

A-I-D to Flexible Change Process

For healthy spiritual growth and change, begin with God's design of humanity as image-bearers. Certainly, the Fall of creation in Genesis 3 radically changed everything...except God's ultimate intent. Jesus is the "*Lamb slain before the creation of the world.*" The Fall did not take God by surprise, nor did it change God's original Eden-intent for intimacy with His people. A true love must be *willingly* embraced, which means love can also be *rejected*. The following simple threefold process will **A-I-D** you in learning (awareness, investigate, do).

Our Amaz'n Brain!

How our amazing brain works through neural connections underlies the learning design behind all that I pass along. Our brains have at least 100 billion cells called *neurons*. Neurons do the work we call thinking. One single neuron can form thousands of communication connections through branching or linking structures or network, called *axons*.

How do neurons form new, rich, denser connections?

Every new experience, new action, new thought, new sensation, forms new connections through networks. God explicitly designed our brains to be our ally in learning. However, we must choose to access this feature. No wonder we emphasize "*learning by doing.*"

As neurons strengthen new connections, they develop *networks*. The first time neurons link up, the network connection is fleeting. If we link up again by study and reflection, by doing and experiencing the *same* concept in various ways, the link strengthens. The more often the pathway is used, the stronger the connection grows and the wider the network spreads.

How do insights on our brain help us grow spiritually?

First, develop a "catalog system" to *embed* in your brain what reflects large categories for storage and easier retrieval. That's why I have written many of these free PDF's, to point to how to encode truth into our minds. For instance, "*Three Essential Questions*" and "*Three Pathways for Discipleship.*" These are big-picture overviews of the "*main & plain*" in Scripture, what is both "*clear and crucial.*" **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. Without a clear catalog system, retrieval would be chaos.

Second, learn how to *encode* what is crucial for our spiritual adventure with Jesus. Repeated reading, verbally interacting with others in a group, putting truth into practice, chewing on what's crucial to make it your "*voice,*" passing what you learn on to others, all mark what you learn as "**High Priority!**"

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).

For Ezra had firmly resolved
to study the Law of the Lord and
to practice it, and
to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel (Ezra 7:10).

Ezra resolutely set heart to *investigate* God's Word and to *do* it, personally and then as he passed it along to others. Some studies today indicate this increases learning retention from 5-

10% up to **90%**. This *encodes* our learning as “This is ‘must remember’ stuff! Store as **high priority!**”

Let’s learn to align with our design.

These characteristics of our amaz’n brain support why I strongly encourage those who engage Scripture personally to read the passage daily and the whole book once per week, focusing on big-picture themes. I have written an 8-series “*DiscipleMaking Companion*” to guide learners in this style of learning. Such an approach strengthens these networks as we also put it into practice and pass it along to others.

Our left brain works by “*knowledge gathering*,” by observing, thinking, problem solving and correlating new information. Our heart, the core of who we are, works by “*experience gathering*.” Like digesting food, we digest truth, so it metabolizes into life-resources through experience. *Both/And*. I encourage each of you to join a host of others as lifelong *life*-learners and doers, turning truth into experience.

That’s why we must engage our entire *heart* to maximize change.

A Wholehearted Process for Change

How do we find our spiritual moorings and break free from the false dichotomy of the “either/or view of life outside our spiritual essentials?”

As I have poured over Jesus’ life and what His followers have written in the NT (New Testament), I see a simple, flexible and adaptable, powerful and indivisible **threefold** process for change. Not fixed steps. Not a foolproof process. But a *wholehearted*, relational approach to our Family-of-Three, relying on the Spirit of God to activate God’s promises.

This is not a simplistic change process. It engages God from the core of our being, our *heart*. In Scripture, I see *heart* (and also soul) as including our *affections* with its emotions and feelings, our *mind* with its thinking and reasoning, and our *will* with its choices. *Wholehearted* following of Jesus fully engages all three. In this fluid, threefold cycle (note the three *clockwise* arrows on the first diagram), Jesus describes how to bring the truth of Scripture practically into the norm for change in our everyday life. *Awareness. Investigate. Action.*

1. Awareness (*affections*): *Awareness* provides motivation for us to recognize that God is summoning us into more freedom. Be sensitive to the subtle stimuli through your affections. Through *awareness*, the Spirit uses the focused attention of our five senses to enliven us, so we better recognize our inner and outer environment. Think spiritual alertness that opens us up for a consciousness of needs and possibilities.

Our attitude towards God’s Word has a great deal to do with *experiencing* God’s Word (Psalm 1:1-2), and thus change. However, our *affections* with their emotions and feelings are **not** an accurate guide on our journey. Our feelings provide us with early *awareness* that “*something is happening!*” We must also engage our mind to *discern* what that “*something*” is.

Where does guidance come from then? How do we know what that “something” is and what to do about it?



“Whoever **has** my commands and **obeys** them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will **be loved** by my Father, and I too will **love** him and **show myself** to him” (John 14:21, **emphasis**).

2. **Investigate** (*with our mind*) “**Has** my commands.” Jesus adds to this healthy process of change and growth by calling us to engage God’s Word with our *minds*. Through our mind we engage in God’s Love-Letter, the Bible, so it actively occupies our heart to discover a solution and rebuild healthy habits. God’s Word records truth as the Spirit enlightens and transforms our minds (Romans 12:2). Fully engage our mind to *investigate* what our *awareness* has awakened in us.

Jesus points us to truth residing in God’s Word. Learn to *think from truth to life*. A mere cursory read will not develop strong followers (*BIG-small-BIG* learning, with the “*small*” = *analyze and the “big” rapid, repeated reading of the passage*). We are the gatekeepers of our hearts. The give-&-take of *debriefing* with others in community provides added space that accelerates growth as we *do* God’s will.¹ How high is your *desire* to **delight** to invest in Scripture to learn to think from truth to life, aligning your *affections* with your *mind*?

