

DISCIPLESHIP I - THE TRIANGLE OF TRANSFORMATION

- 1) There are countless self-help books, seminars, and programs. And they disagree with each other in countless ways. Which raises the question...Can anything actually address the core problems that people have? How do we become whole and an effective agent for good in all of the areas that our lives touch?
 - a) The Biblical answer is that in order to flourish and be well, a person must be changed from the inside out, into the likeness of Christ.
 - b) So far in our curriculum, we have discussed the spiritual practices. But the practices are only one component of what is necessary for our spiritual transformation into the likeness of Christ. In this talk, we are going to discuss the other components.
- 2) Dallas Willard described the three prerequisites for spiritual growth as **The Golden Triangle of Spiritual Transformation**.
 - a) The first of the three sides of the triangle are the spiritual practices, which we discussed in the prior three talks.
 - b) Let's move on to the second side of the triangle. The **second side of the triangle** is this: good-naturedly bearing up under suffering for long periods of time. Patiently, contentedly. *Love suffers long*, as the Scriptures put it (*1 Corinthians 13:4*).
 - i) Now, some of the suffering that people experience is quite extreme. Some is horrific. And, at first glance, bearing that up good-naturedly sounds out-of-touch and possibly even ill-advised.
 - (1) But I want to ask you something. The fact is that inevitably, we will all face difficulties in life. And when suffering does come your way, what is your alternative to bearing it up good-naturedly? To bear it up bad-naturedly. To become bitter, frustrated, and resentful.
 - (2) And if you do that, your trials will make you more and more miserable. On the other hand, if you learn to accept your trials and difficulties with the right attitude, they can strengthen and grow you.
 - ii) Listen to James on this topic: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4*
 - (1) Do you know what G.K. Chesterton called "the chief idea of his life?" "The idea of taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted." We all agree that we ought to feel grateful for the good things that come our way. But can you, should you, as James recommended here, feel grateful for the tough things as well?
 - (2) Now, the hard things themselves are not good things. Cancer, the death of a spouse, physical pain, broken relationships. Not good at all. So, the idea is not that we should feel grateful for those terrible things in and of themselves. That would be self-hatred. And, along those lines, if we can do something to relieve suffering in our lives, or in someone else's, we do.
 - (3) But often there is no easy fix for the difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves. In that case, a Christian makes it a point to endure the pain good-naturedly because we know that as we persevere through our challenges in

faithful, day-by-day obedience, a very precious thing is being accomplished in us. Something thing that can only be accomplished through our patient endurance of suffering.

(a) And what is being accomplished? We will end up, as James says, *mature and complete, not lacking anything*.

(i) To properly benefit from them, we must confront our trials with the following attitude: James says we should *greet our trials with pure joy*.

1. Now, joy isn't happiness, or the mere sensation of pleasure. Rather, as Dallas Willard put it, **Joy** is a pervasive sense of well-being. As has been said, happiness depends on what happens. Joy does not. Joyful people don't always understand why tough stuff comes their way, but they live in the faith that God does. They trust that He is keeping a close eye on us, working everything out. Whatever the horrible circumstance they might find themselves in, joyful people are joyful. They feel cared for, protected, confident in God. They feel as the old hymn puts it, "it is well with my soul".

(ii) Now, this attitude is not always easy for us to adopt. At first, we often find our faith failing. Despite our best efforts, we revert to grumbling or discouragement, victimhood. But as we persist in cultivating the right attitude, our faith is being forged in the fire, *tested* as James puts it, until it is as tough as iron. Until finally, as people of deep faith, we really do trust what God has for us in our life.

(iii) And this strengthening of our trust in God is not only for our benefit, it is to the world's benefit. Because once we are no longer afraid of what God might do with us if we let Him call the shots, we will finally let God start to use us in this sorry world to do some real good.

1. Thomas a Kempis said "Whosoever knows best how to suffer will keep the greatest peace. That man is conqueror of himself, and lord of the world, the friend of Christ, and heir of Heaven."

