

Questions and Answers

By Dallas Willard

[Transcription note: questioners did not have microphones, so most are inaudible]

Dallas Willard:

By saying simply this that I believe that Jesus Christ could be a student at Biola or a teacher at Talbot. So now my first the first level of my intention is to live my life there as he would live in if he were me if I were running a service station or driving a truck or in the army or wherever I was that would be the first level of my intention.

Sometimes that's hard for that that itself is hard and certainly that's why I address that right off because very often we just can't imagine Jesus living our lives. And so we need to we have to intend to do that and think about his identification in the Incarnation with us is to be understood I believe in that way that he could have been you in terms of the occupation you're in the family you're in.

He was really a human being. And so that's the first thing that I would say to that now than in any occupation if I'm if I'm running a service station of something I have attention to the good which has to be done as an act of law to myself and others in that occupation. And through that the glory of God to be achieved by my occupation. So that applies then as a student or as a teacher. And we need to focus on what it is we do as students and teachers and just like you would focus on what it is you would do if you run a service station. What is it you do as students and teachers? And often our problems arise at each of these levels where we ask the questions we haven't asked the questions. We don't have the answer and so we move along rather vaguely

making a living getting credentials finding acceptance and so on. And so instead of having as our vision and the faith supported on it instead of having love of God and love of neighbor implemented in what we're doing, our overriding concerns are the concerns of making a living getting accepted establishing ourselves securing ourselves and then to go back to what I was talking about in the chapel service.

Then of course we are ready to react wrongly. We are ready to be impatient and angry with people and call them twits and twerps and fools and worse we are ready to utilize others as the objects of our lust or respond to them on the basis of our anxieties. You see everything goes wrong in short, if we miss that fundamental point. Why am I here? What am I doing? I'm here as an act of love and service to God and my neighbor. Now then as a student in an economics and economics course. Let's suppose that I'm well I'm picking a course in economics. It's a requirement for my degree and so on. How do I approach that? I approach that in terms of the knowledge to be gained and its use the use to which I would put it. Now often in this very move I've made a tremendous challenge to the whole educational system. Does the system of which I am part fit into the objective of equipping me to be a loving wholly powerful person walking in the steps of Christ? Sometimes I'm afraid we have to accept some things as a kind of something that we don't necessarily see the point of but we're going to take it on authority that we should do it and we will do that. And that's not wholly bad because we don't especially as students we often don't understand why the course would be useful to us for our spiritual objective. The same thing can happen as a scholar. Why are we doing the things we are doing. Why do we run the course the way we do.

Why. What is what is the key to the justification of our research?

How am I in my research loving my neighbor and loving God? And I believe that all of those levels we can find the answer and make our work an act of love and faith as a result of that. I mean get out of the abstract in just a bit. I mean for example suppose that translating some German into English for publication or for study or I'm writing a paper on whether or not you know the famous story about whether or not the tree falling in the forest. No one around makes a sound and so on. These often seem really remote and irrelevant and they may be. I'm always faced with that challenge of what human worth is my work.

Now with reference to those particular scholarly projects my mind in my role I see them as things which enable me to serve my students better and my colleagues better and I am a teacher and I believe that I should be a teacher. I believe that I should be a teacher not just for the sake of the subject matter but for the sake of the glory of God. So that's that's how I'm living. So that's the general approach JP that we would take to that and now I've lived through all of the challenges I think that are faced by especially a devout follower of Christ who is an evangelical. All of the questions about well the world's going to hell anyway and shouldn't I get out there and be saving souls instead of translating this German. It's a standard Chalons that the person faces in a Christian school and all I can all I can say is that I've had to work that out where I believe I know my place in the project of saving souls. I think it's very important and I often find myself thinking how wonderful it would be to just lay everything aside and do nothing but evangelization. I loved evangelism and I still enjoy what I can do of it which isn't much but I believe that what I am doing relates to evangelism in a very fundamental way and I have a role to play and so I'm going to play that role in faith. Maybe that's a good place to start the questions from the group yes.

