

Seven Essentials for a Natural Learning Culture

“I have tried reading the Bible, but I don’t understand much.”

Countless frustrated Christians have uttered similar sentiments. Many have lost hope that the Book of Books will be anything for them except baby food that is ground up by others and spoon-fed to them.

On the other hand, I have also bumped into Christians who have been taught such a complicated and academic way to study the Bible that it ultimately discourages self-study and stifles LifeChange.

I want to avoid both extreme “deserts” that bypass some of the living water in God’s Word. These basic perspectives and skills centered around *natural learning* and *Mining God’s Word* can bring Bible reading and study within the reach of every fervent Christian, releasing dynamic LifeChange.

Is it possible?

Certainly!

If you struggle though, you are the only one who can change **your** views on learning. I’m here to uncover some of what I have discovered over 40+ years as essential to treasure hunt in the Bible. I can teach you how to mine the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:2b-3). However, you must put in the persistent effort.

What motivates me in Scripture? What can motivate you, if it doesn't already?

Think through the lens of the picture of *Mining God’s Word* for gold. **Why** do you think miners began work at “can see” in the morning and finished at “can’t see” at night? **WHY?** is the question of motive. What was their motivation to swing a pick and shovel all day and to bend over with the backbreaking work of panning?

The gold miners were motivated by earthly riches, although the vast majority went broke. We are motivated by heavenly treasure that changes us in life right now and extends into eternity (Matthew 6:6:19-21). However, until we change our *mindset* about diving into God’s Word from drudgery to delight, we will remain on the outside looking in. We then forfeit much of the grand treasure God has hidden **for** us in His Word. Yes, persistence and effort. Yet not the backbreaking work of the ’49-ers because we have Resident Minor within, the Spirit of God.

For adult learners, our attitude towards learning is one of the most powerful motivations.

As Jesus trained His disciples, He brought with Him a new culture of freedom. Jesus focused more on **how** they thought than **what** they thought. Perspective, how we see God and man, greatly impacts how we understand God’s Word. Begin with an “*ancient/new*” way of learning that taps into how Jesus learned and taught, simple yet not simplistic.

Relationship is at the heart of *natural learning*. So, our attitude towards learning is crucial, nowhere more important than towards the Bible, God’s invitation toward fullness of life in relationship with Him.

Unfortunately, many people I know have come through our school systems today with an attitude of “*I can’t wait to get free from learning!*” Kudos to those teachers scattered throughout our school systems who are battling an antiquated learning system with fresh thinking and a caring, personal touch. Such allies help us in the church as we develop a positive view of learning, tapping into intrinsic motivations for adult learners towards radical discipleship in faith-

communities (see *Motivations for Adult Learners* PDF). For those still infected by this faulty learning philosophy for adults, let's overcome it together. If we intend to fulfill our call to multiply learners of Jesus, we must realign learning with God's design.

Fortunately, a fresh wind in how we learn is blowing today. This aids the "*rapid spread of the Lord's message*" (2 Thessalonians 3:1). It's *ancient* since it taps into God's creation design. It's also fresh in this season, adding insight from more recent learning studies. I have worked hard to integrate these cutting-edge insights since the studies simply point out how God designed us to learn. Christians who have had a difficult time in schooling in the past are now discovering *joy* in learning together.

Yes, I wrote "**joy**" above!

Jesus called His followers "*disciples*." Disciple means learner, life-long *life-learners*. Do you still remember the spontaneous fun on the kindergarten playground as we romped and joyfully made-up games as youngsters? This reminds me of the joyous anticipation I feel as I read about the 1st century church. Let's recover this response and joyful spontaneity today.

Come join the revolution!

Let's clarify the problem by beginning with a quick word-association game. Ready? Popcorn responses! What is the first emotion that comes to **your** mind when you hear the words "*school*" & "*learning*"? Make this active before you continue. Yes, you may be honest.

