

# noticing



## 1.2 the art of noticing: are we paying attention?

### the big idea

When you intentionally pay attention to people around you, you will begin to see them differently.

#### ice breaker

In the course of daily activities, how often do you really pay attention to people around you?

#### related Scripture

***A Samaritan traveling the road came [upon the injured man]. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him.***

Luke 10:33 (The Message)

***I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.***

John 4:35 (NIV)

#### challenging wisdom

*I've found a direct correlation between how I view my world and what I'm moved to do. When I start seeing the world the way Jesus does, I'm moved to do something about it in his name.... It's easy to miss something you're not looking for. Haven't you found that to be true? I think this is the big idea in the story of the good Samaritan.... If it truly is easy to miss something we're not really looking for, then maybe we need to increase our awareness.... When we start to notice others ... something happens inside us.<sup>2</sup>*

– Doug Pollock

### Seeing with new eyes

Pastor John Ortberg writes of noticing as the spiritual discipline of seeing God at work all around you. Exercising this discipline challenges us to broaden our focus, slow down our pace of life, and witness God's grace in ordinary people, things, and events. In the study of grace in the Pursuing Spiritual Transformation series, Ortberg shares what it means to live in grace and how it relates to noticing:

If we want to live in grace, we must develop eyes that see. We must learn what might be called the discipline of noticing. To notice something—to truly pay attention—is a powerful thing.... The practice of noticing is a skill. It involves learning to pay attention to gifts that we otherwise take for granted.... They are gracious gifts. And what's even more amazing is that their Giver is lovingly present with you even as you are experiencing them.<sup>2</sup>

In his book *My Name Is Asher Lev*, Chiam Potok's main character is an awakening artist, beginning to see the world with a different perspective. The author captures a simple moment at a family dinner from the emerging artist's point of view:

That was the night I began to realize that something was happening to my eyes. I looked at my father and saw lines and planes I had never seen before. I could feel with my eyes. I could feel my eyes moving across the lines around his eyes and into and over the deep furrows on his forehead. He was thirty-five years old, and there were lines on his face and forehead. I could feel the lines with my eyes and feel, too, the long straight flat bridge of his nose and the clear darkness of his eyes and the strong thick curves of the red eyebrows and the thick red hair of his beard graying a little—I saw the stray gray strands in the tangle of hair below his lips. I could feel lines and points and planes. I could feel texture and color.... I felt myself flooded with the shapes and textures of the world around me. I closed my eyes. But I could still see that way inside my head. I was seeing with another pair of eyes that had suddenly come awake.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doug Pollock, *God Space*, (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing Inc., 2009), 35-37.

<sup>2</sup>John Ortberg, *Grace: An Invitation to a Way of Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 16.

<sup>3</sup>Chiam Potok, *My Name Is Asher Lev* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1972), 108.

What if we paid attention to people with a new set of eyes that “suddenly came awake”? What if we focused on others instead of on our own agendas?

1

discuss

**Have you ever noticed something (or someone) in your daily routine for the first time, only to realize that it (he or she) was always there? What prompted you to notice? What does this reveal to you about paying attention?**

## A small investment can lead to a big return

The American College of Sports Medicine recently stated that “exercise lite,” in which a total of thirty minutes a day is broken up into smaller segments, will help maintain, although not build, fitness. Even if you have no time for long workouts, you can still benefit by doing mini workouts. What if paying attention worked the same way? What if you were to make a habit of paying attention to someone for just 30 seconds each day?

To develop a habit, you follow a certain behavior pattern regularly until it becomes almost involuntary. For example, a parent teaches a child the habit of looking both ways before crossing the street. With regular practice, before long, the child develops the habit. What if we could develop and practice simple habits throughout our day that helped us pay attention to people? These small attempts count. The more we practice, the better we get.

2

discuss

**What new patterns or small changes during your day would help you begin to develop the habit of paying attention to people?**

Paying attention reaps huge benefits. The single most significant benefit is that it transforms us. We begin to see others, ourselves, and even God differently. People that we never noticed before (not because they weren’t there, but because we never paid attention to them) quite suddenly matter to us in ways we can’t explain. We find that the more we pay attention to others, the less we are absorbed with our own agenda and life.

This is not another thing to put on your “to-do” list. It’s a way of living that causes regular intersection with God’s activity in the frantic routines of your ordinary life. You don’t have to assess who is a Christian and who is not, just practice paying attention to whomever is in your periphery and see what develops. Look for what God is up to in people of all kinds, wherever you normally go. This practice transforms you into a spiritual archeologist, discovering God’s activity in people all around you and becoming more and more fascinated in what you find.

3

discuss

**What do you think the term “spiritual archeologist” means? Could you consider yourself one? Why or why not?**

**Can you think of anyone in your own life that fits that description?**

## Common barriers that prevent us from paying attention

Paying attention is the spiritual practice (aka: discipline) of intentionally observing someone who is in your view at the moment, wherever you are. But our everyday lives are filled with obstacles that need to be overcome. Here are some potential barriers along with practices that may help you overcome them:

### 1. Pace of Life

Everybody is very busy these days. We are all rushing around trying to get our “to-do” list done before we have to be somewhere. Being busy and rushed usually keeps our focus sharply on ourselves, our agendas, our needs. This makes it almost impossible to focus on anyone else, even if they’re right in front of us. One way to overcome this barrier is to decide to break up your schedule with 30-second noticing sessions.

