

## DALLAS WILLARD'S *THE DIVINE CONSPIRACY*

### Class Schedule

- Week 1 -- Jesus is the Smartest Man Who Ever Lived (Introduction, Chs 1 and 8)
- Week 2 -- Living the Eternal Kind of Life Now (Chs 2 and 10)
- Week 3 -- The Great Inversion (Ch 3)
- Week 4 -- The Secret of the Easy Yoke (Chs 4 and 5)
- Week 5 -- The Righteous Live By Faith (Chs 6 and 7)
- Week 6 -- Putting on the Character of Christ (Ch 9)

### Summary

- God wants you to be *happy* (i.e., to live the best kind of life).
- Jesus *knows how* you can be happy.
- God's commands (e.g., the Ten Commandments) and Jesus's teaching (e.g., to love God and to love your neighbor) are *instructions* for how to be happy.
- According to Jesus, the only way to succeed in obeying God's commands is to transform your *inner character*.
- As your inner character is transformed into Christlikeness you will be drawn deeper and deeper into an *interactive relationship* with God.
- The traditional *spiritual disciplines* (e.g., prayer, fasting, solitude, service, etc.) are reliable ways the Church has developed throughout history (based on Jesus's example) for transforming one's inner character.

### Willard Bibliography

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*previously published as* In Search of Guidance, (Regal Books, 1984).  
 Logic and the Objectivity of Knowledge: A Study in Husserl's Philosophy (Series in Continental Thought, Vol 6) (Ohio University Press, 1984).

*A list of Willard's articles can be found on the internet at [www.dwillard.org](http://www.dwillard.org).*

## Week 1 -- Jesus is the Smartest Man Who Ever Lived (*Divine Conspiracy* Intro, Chs 1 and 8)

### 1. Seeing Jesus as smart

There are many adjectives that come to mind when we try to describe Jesus: loving, compassionate, righteous, Godly, etc. But what about *smart*? Dallas Willard claims that “Jesus is the smartest man who ever lived.” If being a Christian is about having faith and trust in Christ, then it is impossible to be a Christian if you don’t think Jesus is smart, because it is impossible to *trust* anyone that you do not believe is competent -- that you do not believe “knows the truth about our lives and our universe” (p.94). This thought sounds radical, but why should it? If we take the Nicene Creed seriously when it says that Jesus is the “true God from true God” through whom “all things were made”, then how could we *not* think of Jesus as smart? If Jesus made the universe, then surely he knows everything about it and understands how it works! But we don’t often think about Jesus in these terms.

The problem is especially acute when we come to Jesus’s teaching. A precondition for *any* learning is to believe that your teacher knows more than you do about the subject. How could you learn geometry, movie acting, or automobile repair from someone that you believed to be incompetent in the area you wished to learn? So if we want to learn how to live in the world from Jesus, we have to believe that he knows more than us about how the world works. We have a tendency to write Jesus off as an “idealist” whose teachings present us with ideals to strive for. But this is to make Jesus’s teachings optional. If you fail to follow them, you simply fail to live up to an ideal. But when we realize that Jesus is the smartest person who ever lived, it becomes possible to see him as a *realist* rather than an idealist. It becomes possible to see his teachings as a description of how reality works. On this view, if you fail to follow Jesus’s teaching, you are simply *out of touch with reality*.

### 2. Taking Jesus’s teaching seriously

Why was Jesus’s teaching so successful? Did he just teach us to love our neighbors or that his death would somehow allow us to go to heaven when we die? If that’s all he taught, would his teaching have been so powerful and would he have been able to change the course of history as dramatically as he did? Willard argues that Jesus’s teaching would only have been so well-received if he were offering answers to the deep questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life that philosophers had been debating for hundreds of years. Moreover, common people would not have cared about Jesus’s teaching if it could not do anything to make their everyday lives better -- to solve the problems they have here and now.

Perhaps the best example of Jesus’s teaching we have is what has come to be known as “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew Chs. 5-7). But note that in the paragraph immediately preceding the Sermon, Matthew describes Jesus as “curing every disease and every sickness among the people” (4:23). Here Jesus is portrayed as meeting the immediate needs of people, not offering them “pretty” and “idealistic” fortune-cookie sayings that have no bearing on the practicalities of life on earth. So in *The Divine Conspiracy*, Willard challenges us to take the teaching of Jesus seriously as competent and relevant to our real, everyday lives.

