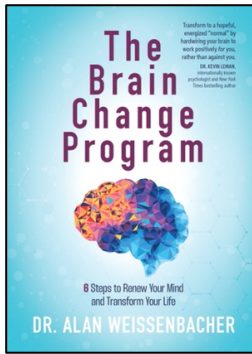


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The Brain Change Program

6 Steps to Renew Your Mind and Transform Your Life



Minneapolis, MN: We are often told that if we want to make positive changes in our lives, then we need willpower; but we quickly realize that is not the only solution. Christians are specifically instructed to turn to Scripture that says we must renew our minds and take every thought captive (Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 10:5). But few of us know how to put these concepts into practice.

While most self-help books focus on the brain's complex structure to explain approaches to personal change, it is equally important to understand the brain's plasticity – how it can change, reorganize, and rewire. It's a simple, powerful capability we can harness to convert harmful thoughts and behaviors into helpful ones, allowing us to shape and reshape who we are and who we can

become.

In *The Brain Change Program: 6 Steps to Renew Your Mind and Transform Your Life* (BroadStreet Publishing), author **Dr. Alan Weissenbacher** leads readers through a practical six-step program designed to improve our mental health, strengthen our spiritual lives, and produce Christlike character.

With professional and educational backgrounds in addiction therapy, theology, and neuroscience, Dr. Weissenbacher uniquely understands that personal change is not one-size-fits all. Instead, he merges neuroscience and biblical wisdom to share actionable, lifelong strategies and tools to help readers:

- **Gain Control:** We tend to only see whatever our past has trained us to see, and the longer a thought or behavior continues, the harder it becomes to change. The key to escaping a stronghold is not to attempt to rid ourselves of the struggle through willpower but to consistently counter it with healthy, productive, and enjoyable habits.
- **Rewire Emotions and Habits:** Our brain links together people, objects, actions, and emotions, including our relationship with God. We can rewire our links for the better by practicing positive thoughts, utilizing a support system of encouraging people, and reframing our emotions when we encounter triggering situations.
- **Exercise the Power of Imagination:** Our brain cannot tell the difference between imagining an action and doing it, which means our imagination plays a critical role when it comes to forming and changing brain pathways, linking neurons, and establishing habits and automatic behaviors.
- **Stay Motivated:** Making too many changes at once puts us at risk of becoming overwhelmed and losing motivation. We don't need to get discouraged if and when we fail; our brain doesn't change overnight, which means all progress has not been lost. Recommit and continue the hard work.
- **Cultivate Christlike Character:** When acting lovingly becomes automatic and habitual, we can demonstrate love even in circumstances that would otherwise provoke negative responses. We need to repeat actions that demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Other chapters teach us to renew our minds and transform our lives by further developing our spiritual disciplines, training ourselves to forgive, identifying our triggers, and reframing our emotions.

Readers of *The Brain Change Program* will also learn why willpower fails, how to maximize opportunities and setbacks for success, how the brain influences spiritual growth, and how to become stronger spiritual disciples who enjoy deeper connections to God.

“I wrote this book not as a magical procedure for health but as a discipline to control and guide our thoughts and behaviors so that we can become more Christlike and have the courage to help others looking to make similar changes,” says Dr. Weissenbacher. “We can change our brain, free ourselves from sin, and exemplify the fruit of the Spirit when we understand our brain, its connections, and the impact our emotions have on our behavior.”

About the Author:



After receiving an education in biology and at seminary, **Dr. Alan Weissenbacher** worked for the Denver Rescue Mission as a chaplain to the homeless. He helped move homeless and addicted people out of an urban setting to a one-hundred-acre farm, giving them opportunities to help run the farm, care for animals, and receive therapy tailored to their individual needs: counseling, addiction therapy, job training, and more.

Inspired by the struggles of his clients and filled with the desire to improve Christian rehabilitation, Alan resigned from his position at the Denver Rescue Mission and enrolled in a doctorate program. He studied neuroscience and spiritual formation at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley and engaged with the question of how to improve addiction recovery, church practices, and spiritual formation using the scientific knowledge of the brain.

Alan serves as the managing editor for the academic journal *Theology and Science* and has published works with Johns Hopkins University Press, Vernon Press, and ATF Press on the subjects of science, religion, and ethics. He authored the chapter on neuroscience and the human person in the second edition of the college textbook *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction* in addition to articles in several journals, including *Theology and Science*, *Dialog*, *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, and *Zygon*.

Originally from Fort Collins, Colorado, Alan currently resides in Castro Valley, California, where he's a full-time dad to two young boys and enjoys speaking at churches and organizations. Learn more about Alan and his book at www.BrainChangeProgram.com, on Facebook @alan.weissenbacher, and on X/Twitter @acweissen.

