

Divine Rewiring—Scripture & Science Agree: You Must Renew Your Mind

“A God who can fit in my own understanding is too small to meet my need.” – Misty Nease, Vine Life Biblical Counseling Instructor

I. Feelings are a Gift From God

A. Feelings Reflect God’s Nature:

1. Anger – “He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath...” (Psalm 2:5)
2. Pleasure – “The Lord does whatever pleases him...” (Psalm 135:6)
3. Hate – “For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing.” (Isaiah 61:8)
4. Delight - “The Lord be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant.” (Psalm 35:27)
5. Jealous – “Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” (Exodus 34:14)
6. Joy – “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.’ (Luke 10:21)
7. Grief / Sorrow –
 - a. “Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)
 - b. twice Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34)
 - c. Then he Jesus said to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane right before His crucifixion, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” (Matthew 26:38)

B. God gives us feelings as a blessing

- a. He will turn bad feelings into good feelings - “Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their **mourning** (grief) into **gladness**; I will give them comfort and **joy** instead of **sorrow**.” (Jeremiah 31:13)
- b. Our feelings help us connect to God’s presence, to His joy, to His peace

- c. Feelings bring comfort
- d. Feelings warn us of danger
- e. Feelings also indicate when there is something unresolved

C. We are to use our feelings to glorify and worship God

1. “Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” (Psalm 100:2)
2. “Let the trees of the forest sing, let them sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.” (1 Chronicles 16:33)

D. The Lord Uses Feelings to Strengthen and Comfort Us

1. Joy – “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)
2. Joy – “The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.” (Psalm 19:8)
3. Glad – “For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord; I sing for joy at what your hands have done.”
4. He turns negative feelings into positive feelings “to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” (Isaiah 61:3)

E. Feelings are not always accurate, and cannot be our source of truth

1. Feelings are not objective truth, they are expressions and indicators
2. They are like a warning light on the dashboard of the car
3. Or like the blinker. If the car in front of you has the left turn signal blinking it could mean any of the following are true:
 - a. They could actually be intending to turn left in a moment
 - b. They could have bumped it by accident
 - c. They could have forgotten to turn it off
 - d. They could have turned on the left instead of the right signal
 - e. There could be an electrical problem causing it to go off randomly
 - f. It could be stuck in the on position
 - g. Like those situations, feelings can be the same way. We must learn to use feelings as indicators of needed attention, and not as truth.
4. I learned with nervous system damage, even good feelings can be misleading. I sometimes have extremely euphoric feelings just before migraines that can cause a whole host of neurological issues.

5. Or, sometimes I would have rage and an uncontrollable anger before the migraines. Most of the time, I couldn't explain why I felt that way at the time. There was something else causing those feelings.

II. Neuroplasticity

A. the brain can change, heal, and be rewired

1. Plasticity: "capacity for being shaped, altered, or molded."¹
2. Neuroplasticity: "Neuroplasticity refers to how the nervous system changes in response to experience... The nervous system isn't set in stone, it's constantly changing... One way to define this term is that it refers to changes in synapses (electrical signals) and/or other parts of neurons that affect how information is processed and transmitted in the nervous system."

B. Our brains build up and prune back connections

C. According to a YouTube video on Neuroplasticity²:

1. **Neuroplasticity** goes in both directions -it can increase (potentiation) or decrease (depression)
2. Practicing repeated habits or reinforcing an existing connection. Like learning to play an instrument. When you first start, you have to think about every detail, every finger placement. It's difficult and it probably doesn't sound great. But over time with practice, the brain builds more and more connections to the thoughts and actions involved, and even the feeling when you play. This is because the brain is getting much faster at retrieving the information and the signal is much stronger.

