

# I Have a Dream

I have a dream! That one day words associated with “learning” the Bible will sound like this: “pleasant,” “joyful,” “great hobby,” “exciting,” “relaxing,” “growth-stimulating,” “lifelong passion” and “absorbing.” Why not us? Why not now?

An insight from recent learning studies has also helped me. How do learners best **retain** info so they can put it into practice? This realigns our learning theory with God’s creation-design. We learn in many ways. Rank these few with a “4” being the most effective way to learn and a “1” the least effective way.

- we *hear*,
- we *read*,
- we *do*,
- we also *pass-it-on* to another person.

Now, what percentage of learning in each of these methods do you think we **retain**? Give it your best guess. Make this active.

The Hebrew culture knew what we are only now relearning. Some studies show, and observation supports, that we retain around **5%** of what we hear, **10%** of what we read, **70%** of what we hear and do and **90%** of what we hear, do and pass on to others. Actively *listening* and *asking/answering* questions to one another with the commitment to put the learning into *practice* and pass it along to others is the model for natural learning, like Jesus taught.

Let’s make this concrete. Let’s say that a directive teacher is superb and holds us spellbound...a “100” on the scale of 1 to 100. What retention rate does this “listening only” style normally have?  $100 \text{ times } 5\% = 5$  effective retention quotient. Now, let’s say I learn to teach naturally. Let’s also assume that I am a very mediocre teacher, say even way below average, a 40 out of 100. Since the retention rate is 90% for this style, what would this compute to?  $40 \text{ times } 90\% = 36$  effective retention quotient. Learning with this mediocre teacher would be **seven times** more effective than just listening to a brilliant, directive preacher.

Ezra had committed himself to studying the Revelation of God, to living it, and to teaching Israel to live its truths and ways. (Ezra 7:10, The Message).

It's not accidental that experts are now discovering that Ezra tapped into a retention level of 90%. Ezra set his heart with a determined, lifelong effort (yes, learning takes effort)...

- to learn God's Word (read & listen, 5-10%),
- to live his life consistent with it (do, 70%), and then
- to give it away to God's people (pass it along, 90%).

## High Leverage Learning

Wise learners find the maximum "*leverage point*" for change, that point where effort is rewarded with maximum return. With this in mind, based on the stats above, how would you design a learning plan if you wanted to maximize growth? We must rethink how God designed us to learn responsibly, especially in our information overloaded society.

What learning styles would you focus on? Jot down some ideas in the margin. How does this differ from what you have experienced in the past? What emotion does this emit? Hope? Excitement? Enthusiasm? Confusion? Fear? How does this compare with how you prefer to learn?

Our goal in studying together is not simply interaction to fill the air with words, but to build an environment of discovery, insight and application that changes lives. When people verbalize, they often expose gaps in their learning or training, gauge more accurately where they are on their journey, and are inwardly motivated to take steps to move towards ownership for change.

"The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own" (Benjamin Disraeli, former British Prime Minister).

Why invest so much time and energy in such a low-leverage return as mere lecture? Break free from our outdated methods. Recapture high-leveraged learning. Ezra, one of God's leaders in the Old Testament, knew this centuries ago. How about you?

## 3. Learning Styles

One insight from recent studies on learning exposes our departure from God's intent. Our educational society has viewed intelligence as primarily linear, reflective learning. Just look at our IQ tests, which strive to measure linear thinking abilities. Most of us teachers have been trained this way. Teachers are therefore most comfortable teaching like this and so perpetuate this style. God is so much more creative!

Experts have discovered a number of different intelligences or ways that people learn. I want to focus on four main ones so that we can become *S-A-V-I* learners and teachers (adapted from "*The Accelerated Learning Handbook*," by Dave Meir, pp. 41-56.).

