

The Kingdom as Reality in the Writings of Dallas Willard

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 May 2019

Preacher: Richard Bates

[0 : 00] Well, thank you, Harvey. I just realized I have my Yankees cap on, so let me go, dear. Not that the Yankees are a bad team. They're wonderful, but I want to respect you all and take my hat off. Harvey sent me this wonderful card when I was in seminary down in Pittsburgh, and he signed off blessings and all that, and I thought, that's wonderful. And so I've signed things, blessings and all that, since then. So Harvey's part of my little social DNA. I am a priest.

I'm with Cana, the Convocation of Anglicans in North America, and they received me from the Diocese of Egypt. In fact, this parish really helped us make the transition. We were meant to go to Egypt. I was going to be the priest to the English-speaking congregation in Cairo.

And then 2008 came around, and nobody had any money to help us. So we ended up going to Louisiana, and I became a chaplain. So I did clinical pastoral education at a VA hospital.

The funny thing is, is that Munir, who was my bishop in Egypt, said, Richard, I know the Holy Spirit confirmed to me, you will end up in Alexandria.

And he had plans after three years in Cairo to send us up to Alexandria, and he wanted to make me the rector of the pro-cathedral. He had a real plan. Well, we never made it, and we ended up going to Louisiana, and we landed in a town called Alexandria. So, you know, God has a sense of humor. And in fact, my good friend, Nabil, stand up so everyone can see you. He is from Egypt, and he has come to see me.

[2 : 09] And thank you. But anyway, back when Joseph gave his talk on the French historian René Girard, I was in the midst of reading Gary Moon's fine biography, *Becoming Dallas Willard, the Formation of a Philosopher, teacher, and Christ follower*. And I thought, oh, I want to give a talk on Dallas Willard.

And I have to say, the experience of putting this talk together was something like discovering just how deep the deep end of the pool is. One morning, while I was looking over what I'd written and wondering how I was going to cut three hours of material down to 45 minutes, I felt keenly what the 20th century British philosopher Winnie the Pooh said. When you are a bear of very little brain, and you think of things, you find sometimes that the thing which seemed very thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it. So, I had this talk prepared, and there was some brilliant passages, and my ego was gratified.

But I had to throw it out, because I really felt that God was saying, can you really explain Dallas Willard better than Dallas Willard can explain himself? So, I'm going to be reading some passages as well. But all kidding aside, I just want to acknowledge that thinking through the parts of this talk would have been much more difficult had I not had Mr. Moon's book as a guide. And I'm amazed that he was able to research, write, and publish it only five years after Dr. Willard's passing in 2012.

Well, in parts of this talk, I rely heavily on that book and the summary of Dallas Willard's life and interests at the Dallas Willard website, dwillard.org. It's a great resource. They're both great resources for those of you who want to dip your toe into that deep pool.

So, this is a joke that James Catford, a friend of the Willard family, found scribbled in some of Dr. Willard's papers. A cop walks into a diner and sits at the counter. And the waitress says, what do you have? And the cop says, I'll have a cup of joe without cream. And the waitress nods, and she disappears into the back, and she's gone for 15 minutes. This cop is waiting for his coffee for 15 minutes. And finally, she emerges from the back, and she says, I am so sorry, officer.

[4 : 31] I looked everywhere, and we're all out of cream. Would you like your coffee without something else? You know, so what this is, this is a joke about the disconnect between perception and reality. And much of Dallas Willard's work dealt with the nature of reality and how we can know it.

Here's another joke that Dallas Willard liked to tell. One morning, a day laborer sets out for the ditch he's digging, and he slings his shovel over his shoulder, and two worms fall off of the spade.

One falls into a crack in the sidewalk, and the other falls into the carcass of a dead cat. Well, eventually, these worms make their way out where they landed, and the skinny, emaciated worm climbs out of the crack in the sidewalk and runs into this fat, jolly worm. And the skinny worm says, the fat worm, excuse me, sir, but to what do you attribute your success in life?

And the fat worm says, why, brains and personality. I heard Dr. Willard tell that joke in a recorded lecture, and the point he was illustrating for his audience was that we can easily fool ourselves into thinking that our successes in life are the result of our own pluck and talent, that we're somehow sufficient unto ourselves, and we can do life on our own. And of course, as the redeemed, we know this isn't true. But this is also a joke about perception and reality, and we'll return to that in a moment. But I just want to give you a little overview about who Dallas Willard was. Can I see who's familiar with him? Or who isn't?

