

Dallas Willard
The Divine Conspiracy Teaching Series
Hosted by the Harvey Fellows Summer Institute, 2007

Session 8 Outline: The Process of Transformation

The major issue we have to deal with is in detail how transformation happens...

1. Not by Human effort alone.

Not without grace. We are not talking about bringing the inner transformation of the self into Christlikeness by human effort.

2. Not without Human effort.

We still have to act.

The statement - "*Grow in grace*" is a command. (**2 Peter 3:18**)

How do you grow in grace? Grace is a gift. Can you control that?

The answer is, "Sort of."

One of the greatest difficulties we have in our religious circles today is not understanding how *effort* works with *grace*. You must make effort if this transformation is to come about. Not without grace and the Holy Spirit, but not by grace and the Holy Spirit *alone*. That's passivity.

The transformation of the inner being *that exceeds the scribes and pharisees* will not happen passively.

We're familiar with Jesus' statement, "*Without me you can do nothing.*" (**John 15:5**) That is why there is not boasting in this matter.

Paul makes it clear that there's no boasting because it is by grace.

Boasting disrupts everything in kingdom living. Notice also: You can be sure that if you do nothing, it will be without Him. In the same passage, we are given the command to *Abide in the vine*.

The Role of GRACE in the Life We are Talking About

Grace is God acting in our lives to bring about what we cannot do on our own.

Is it unmerited favor? Of course it is. But if you just say grace is "Unmerited Favor," you don't say what it does. This is where the teaching of grace can easily slip over into the default gospel that says grace just has to do with the imputation of righteousness: The merit of Christ being substituted for your demerit to bring you out of the red and into the black with God. You have to say more about grace than just that it is unmerited favor. **Grace** is God acting in our lives to bring about what we cannot make happen on our own.

Grace is not opposed to effort but to earning.

God acting in our lives does not mean that we do nothing. Grace means we never come to the place of saying we've earned what comes out of the process. The effect is to eliminate pride, boasting, self-reliance and self-will. It is to say to God, *"I am dependent upon you. I am surrendered to you. I am following your direction. I am expecting your help. I am going to do my very best, but I'm not going to trust my best. I will engage in disciplines, but I don't trust disciplines. I will seek knowledge. I will seek to be strong. But I don't trust that. My trust is in God."*

So grace does not make you passive but it also doesn't allow you to be proud. It does not allow you to trust yourself because you recognize that what you're involved in is something far greater than anything you can do.

Paul On Grace

[7:44]

- **Ephesians 3:8**, *"Unto me the least of all saints this grace is given to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ."* That's a grace.
- **I Corinthians 15:10**, *"I am the least of the apostles...By the grace of God I am what I am. His grace toward me did not prove in vain. But I labored even more than all of them."* Then he catches himself as a beautiful expression of the consciousness of how grace and effort worked together in the life of Paul: *"Yet not I but the grace of God with me."*

Paul could not have had the tremendous effect he had in preaching the gospel on his own. Paul was miles ahead of the other apostles at the time he wrote this. He had just gone along across the Greco-Roman world like a cyclone. Was it him? He *did* something. If he had stayed at home it wouldn't have happened.

- **II Corinthians 9:8**, *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiently in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."*

Grace there is not just for guilt. Grace is for life. When we're done dealing with guilt, we still need grace. The person who is living fully in the Kingdom of God is consuming grace all the time. The sinner needs grace for forgiveness and guilt, but compared to the grace a saint uses in their lifetime, that's nothing. *The saint burns grace like a 747 burns fuel on takeoff.* They're burning it in quantities because what they're doing is always accompanied by grace and much more is being accomplished than they can possibly do on their own.

- **II Corinthians 11** - *"My grace is sufficient for you."*

This was not to make up for guilt, but to supply the strength Paul needed in his weakness to do what he needed to do.

"Most gladly therefore I would rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

My weakness is an opportunity for the grace of God acting my life.

Thank God I am weak, because I get to know the power of God working in me.

"Therefore I am well content with weakness, with de-stresses with persecutions with difficulties for Christ's sake for when I am weak then I am strong."