- **S** – *Somatic* learning – “Soma” means body. Other terms for this hands-on approach are kinesthetic or tactile learning. This is learning from practice, by doing, by experiencing, often through physical activities and through direct physical involvement. “*I can handle that.*” “*That feels right*” are comments we hear.
- **A** – *Auditory* learning – These learners learn best through hearing, including telling, listening, and dialoging. Since hearing is so critical, interacting with others in a group setting is particularly vital. “*I hear what you’re saying.*” “*That sounds about right.*”
- **V** – *Visual* Learning – These learners picture their own thoughts and see the big picture more easily. Images, word-pictures, diagrams, demonstrations and videos are vital to their learning. They use their imagination in healthy ways to experience what Bible characters experienced. “*I see what you mean.*” “*I get the picture.*”
- **I** – *Intellectual* Learning – By this I mean linear learners who are problem-solvers, grasping information one link after another in the chain of knowledge. These learners are often more abstract, reflective, internal, cognitive. “*That makes sense.*” “*I think that’s a good way to put it.*”

As I was reflecting on these four types of intelligences (guess which style is my strongest?!), I was thinking about the contrast between my wife, Fran, and myself. I have always scored well on

tests, and so my rep is, “*Wow, Jim sure is smart!*” By contrast, Fran worked extremely hard and earned every bit of her “B+” grades. When we married, she perceived herself as a person with below-average intelligence (I have always disagreed!) For comparison sake, let’s weigh each of these four types equally with Fran and me. Let’s say a “10” is genius and a “1” is “learning challenged.” Fran:

- **S** – She is brilliant as a somatic learner. She can work with her hands and put things together in ways that amaze me.
- **A** - In Germany, Fran would go buy some bread, and come back speaking German phrases that she heard on the streets because she is also a strong auditory learner.
- **V** - Fran can picture a finished project in her head and just jump in without any formal plans because she is also a very high visual learner (with a hidden flare for art).
- **I** - Fran has viewed herself as a slow intellectual learner.
- **Summary:** Fran is: Somatic = 9.5, Auditory = 8, Visual = 9, and Intellectual = 5 (that is, in her mind; I am convinced she is better), or about an “8” average.

On the other hand for me:

- **S** - I am about a .5 as a somatic learner (I am mechanically “challenged”),
- **A** - an average 5 auditory (although I am growing here),
- **V** - 1 as a visual learner (I am visually “challenged” far beyond my need for glasses!)
- **I** - 9.5 as an intellectual learner.
- **Summary:** I am about a 4, well-below average.

Now, if we weighed the styles equally, Fran would be considered the brilliant one in our family and I would wear the dunce-cap. Folks would murmur behind my back, “*Why would a brilliant gal like Fran ever marry a dunce like Jim?*”

Let me ask you, which of the four *S-A-V-I* styles of learning best fits your preferred mode? See, learning is like a mosaic. Each of you are unique, one-of-a-kind treasures of the Trinity, the creative, Three-in-One Community-God. You have a unique mosaic piece to bring to this multi-faceted mosaic of learning because you have been fashioned in the image of the Creative One. Will you bring your mosaic piece to the *T-E-A-M*? It’s beautiful to behold!

## 4. Inquire and Advocate

The easiest place to reawaken Trinitarian values that leave little room for competition is to join a natural learning community. The natural give and take of mutual *inquiry* and *advocacy* begin to redevelop neural connections necessary to learn this way. People grow most rapidly when they feel the challenges in community learning are just over their heads—at least, at first—and have a mentor or coach who offers them a helping hand.

*Inquire* by temporarily laying aside our own values and assumptions, best we can. Otherwise, we will simply see what we have always seen, forfeiting the joy of learning from others in community. We all see with filters, a gift that God has built into our minds to filter out the important from the millions of unimportant signals we receive each day. However, our filters may also interfere with learning, unless we become aware of them and choose to lay these aside to inquire into what others are saying. Lay down our need to look good and be seen as an expert. Also lay down our fears that we may look like the dunce. Seek to first understand the mind, heart and passions of the other *from their viewpoint* without imposing our own. Listen without an agenda.

