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The Spiritual Benefits of Scripture Journaling

By Mark Powell

One of the best pieces of advice I ever received about preaching was to first write out the passage by hand. It seems quaint and maybe even simplistic, but it has been an integral part of my sermon preparation ever since. And this was from an older minister who was particularly tech savvy. His reasoning was that it slows you down and makes you take notice of the smaller details in the text. Twenty years later I can wholeheartedly testify to the benefits of the practice.

Significantly, Scripture itself commends such an activity, at least for the king of Israel. In Deuteronomy 17:18-20 we read:

When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

Now, obviously, we no longer have earthly theocratic kings ruling over the people of God. But if this instruction was good enough for Israel's leaders, then surely it is a discipline we all could benefit from doing today as well. What follows are some of the ways I have been blessed since I took up the challenge in my own devotions.

First, it has made me meditate more effectively on God's Word, especially those parts which I might be tempted to gloss over or neglect. I started with the Gospel of Luke and then proceeded to the book of Isaiah. While both are quite large parts of Scripture, I wrote out—on average—approximately ten verses per day. This was great in helping me to dig deep while also noticing the flow of the larger narrative.

Second, I've found that writing makes me more familiar with the content of the Bible. There's something about writing a passage out by hand that engrains the ideas more firmly into one's mind.

Maybe that's why teachers used to prescribe the writing of lines as punishment. Because the discipline of writing out the same truth over and over again makes it more memorable.

Third, it's helped me to be more disciplined with my quiet times. I've struggled over the years with being committed in this regard. But knowing that I have a goal to reach—at least ten verses—has forced me to develop my attention span. Plus, as I write, I've noticed that I review the sentence a few times to make sure that I'm at the right spot.

Finally, as my preaching mentor rightly said, writing the passage out by hand has made me notice things which I definitely would have missed. The eye just has a habit of too quickly skimming over the page and resting on words that are familiar. Writing out the Bible by hand though, means that I'm asking questions about the word order etc.

If you're now keen to attempt this kind of spiritual discipline, then let me suggest a few practical tips from what I've learned.

- Use a nice pen and notepad. It will make the whole experience something to look forward to and therefore, more meaningful. I started using a fountain pen that my son and daughter-in-law gave me for Father's Day, and it was really nice to be reminded of them and their generosity every time I write.
- Don't get too hung up on how neat (or as the case may be, messy) your hand writing is, or especially if you make a mistake. You're not writing something that is going to be published! Focus on what's going on inside your heart rather than how it looks on the page.
- Think about maybe leaving a legacy for your children. So much of one's personality is reflected in how we write. What a wonderful gift to leave behind, especially to demonstrate to your descendants as to what was most important to you.
- After a few weeks, your hand will get sore. Be aware of

this—especially if you're older—and be intentional about doing hand exercises to alleviate the pain. Plus, don't give up on the project but persevere.

One day I hope to have re-produced the entire Bible. But even if I don't, I know that every time I sit down to write, the LORD is speaking to me through His Word. And surely, that is always

going to be time and effort well-spent.

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