Speaker 2:

It also seems like the Apostles understood the great commission- [inaudible]

Dallas Willard:

Yes I think they did.

Speaker 2:

Would you kind of read out loud... [inaudible] ... what should our unity as churches look like and secondly what role should leaders play in those forms that help bring about [inaudible].

Dallas Willard:

Well let me go with the first one. What should our churches look like? And again I'm just going to talk and leave it to experts to straighten it out. I believe that the appearance of the church is determined by Jesus' statement by this shall all men know that you are my disciples that you have love one for another and their words the church is primarily a place of mutual love not as the world defines love but as Christ defines love. And that passage in John 13 I think makes that clear. So this is the this is the key indicator. It is a place where people really do love one another. And beyond that I think you can have almost any degree of variation but until that is the reality you don't have the model of the church that I believe Christ has chosen to bless. So now how will that work out?

We have a lot of barriers to date this because our the church the Church of Jesus Christ is divided radically. It is divided along denominational historical cultural and other lines so that it's very difficult for it to come together to love one another to be together in loving ways. And I think historical forces alone are going to push us out of our out of the model that we have that is fundamentally defined by buildings and traditions. We've seen a lot of pushes now I mean the

Baptists uh recently have begun to forsake the name Baptist and call their churches by other names and so have other denominations. I think actually that's a very promising sign. I've long have tried to get someone to start a Baptist church that isn't either first or second or third.

I suggested the name the Last Baptist Church on the general principle that those that are at last will be first but I've never been I've never been able to get anyone to take me up on that and start at Last Baptist church. But maybe you were approximating something of that sort. So I think that now when we talk about loving one another we're not going to be able to define that in terms of what we today understand local congregations. It has to be Christians who are loving one another. I think for example if ministers were to begin to think of themselves as primarily ministers to one another in an area. Suppose you had La Mirada and all the ministers begin to think of their primary job was to love and serve the other ministers and just think of them. In one of the Pope's better moments is the description of him as the servant of the servants of God. See we have a tremendous problem of making love actualized in community. It's very hard for group of people driving from a radius of 30 miles to come together in a building and say now we're going to turn love on while we're here and then we drive away. We just turn it off. We have to have a way of relating community more closely to the organic structures of communities. And you know in the cities there's no hope for the old model anyway because you go out like New York City one block you have 10000 people living. You're not going to build churches for those people.

You're not going to have warehouses for them. We have to have a different model. And I really don't have anything like a concrete picture of how that is going to work. But I think we must say that it will be a community of mutual love in Christ that writer is tremendously important in Christ because if we just say love we really haven't gotten much of anything in our

contemporary world. And then it will be it will refer to the community of disciples really do love one another where they are and not just when they come together to go to church as we say we have a whole bunch. The whole idea of going to church is just very strange when you when you think about it in the New Testament sense. I don't mean to condemn it or I mean it's a historical reality we have to deal with but we have to recognize its limitations as well. Now that the scholarly community such as we have here could serve the great commission tremendously by exploring how this has to be done in our world and that then comes back to a J.P.'s question or comment. You say what what how do we serve. Well we serve them by understanding our world and the meaning of the Gospel and bringing them together in such a way that people really do live in the community the loving community of Christ.

Now your second question I've forgotten. Leaders. Well the role of leaders is primarily to exemplify to exemplify and I don't just mean what we have sometimes full-time Christian workers Christians who are leaders see I don't think I think we have really come about to the limit of what we can do in terms of evangelism where we think the real locus of the activity being in the specific activist Christian religious activities where we bring people into church and send them back out to institutions government banks schools and so on where it's assumed that God doesn't exist and what we're going to have to do is to have leaders in all of these areas and we have to reach them. You have to have a message that will reach them a message which teaches them what what is banking for Jesus Christ what is education for Jesus Christ. What is running a corporation? What is raising a family? All of these need that has to be a focus now our leaders I believe as Christian leaders are I don't see the language defeats us. Full time. How can you say Full-Time I mean that gives the whole game away doesn't it?

