

REVIEW OF THE LAST SIX SESSIONS:

The Kingdom of God

- Jesus brings the present kingdom of God, which is God in action.
- We're invited to make our life a part of the kingdom of God, and that's how our life can become an eternal life.

What "Life" Is; What "Spiritual Life" Is

The Two Landscapes: Visible and Invisible

- We have freedom from bondage to fear of what happens in the visible landscape...in particular deliverance from bondage to fear of death. **2 Timothy 1:10**
- This world with all its troubles is a perfectly safe place to be for anyone who's living in the kingdom of God.
 - Remember Amy Carmichael's story

Grace: God acting in our lives to accomplish what we can't accomplish on our own.

- A principle of life; deals with death; also deals with right now

Barriers to Living the Eternal Life Now:

1. The Unsundered Will
 - a. Conversion: many people have never had a moment of conversion and they're living in the kingdom of God, anyway! One of the most blessed cases are the cases of little children that are raised in a home that is in the kingdom of God...they just walk right into it. What matters is you have the (eternal) life now.
 - b. "Not my will, but Thine be done."
2. The Mind: Thoughts & Feelings
3. The Body
 - a. Recognize its goodness
 - b. It creates problems for eternal life now because it's set in a different direction and is ready to act as if God doesn't exist.
 - c. We must retrain the body.
 - d. **The flesh isn't our "sinful nature." It is possession of the body by wrong tendencies that are built into it by its experience in a fallen world.**
 - e. The body is built to carry intentions and actions without our thinking about it.
 - i. That's a good thing! That's part of what it means to have a kingdom is to have a body surrendered to God.
 - ii. The body becomes a primary support of spiritual life.



Today's Topic: Spiritual Disciplines

1 Timothy 4:7-8: *"Discipline yourself for godliness."*

(Next Session: Discipleship) Without discipleship, disciplines don't work. They don't succeed in bringing the eternal life now.

- Today, if someone is a Christian we can't infer that they are a disciple. We currently have a system of Christianity that does not involve discipleship.
- The assumption should be discipleship.

(Last Session: Bearing Witness to Eternal Life Now)

Understanding is essential to discipleship. One of the greatest problems we have is thinking that somehow our religion, our life in Christ, is supported by **will**, that you just will it and hang on. Discipleship cannot be supported by will! It requires will, but it has to be supported by understanding in connection with reality.

The point of understanding is to enable us to deal with reality. Understanding eternal life enables us to deal with it, and to deal with our world, in the light of eternal life, because we understand it and know how it works.

2 Corinthians 3:16-18: *But whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. But we all with unveiled faces, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord.*

Face to face we are transformed.

2 Corinthians 4:6: *For our God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" is the one who has shone in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Knowledge, Interaction, Grace

The routine is we seek His face. Seeking is the human side of holiness. When Paul says to Timothy, *"Exercise yourself unto godliness,"* he's talking about seeking.

FORMATION OF CHARACTER

- **Character is what you do without thinking.** And sometimes what you do after you do something without thinking.
- **Character comes from the "inside."**
 - We choose our characters.
 - Example: learning Spanish. I must *choose* to do it.
 - Learning how to listen to someone...involves not thinking about what you're going to say while someone is talking. But listening is something you have to WANT to do. *Then* you must TRAIN yourself to do it.

What God gets out of your life is the person you become. (That's character!)



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- **Revelation 22:5** – you’re going to be reigning with God forever and ever.... that’s going to be out of your character.
 - That’s why what happens now is so important because we’re training for the time that comes when God will be able to empower us to do what **we** want.
- **We become the person we do by action.** That’s where the disciplines come in - disciplines are action.
- **Actions that form godly character are only possible through grace.**
 - Your kingdom and God’s kingdom – how do you bring those together? You develop habits that are godly, and they involve God’s action with you.
 - When you’re dealing with an issue, you’re making place for God.
 - Grace & discipline fit together; they’re not opposed to one another.
- **The development of character requires intelligent effort.**
 - When training new employees on the job, hopefully, at some point, they can just begin to do it without needing to be told what to do. That’s what we’re aiming at!
 - Many people think they’re only in the will of God if God is telling them what to do. Can you be in the will of God without God telling you what to do? (Yes!)
- **We aim at people being able to act from good character.**
 - Jesus’s teaching: when you do your good deeds, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. How do you do that? It becomes automatic – you don’t think about it.