D. Both Positive and Negative Thoughts can become more persistent and strengthened

1. So, if we think on negative thoughts, those thoughts will become more persistent
2. If we think on positive thoughts, those thoughts will become more persistent
3. These stronger thoughts become louder in our head

E. Example: Changing my attitude

1. One day I was driving down the highway, irritated by traffic as usual. I decided to practice what I had been learning. I started thanking God for every positive thing I could think of about road construction:

¹ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Plasticity. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved August 26, 2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plasticity>

² Jensen, M. B. (n.d.). Neuroplasticity | Nervous system physiology | NCLEX-RN | Khan Academy [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8wW1t1JqUc>

2. They make necessary repairs
3. They make the roads safer
4. They make the roads less likely to damage our cars from potholes
5. Additionally, I started thanking God for the workers and praying for them and their families
6. I started thanking God for the road signs that kept both them and the drivers safe.
7. Pretty soon, I was joyful about the construction rather than irritated

III. How this affects our thoughts about self

A. Negative thought patterns about ourselves

1. If I have a negative thought about myself, every time I think it, it is going to get stronger.
2. The volume gets turned up and the brain forms more connections to that thought.
3. Not only that, but the connection to the truth becomes weaker.
4. If we don't overwrite it with the truth, the lie can begin to sound like truth.

B. The lies we already believe become like a lens we see our experiences through

1. If we believe we are not loved, especially as a child, every life experience gets put through that filter
 - a. Parents' divorce, a breakup, rejection, not belonging, feeling alone, etc..
 - b. We try to find security and love in other broken people
2. So can positive beliefs about self. If I believe God loves me:
 - a. In every experience I am more likely to trust Him
 - b. I am more likely to see His perspective
 - c. I am less likely to believe He abandoned me
 - d. I am less likely to be afraid
 - e. I will be more secure in self and look out for the needs of others rather than obsessing over what others think of me
3. If you are not speaking God's promises over your life:
 - a. Those connections between your circumstances and trials and the hope and promises of His Word become weaker

C. Our thoughts, especially based on feelings, can lead us away from trusting God

1. In 1 Samuel 26:24, David after running from Saul concluded he could trust God

2. But 2 verses later in 1 Samuel 27:1 it says, “But David thought to himself, ‘One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is escape to the land of the Philistines.’”
3. As a result, David went and lived in Gath, the home of Goliath and the Philistines that had vowed to destroy Israel. Although God did still protect David because His promises would not be broken, David suffered a lot of consequences in that year and a half.

IV. The Fear Pathway in the Brain

A. Definitions:

1. **Stimuli** -input from our senses: what we see, hear, taste, feel (not feelings, but what we have physically felt through touch), or smell
2. **Threat** – if the sound of the brakes on a car indicate we might be about to be hit by a car, it sets off the smoke alarm that there might be an imminent threat to our safety. If we smell smoke, our internal smoke alarm (a sensor for lots of different stimuli) tells us we are in immediate danger
3. **Reward** – a stimulus can also be flagged as a potential reward. The smell of a freshly baked cake, for example, might get flagged as a potential reward. Or the sounds of a casino could excite our brain for potential reward (though I am not condoning the casino, we might associate that sound with winning).
4. Threats and rewards are interpreted differently by different people
 - a. For most people, the smell of a freshly baked cake would signal reward. But if you get really sick from eating cake because of gluten or dairy or whatever, it might trigger caution instead
 - b. For most people the sound of screeching brakes would be a bad thing, but if you grew up going to car races it might take a minute to realize, wait this is bad!
 - c. Threats or rewards are not necessarily actually good or bad for us, but it is how we perceive them. For example, cigarette smoke is a putrid smell. But for an addicted smoker, the smoke isn’t necessarily a good smell, but it does trigger the potential for the chemical that the brain is craving that helps the brain calm down (temporarily, and at great cost)
 - d. Ultimately, the brain is seeking pleasure and survival. But it can be confused into thinking that rewards are actually good for us when they might actually be very dangerous things that just make us feel good. Or,

things perceived as threats may be harmless, but because of past experience can set off the alarms.

B. Important Notes:

1. First Note: this system is far more complex and involves many other parts of the brain, I am just giving a simplified basic structure
2. Second Note: I am not a doctor and this talk is in no way intended to give medical advice. I am sharing my own research and my own personal experience, but this is intended to point you to biblical principles. But the science is fascinating!

C. The Thalamus (The Traffic Cop)

1. Most stimuli the thalamus filters out as unnecessary or irrelevant.
2. It doesn't mean that we don't process it somehow, but it isn't flagged as a potential threat or reward.
3. We should be very grateful for this design! If it weren't for this filter, our brain would be on constant high alert from everything we see, hear, touch, taste, etc...Smell is the major exception. Things we smell bypass the thalamus initially.
4. The thalamus directs the signal to where it needs to go. If there is any potential for threat or reward, it sends it to the amygdala
5. The Thalamus sends a slower, more detailed report of the raw sensory data (what you see, what you hear, etc...) to the Prefrontal Cortex. It sends more information about the scene and the situation so the Prefrontal Cortex will be able to make a more informed decision.

