



Neuroplasticity

Rewiring Our Minds

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Scripture

- *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Acts 9:1 NIV)*
- *He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:2 NIV)*

2

Scripture

- *As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. (Acts 9:3 NIV)*
- *He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4 NIV)*



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Scripture

- *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. (Acts 9:5 NIV)*
- *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. (Acts 9:6a NIV)*
- *"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:6b NIV)*



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Scripture

- *The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the **sound** but did not see anyone. (Acts 9:7 NIV)*
- *Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could **see nothing**. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. (Acts 9:8 NIV)*
- *For **three days** he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9:9 NIV)*

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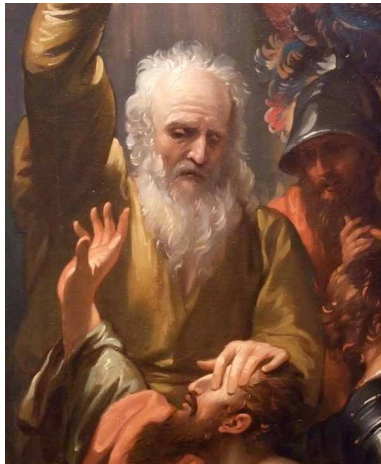
Scripture

- *In Damascus there was a disciple named **Ananias**. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” (Acts 9:10 NIV)*
- *“Go! This man is my **chosen instrument** to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Acts 9:15–16 NIV)*

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Scripture

- *Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord — Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17 NIV)*



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Scripture

- *Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was **baptized**, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. (Acts 9:18–19 NIV)*
- *Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. (Acts 9:19 NIV)*
- *At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the **Son of God**. (Acts 9:20 NIV)*

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Introduction

- Nine years ago, Sean Maloney was sitting pretty, and things looked like they could only get better.
- He was the executive vice president of Intel and widely considered the next in line to be CEO.
- He had a wife and family and maintained an active lifestyle that included running, rowing and skiing.



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Introduction

- Then, in February 2010, he had a massive stroke.
- A blocked artery paralyzed the right side of his body and severely impaired his speech.
- He underwent six months of intensive rehabilitation to regain movement and the ability to talk.
- He had to learn to let speech originate from the other side of his brain.



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Introduction

- While not everything returned, he was able to get enough back to functioning without relying on caregivers, and eventually to return to work.
- He retired from Intel in 2013, where he then took up cycling.
- In 2015, he founded Heart Across America, a 5,000-mile, cross-country bicycle ride to raise money and awareness for heart disease and stroke prevention.



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Introduction

- There are other stories like Maloney's, and the reason he and others have been able to regain back some of what they lost to strokes and other brain-damaging events is something called neuroplasticity.
- That refers to the brain's ability to change at any age.



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Introduction

- It was once believed that the brain became fixed after childhood, but we now know that is not the case.
- The brain remains “plastic,” capable of changing in function and structure as it responds to experience.



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A Neuroplastic Event

- It could be argued that what Paul experienced in his blinding-light encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road was a type of neuroplastic event that rewired his brain.



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A Neuroplastic Event

- One minute, he was a persecutor of those who followed Jesus.
- Then next minute, he is questioning everything he knew to be true about his own faith in Judaism.



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A Neuroplastic Event

- We should remember the Apostle Paul was a zealous and devout Jew, who was according to the practices and customs of Judaism, faultless.
- According to Galatians 1:13-14, Paul was . . .
 - Violently persecuting the Church of God.
 - So much so that he was trying to destroy it.
- He was even there at Stephen's stoning — condoning his death.
- Then he had a brain-, life- and heart-altering event. He met Jesus on the Damascus road.

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A Neuroplastic Event

In Philippians 3:7-9, Paul describes it this way:

- *But whatever was to my profit (born a Hebrew and a devotee of Judaism) I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. (Philippians 3:7 NIV)*
- *I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ . . . not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the [Mosaic] law, but that which is through faith in Christ . . . (Philippians 3:8-9 NIV)*
- *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, . . . (Philippians 3:10-11 NIV)*

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A Neuroplastic Event

- For Saul, this is a complete reversal in philosophy, career path, purpose of life, values — everything.
- Total inside-out, upside-down reorientation of perspective.
- A neurologist might be tempted to call it a **neuroplastic event**, and perhaps it was a type of one.
 - But that's what conversion is about: a rewiring of everything.
 - After his **Damascus Road experience**, Paul was not only a follower of Jesus, but also a leading proponent and missionary of the gospel of Christ.

