

Staying Connected to the Head: The Way Out is God's Indirect Way of Renewing our Minds

Chapter 12: (HEAD/The Way Out): Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – BiblicalMentoring.org / Studies

Resource: In His Image by Dr. Paul Brand & Philip Yancey. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. (1984). *In his two companion books, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made and In His Image, Dr. Brand with the help of Philip Yancey, places an emphasis on the individual human cells in our body and their varying roles for the sake of the body as a whole. He then points to the Body of Christ (the Church) and makes insightful analogies about the connections and forces that unite and guide our human bodies (and the Body of Christ). We suggest you memorize the key verse and read that chapter in the Bible then review the questions prior to reading the content together. This is meant for life-to-life discipleship training sessions.*

Key Verse: Romans 12:1-2 - *I appeal to you therefore, brothers by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship¹ ² Do not be conformed to this world,³ but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

In this session, we will learn:

1. That the mind needs a cooperative body to connect with for functionality.
2. We can be like disobedient cells that cause dissension between the mind and the body.
3. In Christ we all benefit if and when we concentrate more on training to advance the Kingdom of God.
4. How our unconfessed sins clog up our communications – our intimacy with God.
5. How we are encouraged to renew our minds – to learn or re-learn God's good, pleasing and perfect will through the disciplines of faith. We can depend on God's instructions written in the law which is also written on our hearts.

Dr. Brand starts this chapter talking about a teenage girl suffering from cerebral palsy. Immediately I remembered my younger sister who suffered and died of MS at the young age of 65. Brand continued talking about another person with the same disease (CP) who had the fortune of training and rehab work. The first patient had received no rehab therapy so his point was that everything was wrong with the girl except her mind but that the mind is not enough since he argues that a healthy mind needs a cooperative body to be fully functional. The obvious spiritual application for this discussion is that the mind of Christ is not enough – a cooperative Body (people) is needed for the Church to achieve its goal which is to go and make disciple-makers who make disciple-makers, etc. There are only two requirements for all believers (disciples) – to die to self and reproduce others to be like Christ.

He then says there are predictable problems when cells become disobedient. Cells in the human body and in the Body of Church must be cooperative and on the same page or mission. Many people suffer from diseases like cerebral palsy or MS or ALS. He says we unfortunately tend to disregard people with such diseases as ignorant or retarded. Brand suggest they simply have an obvious dissension between mind and body as effective communications are affected by dysfunctional cells as communication requires unbroken connections. He says a spastic disease or paralysis break the connections. The way-out messages are disrupted.

Note: I shared this story in Chapter 2 but it applies here as well. The mind of my friend, Bruns Myers, a paraplegic was excellent. Brun's messages from his head (brain) couldn't reach his arms and legs since he had severed his spinal cord from an accident riding his horse. He had partial use of his arms thankfully. No amount of desire or personal efforts could correct this disconnection. He was dying of pneumonia at the time I met him while I was working as a chaplain in the Methodist Rehab Center in Jackson, MS. I asked what I could do to help him achieve his goals if God permitted him to live. Not sure I know what I was promising. Well, he lived! And by God's Grace, I kept my promise by helping to get him enrolled in Reformed Theological Seminary which needed wheelchair ramps, etc. I bought a motorcycle to go get him during my lunch breaks. He eventually earned a Masters of Divinity (theology) degree and then served for years as a chaplain at the same rehab center. He served very effectively as a former patient – even or especially in a wheelchair.

God has access to his spiritual Body (the Church). We have access to him which Brand calls the way-in messages. We rely on the messages we get from God (His Word Jesus and His Word – the Bible). Have you considered how God relies on messages from us? That is, our prayers. Brand says only the Head can determine the needs of the whole body and that obedience alone determines our usefulness in his Body. The point is the Body of Christ, like this spastic patient's body, can be judged by its disobedient body parts. God is guilty by association with a Church of selfish, greedy, intolerant and prideful members. Brand points out that God worked with David, Jonah, Peter Luther, Calvin, and even people like you and me. We as his people take using his name as we are called "Christians" or people of "The Way". We are adopted children by his Spirit.

Brand said that at first, Jesus did it all, but near his death he concentrated more on training those who would be left behind. Our ministry (found at Biblicalmentoring.org) is focused on training participants to train disciple-makers to train disciple-makers. We sometimes use various studies of books like In His Image to do that to stimulate Biblical discussions.