D. The Amygdala (The Smoke Alarm)

1. The amygdala receives a direct, rapid signal from the thalamus to check for immediate threat.
2. The amygdala is a sensor that scans stimuli (what we see, hear, taste, smell)
3. This happens in about 1/4 to 1/5 of the time it takes you to blink (about 75 milliseconds)
4. The amygdala processes the signal from the thalamus for threat or reward
5. If it detects imminent danger, it sends a signal to the hypothalamus (the dispatcher) to activate the emergency response program to get us out of danger.
 - a. This happens faster than you can even process it. This is why you can jump out of the way of an oncoming vehicle faster than you can think about what to do.
6. If it does not detect imminent danger, it sends a signal to the hippocampus (the memory detective)

E. The Hippocampus (The Memory Detective)

1. The hippocampus receives a signal from the amygdala (the smoke alarm). It scans past memories looking for potential matches.
 - a. It communicates back and forth to the amygdala
 - b. If it finds a match for danger, it tells the amygdala, “Hey this is familiar, this was really bad before, we need to get out of danger!”
2. Example (the sound of brakes on a car)
 - a. **No match at all** (maybe as a baby or coming from a third world country or very rural area) – “Huh, I have no memory of that sound. We need to investigate further.”
 - b. **Positive match for reward**– “We’ve been to lots of car races and we’ve heard that screeching of brakes there many times, this might be fun!”
 - c. **Positive match for minor threat** – “We’ve heard that sound last time we were in a fender bender. Can we avoid it?”
 - d. **Positive threat for life threatening situation** – “Last time we heard that sound we were in a major accident and our loved one was killed.” (This would set off a massive system response, even if the screeching of car breaks doesn’t mean the car isn’t going to hit you. The memory is so traumatizing that the hippocampus says – this was really bad last time!)
3. **Personal example:**
 - a. My mom and I were side-swiped by a semi-truck in 2006. It sent us spinning like a top all over the highway into oncoming traffic with another semi-truck headed right for us. I was terrified and screaming and thought I was just moments from being in hell. For the next two years every time a semi-truck passed us I would hold my breath and my whole nervous system would go into crisis mode all over again.
4. The hippocampus sends a detailed memory report to the Prefrontal Cortex (the Executive – the thinking/reasoning/logical part of the brain)

F. The Prefrontal Cortex (The Executive)

1. This is the thinking/reasoning/logical part of the brain
2. Responsible for decision-making
3. The Hippocampus sends a detailed data report to the Prefrontal Cortex for further investigation and analysis.
4. Now the rational brain kicks in and begins thinking about it.
5. Data has already been sent to the Prefrontal Cortex about the current situation from the thalamus, but the hippocampus fills in details from past memories that might help the prefrontal cortex make a decision

6. The Prefrontal Cortex translates past memories into a guide for future behavior by assimilating new memories into pre-existing networks of knowledge³

G. The Hypothalamus (The dispatcher)

1. The hypothalamus controls the body through the autonomic nervous system “which controls such involuntary body functions as breathing, blood pressure, heartbeat,” and more.
2. It is broken down into the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system.

3. The Sympathetic Nervous System (the gas pedal)

- a. Activated when there is some kind of stimulus that the brain wants the body to react to – it could be threat or reward
- b. This has a massive internal response in the body including⁴:
 - The heart beats faster than normal, pushing blood to the muscles, heart, and other vital organs.
 - Pulse rate and blood pressure go up. Breathing rate increases and the lungs open up. This way, the lungs can take in as much oxygen as possible with each breath.
 - Extra oxygen is sent to the brain, increasing alertness so that sight, hearing, and other senses become sharper.
 - More blood sugar and fats are released into the bloodstream, supplying energy to all parts of the body.
- c. All of these changes happen before the person is even before the brain’s visual centers have fully processed all of the information. For example, a person is able to jump out of the way or a vehicle coming towards them before they realize what they’re doing.⁵

4. The Parasympathetic Nervous System - (the brake pedal)

- a. The Parasympathetic Nervous System is supposed to help the body return to a state of rest and homeostasis after the threat has passed

³ Preston, A. R., & Eichenbaum, H. (2013). Interplay of hippocampus and prefrontal cortex in memory. *Current Biology*, 23(17), R764–R773. You can read the full article at ScienceDirect.

