



Lesson Five

Increase Self-Understanding by Journaling Your Life

In the last lesson, we talked about your personal identity. Do you feel like you don't understand your own motives or choices? If you feel this way, you can learn why you do the things you do.

One method to increase self-understanding is journaling your thoughts and feelings.

The idea of keeping a journal may sound strange to you; you might not think of yourself as a writer. Even non-writers keep journals, though. When you open yourself to journaling, you experience a new wealth of self-understanding.

Writing bits and pieces of your life experiences can be an incredible journey. Once you start thinking about something that happened to you in the past, you'll find yourself remembering another story, then another.

Once you start making an effort to recall experiences from your past, you'll trigger memories you haven't thought about in years.

All of the experiences you'll recall have combined to make you the person you are. To sort back through some of your life stories will help you understand yourself so much more.

Follow these steps to get started:

1. **Decide how you'll write your story.** Will you use a spiral notebook and a pen? A computer is the obvious choice if you're comfortable with it.
2. **Don't worry about starting at the beginning.** Interestingly, a lot of people avoid trying to write down stories of their lives because they "can't remember back that far." ***Where you start the story isn't important. Starting it is.***
3. **Think of your life as a series of short chapters.** To simplify your story, each situation you recall can be a "chapter." For example, you might remember the time your Uncle Al took you fishing and the canoe tipped over. Go directly to your computer, open up a blank document and start typing.
4. **Focus on getting the story down. *Things like sentence structure, spelling, grammar, and the like aren't all that important for now, unless you plan to publish your journal.*** You can deal with all those things later by going back through and editing the material.
5. **The order of your stories is irrelevant.** There are two suggested ways to do your stories on the computer:
 - Open a new document for each "chapter" and title the document to describe the story.
 - Or simply write all your stories in one document. Open that document when you feel like writing a story, and separate the stories by using chapter headings.
 - If you feel the need later on, you can copy and paste the stories into whatever order you like.
6. **Document what you remember.** Get down information about what happened, what you did, what you thought, and how you felt. These details will ultimately lead you to develop a better understanding of how you've lived your life as an adult.

Writing your life story is not all that difficult. If you follow some of these journaling methods and keep your focus off of the end result, you'll find yourself recalling more and more parts of your life. Plus, you'll learn to understand and even love yourself more than you ever have!

There's still more of you to get to know too! Consider your personal values and passions. The next lesson will help you identify your personal values.

Here's what you need to do today:

Get a spiral notebook, blank journal, or open your word processor on your computer, then pick a story from your life and write it down.

Include your thoughts and feelings about this experience.

How does the experience affect who you are today?