*Advocate* by picking up our values and assumptions again. Re-examine them carefully in light of what we are now learning. Determine to remain a lifelong *life-learner*, but don't bob about like a cork on the waves of the views and opinions of others. Champion our opinions and ideas. Defend, explain, and support them. This mutual give-&-take accelerates learning.

Then, since this is a dialog of mutual openness and learning, be willing to “*agree to disagree*” if no common ground is discovered, with full love and acceptance and without looking down on each other. Experience the mutuality that this natural learning environment accesses. We are not battling on the ground of “*right & wrong*,” which is the ground our ancestors embraced with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and Law. Rather ask, “*What is the Father doing?*” (John 5:19). The Spirit will not lead

us into what is morally wrong, but He will at times lead us into what we erroneously believe is wrong.

*Can you hear the distinction?*

*Tolerance* is a word much bandied about today. “*Classic tolerance*,” though, encourages both sides to know what they believe. There *are* absolutes. Advocate strongly for our opinions and honestly inquire into the ideas of the others from the viewpoint of others, so that we may learn and grow. “*Classic tolerance*” has strong values and beliefs. It puts our views and values on hold for a time, however, so that we can understand others as they see themselves, communicating respect and dignity.

Many spiritual development programs are packaged as short-term seminars or workshops. Imitating our microwave society with its short-term fixes will **not** bring ideal lasting change. By contrast, a learning community aligns with recent studies on how our mind works. These type skills and values are best learned through extended practice and feedback. The limbic brain...

“...is a much slower learner—particularly when the challenge is to relearn deeply ingrained habits. This difference matters immensely when trying to improve leadership skills: At their most basic level, those skills come down to habits learned early in life. If those habits are no longer sufficient, or hold a person back, learning takes longer. Reeducating the **emotional brain** for... learning, therefore requires a **different model** from what works for the **thinking brain**: It needs lots of practice and repetition” (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, *Primal Leadership*, **emphasis**).

*Both/And.* The dual skills of *inquiry* and *advocacy* promote dialog in a healthy learning community where each adds their full value. This healthy confidence in how highly God views us and how thoroughly the Holy Spirit equips and frees us to look at life through the lens of the other without indiscriminately swallowing everything. Without this weighty base, we will get mired down in the swamps on either side of the stream of life, either venting our opinions without listening or stuffing our opinions in the other swamp. Both swamps rob a community of vital resources.

## 6. SAVI Learning

The creative God who shaped this vast variety in His physical creation also created every human being as a lifelong life-learner. What tremendous variety, even those of you who may have struggled in school in the past. So, why do so many struggle with education? *We must expose and shatter the power of lies about learning!* And we are beginning to do this as we learn together in community. There are at least four different styles of learning.

- **S** – *Somatic* learners like to be hands-on. Studies show that the movement of our bodies actually releases chemicals that stimulate the brain. *“That feels right.”*
- **A** – *Auditory* learners find the give-and-take interaction in a community setting vital, as they ask and answer. *“I hear what you’re saying.”*
- **V** – *Visual* learners picture their own thoughts. Images and word-pictures accelerate learning. *“I see what you mean.”*
- **I** – *Intellectual* learners grasp information one link after another in a chain. They are often more reflective, internal, sequential, logical, and detailed. *“That makes sense.”*

The primary focus of our traditional learning philosophy is linear learning supported by lecture-based teaching and testing that feeds back what we heard. Unfortunately, much of the church has also bought into this flawed educational philosophy. It’s not all wrong, just incomplete. *Not everyone learns best in a linear way.* One is not inherently better...just different. In a learning community, each of us freely adds our unique mosaic piece. Each is needed and highly valued. When the mosaic is completed with each beautiful piece in its place, oh my, what an extraordinary masterpiece!

Learn like Jesus. Do you still remember how Jesus learned as a young boy in the temple according to Luke 2:46-47? He was *listening* with an open heart and mind, *asking* honest questions, and *answering* questions with understanding as an active learner.

