

Immanuel Approach Intermediate Skills Training Group
Week 1 Reading
By Andy Ross LCPC

Brief Orientation to the Immanuel Approach with an Emphasis on the Ingredient of Safety

Brief Intro to Immanuel Approach

The Immanuel Approach was primarily developed by Dr Karl Lehman and Dr James Wilder starting in the early 2000's. Dr Lehman's journey of developing the model is thoroughly recorded in his recent book *The Immanuel Approach For Emotional Healing and For Life* which can be found on his website www.immanuelapproach.com. Dr Lehman distinguishes between the Immanuel Approach For Life and the Immanuel Approach for Emotional Healing. The Immanuel Approach For Life is essentially a lifestyle of practicing and living the fundamental assumptions that inform the Immanuel Approach that God is always with us, that God loves us dearly, God wants to share/interact with us about everything in our lives, and that we can direct our attention and optimize our brain mind spirit system to more consistently and meaningfully connect with God as often and as deeply as possible.

The Immanuel Approach for Emotional Healing takes all of these same principles and practices and applies them to the field of emotional healing. The purpose of this Dr Lehman points out is not necessarily healing/symptom relief as an end in itself but that healing is necessary to remove the blockages that limit or hinder deeper intimacy and connection with God (not to mention people) in our daily lives. Dr Lehman humbly describes how he began discovering and developing the Immanuel Approach as a "tool" in his psychiatry/therapeutic practice for helping people resolve large and small unprocessed memories. Dr Lehman realized that if people were able to become aware of Jesus/God's presence in a memory it often became much easier for them to stay connected to the memory, feel the needed emotions, express them, no longer feel alone in the experience and essentially move through a process or resolution ending with a sense of peace within the memory context which had previously felt distressing. In the beginning Dr Lehman's primary goal was healing and connecting with God/Jesus was a nice secondary benefit until one day a client described how Jesus seemed to just want to sit together and connect. Dr Lehman knew there was more traumatic material to be resolved in the session and kept gently encouraging the person to work on the pain. Then she told Dr Lehman that Jesus wanted to tell him that all of this emotional healing stuff is for the purpose of removing blockages between his heart and ours and that essentially connecting with him is the primary agenda. This resulted in a significant reorientation of priorities for Dr Lehman which seems to still be unfolding as we keep learning more and more how to simply stay connected to God/Jesus as deeply and meaningfully as possible and allow the relationship to strengthen and God to lead as much as possible what happens in a session.

The Basic Process

It would be helpful at this point to describe the steps/process/ingredients of the Immanuel Approach For Emotional Healing as basically everything in the process can be transferred over into practices used in the Immanuel Approach for Life to help people more easily and deeply connect with God in daily life. Dr Lehman currently has several handouts on his website www.immanuelapproach.com

describing the process which can be downloaded for free. The steps he described can essentially be boiled down to the following.

Dr Karl Lehman's Immanuel Approach For Emotional Healing Model (For Beginners)

Note this is a rough outline created by Andy Ross based on Dr Lehman's more complete handout entitled Immanuel Approach Basic Exercise for Groups & Beginners found at www.immanuelapproach.com/exercises/

Outline of Dr Lehman's Model

- 1) Break up into small groups
- 2) Share Positive Memories and Appreciation
- 3) Re-enter a Positive Memory and Establish a Interactive Connection [with God]. (This is done one by one if in a group.)
 - If Recipient perceives the Lord's presence proceed to step 4
 - If recipient does not perceive the Lord's presence try simple troubleshooting as explained in full handout.
- 4) Help recipient choose a small traumatic [unprocessed] memory that you can talk about without being overwhelmed (for beginners).
- 5) Invite/welcome Jesus/the Lord into memory, ask for interactive connection, engage with Him to receive healing
 - If recipient not able to establish interactive connection with Jesus try simple troubleshooting in memory ask re
 - If still not able to perceive God's presence return to positive memory.
- 6) Interact with the Lord about everything until the memory is resolved.
- 7) End with a closing prayer and if desired formulating the Immanuel Story.

