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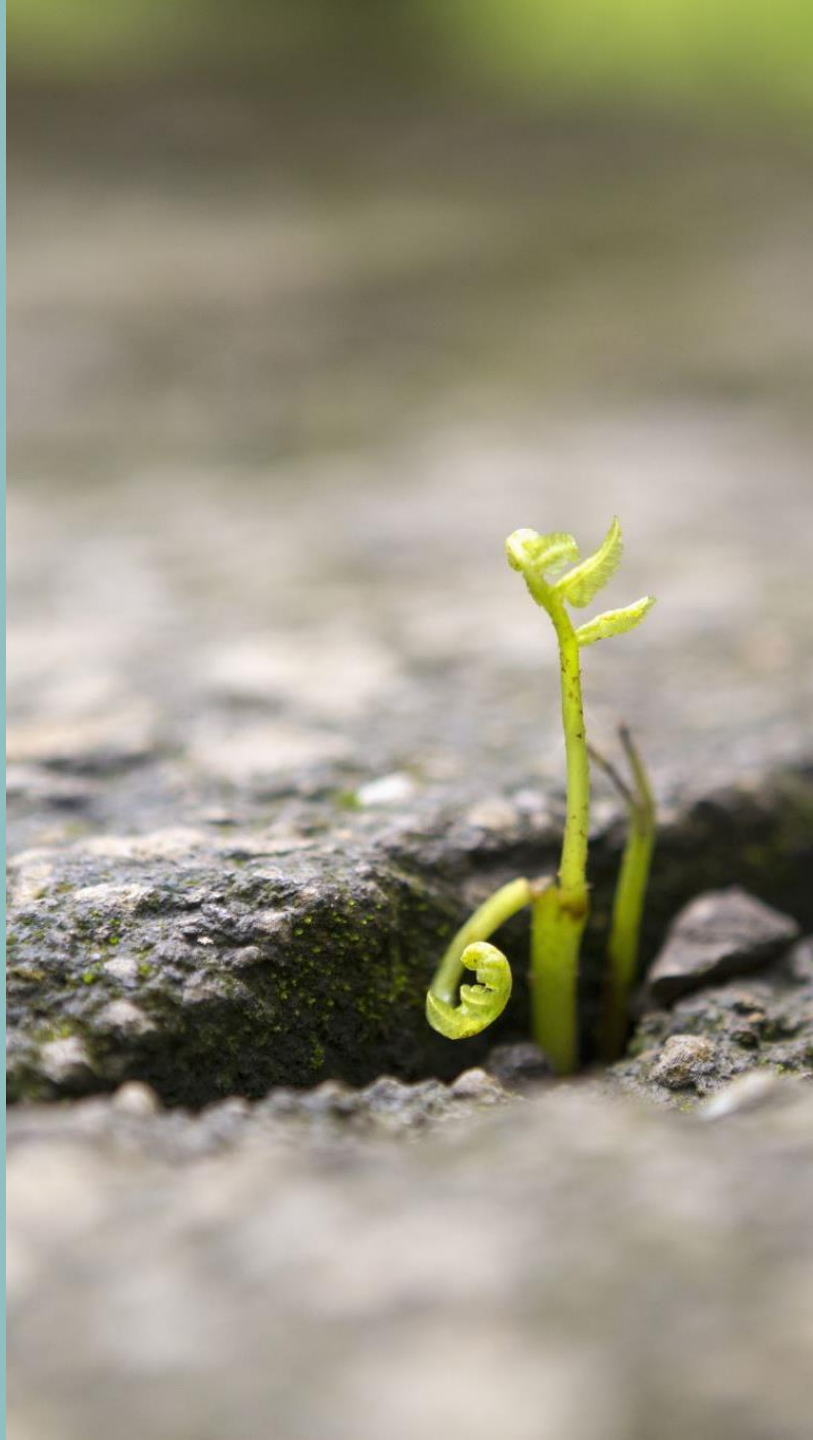
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# Session 13 Growing Character

Life Model Works  
Leader's Collective



## What is Maturity?

Maturity comes from having appropriate needs met and mastering a growing set of relational tasks we are meant to learn as we pass through the stages of life.

## What is Character?

Character is our instantaneous responses to our relationships and circumstances — our “gut behavior” that seems to come out before we realize it.

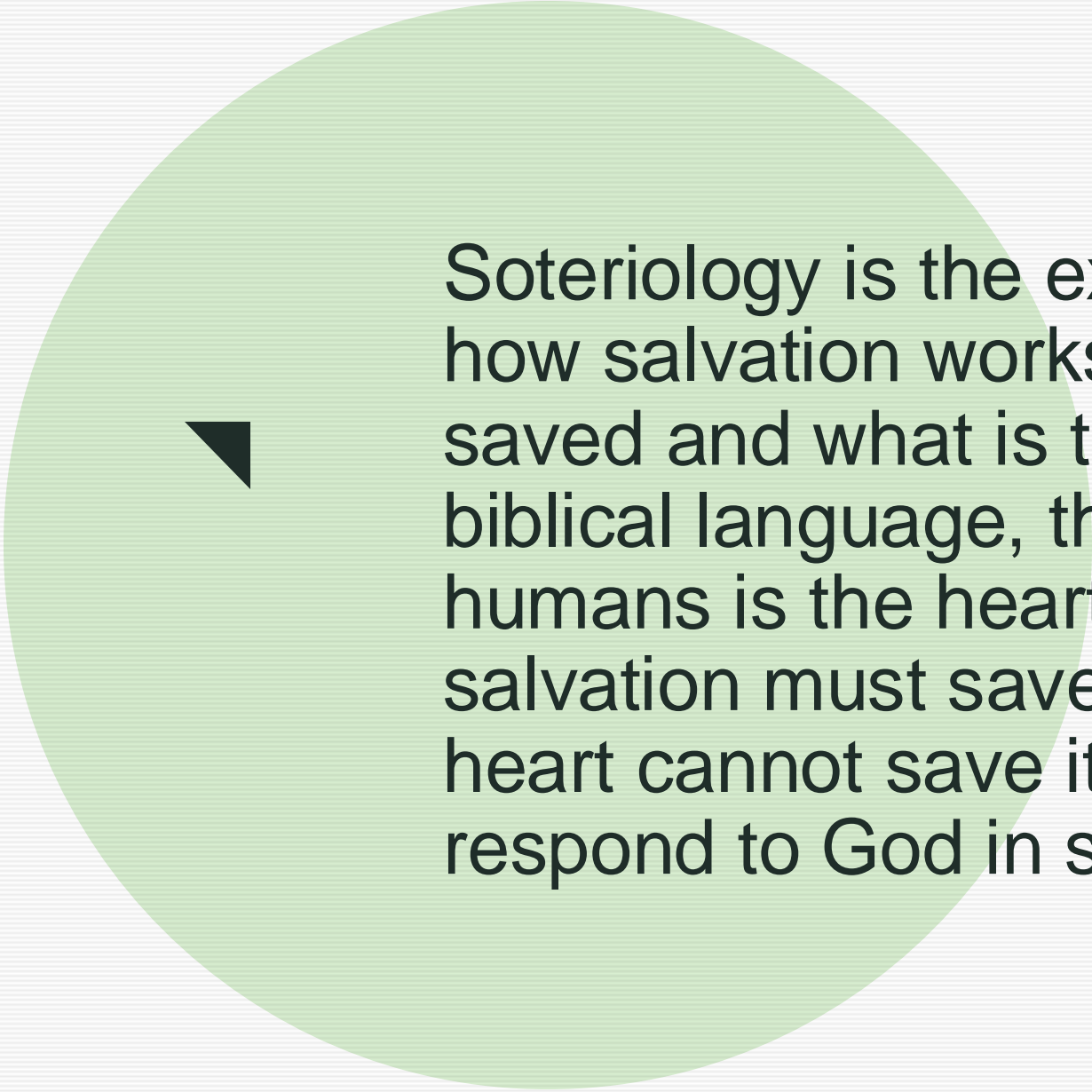
Our character is too fast for our willpower to override, so trying to improve our character by “swearing never to do that again” or “trying harder” is a losing strategy.

