

## Embeds a Big-Pix Framework into our Brain

*What an amazing brain our infinitely creative God designed to bless us with!*

Our brain craves novelty. It's always searching, scanning, looking, waiting for something unusual. Notice, for instance, how we respond to the unexpected in a movie thriller or a surprising twist to a well-written mystery.

We receive millions of impressions each day, many of which are trivial. So, God also designed our brain to automatically filter the commonplace. In these arenas, our habits kick in and semi-automatically bring into play what's needed. No wonder it's so crucial to build good habits. Our brains take much of the routine and ordinary and filter out the normal to keep it from interfering with the brain's primary purpose...to record what really matters.

*This cuts both ways.*

God designed our brain to function through associations, connections and link between bits of information. These mental "*maps*" (or circuits, wiring, neural pathways) join together via complex chemical and physical pathways. This selective attention allows us to focus on what is essential without being flooded by all the minutia of daily life.

*However, this filter may also block out important information if our filters are off kilter.*

Therefore, **first** embed in our brain a big-picture, broad-stroked "filing system" for information. Then we carefully *encode* what we take in, marking it as "*can't forget*" stuff for the proper filing system.

"Our brains like to create order out of the chaos of data coming into them, to make links between information so that our lives make more sense" (David Rock, *Quiet Leadership*).

I'm encouraging disciples of Jesus to *intentionally* tap into how God designed the functions of our brain to accelerate learning. Learn a solid, big-picture overview of the "*main & plain*" of God's Word and life itself. Deliberately work on *encoding* what's crucial to us. When natural learning groups learn to "*draw out*" with questions and dialog, this marks the "*aha's*" we discover as "*Remember this!*"

Once it's *encoded*, our brain transfers and hard-wires this in our long-term memory in existing categories until needed. That's why a simple, yet powerful, way to study Scripture is to soak in a passage for a whole week and put weight on **doing** God's Word. Have you intentionally designed how you study Scripture, so it's *encoded* as: "*This is memorable!*" "*It's can't miss stuff!*"

*Here is a bit of layman's understanding of how God fashioned our brains to process.*

God designed our brains in Genesis 1 with unique complexity, each one different yet each fearfully and wonderfully fashioned. Our thoughts and memories, skills and actions are vast sets of connections or "maps." These maps or circuits are wired together via complex chemical and physical pathways.

Here's a simplified glimpse into the vast complexity of our brain from a non-expert. The brain has around 100 billion **neurons**. Neurons connect together like a super internet and do the creative work we call thinking. Neurons send rapid signals to other neurons through the **synapses**, that is, the points where neurons connect.

One single neuron may have up to 100,000 **dendrites** (think roots as they gather and link info). **Dendrites** can form thousands of communication connections through their capacity for branching, networking and linking. The first time neurons link up, the **network** connection is

fleeting. **Dendrites** strengthen from these stimulating experiences. On the other hand, a newly formed dendrite shrivels and disappears if we don't quickly reinforce and put into practice what we have learned.

*How do our neurons become even more effective?*

The **myelin sheath** is a layer of cells that grows on the outside of neurons. **Myelin** allows you to speed up your brain, like we can super-charge our computers. Build layer upon layer of **myelin** in crucial areas. With fifty layers of myelin on each neuron, the signals may increase from 20 miles per hour up to 200 miles per hour. Our neuron network can then send 30 times more signals down the same neuron network. The overall processing in your brain can become 3,000 times more effective.

If we link up again by study and reflection, by doing and experiencing the **same** concept, these actions strengthen both the **dendrites** and the **myelin sheath**. Every new experience, new action, new thought, new sensation, forms new connections or strengthens existing ones. The more times the pathway is used, the stronger the connection grows and the wider the network spreads.

How do soccer players or singers improve? Certainly, they may have natural gifting, but they also master their skill through many hours of "*deliberate practice*" aimed at continuous improvement through incremental changes. *Deliberate practice* occurs best under the watchful eye of another or others who aid the training process. For us, those in our natural learning SmallGroup act as peer-coaches with their encouragement and joy in learning.

These combine for **300 trillion** constantly changing connections with an almost unlimited array of ways each brain stores information. This means we all process differently. We therefore make a fatal error in relationships by assuming other people problem solve exactly like us. This is one reason questions are so powerful to "*draw out*" the unique connections of the others.

