

The Rewire Principle

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

I've been playing guitar for probably 10 years now.

I started learning on electric guitar before I came to the realization, I'm not cool enough to be an electric guitar player. So I put that down and picked up an acoustic guitar instead.

On July 10, 2016, I played my acoustic guitar for the first time at NorthernLife or as it was then called Hornsby Baptist Church.

At first, I was so new to it that I needed to be looking at the sheet music the entire time because I didn't know what chords to play.

Well, as the months and years went by, playing most weeks at church and practicing for hours a day at home, I came to find I was looking at the sheet music less and less. And I was starting to memorize the songs we play.

The music moved from my brain to my fingers. The big point here is not that practice makes perfect. It's that practice gets into your bones.

The music moved from my brain to my fingers. I stopped having to think, I just did. Repetition rewires the brain.

Repetition rewires the brain. Repetition... Okay, you get the idea.

We've seen from 2 Corinthians 10 that there can be strongholds which exist in our lives due to lies that we've believed. We also saw how the truth of the gospel can demolish strongholds and replace them with truth.

We've referred to this as the replacement principle. The tricky bit about these lies is that they are deeply woven into our minds and bodies neurologically. Once we have uprooted the deep lies, we need to deeply entrench the truth in its place.

This is called the Rewire Principle, Romans 12 2. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, perfect, and pleasing will.

This word, be transformed, is the Greek word metamorpho. It means to change inwardly in fundamental character or condition. It's the same word we have in English, to describe the change that a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly.

Metamorphosis. I like this definition. The process of transformation from an immature form to an adult form in two or more distinct stages.

If only it took two distinct stages to become like Christ. Romans 12 says, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

What I find interesting about this word metamorpho in Romans 12 too, is that it is a passive imperative. A passive imperative is a command for something to be done to you. You are not the subject, but the object of the verb.

A passive imperative is like if I were to say to you, be called by your mother or be pooped on by a bird or be struck by lightning, you would rightly say, I can't, you're commanding me to have something done to me that I cannot do to myself.

Well, right you are. Paul says, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed. There's a paradox here.

If I could, I would have a much thicker and richer beard. Now, I've tried squeezing, trying my hardest, and it does not grow. I cannot squeeze transformation out of myself.

No, it's God who transforms me. And yet here we find a command to be transformed. Spiritual transformation is a partnership between you and God.

As the saying goes, without him you can't, without you, he won't. This week, I was reading through old journal entries I wrote when I was 16.

And one of the things I kept on writing back then was, it seems God is not in a rush to make me the man he wants me to be. I looked back on that this week and thought, yeah, God is not in a rush and transformation can be slow.

But if I was really feeling like nothing was changing, maybe it's because I needed to do something too. He will not change you without you. Romans 12 2 is passive because the Holy Spirit is the one who does the transforming.

But it's also an imperative, a command to be transformed because we have a part to play. God doesn't want to click his fingers and transform your entire life without you having to do anything. He wants to partner with you.

Now, don't get me wrong. I believe when we trust Jesus, God does in one instant make us born again, a new creation, loved, forgiven and freed on the inside. But the actual way we live our life needs to be transformed.

Verse 2, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but what? Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Notice the by.

What are we transformed by? The renewing of your mind. The word is *anachinos*.

It just means new again. According to Paul, you and I need a mind that is new again, and that will transform us. This diagram is one we've been coming back to.

In the first chapter of these teachings, we looked at how spiritual formation happens from the dead center out. And that's a play on words actually. We are dead in the center until Christ makes us alive.

So the first step must be to surrender your will to the Lord. By the power of the Spirit to say no to the impulsive will and yes to the reflective will, we live from the inside out.

So you see when Paul says we need a mind that is new again, that will transform our emotions, then our body, then our social context, and then the world. Now this is a huge aspect of spiritual formation.

The renewing of your mind, having a mind that is new again. Because if your mind is renewed, it will transform you from the inside out. So the central question must be, how do we get a new mind?

Before we get to the answer to that question, let's take a journey into the world of neuroscience. Now I'm not a psychologist or a neuroscience. I have no expertise in this area.

But I can repeat to you what other smart people have said. Psychiatrist Dr. Kurt Thompson says this about the human brain.

Neurons that repeatedly activate in a particular pattern are statistically more likely to fire in that same pattern the more they are activated, meaning you think one thought, you're more likely to think that thought again.

