

spiritual journaling course

WITH HEATHER PAIGE HUNT

Since I began journaling in 2003, the practice has become my most treasured and formative habit. I truly cannot imagine life without it. Most mornings, you can find me curled up by a window in the early light with mug and pen stash reading scripture slow and journaling. When I write out verses, prayers and my innermost thoughts on my waiting pages, God teaches me. I write as I learn and learn as I write. God corrects me, comforts me, frees me, molds me and reveals His character to me more and more through these morning rituals. The practice gives a beautiful experience with a fruitful outcome.

Friends asked me to write a series explaining how I journal. Instead, I wrote an eight-week guide to equip you with the tools and practice you need to journal confidently on your own. You can complete the course alone, with a friend or in an organized small group.

There are several approaches to journaling and we will dabble in many. Since journaling is so personal and open-ended, I aim to provide freeing flexibility within a helpful framework. Each week I introduce a different method to practice and each day I provide a different Bible passage and entry-starter to follow. It is up to you how deep you dive into your daily studies; journaling can take a short and sweet 15 minutes or it can easily stretch to a lovely hour.

Here is the lesson line-up:

WEEK 1. JOURNALING TO REST

WEEK 2. JOURNALING TO GROW AND THRIVE

WEEK 3. JOURNALING TO LEARN SCRIPTURE

WEEK 4. JOURNALING TO APPLY SCRIPTURE

WEEK 5. JOURNALING TO PUT ON GOD'S DESCRIPTIONS OF YOU

WEEK 6. JOURNALING TO SELF-EXAMINE

WEEK 7. JOURNALING TO DREAM AND PLAN

WEEK 8. JOURNALING TO APPLY STORIES FROM SCRIPTURE

WEEK 9. JOURNALING WITHOUT GUIDELINES

Your white page is a space to explore a concept and flesh out a thought. It's a place to weigh decisions and evaluate everything beside God's Word. There, you can store nuggets of truth that speak to your soul and revelations that stand like milestones in your life. It is a safe haven to be real and raw and deep. It is a record of your faith journey and a reminder of answered prayers. It is a mechanism for staying your mind on a prayer when you might otherwise be distracted, a lens to look inward, a tool for practicing solitude, a gauge for how you are doing spiritually, a place to reason through possibilities and a spot to create beauty. The habit reels God into crannies of your life where you previously stood alone, chips away at assumptions and entitlements, lifts off burdens, uncovers lies, dismantles idols, probes motives and gradually transforms you into a more discerning person. Call it a system, an instrument, a channel or a method. Call it a ground for encountering God and a means for developing Christlikeness. Call yourself a journaler.

GETTING STARTED

Choose a journal that feels good in your hands and appeals to your eye or you will not be excited to write in it. But do not spend too much money on it or you will not feel the freedom to fill up your pages liberally. Some journalers like thick journals that take a year to fill while others prefer pocket-sized journals to carry with them and write on a whim. I use midsized journals because I like changing my style periodically. You can pick from lasting refillable covers to spiral bound notebooks to artsy Rifle Paper Co. or Cavallini Papers and Co. journals. Barnes and Noble and Amazon offer a splendid selection and Target usually keeps a good assortment.

Now, look at your home and your routine to choose a spot and a slot for your journaling practice. In college, my “spot” was the coffee shop I passed each morning near campus and my “slot” was after my first class each day. After college, I was slow to establish a slot or spot, thus my journaling habit became inspiration-based rather than habitual for a while. The shift impacted my nearness to God, my understanding of myself and my choices (which in turn further impacted my nearness to God). I decided to choose a new spot and slot that suited my new circumstances. When I had my first child, my slot was my son’s long afternoon nap and my spot the kitchen table. I would walk directly from his bedroom to my tea kettle without pausing to clean a surface or send a text message; while my water boiled, I gathered my materials. With each additional child, my slot becomes dawn and my spot the middle of my bed with my newborn beside me and coffee. When that early-rising babe starts crawling and grabbing, my slot becomes evening on the couch by a lamp with tea. But as soon as mornings are manageable, I choose dawn again as my ideal slot. Now, I journal in an oversized chair by the living room window, where I can watch birds eat and dewy shadows shift in the early light. I think often of Psalm 90:14, *Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love*. Before you start journaling, consider your daily routine and your surroundings then choose a pleasant and doable spot and slot for yourself. Keep your journaling practice like an appointment each day until the habit becomes as natural to you as eating lunch or showering.

Remember that you are a unique journaler. God designed the gambit of different gifts, learning styles, interests and personality types then whisked them together artfully to form individuals. Your journal will not look like my journal or like your friend’s journal. It is a secret place between you and God. Your preferred style will develop over time, so feel free and confident to make it your own. At first, it may feel awkwardly rigid like a new chair, but it will become comfy as you break it in. And perhaps journaling will become for you a beautiful unshakeable habit.

I recommend printing this journaling guide rather than working from a screen, since technology can distract you and derail your quiet time. I would love to hear about your experience and answer your questions. Reach out by emailing me at heatherpaigehunt@gmail.com.

FOUNDATIONAL PASSAGES

The following passages have formed a foundation for why and how I journal. You may choose to write some of them in the front of your own journal.

James 4:5, 8. *He yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us... Draw near to the Lord and He will draw near to you.*

Knowing that God longs to spend time with you- that He is waiting eagerly for you to spend time with Him- can encourage you to keep drawing near.

1 Peter 5:7. *Cast your burdens onto Jesus for he cares for you.*

Psalms 55:22. *Cast your cares on the LORD and He will sustain you.*

Bring your cares to the Lord in your journal. As you write out your prayers, He will reveal and lift off burdens you didn't even know you had been carrying and He will teach you to rely on Him more and more.

Mark 9:22-24. *"But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."*

"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Sometimes I don't notice my lack of belief until the words hit the journal page. I look at it and realize, "Hey, doesn't the Bible say something about this?" In your journal, you can whittle down unbeliefs and replace them with God's promises. I write the words, "Help my unbelief!" often and God graciously gives more faith.

Jeremiah 17:10. *"I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind."*

Lamentations 3:40. *Let us test and examine our ways.*

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22. *Test everything; hold fast what is good; abstain from every form of evil.*

There's nothing as personalized as a journal to examine your own plans and priorities and tendencies. There, you can lay your ways alongside scripture and let God reorient and remold you. Indeed, He knows our hearts and our longings better than we do ourselves.

Jeremiah 15:16. *When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my hearts delight.*

This verse proves true. Really, nothing in life brings me more joy than basking in God's Word, when I am paying attention. The Psalmists compare them to honey on the lips in Psalm 19:10 and 119:103.

2 Chronicles 16:9. *The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.*

Drawing near to the Lord takes discipline. And the Holy Spirit is our much-needed help in the endeavor. God's promise to strengthen applies not just to the Christian who has been faithfully running the race for years, but to the one who feel like a mess on the floor, with arms-extended and heart contrite, asking for strength. The habit of journaling can keep you committed.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Even if you have never kept a journal yourself, you can facilitate this class.

I recommend meeting in groups of two to six. If your group is bigger, consider splitting into pods of 3 to 4 each week, so that women have the freedom and time to share deeply.

WEEK 1: Get to know one another and read foundational passages from the introduction.

1. Pray thanking God for the group and asking Him to lead your personal studies and discussions in the coming weeks.
2. Go around the circle sharing:
 - a. Introduce yourself (i.e. name, family, where are you from?)
 - b. Have you journaled before? If so, tell about your experience.
 - c. Why are you taking this class? Why do you want to journal?
3. Discuss the foundational passages listed in the introduction. Go around the circle having each journaler read a passage aloud.
4. Go around the circle again sharing:
 - a. Share your "spot and slot". Your spot is the place where you plan to do your journaling and your slot is the time of day you will do it.
 - b. Share prayer requests and pray for one another.

WEEKS 2-9: Meetings flow naturally through a very simple structure:

1. Ask, "How did you like journaling with this week's method?"
2. Open up Bibles and journals to share:
 - a. DAY 1
 - Weeks that the guide begins with a word or question, read that aloud first.
 - Ask a volunteer to read the day's passage aloud (except week 8 stories).
 - Ask, "What did you write about?"
 - If no one speaks up, ask a specific question from the day's entry-starter.
 - b. DAY 2
 - Read passage
 - Ask open-endedly, "What did you write?"
 - c. DAY 3
 - Read passage
 - Ask open-endedly, "What did you write?"
 - d. DAY 4
 - Read passage
 - Ask open-endedly, "What did you write?"