Really? Okay. Well, he was an American philosopher who taught at the University of Southern California 47 years, and he was the world's leading authority on the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who was the principal founder of phenomenology. You might know about phenomenology from Sesame Street, when they do that phenomenon. Do you, do you, do you, do you. Yeah, okay. That's the level of my knowledge before I got into this. Anyway, he was born in Missouri during the Great Depression, he learned to read in a one room schoolhouse in the Ozark Mountains, and he was passionate about reading and learning. So much so that when he was a teenager, and he worked in it as a migrant farm laborer, tired as a day like that can be, at the end of it, he'd be reading Plato in the evening as a teenager. Well, Harvey, yes, Harvey and Dallas Willard would have been reading Plato. I was watching Pluto and Mickey. Anyway, eventually he goes to college, he's ordained a

[7 : 13] Southern Baptist minister, and he takes a job as an associate pastor in Macon, Georgia. But, and these are his words, he became increasingly convicted of how little he knew about the key things he preached about, and he felt incapable of making any sense of God and the human soul. Dr. Willard said of himself that as a young Southern Baptist pastor, I tried to do the best I could with what I had, and it wasn't very much.

The most serious people in my congregations were the ones I seemed unable to help. I could evangelize and do a lot of things, but when it came to spiritual growth, I honestly had nothing to say.

So he went back to graduate school to study philosophy, because these are the people that were dealing with the big questions. He hadn't planned on taking a degree, because he simply wanted to improve his understanding of the soul and return to the pastorate, better able to care for others. But in the end, he formally entered a PhD program. This was at the University of Wisconsin.

Eventually, he had to choose between being a pastor, which he loved, and staying in the academy, because he liked teaching undergraduate philosophy courses as well. He couldn't make a decision until one day God spoke to him through a friend who said, If you go to the church, the universities will be closed to you.

But if you go to the university, the churches will be open to you. And in 1965, the University of Southern California offered Dallas Willard an associate professorship without his having applied for the job. It just came out of the blue.

[8 : 46] Regarding his work in the academy, Dr. Willard said that what you'd find at the intersection between his philosophical and Christian teachings was the simple question, Who are you going to become?

And he often told people who were pursuing truth about life that if you could find a better way to live, Jesus would be the first one to tell you to take it. He believed that this realization made it possible to do honest inquiry in any area of thought and to meet people of different persuasions on the field of common inquiry and not based on assumptions that must be protected at all costs.

In his writings, Dallas Willard emphasized the importance of intentionally choosing to live your daily life in ways you believe Jesus would live it if he were you. He considered spiritual exercises like prayer, service, study, worship, solitude, and fasting as important means of that intentional decision to grow in Christlikeness through God's grace.

What made his teaching so contagious was his gentle manner and thoughtful invitation to take small steps with God that quietly and certainly lead to transforming us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

So, yes, I have it. I'm holding up a spoon here. That's for the benefit of the radio audience. And I'd like you to focus your attention on it.

[10 : 13] Now, you need an answer, but let me put this question to you. How do you know that what we're all looking at is the same spoon? That may feel like a silly question, but it's the sort of question the philosophers throughout the 20th century played with when thinking about perception and reality.

And most philosophers were persuaded that what's presently occupying your mind as you look at this spoon is only the mental representation of this spoon, not the spoon itself.

Now, if that's true, then you have to ask how any of us in this room ever accesses reality. Because if all you have intimate access to is your own idea or image of this spoon, then how can you ever perceive it as a thing in itself?

And if you always experience the world through a veil of representations, then how can you ever know a reality that's independent of your mind at all? Many philosophers came to the conclusion that only objects you can know are your own personal and private sensations and representations.

They believe that there exists a thick veil of mental perceptions between you and the external world so that in the end, it's not possible for you to perceive a reality that's independent of your mind.

[11 : 30] There is no spoon that can be known. You can only know your own subjective private perceptions. Now, this line of argument leads to the conclusion that if, say, Harvey thinks he's apprehending something objective, this metal spoon, I could easily contend that the spoon is, in fact, something subjective, an image in Harvey's mind.

It's a line of argument that's not been only used of spoons and other objects, but of God. So, my wife could tell me that she has had a conversational relationship with God for years.

She might even share with me an actual event where God spoke to her or she experienced God acting in her life. And I'm free to dismiss that as a subjective experience that only happened in her mind.

These are the logical conclusions. This is not what Dallas Willard taught, by the way. This is the milieu of philosophy that he entered into. Now, remember that Willard had turned to graduate study in philosophy to better understand both the invisible soul and an unseen world, which includes spirit, the kingdom, and a Trinitarian friendship.

So, he needed better guides. And he found that in the realism of the philosophers G.E. Moore, Gustav Bergman, and particularly Edmund Husserl, a phenomenologist.

