

GETTING STARTED

RESOURCES FOR PRACTICE PARTNERS—NOTICING

LIVING ON
THE BRINK

WEEKEND!

JACKIE CLARK AND JIM STILL-PEPPER 

NOTICE

Take a few minutes to play the Notice Game. Sit with a friend, and take a good look at him or her for one minute. Then close your eyes. Ask your friend to make a small change in his or her appearance, like buttoning one button or moving some hair around. Open your eyes, and try to figure out what has been changed. Then switch roles. And as long as you are hanging out with your friend, why not read this article together?

I don't know how you did with your friend, noticing the changes; but because you've been reading the devotions this week, you've probably noticed that people struggle with a lot of deep issues. Often the deeper their pain, the more they try to hide it. I know this is true in my life. It makes me wonder how many of my friends are struggling and I am not noticing because I am not paying attention.

How do you take notice and help a friend who is struggling? This simple three-step process can change the way you see other people.

1. BE AWARE

Pay attention to their

- + *Words:* What do they say? How do they say it? What don't they say?
- + *Emotions:* Are they sad? mad? frustrated? happy?
- + *Behavior:* Are they acting in ways that seem to be uncharacteristic? Have they stopped doing what they used to enjoy? Have they started doing something destructive?

2. CARE

- + Spend time with them. Talk. Laugh. Cry.
- + Most important, listen. The best way to listen is to give them something to talk about. Ask them questions, and listen to their answers.

3. SHARE

- + Connect them with a trusted adult. Encourage them to share their pain with an adult they trust.

- + Offer to be there when they talk to an adult.
- + Recognize that if your friend is in danger of hurting himself or herself or other people, you may need to involve an adult, even if your friend doesn't want you to.

God knows when we are in pain and often uses us to care for others. We need to be tuned in and willing to partner with God in order to help each other. <

26 MAR>APR 2014

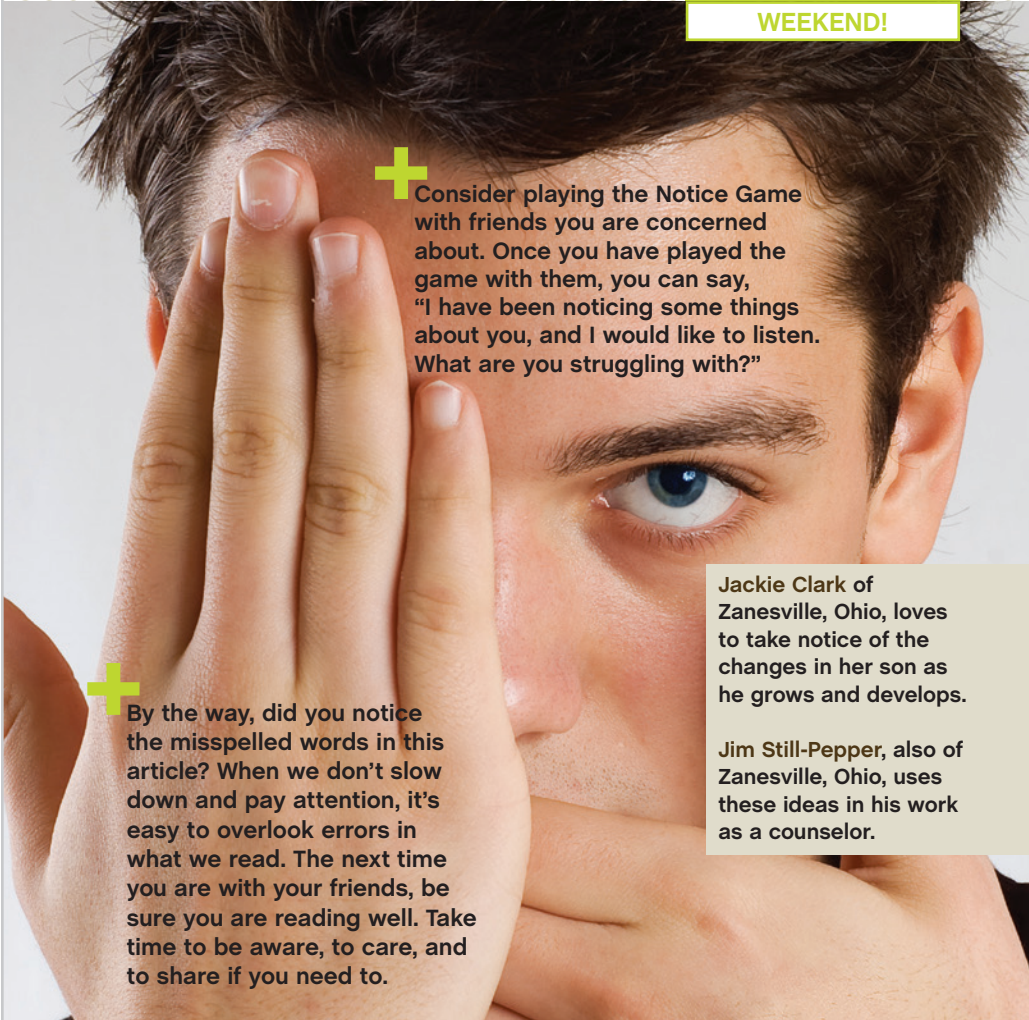
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+ Consider playing the Notice Game with friends you are concerned about. Once you have played the game with them, you can say, “I have been noticing some things about you, and I would like to listen. What are you struggling with?”