*Listening ears prepare understanding minds & responsive hearts.*

*“I wonder how we can...”* unlocks the latent abilities within and opens up possibilities as agile, adaptable disciples. Learning to

approach life like this begins to shatter the “*I can’t*” limitation that diminishes creativity.

Because of our narrowly focused educational philosophy, many high potential disciples have a bad taste for schooling because they have been bombarded by lies. Perhaps *you* wonder if you measure up in the learning arena. “*I may not measure up as a student!*” “*I’m really not sharp enough!*” “*I don’t know if I am saying this with right words*” are all condemning words from the enemy. “*If I throw my hat into the learning ring with the rest of you, I’ll come out wearing the dunce-hat.*”

Does this resonate within? In the past when asked about school, *somatic* learners in particular have blurted out things like, “*My educational experience has been a living hell!*” Somatic learners, this has less to do with you, and more with a faulty system.

*Jesus has a better way!*

*We are entering the process of discovery together.*

I believe these negative emotions regarding learning have more to do with our incomplete teaching/learning philosophy than with how you label yourself (the lie: “*I am just not a good learner*”). You *do* recognize that is a lie, don’t you? In fact, if a person believes that past failure is primarily due to their lack of personal aptitude, they tend to give up since their actions would have little effect anyway. This in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. *We must expose and shatter the power of this lie!*

I am challenging us to rethink how we learn (especially reuniting knowing and doing again in community). Jettison the rusting holdovers from the last centuries so we can step up to the fast-paced, rapidly changing environment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. God’s people must be equipped to engage their full powers as agile disciples in the fluid, crazed haste of our rapidly changing world. Personal Bible reading and study should and can be one of the most rewarding, exciting and fulfilling Christian experiences!

Jesus has come to break off this ball and chain of past educational failures. God Himself comes alongside His people to help us learn. Trust Him. He longs to free us to experience the joy of lifelong learning. *Do you believe this is possible for you?*



# My Confidence & Challenge

There *is* an answer to release the “common” man and woman to *uncommon* learning responses. Jesus did. He took 12 unschooled men and trained them for three-years consistent with God’s original Eden-design. He then watched these spirit-filled men turn the world upside down. Read Acts 4:13. What was the open secret in the 1<sup>st</sup> century that turned unschooled, ordinary people into people of courage?

When [the schooled leaders] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were **unschooled, ordinary** men, they were astonished and they took note that these men **had been with Jesus** (Acts 4:13, **emphasis added**).

*First*, these common men had been with Jesus. Release the “common” man and woman to *uncommon* responses. We are already learning this as we interact a bit together. *Second*, Jesus taught in a more complete, natural, life-relating way. We are also taking small steps together toward this kind of active-learning. Can you feel the power of active learning begin to stir hope within? You know more than you think you do! Really!

*Imagine the impact on our faith-communities today!*

How did Jesus learn in the temple at 12-years of age (Luke 2:46-47)? He was *listening* with an open heart and mind, *asking* honest questions, and *answering* questions with understanding as an active learner.

Learn like 2-year olds. A child is characterized by *ignorance* and *inability*...and doesn’t even care. Since a child is *ignorant*, healthy education must provide *teaching* to communicate to the child the experiences of life (called knowledge). Since a child *lacks ability* in the awareness and use of all his or her capacities, authentic education provides whatever *training* will bring the child to full development of skills, values and character. Though separable in thought, *teaching* and *training* are not separable in practice. We may have severed them from each other in our 21<sup>st</sup> century

learning theory, but *teaching* and *training* are the two, indispensable “wings” of education.

What happens when a bird tries to fly with just one wing? “*Ever decreasing circles until we crash and become ground-bound.*” I am amazed at how many feel this accurately describes their past educational experiences. We must break the chains of a 17<sup>th</sup> century scholarship as our learning theory.

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” (Benjamin Franklin)

Do you believe that...

