

# Discipleship in Church

By Dallas Willard

[Choir Music]

Announcer:

Good morning everyone! Welcome to Talbot Chapel. Like last week we're going to have a lot of people in here, so if you could take those backpacks, put them on the floor squeeze together, make a friend, toward the center a little bit, of those pews, there's plenty of seats out in the wings folks as you're coming in, thank you for cooperating, we appreciate that very much. Talbot women if you like chocolate and sweets join your sisters in the Sycamore Lawn tomorrow at 12:45, right out here. You can eat lunch beforehand or bring a sack lunch but at 12:45 you will be uh given drinks and decadent desserts for free so that's something to look forward to tomorrow. Guys stay away it's not your chocolate. Tomorrow at 12:45 it would be helpful for the AS officers if they knew how many were coming so if you wouldn't mind ladies to check at the AS office in the Myers lobby that would be uh great for them. Also this Thursday as normal we will have prayer on the patio, the Myers Patio from 9:30 to 10:15 and just a reminder concerning our facility, we like to make this announcement every semester this is a no food facility, so

please no food or drinks other than water in this uh venue we appreciate that very much it helps us keep this building uh in good order for its purposes. A quick announcement from one of our students Brett Durum about a new ministry called the door, Brett if you could come up.

Brett:

Uh there's a major problem within the Christian community and that is a lack of sexual integrity uh and so for men at Talbot we are starting a ministry called The Door, an entrance into grace and freedom. Uh we are starting it next Friday which is September 18th at 10:30 AM until 12 Noon. We're going to be meeting at the Grove and this is again just, this isn't the place where you will probably fully be healed this is just a beginning point, this is an entrance into authentic relationships and true intimacy, and so if any of you have uh if any of you are interested in being a part of this please contact myself. You can talk to some of the AS members who know me, Dustin Reed, he's the uh publicity chair um or Phil Jensen and we also have an email [thedor@talbot@gmail.com](mailto:thedor@talbot@gmail.com) if you want more information, thanks.

Announcer:

Thank you Brett. Appreciate, I appreciate your leadership and Phil's as well in this this is very special. At this time Dr. and Mrs. Rigsby are going to come and lead us in a hymn of praise and as they do again everybody standing in the walls there are seats out in the wings a bit here. If

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you have room next to you put your hand up so that everybody can see where there's a little space. We don't want folks to have to stand all the way, there's plenty on the sides. Following our hymn of praise uh Dr. Doug Gyvate will not only introduce our speaker but will also lead us in prayer, Dr. Rigsby if you would come, thank you very much brother.

Dr. Rigsby:

How firm a foundation, number 411

[Song is sung]

Dr. Rigsby:

Remain standing for prayer.

Doug Gyvate:

I'll be introducing the speaker before prayer so I think it'll be fine if you go ahead and be seated. I didn't mention that to Dr. Rigsby, sorry about that. The Apostle Paul was a great scholar and energetic evangelist and the model of Church planting. He wrote two letters to a young pastor named Timothy and in one of those letters the first letter he said pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching for as you do this you will insure salvation, both for yourself and for those who hear you. That's an interesting use of the word salvation that we might insure the salvation of ourselves and others through the way in which we guard our own lives and the teaching that we give. The passage seems to suggest that our intimate relationships with people and our private lives should support the public role which we play. Should be consistent and I'm afraid that's a rare thing in these days you might agree with me about that. But there are exceptions and uh I know a few of them myself and this morning I have the privilege of introducing you to one of them whom I have known now for almost 25 years. He is a well-known scholar throughout the world, uh in the academy he lectures at universities on various topics, philosophical and Christian. He has published numerous books and articles for the guild of professional philosophers. His latest book has been a long in waiting book for many of us who were anxious to see it finished as he puts the final touches on it this semester called the Disappearance of Moral Knowledge. But you may know him best through his various edifying works on the spiritual life. The spirit of the disciples, the divine conspiracy, hearing God and now as recently as June, Knowing Christ Today. Our guest this morning is a friend of mine I met him in 1985. He was my mentor and friend and most important near the end my dissertation advisor at the University of Southern California. He is well known in the community he is our friend at Biola. He has uh lectured in the philosophy department at Talbot, he has spoken in various venues around campus, and he has served on the board of trustees of Biola University. This morning it's

