Journaling:

A Hidden Language Of Intimacy

BY KIM McMECHAN



A number of years back, I suffered from a headache that lasted a year and a half. Some days it was so bad it threatened to send me to emergency for a shot of Demerol. I tried everything from chiropractors to allergists but nothing seemed to be the solution. Then, God began to show me the cause of my headache – unresolved issues and unexpressed emotions that were building up inside of me.

Necessity is truly the mother of invention and through that time, I found myself desperately inventing different exercises in my journals to somehow write my way out of my headache. It worked. Writing became my way of healing, and a vehicle through which God released me from my pain.

Journaling: Speaking With An Honest Heart In the midst of journaling my way toward physical healing, writing became a place of uncensored honesty with God and with myself. I looked at King David's writings and saw that

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he had this kind of honesty before God. God is not threatened or offended by our honesty...in fact, He requires it. King David expresses this truth in Psalm 101:7 when he writes, *"no one who practices deceit will dwell in my (God's) house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence."* I have felt hindered in worship many times and often, if I look deep enough, I see that it is because I am not being completely honest. It's hard to get into God's presence when we are scared of our own truth.

King David was not afraid of his questions: *"My God, why have You forsaken me? Why are you so far from the words of my groaning?"* (Ps 22:1), or his complaints: *"For my soul is full of trouble..."*(Ps 88:3).

And he was shockingly honest: *"The righteous will be glad...when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked"* (Ps 58: 10). (Imagine singing that in a worship song!)

Like King David, I found a doorway that accessed God's presence in ways I had never experienced before through this kind of honesty.

Journaling: Listening With An Open Heart Believers over the centuries, such as St. Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila and King David, have found their strength in silence and waiting. Writing requires silent waiting. This combination of silent waiting and putting honest words to paper has the ability to access the presence of God in life-changing ways.

As I write, I am staying at my mom's place in the mountains. It's a cozy, rustic house surrounded by tall firs. It's late December and I am writing by a large picture window. There is hoar frost clinging to the branches of the firs so that the tips are solid white and blend with the sky. There is a downy woodpecker on one of the birdfeeders and whisky jacks darting across the frosty boughs. Those fir boughs were not as frosty yesterday and the day before that they were hardly touched by the cold at all. You see, it's gotten well below freezing up here for the last few nights, and the moisture of the mountains has been layering itself on these trees, little by little, and now you can barely see the green.

It reminds me of how most things in this life are built, bit by bit, stone by stone, layer by layer. It's also how they are torn down. If you ask someone who has undergone a divorce what went wrong, you will rarely hear that it was one single moment that did it. It is the small pieces, bit by bit, layer by layer, that are usually the culprits.

Journaling makes us aware of the slow, yet vital processes in our lives, of the building up and the tearing down. Journaling makes us notice. It becomes the listening to the still small voice of God. It becomes what Proverbs 8:32-36 speaks of... *"Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway."*

Journaling: Tools Of The Trade I have begun to apply some of the journaling tools I have learned to corporate worship settings, and find that they work really well as a meditation exercise toward the end of a worship time. Usually these tools work best in smaller groups such as a house group setting, but I have done it with as many as 80 in one room (just be sure to provide lots of pens!).

One that always works well is to give the group 10 minutes or so to simply write out their prayers in the form of a letter to God. It sounds ultra-simple, but it's amazing how much "good behavior" we bring to worship. The act of writing seems to cut right through all that. On paper we see our own lies. On paper we are more willing to take off our masks and tell it like it is.

Or you can do the opposite: have the group attempt to write a letter to themselves from God. In this exercise, you write all the things you think God would say to you at that moment if He wrote you a letter. The last time I used this tool with a group, a few eyebrows went up as I explained it. But as everyone in the room began to put pen to paper, the room transformed. It began to fill with quiet weeping as God's love began to fall on people. It's not just that they were writing what they already knew; God was making those truths alive in their hearts. I think that's what is so powerful about writing. Sometimes we think we know things, but writing brings the truth out and clarifies it. It makes us aware.

Another exercise I often use is what I call "Inventory." I set aside 10 minutes for quiet reflection. For this tool, you need to write down the major aspects of your life and leave space enough to reflect on them. So a piece of paper might read: Job, Goals, Dreams, Marriage, Friendships, etc... interspersed down the page. People are asked to fill in the spaces with detail; how they feel, what they're worried about, how it's going, what they wish for. The beautiful thing about writing is that it's hard to complain about something for too long before you decide to do something about it. This exercise makes people present to where they're at and empowers them to act. It's active prayer through writing.

I share this with you because it seems like God is really moving through the arts in a new way. I encourage you to experiment with these tools, or, invent your own. Writing is a particularly potent form of prayer and meditation in our busy culture. Over the next few months, set aside some time for some personal journaling, or try out one of the tools in a small group setting; you'll be surprised to see the miracles.



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Kim is a songwriter and worship leader at Winnipeg Centre Vineyard. She has been featured on Vineyard Music recordings such as *All I Need* and most recently, *The Mystery*. She also has a passion to bring healing to the church through journaling. Kim and her husband Craig have lived in Winnipeg for four years and are actively pursuing the arts. They welcomed their first child into the world this past spring.