Put that into ordinary life and all the things we might suffer from, and say, "Thank God!" Why would one be thankful? Because they expected to see God acting in that situation. That is better than them being able to control it themselves. That's what Paul is talking about.

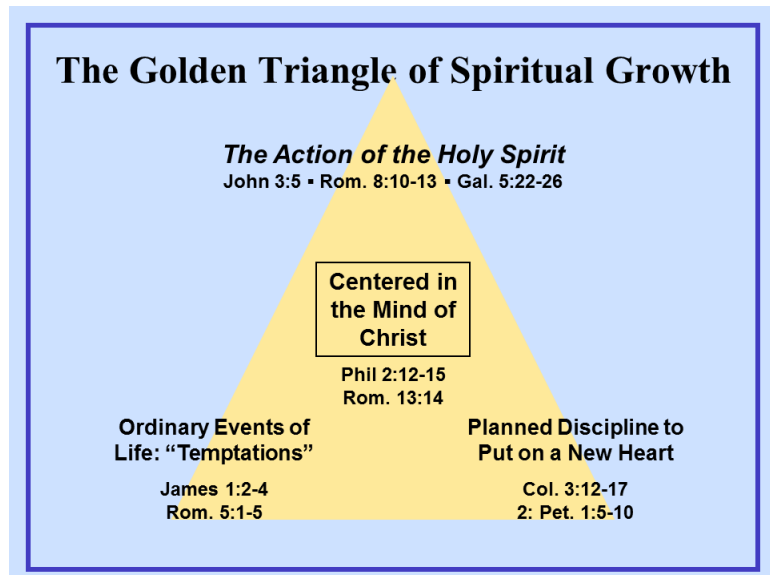
Holistic Picture of Spiritual Growth

[15:15]

I use this diagram because we want to have all the factors in place.

1. Our mind is centered on the mind of Christ.
2. The action of the Holy Spirit – you don't go anywhere without that.
3. Ordinary Events of Life - Where you are. We don't throw trials and temptations away. We live an ordinary life and we experience trials.
4. Planned disciplines to put on a new heart – To go beyond the righteousness of the

Scribes and Pharisees, you don't just try. You put yourself in a position where you can train and receive help. (**II Peter 1:5-10**)



The planned disciplines are crucial. We have to take practices that enable us to receive grace in the ordinary events of life, to keep our mind centered in the mind of Christ, and acting with the Holy Spirit, to be the kind of person that Jesus has called us to be and gives us to be. You *plan* for this.

V-I-M Principle

[18:20]

This is the outline of spiritual growth. Any personal change requires these three elements, rightly related:

1. **VISION** – You must have the vision of the goodness of what you're after.
2. **INTENTION** – If we don't have the vision, we won't form the intention. When we get gripped with the vision of the goodness of something, the intention will follow.
3. **MEANS** – Once we have the intention, we find the means. The means are not righteousness and things we have to do to obey Christ.

I now believe the most important thing that God gets out of my life is the person I become. Actually, I think the most important thing I get out of my life is the person I become. The things I might accomplish in the way of ministry are very small compared to the importance of my becoming Christlike. I believe that the more Christlike I become the greater my results will be, but that's not why I do it.

The church's problem is never that we need more money, more influence, more people. The problem is the quality of the people that are there and that begins with me. What is the quality of my life? Of course, there are meaningful questions about other things but that is most important.

Understanding the Disciplines

[26:20]

The Spiritual Disciplines

Disciplines of ABSTINENCE

- Solitude
- Silence
- Fasting
- Frugality
- Chastity
- Secrecy
- Sacrifice

Disciplines of ENGAGEMENT

- Study
- Worship
- Celebration
- Service
- Prayer
- Fellowship
- Confession

Disciplines of Abstinence

Things you abstain from, that you need to step out of, in order to allow things to shift around in your soul and your body, and to break free of old patterns that keep you enslaved.

Disciplines of Engagement

If these are all you've got, that's a short recipe for

burnout. You grind away at those, especially in a social context where people have all sorts of things for you to do. That's going to burn you out because it will not put you in touch with things that will nourish you and grow you and allow you to have a joyous, strong walk with Jesus. In order to get that you have to shift over and practice disciplines of Abstinence.