- Michel Hendricks

*Renovated: God, Dallas  
Willard and the Church that  
Transforms*

Highlights from Chapter 5 –  
*Neuroscience and Developing  
Character*





Soteriology is the explanation of how salvation works. What about us is saved and what is the mechanism? In biblical language, the central part of humans is the heart. At the very least, salvation must save the heart. The heart cannot save itself, so it must respond to God in some way.

By what mechanism does the heart respond to God's salvation? The most common answer is the will.



***A soteriology of attachment replaces the will with attachment.***

We must move attachment to the center, then, where our heart is found, where attachment becomes the mechanism through which the heart responds to God and develops Christlike character.



Doesn't moving the will leave us in some kind of determinism?

No! Attachment is the ignored, but *active motivator*, of human life. It is a free and active force. Who we form attachments with is not predetermined.

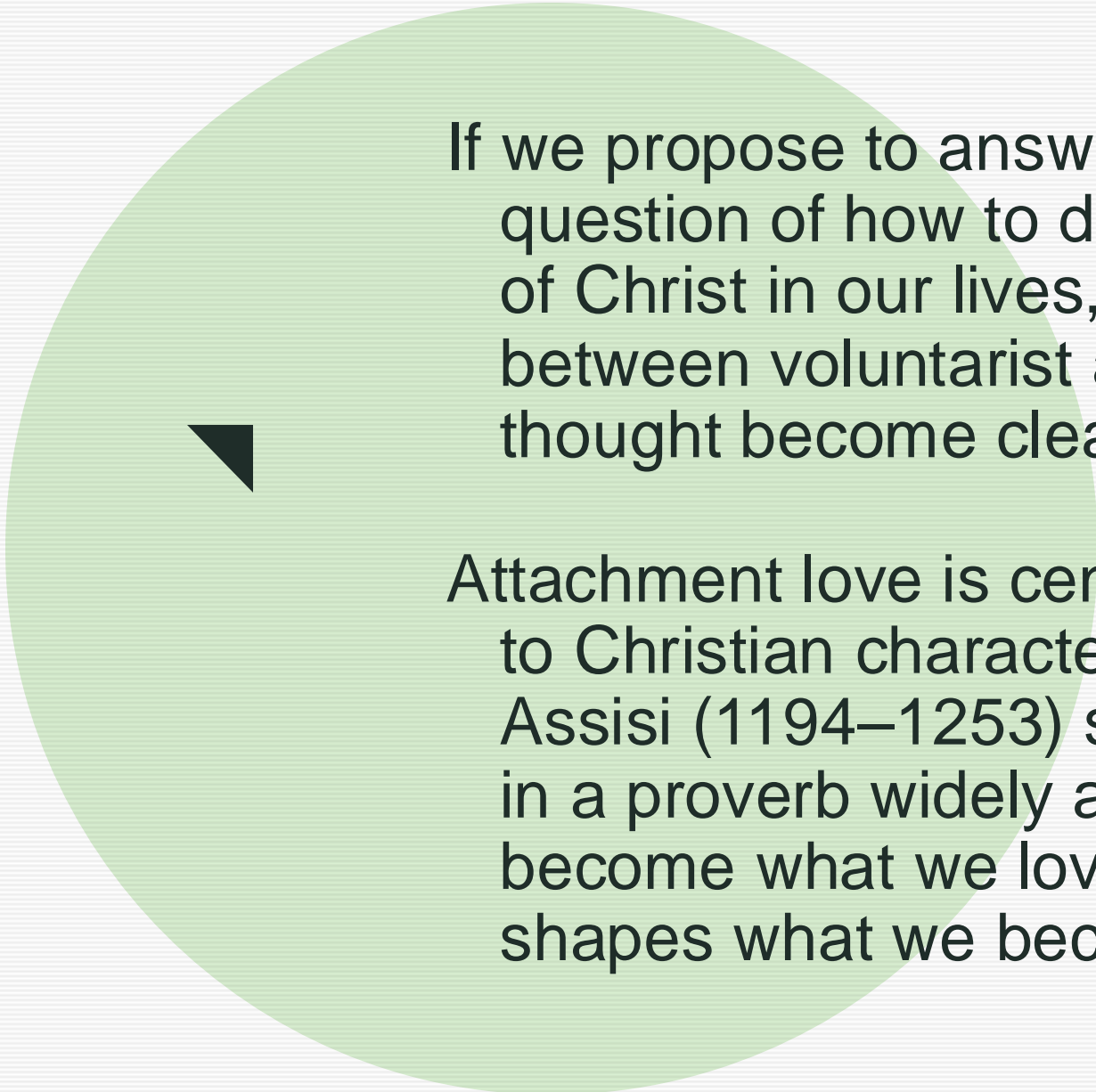
We are in for some good news when we consider how attachment could replace the will as the center of spiritual life!

## The rise of Voluntarist theology:

Why all this attention on the will? William Ames book, *The Marrow of Theology*, represented a minor minority view in his day. But for those early settlers in the American colonies, his book and the Bible were considered all that was needed for pure Christian life.

As the enlightenment unfolded, the faculties of the will and the intellect became the focus of both theology and philosophy, explaining what made one both human and Christian. From this perspective, the Christian life was based on truth and good choices. Sin was understood as a choice made to disobey God, salvation as a choice to accept Jesus as personal savior.

Voluntarism is the prevailing undercurrent of the American Christian worldview. The mechanism for change, then, under this system has been to use conscious thoughts in the slow-track of the brain to focus on truth so we make better choices.



If we propose to answer the practical question of how to develop the character of Christ in our lives, the differences between voluntarist and attachment thought become clearer.

Attachment love is central to an older path to Christian character. Saint Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) spoke of attachment in a proverb widely attributed to her: We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.

