

November 12 & 13, 2005

Dialogue between John Ortberg & Dallas Willard

The Heart of Worship

This is a dialogue between MPPC Pastor John Ortberg (JO) and Dallas Willard (DW)

JO: Dallas Willard is with us this morning. This is a big year for Dallas. Dallas turned seventy this year, and he and his wife, Jane, celebrated their 50th anniversary. They have two children, John and Rebecca and a granddaughter, Larissa. Dallas leads several lives: he has been a professor of Philosophy at University of Southern California for forty years and specializes in epistemology; he also has had a unique influence in spiritual life through his writing about God. In academic circles, he is very well known.

Dallas has influenced many people in their spiritual lives, and I want to say a personal word about that. About fifteen years ago, I reached a point where I felt very frustrated. I had grown up in a Christian home, and I was doing church ministry, but I felt that I didn't know how to grow. I wanted to know God better, and I thought there had to be something more, but I didn't know how to pursue it. Then I heard about this book—***The Spirit of the Disciplines***—written by someone named Dallas Willard.

I could take you to the chair on the plane going from Chicago to Los Angeles where I read that book. Right at the beginning, in the Preface, Dallas writes that his thesis is that it really is possible to become like Christ:

If we're willing to follow Him in the overall style of life He chose for Himself, by arranging our whole lives around the activities He Himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of His Father.

When I read those words that affirmed to me that transformation is possible, and that there is a way to be transformed, it changed everything. I probably read that book seven or eight times. No book outside of the **Bible** has influenced me the way that one book has. Then I found out that Dallas lived just a few miles away from where I lived in Simi Valley. He lives in Box Canyon. I called him, out of the blue, and started haranguing him over the phone. Finally he said:

Why don't you come over to the house and harangue me in person?

I did, and one of the reasons for the faith that I have today is a man named Dallas Willard, who knows God the way that he does and sees things the way that he does.

I have been very eager to introduce Dallas Willard to you and to introduce him to our church. We have been studying about the role of a rabbi in the lives of his followers, and I would like to say that Dallas has been a kind of "rabbi" for many folks, including me.

He has been here all weekend teaching in our "RENOVARE" Conference and in our church services. Please thank him.

Every week we gather to worship, but we don't get much coaching in how to use worship in a way that will really connect us to God. I don't know of anyone who can do that for us better than Dallas, so that's what we're going to do. This will be a very unstructured, unscripted service, but we're going to try to walk together through how we use worship. Maybe our worship and experience of God will never be the same.

Dallas, will you please pray for us before we sing, and help us to enter into a spirit of worship?

DW:

Our gracious Heavenly Father. You're here, and we ask You to speak in each of our hearts and minds, to teach us what we need to know and show us how we can use the things that are available to us to lift ourselves, our hearts and our minds to You and keep You in all of Your glory faced in the center of our lives. We ask it in the Name and Honor of Jesus and in Your Name.

In Jesus' Name

Amen

JO: Dallas, we need a great, big God. We gather today, people coming from all kinds of different circumstances. Some may be beaten down by life. Then we come to do this thing called "Worship." We need help to understand this. Many people in many churches, when they think "worship," they just think "singing." Of course, some people don't sing well, and others are not moved by music. When we come to worship, how do we do it in a way so that we are not just treading water, but so that we can actually connect with God?

DW: Yes. That is extremely important to understand, and you can actually sing and not worship just as you can worship and not sing. So we just need to think about what Worship is really.

Worship is the intentional turning of the mind to God and ascribing to God all of the greatness and goodness and glory that belongs to Him.

You can do that sitting perfectly silently; you can do that dancing with joy; you can do that singing great hymns; you can do it sitting with a friend, holding a hand, praying about your life together. The basic idea in worship is the intentional turning of your mind to God and ascribing to Him all of the good things and the great things that you have learned about Him . . . perhaps even the things that your heart says ought to be there, if you haven't learned them.

These usually fall into three categories. Listen to the hymns that we are singing, and you will find that is true.

