

"Transformed by the Renewal of the Mind"
Dallas Willard, Trinity Seminary - Interview 2011

Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the recording in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The **bold** and underline offer the scribe's emphasis and the [brackets] refer to other Willard teachings.



["Transformed by the Renewal of the Mind"](#) [full interview]



[Video 1 of 4](#)

[14:59]

Q - Your story as a Pastor & schooling & career as a philosopher?

A - I was terminally ignorant on God and the Soul. I found it in the Bible but not a lot of teaching about it. Philosophers spent more time talking about those two things than anybody. I decided to spend a couple of years studying philosophy then go back into the pastorate or evangelism or the sort. Within a few years I wound up with a PhD. I stayed to teach a few courses and served as a pastor as a couple of small churches in the countryside in Arena, WI. God said to me, "If you stay in the Universities, the churches will be open to you. If you stay in the churches, the Universities will be closed to you."

In the middle 60's the church was still the center of culture.

I had no plan of being a university professor. It has worked out wonderfully well.

The work of philosophy in the traditional pattern is very close to pastoral work. Philosophy asks the questions Jesus Christ provides the answers to. I find my work in philosophy very useful to me both at USC and in my writing.

Q - How has your study in Epistemology influenced your studies in the Life of God and the Soul of Man?

A - The first book I published and all books come of a series of talks I gave. I never sought to write a book.

First writing in Christianity - Article in Christianity Today about "Discipleship" that is in the appendix of *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

First book I published is **Hearing God** (originally titled *In Search of Guidance*.) The heart of that book is about knowing what's it like for God to speak to you. That's a highly contested issue. It doesn't make much sense to people but there is a reality about it.

The Spirit of the Disciplines is an attempt to answer the question of classical philosophy - Socrates, Plato, Aristotle - How do you become a good

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person? Christ answers to that is, "Become my disciple." **The practice of the disciplines are the means the disciple uses to become the kind of person really everyone knows we ought to be.**

* That was the unsolved problem of Greek civilization. They knew what kind of person you should be but they didn't could not figure out how you got people like that. In 310 B.C. the Greeks were so busy killing each other they had to call in the Romans to stop them. The Romans never left.

That was the unsolved problem and that's where Christianity comes on the scene. Jesus Christ and his followers answer the questions they had been trying to answer for 800 years. In the 2nd century there was a mass conversion of the intellectuals to Christ and it built from there.

Four Main Questions in Human Life

[11:55]

1. What is real?
2. Who is well off?
3. Who is a good person?
4. How do you get to be a good person?

Those are the questions that the Bible and Jesus Christ and His people through the ages have answered. The answers they have provided are very clearly superior to the answers of any other group of people, East or West. I always say, "Show me something different." I present Jesus Christ as someone who would say, "If you can find a better way than what I've got, you should take it." He is a person of truth.

Q - Are you able to do that in the classroom?

[12:50]

A - Absolutely. The only issue is relevance. I teach philosophy. I don't go into preach or convert people. Jesus Christ is the most intelligent person who ever lived on Earth. I'm very painstaking to say I'm ready to hear any argument and I will listen and I'm open to change. If you've got it, I want it. Unfortunately that's no longer the general attitude on the campus. It's close minded.

Q - What is **truth** and can we know it?

[13:55]

A - This is one of the amusing things in our ordinary universities from the East and the West - one of the most common things written in stone not in spray paint is "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.*" That's on the Philosophy Building at USC, but they let a tree go up where you can't see it.

Truth is embarrassing to people now on campus. Truth is a very simple thing. Your beliefs are truth if what they are about is as you believe it to be. That's truth. It's very simple.

"Transformed by the Renewal of the Mind"
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[Video 2 of 4](#)

You don't have to teach them [children] to lie. They know about truth. If you say, "Johnny, did you steal the cookie?" and they say, "What is truth?" you know they've been corrupted.

- Tarski's (1933) definition of truth,
"Grass is green, if and only, grass is green."

Truth is simple but it's embarrassing because it is totally merciless. I challenge my students when I get on this. I have to talk about this in almost every class. "Why are we having this course?" to try to get around to "We want to gain knowledge." **Knowledge** is important because it embodies truth. Truth is important because it helps us have a pleasant relationships with reality as distinct from unpleasant ones. Reality is what you run into when you are wrong. Reality is also what you can count on. People are so embarrassed they won't talk about truth. Research has replaced knowledge and truth. We have research universities. You don't have knowledge universities. You can't get a grant for knowledge, you can get a grant for research.

