

Flips Engagement to Accelerate Learning

How do we accelerate learning?

What does it mean to “flip” our engagement in the Bible?

Two teachers in Colorado experimented by “*flipping*” the traditional classroom structure to accelerate learning in their students. Their students read the material and/or listened to taped lecture at home to prepare *beforehand* for group interactive learning. Now the classroom could be “turned upside down,” which is really “right side up.” Instead of classroom time being initial exposure to the lesson, now space opened to interact more deeply and broadly together. The model quickly became popular because of the increased learning and enjoyment of both the students and teachers.

Read Mark 4:1-20 as a brief example of *what* Jesus taught and also suggestive of *how* He taught. I suggest with elements of flipped learning. Jesus first told the crowd a parable about four soils while His Twelve listened (4:1-9). However, focus on *how* Jesus taught His Twelve closest followers, those He would send to the ends of the earth.

His disciples listened to Jesus’ new teaching with enough engaged, reflective interest to raise unanswered questions. This is what flipping our engagement does today to accelerate learning. It stirs a learning heart. As soon as they were alone with Jesus, His Twelve disciples asked Him to explain the parables (4:10). Small group time carves out space to dig deeper in order to respond more boldly (4:11-20).

Remember that Jesus taught as a typical Jewish Rabbi taught. That’s why His followers called Jesus “*Rabbi*.” Jesus had no “*Rabbi certificate*” but taught with a similar approach. Look at the brief glimpse of *how* Jesus learned at twelve in Luke 2:46-47 for an example of Rabbinic teaching. Interactively *asking* questions. *Listening* and reflecting. *Answering* with *understanding* All in a *group environment*. If Jesus had not already immersed Himself in the OT Scriptures, such a style could not have been effective.

I’m suggesting that the teaching of the parable to the crowd functioned similar for His Twelve in preparation before the small group as flipped learning does for us today. Jesus taught the *new culture of freedom* He brought with Him from heaven that flows out of changed hearts (the four soils). Jesus *embodies* His new message. For Jews already steeped in the OT foundation, Jesus could not give them books to read about this *new culture*. Or CD’s. Or podcasts.

Think about this. If you buy my reasoning, this makes Mark 4:1-20 more than a powerful teaching. It’s also a powerful model for SmallGroups today. I’m suggesting *how* Jesus taught in Mark 4:1-20 is a cryptic description of *what* Jesus taught and also *how*. Flipped learning aligns with how Jesus taught, sets the stage for informed interaction. An interactive learning style will accelerate learning.

Following are some of the advantages to flipping our engagement gathered in a recent survey with the percentage of change from the traditional approach.¹ Make your learning active by adding your own thoughts to why groups that flip accelerate learning.

1. 52% reported improvements when measuring learning retention through objective measurements.

¹ <https://www.chemedx.org/blog/flipped-classroom-advantages-and-challenges#:~:text=%20THE%20ADVANTAGES%20OF%20A%20FLIPPED%20CLASSROOM%20,students-students%20and%20student-teacher%20interaction%20%2820%25%29%20was...%20More%20>

2. With learning prior to group, the members liked the flexibility to learn at their own pace and to adapt to their own time schedules (23%). We all learn differently. Some prefer to power through and others appreciate the flexibility to pause, reflect and look at it again.
3. 20% marked the advantage of increased interaction. Since each came with at least a basic familiarity with the text, the group leader spends less time in directive teaching and more in dialog.
4. The learners expressed increased satisfaction (18%) and enjoyment (11%) in the flipped classroom.

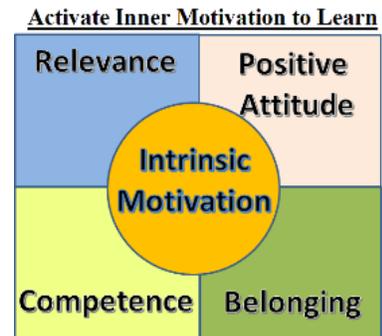
Most students described positive benefits towards flipped classrooms, when they actually prepared. Even in a group of followers of Jesus who long to grow, this is the push point. Each of us gets out of the interactive group learning something in proportion to what we put in. Such a style releases the natural curiosity in a learner. It provides more freedom to determine what to learn, how to learn and when to learn. The group now supports each other to become self-directed learners.

*How do these apply to a group soaking in the Bible with a bias towards **doing**?*

How high is your eager desire to grow more like Jesus in maturity and ministry?

Flipped learning also aligns with the four motivational factors for adult learners. Research points to at least four key factors that release inner motivation and inspire adults to become lifelong life-learners. The interconnection of all four accelerates learning in adults.²

1. Relevance: *Demonstrating value by relating learning to life:* A desire to find meaning is fundamental to humanity. Adult learners in particular dislike busywork. Adults need to know the reason for learning something. So relate learning to life. God’s image-bearers are active beings who desire to shape the course of our lives in relevant ways. *First*, create thoughtful and challenging learning experiences *within the group* that tap into the rich perspectives, exquisite variety, and deep-seated values of adult learners. Such an environment where meaning-making roams about promiscuously is the source of surprising new births.



