

Just the Safety Net Pieces, Immanuel Approach Exercise (Positive Memory, Appreciation, and Interactive Connection)

(Complete version of instructions, Karl D. Lehman MD, Revised 2/14/14)

If you have questions regarding any part of these instructions, see the “Immanuel Approach Exercises for Groups & Beginners detailed discussion of all group exercises ” essay for additional explanation and discussion. Also see www.immanuelapproach.com/exercises for additional handouts for group exercises, opening and closing prayers, and more..

Note: for this exercise, with just the safety net pieces, I recommend trying the exercise with a trainer/leader providing verbal explanations and instructions, and the practice groups using only the 1 page summaries as “cheat sheets.” Using these complete instructions for a reference resource before and/or after can be helpful, and it is important for the person providing verbal explanations and instructions to be familiar with the detailed instructions, but I think this exercise is simple enough that most groups can get through it with verbal explanations and instructions in combination with the 1 page cheat sheets. My observation is that if the participants try to use the detailed instructions during the actual exercise, they let themselves lean on them too heavily instead of trying to follow the verbal instructions and go through the exercise more from memory (with just small prompts from the cheat sheets). When this happens, it seems that people often get bogged down in the detailed instructions.

1. Break up into small groups: Break the larger group into small clusters (three to five participants in each practice cluster (See essay for additional explanation and cautions)

Opening prayer and commands (optional, depending on context see essay for additional explanation):

2. Positive memories and deliberate appreciation: Ask the Lord to bring forward a memory of a previous positive experience of perceiving His presence and connecting with Him. If no memory comes forward spontaneously, take time to deliberately find one. Ask the Lord to help you recognize different aspects of the positive experience that you can specifically appreciate. Each person in the group then describes her positive connection memory to the others in the small group, and names specific things she appreciates about the experience. The goal is to *reconnect* with the positive memory, and to describe specific things that you appreciate until you *feel* appreciation/gratitude. Note that faith and gratitude “momentum” usually grow for all in the group as each person shares.

Remember that you may need to help other group members in using safety net #1 later in the exercise. As described below, sometimes you will need to remind them of specifics as part of coaching/helping them to return to their positive memories, repeat their deliberate appreciations, and reestablish their initial connections with Jesus. So pay attention (taking brief notes is ideal).

As we and our colleagues have been working with the Immanuel approach, with groups and individuals and in many different settings, we have identified several frequently asked questions and special considerations with respect to the positive memories that recipients work with to begin the Immanuel approach process:

a.) “What if I don’t have any memories of positive connections with the Lord?”: Memories of past positive connections with the Lord are ideal, but if you have not yet had special interactive connections with God then use a memory of some other special event. For example, a memory of a particularly beautiful experience with one of your children, a favorite family Christmas memory, a memory of an especially positive vacation with friends, or a memory of thoroughly enjoying your favorite meal. You can practice deliberately reentering the positive memory, reconnecting with the positive emotions associated with the positive memory, and deliberately focusing on things you appreciate even if an interactive connection with God was not part of the original positive experience. Also, for step 3, below, you can experiment with asking the Lord to help you perceive His presence and establish an interactive connection in the context of this “non-God” positive memory. Maybe this exercise will be your first time for perceiving the Lord’s presence and experiencing and

interactive connection.

b.) More than one positive memory: One positive memory is usually adequate, but it is ideal to have several, since appreciation momentum builds as one works with several positive memories in succession. Having several memories available will be helpful if anyone gets stuck in particularly intense negative emotions later in the exercise, and therefore needs an especially strong positive memory and appreciation safety net. So if you are working with people who are more likely to need an especially strong safety net (for example, they have survived severe trauma, their support system is poor, and their coping skills are weak), we recommend repeating the first step several times, so that each person has a safety net that includes several positive memories.

c.) Appreciation memories without splinters: Many people have positive connection with God memories that still include trauma splinters. For example, the person's appreciation memory may be for an Immanuel approach session in which she experienced Jesus' loving, healing presence powerfully *with* her in a traumatic memory of her intoxicated father emotionally, physically, and sexually abusing she and her siblings. However, in this kind of complicated trauma, it is common to have a number of distinct traumatic pieces, so that unresolved pieces (or "splinters") may remain, even while the parts of the memory that *have* been resolved *are* indeed now positive places where the person experiences the Lord's healing presence. And if the traumatic memory the person works on later in the exercise resonates with the unresolved splinters, the initial appreciation parts of the memory can get blended together with the negative thoughts and emotions from the (now) activated splinters, so that the memory is no longer usable as a safety net. Therefore, if the people you are working with are describing appreciation memories that may have splinters (the positive memories being describe are about the Lord's presence in the midst of trauma), and especially if many of the people in your larger group have similar traumas, so that each person's splinters could trigger other participants, it is important to coach the participants to deliberately find positive memories that are completely free of splinters – memories without any aspect of pain or trauma. For example, feeling God's presence while appreciating a beautiful sunset, seeing Jesus standing beside her as she holds her new baby, or experiencing a connection with Jesus in the context of a particularly beautiful worship service.