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180-Degree Turnaround

- While a **Damascus Road experience** can quickly get our attention and get us going down a new path, we still need to do things that rewire our minds.
- As a stroke patient engages in **physical therapy** to rewire their brains, so we must engage the **Word of God** in our lives to give and produce in us the “**mind of Christ**.”
- As the Apostle Paul says, *I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, . . . be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* (Romans 12:1-2 NIV)

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180-Degree Turnaround

- The truth of the matter is all **Physical Therapy** is hard and the path of **spiritual healing** or **recovery** is not easy as well.
- It can often take years. The time between Paul's Damascus Road experience and his first missionary journey was **12 years**.
- In fact, Paul was always **undergoing training** and **spiritual discipline** so that he could know Christ better.
- He said, *I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.* (1 Corinthians 9:26-27 NIV)

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Come to Jesus

When the Apostle Paul had his Damascus Road or “Come to Jesus” moment he initially learned several things.

1. He learned that he was a **complete idiot**.
 - Zeal for God is not important unless it is directed by revelation of truth.
 - He himself was on the wrong road going in the wrong direction.
 - Instead of bringing heretics to justice, he was the one who was in error.

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Come to Jesus

2. Jesus was indeed **alive** and his follower’s testimony was true. Jesus was indeed . . .
 - **Risen from the dead!**
 - **God’s Son!**
 - Was now **Lord of lords, and King of kings**—holding the keys to both heaven and hell.

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Come to Jesus

2. Not only are Jesus and the Father one, but **Jesus and his followers are one in a sense as well**. Implying . . .
 - There is an organic and lasting connection between **Jesus and his followers**.
 - When we’re mistreated and persecuted for our faith, Jesus not only feels our pain but also takes it personally.
 - In the parable of the **Sheep and the Goats**, Jesus says, ‘I tell you the truth, *“whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”* (Matthew 25:40 NIV)

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The Body of Christ

- This **revelation of union** between Jesus and the Church is one of the **most beautiful doctrines** in the New Testament.
- Later in Paul’s ministry, as he matured and **renewed** his mind through obedience to the truth, he developed what we know today as the **Body of Christ**.
- The teaching that **Christ is the head** and we are the **parts of his body** and all of us have a distinct function, responsibility, and role in the body.

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The Body of Christ

- If fact, this **doctrine** and understanding is one of the most neglected teachings in the New Testament and limits our understanding of **worship**.
- In other words,
 - If the **nations** are going to be judged on how they have treated Christians, and
 - That Jesus had to confront the Apostle Paul on how he was treating his followers,
 - Don't you think our **minds** should be rewired to think the same way toward the **Body of Christ**?

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The Body of Christ

- The truth of the matter is that how we treat each other, is a **form of worship** that God takes very serious.
- It can very well effect our relationship with the risen Lord.
- Therefore, let us rewire our minds to think that how we treat our spouse, parents, children, and fellow believers in Christ matters to God.
- Blessing the “**apple of his eye**” might be the most important and constructive thing we can do to **grow** in God's grace and favor.

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Conclusion

- I don't know about you, but I think we're all on the **Road to Damascus** from time to time.
- The **risen Christ** through his Spirit and Word is frequently confronting us in what **we believe** where sometimes we are flat on our backs looking up.
- But this is not a bad thing!
- God does this because **he wants us to be whole, healthy, and ready** for any good work.

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Conclusion

- So then when the **Lord** corrects us and leaves us a bit bewildered, we know that it is for our good. His intent is to give us the **mind of Christ** and be filled with his Spirit.
- Just as **Physical Therapy** can rewire our brains, so can **Spiritual Therapy** rewire our spirits and bring healing to our souls.
- God's will for us is to be **whole**, let us let Him have his own way with our lives.

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