[12 : 51] And phenomenology is a school of thought and philosophy that emphasizes how careful first-person attention to the way things appear can bring insight into the way things are, even if this sustained attention is directed to invisible things like the Trinity and the kingdom of God.

Willard said, I would never have chosen to work at philosophy as a profession, but for the single, though multifaceted issue of realism. I have always felt that realism had to be true because there is just no way that the objects of our world, whether particulars or universals, a tree or galaxy, a color or shape, could, being what they are, be produced or sustained in existence by acts of thought or perception.

And I know, with you, I'm going, duh. I'm glad I didn't read that deeply into philosophy. Gustav Bergman expressed the same idea in a more colorful way.

Ordinary objects exist independently of minds, which may or may not perceive them. If you don't believe this truism, you are mad. I love that.

Anyway, as far as Dallas Willard was concerned, philosophy was a practical discipline. He often said to his various audiences, we live at the mercy of our ideas. And he meant by this that people live or die based on what they come to know or fail to know.

[14 : 15] But reality is made up of more than spoons and trees and ordinary objects. Husserl showed Willard how to defend the notion that Jesus was describing a real and knowable reality when he talked about the kingdom of God and the Trinity.

And that the kingdom and Trinity continue to be a present reality. In the philosophy classes he taught at the University of Southern California, Dr. Willard posed four questions.

What is reality? Who is well off or blessed? Who is truly good person? How does one become that truly good person?

Dallas Willard believed that how each of us handles these questions could determine, as he put it, our bane or blessing. And it's important to note that none of these questions concerns themselves with our most sacred, contemporary, idle feelings.

Each of these questions addresses instead a realm of knowledge. They deal with the relationship between perception and reality. Dr. Willard often said that reality is what you run into when you're wrong.

[15 : 24] Think about relationships, finances. This is very true. So about those worms. I mentioned that jokes sometimes scare up what we aren't aware we believe.

And the obvious lesson is that joke is that we're often like that fat worm who believes that he has only himself to thank for the circumstances in which he finds himself.

But you'll notice that the emaciated worm believes the same thing. He wants to be a fat worm too. And he's asking fat worm what he needs to do or have to pull that off.

Success in life, according to Dallas Willard, is knowing and acting on the correct answers to those four questions.

Questions that people have been trying to answer for millennia and that Jesus Christ has answered. What is reality? Reality is God and his kingdom, according to Jesus.

[16 : 26] Who is truly well-off or blessed? According to Jesus, anyone who is alive in the kingdom and interactively engaged with the Trinity is blessed.

Who is a truly good person? According to Jesus, anyone who is pervaded by agape love. How does one become that genuinely good person?

And Jesus taught us that we do that by placing our confidence in him and becoming his apprentice or student in kingdom living so that our will aligns with and is obedient to the will of God.

Neither of those worms are perceiving reality correctly. They're thinking of their life and their lot in it as something independent of the one who sustains their life and everything surrounding them.

And that's the problem that everybody deals with today. Even us, to a certain degree, because we live in this Cartesian box. We don't even know it. You know, what we can't see mustn't be real.

[17 : 30] It affects us all because it affects the culture. In *Becoming Dallas Willard*, if you ever pick that book up, you'll read about how in the early 70s, Dallas and Jane Willard called Richard Foster to be the pastor at Woodlake Avenue Friends Church.

It's before Richard Foster was Richard Foster. It was a little church and Dr. Willard was acting as the fill-in pastor. And Willard and Foster and others made of that little congregation a kind of living laboratory where ideas could be explored, like the kingdom of God as a present reality, not just something you get to when you die.

Salvation as an ongoing life with God. And the participation in spiritual disciplines as a means of transformation. And Dallas Willard's writings are a repository of what he and others could actually verify from experience about a with God life in the kingdom of the heavens as apprentices of Jesus.

And as such, these books are deeply and profoundly pastoral. They're the kind of books you really have to read slowly and meditatively. And I would suggest with a conscious awareness that Jesus is with you while you read.

We don't have time to go through all the five books that really encompass these questions. So the first five books he wrote really address those four questions.

[18 : 51] But we're going to go through the first three. And I'll read a passage from some of them. But here's the intentional order in which to read Dallas Willard's books. You can go in.

Everybody starts with *The Divine Conspiracy* because it's his big book. And I really do believe that that book will be remembered like C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*.

It is absolutely stunning, especially how the third chapter, when he tells you, this is what Jesus saw and what Jesus knew, a God-bathed world.

You think about Jesus in that boat sleeping. And these disciples saying, Don't you care if we die? And he says, he calms the storm.

