

I felt the pressure building as I griped at my son for breaking his lunch box. A few days before, my husband, Greg, had been laid off for the third time, and every time something broke or wore out I felt my tightly bound panic cut loose. I needed to quiet myself before I heaped more shaming, unfeeling words on my family. The cells of my flesh felt drawn toward my bedroom, so I finished preparing lunch and slipped on to my bed—not to sleep, but to pull out an untidy spiral notebook and spread my grief before God:

God, I'm angry that Greg was laid off—he was the second top salesman! I'm angry that I don't make more money. I'm angry that we live simply and spend money wisely, but we can't afford to buy frozen pizza. Now, without Greg's paycheck, I feel a gun in my back forcing me to make money magically appear. I know I need to trust you more, but I don't like the way circumstances are forcing me into it.

Within the rhythm of our relationship with God, there are times when prayer and meditation seem too ethereal, but the concrete act of gripping a pen seems just right. It's as if whatever is churning in us flows through the arm, cascades through the fingers into the pen, and splashes on to the page. There it is for God to see, for us to see.

In that quiet space, we develop a conversation with God in which we offer our self-absorbed ideas and then allow them to become swallowed up in the goals God is cultivating in us. We confess the faults and mistakes that we find so difficult to admit elsewhere. We record flashes of insight and treasured moments of encountering God.

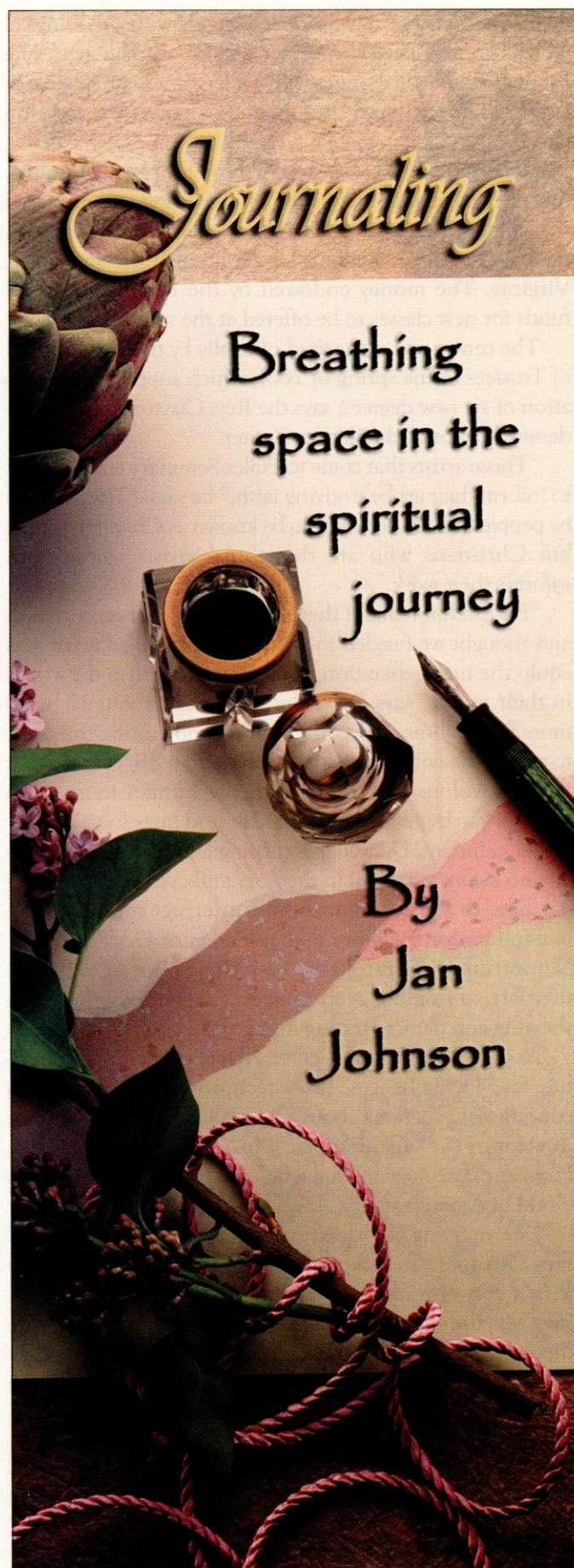
More than a chronicle of events

The spiritual discipline of journaling moves beyond and behind mere descriptions of life events, providing a place to ponder the pattern our lives are weaving. If a journal answers just one question, it is: What is God doing in my life?