⁴ “Understanding the stress response: Chronic activation of this survival mechanism impairs health”. Harvard Health. 3 April 2024. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthy-aging-and-longevity/understanding-the-stress-response>. Accessed 13 August 2026.

⁵ Ibid.

- b. It lowers heart rate and respiration rate, it relaxes the muscles that help digest food, produce and remove waste, and helps release insulin to break down sugars into a form your cells can use.⁶
- c. The terms come from Greek:
- d. Sympathetic = “Suffering Together”
- e. Parasympathetic = “Alongside the System the suffers together”
 - These both reflect Jesus. He suffers with us. And we are called to suffer with Him. We are called to deal with stressful situations and trials. The sympathetic nervous system is a God-given response for our protection. Jesus is the one who sends warring angels on our behalf and will move heaven and earth to protect us from threats outside and from threats within ourselves
 - He is also the one though that calms the storm in us and brings everything back into a place of peace and security

V. How Stress and Trauma effects this system:

A. Trauma vs. Chronic stress

1. Trauma is more acute, an incident, a shock to the system. It can be repeated events for years, but not a constant state
2. Unhealed trauma locks the brain into a permanent and ongoing state of high alert. It's ability to detect real threats become impaired, and normal, safe, every day situations are viewed as a potential threat.
3. Chronic stress is a slow degrading, dysregulation, and alteration of the structure and function of the brain

B. How Trauma effects this threat detector system:

1. **Changes in the amygdala (The smoke alarm becomes too sensitive):**
 - a. After trauma, the amygdala becomes more active and more sensitive. It is more likely to turn on the alarm and flood the body with adrenaline creating a fear response and making us sense danger when it shouldn't
 - b. Trauma survivors become less tolerant of stress and little things can “trigger” them or make them have an unnaturally extreme response
 - c. For example, when I started experiencing this massive nervous system dysregulation, I remember having full on panic attacks over spilling the milk or almost knocking a glass off of the counter

⁶ “Parasympathetic Nervous System”. Cleveland Clinic. 6 June 2022.

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/23266-parasympathetic-nervous-system-psns>. Accessed 13 August 2026.

- d. Safe situations and people can then feel like a potential danger situation to our system. Then, because the brain sets off the danger alert system and our body feels afraid, we assume it is because this person or this situation can't be trusted and needs to be avoided.
- e. The problem is, the more we allow that system to take over when there is no real danger, and we don't override that response with the truth, it grows stronger and stronger. Our world shrinks as we cut out more people and more situations

2. Changes in the Hippocampus (The Detective Becomes Confused and Impaired):

- a. Stress hormones kill off cells in the hippocampus, making it less effective at processing emotions
- b. Memory performance decline
- c. Higher risk of Dementia and Alzheimer's
- d. Impairs memory retrieval
- e. People who have experienced trauma may have missing memories, fragmented memories, or painful memories that pop up when they don't want them. When these memories pop up they re-trigger the amygdala. So, the amygdala perceives the memories as a new threat and sends off that alarm that restarts that trauma cycle
- f. Example: I once had a smoke alarm that had been installed in a vaulted area of the ceiling that came to a point. Because smoke rises, the tiniest bit of smoke from the pan collected there and concentrated rather than being dispersed throughout the room. So, the smoke alarm went off almost every time I cooked.

3. The Prefrontal Cortex, (the "General" Shrinks or gets silenced):

- a. It's like all of the team members are not listening to the executive (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- b. The "feeling" part of the brain is leaning on its own understanding rather than allowing the rational part of the brain to analyze the situation and come to a good and correct conclusion.
- c. We can't focus and we struggle to organize and plan
- d. This part of the brain handles higher thinking, planning, rational thought, logic, reasoning, and language. But when there is chronic stress, the response team takes over, and the volume gets turned down on the executive. It's like a military unit that is under attack and rather than listening to their captain for orders, they scatter and come up with their

own plan to save themselves. They've turned down or turned off their radio that has the battle plan.

