

## **"The Value of Truth"**

Dallas Willard @ LSU Veritas - 2.17.08

Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the audio recording in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The bold, underlining and [brackets] offer the scribe's emphasis or refer to other Willard teachings.



**"The Value of Truth" by Dallas Willard** (audio)

[51:00]

[2 of 2 at LSU - "Disappearance of Moral Knowledge on Universities"

### **Introduction**

[01:10]

I want to talk to you tonight about truth.

May not be very enticing. The truth will make you free, but it is also true that the truth will make you flee. People are uneasy about it. Yet, it's one of the things that is most important about life. We want it and we don't want it.

I want to start out talking about what truth is. Hopefully, when you leave, you will know the answer to that question and feel perfectly comfortable about it.

Who is most famous for asking the question, *"What is truth?"*

\* Pilate - He is most famous for crucifying an innocent man. If you're going to do that, you probably don't want to know too much about truth. When he asked Jesus, *"What is truth?"*, he didn't stay around to get an answer. He did not want to have to deal with it.

\* Say to your girlfriend/boyfriend, *"Is it true that you love me?"*  
If they reply, *"What is truth?"*, you know you're in trouble.

We have a dance we do about truth. We need to be clear about what it is and how important it is for us to live with it. Ironically, perhaps the people who today might ask that question with the same cynicism as Pilate might well be University professors. We are uneasy on the campus around truth.

### **Truth is Very Simple**

There are a lot of truths that aren't simple. But truth itself is very simple.

**Truth (def.) - "Accuracy of representation"**

[3:40]

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\* If someone tells you, "The broom is in the closet." If you look in the closet and the broom is there, they told you the truth. You are able to match their statement and thought against what it was about.

\* "Gas in the tank." If there is gas in the tank, the statement is true.

It is very simple. Please don't lose that because a world that is in flight from truth and uneasy about truth will try to convince you that truth is an enigma, that it is impossible to know. If it is impossible to know, that leaves you a lot of wiggle room. If someone tries to measure you against the truth, you can always say,

*"What is truth? No one knows the truth." Or, "Truth is relative."*

If you believe it, it's true. If you don't believe it, it's not true.

\* Try that on your empty gas tank.

Believing doesn't make beliefs true or false.

Reality makes beliefs true or false. That's the way truth works.

**Truth (def.) "A statement, belief, idea is true provided that what it is about is as that statement says it is."** [5:38]

They are always "about" something.

\* Gas in tank.

\* Girlfriend loves you.

A belief, idea, statement picks something out.

If it is as the statement said, then you've got truth.

**There is nothing more Radical than Truth.** [6:35]

**Nothing goes more to the root of life. Life is based on assumptions about truth. The human problem is to find truth adequate to live by.**

\* Flying on a plane. I was free to fly because people understand truths about metal, plastic, air, jet engines. Sure beats coming in a covered wagon.

**We want Relevant Truth** [7:20]

Truth that relates to things that are important.

When we come to a University, that's what we're looking for.

We got a lot of wonderful things out of our time at the University but what we are really here for is to know truth.

**Knowledge is Related to Truth** [8:05]

You can not know what is not true. **Knowledge is an established truth.** It is truth that has a basis to it. It has a method. It isn't just luck. It's what we expect out of those who serve us.

\* Dentists, Mechanics, Government Leaders, Instructors

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We expect not just truth, that might be lucky. We expect knowledge. Knowledge is established truth. There is a method back of it. There is evidence, there is support that is something that can be shared. If you're going to share something that is true, you better know what it is. We require that because we need to base our lives on things that are known, not just things they are true.

That's why knowledge requires a basis in experience and thought.

\* Not take your car to a shop - *"We are lucky in making repairs."*

You want someone who knows how to make repairs to your Brain or Auto

**Knowledge (def.) - "If you are able to represent it - think, talk, treat - it as it is [truth] on an appropriate basis of thought and experience."**

[10:00]

You can be lucky and be true. We need truth on a basis that is certain and sure.

**The human problem in life is to find knowledge that is adequate to base life on.**

Sometimes our courses don't seem relevant to that.

