

Spirit of the Disciplines Series
"Spiritual Formation - Changed Lives"
Dallas Willard - Gordon Conwell 1 of 3

Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the recording in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The [brackets], **bold**, and underline disclose the scribe's commentary and cross-references other Dallas Willard teachings.



Session 1 - "Changed Lives - Is it real?"

[1:05:02]

[["Spirit of the Disciplines" Series audio links](#)]

- 1.) ["Changed Lives - Is it real?"](#)
- 2.) ["The Sermon on the Mount"](#)
- 3.) ["Spiritual Disciplines"](#)

The Great Commission

"I have been given say over all things on Heaven and Earth."

"Go therefore" - Since he has been given say, go and make disciples, students, apprentices is the first step after the "therefore".

We live in a period in which it is assumed you can live your whole life as a Christian and not be a disciple. That's why the great commission doesn't work.

"...in the name" means more than a name, it means the reality. You surround them in the triune name and community of Jesus.

Then you *"Teach them to do all things I have commanded you. Lo, I am with you always."*

The Great Omission from the Great Commission.

The *"Lo, I am with you always"* has disappeared from our language.

I don't know a single group that has a plan for teaching their people to do all things Jesus commanded.

The Spirit of the Disciplines

[5:25]

When I speak of the disciplines and how God changes lives, I mean what the Great Commission means - we come to the place where we naturally do what Jesus taught. That's what it means to have life changed by the power of the gospel. The Spirit of the Disciplines is the "love of Jesus". To think well of Him, to believe He is it!

"Those who love me keep my commandments."

—> **The love of Jesus is the spirit of the disciplines.**

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They believe it was the way we were meant to exist and they love him. They stay with Him as His disciples to learn from Him.

—> A disciple of Jesus - *I am with Him learning to be like Him.* [8:45]

That's the general pattern of discipleship - learning from Him how to lead my life if He were I. I am not learning to lead His life. I am leading my life. That's my place. I need to learn to from Jesus how to lead my life that I was given. Then we begin to understand what life is really like.

"The glory of God is a human being who is fully alive."

Saint Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.)

Salvation

Salvation is "eternal life" - a quality of life that begins now that we, though faith in Jesus, take our lives into the Kingdom of God in reliance upon Him through redemption that is in Him.

The life of Christ will be lived in us. [12:20]

* John Wesley quote - *"I would make people virtuous and happy."*

What Jesus brings us in the word of His gospel.

"Set your affections on things above...you shall appear glorious." (Col. 3)

In Christ, we have a different kind of life for we are called into the life God created us.

Sanctification

[16:30]

Sanctification is a consciously chosen and sustained relationship with God in Christ in someone who is able to do routinely what they know to be right before God - moral, religious, prudential.

A common problem - people do not do what they think they should do and they do what they think they should not do.

We have a standing walk in relationship with Christ that we can do what we think we should do.

Sanctification is not an experience, though it may involve experiences. It is not a status, though it will put us in a status. It is not an outward form. Those have proven to be deadly traps - legalism. It does become a track record and a habituation.

Spiritual Formation

[19:15]

Spirit - inner most core of a person where choice is made.

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It is the organ of choice.

Spiritual Formation is the formation of the "will". It doesn't function alone. It functions in the context of the whole personality.

"Spirit" is, above all, the nature of God

Exodus 3:14 - Gives us the most fundamental, metaphysical statement of what spirit is - self determined existence - "*I am that I am.*"

My being is based on my being itself - a self determined being. God is infinite, creative will. He is a person for only persons have a will.

"He has given life to the Son". God is Spirit.

"Spirit" (def.) Un-bodily personal power.

You have that in you - it is called your "will".

Because of that, you are able to be responsible before God.

If you choose, that is the spiritual element in you.

If you are alive in God, then your spirit primarily reaches to out to God.

The main function of spirit in man is to choose God.

Genesis - man was established to have dominion, to reign. Your kingdom is the range of your effective will. We were meant to exercise that in union with God. Human beings are quite ready to take control of the Earth. When we turn away from God, our spirit is in a condition of death. We are dead in trespasses and sins. We still have a spirit but our spirit is dead.

We come back to life in the Spirit through the Word of the gospel. and the work of the Spirit. We are born again which means we enter the Kingdom of God. Read John 3 - coming to eternal life which the same thing as entering the Kingdom through faith in Jesus.

Our spirits are turned back to God. Our whole being begins to blossom. Quote from Saint Irenaeus. "*You shall appear with Him glorious.*" Glory is energy and power. God is so glorious, He floods the whole universe with light. God is the Father spirit such as you & I.

You are not your body or your brain. The brain is an interesting piece of flesh. God doesn't even have a brain. Did you know that? And He doesn't miss it. All the cavalier things Jesus said about the body, "Don't worry about those who can kill the body" is founded on the understanding of who we are and who God is. "*Those who keep His word will never taste death.*"

I Timothy 1:10. "*He has abolished death and brought to light life and immortality.*"

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Matter is the servant of spirit. The transfiguration of Christ is the highest manifestation of the nature of matter in the body then the resurrection body of Christ.

