

The Immanuel Approach (to Emotional Healing and to Life)

Chapter 37: How Can I Prepare for Immanuel Approach Work?

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People often ask about any preparation they can do to get ready for their first Immanuel approach session, and they also often ask about any “homework” they can do between sessions to increase their ability to cooperate fully with the process during sessions. A thorough answer to these questions would require a medium-length book addressing most of the basic principles of personal and spiritual growth, but here are a few quick thoughts.

A. Read this book: One of the most straight-forward things you can do to prepare for your first session is to read this book. Knowing what to expect and understanding what you are doing can help you cooperate with the process most effectively (at least this is true for some people). I would strongly recommend reading at least the first three chapters, to get an introduction to the Immanuel approach. And if you are one of those people who finds it helpful to know what to expect and to understand what you are doing, I would encourage you to continue reading through to chapter eighteen, and then also chapter twenty-eight. Furthermore, reading all of the story chapters will be encouraging and increase your faith. (The remaining chapters are primarily for facilitators and trainers.)

B. Watch a few of the full length live ministry sessions: Another way to know what to expect, and also to build your faith, is to watch several of the full length live ministry sessions.¹ *Rita #3: “Jesus is better than candy”* (Live Ministry Series #18), *Maggie #3: Labor & Delivery Trauma* (Live Ministry Series #19), and *Ian: “I’m not enough”* (Live Ministry Series #24) are the three best examples of simple, basic Immanuel approach sessions.

C. Learn to be more consciously aware of your relational circuits: Something you can do to prepare for your first session, and that you can also continue to do as homework between sessions, is to learn to be more consciously aware of whether your relational circuits are on or off.

Our book, *Outsmarting Yourself*, has a list of questions that will indicate whether or not your relational circuits are on line. For example, “Do I feel connected to _____ (fill in the name of the person you are interacting with or thinking about)?” “Do I *want* to be connected to _____ (again, fill in the name of the person you are interacting with or thinking about)?” “Do I experience her as a source of joy, or as a problem to be solved/resource to be used?” “Am I glad to be with her?” “Am I aware of her true hearts?” “Do I feel compassionate concern regarding what she is thinking and feeling?” “Am I patient and tolerant, or am I impatient and irritable?” “Can I easily think of past positive experiences with this person, and do I feel the positive emotions that should be associated with these memories?” “Can I easily think of things I appreciate about this person, and do I feel gratitude as I think about these specific appreciations?” And, “Do I perceive the relationships involved to be more important than any problem I might be trying to solve?”

¹ The condensed sessions are good for introducing people to the Immanuel approach, and for building faith; but if you are preparing for your own Immanuel session it is good to watch a few full length sessions, so that you can get an accurate feel for how much time it takes to go through different parts of the process.

One of the best ways to develop the skill and build the habit of being more consciously aware of your relational circuits is to look over the full list of questions², pick the six or seven questions that resonate most with your own experience, write these out on a 3x5 card that you keep in your shirt pocket or purse, and then pull this card out and go over the questions whenever you feel particularly good or particularly bad.³ If you do this regularly for even a few weeks, you will start to *recognize what it feels like* when your relational circuits are on and when they are off, and you will start to *become much more consciously aware* of whether your relational circuits are on or off.

Once you learn this skill and build this behavior into your life as part of your every-day habits, it will become the single most valuable resource for helping you notice when underlying painful memories are getting stirred up. And this increasing awareness of unresolved trauma will help you to find and connect with the traumatic memories that the Lord wants to help you resolve.⁴

D. Care for your connection with the Lord between sessions: Once you get started with the Immanuel approach, you can increase the strength and quality of your interactive connection with the Lord *during* sessions by caring for this connection *in between* sessions.

The first piece of caring for your connection with the Lord in between sessions is to take responsibility for getting your relational circuits back on whenever you notice that they are off. As already discussed in the chapter on appreciation, having your relational circuits on line prepares your brain to connect with God. The more your relational circuits are on line and strongly active, the more easily you will be able to connect with the Lord and the stronger your connection will be. So when you notice that your relational circuits are off, get them back on by employing one or more of the following interventions: receiving attunement, calming exercises, deliberate appreciation, and strategic humor.⁵ *Practice these skills and build these behaviors into your every-day life as habits.*

Another piece of caring for your connection with the Lord in between sessions is to deliberately point your relational circuits towards the Lord. For example, deliberately think about God – remember that he is with you throughout each day, and think about what that means. Deliberately remember past positive experiences with God, deliberately stir up gratitude towards God, deliberately thank God for the things you appreciate, and deliberately send “I’m glad to be with you” messages to the Lord. *Practice these skills and build these behaviors into your every-day life as habits.*

² Chapters fifteen and sixteen in *Outsmarting Yourself* present a number of additional checklist questions that are not listed here, and also provide explanations and examples to clarify each of the complete list of questions.

