



Facilitating Relational Learning

Life-Changing Small Groups



Facilitating Relational Learning (previously published as *Facilitator Training*)

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Preface

Welcome to *Facilitating Relational Learning*! We are so glad you have joined us on this journey to explore how facilitating fosters growth in our relationships with God and with one another. We look forward to all the ways God will transform us as we study his Word together.

Small group discipleship is nothing new. Jewish rabbis have used it for centuries to pass on rabbinical teachings through instructing small groups of men. In the New Testament, we see Jesus using a small group to disciple others as well. He brings together a group of unlikely people to spend three years together—learning, growing, maturing, struggling, and eventually ministering together. We discover much from watching this small group of people learn and grow together.

As Jesus prepares to ascend to heaven following his resurrection, he gives the disciples one last instruction. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20).

How would they go about this task? Through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples do as Jesus commands. They make disciples and establish churches. They teach others the things that Jesus taught them. Then, these new disciples train reliable people to share the way of Jesus with others. Through ever-widening bands of circles rippling through time and space, we, too, learn about Jesus. We have become Christ followers through other people’s faithfulness to Jesus’s command. And now this commission has been passed down to us.

Entrust’s desire is to equip Christian leaders to serve however and wherever God leads them. We take our name and our mission from 2 Timothy 2:2: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (NIV).

How do we, as 21st-century Christ followers, pick up the mantle? How do we make disciples amid the busyness of our days? How do we compete with all the options demanding our time and attention?

In *Facilitating Relational Learning* (FRL), we will explore how we can continue to grow in Christ and invite others to grow with us. We will see how the small group model is one effective way to continue the process of discipling others. This model of discipling others is essential to the ministry of the church. It enables us to fulfill the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations.

As we expand our vision beyond our immediate circles of friends and church members, we see a world that needs Jesus. The good news is that the gospel is exploding in some parts of the world. It is hard for church leaders to keep up with the growth. The number of new congregations far exceeds the number of equipped pastors. This growth results in a tremendous need for trained pastors who can teach the Word of God.

We believe one significant way to help solve this need lies in effective, accessible, church-based training. When we take Jesus's command to make disciples and invest ourselves in training others, God can use us to be part of the solution to equip disciples. Jesus starts with twelve disciples. Through the ongoing discipleship and multiplication from the first century until now, God has raised up over two billion Christians worldwide.

The church needs men and women to fulfill the work of evangelizing, discipling, shepherding, serving, and leading the flock. This practical multiplication strategy that Jesus and Paul used to train the first-century Christ followers can make a difference in the global need for worldwide training. Our individual steps may be small. Yet when we gather with other believers, working toward the same goal of making disciples, the church strengthens, multiplies, and thrives.

So, let's get started! Again, we welcome you to *Facilitating Relational Learning*. Many people are praying for you as you begin this module. One of our prayers is that you become one in the line of history who passes down biblical truth from one generation to another. Blessings on the journey ahead!

Understanding Icons



1.1

Assignment: questions that focus on course content.

Record your written responses and bring them with you to the trainings. You will refer to some of your answers during the module.



Adoration: an encouragement to respond to what God is saying to you as you go through this study. Praise him for what he is teaching you.

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson, you will be able to

1. describe the unique ways adults learn
2. identify the characteristics of facilitated learning
3. reflect on ways to incorporate effective group learning through facilitation
4. practice the learning cycle as a tool to maximize learning

Lesson 1

Adult Learning

Growing up, John struggled in school. Other students always seemed to understand the concepts more quickly than he did. The classes seemed irrelevant to his life, leading him to drop out. He then decided to do an apprenticeship because he liked working with his hands. While he was in his early twenties, a friend started asking him questions about the purpose of his life and shared about his faith in Jesus. John became curious and wanted to learn more.

Gradually, John came to believe that Jesus loved him and offered him eternal life. He entrusted his life to God and became involved in his church. One day his friend invited John to an engaging Bible study. John hesitated because of his difficult school experience. Although he wanted to learn more about his faith, he worried that everyone would know more than he did. He feared he would feel inadequate and become discouraged. His friend encouraged him to come—they would learn together. Bravely, he went and was surprised by the warm welcome and the way the group explored the Bible passage together.

**1.1**

Think of the first Bible study you attended.

- A. In what ways do you relate to the feelings John had?
- B. How would you describe your experience?