- new information does not become our own until we do something with it?
- information alone just puffs us up unless it’s put into practice in ways to build up?
- when we hear the Word of God and don’t respond, we build inner walls of deceit?
- the knowledge and experience of each of us in the group is as important as our teacher’s (and more important to us)?
- the basic nature of those created in God’s image is to desire to question, dialog, interact, learn and change?
- an experience is a more powerful way to learn than simply listening?
- what people say personally is more potent to bring life-change than what the teacher may say since we don’t argue with our own data and point of view as much?
- learners will remember what they say and do more than what we say?

Unless we are convinced of this...really convinced to the depths of our being...we will not put in the hard work needed to switch from an information-based belief system. What part do you want to play in this *new/ancient* learning process that God is releasing? Unless you are personally convinced that the learning community together has more to offer than any teacher does, you will never pay the price to tap into the creativity lying dormant in the church. We must begin with a high view of mankind designed in the image of God. I am already anticipating the rich pleasure of sensing those growing glimmers of a new way of learning and living in this group as we learn from each other! *What is your choice?*

“*Each one teach one*” with each member coming as both a learner and as a teacher. What are some of the advantages that you have discovered in this type natural learning, a leaning style that encourages active learners who put into practice what they learn?

“Knowledge is experience. Everything else is just information” (Albert Einstein).

Every born-again Christian has all that is necessary to understand the Bible, our Father's love letter to us, even those who have not been successful in school environments in the past. Understanding spiritual things is so much more than an acquaintance with facts, although some learning skills are similar.

The key to learning is not right study material or the right teacher (although both are helpful). The Bible is a book of *revelation* and these mysteries must be unlocked for us. The greatest search engine in the world is not Google or Yahoo. The Spirit of God searches our hearts, strips off our blinders, stretches our boundaries and releases revelation of the Father's heart through His Word.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”—but God **has revealed it by his Spirit** (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, **emphasis added**).

God has designed faith to operate within the restrictions of our belief system. So unbelief acts as a hidden, “glass” ceiling that limits our responses. The Spirit *is* our Resident Teacher. He is very good at what He does. He longs to help each person in a learning group to become a more effective learner, like Jesus. Approach Scripture with a prayerful, expectant anticipation that the Holy Spirit will do what He delights to do...reveal Jesus in His resplendent brilliance so that Jesus will bring fame and glory to His Father.

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law (Psalm 119:18).

Assuming the studies are fairly accurate, if one learner listened to good, solid, Bible-based, life-impacting sermons 30 minutes a week for one year (with a 5% retention rate), he or she would listen

26 hours, equaling just over *1 hour* of effective learning (26 hours times 5% rate, which is 78 minutes). If another learner took full ownership in a 2-hour, interactive module for just 5 weeks, but with buy-in and ownership as a natural learner (90% retention rate for listening/reading, doing plus passing it on), the 10 hours of natural learning would garner *9 hours* of effective learning.

***1 hour*** effective learning over one *year* or ***9 hours*** in one *month*.

*What is your choice?*

Do you want to be a *stone* where 90% runs off or a *sponge* where 90% is absorbed? Be a good Ezra, an *ancient/new* learner committed to a 90% retention rate by leaning, doing and giving it away to others. Do you believe...really believe...that there is a revolution in learning afoot that will shatter our false beliefs? My answer is “*yes indeedy!*” I am committed to giving my life to this.

But unless you also believe this personally, you will probably stumble over the obstacles to natural learning and not push through to realize our destiny as a learning community. Catching a passion and a love for the Word of God is even more important than learning the skills of how to study the Bible. More is caught than taught, so demonstrate to each other your authentic love for God’s Word. Jesus said...

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20).

Let’s choose to learn in a way where Jesus has promised His presence. I am asking if you want to dialog as you inquire and advocate. First, we approach the learning event by laying our past assumptions, values and beliefs temporarily on the table to inquire into truth. Consider other ways to combine truth. This lessens the affects of our blinders. Then, after we have reconsidered (the order is critical), we pick up our assumptions, values and beliefs again in light of new insight. Then support our perspective and advocate.