

Unit 4: Spiritual Development

Lesson 1: Everything you need to know to grow spiritually (to mature).

Main Point: As the first lesson of unit four, the learner will explore several “spiritual learning styles” and learn which style is most effective in helping them grow spiritually.

The History: Spiritual maturity is one of the most widely sought after traits while at the same time being the most difficult to attain. This is typically because spiritual maturity is only gained through spiritual growth, and spiritual growth has been portrayed as being something it is not: A standard set of requirements, tasks, and necessary knowledge that applies to all people. In the same way that humans have different learning styles in classroom and academic settings, we have different learning styles spiritually as well. It is detrimental to assume that each Christian can grow spiritually using the same technique and approach. This lesson will explore the different “spiritual learning styles” and help the learner find which one applies to them.

The Scripture:

1. **Ephesians 4:11-14**—It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God **and become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. **Then we will no longer be infants**, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.
2. **Colossians 4:12**—Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, **mature and fully assured**.
3. **Hebrews 5:13-6:3**—Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. **But solid food is for the mature**, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (6:1) Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.
4. **James 1:2-4**—Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
5. **1 Peter 2:1-3**—Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that **by it you may grow up in your salvation**, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The Facts:

1. Characteristics leading to and descriptions* of maturity from Ephesians 4
 - a. Works of Service leads to maturity
 - b. Unity in the Faith leads to maturity
 - c. Knowledge of the Son of God leads to maturity
 - d. *Attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ
 - e. *Not blown by every wind of teaching
 - f. *Not blown by the cunning and craftiness of men
2. Descriptions of maturity from Hebrews 5-6
 - a. Acquainted with the teachings of righteousness
 - b. Trained themselves to distinguish good from evil
 - c. Moved on from the elementary teachings about Christ
3. Descriptions of maturity from Colossians, James, and 1 Peter
 - a. Stand firm in all the will of God
 - b. Completion of perseverance from the testing of your faith
 - c. Have tasted that the Lord is good (leads to spiritual growth)

The Application:

God has created each person to fit within certain developmental learning styles. As a result, it would be ineffective to assume everyone learns in the same way. Based on that fact and taking into consideration the academic learning styles, a new concept has been developed called the “spiritual learning styles.” This lesson will take you through an overview of these seven styles and help you discover which one best describes the way you grow spiritually.

Once you understand your “spiritual learning style,” you will be able to facilitate and increase the amount of spiritual growth that you experience. You will no longer have to try a hundred different things to see what works because you’ll understand how you learn and how to go about challenging yourself. Understanding your learning style will impact the way you receive spiritual information from here on out. Also, in the same way someone can fit into more than one category of the academic learning styles, (someone can be an auditory and kinesthetic learner) they can also have more than one spiritual learning style.

Before moving on, you should understand that a few things are going to be part of the maturation process regardless of what type of learning style you are. These things are constants of spiritual maturity, because while there are different learning styles, the scriptures are clear in describing what a mature Christian looks like and how one acts. These learning styles are meant merely as a tool to help you attain all of these constants.

Constants of Spiritual Maturity

- Being engaged in works of service
- Desiring and seeking unity with all believers
- Having deep knowledge of the son of God (whole measure of the fullness...)
- Knowing and standing firm in what you believe (not influenced by others)
- Having experienced enough of life to distinguish good from evil
- Having moved on from the elementary teachings of Christ
- Your faith has been put to the test and you have persevered
- You have experienced God’s goodness directly

REFERENCE: Academic Learning Styles

- **Auditory:** Learning occurs through hearing the spoken word.
- **Kinesthetic:** Learning occurs through doing, touching and interacting.
- **Visual:** Learning occurs through images, demonstrations and body language.

“Spiritual learning styles” are different from the typical academic learning styles listed above because spiritual learning encompasses more than just acquiring knowledge. Spiritual learning requires that the learner put into practice what he/she has learned, continue doing it, and eventually allow it to shape them into the image of Christ. When done correctly, spiritual learning causes the learner to grow spiritually—the same way that lifting weights causes the lifter to grow physically. If aborted, the learner experiences no growth. When sufficient growth has occurred in the learner, they achieve spiritual maturity, which is never fully completed. In summary, spiritual learning produces spiritual growth and spiritual growth produces spiritual maturity.