Some of the Psalms David wrote seem to have functioned as David's journal. When the Philistines seized David, he described these events in a typical journaling pattern. He began by *stating what happened*: "men hotly pursue me" (Ps. 56:1, NIV). He then *recorded his feelings* of fear: "When I am afraid," (v. 3). He *expressed his desires* to God: "On no account let them escape" (v. 7). Concluding with what may have David's way of *being accountable to God*, he revealed what he planned to do, "I will present thank offerings to you" (v. 12).

David's rigorous honesty reveals that journaling is a place to pour out our anguish, think the unthinkable, and presume to know what's best. In the safe haven of being able to make such outlandish statements, we stumble across our true motives, feelings, and desires.

This biblical pattern of reflection gives us permission to ask God questions, to try out new choices, to be less than



perfect. A journal becomes the arm of God embracing us and allowing us to look safely at feelings that overwhelm us as well as situations that don't make sense.

Hearing God's voice

Sometimes we don't know what to think. How can we journal then? Writing about our confusion may give us a new way of seeing. This experience is familiar to author Madeleine L'Engle. In her book *Walking on Water*, she writes:

"Not long ago someone I love said something which wounded me grievously, and I was desolate that this person could possibly have made such a comment to me.

"So, in great pain, I crawled to my journal and wrote it all out in a great burst of self-pity. And when I had set it down, when I had it before me, I saw that something I myself had said had called forth the words which had hurt me so. It had, in fact, been my own fault. But I would never have seen it if I had not written it out."

These Spirit-directed moments of insight occur in journaling partly because we have relinquished our confusion to the page in front of us. That relaxed attitude sets the stage for us to hear God's voice. After writing about what's troubling us, we can move on to other topics only to find ourselves scribbling new insights and drawing arrows up to that sentence full of troubles. In those scribbled corrections, God speaks to us.

We may leave our journal filled with unanswered questions: Can I? Will I? When will God? This prepares us to hear fragments of answers when they emerge in the encouragement of a friend or the confrontation of a co-worker. In the meantime, we've learned to listen and rest even though life is full of ferment.

Recording our spiritual journey

In the spiritual life, there are moments that are too choice to be forgotten: prayers that are answered incredibly; insights that help us deal with certain kinds of people; goals and dreams that remind us of who we are and where we are going; moments when God's grace seems to peek through the clouds; those occasional miracles that no one would believe.

Recording these moments of progress affirms who we are and how God is using us. We don't want to talk *ad nauseam* about them to our friends, but we do need to celebrate these attitudes for which we've fought so hard. God, the only audience for our journal, is no doubt celebrating, too.

Insights gained in meditation beg to be written down. We may imagine ourselves as part of the story and assume the identity of one of the characters. We ask ourselves, How do I feel about Christ? About what he said to me? About what he did?

If I had stood in the rich, young ruler's place, God, what would you have asked me to give up? What is it that is so important that it affects every decision? I'm afraid to think of what it could be. But I see that you have looked at me and loved me (Mark 10:21) before you've demanded this of me. This makes it a little easier. Show me, God, what I'm so attached to. . . .

A relaxed approach to journaling

I didn't journal for many years because it sounded like too much work, but when crises erupted that I could not manage, I dug out an old notebook and began journaling. I established only one rule—it was private. When we write knowing that no one will read our words, we don't worry about grammar or penmanship. With no audience to impress, we can be completely honest. Many people find it helpful to journal in one special place such as a favorite chair or a spot in the backyard.

Although some people journal every day, I journal as needed, which is weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. I apply the same principle to it that Christ did to the Sabbath: people weren't created for their journals; journaling was created for people (from Mark 2:27). Seek God about possible journaling habits. Another person's approach may not provide the rest and reflection you need. Whatever the pattern, keep alert for moments when you can't not journal. When you feel the urge to confess, to grieve, to rejoice, or to surrender, act on it. Pouring this response before God helps you find your center in God.

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Reflecting on our reflections

Rereading our journals can amplify God's voice as we note trends about how God has been working in our lives. The earliest pages of my journal are filled with thoughts of being unloved and undervalued. I begged for reassurance. Gradually those statements decreased and I began to affirm that I am loved and valued by God even in my most disgusting moments. I am finally absorbing a truth that has eluded me for so many years.