What are they doing the rest of their time. The language is just ties us in knots. The people who minister and preach and lead and have special elders we might call them their primary task was to exemplify, to exemplify the fullness of Christ. They would in a sense they would in essence stand in a similar relationship to those they are teaching that Christ stood to those he was teaching while he was here on Earth. Of course you have to say similar. Because it won't be the same. And there is some very good criticism some of it from the words of Jesus himself about the way the way leadership is exercised. You remember he has a passage in which he says call no one rabbi call no one master.

And that's very important for us and this will be a part of the exemplification. And I think we see a lot of real progress being made by the way among ministers who are coming to a different basis for their ministry and leadership. So I think the leaders have to be the disciples learn to do learn to have the kind of insides and this really applies in the organization of the church office and the running of the boards and the committees and all of that sort of thing. That's where Christ-likeness has to dwell not just in the mission. We all have this pattern in Christianity. Catholic and Protestant goes back through the ages. This pattern that says the mission is the important thing everything is to be surrendered to the mission. And we talk a lot about burning out for God. And that leads to a lot of harm. I think people take themselves far too seriously in their leadership roles. In a sense you couldn't take it too seriously because it's so important. But on the other hand one has to recognize that there's there comes a time when you need to rest and you need to give other people responsibilities. You need to back off and recognize that if you were to die and disappear the world would go on without you.

So I think the leadership role is primarily finally just to repeat one more time exemplification and then from that context of life teaching and doing whatever special work, see

we've approached it the other way around that the important thing is the professional role. And what I'm saying is No it's the personal life and if the personal life is rich enough then the professional role will take care of itself. Yes. [inaudible question] That's one that's one of the things I mean this is incorporated in some denominational papers and practices. [inaudible question] Yes.

Yes I know what you're talking about and people who don't have problems are often made to appear as if they're somehow something wrong with you. If you're not deeply troubled it's almost to use the current phrase as if you don't get it. You just don't get it. I really don't know what to say to that except it's probably this I'm sure that it is in part the outcome of a lot of teaching that is worried about perfectionism and certainly that's a legitimate concern. But also you know when you get around someone who is victorious you don't look so good unless you're victorious too. And so I think there are invidious comparisons that are set up by someone who is as we might say victorious. Course there's also a lot of hypocrisy that has in past generations. People have faked victoriousness even faked sinless perfection. So I just think there are a whole lot of cultural complexes that have brought us to this situation and we need to think clearly about how we're going to go on from here and I think that the response we need to give is one which takes the commandments of Jesus Christ understands them understands what it's like to work them out and the details of the situation and to actually agree with someone who is suing you as we would say.

So what happens if they take advantage of you as we might say from the human point of view? How is that victory? So we just need to work through the details of what it's like to actually live in the in the teachings of Jesus. And we don't have much of that I'm afraid. How many of you here have actually had at least one session in which you were actually taught how to

bless people who are cursing you. Could I see your hands? Would you say that this indicates some kind of omission? That that's a problem isn't it?

And here again I mean people say said well if I Bless 'um I'm just going to be a hypocrite because I hate them. You'll hear people responding. See that's a counsel of despair that says that I cannot learn how to do this. But without teaching. And here back to the question about leaders again we have to lead out on this. How are we going to do this?

Other comments or questions. Yes. [inaudible question] Yes yes so in my normal way of doing this is to just try to help people understand what the real difference is. For example on the Buddha's story generally speaking Hindu variants the path of salvation is one of enlightenment and enlightenment means that you merely see that you are not an individual that you that individuality including all of the things that go into passion and lust because as you know if you know the four noble truths of Buddhism the world is full of suffering. Suffering comes from lust. The solution is to get rid of desire you get rid of desire by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. So you have to help people understand what the story is about and then you contrast it with the teaching of Jesus that instead of the illusion you are real instead of enlightenment there is forgiveness and new life instead of dissolution which is the goal of the Hindu route.

It's the goal of the Hindu route is to escape the wheel of birth and death to cease to exist as an individual to be absorbed into something which is rather difficult to describe it isn't the same not as nothing but it certainly is something where you don't retain your individuality. So you have two different views. One one according to which the highest and best thing that can happen to you is you can stop existing and you have another view where personal existence is ultimate re- redeemable eternal progressive. So it's just a different picture. So a lot of what I would try to do with people is to just help them see the difference.

