

Pursuing the Heart of God

By Dallas Willard

Speaker 1:

Several years ago, uh one summer my brother and I had the opportunity to rent a sailboat on uh beautiful Lake Tahoe. It was one of those uh gorgeous summer afternoons. It was a clear day, the breeze was steady perhaps just a few gusts of wind but it didn't take us very long before we discovered that the sailboat we rented was not one of the most stable boats we had experienced. In fact, it was a boat that had a very very short center board. If you're familiar with sailboats, they really require that uh very uh sizable center board in order to be stable in the water. Well we were about two miles off shore when all of the sudden an enormous gust of wind caught the sail, flipped the sailboat completely over and as they say turtled the craft. It was completely over and and only the uh the uh hull of the boat was showing. Uh I went for the boat heh as I was thrown off into the water, wanted to keep it from being blown away because it was rented in my name [laughter]. My uh my brother went for our belongings, our ice chest, our tennis shoes and two massive eight foot beach towels.

Well it wasn't long before the enormous weight of the beach towels combined with the frigid waters of Lake Tahoe began to pull him down, nearly took him under. Uh, he paddled around for oh I guess about fifteen or twenty minutes before another power boat came along and rescued us both right at our boat and we were in good shape. But it was that heavy towel that

almost took him under. Uh, to me as I was thinking about that experience it's a bit of a picture, of a picture of the life of a believer. Uh, there're hazards in what even appear to be innocent experiences of life. Those moments when we least expect it that can be very hazardous. And there are no ends of things that have the potential to threaten us and to drag us down spiritually, as it were. This afternoon I'd like to focus our thoughts on uh Matthew, I'm sorry on Psalm 119\, Psalm 119. Though this particular Psalm is not explicitly directed toward the spiritual formation process, I believe that it, it focuses our attention on some essentials that are absolutely necessary for spiritual growth. The things that you and I need to cling to with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our soul, with all of our strength.

And likewise this passage warns us against some attitudes, some behaviors, and some kinds of things that tend to pull us under. Those things that sabotage our growth, as we are attempting to grow into likeness to our savior Jesus Christ. It's a rich summary of some of the requisites that are at the core of spiritual growth. We, we see in this passage first of all, the absolute primacy of God's role in the formation process. God is right at the very center of spiritual development. This is an important counterforce I believe, an irrevocable counter force to the ego-centric grip that this age seems to have on us. Uh, we seem to be pressed from all sides with the notion that somehow we can make it alone. Uh, we need to be reminded even as scholars, as theologians, as teachers, as fellow pilgrims in this uh process of growth into Christ-likeness that God really is at the very center of what you and I do and experience in spiritual growth. In this psalm we read that God hears, that he turns eyes away, that he opens them, that he revives, he renews, he teaches, he causes understanding.

This particular psalm just kind of rivets our attention on the particular significance, particularly of the law of God. In fact the word of God is emphasized in 173 of the 176 verses in

this passage. Means it's pretty important. And it's as though it were being drilled into the consciousness of the believer with with punctuated regularity and punctuated importance. It is essential for our spiritual growth and formation. So this psalm speaks of the primacy of the word of God as a source of essential nutrients for our growth in him. But, formation, I believe as we look at this passage is not passive. Uh it's not a neutral experience in which God just simply does his work in our heart and our life and simply brings about growth. Psalm 119 reminds us and unmistakably accentuates the fact that you and I have a responsibility in this process.

The child of God has a role to play uh and this too is an essential element in the age in which we are fond of playing victim, of saying it's not my responsibility, it's someone else's purpose. As Christians sometimes why doesn't God do this? But we do have a part of the responsibility for the process of our own growth. And our part is not simply a cognitive portion of that process is so frequently assumed to focus solely on this aspect is to truncate our growth. Instead the biblical concept that comes unmistakably out of Psalm 119 is that is that formation is a holistic process. And that's the focus of this Psalm. There are three core areas in 119 into which we might categorize our responsibilities. We uh we see here, at least I would suggest that there is a cognitive dimension that's very important. We're told to meditate, to learn, to remember, to consider diligently. But it goes beyond the cognitive as I have said there's also the affective component of our spiritual growth. And those who are serious about spiritual growth are to love the law; they're to long for God's word. They are to delight, to take particular joy and delight in God's word. All of that part of what we might call the affective portion or element of our experience.

Then there is a a category in this Psalm that I would suggest might be the conative. Those behaviors that involve acts of the will. Uh, we're to seek the Lord and his precepts. We're to

choose his way, we're to observe his laws and to choose to walk in them. All of these seem to have the characteristic of intentionality. There is some intention. There is some conscious, willful choosing that must take place in this process. It's not just simply passive absorbing as God pours out the nutrients. It also suggests that there is an intense, radical loyalty too that is to characterize Godly living. That suggests some some clear intentionality that is part of our part in this process. Alongside what we're to do we're also told the things not to do. We're told not to turn aside. We're admonished to avoid being deceitful. Not to allow double-mindedness. We're told not to forget God's word. All of those kinds of things which would tend to drag us under, that have the potential for disrupting and sabotaging our spiritual growth. It's like the wet towel in the cold water that tends to just drag us down and encumber our process of growth in Christ.