And he says, Why don't you trust me? This is what faith means. It means trust. I mean, why don't you trust me? He says, Don't you know that you're safe?

[19 : 50] Really? And he wasn't saying, Don't you know that I would have woken up and saved you? He was saying, Even if you had died, you would be perfectly safe in my father's world because there is a hidden world that we cannot see but we can access.

This was the work that Dallas Willard gave his life to. In fact, let's talk about the word faith. Faith is a kind of respectable word. You've got faith Baptist church, right?

But if you take the word faith and you actually... Okay. I'm 59 and so I kind of lose my thoughts sometimes.

Hold on. Dallas would like to use the word trust instead of faith because that's what faith means. So, to trust something, you have to have some experience with it.

There's no big leap of blind faith. That never happens. You're sitting on those chairs because you have experience of chairs and you have faith in that chair. And that's the way faith in God works.

[21 : 00] And we live the spiritual life by experimenting with prayer. We put things out to God. We listen. We listen and then we act.

And that's how we come to have faith in God. But anyway, Dallas Willard is very concerned about people's ability to hear God.

The first book he wrote is Hearing God, Developing a Conversational Relationship with God. It comes first because God and his kingdom are the deepest and most present reality there is. And God is a personal and very present being who loves us.

So, on the back cover, it says... Wonderful little summary. Being close to God means communicating with him, telling him what is on our hearts in prayer, and hearing and understanding what he is saying to us.

It is this second half of our conversation with God that is so important and can also be so difficult. And Willard says that the key is to focus not so much on individual actions and decisions as on investing time in getting to know our creator.

[22 : 03] Willard is absolutely convinced that we can hear God's voice clearly and develop an intimate partnership with him in the work of the kingdom. And I just want to read to you a little excerpt here.

We'll let Dallas talk for himself. This is from the preface. I hope to make it clear that the subject of hearing God cannot be successfully treated by thinking only in terms of what God wants us to do if that automatically excludes, as is usually assumed, what we want to do and even what we want God to do.

Hearing God is but one dimension of a richly interactive relationship, and obtaining guidance is but one facet of hearing God. It may seem strange, but doing the will of God is a different matter than just doing what God wants us to do.

The two are so far removed, in fact, that we can be solidly in the will of God and know that we are without knowing God's preference with regard to various details of our lives. We can be in his will as we do certain things without our knowing that he prefers these actions to certain other possibilities.

Hearing God makes sense only in the framework of living in the will of God. When our children, John and Becky, were small, they were often completely in my will as they played happily in the back garden, though I had no preference that they should do the particular things that they were doing there, or even that they should be in the back garden instead of playing in their rooms or having a snack in the kitchen.

[23 : 35] Generally, we are in God's will whenever we are leading the kind of life he wants for us, and that leaves a lot of room for initiative on our part, which is essential. Our individual initiatives are central to his will for us.

Of course, we cannot fail to do what he directs us to do and yet still be in his will, and apart from any specific directions, there are many ways of living that are clearly not in his will.

The Ten Commandments given to Moses are so deep and powerful on these matters that if humanity followed them, daily life would be transformed from beyond recognition and large segments of the public media would collapse for lack of material.

Consider a daily newspaper or television newscast and eliminate from it every report that presupposes a breaking of one of the Ten Commandments. Very little will be left.

Yet even if we do all the particular things God wants and explicitly commands us to do, we might still not be the person God would have us be. It is always true that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

- [24 : 38] An obsession merely with doing all God commands may be the very thing that rules out being the kind of person that he calls us to be. Jesus told a parable to make clear what God treasures in those who intend to serve him.

Who among you would say to your slave, who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, come here at once and take your place at the table? Would you not rather say to him, prepare supper for me?

Put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink. Later, you may eat and drink. Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, we are worthless slaves.

We have done only what we ought to have done. The watchword of the worthy servant is not mere obedience, but love from which appropriate obedience naturally flows.

And this was the thing with Dallas Willard. He wanted to help us to change from within so that our actions came out of a good heart. The next book that he wrote is *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, understanding how God changes lives.

- [25 : 51] And it addresses our desire to deepen our relationship with God and live in his kingdom. And I'll read an excerpt from an article that Dr. Willard published in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, titled *Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and the Restoration of the Soul*.

He does a wonderful job of representing what you'd find in this book anyway. And the passage is lengthy, so bear with Dr. Willard and me. But it addresses our part in the process of sanctification.

He explains what a discipline is and how the primary disciplines of solitude and silence, fasting, and scripture memorization put us in a place where God can work on our transformation into Christlikeness.