If a participant discovers that all her memories of positive God connections are memories of God's presence in the midst of trauma, she can try a simple exercise that is often successful in generating completely splinter-free memories of interactive connections with God. The participant starts with a non-God positive appreciation memory, such as holding her baby, playing with a favorite pet, spending time with a best friend, or some beautiful nature experience like looking out over the Grand Canyon at sunrise. Then, just as for those who don't yet have positive memories for interactions with God (above), she can go through the deliberate appreciation step with these non-God positive memories, and then use these same memories to go through step C, below. With this simple exercise, many become able to perceive God's interactive presence in memories that had previously been non-God positive memories, and these new interactive connection positive memories are totally splinter-free (not associated with trauma in any way).

3. Reenter a positive memory and establish an interactive connection with the Lord: After you have identified one or more memories of past positive connection with the Lord, and *feel* appreciation for His presence and care in these past experiences, spend several minutes reentering/reconnecting with one of the memories. Then, from "inside" the memory, pray something along the lines of "Lord, help me to be aware of Your living presence, and to have an interactive connection with You."¹ Share whatever comes into your awareness with the

¹In most cases the person perceives the Lord's living presence and establishes an interactive connection in the context of the memory imagery (the subjective experience of being inside the memory spontaneously morphs into a new, living interaction with Him, but still in the context of the autobiographical content carried in the memory). However, some people will perceive the Lord's living, interactive presence in the room where they are receiving ministry; some people will perceive the Lord's living, interactive presence in the context of a different memory that comes forward spontaneously; some people will perceive the Lord's living, interactive presence in the context of imagery that does not seem to be coming from any specific

others in your group. Again, if you have not yet had experiences of interactive connection with the Lord, then use a memory of some other special event.

Note that it's best to take turns for the piece just described (the first part of step C), with group members going through this part of the process one at a time. This is because of the way our brains work better in community. When people go through this step in the Immanuel approach process, perception of the Lord's presence and the interactive connection can sometimes be subtle, presenting through thoughts and/or images and/or emotions that the participants initially do not recognize. In fact, people often do not recognize the Lord's presence, or that an interactive connection has been established, until they describe what they are experiencing, out loud, to the rest of the group. And these subtle thoughts, images, and emotions that the person misses until she describes them out loud – these subtle pieces on the periphery of her awareness, that don't initially feel important or make sense – these are the pieces of mental content that the “describe whatever comes into your awareness” technique is designed to capture. When a person disciplines herself to describe these pieces to the others in her group (even though they don't yet feel important or make sense), they get pulled through the part of her brain that is able to feel that they *are* actually important, and that is able to recognize how they fit into the picture.²

Taking turns is important because it's hard to hold onto these subtle, vague, “unimportant” thoughts, images, and emotions. Shoot, noticing them even when they're right in front of you is difficult, let alone trying to remember the vague, “unimportant” content that was hovering in the periphery of your awareness ten minutes ago. If everybody goes through the first part of this step at the same time, when they get to the second part where each group member describes her experience, there will be a long delay between the prayer and the verbal report for everybody but the person who goes first. The participants should therefore take turns, with each member of the group going through the whole process of reconnecting with her positive memory, asking the Lord for help with perceiving His presence and establishing an interactive connection, and then describing “whatever” comes into her awareness before moving onto the next participant.³

No memories of positive connections with God: As noted above, if you don't have positive memories of past interactive connections with the Lord, you can experiment with trying this step with non-God positive memories. We have been pleasantly surprised to discover that many people can begin to perceive Jesus' presence and experience interactive connections with Him *for the first time* by thinking about a positive memory, deliberately stirring up appreciation, reentering the memory and reconnecting with the associated positive emotions, and then asking the Lord to help them perceive His presence and experience and interactive connection. Note that it is especially important to describe whatever comes into your awareness (*regardless of whether it makes sense or feels important*) after trying this experiment, since your first experience with perceiving the Lord's presence and having an interactive connection may be subtle, and you may not recognize it for what it is until you share it with the rest of your group.

If you have established an interactive connection with the Lord: Name several specifics you

memories, and some will experience two or more of these simultaneously.

²To review these principles with respect to how your brain works better in community, see *The Immanuel Approach (to Emotional Healing and to Life)*, chapter seventeen, “Describe Whatever Comes Into Your Awareness (Our Brains Work Better in Community).”

³If all the participants already have experience with the Immanuel approach, and are consistently able to quickly and easily perceive the Lord's presence and establish an interactive connection, then you can save time by doing the first part of this step all together. That is, you can have the whole group reenter their memories, invite the Lord, and ask for interactive connections all at the same time, and then take turns just for the next part, where each group member shares regarding her experience.

especially appreciate about the experience, and express your gratitude to God.

If you do not have an interactive connection with the Lord, and you would like to try simple trouble-shooting: 1.) Ask: “What’s in the way of my being able to perceive Your presence and connect with You in this memory?,” describe whatever comes into your awareness *regardless of whether it makes sense or feel important*. 2.) Ask: “What do I need to do to take the next step forward?,” describe whatever comes into your awareness. 3.) follow any directions from God.

If trouble-shooting resolved blockages and you have an interactive connection, then name several specifics you especially appreciate and express your gratitude to God.

If you have *not* been able to establish an interactive connection after brief troubleshooting (or if you decided not to try troubleshooting), return to positive memories and appreciation until you *feel* appreciation and are at an okay place to stop.

For a one page handout of this exercise for individuals to use while practicing this exercise please visit www.immanuelapproach.com/exercises.