The life we live in the **University** setting is deeply concerned about knowledge on how to live. Our structures, the way we set things up in the Universities teaches us about those things, often without intention. They do it by how we are able to live in the context of the University.

**Why is Truth so Valuable?**

[11:25]

Not so we can feel good about ourselves. The main thing about truth is it enables you to deal with **reality** successfully. If you know truth and act upon it, then you will be able to deal with reality successfully.

\* If you believe falsely there is gas in your tank...

\* If you believe falsely your girlfriend loves you when she doesn't...

**Reality is what you run into when you're wrong.**

Positively - It's what you can count on when you're right

\* Gun Sighting Mechanism - if it's right, you can hit it.

If your life is informed by truth and you have knowledge that enables you to hold it steady and rely upon it, you are able to carry out your objectives in a good and successful manner. People genuinely prefer true beliefs to false.

*"Have you enjoyed your false beliefs today?"* They'll look at you funny.

*"Have you enjoyed your true beliefs today?"* "Yes, I have."

That's why there is a traditional devotion to truth.

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**Truth** is important because it enables us to deal successfully with reality.  
**Falsity** is important to avoid because it's going to hurt you, come back and bite you especially about things that really matter in life.

You have traditionally devotion to truth. That's why Universities exist.

The words on University walls more than anything else...

**"The truth shall make you free..."** [14:25]

Jesus didn't say it quite that way. He said,

*"If you continue in my word (which was truth), live in it, abide in it, put it into practice, then you're my students, my apprentices, (practice as His students), and you will know the truth..."*

\* USC Humanities Elevator Plaque - *"The truth will make you free..."*

Apparently you don't even have to know it anymore.

Actually, truth will not make you free unless you know it.

\* Building airplanes - Truth was there before they knew it.

\* Newton did not invent the truth of gravity.

He formulated it for the first time.

**Truth is something we discover.**

**You have to know it before it helps us out.**

\* Harvard shield - "Veritas" = Latin for "Truth" [16:35]

"Christo" & "Ecclesia" disappeared but they could not give up on "Veritas"

\* WASC Handbook - *"An institution of higher education is by definition dedicated to the search for truth and its dissemination."*

That's a pretty fair estimation of why there are Universities.

University = Truth → Knowledge → Research

if that work is done in a thorough way, the truth that is dealt would cover life. Traditionally that is why **Universities** exist, not just for research in particular areas, but more importantly traditionally has been the teaching of truth about the questions of life generally.

\* Harvard Shield - That's why they included with "Veritas" (Truth) words like "Christ" and the "Church" because in other times that was thought to be the central mission. Why? Not just for the sake of the Church or for the sake of Christ but because those words stood for answers to the basic questions of life. That's changed a great deal in deed.

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A part of the reason why there is skepticism about truth around Universities and professional organizations is:

**1.]** ...because of the feeling that those big questions and the big answers can't actually be known.

*But there is another reason back of it...*

**2.]** ...Those big answers to the big questions pin you down and call your life into question and say,

*"What are you living for?"*

They say, *"There's truth in answer to that question."*

*"What kind of world are you in?"*

*"Do you really have the good life?"*

*"Are you really a good person?"*

Those are the big questions. Traditionally up until about 100 years ago it was assumed that the **Universities** answered those questions. Now then, that's no longer true. The questions that are focused on are not necessarily relevant to all of life.

\* College courses - *"What does this have to do with anything?"*

The answer - *"It meets a requirement."*

You didn't come to the University to meet requirements. If we are not careful, that sort of thing slips into the place of first emphasis.

\* I try to teach a large Freshman class every Fall because I love to have those students walk with me for the four years they are there. It forms a kind of community for me. I like to do that.

They are interested in the big questions but they often go into other courses where it isn't relevant. We have formed a system where it is possible to avoid radical questions, not take them up because they really do call us into question.

That's the bitterness of truth.

[21:40]

If you bring yourself up against truth, you find it does not adjust itself to our wishes, our beliefs, our choices. Truth is utterly relentless.

\* It does not say,

*"You think your gas tank is full. We'll let reality be that way."*

Truth is not like that in any area - mathematics, sociology, English literature or for that matter, theology. Theology use to be taught on all of our campuses. Theology - beliefs about God.

