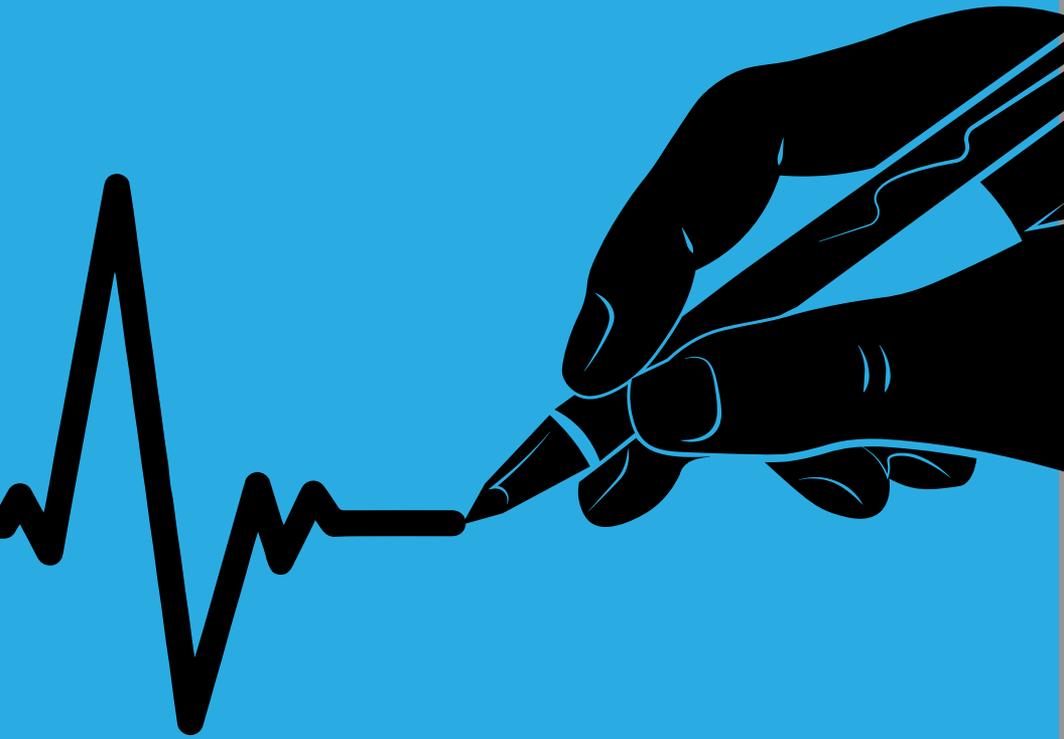
Finally, you are not being graded on your journal. The journaling police are not lurking around the corner, waiting to correct your misspelled words or shame you for lacking structure in how you write.

You likely have other arenas in your life where accurate grammar and formatting is necessary. Allow this journal to be a space where you can be freed up from worrying about what the end product looks like.

Be aware of how you respond to these formats. Is there a particular format that you feel as though you ought to practice? Is there a format that feels intriguing? From your first glance at the list, what stands out to you?

**You are not
being graded
on your journal.**

WRITE / TYPE





HOW DO I START A
RHYTHM OF JOURNALING?



HOW DO I START A RHYTHM OF JOURNALING?

As you discern whether or not journaling is a practice for you to take on right now, here are some questions you may want to consider:

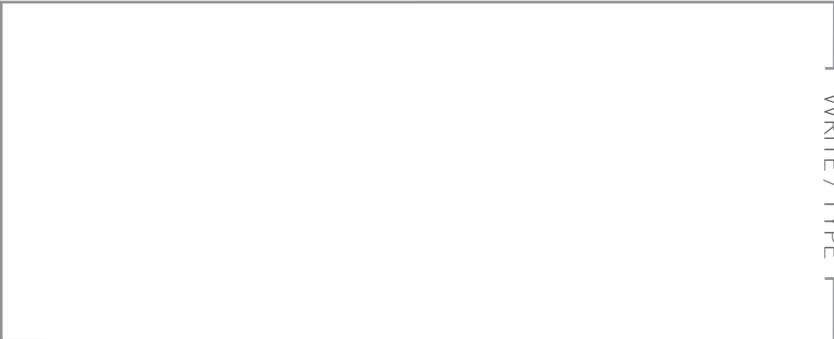
WHAT DOES YOUR LIFE PERMIT?

In light of all that is in your life right now, family, work, service, etc., is it realistic to adopt this? Maybe you have time to journal for a longer period of time, or perhaps you only have 10 minutes a day. If you don't realistically have time, would it be wise to shift your schedule to allow for journaling?

