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“I wrote this book out of the growing realization that the more authentically we seek God through the context of our own human experience, the more intimacy we find in our relationship with God. Each chapter is an encouragement to explore, beneath the surface of relationships and events, our own beliefs and understandings.”

It doesn’t matter if you are a veteran journal-keeper or a living example of journal burnout, journaling has the potential to form you spiritually, taking you below the surface of your life.

Where did you gain inspiration to write this book?

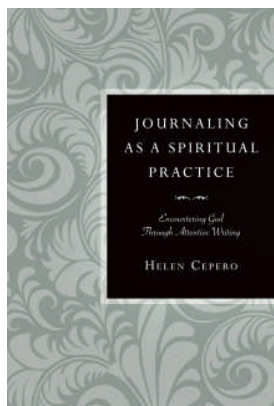
My inspiration came from two different sources. The first is my own journaling practice which was both frustrating and engaging. At times my journaling felt like authentic connection, true prayer. At other times it just did not seem to be going anywhere. But using more intentionally focused journaling exercises called out of me a deeper truthfulness as well as a truer sense of God’s presence beyond the confines of my own life. The second inspiration was from my online students who “tested” the journaling through their own attentive writing. Several classes of students, some who were already faithfully journaling and some who did not keep a journal prior to class, benefited from the intentionally focused journaling exercises. The more fearlessly they journaled and shared from their writing experiences, the more their Christian lives grew and matured.

Reading David Benner’s three short books *The Gift of Being Yourself*, *Desiring God’s Will* and *Surrender to Love* was part of what made me decide to write the book. Although I enjoyed all three of those books very much, I felt frustrated that I knew what he said to be true, but didn’t understand how such surrender, self-awareness and willing discipleship could be achieved. When I taught a journaling class it seemed that attentive writing was one way to make these truths real in the Christian life. Everyone followed the same journaling exercises, but the voice of each student and God’s voice in their lives was distinct.

You talk a lot about journaling being equivalent to prayer. How did you come to this realization?

When we pray we bring our intention to listen to the movement of God’s Spirit in our lives and world. We also bring our willingness to pay attention to God—to be, as I often tell my students, alert to God’s presence and alive to his love. Journaling seemed to me to be a prayer pathway that was accessible and practical. In a journal there is an opportunity for

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honest, authentic dialogue with God, a place to understand how a biblical Scripture may be speaking uniquely to me, and recognition of an inner longing to connect with God that is, I believe, God's desire for us as well.

How can journaling bring us closer to God?

One of the wonders about journaling is that it interprets us to ourselves. Here we find our own lives and discover that, even in the struggles and the hard times, they are shot through with the gold of God's loving presence. It helps us to ask the question, "What is Jesus doing in the context of my own life experience?" With a clearer awareness of who we are created to be in Christ, it is possible to live not only *for* God, but *with* God.

The imagery of "beneath the surface" is a great direction to push yourself in to get past the inner critic and censor.

The blocks that we have to journaling in an attentive, consistent way are very often the same voices that frustrate our experience of God's grace in our lives. When we skim the surface of our lives we miss out on the deeper presence of God that is below the surface in everyone's life. When we go "beneath the surface" we touch not only our own deeper desire to be with God, but God's own desire to be with us. The stronger voice beneath can overcome the negative voices at the surface with a deeper truth.

How can journaling be spiritual formation?

Intentional, attentive journaling can teach us to slow down, to be reflective and to find our own language to express our life in Christ that is unique to us. It gives us new words for the "old, old story" that ring true to who we are and how God has created us to be. Journaling's focus in the book is on seeing the image of God in each of us and helping us to live out of that capacity to hold and express the life of God in us. This is formation that is also transformative.

How can journaling begin?

Journaling as a spiritual practice begins with our longing to deepen our understanding of ourselves and our relationship with God. Then it is just about stopping to write, paying attention, listening to life.