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Suggested Interview Questions:

1. Tell us about *The Brain Change Program*. What prompted you to write this book?
2. You describe two approaches to personal change that can be found in the Bible. Explain to us the Paul Program and the Jacob Program.
3. Explain how the brain creates new neurons, where they go, and how they influence our thinking or behavior. Are we truly able to change our automatic responses over time?
4. What risks should we be mindful of when trying to resist a temptation? What is the solution to a weakness of will?
5. How would you help someone who has experienced a setback understand that their hard work was not a waste?
6. Why do you believe it can work to our disadvantage to pray for the removal or discontinuation of a bad thought or habit? Explain what it means to “pray forward.”
7. How do we create and adopt negative stereotypes, including racist ones, and how can we combat harmful beliefs?
8. How did theologian John Wesley distinguish between affections and tempers? How can we train ourselves to have “holy tempers”?
9. How do certain traits, like anger, become embedded in our character? Can we train our brain to become more forgiving toward others?
10. What would you say to those who are working hard to change but have hit a plateau in their progress?
11. Why can sober culture feel intimidating to someone coming from a culture of addiction?
12. You write that we become what we imagine. How does our imagination influence temptation? How can our imagination help our prayer life or heal traumatic memories?
13. What is the “fight phase” we inevitably encounter when trying to make positive changes?
14. Where can we gain more insight from you and your book?

Notable Quotes from *The Brain Change Program*:

Our personal character emerges from our brain activity. And we can shape our character by harnessing the power of automaticity to ingrain positive, healthy habits and behaviors into our lives. To shape our character through our habits, we must understand that whatever you do consistently becomes what you do automatically. This is likely a biological component that explains why people will persist in doing the very things they do not want to do...We need to repeat actions that demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—so that they become entrenched in our brains...we slowly embed them into our character. (p. 39)

After successfully practicing something for a brief period of time, we might conclude that improvement comes relatively easily. But then it might feel like we plateau or backslide because maintaining improvement and making it permanent requires the slow, steady work of forging new brain connections. What we want to remember during dark nights or periods of dark nights is that this uncomfortable and discouraging phase could very well be our brain’s way of catching up and preparing for the next phase, the next leap in our faith journey. Maybe that leap will be a new experience in sensing God, or a positive shift in our character, a deepening of our spiritual disciplines, a new motivation for service, or a new life direction. (p. 53)

Emotions play a significant role in our moral training and development. That means we first have to train our emotions so that our reactions to those emotions reflect our morals. Most of us can probably agree that it sometimes seems like people with looser morals have more fun and fewer struggles, leaving us resentful of our choice to live morally. Leading a moral life does not have to be an emotional struggle. The Bible assures us that we can find joy in living morally. When we choose to focus on the joyful aspects of moral actions, we link that joy to the actions themselves. When we choose moral actions and are encouraged by others for those actions, we link the positive feelings from receiving encouragement with those moral actions too. (p. 74)

When others share the ways in which God has provided for them, we're able to draw parallels to our own lives. Their testimonies and breakthroughs can carry us through our own rough spots when God seems distant or uncaring or when we're waiting on him, feeling convinced that he's just procrastinating. By sharing with others how God has come through for us in challenging times, we link together the ideas of challenges and God's support, and this neural link begets more faith and hope...At times throughout the Bible, God commanded people to create memorials to remember certain meaningful events. We all need reminders of God's mercy and kindness, and memorials accomplish precisely that. They link together a memory and a symbolic representation of God's faithfulness, prompting us to recall the times when God has come through for us. (p. 89)

Our worldview and what we register both intuitively and subconsciously is linked to what we are familiar with and the actions we are accustomed to performing. What we imagine becomes who we are, and it impacts what we are capable of doing in the future, good or bad. Further, we must pair what we practice in our imagination with physical practice so that we train correctly. And with this training, we change how we see the world and how we see ourselves. That's how we can influence our spiritual development and formation for the better. When we imagine living righteously and put it into practice, we improve our walk with God. We're better able to grow in wisdom so that we "see" new things, new solutions, and new opportunities to serve. (p. 105)

When we're in the fight phase, we must first recognize that this phase exists and requires effort. We will likely struggle with making positive changes, and our old ways of thinking and doing will continue to rear their ugly heads. That's why we want to avoid making too many changes at once; we're more likely to become overwhelmed and lose motivation. Instead, we want to focus on each and every win, and as the number of wins accumulates, winning becomes easier because our brain continues to form and strengthen new pathways, relenting to whatever change we're making. Changing your brain is a fight, and your brain will fight back. (p. 158)

The 6-Step Brain Change Program

- 1) Identify the Thought: Identify the thought or behavior you seek to change. If it's a behavior, ask yourself what thought lies behind it and why you are motivated to act. Contemplate this thought or behavior. Break it down. Write about it and identify the elements within your control that you can change. What concepts, experiences, or people does your brain link with this thought or behavior?
- 2) Evaluate: Evaluate the thought or behavior. Is it true? Is it necessary? Is the thought normal or helpful? Negative thoughts and feelings are completely normal, and not every thought or feeling needs to be challenged or replaced.
- 3) Replace, Don't Resist: Neglect negative thoughts and habits so that the neurons associated with them weaken. Then replace those negative thoughts and habits with positive ones so that those neurons can strengthen.
- 4) Retrain with Imagination: The brain can't tell the difference between imagining an action and doing it for real, so take time to imagine and rehearse the good, positive behaviors you wish to establish. The more you practice good actions in your mind, the more likely you are to convert those good actions into automatic behaviors
- 5) Introduce a New Element: Disrupt harmful, problematic neural links by introducing new, positive elements and emotions.
- 6) Repeat, Rehearse, Repeat: The amount of time to implement change varies from person to person because every brain is different. Neurons take a while to unlink, grow, and form new connections. Repeat each step in the brain change program as many times as you need and for as long as you need, and then keep it up.