- One is Nature.

- Another is Redemption.
- The third is God's personal relationship to you.

Those three things will show up in your thoughts, in your songs and, hopefully, in your sermons or your teachings. That would be making the time of talking a Worship time.

It's very important for us to understand that Worship is not just a thing we do in church.

Worship is an atmosphere in which you can learn to live.

Now, our church services should help us, because we need help. Really one way of describing worship is to say that it is "orientation" or "reorientation," because we have to be spread out in life over so many different things, many of which are really quite trivial. We may have wasted a lot of enthusiasm on them.

JO: What do you do in ordinary life that helps you live in that way? You talk about that idea of "setting God always before us?" What do you do to help you do that?

DW: Those are wonderful words. David learned those in *Psalms 16:8*:

I have set the Lord always before me. (Psalm 16:8)

On the other hand, there is the refusal to retain God in our knowledge. So what we learn to do in order to live in an attitude of worship is we learn to pay attention to the contents of our mind and to be sure that in our mind are the words and the images that lift God up and place Him right in the center of where we are so that in any moment, we are conscious of God. You can do that by breaking the old bad habits of thought . . . turning off the radio . . . stop worrying about who won the game . . . and so forth and so on.

The important thing you know is to understand that this is for our good. Any time you pass by anything of great beauty, or value, or strength, and you don't acknowledge it for what it is, you rob yourself. God is not a cosmic egotist who is

waiting here for you all to show up and say good things about Him. He doesn't need that. He has a wonderful, sufficient community called the Trinity. Here are these magnificent Beings—too One to be Many and too Many to be One—that are just lost in the glory of the goodness of Their life. We are invited to be a part of that. In fact, we were created to be a part of that and then to extend that into the world in which we live.

The primary way that we do that is simply by keeping God in our knowledge—acknowledging Him for what He is and drawing from Him the things that we need for our lives. Orientation is crucial. It's our need, not God's, that rules here. We desperately need to worship the right thing—to have the right thing constantly before our minds.

JO: I think this quote is from *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. You describe how to enter into worship, especially when we come together like this:

Holy delight and joy is the great antidote to despair and is a wellspring of genuine gratitude - the kind that starts out at our toes and blasts off from our loins and diaphragm through the top of the head, flinging our arms and our eyes and our voice upward toward our good God.

But we're Presbyterian . . . so . . .

DW: But you can still put your body into it!

JO: We're going to sing a couple of songs about the greatness of God. How do we enter into that with our minds and with our bodies? Sometimes we feel foolish doing that.

DW: Yes, but there is a fascinating interaction between our minds and our bodies. For instance, raising our hands—a lifting up of the body—which you do naturally on occasions of joy, also lifts our minds naturally up toward God. There

is an interaction. If we can do that at a baseball game, then it certainly is a good thing here, because it is natural. We sing hymns, we kneel in prayer, and we do the things that we do with our bodies in worship, because that helps our minds.

And then, of course, the mind helps the body. Pretty soon, you have your whole being caught up in the worship and adoration of God. There is nothing else like this that will stabilize you for good, from the level of your health to the things that you are choosing, about what you're going to do and your attitudes towards others around you. Worship transforms everything!

JO: It's an amazing thing how when we worship like that, our minds become different and our bodies become different. When we think about how big God is, then problems get smaller, and our selfishness gets smaller. But, we cut ourselves off from all of that.

DW: Yes. One of the great things about the *Psalms* is they're so realistic. In some of the *Psalms*, David talks about how his kidneys praise the Lord! Yes, his kidneys!

Let all that is within me praise His Holy Name. (Psalm 103:1)

JO: One of the things that we do every week when we come together is we say the **Lord's Prayer**, (Luke 11:2-4) & (Matthew 6:9-13) the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to say. It's a great thing, but because we do it every week, it can become kind of routine, or rote, and we need help as we're saying it in order to inhabit the words . . . to be mindful of them. I know that the Lord's Prayer is important to you, and that it is part of your worship each day. If you have thought about that, could you walk us through how to think about the words?