- e. DAY 5
 - o Read passage
 - o Ask open-endedly, “What did you write?”
 - f. DAY 6
 - o Read passage
 - o Ask open-endedly, “What did you write?”
3. Go around the circle sharing prayer requests starting with the journaler to your right. After she shares her request, you pray for her. In turn, she will pray for the journaler to her right and so on around the circle. (Feel free also to pause and pray when a journaler shares something prayer-worthy from an entry.)

Invite members to share what they are learning, wondering about, doubting or struggling with and praying for from their entries. Allow for long silences while journalers skim their entries. Of course, they can read entries aloud, but encourage them to summarize their thoughts conversationally. Encourage and pray for one another as you go. These instructions may feel a bit ambiguous, but that is a beautiful element worth embracing. Each gathering takes on a life of its own; individuals take different lessons from the passages and apply their varying experiences in their writings. Since journal entries are inherently open-ended, you never know what responses you are going to get.

Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, one man sharpens another.” In a small group, members can sharpen one another as they hold each other accountable and practice sharing deeply with others. When we bravely share our doubts or certitudes, we invite others to carry our burdens, to pray for us and to share deeply in return. When we listen, we show love and we often discover that other women experience the same hang-ups we have been so hesitant to share. Fostering sharpening relationships takes courage: courage to initiate, to be honest, to listen and to pray. In authentic conversations, fears lose ground and loneliness subsides; and all leave feeling known and encouraged and sharpened. Help create a culture of transparency in your group by bravely sharing your own writings.

As always, feel free to ask me your questions. Contact me at heatherpaighunt@gmail.com.

WEEK 1: Journaling to Rest

When you open your Bible and journal, prepare yourself to delight in God's Word knowing that He delights in your doing so. Once your journal is open, you are in a sacred space. If you already keep a daily quiet time, you know the gift of solitude. If you are prone to distraction, expect the solitude habit to take cultivating. The blank page and stillness may feel unnatural at first. Indeed, pinning your mind and body down for it may feel like a battle. But the fruits are well-worth the effort. Daily quiet brings peace and clarity. It invites rest to your soul, like an exhale of stress and taking in of gratitude and strength, as you bask in God's presence. So, though you may be interrupted by a person, do not allow yourself to be interrupted by technology or your to-do list. This is an important boundary to draw early in your journaling practice, since your phone can wreck your high hopes for the habit before you gain traction. For a long time, I kept a large antique key with my Bible. When I was tempted to reach for my phone, I would pick up the key instead. I knew that spending time reading the Bible and praying daily was the key to becoming a godly woman and mother who pleased the Lord and experienced His abundant joy and peace. So, I kept the key beside me to help keep me on track. If you find yourself struggling to stay focused, consider keeping a key, candle, seed packet, blanket or some other significant item beside you during your quiet time.

You have a white page before you. The open-endedness unique to journaling creates a place for God to reveal beautiful truths to you directly. When you read the Bible, a line may stand out to you; copy it and write out your thoughts and a prayer. When you pray, God may whisper to you; journal about that. Each week, we will focus on a different aspect of journaling. This week, simply get writing. I provide an entry-starter each day, but you do not have to use it.

SCRIPTURE THEME: Matt 11:28-30 (NIV)

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

THIS WEEK:

DAY 1. Luke 10:38-42

Example: Lord, thank you for inviting me to simply sit at your feet and enjoy being with You like Mary. Help me to see and seize opportunities to experience You and learn from You. Help me to stay here at your feet instead of springing up for tasks or distractions. Thank you for correcting Martha so lovingly. Thank you for also correcting me gently when I am preoccupied or "troubled by many things". Am I more like Martha or Mary, Lord? Give me a teachable heart and teach me. (Note: I make all example entries brief and helpful. In my unedited journal, they ramble, grapple, meander and dead-end.)

DAY 2. Psalm 27:1-8

Entry-starter: Do you share any of David's longings? If so, write about it and ask God to fulfill them like David does, knowing that God wants to grant your request. David's request in verse 4, for instance, captures the essence of your journaling practice. Pray this verse as David did and Mary would- it is "the good portion" and as Jesus promises, "it will not be taken away from you" (Luke 10:42). Do you share any of David's struggles? If so, write about it then preach truth to yourself like David does. Armed men probably do not seek to "devour" you, but Satan does. Ephesians 6:12 says that your struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 1 Peter 5:8 says that your adversary, the devil prowls around like a lion looking for someone to devour. Yet, in verse 1, David says that the Lord is your stronghold against all enemies, seen and unseen.

DAY 3. Matthew 11:28-30 (printed above)

Entry-starter: Jesus' offer confused me for a long time. A yoke is a burden, I reasoned. I already carry plenty of yokes, so how would Jesus setting yet another burden on my shoulders grant me rest? A sermon cleared up my mistake. The pastor explained that Jesus wants to lift off the stacked-up yokes and replace them with His one light yoke. I had been shouldering burdens that God never intended me to bear: perfectionism, worry, shame, unforgiveness, high expectations (mostly of myself), anxious and negative thoughts, regret, blame and others. God warns against all of these. The Bible says, "Do not fear" and "I will remember your sins no more" and "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" and "See to it that no bitter root grows up," etc. Satan wields these yokes like weapons, but Jesus offers to crush them. As Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast your burdens on the Lord and He will take care of you." Today, ask God to show you what yokes He wants to help you lay aside. List any He brings to your mind and begin the process of letting Him take them off. This process may take more than one sitting, so we will return to it again in this course. As God lifts yokes off, cross them off your list. Without them weighing you down, God can give His rest to your soul.

DAY 4. Philippians 4:6-7

Entry-starter: Jesus wants to remove some of our yokes altogether, like sin and strife. Others He wants to carry for you, like worry. "We are weak but He is strong." Lay out your concerns before the Lord in your journal today. List them, then as you put each in His strong hands, cross them off yesterday's list. With the burdens of your sin cast away and the concerns of your heart in His strong hands, His peace "that surpasses all understanding will guard your heart and mind."

DAY 5. Psalm 84

Entry-starter: Again, personalize David's words. When a line stands out to you, pause to copy it into your journal then prayerfully write about it.

DAY 6. Review and pray, Lord, thank You for Your Word and for Your presence. Thank You for inviting me to sit at Your feet and learn from You. Thank You for revealing Your truths to me.

This week, I discovered _____ about Your character.

This week You showed me _____ about myself.

WEEK 2: Journaling to Grow and Thrive

Time spent with the Lord can be likened to a flower tucked into a growing bouquet of past quiet times. When you read a familiar passage, you'll remember journaling your thoughts and prayers about it. It's like taking a flower out of the bouquet, giving it a reminiscing sniff and placing it back alongside the new flower of today's journaling experience. The figurative bouquet is a pleasing aroma to God and to you.

There are many ways to journal, all of which will bless you and grow you in:

- your nearness to God
- your knowledge of His Word
- your understanding of His character
- your faith in His promises
- your application of His instructions

This week, practice intermingling scripture with your thoughts and prayers. Pick two pens, one color to copy the day's passage and another color to record your prayers and ponderings. Writing verses slows you down to think deeply about the words and apply them to your life. As you read, you may be awed by the passage and want to pause and thank God. Or you may be convicted and want to ask for forgiveness and help. Or you may be confused and want to unpack an idea. So, interrupt your copying, switch pens to write out your response, then continue copying the passage. I provide partial example entries to help you get started.

SCRIPTURE THEME: Eph 3:12 & 16-21 (NLT)

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.... I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

THIS WEEK:

DAY 1. Eph 3:12 & 16-21 (printed above)

Example: Because of Christ and our faith in Him, Lord, increase my faith, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence. Lord, I do not feel bold. I feel small and coy. But I know that Christ's blood has made me righteous in Your sight. You sent Jesus to die because You desire to be with me! Thank you for your grace and for inviting me to enter Your presence. I "have confidence to enter the holy places because of the blood of Christ" (Heb 10:19)! I see that coming humbly does not mean I cannot also come boldly. Make me as confident as you say I can be. I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit. Yes, Lord I pray this over myself, boldly. Your resources are unlimited- nothing is too big for You! Empower me. With inner strength that undergirds all that I do and think. Help me to sense and rely on Your Spirit at work in my life. Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him. Lord, You say to my heart, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in." I open my door. Come in and dwell in me always. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. If I am a tree, what have I been growing my roots down into? Have I been growing them into God's love as a tree in rich soil? Or have I been growing my thirsty roots into sifting sand that will not nourish? Do my roots hold fast to firm ground or do they cling to an eroding cliffside? Show me, Lord, how to grow my roots down into your love. Make me strong...