(iv) The result is wonderful, but this process of faith under fire is very uncomfortable at times. It must be. The forging fire has to get hot enough to burn out those impurities. And after all, it doesn't take much faith to trust God when everything is comfy and cozy. But in patiently suffering over a long period of time, we are doing the hard work of learning trust. That is why biblically, suffering and sanctification are linked together. *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you, reads 1 Peter (4:12)*. Sanctification takes time, and it often hurts. There are no shortcuts.

iii) Are your trials leading you into joy, or into misery? It is up to you.

(1) And here are a couple of tests that you can use to gauge if you are approaching your trials with the right attitude:

(i) *Do all things without complaining and disputing. Philippians 2:14*. Do you do that?

- (ii) Here is another one...can you say with the old hymn, “it is well with my soul”?
- iv) These are challenging questions because difficult feelings can run extremely deep in us. At times, they overwhelm us. What if we struggle with adopting the right attitude? After all, we are not just intellects, or brains on a stick. We shouldn’t minimize the role of feelings in our Christian lives.
- (1) Jesus Himself experienced the entire gamut of human emotions. At times, He was profoundly affected by things. For instance, He wept aloud at the tomb of His friend.
 - (2) As philosopher Peter Kreeft pointed out, the word emotion has the word motion in it. An emotion is something that acts on us, that moves us.
 - (3) Emotion is a tremendous blessing. The fundamental function of emotion, working in a healthy person, is to move us where we need to go, when we need to get there.
 - (a) Such as when a little child cries out for help and we feel a rush of urgency and concern.
 - (b) Also, emotions enhance life. They add extra layers and complexity. That wonderful feeling you get when someone pulls fresh baked bread out of the oven and the smell hits you. What if you just had no feeling at all about it? We would be missing out.
 - (4) The issue though, is that because we are not entirely healthy, our emotions at times move us somewhere that we shouldn’t be. Where we are a danger to ourselves or to others.
 - (a) Our emotions tend to get all out of order and out of control, and they rule over us, instead of us over them. Road rage is an example of that. Destructive emotion.
 - (5) What do we do about this?
 - (a) First, we always need to frankly acknowledge our emotions, the good, the bad, and the ugly. It will do great harm trying to deny that we have them, ignoring them, or trying to suppress them. And we also must understand that we cannot stop feelings from coming to us. So, we never feel guilty or sinful about how we feel.
 - (b) Next, we recognize that we are having an feeling that is unhelpful, and we note its harmful potential.
 - (c) And then we correct it, with the truth
 - (d) For example, say you are feeling frustrated with your child, and you are getting angry with them.
 - (i) You don’t just listen to yourself. You talk to yourself. “This child is my child. God gave him to me, knowing the difficulties involved for me with this arrangement. I need to have faith that God is ordering my life and this is all a part of His plan. *I need to consider this pure joy*, as James put it. I need to remember that I have many deficiencies as a parent, just as he has deficiencies as a child. So, I am not going to be resentful or upset about

this situation. I am going to be patient and kind. God do this through and in me, please.”

- (e) That is how the will uses the mind to speak to the emotions. That’s an integrated person, with all the parts working together properly.
 - (i) We can use our mind to control our feelings. But we cannot use our feelings to control our mind.
 - (ii) So many of the Psalms take this form. There is an initial pang of despair, of pain, of fear. And then a standing in the truth. And then the psalmist finds encouragement and security rising up in them.
 - (iii) Your primary experience of life is the thoughts that are in your head. And you do have some say over the thoughts that are in your head.
 - (f) And not only in isolated episodes, but on a long-term basis, the sad reality is that there are deeply problematic, longstanding types of dysregulated emotions that we all deal with. They are always there, underneath the surface just waiting to boil up and make a mess of things. Frustration, boredom, despair, inadequacy, anger, compulsions, resentment, fear, and so on.
 - (i) So, how does our deep emotional core become made well?
 - 1. First, of all, as we discussed previously, the practices are very helpful here. For example, fasting, in particular, will help with compulsion. Silence and solitude will help with anger. And so on.
 - (ii) But also, importantly, we need to make the effort to look at the patterns in our life and behavior. We recognize the consistent area of emotional dysregulation, and then deeply mediate on the Scriptural realities that are corrective to it. We memorize some passages that speak to that hang-up.
 - (g) Your feelings as you go through life are going to try to push you every which way. Don’t let them.
 - (i) *1 Corinthians 16:13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong*
 - (ii) Over time, this process of regulating our emotions will become easier and more automatic, as all the parts of our person get healed up and properly integrated. .
 - (h) The only way to succeed in bearing up our trials patiently and contentedly, is that we must bring our emotions under the lordship of Christ. In fact, bringing our whole selves under the lordship of Christ is really the overall key to Christian growth.
- c) Let’s move on to the third side of the triangle. **The third side of the triangle** is our cooperation with the activity of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- i) In order to benefit from the presence of the indwelling Spirit, we must learn *to keep in step with the Spirit* as the New Testament puts it (*Galatians 5:25*). Yes, we have the living water. But we need to reach our roots into that well and take the Spirit from deep down inside of us and distribute it to all the other parts of our body. Our physical self, neurons and hormones, our mind, our will, our feelings and emotions, all of it.