Second, this fluid learning community stimulates personal, relevant responses that propel learning *out of* the formal classroom into significant arenas of our real-life experiences, connecting truth with daily life. **Doing** is a crucial key to learning. God’s people possess a strong need to apply what we have learned in our concrete and real world. We cannot respond to life and remain unchanged. As we bring these experiences back to the group, this also releases life and learning in others.

2. Positive Attitude: *Creating positive attitudes towards learning:* Our attitude predisposes us in a certain direction, positively or negatively. Particularly since many western Christians have negative past experiences with learning, realistic, positive expectations are essential at the beginning. **Joy** is the hallmark of God’s design for learning. Affirm in one another a favorable outlook towards learning. Provide a basis for hope. Inward motivation is released when learners see that what is coming will be valuable to them. Without this expectation, their will to take ownership and to learn rusts shut. With this belief, learners will make the indispensable choices to put out full

² Adapted from “Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn” by Wlodkoski. Chapter Three, “Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn,” is worth the price of the book.

effort, leading to active buy-in and ownership, which in turn is a key to learning. Adults need to take responsibility for their learning. Regardless of what they might add as imperfect learners, every member is vital, like each part of a body is. Communicate unqualified acceptance and a strong belief in their capacity as lifelong life-learners designed in the image of the Trinity.

2. Belonging: *Connecting with each other accelerates growth:* Creating a community environment in which both the learners and teachers feel respected and connected to one another develops a relaxed, stimulating place to learn. Cooperation is the norm for learning since we are social beings. As a community of learners, as mutually-accepting, encircling partners, we care as much about the learning of our peers as we do about our own learning. Perhaps on the horizontal plane, nothing is quite as powerful as community in a high-learning, no-shame culture. When we respond with authenticity from the center of who we really are, our desire to make sense of things and search out our full range of capacities grows. This fluid, playful, inclusive collaboration with one another develops a different relationship with discovery, frees us to tell our first-person story, enhances retention, opens up rich possibilities for relevant action, and maximizes growth as we become influence-able influencers.

4. Competence: *Experiencing growing competence in skills, values, &/or character:* As image-bearers, God created us to rule...to explore, perceive, evaluate, think about and change our surroundings to promote positive effects. We want to matter! Growing competence taps into our God-given yearning to count, to experience significance. Learning something valued is the single most powerful motivation for adult learners. This makes the process pleasurable and desirable...and fun! Success cultivates expectancy for continued success to improve skills, values and character. Successful learning drives us to learn more. So early-on in the process, encourage incremental, easy-to-learn, “quick-hits” success in crucial leverage points. Everyone is then inspired to learn when information is not just accumulated and hoarded by individuals, but willingly shared. *Each one teach one* as one learner in community shares a positive experience.

Stop now and ask yourself,

“Why are these four key ingredients so important to recapture healthy learning?” “How do these four key motivational elements interact?”

Solid learning theory is behind how Jesus taught and what we are attempting to reproduce in sowing a new culture like Jesus. Here are some suggested responses and activities that align well with how God designed our minds and encourage groups to accelerate learning.

“We learn best incrementally, one layer at a time.” So early-on in the process, encourage incremental, easy-to-learn, “quick-hits” success in crucial leverage points. **“Layer learning”** learns one basic layer on the first theme, and moves on to others before returning to learn another layer on the first. This spacing and interleaving strengthens retrieval.

“Learn in a conversational and personalized style.” Recent studies show a 40% increase in post-learning retention with a conversational style. This style is a natural outworking of *natural* community learning. Flipping learning provides familiarity with the text and forms a solid base for our interactive conversation around Scripture.

“Touch our affections.” Our emotions/affections must scream to our brain with what is clear and crucial. The quickest way to freedom is to increase our passion for God in a *“naturally supernatural,”* interactive, fun-laced environment. God fashioned us to pursue our highest passions. As we experience change in ourselves and as we pass it along to others, this taps into

our inner desire to become lifelong *life*-learners. Again, if you have flipped learning and prepared before group, the chances of God stirring your life at the affections level greatly increases.

*“Think more deeply as a lifelong *life*-learner & doer.”* Unless we as learners actively flex the neurons in our brains, nothing much happens in our heads. Don’t bring our thick filters to learning like an *“old wineskin,”* seeing only what others have told us. This would then be an *“echo,”* hollow, distant and lifeless rather than a *“voice.”* Unless you have prepared, how can you bring anything fresh to the group from Scripture? Learn to be confident in our Resident Teacher, the Spirit of God.

Turn what we hear as an *“echo”* into our *“voice”* by making it our own. First temporarily lay down our preconceptions. *Inquire* into the truth with fresh eyes. Then pick up our views and values again. *Integrate* the newly learned with what we previously believed. Discard the outdated. Hang on more tightly to what stands the test of scrutiny. Advocate with others, giving space for disagreement without being disagreeable. And put learned truth into practice personally.