Very interesting to me in this passage how prominent a place the heart is given in the process of spiritual growth. And I believe that's because spirituality and spiritual formation is not so much an issue of outward conformity as it is interiority. Uh, despite many popular programs of discipleship that we might point to today, current programs emphasizing the things that we do, the outward appearances perhaps more than the interior reflection. We're told in Psalm 119 that our heart is to be inclined, that with the entire heart God's precepts are to be observed. And it is God who enlarges the heart. It's also very interesting to me in this in this very lengthy passage to see the prominent role of suffering in the life of a believer. The essential role of the experience of pain in our life is underscored in this psalm, and it's an area that you and I would rather dismiss or avoid I believe isn't it? There's I believe not one of us here who would raise their hand and say yeah I'll sign up for that. It's not part of what you and I are naturally inclined to and yet we know that suffering teaches us the very stupidity of wandering aside. And it helps prevent our hearts, as the psalmist describes it, from being covered with fat. It prohibits us from developing an

insensitivity to the things of God. It prohibits and incapability of receiving the spiritual truth that God has in store for us. So suffering is important for us as believers.

I'll never recall uh an evening which probably fits into the category of suffering which most of you here in this auditorium could relate to. Happened a number of years ago when our daughter was four years old. Uh, my wife had been out shopping with our daughter. Our daughter was strapped up strapped in to the front seat of the car and as my wife was pulling into the driveway, daughter unbuckled the seat belt as she was fond of doing before the car came to a complete stop, and then for some reason reached over and popped the door. Well all of that happened just as the car was turning. Jennifer tumbled out of the car, out onto the driveway and Karen ran right over here cuz she tumbled right under the car. Well Karen immediately stopped the car, jumped out and went to see what had happened and Jennifer actually had her leg resting underneath the rear tire of the car, full weight of the back end of that portion of the car was on her ankle. You can imagine the kinds of things that were going through my wife's head at the time because she was recalling at that moment how one year earlier Jennifer had shattered that very ankle, five bones had been broken, just completely shattered had been set the wrong way, had then required surgery, lengthy healing process and she could just see this whole process right over again.

Well she calmly got in the car uh moved the car forward and she rushed, about that time I came home and we rushed Jennifer to the hospital. Everything was fine; the X-rays showed she was doing just great. We got back into our little '65 Volkswagen and we start getting onto the freeway and we're on the onramp for the freeway returning home when Jennifer began to have a panic attack. And so I pulled over on the on ramp way over tot eh side of the road as we dealt with this before we made our journey home. As uh as was sitting there and my wife and I were

trying to calm Jennifer, I noticed in the rearview mirror that there was a car coming right for us at incredible speed and sure enough just what I had imagined in my worst imagination he hit us dead on. Turned out he was a drunk driver and he had it up to about 55 miles an hour before he realized what was happening and and uh caught us full on as he tried to veer his car away. Well all of this served to unsettle the whole family as you can imagine. But to complicate all of that, I didn't even have time to to help the family work through all of this because the very next day I was scheduled for a conference in the Mid-West. And so they were left to to carry on the process of dealing with the aftermath of all of this. I'm not certain of the specifics that God was trying to teach in this situation, still don't know for sure, but I remember a lot of pain. And I also remember increased sensitivity to the work of God in our life at that particular time.

And that really is what God has in mind for the moments, the hours, the days, for some even the weeks the months and even the years of the suffering process. It's all part of the refining process. But, it also does for us like it did for the psalmist. It tends to drive us to our heavenly father. Well Psalm 119 is a rather full-orbed overview for some of the essentials for spiritual formation. But it's also a reminder for us that it's not enough, and it's not just a matter of simply putting in time in the Christian life because God is not so much interested in our chronology as he is in our wholeness. Let's pray. Father in heaven we give you thanks for your goodness in our life. We claim the reality of that goodness knowing that even when there is pain in our life it's part of the ultimate good that you desire to produce in us. Father as we think of the importance of your word, the centrality of your work in our life, we're both humbled but we're also encouraged, because if we were left to our own devices uh exclusively we know where that would lead us. Father as we enjoy this time of stimulation and interaction today, we ask that you would help to refine our thoughts, that you would guide our thinking. May we become clearer and develop an

even deeper commitment to the process of spiritual growth in you. For we pray this in Christ's name, amen.

Speaker 2:

Do I see Dallas? [laughter] You're a dear friend. Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and I will confirm it that I will keep thy righteous ordinances. I am exceedingly afflicted. Revive me, oh Lord, according to thy word. The words from Psalm 119\.

Thank you very much Dennis, appreciate those. The Plenary address is going to be given, as I mentioned by Professor Dallas Willard, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California. Not only is professor Willard a leading philosopher who has had a profound influence through his own work, his own writings, also in the training of a host of evangelical philosophers who are indeed shaping much of the modern thinking. But he has also had a profound effect upon the evangelical world in calling its pursuit to spirituality to be grounded in a thoroughly Biblical anthropology and Soteriology.