### 3. The Bible as ancient philosophy

In the ancient world, philosophy was supposed to tell you how to live a meaningful and happy life -- *now*, not merely after death. You may have heard the phrase “the good life.” This is a phrase that comes down to us from ancient philosophy. For the ancients, “living the good life” is synonymous with

“living well” or achieving “happiness”. This is what philosophy was invented to study. And, more radically, philosophy was supposed to teach not just *what* kind of life is best in theory, but how to actually *achieve* this life in real world practice. The method of teaching these things was extended apprenticeship -- the entering of a student or disciple into a relationship with a teacher or master in order to learn to be like him. This is why Jesus says to his students, “Follow me” (4:19). It is also important to note that ancient philosophy was a complete way of life involving not only what we would call philosophical ideas but political and even religious ideas as well. And philosophy included not only the intellectual domain but also the emotional and physical. Different sects often had distinctive dress and even distinctive diet and exercise routines. So the entrance of someone into an apprenticeship to a philosophical guru involved a radical change of life, not merely the transfer of information (p. 112).

It might seem strange to think of the Bible as a source of teaching about happiness. But even on a cursory reading of Scripture it becomes obvious that *God wants you to be happy*. Here are a few of my personal favorite passages: Deut. 6:1-3ff. (So that your days may be long), Ps. 37:1-9 (Take delight in the Lord.), Prov. 3:13-18 (Happy are those who find wisdom.), Isa. 55:1-9 (Why pursue what does not satisfy?). Note that in ancient philosophy being “happy”, as these verses suggest, is not a matter of merely subjective pleasure; it’s a matter of objective flourishing. The words translated “happy” could also be translated “blessed” or “fortunate.” It’s not enough to falsely believe that your life is blessed or fortunate -- you also want it to actually be blessed or fortunate. Likewise happiness is not just about *feeling* well-off, but actually *being* well-off.

#### 4. *The Essence of Discipleship*

In general, “disciple” is just another word for “apprentice” or “student”. And as Willard puts it, a student is “simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is” (p. 282). We are all “disciples” of someone in this sense -- we have all “learned how to live from somebody else” (p. 272), usually a small group of people that includes our parents, teachers, peers, etc. On Willard’s view, then, to be a Christian and to have faith or trust in Jesus is simply to think *Jesus* is the best person to spend time with and to pattern one’s life after. This is what Jesus meant when he called his disciples to “follow me” (Matt 4:19).

But, as the ancient philosophers realized, your actions are the products of your habitual character, not merely your instantaneous decision. So in order to do what Jesus did and live like Jesus lived we must be the kind of *person* Jesus was and have the kind of character Jesus had. And since beliefs influence action and character, if we want to live like Jesus lived, we must change our ideas and patterns of thinking to believe what Jesus believed (p. 307). [Incidentally, this is why the usual translations of Pauline justification passages as saying that justification and righteous come from “faith *in* Christ” are better translated as saying that righteousness comes from “the faith *of* Christ”; see, for example, Rom. 3:22, 3:26, Gal. 2:16, 20, 3:22, and Phil 3:9.] In other words, we must take Jesus’s *teaching* seriously as the best answer to the question of happiness and as the best source of wisdom and knowledge of how to live. But there’s good news: The smartest man who ever lived “is now taking students in the master class of life” (xvii).

## Week 2 – Living the Eternal Kind of Life Now (*Divine Conspiracy* Chs 2 and 10; see also *Spirit of the Disciples* Ch 3)

### 1. What is the Gospel?

*Gospel* is the English word for the Greek *euangelion* which means “good news.” So what exactly *is* this good news? What Jesus called “the gospel of the kingdom of heaven” is *not* the “fire-insurance” offered to us by fundamentalists or the liberation from political oppression preached by progressive churches. Neither of these so-called “gospels” take the *teaching* of Jesus seriously. The fundamentalists think Jesus’s teaching is irrelevant to the gospel because the good news is merely that Christ’s death made it possible for you to go to heaven; and the progressives think Jesus’s teaching was fundamentally mistaken because loving your neighbor has nothing to do with all the prescientific stuff about unseen spiritual realities.