You know now I would usually add on something to this effect that we don't measure Buddhism by Christianity. You major Buddhism by Christ in fact we don't even measure Christianity by Christianity we measure Christianity by Christ and often it doesn't do as well as on Buddhism. Sorry about that but it's great that you had to say that Christianity is a culture. What is there really to choose? That's when you hear people talk about inclusive Islam and so on all you have to realize that often what they're doing is they're talking about comparing Christianity as a historical culture with Buddhism story. Now that can be argued in its own right but from the point of view of someone who is trying to bring people to a knowledge and into the reality of the Kingdom of the heavens as Jesus taught it. I had I wouldn't spend much time arguing about that.

So that's kind of the line I would go and I really do believe that we have to present these things to people in such a way that they understand they are they must go with the truth. I'm not there to defend Christianity or defend Christ. He doesn't need any defense. He needs presentation and if someone can look squarely at Jesus Christ and say No thank you I have nothing more to say to them. Nothing more to say. I still love them befriend them. They're my neighbor but I don't have any more to present. And that's you see that's why it's so important for us to present the realities of the Gospel. I mean what are we talking about. Take the business of loving your enemies blessing those that curse you. Well the Buddhist has a way of handling that too. The Hindu does and the Confucian does and the New Age person and so on.

So we compete on a common ground in that sense that we're all dealing with life. Now the question is who really understands who has the reality. And once we do our best to make that clear then we stand here and then hear [inaudible question] the goal of desire. First of all desire is not in itself bad as it exists in a fallen world, it becomes very destructive. And so we are warned

against lust Epithumia I think is not just desire. Like if I desire a drink of water I'm not exactly lusting after it unless I'm in some very strange state of mind. Now if I get thirsty enough and you know if I get thirsty enough I might I might actually come to lust for water so much so that I have delusions and see Oases where they're not so on but you see in itself desire is not bad. I remember once I was dealing with someone in another country who was really a very smart man and a very fine person but he had it in his head that desire was wrong.

And so well I just I just showed him in the scriptures where angels desire things and it's totally blew his anthropology out the window because he thought it was just wrong. That desire was wrong see that's that is an Orphic stoic or Buddhist view of desire. Now desire on the Christian view is in itself good because it is a part of creativity it's a part of action we are made to act. And anyone who says they can act without desire is into advanced stages of self-deception. Such a desire is necessary in order to have action. Information is also necessary. So desire is meant to be good. That desire is meant to be subject to God and to God's law. And as long as it is so subjective so it's good. And see what happens is in a fallen world, we put the body and its desires at top. If you just look at if you look around you'd see that most of what goes on in the world is an attempt to serve the body and its desires and we subject the soul to that whatever is left the spirit be subject to that and God gets in down at the bottom. And this is this is where the prophets in their discussions of idolatry. The irony that comes out of the fact that you take a piece of wood and cook your eggs on it and whittle it and sit on it and take another part of it make a God out of it fall down and worship. They very ironic in their treatment of all of this which you see. The important thing is that if you put your body on top and your soul in service of that and so on down if you're going to have a God you better have one you can manage.

So everything is out of shape and desire runs wild and you get the people that Paul describes as their god is their belly. That is they live for their desires. [inaudible question] I would think that that's part of what's involved by accurately presenting Christ. I mean to speak to them in such a way that we communicate with them where they are apologetics for me as a helping ministry apologetics for me is answering real questions. It isn't going around and browbeating people with knock down arguments. It's helping people understand. So I would think apologetics is a part of that and of course people need to be specially trained to deal with special kinds of problems. So for example if you can say that evil is an illusion you solve the big problem in one way whereas if you say no evil is real you've got to solve that in another way and the work of apologetics is involved.