³ An alternative is to set you smart phone to remind you every one to two hours, and then pull out the card and go over the questions whenever the reminder chime goes off.

⁴ Chapters twelve and fifteen in *Outsmarting Yourself* provide a careful explanation of why noticing your relational circuits going off line is the best resource for becoming more consciously aware of when traumatic memories are getting stirred up.

⁵ As you will remember, deliberate appreciation has already been thoroughly discussed in chapter six, and Chapters seventeen through twenty-three in *Outsmarting Yourself* provide detailed, practical discussions of the remaining three interventions.

Another piece of caring for your connection with the Lord in between sessions is to have regular times of deliberately establishing interactive connection with the Lord. Once you get started with the Immanuel approach, and become familiar and comfortable with the first steps for establishing an interactive connection with the Lord, you can practice these steps for establishing an interactive connection with the Lord in between sessions. Find a quiet space, take at least ten to fifteen minutes, go through the Immanuel approach steps for establishing an interactive connection, and then spend a few minutes just enjoying the Lord's tangible, living, loving, interactive, personal presence.⁶ *Practice these skills and build these behaviors into your every-day life as habits.*

Yet another piece of caring for your connection with the Lord in between sessions is to learn to be more consciously aware of spontaneous times of interactive connection with God. And when you notice these times of spontaneous connection, make more space for them.

As you practice the skills and build the habits of keeping your relational circuits on, pointing your relational circuits towards the Lord, and having regular times of establishing interactive connections (and as you also work during sessions to steadily eliminate more blockages), little moments of pointing your relational circuits towards the Lord will eventually begin to produce spontaneous perceptions of his presence and spontaneous moments of interactive connection.⁷ When this begins to happen, practice the skill and build the habit of watching for and noticing these moments of spontaneous connection – practice the skill and build the habit of being more *mindful* of these spontaneous interactive connections with the Lord.

And, as just mentioned above, when you notice these times of spontaneous connection make more space for them. For example, if you are walking, washing the dishes, or some other task that requires only a very small portion of your attention bandwidth, lean into the spontaneous interactive connection with God by focusing the remainder of your attention on it, appreciating it, and participating in as much interaction as possible. And if you are doing something that takes a lot more of your attention, like reading a book or preparing a presentation, take a moment or two to focus more attention on the spontaneous connection, acknowledge it, and appreciate it more deliberately, and then try to enjoy the Lord's presence in the background as you continue with your initial task.

This last piece – becoming aware of a spontaneous connection even while I am engaged in something that is already taking a lot of my attention – is actually a new one in my own experience. It just started happening in maybe the last six to eight months, and I'm still trying to get words for it. The best I have so far is that it's like Charlotte and I sitting in our

⁶ As just mentioned in chapter thirty-seven, the interactive journaling exercises described in *Joyful Journey* can be very helpful when using these first several steps in the Immanuel approach process on your own. E. James Wilder, Anna Kang, John Loppnow, and Sungshim Loppnow, *Joyful Journey: Listening to Immanuel* (East Peoria, IL: Shepherd's House Inc, 2015).

⁷ These moments of spontaneous perception and connection (usually associated with brief times throughout the average day of pointing your relational circuits towards the Lord) will usually be more subtle and brief than when you take time to carefully go through the Immanuel approach steps for establishing an interactive connection, but these moments of spontaneous connection will still contribute to the growing strength and quality of your interactive connections, both in sessions and between sessions.

livingroom together, each of us focused primarily on whatever it is that we're reading, but still also aware of each other's presence. I'm not actively engaging with her, but I am aware of her presence and there is a very subtle interactive connection. For example, if Charlotte looks up at me I notice the movement in my peripheral vision and then look up at her. Or if Charlotte chuckles, I say, "What? What was so funny? Let me in on the fun." (and it's nice).

And again, *practice these skills and build these behaviors into your every-day life as habits.*

E. Build your faith: As described in chapter twenty-one, increased faith will help you to both facilitate more effectively and to cooperate more effectively with the process when you are receiving. So if you want to increase your ability to cooperate with the process by increasing your faith, invest in the concrete, practical interventions that have already been described in chapter twenty-one.

