

Immanuel Journaling Overview

- summarized from Joyful Journey:

A counselor is an empathetic witness in the midst of challenges, they attune themselves to the person in front of them, reflect back what the person is going through, and support them to practically take steps to get to a space of healing. A group of counselors developed The Immanuel Journaling process with the intention to help people **experience God acting as our divine counselor**. We invite our church to enter into this practice together this Lent.

There are several steps to Immanuel Journaling; these steps are based on God's attunement to us as recorded in Exodus 3:7-8 "I have indeed **seen** the misery of my people in Egypt. I have **heard** them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am **concerned** about their suffering. So, I have **come down to rescue** them from the hand of the Egyptians and to **bring them up out** of that land into a good and spacious land."

God's attunement pattern reflected in this passage mirrors the brain's natural progression of processing challenges and coming to resolution. Immanuel, meaning God with us, is an empathetic witness. He lived a full life among us, he understands us completely. He is inviting you to sit with him and experience His divine counseling as you process your day or as you intentionally process prior challenging circumstances or interactions. Here's a template to follow with neurological explanation, we pray this empowers you to experience Immanuel guiding you through life:

Step 1 Interactive Gratitude:

Neurological understanding: The thalamus needs to experience safety in order to turn on our "relational circuitry" which give us the capacity to relate to others. Feeling "safe" is required to start processing experiences rather than staying stuck in just feeling them. Thus, we start our time with God in gratitude. Perceiving God's loving reaction to our thanksgiving assures the thalamus that God is good, & God is there for me; therefore, I am safe to be vulnerable.

- **Dear God I'm thankful for....**
 - God desires for you to be securely attached to Him as your heavenly Father who protects and provides. To experience this healthy attachment, share with God what you are grateful for.
 - Suggestion: Remind yourself of the truth of God's character through past experiences and the scriptures – thank Him for who He is and as you profess this truth it will transform your thoughts towards God.
- **Dear Child of mine....**
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to reflect back to you God's response to your gratitude.

Step 2 I see you:

Neurological understanding The amygdala provides a basic evaluation of our experiences, "is this good, bad or scary?" When experiences are too hard to handle, our brain may freeze, fixating on the "bad or scary," causing the experience to get stuck and thus, never complete the processing cycle. This can leave mental scars which are susceptible to being triggered or result in ongoing dysfunctional perspectives, habits, and responses.

- **Practical step:**
 - Without judging or making meaning, describe your actions, surroundings, and bodily sensations/tensions as if God is describing them to you.

- Slow yourself down and scan the room, scan your body from head to toe to notice details that you may otherwise not be attuned to.

Step 3 I hear you:

Neurological understanding: The cingulate cortex allows us to look outside of ourselves and perceive mutuality with another. Often, negative emotions can lead us to assume the worst about ourselves, about others, or our circumstances; which tends to lead to isolation or dysfunctional relational attachments. When we invite God to reflect back to us what we are saying aloud or thinking, God responds, “Yes, I hear you without judgement,” and this response helps us to open up to the possibility of securely attached relationships.

- Practical step:

- Without judging or making meaning, write from God’s perspective what he hears you saying or thinking. Be completely honest.
 - The left brain will try to filter out thoughts that seem irrelevant but these thoughts may also be areas that need resolution or lies that we’ve believed that need to be processed. Write it ALL down so you can bring every thought captive and submit it to Christ for renewal.
 - Allow yourself to experience God truly listening to all of your thoughts, and conversations, and choose to believe that God is not condemning you or those you may be struggling with. Your thoughts may even reveal struggles you’re having with God.

Step 4 I understand:

Neurological understanding: After having accumulated wisdom about our state of being through hearing God’s attunement to us, the orbital prefrontal cortex seeks to validate the accuracy of our assessment. When we receive validation of how big or hard our experiences are, and acknowledgement of what they cost us, our brain can come to a place of calm. The Prefrontal cortex is where our sense of identity is stored. Identity is primarily developed through the responses we receive from our primary caregivers- let’s attune ourselves to God as our primary caregiver and allow Him to reform our identity as he validates who we are in Him. A healthy sense of identity will allow us to be resilient to process pain rather than become stuck in it.

- Practical step:

- Write from God’s perspective affirmation about how significant this experience has been, what it has cost you, and the validity of your feelings. God does not minimize our struggle.
 - Perhaps you’ve minimized trials for yourself or others because of the perceived bigger struggles of someone else. On the other hand, Satan may have inflated some of your fears. Sit with the trial and invite God to “right size” it’s impact on you and others.

Step 5 I am glad to be with you:

Neurological understanding: Processing our thoughts and experiences is an intimate, vulnerable process. Now that I’ve exposed myself so intimately, the thalamus and basal ganglion are simultaneously checking to see if God is still non-judgmentally attuned to me. God responds, “Most assuredly, I am always glad to be with you my child.”

- Practical step:

- Write words of confirmation from God of his love for you and what it looks like for him to be present with you and participate in your life.
 - For example- “I see your discouragement that you keep succumbing to this temptation, you need my strength now more than ever, keep your

eyes on me, I am always right here.” OR “Your desire is wonderful, I love hearing your ideas, let’s talk about it together.”

Step 6 I want to help, I can do something about what you’re going through:

Neurological understanding: When we’ve allowed the right brain to go through it’s emotional and social processing, we can now integrate the left brain into discerning a plan. When we can manage our emotional reactions we can think rationally.

- **Practical step:**

- o Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what God might be saying to you about how He will be with you and help you.
 - You may be reminded of God’s faithfulness to you in the past or something that he’s gently asking you to repent of and turn from to embrace the fruits of His Spirit in your life.
 - You may perceive a scripture, image, or song lyrics.

Step 7 Shalom check:

How do we know if it’s really God? The desire behind Immanuel journaling is that we train our mind to listen to God and understand our experiences increasingly the way God does. This is a tool the Holy Spirit uses to align our thinking with God’s thinking. Ephesians 2:10 describes that we are God’s poetry. In Jewish tradition, poetry rhymes ideas. As we are made in God’s image and called to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, by the power of his Holy Spirit, we can experience our thoughts being in alignment with God’s thoughts- the poetry of God.

- Do you have the peace of the Lord? Shalom signals that we have processed painful or challenging experiences all the way through. When we don’t have peace, the processing is incomplete and we should ask God, “why do I not have peace, what more do you want to show me?”
- “May the God of all Peace give you peace at all times, in all ways, and in every place as God continues to be with you.” 2 Thessalonians 3:15-16
- **Test question to ask as you read through your journal entry:**
 - o “When I think of Jesus’ presence with me in the circumstances I processed, do I feel an authentic sense of His love for me and a growing desire to love others?”

Step 8 Read Aloud:

- Reading your Immanuel Journaling aloud blends the words of the left brain and the emotional experience of the right brain. This blending of words creates a new narrative for the brain. The brain makes sense of our experiences in narrative form. A new narrative is what allows us to tangibly experience a new understanding of God’s care and goodness to us.
- When we read aloud in the presence of other empathetic witnesses this amplifies our new narrative and our hope and joy. The listeners create a sacred space for the reader to encounter themselves, God, and their community without judgement.
- You’re invited to join others Monday nights Feb 26th, March 4th, 11th, and 18th 7-8:30pm dive deeper into the neuro-theology of this practice and engage in this practice in community.

As we think about making Immanuel Journaling a practical way for us to be constantly attuned to God’s voice, and thus, having spiritual mature perspectives of ourselves, our circumstances, and those we interact with, we want to come to a place of constantly asking the question, "**Jesus, what do you want me to know about this situation?**"