DAY 2. Jeremiah 17:5-8

Example: ...He is like a shrub in in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. A desert shrub or even a meadow tree depends on circumstantial rains for its water. Sometimes there is a flood and she is satisfied, but sometimes there is a drought and she cannot thrive. She grows her roots wide across the ground to catch what water she can. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, Lord, you are the stream that never runs dry. Make me like a tree on your riverbank that grows her roots down deep into you as Ephesians 3:17 says. Say to me what you said to the woman at the well in John 4, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirst again." For its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit...

DAY 3. Isaiah 35:1-7

Example: The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice... I know what it is like to be a desert. I've been there twice. But You are mighty to save. You are abundant, Lord. You loved me too much to leave me a dry wilderness. I called on You and You came to rescue me. You

healed me and made me bloom beyond what I could “ever ask or imagine”. I magnify You for Your power and Your steadfast love. Be glorified in me. ...with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it...

DAY 4. Colossians 1:9-14

Entry-starter: The New Living Translation is my favorite version of this passage. Come boldly before the throne and pray Paul’s prayer over yourself. With your two pens, write out the verse pausing to ask for each part in full measure.

DAY 5. Colossians 1:9-14

Entry-starter: Turn again to yesterday’s passage. This time pray it over someone else, like a friend or your spouse or child or a community leader. You needn’t copy the full text today.

DAY 6. Review your journal entries from this week, look for a common thread. Write and pray.

WEEK 3: Journaling to Learn Scripture

Interacting with scripture through journaling helps cement it in your mind. Yes, it aids in memorization, but mostly it teaches the concepts to your heart. As you write about a passage, another verse will come to mind and you can lace the truths together in your entry. As with any Bible study, synapses connect as you read, creating a fantastic web of verses and concepts in your mind. The more scripture you read, the bigger your figurative knowledge web grows. And the experience of journaling scripture strengthens the bonds and multiplies the effect.

I have found that journaling with a concordance broadens and deepens my understanding of Bible truths. Seeing a word in multiple contexts and journaling my findings helps me define and personalize its meaning. The number of verses listed in a concordance is splendid, so long as I don't expect myself to study them all in one sitting! Instead of being overwhelmed by the word buffet, I content myself to nibble and enjoy the research. For the next two weeks, you will research a bit and make connections in your journal by focusing on one word a day. This week, you will study five words from Galatians 5:22 and journal using a concordance; next week, you will study words from James 3:17 and journal using different translations. You could stretch future word studies out to days, but this week just skim the list of phrases in your concordance and flip to a few that catch your eye. If your Bible does not have a concordance, you can use the search function on the Bible app or Blue Letter Bible app or biblegateway.com, but filter your results by testament or book to shorten the exhaustive list. If using your phone is too tempting (me!) you might want to buy a concordance later. Copy, paraphrase, make a list, draw a word map or jot down key phrases as you journal your findings. I provide a verse in each entry-starter, but only look it up if you need it.

SCRIPTURE THEME: Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

THIS WEEK:

DAY 1. "Fruit"

Entry-starter: Open your concordance to the word, "fruit." Skim the phrases and flip to a few that catch your eye. Track your learning in your journal by interweaving new quotes or paraphrases with what you already know about fruit and fruitfulness. A verse may remind you of last week's entries about roots and thriving trees; if so, you are growing both your knowledge web and your figurative bouquet! (I found Luke 3:8-9.)

DAY 2. "Joy"

Entry-starter: Do not be overwhelmed by the number of verses about "joy." You could easily spend a week studying this one word, so nibble today and keep the study in mind for future entries. With your concordance, begin to extract the essence of joy from scripture. You can compile a bulleted description or, if you are a visual learner, draw a word web with "joy" in the center and snippets from different verses in bubbles around it. (I found Psalm 28:7.)

DAY 3. "Peace"

Example: Interesting. Peace is sometimes named as a gift and other times as a command:

"**Peace** I leave with you, my **peace** I give you." (John 14)

"You will keep him in perfect **peace** whose mind is stayed on you." (Isaiah 26)

"So far as it depends on you, live at **peace** with everyone." (Romans 12)

"And the **peace** of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds..." (Philippians 4:7)

Jesus "said to the sea, '**Peace!** Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." (Mark 4)

Thank you for your gift of peace. No matter how big the storm in my circumstances or in my chest, you are mightier. Help me to stay my mind on you and receive the peace that you give unconditionally. Help me choose peace in all my relationships, forgiving others as you forgave me. Lead me to live in a state of peace that surpassing understanding.

DAY 4. "Patience"

Example: Lord, You did not say "be patient until" or "be patient unless"- You just said, "be patient." All the time. I know you would never command me to do an impossible thing, so there is never a reason to respond in frazzled rattled snappy grouchy irritation. Rather in every situation, I can expect the Holy Spirit to help me be: patient no matter how incessant the needs, tender-hearted however troublesome the behavior, kind however annoying the habit, humble however great the inconvenience, gentle however loud a child's tantrum, every day. I think again of Fenelon's words, "Sit quietly before the Lord and your active argumentative mind will soon be calmed. God can teach you to look at each matter with a simple clear view." It's true. I cannot pray sincerely and stay an emotional boiler. You calm me and guide me when I ask. When I choose patience, I am not only obeying You- I am demonstrating for my children how to react when they too feel overwhelmed or bombarded. Instead of showing them how to burst under pressure, I can show them how to prayerfully peaceably persevere, like Jesus did when crowds incessantly followed and nagged Him (Matthew 14:13-14).

DAY 5. "Self-control"

Example: 1 Peter 4:7 says, "Be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." Peter's instructions remind me of Jesus' words in Matthew 26:41, when He tells the disciples in Gethsemane to "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." I see a cycle: Pray so that I do not fall into temptation; don't fall into temptation so that I can pray. I see how silly it is to expect myself to have self-control without regular prayer. Indeed, I have already found that living without self-control muffles my prayer life. The two are inseparable. 2 Corinthians 10:15 says to "hold every thought captive in obedience to Christ" and Hebrews 12:1 says to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul says that he disciplines his body and keeps it under control and in 1 Corinthians 6:12, he says "I will not be dominated by anything." 1 Corinthians 10:13 promises that no temptation has seized me that is not common to man and that You will not let me be tempted beyond what I can handle but will provide a way out so that I can endure it. May it be so with me, Lord. Help me to control myself by relying on the Holy Spirit's help through prayer.

DAY 6. Ask God what He has for you today and wait. Enjoy the stillness. Or feel free to choose a sixth Fruit of the Spirit to study.

WEEK 4: Journaling to Apply Scripture

Some days I journal out of pure inspiration; some I push on with sheer self-discipline. I know how desperately I need God's guidance every day. For that, a journal is also a helpful gauge for how I am doing spiritually. I can monitor my journal for signs of slipping. If I flip through and find weeks of to-do lists and daydreams or back-to-back sermon notes, then I know I need a reset. If I notice that scripture is missing from my entries, I know I am on my way to deception. Staying my mind on God takes effort and a journal can either help me in that endeavor or hurt me worse than ever. Sin nature is ever-present and the devil is crafty. A few times I have let my journal become teen diary-like, filled with insecurities, self-criticisms, boasts, rants or complaints. I noticed in those seasons that I felt less content, less controlled, more irritable, more anxious. God doesn't leave me wallowing; He graciously corrects me like pressing a gentle hand my shoulder. Like Isaiah 30:21 says, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" I have torn out pages before or written "forgiveness" over them with big black marker. Yielding in these hard moments has brought joy and peace to my heart and my relationships. God brings healing when I choose to follow His precepts over my own tendencies. I know how sweet it is to abide in the Lord and I know how much He desires to spend that precious time with me, so I press on full of gratitude.

This week, we will complete our word study. Instead of studying verses from a concordance, we will journal with different Bible translations. Some verses slide past my notice in one translation but pop out powerfully in another, so I keep a couple versions on hand. I primarily use the English Standard Version (ESV) because scholars say it is the most accurate, but I often turn to the New Living Translation (NLT) because it is beautiful and easy to understand. I have penciled "NLT" beside many treasured verses in my ESV Bible. I also keep my high school study Bible for reference, which is a 1984 New International Version (NIV). Your preferences will be different from mine. Many like the Amplified Bible (AMP) for its thorough explanations. Some love the King James Bible (KJV) because it is lovely and historically important. There are many to choose from. Sometimes I draw simple tables in my journal comparing synonyms and phrases from different versions. If you do not have two or more versions at home, use the parallel feature on biblegateway.com by clicking the icon of two pages between the search bar and the text. This week's entry-starters and examples serve as idea-generators, not instructions, so journal however you like.