+ By the way, did you notice the misspelled words in this article? When we don’t slow down and pay attention, it’s easy to overlook errors in what we read. The next time you are with your friends, be sure you are reading well. Take time to be aware, to care, and to share if you need to.

Jackie Clark of Zanesville, Ohio, loves to take notice of the changes in her son as he grows and develops.

Jim Still-Pepper, also of Zanesville, Ohio, uses these ideas in his work as a counselor.

23 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Read Exodus 3:7–19. What was God aware of? How did God care for God’s people? Though God could have saved the people without Moses’ help, notice that God made Moses a partner in freeing the Hebrew people. How does God want to work with you to help your friends?

www.devozine.org

MAR-APR 2014 **27**

CRITIC AT LARGE

WEEKEND!



YOU TOM ARTHUR 17 ASKED FOR IT!

I have a pretty serious emotional poker face. It's hard to tell what I'm feeling from my expression. This poker face helps me pretend that my feathers don't get ruffled when someone criticizes me; but if I'm really honest, I have to admit that I don't receive negative feedback any better than anyone else. When someone says I'm not doing a good job, when I get a bad grade, or when I receive an angry email, I get tense and anxious. My stomach ties up in knots; my heartbeat accelerates. I dwell on that negative feedback all day, even though it may have come among a sea of positive comments. >>>

GETTING STARTED

RESOURCES FOR PRACTICE PARTNERS—ASK FOR FEEDBACK

CRITIC AT LARGE

WEEKEND!

> The only time I am able to avoid all this craziness is when I ask for feedback. *Ask for feedback?* Yep. When I ask someone to critique me or my work, something different happens. I'm less defensive and anxious; I open up and choose to receive the feedback. After all, I asked for it.

I recently read that psychological research has shown a similar response to be true for most people: When we ask for feedback, we receive negative feedback much better than if we didn't ask for it. I've also found that when I ask for constructive criticism, people are more likely to give it to me in a kind, gentle, and loving way. My occasional requests for feedback provide a healthy release valve for any frustration they may feel toward me, so their feelings don't build up inside and come out in one big blast of negativity. Asking for feedback not only helps me to be more open to receiving criticism; it also helps the other person to offer praise or criticism in healthier ways.

THE HUMILITY OF FEEDBACK

I think asking for feedback is actually an extension of the Christian virtue of humility. Paul says, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12, NRSV). Humility is an attitude that admits the truth: "I don't have it all together. I don't have all the answers. I need you to help me be the person God wants me to be." When you ask for someone to give you feedback, you're practicing humility.

So how does this work? Here are some habits I've adopted to help me ask for feedback. At least once a month, I ask my wife how I'm doing as her husband. I regularly ask my colleagues how well I'm doing my job. I invite friends and teachers to look over my work and to tell me if they see anything that can be improved. To help me grow personally and professionally, I seek out mentors who are older than I am and who have more life experience and professional expertise than I do. I meet every other week with a small group of men who ask how I am doing in my walk with Christ. Every day I sit in prayer and ask God for this same kind of feedback. Then I listen. When I get an answer, I ask God to help me live it out. <

Tom Arthur, pastor of Sycamore Creek Church in Lansing, Michigan, welcomes feedback on this article: What did you like? What could he have done better? Respond to him at www.sycamorecreekchurch.org.

18 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Whom do you need to ask for feedback—a friend? your girlfriend or boyfriend? a parent? a teacher? your pastor? Set up a time this week to sit down with one person and ask, "How can I be a better friend, son or daughter, student, Christian?" Then listen. If you receive wise advice, say, "Thanks, I'll give it a try." *Then try it.* Ask God for help.

20 NOV>DEC 2012

november 12–18

GETTING STARTED

RESOURCES FOR PRACTICE PARTNERS—LISTENING

WRECK LESS

WEEKEND!

7

DARREN WRIGHT

just listening

Consider the story of Job, a blameless and upright man who feared God. Due to a bet between Satan and the Lord, Job's life was destroyed. He lost his cattle, his property, his servants, his family—all of it gone; and he sits among the ashes, naked and covered in sores.

Enter his friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—old friends, good friends, who traveled from their homes to be with Job in his suffering. Until this point, Job has been alone. Now he has friends who will join him in his agony. They sit with him in silence for seven days. (Read Job 2:11–13.)

When the world closes in on me, when I'm hurting or grieving, when I'm at my lowest, I wish I had friends who would sit with me. I don't need them to be wise or to offer advice, only to have the ability to be with

me, to enter my world and to sit in my ashes. When friends can't be there, I'm glad for other people who will sit with me. Counselors, doctors, pastors, youth ministers, teachers, or parents can be great listeners; all I need to do is ask.