Solitude, Silence and Fasting are the most. Begin to practice them and they begin to sustain you. Solitude, doing nothing, is connected to Sabbath. Sabbath is still one of the Ten Commandments. Often people think that was the ritual law and not the moral law, but it turns out to be moral law because it has so much to do with your well-being and the well-being of others you are related to. Solitude for most people is the only way to practice Sabbath, because Sabbath means you do no work, but being around others will keep you working.

A Summary of Disciplines in Practice

Enter into these experimentally, expecting the Lord to be lead you and be with you. This will be part of His teaching presence with you. Don't try to force things. Don't try to make things happen. Be gentle, be experimental. If you don't succeed, don't worry. Find out what went wrong, try to fix it and try again.

These are not righteousnesses, they are wisdom. They are not laws. As you enter into them, you will begin to experience from God and from your own nature and soul, a kind of renewal and strength that will then put you in position to engage in study and worship and celebration in a way you've never done it before. Out of this will come a richness of your life in the kingdom that will allow you to do the things that Jesus said at a walk. All of the struggle and tension will gradually move out of your life and you'll understand what it means when Jesus says, "*My yoke is easy. My burden is light.*" (**Matthew 11:28**)

Now remember, this is not behavior modification. That's one of the differences between a wonderful program like Alcoholics Anonymous and spiritual disciplines. AA is aimed at behavior modification. This does not *aim* at behavior modification, but it has as its result incredible behavior modification. You aim at the inner transformation of the self. This is what it means to grown in grace, because s you enter into these things, you increasingly receive grace through your knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How does one practice the disciplines?

You decide to live as Jesus' student. You begin to obey his teaching. You observe why you fail (and you will fail), and then do in reliance on the Spirit what will remove the causes of these failures.

Definition of A Discipline - something in your power that you do in order to enable you to do what you cannot do by direct effort. [32:10]

The principle is Indirection. You do the things that will help you grow and change. As a result, what comes out of you is different because what is inside of you is different. If you don't decide to live as Jesus' student, you

are not a disciple. Disciplines are for disciples. If you are going to take an orderly approach to transformation into Christlikeness, you need to do this to become a disciple.

Churches and Spiritual Disciplines

Churches moving in the direction of discipleship and transformation have to organize their program of spiritual growth and development around the disciplines. You cannot get growth in Christlikeness out of "church as usual." There just isn't enough there. Many churches are making more intensive experiences available.

The result will be that you will get out of *improper subordination* in yourself where the body is running the show, the soul is subordinate to that, the mind (including thoughts/feelings) to the soul, the spirit to the mind and God to the whole shebang. That's the situation that people live in. Sometimes they just leave out God and live for their body. The prominence of the body in human life is the result of that.

Proper subordination puts God first. The spirit puts the will under God. Then the mind (thoughts/feelings) at the direction of the spirit. The soul begins to respond to the mind and to the spirit and to God. And the body finally takes its place *under* the soul rather than *driving* the soul.

What does this have to do with being saved?

[35:40]

Regeneration - New life from above - comes at the new birth. Now we're entering into an interactive relationship with God and His son Jesus and His Kingdom. Since that has happened, forgiveness and Justification is an appropriate thing. The life which comes in regeneration naturally develops into Sanctification - *the established relationship walk with Jesus*. All of the parts of the self are involved in that. That naturally progresses to Glorification. Glorification has already begun. (Colossians 3 - "*When Christ who is our life shall appear, then you will also appear glorious.*") That glory begins to shine in you already. When you are waking this path, you are going look different. There is going to be something in you that that people can see. They will respond to it. They will want to know where it comes from, and they want to have it themselves. There will be a beauty in you.

Being saved is not a matter of where you are going but of who you are now: a participant in the life that Jesus is now living here. That's what salvation is.

That all fits together once you start at the right place, and keep Jesus in the right place. You see him as King over a Kingdom in which He invites you to live with Him now. **Colossians 1:13** - "*We are transformed from a kingdom of darkness to a kingdom of His dear son.*"