my privilege to introduce to you both the man and his wife, uh Dr. Dallas Willard and Jane. If you would stand I know that other would like to welcome you along with me. Jane. [Audience applauds] I asked Jane if she would come and sit in the front with us and I thought her excuse was going to have something to do with hearing Dallas all the time but she said she loves to just sit amongst the other and blend and I really appreciate that but thank you for being with us Jane it's good to see you again. And Dallas uh we look forward very much to the feast of words that you will share with us this morning.

Shall we pray? Holy Father in heaven, we are grateful to be in your presence this morning, we are glad that your son Jesus made us daughter and sons of your through his incomparable sacrifice, and we ask that your holy spirit would fill us today, so that we might be more loving, more patient, more kind, more courageous and more humble. We thank you for the many uh gifted men and women that serve the church today and we thank you this morning that we have the blessing of hearing from this one Dallas Willard, our good friend. Would you bless him as he speaks and as we open our heart to your blessing through him? In Jesus' name, Amen.  
Dallas?

Dallas Willard:

There are many blessings in coming back to visit at Talbot and Biola and I was rejoiced to have a chance to be here. It's so good to see so many of you again and meet others for the first time. What a blessing to see Doug. I get to see him on television once in a while as I was telling him because they interview him for his expertise on things and I can sit there and say I know that

guy [laughter]. And uh wonderful that Jane could come down with me. She was a sacred music major in this school, where we met. And if I recall you did one of your final exercises on How Firm a Foundation didn't you? Yes. And um it's just wonderful to think about places like Biola and to have a chance to be with you again. And uh we come down early if you, if you live on the other side of Los Angeles and you want to be here, at 9:00, you leave at 6:00 ha. That way you're pretty sure to be here. We have been uh reading and thinking and enjoying the atmosphere. I was reading the 100 year anniversary book over in the administration building and it says Biola's new vision to become a global center for Christian thought and spiritual renewal. And I think that's exactly how it should be. And your new president is leading you in that direction. And uh I thought I would like to try and say some things this morning that might be helpful.

I want to talk about uh discipleship today and uh I think it's on that screen so I can't see it. Oh I got it down here ok I can see it so I know what I'm supposed to say. [laughter]. Discipleship today, what it is and where it happens, especially concerned about our churches. I know your leaders and our brother's announcement is so important, dealing with the issue of Sexual integrity and all kinds of integrity because that refers to having a personality where all the parts fit together. That's what integrity is. And Christ comes to bring us to that place. And the way he brings us to that place is through discipleship in him. So I would like to just give you as a kind of text, Colossians 3:17 and if I had time, it would be wonderful just to dwell on that chapter because it's actually about church life, and it culminates in verse 17, and verse 17 says "Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to the father through him." Uh that's how you give thanks to the father through him is by doing everything you do, word or deed, and that pretty much covers the ground doesn't it, not a lot is left out, word and deed. Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and that means do it on his

behalf and from his resources. So you're not on your own, you know. The secret is as he said I am with you. And now learning then to do everything that we do in word or deed on his behalf and from his resources and in that way give thanks to God the father is the culmination of our life as followers of Christ together. And um that is what church is about. In case you might have wondered sometimes.