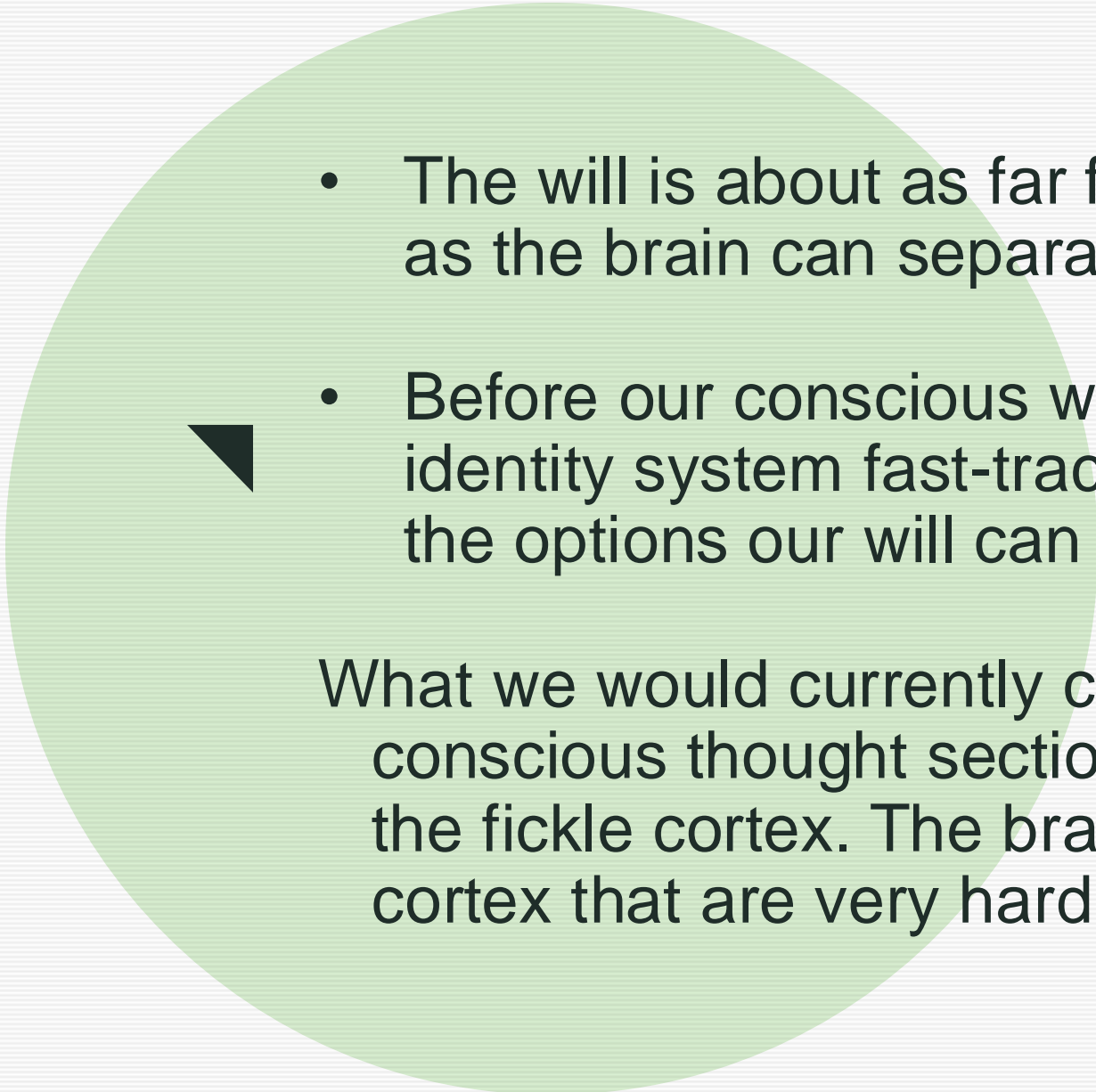
A soteriology of attachment changes our model of transformation!

You have just rehearsed a hugely simplified version of 2000 years of philosophy and theology in the West.

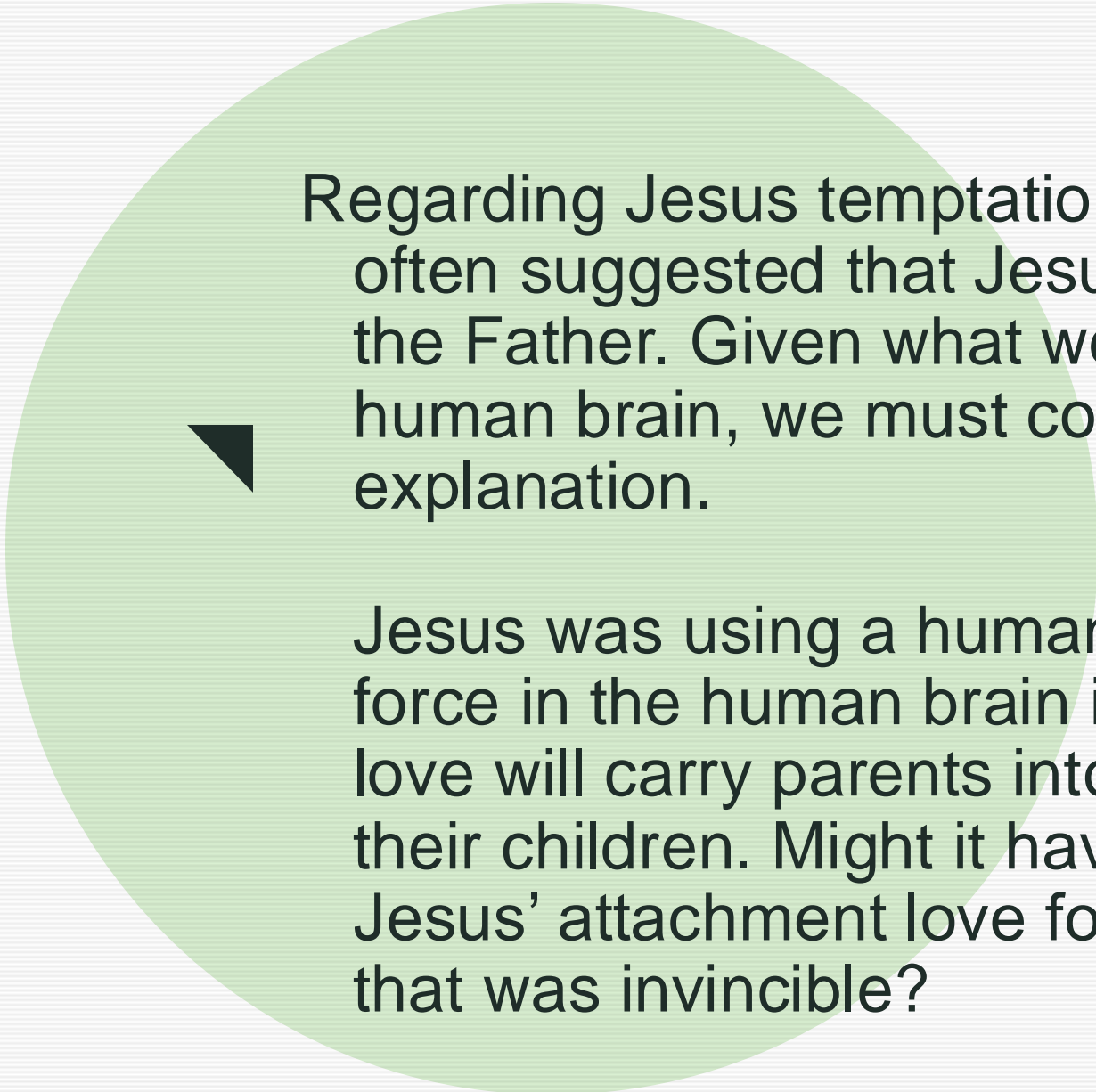
There are two serious problems with this traditional model for understanding humans.

