

Journaling Through Prayer  
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Writing is a way to sort my thoughts; to figure out which to keep and which to let go of. Some thoughts are stupid; they need to be challenged and quickly dismissed. Other thoughts seem to come from a divine source and I know in myself that they need to be corralled, captured and contemplated. Journaling is a way to get my thoughts out and to work through this sorting process. The work of regularly considering my thoughts is an important discipline that benefits both my mental and spiritual health. In these considerations I not only determine what is to be held and what is to be dismissed, I consider which thoughts are to be held in my heart and which are to be shared with others. Scripture tells me that Mary treasured things in her heart. There are thoughts that need to stay in my heart. Yet as a spiritual leader, sharing thoughts with others is part of my life calling. So I regularly pray for wisdom to know what it is I am to share.

Annie Dillard in her book, *The Writing Life* urges sharing. “One of the things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book or for another book; give it, give it all, give it now. The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes.” I do not think of myself as a writer but I do know from experience that a blessing shared becomes doubled. Therefore I want to continue to strengthen the discipline of journaling so that I can capture, save and share with others, thoughts that have blessed and enriched my life.

Samuel Rima, in both of his books, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* and *Leading for the Inside Out*, writes about the importance of journaling (I highly recommend both books). Rima states, “Journaling has been an essential means of soul-care for centuries... however, it is only helpful to the degree that you are honest with yourself.” I have found that I am more open and honest in my journal when I use an online journal. Off and on over the years I have used [Penzu](#). When I use hard copy scribblers I hold back and worry what people would think if they were to read my unfiltered thoughts. Penzu offers a free version and a pro version that requires a modest annual fee. There may be other online journals that others recommend. The purpose of this sharing is to encourage journaling, not to promote a product. Whatever method you choose, I believe there is benefit in examining, sorting and saving your thoughts. I am in the season of life when the adage “use it or lose it” rings true. If I don’t write it down I quickly forget and there are thoughts I want to hold, treasure and save. Therefore I will more intentionally work to write.

I hold a fond memory of the discipline of writing. In 1983, I was one of a group of cadets traveling from Toronto to Nova Scotia to lead an Easter Weekend. Our brigade officer, Captain Catherine Spence, announced early in the trip that we were to lead the Good Friday service. This

was not expected. She had brought with her an article from an old *War Cry* issue called “Proxy at the Cross.” She announced to the van of travellers that she would read portions of the article to frame what would be a Good Friday drama. She assigned parts; Henry was to be Peter, Ruth the Mother of Jesus, Karen as Mary Magdalene. Captain Catherine Spence and I had earlier been in discussion about some thought I had had about Barabbas while reading a book. I do not remember the content of the discussion but it led to Captain Spence assigning me the role ‘wife of Barabbas.’ I wrote a first person account of what the wife of Barabbas may have felt when she heard the crowd shout “release Barabbas and crucify Christ.” I wrote and performed a monologue because Captain Spence heard some stirring of God in the conversation we shared. Had I not been encouraged to write I would have long forgotten the God directed thoughts spurred by reading about Barabbas.

Many famous and not so famous Christians are committed to the daily practice of journaling. Pairing the practice of sacred reading and journaling becomes a form of prayer. As we read and journal we can be praying, “God help me to sort my thoughts, what of this I am to keep and what I am to let go of, what am I to ‘treasure in my heart’ and what am I to share with others.”