Uniqueness of Adult Learners

Humans are curious; they desire stimulating, engaging, and meaningful learning. They come with unique backgrounds, characteristics, and expectations. To be effective in teaching adult learners, we need a good understanding of their needs and perspectives. What interests him? What helps her learn? How does each individual see the world? Effective teachers look at the learning process from the learner's perspective.



Humans are curious; they desire stimulating, engaging, and meaningful learning.

Common Characteristics of Adult Learners

Adult learners generally have some common characteristics that shape their learning decisions.

Adult learners are often

- motivated
- self-directed
- autonomous
- voluntary learners
- goal-oriented
- collaborative
- relevancy-oriented
- practical
- focused on results

They bring to the learning environment

- life experiences
- work experiences
- their opinions, values, and beliefs
- unique personality and personal strengths
- wealth of knowledge
- readiness to learn¹

Factors which influence their learning are

- life stages
- multiple responsibilities
- limited time
- prior learning experiences
- level of support and encouragement from family and friends
- fear/insecurity of current ability to learn
- evolving technology
- focused on the personal benefits of the learning experience

The combination of responsibilities and roles, life experiences and resulting perspectives, as well as potential anxieties associated with new learning experiences help us identify the best practices for adult learning. A teacher, or a facilitator of learning, can capitalize on these realities about adults by engaging them in conversation that reflects their life experience on the subject. Discussion allows them to apply new learning to their past experiences. This dialogue can help adults value how they interpret information and help them develop more effective ways of handling life's experiences.

When teachers do not respect the adult learner, interacting and gleanings from their experiences, they miss an opportunity to engage with them. However, when teachers have a biblical understanding of how God uniquely makes each learner, they begin to draw out this God-given design. This is the start of the process of facilitation.



1.2

- A. Psalm 139:13-16 reminds us that God was intimately involved in creating each of us and that he has recorded our days in his book. How might this knowledge affect our view of learning?
- B. What have been your positive learning experiences? Negative ones?
- C. As you matured, in what ways did your learning change?

Adults have a reasonably good understanding of what they want to learn and why they want to learn it. As teachers, we need to consider why the learners are here, and what their hopes and expectations are for our time together. Then, we develop our content accordingly.

Human nature often drives us to do what was modeled for us. Out of habit, we recreate the kind of learning experiences we have had. We tend to instruct in the same manner we were instructed. Therefore, it is best to evaluate if we are using the most effective methods of learning for our audience.

Metaphors of Learning

Metaphors can help us make sense of life by comparing an object or concept to something else to help us more fully understand it. In education, metaphors have been used to describe the learning process.

Traditional Metaphors

Two common metaphors that have been used to describe education are 1) filling up an empty container and 2) a manufacturing process. In the filling up of an empty container metaphor, the teacher pours his wisdom into the students (the empty container). Teachers are the givers of knowledge; students are the receivers. In the manufacturing metaphor, the teachers are working toward producing a uniform product. They strive to conform the students to the established educational standards; therefore, there is little time for individual learning to take place. When teachers are viewed as the authority, the needs of the student are often discounted. In some cultures, questioning a teacher is considered disrespectful. In both of these metaphors, teachers are the possessors of knowledge, and they share this knowledge with the learners.

These traditional metaphors often fall short because they are focused on the teacher directing the learning process rather than recognizing the needs of the student. Some resulting attitudes and behaviors from these approaches are demonstrated in this chart.



The Authoritative Teacher	The Students
is the expert	need the teacher's knowledge
knows the best way to teach	are expected to learn as delivered
is the potter	are the clay
controls the learning environment	role is to comply
speaks authoritatively	listen passively
decides the content	receive the content

We want to acknowledge that there is a time and a place for authoritative teaching and lecturing; however, the scope of this workbook is incorporating the facilitating style into our learning environments, relationships, and small groups. There are excellent resources that discuss other teaching formats such as sermons, lectures, panels, and podcasts, among others.



1.3

- A. In what ways have you experienced these metaphors of learning?
- B. How might these metaphors hinder or support the learning experience for adults?
- C. What are some learning metaphors in your culture?

Alternative Metaphors

In contrast to the traditional metaphors, let us consider some alternatives.

Gardening

One helpful metaphor for learning is gardening. Plants do not have to be told how to grow. Gardeners cannot force them to grow. Gardeners can till the soil, add fertilizer, and water the ground. But the plants grow by themselves as part of a natural process that God has created. Though the gardener does her job, she must be patient in waiting for the plants to grow into the desired harvest.