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**Whether or not there is a God and the relevance of God to our life is one of the most important questions anyone could ask.** [22:40]

That has disappeared. Only at Notre Dame of all the major Universities do the still teach theology.

Bitterness of truth is something that makes people want to avoid it. It doesn't adjust to us, we have to adjust to it. [\* Bitter flavor is avoided]

\* Girl in Sunday School, "What is a lie?"  
*"An abomination to God...and a very present help in time of trouble."*

Children are little folks in the middle of giants. They need a lie now and then. That's why you don't have to teach them to lie. They figure it out on their own. They know what truth is. They understand its connection, they understand the bitterness of truth and the need to work around it.

~ **What Knowledge of Truth Does for Us** [24:00]

It is not like feeling...sentiment...tradition...firm belief.

Knowledge puts you in a different category because it lays hold of truth in a solid way.

Knowledge confers **Rights & Responsibilities** that none of these other things do.

*It confers:*

- 1.) The right and responsibility to act  
*"What do you think you're doing?" Assumption - you better know*  
\* Trained as a brain surgeon, you have a right others don't.
- 2.) The right and responsibility to direct action  
\* Why we want leaders and administrators to have knowledge
- 3.) Formulate and Supervise Policy
- 4.) Right to Teach  
\* Aristotle, *"It is assumed that people who teach know something."*

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That's the nature of knowledge. Because it has all that power, it becomes politically potent. Knowledge is in its effect always political because it gives those "Rights & Responsibilities". You might say political is always making claims about knowledge.

- \* What are politicians claiming? Why vote for a candidate?  
They are claiming to know what to do better than the others.

That's where trouble comes. [26:50]

Many people claim to know what they don't know in order to be influential - or - they claim *you* don't know what you know to disallow your right to act and to direct action. In social life, knowledge and claims to knowledge become extremely important in what we do. The power to control.

~ **Lack of Knowledge** [27:30]

One reason why that is so powerful is because we do know in the words of the prophet, "*My people perish for the lack of knowledge.*" **Hosea 4:6**

You can see that happening around you.

- \* People who don't know how to manage money perish because of that

Hosea is talking about knowing God and God's ways. That is a place where we are in great danger because God is perhaps the most important thing we need to have knowledge about. There are a lot of questions about that and they have to be dealt with honestly. On the assumption that there is a God, you would want more know more about Him more than anything else.

~ **Jesus & Truth** [28:52]

That's where Jesus comes in. When we say Jesus is "the way, truth & life", Jesus makes a claim that He is the way and truth about God.

"Accuracy of Representation" [[Truth defined](#)] is what we're talking about. Jesus brings us to realization of the true nature of God.

~ **Knowledge Rejected because Knowledge Restricts**

But people reject knowledge because it restricts their freedom. A person that is fully rational person would not do that. But we are not fully rational. We live in a society where we are trained to dodge, to avoid and not deal with REALITY, to try to shape it to our own wants. Not suiting our feelings can lead us to reject all kinds of things. We can form our BELIEFS because of our emotions. Those beliefs may be opposed to knowledge.

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Knowledge tells us we are not in charge and we must submit to those who know.

Sometimes we hear people say, *"Don't impose your values on me."*

That's because values are no longer thought to be in the domain of knowledge. You will rarely hear, *"Don't impose your knowledge on me."* Knowledge comes with "Rights & Responsibilities" to act, lead and so on.

\* Teachers impose their knowledge on you and you don't say anything

**Knowledge restricts what we can do.**

**God has left a gap between reality and us.**

**This is an arrangement put there to allow us to choose.**

\* Adam & Eve in the garden.

Why did God let them choose? He could have had an angel stop her.

**~ Knowledge Has to be Sought**

[31:35]

Choice is very important. We need to understand that in thinking about truth. Truth does not jump down our throats. Knowledge is something we have to seek. If we don't want to know things, we don't have to.

\* You don't even have to know things to pass a test.

Dallas asks students after a test, *"Did you believe what you wrote?"*

What we have learned is you don't have to believe it, much less know it. You just have to know the right answer. Don't you find that troubling?

A part of that is because we know we can not require knowledge.

