



In *The Other Half of Church*, pastor Michel Hendricks and neurotheologian Jim Hendricks couple brain science and the Bible to identify how to overcome spiritual stagnation by living a full-brained faith. They also identify the four ingredients necessary to develop and maintain a vibrant transformational community where spiritual formation occurs, relationships flourish, and the toxic spread of narcissism is eradicated.

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# 1



## Half-Brained Christianity

*What would this idle babbler wish to say?*

Acts 17:18 NASB

**CLAUDIA AND I CAME** home from another church feeling depressed. We were visiting churches in our area after I found myself without a job at a megachurch. I had been a discipleship pastor there, helping people grow in their Christian life. My wife and I had hoped our children would make the church we visited that day their home. Now we were skeptical. Every church we visited served the same good ideas that we had already tried but with results that disappointed us. As I set the table for lunch on our back patio, I wasn't sure I would want to attend church again.

I came out of my musing as my wife glanced at me and understood my thoughts. She set a platter of Chicken Milanese on the table. It was a beautiful summer day, and I walked over to our tomato plants to pick a few for the salad my wife was making. The plants were taller than I was and full of tomatoes. My main job

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responsibility as a pastor was discipleship, to help people grow as Christians. I had hoped that the results of my ministry as a pastor would be like these plants, growing like crazy and full of fruit. Instead, the results I saw were inconsistent and often disappointing. Did I do something wrong? Maybe I was better at helping tomatoes grow than people. At least I knew how to add fertilizer to my tomatoes. To help people grow, I wasn't sure what they needed.

### **Meeting a Neurotheologian**

When I was a pastor, I had lunch every month with two friends who were leaders in their churches. Thankfully, I was not alone in my frustration. Like me, Bob and John wanted to talk about discipleship. How do people grow? We used the phrase “spiritual formation,” which is a fancy way of talking about how we become more like Jesus in our daily lives. We react to life like He does. We value what He values. We treat people the way He treats people. It is the process of “putting on the character of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> We all agreed that this was the central task of the church. We also agreed that the church was mostly failing at this task. We were pastors and leaders, and we were admitting to each other that we were disappointed in the fruit we saw, both in our own lives and in our churches. I wasn't alone in my frustration. They had the same unanswered questions.

During one of our lunches together, Bob made a curious comment: “We need to think about the neuroscience angle of spiritual formation.” Bob was in his eighties, so I thought that maybe he was having a senior moment. I ignored his comment, but a month later he said it again: “We should be careful not to neglect the role that neuroscience plays in spiritual formation.”

I stopped him from continuing and said, “Bob, I have no idea what you are talking about. What do you mean?”

A smile grew on his face as he remarked, “I want to invite a friend of mine to our lunch next month. His name is Jim Wilder. I’ll let him explain.”

The following month, Bob invited this new man to join us. It was the day I began to discover that only half my brain was involved in learning to be a Christian.

Bob introduced our guest by saying, “This is Jim Wilder. He has a master’s degree in theology and a doctorate in psychology. He calls himself a neurotheologian. He studies the intersection of spiritual formation and how our brain works.”

I missed the next few minutes of conversation because I got stuck on the term *neurotheologian*. *Is that a word? What does it mean? Who is this man, and does he know what he’s talking about?* Then I looked at him, and across the bottom of his T-shirt I read, “What is this idle babbler trying to say?” I thought, *Yes, what IS this idle babbler trying to say?* The phrase was from Acts 17, when Paul stepped into the Athens marketplace of ideas and introduced Jesus to Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. The ideas that Paul shared were so new and strange to them that they remarked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” (Acts 17:18).

Bob, John, and I had been meeting for over a year, and we were determined to leave no stone unturned in understanding how character is transformed. Could this neurotheologian understand how people grow? So when Jim asked us what we would like to know, I did not hesitate: “Explain to us God’s design for our brain and how this influences our growth as Christians.”

He reached into his briefcase and pulled out a plastic brain.

**I was a pastor of spiritual formation, and I did not understand how people grew.**

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He pulled it apart into two halves and started explaining how the human brain works. What I heard as we met over the following months startled me. Like Paul's message to the philosophers in Athens, what Jim explained about our brains was so new that I struggled to understand. Once I was able to absorb what he was saying, I realized that I was a half-brained Christian, and I was helping other Christians grow with practices that largely ignored one half of who they were. I was a pastor of spiritual formation, and I did not understand how people grew. What I was learning also explained why I grew so fast in the first eight years of my Christian faith, but little after that.