DW: The important issue is to keep the words alive. We need to do that when we come together. That's one of the benefits of not having a card that tells you what is going to happen next in a worship service. I recommend it. That way, people will stay awake wondering:

What's going to happen next?

Jesus led His prayer life in the presence of His disciples, and they were tremendously impressed with it.

You may recall that when He was praying on one occasion, they came to Him and said:

Lord, teach us to pray. (Luke 11:1)

What we have in the way of the Lord's Prayer is actually our prayer. It is the prayer the Lord gave us, and it's a teaching about what you do when you pray. We have to be very careful and keep it alive.

My family was very devout. We prayed the Lord's Prayer every morning at breakfast, and we prayed extemporaneously at the other meals. It becomes kind of rote; you don't get the meaning, and your heart isn't lifted up. We have to make a point of putting our thoughts into the prayer. One way of doing that is to change the words a little bit and put them in ways that might mean more to us today.

For example, you begin with the form of address. By the way, when you pray, do address the Lord like you would someone else. Prayer is talking to Someone. That's why Jesus always looked up to Heaven when He prayed. That's where the One was to whom He was talking. So you start out with a form of address.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven.

Now understand that when the Bible talks about Heaven like that, it doesn't mean something that's a way off. It's talking about something that is right here around you. In the first place, it is talking about the atmosphere. That was the "first heaven" in Biblical terms. You might also say that phrase— ***Our Father Who art in Heaven***—in this way:

Our Father always near us, always present to us.

Now we are standing before God, and we have “sought His face,” as the Bible says.

Hallowed be Thy Name.

“Hallowed” doesn’t really do much for most people, except at Halloween, or in The Gettysburg Address, or something like that. Here’s what Jesus is saying:

May Your Name be treasured and loved . . . cherished and loved.

We know what it’s like to do that. We have a little granddaughter, Larissa. That name is sweet to me. I cherish it. I love it. I don’t separate it from that little girl. And the first request of The Lord’s Prayer is that the Name of God would be cherished and loved.

Thy Kingdom come.

That means:

May Your rule be completed in my life. May what You want done in my life come right around me. Thy will be done, Thy Kingdom come where I am . . . all around me . . . as it is in Heaven.

You need to dwell in those phrases. Sometimes you can spend a long time just in one phrase. That’s a good one to spend time in:

May Your will be done all around me today and day-to-day just as it is in Heaven.

How’s it done in Heaven? Pretty well! Wouldn’t you say? So, we are inviting that to come into our lives.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Give us today the things that we need. It isn't just bread. We're asking for all of our provisions, and we're trusting God for it. Very importantly, we are asking Him just for today, because He's going to be here tomorrow. If your children were found stuffing cornflakes into their pockets because they thought you might not provide them tomorrow, you would be worried about them, wouldn't you? That "daily bread" is what we need for today. I'm counting on God, and I tell that to Him.

Forgive us our debts.

The word "debt" doesn't say all that needs to be said there. Methodists say "trespasses." Presbyterians are "debtors." Those words are narrowed down for us. So my suggestion is:

God, please forgive us for the ways we have imposed upon You as we are forgiving everyone who imposes on us in any way.

Try that on. Work it through your mind and think about what it means. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.

These next two lines are so simple that you find translators struggling with them all the time.

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.

The older versions aren't just quite right. That means:

Keep us out of trouble and deliver us from everything that's bad.

I hope you're not above asking that. Many people feel that they are. But remember that this is the prayer of a child to its father. If you've forgotten to be a child, you need to relearn it. So you can just say simply to the Father:

Lord, keep us out of trouble and save us from everything bad.

Finally, the grand conclusion gives the basis for the prayer.

Yours is the Kingdom.

You might try that as:

You're the one who is in charge. You have all the power. The glory is Yours forever, and that's just the way we want it.

Amen.

“Amen” doesn’t say a lot, does it? Sometimes it just means, “OK. We’re done. Over and out. 1040.”