3. **DO** (*obey from our will*) (“*obeys them,*” compare Psalm 1:3, Joshua 1:8, James 1:22-25 with John 14:21. Then engage your *will* through active *doing* and *obedience* to God’s Word. God releases His blessings as discovery moves to an active response to God’s Word to encounter life with truth. Although I’m focusing this process to **A-I-D** our growth to the Bible, it’s effective in any arena of life. God’s Word contains God’s mind and heart towards us. We are “*careful to do*” what God instructs quickly, not just vote on whether we will. If even Jesus learned obedience through what He experienced, our pathway towards His highest and best also passes through obedience.

Results: Experience Change through God’s Word (“*will be loved...I will love...*”): Often we attempt to bypass the process and leap directly to the wonderful *experience* of the intimate love the Father, Son and Spirit offer us through the *change* process. Such an approach weakens the depths of that very *experience*. The Spirit comes alongside as we partner in this threefold process, so we experience the heart of God firsthand.

*Have we taught new Christians...and our children...this basic process to **A-I-D** change and growth?*

If not, we are in danger of losing a generation who attend church without a passionate, wholehearted allegiance to follow Jesus regardless of cost.

Our age has traded in this healthy relational knowledge for a very impersonal knowledge acquisition (for instance, primarily lecture, Zoom, Facebook, all without face-to-face interaction). These are not wrong, just limited and incomplete to generate much heart-to-heart connection with their directive focus on “*put in*” with the *directive* teaching style most common in churches. The highest act of teaching, however, is to “*draw out*” of others what God has already put in, like a midwife “*drawing out*” the life God formed in the womb. Now we are training others to take responsibility for their lives and learn personally.

Many of us have one particular aspect of our *heart* that is strongest, whether feelings, thinking or action. Although my strongest is my mind with its thinking and reasoning, in the last few years

¹ I’ve designed each “*DiscipleMaking Companion*” to prepare **before** gathering to maximize our learning. These are available on Amazon.Com.

I realize for me that my *affections* are the best “early warning” signal for what the Spirit is doing in my life. Now, our feelings are not accurate guides. However, they are the most sensitive indicators in us as a “tell” that something is happening. They don’t guide our life yet are crucial for discernment. That’s why the *normal* seems to me to be **A-I-D**.

However, what about those who are most in tune with their thinking or their actions?

A-I-D is so flexible adaptable that we can begin the change process at either of the three, all three are indivisible, it’s effectiveness greatly impaired when any of the three are overlooked.

Notice in this expanded diagram below that this change process in *reciprocal* (note the additional *counterclockwise* arrowheads added from the first diagram). Although the primary process is *awareness, investigate, do*, either one of the three can stimulate any others. For instance, you may have no *awareness* of need yet to engage in God’s Word within a mutually interactive group. As you join the group and *investigate* together in a NT passage and put truth into practice, you become *aware* of the gap between where you are on your journey and where God is calling. Then *act* on it. In this case, your sequence is *investigate, do, awareness*.

The Spirit uses our “*deliberate practice*” in this threefold process as transforming responses (John 14:16-17) to change us since we add active faith to partner with divine revelation (2 Peter 1:5). “*Revelation demands response.*” Note also the organic connection existing between *abiding, obeying* and being *loved* (John 15:9-10).

This threaded, threefold response fires the neurons in our brain that cause thinking, This the forms denser, richer connections and wider networks.

Knowledge is designed by God to be personal. “*Adam knew Eve...*” (Genesis 4:1 NASB) and they conceived. This particular “*knowing*” was an intensely personal *act*, birthing life! True knowing is open, expressive, uncovered intimacy. Nothing hidden before God. The sin in Genesis 3 was not in knowing. Adam and Eve gathered knowledge to *control separate from an interdependent relationship with God.*

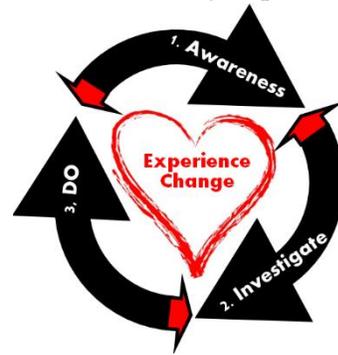
How can we respond? Take “ant-steps.”

Take a few minutes to reflect. How are you wired? How do you *first* sense God’s gentle message, “*Something important is happening. Pay attention!*”? More through a gentle tug on your emotions, thoughts bouncing around in your mind, or a growing urge to do something?

Have you ever seen one of those glass ant farms that come in the mail? Throw the dirt and ants in and chaos breaks out. After a few days order is restored out of chaos as tunnels form under the surface.

How?

One ant takes one grain of sand and carries it one ant-step after another to the far end of the ant farm. The ant then comes back for one more grain of sand. One ant taking one “ant-step” hardly seems significant. In the change process, we often overstate the conspicuous and understate the continuous. When change is needed, grab onto one grain of the solution. Then take one “ant-step” in the right direction.



Action learning is crucial to develop an authentic learning culture. ***What a difference between a person*** (1) who engages Scripture to ***fit*** the Bible into *his/her life* and (2) one who responds to God's Word by ***changing*** his/her life to align with God's heart revealed in the Bible.²

² Take ownership to cultivate such a natural learning culture. When you join a group, this is your group. Develop a group where every member is more than a passive stenographer of an expert teacher's store of knowledge. Come each week as both a *learner* and a *teacher*. A listening heart prepares an understanding mind! The only time we cannot learn is when we forfeit our listening hearts as lifelong life-learners.