Spiritual Learning Styles

- **DIAKONETIC:** Diakoneo (diakoneō)
 - “to be a servant, attendant, to serve”
 - Matthew 20:28- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many ."
 - Spiritual learning occurs through a context of service to others. The learner needs to experience doing acts of service to truly understand some spiritually related matters. This learner accepts spiritually related matters when communicated in the context of service to others, “how does this equate to helping other people?”
 - This is closely associated with Dokimitic learning.
- **AINETIC:** Aineo (aīneō)
 - “to praise, extol, sing praises in honor to God”
 - Romans 15:11- And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM."
 - Spiritual learning occurs through a context of praise and worship to God. The learner most readily accepts spiritually related matters that are communicated through song or experienced during praise. Spiritually related matters are best communicated in language that describes the end result as being “praise (or worship) to God.”
 - This is closely associated with Desistic learning.
- **GRAPHETIC:** Graphe (graphē)
 - “a certain portion or section of the Holy Scripture”
 - 2 Timothy 3:16- All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
 - Spiritual learning occurs through the context of being in and hearing the Word. The learner acquires most spiritually related matters directly from the Scriptures. When taught, spiritually related matters must be closely intertwined with the Scriptures for this type of learner to accept them. Change is only accepted after reference to scripture is given.
 - This is closely associated with Desistic learning.

- **HODEGETIC**: Hodegeo (oðhgeñ)
 - “to be a guide or a teacher, to give guidance to”
 - John 16:13- “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will **guide** you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.
 - Spiritual learning occurs through the context of a relationship with someone who mentors and offers guidance to the learner. Spiritually related matters are communicated through this person’s example, time spent together, and their efforts to teach the learner in one-on-one settings. Almost all spiritually related matters are communicated through the learner’s mentor (or mentors).
 - This is closely related to Plerophoric learning.
- **DOKIMITIC**: Dokimion (dokiñion)
 - “that by which something is tried or proven, a test”
 - James 1:3- knowing that the **testing** of your faith produces endurance.
 - Spiritual learning occurs through a context of trials and testing of the learner’s faith. While acquiring spiritually related matters from many sources, the learner remains skeptical until the truths have been tested and the learner has experienced first hand that they are accurate and helpful. This type of learner, while knowing a lot about their faith, doesn’t truly believe until they have seen it for themselves. They will very rarely “take someone’s word on it.”
 - This is closely associated with Diakonetic learning.
- **PLEROPHORIC**: Plerophoria (pl hroforiā)
 - “full assurance, confidence, conviction”
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:5- for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full **conviction**
 - Spiritual learning occurs through a context of hearing the Word presented in such a way that it convicts the learner that personal change is needed and beneficial. Spiritually related matters are communicated with a sense of urgency and immediate response/action is typically requested. When no personal application or conviction is made, the learner has a difficult time seeing why the material was presented.
 - This is closely associated with Hodegetic learning.
- **DESISTIC**: Deesis (deñsiv)
 - “a seeking, asking, entreating to God or to man”
 - Hebrews 5:7- In the days of His flesh, He offered up both **prayers** and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.
 - Spiritual learning occurs through a context of intimate conversation with God. This type of learner finds themselves praying through scriptures and taking all spiritually related matters before God very often. Spiritually related matters are best taught through an environment that is heavily covered in prayer and refers to the blessing of being in communion with God. Small group prayer sessions are very effective in reaching this type of learner.
 - This is closely associated with Ainetic and Graphetic learning.

After reading through the definitions and explanations of all seven of the “spiritual learning styles,” take some time to analyze your spiritual development to see which one you gravitate towards naturally. Which one of the styles best describes how you prefer to experience spiritual lessons and ideas? As mentioned earlier, it is possible for you to fall into more than one “spiritual learning style.” At the end of each style, a companion style was given to help you see if you fit naturally into more than one category. If after spending some time thinking through the styles you still don’t know which one you are, reading through the next few points may help.

Whenever you’re in a situation where spiritual learning could occur, your “spiritual learning style” can make that encounter even more beneficial. These encounters are called “Spiritual Learning Opportunities.” For example, if you realized that you are a Hodegetic learner, then there must be a person in your life that you look up to and admire spiritually. This person is probably involved in your spiritual life on a regular basis and is probably who you talk to when you have questions. When you find yourself confused and wondering why certain stuff is going on in your spiritual life, you should take this “opportunity” and talk through your circumstances with this person in order to learn from the situation and continue growing.