- e. When we can't use reason to logically assess the situation both in the current context and by the report of past memory consolidation from the hippocampus, it becomes extremely difficult to calm the nervous system and tell our brain and body that we're safe

4. The Nervous System (the Soldiers are too scared to listen)

- a. The constant flooding of the body with stress hormones causes the body to be locked in the fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response system
- b. Feeling constantly on edge, jittery, nervous, and anxious
- c. Leads to exhaustion and eventually adrenal fatigue
- d. Leads to chronic fatigue and other chronic illnesses such as auto immune disorders, low functioning of the immune system, diabetes, obesity, muscle tension, chronic pain, sleep dysfunction, heart problems, and gut problems.

C. How Chronic Stress damages this entire system

1. Has many of the same effects as trauma, but does long-term damage to this system.
2. We can get stuck in the fight, flight, or freeze response – like the gas pedal to the floor of the car without letting up. Any minor stress sets off the emergency response program
3. High levels of cortisol over long periods of time wreak havoc on the brain. High cortisol increases the number of connections and the activity level in the amygdala (the smoke alarm).
4. Cortisol can literally shrink your brain! Too much cortisol weakens the connections between neurons and shrinks the Prefrontal Cortex (The Executive or the General), which is the part of the brain responsible for decision-making, concentration, judgment, and social interaction.
5. It strengthens fear conditioning so that we more easily become fearful⁷
6. “Chronic stress physically rewires the brain by enlarging the amygdala, shrinking the prefrontal cortex, and damaging the hippocampus.”⁸

⁷ Arnsten, A. F. T. (2009). Stress signalling pathways that impair prefrontal cortex structure and function. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 10(6), 410–422. doi.org

⁸ Routinery. (2026, March 17). Amygdala burnout is real: How chronic stress rewires your brain and destroys your habits. <https://www.routinery.app/blog/chronic-stress-brain>

7. “[Chronic stress] makes it harder to form habits, control impulses, and sustain motivation.”⁹
8. It also impairs the brain’s ability to make new memories, to learn new skills, and lead to Alzheimer’s or Dementia.
9. A study on rats found that the more nurturing a mother rat was to her pups, the more the pups nervous system was able to handle stress because their brains developed more cortisol receptors. The changes in these rats were passed down to many generations.
10. But, these effects can be reversed if the mom is swapped! This was fascinating as I instantly thought of this verse: Psalm 27:10 “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.” (Move this section to how to renew our minds include info on right-brain resonance)
11. As Christians I think we are really prone to this type of damage to our system. We are under constant warfare from the enemy, pressure to be a good Christian, the perfect spouse, the perfect parent, to raise our kids well, to do ministry, to read our Bible and pray every day, and we have this massive list of expectations.
12. Chronic stress from trying to fix ourselves in our own strength and trying to accomplish everything we think we should damage our system that should be able to handle trials and tribulations.

D. Stress if not always bad but chronic stress is

1. Remember, stress is not necessarily bad. Some stress is good. But chronic stress is often an indication of failure to trust the Lord:
 - a. **“I don’t have enough time”**
 - “My times are in your hands;” (Psalm 31:15)
 - “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (Matthew 6:27, Luke 12:25)
 - b. **“I don’t have enough money”**
 - “And my God will meet all of your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)
 - Matthew 6:25-34 don’t worry about your needs, but “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (the things you need) will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)
 - “Do not be like [the pagans], for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Matthew 6:8, Luke 12:30)

⁹ Ibid

- c. **I don't know what tomorrow will bring:**
 - Matthew 6:34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."
- 2. We are told over 300 times in the Bible not to fear

VI. The Broken Ways We Try to Comfort Ourselves

A. When storms and trials come, we seek comfort rather than God

1. we tend to fall apart, and it becomes extremely difficult to make our rational brain kick in.
2. When we are stressed, exhausted, and overwhelmed, we tend to turn to addictive, mind-numbing, or temporary pleasures that make us feel better. This might include: Video games, Social Media and mindless scrolling, Drugs and alcohol, Pornography, masturbation, and sex, Comfort food, Excessive sleep, TV, movies, and other entertainment

