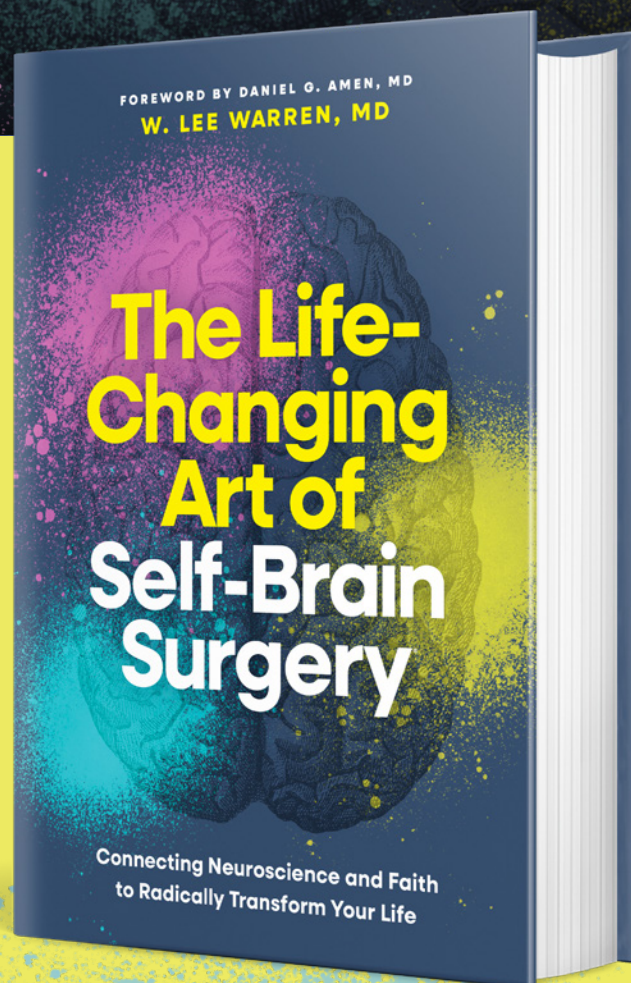


Group Discussion Guide



How to Use This Discussion Guide

This group discussion guide will help you understand and apply the principles of self-brain surgery to transform your life. With nine sessions that each correspond to specific chapters in *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*, this guide provides many opportunities for you to connect, discuss, and reflect in a small group setting. Each session has been designed to last 65 minutes, and each group member needs their own discussion guide.

Before each group discussion, read the chapters from *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery* that correspond with that session.

Patient Intake

(10 MINUTES)

Each session begins with time to build trust and connection between group members. A few questions or prompts are provided to get the conversation started about the session's main topic.

Consultation

(30 MINUTES)

In this section, you have an opportunity to consult with your fellow self-brain surgeons and discuss the session's chapters from *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*. These questions do not cover all the information from the chapters, so feel free to also ask your own questions and discuss other points that you found important.

Progress Notes

(10 MINUTES)

This section gives a few moments for you to pause and reflect individually on the session's main ideas. Writing space is provided for you to record your thoughts and observations related to your own self-brain surgery training.

Spiritual Evaluation

(15 MINUTES)

Each session includes a Scripture verse to discuss as a group. The questions provided will help you consider how neuroscience and faith connect and how you might invite God more fully into your self-brain surgery practice.

Becoming the Surgeon

(PERSONAL APPLICATION)

In this final section, a suggestion is made for how you can practically apply the session's content to your life. Reading about and discussing self-brain surgery is helpful, but true transformation happens when you begin to bravely take real steps to change your brain—and your life.

Session 1: The Waiting Room

Please read Chapter 2 of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- The first step of self-brain surgery is to answer the question, Why am I here? Share with the group what in your life has led you to want to read and discuss a book about self-brain surgery. What do you hope will change by the end of this study?

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- What messages have you heard in school, the media, and society about the extent to which we are able to change our brains?
- Dr. Warren says that self-brain surgery is “something you are already doing, every second of every day” (page 1). What does he mean by this? What becomes possible when we begin to *intentionally* practice self-brain surgery?
- One of the keys to self-brain surgery is transitioning from patient to doctor. How much of an active role do you currently play in your own health and healing?
- What thoughts, actions, or habits in your life leave you feeling stuck, discouraged, or out of options?
- What lessons can be learned from the true story of Leonid Rogozov becoming his own surgeon?
- When a medical team first meets with a patient, they listen for a chief complaint—a succinct one-sentence summary of what the patient thinks is wrong. How would you identify your chief complaint in this season of your life?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

On pages 16–17, Dr. Warren explains how physicians write SOAP notes to track a patient’s progress. The S stands for *subjective*: how a patient thinks and feels about their problem. At this point, there is no judgment or attempt to line up a patient’s thoughts and feelings with reality. The doctor is only concerned with understanding the patient from the patient’s own perspective.