Applying the model does not produce the kinds of transformation we would expect from Christian practices.

The model does not match the way the brain works. The brain has attachment love, not our will, as its central feature.

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- The will is about as far from our deepest identity as the brain can separate things.
  - Before our conscious will comes into play, our identity system fast-track has already determined the options our will can consider.

What we would currently call the will is located in the conscious thought section, which places the will in the fickle cortex. The brain has many wills on the cortex that are very hard to separate from desires.

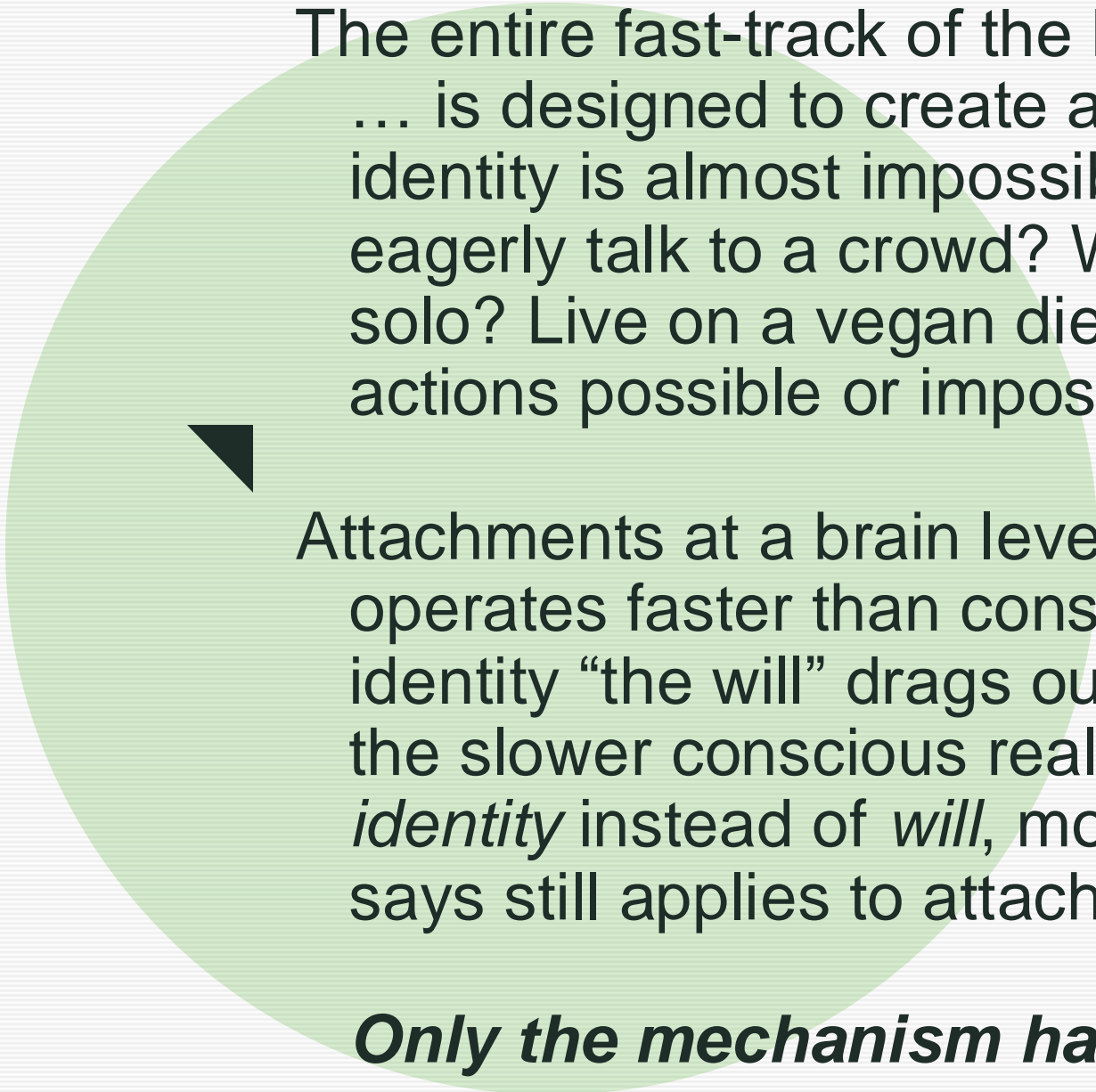


Regarding Jesus temptation in the garden, it is most often suggested that Jesus was submitting his will to the Father. Given what we now know about the human brain, we must consider a different explanation.

Jesus was using a human brain, and the strongest force in the human brain is attachment. Attachment love will carry parents into burning buildings to save their children. Might it have been the strength of Jesus' attachment love for his Father, not his will, that was invincible?

Dr. Schore explains that relational joy builds identity and character in the brain. Joy gives us self-control. Joy is our strength. Joy lets us suffer well when we must suffer.

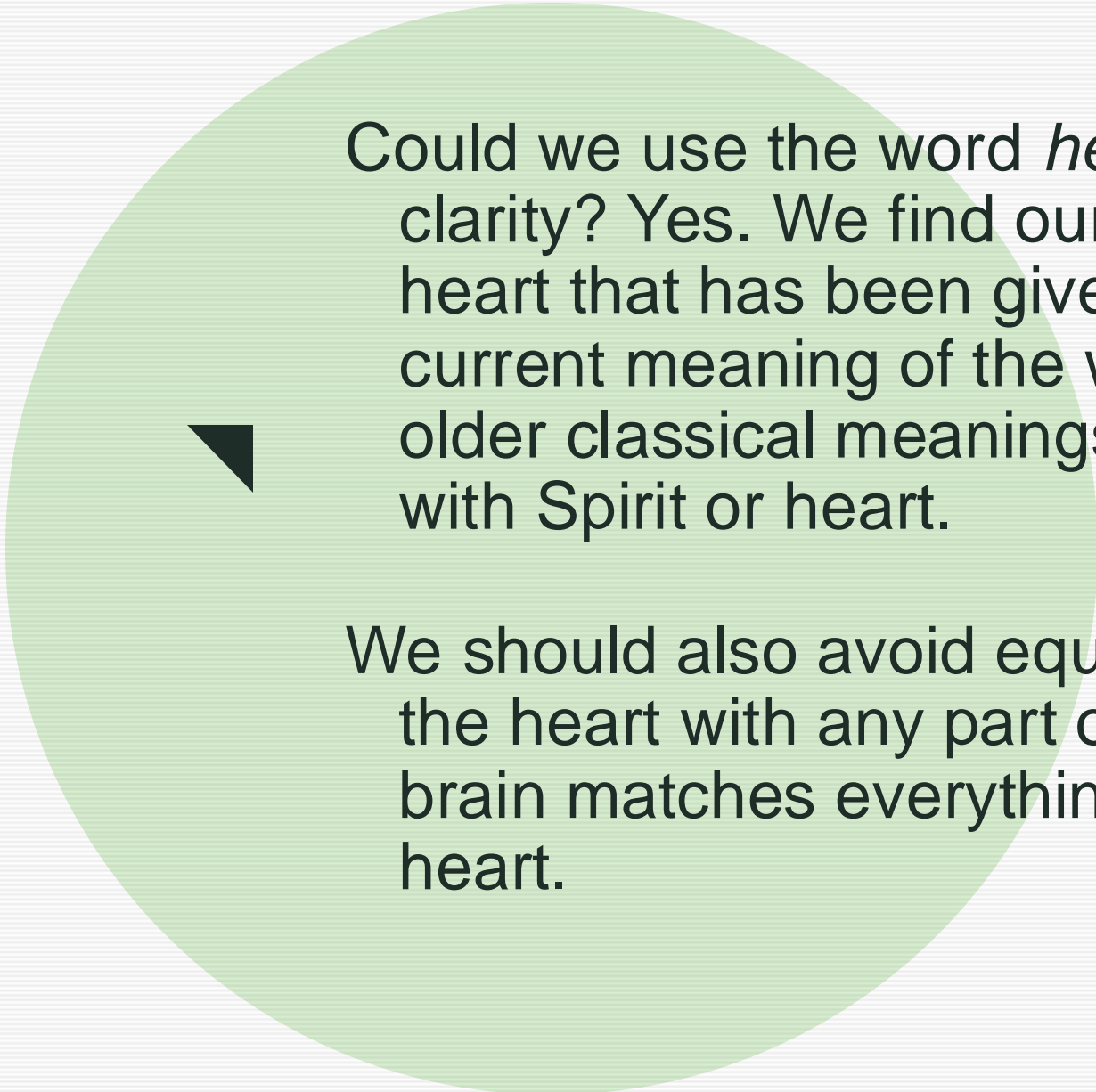
It would be consistent with the entire narrative of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion-including the upper room discourse – it would attribute victory to Jesus as attachment love for the Father and for his disciples.