### **Michel's Story**

What I learned from Jim about how character grows was not only relevant to my frustrating job as a pastor of discipleship, but also applicable to my own spiritual life. When I was nineteen years old, I had an encounter I can best describe as *a spiritual burst of light*. I had gone to bed one night an angst-filled young man. I was confused and lost, asking the ceiling, "What is life about? Why do I exist? What's the meaning of it all?" In the middle of the night, I had an encounter. It is hard to explain, but what I heard without words being spoken was, "I hear these questions of yours. The answer to them is My Son. He is the answer."

It was as though someone had switched on a light in my dark and confused soul. I had not been raised in a Christian family, did not attend church, and knew very little about Jesus. Hearing that He was the answer to my existential confusion was like an explosion of light and hope.

The next morning, I knew something inside me had changed. I still felt hope, which was new to me. I started reading the Bible for the first time. I became part of a community of friends who

also found meaning in Jesus, the One I had encountered in the middle of that night. In the span of several months, my life looked and felt nothing like the life I had before. This was transformation! For eight years as a university student, I grew and grew. I was surrounded by people I loved and who loved me, and I saw my life change. This is the time in my life that reminded me of my tomatoes—growing like crazy and full of fruit.

Then our community began to scatter. Careers took people away as mine took me into engineering. Some married and had children. My experience of the Christian life bogged down. Growth, which for eight years seemed inevitable, became stubborn. I went through a bout of depression. I did not walk away from Jesus, but I saw much in myself that I did not like and did not know how to change. This was not the transformed life I had taken for granted. Instead, my life was often disappointing, and parts of me seemed resistant to change. My temper would flare, and it seemed beyond my control. I experienced stretches of hopelessness and spiritual lethargy. Why? Did I do something wrong? Was my church doing something wrong?

When I was the spiritual growth pastor for a megachurch, my goal was helping others experience the growth I experienced my first eight years as a Christian. In the back of my mind, I wondered whether their growth would slow like mine. Maybe this is just the way the Christian life works. Transformation starts off at a sprint and slows down to a crawl. I lowered my expectations. We talked a lot about brokenness in our church, and I found some solace there. We all are broken, but God still loves us. This is true, but I desired more. I wanted Jesus to live His life through me. I did not want an improved life. I wanted a transformed life. I found myself settling for small improvements instead of radical transformation. Why was the fruit in my church and in my life so inconsistent? Was there something lacking?

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When I met Jim, I began discovering why I grew so much for eight years, and why my growth got bogged down. The details of God's design of the human brain and its role in forming character would answer the mysteries that had plagued me for thirty years. These details were unknown to humanity until recently. I was surprised by what I learned when I opened up the hood on the engine of the brain and took a look.

### **The Brain Discovery**

Jim explained that much of what we now know about the brain has come from research in the last few decades. As the assistant director of a clinic specializing in trauma recovery, he received a flyer in the mail advertising a lecture by Dr. Allan Schore on "Affect Regulation and the Neurobiology of Attachment." The title sounded so uninteresting that Jim tried to throw the flyer away several times, but to no avail. In his words, "The flyer wouldn't fly," and he sensed that God was trying to get his attention. Jim was a busy man, so he sent an intern to find out what Dr. Schore had to say. The young man dutifully obeyed and returned on Monday, having purchased the entire set of recordings of the conference.

"This was the most boring presentation I have heard," he reported back. "Dr. Allan Schore read verbatim the contents of a manuscript he was writing. However, he talked about the ages at which the brain develops different abilities, and they matched precisely with the theory we are developing here in the clinic. So, I bought all the recordings because I didn't understand much else he was saying."

Unknown to Jim, interesting findings were coming out of UCLA where Dr. Allan Schore discovered how the human brain develops in a person through joy and attachment. Jim started attending every conference where Dr. Schore presented his material.

He was especially intrigued by a topic that Dr. Schore emphasized in all of his talks: the importance of joy for healthy brain development. Dr. Schore defined joy relationally as “someone who is glad to be with me” and “being the sparkle in someone’s eye.” Jim had heard little about joy while studying for his degrees in psychology and theology. *Could this be the key to unlocking the hardest cases in my practice?* he wondered. More generally, he suspected that joy and attachment might also be the keys to helping us grow as disciples of Jesus.

