

Title: “How Does One Discern the Best Agenda for an IA Session?”

November 26, 2024

Greetings all,

Just finished another FAQ, “How does one discern the best agenda for an IA session?” This same content is also available as section VII, B. of the Cumulative FAQ Document (available as a free download from the FAQ page of www.immanuelapproach.com).

Blessings,

Dr. Lehman/Karl

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“How does one discern the best agenda for an IA session?”

Just ask Jesus: The easiest way to identify the agenda for an IA session is to help the recipient establish their connection with Jesus in the initial positive memory, and then just coach them to ask Jesus, “What do You want to do today?” This is the option that I suggest beginners start with. And with some recipients, this is all they ever need. If the recipient is able to establish a good connection and perceives guidance that is adequately clear, and if observation over time confirms that the guidance is good,¹ you can just continue with this very simple, straightforward option. Unfortunately, this simplest, most straightforward option does not always provide the best guidance. As discussed below, we don’t like pain, and most of us will subtly (or not so subtly) lean away from difficult/stressful/unpleasant issues. This avoidance can sometimes get in the way to the point that “Just ask Jesus” is not adequate. For example, I have encountered recipients who had triggers that were severely disrupting their marriages, parenting, and other important areas of their lives, but with “Just ask Jesus” they never perceived Jesus to be guiding them to work on these obviously important triggers.² Furthermore, many recipients will have occasional sessions in which they are not able to get an initial connection that is strong enough to provide guidance that is clear enough.

Therefore, it is helpful to be aware of additional considerations that can help us with discerning IA session agenda. Also, Jesus seems to be aware of these other considerations. As described

¹ If the recipient displays observable, lasting positive changes that steadily accumulate over time, and if they do *not* persistently avoid important areas of dysfunction, then their ability to receive guidance in response to “Just ask Jesus” is good.

² My perception, from putting together many different observations and clues, is that Jesus was inviting them to do important-but-difficult work, but that they were ignoring/resisting this guidance (sometimes unconsciously).

below, He often provides guidance regarding agenda by directing the recipient's attention to these other sources of helpful information.

Is something already stirred up?: If the recipient has gotten triggered shortly before the session, and the issue is still stirred up right at the time of the session, this can be an important consideration. The key is that the underlying trauma is already activated. It is closer to the surface, and therefore much easier to access and work with. For those of us who usually have trouble finding and connecting with old trauma, this provides a window of opportunity. And this point is especially important if the memories that are stirred up are ones that the recipient usually has an especially hard time connecting with.

For example, I have certain triggered thoughts and emotions that very directly interfere with my connection with Jesus, and they are rooted in early memories that are strongly defended. It is usually very difficult for me to get to these memories. In fact, I am almost never able to work with these especially strategic memory-anchored blockages unless I am intensely triggered. Furthermore, as the Lord has helped me to resolve more and more of the underlying nest of related memories, it has become harder and harder to trigger the remaining splinters. So when I bump into a trigger that is large enough to stir up this specific content, I have a rare, precious window of opportunity. If I am so fortunate as to bump into one of these triggers shortly before an Immanuel session, I assume that this is what I should work on unless I receive clear, specific guidance to the contrary.

Recurrent thoughts: The Holy Spirit often works in the recipient's heart between IA sessions, preparing them for the next session. One of the most common ways in which the Holy Spirit does this is to repeatedly bring a particular question/issue/trigger/potential target into the recipient's mind during the days or weeks prior to the session. And it is helpful for the recipient and facilitator to be aware of this phenomena, so that they can more easily notice it when it occurs and recognize it for what it is.

Recurrent triggers: If certain triggers have been getting stirred up repeatedly during the weeks leading up to an IA session, the underlying traumatic memories are probably closer to the surface, and are thereby strategic targets due to being especially easy to access. And/or the underlying trauma are particularly associated with the recipient's current activities, and are thereby strategic targets due to their potential negative effects on said current activities.³ And/or the underlying memories are being repeatedly triggered because they are associated with many different aspects of the recipients life, and are thereby strategic targets due to the wide-ranging negative effects that they have most certainly already been producing.

Practical factors with respect to strategy/priority: God gave us brains and wants us to use them. I think it is wise stewardship to consider practical, logical factors with respect to

³ For example, we don't want triggers to derail the high-stakes project the recipient has been struggling with at work, or to exacerbate the intense conflict they have been entangled in with their teenage child, or to sabotage the important leadership meeting that they will be facilitating in a few days.

priority/strategy. For example, if I have a particular trigger that gets stirred by one of my colleagues, and I need to have an important meeting with this person in a couple of weeks, it seems strategic to prioritize this target in any IA work I might do between now and then.

List of thematic, ongoing issues: Some recipients (such as myself) have a cumulative list of potential targets for IA sessions – a list of issues that have been identified over time, that are anchored in many different memories (thematic), and that are not yet fully resolved. This list can serve as a “plan B” that is always available. If one or more of the other considerations discussed here do not provide a clear candidate, you can look at your list and just make your best judgement regarding what would be most strategic. And then submit this tentative agenda to Jesus, as described below.