God explicitly designed our brains to be our ally in learning. However, we must choose to access this feature. I'll be chatting with a grandchild and casually say: "*I wish my I-Phone could....*" Immediately my grandchild grabs my phone and says, "*Watch, Poppo. Let me show you.*" A function is useless if it's not utilized. No wonder we emphasize soaking in a passage and learning together in community "*by doing.*"

"[The brain is] capable of creating new connections on a massive scale, at any stage of life, and [does] this in response to anything new that was learned [and practiced]"  
(David Rock, *Quiet Leadership*).

A key to becoming lifelong *life*-learners is for us to fully engage ourselves to store the most important concepts of Scripture as "**must remember.**" God designed our brains to function similar to a muscle. The more we use our brain, the more networks and branches we grow and the better we get at storage and retrieval.

Work on a skill every day with incremental learning toward continuous improvement and we get better and better. Release the unbridled creativity in God's image-bearers. Involved learners increase the neurons that fire.

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God's plan is for other mature people to help us to process good and bad experiences. They come alongside so we can discern the healthy from the unhealthy, the life-releasing from the life-stifling. And a certain "chaos" exists in creativity. Creativity is not something rare or neat or packaged in an orderly way. Creativity is messy. Flashes of insight come at inconvenient times. It's enhanced by a fun, fast-paced, uncritical exchange in a cooperative group that functions more "right-brained" in its earlier stages.

Join a host of others as lifelong *life*-learners, turning truth into experience. The head works by "knowledge gathering," by observing, thinking, problem solving and correlating new information. Our heart is the core of our being and learns differently. The heart (affections, mind, will) works by "experience gathering" as we put truth into practice. Like digesting food, we digest experience. We walk through an event, take in what is usable and eliminate the waste.

*How do insights on our brain help us grow spiritually?*

*First*, learn how to **encode** what is crucial for our spiritual adventure with Jesus. Without these encodings, we are doomed to process most of life's events in a manner that is difficult to retrieve. Centuries ago, Ezra had learned God's creation design to store truth in our brain (Ezra 7:10). "This is 'must remember' stuff! Store as **high priority!**" Let's learn to align with our design.

*Second*, develop a "catalog system" to **embed** in your brain that reflects large categories for storage and easier retrieval. **Retrieval** seems to be the largest problem. Just like when you seek a book in the library, you go to their catalog system to find it most easily.

**TIP ONE:** "Encode Crucial Ideas as 'MUST REMEMBER'"

Experts say an average adult has somewhere around 50,000 thoughts a day! God designed our minds with filters. We automatically filter out what is crucial from what is inconsequential. Over time, we train our minds to focus on what is crucial for us. Have you ever heard some criticized for having "selective hearing?" How do we train our mind to know what the crucial Scriptural "must remember" ideas are to accelerate learning by enhancing retrieval?

Our brain must believe, "this material is 'can't forget' stuff" in order to bypass our God-given filters. In recent decades, educators have begun to grasp this. They teach us to design a wide range of creative, novel learning ideas to jazz up the drab classroom teaching. The problem is these artificial techniques are Band-Aids to an outdated adult learning philosophy.

*Our 20<sup>th</sup> century learning philosophy needs major surgery.*

Be careful here. Novelties by definition are "small ornaments." To partner with the Triune God for authentic, from-the-inside-out LifeChange, we need more than ornaments or Band-Aids plastered on the outside. I believe God is calling us to a revelation in learning! Here are a few ideas to **encode** the main-&-plain, what is clear and crucial. Develop more of your own.

1. *Put the Word into practice to tap into your amazing brain.* Why does the Bible put so much emphasis on **doing** the Word of God, rather than simply studying or hearing? When truth intersects life, reflecting on this encounter brings about true learning. We don't learn simply by studying. We learn as we put it into practice and reflect on how that truth looks in life. Stated another way: the sequence for learning is: study, do, *then* reflect to know. Active learning files crucial truth as "must remember" stuff. When we put truth into practice, so it intersects life, retention and retrieval increase from 10% for only reading or hearing to **70%**. And if we pass it on to at least one other person, it increases to **90%**. Lets become "**90% Learners.**"

2. *Review the lesson to align with how your amazing brain works.* Review shouts “*This is ‘must remember’ stuff!*” This includes the skill called “*practiced retrieval*” that significantly increases our ability to retrieve over the long term. One of the responses in “*DiscipleMaking Companion*” when we get together is to *review* the key points we remember as a group from last week.