- ii) The seventeenth century Scottish minister Henry Scougal wrote a letter to a friend in which he discussed the essence of true religion. Here is what he arrived at. True religion is “the life of God in the soul of man.” It is the life that God Himself is living, that activity, at work in our souls, that is the difference maker. Until something from outside yourself, comes into you, and changes you, wherever you go, there you are. Whatever you do, thus you have done
 - (1) You know, if you had leprosy, or some other condition that made you chronically unclean in the experience of the Jewish people, you were really out of luck. Because when something clean touched something unclean, the clean thing was defiled, needing purification, and the unclean thing remained unclean.
 - (a) However, great news for the unclean here: when Jesus, who was clean, touched the unclean, He didn’t become unclean. And the unclean thing did not remain unclean. Instead, the unclean became clean.
 - (b) Each of us must, in our unclean state, partake of the incorruptible holiness of God, exposing the deepest and dirtiest caverns of our souls to its cleansing power. “There is power in the blood” as that old hymn says.
- iii) And how, in practical terms, in day-to-day life, do we do access this power of the Spirit within us? We will start from the negative. From the point of the new birth on, we are told to be careful, as Thessalonians puts it, “*not to extinguish the Spirit.*” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).
 - (1) The primary way that we extinguish the activity of the Spirit is through ongoing sinful patterns of thought and behavior. **Unrepentant sin** is a willful refusal to turn away from a particular sin or habit. I am not talking about struggling against recurring sin. We all do that. I am talking about not struggling against it.
 - (2) Now, any compromise with sin on our part is deadly serious. Even a tiny area of tolerated sin severely hinders the activity of the Spirit within us. This is because stubbornly holding onto sin is an ongoing ignoring of the Spirit’s promptings within us. It is a refusal to cooperate with the Spirit in His work of our inner purification. And if you do wish to resist Him, the Spirit will respect your wishes. He will get out of the way, quiet right down.
 - (a) This will leave you in a very dangerous spot. Because you can’t keep just a little bit of sin tucked off neatly in a corner. Sin that is not dealt with always festers, grows, and spreads. Slowly but surely warping the different aspects of your personality.
 - (b) *Do not let the sun go down on your anger*, says Paul...why? Because to do so is *to give the devil a foothold*, says Ephesians (4:27). Take a minute and think about that verse.
 - (c) “Watch out!” is the Biblical warning. Deal with it right now, while you still are able to. Sin becomes more and more difficult to get rid of as its root grow deeper in us. All the while damaging ourselves and those around us more and more.
 - (d) What did God tell Cain when Cain was starting to angry with Abel? *Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*

Genesis 4:7. But Cain did not heed the warning. And we all know what happened when that anger that he let fester in his heart reared its ugly head.

(i) Think of dealing with sin like shooting baskets. We know we can't shoot with 100% success, but we try for 100% anyway. Because the way to get as close to 100% as possible is to aim for 100%.

1. Consider the woman caught in adultery (*John 8:11*). Jesus was so gentle and tender with her as He forgave her, wasn't He? He didn't condemn her, is what He said. God is that way with us also. He is oh-so patient with us as we stumble along. He is faithful to forgive. We are secure in His love. He is our Father.
2. But Jesus didn't stop there with that woman. *Go and sin no more*, is what He left her with. (*John 8:11*).
3. If you are going to make real progress in your struggle with sin, that is the attitude you must have. "I am done with sin. I will do whatever it takes, by God's grace, to leave it behind."
4. Given the devastating effects of sin in our lives and others' lives, we are to be ruthless in eliminating sin from our lives. And God is also ruthless in rooting out all sin in His children's lives, using discipline as necessary.