Imagine a learning environment around Scripture where we freely brainstorm together with people we trust over *“freshly baked spiritual bread of life”* focused on what is essential, like the priorities we embed in our minds for better retrieval (the *seventh essential of interactive learning*).

It will take time and elbow grease to learn how to learn naturally. Preparing for group so you have *“fresh bread”* from the Spirit demands effort. If this is new, don’t despair. I was not taught in such a way. I see few models around that tap into natural learning. When we do tap into it, though, we touch powerful experiences from our past. We often tap into the same type of fun and spontaneity that we have experienced at play! I believe God formed and fashioned us to also learn in similar ways.

“If you really want to learn, and you want to learn more quickly and more deeply, pay attention to how you pay attention. Think about how you think. Learn how you learn. Most of us did not take courses on metacognition or learning theory when we were growing up. We were *expected* to learn, but rarely *taught* to learn. [The] trick is to get your brain to see the new material you’re learning as Really Important. Crucial to your well-being. As important as a tiger. Otherwise, you’re in for a constant battle, with your brain doing its best to keep the new content from sticking. [Respond to do] anything that increases brain activity.”³

How can we learn to learn naturally? How can we tap into the creativity for which God fashioned us in Genesis 1 and 2?

Here are a few tips.⁴ Please add your own in the margin. Most importantly, begin to practice these as you read and study Scripture. Integrate them into your spiritual journey and in your everyday work and personal life.

“Slow down.” There is a proper place for rapid, repeated reading to fix the full scope in mind (see *“Tips for Improved Reading,”* for instance). Additionally, stop and think. This is God’s design behind the power of meditation and why I encourage us to slow down and really see a

³ Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), pp.102-103.

⁴ Jennifer Green and Andrew Stellman, *Head First PMP* (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, Inc, 2007), p. xxix. The italicized points come from this book and some of the description.

chapter. The more deeply we force our brains to think, the better chance of learning, retaining, and changing.

“Do the exercises.” Assignments are not for busy work. Refuse to tap into your negative learning experiences from school! No lasting learning occurs without doing, so choose to be a doer. Figure out what works best for you and what doesn't. Try new things. The more different ways we see, hear and experience what is essential, the more quickly it's really learned.

“Read the questions & text.” I do not intersperse questions throughout the text as a technique (experts call these “rhetorical questions”). Do you know why I ask questions? I want you to go back (after quickly reading the whole) and think deeply. Questions cause us to think, firing more neurons in our brain. Ask questions yourself of what you read. When a question remains unanswered, our brain springs to action to find an answer. Our brain often works overtime in the background until it's satisfied. Often I discover answers to questions months after I asked. Tap into this God-given design.

“Make this the last challenging thing you read before bed.” I regularly meditate on something significant before going to bed. God-designed our brains to focus in our sleep on whatever it was last engaged in. Our brains need time on its own to do more processing. A vital part of the learning (especially the transfer into long-term memory where we want the crucial to go) happens after we put the book down, even at night. What a waste to give this time to what is fleeting! Often I pray this before I go to sleep:

“I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; **even at night my heart instructs me** (Ps 16:7, **emphasis added**).

“Drink water. Lots of it.” Our brains work best in a nice bath of fluid. While you learn, hydrate your body even before you feel thirsty.

“Talk about it. Out loud.” Speaking activates a different part of your brain. Engage in dialog with others (best) or with yourself if no one else is around. This is one of the many reasons why people learn best in a community learning environment. Dialog with Jesus about truth from Scripture in the inner conversation in your mind.

“Listen to your brain.” Pay attention to whether your brain feels overloaded or flooded. **Why?** When I feel myself starting to skim material just to get through or forget what I just read (more than usual!), my brain is shouting *“I need a break, bud!”* Past a certain point, we will only put in our time yet not learn much. So, listen to your brain without coddling it. Of course maximum impact, begin with our preparation for group as soon as possible so we have leisure to reflect and put it into practice.

“Feel something!” Your brain needs to know that what you are learning matters. Tell God how important Scripture is and ask your brain to listen. Feel the emotions of the author. Use your imaginations to smell the aromas, hear the sounds, feel the pain and joy of those in the story. Live it. This is why meditation is critical to learning and to LifeChange.

“Create something!” Apply what you are learning to your 24/7 lives. Ant-steps are okay but do something. Then bring that experience, small as it may have been, back to our learning community. As you talk about it out loud, it is deepened in you and experienced by us. This in turn will accelerate learning both in you and also in others.

Next Steps

1. Print out the **PDF of this page**, mark it up and make this your own.

2. Print PDF's to deepen key aspects, like *Adult Intrinsic Motivations*, *Layer Learning* and *Tips for Improved Reading*.
3. Continue to the *sixth* of the seven essentials, *Employs Questions to Mutually “Draw Out.”*