B. But God warns us against living for the pleasures of this world:

1. Romans 13:14 "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh."
2. Galatians 5:13 "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love."
3. God tells us that His grace is better than the pleasures of this world
4. Ephesians 2:1-7 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

5. Choosing to indulge the desires of the flesh to escape the stress rather than dealing with it leads to an even further destruction of the system designed to handle it

C. Temporal pleasures often give us dopamine (the motivator chemical – usually makes us feel euphoric), but make serotonin (the chemical that makes us feel satisfied) go down

1. Overuse of dopamine makes it harder to feel pleasure so we need more of it
2. It's not satisfying
3. It is harder to be motivated
4. It is harder to pursue long-term goals

D. The Bible tells us we must live according to the Spirit

1. “Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” (Romans 12:1-2)

VII. The Way We Should Find Comfort and Healing

A. We are to forgive

1. Matthew 6:14-15 “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”
2. An offense against us is seen by the brain as a threat. it sets off the stress response system just like a physical threat like a gunman or an oncoming vehicle. Like physical threats, the degree of the response varies by the gravity of the offense.¹⁰

¹⁰ Mnich, K. (2026, February 25). *The neuroscience of forgiveness & 6 common barriers*. PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-forgiveness/>

3. “Your brain wants to prevent you from experiencing similar situations again (Billingsley & Losin, 2017), which is why avoiding that person or the topic altogether is often the first instinct (as cited in Mnich, 2026). ”¹¹
4. In hearing encounters of the personal experience of hundreds of parents, This is what many therapists and counselors are teaching people today—to cut off anyone (in their case the adult children cutting off the parent) who causes them any psychological distress, or has offended them in any way in the past, even though there is a vast amount of neuroscience showing that unforgiveness leads to psychological harm, negative impacts on the brain, and a decrease in overall health.
5. Forgiveness is not just a good spiritual practice, it is healthy for our brain. When our brain is healthy, we make better choices and handle stress more easily. Studies have shown that situational forgiveness¹²:
 - a. activates (and therefore strengthens) the prefrontal cortex, the thinking and reasoning part of the brain
 - b. Promotes overall well-being
 - c. Improves cardiovascular health
 - d. Lowers the physiological stress response¹³
 - e. Combats anxiety, depression, and PTSD¹⁴
6. Interestingly, further study showed situational forgiveness (forgiving a specific incident) reduces heart rate and physical symptoms¹⁵
7. While an ongoing attitude of forgiveness is associated with
 - a. **Diminished reliance on medications and alcohol**¹⁶

¹¹ Mnich, K. (2026, February 25). *The neuroscience of forgiveness & 6 common barriers*. PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-forgiveness/>

¹² [Pietrini, P.](https://www.google.com/search?q=pietrini,+p.&kgmid=/g/11b_2s33h2), Ricciardi, E., & Pietrini, V. (2013). How the brain heals emotional wounds: The functional neuroanatomy of forgiveness. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 8(8), 920–929. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3856773/>

¹³ Greater Good Science Center. (2025, April 29). *How Forgiveness Changes You and Your Brain* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKKTc43VoqA>

¹⁴ Greater Good Science Center. (2025, April 29). *How Forgiveness Changes You and Your Brain* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKKTc43VoqA>

¹⁵ [Pietrini, P.](https://www.google.com/search?q=pietrini,+p.&kgmid=/g/11b_2s33h2), Ricciardi, E., & Pietrini, V. (2013). How the brain heals emotional wounds: The functional neuroanatomy of forgiveness. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 8(8), 920–929. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3856773/>

¹⁶ Ibid.

8. Refusing to forgive has been shown to¹⁷:
 - a. **Erode health**
 - b. **Raise the reactivity level of the cardiovascular system with increased blood pressure**
 - c. **Stimulate the production of stress-related hormones such as Cortisol**
 - d. **Developing or worsening of depression**
9. Forgiveness has also been shown through brain scans to help past memories hurt less.¹⁸
10. Forgiveness restores homeostasis between the Sympathetic Nervous System (the gas pedal for the stress response) and the Parasympathetic Nervous System (the brake pedal).¹⁹
11. According to a video on StarTalk Plus called “The Neuroscience of Forgiveness: How it Heals Your Brain”,²⁰
 - a. **“When you forgive somebody, it shuts down that very pain network, the anterior insula, which is the pain of your grievance area in the brain, it turns that off completely when you forgive.”**