But what did *Jesus* think the good news is? The gospel Jesus preached was this: “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17), or as Willard might paraphrase it “Reconsider your plans for living in light of the fact that God’s resources are now available for your use, making possible a whole new kind of life.” [The way Willard actually puts it, the gospel, along with its usual results, is this: Jesus’s “basic message, ‘Rethink your life in the light of the fact that the kingdom of the heavens is now open to all’ (Matt 4:17), presents the resources needed to live human life as we all automatically sense it should be and naturally leads one to become his student, or apprentice in kingdom living” (p. 274).] What this means is that because of Jesus it is now “easy” to be happy and fulfilled (Matt 11:28-30) because God has made available everything you need (Ps. 23:1) in order to live the kind of life you were created to live. This ability comes from “knowing” God (John 17:3), which means having an interactive relationship with him. So on this view, salvation is not mere forgiveness and the possibility of a future happiness; salvation is a life, namely “the eternal kind of life” which we can live now.

### 2. The Meaning of “Life”

Not only do the fundamentalist and progressive gospels not take the teaching of Jesus seriously, they don’t take the *life* of Jesus seriously either. More to the point, they can’t explain why Jesus’s *resurrection* is important. For Christians, the resurrection is supposed to be the most important event in history -- more important to our salvation than Christ’s death (1 Cor. 15:17). But if Jesus was just a nice guy or a blood sacrifice, why would God bother to resurrect him? (Worse still, if Jesus was just a sacrifice, then why not kill him as a child and not waste 30 years letting him grow up?) But if, as Willard puts it in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, “Salvation is not just forgiveness of sin but a new order of life” (p. 32), then the resurrection starts to make sense: it turns out that the kind of life Jesus lived (and which his death made possible for us to live) is *indestructible*.

In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard defines “life” as “the ability to contact and selectively take in from the surroundings whatever supports its own survival, extension, and enhancement” (p. 57). So on this view, *regeneration* (or having a new life “born from above” as in John 3:3) is the regaining of the ability to take our nourishment from God rather than relying on our own physical abilities (John 6:51). Of course, if we “live according to the flesh” and take our nourishment only from the physical order, we will eventually die when our body wears out; but if we “live according to the Spirit” and take our nourishment from the divine order, then just like Jesus we will *not be able to die* (Rom. 8:5-11). Now we are able to understand why the Apostle Paul says “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10).

### 3. The “Meaning of Life” and The Kingdom of Heaven

Willard says that any kind of meaning comes from context, so in order to have a meaningful life we must understand “the ultimate context, God and his kingdom. ... For only then do we really understand what our current life is and are we able to make choices that agree with reality” (p. 387). Another way of putting this point about the contextual nature of meaning is to say that a life is meaningful to the degree that it is aimed at a meaningful *end* or *goal*. And as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* teaches, Christianity says human life’s “chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” This is precisely the gospel of Jesus we examined above: we are able to have an intimate and interactive relationship with God.

But what does this relationship consist of? It consists of our doing what God *created* us to do, i.e., fulfilling the *purpose* of human life. According to Willard’s reading of the Bible, we were made to live in God’s kingdom. Remember that a “kingdom” is whatever resources the king has say over. So we all have a kingdom of our own -- we all have “say” or control over something. In fact, *the purpose of human life is for each of us to exercise our personal control in a meaningful way*. This is what it means that we are to have “dominion” or “rule” over the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). This is why it is so soul-crushing to feel that you are out of control of your life. Being a slave to something (whether literally or figuratively) means that you are prevented from fulfilling your purpose and from living a meaningful life.

But achieving this purpose is much more difficult apart from a relationship with God -- after the Fall, the work of dominion became “toil” and “sweat”-inducing (Gen. 3:17-19). Sin also makes it impossible to fulfill our purpose in life because it makes us think being in “control” of our own lives means deciding for ourselves what is “good and evil” rather than trusting the God knows more than us (Gen. 3:4-7). So that is why sin leads to death (Gen 2:17, cf. Rom. 6:23). On this view “death” is the state in which our own kingdom and desires are in opposition to God’s kingdom and desires; and “life” is the state in which our own kingdom in harmony with God’s kingdom.

So our job now is to learn how to rule our kingdom in such a way that we work with, rather than against, God’s purposes. And to do this, we must learn to have the right sorts of desires. As I once heard Willard put it in a lecture, our life is “training for reigning.” In other words, “the intention of God is that we should each become the kind of person whom he can set free in his universe, empowered to do what *we want to do*” (p. 379). The good news, then, is that now Jesus has made it possible for us to have a *new life* -- to regain our lost relationship with God by bringing our own kingdom back into alignment with God’s kingdom, thereby making it possible to achieve our ultimate purpose in life -- a life that will continue forever because it is indestructible.