- Reflect on your chief complaint. What symptoms are you currently experiencing? How do you feel about your life? What do you believe is keeping you from your ideal levels of mental health and emotional well-being?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2, NIV).

- In what ways is your mind currently “conform[ed] to the pattern of this world”?
- What would it look like for your mind to be renewed?
- How does it make you feel to know that God created your brain with the capacity to change and improve your life?

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

To be a successful self-brain surgeon, you must believe that changing your mind can change your life.

- In what areas of your life have you lost hope for your own healing? Pray that God would open your heart to the possibility of a dramatically transformed, more fulfilling life through the practice of self-brain surgery.

Session 2: The Office

Please read Chapters 3–4 of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- How comfortable are you with change? Share about a time in your life when a change led to an outcome that was better than you expected.

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- How does it make you feel to know that your brain is changing every moment?
- What is the difference between your brain and your mind? Why is distinguishing between them fundamental to the practice of self-brain surgery?
- What attempts have you already made to improve your mental and emotional health? Did they yield the results you were hoping for?
- Where in your life have you let past failures, tragedy, or other people convince you that positive change is impossible?
- In what areas do you most often compare yourself to others? What are the dangers of comparing your life to the perfect life that you believe someone else is living?
- What hesitations do you have about becoming a self-brain surgeon? On a scale of 1 to 10, how ready do you feel to become a more active participant in your own healing?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

On page 38, Dr. Warren describes how when we encounter trouble, the pain of that experience can lead us to “live smaller, take fewer risks, and thus limit our potential.”

- How have troubles rocked your confidence and made life feel dangerous? Identify any ways that you are living a smaller life than you would like. What habits or practices are not serving you on your journey toward a freer, more abundant life?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7, NLT).

- How are your fears limiting your potential?
- How does it feel to know that God has given you the power to discipline your mind?
- Are there any risks that God is calling you to embrace in this season of your life for the benefit of your own healing?

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

Think about your chief complaint. Then remind yourself that you are a compassionate surgeon with the power to address it.

- What is one small step you can take to try out an approach that you haven’t used before? Notice how it feels to try something new.

Session 3: The Approach

Please read Chapters 5–9 of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- Share about a time when you asked someone for help. What about the situation made you realize you needed additional support? How did you decide who to ask? In the end, were you happy that you had expanded your approach to include the other person?

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- What is the danger of not mindfully choosing an approach when responding to life's challenges?
- Would you be interested in a new approach to your problems if it could make you 10 percent happier? In what areas of your life would a 10 percent improvement not be sufficient?
- What did Dr. Warren and his wife, Lisa, discover during their visit to the MRI Research Center at Auburn University? How did this give them hope during a season of intense grief?
- Explain the four different approaches that Dr. Warren lays out in chapters 5–8. Which approach best matches how you tend to address your problems?
- Do you believe that God and science ought to be separate? What might be possible if you invited God to help you?
- Would you describe yourself as fragile or antifragile? What impact does this have on how you live your life?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

On page 83, Dr. Warren highlights two critical truths:

1. How you think affects how other people think.
 2. How you think affects your entire life and even the generations after you.
- How satisfied are you with your current relationships? Where would you like to see change occur?
 - How does it feel to know that you have the agency to become different from those who came before you? What are your hopes for the next generation?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, ESV).

- How do you understand the math equation that Dr. Warren derives from this verse: $A > SKD$ (abundance is greater than steal, kill, and destroy)?
- Would you describe your life right now as “abundant”? If not, what word would you use instead?
- How might embracing $A > SKD$ transform your life?

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

There is plenty of scientific evidence that prayer and meditation make our brains better. Begin your own scientific experiment by spending a few minutes each day clearing your mind and asking God to improve your brain. Observe any changes to your thoughts, feelings, attention, perspective, or emotional regulation. If you see positive results, commit to continuing this practice long-term.

Session 4: Self-Brain Surgery Commandments 1–3

Please read Chapters 10–13 of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- What impact has this study had on your life so far? Have you found yourself thinking more like a self-brain surgeon? If so, in what ways?

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- How are you tempted to commit self-malpractice when it comes to your mental, physical, and spiritual health?
- Dr. Warren argues that feelings are not facts. What can happen when you attach meaning to your feelings prematurely?
- To what extent do you consciously control your feelings? In what situations do your feelings tend to control you?
- How does Dr. Warren push back against the cultural understanding of emotional “triggers”? Have you ever used “being triggered” as an excuse for your behavior?
- Dr. Warren explains that “the brain’s main job is to automate as many processes as possible to keep you alive” (page 124). What are the positive and negative implications of this when it comes to your thoughts?
- How would you describe the three scripts that run through our brains? What do they sound like? How are they different? What are the benefits of learning to identify and distinguish between them?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

Research suggests that you have over six thousand thoughts per day, and they are negative by about five to one.