The entire fast-track of the brain ... the master system ... is designed to create and maintain identity. Our identity is almost impossible to override. Would you eagerly talk to a crowd? Wear a pretty dress? Sing a solo? Live on a vegan diet? Identity makes these actions possible or impossible.

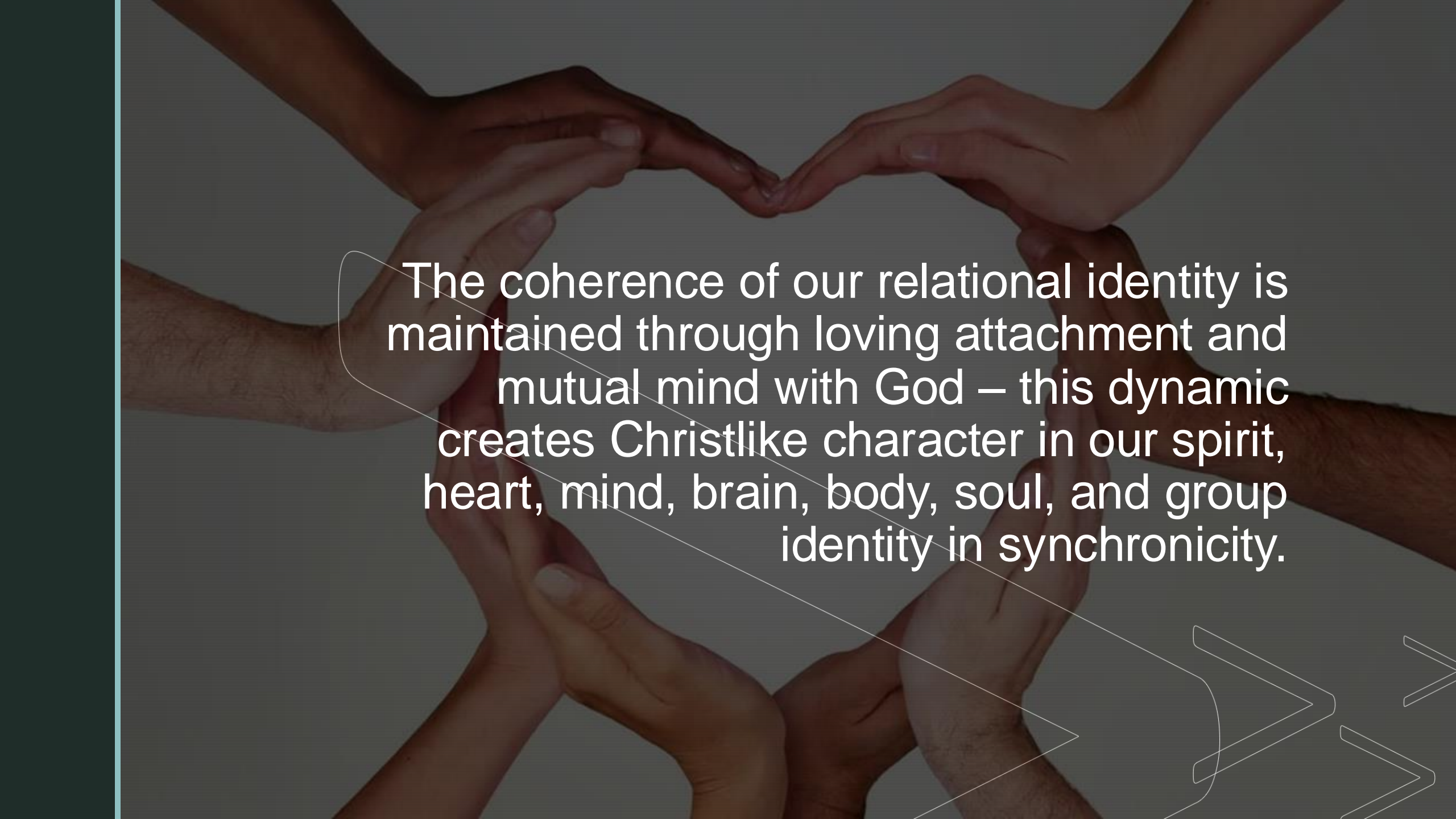
Attachments at a brain level create an identity that operates faster than conscious thought. Calling that identity “the will” drags our concept of identity into the slower conscious realm. If we use the word *identity* instead of *will*, most of what Dallas Willard says still applies to attachment-based salvation.