As Christians, we believe that God created us, including our brains. Jim explained that a fascinating aspect of God’s design is that our brain is not a single unit. We have a dual processor. When you buy a cellphone, you may think that it has a single micro-processor inside controlling everything. Like the brain, that is not true. Most phones have two processors running simultaneously. One handles the cellphone communication. The second processor runs everything else. The human brain also has two processors, one on the right and another on the left, that work together but specialize in different responsibilities. This is where things get interesting. God put taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing sensors in our bodies that help us to interpret our world. All are connected to nerves that enter the bottom of the brain. They all travel up into the brain stem and begin processing on the right side of our brain.

## **The Right Brain**

Until this lunch, I shared the popular misconception in our culture about the left and right sides of the brain. I understood that the right side was creative and the left was analytical, and some people were left-brain dominant while others were right-brain dominant. Artists and musicians were right brained, and accountants and engineers were left brained. This was not an accurate description.

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Jim explained that all of the ways in which we interpret our world, from seeing an expression on a friend's face to smelling our grandmother's roast chicken cooking in the oven, enter into our dual processor brain on the back of the right side. Processing the smell of the chicken shifts from the back to the front of the right side, and somewhere behind our right eye it crosses over to the left side. Then the smell of grandma's chicken processes from the front to the back on the left side. It is like going up one supermarket aisle and then crossing over and returning on the next aisle to the left. Everything takes this path. Words in a conversation. A handshake. A favorite song. A puzzled look on a friend's face. A math problem. The taste of grandma's chicken when you finally sit down and eat. That and everything else you experience follows this path. Back to front on the right side, front to back on the left side. As Jim explained this to us, I thought to myself, *I have never heard this before. No one has ever explained to me the basics of how the brain works.*

LEFT (SLOW TRACK)		RIGHT (FAST TRACK)
Conscious thought		Individual identity
Speech		Group identity
Strategies		Emotional attunement to others
Problem solving		Assessment of surroundings (good, bad, scary)
Logic		Relational attachments
Stories		

The right side starts processing our surroundings and draws conclusions before the left side is even aware of what is happening. Jim calls this “preconscious thought,” meaning that our right brain processes our surroundings faster and before our conscious awareness. That was hard for me to understand, and I asked Jim to explain again. What did it mean that my right brain was processing my surroundings faster than my conscious thoughts? Jim explained it this way: “The right hemisphere process that creates our working identity integrates our reality six times per second. The brain brings together current experience and emotionally important personal memories to create an active sense of who we are in our relationships at that moment. This happens faster than we can become conscious, so we assume we just ‘know’ who we are at all times.”

This was still hard for me to digest. I thought that my brain was filled with my conscious thoughts, but this was only half true. Much of the right half of the brain runs ahead of my conscious awareness.

“The right brain functions begin with our important relational attachments and are intended to help us be ourselves in relationships,” Jim said. He calls the right side the “fast track” and the left side the “slow track.” The right hemisphere is a more powerful processor than the left and samples our environment at six times a second. The left side samples at five times a second, so we often know things faster than we are conscious of them and definitely faster than we can speak about them. We might say the right brain has more horsepower. From a theological point of view, God put a lot of power into the responsibilities dominant in the right side of our brains. These functions must be important to Him and crucial to our ability to grow as disciples of Jesus.

Even as we talk about the functions of our right and left brains, we must be careful with how we explain this because of the

complexity of God's design. When we think of something being located in the right brain, this layman's explanation is not technically correct. Our brains have tendrils all over both hemispheres that support the various brain functions, but the left-brain/right-brain location is where the control or unification is dominant.<sup>2</sup>

With that in mind, our right brain governs the whole range of relational life: who we love, our emotional reactions to our surroundings, our ability to calm ourselves, and our identity, both as individuals and as a community. The right side manages our strongest relational connections (both to people and God) and our experience of emotional connectedness to others. *And character formation.* Don't miss that. Character formation, which is a primary responsibility of the church, is governed by the right brain, not the left brain. If we want to grow and transform our character into the character of Jesus, we must involve activities that stimulate and develop the right brain.

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Jim said the right side “tries to be sure that we can joyfully be like our people in every situation we encounter. Character is formed by answering the question, ‘What would my people do now that would reflect our deepest values and maintain all our important relationships?’” He

was saying that character formation develops out of our community, the people we call “my people.” Our loving attachments and the values of our community drive our character. We will explain more about the importance of group identity in forming character in chapter 5.