And really I want to dwell on that some. There. And uh this is a paraphrase of sorts of what we have come to know as the great commission. And I've taken the three main parts of it uh and I'd like you to see how that fits in to what we do as leaders and teachers all of you that's what you're doing and that what you're preparing to do in our churches. So here is the breakdown. But it starts with all power in heaven and earth has been given to me Jesus said. And it ends with I am with you every moment. Those are the book ends. And these are the books. As you go, is probably the best way to translate that, as you go make disciples. And those are students or apprentices. I like the word apprentice because of its practical bearing. An apprentice is someone who is working under another learning how to do what they do. And in case you may not have thought of it in that way, that's exactly what you see going on in the gospels. You see apprentices, Jesus calls some special ones and then there was an entire group around that who were doing the same thing though they did not have the same responsibilities. They were apprentices of Jesus. They listened to him talk. They watched him do things, Jesus basically did three things. He proclaimed the availability of the kingdom of God to everyone, he manifested the presence of the kingdom through the deeds that he did, and he taught about what life was like in the kingdom of God. And then after a period of time he said now you do it. And he watched and criticized if you wish he, he had some pretty strong language.

There's a word, a Greek word oligopistos. That is translated usually oh ye of little faith. I think actually it meant Knothead. [Laughter] I don't, that's not a literal translation but that's the language. You know 'oh how long am I going to put up with you' right? Well that's apprenticeship. It's a, it's a loving, vital, truthful relationship. Disciples of Jes- so now our first task is to make disciples because really until you get to that place and we want to talk about exactly what that is in a moment, you're not ready for the next step, and the next step you'll recall there in Matthew 28 is, now you may think this is funny especially coming from a Baptist but uh submerge them in a Trinitarian life that flows over the communities of disciples. I hope you will at least agree with me it doesn't mean get 'em wet while you say in the name of the father, son and Holy Spirit. IT ought to be more than that don't you think, yeah. To baptize does I think mean to surround, submerge if you wish but I don't want to get picky about that. I think you could do it by throwing water at them. [Laughter] though I don't recommend that.

The important thing is now you've got a group of disciples, and in that group of disciples, Christ with his father and his spirit dwell. And so you're bringing them together in that Trinitarian fellowship. Now you don't start there. You start with disciples. And you bring them together, you know Jesus said where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there. And there's in my name again you know? Remember what that meant. Gathered in my name, now we usually say that, when do we usually say that? When only two or three show up. [Laughter] Isn't that right? But it also works when two or three thousand show up. When two or three thousand show up we don't say well thank you Jesus we don't need you now we got lots of people. We still have that same dependence on that Trinitarian presence in the disciples. See? Same dependence. And now then, we can move on and talk about integrity now. We can talk about healing people,

developing people. And that's what we do with the third part; train them to do all that I've commanded.

Now don't start there, start with disciples. Now then I have to say that is a real problem for us folks because we live in a period where we have accepted non discipleship Christianity. And so actually what I'm talking to you about this morning could get you into trouble, because it isn't the way that the church generally is moving, and unfortunately I've gotten people into trouble. Just a couple of months ago I was in a conference with a man who had been pastoring a church as an assistant pastor for eleven years and done a wonderful job. Everyone assumed he's become the lead pastor when the lead pastor left and the lead pastor left and so they interviewed and talked with him and he said well I'd like to center the church on discipleship. And he didn't get the job. Because we're really talking about something different when we start talking about discipleship. But I think that's a good statement of what we could be doing and should be doing. I wonder, don't raise your hand.

Do you agree that our primary task is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, not Baptist, he didn't say go make Baptists. Didn't say go make Methodists, Protestants, he didn't even say go make Christians. See the word Christian is introduced in New Testament language at the point where they needed to have a different word for the disciples. It was disciples who were first called Christians at Syrian Antioch when the church was spilling over out of its Jewish shell and they didn't know what to call them so they said well we'll call them Christians. Do you agree with me that the task is to make disciples? That if I were going to lead as a teacher and a speaker for Christ my aim would be to make disciples, not converts, though they would be converted, but disciples. Now, everyone is welcome to work out their own concept of disciple and a lot of people do that, and I don't have time this morning to go into details of how that has worked in

our day. But if you look at various groups, left of right, theologically, and uh you will find different ways of spelling out what it is. What I say to you is this, if you're going to make disciples you need to have an understanding of what a disciple is.

