

Faculty Luncheon

By Dallas Willard

Announcer:

Dallas Willard's really no stranger to the Biola Faculty. He's a Christian who serves God by, among other things, teaching philosophy at USC and serving on the board of trustees of Biola University. Born in Missouri, educated at William Joel College, Tennessee Temple College, and Baylor University. He received his PhD from the, in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin. In addition to his scholarly publications, he's written on issues of spirituality and a number of Christian periodicals. He is the author of a book I consider superb, "The Spirit of the Disciplines, Understanding How God Touches Lives" Today He'll be touching on several issues he addresses in his book with some comments on how these issues relate to us in the academic setting, so please welcome Dr. Dallas Willard.

Dallas Willard:

It's good to be here with you again. I always feel a special bond of unity with the faculty at Biola and remember many wonderful times we've had together in the past and um appreciate

you coming today to listen to me talk about my book. I mean it's a little like hearing a grandparent talk about his grandbaby I know but um uh that's the way these things are and uh they come, books come and pass on and then there's the next one and uh so this is the last one and uh the next one will be in philosophy uh but we'll talk about this one today. I think the best way to do is just go through a few simple points about the book itself. It's called "The Spirit of the Disciplines" and the subtitle is "Understanding How God Changes Lives" One of the ironies of publishing is that the titles often are not chosen by the author. Ha-ha. And in fact I didn't choose either one of these. The title I originally gave the book was "Exercise unto Godliness" which as you may recall were Paul's words to Timothy. Exercises unto Godliness is profitable for all things having promise of the life that now is and that which is to come. And my subtitle was "A Theology of the Disciplines for the Spiritual Life". A theology for the disciplines for the spiritual life. Well these people at Harper have their eye on publicity and they thought that was too many big words in a row or something, so they changed it. I have actually only added a paragraph or two to sort of tie the title in with the text.

And it is fair to say, thought he subtitle is a little presumptuous that what I'm really interested in here is understanding how God changes lives. Now it's presumptuous because that suggests that we might now already know and uh so I'm immediately on the defensive about that but uh among friends I'll just have to let that stand and go on and say what I have to say and then we're going to have time for you to to respond and make statements or raise questions as you wish. The spirit of the disciplines, what are the disciplines we're talking about? Now just in order to make sure that we're thinking along similar lines I want to but on the board here a list of activities which you may be able to identify some of them with concrete situations, others you may not. I don't mean to suggest that this is a list of all of the disciplines for the spiritual life but

it is a fairly decent and inclusive list and you may have ones you want to add or detract and I don't feel defensive about the completeness of the list. What I am concerned about is that we understand that there are practices which we consciously engage in in order that we might more fully come to have the character and power of God by the grace of God. Practices which we consciously, purposively enter into that we might more fully have the character and power of God by the grace of God. Now to comment on the last clause immediately. Someone might say "you're not talking grace, you're talking works" and we immediately have to deal with this. And in fact one of the chapter uh in the book uh chapter eight is entitled "A History and Meaning of the Disciplines" and they try to go into the ways historically that we have been robbed of significant direction as to how to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ by an overreaction to a view of the body in particular where it was to be punished or made full of pain uh where we were to merit something by how many uh how much suffering we imposed on ourselves and so on. The stories are incredible. I'm sure you know some of them I won't get into them they're they're pretty good after dinner entertainment in fact they're quite ridiculous.

