

Review of the Book *Who Switched Off My Brain*

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Abstract

The brain is an amazing and complex organ. It performs countless functions continuously every moment that we are alive. All of these functions are performed simultaneously! Much study has been performed on the brain. As magnificent as the brain is, it has been widely thought that as the brain ages it loses its capacity to learn new things. The brain's volume peaks in your twenties and gradually declines the rest of your life [ CITATION Ame11 \l 1033 ]. What about other functions of the brain such as thinking, and processing information? What is a thought? What does a thought look like? Are there good thoughts and bad thoughts? If so, what effect do they have on our health and lifestyle? Such questions as these are tackled by Dr. Caroline Leaf in her book titled *Who Switched Off My Brain?* The purpose of this writing is to explore the findings of Dr. Caroline Leaf and give an analysis of her conclusions on how thoughts can greatly impact the quality of our lives, as well as how these effects can be undone. Additionally, the expertise of the author and the appropriateness of the evidence will be reviewed.

Introduction

## WHO SWITCHED OFF MY BRAIN BOOK REVIEW

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Author: Dr. Caroline Leaf

Book Title: Who Switched Off My Brain

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Dr. Caroline Leaf is a cognitive neuroscientist with a PhD in Communication Pathology and a BSc in Logopedics and Audiology, specializing in metacognitive and cognitive neuropsychology[ CITATION DrC17 \l 1033 ]. She has researched the science of thought since 1985. Her passion is to help people achieve their greatest potential, using techniques that are created to align with brain science for lasting change.

Her science of thought techniques have transformed the lives of patients with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), learning disabilities (ADD, ADHD), autism, the dementias, emotional traumas and mental health issues and has shown thousands of students of all ages, and adults and corporations how to use their minds to detox and develop their brains[ CITATION DrC17 \l 1033 ].

She travels the globe as an international speaker and expert in her field of study. Dr. Caroline Leaf's worldview is rooted in her Christian beliefs. Her additional focus is to reveal how God has given us the ability to change our lives and health through the renewing of our minds. She illustrates how advances in neuroscience prove scripture.

*Who Switched Off My Brain* is a book whose target audience is the Christian community. It should be noted that you will get a healthy dose of scientific terminology and vocabulary that will take some effort on the part of the reader to follow along with the premise of the book. The information given, however, can have a significant impact on the reader's understanding of how important your thoughts are to your overall well-being. It is a short book made up of only 175 pages in its entirety. The large print is a plus as well which makes it a more practical read.

The Problem the Book Addresses

The general problem that the book addresses is that of the effects of toxic thinking. Simply put, toxic thoughts are thoughts that trigger negative and anxious emotions, which produce biochemicals that cause the body to stress. These toxic thoughts, if not properly dealt with, can become permanent fixtures in our brain. This causes stress levels to remain high, leading to eventual health and other problems. Dr. Leaf stated, “A massive body of research collectively shows that up to 80% of physical, emotional, and mental health issues today could be a direct result of our thought lives[ CITATION Lea09 \l 1033 ].

The notion that that a toxic thought life can increase stress to sustained harmful levels is supported by Dr. Joe Dispenza, whose material was used, to some degree, to research this topic by Dr. Leaf. He stated,

“Why is this such a problem? The chemicals that continually flood our body when we are under long-term stress are the culprits that begin to alter our internal state and pull the trigger of cellular breakdown. Moreover, when we're always on high alert or in emergency mode, our body doesn't have the time or the resources necessary to repair and regenerate itself. The body can even become addicted to the chemical state of being under stress[ CITATION DrJ09 \l 1033 ].

Toxic thoughts and the resulting ill effects are the problems set forth in this book.

#### Evaluation and Review

In the introduction section of the book a question is posed immediately to the reader, “Do you ever feel like your brain has been switched off?” This is a very thought provoking question as evident by the book’s title. My feeling is that there was not a clear meaning as to what a “switched off” brain is. It seems to allude to a meaning of one feeling discouraged, unfocused, or overwhelmed. I am left to assume that a switched off brain is a brain operating off of a pattern of toxic thinking. This is a small thing. However, Dr. Leaf gives a very vivid picture of what a thought is. She informs us that thoughts are measurable and occupy mental real estate and

influence every area of our lives. The most compelling picture is her comparison of our thoughts to trees and their branches.