Of course, the whole story of Job goes a little pear-shaped when his friends stop being silent and start giving advice. When I'm in a difficult place, the most powerful comfort is to have someone sit with me and listen, without giving advice.

10 JANUARY>FEBRUARY 2017

january 1–8

GETTING STARTED

RESOURCES FOR PRACTICE PARTNERS—LISTENING

WRECK LESS

WEEKEND!

NEEDING PEOPLE WHO LISTEN

Talking with someone we trust, who is able to sit and listen to our pain, can be a bit intimidating, especially when we're in the depths of anxiety, depression, or grief. Yet, opening up about our struggles can be freeing, the beginning of healing. If you don't know someone that you feel you can trust, consider talking to a doctor or a counselor. Maybe ask a good friend to go with

you for support. Even talking to a pet could be a good starting point. My dog, Tilly, will sit with me in the ashes any day, anytime.

BECOMING SOMEONE WHO LISTENS

Perhaps we all can learn from Job's friends the importance of being present with and listening to another person. Listening is a skill that most of us aren't born with, but it's one we need to learn. Listening is a habit

that grows only when we practice listening over and over again. How could you learn to listen intently to people so that you are able to enter into their world? <

Darren Wright is involved in youth ministry and lay ministry support with the Uniting Church in Australia. He's also the proud father of a very active two-year-old.

8 NEXT DAY STRETCH

LEARNING TO LISTEN

This weekend, get together with a friend or three. Go to a park or on a long walk—somewhere you can be with each other and practice listening.

Follow these tips:

- + Turn off your phones.
- + Give one another a set amount of time to talk.
- + Don't feel the need to respond, interject, or give advice. Listen.
- + Don't be afraid of silence. Silence is your friend. It allows you to think about what you just heard rather than thinking about what you're going to say next.
- + Spend some time telling your stories and listening to one another. Or ask one another questions such as these:
 - > What has given you energy this week?
 - > What are you struggling with?
 - > What would you like to celebrate?
 - > What are some ways you put yourself down?
 - > How do you cope with the pressures in your life?
 - > Who or what do you find difficult to forgive?
 - > What destructive choices have you made in your life?
 - > Where do you find God when life is difficult?

GO DEEPER www.devozine.org—Practice Listening

JANUARY>FEBRUARY 2017 **11**

GETTING STARTED

RESOURCES FOR PRACTICE PARTNERS—ACCOUNTABILITY

Judgment and Accountability

Rachel Winters

The other night, I sat down with a friend I hadn't seen in a while. We curled up in my living room to catch up; and after a few minutes, we flashed back to church camp. Like most summer campers, we had made commitments at the peak of Mt. Spiritual High; but we'd fallen short of our goals. Campers live in a spiritual bubble for a week. When they re-enter the real world, that bubble pops. A member of my youth group describes the experience as "Hello, World."

This year was different, though. One night at camp, I was sitting with my youth group. One person told his story. Another opened up about the pain in her life. An hour later, the single box of tissues wasn't enough to keep up with the tears. I know that God forgives us and heals us when we confess our sins and pray with one another. That night, I experienced long overdue healing. Because I had been afraid to trust people, I had carried a burden that I was never meant to carry alone.

Since the last day of camp, when we piled out of the van to go home, we've all messed up; but we've all changed too.

Honesty and Accountability

I've been frustrated that my youth group isn't as open as we were at camp. I'm also realizing that pride is stopping me from seeking accountability. To look at someone and to be completely honest takes a lot of guts. Often, we don't realize how much we're struggling until we admit it to another person. Looking at a friend and pointing out a sin is easy. So is yelling at a sibling. But to look at ourselves and to examine where we fall short is hard.

As we are held accountable, we are changing. God is working in our hearts and revealing our sins. As our pride is stripped away, we lose the judgmental attitude that causes us to point out flaws in others while refusing to look in the mirror. Instead, we're working to become more like Christ; and we, in turn, are helping others to do the same. That's accountability.

Begin asking God to let you see what God sees in your heart. As God shows you your sin, trust God to use the people around you to help you become more like God. Ask God to give you the love and courage to hold them accountable too.

GETTING STARTED

RESOURCES FOR PRACTICE PARTNERS—ACCOUNTABILITY

Dig Deeper

Read Matthew 7:1-5. Call a friend you trust, and ask him or her to be your accountability partner. (If you don't have a close Christian friend, pray that God will bring someone into your life.) Talk with each other about your temptations and sins. Pray for each other. Every week, check in with each other.

How does accountability work?

- If you find out your friend is a worrywart, ask about particular situations he or she is worried about. Say, "When you trust God, you have no need to worry." Write a note of encouragement or jot down a Bible verse for him or her to read.
- If you are tempted to go to parties you know shouldn't go to, your accountability partner might ask about your weekend plans, help you find out why you want to party, and offer to hang out with you on the weekends so you have something else to do.

Discover how you need to offer each other support and hold each other accountable.