

Journaling is my preferred method of Bible study. As you will see in the descriptions and examples below, my methods vary widely depending on the time I have to invest that day, what type of scripture I am reading, and my mood or needs for that day. One of the things I like about journaling is how flexible it can be from day to day.

In general, I follow the R.E.A.P. method for journaling. R.E.A.P. stands for Read, Examine, Apply, Pray. I always read the passage between two and five times. I want to first get an overall picture of what the theme is, then I want to start picking out finer details which I might have missed during my first or second reading.

During the examinations step, I begin writing in one of several ways, always looking for ideas to take root in my heart. My goal in examination is to see the passage in a new way, to pull out a new idea, or to make a new connection to another part of scripture.

This paves the way for application. I don't just want to know about the text. I want something that I can use today. Sometimes my writing helps me to understand a familiar story with fresh eyes. Alternatively, I may see a way to immediately bring my life into better conformity with God's will. Best of all is when I suddenly come face to face with a deeper understanding of God himself, seeing him in a new way.

The final step is always prayer. I thank God for what he has shown me. I ask him to cause it to bear fruit in my life. I confess where I have fallen short. Prayer is the means by which I release the power of scripture and the Holy Spirit to come into my life and change me in ways that before seemed unimaginable.

***Please note:** The examples contained below are from my own journals. Some of them are old, while others are more recent. I am not putting forth their content as subject matter to be learned or discussed. Of course, as I went through and selected examples, I avoided anything too personal, and I tried to make sure the ideas recorded were doctrinally sound. However, I do feel it necessary to make the disclaimer that the content of these examples is in no way reflective of the teachings of this church, or even this Sunday school class. With that said, may they be enlightening in the manner in which they were intended to be: that of exemplifying how to journal. Enjoy!*

Journaling Method 1: Paraphrasing

I like this method for a passage of scripture that stands alone, like a Psalm or Proverb, although those are not all I might paraphrase. I usually read through the passage once or twice first, to get a feel for the overall message. Then, beginning with the first verse or sentence, I just rewrite in my own words.

Occasionally, as in the second paragraph of the example below, I might write the original wording in parenthesis if I feel it clarifies my paraphrased thought. I try to focus my paraphrase on application and action. As I write, I try to think about how this verse relates to me personally at the current time in my life, and how I can learn from it and apply it right now.

August 26, 2006

Psalm 1

God will turn his face toward the man who does not act on the teachings of evil men or passively allow sin in his life or get comfortable talking about others/gossiping. But he loves to read God's Word, and he thinks about it and munches on it all the time. The Word of God becomes the resting place for his mind.

He is like a mighty oak or apple tree planted by a stream, getting steadily fed, not a torrent and then a drought. He will (yield fruit in season) be ready to act on the prompting of the Lord, and he will not get dried up when the hot sun beats down. God will bless whatever he puts his hand to, because his life will be lived in God's will.

The opposite can be said about those who ignore God. They are like refuse/dust/chaff that is not held down by anything stronger. When even a breeze blows, they are scattered and helpless. Therefore those who do not seek God will not be able to stand open before his judgment, and those who are still in their sin will be ashamed because of those who have been made clean.

For the Lord looks after the man who seeks him, but the man who doesn't is on his own, and you won't make it that way.

Journaling Method 2: Historical Analysis

I use this method whenever I am reading an historical book, such as Kings or Deuteronomy, or one of the gospels. I begin by reading the section three to five times. Each time I read through, I am trying to think about the context. What is the historical and cultural setting? Who are the main characters? How are they feeling and interacting with one another? What is God doing, and what is his larger purpose in these actions?

This method often looks more like an outline than anything else. Sometimes it is a list of facts. At other times I will break out into prose or prayer, as an idea catches hold in my heart. As always, I am looking for more than just information. I want something I can use today!

October 23, 2012

Deuteronomy 1:1-8

Moses said these words east of the Jordan - in the desert

Moses proclaimed all the Lord told him to

This was after two victories

-They had seen God's faithfulness

-Now they had to leave their leader behind

The Lord said 'you have stayed where you are comfortable long enough. Now go where you will be uncomfortable for a while, but I have already given you success.'