When we are talking about the transformation of the person, we do it in the understanding the spiritual nature of God and Human being. [29:55]

Your life as a spiritual being is completed only by living in and from the Kingdom of the Heavens. We are made to live from that. That is our nature. Jesus comes to restore us to that by faith in Him. His death for our sins removes that sin. His resurrection brings the new life into the world and makes it available now to everyone without reference to any kind of human distinction. That is the meaning of the gospel of the Kingdom of the Heavens - by trusting Jesus Christ we come back into the rule of God. Through Him by our discipleship to Him we are able to fulfill the covenant of Genesis 1:26 for eternity.

Why spend time on this? This is the only way we can lay a foundation for changing our lives, taking an active role with God in the transformation of personality. That is the point of spiritual disciplines. They are not human tricks. They are ways we interface with the Spirit of God and the spiritual kingdom of God. In order to see their point and understand what they are, we have to understand the nature of God, the nature of ourselves, how the gospel relates to that and the life into which we are called.

We have a lot to do in this because we are a spiritual being.

The Picture of The Whole Person

[33:20]



When we look at the whole person, the unit of analysis is the person.

* SOS - "Save our Souls". When you save the souls of the people on the sinking ship you don't leave the person there and bring their souls back. The "soul" refers to the whole person.

The Whole person is this combination:
~ Heart/Spirit/Will ~ Mind (Thoughts & Feelings) ~ Body ~ Social Realm ~ Soul

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The "Soul" is the principal that unites everything and makes them one person. The "Soul" is the unifying part of the whole personality. The soul is the place from which the whole personality runs, for good or evil.

The center is the "spirit" - the "Executive Center" of the self.

When the Word of the gospel comes, it comes to the "mind".

It impacts the "feelings".

The "will" responds to that. It can say "Yes" or "No".

One of the greatest challenges to contemporary Christians is to resolve the practical problems around activity and passivity.

Much of the language in the scripture is passive and much is active.

GRACE is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning.

God does not get nervous when you start acting. If you want to bargain with Him, that's another story. He gets adamant at that point.

Earning is an attitude, effort is an action.

The "spirit" can respond. Often there is a struggle. We use to speak about people being "under the conviction of sin." That's when the spirit hears the gospel and the emotion that goes with it, it is never a dead, unemotional thing and it is conflicted. It says, *"Yes but no."* There is a moment when it says, "Yes" and faith in Christ comes and we are born again. That line leads up to God. It's a two-way street. The life of God begins to flood in our spirit and then it says,

"What are you going to do with the rest of the mess?"

Now you have peace with God, what are you going to do with the rest of it?"

* Peter confessed the Messiah but he had a lot of other programs running in his personality than the Messiah. He really meant that he wasn't going to deny Jesus but he had some other programs running. They all were not going to run but they did. Where was that? In their body and their social environment. Their soul took over. When the legs said, "Run!", they did not consult the head. They just left and took the head with it.

"You're one of his people!" "Oh no I'm not."

Which program was running?

The deep teaching of Jesus He gives His friends in the garden:

"The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

In their heart, they really did mean it.

He wasn't scolding them. He was trying to teach them what was going on.

"Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation."

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Those are typical disciplinary passages. They did not watch and pray. They slept. Why did they sleep? They were tired and sorrowful. Why? The "soul" really doesn't have boundaries except those God sets around it.

Summary - Who you are and why you are here. [41:15]

You are a never ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.

You don't want to worry about ceasing to exist. You are never going to cease existing and there's nothing you can do about it. You want to be planning your life in light of that fact. You are a spiritual being and God has use of you and He is going to keep you in existence for His purposes. So don't plan on dying and stopping existing. A lot of people are planning on that and they are in for a big shock.

Spiritual in substance,
Never ceasing in duration,
Ruling, creative governance in destiny.

Revelation 22:5 - A complete expression of your destiny.

"And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever."

The Progression - 3 texts: II Peter 1:5-7; Col. 3; Romans 5 [43:15]

What are we going to do and how are we going to do it?
That is where spiritual disciplines come in.

Δ3 Disciplines of Disengagement (Retreat)

solitude, silence, fasting, frugality,
chastity, secrecy, sacrifice, watching

Δ3 Disciplines of Engagement (Advance)

prayer, study, meditation, memorization, worship,
celebration, service, fellowship, confession, submission,
simplicity, obedience, generosity, giving, guidance, pilgrimage

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~ **II Peter 1:5-7**

[44:00]

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith add moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, agape love.

These progressions nearly always wind up in "agape".

—> Agape is the encompassing reality or character of the mature or fully developed personality (self) in Christ.

I Corinthians 13

Romans 13:8 - *"He that loves has fulfilled the law."*

Next session we're going to Matthew 5 to look at that in great detail.