- Name 2–3 negative thoughts that play on repeat in your brain.
- How would those thoughts sound different if you deliberately and compassionately took mind-down control of them (think script #2)?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32, NLT).

- How does learning the truth keep you in control of your thoughts and feelings?
- What lies have you believed about yourself or your circumstances? How have they kept you stuck or discouraged?
- Where would you like to experience more freedom in your life?

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

Pay attention to negative thoughts as you have them. Remind yourself that you are perceiving chemical events, and you have the power to decide which of them to accept as true. Use reassuring self-talk to reframe your situation and rewrite the script with thoughts like *I am building resilience* or *I am doing my best*.

Session 5: Self–Brain Surgery Commandments 4–6

Please read Chapters 14–16 of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- Share about a time in your life when your discomfort led to growth or healing. What did you learn from that experience?

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- Describe what Dr. Warren calls a “brain-out” worldview. How can this way of thinking about identity limit your flourishing?
- How could changing your brain through self–brain surgery improve the lives of the people around you?
- Having a physically healthy brain is foundational for self–brain surgery. What are some ways that you can take good care of your brain?
- What quick hacks have you tried to improve your mental and emotional health? Did they transform your life to the extent that you were hoping for?
- Share about a time when you paid a “tomorrow tax” for your decisions. Are there any tomorrow taxes you are paying regularly?
- Why do numbing behaviors prevent us from making progress in our lives?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

On page 132, Dr. Warren asserts that, contrary to popular belief, your identity is not fixed. You are not destined to see the world or interact with others in a certain way. Instead, the choices you make have the power to change your brain, expand your life, and chart a new future.

- When you consider your identity, what words come to mind?
- Do you currently feel limited by any parts of your identity? Consider your personality, genes, family, trauma, and behaviors. Where are you tempted to think, *This is just how I am*?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:11, NIV).

- In what ways does self–brain surgery require you to discipline your thoughts?
- The Holy Spirit wants to fill you with power to face the hard stuff of your life. What would it look like to turn to him instead of your go-to numbing behaviors?
- What harvest do you hope to reap by courageously undergoing self–brain surgery?

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

The next time you recognize the pull to engage in a habit that isn’t benefiting you, practice the Five-Minute Freeze (see pages 269–275). Stop and spend five minutes considering your reasons for making your choice and what positives or negatives might come from it. Will you find yourself paying a tomorrow tax? How can you love tomorrow more than you hate how you feel right now? Remind yourself that if you say no to temptation this time, it will be easier to say no again next time. You can start becoming a new person today.

Session 6: Self–Brain Surgery Commandments 7–10

Please read Chapters 17–20 of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- Share about a time when you broke a generational family pattern. How did that experience make you feel? What led you to decide that you wanted to act differently?

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- Dr. Warren often reminds his surgical team not to make an operation out of everything. Are there ways that you have been making your life harder than it needs to be? What would it look like to take it easier on yourself?
- Because gene expression is an ever-changing process, you have the power to switch on or off most of your genetic starting points. In what areas of your life do you find relief in knowing that your decisions, beliefs, and behaviors have more power to change your future than your DNA?
- How can changing your brain improve the lives of future generations?
- Consider the health of your regular self-talk. What phrases commonly run through your head about yourself, others, or God? Which of these neural circuits would you like to strengthen? Which of these circuits would you like to weaken?
- What actions can you take to strengthen or weaken a particular neural circuit?
- How does the arrow metaphor explain how thoughts become things? How would your life and the lives of those around you improve if you never shot a harmful thought arrow?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

One way to stop making an operation out of life's challenges is to practice gratitude.

- What are some things that you are thankful for in this season of your life? What blessings do you have despite (or even because of) the pain or trauma you've experienced?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7, NLT).

- What place does prayer have in your life? What would it look like to “pray about everything”?
- Where do you need more peace right now?
- In what ways would you like God to “guard your heart and mind”?

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

Spend five minutes per day making a gratitude list. Write down even things that seem trivial. Pay attention to how this practice boosts your mood and improves your thoughts.

Session 7: The Diagnosis

Please read Chapters 21–23 of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- Have you completed a Whole-System Scan and a Thought Biopsy? What was that experience like? What insights did you gain about the thoughts that have been driving your emotions and behaviors? If you haven't completed these, what is holding you back?