So I think I think it's very important to say desire ideas desires and ideas are the two resources that we use constantly in making decisions and apologetics is idea work. In fact scholarship generally is idea work and it's extremely important for that reason. Sometimes some some arcane piece of knowledge that you picked up in your scholarship will turn out to be just the thing that someone who has wandered into your life is needing. And so it's very much in place. J.P. if you want to say something else and then we have to-

J.P.:

Your view of spiritual life includes the idea of learning from experience, being willing to fail. Would you talk about That a little bit and apply that to praying and what happens when you pray and nothing happens would you spell that out a little bit.

Dallas Willard:

No absolute absolute. Yes. OK. Well that's such such, quite an assignment. Yes. I looking back I think I can see some stages one for example. When I when I began to think about prayer I always thought of prayer as something you do in response to extreme need you know. And looking back I can see that that was a major part of my early life. You may know the story of the lady who was visited by the pastor in the hospital waiting room and he'd been in to see the see the husband comes out and visits with the wife and says pleasantries and then says well shall we pray. And she says oh is it that bad.

So one of the things I had to do J.P. was to shift my thinking so that praying is not emergency oriented that praying is something I do as an ongoing work and it is a part of my it is as much a part of my life as the other things I do to keep myself in shape and to carry out my mission. And so it's not a special occasion. I think that's one of the things that one has to learn to do the other things that helped me a lot was just meditating and thinking and trying to learn from what Jesus himself taught about prayer for example. Why is prayer answered? What is the role of persistence and prayer? And to understand that it is all right to persist in prayer. One of the illusions I had that was taught to me was that if you ask once in faith don't ask again because it'll mean you didn't have faith the first time as if God didn't know until you ask again. Persistence and prayer. Why does prayer work? Is prayer like, is prayer like putting a coin in a Coke machine where you just put the right coin in and push the right button and the thing comes out. Or is it something that you remain involved in the process.

And so to summarize a number of points then making prayer constantly a part of my life not on an emergency basis but as life as usual understanding that that is God's choice of how we are to work with him. [inaudible comment Well the main two stages one was learning to spend a long time in solitude. That was a crucial. I learned that praying for long periods of time in

solitude both in their disciplinary effects and in terms of answers answers to prayer was the way you did it. And then I learned beyond that it is possible to pray without ceasing by practicing and I've done such things for example as to take the day and trained myself at every change of attention or location or occupation or a person I'm working with to take that to use that to remind myself to invoke the blessing of God on that situation on that person on that class whatever the situation.

So training myself to pray without ceasing goes hand in hand with spending long periods of time in solitude and prayer. I didn't have enough sense to understand what I was doing. I just worked my way into that and look back and looking back I said Well Jesus did that why maybe I should do it. You know but I didn't. This was just something that came to me by search and find seek and fail and try it again kind of method. But those two things are the most important. Of course the experience of keeping track of answers journaling as we sometimes say I don't in general journal but I do journal periodically with prayer and one of the reasons why I had to do that is because I find that my memory is tremendously short about prayer and I've actually found myself receiving something that I've forgotten I asked for.

And so journaling also helps gives a kind of continuity and confidence. I guess those three things I mentioned solitude learning to use now in that second stage Frank Laubach spoke book gave little book "game with minutes" it is the most helpful thing I ever came across. Game with Minot's Frank Laubach Laubach game with minutes. What Frank Laubach decided to do was a missionary Presbyterian missionary in Philippines was to try to turn his mind back to God once a minute and he knew he had studied enough of this of the mind or spirit to know that if you turn your mind to something it does not immediately disappear even if you go on to something else. It remains in the margin of your consciousness. And of course we all know this

if we just reflect on how we do such things as drive automobiles and sight read music and all kinds of things. We know that we can pay attention to a lot of different things in different ways in the same movement and Laubach decided on the strategy of turning his mind back to God once a moment and he had to learn how to do this because he failed badly when he first began to try it. Reading his experiments and his experience was helpful to me and trying to read that second part about praying without ceasing. The scripture says pray without ceasing. You have to make up your mind what that means and how it really does work. But I think that you can find that you can actually do it that you can pray without ceasing. It doesn't stop you from doing other things.

