

PART 32 – HOW YOU GROW AND LEARN

One very interesting fact that I have learned in developing these studies is that **emotions** and **feelings** are directly tied to your neural pathways.

Strong emotions and strong feelings are simply the result of what and how you think.

Your thoughts on something are what make you emotional about a particular situation. I believe it is good to feel strongly about different things in your life as long as what you feel strongly about is biblical. Having strong emotions and feelings that are not in alignment with God's truth become toxic to both you and the other people that are in your life. Why? It because you will always verbalize those emotions and feelings. There are many things in my own personal life for which I have strong emotions and feelings such as my relationship to God, my relationship to my wife, and my relationship to this church. All of those evoke very strong emotions and feelings in my life. They are all good and biblical emotions to have, but just think about three strong negative emotions for a moment and how they can impact your life when not brought under God's control.

1. **Anxiety** is a strong, almost debilitating emotion. You are predisposed to be either a calm person or an anxious person based on what and how you think. If everything seems to make you anxious, then before long it will be almost impossible for you to be calm when something happens to you because you have developed a neural pathway for becoming anxious.
2. **Anger** is an emotion that destroys the relationships that you have with other people – especially your family. You are predisposed to be an angry person or a kind person based on what and how you think. If you are predisposed to anger and sharp, cutting remarks, then you have developed a neural pathway where you are much more likely to react to someone in anger rather than respond to them with kindness and grace.
3. **Bitterness** is an emotion. When you are bitter, your thinking has you imprisoned where you are unwilling to forgive as God wants you to forgive. You stew about things and just cannot let go of something that someone said or did, and by your bitterness, many people are defiled. **Hebrews 12:15** says,

Hebrews 12:15 (NKJV) looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.

When you are a bitter person, you are **predisposed** to say things that you may regret for the rest of your life. In fact, this verse says that what you say and do will “**cause trouble**” and “**defile**” many people in your life. The word “**defile**” means to contaminate, to stain, to pollute someone's life.¹ Trust me, but it is not a good thing to be polluting people's lives with negative emotions.

What you want to understand about strong negative emotions and feelings that you have is that they create other negative issues toward people like frustration, irritation, disappointment, and even physical and mental weariness. In many cases they lead to both physical and emotional abuse of someone else. Negative emotions and feelings literally drain you of both physical and mental strength. They are like a cancer that is slowly destroying your life little by little. Now, if you want to know if any of this applies

¹ Zodhiates, *mianō*, 984.

to you, **then simply listen to what comes out of your mouth.** [Luke 6:45](#) says that “**out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks**”. If you have any of these negative emotions – anxiety, anger, bitterness, frustration, irritation, and/or continual disappointment, then just listen to what you say to people and how you think about people. Just listening to what you say to others will quickly let you know where you are relative to controlling or not controlling your emotions. Listen very carefully because this is extremely important.

If you create enough negative neural pathways, it will literally break you as a person and deeply hurt the people that surround your life. Negative neural pathways have the ability to ultimately destroy your life as God intended.

You must understand that your **emotions** are what shape your relationships with people. If someone has hurt you, your tendency will be to not like them, and it will be very difficult for you to love them the way that Christ would want you to love them. Resenting someone and disliking them are very destructive emotions that always impact your behavior in a very harmful way.

Please understand that your emotions are always a by-product of how and what you think.

KEY PRINCIPLE 108: NEGATIVE EMOTIONS ARE A MENTAL PRISON THAT GREATLY DAMAGE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE.

❖ GUNS, CARS, RATS, AND ROADMAPS

I do not like guns and my brain sees guns in a fairly negative way. I almost accidentally killed my wife one time before we were married while pulling a shotgun through a fence. It scared me so bad, that I still have not gotten over it. I still remember it today like it happened yesterday. Remembering what almost happened still frightens me and created strong emotions in me. When I see a gun, it always triggers something negative in me rather than something positive. I do not like to go fast in cars because I have seen several wrecks in which a lot of people were killed, so I do not like riding with someone who is going very fast. I went somewhere recently with someone and they drove much too fast for me. I have no intentions of getting in a car with them again. My wife is absolutely scared to death of a mouse or a rat. She will scream and run and hide and yell at me to “*kill that mouse*”. I have no idea when it was or where it was, but she has had a very negative experience with a mouse at some time in her life, and she has a huge neural pathway that cannot stand to see mice or rats. The moment she sees a mouse or a rat, she immediately goes into a panic mode.