Uh but uh let's let's just pass on with that and think about some of these practices. Um why are they necessary? Uh in the book my aim has been to show that some practices of this sort well thought out well adapted by experience and by council um are necessary from God's points of view and from man's point of view. Theologically and psychologically. Grace, when it comes to us, does not obliterate personality. There is still something for us to do and there's much for us to do. We have our salvation by grace but we still work it out with fear and trembling. And the question is now how do you do that? Paul's statement in the eight chapter of Romans, "Therefore brethren we are debtors not to the flesh to live after the flesh for if you live after the flesh you

shall die, (a familiar statement in Paul's thought) but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." We are placed between two sources of life, one which we can characterize very briefly as the natural energies of the body, the flesh. Now flesh does not mean meat in the Bible and I know that there are many of you that understand these matters better than I and probably you'll want to correct me and that'll be just fine because I'm happy to learn. Uh there are some uses in the Bible where it does refer to meat but flesh generally is a living system of tendencies that characterize different kind of bodies. And flesh is a natural power that is put in us in God's creation and it gives us a place to stand, even to rebel and resist God. But it also gives us a place to receive God. Flesh is not a bad thing. It is a natural, created power in which we as individuals alone can live. Now in the strength of the flesh we must live or we don't have any life at all so the question is not shall we be fleshly in that sense or not but rather the question is whether or not the power of the flesh is all we will know in our lives. And Paul says if that's the way it is with you, then you will have a natural life and it will die and indeed it will not be a very good life. But if you mortify the deeds of the body through the spirit which is the other source of life, then you shall live. And that life will be never ending and it will be good and it will be what God has intended to be.

Now in that life in the spirit the Body will not disappear and the flesh will not disappear but it will receive its natural fulfillment which God made it for. So that the embodied personality will, led by the spirit of God, empowered by the spirit of God be presented to God as a living sacrifice which is its reasonable service. In other words that's what it was made for, that's what the body was made for. Now then when we have been quickened by the spirit of God and given new life through the new birth, through the sovereign act of God's grace, and the word has come in, and it being as Jesus says in John 6, the words that I speak unto you they are spirit, they are

life. Now then we are in a position to make decisions about how we are going to surrender our bodies to God and everything that we find in religion really, in our Christian religion is a bodily activity, or involves a bodily activity. And you say well what about the heart? Well the heart, even in a spiritual sense is tied to the body. God has ordained that we should live in a body and as we're told in the sixth chapter of 1 Corinthians, the body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Our temple, our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. It is to be the place in which the spirit of God lives and moves. I don't want to spook you too far out but I believe that it is to be understood as a real substance which God conveys to us and which we can even give to other people. And if you look at the New Testament carefully you will see that among the fundamental doctrines of the faith that are listed in the sixth chapter of Hebrews is the laying on of hands. See our body is supposed to really have something in it. We are able to send out of ourselves and we do send out of ourselves to others. When Peter was ministering and Jesus was ministering the very touch of his garment or in Peter's case even the shadow.

Now I know that we get a little worried about this and we should get a little worried about it perhaps but on the other hand if you're not careful you go so far that you'll have a religion that is totally removed from the body and ours is an incarnational faith. Now if you look at these activities you will see that in every case they involve the body. I'll just go through them quickly and then make a few more general comments and then we'll have some discussion. I list first the disciplines of abstinence and then the disciplines of engagement. They come in that order because if our lives and our bodies are filled with the wrong things there will be no place for the right things. And that is unfortunately what often happens. Uh repentance as an experience should help us see what we need to empty our lives of. I begin my list of disciplines, disciplines of abstinence with solitude. One of the reasons I do that is because I know that if we

are constantly hammered at by people and events around us, given the fallen condition in which we have lived and the the death in trespasses and sins from which we are moved and which still afflicts us because we're not, we don't immediately uh everything isn't changed. We talk about being new creatures but we look remarkably like and feel remarkably like in many respects after we are converted than what we did before.