Two books in particular have had a profound effect on the Church's search for authentic sanctification. Through his book "In Search of Guidance" Dr. Willard attempted to make real and clear the intimate quality of life in Christ. As he says, it is a conversational relationship with God. But that relationship is not something that automatically happens. We did not receive it through passive infusion. In his second book, "The Spirit of the Disciplines" Professor Willard explains how disciples of Jesus can effectively interact with the grace and spirit of God to access fully the provisions and character intended for us in the gift of eternal life. Therefore the has

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recently completed the manuscript which becomes the third and what could become the most profoundly influential of these, of this trilogy, tentatively entitled "Kingdom Come; Jesus' Gospel for Life and Christian Discipleship" The executive board of the far west region of ETS has decided the theme for this year's annual meeting should explore this renewed interest in the spiritual life. Hence the title for this year's theme, "Pursuing the Heart of God; Rethinking Sanctification and Spiritual Formation" Uh, we really could think of no one better to give the Plenary Address on this theme than Dallas Willard, who had graciously agreed to join us today. So please join us in welcoming one whom I consider my tutor, Professor Dallas Willard.

[applause]

Dallas Willard:

Thank you very much for those very generous words and um I'm delighted to have an opportunity to speak to you. I hope you will remember that technically I'm not a theologian uh or a New Testament scholar and uh so I am here to learn as well as to speak. I hope it is within the logic of the Plenary Address that we might have a few moments at the end for discussion if that's possible. But I'm very grateful to have an opportunity to speak to you because I know that you are the teachers of a large part of the church and to have the occasion to speak with you uh is to both have the occasion to learn from you from what you're learning in our role and possibly to have chance to say some things that might have a ripple effect across the community of Christ.

Now, I hope you will understand that as a philosopher when I look at a topic such as you've chosen, "Pursuing a Heart of God; Rethinking Sanctification and Spiritual Formation" I'd

like to just get on those words and say now what does that mean? Pursing the Heart of God. Um, one thing it might mean is having God's favor. Uh standing before God in a way and living before God in a way that his favor uh comes upon us in a special way. I realize that we live by the favor of the God and the grace of God, but when we have these wonderful words such as in the great benediction; The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. See that's a special, that's a special thing isn't that? And I think pursuing the heart of God uh certainly that's a part of what we have in mind. I think actually more importantly uh the words of Jesus uh seek first the kingdom of God and his kind of righteousness. uh that's more perhaps what we need to address.

We need to ask ourselves the question "How do you do that?" How do you seek the kingdom of God and his kind of rightness or goodness, his Dikaiosune So often I think when we hear that verse we only hear the part about seeking the kingdom of God. But you can't seek the kingdom of God without seeking to have his kind of Dikaiosune. Now I have to deal with that word in a lot of courses that I teach because that happens to be the main phrase or main word in various forms that shows up in Plato's "Republic" often very badly translated as justice. Um, it really is not like anything that we would call justice today. I often paraphrase it as being a really good person. I think that to today's student especially does convey the meaning that is intended. Certainly that's what, that's what Plato and Socrates were interested in. I think it's important to realize that when we find uh the word Dikaiosune in the teachings of Jesus we're looking at a word that has a long history in the world of which Jesus was a part. And Jesus in his teachings addresses the basic issues that face human beings. And these come together under two simple headings. What is it to be really well off? And the teaching of blessedness. Who is blessed? And

uh we understand that blessedness means life in the kingdom of God. No matter what else happens, if you live in that kingdom, you are blessed.

And if you will forgive me for being very short in summary about it let me just say I believe the kingdom of God is best understood simply as the effective range of God's will. That is where what God wants to be done is what is done. And to seek to live in the kingdom of God is to seek to live in the range of God's effective will where what he wants done is done. So we seek the kingdom of God, you see that it comes together very naturally with seeking to have the kind of heart that God has and when we think of pursuing the heart of God, I want to today have upmost in mind the idea of having the kind of heart that God has. Of having the family resemblance if you wish that you see so beautifully developed in Matthew 5:21 and following to the end of where he says, he speaks of us being the children of our father who is in heaven. That means having that nature of God, the very heart of God that has come to us as disciples of Jesus Christ.

So now, with that in mind I move on to the second phrase and that is rethinking sanctification and I am glad you put rethinking before that because obviously the old thinking has kind of run out on us. And um it's interesting when you travel in the uh sort of circuits I do and you go into a lot of churches where there used to be teachings about holiness. And you ask what is holiness now? What is sanctification now? Or take the old fashioned word modification. What is your program of mortification at this church? [laughter] Uh usually the best they can think of is some program of embarrassment because that's the only sense of mortification they understand any longer. But still we need to rethink that, and I want to try to say in a rather formal way what I think sanctification is. And then of course spiritual formation has become almost a contemporary uh rallying cry of some sort. Uh, I think actually it is stepping into a vacuum that

has been left by a series of moves in the uh in the understanding of the churches. I shall speak generally and not worry about exceptions. Um the understanding of the churches as to what spiritual growth amounts to. And as I see it we have in my lifetime gone through uh two and are now in a third and very important phase. The first phase was the one is was, well I became conscious understand that is that, to use an old phrase, the the only sacrament is the word of God. If preaching at you and teaching at you didn't do it, nothing else would. And the idea was you went to church and uh perhaps the spirit would fall or the power of the word would be so great that you would be changed into the likeness of the image of Christ. And at a certain point we just, it just became clear that that wasn't so.