3. *Learn the Word in community & tell stories how truth encountered your life.* When we learn together in community and come back the next week to share a fresh story how truth intersected life, hearing these encounters helps us to see truth differently. Our minds have now received this several times and files the truth as “**must remember**” for easier retrieval.

**TIP TWO: “Embed Categories in your Memory”**

*Encoded information and experience must have a framework into which we embed or store it.*

Certainly, we could use the excellent, recent insights regarding how the brain works to patch the old learning philosophy. My encouragement, though, is to view this research as signposts pointing to a different philosophy and practice of learning. In other words, I believe these recent studies simply point back to God’s creation design. When we shift our philosophy of learning to orient with how God formed us, we will no longer depend on a patchwork of outward techniques to artificially stimulate learning. We will become lifelong *life-learners*.

*OK, so where do we store or **embed** this “must remember” truth from Gods’ Love-Letter?*

Our Team-of-Three is very well organized. Just gaze at the breathtaking universe. Or at the marvelous way the human body functions. God created us in His image. So, it comes as no surprise to me that scientific studies reflect that a mental filing system with clear categories improves our retrieval.

*Have you ever been in an office where some temp filed important documents randomly?*

What a horror to retrieve valued information! Some of us in the past have been operating like this with the most essential truth in our life, spiritual truth. In optimum mode, our minds work with a well indexed filing system. As you read the Bible, what are the categories you presently use to store information in from its sixty-six books inspired over millenniums?

*How is your system working for you?*

We learn new things by relating the new to previously learned information. Our categories act as the skeleton on which we attach a myriad of detailed truth. The better our mental filing system, the easier to retrieve. Over the years, scholars have proposed many excellent storage categories. In the past, I have learned categories so complex that I need another storage container to remember them! In a few moments, I want to pass on simple, broad stroked categories that I now use, even though they are fairly comprehensive.

Keep your categories as **few** as possible, yet as **many** as needed (**KISS**, **Kee**P** **It** **Simple**, **Servant**). The following categories are not exhaustive, simple yet not simplistic. I suggest you begin here then let need draw you to ones that are more complex. Print this out and rehearse these until you make them your own. As you study Scripture, file the “*neons*” that that Spirit floods into your heart with bright light from Scripture under one or more of these categories in your mind as “*must remember*” truth.**

As we move from one book in the Bible to the next and put truth into action, our brain connects this new information with previous learning in these categories. Without these encodings, we are doomed to process most of life’s events in a fragmented manner that is isolated and difficult to retrieve. **Retrieval** seems to occur best when important bits of information are both **encoded** as

memorable, and connected together and *embedded* in categories, like in a catalog system in a large library for important books. Here are my suggestions in an expanding sequence.

***Level ONE Category: Two Essential Questions.*** The source of all is the Father, Son and Spirit, reflected in my two essential questions. “*What is God like?*” “*How does this God see me?*” It’s crucial for our growth to learn to discern “*God’s part*” and “*our part*” in this adventure of faith.

1. “*What is God like?*” In short, God is a relational Trinity. Although this fries my mental circuits, it also ravishes my heart. He is intrinsically *good, great* and *generous* (see Genesis 1). He is a Being far beyond our ability to fully comprehend yet ravishes our hearts with what we do grasp. What He reveals to me draws my heart even more to Him in love (Ephesians 1:17). Much of what I write explains and points out how knowing God accurately leads to transforming LifeChange. Of course, God is much, much more. We are searching now for large categories. You have a lifetime to expand more detailed levels beneath.

2. “*How does this God see me?*” Our Family-of-Three created us in His image, after His likeness, as much like God as any created being could ever be (look at Psalm 8:5 in the NASB Bible). God did not create because He was lonely or lacked anything. He has been a completely satisfied SmallGroup of three since before creation, loving and being loved. But life and love long for additional outlets to pour into, so God created humanity to bless.

Even with the horrific breach humanity created by going rogue in Genesis 3, the relational Trinity had a plan, a costly one. God’s eternal plan calls for investing the very life of the Son of God into humanity. The *incarnation* of the Son of God (God becoming man without ceasing to be God, oh mystery!) belongs here. Not only did Jesus come to open up a way back to God through His death, resurrection and ascension, but He also fully embodied humanity. He demonstrated to us both how to live as restored humanity (our second question) and also what His Father is like (our first question).