And this has become even more so as conversion has in our time been more and more cut down in its psychological significance and has come to be a very thin sort of thing often which we may describe merely as praying to receive Jesus and it may have very little depth in it. So there are a lot of things that are still present with us. The weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us as the writer of Hebrews says. So solitude is absolutely essential. We need to be alone with God and without extensive time along with God; we are not going to be able to grow in the spiritual realm. We're not going to be able to become more and more governed by the spiritual life which comes to us from God. Now, one can say well if God wants that for me, he will make it happen. I just don't know of people for whom that has been true. The people I know who have been able to gain solitude and grow in the spirit through solitude are people who have paid a price to choose it. They have planned it. You don't find time all of you know that. You don't find time, that's a deep metaphysical truth about time. You don't find it you make time, you choose and you give time to it. Now Jesus was an individual who was much in solitude. If there's anything that characterizes his life when he's not on the spot out here ministering it is that he was alone with God. And in his aloneness he found time to study and to pray and to worship and in those he found strength then to come out of the solitude and move into the disciplines of engagement of service and celebration, prayer and fellowship and all of the things that he did when he was on the spot.

You see if we're going to follow Jesus we have to understand that it isn't just when he's on the spot that we follow him. That is to say we don't stand around and wait until someone smites on on one cheek and then we say now I'm going to follow Jesus and I'll turn the other. Well it can be done but it's very unlikely it will happen that way. The first chapter of the book I call the secret of the easy yoke and the secret of the easy yoke because many people frankly don't find Jesus' yoke easy and they don't find his burden light. Many of our church folks will frankly tell you it is not only not easy and not light, it is impossible. No none can behave like Jesus, especially at home, especially on the job you se. and it's presented as if it were impossible, these people generally are thinking about doing what Jesus did when you're on the spot. Now if you were to go and watch uh the people on the basketball team play and you were to decide that you wanted to play just like thy did and your procedure was I will go out on the court and I'll move around just like they do. I'll do exactly what they do in the game. What would happen? Well you'd fall on your face because you see what makes it possible for them to do what they do when they're on the spot is what they do when they're off the spot. Isn't that right? And generally speaking that's the way it is throughout life. If you have trouble with a family member and there's a war going on, you cannot ever master that just by saying now whenever this war starts I'm going to grit my teeth and I'm not going to start hollering. No, you have to change things generally.

And the secret of the easy yoke is to follow Jesus in the overall pattern of his life. Now we need what he had and more because we're more needy. But if Jesus spent that much time in solitude, don't you think we may need a little bit too? If he spent that much time in prayer, perhaps we also should do that. Jesus was a very smart student began to show up even at the age of twelve. We need to study also. What drove me to write the book more than anything else was

the realization that we cannot count on the ordinary advice that is given to earnest church members. We cannot count on that advice to make people grow spiritually. It will not do it. And the reason is obvious. There's just, there's simply not enough of it. We are made to live twenty four hours a day before God, and you cannot grow spiritually by having a little hour or two through the week. You have to learn how to spend all of your time with God. The hours that you go to church or other special hours in the week are important but until we come to the place where all of our lives are a repository of God's power, we have not yet begun to understand what a spiritual person is.

There's so many things to be gotten past here I can't begin to deal with them all and you will have particular things possibly you want to raise but we must above all get beyond the idea that here are special religious services which are it. Now there are special religious services but they're not it. If anything they are there for the purpose of enabling us to do all things on behalf of Jesus and to live in his world as his woman his man his boy his girl, twenty four hours a day and that is where we know what true spirituality is, cuz true spirituality is not in existence with gone from the world, it is living in the world by the power of God, now ask yourself what the spirituality means. And that's enough to uh really throw many of us off the track, because we've heard so many things about spirituality but to be spiritual is simply to live from the spirit. It is to live from the spirit. That's a spiritual person. Is there a spiritual life? Is it real? Can it show up wherever we are? No matter what the circumstances and am I ready to receive it where I am, no matter what the circumstances? Well this list of activities that I have and as I've described them is designed to help us come to the place to where we can receive the spirit of God in every circumstance whatsoever.