WRITE / TYPE

HOW OFTEN DO I JOURNAL?

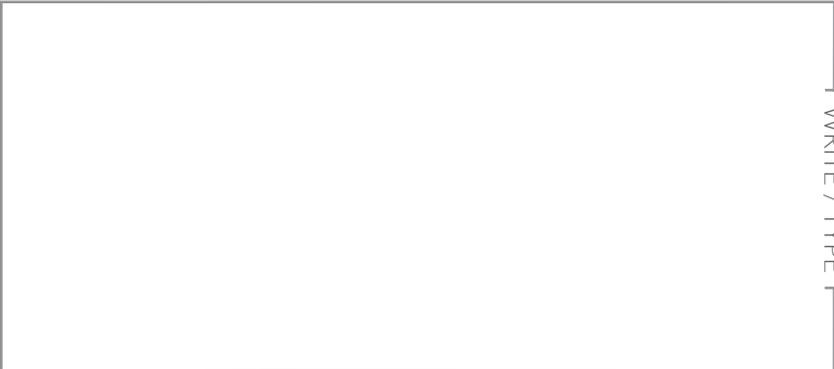
It takes about 40 days for a practice to become a regular part of your life. It does not happen overnight. It is recommended to commit to the practice at least three times a week and to intentionally schedule a time for this to happen. When scheduling those times pay attention to when you are most alert and unhurried.



WRITE / TYPE

WHERE SHOULD I JOURNAL?

Do you need absolute silence or some ambient noise when you write? Do you prefer to write inside or outdoors? Where are you least distracted?



WRITE / TYPE



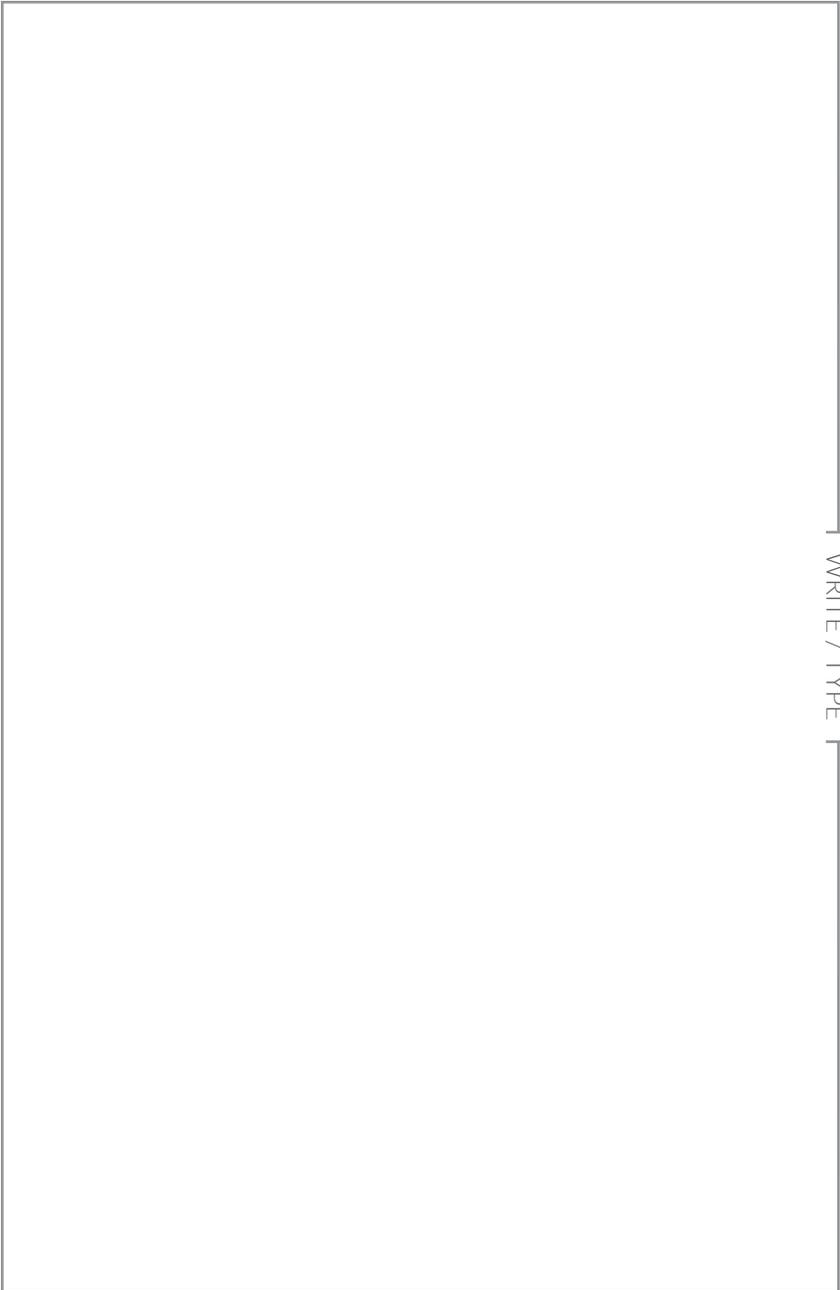
IS MY JOURNAL PRIVATE?