Great detail is given to this analogy. A schematic drawing of how thoughts look in the brain is given on page 20 of the text. This analogy really helps to build the seriousness of the subject that toxic thinking has harmful effects on our overall health. The message comes through very clear that either your thoughts will grow and branch out as healthy trees or as dark trees with branches of poisonous thinking that can have dire consequences on your quality of life. All I could think about was; whatever kind of tree I plant and grow in my mind, it was going to occupy valuable real estate in my brain!

The fact that stress, particularly prolonged stress, can be harmful to your body is not new. Dr. Leaf points out the end result of harmful thinking are continued stress upon the body's systems. In what I consider a brilliant manner, she was able to explain the complex findings about the connection of stress, feelings of bitterness, resentment, and sickness, to toxic thoughts in simple easy to understand language. As stated before, there are some technical and scientific terms that may be hard to understand, but overall the message comes through clearly.

Neuroplasticity is seen as a remedy to break this cycle of bad thinking. This is the process of re-wiring the brain to undo the damage done by toxic thinking. I am very intrigued by this concept. Dr. Leaf is not alone in her belief in neuroplasticity. Debbie Hampton believes, "Neuroplasticity also enables people to recover from stroke, injury, and birth abnormalities, overcome autism, ADD and ADHD, learning disabilities and other brain deficits, pull out of depression and addictions, and reverse obsessive compulsive patterns"[ CITATION Deb15 \l 1033 ]. I will definitely look more into the subject as a result of reading this book.

Neuroplasticity is what is prescribed in the book to combat the effects of "The Dirty Dozen."

“The Dirty Dozen” given by Dr. Caroline Leaf in section four of the book. These are twelve areas that are targeted by toxic thinking. Each one is given a short chapter that explains each one of these areas. The brevity of each chapter forces the author to get straight to the point in explaining each of the dirty dozen. This strategy is a plus in my mind that balances with the scientific and technical terms that could make the book hard to understand. The list is quite comprehensive in that it covers all areas of life.

Surprisingly, as complex of a subject as how thoughts are made and their impact upon our well-being is, the answer is laid out in a simple five step process. This process is called the “brain sweep.” The five steps are: Gather, Reflect, Journal, Revisit, and Reach. As you deal with each member of The Dirty Dozen in your life, you then go through each step of “The Brain Sweep” to break that cycle of toxic thinking in that particular area. The steps may seem simple; however, it takes a commitment on a daily basis, to actively go through these steps. Dr. Caroline suggests using a METACOG MAP, an example is given on page 153. This is a brain mapping technique that she devised to give you a visual of your steps through The Brain Sweep. The goal of the brain sweep is for you to face up to the area of your stinking thinking, and rethink your approach in dealing with that area. Doing so in a more productive and stress free manner.

As I read *Who Switched Off My Brain*, I could sense that this book was written in a manner to compel the reader to believe the information. Indeed a case was being made with the support of scientific research and Bible scripture. The author’s unashamed Christian ideals are spelled out clearly in the writing. She believes, wholeheartedly, that the findings of this study reveal how God purposed for us to think, that we were created with the power to renew our minds as it is stated in (Romans 12:2) of the Holy Bible. There are many biblical passages across the landscape of this book. All of them are used to convince the reader of the validity of the information from

a Christian perspective. This is refreshing to see in my opinion. An ongoing area of debate is whether or not science and belief in the Bible can coexist. She has accomplished that in this book in a very convincing manner. I believe that the truth of the Bible can be explained scientifically where it becomes necessary to do so. I admire her passion as a believer in Jesus Christ to prove the Word of God through her studies. Also, there is an extensive amount of material available in blogs, books, and videos, to further study the work done by Dr. Caroline.

#### Summary

Dr. Caroline Leaf has done extensive research to arrive at the conclusions she has drawn. Her extensive educational background and years in the field of neuroscience gives her credibility. The layout of the book is simple and the main ideas flow smoothly one into the other. In spite of the technical terms used at times, it still qualifies as an easy read. What a thought is and what can cause a thought to become toxic were clearly laid out and understandable. Anyone doing further research on this subject should make it a point to use *Who Switched Off My Brain* as source from an expert in the area. A subject as complex as the brain, and how it builds and replace thoughts on a constant basis, could easily warrant a book of several hundred pages. Dr. Leaf managed to simplify difficult subject matter and put it into layman's terms.

This would be a great book to use as a study guide for classes in a church setting for Bible Study groups, ministry training, and counseling courses as well. It will definitely remain in my library.

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