## Week 3 – The Great Inversion (*Divine Conspiracy* Ch 3; see also *Spirit of the Disciples* Ch 4)

### 1. What is God like?

We all want to live good lives. (Remember that for the ancients “living the good life” or “living well” was synonymous with having achieving “happiness.”) And presumably God has the best life. Therefore we ought to live the kind of life God lives. What’s *that* like? Glorious, joyous, etc. The Triune God’s experience is of the most vibrant, stimulating community conceivable -- an experience of fellowshiping friends in the greatest environment -- which is what allows him to love others so freely. In other words, God’s life is so great because he has an intimate communion with himself. Likewise, for us to have a great life, we must have an intimate communion with God.

But how is this possible? Isn’t God far away in heaven someplace? No. God “is literally with us in surrounding space” (p. 68) because what the Bible calls “the heavens” (always plural) are *here* (the atmosphere) as well as out there (outer space) and beyond (the nonphysical “third heaven”). God “intelligently and purposefully fills and overflows the space in which we live” (405 n.12) “including the atmosphere around our body” (68). “God relates to space as we do to our body. He occupies it but cannot be localized in it. Every point in it is accessible to his conscious will, and his manifest presence can be focused in any location he sees fit.” (76).

### 2. What is the world like?

It seems weird to us to think of God as being right here with us. But that is because modern science has (wrongly) taught us to think of the universe as fundamentally physical. If there is any such thing as God or the soul or other spiritual realities (and there’s no evidence that there is), Science tell us, then it must be something separate from and added to the physical -- something “out there” beyond the universe we can really know about. Willard strongly disagrees with this kind of “science” -- which is not science at all but bad philosophy. It’s not that the two dimensions are completely separated so that they don’t interact (as science claims), but that the tools of science (i.e., the empirical senses) are not the proper tools for detecting the interaction. The only reason one would be led to think that the physical is all there is, or that the spiritual has no causal power in the physical domain is if one thought that science is the only means to knowledge.

According to Willard’s reading of scripture, the universe is fundamentally a “spiritual reality”. The physical, visible world is like the visible part of an iceberg with the larger (more significant) part unseen below the surface. Occasionally God “pulls back the veil” so his prophets can get a peek at the *real* reality. The spiritual domain is most easily seen when we think about human persons (or “selves”, i.e., the things which have the “unity of experiences” we call individual “lives”). I am not my physical body, but “I am a spiritual being who currently has a physical body” (p75). But if I am a spirit, what’s that? Willard defines *spirit* as “substantial unbodily personal power” (p. 81). This is a careful definition made up of specific terms: *substance* means something that “exists in its own right” (82) and can retain its identity even when the properties it has changes; *unbodily* means “nonphysical” (p79); *personal power* means “will” or agency (p.80-81). So a paraphrase of the definition of spirit might be “a nonphysical agent who exists independently of other things”. The primary examples of spiritual realities are thoughts and values (80) which are things that only spirits can have -- a physical thing like a computer doesn’t *think* or *care* about anything, it just calculates.

### 3. What is “the will” like?

The most important element of the human's spiritual nature is the *will*. The will is the "innermost core" of the person which Biblical writers often refer to as the "heart" (p. 80). [Incidentally, the biblical words translated "will" are (in both the Old Testament and the New Testament) forms of the words for "desire", "delight in", "take pleasure in", etc. So it is not implausible to interpret "heart" as the faculty of will since the thing that desires (especially in the Old Testament) is the "heart". Note also that the biblical connection between will and desire is precisely parallel to the one found in classical philosophy where the "will" is defined as the "rational desire", i.e., a kind of nonphysical desire different than bodily desires like hunger and thirst.] This fits with what Willard said about "kingdoms." If, as Willard says in *The Renovation of the Heart*, the will is "the capacity of the person to originate things and events that would not otherwise be or occur" (p. 33), then the will is the person's ability to control the world around them which is what we said their kingdom is.