It really means something much more than that. A good way of paraphrasing it is to say:

That's just the way we want it.

Now if you are caught up in the prayer, you may want to say something like:

Whoopee!

I guarantee that, you may have to do it in private . . . you may be a little self-conscious. We’ve never done that here before. But I guarantee you; you can work up to doing it here!

JO: We’re going to say the Lord’s Prayer, but we’ll try it in a different way today. Dallas, would you lead us in it and just say it phrase by phrase out loud. We’ll repeat it slowly together, thinking about what it is that we’re saying? If it would help you to close your eyes, close your eyes.

DW: Yes, if you want to, you can close your eyes. But, by the way, you don’t have to close your eyes. If you want to, you can look up. That’s OK too!

Our Father always near us, may Your Name be cherished and loved. May Your rule be completed in us. May Your will be done all around us just like it is done in Heaven. Give us today the things we need for today, and forgive our impositions on You, just as we are forgiving anyone who imposes on us. Please don't lead us into troubles, but deliver us from everything bad. For You're the one in charge, and the power is all Yours and the glory too . . . forever.

Whoopee!

That's worship! You're admiring God. You say:

Oh this is a wonderful arrangement!

JO: I think one of the things that blocks us from Worship is we think it is something that we're supposed to do, but we don't think of God as this really wonderful person.

DW: That's a burden, isn't it? Say that again, one more time. We need to get the tension in that.

JO: We think of Worship as something we're supposed to do, but we don't think of God as a wonderful person.

DW: That's really true. And we haven't been taught how to do it. We haven't been taught that this is intentional.

JO: For so many of us, in our culture, we go to movies and plays and concerts; then we just think of Worship as one more thing that we go to. We talk about it:

How was worship today?

I want to talk about another part of Worship, and we touch on it in the Lord's Prayer when we ask God to forgive us our impositions. This is a quote from ***Renovation of the Heart:***

We must accept the fact that unconfessed sin is a special kind of burden or obstruction in the psychological as well as in the physical realities of the believer's life. The discipline of confession and absolution removes that burden.

Everybody in this room, whatever we think about God, we all have this sense that things are not in me the way that I want them to be; I'm not the person I want to be. But we all carry that with us. We try to hide it, or manage it, or make it look better than it is. What is this "discipline of confession," and how do we actually do that in a way that brings relief and release?

DW: Well, when we don't come up to meet our own expectations, and certainly when we don't come up to what we believe God expects of us or others expect of us—our loved ones around us—then we have to find some way of dealing with that. One of the ways that we find of dealing with it is to try to hide it. That's a sign that we are really taking charge of our life, and that we are trying to manage it, and that we are unwilling to turn it over to God. That's where the burden comes in. Even for your blood pressure and how your kidneys are doing . . . your brain too . . . your body carries that burden. You can invest a huge amount of energy in that. Sometimes the burdens are false burdens, but it doesn't really matter at this point.

What you do when you confess is you open it up to God. You may need some help from a friend, or a pastor, but often you don't. Confession is just saying to God:

This is how it is. This is who I am. I'm sorry, and I'd like to resume my intimacy with you in a way that there is nothing between us, and I'm walking with You and You're carrying my burden, and I'm rejoicing in You.

Wherever you are now . . . work or home or church or wherever it may be. Confession is a matter of opening our lives to God and counting on His acceptance and His will and power to accept that.

JO: It strikes me just now as I listen to you talking about it what a simple thing it is. You don't have to work up a lot of emotion, or go through something . . . it's really a pretty simple thing.

DW: It is a simple thing, but only if you have surrendered.

JO: I think sometimes I get this picture in my mind that if I've done a bad thing, I have to make God think I'm really, really, really, really, really sorry to get Him to forgive me.

DW: Yes. I think this is one of the deep teachings of the Prodigal Son—the story that Jesus told. The father did not require any song and dance. In fact, it was the son who had the song and dance planned. He was still not giving up. He was thinking still of how he could manage his life this time by managing his father. That's the project that we have to give up in confession. It's said that:

Confession is good for the soul and bad for the reputation.