***Only the mechanism has changed.***

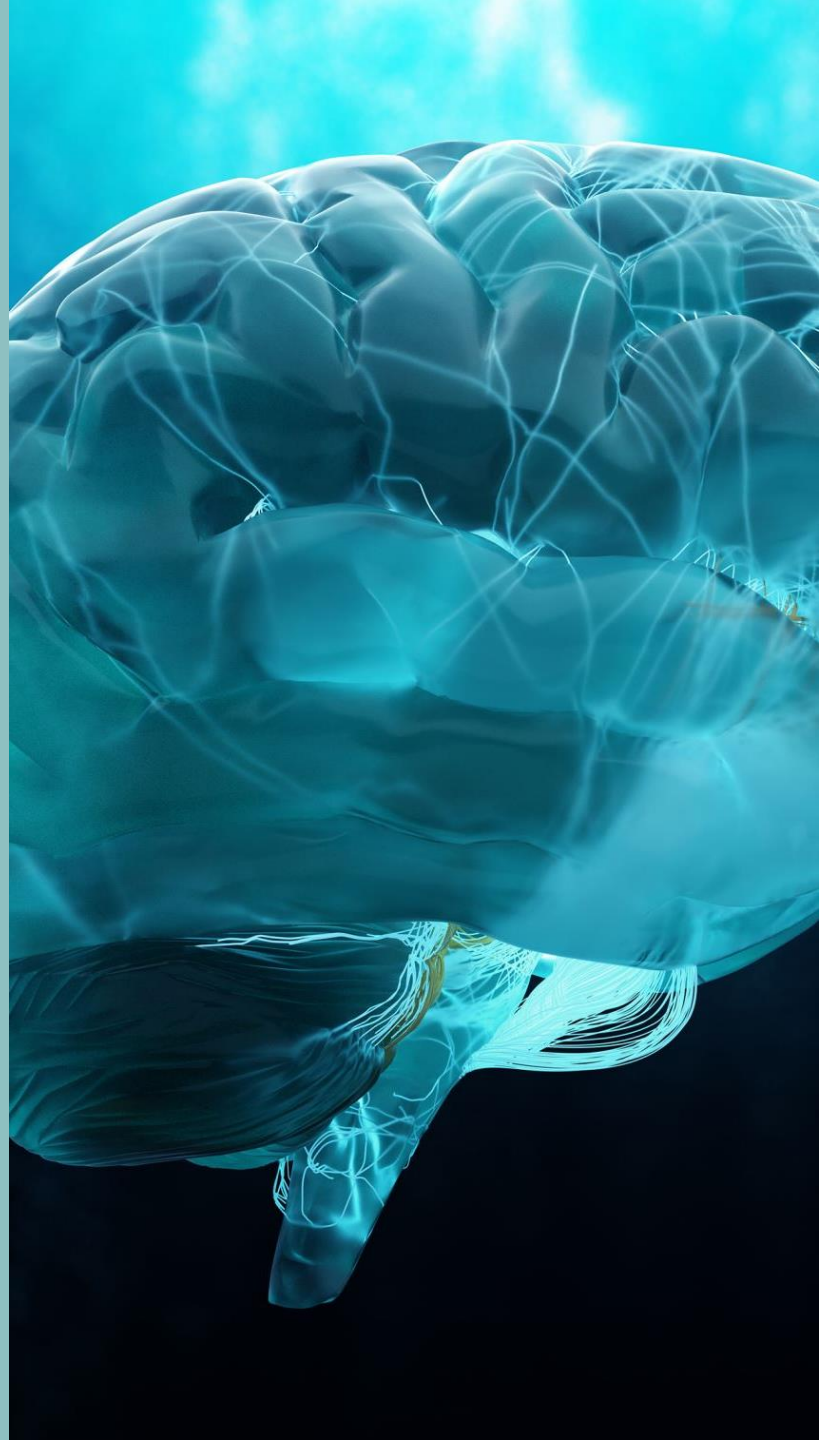


Could we use the word *heart* instead of *will* for clarity? Yes. We find our true identities through a heart that has been given new life in Christ. Our current meaning of the word *will* is so far from the older classical meanings that we should replace it with Spirit or heart.

We should also avoid equating the biblical view of the heart with any part of the brain. No part of the brain matches everything scripture says about the heart.



The coherence of our relational identity is maintained through loving attachment and mutual mind with God – this dynamic creates Christlike character in our spirit, heart, mind, brain, body, soul, and group identity in synchronicity.



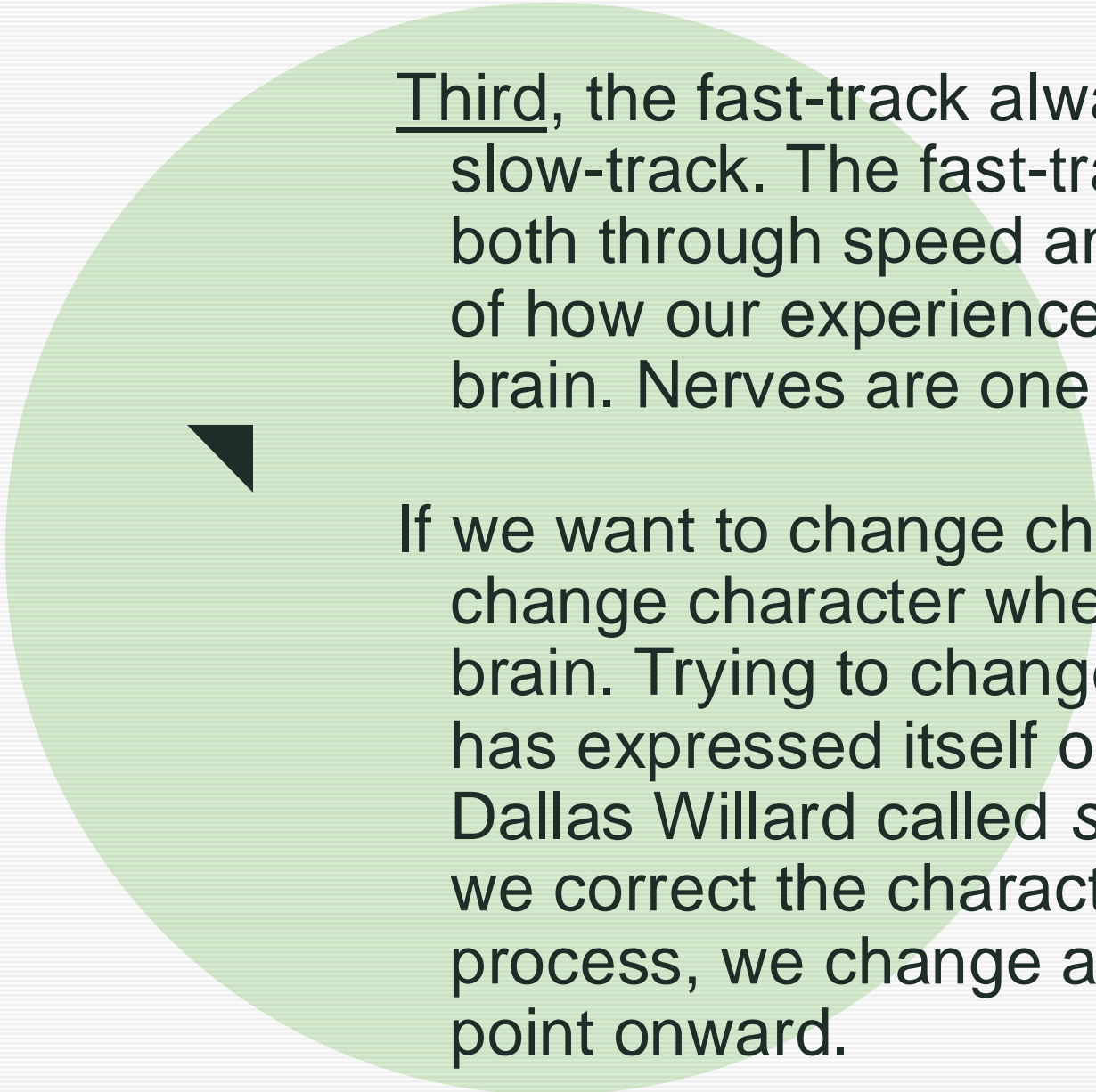
We can all agree that where we focus our attention is huge, and yet, focusing our attention is a very indirect way to change the mechanism that controls where we focus attention.

