

Distilling Principles

Purpose: To use reflection and present experiences as opportunities for learning useful principles.

how to:

One form of reflection that can be especially helpful focuses on discovering and recording principles learned through real-life experiences. This exercise uses the I.I.E.I. paradigm to help a person distill universal principles from a past experience so that they can be passed on to others.

Start with any significant event, situation or experience and journal using the following steps: (If you prefer, you may use another method of recording your thoughts.)

step 1: what happened?

Jot down a brief overview of a situation or experience that was significant to you or had an impact on your life. Write down enough details so that when you come back to your journal at a later date you can recapture the moment.

step 2: what was God up to? what was going on?

Identify: How was God at work in the situation? Did you realize it at the time? How did you become aware that God wanted to teach you something? What was going on regarding your personal development?

step 3: what does it mean?

Interpret: What did God do in you? How did you engage God in the situation? What did you learn? Is there a universal principle at work here? For any major new insight or paradigm shift, make sure and describe the events or thought processes that led up to it. (When you are relating your insights to others, the story will have much greater impact if you can relate how you came to that new understanding.)

step 4: create a catch phrase

Engage: Express the underlying learning or principle in a phrase, sentence, or word-picture. Try to make it catchy (“Going from tree to tree” or “Do first, then teach”) so you and others can remember it. If you can identify a pithy scripture that applies to this exact situation, that works great, too.

Optional: Artists, musicians or poets may choose to create a work of art that illustrates the principle. This is a great way to both remember and communicate it.

step 5: create a story

Imprint: Take your notes and create a story that illustrates the principle. Keep it short and to the point, and include your catch phrase as a “punch line.” Either write out the story or practice telling it out loud several times. The act of writing or speaking will help you remember your story and tell it more effectively. Now, share your story with at least one person this week!

Optional: Some individuals may find this exercise most fun and helpful when done as a conversation with a friend or coach instead of as a journaling exercise. Extroverts in particular tend to think out loud, and so gain significant insight simply by verbalizing their thoughts. Use whichever process works best for you.