Once the initial neurons in a network fire, there is a very high probability that the related neurons will also activate and move along the same bioelectrical pathway to the end of that network.

The more frequently those patterns have been fired, the more easily they will fire in that same pattern in the future. More simply, neurons that fire together, wire together. If you have no idea what that means, join the club.

Neither do I.

But as far as I understand it, he's getting at this idea called neuroplasticity, which neuroscientists now understand as the process by which the brain, kind of like plastic, literally rewires, remolds itself around our repeated thoughts.

There is an actual neurological change that happens when we think thoughts. Repetition rewires the brain. Repetition rewires the brain.

Repetition rewires the brain. Repetition rewires the brain. If this is still making no sense, here's a metaphor.

You're hiking through a jungle with a machete creating a trail. The trail you hack is your thought life, and the jungle is the billions of synapses in your brain.

When you think a thought, it's like you are cutting a trail, a neural pathway through the jungle. Now, if you think the same thought again, you go down the same trail and hack away at it a bit more and again and again and again.

Eventually, you'll be able to easily walk down the path and think that thought without even thinking about it. Right? Making sense?

Now, this is a really, really good thing about the way that God made our brains. It's the reason why you can brush your teeth and not have to think so hard about how to do it every time. It's the reason you know how to drive.

It's the reason we get better at playing musical instruments or sport or whatever you do repeatedly. It's a good thing. Now, I know this is not life-changing knowledge.

We probably all already know this. We know that repetition rewires the brain. Repetition rewires the brain.

We know this. Now, side note. I've said the word repetition rewires the brain probably a dozen times already.

When I was writing this sermon, every single time I wrote repetition rewires the brain, I accidentally typed Brian instead of brain. Repetition rewires the Brian. Repetition rewires the Brian.

And I thought that was funny. Literally, my brain was automatically typing Brian and not brain because repetition rewires the Brian, I mean brain. Did you know you can make a person believe a lie just by repeating it?

Psychologists call it the illusory truth effect. If you repeat the same lie again and again and again, your brain will start to believe it and rewire itself around that thought. Now, here's the thing.

It doesn't have to be true to actually rewire your brain. Repetition rewires the brain, and it's not always a good thing. Now, I know we know this, but go with me.

This is where it gets powerful. What was the lie you discovered last chapter? Where did it come from?

We suggested that we should identify the problem, ask probing questions, pinpoint the lie. You didn't come to believe that lie by saying it once. You repeated it for years.

So maybe you believe you're not good enough. Where did that come from? Well, maybe you got picked to last to be on the team in Kindy, and you believed that the reason was that you're not good enough.

Then maybe you got a bad grade in year two, and it just confirmed what you already believed that you're not good enough. Then every time you got in trouble at home, it just confirmed what you already knew.

When you got to high school, you struggled to make friends because you felt like you weren't good enough, and you didn't let people speak truth into you. So you kept on believing a lie. You fell into a rut.

Because repetition creates ruts. We get stuck thinking and believing lies about ourselves when we repeat them. Maybe you have a great family who gave you a lot of attention when you were a kid.

Maybe every time you did something funny or cute, they would all laugh and smile. And then you worked out that having the praise of other people feels good. In kindergarten, maybe you realized people would praise you for behaving, so you did.

In high school, you would maybe gravitate to situations where you could be in front of people and they could see just how amazing you are. Now the pattern of your life is doing things for the praise of other people because you feel you need it.

By repetition, over a long period of time, your brain has been rewired to believe that you need the praise of people. You've fallen into a rut and believed a lie that you need the praise of people. Maybe you feel you can't express yourself.

Maybe one time in kindergarten, you were really brave and expressed who you really are, but you got laughed at. So you believed this lie that you can't express yourself.

Maybe you had difficulty speaking clearly in year two, when people constantly were not understanding what you were saying, and it just reinforced the lie that you can't express yourself.

In high school, maybe you tried so hard to look just like every other kid, because you can't express yourself, and if you did, you'd be laughed at.

Maybe today, you don't even try to clarify when people misunderstand you, because you've believed the lie that you can't express yourself. Repetition rewires the brain, and you've fallen into a rut. You've believed a lie by repetition.

Here's one more. Maybe your mom's answer to every problem was food. Maybe she's a great cook, and you believed that food can fix any problem.

Maybe you skinned your knee in preschool, and you'd get ice cream to make you feel better. So now, years later, maybe you've had a bad day at work, and you discover that getting maccas on the way home from work makes you feel better.