That while it is true that great change can happen in some people that way and sometimes great experiences occur that make a great deal of difference in the lives of people still, it does not reliably transform the people who sit under the ministry of the word as we now know it uh into the heart of God. It just doesn't do it. And a lot of people were left in a very bad position and many times these were even ministers. Their minds and their spirits and their hearts were often twisted and much wrong in them and we all know these stories I think too well. And I uh the second movement was the tendency which came, began to grow when I was in undergraduate school and has continued to try to help this by psychological studies and psychological means and as you know psychology has become a very great and important part of the work of the church and it's institutions and certainly saying that here at Biola is like bringing coals to Newcastle because you are leaders here in that field, a very important kind of thing. And yet I think now we come to the third stage where we have to say that even that needs some help.

And what we have been seeing now for the last fifteen or so years is the increasing attempt to recover more traditional methods of seeking the Lord, of of stepping into change

towards Christ likeness. And this has become alarming to many evangelicals. I was recently uh speaking in a context where the the the motivation of the whole series on evangelical spirituality was why are all of our people going off to these Catholic places for retreats and finding spiritual directors from people who wear funny clothes and things of that sort. Uh I'm really not alarmed by that myself but many people are and there is a question isn't there about our own teaching and our own ministry uh if people have to go to others for help.

Now actually I'm not troubled about that at all. I think it is an important move. God did not go to sleep between the time Paul's head rolled and the time Martin Luther nailed the theses on the Wittenberg door. He was doing very important work and we need to recover that, and we need to bring it up to date and we need to welcome everyone who confesses faith in Christ in that joint effort. And so we're left with uh a situation which I think has much that is promising about it and uh everything every time you have situation like that you have much danger and much trouble and so we have to be alert, we have to be thoughtful. Above all, I think, we have to return to the biblical basis of teaching about spiritual formation. And we have to be very careful how we use our language and try to relate what we're saying as closely as possible to the teachings of the scripture.

Now, you know um one that possesses a problem for many people because if we start talking about spiritual disciplines, there isn't a chapter in Romans on spiritual disciplines right. And many people are troubled about this and I explain that to people by saying well there's not a chapter there for the same reason there's not a chapter there on what to eat for breakfast. Everyone knew what to eat for breakfast. You don't need a chapter in the Bible on that. And in the context of the New Testament and at other times you didn't need a chapter on spiritual disciplines because you simply knew what they were from observing the life that was present in

the church and in her leaders, in the teachings that were given. People did not need to be told in particular to do, to follow the practices that Jesus himself followed because they observed it and they understood its importance.

And when Paul comes along and says things like follow me as I follow Christ or the things that you've seen or heard in me that do and the God of peace will be with you and so on. Everyone knew what that was. But see we cannot claim that now because we have been through an interlude in the history of Christ's people in America especially where that was not true. You could not learn how to pray by observing people. You could not learn how to go into solitude by observing people. You could not learn how to fast by observing people. Now some things you could. For example study we're very good at, especially the tradition I was raised in. I mean, Bible Study you could really learn how to do that by observing people, and that's wonderful. But see I had to learn what else you needed in order to make that an effective part of your whole life.

There was an emphasis on prayer, and I had good teaching on that. But it was still a mystery frankly, and no one ever took me individually and taught me how to pray and what happens when you pray and how to grow in pray- until much later in my life there were some people that did that. So you see the problem then I think is to make very sure that in our context we can get a teaching that is derived from the scripture and adequate to our lives to help us move into the heart of God. All of us should aspire to have that heart. And I think everyone, even most people outside of the church does aspire to something far higher than they realistically believe they can accomplish and actually I may say something about that right at the end if we have time. Uh but our problem is to make it real. To make it accessible. To not just read the idealism of the gospels and of Paul's letters or of 1 Corinthians 13 and essentially walk off and say I don't

know, what do you do about that? How do you come to be a person possessed by the love that is described in 1 Corinthians 13? See that's where we need practical advice.

Well I'll talk a little bit about that but I want to focus mainly on these two issues of what is sanctification, try to get us a really good working idea and when secondly what is spiritual formation? And then some things about what we do uh in the process of spiritual formation. I'd like to use a couple of passages uh from your New Testament, both from Paul to to give us a picture of what sanctification looks like uh in um the scripture. First Romans 8, and if you would especially pay attention to the emphasis on the mind uh in these verses I think that will help. Paul says in Romans 8:3, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh." That is at the very place that sin thought it had its best shot. "in order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit. I believe that's a description of sanctification. "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh" And now this moves to the inside of sanctification, what makes it run. "The mind is set on the things of the spirit for those who are according to the spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death. The mind set on the spirit is life and peace."

That is sanctification. Life and peace. Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, it does not subject itself to the Law of God is not even able to do so, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. They are operating from a set of resources that simply do not allow you to live a life that is pleasing to God. However, you're not in the flesh but in the spirit if indeed the spirit of God dwells in you. But if everyone does- but if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. So I think verse 11 pulls this all together. "If the spirit

of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies", so your body is actually going to have a different kind of life in it through the spirit who indwells you. And verse 13 "If by the spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." So you see here two sources of life. One, from what I will just simply call the natural powers of the embodied, socialized human self. The natural powers. There is nothing wrong with these powers in themselves. They're good, God made them. But when they try to run on their own, they become hostile to God. They're not made to run that way. And the mind, the emotions uh the body and the social context are all inhabited with tendencies to do those things which are an insult and affront to a Holy God who wished us to live a life of love and peace in his kingdom.