This gentleman back here had his hand up next. [inaudible question] Yes. Yes yes yes. Oh I think it's one of the most important things we can say we need to trace it to its sources and its sources are in a distortion of the gospel which is the gospel is about getting ready to die and that's all. Now if the Gospel is just about getting ready to die what are we going to do 'til then. And the trouble is Schaefer is addressing a context it's not new because I don't know if you but in chapel the thing I read commented on from William law is addressing the same thing when he's talking you said. Show me a reason why you should be pious when you pray and I'll show you a reason why you should be pious and everything you do. So the problem was the same. It's very deep into our history and it has to do with a long story that goes back at least within a few centuries after Christ where the control of the grace for the forgiveness of sins was thought to fall in the hands of the church and the church had a special dominion and if you wanted your sins forgiven you had to negotiate with them because they had it.

And then of course the Protestant Reformation changed that some but in a way which is discouraging to think about the outcome has been a message which has primarily to do with

forgiveness of sins and that only. I'm not knocking that we need the forgiveness of sins we must have done it is provided we trust Christ but it is provided in the context of a new life which is the one we live not special religious activities.

See even when we talk today about things like the priesthood of the believer we tend to think that means that any person can do what the clergy does. But if you read Luther for example you see he didn't mean that he meant that you were a priest if you were a plowboy or a milkmaid or anything else. Now we don't have plowboys and milkmaids but you can put it in the modern equivalent. So you're a priest when you are, whatever you're doing. It's only by shifting the message so that we understand that the Gospel is life in the kingdom of the heavens now by trusting Jesus Christ that is the gospel and of course it includes the forgiveness of sins. That's a part of what we trust Jesus with is our sins and the forgiveness of them and see if we think that's all there is to it then we are then we're faced with all these other things like the division between church and life between clergy and laity even within the clergy life. There's the there's the stuff that's properly clergy and then there's the stuff that maybe isn't it's just ordinary life. So we have to understand the Gospel differently to to make that continuity. And once we are we make that shift then we are prepared to be able to trust Christ and glorify God in everything that we do because we see that as a part of our eternal life. Not in the sense of earning it.

You know we we all have these bugaboos which are very serious about earning a perfection and effort and so on. Once you have dealt with the truth about that you have to recognize that earning isn't the only issue see grace as opposed to earning but it's not opposed to effort. Effort is another thing and the effort we put forth in faith as a truck driver as a teacher of Hebrew student and economics whatever it is that's that's all a part of our faith. Forget who was next. Yes. Yes please.

Willard: Questions and Answers

Speaker 3:

I'm taking a class called theology of Christian life and we're studying your book spirit of the disciplines-

Dallas Willard:

How's it going?

Speaker 3:

I really like it.

Dallas Willard:

Thank you.

Speaker 3:

... solitude... [inaudible]... grew up in a church where we... [inaudible]

Dallas Willard:

Yes. Yes.No I'm glad that for you to do it. Delighted that you would put it just that way because we really that's we can't talk out of anything else finally but our own experience and

what we're doing and I certainly don't hold myself as a model. There are a lot better people that you could look to for models perhaps but I'm glad to just tell you try to respond to your questions.

Let's see. I'm just trying to think let me let me take a couple of general kinds of issues like for example how many times a day you pray. Well there are two things I try to make sure of every day and one is that in the morning when I rise I explicitly in prayer take a time in which I commit the day to God and tell him that I cannot manage the day. I'm a child before him that I do not know what is going to come up. I know that the things I believe the things that are going to come up. I haven't the slightest capacity to deal with like coming here today and speaking to you all. I really believe that on the other hand because I know that I'm not the one that has to do it I have great freedom in that. But see I have so I have one time of the day where I'm very sure. Now I do not call it a quiet time. I'll tell you why. I find it or put it this way. Many people really do come in bondage to quiet time. I guess if I had to say that I'm really devout people really committed Christians. The one thing that they most commonly after a little talk will share with me is that they just can't have a quiet time and that's right. And I like to talk with them about a quiet time in the morning. It's almost impossible for most people in this culture. And if I if I want to invest in that I can have a 15 20 minute period. If you call a quiet time I don't want I want that type of intense commitment of the day to God.