F. Build your capacity: As described in chapter three, in order to resolve a traumatic memory you need to be able to connect with the painful emotions in the memory, and you need to be able to stay connected with these unpleasant emotions long enough to work through them. Jesus will be with you and Jesus will help you, and this will make the work easier and faster and less painful, but you still need to be able to stay connected to the unpleasant emotions long enough to work through the unfinished processing tasks. As also discussed in chapter three, staying connected to unpleasant emotions requires a lot of brain-mind-spirit capacity. Therefore, increasing your capacity will always enhance your ability to cooperate with the emotional healing component of the Immanuel approach.

This is not the place for a thorough discussion of how to build your capacity, but here are a few quick thoughts:

- Build relationship support: Genuine connection with people who are glad to be with you and can attune to you will increase your capacity, so anything that will increase this kind of genuine relationship connection will help to build your capacity. Participating in a *Restarting* or *Forming* group is an especially good option because one of the explicit goals of these groups is to build genuine, joyful, attuning relationships.⁸
- Care for your connection with the Lord: As described in chapter three, to the extent you are connected to the Lord you can share his capacity – like the child who can go down into the dark basement as long as she is holding her father's hand. So anything you do to increase the quality and strength of your connection with the Lord will increase the capacity available for your Immanuel approach work. (Hopefully you are noticing that there is a lot of interaction between the different things you can do to prepare for Immanuel approach work. For example, strengthening your connection to the Lord is inherently valuable for Immanuel

⁸ *Restarting* developed by Edward Khouri and E. James Wilder, and *Forming* developed by David Tackle, Edward Khouri, and E. James Wilder are two components of the *Thriving: Recover Your Life* program developed by Edward Khouri and E. James Wilder. Both *Restarting* and *Forming* include the building of genuine, joyful, attuning relationships as a central part of both the teaching material and the practical exercises. You can get the training material, gather your own small group, and then go through the teaching and exercises together, or you can contact the people at www.thrivingrecovery.org to find out if there are already *Restarting* and *Forming* groups in your area. Edward M. Khouri and E. James Wilder, *Restarting* (Pasadena, CA: Shepherd's House Inc., 2007), and David Tackle, Edward M. Khouri, and E. James Wilder, *Forming* (Pasadena, CA: Shepherd's House Inc., 2012).

approach work, and it also enhances your capacity.)

- Increase your faith: Increasing your faith will also increase your capacity, so anything you do to build your faith will also build your capacity. (Again, notice the double-blessing interactions. Building your faith is inherently valuable for Immanuel approach work, and it also enhances your capacity.)
- Care for your physical body: The health and strength of your physical body affects the health and strength of your biological brain, and the health and strength of your *brain* affects your *brain-mind-spirit* capacity. So caring for simple physical considerations, such as engaging in regular exercise, getting enough rest, and eating a balanced, nutritious diet will enhance your capacity. The value of caring for your physical body is especially easy to see if you think about the opposite scenario – if you come to a session exhausted and starving, you will have more difficulty with challenging emotional healing work.
- Practice staying with unpleasant thoughts and emotions:⁹ The capacity to stay with unpleasant thoughts and emotions is a strength that you can build with deliberate practice, just as you can build the strength of a muscle with regular exercise. So the next time you notice negative thoughts and realize that you are feeling anxious, or sad, or discouraged, or embarrassed, you can build your capacity by taking a few minutes to practice staying with your unpleasant thoughts and emotions. That is, before immediately going to your usual coping tools, you can choose to build your capacity by “exercising.” You can say to yourself, “I’m going to exercise to build my capacity strength,” and then deliberately wait, even one or two minutes, before engaging in whatever it is that you usually do to make the negative thoughts and feelings go away. For just the brief time of your deliberate exercise, choose to keep your focus on the negative thoughts and allow yourself to feel the negative emotions. And then as soon as the allotted time is up, do whatever it is that you do to escape unpleasant thoughts and emotions – do your relaxation exercises, or read comforting scripture, or listen to music, or check in with all of your friends on facebook, or go for a walk, or get busy with a project around the house, etc.

Another piece of good news is that your capacity will steadily increase as you resolve trauma and eliminate lies as part of the Immanuel approach emotional healing process.

For additional discussion of brain-mind-spirit capacity, see *Immanuel, Emotional Healing, & Capacity: Part I*, and *Immanuel, Emotional Healing, & Capacity: Part II*. (These presentations are available as teaching DVDs from the “Store” page of www.immanuelapproach.com, and also as free download essays from www.kclehman.com.)

⁹ NOTE: this intervention is for people who are functioning well in their day-to-day lives, but who are having difficulty with their emotional healing work because they can’t stay with unpleasant thoughts and emotions long enough to process them. This is NOT for people who are having trouble with being flooded and overwhelmed with negative thoughts and emotions. If you are having trouble with being flooded and overwhelmed with negative thoughts and emotions, I would strongly recommend that you do this kind of capacity building work only in the context of Immanuel approach sessions, so that both the facilitator and Jesus can guide you, encourage you, help you, and protect you as you practice staying with your negative thoughts and emotions.