This is an irony. When we focus our attention to change our character, we encounter three massive problems in our brain.

First, focused attention works too slowly to form character. Focusing is done in the slow-track; character develops in the fast-track.



Second, the fast-track of the brain - cannot be focused. The fast-track considers all it knows about identity and reality at once. Rather than *focusing*, the fast-track *synchronizes* with another greater mind. If an attachment has been established, the greater mind can reach past the "firewall" and change the identity and character of the lesser mind.



Third, the fast-track always comes before the slow-track. The fast-track is primary, both through speed and through the direction of how our experience moves through the brain. Nerves are one directional devices.

If we want to change character, we must change character where it happens in the brain. Trying to change character long after it has expressed itself only results in what Dallas Willard called *sin management*. When we correct the character creation process, we change all the activity from that point onward.

What would happen if the heart moved its mechanism of influence from the conscious slow-track that thinks about God to the fast-track that thinks with the Beloved?

Paul tells the Ephesians that Jesus dwells in our hearts through faith that is rooted and grounded in love. This teaching is in harmony with neuroscience if, and that is a very big if, what roots and grounds us is *attachment love*.

If love is a choice, there is little love can do. In an attachment love model the means by which Jesus influences our lives is not primarily the conscious, focused attention of the will. We are guided from our very spirit on out by the most importantly powerful thing the brain knows - who we love.

The Life Model posits that the Hebrew word *hesed* and the Greek word *agape* mean attachment love.

Many a voluntarist preacher has said of agape; this love is commanded and therefore must be an act of the will. *But agape could also be commanded because it is possible by being in union with Jesus.*

Attachment love is commanded because God loves – he is *hesed* – and all who share a mutual mind with God will also love.

Attachment has a lot of power compared to will and choice. Joy is the energy that builds strong attachment love. The power of an illicit joy builds an illicit attachment that costs people everything.

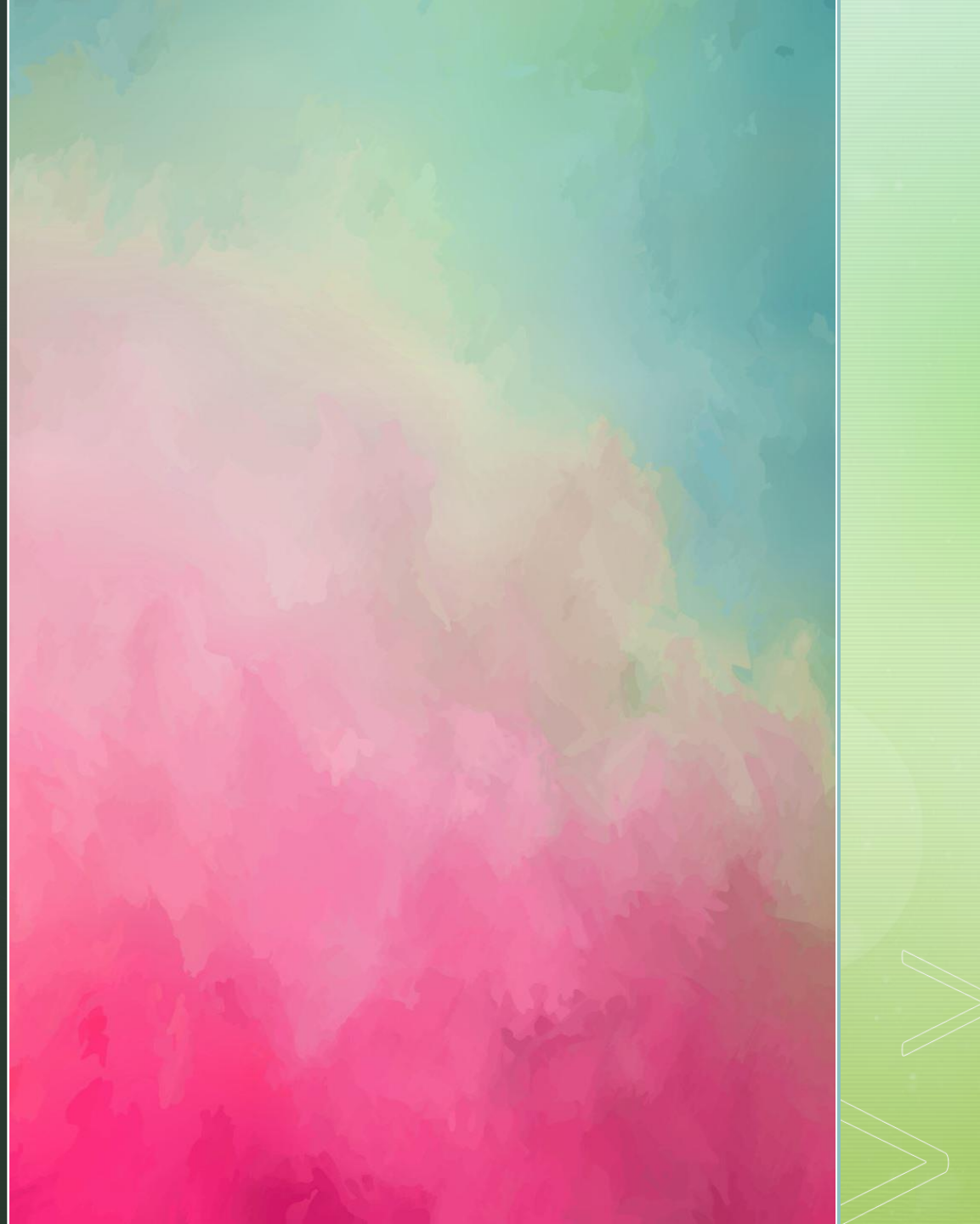
## Coherence:

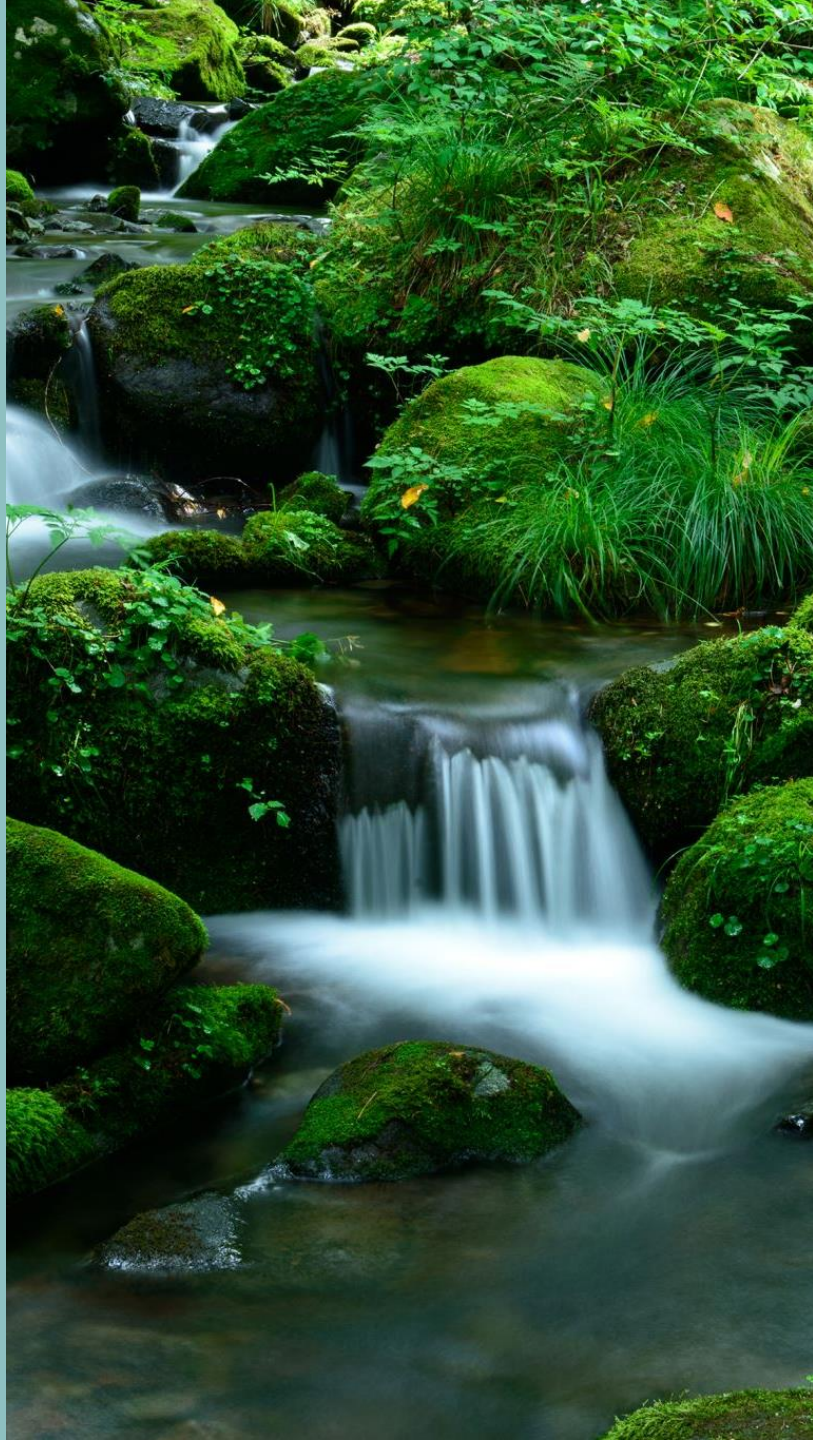
Could it be that at every level of the human person, we are both created and made new by attachment love? Are we being saved when God becomes our beloved and God's people become our beloved people?

***We are transformed by who we love more than what we believe.***

We should neglect neither but make attachment love our priority. The means and mechanisms for developing Christlike identity in a human brain are tied, at every level, to the need for loving attachment. Restoration is a relational process. Salvation gives us a new heart and a Lover for our soul.

Trauma and deprivation hinder or block the development of maturity by teaching us to be enemies rather than God's family. But by healing through the Holy Spirit, these blockages to maturity are removed. Fellowship with the rest of our people trains our brain to grow what has been missing. With a loving attachment that will not let us go, we can develop a fully formed, joyful, and Christlike character.





Motivations that are "upstream" from our willpower and reasoning must be accessed, activated, and developed in order to transform our character.

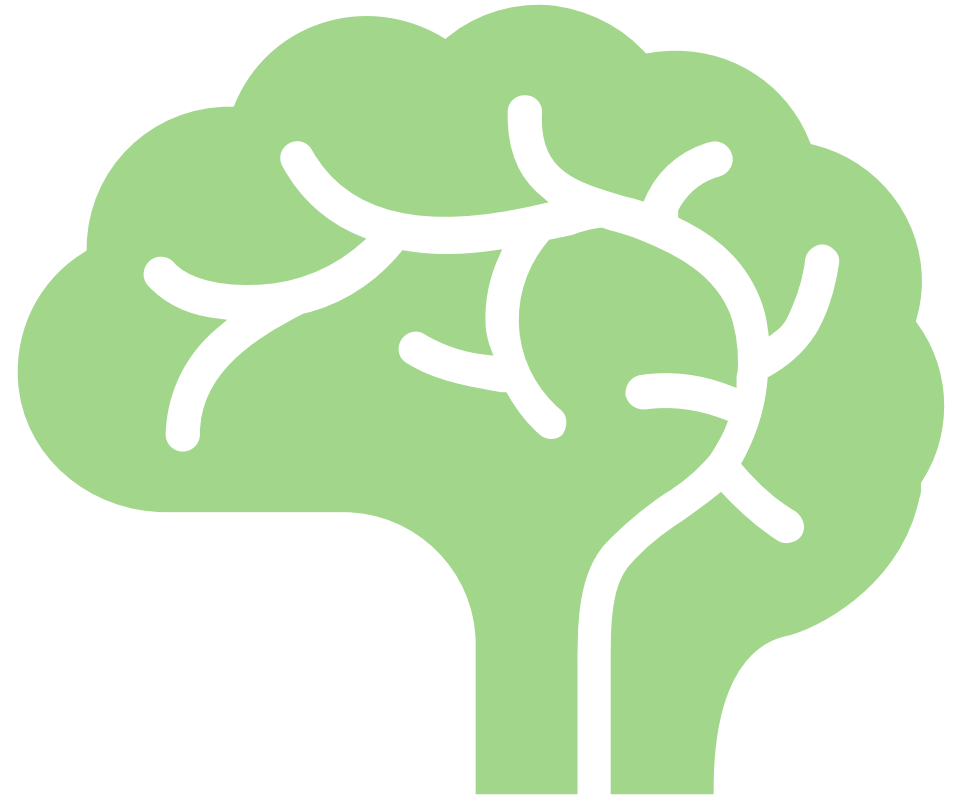


I did not grow up in a Christian family, but I got involved in a Christian group when I was 19. Suddenly I was spending time with people who had better character than I. One day I was helping an older staff member install a sprinkler system in his yard. During a lunch break, his 5-year-old son stuck one of his toys into their VCR. My friend calmly walked over and crouched down to look his son in the eyes. He said, “Jeffy, we have talked about how we treat others’ belongings with respect. Your toy can easily break our VCR. So please don’t do that again.”

I saw the whole interaction and my jaw dropped. I had never seen a parent correct a child this way. Unknown to him or me, he rewired the character circuits in my brain that day. And my instantaneous reactions in similar situations changed.

Michel Hendricks' - Testimonial

To grow better  
character, we  
need good  
examples and  
relevant stories  
to draw upon  
from our brains'  
libraries



"...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Philippians 2:13.

# Our Stories:

Who formed our character?

Tell about a character test you failed.

Tell about a character test you passed.