Journeying

In this metaphor, learners are travelers who experience their educational journey differently from one another based on their unique experiences. These experiences, in turn, determine how and what they learn. Travelers learn from one another along the way. This life-long journey of learning results in a rich and rewarding journey for each individual.

Hunting

As our world has become more connected through online technology, some people use hunting as a metaphor for learning. People hunt for and choose what they want to learn. Therefore, knowing where to find helpful and accurate information is paramount to learning. While universities or trade schools used to be a common post-educational route, people now choose their own path for additional learning experiences.



1.4

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7, Psalm 1:1-3, and Philippians 4:8-9.

Each of these passages describe possible ways people might learn.

What do you glean from these verses that enhance your understanding of learning?

Addressing these metaphors leads us to ask the question, “how can we effectively teach adult learners?” The answer can be found in facilitated learning.

Facilitated Learning

What is facilitated learning? It is a method by which the teacher guides the learning process primarily through asking questions that result in growth for both teacher and learner. Successful teaching is not demonstrating how much the teacher knows. Rather, it is when the learners absorb and integrate the information into their lives. Because this facilitated learning



**Facilitated learning –
guiding the learning
process through
asking questions.**

method employs an interactive dynamic between the teacher and student, we prefer to use the word facilitator instead of teacher.

When a facilitator views himself as someone who facilitates learning, the focus is on the needs of the students and the learning process. Some characteristics and attitudes of this approach are listed in the following table.

The Facilitative Teacher	The Learners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is collaborative uses questions engages with the learners creates learning experiences fosters discovery knows his audience provides a springboard for learning is a co-learner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> actively participate in learning think critically and reflectively engage with the content learn interactively with others make discoveries receive individualized material eagerly explore related ideas are co-learners

Facilitators in adult education join the learners as peers and equals, shifting the focus from what the teacher says and does to what the learner says and does—a significant shift. An effective facilitator makes learning more accessible by guiding and being a companion in the learning process. Facilitators and learners alike will draw upon their own experiences and expertise and, in the process, develop a deeper understanding of the subject.



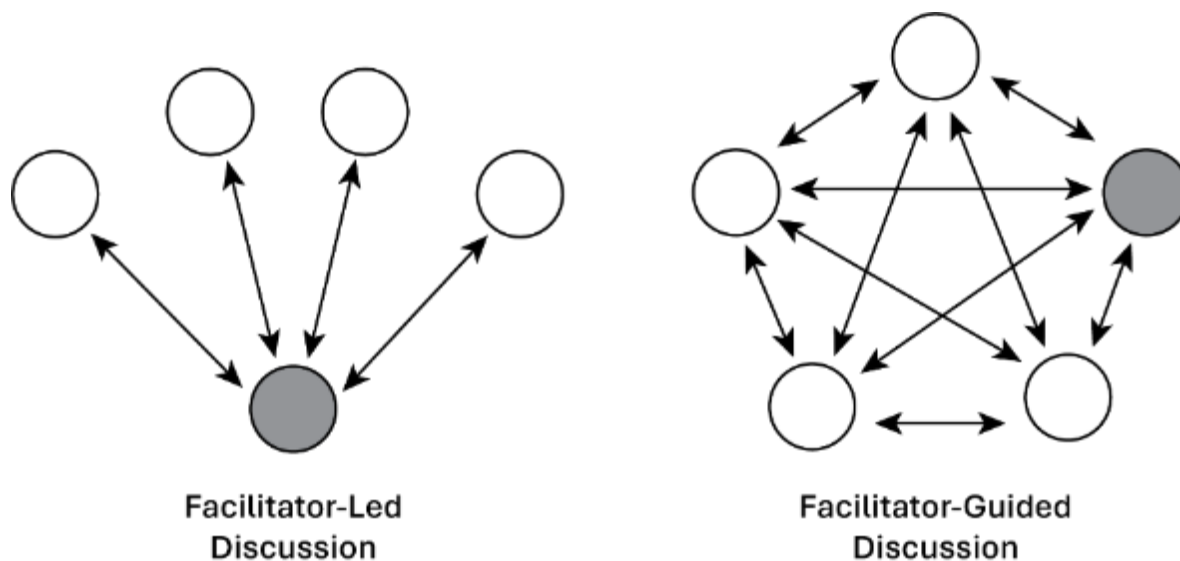
Viewing teachers as facilitators of learning parallels the Hebrew view of education. Rabbis sit with their students, ask questions, and all learn in community.