Whether it's being debased or abounding, we say I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me. What does that really mean? Sometimes for Christians it means look I can take it, I'll get by, ok? That's really all it means for many people who are Christians. It does not mean what Paul clearly meant and taught in his own language mainly that in all circumstances, and by the way also we often think that we need Christ to help us only when we are in hard times but you may note that Jesus, that Paul also found the strength of Christ to abound, to be full, and probably that's harder than being empty. You seldom ever see a person who receives a great amount of money and says well I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. You see. And we haven't got the right perception of the relationship of God to us and ourselves to the kingdom of God because in all things, we're not safe just because we've got a pocket full of money. See? One of the reasons why we don't say I can receive this and abound in it through Christ who strengthens me is because we're saying who needs Christ? I can do all things through money which strengthens me. Or fame or recognition or success.

One of my favorite sayings about religion and churches generally is "nothing fails like success" And the proverb says does it not that the prosperity of fools destroys them. It's harder to un- to harder to stand success and we in the American church of today of all people should know this best. So there are uh uh many places that we can apply these uh sorts of considerations I think that we have to say that individuals will vary in what they need uh many people need to be able to fast more than others do because they are very close as Paul would say to making their belly their god. And if they're belly worshippers fasting is good for them uh if they can't get along without society they need solitude all the more. All of us need study, we need to immerse ourselves totally in the word of God and one of the constant griefs I have in travelling about and teaching is that in many of the bible believing churches no one is studying the bible. They talk

about it but they don't really study it. And that is perhaps one of the greatest weakness that we have now. In many of our churches that look conservative or even fundamental is that they have gotten so wetted to their declarations of truth that they are no longer really consuming the word of God. And from the positive side, there's no doubt in my mind that is the single most important discipline of engagement is the study of the word, so we need, each of us to think I believe in terms of our plan for becoming like Jesus Christ.

I would ask you think [inaudible] do you have a plan for that? Are you planning to be like Jesus Christ? Or have you got the sort of device that says well I'll die someday and then I'll be made like him. You know I have a feeling that many people are gonna be surprised to find out that after they die they're still the same person, and you can pass that off as speculation if you wish. But I believe there're going to be some very real differences and they're going to be some very real regrets because people looked at discipleship and they said well it's so terrible and they paid the cost of non discipleship and they paid the cost of a non-disciplined life and as the result their work was not what is should have been and could have been. And we are the people I want to tell you as intellectuals as scholars as thinkers and writers and artists, we are the people that are closest to control strings of the world system.

The world runs on ideas. Our work is the most important work in the world, and the work that is done by Christian scholars and intellectuals in its promise for the kingdom of God has absolutely nothing that compares with it because all of the world system, everything that comes out of us comes from our mind and our heart and those ideas that we work with are the one where we need above all to know the full power of God and to have that we must lead a life that is planned and disciplines to receive the power of the spirit of God. And if we do it, we will gain the character which can stand the power, there's no point in sending ten thousand volts through a

Willard: Faculty Luncheon

transistor radio is there now. You'd just get a fried piece of plastic. We have to have the character to bear the power. Brother E.V. Hill says with regard to the goods of this world, if God can get it through you he can get it to you. But many of us don't have the character to bear the transmission. The disciplines of the spiritual life are a way of planning to have that character.

Now this is very incomplete and very inadequate but I hope it's enough for you to get a hold of and now I'd like to stop now if I might and just uh have any comments or questions. [inaudible] comments and uh questions. J V Phillips translates that, uh Philippians 4:13 I'm ready for anything through the strength of the one who is in me.

Audience member:

I love it that's good.

Dallas Willard:

Yes, Dietrich. [inaudible audience member] Has he what? Well I've uh I have read a lot of Tozer and have enjoyed immensely what he's doing and I think the fact that he was there through an important part of my young life as a minister was encouraging but it's more like he and I were drinking at the same fountain and uh so he was a great encouragement to me and um um I I can't say to what extent he may have been influential but he's the sort of person I would

hand to anyone and encourage them to read, yes. He was so remarkably refreshing in the way that he could get past all the little historical practices and get to the heart of what really mattered in the spiritual life I think I'd better to say yes to that now that I think of it, yes Herold.