So, planning for routine progress in wholeness. How precisely am I to go about doing my part in the process of my own transformation?

What is my plan? The answer to this question is, in general formulation, by practice of spiritual disciplines or disciplines for the spiritual life. We may not know or use this terminology, but what it refers to is what we must do.

- [27 : 05] What is a discipline? A discipline is an activity within our power, something we can do, which brings us to a point where we can do what we at present cannot do by direct effort.

We know this from learning how to play the cello, right? Discipline is, in fact, a natural part of the structure of the human soul, and almost nothing of any significance in education, culture, or other attainments is achieved without it.

Everything from learning a language to weightlifting depends upon it, and its availability in the human makeup is what makes the individual human being responsible for the kind of person they become.

Animals may be trained, but they are incapable of discipline in the sense that it is essential to human life. The principle of discipline is even more important in the spiritual life.

Once in a seminar, a wealthy influential leader said to me that he could not help exploding when he tried to talk to his rebellious son. I said, of course you can. He looked at me in astonishment and denial.

[28 : 08] Just tell your wife, I continued, that the next time you blow up at him, you will contribute \$5,000 to her favorite charity, and also every time thereafter. He paused, and a smile of recognition tugged at the corners of his mouth.

But while this sort of case makes a point, it does not really convey the main point of discipline in the spiritual life. Spiritual disciplines are not primarily for the solving of behavioral problems, though that is one of their effects.

That is why, contrary to popular opinion, the various 12-step programs are not programs of spiritual discipline. They are disciplines, of course. Quite precisely, they focus on things we, for the most part, can do.

Attend meetings, publicly own up, call on others from the group in times of need, etc., etc., to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort, stay sober.

But staying sober, while desperately important for the alcoholic, is hardly a mark of spiritual attainment. The same is true for not exploding at one's son. The aim of disciplines in the spiritual life, and specifically in the following of Christ, is the transformation of the total state of the soul.

[29 : 18] It is the renewal of the whole person from the inside, involving differences in thought, feeling, and character that may never be manifest in outward behavior at all. This is what Paul has in mind when he speaks of putting off the old man and putting on the new, renewed to resemble in knowledge the one who created us.

The genius of the moral teachings of Jesus and his first students was his insistence that you cannot keep the law by trying not to break the law. That will only make a Pharisee of you and sink you into layers of hypocrisy.

Instead, you have to be transformed in the functions of the soul so that the deeds of the law are a natural outflow of who you have become. This is spiritual formation in the Christian way, and it must always be kept in mind when we consider Jesus' teachings about various behaviors in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere.

For example, his famous teaching about turning the other cheek, if all you intend to do is that, you will find you can do it with a heart full of bitterness and vengefulness.

On the other hand, you become a person who has the interior character of Christ remaining appropriately vulnerable, will be done in a matter of course, and you will not think of it as a big deal.

[30 : 34] An intelligent, balanced, persistent course in the standard disciplines, well known from the sweep of Christian history and sources, can serve the individual well and are, in fact, essential to the development of her cooperative relationship with Christ.

While they are by no means all that is involved, not everything in this process, they are indispensable. They do not take the place, and they cannot be effective without the word of the gospel and the movements of the Spirit of God in our lives.

But neither will the gospel and the Spirit take their place. Some people, of course, are unable to put them into practice. They are not in their power, at least for the time being. Such persons need help and ministry of various kinds, depending on the particular case and circumstances.

But people who are not totally shattered and who have experienced the birth from above can usually, with simple instruction and encouragement, begin to make real progress toward wholeness by practices such as solitude and silence, fasting, scripture memorization, regular times of corporate and individual praise and worship, and so on.

The various disciplines minister to different and complementary aspects of our wrongness and brokenness. Solitude and silence are primarily means for correcting the distortions of our embodied social existence.

[31 : 59] Our good ideas and intentions are practically helpless in the face of what our body in the social context is poised to do automatically. Jesus, of course, understood all of this very well.

Thus, he knew that Peter's declarations that he would not deny him were irrelevant to what he would actually do in the moment of trial. And in fact, the social setting and Peter's deeply ingrained habits moved him to deny Jesus three times, one right after the other, even though he had been warned most clearly of what was going to happen.

The wrong habits of mind, feeling, and body are keyed so closely and so routinely to the social setting that being alone and being quiet for lengthy periods of time are, for most people, the only way that they can take the body and soul out of the circuits of sin and allow them to find a new habitual orientation in the kingdom of the heavens.

Choosing to do this and learning how to do it effectively is a basic part of what we can do to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort, even with the assistance of grace.