Now we can also see what it means to say that "God is spirit" (John 4:23). Since, as we have seen, spirit essentially involves the personal power of will, the claim that God *is* spirit is the claim that God is self-determining in a way that nothing else is. We have an element of spirit at our core, but God is essentially spirit. Willard calls this "the highest biblical revelation of God's metaphysical nature" (p. 81). This is also what is meant by the name God calls himself "Yahweh" which means literally "I am that I am" or "I will be what I will be" (Ex. 3:14). What God is telling us about himself is that he is unique in being "totally self-sufficient" (p. 81). As Willard puts it in *Renovation of the Heart*, "Only God is purely spiritual, pure creative will and character" (p. 34).

#### 4. *Spiritual formation*

The application of all this is that since humans are spiritual, we are made for a spiritual existence -- without the spiritual domain, we die (Rom 8:6). Conversely, connected to the spiritual we will never die, as we noticed earlier. This is what the "spiritual disciplines" are for: to prepare us for eternal life by teaching us to rely on the power of the spiritual domain rather than on the power of the physical domain. And this is what Willard means by living the eternal kind of life now: living with the resources of God's spiritual power/energy. This is also what is meant by "spiritual formation." The spiritual disciplines help us to "form" (or "reform") our spirit so that it is brought into harmony with God, reality, and itself and is thereby able to take advantage of God's spiritual resources rather than trying to live on its own which only results in spiritual disorder and chaos.

Moreover, when we realize that the world is fundamentally spiritual and that we are able to rely on God's resources for living in the world, we can come to a radical conclusion: *the world is a safe place*. There is "a totally good and competent God" who "is right here with us to look after us" (p. 67). So there is nothing to fear because God has made the world such that "there is nothing evil we must do in order to thrive. [Jesus] lived, and invites us to live, in an undying world where it is safe to do and be good." (p. 84) This is the great truth celebrated in Psalm 23:1 -- "God is taking care of me, so I lack nothing I need to be happy."

## Week 4 -- The Secret of the Easy Yoke (The Sermon on the Mount, *Divine Conspiracy* Chs 4-5)

### 1. *The ethics of Jesus*

The Sermon on the Mount is an intelligent and ordered essay on the two fundamental questions of ethical theory: First, *Who is a truly good person?* and, second, *What should one do to live a truly good life?* (p. 97-98). Note that most ethical theories skip the first question -- or, rather, they reduce it to the second question. In other words, they say the good person is determined by who is doing the good actions. But Jesus reverses this order. He says you first determine the good person and then do the actions that person does. (In this he is making the same philosophical move Plato and Aristotle made -- a move which has recently been rediscovered by the contemporary movement known as "virtue ethics.")

In other words, the Sermon on the Mount is a lecture on some of the most difficult questions of human life given by the smartest person who ever lived. The *thesis*, of this lecture, as we have seen, is the present availability of the kingdom of heaven which makes possible a new kind of life entered into by apprenticeship to Christ.

### 2. *Who can be good?*

Jesus begins his lecture with what we call "the Beatitudes", or pronouncements of blessing. It is important to notice that while some of the beatitudes are clearly virtues (for example, being a peacemaker or merciful), others are just as clearly negative (being poor, persecuted, or mourning). Willard argues that it is unlikely that Jesus would be doing one thing (i.e., praising) with some of the beatitudes and another thing (i.e., pitying) with others (p. 119). But if he is doing the same thing with all of the beatitudes, what is it? One thing we can say for sure is that he is *not* giving us a new Law. Jesus was always concerned to replace legalism with love. Jesus does not say that we must be poor, meek, etc., *in order to* be blessed. That would be the kind of "salvation by works" that Christianity opposes (p. 103). The key to understanding the beatitudes is to realize that the Sermon on the Mount is a unified and coherent lecture organized around the thesis that the kingdom of heaven is now available to everyone (p. 99).

On this view, then, "Those poor in spirit are called 'blessed' by Jesus, not because they are in a meritorious condition, but because, *precisely in spite of and in the midst of their ever so deplorable condition*, the rule of the heavens has moved redemptively upon and through them by the grace of Christ" (p.102). So what Jesus is doing is not giving us "a set of 'how-tos' for achieving blessedness" (p. 106), but rather correcting a general misunderstanding about who is able to be happy. Remember the audience of the Sermon is made up of "those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains" (Matt 4:24) which are precisely the kind of people Jesus saw as his target audience (Luke 4:19-19) -- the physically (and hence socially and spiritually) down-and-out which form a stark contrast to the Pharisees who were looked on as being spiritually blessed. So Jesus is proclaiming God's blessing on *everyone*: even those usually thought to be hopeless can enter the kingdom (p. 119). *In short, Jesus is saying that there are no prerequisites for becoming his student -- just come as you are.*