The gift of a journal is having a place where you can be unfiltered. If your journal does not feel private, then you may not be fully honest. It is important for your journal to be a safe place.

**If your journal
does not feel private,
then you may not
be fully honest.**

WRITE / TYPE

You will inevitably miss a day here or there. Don't let that stop you from continuing this practice. Remember you are learning, and God never commanded that you journal every day.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for the user to write or type their journaling.

| WRITE / TYPE |





JOURNALING EXERCISE



JOURNALING EXERCISE

This “Journaling Exercise” is designed to help direct you as you begin to practice journaling. The exercise, which takes about 1.5 hours, will lead you through a few different journaling formats.

INTRODUCTION

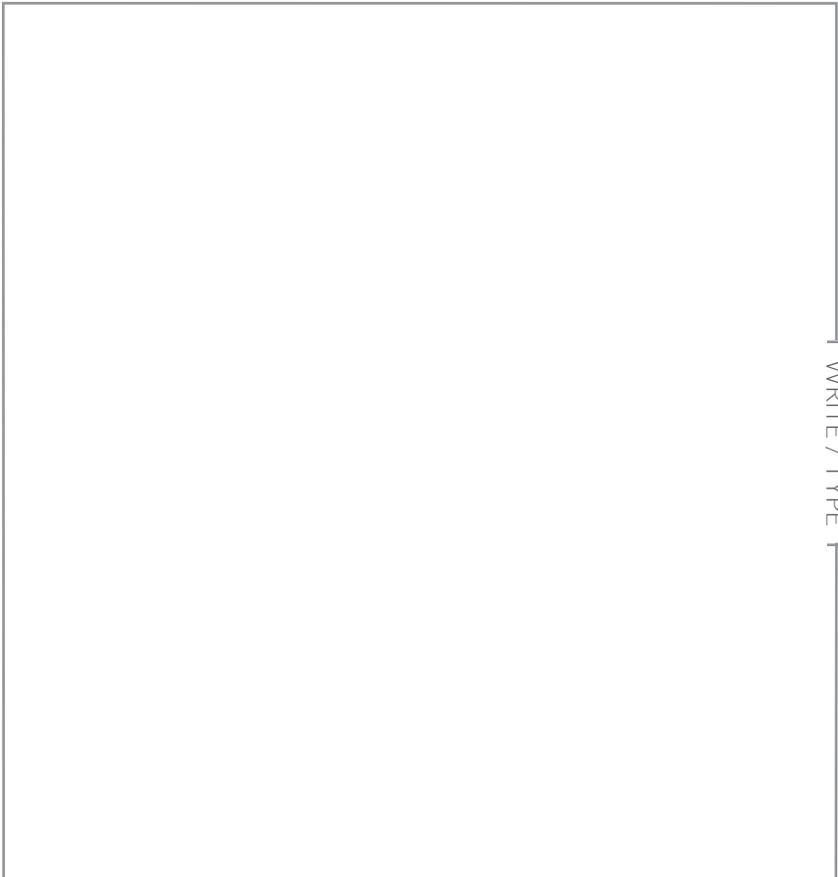
Begin your prayer time by going for a 10-minute walk. Take your time and be attentive to your surroundings. Thank God for his creation. Spend some time telling him about your day so far. Share with him your excitement and fears about journaling. Invite him into this process with you and ask him to guide you. Feel free to journal your reflections as you pray.

WRITE / TYPE

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing or typing. The text "WRITE / TYPE" is written vertically along the left side of the box.

WRITING A LETTER TO GOD

For the next 15 to 20 minutes write a letter to God in your journal. What would you like him to know about your life today? As you write, consider including what you are thinking and feeling in the moment. What are you crying out for? What are you rejoicing in? What are you angry about? You may want to consider using drawings as part of your letter, especially if you find your words are not accurately expressing what you feel. Additionally the Psalms, with its raw and uncensored prayers to God, may be a helpful place to gain inspiration.



