

Layer Learning

This ongoing learning community is about the Giver of the Bible and about principles and practices of studying His love-letter in a life impacting way. It's an incremental, lifelong process of growth in skills and in understanding in the context of community, one skill built upon another, one layer at a time.

These skills need to be introduced gradually at first and deliberately practiced enough to feel comfortable with them. I call this incremental-type learning "*layer learning*."

This best happens in an ongoing, community learning environment. Such learning in *koinonia*, drawing from the life of Jesus we share in common, provides the leisurely time to learn one facet and then later build upon it. It takes time and an ongoing commitment for new values to seep down into our inner being. This could be one reason why Jesus disciplined the Twelve over a three-year period...and still lost one. Lasting learning is incremental, connecting new truth with what has already been learned. Build upon the past, like climbing a summit.

"As we climb each in succession, many points in the landscapes seen from their summits will be found included in different views, but always in a new light and with a fresh horizon. New groupings will show new relations and bring to light, for the careful student, new aspects and uses."¹

By contrast, much of what I have been taught used the "drill down to bedrock" approach. A teacher studies a subject in depth for weeks or decades and passes it all along until he/she hits systematically exhausts the subject. This is certainly not wrong, and later in the process it's often helpful. However, it's not the *natural* way to learn, first one layer, then move onto other interconnected themes before circling back again to the first.

If I wanted to study geography, the normal way would be to first pull out a globe and begin to see the big picture of the entire planet. Then I would find a good map of the continent I decided to first study. Only then would I begin to study the capes and bays, the lakes and rivers, the mountains and the plains of that continent. Incremental layer learning, building knowledge upon previous knowledge.

A view of the whole materially assists in understanding the parts. And grasping the parts more fully then adds clarity and shadings to the whole. That's why I encourage *BIG-small-BIG* learning in one book of the Bible after another for maximum impact.

Also, learning must take place in a way that impacts our lives or we may become less motivated since one inner motivation for adult learners is *relevance*. Therefore, week-by-week we want to build one skill and value onto previously learned ones in a way that will help each of us to put into practice what we are learning.

I believe this active approach is the natural way God designed us to learn, one layer of learning after another, like children learn. This view of learning greatly impacts how we approach learning to study God's Word, "*BIG-small-BIG*" learning together in community. But training only occurs with hands-on practice rather than primarily with lecture-based learning, until questioning has taken root. It's vital that we each take ownership for our learning (and, to a certain degree, for the learning of the rest of us in this learning community).

¹ John Milton Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Nineteenth printing, July 1976 (first published 1884), p.25.

Personal Bible reading and study should and can be one of the most rewarding, exciting and fulfilling Christian experiences. It can really be fun! Exhilarating!

It's possible to study the Word and then to say, "*WOW! We had a great time today!*" This is the kind of fun we mean—a joyful, enriching experience because we are learning how to become discoverers in God's Word who are changed in His presence. We find satisfying joy in the process of discovering and experiencing the God of the Word together through the Word of God. God's Word is *truly*...

...more desirable than gold [and] sweeter also than honey (Psalm 19:10).