SCRIPTURE THEME: James 3:17

The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

THIS WEEK:

DAY 1. "Considerate" in Philippians 2:3-8

Entry-starter: Paul calls us to be considerate then gives the ultimate example to follow. Read from two translations, then just bask in this beautiful passage and let gratitude and adoration flow out onto your page. Ask God to make you more Christ-like.

DAY 2. "Full of Mercy" in Colossians 3:12-17

Example: Lord, you are slow to anger and abounding in love. You are longsuffering and mercifully made a way to forgive me so that I can be united with You. You did not say to forgive seven times, but seventy times seven times. Here You call me to forgive as You forgave me over and over. To me, verse 13 in the ESV is helpful but in the NLT, it is poignant and has changed my life. "Make allowances for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you." I have turned to it many times, sometimes in hot tears, to prompt me to forgive and forbear. The passage is painfully convicting, but it sets me free and protects my relationships every time that I obey it. When I put off obeying, I make messes hard to overcome- the sun goes down on my anger (Ephesians 4:26), records of wrongs are kept (1 Corinthians 13:5), and roots of bitterness spring up (Hebrews 12:15). Thank you, Lord, for your Word. Thank you for convicting me when I am wrong and for helping me obey your commands. As Psalm 19:17-14 says, all your commands are good. Help me receive Your forgiveness in every nook and cranny of my life. Help me also to forgive others as you forgive them and me.

DAY 3. "Sincere" in Romans 12:9-18

Entry-starter: Open two translations side-by-side to deepen your understanding of Paul's exhortation. Jot down differences you notice. Name a command that you are excelling in and thank God for His help. Also, name a command that you can improve in and prayerfully write a brief plan for how to change. Ask the Holy Spirit for help.

DAY 4. "Pure" in Philippians 4:8

Entry-starter: Philippians 4:8, like Galatians 5:22 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, is an excellent verse to study at length with parallel translations and a concordance. Today, you can just make a simple table or bulleted list of words you find in three or so translations. Aren't they inspiring? Write some thoughts and goals for applying Paul's advice as you read.

DAY 5. "Submissive" in John 15:5-11

Example: Paul commands us in other passages to submit to authority. Earlier this week, we saw in Philippians 2 how Christ submitted to the Father. And Paul and Jesus Himself command us to submit to Christ. The words "submissive" does not appear in John 15, but

the call to submission is clear. John writes with beautiful repetition here. The NIV repeats “remain in me as I also remain in you” while the ESV says, “abide in me and I in you.” In this case, the word choice, “remain,” helped me understand Your meaning, but “abide” led me love it. Abide. “Abide” is one of the most beautiful words I know. I have written it in every size, color and script in my journals over and over. Without the NIV, I might not have grasped what abiding meant, but without the ESV, I would not have latched onto the idea with such joyful gratitude. You are constant, unchanging, steadfast. JJ Heller sings, “No matter how the wind may blow, it cannot shake the sun.” Thank you, Lord, for being a steadfast sun in Your promises and in Your love, unaffected by winds of my circumstances or even my sins. Thank you for showing me Your character and for reshaping me. Thank you for your faithfulness. Help me to submit to you in all things and faithfully abide in you.

DAY 6. Review by listing the ten words we studied these two weeks and jotting down a short and simple phrase that represents each word’s meaning to you.

WEEK 5: Journaling to Put on His Descriptions of You

In the Bible we find prescriptive passages and descriptive passages. Prescriptive passages give instructions on how to live a godly life: “Act justly,” “Be strong and courageous,” “Love your enemies,” “Pray continually,” “Be content in all circumstances,” “Resist the devil.” This week we will look at and put on descriptive passages. These name traits we take on simply by being God’s. Applying prescriptive verses is important, but receiving descriptive passages first is essential.

Here is a refined excerpt from my 2017 journal after an extended study of how God describes us:

My identity is not determined by my works. It is predetermined by God who made me and chose me and redeemed me for Himself. Apart from my own efforts, regardless of my success or failure, God says in His unchangeable Word that I am: His, His delight, His daughter, His workmanship, His bride, His temple, a sheep worth searching for. I am worth more than many sparrows. I am spotless and not condemned, imperishable and eternal. Rescued, ransomed, righteous, royal, reborn, refined, reconciled and robed in salvation. I am protected, sustained, emboldened, not abandoned, atoned, armed and more than a conqueror. I am loved, known, understood, forgiven, justified, grafted in, healed, and free indeed. I am crucified with Christ and alive in Christ. I am a new creation. I am being transformed. I am salt and light, a lamp and a star, a letter and a messenger, a branch, a citizen, a friend and an heir. I am blessed. I am holy. And I am filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus doesn't love me because I obey, He just loves me. Yes, I should obey, but my obedience comes from his might, not mine, and my worth does not hinge on my obedience.

Prescriptive and descriptive passages are inextricably linked- because He loves us, God helps us obey His commands. Indeed, all God’s commands are promises. Jesus would not give us a command that He would not also help us obey. Therefore, every time we read a command, we can read it not as another thing to strive for or fail at but as a great and precious promise that He will help us follow! In other words, our activity does not determine our identity, but our identity should determine our activity.

This week, let’s journal our way through some descriptive passages and put on our identity in Christ. Record how you feel as you go. Some journalers, for fear of being dramatic, do not allow themselves to write honestly. There are no manners to journaling- it doesn’t need to appear cool and collected. You don’t have to leave every session with closure. Your journal is a place to be raw and real and deep without holding back. So, if you haven’t already let your journals get messy with wrestling and wordy questions, then free yourself to do that this week.

SCRIPTURE THEME: Galatians 3:27 (NLT)

All who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.

THIS WEEK:

DAY 1. Psalm 139:1-16

Example: At my core, I long to be known. Deep down I desire to be cherished and pursued. Lord, in verses 1-6, you tell me how fully you know me. In verses 7-12, you say that I am worth pursuing and that you will never leave me. If ever I felt unseen or doubted my worth, verses 13-16 prove me wrong. Thank you, El Roi, the God who sees me. You know me better than anyone on earth ever could, better even than I know myself. You see and treasure me and lead and comfort me. You hem me in. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. I cannot understand it. Why would I not abide and confide in You in all things? Why would I hide or fly in any part of my life, big or small? Thinking You do not see all before I open my mouth would just be denial. Help me to let you be to me what you already are. Today, I put this description on like a fine linen garment that you cleaned and pressed and hung on my door. I will not pass it by, clothed in dirty laundry any longer. I believe it and receive it. It is lovely and it will never wear out.

DAY 2. Song of Solomon 4:7

Example: My Bible commentary says Song of Songs is not just a love story between a man and a woman, it is also an allegory about Your love for Your people. We are Your “beloved,” altogether beautiful and flawless in Your eyes. I love the word, “beloved” almost as much as “abide.” I looked this verse up in a few translations and the NIV is my favorite, “You are altogether beautiful my darling; there is no flaw in you.” I can write it big pink and cursive across a journal page now; just one year ago, I could not say the words aloud or even look in the eyes of someone saying them to me. I lived under a heavy invisible lie that I was flawed, not beautiful or “darling.” Then You rescued me. You healed a part of me that I had not known was broken and used friends and a counselor to help me put on these words. You showed me that I was not a lost cause or a mess beyond repair. No, I am beautiful and flawless because 1) You made me exactly the way You meant to- You made no mistakes and 2) despite the sins I have committed and the sins committed against me, Your sacrifice has made me flawless. I tear up now as I recollect fifteen years of quiet aching and as I praise You for teaching truth to the deepest places in my heart. You love me so much. I believe You that I am loveable.

DAY 3. Isaiah 61: 10

Example: I am seen and known and pursued and robed by You. I am flawlessly beautiful and betrothed to You. Galatians 3:27 says, “All who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.” This is no ordinary garment. There is no work or wage that could buy it. And, like an exquisite gown laced down my back, I could not even put it on myself. The garment of salvation and robe of righteousness are not donned by my own efforts; rather You stored it for me when You knit me together in my

mother's womb and waited for me to look up and receive it. I needed only stretch out my arms and let You dress me. Amen! 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that, in Christ, I am a "new creation. The old has gone; the new has come." I know that innocence can be lost, but purity can always be reinstated. You say in Isaiah 1:18, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." So, I picture myself washed clean in a warm tub on my wedding morning, then wrapped like a child in a warm robe by my heavenly Father. I imagine being dressed in white linens and silks, with a pearl necklace around my neck and a crown of pale pink rosebuds on my head. The frame of that floral crown is not common green wire, it is gold because even the unseen parts of me are beautiful and perfect to You. Thank you, Lord, for seeing me and loving me and remaking me and drawing me to Yourself. Amen.