Now, lets' move out of the the pretty- uh the thin air there to a very concrete sort of teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4\). And Paul here is uh in this very direct and street level treatment of the Christian life, uh he is telling them in chapter 4 verse 1 how they ought to walk and please God. You're actually doing it, he says, but do it more and more. And uh verse three. "This is the will of God, your sanctification." Uh so God wants us to lead that kind of life where the animation and direction and sufficiency come from not the flesh but the spiritual reality of Christ in us. The reality of his kingdom in his person. Now, Paul comes right down to the level where we live, that you abstain from sexual immorality. Uh, this is a major part of the problem in a fallen world. Sexuality has been twisted, it has been misdirected, and in that form it occupies the minds and the bodies and the souls of people so that in order to deal with the separate kind of life that we're called to as sanctified people in Christ, we have to deal with that perhaps first uh Jesus deals with this at length and he deals also with anger, a very fundamental dimension of our life in the flesh as we know it. And if you pull out anger and lust alone, two of the major uh issue sin

sanctification. If you are able to step free from them, then your life is going to be transformed almost beyond recognition. You will not be responding and moving like human beings normally do in this world and you know I'm sure enough of that just from your experience. You know what a difference that makes.

Now I'm not talking about repression, I'm not talking about repressing anger or repressing desire. I'm talking about how to learn to live in such a way that they do not pull us away from the life that God gives us in his kingdom. And of course the mixture of anger and sexual desire is doubly potent. Well, God goes on to say that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. And I do believe the reading there is referring to the body. For the body is the tagger you are writing. From the time you and I come to a mature consciousness, our body has been formed in a world that has been given over to rebellion against God, to the pursuing of lusts and anger so that by the time we as it were, I often think it's life is very like these bucking broncos. They pin them up and get you in the saddle, then they throw open the gate. Except in life, they don't even hold it for you to get on. I mean when you touch the saddle the thing is already ten feet in the air, uh and uh we don't get the controls of the rocket until it's way off course. So you see that's what it means to be dead to trespasses and sins, as Paul calls it. It means to be already out of control. And so that body is is the is the project to retrain that body uh without going out of the world and becoming a hermit, remaining in the world but finding the practices that can bring the body back around to the side of Christ. You see when Jesus said to his uh sleepy friends the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, that was a very analytic statement. It was not like saying if you had the sense God gave a goose you'd stay awake. It was not a scolding. It was a very analytic statement. Their spirits were willing, but of course their whole person is more than their spirit. Their flesh was weak. And the intent now is

to bring the whole person around to the point where everything is working in subordination to the spirit. See we find ourselves, when we get on the bucking bronco body first, soul next, spirit next, God last. And so much of our religion you see keeps that order. We're serving our bodies and our souls and we're trying to come around and get a little help from God with our projects. But of course the preaching of the gos- [piece missing] -to become a transformed spiritual body. That's what it's called for. But it can only do that as it is subordinate to God, spirit, soul, and then body. And then you have a wonderful harmony that comes out of that. And Paul is, I believe, talking about that when he speaks of knowing how to possess your vessel in sanctification and honor. Uh skipping a few verses, he goes on to say in verse nine, now as to the love of the brethren you have no need anyone write to you for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. You see that's sanctification continued and brought to the level of neighbor love generally, to love one another, to love the brothers and sisters especially in the fellowship of the redeemed. And Paul acknowledges that they're good at that and he just wants them to be better. But look finally at verse 11, and this is an essential part of our sanctification, of having the heart of God. And make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and to attend to your own business and work with your hands just as we have commanded you.

Now what an interesting uh capstone really to this treatment that starts out with lusts out of control, the need to bring them back into subjection to Christ and to the kingdom of God, moves on to the love of neighbor and then, be quiet. Tend to your own business. Work with your hands. Now, may I just say to you because I don't have time to say much more about that, this is the kingdom of God. This verse is talking about living in the kingdom of God. Your own business is God's business. Whatever you're called to do and what's given to you in your family and indeed in your body and in your place and space and time, in your work. That is God's

business. You see, the kingdom gospel invites us to bring our little kingdom into God's kingdom. And to bring our to mind our business, to work with our hands. Paul understood as perhaps few others have in the tradition of Christian teaching how important the ordinary things of life were that these were a part of sanctification. That's why in Colossians 3:17 he has that wonderful conclusion "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the father by him." You see that's everything. That's sanctification. To do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is to do it as if Jesus were doing it. It's to do it on behalf of Jesus. It is to take your kingdom into his kingdom.

Now then we go back to the teaching. Seek first the kingdom of God, and his kind of goodness and you see if we reserve that just to the special moments of sexual temptation are we going to love our obnoxious neighbor or whatever it is, we will have missed most of it. It really comes home in this little verse. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we have commanded you. Now, with all of that scripture in the background let me just say in a rather formal way what I believe sanctification to be and we will have time for you to respond to this in a few minutes. I believe that sanctification is a consciously chosen, a consciously chosen and sustained relationship to God and I would hyphenate it God with Christ. A consciously chosen and sustained relationship with God with Christ in which one is able to do and routinely does what they know to be right before God. In which one is able to do- and of course it will be a miracle wouldn't it? And the words we were given in the devotion were so appropriate I mean this is the work of God in which we are able to do and we're not able to do that outside of that relation and we routinely do what we know to be right before God. Does simply that. Obedience. But obedience is always the same as fulfillment. And you can use either word for it as long as you understand that the other one goes along with

it. Fulfillment is not a vacation from Holiness, and Holiness is not a frustration to fulfillment. It is the way of fulfillment.