So my challenge to you this morning is not so much to buy my particular version. You're certainly welcome to it. I think it fits the description, especially if you look at the disciples of Jesus when he was here in the days of his flesh. But just try this on as Jesus's disciple I am learning from him how to lead my life in the kingdom of God as he would lead my life if he were I. See the emphasis here is on my life. Jesus has already led his life, now what will my life be. I am learning from him to lead my life in the kingdom of God, that's where he invited me. He said repent for the kingdom of heaven, and then kingdom of God is at hand. That was his proclamation. That was his invitation to everyone, and he broke down all of the human barriers that had been erected to stand between ordinary human beings and God and said whosoever will may come. That's what you see in the gospels, time after time someone who's not supposed to be coming by the established standards he said come. And they were just beating down the door.

You know the language in Matthew 11 probably where it talks about how the kingdom suffers violence and men of violence take it by force. It's not talking about uh taking Uzis going around shooting people and things of that sort. It's talking about a little leper who heard Jesus and who comes and as you know Lepers were not supposed to be coming they're supposed to be going but he comes and he says master if you would not necessarily that you would but if you would you could heal me. A Roman Centurion. A little woman with an issue of blood who slips through the crowd and touches him. Those are the people of violence because what it refers to is the fact that now you don't stand of proprieties, you just come. The bath comes later, the cleanup, the correction, that's in his hands. Whosoever will may come. And now, as I come then I am

learning from him how to live my life in the kingdom of God as he would lead my life if he were I. And of course it's the same for you. And we're all different, we're all unique. And he accepts us and calls us to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth wherever we are. And in that role we have to be his students because we're not able to carry that out on our own. This is a very important teaching for us. And uh we often quote it uh in terms of studying his word possibly uh but the language here is if you abide.

Abide means you live in it. It's the same word that's used when Jesus later in the Gospel of John talks about um the branch abiding in the vine and how does a branch abide in the vine well it gets all its stuff that it lives by out of the vine doesn't it. The old common language says if you continue in my word then you are my disciples indeed. But I think you need to understand that's not a nonstop Bible study. To abide in his word means to put it into practice. That's where you come to know the kingdom of God, is when you trust Jesus now and you take him as your master and you're Lord and as his disciple you put what he said into practice. And of course there are many dimensions of that. There's the dimension of trust, learning to trust, and all the wonderful sayings of Jesus about the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and all of that wonderful teaching. The lilies of the field they toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in his best suit didn't look as good as those little lilies. And if you check it out you'll see that's true. Maybe you're not into Solomon just try George Clooney or someone like that [laughter] just compare him to a little field flower and George will look mighty pale beside that, see? God is pouring fourth his abundance and now he pours it forth into you.

And so to put Jesus' words into practice in that case is to count on that, rely on it. Doesn't mean you don't work. It's a question not of whether you work or not but what you trust, whether you work or not. Birds work very hard but apparently they don't do a lot of worrying. It's a

matter of who you trust. And in all of our roles as students and leaders and teachers and workers, we want to work hard but not trust our work. We trust Jesus, we trust the presence of our kingdom, and that leads us. Now um I want to just give you three main dimensions of discipleship because I want now to begin to work discipleship out of a religious category. Discipleship is not religion, its life. It's not religion and one of our main problems and what I want to try and work us past this morning is the idea that it's, If you're a serious disciple you do something strange called going into full time Christian work. Now I don't know what the other kind of Christian work is. Discipleship is for life. This is one of the hardest things for churches who get serious about it to understand. Discipleship is for the benefit of the world that God loved, that God loves. It is for the benefit of God dwelling in people wherever they are.

So now you have the first dimension that's actually learning to do the things that Jesus said. For example he has some teachings about anger and about lust and about letting your yes be a yes and your no be a no. Those we have to learn because we've been brought up in a world in which by the time we reach almost any age and it's earlier and earlier now in the world we live in, we have already been ruined. We have unless we have been very blessed in our family and our church associations we are full of anger of desire, getting our own way, covetousness. As well as other kinds of lust. And Peter warns us about this you remember in 1 Peter 2:11 I beseech you therefore as strangers and pilgrims to abstain from fleshly lust which war against the soul. And as you look upon human life you see souls just ripped and torn apart by desire, desire always is disappointed at some level and that brings anger and that brings violence and harm. And all that comes out of the mess that the world has contrived and Satan has contrived to bring to pass in our hearts. And so love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, kindness, meekness, self-control that is the fruit of the spirit but it's very far from most people.

