

Exercise 2: How Have Your Thoughts and Ideas Changed about God over the Course of Your Life?

For this exercise there are three roles:

1. Storyteller
2. Listener
3. Observer

Storyteller:

Can you talk a bit about how your perspective of who God is has changed over the course of your life? If this has been a developing process, start with the first changes. Then tell about other changes.

When did you first begin to realize you were developing different ideas than those you had as a child (or whenever you first had ideas about God)?

What were some of the influences that led to your changing ideas? Circumstances? People? Things you heard or read? Special events such as a conference?

There are no “rules” here. And there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. If you’ve not thought about this much before now, you might struggle a little and not be sure. That’s perfectly ok. 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, too. 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 genuinely curious. This particular question has greater potential to get us thinking about our own journey, our own thoughts and beliefs, our own experiences. And beliefs about God are among the most important beliefs in our life, so it can be easy to get “hooked” on our own story and beliefs. The way out of this is to become interesting in the storyteller and their story. The way to gain interest is to ask specific questions about their story. Such as:

Can you say more about how “that situation” came about? Can you say a little more about its impact on you? How did it effect what you thought or believed about God?

“The Five Whys” (*Remember the power of the pause*)

“Five” is both symbolic and real. The goal of “the five whys” is to help people get to and express the deep meaning to them of what they’re sharing. Sometimes it takes literally five questions before they’ve gotten to the real meaning. The questions don’t all have to have the word “why” in them. You could ask:

What was it about that that was meaningful to you?

After they answer you could ask again, why was that so meaningful?

What was its impact on you?

Did it take a while for these changing ideas to change what you believe about God?

Or, did what you were finding yourself believing take a while before it changed how/what you think about or could articulate how/what you think about God?

Did these changing ideas result in changes in what you do?

What was it like to realize you were questioning what you thought?

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.

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!"