



# ADULT LEARNING: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

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## Three Big Ideas:

- a) God wants to use every single person for kingdom contribution. When adults join our groups, we can assume that God is up to something very good in their lives
- b) It is not up to us to be the answer-person, or wisdom-dispenser, or carry the heavy weight of each adults' learning, healing, and next steps.
- c) It IS up to us to cultivate the conditions for adults to discover for themselves what God has been and is doing in their lives, and what might be next.

## 1. Lifelong Learning

"We understand that the deepest lessons are not learned in textbooks, but instead are discovered as learning meets life." Steven Garber, *Fabric of Faithfulness*

- Adults retain what they discover for themselves.
- A person is an "adult" when they take responsibility for themselves.
- The holistic nature of our lives creates endless opportunities for learning.
- Dallas Willard says, "It is in the stuff of our everyday lives that we encounter the furnace of transformation."
- In our ministry settings, one size does not fit all. How can we walk alongside adults more individually to enhance their unique learning?

## 2. Dynamics of Adult Learners

What are you curious about these days? What are you seeking to learn? What are you currently working on that you are finding really energizing? (We broke into groups of four and discussed for 10 minutes. This provided insight and energy.)

- Adults are self-directed learners.
- When adults show up we can trust that God is up to something good in their lives.
- Another way to say this, "adults vote with their feet and time."
- Every adult has something to say. Trust this to be true.
- Adults will not participate until they feel safe to do so.
- Conversations within the group, of 2 or 3, really helps create safety and engagement.
- Adults mature and develop uniquely. Be patient. The heavy lifting is not on you.



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### 3. Adult-centered Approaches to Learning

#### The Land of Fools

*Once a man strayed into the world known as the Land of Fools where he saw a number of people fleeing in terror from a field where they had been trying to harvest wheat. "There is a monster in that field," they told him. Upon close examination the man saw that it was a watermelon.*

*The stranger offered to kill the monster for them. He walked into the field, cut the melon from its stalk, took a slice and began to eat it. Now the people were more terrified of him than they had been of the melon. They drove him away with pitchforks crying, "He will kill us next, unless we get rid of him."*

*Years later a second man strayed into the Land of Fools and the same thing happened to him. But, instead of offering to help them with the monster, he agreed with them that it must be dangerous, and by tiptoeing away from it with them he gained their confidence. He spent a long time with them in their houses until he could teach them, little by little, the basic facts, which would enable them not only to lose their fear of melons, but even to cultivate them.*

#### What does this story have to do with facilitating learning for adults?

- The answers are in the room.
- Start where people are!!
- Pam shared the story of John Wilson, a professor who led a graduate level class with ONLY questions. This forced the adult students to name why they were there, what they hoped for, sharing introductions about themselves, and making decisions together.
- As we facilitate adults, are we OPENING UP THE SPACE, or are we OCCUPYING THE SPACE?
- The Listener-Talker Continuum. Listener 1..2..3..4..5..6..7..8..9..10 Talker  
A helpful exercise to provide language for where we each fall and manage discussion over time.
- Another phrase, W.A.I.T. Why Am I Talking?
- Repeatedly ask adults for their input and ideas and use them to adjust.

### 4. Leaning into Life Experiences

**Poll Question:** Which picture most speaks to you as a way of describing where you find yourself these days? Choose a number on the poll question. (This exercise modeled a way to include visual entries into the discussion of "Where are you?")

- Sharing our stories gives God the opportunity to reframe, refresh, restore, and renew our experiences for good.

- Every adult wants to participate well. Inviting discussion and asking questions focused on a concrete experience shared, a short reading is VERY helpful to adults.
- Talking and writing about our life experiences helps us lean into self-discovery for the good of others and healthy maturity over time.
- Adults learn best when the new learning is related to their life experience. (Knowles) Tapping into their life experience is “the elephant in the room” when engaging adult learners, whether you are guiding a Bible study or preparing a sermon or leading an automobile mechanics workshop.
- The history of adult education was grounded in helping people to be free, empowered, and hopeful.

## 5. Being a Guide

“We have maps and map-makers ad nauseum in the church in North America. What we need are a few more mountain guides.” James Houston

- Providing a patient presence and care over time.
- The *heart of a teacher* is a willingness to be oneself, not to wear a mask or play a role. Your authentic self is exactly what others seek.
- A guide suggests, notices, shares when asked.
- A guide leads gently.
- Relax—let Jesus do the heavy lifting (Matthew 11:28-30)

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VantagePoint3 is a ministry that helps adults discover more deeply who God is, who they are, and what God wants to do through them. Our deep conviction is that God wants people to grow up into maturity in Christ. VP3 partners with church leaders, as well as men and women in the marketplace, seminaries, and home who are looking for a proven, integrated process, like VP3’s *The Journey*, to help them deepen and develop adults in Jesus’ name. ([vantagepoint3.org](http://vantagepoint3.org))

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