Brand notes that Jesus initially sent out six-dozen novices – a group of 72 lambs in training (Luke 10). They reported great and unexpected success. Jesus had extreme joy over their success. The work of the Kingdom advanced. Jesus was serving in an indirect role as he is still doing today. Discipleship training results in multiplication which builds exponential growth. Each person who gets trained then trains another who trains someone else, etc. This is the pattern that Jesus used and it continues today globally. This method keeps the lines of communication open. We simply need to diminish the barriers that block the necessary communication that causes disconnection between the Head and the Body.

Jesus turned over his whole ministry at the Last Supper. From that point, Brand says Jesus has relied on “the way-out”, that is the indirect way of working through humans. He could do it perfectly then and even now yet He chooses to use imperfect and flawed servants even though our failures and lack of faith can paralyze His plan. He continues to delegate His authority to us. There are still spastic moments as ministry is not smooth and or easy at times. He says that this kind of humiliation cannot be easy for the Father, Son and Spirit. Yet, God continues to depend on people to do His work.

Humans with handicaps have body parts that have lost contact with their higher order from their head (brain). Body parts can still move involuntarily with reflexes and irrational movements. Likewise, members of the Body of Christ who get disconnected from the Head can have irrational actions. Brand says poison, such as cocaine, botulinus and atropine can jam the normal chemical synapses. A logical word for this poison is sin which steals intimacy between the head and the body member. A person suffering from unconfessed sin can legalistically judge another member for his wrong actions yet not see his own sin. (See Colossians 2:18-19).

Did you know you can re-pattern parts of your brain? The authors say that the normal brain assigns a specific area to govern a part of your body. Brand tells a story of getting involved in disrupting associative pathways and attempts to establish new ones. For example, he would transfer part of a hairy scalp to construct new eyebrows. Interestingly, if a fly lands on the new eyebrow, the patient would slap his scalp. Or if a tendon was transferred from a ring finger to a thumb, the patient would move his ring finger when asked to move his thumb. Funny, but totally logical. Overtime, the patient must repattern his brow to interrupt the sensations. However, people 40 and older have difficulty doing repatterning work. It seems harder for older people to do transformational work as well.

Spiritually, we are to be re-patterned or transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12). We are to let the mind of Christ, which was in Christ, be in us. We are to know what he said and taught and let that form our thoughts and actions. (Philippians 2:5) He says this renewing process can be intense and time-consuming. We are to examine the model of Christ by forming not just a religious process but a relationship with Him. That is how we learn the mind of Christ – what he thinks and expects of us. Again, the biological process is similar to the spiritual process.

Discover the disciplines of faith such as meditation, fasting, prayer, simple living, worship, and celebration. We can benefit by repeating prayers from a Book of Common Prayers to discipline the mind. We can repeat actions of obedience similar to how musicians, athletes, practice their skills. Physicians and lawyers and all kinds of professionals practice and continue practicing to improve their skills – their connections and internal communications. We attend worship with others regularly and learn and relearn Biblical truths. We celebrate communion as often as possible. Infants learn to walk by stumbling and falling a lot initially, but get smoother daily with practice. Spiritually we get stronger in our faith with practice.

A physical therapist works with patients helping them to learn how to get muscles and joints to cooperate smoothly and without pain. Occasionally, we are alarmed when we see someone with a handicap or paralyzed who has no ability to control their limbs. Our desire is to offer sympathy but our best action is to help them with things they cannot accomplish.

Dr. Brand closes this chapter with the illustration of the valuable instinct that God gave the Orchard Orioles that know how to build a strong protective nest for their young. He compares that to his wife's ability to follow written instructions to knit a sweater for him. He says that he tried and failed to build a nest, even though he had ten functioning fingers. He couldn't achieve what the oriole had achieved with its beak and feet with great success. He affirmed that the bird's instinct was the key. These migrating birds, and even fish such as salmon, are not encumbered by reason (a factor for humans) are able to do what is needed every year. He says this innate God-given wisdom predates the egg that they came from.

He writes that messages from God reach men along the pathways of “the way-out”. He writes that we would do well to prevent reason from interfering with this God-given wisdom to our brains. We have to put aside selfishness and pride and lean on a force more dependable than reason. This force comes to us, he says in our conscious or even our subconscious, and is all that is in the law written in our hearts (Romans, 2:15). We can strengthen this instinctive sense by practicing the disciplines of faith, especially memorizing scriptures (from God's Word) and then meditating on it regularly. Ask God to print His instructions in your memory as if they were there instinctively. He concludes by asking God for an uninterrupted flow of messages and for an obedient response. This chapter about “the way-out” messages from the Head (Christ) was very helpful personally.