One of the objectives of the facilitator is to empower learners (or participants) to think critically and reflectively. In order to accomplish this task, the facilitator must be ready to take on many different roles. The facilitator acts as an encourager of learning, a guide along the path, a caretaker of a garden, a fellow-learner of ideas, and an

explorer of God's world. By engaging in these roles, the facilitator adapts to the needs of the participants.

Those who have studied adult education consider the discussion method an irreplaceable part of adult learning.² One of the most significant roles of the facilitator is to cultivate an environment where discussion can thrive. This type of discussion occurs when

participants engage, not only with the material, but with each other, building off one another's thoughts (facilitator-guided discussion) rather than always referring back to the facilitator (facilitator-led discussion). The following two diagrams illustrate the difference between facilitator-led and facilitator-guided discussions. When we use the facilitator-guided model, we engage all members equally. This model values the contributions of each participant, and thus no one person dominates the conversation.



Facilitators can accomplish guided discussions by limiting their responses to each comment. By using open body language, waiting for others to respond, and occasionally asking, “what else,” the facilitator encourages more participation by shifting the focus away from themselves and back to the group. When the conversation moves from one person to another, group members learn from one another. We refer to this type of movement within the discussion as *pinging* (one response pings off another). These dynamics foster a richer and deeper learning environment for all group members. These concepts will be considered more fully in Lesson 7.

1.5

Read Deuteronomy 11:18-21, Joshua 4:6-7, and Mark 8:27-29.

- A. In what ways do you see facilitated learning in these passages?
- B. What are some ways you have experienced facilitated learning?

Effective Adult Learning

Facilitator-guided discussions are an effective way for adults to learn because this environment encourages the active participation of all members. The members become co-learners as each one participates. The learning process is enhanced as they share from their backgrounds, experiences, and expertise.

Integrating New Knowledge

Adult learners often embrace being a lifelong learner. However, as adults, we can decide whether we want to continue to grow and learn or be satisfied without advancing or developing. In educational terms, this idea is known as a growth or fixed mindset. A growth mindset is believing that we can continue to learn and to make changes; a fixed mindset is believing that we cannot.

A growth mindset looks for ways to overcome challenges, listens to feedback, persists through difficulties, and pursues new knowledge. Someone with a growth mindset takes risks in pursuing new skills. A fixed mindset is the opposite. Someone with a fixed mindset will often give up when they encounter difficulties, may have a hard time thinking of alternative solutions to problems, and will avoid new things for fear of failure. They can be offended by feedback even when it is given in a constructive manner. Small group settings provide a climate and atmosphere of trust and growth that encourage adults to continue learning.

Studies in psychology have discovered that the brain can adapt and change over time. Although the brain changes more rapidly during childhood, it continues changing throughout one's lifespan in response to life experiences. Therefore, it is possible to learn new patterns of thinking and behaving and to develop new skills and abilities.

Because of this fact, it becomes essential to have lifelong stimulation to maintain optimal brain health. A small group provides a helpful context for reflecting on an experience through several people's views and, therefore, can stimulate new ways of interpreting life and values.

For adults, learning becomes more than acquiring knowledge to pass a test or earn a degree. Learning becomes a way to improve our lives. How does knowledge become integral to our thinking and doing? In their book *The Learning Cycle*, Duane and Muriel Elmer describe a process to incorporate new information into our lives. One piece of the learning process is to

- write what is significant to us in our own words
- then describe why it is meaningful
- and finally, note how it might impact our lives³

These steps can be integrated into small groups settings. One example of using this process is to have group members write down something they want to remember near the end of the study. The following week, they can briefly share what they wrote, why that is important to them, and how they envision using it. This practice moves information from our short-term memory into working memory. This process is important because it solidifies new learning and moves us one step closer to behavioral change that glorifies God. Our small groups provide a place for us to practice the learning cycle.



1.6

Let us practice this learning process.

