

REFLECTION TOOL #11

JOURNALING

The practice of maintaining a journal can assist one in a personal adventure of growth and discipleship. A journal is like a collage of life. When used as a spiritual workbook, journaling can result in the following:

- helps identify direction and potentiality
- crystallizes decisions that need to be made
- enables us to see ourselves better
- helps to identify needs
- identifies new goals to work toward
- helps test whether we are doing what we planned
- helps process events and relieve stress

The eventual result of an effective "journey inward" for growth, should be a "journey outward" to minister to the needs of others. A journal should not be an introspective diversion, but a workshop to nourish new growth.

A journal is a servant, not a taskmaster. Its only value is its usefulness to you. But in order to make it work, it is suggested that you set aside a regular time for journaling. Otherwise, the busyness of life will consume all your hours and days, and there will not be time for writing in your journal.

There are some dangers to be avoided in journaling. Take caution that you strive for balance and not become too subjective. Also, if one comes to journaling with a set of fixed attitudes, journaling becomes a tool for self-justification, rather than growth. Finally, do not use journaling to insulate yourself against something you do not want to face, whether people or ideas.

The journal should contain both the peaks and valleys of life, and more importantly, your inner relationship to these events. Be sure to deal with both the cognitive and affective. Include your prayers, laments, and expectations. Be specific. Don't write for an audience. This book is for you.

It is a good practice to review your journal, whether weekly, monthly or at the end of each section. This helps you to see patterns emerge, and can give you a new perspective.

Also, reading the journal out loud to yourself or a close friend reveals the feelings present, and helps you to own them. If a friend is invited to listen, he or she should do so without comment unless invited to comment. This is a surprisingly effective procedure for assimilating the contents.

Growth centers around four basic areas in life (Luke 2:52). Be sure to include the intellectual, physical, social and spiritual in your journaling. They each influence ministry.

Some suggestions to prompt writing are:

What was the high point or low point in ministry of the week?

What has been my primary learning from this ministry experience?

How does this learning relate to my objectives?

How was I feeling and how did this affect my ministry at this point?

How would I lead differently if I had the chance again?

How do I see God in this situation?

What biblical passages relate to the situation?

Name sources of grace and hope.

Were there any missed opportunities for ministry?

What actions need to be taken next?

How well did I respond as an authority figure?

Did my own agenda preclude the concerns of others?

Was I open and vulnerable? Or closed and resistant?

Did I facilitate the other person in their ministry? Or did I dominate?

Was my action congruent with my stated theology?

What theological issues are involved?

What is my role (as a minister/teacher) in this situation?

What are the larger dynamics to be considered, such as health, family interaction, and culture?

Two excellent resources for help in journaling are [Keeping Your Personal Journal](#) by George F. Simons, and [At A Journal Workshop](#) by Ira Progoff. It is best to learn

Progoff's method in a workshop experience. These are offered through the Dialogue House Associates, Inc., 80 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003.

Please submit pertinent excerpts from your journal (2-3 pages) attached to the signed Reflection Tool Cover Sheet, to the MM Office on the appropriate due date.