(3) One example of unrepentant sin that is rampant in our churches is a refusal to forgive.

(i) Why, for example, is divorce so incredibly common among Christian couples? Sometimes, divorce is undertaken for good reasons. But in many cases, when we move beyond the superficial reasons and circumstances, we will find that often the answer is the same old black cancer, growing unchecked, year after year. Unforgiveness.

(b) Jesus talked a lot about forgiveness.

(i) For instance, in *Matthew 18*, Peter comes up to Jesus and says "*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?*"

(ii) Now, the rabbis had said that three pardons were enough. Peter thought, "well you know how Jesus is!", and so suggested seven. You see, we don't like forgiving. We don't want to do it. "What's the minimum here, Jesus?"

(iii) *Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven."*

Jesus is just on a whole different wavelength. He loves forgiving! He can't get enough of it! Now, He doesn't love people hurting each other; He doesn't love sin. But He sure loves forgiveness, reconciliation, healed relationships. That is what He is all about. And so, Jesus insists here that there must be no limits to forgiveness.

(iv) And in *Luke 17*, He tells them the same thing. *Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them.*" To which the disciples reply, "YIKES, what did

we sign up for!” Which is rendered in the modern translations, *“Increase our faith!”*

(v) And Jesus shows them yet again, with that response that they are just not on His wavelength. They are not thinking about life correctly. “You think you need more faith, do you disciples? You think that it would take a lot of faith to forgive?”

1. *“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.*
2. As Jesus points out, because God has limitless power, even a tiny speck of faith on our part is enough for God to do something extraordinary, like cast trees out into the sea, through us. Now God is not necessarily interested in helping each of us cast trees into the ocean. But He is extremely interested in helping you forgive. The problem is that we often do not have even a tiny speck of faith for Him to work with.
3. Jesus is teaching that faith and forgiveness always go together. If you won’t forgive, you have no faith in God. You simply do not trust that God is taking care of you, and of any wrongs and of any people who have wronged you in the best and most helpful way possible.
4. And then Jesus continues on and gives them another corrective to their way of thinking about forgiveness. He tells them this story. *“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”*
5. Forgiveness is something that we ought to be very willing and able to do, given all that God has done for us. Forgiving is Christianity 101. So, Jesus teaches His followers, don’t make a big deal of it when you forgive, or talk about super feats of faith being involved. And don’t think of it as an extra big ask on God’s part that He tells you to. See the thing for what it is. We are the unworthy servants, and forgiveness is our duty.

(c) What **forgiveness** means in practice is that we don’t hold on to hate, anger, or resentment. And we don’t punish or try to hurt someone for what they have done to us. Instead, we cultivate love and kindness in our hearts for them. And we are respectful and helpful to them.

(i) “Well, how can I be helpful to them if they refuse the type of help that they actually need?”

1. If that is the case, then you can't be of practical help to them at this time. For instance, it might be an abusive situation, where distance and boundaries are needed, and a meaningful relationship is not possible.
 2. But realize that, even in those situations, forgiveness is an issue of our own heart. Of an attitude that we take. So, we would still for instance, always be keeping an eye out for ways to help them that are not enabling their bad behavior. We would be praying for them still.
- (ii) "Are we supposed to forgive and forget?"
1. No, you are not. That is not possible. That is just another silly thing that people say. But you are always to be open to reconciliation, to relationship.
- (iii) They won't accept your forgiveness? They won't acknowledge what they did wrong? They won't reconcile?
1. That's not up to you. But forgiving them is.
 2. God knows the pain of reaching out in love in the face of rejection.
 - a. *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8*
 - b. *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** Colossians 3:13*
- (d) Forgiveness can be difficult. It is a process.
- (i) Despite our forgiving, there will still be, at times, an emotional hurt that remains, surfacing here and there. But when that happens, instead of stewing in our hurt and victimhood, we give the wound to God, and let go of it.
 - (ii) You can tell that you have not completed the process of forgiving someone if you tend to get annoyed when the person is mentioned. If you are secretly delighted to hear about the person's current difficulties and losses, or maybe daydream about some sort of revenge or justice coming to them. If you preoccupy your mind reliving the hurt or dwelling on the wrongful situation or the person's behaviors.
 - (iii) On the other hand, you can tell that forgiveness has occurred if you hear about a good happening in that person's life and you inwardly find yourself rejoicing. You are genuinely happy for them.
- (e) Now, many Christians are really trying, just struggling to forgive, for years at a time. Which is admirable. But the baggage, the hard feelings, boil up into unhelpful thoughts, words and deeds, time and time again. Triggering, under the right circumstances. That is a type of bondage, isn't it?
- (i) When you are trying something over and over again without success, it clearly shows what? That you are going at it in the wrong way. So, for anyone struggling to step into the power of forgiveness what can they do about it?