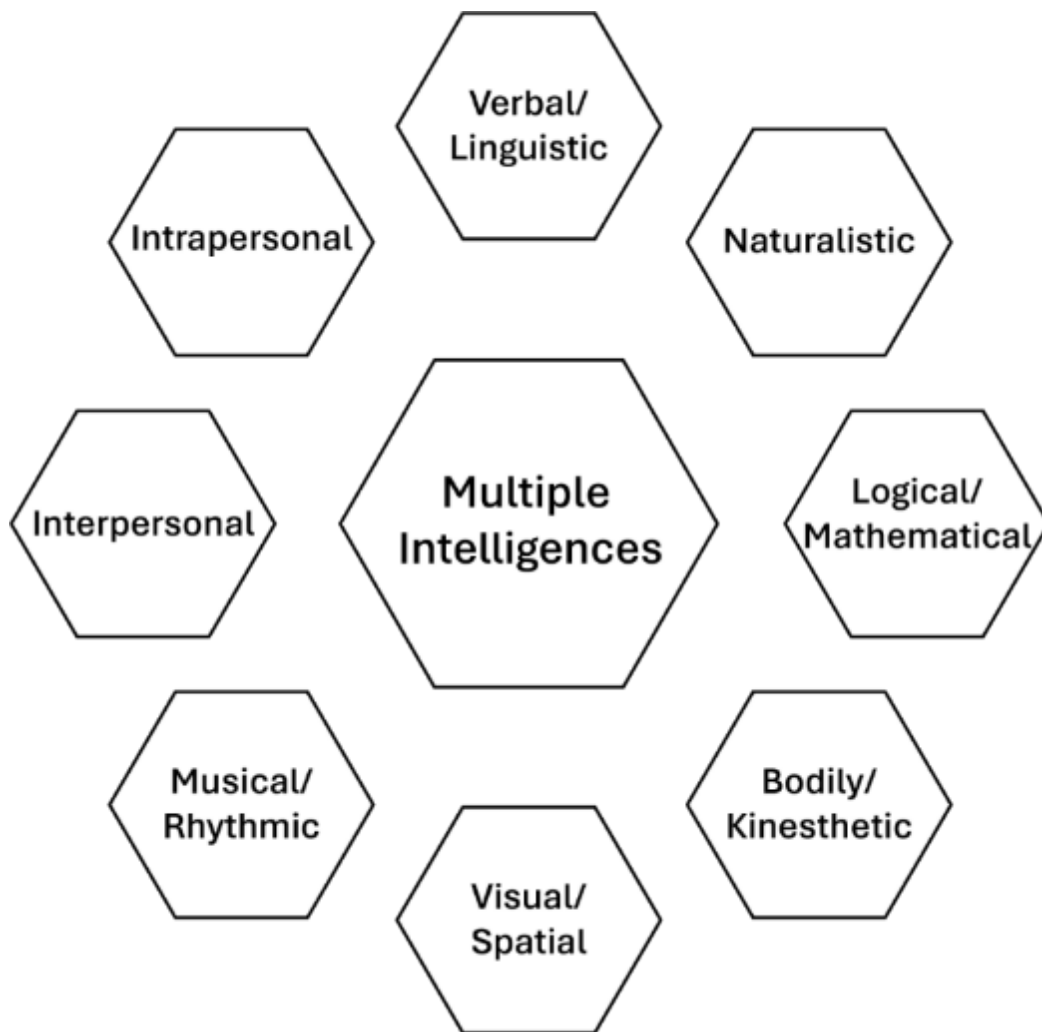
- A. Thinking about what you have read so far, write down in your own words something that has been significant to you.
- B. Describe why this concept is meaningful to you.
- C. State how you might use this concept.
- D. Share with someone what you have learned.

Another helpful learning method is called *action, reflection, action*. When we use this method, we practice a skill (action), then reflect on what went well and what we would change (reflection), we can then implement what we learned the next time we practice the skill (action). In other words, we try something, we think about how it went, then we do it again.

We use this approach of action, reflection, action during our training module to help us learn and apply what we are studying. We will practice facilitating a discussion (action), we will talk about what worked well (reflection), then we will modify our facilitation skills for next time (action).