Jim explained that our instantaneous reactions to our surroundings are created before our conscious mind is aware of them. He called them our “gut reactions and first options for response.” These reactions are faster than conscious thought. Our immediate response is what we call character—how we spontaneously react to our surroundings. My discouraging job as a pastor was to help people change their character. If I wanted to help transform character, I needed to involve changing these instantaneous reactions. But I had no idea how to do that.

Being a disciple of Jesus means reacting to the world as He would react. One author describes Christian discipleship as the “way to become the kind of person who does, easily and routinely, what Jesus said—does it without having to think much about it.”<sup>3</sup> I like that explanation, but how do we train ourselves to spontaneously act and think like Jesus if this happens faster than conscious thought?

This was hard for me to grasp because I was so accustomed to focusing on conscious activities in my Christian life—activities like praying, reading the Bible, fasting, and meditating on Scripture. Jim was opening my eyes to a vast unexplored area of growth. I had no idea that there were practices that conform my instantaneous “faster than thought” reactions to the image of Christ. I felt like I had discovered a hidden treasure.

It is likely that you are learning much of this for the first time. You might be thinking, *What does this mean practically? How do I grow spiritually if growth is governed by the right brain?* We will get to that, but the first step is to realize that *we do not grow the way we have been told*. I, in my job as a pastor of spiritual formation, had a woefully incomplete understanding of how to help people grow. In my seminary education, I was taught very little about how people grow and character is transformed. Like I was, most pastors, churches, and Christian communities are mistaken

about how character is transformed. To understand how we are mistaken, let's look at the left brain.

### **The Left Brain**

The left side of the brain is what we commonly think of as “the mind” in popular culture. Our concept of the mind describes only half of our brain. The left brain is dominant for functions we associate with the mind: logical thinking, problem solving, strategies, and language. Cause-and-effect relationships are formed here. Words are put to our life experiences to create autobiographical stories. Problems are solved. Plans are hatched. Arguments are formulated. Stories are told. Truth is defended. What we think of as “the mind” covers only one half of the brain—the left brain. The left brain runs at the speed of words; the right brain runs at the speed of joy.

God designed our left brain to understand important aspects of our Christian beliefs. Without truth we would be lost. Our beliefs and doctrine (formulated in the left brain) are created from knowing the relational love of God (formulated in the right brain). The right brain is the fast track, and it leads the left brain. This means that a smoothly running right hemisphere is necessary for our entire brain to function as designed.

### **Left-Brained Christianity**

As John, Bob, and I listened to Jim explain the role our brain plays in spiritual formation, we looked at each other and realized, “We are half-brained Christians!” More specifically, we were left-brained Christians. We were pursuing discipleship by focusing on strategies centered on the left brain and neglecting the right brain. We were not using our full resources to help us grow to spiritual maturity. We were neglecting not only half of our brains, but also

the dominant half for forming character. If we had to focus on one half of our brains in church (which we don't), we were focusing on the wrong half!

In a typical church service, we hear teaching on important truths from the Bible. At the end of the sermon, we are given an application, which usually consists of being told to make better choices. We are encouraged to trust that the Holy Spirit will give us the power to change. In small groups, we usually study questions on a Bible passage or a sermon, and at the end we discuss how to apply what we learn. Then we pray and ask God to help us. I have been taught these steps from the first day I went to church. If you are like me, you have seen this pattern in your Christian community. This is the accepted strategy for growth in Western culture, but there is one small problem. These strategies focus on half of our brain, and it is not the half that forms character. When we neglect right-brain development in our discipleship, we ignore the side of the brain that specializes in character formation. Left-brained discipleship emphasizes beliefs, doctrine, willpower, and strategies but neglects right-brain loving attachments, joy, emotional development, and identity. Ignoring right-brain relational development creates Christians who believe in God's love but have difficulty experiencing it in daily life, especially during distress. In a left-brained community we are taught Christian doctrine, but the doctrine has difficulty showing up in our instantaneous reactions:

- We are told not to lie but are not shown how to stop lying
- We are told to trust God with our money and not be greedy but are not shown how
- We believe that God loves us and that we can trust Him, yet our beliefs feel shaky when we are in distress

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I am not suggesting that the familiar left-brain strategies are unimportant in discipleship. Biblical teaching, Scripture meditation, beliefs, strategies, and the choices we make play an essential role in forming our character. We don't grow without developing these left-brain skills.