Knowledge is something the individual has to open their heart to and seek. We can require people to know the right answer even if it is the wrong answer.

**Knowledge is something you have to seek. You have to want truth. You have to reconcile yourself to truth because CHARACTER is the real issue in life. Character comes from choice. Our human challenge is to master DESIRE on behalf of what is good and what is right.**

\* Cain & Abel

[33:30]

*"Cain, sin is crouching at your door."*

*"Its desire is for you and you must master it."*

That's **CHARACTER** - the issue for human life.

What kind of person am I becoming?



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**God's plan for each of us is that we should grow to point where He can empower us to do what we want.** [34:50]

[["Truth seeking" is a choice that reveals & shapes character](#)]

The Greatest Test of Character is...

- Suppose you could do anything, what would you do?  
No repercussions, no consequences, the power to do anything...

That's what really challenges our desires.

We must understand that **DESIRE** is one thing and **GOOD** is another.

**LOVE** is tied to what is good, seeks what is good for people.

\* You say you love Chocolate Cake but you don't. You want to eat it.

Imagine someone who loves it - take care of it, preserve it

If you're the cake, "*I love chocolate cake*", you know you're in trouble.

~ **Jesus Helps with Who We Are**

[36:10]

Jesus comes to help us with that. We are becoming the kind of person we will be forever. What kind of person do want to get stuck with?

Supposed you got to heaven and you didn't even like God. Would you want to be there? Probably not. It might turn out the fires of heaven are hotter than that other place?

*Do we like God?*

*Do we love what is good?*

*Do we seek what is true?*

*Do we want to know the truth?*

**That's the great challenge - to live in the truth.**

Jesus said, "*Everyone who is of the truth...*" (that doesn't mean that they got it, but it does mean they want it) "*...hears my voice.*"

That's what provoked **Pilate** to say, "*What is truth?*" Pilate knew he wasn't of the truth. He was doing his dead level best to dodge that arrow that was coming at his belly. He didn't want to hear what was true because He knew he wasn't living in it. He knew he was on the verge of doing something that stands out in history as one of the most totally ignoble deeds that human beings have ever done.

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Unfortunately, much of our life today including life in the **University** is not devoted to truth and actually ask that question in the same posture as Pilate did when he stood before Jesus.

People talk about Jesus before Pilate. I think it was the other way around. Pilate was before Jesus. That's where we are all standing. [38:20]

Here is a person who is devoted to truth, devoted to goodness, to give his life to influence history as no other person has ever done because He gave himself to truth and knowledge and goodness to the point of giving His life. He's standing here.

Pilate is not the one in charge. Pilate is the one who is in trouble.

~ **The Great Questions We Need Truth On** [39:00]

[\[See Willard's "The Bible as an Indispensable Source of Truth" @ 15:20\]](#)

For every human being, for every great teacher - Buddha, Confucius, Freud - has to answer these four questions:

### **1.) What is reality?**

What is the answer to that question that is given by LSU? There is one that is given. They don't teach it in class. There is not a "Department of Reality" at LSU. That's going to be true of all of these questions. I want that to stand out in your mind to understand where you are.

Faculty are by in large good people. They are doing the best they can. The problem is they are caught in a system that does not deal with reality.

You're going to have to deal with it.

—> Exercise - write out what you think is real.

Real is what you've got to deal with, what you can count on.

*What do you think you can count on? What is reality for you?*

### **2.) Who is well off?** [40:48]

Who's got it made? Who has the good life?

\* Peugeot Ad - *"Pursue happiness in a car that can catch it."*  
Never mind there are lot of miserable people driving Peugeots.  
We think in very shallow ways.

\* Sears - *"The good life at a good price."*  
Want to bet? That's manipulative.  
We have to think deeply about who is well off.

Jesus' answers:

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1.) Reality is God and His kingdom, whatever God is doing.

2.) Who is well off is anyone who is living in the kingdom of God.

If you're living interactively with God you are well off. It doesn't matter what else has happened to you, it may matter a little bit, but it's not going to ruin your life.

*Blessed are the \_\_\_\_\_.* (You fill in the blanks)

As long as they are in the Kingdom they are well off.

