

Noticing

But God has blessed you, because your eyes can see and your ears can hear! Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. Matthew 13:16-17 (CEV)



Noticing – The practice of connecting our story with God’s story and God’s story with our story thereby noticing God’s presence and activity for good in the world and our lives.

Why?

The Examen is a technical name for one of the Spiritual Exercises developed by St Ignatius of Loyola somewhere around 1580(ish), who realised that even apparently small and insignificant details of life are incredibly powerful signifiers of personal, spiritual and community truth. The Examen can take different forms, but it invites us to notice when we feel energised, alive and full of life and possibility (Ignatius called this consolation), and also when we feel empty, drained, hopeless (named ‘desolation’ by Ignatius).

This noticing exercise invites us to call to mind the events, people and situations we’ve encountered through the day paying particular attention to a particular fruit of the Spirit. In noticing the presence or absence of these we may feel that consolation or desolation Ignatius felt.

When will we do this?

Try this with whoever is in your family or household at a mealtime when you can gather around the table or over food.

This could also be a useful part of your bedtime routine, giving you reflective and prayer time with children individually.

Top tips

Remember, this doesn’t have to be ‘led’ by an adult but it will need to be modelled at least once so children can learn and then practice leading if they would like to.

Take time without rushing. That said, you know your children and their capacity for engaging. Don’t worry or feel you’ve failed if your children disengage after a shorter time than you hoped. Short and sweet is good too and it can be a strong foundation for longer engagement in due course.

Allow and hold silence. Try not to fill it with too many words or unhelpfully pressing and rushing children. Some are slow reflectors who need a good time to reflect when asked a deep question in order to work out a response and verbalise what it is inside. It takes time to learn this. Notice if your children are slow reflectors and give them permission to keep wondering or thinking about things.

You don’t have to ask all the questions but where there is more than one do pause in between asking them.

Noticing Fruit of the Spirit.

When my children were smaller it felt important to help them to know that they are disciples of Jesus every day. One way of doing this was to say to them “Be kind and helpful” when they went into school. If it sounds simple, it is! This simple statement meant that when they came home, I could ask if, when and how they were, or experienced others being, kind and helpful. This helps them know and see God at work for good in, through and around them. You can reinforce or challenge them with phrases like; “It’s great that you helped the teacher by...”, “You were kind when you”, “Was that thing you said in that story really kind?”

Give it a go

Decorate lolly stick or strips of card with the name of each ‘fruit’ on it.

Ask each person present to draw one out of the pot or jar and everyone shares their story about noticing or experiencing that fruit in themselves or others that day.

You don’t have to do them all in one go! Do one each to start with to get used to noticing and storytelling, increase if and when it feels right.

Ask questions like

Where have I shared and seen love today?

Where have I experienced and shared joy today?

Where have I experienced and brought peace today?

When have I been and experienced patience today?

Where have I been and seen kindness today?

Where experienced goodness/generosity today?

How have I have seen or experienced faithfulness today?

When have I been or experienced gentleness today?

How have I been or experienced self-control today?

Jesus’s disciples were people who lived with and followed him around, learnt from him and tried to copy what he did. What have you been noticing about who Jesus was and what he said and did.

In your conversations, notice where you have all acted as Jesus Disciples, following and copying him. Tell each other when you notice this and that you’ve seen God at work. It’s ok for it to a fleeting example – the fruit was still displayed and noticing it and speaking it out could be the very encouragement needed.

You could add other ‘biblical signs’ of spiritual growth over time, for example being peacemakers, acting justly, fighting injustice, forgiving, caring for creation and so on. When you notice your child doing or being these things tell them! You’ll probably find they start telling you when they notice you displaying them too!

Have a sheet of paper and stick stars or stickers on it every time any of you notice another family member displaying a fruit of the Spirit or other biblical sign of spiritual growth. Decide together what you will do when the paper is full of stickers. For example, have a treat, make and give away a cake or do something else for others.

Finish with ‘Thank You’ prayers for God’s activity in your lives today, ‘sorry prayers’ for anything you are not proud of and ‘please prayers’ for the people and situations that particularly need God’s blessing.