DAY 4. Ephesians 2:4-10

Entry-starter: This passage explains the overlap between prescriptive and descriptive verses perfectly. Break the passage down- which lines describe and which prescribe? If you (like me) find that you have mislabeled some descriptions as prescriptions, then thank God for correcting you. Then release the descriptions from your own hands and put them in His.

DAY 5. Matthew 5:13-20

Example: The Bible says, "Jesus took away the sins of the world." and "Light has come into the world but people loved darkness." and "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." It says, "For you *were* once darkness, but now you *are* light in the Lord. Live as children of light." and "Be in but not of the world." and "He will bring forth your righteousness like the dawn, your justice like the noonday sun." It declares, "This is the commandment that the Lord has given us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, so that all the world may be saved.'" Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." I do not manufacture this light; You are the light and You are in me. You descriptively call me light and prescriptively tell me to shine on a stand not under a bushel. In order for You to shine through my life, I must know You well and depend on You fully and talk about You often. I confess that I have not been seizing opportunities to shine. I chitchat with believers whenever I could encourage them in your Word and I plain don't seek conversations with nonbelievers. Am I afraid of people's judgmental response or of saying something foolish or of being challenged or of coming off as proud? Am I too busy or disinterested? You say Your Spirit will speak through me when I give an answer for my faith (Matthew 10:20); You say you did not give me a spirit of timidity but of power (2 thy 1:7); Paul said "I am not ashamed of the gospel" and "I boast in the Lord." I needn't worry about seeming proud- I see that it is possible to be humble while on a hill or lampstand. Whenever I am tempted

to think otherwise, I am falling for a *Screwtape Letter* style lie from Satan. Lord, for Your glory grow my faith and knowledge about you, make me enthralled with you and make me humble yet bold for You. Amen.

DAY 6. Review descriptions that you put on this week. How might these shift the way you live and experience God in the future?

WEEK 6: Journaling to Self-Examine

King David wrote, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” His son Solomon added, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.” God knows the desires of your hearts better than we know them ourselves and He planted longings inside us that only He can fill. When we delight in God and let Him fulfill our longings, we can expect to receive the desires of our hearts and become “a tree of life!” Yet, many of us live life a little “heartsick.” We may mourn deferred hopes and wrestle with unmet expectations. We may chase our tails and follow dead ends, lured in and let down by the shiny. We may believe God can be enough, but forget to let him satisfy us. We love God, but may not feel much like a tree of life. A.W. Tozer explained the common position well when he wrote, “The evil habit of seeking *God-and* effectively prevents us from finding God in full revelation. In the ‘and’ lies our great woe. If we omit the ‘and’ we shall soon find God, and in Him we shall find that for which we have all our lives been secretly longing.”

Journal entries often start with scripture, but sometimes they start with a question or idea. I often pause and ask myself, “Why am I pursuing this endeavor?”, “Why am I so stressed right now?”, “Why do I feel disappointed, irritated, afraid?”, “Why is this thought so constantly in my mind?” or “What is driving me to this behavior pattern?” I journal out my answer and whittle it down to the plainest statement of unbelief. Next, I debunk my statement with scripture and rewrite a new perspective. I have found lies in my heart that source from culture’s influence; I try to throw these off to live as Christ calls not as the world pushes. I have found lies that stem from painful experiences or coping mechanisms I have adopted; I try to dig these out from the root and be who Christ says I am not what my flesh feels. The process can be slow depending on how entrenched my struggle is. Sometimes my heart is slow to grasp what my mind knows; but when I ask, God remolds me. Often, He uses a godly friend or mentor to help me understand or heal.

Your journal is a useful tool for examining yourself and evaluating your thoughts and tendencies alongside scripture. Through prayerful journaling, you can:

- sift assumptions
- dismantle idols
- root out impure motives
- chip away at expectations and entitlements
- sluff off culture’s influences
- debunk Satan’s lies
- reel God into crannies of your life where you previously stood alone
- lift off burdens that would otherwise have gone unnoticed
- aid your transformation into a more discerning person

This week, you will ask yourself broad leading questions about some common hang-ups, then do some introspective investigating. The questions are general, but try to expand and personalize them. This exercise will help you practice soul searching in your journal so that, later, you will be

prepared to examine your unique struggles. Maybe you will discover that your motives are God-centered. If so, praise the Lord. Maybe you will uncover some struggles you didn't know you had and identify some good things you didn't know you were idolizing. Dig, pry, weigh and pray. Not every question will resonate with you, so feel free to journal them out of order. I've been a bit of a backseat driver through my entry-starters, but this week I am getting in the trunk. Enjoy some meaningful quotes and song lyrics instead of words from me- I love journaling with song lyrics!

A GRAND DEDUCTION: What Am I Really Seeking?

Is it better possessions, relationships or experiences that I want or am I searching for satisfaction? Am I searching for satisfaction or am I longing for **joy**?

Is it media and food that I enjoy or am I trying to escape? Am I trying to escape or am I searching for **peace**?

Is it hard work and service that I value or might I be seeking recognition? Am I seeking recognition or am I building an **identity**?

Do I want to be pretty, witty and poised or am I hungry for affirmation? Am I hoping for affirmation or am I yearning to feel **worthy**?

Do I want to be in control or do I want to be safe? Will being in control grant true safety or do I need to depend on a **trustworthy** God?

Look to God in all things, for He is **trustworthy**. You are **worthy** in His eyes and if you put your **identity** in Him, you will be filled with **joy** and **peace**.

SCRIPTURE THEME: Jeremiah 29:14

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.

QUOTE: "It (idolatry) means turning a good thing into an ultimate thing." —Tim Keller

HYMN: "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" by Helen Howarth Lemmel

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in His wonderful face.

*And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
in the light of His glory and grace.*

THIS WEEK: Begin by inviting God to shine a figurative flashlight into the nooks of your heart. Pray King David's prayer each day, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Test me and know my anxious thoughts! Point out any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

QUESTION 1. Is it better possessions, relationships or experiences that I want or am I searching for satisfaction? Am I searching for satisfaction or am I longing for joy?

Scripture: Pray Psalm 139:23-24 and read 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 and 11:3-4. Note also Paul's exhortation in Colossians 2:6-8 (NLT), "Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow Him. Let your roots grow down into Him, and let your lives be built on Him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ."

Quote: "If we are unreflectively immersed in the liturgies of consumerism, we will, over time, "learn" that the end goal of human life is acquisition and consumption. "What is the chief end of man?" the consumerist catechism asks, "To acquire stuff with the illusion that I can enjoy it forever." -James K.A. Smith

Song Lyrics: "You Are My Joy" by David Crowder Band,
*Love's taken over me and
So I propose the letting myself go
I am letting myself go
You are my joy
You are my joy*

QUESTION 2. Is it media and food that I enjoy or am I trying to escape? Am I trying to escape or am I searching for peace?

Scripture: Pray Psalm 139:23-24 and read Isaiah 26:3-4 & 9a

Quote: "The whole high-tech iWorld is so full of diversion and busy, entertaining distractions of all kinds that they have been called our 'weapons of mass distraction.' Who today needs to think beyond the here and now when we are surrounded and equipped by so many diverting devices?... High-tech devices are only the beginning of the many distractions in human life that tear us away from the focused attention that an examined life requires." – Os Guinness

Song Lyrics: "This Cup" by Sara Groves,
*What if I sat right here and took you in
Without the fear and loved you whole
Without the flight and didn't try to pass*

*This cup
This cup, I wanna drink it up
To be right here in the middle of it
Right here, right here
This challenging reality
Is better than fear or fantasy*

QUESTION 3. Is it hard work and service that I value or might I be seeking recognition? Am I seeking recognition or am I building an identity?

Scripture: Pray Psalm 139:23-24 and read Galatians 1:3-10, noting verse 10. Recall your Week 5 entry about being God's workmanship from Ephesians 2:4-10.

Quote: "Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition." – Jeremiah Burroughs

Song Lyrics: "Who Am I" by Casting Crowns,

*Not because of who I am, but because of what you've done
Not because of what I've done, but because of who you are*

QUESTION 4. Do I want to be pretty, witty and poised (in person and online) or am I hungry for affirmation? Am I hoping for affirmation or am I yearning to feel worthy?

Scripture: Pray Psalm 139:23-23 and read Isaiah 61:1-11. Lace these thoughts together with your Week 5 entries about Isaiah 61:10 or Psalm 139 or Song of Songs 4:7.