Go where you normally go, do what you normally do, but plan on spending at least 30 seconds paying attention to someone who is there with you. A bit of intentionality is needed here. But you can resume your agenda after that. You may find yourself slowing down a little because it's fun, and you'll want to do more of it.

## 2. Self-Focus

To be willing to notice someone, you have to take your eyes off of yourself and be interruptible. What if we welcomed the possibility that an interruption might be a divine appointment? Too often we respond to interruptions as impediments to our own agendas. One way to overcome this barrier of self-focus is to intentionally direct your full attention to whomever is in your peripheral view and consider the possibility that God is inviting you to engage in what he is doing in the moment.

## 3. Christian Bubble

Those of us who are involved in churches tend to spend much of our free time absorbed in “fellowship” or church work with other Christians and rarely get close enough to people who don't move in our Christian circles. To overcome this barrier, you can make a point of recognizing other people who are already part of your everyday life—at the store, at work, at school, at the baseball field, in your neighborhood. There are hundreds of people all around you every day, wherever you go, desperate for someone to pay attention to them.

## 4. Attitude

We tend to be judgmental rather than open to those around us we don't know. Often, we don't view people the way God views them. In Luke 15, Jesus paints a clear picture of God's heart for each of us. In three separate stories he describes something that is greatly missed—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—and someone who desperately wants to find them again. What if our attitude toward those who are “missing” reflected this picture of the heart of God?

4

discuss

**Which barrier to paying attention do you struggle with most? What can you do this week to try to overcome that?**

5

practice

**Choose a facilitator to guide you through this practice. Everyone else, close your eyes.**

**How well have you paid attention to those around you right now? Without peeking, think about the following questions:**

**Who is sitting on your right? And on your left? Even if you don't know their names, describe them silently. (What are they wearing? What color hair do they have?)**

**How well have you paid attention to nonverbal cues of those around you?**

**For the person on your right and on your left, what have you noticed about their:**

- **Eye contact:** Were they making eye contact? If so, was it more intense than usual ?
- **Facial expression:** What was their face showing? (Filled with interest; unexpressive; suggesting doubt...)
- **Tone of voice:** Was their voice projecting warmth, confidence, and interest; was it strained and blocked...?
- **Posture and gesture:** Were their bodies relaxed; stiff and immobile...? Were their shoulders tense and raised; slightly sloped...?
- **Intensity:** Did they seem flat, cool, and disinterested; over-the-top and melodramatic...?
- **Timing and pace:** Was there an easy flow of information back and forth? Did nonverbal responses come too quickly or too slowly?
- **Sounds:** Did you hear wordless audible indications of caring or concern; disgust; nervousness; happiness ...?

**From what you've noticed, how would you describe their outlook on life today? Are they upbeat? somber? determined?**

**Open your eyes. Did this practice represent your normal “noticing skills”? Why or why not?**

**How well do you think that you pay attention to the people around you? Explain.**

## Practice on Your Own

Commit to starting a new spiritual discipline by agreeing to spend 30 seconds each day paying attention to people in your ordinary routine and being unusually curious about them. Keep a journal about the people you paid attention to and things you observed about them.

Partner with someone else in the group and share your observations by phone, email, or in person at least once per week between meetings.

Also, share with each other anything that you have noticed happening inside of you as you have been paying attention to others. Make sure to encourage and celebrate every attempt!

## Getting the Big Idea

Paying attention is a simple practice that can have a big impact on you and others. It can change you and cause you to see others, yourself, and even God differently.

Without intentionality, barriers will frequently interfere with your ability to pay attention to the people around you.

## Resources to Check Out

- *Evangelism Without Additives* by Jim Henderson (Waterbrook Press, 2007)
- *God Space* by Doug Pollock (Group Publishing Inc., 2009)
- *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* by Dan Kimball (Zondervan, 2007)
- [www.doableevangelism.com](http://www.doableevangelism.com)

## Q Place Story

Kristin went out for lunch with her family after church one Sunday. Everyone was busy talking and eating when her three-year-old daughter whispered to her, "That little girl over there lost her family." Everyone looked over at a girl of about seven years of age who was crying. It appeared she was alone and standing by the door. Kristin walked over to the young girl and asked her what was wrong. The girl said she couldn't find her family and she thought that they left the restaurant without her. Upon bringing the little girl over to her table, Kristin learned that her name was Audrey and that indeed her family was nowhere to be seen in the small restaurant or in the parking lot outside.

The caring attention of Kristin and her family helped Audrey stop crying. She became calm enough to recall her mom's cell phone number. Kristin was able to contact Audrey's parents who thought that she had gone in the other car with her aunt and uncle. It turns out that the aunt and uncle thought Audrey was going with her parents. They were so thankful that someone had taken care of their daughter through this embarrassing and frightening situation. It took a three-year-old to notice that something was wrong, and because she was paying attention to what was going on around her, God used her to help parents reconnect with their young daughter.

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