



CHANGE AND THE BRAIN

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The brain has long fascinated those seeking to understand human thought and behavior. The brain's functional capabilities exceed even the most complex human technology. As our technological ability to observe the brain has grown, so have our insights into how change occurs.

Every one of us knows the difficulty of working to change a pattern of behavior that we would rather do without. Whether we hope to stop biting our nails, or break any other addictive cycle, we feel a resistance within ourselves to the change we seek.

The brain, in large part, functions based off patterns, or templates, that have been formed through our experiences. For example, our brain notes that when we feel anxious, biting our nails temporarily reduces our tension. Thus, it is determined that this pattern is beneficial, and should be maintained.

As the pattern is repeated, it is strengthened. For the existing pattern to be changed, however, a new pattern must be formed that is more effective than the original. As this new pattern is experienced, the brain changes; altering the existing neural connections. Thus, if we seek change we must live and experience something better.

Much as Jesus described the difficulty of choosing the spiritual "narrow path" (Matt 7:13-14), these new experiences are hard-won. Yet, we have hope that change is possible, and that with the help of God and others, freedom can become our new pattern.