The same thing happened the week after, so you did it again, then again, and again, and again, and again, and again. We can believe lies and get stuck in profoundly unhelpful behaviors. We get stuck in ruts of thinking.

We have these deeply embedded lies in our soul. They won't come out easily because they haven't gone in easily. They've been reinforced over years of repetition, so this feels pretty gloomy and depressing, right?

Well, here's the good news. Repetition is what created the old rut, and repetition is what will create the new trench. What's the difference between a rut and a trench?

Well, a rut is formed accidentally and unintentionally by repetition, and it has no purpose. Our brains are rewired around our ruts of bad habits and self-defeating practices.

Now, a trench is intentionally created for the purpose of redirecting the flow of something. My old bedroom used to get flooded whenever it rained hard for a while.

The water had created ruts in the garden by repetition that had let the water flood my bedroom floor. The solution was for dad to dig a trench that would redirect the water away from my bedroom and to where it should be.

Repetition is what created the old rut, and repetition is what will create the new trench. No matter what lie you have believed, what habits you live in, what rut you're stuck in, you can change.

You can create a new neural pathway by creating a trench of truth. Repeating truth will literally change your brain. Your brain is designed to rewire itself around your repeated thoughts.

So repeat truth to yourself, and it will renew your mind. And even if you don't believe it at first, repeat it. Repeat truth.

Repeat truth. I've been living under a rock since 1997. I only just watched Good Will Hunting a few days ago.

When I watched it, my mind was full of this repetition rewires, the brain repeat truth idea. And when we got to the end of the film where Robin Williams says to Matt Damon's character, it's not your fault. It's not your fault.

It's not your fault. It's not your fault. Matt Damon just breaks down into emotion for the first time in the whole film, and it's so powerful.

And I'm thinking, it's repetition. Repetition rewires the brain. So what truth do you need to hear?

In a sense, you'll have to work out what the lie is for you and custom fit the truth to that lie. But once you know what the lie is, go find a Bible verse that speaks truth to the lie and write it down.

If you believe you're not good enough, you could say, even though I failed, Jesus died for me while I was still a sinner, and he tells me I'm worthy of his love.

If you believe you need the praise of people, you could say, my life is lived for the glory of God alone. I live to make him smile, and I don't need the praise of people.

If you believe you can't express yourself, you could say, my identity is in my father in heaven. I can truly express myself to him and know that he welcomes me.

If you believe you need to self-medicate your pain with food, you could say, when I'm stressed, I turn to God, not food. I turn to Jesus to give me what I really need. Repetition can create a trench of truth.

It can literally rewire our brains and create new neural pathways. And this is where we're building directly on the previous chapter. Identify the problem.

Ask probing questions. Pinpoint the lie. Remove the lie and replace with gospel truth.

And I would add to that, repeat the truth. Repeat the truth. Write it.

Speak it. Repeat it until you believe it. Earlier, we asked the question, how do we get a new mind?

This is how, by repetition of truth. Any rut in your thinking can be overcome by repeating truth because repetition rewires the brain. No, the brain.

Repetition rewires the brain. Psalm 1 gives us a good model of what repetition on truth looks like. Psalm 1 verse 1.

Blessed is the one who does not walk and step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers. This word meditate means to constantly mull over, to mutter and mumble and repeat to yourself.

It means rumination. Joshua 1 says in verse 8, keep this book of the law always on your lips. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

Then you will be prosperous and successful. Meditating on truth day and night, meditating on the word of the Lord literally rewires your brain around truth.

No matter the lie, no matter what you currently think, if you will repeat the truth, you can rewire your brain.

As I've been working and chewing and meditating on this message the past few weeks, I've wanted to have a place where I can write down truth so that I always see it and I can repeat it to myself.

I've been trying to source a whiteboard for my bedroom for about a week now, but it's really tough to find the perfect one. Here's a super practical thought.

Once you have followed the symptoms of the problem to find the root lie, and you have a truth declaration, a trench of truth, write it, speak it, repeat it until you believe it. Write it, speak it, repeat it until you believe it.

You know, it's really helpful that right now, I don't have to stress about what chords are coming up in the next song that I play. But that's only happened after hundreds of hours of repetition.

If you were to look at my fingers right now, you would see literal trenches of where the strings have dug into my fingers. We need this to happen in our brains. Repetition rewires the brain.

Repetition rewires the brain. Repetition rewires the brain.