



The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life

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Rewiring Our Brains to Save Us

Recently, my eleven-year-old nephew and fourteen-year-old niece, who have not been raised in a churchgoing family, attended church. The sermon was a discourse on God's wrath and was delivered with a fiery intensity designed to "shock and awe." After this searing exhortation, both came home distraught and reported that the preacher presented a god that scared them—one that, if true, they would never want to believe in.

I wondered, *Would Jesus be happy if we presented him in such a way that the children would not want to be with him or know him?* Isn't something wrong if in talking about God we frighten the children? Do we help or hurt, heal or injure, when we present a God that incites fear? Does it even matter whether our view of God is good, bad or ugly? It *does* matter, more than we ever realized—to the point of changing our brain structure! Although we have power over what we believe, what we believe holds real power over us—power to heal and power to destroy.

Late one night in a small Alabama cemetery, Vance Vanders had a run-in with the local witch doctor, who wafted a bottle of unpleasant-smelling liquid in front of his face, and told him he was about to die and that no one could save him.

Back home, Vanders took to his bed and began to deteriorate. Some weeks later, emaciated and near death, he was admitted to the local hospital, where doctors were unable to find a cause for his symptoms or slow his decline. Only then did his wife tell one of the doctors, Drayton Doherty, of the hex.

Doherty thought long and hard. The next morning, he called Vanders's family to his bedside. He told them that the previous night he had lured the witch doctor back to the cemetery, where he had choked him against a tree until he explained how the curse worked. The medicine man had, he said, rubbed lizard eggs into Vanders's stomach, which had hatched inside his body. One reptile remained, which was eating Vanders from the inside out.

Doherty then summoned a nurse who had, by prior arrangement, filled a large syringe with a powerful emetic [a substance which induces vomiting]. With great ceremony, he inspected the instrument and injected its contents into Vanders's arm. A few minutes later, Vanders began to gag and vomit uncontrollably. In the midst of it all, unnoticed by everyone in the room, Doherty produced his *pièce de résistance*—a green lizard he had stashed in his black bag. "Look what has come out of you Vance," he cried. "The voodoo curse is lifted."

Vanders did a double take, lurched backwards to the head of the bed, then drifted

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Dr. Jennings was voted one of America's Top Psychiatrists by the Consumers' Research Council of America in 2008, 2010, and 2011. He is president of the Tennessee Psychiatric Association and a fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He has served as president of the Southern Psychiatric Association and is in private practice in Tennessee.

into a deep sleep. When he woke the next day he was alert and ravenous. He quickly regained his strength and was discharged a week later.

Vance is not alone. Medical literature is replete with case reports of patients dying, not from actual illness, but from *believing* they were sick, from the *fear* they were going to die. Surgeons routinely avoid operating on patients who are convinced they will die during surgery. The risk is too great.

In the 1970s, Sam Shoeman was diagnosed with liver cancer and told he had only months to live. A few months after his death, the autopsy revealed the doctors were wrong. He had only one small tumor still contained within the liver – not a life-threatening stage of cancer. Sam Shoeman did not die from liver cancer; he died from *believing* he was dying of liver cancer. Our beliefs change us mentally, physically and spiritually.

Our brains are constantly in a state of flux. Moment by moment new neurons are developing and new circuits are being laid down, new axons and dendrites are forming for the facilitating of new messages to the neurons. At the same time, unused connections are removed, dormant nerve tracks are pruned back and unused neurons are deleted. Incredibly, our beliefs, thoughts, behaviors and even our diets change our brain structure, ultimately changing who we are.

Throughout this book we will explore the amazing ability of our brains to adapt, change and rewire based on the choices we make, the beliefs we hold and the God we worship – as different “God-concepts” affect the brain differently. My goal with this book is to reveal God in the clearest way possible, to demonstrate how our belief in God changes us and to display his methods on a practical level. I also offer a new methodology in the study of God, which I have termed the Integrative Evidence-Based Approach, which incorporates and requires harmony of three threads, Scripture (with special emphasis on the life of Jesus), God's laws in science and nature, and our experience – all studied with a humble mind under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

– Taken from the preface