And so we're learning to do this and we do it by putting it into practice. Jesus said obey my commandments and I will send the spirit. Now my idea would be well you send the spirit first and then I'll obey. But it actually doesn't work that way and that's going back to the other verse. You put my words into practice and you come to know the reality of the kingdom of God. You put my words into practice then you are my disciples indeed and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. That's the way that works. So now anything that Jesus said you can do. Isn't that good news? Yeah that's good news. You can't do it on your own but you're not supposed to do it on your own. You're supposed to do it with him. So, if you approach things like sexual integrity or financial integrity or just living a transparent life God helps you do that and you learn how to do that. Say we have in our present version of Christianity very much we have the idea of faith in Christ over here and over here perhaps holiness. But how do you get from here to here? And the answer is discipleship. That's discipleship.

And then we're learning to handle the ordinary events of daily life within the principles and powers of God's rule. So now that has to do with most of the things we spend our time doing. We don't take a vacation from God when we open our algebra book or our Hebrew Grammar or whatever it is, no no. Now then we invoke God and expect his presence there. And your verbs and your nouns and all these other things you study will come to you much better as you invoke, now you are going to practice that and learn the reality of it as a disciple. And no amount of talking at you can give you the reality that will come from the knowledge of putting into practice the presence of God and the action of the kingdom in whatever you're doing, whatever it is. Remember, whatever you do in word or deed ok now that's pretty inclusive isn't it. And the third thing there on the list is acting in God's power. And these aren't separate things actually. I just separated them to help us look at them. But they actually all go together. You're

not going to be able to learn to do the things that Jesus explicitly said unless you take him with you on the job. And you're not going to be able to do the things on the job that he would do unless you're acting in his power. So learning to act with the power of God goes with these other three things.

So where is the place of discipleship? Well, the place of discipleship is wherever I am now and whatever I am doing now so my place of discipleship presently is standing up here talking at you. So am I just going to get up here and do the best I can to bumfuzzle you and send you away thinking what was that? No. I stand and talk in dependence upon Christ to speak in your minds and bring home the things that he needs for you. And now then whether I'm writing or teaching a class or setting up my schedule or seeing students or dealing with colleagues, it's all the same, it's all the same. I'm learning from Jesus how to do everything I do in the kingdom of God. Now why is our job so important? Well simply because that's where we spend most of our time. And it's very important to understand that there is no such thing as secular work except by choice. God made us to be creative to create value which is what work is its creating value. And uh he made us to work with him in that role and the most important place for my discipleship is in my job. Now you say what about my home. Well it's important there to. What about my church? It's important, it's important everywhere. But you have to think of where you invest most of your time.

I uh have a friend who reads my books and talks to me and he recently sent me a little booklet called "Work Loves our Neighbor, Did Jesus Waste Most of His Life?" He didn't start preaching until quite late. Was all that other, was that a waste of time or was that something that God was involved in. And um uh I really recommend that you think about this and Rick Baugh is the name of the author. And you can reach him at [c.r.baugh@crbaugh.com](mailto:c.r.baugh@crbaugh.com) and this is very

helpful little treatment of the issue of discipleship and work and this is the place I think that as we do our leadership and teaching in church we're most likely to miss because we are likely to think of discipleship as religious and of being serious about that. So I want to give you this verse from one of the most tangled and difficult passages theologically in all of the Bible. Romans 5. And Paul here says "if by the transgression of one death reign through the one much more much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life." And I would just like to ask you to focus on that phrase. Reign in life. Reign is of course kingdom language. It's referring to the fact that when you bring your little kingdom into God's big kingdom, then your little kingdom is redeemed and for the first time since Adam and Eve stepped away from God, you can begin to reclaim the position he made you for reigning in life. Doesn't say reigning at church though that's ok too.

