

Deeper Walk and Neurotheology

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Deeper Walk training is anchored in the Bible and the Gospel. Our core model of heart-focused discipleship comes from five gospel foundations.

- Freedom. We die with Christ in order to be free from what enslaves us.
- Identity. We are raised with Christ to a new kingdom identity.
- Spirit. We are born of the Spirit to walk in the Spirit, which requires both Scriptural understanding and Spiritual disciplines.
- Heart-focused community. We are born into a new family that engages in mission and encourages each other to grow in freedom, live out our identity, and walk in the Spirit.
- Mission. We are called to mission to bring the gospel to those who have not heard or have been wounded by the church and to make disciples by building on these five foundations of the gospel.

In many of our books and in much of our training, Deeper Walk references the neuroscience work of Dr. Jim Wilder and Life Model Works. Toward this end, a statement on neuroscience and neurotheology seems to be in order.

- Neurotheology, as we use the term, refers to the attempt to integrate brain science and theology. This does not mean that science is the foundation and that theology is based on the latest discoveries. In fact, there may be times when theology stands opposed to a scientific trend (it would not be the first time). Rather, neurotheology as embraced by Deeper Walk begins with a biblical worldview and a commitment to biblical inerrancy, while seeking to learn what we can from the enormous amount of neuroscience information available today.
- No one at Deeper Walk is a scientist. When Deeper Walk teaches on science, we do not teach as authorities, rather we cite others who have done research. Our aim is to integrate the best science we can find within the biblical framework that drives our teaching.
- Science is an ever-changing discipline. Sometimes scientists disagree with one another and sometimes they change their minds as new information comes to light. The history of science is, to some degree, a history of debate. Should doctors wash their hands before surgery? Is the universe infinite or is it expanding? Do Einstein's theories need to be updated? Brain science is no different. Discoveries made twenty to thirty years ago may prove to need revision. In light of this, we can either choose not to include science at all, or to include the best science we know and understand that some of what we put in print may become obsolete in the future.
- Neuroscience provides a filter that can shed light on biblical interpretation. The fact is that no one interprets the Bible with complete neutrality. Everyone has a bias. Everyone has a filter—sometimes several filters. Filters can be dangerous. For example, if I read the Bible through the filter of trauma, the Bible can feel “booby trapped.” Filters can also be helpful. For example, reading the Bible through the lens of literary analysis can reveal how the author uses strategies to get to the main point. In this case, neuroscience—and

especially the neuroscience of attachment theory—brings into focus how much of the Bible deals with attachment.

- A common filter used to interpret the Bible by evangelicals is a philosophy called voluntarism. This philosophical system was at its height when the Puritans and later the revivalists played a major role in shaping American Christianity. One of the reasons Deeper Walk highlights attachment theory and the neuroscience that supports it is to combat the nearly automatic filter of voluntarism often used to interpret texts. In a nutshell, voluntarism teaches that the will is central to being human. It teaches that we have one will and that will power is the key to successful living as a Christian. This emphasis on the will and making good choices has tended to overshadow attachment in our interpretation of Scripture. With the voluntarist filter firmly in place, people quickly and easily see the role of choices in the stories and teachings of Scripture, but often miss the importance of attachment because our lens has filtered it out.
- At Deeper Walk we have tended to teach neuroscience in the simplest terms possible and often admit that we “oversimplify” because we realize our primary audience are not doctors and scientists, but people looking for help with relational skills. For example, when we speak of something being a right brain function or a left brain function, we acknowledge that this is oversimplifying. Or when we talk about a switch in the brain, that is a functional truth, not a literal truth.
- There are those who attack all neurotheology as if those who practice it must believe the brain is the cause of the spirit or the soul or the mind. But this is not the case. Dr. Wilder teaches that there is no identity without a spirit. We also believe that humans are both spiritual and physical, and we root our anthropology in Genesis 2:7 which says that God breathed into the body he had formed and it became a living soul. Thus, we believe the soul (mind, spirit, heart, etc.) is the creation of God. The reason we utilize brain science is to emphasize how important the development of our capacity to act like ourselves really is. From this perspective, spiritual maturity assumes relational and emotional maturity and moves beyond that to include the maturity that only comes through intimacy with God and life in the Spirit. Even Jesus’ relationships were characterized by growth, as we see in Luke 2:52 and Hebrews 5:8.
- Neuroscience observes changes in the brain as character and maturity develop. For example, much of the brain is undeveloped at birth and has to be formed and shaped by experience. Some of those experiences are educational—they teach us to believe certain things about life. Perhaps most of those experiences are relational and predispose us to either joy or fear. Whether we are talking about beliefs or bonding, interventions are often necessary in order to correct developmental flaws that keep us from living with all of the emotional capacity and personal maturity that characterizes Christian spirituality.
- Utilizing neuroscience also provides a means of evangelism. Westerners tend to trust science, so providing simple ways to talk about how our brains operate opens doors to spiritual conversations. This has proven especially helpful in working with people suffering from addictions.