



**A Guided Journaling Experience to
Expand the Horizons of Your Life**

(WHY IT'S WISE TO GIVE UP THE WHY'S)

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Chapter 1 - What If?

Why It's Wise to Give Up the Why's or Asking a New Question

The Question of "Why?"

All my life I have been asking questions. I guess I have always been a curious person. My mother used to tell me that before I was old enough to go to school, I would sit in the kitchen on a small wooden stool while she ironed and pepper her with questions.

They all seemed to have one thing in common.

They all started with the word *why*.

As a curious child, I wanted to know why things were the way they were: *Why is the sky blue? Why does the iron make that hissing noise? Why can't I go to school yet? Why is there a baby growing in your tummy? Why can't I stay up later?*

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Some of the answers to my questions were less than satisfactory: *Because I said so. Because that's the way it is. Because God made it that way.*

When I got to elementary school, my thirst for information, for the why of things, was temporarily satisfied with absorbing knowledge — the *what* of things. At school all kinds of subjects filled my head with facts and figures: reading, arithmetic, social studies, science.

There were still some why's that no one could explain, at least in language a six year old could understand: *Why is two plus two four? Why isn't it five? If the world is round, why don't we fall off of it? Why do some words sound the same but are spelled differently?* Answers to those questions required a more sophisticated level of knowledge that came later.

In junior high school, the why's became more complicated. *Why are some kids more popular than I am? Why can some people sing or dance or draw better than I can? Why can some families go on vacation but we can't? Why do people go to different churches? Why should it matter what church we go to?*

In high school, the questions became more agonizing: *Why doesn't Rob like me? Why didn't I make the tennis team? Why can't I figure out what I want to do with my life? Why is there so much hatred in the world? Why am I so scared all the time? Why can't I be outgoing and popular like Susan? Why is my grandmother so odd? Why doesn't my mother ever talk about her childhood?*

In college, the world hit: *Why are we fighting this war in Vietnam? Why should I have to work so hard to pay my way through school and other kids get it all handed to them? Why is my mother so angry at my brother just because he married "outside the church?" Why is religion so complicated? Why is my dad satisfied with working in a factory job he hates when he can do so much with his hands? Why is sex taboo? Why can't I figure out what to do with my life?*

All through my life, the why's plagued me.

Sometimes the why's were just silly — *Why do the appliances break just when you finally have a couple hundred dollars in the bank saved for vacation?* Sometimes they were deadly serious — *Why did my mother keep quiet about the pain she was in, which turned out to be fatal cancer?*

Many of our why's lead us into deep pain. I worked for many years in the mental health field, so I have heard hundreds of why questions that are full of the most agonizing pain and soul-searing torture: *Why was my child born with Autism? Why did my wife cheat on me? Why did I end up with schizophrenia? Why did that drunk driver run the intersection just when my daughter drove into it? Why did my brother commit suicide? Why am I depressed all the time?*

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Recording My Questions

When I was eleven years old I got a diary for Christmas. It was one of those little pink things with a tiny key to lock it. I still have it packed away in the attic decades later. In it I recorded the important things in my life: what I did in school, what I talked to my friends about, what my family was doing, arguments with my brothers and sisters (I had four of each!).

It wasn't profound, but it was important to me. It gave me a place to make a record of my life, and that gave me a sense of permanence. I kept some diaries in junior high school (which my younger sisters claim they read and giggled over profusely), but by high school I was into writing poetry and working for the school paper, and my diary seemed silly. It wasn't until I was grown, married and had two young children that I took it up again.

When I was keeping a diary as a youngster, there were some things that I never put in writing. (Probably a good thing since my sisters read it.) I had been raised in a strict Catholic family and taught never to question authority, never to doubt the Church or to question God. Not that I didn't have these questions, I just learned to keep them to myself; but they continued to rattle around in my soul for years.

As an adult, all the why's came crashing in with full force, and I began to journal again, with intensity and with honesty. I read a book on journaling which convinced me that being completely honest in my journal was the only way I could come face to face with the questions in my life, most of which started with why.

Many of these questions emerged after my mother died. Some of them were questions I had wanted to ask my mother, but never knew how to form into words — questions that pried too deeply into my childhood; questions that I didn't feel I had the freedom, courage or right to ask my parents directly. Other questions that had begun to plague me had to do with my past—failed relationships or heart-breaking romances or the lack of direction in my life. And many of the questions were underlain by a vague, unsettled, unending sense of the blues which plagued me all my life.

Eventually these questions sent me to therapy, and since my mother was no longer there to ask the question directly, I had to come to my own conclusions without her input...not that I would have ever been able to ask her anyway. At first I participated in traditional therapy, which was very helpful — talking to a neutral, trained person to get a perspective on my past. Then I discovered spiritual direction, a type of therapy that works at healing one's relationship with God and freeing you of old, outdated, misconceived ideas about faith and doubt and fear.

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No Easy Answers to the "Why's"

As time went along I began to recognize that there were no easy, clear or simple answers to the why's of my life. I continued to fret over them in my journal, or with my spiritual director, or in philosophical discussions with my sisters and friends, but I wasn't getting any closer to solving them. During this time I began think that other questions might be more productive — questions that led forward, instead of backward. I began to think that the why's were in some way imprisoning me in the past.

I'm not saying I didn't get some answers to my why's. I was able to figure out why certain relationships and friendships fell apart or faded away, why some romances had broken my heart, why I repeatedly did the same non-productive things. Those answers helped unlock the door of my emotional prison, and sent the prison guards away.

But I found that although the prison gate was open and the guards had long deserted their posts, I was still unable to step out of my emotional prison cell. It was as if some of the why's made an invisible barrier that I could not cross.

Asking Different Questions

By starting to ask different questions, I began to find the courage and impetus to walk out of the prison cell. Questions like *Why not? What if?* Questions that opened the horizon to possibilities, which turned me from the past so I could to live in the present and look to the future and all the possibilities it might have for me.

How to Use This Workbook

Much of the work of this mental and emotional change has been done in my journal, and it is these questions and writing exercises that I share with you in this guided journal. This book is not meant to be read like a novel. It's a tool. It's a series of questions that you, and only you, can answer. No one else has had your experience in life; no one else has lived your life. You are unique. So no one else can answer your questions for you. The search is part of the answer.

This workbook is set up in chapters, with each chapter addressing a question. Working through this journal/workbook is intended to take time. It's helpful to limit yourself to one chapter at a time, maybe even one journaling activity at a time, and then think about it for a day or two or even a week or more before going on to the next exercise or chapter. It's important to let the questions and the answers rattle around in your brain and in your memory and thought and heart. There's no race to get to the end of the book; in fact, you may find you pick it up for a while and lay it down and then pick it up several weeks or months later. There's no right way to use this book, just some suggestions.

Each journaling exercise is explained and an example given. There is space to write, as this is a guided journal, but you may want to buy a companion journal to write in if you run out of space or if other questions, thoughts or ideas come to mind that you want to explore.

First a few "Journaling Rules."

Guess what, there are none. No rules. Isn't that exciting! But there are suggestions.