### 3. *Beyond the Righteousness of the Pharisees*

So Jesus turned the whole religious system of his day upside down. To his audience, this understandably sounded like Jesus was abolishing the entire religious order -- what they called "the Law and the Prophets" (p. 126). But Jesus makes clear that this is not what he is doing (Matt 5:17). Rather he is explaining what the Law *really* meant all along. The true Law (as opposed to the laws of the

Pharisees) will always exist because as Willard puts it, “The law of God marks the movements of God’s kingdom, of his own actions and of how that kingdom works” (p. 142). The Law is not a burden, it is a blessing. Keeping the Law is certainly not a prerequisite for being loved by God. The Law is a statement of how the world works. It is an expression of God’s love for us that he revealed to us how we ought to live if we want our life to go well. It is “law” in the sense of the laws of physics, *not* in the sense of the traffic laws or tax laws. Another way of putting it, is that it is “a user’s manual for life”; anyone who wants their life to “work right” must keep the Law.

The Law is instruction for “righteousness”. The Greek word *dikaisune*, usually translated “righteous” is the same word Plato used to talk about being in “harmony” with oneself and with the universe, a state Aristotle later call “virtue” (p. 145). The beatitudes show us that one doesn’t need to have this righteousness *in order to* have a relationship with God; but the fact remains that anyone who does have a relationship with God will want to become righteous so he or she can live in harmony with God’s world.

The Pharisees had rewritten the law so that obedience to it only required the *appearance* of righteousness. Jesus says that the appearance alone is worthless. One could obey all the external laws and still not be righteous since righteousness is interior. It’s not enough to be righteous that you merely *don’t kill* someone; you actually need to *love* them. Remember, the Law is not supposed to *make* you righteous; The Law is supposed to give you guidelines for how to live if you *already are* righteous. The point is not merely to control your exterior actions, but to become the kind of person inside for whom the appropriate exterior actions naturally occur. In other words, we can’t stop doing wrong actions unless we deal with the *source* of wrongdoing in our character. Once we recognize this insight, it should not be surprising that Jesus said “my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt 11:30). It would of course be difficult for us to remain how we are now and do what Jesus said we should do. But if our “thoughts, feelings, assurances, and dispositions” are transformed, then it becomes easy; in fact, after such a transformation, it would be difficult to act the way we acted before (p. 183).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus illustrates what righteousness looks like. He gives examples of what the virtuous person will characteristically do in certain situations (p. 178): for example, when she is attacked, she will “turn the other cheek” and “bless” her enemy in love rather than anger, seeking to help rather than hurt her attacker. Remember, of course, that these are only *illustrations*, not laws; they are ways the righteous person *characteristically* acts and feels, but are subject to (rare) exceptions. Genuine righteousness is “a combination of skill, wisdom, power, and steadfastness for good” (p. 145). So righteousness, unlike law, requires us to exercise our individual responsibility to determine which action appropriately expresses love in each particular circumstance (p. 179). As Willard puts it, “In every concrete situation we have to ask ourselves, not ‘Did I do the specific things in Jesus’s illustration?’ but ‘Am I being the kind of person Jesus’s illustrations are illustrations of?’” (p. 180). And, of course, the summary of all of the Law and all of Jesus’s teaching is this: Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28-34). When one’s life is characterized by this divine sort of love -- “promoting the good of everyone” one deals with -- then one has righteousness beyond the scribes and Pharisees (p. 188).

## Week 5 – The Righteous Live By Faith (*Divine Conspiracy* Chs 6-7)

### 1. *His flesh is food indeed*

When Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread, he quotes Deuteronomy 8:3: the human being “does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Willard thinks Jesus meant this quite literally. He points to the scene in John’s Gospel where the disciples are trying to get Jesus to eat something. Jesus replies “I have food to eat which you do not know about” and goes on to explain this by saying “my food is to do the will of him who sent me” (Jn. 4:31-34). Willard thinks that this passage, together with the temptation passage, suggests that somehow God’s “word” is actual “physical sustenance” for the human body. (p. 197). How could this be possible?