[\["Spirit of the Disciplines: Sermon on the Mount" Gordon 2 of 3\]](#)

~ **Colossians 3**

[46:10]

Notice the active side. This is not earning. We are already in salvation. You are working out the salvation you already got. That salvation is new life. Paul begins to tell us what to do.

v. 5 *"Mortify the members of your earthly body: Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed which is idolatry..."*

* Mortgage - put to death by degrees

Mortify - let something die off. You do that by living in another power. Instead of drawing your strength from these things, you are drawing your life from something else. You have that option because you are alive in the Spirit.

v. 8 - *put aside anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, do not lie to one another.*

"Put on the new self in the knowledge of the one who created you."

All human distinctions are pressed aside - No Greek, Jew, Circumcised, Uncircumcised, slave, free.

- The new person has God's point of view on everything.

"Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another...just as the Lord has forgiven you. Above all these, put on agape which is the perfect bond of unity."

~ **Romans 5:1-5**

A beautiful progression presented in the middle or passive voice. Faith, peace, hope, grace work together. We exalt in our tribulations. We don't "have to do that", we just do it. It winds up in verse 5 with *"love of God has*

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been poured in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." The important thing to learn is that we have a part in that. This will not happen unless we do our part. Regular church attendance won't do it. Not even tithing.

We have to ask ourselves very candidly - is our plan achieving what Jesus set before us? Does it result in people doing all things Jesus commanded you? If it doesn't, we have to change our plan. Jesus, *"Without me, we can do nothing."* You can add, *"If you do nothing, it will be without me."* If you do nothing, you do it alone.

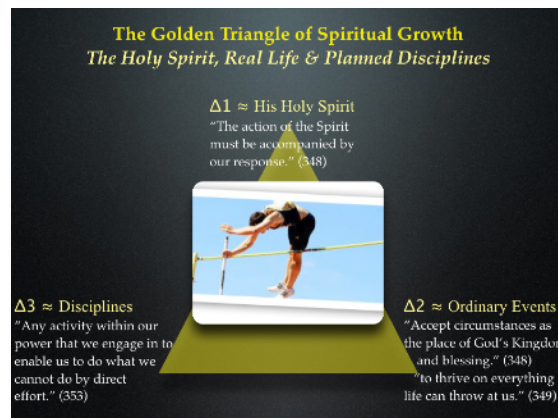
* Jesus miracles - The person had to do something.

- Withered hand, *"Stretch out your hand."*
- Cripple on the bed, *"Take up your bed and walk."*
- Blind man - *"Go wash in the pool of Siloam."* A long walk

Above all, we have to act.

The Diagram - "The Golden Triangle"

[55:20]



Main factors that come to the completion of the process of growing in Christ.

Top Center - "Action of the Holy Spirit"

New life, Gifts & Fruit of the Spirit

"As man that are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."

Something that is going on is not us.

Romans 12, *"No one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit."*

A witness of the Holy Spirit.

Left Bottom - "Ordinary Events of Life"

Troubles are essential to our spiritual growth.

"We exalt in our tribulations." *"Count it all joy when you encounter various trials."* Why? That's where you'll see the hand of God.

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The path of spiritual life is not positioning ourselves where we will not see trouble. Thank God for troubles. Accept them and move along with God. Watch His hand and as James said, *"Patience will make you perfect."*

Right Bottom - Planned Disciplines

To put on new bowels, guts. That's where life comes from. The problem is you have the wrong bowels, the center of your life. It is bodily. We move our lives over into our body and social environment and many people forget there is anything more than that. The third part is planned disciplines to achieve a new inner character.

Spiritual Disciplines

[1:00:15]

Spiritual Discipline is an activity in my power that enables me to accomplish what I can not do by direct effort.

- * Speaking French, playing the piano, bench pressing 300#
- * Great athletes practice all the time. That is in their power. What is not in their power is to excel by effort.

Effort, infusion, information will not do it.

Only exercise will do it.

Paul knew this. It is the open secret of the Bible.

"I buffet my body and bring it under submission unless when I preach to others, I myself will be disqualified (a castaway)." I Corinthians 9:27

He teaches this to Timothy in I Timothy 4:7

"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness for bodily training is of some value but godly training is of a value in every way."

List of Disciplines: Engagement & Abstinence (Monkish side of disciplines)

I didn't do the ["Abstinence"] ones very well. I began to discover how few people in Bible believing churches read their Bibles and how incompetent people felt about prayer. There is a connection to Disciplines of Abstinence. Their lives are so full with stuff, they can not pray, they go to sleep. They can not study. [[Gordon 3 of 3 — "Spiritual Disciplines"](#)]

When we return, we'll begin to look at the central teachings of Matthew 5 and how that relates to the disciplines. [[Gordon Session 2 of 3](#)]

~ ~ ~ **End of Teaching @ 1:05:00** ~ ~ ~

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