WRITE / TYPE



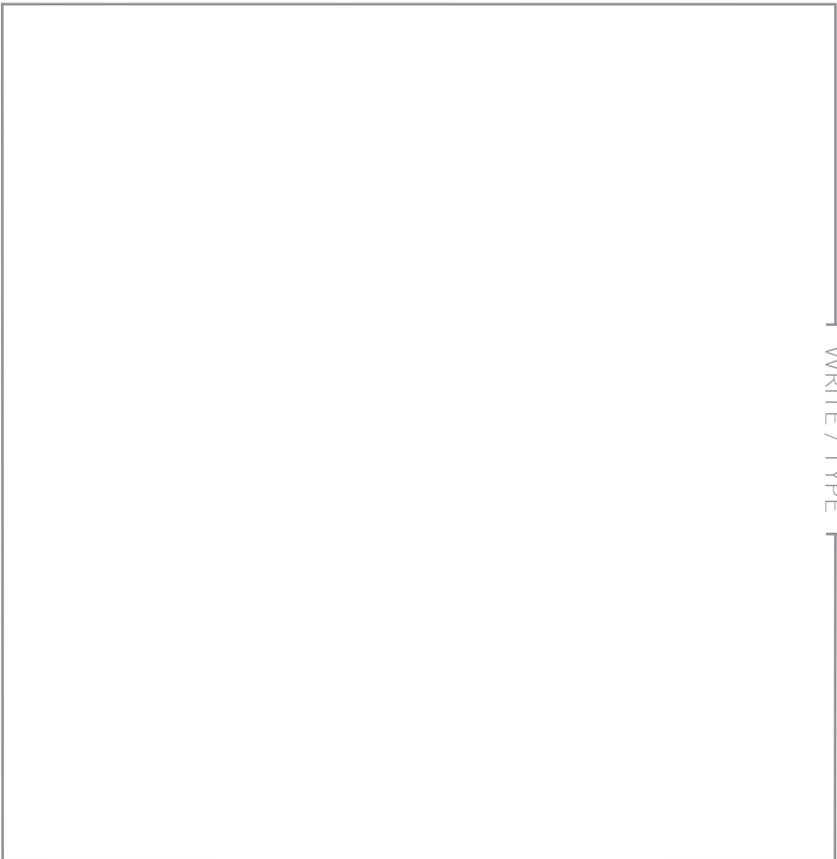
WRITE / TYPE

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing or typing. The text 'WRITE / TYPE' is positioned vertically on the left side of the box.

As you finish your time with this exercise, thank God that he welcomes your honesty.

LISTING YOUR THANKS

For the next 10 minutes begin listing all the things you are grateful for today. This list can range from very important, to the simplest of pleasures. If this is challenging for you, consider beginning with gratitude for the basics: life, food, and shelter. List as many things as you can.



WRITE / TYPE

When you are finished with your gratitude list, take a moment to pause and thank God for his provisions.



LISTING YOUR PRAYERS

Now, take another 10 minutes to create a second list, with your prayer requests for yourself, your family, your friends, your church, your enemies, the country, the world. What is God putting on your heart to pray for? What breaks your heart? What feels challenging to pray for? After writing this list, begin to pray and offer these requests to the Lord.

WRITE / TYPE

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing a list of prayer requests. The text 'WRITE / TYPE' is written vertically along the left side of the box.

As you finish this time, consider with the Lord what it was like for you to create gratitude and prayer lists. Was one list easier than the other?

WRITE / TYPE

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for reflecting on the process of creating prayer lists. The text 'WRITE / TYPE' is written vertically along the left side of the box.

IMAGINING WITH JESUS

For the next 15 to 20 minutes begin by slowly reading through Mark 5:25–34.

Mark 5:25–34 (NIV)

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’” But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

What is your first response as you read through Mark 5? Write down your thoughts below.

WRITE / TYPE



Read through the passage again and be aware of how you respond towards the woman's actions. What in your life would lead you to reach out for Christ as this woman did? Where in your life have you experienced Christ's healing touch? Where in your life are you still reaching out for Christ's healing touch? Write your reflections below.

WRITE / TYPE

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing reflections. The text 'WRITE / TYPE' is written vertically on the left side of the box.

Complete this exercise by reading through Mark 5 a final time. Write a short prayer to God as your response to this Scripture passage.

WRITE / TYPE

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing a prayer. The text 'WRITE / TYPE' is written vertically on the left side of the box.

CONCLUSION

Finish your last 5 to 10 minutes by talking with God about your experience with these different forms of journaling.

Did a particular type feel more comfortable than another?



WRITE / TYPE

Which exercise was the most challenging for you?