You see when God gives us his commandments and when Jesus teaches us even more deeply in those commandments he is giving us wisdom, the wisdom of God, and we cannot understand these things on our own. The history of the human race proves that. We're not meant to do it on our own of course. That's why we can't do it on our own we're not built to do it on our own. We cannot understand the things that we ought to do. And if we could, we would not be able to do them on our own. So the relationship is the key. Sanctification I believe is not an experience though many experiences may be involved in the path toward and in sanctification. I think that many quarters of our own religious culture places far too much in experiences though I certainly think experiences are very important but the main tradition I was raised in was a revivalist tradition, and the idea was that if you were, if you were just there when the divine storm hit, you would be transformed. And then there are other versions of that that are more in the Charismatic tradition, and I don't want to deny that those experiences are important uh but generally speaking I advise anyone not to seek experiences but to seek the Lord, to seek to know the word of God in the reality of their everyday life. And Psalm 119 is just gorgeous with what that means, and how that works, we'll say a little bit more about that in a moment.

I don't believe sanctification is a status, if we mean by status something that leaves ordinary life untouched. And I've heard much teaching in my lifetime about that, the idea that positional you are sanctified and I believe that there is an important element of truth to that because being sanctified since it's a relationship to God means that he recognizes me in that special relationship and God pays attention to me and he thinks about me. The Psalmist says thy thoughts about me just and that see that's that personal relationship. So it is a status, but it is not

one which leaves ordinary life untouched. It is one which involves the moment by moment transformation of ordinary life. And then thirdly it is not an outward form. It is not an outward form and uh whether it means uh some special form of as we now say spirituality and many of them have been tremendously beneficial and have much good in them, you know we speak of Benedictine spirituality, Quaker spirituality, uh some of um my associates are trying to develop something called Baptist spirituality, I'm a little frightened about that um but uh on the other hand we need something um [laughter] hehe. So but you see the problem is it tends to look too much like an outward thing, and uh uh that is not that is not the heart of God, that is not uh sanctification.

Sanctification is a heart conscious heart walk with God in Jesus Christ. It is what Jesus was saying to the woman at the well. God is seeking those who would worship him in spirit and in truth. At the level of the spirit there can be nothing but truth. You cannot lie without your body. There can be nothing but truth, and that's where God calls us to that, face to face relationship. I believe we should understand that this applies to moral matters, when I say they routinely do what they know to be right before God, I mean moral matters. That um in that sustained relationship, the ordinary well known moral temptations with reference to things such as the Ten Commandments cover in their last division from honoring our father and mother on down. Uh we are unable to do that. We want to do it and we learn how to do it in the relationship of sanctification. Uh certainly it applies to religious matters, the things which we would call sins which today we don't think of as moral matters, though centuries ago they were thought of as primary moral matters, like our attitude toward God, whether or not we worshiped him, uh old moralists ought treat that as one of the main divisions of moral duties is our duties to God. Duties to God, duties to others, duties to ourselves. That's not a hot topic of conversation now in moral

theory, uh our duties to God, but that's a major part of what is included in sanctification. We simply are able to do those things we know to be right in that connection. I think also we need to include the prudential areas. Areas where it is not sin and it is not immoral but it is unwise and we see many people suffer badly in these areas, finances, uh health, uh living arrangements; uh there too we need the power to do the things we want to do and not do the things that we want not to do. And uh much of our life actually turns out to be hindered if we are not wise in those areas. We need to have wise counsel, wise intentions, and then we need that walk with God to both free us and empower us to do the things that we know to be right in those areas. Uh many many important choices fall there.

So now let me go back and state the uh definition um what is sanctification? A consciously chosen and sustained relationship to God with Christ in which one is able to do and routinely does what they know to be right before God. It's just simple doing the things that we know to be right. Now, if you know much about human life you know how uncommon it is to find anyone who does that. And uh much of our religious teachings abandons us to a life of failure uh and uh does not give us good teaching and now we want to move on uh quickly to why that is. Uh our problem is that we have to have the renewal of the inner nature of the self. And I mean by that primarily uh the things that occupy our mind, the things that we think of. Another thing, another reason why psalm 119 is so powerful is because it's so strong on that issue of where my mind is. It fills the mind with the law. Because the law is so good. One of the verses says my heart is crushed with longing for your law see. Now you in that you see you don't see legalism. uh you don't see uh formalism and uh phariseeism. You see the inward heart just longing to be one with the heart of God. And that that inner reality is what we have to change if we are going to step into sanctification. Spiritual formation means the formation of the heart or

will, I believe that is the human spirit but in the time we have I can't do much with that those general issues about the parts of the self but spiritual formation is the formation of the heart or will in such a way that there naturally comes from it the deeds of Christ. This naturally comes from that, the deeds of Christ.