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- What role does humility play in becoming a self-brain surgeon?
- What is the purpose of diagnostic work before performing self-brain surgery?
- What are the benefits of completing a Thought Biopsy after completing a Whole-System Scan? How do these two diagnostic procedures work together?
- On page 190, Dr. Warren explains five cognitive distortions that a Thought Biopsy can uncover. Which of these distortions best explains your recurring thoughts?
- Describe the three thought tests that are used during a Thought Biopsy (see pages 190–192). How can these tests help you take better control of your brain?
- Share about a time when you had an especially inspired or convicting thought. Was it a message or an assignment from God? How did you know to pay attention to it? Did it lead you to respond in a certain way?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

One step of the Whole-System Scan is to use the power of your breath to begin to heal your body. Sit quietly and identify any parts of your body that are tense or hurting. Then direct your breathing toward each part. Inhale relaxation and exhale the tension.

- Where in your body have you been holding pain or stress?
- How does it feel to focus your breathing toward your healing?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, NLT).

- What hopes do you have for your future?
- What is one area of your life in which it is hard to trust that God has good things planned?
- What Scripture verses do you fall back on when you need to be reminded of God's promises?

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

Commit to completing a Whole-System Scan and a Thought Biopsy as a daily habit. Consider using the Whole-System Scan report template on page 287 and the Thought Biopsy report template on page 288 to guide your diagnostic work and help you gain a deeper understanding of your mental and emotional health.

Session 8: The Procedure

Please read Chapters 24–25 of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- What have you learned about yourself and your brain over the course of this study so far? What areas of surgical preparation have been the most helpful for you in making the transition from patient to doctor?

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- What is the difference between general/elective and emergency/trauma self-brain surgery? How might you need to approach these two operations differently?
- Dr. Warren recommends getting to know God and developing a good theology of suffering as helpful prehab before self-brain surgery. How do you understand suffering? What does it look like for you to trust God when trouble comes?
- Describe the cellular and molecular changes that happen in your brain during self-brain surgery. In what ways is self-brain surgery a neurological mechanism and not just a metaphor?
- Have you performed a self-brain surgery operation? If you have, share what that experience was like. If not, what questions do you still need answered before you are ready to pick up the scalpel?
- What does compassionate self-brain surgery postoperative care look like? What rehab practices can give a newly transplanted thought the best possible environment to grow and become integrated into your life?
- Who do you trust to be part of your rehab team? How do these people support your mental and emotional growth?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

The final stage of preparation for self-brain surgery is the creation of a treatment plan.

- What is one harmful, false, or unhelpful brain habit that you would like to have surgically removed? How has this habit limited your flourishing?
- What is a better thought, feeling, or response that you can transplant in its place?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8, NIV).

- In what area of your life is it most challenging to control your thoughts?
- What are some benefits of positive thinking?
- What is one positive thought that you would like to think more often? How could this thought improve your life?

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

Perform a self-brain surgery operation. You’ve completed your training and have successfully transitioned from patient to doctor—you are ready! Follow the steps on pages 203–205 and begin to create the life you’ve always imagined. There is no one better prepared to change your life than you.

Session 9: The Practice

Please read Chapters 26–Appendices of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*

Patient Intake (GROUP CONVERSATION STARTER: 10 MINUTES)

- Reflect on your reasons for joining this study. How has learning about self–brain surgery in community benefited you? What questions do you still have?

Consultation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 30 MINUTES)

- The best way to become more skilled at self–brain surgery is to practice. What areas of your life could benefit from more self–brain surgery operations?
- Rewiring neural pathways that have existed for decades can feel slow and overwhelming. What could it look like for you to overcome overwhelm with action? Where can you find encouragement as you continue to practice self–brain surgery?
- What is the two-patient rule? According to neuroscience, how does your self–brain surgery practice affect others in three sectors—the immediate, the distant, and the lasting?
- As you continue to practice self–brain surgery, your relationships may begin to shift as you make progress. Have you experienced this yet? How are you prepared to respond to these changes?
- Dr. Warren believes that self–brain surgery saved his life. Where have you seen self–brain surgery beginning to transform your life?
- Appendix A contains specific microsurgeries for fifteen of life’s most common challenges. Have you completed any of these surgeries? Which one do you think might be most helpful for you to work through this coming week?

Progress Notes (PERSONAL REFLECTION: 10 MINUTES)

An op report is a tool that surgeons use to document procedures and outcomes and track a patient’s progress. Think about the self–brain surgeries that you have completed during this study.

- What negative thought synapses have been severed? What new and better thoughts have been transplanted?
- What actions will you take to continue to reinforce these new positive neural pathways?

Spiritual Evaluation (GROUP DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES)

“Be made new in the attitude of your minds” (Ephesians 4:23, NIV).

- How has God created your brain to be made new?
- What would it look like for you to invite God more fully into your self–brain surgery practice?

Spend a few minutes praying for each other. Ask God to bless and empower each member of your group as you continue to practice self–brain surgery.

Becoming the Surgeon (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

Trust the process. Continue to practice self–brain surgery and experience the radical transformation that will come as you take control of your thoughts and embrace a healthier, happier, more hopeful life.