Now then as far as quiet times for myself and I believe for most other people it works much better instead of trying to have 15 20 minutes half an hour every day to have two three or more days a week in which you have three hours where you're alone with God. You study you meditate you pray you enjoy beauty devote extensive time with some regularity. You know the law of the Sabbath is so important. And I encourage everyone to consider it because actually

God thought it would be a good idea for all of us to have one day out of seven one day out of seven which we did nothing did nothing. You did no work one day out of seven. And he thought so strongly about that that people who did not do it his chosen covenant people in the Old Testament paid a tremendous price for it. And I have to just remind you that that law is still on the books.

So what I would say here is and I try to practice this is if not a whole day a week at least substantial portions of two or three days a week. Now my life being what it is. I cannot run that on a schedule that I can plot out for the year. I have to handle it more on a week by week basis. But to make sure that I get that timing and not preparation for something just being with the Lord. Study singing hymns I love to sing hymns or just read them, poetry or just being quiet. Just go to a room and be quiet. Now in the matter of fasting. I try to follow and well I'll say a little more about the qualifications and I try to follow the old rule of the church and some degree been practiced in many ways twice a week a half day fast or a full day twice a week and not necessarily with no nothing no liquids but no solids. Sometimes complete fast. This is what I call disciplinary fasting and disciplinary fasting. It's like prayer. Sometimes you pray not for the Disciplinary effects but because you want to accomplish something for the Lord and the lives of others yourself or his kingdom. That isn't just a discipline. Fasting also isn't just a discipline like services is also not just intense but it has discipline ethics.

Now I have my own belief is that we need to fast in a disciplined way. I also will pass before special times and during special times of service and I do that to receive strength directly from God for that service. But you see if I haven't faster than a disciplinary way when I start to try to fast for some purpose I'll not be used to it. I'll just be thinking about how hungry I am or when are we going to eat. See all of the disciplines are like that you have to practice some to the

point where you don't think about them when you're doing and fasting is certainly to be like you remember Jesus taught in Matthew 6 that you fasted you were to fix yourself up. Wash your face do the hair so that you would not appear miserable. You remember he taught that. Now many people say well I'm going to be miserable. Why shouldn't I at least the parents are. But his understanding was different. He knew that once you practiced you would not be miserable.

I'll tell you some of the strongest times some of the most joyous times you will know are times when you're fasting when you fast in his service and you hear a disciplinary fasting is primarily to bring you into where you are content to be deprived and you remain sweet and strong under deprivation of any kind. That's training that the old masters knew that if you trained yourself with fasting you would also incidentally train you train yourself with reference to all of the other desires. Because you see the principle is the principle of the will. What you doing when you fast is you train yourself to be content in not doing what you want to do.

And that is one way of describing what is called the cross in the Gospels. The cross is an emblem of not doing what you want to do. You take the cross you resign your desires you rob them of their power to govern your life and you learn directly God's presence to your body. Like when Jesus says in Matthew 4 that he has meat to eat you know not of my meat is to do the will of the father because he's not just whistling. He's telling you something that is true that God directly. Ministers to the individual body and soul. And so go back to Deuteronomy and look at the teaching about fasting and man that will help you too so you pass fast into a disciplinary way. I will normally fast before and during times of intense service but on the other hand you see you should never allow fasting to interfere with hospitality. The old desert fathers learned a long time ago that if you were on a fast you had a friend who came to visit you did not prepare food and put up before them and sit and watch them eat. You joined in.

You can always start fasting and remember this fasting like all of the disciplines are not meritorious works. There are not laws. They are practices you follow to access the reality of God into your life. That's true of all of them they are to use the old phrase means of grace their ways of receiving the grace of God. And when you go on to others you see it much more quickly I think for our background as evangelicals for example the use of the word of God. Now the word of God is a substance and when we study and meditate and memorize and keep it's just like just breathing in the substance of God. Haven't you felt that you know you take a really great passage and you just wrap your soul around it just like taking in substance? And so all of the disciplines are like. I'm not sure how much I answered what you ask or not.