### **3.) Who is a really good person?**

[42:30]

You can make someone mad about questioning someone about that more than, "Who is well off?" That question goes right the heart of our being. It effects our health, our moods that control our lives, the way we approach others.

Let me ask, "*Are you a really good person?*"

You might say, "*You don't know me well enough to ask that question.*"

I'm not getting personal but I'd like you to get personal with you.

You may have some good ideas along this because the teachings of Jesus has so permeated Western Culture. If I were to say to you, "*A person is really good if their life is permeated with love. They love their neighbors as themselves, love their families, fellowships.*"

**LOVE** means they are devoted to the good of others.

\* Martin Luther King, Jr.

*"Anyone can be great because anyone can serve others."*

You want to be great? Be a person of love. Learn how that works down to the level of your bodily interactions, your social relationships.

There is not a Department at LSU or USC about "Really Good Persons."

### **4.) How do you get to be a good person?**

[44:20]

That's a big question, isn't it? Everyone I know wants to be a good person.

I've asked people, "*Anyone here want to be a bad person?*"

\* One student said Yes. Madonna song - being "bad" was good.

Jesus answers these questions.

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You want to be a good person? Follow Him. Put His words into practice. Trust Him. Learn how to live with Him in the Kingdom of God and that will be taken care of.

### ~ **The Academy Today**

[45:20]

[[See Willard's "Spiritual Formation Defined" @ 8:30](#)]

In our academic context today, there are no intellectually responsible answers to these questions. None. By "intellectually responsible" I mean answers that have been honed, carefully explained and looked at in the larger context of life so you could actually know the answers to those questions. Universities are not equipped to answer them now or to deal with them honestly.

\* [Education's End: Why Our Colleges & Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life](#) Anthony T. Kronman, Yale Law School (2007)

What bothers him is that we no longer take those questions seriously.

We save questions about "The meaning of life" and "Why are we here?" and "What we're going to do?" we save for beer & pizza, if we deal with them at all.

The Universities inherited the issues from the Christian past but has no resources to deal with them. Unfortunately, it is more interested in human respectability than in truth. Truth is an embarrassment.

**Research** is all defined by social pressure and connection. You want to do research, you have to do that in a context that is professionally approved or you will have no support or recognition. It is a tragic thing that has come about. Probably you have never heard the words "a Knowledge University" but you've heard "Research University".

What is "Research"?

[47:30]

Research turns out to be a way of avoiding knowledge, truth and questions of the larger sort. You certainly would never be able to get a grant funded for looking into reality. Never. The meaning of life. Never. Generally speaking, truth in these matters is not wanted or sought.

### ~ **Conclusion**

**"The truth shall make you free, if you know the truth..."** [48:10]

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It's still true.

Keep backing up - *"If you are my disciples..."*

One more - *"If you abide in my words"*

Put the teachings of Jesus to the test of life. He prayed that His disciples, His students, would be marked out by living in the truth. He makes it possible for us to do that.

**How to live in the truth is the still unresolved problem of human kind.** [48:50]

Now, it's your turn. The task of the people of Christ is to resist the secular definitions of knowledge that leave out truth about the big questions. We need to force those questions, to push those questions, to say...

***"No, until you have dealt with these great questions, you have not the claim to be a radical representative of relevant truth."***

We need to present Jesus' answers to the great questions as knowledge in the sense explained and to stand as teachers of truth to the nations in all humility with no dogmatism. Dogmatism more often happens with people who are uncertain. It's knowledge that relieves people of dogmatism and makes them open and willing to consider anything.

**If you can find a better way to live than the way of Jesus Christ, He would be the first person to tell you to take it.** [50:05]

He's on the side of truth. He'll go wherever it goes. You can count on that. As people who are standing for Christ's answers to the great questions - the last thing you'll see is dogmatism.

You'll see love, humility, openness, freedom, joy, peace because their hearts have come to rest in a knowledge that stands the test of life.

~ ~ ~ **End of Session @ 50:50** ~ ~ ~

For information & resources about Dallas Willard Ministries — [dwillard.org](http://dwillard.org).

For a "Willard Teaching Toolbox" with dozens of teachings with A/V links & transcribed notes — [JesusCollege.com](http://JesusCollege.com)