B. We are not to hold onto bitterness

1. Ephesians 4:31 “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”
2. Hebrews 12:15 – “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”
3. Some psychologists try to explain it away as a disorder calling it Posttraumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED). Symptoms include: “feelings of helplessness, self-blame, rejection of help, suicidal ideation, dysphoria, aggression, downheartedness, seemingly melancholic depression, unspecific somatic complaints,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Tribedi, S. (2026, May 25). Your brain doesn't forget when you forgive—it does something far more surprising with those painful memories. Science X. <https://sciencex.com/news/2026-05-brain-doesnt-painful-memories.html>

¹⁹ Simon-Thomas, E. R. (2026, July 14). Why forgiveness is good for your health. Greater Good Magazine. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_forgiveness_is_good_for_your_health

²⁰ StarTalk. (2024, May 14). The neuroscience of forgiveness: How it heals your brain [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gzweqap0Rzo>

loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, pain, phobic symptoms in respect to the place or to persons related to the event, reduced drive.”²¹ (Linden, 2003)

C. We are to pray for those who hurt us

1. Matthew 5:43-44 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,”
- 2.

D. We are to bring all of our cares to Jesus with thanksgiving and rejoicing

1. Philippians 4:4-7 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

E. We are to think about good things

1. Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

F. We are to rejoice in our sufferings because we know it will produce the character of Christ in us (if we let it)

1. “...We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5)
2. James 1:2-4 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

²¹ [Linden, M.](<https://www.google.com/search?q=linden,+m.&kgmid=/m/0ds9754>) (2003). Posttraumatic embitterment disorder. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 72(4), 195–202. doi.org

3. 1 Peter 1:6-7 “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed”.

G. We are to be grateful

1. All of the following are from this video²²:
 - a. “Practicing gratitude actually changes the molecular structure of your brain... when you express gratitude, not just say you’re grateful, but express gratitude, your brain releases dopamine, it releases serotonin, which are two crucial neurotransmitters that are responsible for your emotions, and they make you feel good, and they enhance your mood... immediately.”
 - b. “Research shows that writing things down, like three things you’re grateful for today... it can significantly improve your level of optimism... your quality of life, because your satisfaction quotient is going up...”
 - c. “Gratitude can improve your brain function. Studies have found that gratitude can improve your decision-making skills, you can increase your productivity, and it does this by activating your prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for critical thinking and rational thought processes.”
 - d. “Practicing gratitude may help you sleep better and longer. There’s a study done in psychological science (that showed) that simply jotting down a few things that you’re grateful for before you go to bed, it may reduce the worry and the rumination, the anxious thinking, that often keeps us up at night.”
 - e. “It also helps our self-esteem... it reduces social comparison.”
2. Practicing gratitude activates the reward centers of our brain, making us feel happier and more satisfied (it releases both dopamine and serotonin).²³
 - a. Ultimately towards God, but also practicing gratitude towards others as well

²² Kwik Learning. (2023, November 23). *How gratitude changes your brain* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LG0COiQBjXA>

²³ American Brain Foundation. (2025, November 26). *Does gratitude rewire your brain?* <https://www.americanbrainfoundation.org/does-gratitude-rewire-your-brain/>

3. Practicing gratitude activates the parasympathetic nervous system (the brake pedal) that calms the sympathetic nervous system's "fight or flight" response, which leads to a feeling of calmness and relaxation.²⁴
4. "Regularly focusing on gratitude can reduce the amygdala's reactivity to stressors. This can help individuals have less intense emotional reactions to stressful situations and maintain a calmer and more balanced emotional state."²⁵
5. Practicing gratitude over time creates a positive feedback loop which reinforces the behavior as good and healthy for our brain. This makes it easier to experience positive emotions.²⁶
6. When we practice gratitude, the brain strengthens neural pathways that help us with positive thinking and emotional regulation.²⁷
7. Naturally, the brain has what's called a negativity bias. In other words, we tend to focus on the negative things in life. But practicing gratitude shifts the brain's focus towards the positive things in life. This reduces stress, anxiety, and depression.²⁸