Quote: "As women, inside us is this longing- an insatiable need for validation, for adoration, for affirmation, for affection, for devotion. We wonder, 'Where is this coming from?!' and 'What do I do with it?'" – Christy Nockels

Song Lyrics: "How He Loves" by David Crowder Band,

*He is jealous for me...
I realize just how beautiful You are,
And how great Your affections are for me.
And oh, how He loves us oh
Oh how He loves us
How He loves us all*

QUESTION 5. Do I want to be in control or do I want to be safe? Will being in control grant true safety or do I need to depend on a trustworthy God?

Scripture: Pray Psalm 139:23-24 and read Psalm 91:1-4. Similarly, Jesus said in Luke 13:34, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

Quote: “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” —Corrie ten Boom

Song Lyrics: “Yes and Amen” by Housefires,

I will rest in Your promises

My confidence is Your faithfulness

SUMMATION. Look to God in all things, for He is **trustworthy**. You are **worthy** in His eyes and if you put your **identity** in Him, you will be filled with **joy** and **peace**.

Scripture: Read John 10:1-10

Quote: “Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short it costs exactly the abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring. The cross-shaped yolk of Christ is after all an instrument of liberation and power to those who live in it with him and learn the meekness and lowliness of heart that brings rest to the soul...The correct perspective is to see following Christ not only as the necessity it is, but as the fulfillment of the highest human possibilities and as life on the highest plane.” —Dallas Willard

Quote: “If the longing after God is strong enough within him he will want to do something about the matter... Let him insist that God accept his all, that He take *things* out of his heart and Himself reign there in power. It may be he will need to become specific, to name things and people by their names one by one. If he will become drastic enough he can shorten the time of his travail from years to minutes and enter the good land long before his slower brethren who coddle their feelings and insist upon caution in their dealings with God.” —A.W. Tozer

Hymn: “Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” by Louisa M. R. Stead

*Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,
just from sin and self to cease
Just from Jesus simply taking life and rest,
and joy and peace.*

*Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
Oh, for grace to trust Him more!*

WEEK 7: Journaling to Dream and Plan

As your journals add up, you will want to organize them. I shelve mine in chronological order. In the front cover of each, I record the start and completion dates along with my name and contact information. I also like to write a paragraph describing the season of the year and our season of life inside the cover. I write about the frosty mornings or the bees on the zinnias and mention that my youngest can crawl or my oldest has been identifying trees and birds, etc. I pause sometimes throughout my journals to give my future self these snapshots of our life, but I set aside every cover page for this specific purpose. I date each entry and keep a simple index of important entries in the back cover. There, I record the dates and one-line summaries for any I hope to revisit. I like to mark milestone entries or plans to track with sticky note tabs. You will build systems and traditions that work for you. Test new ideas, practice techniques you like most from this guide and discard any you dislike. Make your journal your own.

My journal serves multiple purposes. Each is filled mostly with scripture studies, prayers and rambling thoughts as well as sermon notes, noteworthy experiences, to-do lists and poetic observations of the day's weather. My journal is also an excellent tool for dreaming with God and making plans to track. I do a self-evaluation and make a big plan in my journal annually, then I review and refresh goals every three to six months (usually when I notice seasons changing like daffodils popping up or leaves turning orange). This week, you will do some dreaming and planning. You will ask yourself questions and dream about: your spiritual growth, your personal joy, your friendships, and both your inner and outer circles of ministry. For time's sake, we will do this quickly in broad strokes, so I recommend coming back to it at a slower pace later on. Enjoy this week of big picture thinking about different about different facets of your life.

SCRIPTURE THEME: Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV)

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

THIS WEEK:

DAY 1. What do I desire for my relationship with God and my spiritual growth?

Scripture: Colossians 2:1-7 and 3:1-4

Entry-starter: Reflect thankfully on all God has taught you in past years. Then pray receiving the goodness He has for you in the years to come. Picture yourself one, three and ten years from now and write as you dream about the godly woman you hope to be then. Next, prayerfully list ideas for what you can do now to become that woman later. Consider making a loose three-month plan to help get your started.

Quote: "A strong woman has waited patiently while her roots grew down deep into God's word. Over time she becomes unshakable in her faith. She starts bearing fruit naturally and is full of life. People are attracted to her strength and growth, and may find rest and peace as they lean on her. And when storms and trials come as they always do, they won't be able to take her down. A few branches may be lost or pruned, but in their place comes new growth and new life." -Lisa Chan

DAY 2. Can I do more of the things that delight me and fewer of the things that do not?

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 8:15

Entry-starter: Solomon lists in his famous Ecclesiastes 3 passage, "For everything there is a season... a time to keep, and a time to cast away." "Keep" means more than holding onto an object; we keep traditions and memories and habits and values and schedules and so on. To keep is to savor or manage or remember or obey or protect. We keep promises, secrets, laws, the Sabbath, records, cash, a journal, wine or horses. We keep quiet, keep calm, keep warm, keep watch, keep house, keep right, keep going, keep in step, keep the pantry stocked, keep advice in mind, keep the home fires burning and keep keepsakes. There are bookkeepers, inn keepers, brother's keepers, gatekeepers and soccer goalkeepers. A keep is the safe haven at the center of a fortress. The word has appeared twenty times already in this study, four of those times in our scripture readings. "Keep" is a wide and beautiful word. Today, do a bit of both keeping and casting. Make a messy list of things you want to "keep," like activities that delight you. Prioritize them by writing favorites larger and bolder than others. Make another list of things to cast away, time-eaters that don't bring you joy. Of course, there are responsibilities that cannot be cast away, but can you rework any to make them briefer and more enjoyable or can you delegate? Imagine what this season could look like if you incorporate your delights and cast away nonessential time-eaters. Write a loose plan.

Example: Sometimes I am so busy with tasks that I don't pause to enjoy beauty. Sometimes I am plain lazy and distracted by lesser things. But sometimes I live fully, following a beautiful rhythm to my days, delighting in the little things that You designed me to love and enjoying the work of my hands. I am happiest when I make space for: reading in bed, waking up early to be quiet in morning light, walking outside, flower gardening, birdwatching, taking long baths, lighting candles, singing in the kitchen, baking with my daughter, reading aloud and drawing with my children, listening to my children with undivided attention, doing hospitality, encouraging people, writing and keeping my own little traditions in the four seasons. I am happiest when I do not complain about responsibilities, but learn to embrace what must be done. For me, the joys are often swept aside, not by responsibilities, but by needless busyness or overuse of media...

DAY 3. How can I deepen my friendships with a few godly women?

Scripture: Proverbs 4:20-27

Entry-starter: I think often of the cyclical verses Matthew 12:34 which says, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” and Proverbs 4:23 which advises, “Keep your heart with all vigilance.” Here is the upward cycle at play in a friendship: goodness flows from your heart to your mouth to your friend’s ears to her heart to her mouth to your ears to your heart. The downward cycle is self-evident. We can guard our hearts by guarding our eyes (Ps 101:3) and our ears (Ps 1:1) from corruption, filling our minds with God’s Word and choosing wise friends. We guard our friends’ hearts by guarding our own mouths (Eph 4:29) and hearts. The effort doesn’t stop at choosing our friends wisely, it extends to choosing intentional conversations with the godly friends we have. Wise King Solomon said in Proverbs 27:17, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Fostering these sharpening relationships takes courage: courage to initiate, to be honest, to listen and to pray. When we bravely share our certitudes and anxieties, we invite our friends to carry our burdens (Gal 6:2), to pray for us and to share deeply in return. When we listen, we love and we often discover that other women experience the same hang-ups we have been so hesitant to share. In authentic conversations, doubts and fears lose ground and loneliness subsides; we both leave feeling known and encouraged and sharpened. In your journal, list your closest friends. If you are married, include your spouse. Invite God to examine your common conversation topics and ask Him to point out any trends to change. Think too about a godly woman you admire and would like to spend more time with. Make a little plan for how you can deepen your friendships with godly women to know and sharpen one another well.

DAY 4. Who are the core people I am called to shepherd?