LOVE: “THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY”

- Suppose I want to become a genuinely loving person, as portrayed in 1 Corinthians 13.
 - A person who does not envy, is patient, kind, doesn’t puff up or exalt themselves...
- “I’ll try to do that” = Bondage
- The secret is to take love in and then love will do that.

The goal is to not act loving but to be loving.

- I want to learn to live in a way **where I am set to accomplish the good of those that I affect.**
- **Start with your thoughts.** How do I think about the person that I’m affecting?
- The Good Samaritan is an illustration. He saw the man and he had compassion on him. That was his character. **That’s the kind of person that he became.**
- The response to 1 Corinthians 13 is to take in love.
 - How do you do that? With spiritual disciplines. And God will help you.

TRAINING, NOT TRYING

- **Indirection.** What are the other things you can do that will train you into being a loving person?
- **Understanding** is what must come first.



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"Bless those who curse you."

- What is blessing? Where does it come from? What is cursing?
- **When you bless someone, you will their good under the invocation of God.**
- The lesser is blessed by the better. When you're blessing someone, you're taking a kind of position of superiority...because when we bless, that is an act that we do under God.
- I seek what is good for them. I speak what is good for them. But I do it with God.

What is love?

Love is willing what is good for the thing or the person that is loved.

- Love is the settled will for good.
- I must practice actions that habituate me through grace to act for what is good to the person that I'm dealing with.

If blessing is not in me when I am injured, what is in me will come out!

- Cursing is where you will what is *bad* for someone.
 - If you're troubled with that kind of language (cursing someone) often just understanding what it is, is enough to make you quit!
- When someone curses you – what do they need? They need a blessing! It's an opportunity to bless them.
- You want to be full of blessing so that you can bless the people who need it.
- Cursing comes in all sorts of languages.

Love enables you to stand for what is right, in a more effective way than anything else.

- Very often, to love someone is to stand against the very thing that they want from you. Because love is tied to what is good.

A person trained in love knows how to stand in joyful, non-compliance with evil.

- You have to learn how to do that because the way we're trained, the way our body is set, our idea structures, our feelings of various kinds push us so that if we are not inwardly stabilized, we'll get rattled.
 - Being rattled is often the first step off the cliff.
- **Psalm 119:165 - *Great peace, have they who love the law; nothing shall offend them.***
- **Nothing shakes them – because they are living in the invisible landscape!**
 - You never just see the visible landscape.

We learn to always have the Lord before us, then our training helps us love people.

Escaping envy is not just a matter of not doing something. It's a matter of doing something – of rejoicing that someone has the good things they have.

How do I do that? Love.



LOVE SUFFERS LONG, AND IS KIND, DOES NOT ENVY...

- I don't just *try* to be patient.
- I learn what it is, and why it's good.
- I learn where impatience comes from....
 - The thwarting of my will
 - Anxiety about what may happen
 - Lack of consideration for others
- Trying is not all bad, but the important thing is to find out why one fails.

James 1:2-4 – *Let patience have its completed work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Patience makes place for God to be involved.

NOTES FROM THE SLIDES DALLAS SKIPPED DUE TO TIME:

WHY PATIENCE MAKES PERFECT

- “Let patience have its completed work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 2-4
- Patience makes room to know the faithfulness of God.
- It opens a space in which we can genuinely love and care for others.
- Where we can seek and see what is good.

LOVE IS KIND

- It is hard to be kind when in the grip of impatience.
- To be kind means to be sympathetic, gentle, forbearing. You must see people in the light of their own problems and interests to be kind.
- When you do that, you will not resent them in envy, but be glad they have what is good. And so forth . . .

LOVE, JOY, PEACE . . .

- Now I can take the same approach to Joy, Peace, and the other elements in the Fruit of the Spirit.
- I must come to understand what each of these elements is: its parts and relations.
- It is in this way that I make progress toward the character of one engaged in eternal living.



SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

A discipline is a practice that I engage in, it's in my ability, and it will indirectly have the effect of love, joy, peace, the fruit of the Spirit.