Another person who has done a lot of Immanuel Approach training is Pastor Patricia Velotta or Pastor Patti as most people call her. Her teaching strongly emphasizes the Biblical foundations for the Approach as well as a Biblical argument that it is not only okay but even normal to be able to see God with the eyes of our heart. It seems that many people simply need permission/recognition that it is even possible to see Jesus in any memory and even in the present moment exactly where one is. It is not necessary to see God/Jesus for God to do what God wants to do in a session as sensing God in other ways/ "hearing things from God can be deeply meaningful and exactly what a person needs, but there is something very significant about being able to "see God" as one can pick up so many nonverbal cues such as a facial expression, or what Jesus is doing in the moment that speak directly to our emotional/relational brain in profound ways. Pastor Patti outlines her model in the following way

Pastor Patti's Model

- 1) Remember Jesus (remember a positive memory where you sense Jesus presence)
- 2) Appreciate Jesus (tell Jesus what you appreciate about him based on this memory)

- 3) Locate Jesus (look around and find where Jesus is, she emphasizes right now in the room though many find that it is fitting to locate Jesus in the positive memory they just described)
- 4) Connect with Jesus (Ask what Jesus wants you to know and continue engaging with Jesus for the rest of the session.)

These models are extremely useful and helpful but they are not the only way of faithfully describing the Immanuel Approach Process. I recently read an article recommending that to really learn something it helps to write down exactly how you would describe it to an 8 year old. Then notice any holes in your thinking and go back to research what you need to know then revise your description. Here is how I would describe the Immanuel Approach to an 8 year old.

- 1) Help a person feel safe and glad to be together
- 2) Ask the person if they would like to share a positive memory (they can either pick one themselves or ask God to remind them of one.)
- 3) Ask if one or both of you could thank God for what they liked about this memory
- 4) Ask the person if they can see or sense Jesus/God in the memory.
- 5) Help the person get an even stronger connection with God.
- 6) Help the person stay connected with God and talk about/do everything that God and the person want to talk about and do during the session. If a person loses their connection with God work together with God to restore the connection.
- 7) Throughout the session help the person notice and describe whatever they feel safe sharing even if it doesn't at first feel very important.
- 8) End the session by saying a simple prayer for the person and if they want you can help them put what happened into a story that they can share with other people.

Safety the critical but often unnamed ingredient

You may have noticed that Dr Lehman and Pastor Patti's models did not explicitly name the necessary ingredient of helping a person feel safe and glad to be together. It does not need to be named if a sense of safety is already present, however if the sense of safety is lacking or absent everything else you are trying to do in an Immanuel Approach session will either become very difficult or stop working altogether. I think all Immanuel Approach facilitator can point to stories because the person perceived some sort of danger even if it was just the perceived danger that they may have to go to negative memories. As long as the brain is perceiving danger of some kind it will be difficult to remain connected to a relational sense of God's presence or to other people. Additional explanation of this below.

How to promote safety

How do we help people feel safe? A lot could be said about this which will be elaborated in more advanced trainings but here are some of the basic ingredients:

1. Be a safe person as the facilitator.

- Make every decision based on love which is genuine care for the other person's well being.
 - Keep your own relational circuits on and wherever you find this hard simply acknowledge it and you can even ask for a minute to pray out loud and acknowledge to God that you are struggling and welcoming God to be with you and help you.
 - Do your own healing work to keep resolving blind spots
 - Keep getting good training and consultation.
2. Be tuned in to the person's feelings.
- A technical term for this is attunement which is essentially helping a person feel seen, heard, validated, and understood.
 - Verbal attunement: Make very brief well timed statements that reflect what the person seems to be feeling or wanting/needing/hoping, or that assure the person that you are tracking closely with them. When done well this feels very satisfying to people and also allows them to respond and correct you if you are a bit off the mark.
 - Non-verbal Attunement: The most important part of attunement is actually non-verbal reflection of a person's feelings. The most basic way to do this is to actually subtly make the facial expression that matches what the person is feeling and to make the expression more pronounced the stronger the person's feeling is, thus helping them see that you get how big this feels.
3. Be tuned in to the person's needs
- When you start with a person there will be a lot of things that they need that you are not yet aware of. For example, some people need longer times of quiet to allow things to unfold and process and others get distracted and move on to other things if you wait too long between questions so it takes some time to get synchronized.
 - You will also become aware that each person has different triggers which will inevitably arise during sessions and need to be cared for appropriately. For example, many people have particular triggers which make it difficult to say no to a suggestion. Therefore they may go along with a suggestion you make such as "what if we talk to Jesus about that" when inside they do not feel comfortable at all talking to Jesus about this particular concern. In such cases it is helpful to transition more slowly and double check if there is any part of the person that has any concern about a particular direction. Or to let them take the lead as much as possible about what they would prefer to do next in the session.
4. Create as safe of an environment as possible.
- Meet in rooms that are private and safe. Often people like to bring a friend as support which works well as long as the receiver feels safe to share whatever comes in the presence of the friend.
 - Give the receiver control over the final decisions at every point presenting each additional step in the process as an invitation or option.
 - Let the receiver know that if anything comes they don't feel comfortable sharing they can just say, "something is coming but I don't feel ready to share it." God and the person know what it is. That is the important thing.

- Say an opening prayer welcoming God's protection guidance and help. If a person will feel weird with prayer for spiritual protection you can add those parts silently.
- If possible establish the safety net of a good positive memory that the person can return to if they get stuck in negative emotions later in the session.

5. Additional Components?

The Neurology of Safety

While whole books could be written about this a brief summary of the neurology is helpful to understand as it reinforces our understanding of why safety is so foundational. It seems that our brain is built in a hierarchical structure. Dr Wilder and Dr Lehman follow Allan Schores work in identifying 5 levels which build on each other. Other brain scientists describe the human brain as 3 distinct yet interconnected brains

1) The instinctive brain or the reptilian brain

- This part of the brain functions similar to a reptile's brain
- Roughly correlates to Dr Wilder's level 1 and level 2 functioning.
- The part of our brain in charge of orienting to our environment. Scanning for threat, assessing whether to move towards or away from something, and engaging what it assesses to be the most fitting response to threat namely: seek a safe other, fight, flight, freeze or flop.

2) The emotional/relational brain or mammalian brain

- Functions similar to the brains of other social mammals
- Roughly correlates to Dr Wilder's level 3 and 4
- This part of our brain is primarily involved in what Dr Lehman calls our relational connection circuits. Other scientists such as Stephen Porges call this our social engagement system. When we feel safe our brain naturally turns on this system to engage with others.
- This part of our brain is largely responsible for our feelings, especially the feeling of joy which is being glad to be together with others no matter what additional emotions we are also feeling.

3) The rational brain or the neo-cortex

- This part of our brain is distinctly human and allows for many of our amazing abilities with logic and language.
- Correlates to Dr Wilder's level 5
- This part of the brain is engaged when we can consciously feel that we are thinking.

Our brain works best when all of these levels are working in sync and operating in a healthy balance. Each level only works optimally if the level below it is also working optimally. A break down at a lower level causes the higher levels to get desynchronized. Here is where we return to our emphasis on the receiver (and the facilitator for that matter) feeling safe throughout an Immanuel Approach session. Feeling safe in our environment is one of the most important factors which allow our instinctive/reptilian brain to function most optimally. When we start to feel unsafe, this part of the brain becomes overly active scanning for threat and preparing us to meet danger which then causes all of the higher levels of social functioning and rational thinking to also get out of sync. If

our relational brain stops working well it becomes very difficult to feel connected to God's presence or to other people. It is therefore very important to recognize when some aspect of the setting, the relationship, or some aspect of the session is feeling unsafe to someone and to work together with God to address the cause and restore a sense of safety. The practical means by which this task is carried out by an Immanuel Approach facilitator will be addressed in more detail in future weeks.