KEEPING THE HEART

How to keep a *heart journal*

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

PROVERBS 4:23

A simple way to meet God in his Word each morning and look back on his hand each evening. All you need is a Bible, a notebook, and a pen: about fifteen minutes in the morning and five at night. Write a few lines for each step. A short page is better than a skipped one.

BEGIN THE DAY

Text, Doctrine, Use, Prayer

Read your passage first. Then look to Christ: you come as one already loved and accepted in him, not to earn his favor.

1. **Text**
   Write down one verse that stood out to you. Copy it word for word. Writing it slowly is the first act of meditation.
2. **Doctrine**
   In one sentence, write the truth this verse teaches. What does it say about God, about Christ, or about me? Keep it plain enough to remember all day.
3. **Use**
   Ask what this truth asks of you today. Most uses fit one of four kinds:

   Believe: a truth to trust
   Repent: a sin to turn from
   Do: a duty to take up
   Comfort: a promise to rest on
4. **Prayer**
   Turn the verse into a short prayer. Pray the doctrine back to God, and ask for grace to live the use.

Stay with the verse until it warms your heart.

A MORNING PAGE, FOR EXAMPLE

TEXT *"But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."* Psalm 130:4

DOCTRINE God's forgiveness doesn't make me careless. It draws me to reverence and love him.

USE · COMFORT Yesterday's sin is not the last word. I can come to him today without hiding, because the forgiveness is with him, not in me.

PRAYER Lord, there is forgiveness with you. Let me not run from you when I fail, but run to you. Make your mercy the reason I fear and love you today. Amen.

CLOSE THE DAY

Mercies, Sins, Providence, Promise

Before bed, look back over the day with the Lord. Begin with grace, not with failure.

1. **Mercies**
   Write two or three good gifts from today, large or small. Thank God for each one.
2. **Sins**
   Name plainly where sin showed itself. Confess it, and remember that Christ has already paid for it.
3. **Providence**
   Write one way you saw God's hand today: an answered prayer, an open door, a hard thing he carried you through. Star it so you can find it later.
4. **Promise**
   Write one promise of Christ to rest on as you sleep. It can be the morning's verse.

Once a month, read back through your starred providences. They become a record of the Lord's faithfulness, your own Ebenezer stones (1 Samuel 7:12).

Where this comes from

The morning steps follow the "plain style" of Puritan preaching, taught by William Perkins in *The Art of Prophesying* (1592): read the text, draw out its doctrine, then apply it in uses. Ordinary Christians learned to hear sermons, and read their Bibles at home, the same way.

The evening steps follow the Puritan habit of self-examination at the close of the day. Assurance comes first and examination second: you look at your sins as a child of God, not as someone trying to become one.

Keep it short
Four lines in the morning and four at night is enough.

Missed a day?
Just start again. The journal serves you.

Bring it to church
Use the morning steps for Sunday's sermon.

Prefer your phone?
The Keeping the Heart app has these steps.