They were 'comfortable' in the desert. How often do we resist God leading us away from the familiar wasteland and into the unknown of the promise-land?

Journaling Method 3: Just Write!

Sometimes the new idea begins as I am reading. When this happens, I just write it down and try to develop it further. These entries tend to be full of the words "I think," and it is very important to differentiate between my thoughts, and actual fact or doctrine. The things we think about scripture can be very windy roads which may lead us closer to God, but need to be tested thoroughly along the way.

The delightful thing about this method of journaling is that the winding road we travel can lead to some wonderful insights into God's character and his plan for our lives. The danger comes in that the method departs from scripture and does not necessarily return. While the thought I am pursuing was born in the reading of a passage, I may pursue it from there, and forget to check my direction of travel against the compass of the context of the Bible.

October 12, 2011

Matthew 16:13-28

I love Peter. Perhaps because I relate to him so well. In all three books where it is told, his confession of Christ immediately precedes his rebuke.

It must have been a hard teaching. Peter and the rest were still in the afterglow of their realization of whom they were following and Jesus began to predict his death. No wonder Peter rebelled against the thought!

When Jesus called Peter Satan, I don't think he meant the devil. Satan can mean adversary or accuser. I think perhaps Jesus was truly rebuking Peter, not just the devil's use of him.

"You have not the things of God in mind but the things of men!"

Such dangerous ground for any believer! Jesus tells us we can serve and serve, but it's all for nothing if we don't know him.

It is no coincidence that Jesus then turns to them all and says

"whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will find it." The things of God are the only things that matter.

Peter knew who Jesus was, but he wanted to think about how who Jesus was could benefit them in this life. He was looking with an earthly perspective. There was probably some selfish ambition, but also a lot of good will - Jesus is the Christ! Freedom for Israel, and surely I will be one of the rulers! That's all fine, but it wasn't God's plan; it was Peter's plan.

Journaling Method 4: Exposition

When I have the time, this is my favorite way to journal, especially for the epistles. As before, I read the passage a few times before I begin. I then proceed verse by verse, or thought by thought. I write much of the actual scripture (seen below in red), and I denote my comments in brackets.

This process becomes almost a conversation between God and me. I write his Word, and then I respond. My response may be a rephrasing, a clarification, or a question. Often, if I do write a question, he is faithful to answer it later in the passage. If not, I make note of it for further study.

My goal in this method is to understand what a passage is saying, and how it connects to its context. Often, if I am studying an entire book in this way, I find it useful to stop every few entries or so and sum up what has been said so far. In this way, I maintain the over-all logic of the argument being given. This is especially necessary when reading Paul's writings, since he did tend to get side tracked.

March 11, 2012

Philippians 3:12-16

Not that I have already attained this [The righteousness that is by faith, becoming like Christ, and the resurrection from the dead]

But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me... Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.

Paul has a goal he won't reach until he meets Jesus. We don't attain righteousness here, but we push ourselves. We press on to take hold of what Jesus sacrificed to give us - the ability to please God.

We forget what is behind - good and bad- and focus on current and future opportunities to live with the righteousness that is by faith.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things [the view that says I have not arrived but I'm working - proceeding] And if on any point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you [God, not Paul]. Only let us live up to what we have already attained [We have been justified. We now have even the ability to please God. Let us work to do so.]

January 28, 2010

Romans 8:31-?

v.31 - *What then shall we say in response to this* [God working for good, calling us for his purpose, glorifying us] *If God is for us* [has a plan for us, has chosen to use us, is bringing us into glorification] *who can be against us?* [He gave up his son - after that what would he withhold from us? He will give us all things we need to be glorified, to accomplish his purposes]

v.33-34 - *Hardship in the Christian's life is not punishment from God or the withholding of blessing. "It is God who justifies."* The debt is paid, and our groom is standing at the right hand of the King - in a position of power, raised to life - interceding for us.

v.35 - *Nothing can separate us* [or signify our separation] *from the love of Christ.* Is there any moment where we can say "This hardship is too great, God must have turned away from me." No!

v.37 - *more than conquerors* [not only do hardships not signify God's rejection. They indicate confidence. We can not only overcome them, but can receive benefit from them. They are evidence, not of God's abandonment, but of this investment in our character.