My journal itself has become one of the many symbols, the many proofs, that I cannot chase God away. This prodigal child can question God, rail at her enemies, or languish in self-pity and still she's welcomed back to the journal. After weeks of absence from my journal, I am not greeted with guilt. As soon as my pen touches the page, loving communication is flowing in both directions. Perhaps this is what is meant by entering God's rest (Hebrews 4:11).

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Seminary that aims to better equip artists with a theological education and better inform clergy about the arts. The Brehm Center collaborates with Fuller's graduate schools of theology, intercultural studies, and psychology to develop curricula.

William K. and Delores S. Brehm of McLean, Virginia, first pledged \$2 million in 1999 for the center and increased the amount over time to \$15 million total. Mr. Brehm is on the board of directors of SRA International Inc. in Fairfax, Virginia. The money endowed by the Brehms provided funds for new classes to be offered at the seminary.

The center was authorized officially by the Fuller Board of Trustees in the spring of 2001, which supported the creation of six new degrees, says the Rev. Clayton Schmit, academic director of the Brehm Center.

"Those artists that come to Fuller Seminary tend to want to inform their art by studying faith," he says. "They tend to be people who do not want to be known as Christian artists, but Christians who are thoughtful artists whose faith informs their work."

"Bill Brehm realized there was a poverty of imagination and thought we needed to affirm the faith-filled artist and equip the next generation of ministers to affirm the artists in their midst," says Detweiler. "We need about 10 or 20 more Bill Brehms all over the country and around the globe to affirm the faith-fueled art. We have to rediscover that art is not frivolous. It's essential to the human journey, to humanity's deepest longings, needs, and questions."

As a student, Detweiler is earning a doctorate in theology with a concentration in theology and culture. "I'm learning how to create, express, and interpret more creative metaphors for the glory and splendor of God," he says. "Unfortunately, Protestants have done a lot of telling in their art, as in more overt movies. I'm more interested in showing and demonstrating in my art."

As part of the Brehm Center, "Reel Spirituality: An Institute for Moving Images" (www.reelspirituality.org) provides educational programs about film, says Justin Bell, assistant director of the organization. "Music to Our Eyes: Music, Film, and Theology in Dialogue" was held at the Director's Guild of America in Los Angeles in October.

"We're trying to give artists better tools to do their art," says 25-year-old Bell, who is earning a master's in divinity with a concentration in worship, theology, and the arts. "We're rethinking inside the church how we communicate theology.... It's not just preaching from the pulpit."

However, the main goal of the faculty is not to teach the students to create evangelistic art, says Fred Davison, executive director for the Brehm Center.

"When God asked the Israelites to create the Tabernacle, there were things in the Tabernacle that didn't have any function but to be beautiful," says Davison. "We know from the Bible that God appreciates beauty. We can see that all

around us. It's a way we communicate as human beings."

Instead of focusing on evangelism, Davison would rather have artists who are Christians correctly represent the worldview they attest to believe. Further, since he says only a person can be a Christian, he doesn't use the word "Christian" as an adjective. He tries to discourage his students from becoming involved in subcultures, such as "Christian music" or "Christian dance."

"In an effort to engage in popular culture, we get 'love songs for Jesus,'" he says. "They think the text of the songs are conveying a biblical truth, but it's not a biblical truth. These songs may be fun to sing, but what does the song really say? Does it say a truth we believe about God?"

Michelle Markwart, 26, a student at Fuller Theological Seminary, says she decided to earn a master of arts in worship, theology, and the arts because she wants to display excellence and professionalism in her work. She is a vocalist. She also plays the piano and guitar.

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"If you've ever seen any amount of church drama, it can be a little sugary, not very artistic, and very trite," she says. "That doesn't communicate the love of Christ to anyone, because Christ wasn't trite. We're tired of seeing the word Christian placed on art because of the stereotypes it places on Christianity. It demeans the arts. The world doesn't want to see it. The church has to realize it's our fault as the church for allowing that stereotype to happen. If we can't take responsibility for our own hypocrisies, it's really foolish."

Without a credible voice in popular culture, the American church becomes obsolete, especially in the area of the visual arts, says Jack Hafer, producer of *To End All Wars*, starring Kiefer Sutherland. The film, which had limited release in theaters and is available on DVD, was based on the book by Ernest Gordon called *Through the Valley of the Kwai*. Mr. Hafer, along with other professional artists, mentors students at the Brehm Center.

"The church in America has really been behind the times in the support of the arts," he says. "The church needs to be part of the great conversation, which is really the great issues of life, talked about in a great way.... I'm doing everything I can to encourage them to keep moving ahead in that area."

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