Absorbing Information

Another factor that impacts learning is the way God creates people with unique personalities, talents, and ways to absorb information. Some educators describe the ways we learn and process new information as kinds of intelligences. Although this theory has been called multiple intelligences, it is not referring to intellectual capacity. It refers to the preferences and natural inclinations we have for receiving information. We will likely recognize ourselves in more than one of the following descriptions. Some of the more common types of multiple intelligences are described in the following graphic.⁴



Verbal/Linguistic

- loves words, reading, writing, telling stories, debate, languages, conversations
- learns best by speaking, listening, seeing words, memorizing, meditating

Logical/Mathematical

- loves numbers, patterns, how things relate, logic, experiments
- learns best by reasoning, problem-solving, categorizing, classifying, reflecting

Visual/Spatial

- loves drawing, building, designing, creating
- learns best by thinking in pictures, watching videos, doing puzzles, reading maps and charts

Bodily/Kinesthetic

- loves dancing, movement, crafts, manipulating objects
- learns best by moving around, touching, talking, using their body

Naturalistic

- loves animals, geography, weather, interacting with their surroundings
- learns best by collecting, classifying, learning in the natural world

Musical/Rhythmic

- loves sounds, melodies, pitches, rhythms, keeping time
- learns best by creating rhythms and melodies, singing, humming, playing an instrument

Interpersonal

- loves being with people, leading, organizing, communicating, mediating conflicts
- learns best by sharing, comparing, relating, cooperating, asking questions

Intrapersonal

- loves working alone, pursuing their own interests, following their instincts, dreaming
- learns best by having individualized projects, their own space, self-paced instructions

Being fearfully and wonderfully made, we all have a blend of how we absorb information. No one person fits into any one category; we all absorb information in multiple ways. We can maximize learning by knowing the various intelligences and incorporating them into our facilitations.

The Way We Process

Another aspect of adult learning is processing styles and speeds. These aspects affect group dynamics as well as individual learning.

Internal processors are individuals who gather their thoughts and formulate their ideas before stating them aloud. They develop their thoughts internally before expressing them to the group.

External processors are those individuals who process by talking. They understand what they think by speaking about their thoughts and exploring ideas verbally. They often cannot think without talking. We need to create an environment that allows everyone to contribute meaningfully.

Processing speed also affects how quickly people respond. It refers to the rate at which a person is able to identify, categorize, and incorporate information. Since all of our brains are different, we have a wide range of processing times. Some people make rapid

connections; others need more time. The rate at which information is processed in no way correlates to intellectual capacity.

As facilitators, we can create space for processing styles by

- discussing these different styles early on in our small group
- reminding the external processors to sometimes pause before speaking
- encouraging internal processors to speak up
- providing occasional opportunities for people to write down their thoughts before answering
- having members share their thoughts with a partner before sharing them with the group
- inviting people to imagine or visualize a scenario
- asking external processors to record the group's responses



1.7

- A. What was useful for you from the above information?
- B. Thinking about how you absorb and process information, what helps you learn?
- C. What are some ways you can continue to be an adult learner in your life?

By recognizing and appreciating the different ways we learn and process information, we honor and value each other and the way God made us. We can offer space and time to our participants: quiet space for the internal processor, verbal space for the external processor. As facilitators, we desire to hear from everyone so that each person has the opportunity to share his or her experience and expertise. Within the body of Christ, we benefit and learn from one another. The discussion-based format of facilitation enables all members to think deeply and participate fully in this adult learning experience.

Lesson Summary

- To be effective in teaching adult learners, we need to have a good understanding of their needs and perspectives.
- Effective facilitators look at the learning process from the participant's perspective.
- Adults have a good understanding of what they want to learn and why they want to learn it.
- In education, metaphors have been used to describe the learning process.
- Facilitated learning is a method by which the facilitator guides the learning process primarily through asking questions that result in growth for both facilitator and learner.
- Facilitator-guided discussions are an effective way for adults to learn because this environment encourages the active participation of all members.
- Just as God gives people various personalities and talents, he also gives us different ways to absorb information.



Lesson 1 Review Questions

What did you find significant in this lesson?

Why is this meaningful to you?

How might it impact your life?



O Father, we thank you for the many ways we can learn and for the variety of learners you have created. Each one is a gift to us. We praise you for giving us the body of Christ so that we can learn from one another.

NOTES

¹ Based on Shikha Kapur, “Understanding the Characteristics of an Adult Learner,” *Jamia Journal of Education, An International Biannual Publication* 2 (2015): 111-121.

² Based on Muriel Elmer and Duane Elmer, *The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020) and Jane Vella, *Training Through Dialogue: Promoting Effective Learning and Change with Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995).

³ Muriel Elmer and Duane Elmer, *The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 31-32, 42.

⁴ Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York City: Basic Books, 2011).