That's the point, because actually, "reputation" is bad for you. You have to put your reputation in the hands of God.

JO: Let's just think about that for a minute. I have to think about that. "Reputation is bad for you."

DW: Yes. It's manning the facades. Especially in our fellowship, one of the things that we should be aiming at would be to grow to the point where we never pretend. That takes the load off. Confession is a big breakthrough with pretending. Many times, it's the way that God breaks through to us.

There was a wonderful Presbyterian missionary of the century before last named Jonathan Goforth. Hard to imagine how he could have been anything but

a missionary with that name, isn't it? There were tremendous revivals in China among the missionaries and the population, and they all came when the missionaries broke down and confessed things like their lack of love for one another and the things they had said and done to harm one another.

Over and over you will see in the life of the church and of Christians how the breakthrough comes at confession. The reason is very simply that at confession, I give up.

Often I find analogies in the everyday things around me that illustrate God's truth. For example, the lady who picked me up to bring me here had a GPS system in her car that kept her from getting lost. When she didn't follow the directions of the system and turned the wrong way, the voice did not say:

You idiot! Why didn't you listen to me? Now look where you are! See what you've done!

Instead, the mapping system recalculated the routing and began to direct her again starting where she was.

Isn't that just like God? He comes alongside and says:

Let's start again from here.

JO: We're going to take a moment right now to do that. Debbie's going to lead us in a song and the first time through, she will sing it alone. Each of us will have the opportunity to reflect. If there's something you've been hiding, or a burden you've been carrying, just simply lay it at His feet. Then, Dallas, at the end, would you pronounce that word of forgiveness over us? Remind us that we're not stuck in confession, but that it is well between God and us.

DW:

May I say to you on behalf of the Father whose heart is revealed in the story of the Prodigal:

Our sins are forgiven.

You will remember that all the son had to say was:

Father I have sinned, (Luke 15:21)

And the arms of the Father around him prevented him from going on.

So I am glad to tell you that our sins are forgiven and fellowship is renewed as we turn to the Father in openness.

JO: And that's worth a "Whoopie!" That's good news!

Now we come to the time of the Offering, and I'll ask if those who are receiving the offering would come and begin to receive it. We do this every week. Some people become mechanical about it. Some may be kind of scared of giving. Our money can be so tied to our sense of identity or security, especially here where we live. That can be so deeply true.

So, Dallas, talk to us about this part. Why is this important? Why is this a part of living in the Kingdom, and how do we use Giving as part of our Worship and drawing close to God?

DW: Giving fits in with Worship in the following way: By our giving, we acknowledge the worthiness of what God is doing, and we get a chance to participate in it. I'm sure that all of you know that God is not in need, and so we don't give because He's in trouble, or because His work is in trouble. We give, not just in church. Giving like Worship is an atmosphere in which we live. It is a part of love. It honors the God that we worship by accepting His invitation to be a part of what He is doing.

Your money is a part of your kingdom. You have a kingdom. Your kingdom is the range of your effective will. God made you that way, and that's a good thing not a bad thing. Giving and Prayer—are really the two main ways that we begin to take steps into the Kingdom of God. We come through faith in Jesus. He receives us and gives us new life. Giving and Prayer are opportunities for us to participate in what God is doing. It is OUR opportunity.

It's the same way with Worship generally. It's basically for our benefit, not for God's. Giving is the same way. We can learn to live in an "Atmosphere of Giving" that will then allow those things that others have to give to come to us. There is a "Great Circle of Giving," if you wish. Jesus talked about this in *Luke 6* where He says:

Give and it shall be given unto you. (Luke 6:38)

Why is that? Is that a bargain like we often hear talked about on TV where you give some money and you get so much back? No. It's where you enter into the "Life of Giving," and you are put in the cycle of God's abundance. When you give, you affirm God's abundance. When you put money in the plate, you are saying, "God will take care of me." That puts you in the "Circle of the Kingdom." Jesus says:

Give and it shall be given unto you; men shall pour out in your lap pressed down, shaken together, running over. (Luke 6:38)

You know, when you open the cereal box, there's a lot of air in there. That hasn't been pressed down, shaken together and it's not running over. They just put it in there and didn't shake it and closed the lid. You get to buy a lot of air. But that isn't the way God is.