[inaudible question from audience] Among other things he read Shakespeare through once a year and things of that sort he was a very avid reader. Um well I think that again the answer and it's a little broader than that see my my outside of the scripture my main people are Wesley and Finney. They're the people that I devoured. On the other hand uh Thomas Aquinas has meant a lot to me but I don't think it's exactly the same. Tozer bothers me a little bit. It gets too sweet at a certain point in him for me and uh the literary side of Tozer kind of, it isn't that I think it's wrong it's just I don't find it attractive. I'm more drawn to a Wesley or finery a kind of more muscular side of spirituality.

Yes Nick. [inaudible question from the audience] Yes. Um I lemme uh lemme answer that in the following way uh I don't think that Paul is saying it is impossible for a person who is in Christ to sin. Um I think what Paul is exclaiming over there is how can a person who has tasted the life that is in Jesus ever think of living on anything else. Um want to carry on- [audience question] I think that it means that sin is no longer attractive to that person. I think that's what it means I mean it it's dead to the sin and the way that I am dead to well this is not strong enough but you know a little baby has a bottle of some sort of formula I'm dead to that stuff I wouldn't want it. Uh and what Paul is really saying in that passage as I understand him is he's responding to the suggestion that we might continue in sin to make grace abound and he's saying look you don't understand. How can you, once you know the life of Christ and now he was talking about something that was real that you didn't have to whistle up. He had felt it in himself. He had known it as a reality. Once we have known that, I believe what he's saying is sin

is so unattractive, sin is like slop. God forbid, how can I after eating this wonderful food want slop? That's, you see there are other verses like uh they that have suffered in the flesh have ceased from sin, remember that what is that 1 Peter, 2 Peter? They that have suffered in the flesh. In other words once you have come to know by the course of your life what sin is you just don't want any more of it. Now that doesn't handle the practical issues of the transition but at least for Paul, and I believe that his experience was of course very strong. That I believe is what he meant. It's simply without attraction, ok?

Ed. [inaudible audience question] Well, yes. We are stronger in our theory but my own reading of this is that it doesn't work very well and uh I don't find many people in good churches that are really praying and confident about their prayer and they have a prayer life where they know that is going on they know what can be accomplished they count on it. Where there's uh a real study or real worship real celebration and so on I just don't find it and submission I mean uh I haven't talked about these individually but uh the idea of humbling yourself under the mighty hand of God under the mighty hand of your brother or your pastor or your sister you know this idea is very far from our thinking when we get right down to it. And I think our problem is that we have fallen into the fallacy of thinking that God is just going to dump it on you, that you don't have to do anything in preparation for this. Isn't it for grace?

And of course we confuse what is done to merit something with what is done to receive it and if we don't do something we won't receive it. Growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ is something we have to plan for or it will not happen. And you can go to church from now until kingdom come, and we have a standing record of the fact that most people don't get anywhere by faithful church attendance. This is a terrible thing to say, 'm sorry but it's true. They sort of maintain a sort of status quo they they paddle, you know they stay

afloat but they don't grow. And now I don't say it about everyone, some people do, it's there. it's sort of like education at the university, it's there but if you don't do something about it you won't get it. Right I tell my all of my freshmen I try to teach a large freshmen class each year you can get a wonderful education here but it may not happen and if it does happen you will be the one who made it happen, it will not happen automatically.