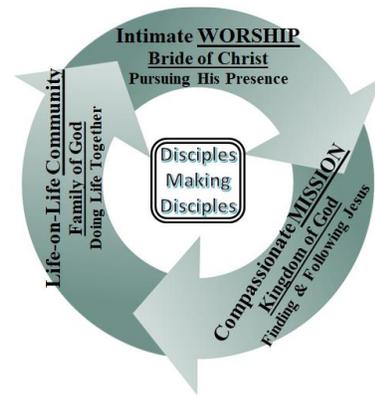
Through faith in Christ, this God restores us, bringing us home, to the home we have been longing for all our lives. Now he builds and trains us up to send us out on His God-Assignments. He is “*with us,*” partnering in all we do. My website, as well as many great Christian books amplifies this. A sub-category, when you want to break this out is: “*What are my God-Assignments in this season of my life?*”

***Level TWO Category: Three Dynamic Pictures.*** God designed us with core-needs for *intimacy* and *adventure* that require more than we often believe we have.

*Have you stopped to think how difficult it is for created humanity to relate with an infinite, uncreated Being?*

We are *created beings, fallen, restored* yet still in-process beings, even after giving our wholehearted allegiance to Him. God transcends our ability to fully comprehend Him. Therefore, our gracious God has given us powerful pictures to begin to bridge the gap, three of which I see as primary. Now we will better enjoy and experience, respond to and pass Him along to others. The following are the three great *pathways* from which we *receive* and through which we freely and generously *give away* His love. *Both/And.*

In summary, as intimate allies, our *good Father* and our *great King* prepare His people together as His son and daughter, His prince and princess. We now take our rightful place as co-regents over this world as His Bride alongside our *Groom*, Jesus. These three fabulous word-pictures stir our hearts. The OT explores the first two, then adds depth and breadth in the NT. When Jesus came in His *incarnation*, He changed the game (Hebrews 1:1-3)! The NT clarifies that Jesus also came as the *generous Groom* ravished by love for His people as His Bride. Our heart is unhinged by such intimacy! Progressive revelation in Scripture waited until the coming of Jesus to clearly reveal such an astounding relationship (Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 19:7).



**1. “God is *FATHER* and I am His *Beloved Child*” –*Family of God* – Community:**

The *Family of God* interweaves itself from Genesis 1-2 before the Fall through Revelation 22. This is God’s presence as it relates to His beloved children, those who have come to Him through faith in Christ, His people. This picture depicts us as much-loved children (1 John 3:1-2) who turn to our Father for everything in our lives. He grows us up and trains us for His Family Business through His presence. He fulfills all the needs that He designed us with in Genesis 1 and 2. Provision. Relationship. Companionship. Protection. Love and compassion. Character and ministry training. Every family on earth is an imperfect expression of this eternal *Family of God*.

**2. “God is *KING* and I am His *Servant-Warrior*” *Kingdom of God* – Mission:**

The *Kingdom of God* also stands prominently in Scripture, referred to as eternal in the OT. I view the *Kingdom of God* as His presence reflected through His people towards the world to make right what is not right. Jesus embodies God’s Kingdom right to rule. When we came to Christ, the inbreaking of God’s *Kingdom* presence transferred us out of the dominion of darkness and escorted us into the *Kingdom of God* (Colossians 1:13-14). As servant-warriors, we carry the same authority that Jesus did (Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 1:19-23). The Father sends us into the world of people in the same way He sent His unique Son, Jesus, to do the same things His Son did (John 20:21). Read the Gospels to see the full extent of our call (except for Jesus' unique atonement for our sins, which only One who is both God and man could do).

**3. “God is *GROOM* and I am His *Precious Bride*” – *Marriage* – Worship:**

The picture of *Marriage* also spans the entire Bible, yet not nearly as clearly in the OT as the other two. I find the first allusion before the Fall in Genesis 2:21-25 (compare Ephesians 5:25-33). This picture brings me to my knees in adoration! What an awesome privilege to be invited into such friendship as God’s intimate partners. Except for a few scattered OT illustrations, the culmination of the intimacy of our relationship with the relational Trinity could not be grasped until Jesus came. Jesus revealed the radiance of God’s glory (Hebrews 1:3). The *Marriage Feast of the Lamb* culminates this great picture of full partnership in Revelation (Revelation 19:9+17 with 19:7; 21:2; 21:9; 22:17).

**Summary:** These are the three great *pathways* of discipleship through which we receive God’s generous bounty and pass it along freely and generously to others in love. 1 Thessalonians chapter one give them in this order. *Worship* (2-3). *Mission* (4-5). *Community* (6-10).