Practice things that lead to patience.

- When a person curses you, you'll see that there's a blessing needed and will be in a position to do that.
- You won't be in a position to do that unless you are really comfortable in God's care.

Indirection is key.

A discipline is an activity that is in my power that enables me to do what I cannot do by direct effort.

Grace is God acting in my life to enable me to do what I can't do on my own.

Grace and discipline go together!

One deals with our part; one deals with God's part.

Many things not in (the list of) disciplines could be made into a discipline.

- Commuting to work could be a discipline.
- Meditating on the Lord's Prayer

Experiment with disciplines. Approach them experimentally, not legalistically.

- They are not ways of getting righteousness.
- If you fail, you have not sinned.

Disciplines are not righteousness, they are wisdom.

You are coming at walking in the character and power of Christ by indirection.

- That is how you have victory.
- This is how the life is opened up to grace.

SOLITUDE: going into a comfortable, quiet place, and doing nothing.

- Solitude is not just being alone; it's **learning how to do nothing**.
- If you practice, you might graduate to Sabbath. On the Sabbath day, you're to do no work. You turn your kingdom loose.
- Solitude is about practicing turning your kingdom loose.



Questions & Comments

Q: I don't understand this bullet: "I must train myself to see things people do to make an impression as onboarding even good things."

- In 1st Corinthians 13 Paul starts off saying, though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love...
 - If I have not love, I have nothing.
- 1 Corinthians 13 looks at all those things and doesn't say they're bad, it says if they're done without love, it doesn't mean anything.
 - Context matters - feeding the poor without love is still a good thing...
- Paul's talking about your own position in life before God. You can do that and still be a mean person if you're doing it to look good.

Q: "I'm familiar with your very instructive teaching on being free from anger and contempt...would you see it in an entirely different realm and appropriate occasion to deliver a strong rebuke, something on the order of men confronting other men if they're speaking inappropriately in public, and what some circumstances would be and how that should be delivered."

- You don't have to be angry to deliver a strong rebuke.
- If you deliver a strong rebuke without anger, it will be much more effective.
- Everything that you need to do, you can do better without anger.
- Some people can't stand for what is right until they get angry.
- Anger itself is not a sin. It's like a pain. It tells you that you need to change something.
- The tone you use often says more than the content of what you say.
- Anger is self-defeating because it evokes anger – that's in its nature.

Q: "Which of your books would best reflect the teachings of this conference?"
It depends on where you're at...

- *Hearing God*
 - The fine texture of the spiritual life...
 - How do you learn to live in a conversational relationship with God?
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines*
 - The "spirit" of the disciplines is the love of Jesus.
 - It's a discussion of how you become like Jesus by walking in the easy yoke with him.
- *Renovation of the Heart*
 - Goes into detail on each of the circles spoken of in prior sessions...
 - What spiritual formation is in each part of the person, and what spiritual formation looks like in the local church.
- *The Divine Conspiracy*
 - Pastors and theologians can start at chapter one.
 - Otherwise, start with the LAST chapter.
 - Then move to chapter three – about Jesus and His faith.



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- Then go to chapter four – the Beatitudes as Gospel, instead of other burdens to carry.
- And then you can go anywhere.

Q: Case Study: A woman in her early 30's has a group of other single women who are struggling with wanting to be married and submitting to God's will in that, and asking for God's will at the same time. Could you address some of the issues of that level of frustration?

Fullness of life does not depend upon being married. But you have to find the fullness of life. We should look to God to give us a full life. And surrender to the will of God. Fullness of life is for everyone.

Q: I live with someone with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). At the beginning of the session you said in the kingdom, living in the kingdom of heaven, this world is a perfectly safe place to be. Could you say more about that?

If you're living in the kingdom of heaven, there's nothing that will happen to you that will not be redeemed and turning into something good. Sooner or later.

- That's a very general point about how big is your God and what happens to you as a person at death, as well as this side of death.
- It won't do much good on many occasions to say to the suffering person, "now everything works for good." In so many cases, the only real thing you can do is be with them and reassure them that you are with them no matter what.
- Being with is the most profound Trinitarian reality about life.

I think that's why Jesus talks so much about how you can completely trust God in this world. Not just in the next world; in this world, you can completely trust God.