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:2 says to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you.” Verse 4 promises that “when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

Entry-starter: Even pastors with large congregations have a small inner flock. Jesus Himself shepherded the 12 disciples more closely than the masses. Among the disciples was the still smaller flock of Peter, James and John. Today’s passage is written to church elders, but its application extends to any Christian. In your journal, identify the little “flock of God that is among you.” In other words, who are the people in your inner sphere of influence? Ask God how you can “shepherd” them well to the degree you are called to shepherd them. Write about your role in their lives and make a plan for how to love them well. My primary flock is my children. Journaling has helped me discover my children’s needs and shape my plan for how to shepherd them. If you are a mom, I recommend devoting this entry to motherhood-planning. You know your children’s individual needs: their personalities, skills, interests, struggles, love languages and how they connect with you. In your journal, thank God for how He uniquely designed your children and for His decision to make you their

mom. Ask Him to reveal still more to you, then list some of their attributes and favorite things along with their weaknesses. Jot down ways you can shepherd them and connect with each of them in the next few months.

Example: I see that my son is a nature-loving, creative introvert. I learned that he needs time alone outside every day, so I provide and protect that time. I see his skill in drawing, so I give space and supplies for him to practice. Also, I know better than he does how much he needs to talk to me, so I draw or take nature walks with him sometimes and listen as he shares his thoughts, thus engaging him in a life-long habit of sharing his inner life with someone. His love language seems to be words of encouragement, so I look for opportunities to compliment and embolden him. He is compassionate and sensitive by nature, so I give him opportunities to pray for and encourage others. I also know his tendency toward negative thinking, so I help guard his mind by guarding my own tongue from grumbles and complaints. He is patient and compliant, so I aim to foster confidence and independence by entrusting him with big responsibilities and choosing stories about valiant young men. My daughter, on the other hand, is a brave, social, athletic story-teller. I enroll her in ballet classes because she thrives when doing physical activity; and I don't expect her to sit and draw for long periods like her brother. She loves baking, so I we try recipes together, even when I don't feel like it. I make time to chat with her every afternoon, often while cooking, because she behaves better when she meets her daily word quota and because I want to build a lifelong bond of trust with her. I know better than she does how much she needs time to herself, so I smilingly send her to her room with her dolls or music to grow her aptitude for solitude. Her love language seems to be touch, so we cuddle or braid hair or paint nails while we read. She is a head-strong leader and I trustingly thank God for this (sometimes trying) quality at the same time as I ask Him for help shepherding her into it. We read novels together partly because she is so story-oriented and partly because I know tales about noble characters will help build her moral imagination and influence her (strong) character. She is not particularly compassionate by nature, so I also select stories that grow empathy in her little heart. To tuck God's Word in all our children's hearts, we read the Bible, memorize scripture, sing and pray together. To shepherd their thought-habits, we season our conversations with scripture and try to demonstrate prayer in any situation.

DAY 5. How is God calling me to serve the larger body of Christ?

Scripture: Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and Romans 12:3-8.

Entry-starter: God designed the gambit of different talents, spiritual gifts, interests, experiences and personality types then whisked them together artfully to form individuals and called each to different roles in the church and community. If you already know what facet of ministry God has called you to, write an entry reminding yourself of His calling,

encouraging yourself to press on and thanking Him for guidance. If not, ask God to reveal how He designed you for ministry and how He equipped you to serve. This big question will take more than one sitting to discern, so return to it another time. Here are some quick questions to get you started: Which spiritual gifts in today's scripture reading resonate most with me? What work have people complimented me in? What work energizes me and what do you catch myself dreaming of doing? What group of people does God stir my heart towards loving? God will reveal the work He has for you, then help you live it out. You are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which He prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2). Your ministry may focus fully on your little flock or it may extend beyond them. Some folks are like horses prone to run eagerly ahead and take on more ventures than God is actually calling them to; some are more like mules prone to resist even the ventures God does call them to (Psalm 32:9). When we do too much, we cannot shepherd our little flock well or savor life's joys or cultivate deep friendships or spend blessed quiet times with the Lord. When we resist, the church misses our ministry and we miss the blessing. There are whole books written about finding your calling. Jennie Allen's guide, *Made for This*, is an excellent one to journal through.

DAY 6. Review your dreams and goals then make a united plan.

Scripture: Read Psalm 32:8-9.

Entry-starter: Pray again, surrendering yourself to the Lord and submitting all your plans to Him. Then, imagine having a conversation with your 2023 self. What will you be glad you did? What might you wish you had done? Comb through this week's journal pages to dream up the woman you hope to be three years from now and goals to keep in the coming months. You can highlight key ideas in your entries or condense them into a bulleted list. I like to write out an at-a-glance-plan on a two-page spread, by building a general three-year dream on the left and a specific three-month plan on the right.

WEEK 8: Applying Stories from Scripture

I keep a four-strand yarn bookmark in my Bible. One strand marks my place in Psalms and Proverbs, full of beauty and wisdom and praise. Another holds my spot in the books of the Prophets, which reveal so much about God's character and the human condition. I keep one in the New Testament, rich in truth and hope and guidance. And I keep a fourth strand in the history books of the Old Testament, full of stories.

This journaling guide would not be complete without a week spent studying Bible stories. People are story-oriented. Stories spark the imagination and stick in the memory. They shape thoughts and influence actions. By nature, we tend to put ourselves in a character's shoes. The "What would I do?" question hovers in the backs of our minds as we read stories about patriarchs and prophets and kings and warriors and apostles and mothers and lovers and angels and slaves and prostitutes and farmers and craftsmen and so on. In turn, the "What would he or she do?" question comes to mind as we face comparable circumstances and make similar decisions in our own lives. Indeed, the right story can preach more poignantly than a sermon and its impact can last far longer.

In our journals, so far, we have lingered on scripture by copying it verbatim, deepened our understanding of it by studying with a concordance and various translations, grown our comfort zones by writing honestly, wrestled with our inner selves by examining our tendencies and set goals by prayerfully dreaming with our Creator. We have put on the Bible's descriptions, laid hold of its promises, applied its instructions and basked in its beautiful truths. This week let's practice journaling about lessons from Bible stories. As you read a passage, consider whether your experience of God and expectations of Him match that of the characters'. What do you notice about God's character as you read about His interactions with people? What do you discover about yourself as you apply the story's lessons to your own past and future? You may choose to read the full excerpt before you start journaling or you may pause at a meaningful verse to write. You might even linger on one wonderful thought the whole time. In my own study, I sometimes spend days on one story because I want to squeeze as much meaning out of it as I can. This week's stories focus on admirable choices, but sometimes (as with Samson and Delilah or Nadab and Abihu) characters teach us more about what *not* to do than what to do. As always, I provide entry-starters, but feel free to skip them. You will see things I did not see.

SCRIPTURE THEME: Romans 15:4

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

THIS WEEK:

DAY 1: Moses and Joshua at the tent of meeting in Exodus 33:7-34:8

Entry-starter: In Exodus 32, Moses returns from Mt Sinai to find the Israelites worshipping a golden calf statue then he breaks the ten commandments. In Exodus 34, Moses ascends the mountain again with new tablets. But nestled in between, in chapter 33, we are given a peek inside God and Moses' beautiful relationship. We even get a glimpse at up-and-coming Joshua's relationship with the Lord. Just as you applied Paul's instructions to your life, apply this story to your own experience of God and let Him rewrite your expectations of Him. Pause to write and pray whenever a line strikes you.

DAY 2: Moses and Joshua fight the Amalekites in Exodus 17:8-13

Example: This story reminds me of an encouragement twice written in scripture: Isaiah 35:3 says, "Strengthen your weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees" and Hebrews 12:12 says, "Lift your drooping hands and stand firm on your shaky legs." As a mom, I sometimes feel a bit like Joshua on the battlefield doing important work with no job experience leading an untrained army- I need a mentor like Moses to intercede for me! At the same time, I feel like Moses on the hilltop praying for my children as they fight their own figurative battles- I need comrades like Aaron and Hur to encourage me. In neither of my roles, as Joshua with sword in hand or as Moses with staff upheld, can I persevere without help from other believers. Both Joshua and Moses needed help. Even Aaron needed Hur's aid helping Moses help Joshua! Lord, thank you for Mrs. Sue, the Moses who intercedes for me as I mother my children. Please send me an Aaron and a Hur to come alongside me as I intercede for my children. Also, please make me like an Aaron in the life of another mother to help her hold her hands up when she grows weary too. Help all of us to know that you are the power behind it all. As Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

DAY 3: David fights the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 30

Example: I could learn many lessons from this story, but today I am struck by David's immediate response, "Bring me the ephod!" For many leaders in Israel's history, praying seems to be an afterthought. In crises, kings shake in fear or summon a host of godless counselors or pray to an idol or reluctantly hear out a prophet sent by God. But for David, asking God seems to be his default response to any situation. In 1 and 2 Samuel, he "inquires of the Lord" at least eight times. In the Psalms, he lifts many more personal beautiful requests (like Psalm 86). God always answers by instructing David in what to do next or by granting him the intimacy he asks for. Lord, you want me to ask for guidance and intimacy too. You say in John 15:7, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." You retell the same promise in Matthew 7:7-11 and John 16:23-24 and James 1:5. When David abided, You heard his prayers and gave him favor and called him *a man after Your own heart*. When he sinned then repented and abided again You went on answering his prayers. The same opportunity is open to me. Prayer is not natural to man, but it can become second nature with practice. Help me make prayer my default response, even when I am not in crisis. Help me put on your promise to answer my inquiries and requests. Thank you, Lord.