WRITE / TYPE



Consider with the Lord what might be a helpful type of journal for you now. Is there a particular format that would help you to better know God and yourself?

WRITE / TYPE

Close your time by slowly reading Matthew 11:28–30, as a reminder of God’s invitation to you.

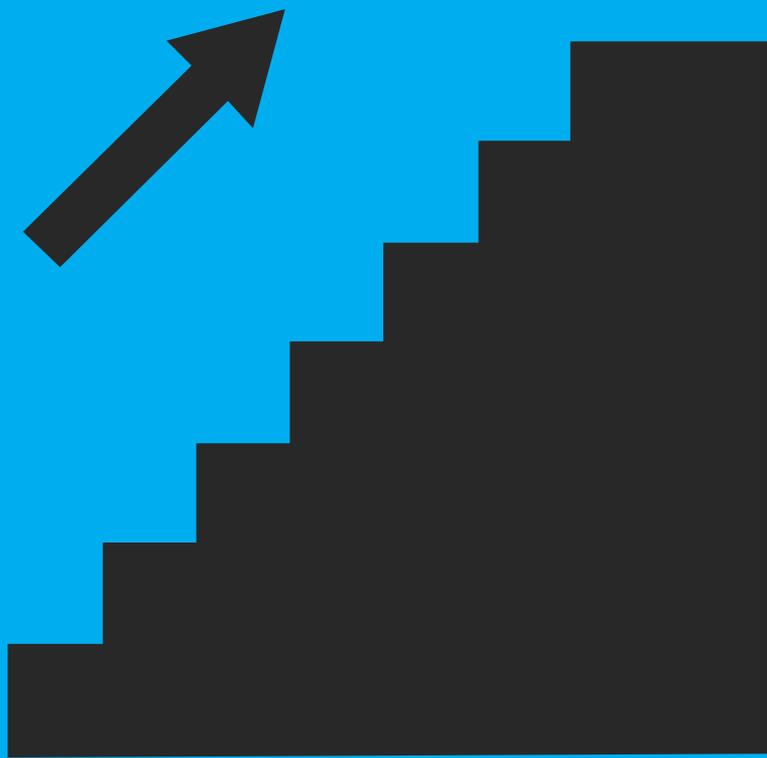


Matthew 11:28–30 (MESSAGE)

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for the user to write or type their journaling response.

| WRITE / TYPE |





NEXT STEPS



NEXT STEPS

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Silence & Solitude

Feeling drawn to silence and solitude with God, but unsure how to practice this in the midst of a busy life? Wondering how this fits in as part of the Christian life? Searching for some practical steps on how to incorporate silence and solitude into your life?

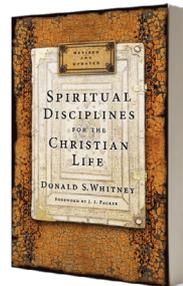


In the Bible we often see Jesus going off by himself to pray. Yet, today we struggle to regularly enter into the practice of silence and solitude. This retreat, guides you through what it means to develop this spiritual practice in your own life.

Visit saddleback.com/retreats to download the free retreat booklet to do on your own or join us for an in-person gathering.

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life

If you would like to learn more about spiritual practices or disciplines on your own, check out Don Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. With topics ranging from fasting to learning, Whitney gives practical steps to developing nine different spiritual practices into your daily life. Available at Amazon or wherever books are sold.



JOIN US ON RETREAT

We offer a variety of retreat experiences at the Rancho Capistrano Retreat Center. Consider joining us for one of our upcoming retreats:

- **Surrender:** This retreat will help you refresh and discover what it truly means to trust God with your whole life.
- **Rest:** This day retreat will give you space to enter into God's invitation to rest.
- **Behold:** This retreat will encourage you to think about the way you see the world.
- **Mercy:** This day retreat will teach you what it means to receive and give mercy.

If you have any questions or would like to connect with us further regarding this retreat experience, please contact the Spiritual Maturity Team at maturity@saddleback.com.

JOURNEY WITH JESUS

Experience "Journey with Jesus," Saddleback's interactive art-trail walking through the last week of Jesus' life before his crucifixion and resurrection. This unique experience can be done in person at the Rancho Capistrano Retreat Center, on-demand through the Journey with Jesus app, or a 360° experience on YouTube. Visit saddleback.com/journeywithjesus for all information.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH AT SADDLEBACK

From in-person classes and workshops to podcasts to on-demand digital tools, Saddleback offers a variety of ways to help you grown spiritually. Visit saddleback.com/grow for all information about spiritual growth at Saddleback.



SADDLEBACK CHURCH
RETREAT
MINISTRY

www.saddleback.com/retreats