1. First, we need to first understand that deep, from the heart forgiveness is the most difficult thing in all the world for a person to do. *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you*” *Matthew 5:43-44* Jesus says. Anything tougher you can think of? If you look around you will notice that people, on their own, cannot and do not do that. It is just out of this world, that kind of thing. It comes from God. You have to ask God to give it to you, and open your heart and receive the gift of it from Him. *Do you want to be well?* Jesus asked the paralytic (*John 5*). That is sometimes the hangup we have with forgiveness. We just don’t want to be well. We are wedded to our pain, our resentment, our anger, overcome by it. Then, “Lord, make me willing” is the prayer.
2. Another thing will greatly help you forgive is your coming to an understanding that God can and does bring good out of any circumstance, no matter how evil or desperate. Doesn’t mean that everything that happens is good. It is certainly not. But God is working everything out for good, in the lives of His children. Everything.
 - a. That is why forgiving God and forgiving others are linked together.
 - i. I do not mean that God actually needs forgiveness. I mean that sometimes we feel upset or resentful at God for allowing these wounds to occur in our lives. But we don’t need to feel this way, because God doesn’t just let this stuff happen because He is a jerk. Instead, He has a good reason for allowing any difficulty that you go through. You might not know the good reason, but it’s there. And any harm any person has caused you will, in the long run, be used, by God, to your advantage, if you will humbly open your heart and commit to forgiveness.
3. Another thing that will help you forgive is to think about the fact that not just your little life, but in fact the entire world is a gigantic mess and each of us has contributed to that. None of us are totally innocent parties. We have all wronged others. And the ways that we have harmed others and the ways that we have been harmed by others many times connect together. We are all both victims as well as perpetrators.
 - a. Jesus taught that unforgiving people are blind and deluded people. They do not realize, they refuse to realize, their own sinfulness.
4. Now, some folks are on the opposite end of things, and the struggle is not with realizing the own sinfulness, but with forgiving themselves. Hard to look at the profound damage we at times have caused to others, isn’t it?

- a. The only way that we can come to terms with that is to realize that all those difficult wounds that we have caused them can be used by God redemptively in their lives.
 - i. So, once you have confessed the wrong, and done your best to make amends, be done with it. Don't stew in your guilt. God doesn't.
 - b. Yes, we can cause temporary and very real harm to people. But not permanent harm. Whatever happens to them, their life, your life, anyone's life, can turn out just fine. Anyone who will simply accept the help of God and step under His care and direction will meet an end that is utterly magnificent. In the biggest and most complete picture of what a Christian life is, there are no victims. Entirely the opposite. We are all benefactors of God's abundant and lavish goodness far out of proportion to what we deserve.
5. Forgiving God, others, and ourselves are all absolutely crucial to our wellbeing and they all three go together.
- a. Forgiveness just makes sense, with a good God running the show, working everything out. Once we have our ideas straight on that, forgiveness will just start to flow naturally.
 - b. Jesus invites you to step entirely out of the realm of retaliation and resentment. And instead, into the beautiful realm of unconditional mercy, kindness, and relational restoration. A total shift in the way that we relate to others, to God, and to ourselves. A leap into freedom.
 - c. Don't hold onto things. Don't hold things over people's heads and don't let them hold things over your head. God doesn't hold on. Be like Him. Let it go. All of it. Believe me, you won't miss the bitterness and hate. And neither will the people in your life. Forgiveness is in your own self-interest. It is getting the position sucked out of the wound, so that it can finally begin to heal.
- (4) Again, unrepentant sin of any type will shut down the activity of the Spirit, but I wanted to spend some significant time on unforgiveness because there are so many people in profound captivity to different types of unforgiveness, thrashing around and damaging themselves and others. (END OF SEGMENT 1)

iv) (START OF SEGMENT 2) But we can now move on and continue to explore the positive part of the third side of the triangle. Let's move on from the topic of quenching the activity of the Spirit, and to the topic of how to cooperate with the activity of the Spirit.