Q - How do our answers to our question of truth effect our spiritual lives?
[2:25]

A - Profoundly. **One of the crusades I have been on for years is to help people understand the difference between having knowledge of truth than just having belief.** This is a big problem for our churches. Many of them have accepted the repositioning of Christian teaching outside the domain of knowledge into something called faith. The Bible and the tradition of Christ is not a tradition of faith if you take it as something distinct from knowledge. It is a tradition embodied, surrounded in knowledge.

- * Abram by faith knew who was going with him.
- * David vs. Goliath - He knew from past experience what He was doing.

Faith envired in knowledge is what stabilizes our lives.

Knowledge gives you the right and responsibility to:

- Act & Supervise Actions
- Formalize policy and supervise it's implementation
- Teach

Faith does not give you any of those. You begin to realize the situation we've got ourselves into in this country. The Church gave knowledge over to the secular world. The Universities progressed and by and large away from faith

"Transformed by the Renewal of the Mind"
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into something call knowledge. The way they handle knowledge put God away. Many people if they knew what is taught in some of our classes and Universities, they'd burn the place down.

All the social issues we talk about constantly they are not open to truth. Diversity came into the educational system hoping to enable people to have conversations but the effect of it has been to cut off conversations. "You can't attack us because we are diverse." Everyone just shuts up. There is almost no discussion about fundamental matters now on the campus.

Q - Corporate Scripture Memory - What practical steps Pastors can take to lead their congregations on corporate scriptural memory? [6:55]

A - The human mind and transformation.

What are we to occupy our minds with?

The answer of our tradition is with the truth about God, human life under God. Where are we to get that? The Scriptures.

The point is to occupy the mind with the truth about God and His relationship with us. One of the reasons I recommend **Colossians 3** it is such a compact and clear portrayal with what to do with your mind.

Joshua 1:8 & Psalm 1

Colossians 3:16 - Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly. It becomes an individual project of embedding the scriptures in our minds in whatever our situation, wherever we are. The way you do that is by memorization.

You can do that by good teaching and our songs.

I have learned that there is nothing that will replace memorization of passages of scripture.

Pastors have to get through the barriers already in the minds of their people. To go it together is so important. I do this in retreats. It works in the church. You want to have people to meet purposively to discuss their scripture memorizations.

You might have to teach how to memorize. A lot of people think they can't memorize.

Repeat ~ Concentrate ~ Understand

John 14 is a good one to start on. You'll learn you'll have to relearn the scripture. After a period of time it will be like the back of your hand because it will be in your body. That's the picture of the man in Joshua 1:8 murmuring the scripture day and night. What's interesting is what comes out of our mouth without thinking.

- * Retreats for memorization
- * The Bible Memory Association

"Transformed by the Renewal of the Mind"
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Take it the congregation, talk about it, hold it up. The difference it makes in human life is unbelievable. It's one thing to have a high view of scripture. It's another thing to have it embodied in yourself.

Q - Has the church always done but never essential or has it been lost?
[14:05]

A - I think it has been lost. The early centuries of the Church, ministers and deacons has to memorize whole books of the Bible.



[Video Part 3 of 4](#)

When we organized services, and we see how little in many of them we actually present the Word of God, the scriptures, it's no wonder people leave their Bibles at home and read a few lines off the screen and that's all the Bible they get. Most Christian homes have 7 or 8 Bibles. The old preaching theme, "Dust on the Bible". It's not the same to have recordings of it or see it on the screen. You need to take it in the bodily form of the book. It needs to be near to you. You need to know where to find things on the page. That's where we need to be with the Bible. It needs to be like an appendage to the brain. We know where it is, whatever we are looking for because we are so familiar with the physical incarnation of the scriptures.

* John Bunyan spent his time in jail very well. He became a marvelous writer and the command of the English language came from studying the Bible.

Q - Help pastors preach to reach the heart.

A - The affections follow thoughts. Thoughts don't follow the affections in the same degree. If you want to change people's feelings, you want to change their thoughts. That's where the will, the heart, becomes involved. You bring the gospel, the good news to them - that's thought. "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*" That's knowledge. The living Word and the Holy Spirit solicits the will to surrender to God. You have to go there first. When you have a will that's un-surrendered to God, it's subject to all kinds of bad thinking and bad affections.