However, without the proper right-brained relational and emotional environment, our fruit will be meager. When the right brain and left brain work in harmony, character transformation becomes commonplace in our communities. We are growing character in healthy soil, like the tomatoes in my backyard. I am not arguing for a right-brained Christianity instead of a left-brained Christianity, but for a full-brained Christianity.

Although this brain theologian across the table never used the term "half-brained," the shock went so deep that it has become the title of this chapter. You might think that I felt insulted or foolish sitting across the table from Jim Wilder and realizing that I was a half-brained Christian. It might sound like an insult if we confuse half-brained with harebrained. I don't believe that most Christians are harebrained, although some undoubtedly are. You might think that half-brained implies that Christians are stupid. We use only half of our brains. That is not the meaning either. Thinking about Christians and their brains was new for me. I was eager to know everything I could about how God designed our whole brain to grow us into the image of Christ.

### **Finding the Rest of My Brain**

Contrary to the popular misconception that people are left-brain or right-brain dominant, both sides are created to operate in harmony. The right-side "fast track" leads the way. Brain scientists call this synchronization. Both sides are operating as God designed them and they are playing together nicely. A synchronized

brain runs smoothly like a well-tuned engine, even under stress.

When Jim explained the technical details of right brain/left brain synchronization, I didn't understand much of what he said,<sup>4</sup> but I understood the importance for spiritual formation. I wanted to know more. As our lunch came to an end, Bob, John, and I asked Jim whether we could meet again. We wanted to try out some exercises that would develop our brains. Jim offered to give us a taste of what he called "relational brain skills."

A month after our lunch with John and Bob, we met again and Jim shared practices with us that train our brains to run smoothly. He showed us how to recognize when our brains have a traffic jam. He shared drills that build our joy capacity and help us handle big emotions. (You will learn more about joy in chapter 3.) He emphasized the importance of building our true identities and living in a community of belonging. When our identity is not well developed, our personality will change in different settings. With a well-formed brain, my identity will not change in different circumstances. All of these exercises help us develop and strengthen our entire brain. Even though it was unclear to me at the time how these simple exercises can form my character and emotional health, I was eager to try them. It would take me three years of practice and learning, but I have seen the results, and they look a lot like my tomato plants.

As Jim was explaining this, I thought of my job as a pastor. If I could go back and do it again, I would redesign our entire spiritual formation program. What at first sounded like theoretical brain science suddenly challenged my understanding of how we grow spiritually. Many Western Christians believe character is formed by thinking correctly, believing truth, and making wise choices in light of the truth.<sup>5</sup> If all of this is empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are on the path to Christian maturity. This is the philosophy I used to help people grow in their faith. I remember

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leading a training by saying, “To change our character, we need to change our thinking. New thinking produces new behavior.” Most Christian communities agree, and it is true that correct thinking is important in discipleship. The problem is that this anthropology ignores other, more dominant drivers of character change.

Don't get discouraged if you don't understand all of the brain details. I usually need to hear explanations several times before they sink in. Much of how the brain forms character sounds strange to us. For example, a full-brained Christianity would include developing areas of our lives that are not under conscious control. Much of what we call discipleship or spiritual formation is an effort to change our spontaneous reactions to life situations and conform them to the image of Christ. Since we don't understand preconscious thought, we try consciously to change our character. This is putting the cart before the horse, since our preconscious right brain is the driver of character change, not our conscious thoughts and willpower.

The right brain integrates our life, including our connection to loved ones, our bodies, our surroundings, our emotions, our identities, and our community. Character formation flows out of these connections. The right brain processes these questions: Who is happy to see me here? What do I feel right now? Is there anyone here who understands me? How do I act like myself right now? What do my people do in this situation? The answers to these questions drive our character development.

If you are like me, you need to read that again: our right brain depends on relational input to form our character. Much of this processing is nonverbal and preconscious. Keeping our relational right brain running smoothly creates the optimum environment for character transformation. And we can train ourselves in these skills.

## **Neglected Soil**

After hearing all of this new information about Christian growth, Claudia and I started sharing a meal with a new group of fellow Christians who were hungry to grow spiritually, like we were. Jim and his wife, Kitty, challenged our understanding of how we mature. In spite of my doubts, my understanding of how the Christian life works was being turned upside down. The group was learning and practicing something they called *hesed*, or relational brain skills. We saw glimpses of something we desired. Could this be a journey from disappointment and confusion to growth? We sensed that God was gently guiding us to reengage. Something very deep was being reawakened. I was hoping for a discipleship that was abounding in fruit instead of disappointing.