Unfortunately, for most people schooling is often associated with words like anxiety, fear, boredom, humiliation, failure, irrelevance, disrespect, meaninglessness, frustration. "*We're out of prison!*"

It shouldn't be! And doesn't need to be!

Do you think the God who created us as lifelong *life-learners* and -doers created us to be educationally deformed? Especially not you. So, why do you think we feel so cramped in learning? Stop and think about this a minute before you continue. Jot down your thoughts and interact as a "comment" on this web page.

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 1st 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. Deepening relationship with Jesus in community with others activates learning that transforms. Natural learning in relationship releases the "common" man and woman to *uncommon* responses. View a learning culture like a mosaic with each piece a unique array of colors and shapes. Value the unique mosaic piece you bring since a mosaic needs each piece to be complete.

Second, Jesus taught in a more complete, natural, life-relating way. We are also taking small steps together toward this kind of active natural 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!

At 12-years of age (Luke 2:46-47), how did Jesus learn in the temple?

Jesus was *listening* with an open heart and mind, *asking* honest questions, and *answering* questions with understanding as an active learner *in community*. A strong desire to learn fuels growth. Luke sketches out this simple model for natural learning and teaching that Jesus practiced. Both *listening* with understanding and *asking/answering questions* in *community* are within the reach of each of us.

How Jesus learned begins to make more sense when we look at the most natural and rapid time of learning in our lives. *When do most people learn like wildfire?* I've watched our four children and now our fourteen grandchildren learn as two-year-old children. Their rapid learning is so fun to watch! So, how do two-year olds learn? Jot down a few quick thoughts before reading.

- Life-related desires drive their learning (they learn to crawl because they want the toy just out of their reach). Learning is its own reward, even more than and external rewards.
- Questions are such a normal and integral part of their young lives that we adults often get weary of answering... or even a bit irritated. "What's dat, daddy?" "Why?" "How long till we get there?"
- "Heh, Poppo, I know what! Let's play...!" prefaces a learning opportunity initiated by one of my grandchildren. A playful sense of wonder and joy, enthusiasm and expectancy, curiosity and anticipation, characterize how they play.
- A two-year old is active and fully engaged. Children abandon themselves to learning in a natural way, unafraid to fail and expose what they don't know.
- Youngsters learn holistically, with all their senses, not just linearly, one thought sequentially following the other.

Which of the above traits apply to *natural learning* with the Bible?

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become **like little children**, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Jesus in Matthew 18:2, **emphasis**).

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, perspectives and character.

Though separable in thought, *teaching* and *training* are not separable in practice. We may have severed them from each other in our 21st 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 it crashes and becomes ground-bound." I'm amazed at how many feel this accurately describes their past educational experiences. We must break these chains of a 17th century scholarship and a 19th century model as our learning theory as we approach the Bible.

In strong contrast to 2-year-old learners, adults do all we can to cover up our ignorance and inability. This shuts down our creativity and stifles natural learning. Adults approach life with strong filters, so we often simply see what we have always seen and miss the wonder.

How does this stack up with how you want to learn together?

We are the gatekeepers of our hearts. The only time we cannot learn is when we forfeit our *listening hearts* as lifelong *life-learners* and -doers. "I can't" shuts our minds and snuffs out

creativity. “*I wonder how we can...*” unlocks the latent, God-given abilities lying dormant within and opens up possibilities as agile, adaptable disciples. A *listening ear* prepares an *understanding mind* and a *responsive heart*.

Our current “*deliberate practice*” from our ongoing responses even more than what happened to us in the past. As adults, we can choose to change, accelerated by the inner working of the Spirit. The Good News of faith in Christ shouts that we do not need to be today how we were yesterday! We are on a journey of *becoming*.

How do we discard our limiting filters to rapidly learn again?

I have identified seven essentials to develop a natural learning culture. All lie within the reach of each of us with an openness to change as a new wineskin. Because I believe in *layer learning* (familiarity with a broad understanding before adding additional layers), we will focus on each in succeeding pages.