Jesus knows about these other considerations: As mentioned above, Jesus seems to know all about these considerations for discerning the agenda for IA sessions, and often provides guidance by directing the recipient’s attention to one or more of these points. For example, when I coach recipients to ask Jesus, “What should we do today?” they will often respond with, “Jesus is reminding me that I’ve been stirred up all day about how my boss criticizes me – maybe I should work on that.” Or, “Jesus is directing my attention to how a particular issue has been coming to me repeatedly in my quiet times this past week. I get the sense that this has been the Holy Spirit, and that this issue is what we should focus on today.” Or, “Jesus is reminding me of one of the issues on my list. I haven’t thought about it for a while, but He’s bringing it to mind and I’m realizing that it’s affecting my marriage more than I had realized. I think maybe this is what we should work on.” Or, “Jesus seems to be directing my attention to the way in which I’ve been getting triggered by one of my co-workers this past week, and I’m just remembering that I need to start collaborating with this co-working on an important project next month. It would be really strategic if I could get rid of this trigger before we have to start working together.”

Recipient comes in with tentative agenda: Recipients will sometimes come in with a tentative agenda. For example, the recipient might walk in and say, “I’m really stirred up about an interaction I had with one of my friends a few days ago, and I think maybe this is what I should work on,” or maybe, “A smoldering tension with one of my colleagues has come to mind a number of times in the last couple of weeks, and I’m wondering if this is what we should focus on today.” As mentioned above, my perception is that these thoughts regarding tentative agenda are often the Holy Spirit subtly preparing the recipient for the session.

When the recipient comes in with tentative agenda in this way, I coach her through the initial steps, to the point of having an interactive connection with Jesus, and then coach her to engage directly with Jesus regarding her tentative agenda. For example, she might pray something like, “Lord, my smoldering tension with John has been coming to mind a lot lately, and I’m wondering if the Holy Spirit might be bringing this forward for me to look at with You. If this is what You want to work on, please give me a sense of confirmation and show me the next step forward. But if You want to do something else, please show me what that is.”

Deliberate, proactive trauma work: As mentioned above, nobody likes pain. And if the only thing we ever do is to get a connection with Jesus, and then just say, "What do You want to do today?" our psychological defenses will tend to subtly (or not so subtly) lean away from difficult/stressful/unpleasant issues. Even those of us who *sometimes* cooperate with guidance from Jesus directing us to work on difficult issues, will, at other times, subtly resist/avoid/ignore invitations from Jesus to do unpleasant work. And we are all especially prone to avoid working on trauma. In light of this tendency to lean away from difficult issues, and to especially lean away from trauma work, it is important to have some sessions in which we deliberately start with the tentative agenda of working on triggers and trauma.⁴

Putting it all together: Again, just asking Jesus for guidance is a fine plan for beginners, and this is often an acceptable plan even as one learns more. However, the *ideal* approach for an intermediate/advanced recipient-facilitator team is to be aware of all these potential contributions to discernment, ask Jesus for guidance at the beginning of each session,⁵ and then do the best they can to discern which of these considerations apply and how they fit together.

Sometimes this is fairly easy. For example, if the recipient is really triggered, the triggered issue is important and usually very hard to access, and she senses Jesus directing her attention to these considerations and assuring her that He will be with her as she works through the underlying trauma, the facilitator can be confident in coaching her to stay with the trigger and ask Jesus for guidance regarding the next step forward. Or if the recipient has a clear sense of Jesus inviting her to work with Him in addressing a specific area of struggle that she has been avoiding, the facilitator can be confident in coaching her to just follow Jesus. Or if the recipient has a persistent pattern of avoiding difficult issues, dramatic triggers are currently disrupting several important relationships in her life, and she once again reports "guidance" that she should just spend more time in her happy place, the facilitator should help her to ask Jesus about this problematic pattern.

And sometimes the situation is not so clear. For example, the recipient does not have a good connection with Jesus or a clear sense of direction, and she is aware of several of the considerations discussed above, but they each point to a different possible target. In these more difficult situations, do the best you can, keep asking Jesus for guidance, and keep perspective by reminding yourself of final comment below.

Any IA time is good: One final thought. If you are stressing out about how to make the perfect discernment regarding the perfectly most strategic agenda for each IA session, it's important to

⁴ See the "Does an Immanuel Lifestyle Really Need to Include Regular, Deliberate, Proactive Trauma Work?" section at the end of chapter forty-one (Alt: See the "Does an Immanuel Lifestyle Really Need to Include Regular, Deliberate, Proactive Trauma Work?" FAQ) for additional discussion of why it is important to include deliberate, proactive trauma work as part of our Immanuel lifestyles.

⁵ Again, when we ask Jesus for guidance He will often direct our attention to one or more of the considerations just discussed above.

remember that any time you spend in an IA session connecting with the living, tangible presence of Jesus is good. And if you are stressed out about needing to find the perfectly most strategic healing targets, remember that any healing work is good -- *any healing work is better than no healing work, and any trauma resolution will move you forward*. Furthermore, if you embrace a lifestyle of doing regular IA healing work, you will make steady progress and eventually get to all of the most important targets.