- (1) *Romans chapter 8. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*
- (a) Some of this terminology is unfamiliar. Let's start with defining "*the flesh*".
 - (i) At certain times, *the flesh* is used in the Bible to simply refer to a human body. And the Bible teaches that our bodies are useful, good, beautiful,

are in the process of renovation to godliness, along with all the other components of us, and will be a part of the new creation.

(ii) But when used in New Testament in passages such as this one, *the flesh* is talking about something else entirely. In passages like this, **the flesh** simply refers to “our natural selves.” Now, our natural selves are composed of many parts, including the physical body, the will, the mind, the emotions, etc. So, the flesh is who you are, without any other help coming in. Living according to the flesh is therefore allowing your default tendencies, impulses, and abilities have free reign.

(iii) *The flesh* is actually a mix of good and bad.

1. In terms of the good part of the flesh, people without any religious orientation or conviction, for example, can be charitable and kind, have composed magnificent symphonies or built impressive bridges, etc.

2. In terms of the bad part of flesh, just turn on the news to get an idea.

(iv) The particularly tricky thing for us is that the flesh is useful at times but also it is frail, driven by desires and passions, and inconsistent. Because of its fickle nature, when the flesh is in the driver’s seat in a human life, things tend to go poorly.

1. And so, Jesus taught that we should not live according to the flesh.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak is how He put it (*Matthew 26:41*). It is weak. Don’t depend on it. It will betray you when you need it most, was His teaching.

(v) When living according to the flesh, we might be quite productive and successful in certain areas of our lives, but our life as a whole will be confused and fractured. And yet our little fleshly successes here and there tend to encourage us to put God on the side and instead rely on *the flesh*. To go it on our own again but this time just try harder, be more clever, more resourceful.

1. And really, to deeply recognize and come to terms with the failure and inadequacy of our unaided natural selves is difficult, as a point of pride.

a. It is humbling to understand and acknowledge as Paul did, *I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. Romans 7:18*

(vi) As a result, we have a tendency to want to operate according to the flesh that is persistent and quite difficult to eradicate.

(2) But let’s say that you have started to wise up. You do recognize the futility of living according the flesh, and you are committed to living according to the Spirit. How do we do that?

(a) *Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. Galatians 5:16-17*

- (i) When you see the term walk used like this in the New Testament it is referring to an overall way of life.
- (ii) So, **walking in the Spirit** means involving God in every part of your life, in what you do and think and feel, as opposed to just doing things on your own. The other terminology the Bible often uses for this is abiding. **Abiding** is being constantly in Christ.
 - 1. *Abide in me*, Christ told his followers *John 15:4*.
 - 2. Now, abiding involves our whole being. But it starts with our mind.
 - 3. The single, fundamental question that will by and large determine what type of life you will live is this: Where do you put your mind?
 - a. Putting your mind nowhere in particular, just letting it roam as it pleases is a sure-fire recipe for disaster. There is so much distraction and meaninglessness, and also so much spiritual darkness dragging us down, attacking us.
 - b. The solution to this? *The mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. Romans 8:6.*
- (b) As we learn to set our minds on God and by doing this to involve God in every part of our life, we allow His Spirit, who is Love, to constantly work in and through us, to live our life along with us.
 - (i) That is why *1 Corinthians 13* says that love is patient love is kind, love doesn't keep a record of wrongs, and all the rest. It says that **LOVE** is all those things, not that we are. *God is love (1 John 4:7)*. We are not. And on our own, never will be. When push comes to shove, often enough you will find that your flesh is not patient and kind.
 - (ii) From the heart, self-giving, bottomless, joyful love is only found one place in the universe. In God. If you want it, you need to get it there. *Love comes from God*, reads *1 John (4:7)*.
- (c) Consider those famous words of Jesus about us being the light of the world. If you read that passage carefully, you will notice that, actually, you are not the light. You are the lamp. *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.* Why would they glorify God when they see your good deeds? I mean, aren't they your deeds? Yes and no. You see, we have moved beyond that distinction when we are walking in the Spirit. As my father put it, when we are walking in the Spirit, it is not "God did it", nor is it "I did it". Instead, it is "we did it".
 - (i) As Dallas Willard advised, quit trying to be righteous. Just give up on the whole project. You, on your own, are not up to it, and never will be. Instead, access Christ. Jesus is righteous, and He will live your life with you.
 - 1. It is like light coming through the stained-glass window. We are the window. Christ is the light. When you are walking in the Spirit, everything you were meant to be will be on full display. Beautiful, colorful.
 - 2. *I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10.* Yes, Paul worked hard. That was