H. Live knowing that we do not lack anything in the Lord

1. Psalm 23:1 – "The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing."
2. Ephesians 1:3 – "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."
3. An article about how neuroscience teaches us about contentment had a powerful statement that is also biblically true: "contentment isn't the result of getting what you want. It's the result of changing what your brain is designed to want in the first place."²⁹
4. The article went on to describe the need to get more, to achieve more: "You get a promotion, move into a better apartment, start a relationship, buy something you've been wanting — there's a spike in happiness, and then, within weeks or months, you adapt. The new situation becomes your new normal. The pleasure

²⁴ American Brain Foundation. (2025, November 26). *Does gratitude rewire your brain?* <https://www.americanbrainfoundation.org/does-gratitude-rewire-your-brain/>

²⁵ American Brain Foundation. (2025, November 26). *Does gratitude rewire your brain?* <https://www.americanbrainfoundation.org/does-gratitude-rewire-your-brain/>

²⁶ Green, N. (2026). *7 ways gratitude rewires your brain: The science behind a powerful practice*. Center for NeuroWellness. <https://centerforneurowellness.com/gratitude-brain/>

²⁷ Green, N. (2026). *7 ways gratitude rewires your brain: The science behind a powerful practice*. Center for NeuroWellness. <https://centerforneurowellness.com/gratitude-brain/>

²⁸ Green, N. (2026). *7 ways gratitude rewires your brain: The science behind a powerful practice*. Center for NeuroWellness. <https://centerforneurowellness.com/gratitude-brain/>

²⁹ The Whimsical Shots. (2024, February 3). What neuroscience teaches us about contentment. Medium. <https://medium.com/@thewhimsicalshots/what-neuroscience-teaches-us-about-contentment-423e5d22ede2>

fades. You're back at baseline, already looking toward the next thing that will finally make you happy."³⁰

5. "Dopamine spikes when you anticipate a reward, not when you receive it. The searching is what feels good, not the finding. The wanting is what your brain is designed to enjoy, not the having. This is why achieving a goal often feels anticlimactic. The actual moment of arrival can't match the neurochemical high of pursuing it. Your brain was getting its dopamine rush from the chase. Once you catch what you were after, dopamine drops, and you're left feeling flat — which your brain interprets as a signal to start wanting something else."³¹
 - a. This is fascinating because Jesus is the only thing that is an inexhaustible supply. Everything else we achieve in this life is never going to be enough.
 - b. As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun."
 - c. Pursuing God is a never-ending pursuit. Sometimes as a Christian we pursue the goals of ministry rather than the reason for the ministry Himself. Or we pursue certain changes in our lives rather than the giver of those gifts.
 - d. Even in eternity we will never fully arrive at the end of knowing God. It will be an eternal pursuit.
 - e. True contentment doesn't come from achieving the goal, but from pursuing the goal.
 - f. Example of the weight lifter who was depressed and suicidal after winning a big competition.

I. God does not want us to leave empty handed

1. Matthew 28:11-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

³⁰ The Whimsical Shots. (2024, February 3). What neuroscience teaches us about contentment. Medium. <https://medium.com/@thewhimsicalshots/what-neuroscience-teaches-us-about-contentment-423e5d22ede2>

³¹ The Whimsical Shots. (2024, February 3). What neuroscience teaches us about contentment. Medium. <https://medium.com/@thewhimsicalshots/what-neuroscience-teaches-us-about-contentment-423e5d22ede2>

2. Many of us try to lay down our burdens at the cross, but then we pick them back up. He wants us to lay down our burdens *and* take up His yoke. The yoke is not meant to make us a slave—though we are to be bondslaves of Christ (willing servants)—His yoke is like a training yoke. We are to be yoked with Him as He teaches us to walk and plow the fields to plant seed. (include link to teaching about the training yoke).

J. The Fear of the Lord leads to wisdom, peace, and security

1. Proverbs 19:23 – “The fear of the Lord leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.”
2. Isaiah 33:6 “He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.”

K. We are to come to the Lord for peace, not the things of this world

1. John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”
2. 2 Thessalonians 3:16 “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.”

L. We are to abide (remain) in Him

1. John 15:5 - “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

M. We are to fix our gaze on Him

1. Psalm 27:4 “One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”
2. Isaiah 26:3 “You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.”
3. This is more literal than I realized! The science behind gazing into the face of our caregiver is astonishing!