While that is only one example for one specific style, there are many opportunities for spiritual learning that you could encounter on a regular basis. These range from corporate worship times to your private times at home. These could be passive or active opportunities; meaning you could be interacting or just sitting and listening. Regardless of the type of opportunity, if it’s passive or active, or if it’s just plain boring, when you know your spiritual learning style, you can turn an otherwise useless experience into something that helps you grow spiritually. Think through this list and consider which of these you feel help you learn most effectively and which ones help you the least. Which one is your favorite experience? (This is not a complete list.)

Opportunities for spiritual learning

- Bible class/Sunday school
- Sermons, lectures, and conferences
- Reading the Bible by yourself
- Personal prayer time/Quiet time
- Participating in service work
- Fasting from food or something else
- Singing songs of praise (in a group or alone)
- Thinking about spiritual stuff
- Personal struggles, trials, and temptations

The “Spiritual Learning Opportunity” that you picked as being your favorite (or the time when you feel you benefit the most from whatever is happening) represents when you are in your element. That means you are in your ideal learning situation. For whatever reason, you prefer this learning opportunity over all of the others. Maybe when you’re at home reading your Bible you focus really well; maybe when you’re in the worship service on Sunday morning you really connect with God. Either way, if you haven’t figured out which learning style you are, this could help you discover it. However, the main benefit here is in identifying the times when you are not in your element.

The main benefit of knowing your “spiritual learning style” comes when you encounter the “spiritual learning opportunities” that are not your favorite. It’s during these times when you would normally tune out whatever is happening, fall asleep, ignore it, walk away from it, or just put up with it. The normal Christian only takes advantage of the opportunities that are within their element and never looks to see what they’re missing elsewhere. That’s why the main benefit comes from realizing that these opportunities you miss have potential for spiritual growth. If you can identify when you have the most difficulty learning, you can take these (usually missed) opportunities and turn them into something beneficial to your spiritual life instead of walking away saying “What was that about?”

Looking back at the list of “spiritual learning opportunities,” think about the ones that are your least favorite and the kind of attitude you have when approaching these situations. Not good, huh? That’s when you take your learning style and say “I may not like this experience, but if I take it home and pray through these thoughts, I could really grow from this” (if you’re a Desistic learner). Or you could say to yourself, “I don’t like reading my Bible, but I’ll do it because I know it will help me reach others” (if you’re a Diakonetic learner). By using your “spiritual learning style” to adapt your environment into something you relate to will allow you to maximize your spiritual growth because it will increase your opportunities for spiritual learning.

Finally, as you encounter more “spiritual learning opportunities” and grow more effectively using your “spiritual learning style,” you could find that you begin to fit into more learning styles than you did at first. This is normal and happens to some people as they become a mature Christian. In my personal opinion, mature Christians have a wider base of “spiritual learning styles” because they have learned to adapt to more “spiritual learning opportunities,” which enables them to grow from almost any spiritual stimulus. This adaptation occurs by spending time developing and understanding how to grow outside of your typical learning style. However, it is possible for someone to reach spiritual maturity while only growing from one or two “spiritual learning styles.”

If you are still having trouble figuring out which style you fit into, pray and continue searching out the “spiritual learning opportunity” that is the best learning environment for you. Just being aware of the seven styles will give you more chances to notice which one you are as you encounter each style over time. Eventually you’ll be able to identify which style is the best facilitator of spiritual growth for you.

SUMMARY: How to use the “Spiritual Learning Styles”

1. Figure out which learning style you are
2. Look for “Spiritual Learning Opportunities”
3. Approach the opportunity expecting to learn from it—Do not ignore it
4. Process the information that is given/experienced by adapting it to your “style”
5. Find the application
6. Use the application in your daily life and allow it to shape you

The Questions: (Section for teens to share their questions about the topic.)

Possible Questions:

How do I figure out which type of “spiritual learner” I am?

What if I fall into more than one category of the spiritual learning styles?

What if I don’t understand what the different types mean?

The Reality:

Option 1—You choose to seek and discover which spiritual learning style you are and then make an effort to learn within that context. The more you find yourself learning within your style, the more you end up learning and growing spiritually. Now as time has passed, you see yourself as a stronger and more developed Christian than you were not too long ago.

Option 2—You choose to continue on as you have been your whole life. You just take whatever is offered to you and work through what you're given. You make no effort to adapt other contexts to your learning style, but rather just try your best to adapt to everyone else's styles. Sometimes you walk away having grown from a spiritual experience or lesson, but most often you leave empty or confused. It's time you realize that knowing your spiritual learning style can benefit you in many ways.