DAY 4: The Sinful Woman at Dinner in Luke 7:36-50

Example: I read about this woman's response to Christ in His earthly form a few years ago shortly after reading about John's reaction to Christ in His heavenly form (Revelation 1:17). John was a close companion of Jesus on earth, yet he fell prostrate "as though dead" when he saw Him in His glorified state. I wondered, what will I do when I see Christ in heaven? And what would I do if I encountered Him at a dinner party on earth? In heaven, I expected myself to react like John. And I marveled at the thought. But I was ashamed to realize that, at Simon's table, I may not react like this humble woman. More likely, I would sit down for a philosophical conversation with Jesus. I might wax eloquent about all I knew and ask Him my wise questions. I might aim to impress Him and enjoy His company while learning from His highly interesting answers. I was disgusted at myself and I cried. How much truer and better was this grateful woman's response?! And how like this sinful woman I was! I recalled Revelation 3:17, "You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." I thanked the Lord for His kindness and prayed Psalm 86, "You are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my pleas for grace." He did not leave me in my folly, but convicted me then lifted me gently and taught me how to worship anew.

DAY 5: Philip on the Desert Road in Acts 8:26-40

Entry-starter: By Acts 8, the Holy Spirit had come, crowds were being baptized, Stephen had been martyred and Saul was on a rampage against the budding church. Providentially, the apostles scattered and were preaching the gospel beyond Jerusalem. Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, was preaching in Samaria when he received very simple instructions on what to do next. As you read Philip's story, you might ask yourself how you would respond to such a nonspecific itinerary. You might wonder about what experiences and choices had prepared Philip to hear and obey those initial instructions as well as the step-by-step instructions that followed. You may jot down some of your own faith-building experiences and think about how you can prepare yourself now to hear and respond to the Spirit later. Christine Caine pointed out that "You can't get ready if you are not already ready." Philip was already ready. Journal today about your own readiness.

DAY 6: Flip through this week's entries. Which character made the biggest impression on you? Why? Which story had the biggest influence on your understanding of God's character? Why?

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL: JOURNALING WITHOUT GUIDELINES

At first, journaling may have felt awkwardly rigid like a new chair, but it becomes comfy as you break it in. I hope this course has given you the tools and practice you need to continue journaling without guidelines. Next, simply choose a book of the Bible and journal your way through its stories and instructions and promises. Your journal will not look like my journal or like your friend's journal. It is a secret place between you and God who made you unique, so feel free and confident to make it your own. Tweak old methods and try out new ideas. Your preferred style will develop over time. I hope journaling will become for you a beautiful fruitful unshakeable habit. Below, I have compiled extra passages for you to practice techniques you've learned. I have included also a few techniques we did not learn in this course.

MORE PASSAGES LISTING WORDS TO STUDY WITH A CONCORDANCE:

Philippians 4:8	1 Timothy 6:10-12	2 Peter 1:5-9
James 3:17-18	Ephesians 4:1-3	1 Corinthians 13:1-7

MORE PASSAGES TO READ IN PARALLEL TRANSLATIONS:

1 Thessalonians 5:11-24	2 Corinthians 6:2-13	Psalms 86
Romans 12:9-18	Hebrews 12: 1-4 & 12-13	

MORE DESCRIPTIONS TO PUT ON:

You are a sheep worth searching for: Matthew 18:10-14

You are adopted and an heir: Ephesians 1:3-14 & Romans 8:12-17

You are a friend of Christ: John 15:13-15

You are the aroma of Christ: 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

You are a temple: 1 Corinthians 6:19

You are a royal priesthood: 1 Peter 2:9-12

You are justified: Romans 3:21-25

You are healed: Isaiah 53:4-6

You are a new creation and an ambassador: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

You are more than a conqueror and cannot be separated from God: Romans 8:31-39

You are being transformed: 2 Corinthians 4:12-18

MORE STORIES TO APPLY:

David and heaven's army- 2 Samuel 5:17-25
Elisha and heaven's army- 2 Kings 6:8-23
Jeremiah at the potter's house- Jeremiah 18
Gideon and his men- Judges 6:36-7:22
Nebuchadnezzar humbled- Daniel 4:4-37
God's covenant with Abraham- Genesis 15
A parable on forgiveness- Matthew 18:21-34

Two parables on faithfulness- Matthew 25
Elijah and the gentile widow- 1 Kings 17
Jesus and the gentile woman's town- John 4
Jesus calls the disciples- John 1:35-51 as well as Luke 5:1-11 & 27-32
Jesus feeds the 4000- Matthew 15:29-32
Paul and Silas in Jail- Acts 16:16-4

IDEAS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION:

Take a spiritual gifts inventory to learn more about how God designed you
Research personality types to learn more about how God designed you
Journal through Jennie Allen's guide, *Made for This: 40 Days to Living Your Purpose*
Journal through Lara Casey's guide, *Cultivate: A Grace-filled Guide to Growing an Intentional Life*
Invite God to "prune" you (John 15:2) then journal through prescriptive scriptures like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 or the book of James
Whittle down a specific struggle by using the following framework

FRAMEWORK FOR WHITTLING DOWN A STRESS OR DOUBT UNTIL ONLY CONFIDENCE REMAINS:

Lord, my heart should be quiet and confident, but right now it is roaring with anxious fear.

My fear is not that You will not keep your promise to guide and provide. (Ps.32:8)

No. My fear is that I will not follow. (Jer.42)

But why would I not follow? I sincerely want to obey.

Then my fear must be that I will not hear. (Is.30:15-21)

But why would I not hear if I believe You will guide me?

Then I must fear that I will not listen. (Is.50:10-11)

But I am listening. I am asking and waiting.

Then why do I fear?

If I am not afraid that I will not listen,

And I am not afraid that You will not guide,

And I am not afraid that I will not follow Your guidance,

Then my fear is unfounded.

And I can rest in the hope that I already have. (Heb.10:19-23)

A FRAMEWORK FOR LAYING HOLD OF PROMISES:

When I read a tremendous promise in scripture, one that I've long held near in my breast pocket, I drink of it as from a warm foamy mug. I sip and savor the passage, humming a song of gratitude to my Father who gives so abundantly. When I encounter a tremendous promise in scripture, one that I find myself wishing I believed because it sounds so lovely, I stop to lay hold of it. I say, like the desperate father in Mark 9, "I do believe! Help my unbelief!" because I do not want to miss any of the goodness God has for me.

I follow a three-point framework in my journal to help me lay hold of the God's promises. By it, some verses have become pocket watch promises to me. Like a train conductor continually pulling his watch from his vest pocket, I over-and-again pull them out and try to live by them. As you read the passage provided, sip and savor those you believe already and apply this framework to those you have yet to lay hold of:

- RECEIVE. First, proclaim that "every word of God proves true" (Proverb 30:5). Then boil the passage down to its core promise. Write yourself into the promise by rewording it in first person. Thank God for the promise, even if you don't fully believe it yet.
- REPENT. If you have not believed it, confess your unbelief and repent.
- ASK. Next, proclaim that whatever you ask in Christ's name, He will do (John 14:13). Then ask God to grow your faith and help you drink deeply of His promise. Pray the promise over yourself, trusting that He will teach your heart to believe it more fully.

The order of the framework may seem funny. Shouldn't we ask before we receive? But, in fact, the gifts have already been given. We just haven't acknowledged all of them. Therefore, receive what is already yours, then ask for the faith to believe that you have it.

SCRIPTURE THEME: Isaiah 45:19

I publicly proclaim bold promises.

I do not whisper obscurities in some dark corner.

*I would not have told the people of Israel to seek me
if I could not be found.*

*I, the Lord, speak only what is true
and declare only what is right.*

RECOMMENDED PASSAGES:

2 Peter 1:3-5a

Jeremiah 33:2-3

Deuteronomy 31:7-8

Titus 3:3-7

Jeremiah 29:11-13

James 1:2-8

Romans 8:26-30

Isaiah 40:28-31

Isaiah 43:1-3

Matthew 7:7-11

Exodus 14:13-14

Psalms 23