My hope for revived growth reminded me of my tomato plants. After buying our first house, I decided to plant tomatoes. To my surprise, the plants exploded over the summer, and we had hundreds of homegrown tomatoes. We had a difficult time keeping up with the harvest. I was surprised how easy and fun it was. Planting tomatoes in the spring became a yearly tradition for our family.

Unfortunately, my tomato harvest decreased over the next few years until one summer I picked only a handful. I discovered that tomatoes are heavy consumers of nutrients, so they deplete the soil over time. I was planting and watering the same way each year, but saw fewer and fewer tomatoes. My mistake was that I was neglecting the soil, which got depleted.

I read an article on the building blocks of healthy soil and immediately started building my soil back to health. I replenished the soil each year with the nutrients that tomatoes need to grow, and my harvests quickly improved. Once I met Jim and started learning more about the brain, I wondered whether the same was happening in my Christian life. Was I trying to grow in depleted soil? If so,

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what nutrients did my soil need? Could these nutrients be related to the new area of discipleship that Jim was sharing with us?

When I discovered the ingredients for good spiritual soil, they made sense and connected to my experience. We will see that right-brain development of relational joy, group identity, and healthy correction are essential ingredients for character transformation. We will spend a chapter studying each of these nutrients. What turned my mind upside down was their understanding of *hesed*. We will devote a chapter to this Hebrew word. I realized there was abundant *hesed* in the soil when I was growing well. Likewise, the lack of *hesed* went unnoticed when my harvest slowly dwindled. Even worse, soil without *hesed* favored the growth of weeds. We will look at a specific weed that grows in poor soil in a later chapter.

I am going to take you on my journey of discovery. We will learn to maintain healthy soil that supports bountiful growth. This trek might make you stop dead in your tracks and wonder, *Is this too good to be true?* Other times, the new perspectives may seem confusing and even overwhelming. This adventure has caused me to reinterpret my own life and my experiences as a pastor. My understanding of church and how people grow was turned upside down. This journey will likely have you rethinking many assumptions you have about spiritual formation and especially how we grow.

As Claudia and I continued to meet on Sunday afternoons with our new group of friends, we embarked on an intriguing adventure. Much of what we learned went against the tide of our previous Christian experience. We began feeling the flow of life-giving nutrients. We started seeing spontaneous changes in our character, much like I saw in my first years of faith. I even saw growth in my stubborn areas that seemed resistant to change. We were so excited that we talked to anyone who would listen. My wife lamented that we hadn't learned this years ago. We have

grown more in the last two years than in the last twenty. This is our impetus for sharing our story with anyone who hungers.

In the next chapter, we will discover how many churches adopted the flawed model of discipleship I used as a pastor. We will learn how our soil became depleted and what steps we can take to replenish the nutrients. The church did not start out being half-brained. In the book of Acts we find a vibrant whole-brained community. But several hundred years ago, culture changes<sup>6</sup> pulled the Christian faith toward practices that are left-brain dominant.<sup>7</sup> Growing disciples of Jesus became focused primarily on thoughts, words, strategies, and arguments for truth. Relational skills and maturity were largely neglected. The results have been disastrous for our relational soil.

Unfortunately, the consequences of half-brained Christianity do not stop at anemic character change. Something dark grows in Christian community when the soil loses its nutrients. I was to discover that narcissism thrives in depleted soil, especially in positions of leadership. Headlines are filled with the downfall of pastors and leaders, devastating churches, ministries, and families. A whole-brained Christianity creates communities that are both transformational and resistant to narcissism.

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**When we fail to engage the full brain in our Christian communities, our spirituality gravitates to a left-brained Christianity. We lose the relational and emotional skills that form our character. Without them, our discipleship is ineffective. Left-brained Christianity not only leads to a lack of character growth, it creates a relational environment that is optimal for narcissism to flourish.**

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**GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Do you relate to Michel's surprise at discovering he was a left-brained Christian?
2. Are the spiritual practices you have been taught mostly left-brained, right-brained, or a good mix of the two (whole-brained)?
3. Discuss what your life might be like with more right-brained focused skills: more joy, a better ability to regulate distressing emotions, a more coherent identity, and the ability to feel God's face shining on you.
4. Does the soil of your Christian community have signs of being depleted? How common is transformation in your church?

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