critical. The things God has for you are not going to happen without your cooperation. But Paul was also letting God act through and with him.

a. *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20-21.*

b. Not Christ. Not I. “Christ in me”.

(d) But this abiding can be difficult for us. The flesh is thorny and is always reasserting itself. And so, we must learn to abide.

(i) And one of the ways we learn to abide is by doing the practices. You see, while we are doing the practices we are abiding. The practice of the presence of God is the fundamental spiritual practice, and the basis of all the practices. And we make it a point to then bring that abiding out from the practices and into the rest of our everyday lives.

(ii) Practicing God’s presence doesn’t mean we attempt to think about God every moment of every day, which is not possible. Rather, it means that we do everything in His power and under His direction, thinking of Him and conversing with Him at designated intervals during the practices, and here and there as often as needed.

(iii) And with time, we will become the kind of person who naturally and regularly, without any great effort or concentration, does say no to the flesh and yes to the Spirit.

(iv) We can now start to notice that there are two different components of our spiritual life that we are facilitating in the practices.

1. The first is, we are learning to be able to resist the flesh, when it leads us astray. That is why many of the practices, such as fasting, silence, and the like have to do with learning to resist or control our natural impulses. With refraining.

2. The second component is, to say yes and open ourselves to the activity of the Holy Spirit. That is why many of the practices, such as worship, Bible study, and prayer facilitate our direct experience of God. With saying yes to good natural impulses. With partaking.

3. Both the refraining and the partaking that the practices provide us are critical. As we resist and control our natural impulses, we are creating a vacuum of sorts. If that is all we do, it is not helpful. Because the flesh will simply come out in some other way. It is persistent and tricky.

4. There must at the same time be a partaking. During the practices, we are inviting the Spirit into that vacuum we have created. Something of real substance is coming to us. *For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. John 6:55.*

(e) So, the practices help us learn to abide. And the other way that we facilitate abiding is by making adequate space for it. You will need to have some space in your day, and in your mind, to stay plugged into Christ. It is not possible to abide when you are rapidly dashing from one thing to the next all day. In this regard, a lifestyle suggestion, it’s not any kind of command or legalism, that

Dallas Willard makes is to drive the speed limit. You don't have to go five or ten over. You will get to your destination five minutes slower...so what? There is a benefit to you not being in a hurry all the time, in terms of your mental state, isn't there? Don't rush. Be where you are. Not where you are going. Maybe sometimes don't listen to anything or talk to anyone on the phone when you drive. Just be there, with God. Not just when you drive, but in your life generally, when breaks in the action occur here and there, don't always take your phone out, turn on the TV on, seek out a conversation, or some other type of stimulation or diversion. Get used to being in silence, without distraction. Sit quietly at different points throughout your day. Just a few minutes here or there. Pay attention to what you are doing, what is happening around you, who is around you. Take time to process and think through what you are doing and experiencing instead of bouncing from one thing to the next. Contemplate what God thinks about what is going on around you, where He is active in it.

- (i) When he woke up in the morning, Dallas Willard used to say aloud "God is here. The Lord is present." We want to operate from that mindset.
- (ii) Or another practical point is to learn a few hymns. Sing them out loud here and there when you have a spare minute. That will lift your soul right up to God.

1. *Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.*

- (f) In learning to abide, let's consider the experience of two Christians.