However, the good part in all of this is that negative pathways and their emotions can be changed and actually reversed. Let us look at bitterness again. You can be very bitter towards someone, but to be pleasing to God, that bitterness has to be dealt with and removed. Bitterness is a very caustic and destructive **emotion** that will literally destroy people’s lives, including yours. If for some reason you become bitter towards someone and are unwilling to forgive them, then Satan has clearly taken advantage of you. You have believed his lie that bitterness is better than forgiveness. The real question is how can you personally know whether or not you are bitter and unforgiving toward someone. Well, the answer is really very simple. **You are always bringing up how that person’s past offenses have hurt you –**

even though it may only have been one wrong thing that they said or did.² That is a sure sign of bitterness having taken root in your life. Bitterness always reveals itself in your words to the other person.

The point is simple. **You have to know exactly what God says about an issue in your life.** This is how you grow spiritually. You find out what is God's perfect will for your life in His Word, and then you do everything in your power to embrace it with all of the strength and energy you can find.

KEY PRINCIPLE 109: YOU FIND OUT WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT AN ISSUE AND THEN YOU BUILD YOUR LIFE AROUND THAT TRUTH.

Do not ignore the importance of this reality. God's Word is your **roadmap** to the spiritual freedom and abundant life that only He can give. If you are truly looking for direction in your life, it is found in God's Word. **God's will is His direction.**

KEY PRINCIPLE 110: YOU MUST FIRST LEARN THE TRUTH FOR YOUR LIFE, THEN YOU MUST APPLY THE TRUTH TO YOUR LIFE.

You learn, you apply. If you are looking for some shortcuts for this, there are none. They do not exist. Learning and then applying truth takes both time and patience. Over time you learn new information that literally changes the way that you previously understood a certain passage or a particular doctrine of the Bible or something that happened in your life. You actually developed a new neural pathway and have been adding to it. In fact, **strengthening godly neural pathways is the key to achieving peak performance in your life because you are always upgrading your mind with greater insight and truth.** You should love what God has done. He has made you in such a way that you can literally rewire and reprogram your brain to both believe and understand how he wants you to live and to see what happens to you in your life differently now that you have applied His Word to your life.

1. What use to upset you no longer upsets you.
2. What use to make you impatient no longer makes you impatient.
3. What irritated you no longer irritates you.
4. What you never liked, now you love.
5. What made you angry no longer makes you angry.

Why? It is because you learned what God said about a matter and you chose to let it change your life. Literally, you learned to think like God thinks.

KEY PRINCIPLE 111: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS BUILT AROUND CONSTANTLY REPROGRAMMING YOUR MIND TO THINK LIKE GOD THINKS.

❖ REPROGRAMMING TOOLS

If you asked me to reprogram your computer, that would be a recipe for disaster. I am convinced that 10-year-olds are smarter with computers than I am. However, when it comes to reprogramming

² Anderson / Miller, Letting Go, 123, 125.

my mind and my brain, I know exactly what to do. I find out what God says and then I incorporate that truth into my life. The way we said it previously was “Truth in, life out”.

Now this should really be easy because you can know exactly what and how God thinks because He has written it down in His Word. What this clearly means is that you have all of the “reprogramming tools” that you need to change what and how you think. [2 Peter 1:3](#) says,

2Pe 1:3 (NKJV) as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,

I love the word “**knowledge**” because it is saying that “**life and godliness**” are a by-product of what you place into your mind, what you know, what you learn, how you think. The key word, however, is “**through**” and could be translated as “**by the means of**”. It denotes the actual channel of an act.³ Do you really want to enjoy your life and live a spiritually full life? Then the means for that happening is through having the correct “**knowledge**” of God, and it cannot happen without it. If you ignore growing in your knowledge of what God has said, then you will always be stunted spiritually.

Knowledge is a mind thing, and God never by-passes your mind. Knowledge is something that you keep placing into your mind.

You read, you learn, you apply, you grow. You have to see this as a well-defined and intentional discipline in your life – constantly reprogramming your mind to think like God thinks.

A very basic principle of being spiritually successful in your life is to know God and His ways.⁴ [Jeremiah 9:23-24](#) says,

²³ Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty *man* glory in his might, nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches; ²⁴but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.

Obviously, the ultimate failure is to never know God⁵, but to casually say that you do know God, but to never truly experience His supernatural life working in you is a tragedy that cannot be measured. It really is a form of simply wasting your life away. If all you receive from God is what I give you on a Sunday morning, I doubt very seriously that you will ever grow very much as a Christian. You cannot achieve “**life and godliness**” apart from God’s Word. It is a spiritual impossibility that must be recognized, so you must develop the habit of “feeding” on the Word of God. Think of it this way:

Divine knowledge is the fuel for your spiritual growth.