Now, you may believe that's impossible and uh fine uh I don't know how else you can approach this. The renewal of the heart is absolutely fundamental. Jesus' teaching was, were that a bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit and a good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit. It is very hard for a fine apple tree to bring forth little naughty sour apples, very hard. In fact it's impossible because its inner nature is set against that. And uh when we look at the inside of the self we can see why the deeds that come out of it are the ones that come out of it. The heart that is formed after Christ's heart is the one that chooses to think the kinds of thoughts that he would think, and to feel the kinds of feelings. And because the power of the gospel of Christ has come into that heart through the mind, it now as excepting of that power, the spirit comes alive and it is actually possible to begin to move in the direction of Christ's likeness. The outcome effects what one naturally thinks of, and now this to me is the very heart of spiritual formation. What does one naturally think of, where is one's mind? As one goes through the day. What is before the mind? What does one believe and belief means what you're ready to act as if it were true, right? What are you, what do you automatically believe, what do you hope for, what do you fantasize about, what do you fear? Also such things as where do you turn for rest and enjoyment. See that where I turn for rest and enjoyment is a major indicator of the condition of my heart. And um that that that leaves a lot of stuff out in our culture folks, frankly. And uh some of it is uh perhaps not as bad as others uh but for example if you're constantly running replays of Seinfeld in your mind, you are not going to be equipped to deal with life on the basis of the kingdom of God.

Now does that mean you shouldn't watch Seinfeld well... just don't fill your mind with it ok. And Seinfeld is very innocent compared to what you mainly have to look at. The news is worse than the programs you know. So you have to think about what is, what do you furnish you mind with and then bodily what are you ready to do, what is your body ready to do. Uh this is a very humbling kind of thing uh you remember the case with Peter. Uh, Jesus was teaching Peter very carefully and Peter announced his intentions and Jesus never doubted his intentions but he told him what he was going to do. He said you'll deny me. And you have a great lesson here in the power of the body because when Peter denied he was acting from his embodied social self. And when the little girl said you're one of them his body just said I'm not. He didn't run that through his head. If he had run it through his head, he might have at least paused. It took quite a while for it to get to his head, that he had even done it. And you would think well he was told and then he did it and then having been told and done it he did it again and then having been told and done it and done it he did it again where was his mind? His mind was not running his body. His body was running his body. His soul, in the social context you see that's the heart of the spiritual nature of the human being because that spiritual nature moves out through the body and the environment it as it were farms out action to its body. And that's good because if it weren't for that we couldn't live. I mean think of what you have to go through when you're trying to learn to speak a language.

You have to pay so much attention to your lips and your mouth and your nose and all of that that you can't even speak if you could you couldn't. Cuz you have to think about it so much. And of course when you learn the language then you just say it, see. And uh driving a car, conversing with people, almost anything you do. You see God gave us our body to play that role but now then it has been taken over with the wrong thing, and very little of what is in our spirit

gets directly translated into our actions. So the process of spiritual formation is one that begins at the inside in the heart, takes the intentions of the heart, stands in the personal relationship to God, and on the basis of that, redirects the body and the social conduct in such a way that they become transformed. So that instead of automatically doing the things that are wrong, now you automatically do the things that are right. And that will perhaps be a challenge to you, you may reject that, but I think what I have to say is precisely that we are looking at a process which brings the body and the social context around to a situation where the spirit is willing and the flesh is right at its side.

Now of course that's going to affect the social context. And there are a lot of things that you will be prepared not to do as well as to do in the social context. The parable of the good Samaritan among many other things is a study of social context. And when you look at the response of the Samaritan, the most striking phrase in that is he had compassion upon him. Why didn't the other guys have compassion on him? See that gets into their social context, their body, what they were not ready to do what they were ready to do. And we have to understand that spiritual formation reaches into that area of life which goes far beyond what we can think up and do consciously at the moment. And retrains our body, re- uh there are many social contexts we won't be in and there are many social contexts we will be in in a different way. And all of the issues that agitate us about fame and money and reputation and discrimination and all those kinds of things come in here I hope you see that. But it all starts with the desire of the inner self to have the kind of heart, the kind of inside that Jesus Christ himself had. Spiritual formation reaches into the depths of the person so that you come out with a good tree; you come out with a heart of love. 1 Corinthians 13 is a natural expression of who you are. The emotions, the body

the social context are transformed so that as I say in my little description we are able to do and routinely do what we know to be right before God.

Now, just in the last uh moments of my talk um I think that the great commission is simply an outline of the whole process of spiritual formation. Let me just quickly remind you, go to all kinds of people, Jesus said, now the basis for that has been given, all power has been given to me in heaven and earth. I've been given say over everything.

Now go to all kinds of people and make them my apprentices, make them disciples, make them my students. Surround them in the reality of the Triune name, the Triune person. I believe that baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost means that that we form a community in which the reality of the triune God lives. And so now we have students, now we have an environment, and now we have an outcome. And that outcome is, do you remember? Teach them to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. That's sanctification. Are we talking about perfection? We're talking about doing a lot better. I'm sure if you're like me you'll always have some room for improvement. But we're talking about getting there. We're talking about the renewal of the inside of the person in such a way that from that person there comes a flow of the deeds of Christ in a natural, life-filled, life-centered healthy way there just comes the deeds of Christ.

