

# Engineered for Success

## Renewal. Recovery. Restoration

**Harvey and Irma captivated the news for weeks.** No, not the sweet couple married for 75 years—the two Super Hurricanes whose names they share. In September 2017, Harvey pounded Texas with such violence that it put 2/3 of Houston under water. Irma followed shortly after, crushing the Caribbean Islands, pounding Florida, and wreaking havoc in surrounding islands. Aside from the indescribable human and private property loss, these hurricanes inflicted more than 500 billion dollars in damage and may go down in history as the costliest natural disasters in America.

**Storm-ravaged cities have two major challenges. Damaged infrastructure** such as communication and transportation systems shut down normal operations. The result is **weakened defense systems** that make the city vulnerable to violence and vandalism. The city is now in survival mode—it needs comprehensive renewal, recovery, and restoration. Have you ever had times when you have been in “survival mode”? Have you ever felt like you needed spiritual renewal, physical recovery, and emotional restoration? I think most of us have!

God often uses the things that we can see to help us understand the things we cannot see. Notice this vivid comparison of just such a city with mankind in his broken and vulnerable condition: **“A man without self-control is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”** Proverbs 25:28. Yes, that broken city powerfully illustrates the broken brain—a brain that may have been broken down over time by chronic stress, depression, unhealthy lifestyle, and addictions. **The battle is for the brain**—the seat of our thoughts, emotions, and actions—and that’s where recovery begins. The brain has been called “the hardware of the soul.” A healthy, well-functioning brain can make better choices and more clearly hear the guiding voice of God.

### **There are three major areas that influence your brain:**

**Genes:** You cannot change your gene structure: but its function and activity is dramatically influenced by your diet, lifestyle, exercise, and even the way you think.

**Environment:** Your internal environment is how you think. Your external environment is what surrounds you. God has a wonderful restoration plan for your life. He’s got the power to change your brain, emotions, desires, actions, environment, and your life!

**Choice:** Every choice you make, to a greater or lesser degree, affects emotional, mental, and physical health. Every day presents you with opportunities to make choices that will influence brain/body systems and even the activity of your genes. Every choice that improves the health of your brain improves the health of your body, and vice-versa.

**God has a plan for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual renewal.** The great news is that you can move forward and *continue* forward—whether your brain has been hit by a storm of stress, depression, negativity, or unhealthy habits. “Experiences, thoughts, actions, and emotions actually change the structure of our brains.”<sup>i</sup> Rebuilding a broken city requires a plan—and so does rebuilding a broken brain. Your brain is constantly reshaping itself according to what it learns. This is called “plasticity.” **Plasticity** is the term neuroscientists use to describe the remarkable ability of our brains to adapt and change. Scientists now know that: “The brain is a far more open system than we ever imagined, and nature...has given us a brain that survives in a changing world by changing itself.”<sup>ii</sup>

**Behavioral and lifestyle choices build a better brain, better habits, better health, and a better life—for good!** Here are some key pieces:

**Environment:** The internal environment of how you think and the external environment you surround yourself with are critical for achieving and maintaining positive change. Repeating God’s promises replace faulty internal monologues. His Word is living, powerful, and true. **“I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.”** Philippians 4:13. Focus on what you can change in your surroundings—focus on solutions and the power of God to guide you, not problems and obstacles.

**Lifestyle:** Lifestyle choices strongly affect physical, mental, and spiritual health. “Physical and mental exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep will help anyone gain cognitive clarity and emotional stability.”<sup>iii</sup> Nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, and refined sugar dampen immune health, fan the fires of inflammation, and promote stress, addictions, and depression. **Food is medicine.** Replacing empty calories, unhealthy fast foods, and high-fat animal products with nutrient-rich fresh vegetables and fruits, beans, whole grains, and nuts creates real strength, lowers stress hormones and inflammation, and boosts mental and physical energy. Modest positive choices pave the way for breaking big, bad habits. Daily exercise improves circulation and improves every level of brain function, including learning, problem-solving, creativity, and mood.

**Connections:** Your associations and interests have a profound shaping effect on your values and goals. Take time to connect with others. Connecting with God through prayer and time in the Bible open the gates of power, guidance, and courage for life’s journey. **I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go. I will guide you with my eye.”** Psalm 32:8.

**Managing Stress:** You need practical strategies to tap into when confronting challenges and stress. A healthy lifestyle lowers stress hormone activity, protects the brain and body from stress damage, and improves problem-solving ability.

**Assessment:** It is always important to work closely with your physician or healthcare provider; lifestyle changes may reduce or eliminate the need for certain medications over time. Medicine or medical procedures may be essential.

God cares about your welfare. He has a plan and the power to renew your heart, recover broken health, and restore emotional and mental strength. Grace and strength will be given to you for every trial. For those who trust Him and commit their lives to Him, the promise of Heaven and a new Earth where there will be no more pain, suffering, or disease is assured. Revelation 21:4. Restoration and hope begin now. Will you choose God's plan? He is waiting to help and bless you.

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<sup>i</sup> Ratey J. User's Guide to the Brain, p. 17. Vintage Books, 2002.

<sup>ii</sup> Doidge N. The Brain That Changes Itself, p. 26. Penguin Books, 2007.

<sup>iii</sup> Ratey J. User's Guide to the Brain, p. 356. Vintage Books, 2002.

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