Indeed, solitude and silence are powerful means to grace. Bible study, prayer, and church attendance, among the most commonly prescribed activities in Christian circles, generally have little effect for soul transformation, as is obvious to any observer.

[33 : 18] If all the people doing them were transformed to health and righteousness by it, the world would be vastly changed. Their failure to bring about the change is precisely because the body and soul are so exhausted, fragmented, and conflicted that the prescribed activities cannot be appropriately engaged and, by and large, degenerate into legalistic and ineffectual rituals.

Lengthy solitude and silence, including rest, can make them very powerful. But we must choose these disciplines. God will, generally speaking, not compete for our attention.

If we will not withdraw from the things that obsess and exhaust us into solitude and silence, he will usually leave us to our own devices. He calls us to be still and know, to the soul disciplined to wait quietly before him, to lavish time upon this practice.

He will make himself known in ways that will redirect our every thought, feeling, and choice. The body itself will enter a different world of rest and strength, and the effects of solitude and silence will reverberate through the social settings and where one finds oneself.

Fasting, another one of the central disciplines, retrains us away from dependence upon the satisfaction of desire and makes the kingdom of God a vital factor in our concrete existence.

[34 : 37] It is an indispensable application of what Jesus called the cross. In the simplest of terms, the cross means not doing or getting what you want. And of course, from the merely human viewpoint, getting what one wants is everything.

Anger is primarily a response to frustration of will, and it makes no difference to the broken soul if what is willed is something perfectly trivial. What is called road rage, now epidemic and often fatal in our society, is only a case in point.

Fasting, which primarily concerns voluntary abstention from food, all or some, and can also be extended to drink, has the function of freeing us from having to have what we want.

We learn to remain calm, serene, and strong when we are deprived, even severely deprived. If our desires are unsatisfied, we learn. So what?

Positively, we learn that God meets our needs in his own ways. There are words of God other than bread or physical food, and these are capable of directly sustaining our bodies along with our whole being.

- [35 : 43] Fasting liberates us on the basis of experience into the abundance of God. The effects of this for the reordering of our soul are vast. Christian practitioners throughout the ages have understood that to fast well brought one out from under dominion of desire and feeling generally, and not just in the area of food.

And lastly, scripture memorization is the final specific discipline we will mention here. It is, in fact, a subdivision of the discipline of study. Study as a spiritual discipline is, in general, the focusing of the mind upon God's works and words.

In study, our mind takes on the order in the object studied, and that order invariably forms the mind itself, and thereby the soul and the life arising out of it.

Now pause with me for a moment and think about the trash that people watch on TV that's ordering their mind. I know I sound like a legalistic person when I say that, and there's something in me that wants to be free to watch anything I want or listen to anything that I want, but you listen or watch something enough.

It's going to form you. Thus, the law of God, kept before the mind, brings the order of God into our mind and soul. The soul is restored as the law becomes the routine pattern of inward life and outward action.

- [37 : 07] We are integrated into the movements of the eternal kingdom. The primary freedom we have is always the choice of where we will place our minds. That freedom is enhanced by the practice of solitude, silence, and fasting.

We can then effectively fill our minds with the word of God preserved in the scriptures. To that end, memorization is vital. It is astonishing how little of the Bible is known by heart by people who profess to honor it.

If we do not know it, how can it help us? It cannot. Memorization, by contrast, enables us to keep it constantly before our minds, and that makes it possible to consciously hold ourselves within the flow of God's life.

There is no greater disciplinary verse in the entire Bible than Joshua 1a, mirrored and expanded in Psalm 1, and none more instructive on the restoration of the soul.

There we read, The book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

- [38 : 12] Memorization enables us to mumble and meditate, which enables us to do, which enables us to have good success. And God will define success for us. But we are walking God's ways with an interior character like his.

If someone says they cannot memorize scripture, they're probably living in a condition to which solitude, silence, and fasting are the only answer. The spiritual disciplines require one another to achieve their maximal effect.

Scripture memorization, on the other hand, strengthens those other disciplines. Together, the disciplines well known among Christians through the ages can fill out a reasonable, time-tested plan for our part in working out our salvation in awe of God, who is at work within us to will and to accomplish the good he intends for and with us.

End of quote. Thanks for hanging in there with me. So in these first two books, Dr. Willard is emphasizing that human life is best lived in a conversational relationship with God, and how apprentices of Jesus can become intentional about entering into practices that will increase their awareness of God's presence and transform their character.

And the time is rapidly slipping away, but the third book is *The Divine Conspiracy*. This is the big book. If you wanted to say, Richard, what should I do if I want to get into Willard?