And I'm afraid our churches are a lot like that. I don't believe they have to be and one of the things I'm pleading for here is a serious church program for fulfilling the great commission of teaching all nations, people from all nations who have been made disciples and baptized into the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit of teaching them how to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you. I was telling um ah I was telling professor Dollar as we came in, I don't know a single church that even has a plan to do that. And if you know of one I hope you'll let me know because I'm going around the country saying these false things if, if that's not true. I just know models uh you know and uh our other models have been destroyed whether they're in the church uh top leaders that have become immoral or evangelists or even Pete Rose I mean uh no I mean I did alright until we got to Pete Rose. Its uh either a submission or authority or not it's really true and I think this a terrible thing to say possibly but I think if you look at the ones that have had so much trouble you'll see that a major part of their public performance was entertainment and that has taken over because there's a need to keep pulling people in, and we've developed a consumer type religion where we train people to consume services and of course we want to keep that good so they'll keep coming back whereas it would surely be one test of a good church, good New Testament church is that a lot of people would go and say I'm not going back to that place until I'm dead. [question from audience]

Boy uh with this we'll close try to maybe we better close first. No uh I'm sorry about that sense of indictment and I really apologize for it and yet I have said in the last chapter of the book that the people who are responsible for the condition of the world today are the ministers of the Christian church, and their responsible because they're the ones who have even the possibility of the power to do anything about it. Um and of course then that comes back to those of us to teach and who train so let me try to be quite simple and straightforward and I hope helpful I in this and that is to say I would recommend that we once again ask ourselves the question, are we teaching what Jesus taught? Are we teaching what Jesus taught? Now I don't mean to say that we should only teach that cuz there are other things that obviously, for example we need to have a grasp for the nature of the Bible and the languages and all that and Jesus didn't have to teach that I'm talking about the central message that Jesus taught. And are we uh showing people how to live as he lived. See, my my guiding light being for whatever its worth is the great commission.

This has hounded me, and it has hounded me at the beginning and at the end because the first thing it says to do is to make disciples. We are immediately about uh several degrees off course at that point because we do not first make disciples, we make church members and Christians we hope but Christian is not a remarkably Biblical term. It occurs three times in the New Testament, and it's used to introduce disciples when you could no longer call them Jews. That's my reading of it in any case and uh it's uh disciples is what the book is about, making disciples and uh we I think have a sort of cut it down to where we don't do that. Uh Lennie when he met with a small group of the communist party in London in the first part of the century, they had a tiny group, and they said we're making admissions too hard, we must open the door and Lennie stood up in a fit and used some wonderful words which Bob Pierce later used. He said we

must make it as hard as possible. The people who join this group must regard themselves as dead men of furlough.

And that's almost, isn't it, out of the book of Romans isn't it. As those who were alive from the dead, Paul says. So at the beginning make disciples. How do you make a disciple of Jesus Christ? What goes into that? How then do you teach them to do all things whatsoever I've commanded you. So what I would say being is that and uh thank you for raising the question. This is the absolute central imperative of the church today is to give substance to the great commission, in its public services, in its seminaries, in every way. We are here to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We are here to surround them with the power of the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and baptize them into it, and then we're here to teach them to do everything Jesus said. And of course uh it's what we have to do is present that in the way he did where it was great good news. It was great good news and it's the greatest opportunity we will ever have. That's the program. That's what I face as a minister, that's what I must do I must make disciples. I must have upon me the spirit of God and the name of Jesus and acting and living in that and then I must say here's the way to do it now my writing of this book and this list of disciplines is a part of the answer to how I would direct them after that. I remember this story of um some missionaries heading for the south seas and the uh captain of the ship warned them of cannibals there and their response was we died before we left.

Those of you who are in chapel know what I'm gonna do with these books. I have six books here, and I thought was was good for the students would be good for the faculty and uh I've got six here for those who are really serious about uh learning more about this and will read the book and digest it so if you wanna come up afterwards uh we'll uh give one to you and Dallas say you prayed for students at the close of chapel would you pray for the faculty, administration,

Willard: Faculty Luncheon

staff who're here as we close. Lord it's more than we can do and we're glad. Give us grace to follow and for each one of us to claim our lives beyond death in your resurrection life and to set our sights in such a way that it would be worthy of your calling. Help us to master by your grace those things in our lives which would keep us from planning to be like you. Give us grace to encourage one another and to persist until it is done. In your name we pray, Amen.

Announcer:

Thanks, you're dismissed.