1. The first is George Müller. Mr. Müller lived in the 1800s. He was an evangelist and the founder and director of an orphanage in England, which at one point housed 1,700 children. For many years, He dutifully prayed first thing in the morning, and then went about the rest of his daily duties. But over the years, he found a much better way. He discovered that:

- a. "As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man."
- b. "Now what is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God"
- c. He goes on to explain that when we pray, we speak to God. But when we "ponder Scripture and apply it to our hearts" God speaks to us.
- d. He said, "the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every [morning] was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get

my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished.”

- e. First thing in the morning, open yourself to God’s voice, to the Scriptures. Take that time to get your soul happy in the Lord. The rest flows from there. Grumps and discouraged folks are not too useful for the Kingdom. That was what George Müller came to find out.
2. The second example is Brother Lawrence. He was a 17th century Frenchman, of no particular social or religious standing, who worked as a cook in a monastery. Despite his lowly position in life, he had a reputation for experiencing profound peace and visitors therefore came to seek spiritual guidance from him, who compiled a book of his sayings titled The Practice of the Presence of God
 - a. Brother Lawrence often stated that it is God who paints Himself in the depths of our souls, we must merely open our hearts to receive Him and His loving presence. Brother Lawrence’s central idea was that the basis of living in the kingdom of God here on Earth was the art of “practicing the presence of God in one single act that does not end.”
 - b. Here are some things that Brother Lawrence said:
 - i. “We should establish in ourselves a sense of God’s presence, by continually conversing with Him. This conversation should be free of mystery, of the utmost simplicity...[and very frank].
 - ii. We should do well whatever God is demanding of us in that moment, offering our actions to Him before doing them and giving Him thanks for having done them for Him after we have done them.
 - iii. Brother Lawrence said that his prayer was often simply an awareness of the presence of God. And after prayer it was no different, as he stayed close to God by praising and blessing Him with all his being so that he passed his life in continual joy.
 - iv. He said that he was so accustomed to the divine presence that he received continual aid from it in all circumstances.
 - v. He advised others to “lift up your heart to [God] during your meals and in company; the least little remembrance will always be the most pleasing to Him. One need not cry out very loudly; He is nearer to us than we think.”
 - vi. In learning the presence of God, often, in the beginning, you will think that you are wasting time, but you must go on, be determined and persevere in it until death, despite all the difficulties. Do not be discouraged by the resistance you will encounter from your human nature; you must go against your human inclinations.

vii. When he had failed in his duty, he only confessed his fault, saying to God, 'I shall never do otherwise, if You leave me to myself; It is You must hinder my falling, and mend what is amiss.' That after this, he gave himself no further uneasiness about it."

viii. All the mortifications and other spiritual exercises are only useful insofar as they bring us to union with God through love.

(ii) I want to conclude our discussion of our third side of the triangle with these words.

1. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5*
2. That is the reality of God, present and active in a human life. Or the reality of a human life without God. That is as simply and as directly as it can be said.

v) Remember, the triangle of transformation works.

(1) And this means that when there is an area of ongoing failing in myself, or another, consideration of this triangle of transformation will be critical. Which of its three sides is not being properly addressed?

3) To summarize this talk:

- a) The triangle of transformations includes the following three items: The spiritual practices, good-naturedly bearing up under suffering for long periods of time, and cooperation with the activity of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- b) We learned that the trials and difficulties of our lives can discourage and overwhelm us. They can also strengthen and mature us, leading us into contentment and peace. The determining factor as to how they affect us is the attitude with which we undergo them.
 - i) The key to emotional well-being is understanding that we can use the truth to correct our emotions when they are off base or dangerous. Or whenever we need encouragement.
- c) Keeping in step with the Spirit means doing everything with God, rather than on our own. Unrepentant sin will severely hinder the activity of the Spirit in our lives.
 - i) Unforgiveness is a very common form of unrepentant sin and indicates a lack of faith.
 - ii) Learning to walk in the Spirit, as opposed to the flesh, requires the practices, and well as continual abiding. That to abide, we must set our minds on Christ as we go through our day.

Father, please come and be with us, transforming us from the inside out, for our benefit, and the benefit of the world.

- Amen

Reflection

- Why are suffering and sanctification linked together?
- Why are faith and forgiveness linked together?
- What is the consequence of unrepentant sin in the Christian life?
- What did Dallas Willard mean when he advised Christians to “Just quit trying to be righteous?”