**Level THREE Category:** Amplifying *community* with one more layer.

In my mental file cabinet, I also now add three additional categories from 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 to clarify how we develop disciples in **community**. *DiscipleMaking in community is my primary ministry call*. If your particular ministry call is *worship* or *mission*, **if needed**, add one more layer to yours. Within 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 on “*community*,” I see three “nutrients” for a soil conducive to releasing life in SmallGroup community interaction.

*How do we raise up our spiritual children toward maturity?*

1. **Relational belonging** (“*You became imitators*” plus 1:5b): Young Christians need authentic, though imperfect, models of what this Christian life looks like in real life (incarnational living). God was burning into Paul’s heart the need to walk with these young believers, life-on-life. They had the potential to become generational leaders...to set apart their past from their future and make a difference now. Paul and his team came alongside to invest all they possessed to help them get to that place.

2. **Biblical responsiveness** (“...*in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit*”). **Experiencing** promised freedom comes through the pathway of **knowing** and **doing** His Word. Make disciples who hear and obey the Word of God, and quickly make other disciples who multiply disciples. What these new believers learned, they went out and immediately gave away to others (1:7-9). This obedience-focused learning accelerates their own personal growth. Spiritual experience arising out of response to the Word illumined by the Spirit connects faith to our whole lives. “*Word & Spirit.*” *Both/And.*

3. **Intentional mutual-ministry** (“*the Lord’s message rang out*”): From day one, these young believers possessed an eager, joyous, almost happy-go-lucky expectancy as they put their faith into daily practice. First, they did it in their own lives. Then as contagious carriers of Jesus, they passed Jesus along to others as they went about doing life in the surrounding regions of Macedonia and Achaia. They lifted up Jesus in the forefront, joining what the Father was already doing in their region.

The lub-dub heartbeat of God is “*receive & give.*” Whatever we *receive*, freely and generously *give away* because God is generous. We grow as we pass it along as servants, like Jesus. If we receive forgiveness, give it away. If acceptance, give it away. If love, kindness, grace or insight, give it away. *Upward* toward God, *outward* toward the needy world, and *inward* to build up this faith-community. We are not only changed in the giving, but our city and region is also impacted by God’s presence, one heart after another (1 Thessalonians 1:8-9a). We learn as we reflect on encounters with truth, not just by study. Intentionally doing the Word builds on the rock, not the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). If we do not respond, we deceive ourselves (James 1:22). The DiscipleMaking process happens through our obedience of faith (Matthew 28:19-20), thus the “*I will...*” choices we encourage.

**Summary:** DiscipleMaking is more than education that teaches knowledge, more than coaching/training in a discipline, more than a director or counselor, although we will help and support one another. The end-result of DiscipleMaking in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was a follower whose life reflected the life and thinking of the Master. It’s holistic. Yes, convey knowledge and training, yet continue on until disciples think and respond like the Master (Luke 6:40). LifeChange. And our chief Discipler is Jesus, even though He uses us as flesh-&-blood examples.

Much of our transformation happens in the alternating rhythm of our private time with God and our time with others in SmallGroup life. So, as we intersect the lives of others, deliberately align ourselves with the Spirit. He forges together **relational belonging** with **biblical responsiveness**

and **intentional mutual-ministry** to develop radical disciples or learners in community to influence the world.

1. **Intimate Worship;**
2. **Compassionate Mission;**
3. **DiscipleMaking Community.**
4. **Relational Modeling;**
5. **Biblical Responsiveness;**
6. **Intentional Mutual-Ministry.**

Some learn best visually. In the chart below, I attempt to integrate both levels of categories. However, I still encourage you to begin with Level One (Know God and know ourselves) and let need draw you to expand.

<b>Category</b>	<b>God's Part</b>	<b>My Part</b>
Level One	<i>"What Is God Like?"</i>	<i>"How does This God See Me?"</i>
Level Two	<b>Three Dynamic Pictures</b>	
	<i>Groom in Marriage</i>	<i>Bride in Marriage</i>
	<i>King in Kingdom</i>	<i>Servant in Kingdom</i>
	<i>Father in Family</i>	<i>Child in Family</i>
Level Three		<i>Relational Belonging</i> <i>Biblical Responsiveness</i> <i>Intentional Mutual-Ministry</i>

*How will you embed these six categories into your memory to accelerate retrieval (or seven if you add mine)?*

1. Print out the **PDF of this page**, mark it up and make this your own.
2. Deepen specific concepts by printing the free PDF and making it your own; **90% Learning and Our Amaz'n Brain**