But reigning in life means to under the power of God live your life in a way that brings good to pass for you and everyone around you. Much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life how? Through one Jesus Christ. Now that will, notice that was through grace and so you you want to get grace in the right place and grace is for your life. It's not just for your sins grace is not just for forgiveness. Some of you may have heard me say that the saint burns much more grace than the sinner. The sinner just needs a little forgiveness, or a lot of it. But the grace in this life of the saint burn grace like a 747 burns fuel on takeoff. It's everything they do. Is graceful. So growth in grace means that every dimension of our life is increasingly a place where grace is in action. Growing grace, what does that mean? It means more and more, everything that we do is empowered by God's action with us. And it might be helpful just to think about what grace is because I find that many people know a formula like well it's unmerited favor. Uh that's not helpful enough. It is unmerited favor, no

doubt about that. But what is it that you get and the answer is grace is God acting in our lives. That's grace. It's God acting in our lives to enable us to do what we cannot do on our own. Now when you do your uh um study Biblically inductive bible study on grace and you'll see that's what that is.

The grace is meant to be accompanying you and your learning as a disciple how that actually works. One of my favorite verses on grace is in 2 Corinthians 9:8. 2 Corinthians 9:8 and that's where Paul is talking about the Macedonians, a very poor people, and about how they gave themselves and then they gave their money and he talks about uh how God blesses them and he says and God is able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in everything you may have an abundance for every good deed. That's grace. Your whole life is accompanied by grace. So now just finally in the minute or two that I have left let's uh think about Church again. Very few churches today do what Jesus said to do. And that is make disciples. At best it is a kind of by product. You see some of it happening but it's not the center of their focus. Discipleship is not now the decision through which one becomes a member of a church. I wonder if you agree with me about that. We do not take people into membership on the basis of discipleship. Can we do that? What do you think? Could you do that? Or do we take them into the church on a different basis and then see what we can do with them after that? I'm afraid that's the way it works, and I'm challenging you today, your leaders and teachers and preachers your uh teachers here on this wonderful campus can we make discipleship the center of our churches?

We want to present discipleship as a way of life for everyone in everything. Discipleship is usually presented as some special form of religious activity. Ministry then is coaching in kingdom living with Jesus in our real life. What we want to enable and say to people now, you're

a disciple of Jesus that means that Jesus is going to teach you and help you in everything you do from your personal life to your corporate life uh no matter at what level you may be serving or working that he will teach you and as leaders our first step is to say yes this is what we do. Now if you are going the way that the great commission says you make disciples, surround them in Trinitarian life, and then you teach them to do everything that he said. Do you think that if we did that that would have a significant influence on our society and our churches? Teaching them to do everything that Jesus said. It has had that effect in times in the past and it always has that effect and when we look back at those glorious times we always want to ask ourselves are we actually saying what they said. And doing what they did. If we're not saying what they said and doing what they did that's probably what accounts for it if we are getting a different result.

And so our first step is to say yes this is what we do, can you say that in your circle of ministry and life? And then carry through with it, can you say we teach people to do everything that Jesus said. Is that true of Biola, and Talbot? Is it true of our churches? So um that's going to be a challenge and we want to know is there an alternative to that and obviously there is. It's what very largely what we do today. But then the result we have today is often thought to admit of some improvement and uh one of the things that we are apt to wind up thinking as ministers and leaders is is what I am seeing as the result of my ministry is it really worth pouring out my life for that. And that I think is the question I would like to leave with you. With the verse whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the father through him.

Can we stand for prayer? Almighty God blessed Lord Jesus sweet Holy Spirit will you take these words and make them fitted to the needs of our hearts and show us the way forward as

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those who live as disciples and those who make disciples in our world today. And we pray that you would honor the name of Jesus in this world, in this way and so let it be done please, Amen.