Well of course spiritual disciplines will be a large part of the training, but the important thing before that is the intention. To form the intention for this to actually be me. Do I intend to have the righteousness of God? Do I intend for that to be my life. Do I intend that to be my life in all of the circumstances that I go about in in dealing with people and teaching or talking with students or being with my family or working at some job in the yard or whatever it may be? See

that intention must be there and frankly folks that's one of the places we miss it today. And that's associated with the failure to really think of ourselves as disciples. See as a disciple of Jesus I'm learning from him how to lead my life as he would lead it if he were me. And I am a disciple of him because I think he is the smartest man in the world. He's the most brilliant, most admirable, most thoroughly competent man that ever lived. But, you say, he was also the son of God. Don't let that get in the way of him being the son of man. He was both. And a part of our problem is we have isolated Jesus into a religious category, given him a halo, and parked him off somewhere irrelevant so that we don't think of him as someone of whom I could be a student. And for many reasons, Christ as teacher has disappeared from our churches and where Christ the teacher has disappeared you cannot have any students. And we have to recover this. The intention to be to have the heart of God, the plan to do that by discipleship to Jesus Christ. Let me close there and ask you if you would please make some comments or questions about these subjects.

Well you know one of the things, one of the things we don't have are retreat houses. There are very few protestant retreat houses. Uh and uh I think a lot of folks find that uh when they have uh read the books they want now to do some practice, and it's very hard to find the place to do that. Did I let you finish your comment I'm sorry. [inaudible comment from audience member]. Well and then- no it's not just a matter of place but it's hard to overestimate the importance of place. Uh all of the spiritual disciplines, it sounds strange to say it are bodily behaviors. So for example if you decide you want to have solitude for a period of time, where are you going to get it? That's rather hard to find around most of our churches. Hard to find in our homes. And suppose you are in solitude and you wish to speak to someone about prayer, or about um silence or fasting. Where are you going to find them? So it's a larger picture than just

place but actually it is not uh it is not an insignificant factor, this business about there not being a lot of protestant places for retreat, and of course that comes out of the past. We didn't need them, and uh there are a lot of uh historic dynamics in that that are that are troubling to many folk. So what you have basically is a felt need uh which the plethora of good books, which I suppose we've never had the like before uh simply will not meet on their own. Now of course that's not everyone. For some people apparently it does. Back uh here someone was, yes. [inaudible question from the audience]

Yes. Yes. Unfortunately today I chose to speak of the more concept side of it. Um, the question with that is how do you do that. [continued inaudible question]. yes. uh that's true, uh that touches the issue of the balance between active and passive, and certainly we have a lot of theological knots to unravel around that, um on the other hand you see when Jesus says abide in me obviously that is something for me to do, now how do I do that? That's the question of where spiritual disciplines, practices of various kinds we need to learn how to do that. I learned for example that memorization of scripture was incredible in its effect on me. And the disciplinary teaching of that I think is extremely powerful and often missed. Joshua 1:8 for example, the first part of the Psalms for uh psalms 1\ . Joshua 1:8 is a perfect disciplinary verse, "this book of the law shall not depart from out of your mouth, but you shall mediate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein and then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success. Well most of us want to go right to the end, we'd like good success. But actually that verse is worth more than than a college education. Much more. If you will learn to do that, you can go and get your college education anyway. But I don't know of a college education that would guarantee you success. So we need to look at the

methods, is what we need to do. Abide in me. Those verses have always meant tremendous amount to me. John 14-16\ . Uh but you see John also doesn't tell you how to do that does he? He never does that. And that again is the reason I think the reason is because the practice that was around him informed people how to do it. But we, I don't think have that today and that's what creates a part of the problem. Yes. [inaudible question from the audience]

Right. Every discipline is a bodily behavior. Solitude, you take your body into solitude. Silence, same thing. Fasting. Study. Worship. A fellowship. Uh confession. All of these are bodily behaviors.

Now that's tied to this point I was making very quickly about how we aim for the transformation for the self. We aim for it by starting the word of the gospel comes to us. The initiative is God. we are dead in trespasses and sin. The word of the gospel comes and by our spirit, responding to that we become alive in spirit. Then the war which was between us and God now breaks out between us. And we have to deal with that. So how does the spirit move to transform the character? By redirecting the body. And as the body is redirected the soul is reprogrammed if I may say so. So things like solitude, uh in have an incredibly powerful effect on people uh but they do have to go into it long enough to where their body stops twitching and jerking because it's almost like going off drugs. "What do I do, what uh hoe what do I do what's supposed to come out of this?" Do nothing. Nothing. Right. I mean, according to the ten commandments, we are supposed to spend one seventh of our time doing no work. And you say well what's going to happen to the world? [laughter] that's the point. God will rule it. So, but now that's a real, that's an incredible change in one's life. And uh I watch especially leader types, like

many of you. And boy they're just wondering you know can they take their cellphones with them or something of that sort uh what what work shall I take with me? All the things I've been wanting leave them home. Go. Do. Nothing. And many folks feel like this is a terrible mistake because is not idleness the devil's workshop. That's actually not in the scripture. [laughter] and you you shouldn't, you should see how, what Satan gets done through overwork.

[end of recording]