* Anger - Where does anger come from? It comes from a misunderstanding who one is, where God is, what the world is and where people are.

"Transformed by the Renewal of the Mind"
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Teaching can transform our affections from hate to love, from fear and anger to confidence and joy. These are not just feelings, they are more like dispositions that take over a person. If you just try to deal with the feelings without changing the thoughts, you'll become slave to your feelings. There is a real danger of that in religion because people are apt to go for the feelings and use that for a basis for decision without going through the mind. That make many people come forward at meetings and you never see them again. They don't become disciples because they are...

Paul, "*There god is their belly.*" They are belly worshippers. By that he means they worship their feelings. You don't go for the feelings, you go for the clear apprehension of truth. That lays a basis for decision and provides the feelings that are appropriate for it that can overcome habits that keep you away from God. We have to work with the content of the Word and bring it to bear as clearly as we can. You can't do that without the assistance of the Holy Spirit but we are not waiting on the Holy Spirit. He is ready to do this. The task that we have is to speak clearly. If we don't think of ourselves as conveying knowledge of reality, we think of ourselves as exhorting people as though divine lightning will strike them and something will happen.

Pastors as motivators is one of the greatest tragedies. To motivate people to do things they don't want to do. We should be teaching in such a way that the motivation changes because the understanding changes. If I understand the house is on fire, I don't need someone to motivate me to get out. If you are driving your car, you don't need motivation to turn the wheel, speed up, that's knowledge. We've lost our confidence in knowledge. Then we turn to feeling and that's the source of all addiction. An addict is someone who has abandoned their will to feelings. They will tell you, "I can not resist." Everyone knows that you can resist. You have to have find out how, to have a knowledge that will fortify your will so you can resist. There is no addiction you can not resist unless it has moved into the area of demon possession.

The problem in religion is matched by so many things in our society for example abuse in families, diabetes epidemic, the addiction to sports. Where does that come from? It comes from a lack of knowledge about life. If that knowledge is not provided, there is really no remedy. **You can't motivate people into salvation.** You have to communicate truth which is the Word of the gospel. That as Paul knew so well, "*It is the power of God in salvation.*" That's real power. **Knowledge communicated in power is the secret to solving the problems of humanity.** We as ministers and teachers have the responsibility of bringing that to bear. We are in great opposition to a world system which denies that. We really have to understand the significance of this idea of knowledge and power.

"Transformed by the Renewal of the Mind"
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"We war not against flesh and blood. Our weapons are powerful to casting down strongholds." II Corinthians 10:4

There's where we as ministers must stand today in our communities and realize the dignity of our calling. We bring something no-one else can bring, the most important thing happening in any community is meant to be what is going on in the church. We have to reclaim that.

Q - Exposure to Asian Christians? [12:30]

A - Years ago I was attracted to the title, *The Normal Christian Life* by - Watchman Nee. By that time I spent so much time reading Luther, Calvin, Wesley and Charles Finney. I loved that title, *The Normal Christian Life*. It's what you see in Colossians 3:1-3. We need that reaffirmed.

Circumstances have forced them to the reality. I can't say I would ask for it but probably the best thing that would happen to the American and Western Church is persecution if we really had to pay a price. A lot more faculty on campuses are more Christians that you would think. If word went out that all the Christians were...



[Video Part 4 of 4](#)

...to come to center campus and they were going to be shot, many of these people would show up. But they how to live it. There's something about the press under the yoke of God. "It's a good thing to bear the yoke in your youth." Jeremiah. "The Lord is my portion." Psalm 16. What've I've got is the Lord, and it's often said, "It's all I've got." The church has always done best in godly terms and cultural terms in the least. "I have been given say over everything in heaven and earth." Put yourself inside of them, "In light of our recent successes if Jerusalem, we'er ready to take on the world." And they did. They did it with nothing except the Lord.

That's where I stand in what I do. All I've got is the Lord. And that's what I have to count on. I believe the truth of the matter is when we count on it, we will see the reality of the kingdom breaking forth all around us. The reason I believe is not just because that's what Scripture will lead you to believe but because it actually happens. When you look at church history, you see it over and over and it's happening now in many parts of the world.

~ ~ ~ **End of Part 4 @ 2:40** ~ ~ ~

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For a "Willard Teaching Toolbox" with dozens of teachings with A/V links & transcribed notes — JesusCollege.com