[39 : 39] I'd go ahead and read this book. It's not an easy book. You have to read it slowly and think about what you're reading. I know a lot of people who started it, and they gave up, but they found the lectures on YouTube.

So you can find Dallas Willard on YouTube, and there are 12 lectures about *The Divine Conspiracy*. But anyway, in this book, *Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, by the way, so we have this idea that there's an unseen real that we can interact with.

It focuses on Jesus Christ as the model of a good person who lived a good life that was pervaded by agape love. And in it, we rediscover Jesus as teacher, as we read about him in new, refreshing, and challenging ways.

By looking deeply into *The Sermon on the Mount*, *The Divine Conspiracy* shepherds us into what it means to follow Jesus and to live a life increasingly pervaded by his love. This is what Dallas Willard had to say in the preface of this book.

This third book presents discipleship to Jesus as the very heart of the gospel. The really good news for humanity is that Jesus is now taking on students in the master class of life.

[40 : 47] The eternal life that begins with confidence in Jesus is a life in his present kingdom now on earth and available to all. So the message of and about him is specifically a gospel for our life now, not just for dying.

It is about living now as his apprentice in kingdom living, not just as a consumer of his merits. Our future, however far we look, is a natural extension of the faith by which we live now and the life in which we now participate.

Eternity is now in flight, and we with it, like it or not. Besides shining light on Jesus' vision for a new age to live, the divine conspiracy points to a radical shift in the foundational element of Christian thought, the meaning of the gospel.

Whereas the gospel of atonement or sin management is that your sins can be forgiven. And let me stress right now, that is very important, and that will happen if you decide to join Jesus in the kingdom of the heavens.

The gospel of the kingdom is that you can live in the kingdom of God here and now. That's the vision. That's a new way to live, and you're invited in. So a few weeks back, Harvey mentioned the biblical scholar William D'Embrell, a graduate of Moore College, had written of the Sermon on the Mount that the blessed, the poor, the hungry, the grief-stricken, and such, aren't conditions that people had to adopt to be blessed.

[42 : 08] They weren't preconditions. And this is what Dallas Willard argues in *The Divine Conspiracy*. I hope I didn't oversimplify what Bill D'Embrell said. But what then does Jesus say to us with his Beatitudes?

How are we to live in response to them? We have already indicated the key to understanding the Beatitudes. They serve to clarify Jesus' fundamental message, the free availability of God's rule and righteousness to all of humanity through reliance upon Jesus himself, the person now loose in the world among us.

The Beatitudes do this simply by taking those who, from the human point of view, are regarded as the most hopeless, most beyond all possibility of God's blessing or even interest, and exhibiting them as enjoying God's touch and abundant provision from the heavens.

This fact of God's care and provision proves to all that no human condition excludes blessedness, that God may come to any person with his care and deliverance. God does sometimes help those who cannot or perhaps just do not help themselves.

But the religious system of his day left the multitudes out, Jesus welcomed them all into his kingdom. Anyone could come as well as any other. They still can.

[43 : 24] That is the gospel of the Beatitudes. So, just briefly, this is the next book, Renovation of the Heart, and it answers the fourth question, how do I become, and it's kind of a discipleship manual.

It talks about what our soul consists of, how it operates, and how we deal with feelings and knowledge, all of that.

It's kind of a tough book. So tough that they had to rewrite it with another writer, and they called it Revolution of Character. And then they made a teenage version, Renovation of the Heart, Putting on the Character of Christ.

Only ten bucks. This is remarkable. There's another one, too. I actually read this after I read it. I read the teenage version. It was great having that little road map up in there, in my head, while I was going through it a second time.

And his last book is Knowing Christ Today, or his fifth book, Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge. A little bit more philosophical, and the purpose of this book is to actually talk to you and reason with you about why faith in an unseen real is reasonable.

[44 : 37] How can you share this faith? After his death, two other very important books, The Allure of Gentleness, Defending the Faith in the Manner of Jesus.

These are writings from lectures, talks he gave, scribbles in his papers that he was going to put together as a book. about apologetics. And he was working with his daughter, Becky, but he died, and she put it together, kind of like a patchwork quilt, kind of like this talk.

But what I loved about Dallas Willard was he always refused invitations to go debate. He would not debate to defend the faith. But he did say, but I will join somebody on stage, standing shoulder to shoulder to inquire what truth actually is.

A different approach. This latest book is called Life Without Lack. Now, if you want a simple introduction to him, read this book, because it's kind of homespun.

It's very accessible. But, he goes through living in the fullness of Psalm 23. Willard really believed that this was a description of reality.