When we enter the Cycle of Giving in the Kingdom of God, we experience abundance. It isn't tit for tat; it's much bigger than that. It's living a certain kind of life. And that's all how it fits together with Worship. If you really are worshipping God, you're going to be a joyful giver.

JO: We have a time of learning here when the sermon is preached. This fall, we've been going through a series about Jesus as the One who can be our Master. There are words in Dallas' book, ***Renovation of the Heart*** that move me greatly when I read them. You talk there about how all of us learn how to live from somebody. We don't really have a choice about whether or not we will

have a teacher or rabbi; we will be somebody's disciples. The question is whose disciples? It's usually our parents, then maybe teachers, or movie stars, or bosses, or someone. You write this:

It is one of the major transitions of life to recognize who has taught us, mastered us, and then to evaluate the results in us of their teaching. This is a harrowing task, and sometimes we just can't face it. But it can also open the door to choose other masters, possibly better masters, and one Master above all.

It sounds like Jesus. Would you take a moment to tell us why someone should make Jesus the Master of his or her life?

DW: Basically, we don't want to make a mystery of this, though there are a lot of mysteries in our relationship to God. It's a very simple thing. Jesus knows what's going on, and when we learn from Him, He puts us in touch with reality. That reality is primarily the Kingdom of God, which is what He talked about more than anything else.

I often have this experience. A weekend or so ago, after a talk, a young lady, who was no longer so young and who had been through a lot of stuff, came up to me. The tangle of life becomes so unbearably complicated when you're trying to run it on your own. Trying to unravel that is the worst fish line experience you can have. As is so often the case, the solution really is, as I said to her:

What you need to do is devote some time to just understanding what Jesus said about the Kingdom of God.

That's the main thing He talked about both before and after His Resurrection.

That's mainly what He has to teach us about: the reality of the Kingdom and how to interact with it. The way you interact with it is that you just put your confidence in Who He is, believe that everything that is presented about Him in the Scripture and among His people's central teachings is true. His sayings are

expressions of how we can live in the Kingdom of God. So, for example, when we think about Blessing, He taught us to live by blessing even those who curse us. We have plenty of opportunities to do that. Probably if you go to work on Monday, anyone who drives in this culture has many opportunities to bless those who curse them.

JO: Maybe we could just close with that. We're going to sing a song, and then we end by giving a blessing. Could you say a word about what it means to receive and give a blessing?

DW: That's one of the things that we learn in the Kingdom of God. Worship plays the foundation for all of this, because it is in the abundance of God to us that we are able to act out the Kingdom. The primary way of acting that out and knowing its reality is Blessing. Here's what Blessing is. It is a very simply thing:

You bless something when you will its good explicitly under the invocation of God.

You bring God down for the blessing—the goodness—of something. Suppose someone curses you. They don't need a curse; they need a blessing, don't they? We can train ourselves to do that. When you get up in the morning, start blessing things as soon as possible.

To bless something is to explicitly will its good under the invocation of God.

You can begin doing that the moment you wake up. Bless God for the new day. Bless God you've got a car to drive. Bless God you have a place to go to work. Bless God for your associates and bless them. Out of the abundance of the Kingdom, you will experience its reality, and it will solidify that attitude of worship that affects giving, that affects petition and praying. All of that comes into one picture.

The best thing that can happen to you is that today you will know the movements of God with you in every thought you have and in every action you take. Watch for it. Watch for it. That's the Kingdom of God.

May the Holy Spirit warm you and move you within.

May Christ walk with you and the presence of the Father be over you

And may you know it and see it today.

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Whoopee!