One other thing I want to mention that you said you were talking about how some people in this country they were successful and they don't fast and so you always want to be careful how you define success. See a lot of times we see people who are successful it appears and then we find later that there was a real shell there. There was not much reality. So our primary success is in our personal walk with God not in effects. Exterior effects though those are important. But that isn't the primary measure of success. I think this gentleman here with next.

Speaker 4: [inaudible question]

Dallas Willard:

Oh I believe it's very different. Yes. Well you see it isn't just a matter of your awareness. My belief is that we have to always distinguish with reference to God and Christ his presence and his manifest presence. And that is not just a difference of your awareness when he manifests

his presence. You will have a different awareness but it's not just something's happening in your head. And when we believe that generally speaking the practice of the disciplines is a way we have of being in the manifest presence of Christ. We don't cause it. No we invite it we put ourselves in position for it. But you cannot cause what another person does in any circumstance. You're not causing that's, I'm glad you're asking this question. You definitely are not causing it. Well let's say you're playing tennis and you lob the ball over do you cause the person to lob it back. That's right. [inaudible comment]

OK. Now what you want to understand I believe here it is when we're thinking about our relation to God. We don't want to just think about how what God can do. We want to think about how he chooses to do things. And of course God could open the heavens and sit on your head. But he's probably not going to do that and it's better for your head that he doesn't. See God has appointed certain ways in which we approach him. And that's that's very important for us to understand because we really he is so great that that it's necessary and a great part of that is our desire to approach him. I don't know who here last night were talking about how spiritual reality manifests itself when it wants to and it wants to when others want it so God manifest himself in Jesus Christ in a very tender way which allowed people who wanted to reject him and still reject but allow those who wanted to come to him to come to him.

Now the Bible for example sits in human history. I can tell anyone you want to find God. Just go to the Bible and the right attitude of love desire to know and to learn you find him that it will jump on you. So I mean at the root of your question I think it's an issue of does what we do really matter. Does it really counts. And I say it does and it does because God has chosen that it should count in that way. So for example coming to the sacrament Lord something that's a tremendous discipline and it's also a way that is appointed by God for us to approach. And just

when you begin to study the disciplinary effects why is it powerful but it's powerful because God acts in conjunction with what we have to do something. I think the gentleman blue shirt was next and trying to keep a line here. Oh OK we'll get squeeze. [inaudible question]

Well I can't I can only deal schematically with that. But my identity is as a disciple of Jesus Christ. That means that I am here to participate in his mission to the world and in doing that I share. In doing that I share in the eternal life which he gives to human beings in his person. Now that's the one side now looking at the other side. I come at it from the fact that I am a certain kind of person I am a human being of male species. Born in a certain place a certain time and so on. I have certain capabilities and from my point of view where I enter the world given my family my training and everything I see certain things that appear good to do to honor God and to love my neighbor. And for me that has primarily focused itself on the one the one activity of teaching not just teaching about religion but being a teacher in my world as a Christian.

So then now then of course I have the other parts of family and all of those things and they are important they are crucial to my life too. But they share in that mission. So within the context of a person such as I with a desire to do the good which I see primarily as teaching then I begin to make my decisions about schedule and beyond that it's very difficult for me to say anything specific. Other than that I weighed the possibilities for service that come my way and try within the integrity of my own health and well-being of my family to do the best I can to accomplish the most I can with the propagation of the truth of the Gospel of Truth generally. I'm sorry I don't really know how to go beneath that.

Rather than start talking about particular things for example coming here my wife and I have discussed this openly and she has told me over and over it's much more important to come to talk to people like you than it is to do a Sunday morning service. So.What. How did that come

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to a kind of decision? I rarely take Sunday morning services and so I do want to go into details that much but it's just less profitable to do that than it is to come here. And so those are the kinds of that's the way the schedule works. Now I'm not really good at this as I'd like to be but I do have some friends now that are helping me with it and Jane has been working with me. I'm getting better I think.

Announcer:

Thank you for coming.