For now, let me whet your appetite.

Because god’s Word *is* from God, it has authority over our lives. Therefore, we dialog with each other with an attitude of *authentic tolerance*. Yes, we have absolutes as we follow Jesus. And we interpret Scripture with a humble teachableness and pass it along to others with gentleness and kindness bringing the skills of *inquire & advocate* as integral to our learning.

Inquire by temporarily laying aside our own values and assumptions, best we can, *for a short time*. Seek to first understand the mind, heart and passions of the author/Author from *his/HIS* viewpoint without imposing our own. Listen without an agenda to the Biblical text and to one another as we pass it along. Approach with an eagerness to change wherever Scripture cuts across the fiber of our lives so we learn to live loved, for then others will feel more accessible to us

Then after re-examination, pick up your values and assumptions again and strongly *advocate*. Defend your views from Scripture. Explain, support, and champion your values and beliefs with God and with others in the learning community. The natural give-&-take of mutual *inquiry* and *advocacy* begins to redevelop neural connections necessary for active learning from a lasting, inner motivation. The Community-God loves us to bring our whole person into His presence so we can wrestle together.

I mentioned seven essential perspectives and skills to support natural learning aligning with God’s original design. Since these are also stand-alone topics, a subpage supports each of these seven. A *natural learning* culture...

1. Welcomes God’s Word as our Authority.
2. Relies on the Spirit as Resident Partner.
3. Draws on the Transforming Power of *Koinonia*.
4. Responds by Encountering Life with God’s truth.
5. Flips Engagement to Accelerate Learning.
6. Employs Questions to Mutually “*Draw Out*.”
7. Embeds a Big-Pix Framework into our Brains.

What are some of the benefits and values for the individual as we learn like this together?

Deepen understanding by jotting down your thoughts before reading my *Benefits for Learners*. And post a “comment” to this web page with additional benefits you discover.

What is your next step?

My encouragement is: jump in and practice *natural learning* now, even before you understand it more fully. Learn on the way since both Jesus and Paul seemed to train this way. First, invite followers into the practice. Then, explain the process later. As an example, 1 Thessalonians is Paul's explanation to the 3-week-old believers. He left because of persecution and immediately wrote this letter so they could reproduce a similar active learning culture. Such an approach cuts across the grain of how most of us have learned, first information then sometime later we use it. I trust Jesus to know best how we have been designed to learn.

I've simplified *natural learning* by interweaving God's design for learning into my *DiscipleMaking Companion* series. It will take you directly into a book of the Bible and be your *companion*. Gather a good friend or two with some desire to grow around God's Word. Order the first book in the *DiscipleMaking Companion* series on Amazon.com for an introductory price, *Philippians, Joy Overflowing, Word & Spirit*. Each *Companion* seamlessly integrates what I sketched out above and will expand on later, guiding you through the process as your ally. When you experience *natural learning* first-hand, then dig deeper from this experience of the style of learning I'm advocating as a context, yet only if needed.

Either dig deeper and wider into *natural learning* with the first essential, *Welcomes God's Word as our Authority*. Or with any of these PDF's related to this page that support *natural learning*: Layer Learning, Inquiry & Advocacy, Activate Intrinsic Motivation for Adult Learners, Deliberate Practice, Benefits for Learners (this, only after you **first** jot down your ideas!)

What two **benefits for learners** strike you so you **enjoy** the process of Life-Change?

Jesus has your back! Jesus Himself calls His followers "*disciples*," learners.

I've simplified the learning process, so it fits into any of our schedules, yet hopefully without lessening its impact.

Trust the Spirit to make it so for you.

Lord, make me a vessel who knows...

- ...the **Father** designed me to learn and to live loved.
- ...**Jesus** provides everything I need to learn and to live loved.
- ...the **Spirit** partners with me to actually learn and to live loved.