In a supernatural way, the initial reprogramming of a believer’s mind actually happened in their life at the moment of salvation. [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) says,

2Co 5:17 (NKJV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

³ Strong, dia, #1223, ep.

⁴ Anderson / Miller, Letting Go, 133-134.

⁵ Anderson / Miller, Letting Go, 134.

Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that is exactly what happened to me personally. In just a moment of time, I saw everything in a completely different way. My brain was instantly reprogrammed by God and by His Word and it changed everything about my life and I have never been the same.

So, how do you change a negative neural pathway? Well, it is really quite simple.

You keep repeating, reminding, and reiterating biblical truth in your mind over and over again until your neural pathway for God's truth becomes strong.

If you never do this, you can never be strong spiritually. You cannot grow apart from God's Word. You cannot just casually ignore and dismiss God's Word in your life and ever experience the depth of what God wants to do in your life. It is not possible.

Repetition is what God uses to make your mental and spiritual pathways to be dominant in your brain. Repeat, repeat, repeat – that is the formula for your spiritual success.

Paul said in [Ephesians 5:10](#) to “Be strong in the Lord”. He did not just say “Be strong”.

If you see your life as your own, you are destined for failure simply because your resources, your ideas, and your inclinations are totally inadequate to accomplish God's purposes in your life.

It seems amazing that so many Christians fail to recognize this spiritual reality. Jesus said this in [John 15:5](#),

John 15:5 (NKJV) “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

BRAIN FACT:

1. Making significant life changes is different for everyone, but neurological research indicates that the average time that it takes is about 2 months. What you must do is to replace unbiblical thoughts with God's thoughts, healthy thoughts.
2. Whatever you think about the most in your mind is what grows the most in your brain.⁶

For some people it could be 10 days and for someone else 10 months to make significant life changes. The truth is simply that it takes some time. If you are an impatient person and if that is your dominant neural pathway, then most likely you will not be successful in making any meaningful changes because your brain rut is that you are not willing to take any significant amount of time to change. When God begins to teach me something that is really significant to me, I try to repeat that truth to myself in prayer and to others with whom I am talking or praying. I write it down in one of my personal notebooks. The more I repeat and remind myself of what I believe God wants me to know or to change, the more it gets enlarged in my mind and the stronger that neural pathway becomes.

❖ BEING CRITICAL OF OTHERS

For a long time I have been developing a spiritual and neural pathway that I never want to be a critical or fault finding person. Rather than criticizing people, I want to see them as individuals made in the image of God who have great potential and who are deeply loved by God. This has been a very

⁶ Leaf, Switch, 150.

conscious and deliberate effort on my part, what I would define as “intentional”. It started with a book that James and Cindy recommended to me called Cross-Cultural Servanthood. As I read it, I was deeply convicted by God to see people the way that He sees them. Over a period of time, I believe that I have developed a new neural pathway, a new mental pathway, a spiritual trench in my mind that facilitates this desire. I want to see the best in a person, not the worst, and I want to find ways to be an encouragement to them. Many people always see the worst and never the best. Why is that? It is because they have mentally trained themselves to think that way.

Now, you may be thinking that all of this is just a kind of religious mind over matter game, or some crazy kind of mental gymnastics, but it is not and never has been. [Psalm 139:14](#) says that you are “**fearfully and wonderfully made**” – and you are. Your brain is the most amazing creation ever, and the more that you understand how wonderfully God has made your mind, the easier it will be for you to make the necessary changes that God wants you to make in your life. We have said all along that spiritual change for someone fully committed to Christ is inevitable and unavoidable.

God has programmed you in such a way and given you a spiritual DNA so that you can truly know Him, confidently believe Him, passionately follow Him and love Him, and wholeheartedly trust Him with your life.

Your brain is spiritually wired to do exactly that if you will simply yield yourself to His Word. Let me say it this way – **you need to connect your mind to God’s Word**. That is exactly the way that God wants you to see your life. He made you and you are His. He designed you and created you a certain way, and you function the best when your life is aligned with His perfect will for your life. Many times you meet someone who you think is a really spiritual individual, and they probably are. However, they are only that way because they have devoted themselves to being godly, yielded themselves to obeying the Word of God, and devoted themselves to knowing and understanding the Word of God. Listen carefully. True and genuine spirituality in a person’s life is never an accident - never. Thinking like God thinks is never an accident – never. It is always deliberate and intentional. You can know that these people have made godly decisions and had the discipline and the perseverance to follow through with what they knew was God’s best for their life. Being controlled by the Spirit of God is never an accident.

KEY PRINCIPLE 112: IF YOU WILL DISCIPLINE YOUR MIND TO THINK GODLY NOW, YOU WILL BE INCLINED TO THINK GODLY LATER.

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