

Exercise 1: Early Thoughts about God

For this exercise there are three roles:

1. Storyteller
2. Listener
3. Observer

Storyteller:

Can you tell us something about your early ideas of God?

When did “God” become a topic, idea, or person in your life? How old were you?

Where did you get your ideas – immediate family, extended family, church, friends, school, other?

Were these ideas associated with activities, such as prayers at meals, bedtime prayers, church activities, family activities, etc.?

There are no “rules” here. Just, please, tell your story as freely and as openly as you are comfortable telling it. If you find your self questioning this or that or this or that person, that’s perfectly ok. Perhaps you’ve not thought of this before or for a long time and “stuff” is occurring to you. As you feel comfortable, let that be part of your story. It’s all good. It’s your story and your experience of your story.

Listener: As best you can, be fully attentive to the storyteller (see hints sheet). As best you can, be curious. If you get stuck, return to something about which you can be curious and simply ask a question. First, hear the “whole” story. Then inquire with a curious mind. Such as:

Can you tell me more about what you thought about God or who you thought God was or where you thought God was or where God lived?

Can you say more about your family’s “relationship” or lack thereof with God or church or other associations of God?

Could you say more about X (the person(s) who seems to have been most influential in your early learning about God)?

Be genuinely curious and allow this to take you wherever it takes you. Albeit, always attentive to the storyteller’s story and presence. If they are uncomfortable saying more, they will let you know, often first with their body language (facial expressions, tones, gestures, posture) and then words. Follow the storyteller’s lead as best you can.

Remember the power of the pause (see hints).

Observer: What do you notice in the Storyteller, the Listener, and your self? You are encouraged to take notes. Especially notice all the ways your “thoughts” are sparked: Your beliefs, preferences, desires, perspectives, experiences, your wanting to tell how you relate/don’t relate to what you’re hearing, your feelings, emotions, and perhaps passions. This is a terrific opportunity for you to experience the challenge of really listening when all manner of things are being sparked in you. Let it be fun! You are not being asked to set aside your thoughts but rather to notice them. At the same time, there is a chance that you will begin to experience your self noticing your self, perhaps for the first time. That is,

noticing your thoughts, feelings, emotions, passions and possibly even your “assumptions” about your thinking in a way that you’ve not done before. You might “see” something like, “Wow, I never realized that I just ‘assumed’ that!”

Debrief

Here’s where all can have great fun and learn, learn, learn. There is no right or wrong, good or bad, success or fail. Embrace whatever happens and all the truth you can about *yourself*. Let every “mistake” be a roaring “success” by shouting “alleluia! I have learned something!”

Storyteller

What did it feel like to tell your story?

Did you feel heard?

Did you feel comfortable/uncomfortable?

Did you *feel* the listener was genuinely interested in *you* and *your* story? Can you recall what the listener did that influenced how you feel about this?

Did you notice assumptions, thoughts, feelings, emotions, passions that you had not noticed in yourself previously?

Anything else?

Listener

What was it like for you? What did it feel like? Were you nervous? Were you worried about getting it right? Did you find yourself getting anxious or troubled? Were you afraid that you didn’t know what to say next?

How was it trying to set aside your thoughts, feelings, emotions, passions, desires, etc.?

Did you struggle not to ask leading questions?

Did the encouragement to be curious help you?

What else?

Observer

What did you notice?

Did the storyteller seem comfortable/uncomfortable?

Did the listener help the storyteller tell their story?

Did the listener ask leading questions?

Did the listener use pauses well? Can you recall a time when the listener used a pause well?

What occurred within you with regard to your thoughts, feelings, emotions, passions, and assumptions?