G. Progressively dismantle avoidance, “self-medication,” and other hindering defenses:¹⁰

Nobody likes negative thoughts and unpleasant emotions, and most of us have developed a rich and creative toolbox of avoidance techniques, self-medication options, and other defenses that help us spend as little time as possible being consciously aware of negative thoughts and/or actually feeling unpleasant emotions. For example, as soon as we become aware of negative thoughts or unpleasant emotions, we watch movies, play video games, or engage in compulsive social media as ways of distracting ourselves away from the pain. Or as soon as we become aware of negative thoughts or unpleasant emotions, we immediately engage in an intense work-related activity as a more legitimate, socially acceptable way of distracting ourselves away from the pain. Or as soon as we become aware of negative thoughts or unpleasant emotions, we self-medicate with ice cream, chocolate, pornography, alcohol, or shopping as ways to cover over the pain.

However, as has already been mentioned, in order to find and resolve traumatic memories we need to be able to stay with painful thoughts and unpleasant emotions. So another way you can prepare to cooperate more effectively with the emotional healing component of the Immanuel approach is to deliberately, progressively surrender and dismantle these avoidance techniques, self-medication behaviors, and other defenses that enable you to *avoid* staying with painful thoughts and unpleasant emotions.

One practical note is that most people will want to do this gradually. We want to gradually become more and more able to stay with our negative thoughts, feel our negative emotions, and then find and resolve the underlying traumatic memories. We do *not* want to suddenly force ourselves into decompensation, so that we have trouble sleeping, yell at our kids, drive recklessly, and are unable to function at work. So when you first begin to surrender and dismantle these hindrances, start with gentle initial steps.

For example, when you notice painful thoughts and unpleasant emotions, invite Jesus to be with you, ask him to help you perceive his presence, ask him for guidance regarding the true source and origin of your pain, and then notice whatever comes into your awareness as you wait for two, or five, or maybe ten minutes before engaging in your usual coping strategy. And then, as you continue to find and resolve the underlying trauma, as you continue to strengthen your connection with the Lord, as you continue to build your faith, and as you continue to increase your capacity, you can continue to progressively surrender and dismantle the coping strategies that hinder your emotional healing work.

Another piece of good news is that you will have less and less need for these avoidance techniques, self-medication behaviors, and other defenses as you strengthen your connection

¹⁰ NOTE: These interventions are for people who are functioning well in their day-to-day lives, but who are having difficulty with their emotional healing work because they can't find the underlying traumatic memories that are fueling their triggered reactions, and/or they can't connect with the negative thoughts and emotions associated with their traumatic memories, and/or they can't *stay* connected with the negative thoughts and emotions. These interventions for dismantling defenses are NOT for people who are having trouble with being flooded and overwhelmed with negative thoughts and emotions. If you are having trouble with being flooded and overwhelmed with negative thoughts and emotions, I would strongly recommend that you do this kind of work to dismantle your defenses only in the context of Immanuel approach sessions, so that both the facilitator and Jesus can help guide the process, and so that they can also encourage you, help you, and protect you as you engage in this challenging and important work.

with the Lord and as you identify and resolve more and more of your traumatic memories. So as you strengthen your connection and get more healing it will be easier to surrender and dismantle these blockages, and as you surrender and dismantle more of these blockages it will be easier to get to the next level of memories that need to be resolved.

H. Mindfulness and body awareness exercises: If you are persistently disconnected from emotions (for example, if you have dismissive attachment), it can be helpful to spend regular time between sessions practicing mindfulness and body awareness exercises. See, for example, the eleven different exercises described on pages 89-92, 95, 96, 97, 112, 113, 114, 115 & 116, 134-136, 207, and 214 in Daniel Siegel's *Mindsight*.¹¹ These exercises will help you to be more consciously aware of your emotions, and they will also help you to increasingly *feel* your emotions.

Finally, after describing all of these homework preparations that enhance your ability to cooperate with the Immanuel approach process, I want to acknowledge that many people don't seem to need any of this. Many people come to an Immanuel approach training event as their first contact with the process, and then get good results in the context of group exercises after only brief explanations. So you may not need all (or any) of this preparatory homework. However, this preparatory work is a good investment if you want to maximize your chances of good results. Also, these ideas for homework *between* sessions will be a wise investment if you are receiving ongoing Immanuel approach work and you want to increase your ability to cooperate with the process *during* sessions.

¹¹ Daniel Siegel, *Mindsight* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011).