[45 : 48] You know, Psalm 23 ends up on a lot of tombstones, but you can actually have that life. And it involves putting your mind on God, seeing the God that Jesus knew, seeing the world as a God-bathed place where you're perfectly safe, even though somebody might come up behind you and whack you on the head with a ball, peeing hammer, and kill you.

You're still safe. It's God's world. What we see isn't all that there is. Just very briefly, the chapters, God in himself, part one, the glorious, self-sustaining, eternal being of the shepherd.

He wants you to see this. God in himself, part two, living in mindfulness of our magnificent God. He talks about memorization, putting scripture that helps you see the reality of God, why there are people on earth, why such lack and evil, trusting God, the key to life, trust completed in death to self, sufficiency completed in love.

And the last chapter is all the days of my life, and he talks about spending a day with Jesus. And I'm going to really rush through this hard. May I, or should I?

I don't know you that time. Okay, good. He's talking about spending a real day with Jesus, not a retreat. And this is such unconventional, but such level-headed and horse sense advice.

[47 : 07] I just love it. He says, strength to please. This is the name of the section. If we were to go through a day with Jesus, we would find the strength to do the things that would please him. We'd be patient.

We'd be kind. We'd be helpful. Be careful, however, how you think about this. You may imagine that being with Jesus means that you would never do anything wrong, that would be nice, but it is not required.

You especially do not want to set yourself up to come to the end of the day believing you were unsuccessful and making it through a day with Jesus because you did something wrong. This would depend on how we experienced our connection with Jesus in the moment when we did the wrong thing, what our thoughts and intentions were at the time.

Suppose you come to a point in the day when you find yourself desiring to do something you are nearly certain Jesus would never do. In such a situation you might decide to say, now, Lord, I would very much appreciate it if you would just look the other way now so I can do this.

He probably would do as you asked. He's not going to hang around where he's not wanted. On the other hand, it is quite possible to become the kind of person who goes through a day without doing anything wrong while never specifically thinking of Jesus.

[48 : 18] Spending a day with Jesus is not the same thing as never making a mistake. You will learn a great deal about yourself during your day with Jesus by paying attention to what happens if you are faced with a temptation to do something you believe is wrong and you decide to do it.

How will you handle that? Imagine what it would be like to ask Jesus not to leave but to stay with you while you go ahead with your little plan. My point is that spending a day with Jesus is not merely a matter of never doing anything that would disappoint him.

If we want him to stay with us, he will stay with us even if we choose to do something displeasing to him. Remember, Christ receiveth sinful men.

He receives sinful men and women and boys and girls. Jesus was repeatedly criticized because of the kind of folks he associated with, tax collectors, prostitutes, and other various sundry sinners.

That is a great encouragement to us. He receives us and is glad to spend a day with us, all of our days in fact. Of course, when he receives us, it puts tension on us because we want to do what pleases him.

[49 : 25] We must learn how to deal with this tension by applying his grace when we fail. But in a day spent with him, we can expect to be receiving his strength to do those things that would please him and avoid those things that bring him pain.

As we grow, we can look forward to some days in which we don't do anything that displeases God. I realize that this very suggestion that it may be possible to go through a day without sinning by either remission or commission may sound like heresy, but I need to be sure you understand that this is possible for us.

It is within God's ability to keep us from stumbling, and Jesus would not be displeased with us if we did not displease him in thought, word, and deed throughout an entire day. We really can become people who naturally obey his commandments, and we wouldn't even have to be especially perfect to do that.

We are his children, and in his goodness he receives us as a child and helps us just as we are. God accepts you, the one who has lied, who has cheated, who has stolen things.

He accepts you just as you are. He's not going to let you stay that way, but you can't allow your failings to keep you from pursuing Jesus Christ because he will change you and you will become like him.

[50 : 41] Anyway, I am out of time. It's five minutes to my watch is correct. Why don't you give us a slow relog at that time? Do I really?

A slow summary. The slow, no. No, if you want to edit, it's fine. Yeah, sure. I mean, you know, I've spoken enough. You know, one thing Dallas Willard used to say, so a criticism of Dallas Willard is that that's works righteousness, making people fast and spend time alone.

It's not works righteousness. It's not righteousness. The disciplines are not righteousness. They're wisdom because they work. He says, we're not only saved by grace, we're paralyzed by it.

I mean, when I went to seminary, we had a big law grace debate. Paul Zoll, who is, God love him, he's God's child, but he is an anthonymian. And that means against the law.

That license, it's okay. God loves you anyway. Go ahead and sin. That's not what Dallas Willard is talking about. He's talking about striving to become like Jesus, supported by his grace by an unseen real.

[51 : 47] Anyway. Thank you. Thank you.