Remember that *Genesis* portrays God as creating “the entire physical order by his word” (p. 197, Gen 1). Einstein discovered the link between matter and energy ( $e=mc^2$ ) which allows us to manipulate matter in order to create energy (as in atomic fission). Likewise, God can manipulate energy to create matter (p. 197). This is how Jesus was able to feed five thousand people with five loaves of bread; he had the power of God’s creative word. And there’s more. In an echo of the *Genesis* creation passage, the *Gospel of John* says that Jesus was in fact the eternal creative word of God itself come into the physical order as a human being (Jn. 1:1-14). So when Jesus says “whoever eats [me] will live forever” (Jn. 6:51), he is offering us direct access to the most awesome power in the universe, “the direct availability of God to nourish, sustain, and renew the soul” (p. 199). And this is just what we said the gospel is about: our present access to the resources of God.

How do we “nourish” ourselves on Jesus in this way? We “abide” in Christ (Jn. 6:56) through faith (6:47).

### 2. *What is Faith?*

Faith involves turning over *control* (management, government, rule) of our lives to God -- not destroying our free will, but bringing our will into harmony with God’s will (torah, logos, kingdom). We often try to control our lives through things like reputation or money, and we even try to control the lives of others through the manipulation of violence or condemnation. Control is the meaning of life, but we need right control. And we can’t control others without abusing their free will and dignity. We can only ask them for things we need, and have confidence in God that we don’t need to manipulate others to provide for our own needs (p. 235).

But if we have faith in God and are acting out of an inner character, it will not matter what others think about our external behavior. “We have no need to be anxious, for there is a divine life, the true home of the soul, that we can enter simply by placing our confidence in him: becoming his friend” (p. 215).

As Jesus puts it at the end of his lecture, the life of faith in the kingdom is stable, fixed, secure, peaceful, joyful, unmanageable by circumstances, unwanting, unfearful, etc -- it is a life built on a rock (7:24-27, cf. Philippians 4:11b-13 and the Psalms, esp. Psalm 23).

In Scripture faith is opposed to *seeing*, not *knowing*. The modern idea that knowing and seeing are the same thing is empiricism which is manifestly false. Faith is not opposed to reason but to *sight*. To think of faith as an irrational “blind leap” which is not based on knowledge of any kind is to ask people to act in a way that we would consider irresponsible in any other realm action (since knowledge is required for

responsible action). But since we can have knowledge of God (and other things in the religious realm), then faith is not irrational or irresponsible.

Faith is living on another dimension. “God is spirit and exists at the level of reality where the human heart, or spirit, *also* exists, serving as the foundation and source of our visible life” (p. 194).

Jesus says “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). “Remember that our heart is our will, or our spirit: the center of our being from which our life flows. It is what gives orientation to everything we do. A heart rightly directed therefore brings health and wholeness to the entire body” (p. 206). Your life will have a telos, end, goal. But it can have only one (6:24). But how do we “treasure” God? We “hold him and his dear, and to protect and aid him in his purposes” (p. 203). We love God with our whole person (heart, mind, soul, and strength). This is also what prayer is about.

### *3. What is prayer?*

“Kingdom praying and its efficacy is entirely a matter of the innermost heart’s being totally open and honest before God. It is a matter of what we are saying with our whole being, moving with resolute intent and clarity of mind into the flow of God’s action” (p 195).

Prayer is “intelligent conversation” with “the living and personal God of the universe ... about matters of mutual concern” (p. 194).

**Week 6 -- Putting on the Character of Christ** (*Divine Conspiracy* Ch 9; see also *Spirit of the Disciples* Chs 1-2)

*How can I be like Jesus and live the kind of life he lived?* VIM, the disciplines, setting your mind, etc.

The most important decisions you have to make in life concern where you will place your *mind*. Anytime you place your mind on any object, the reality and power and potential of that object comes into your mind and changes you. Ephesians 4:... Placing your mind on the wrong things leads to ignorance and then to death. Jesus came so that we can place our minds on things that are life-giving and important. But this does not happen automatically. We have to make an effort to change our minds.

“A discipline is an activity in our power that we do to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort” (p. 200).

*Christian Philosophy?* 2 Cor. 10:3-5, esp. 5: “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” We are at war ... But what does this mean? What kind of war are we in? What is the territory to be gained or lost? It is clearly not a war of “the flesh,” but in this passage, Paul is not talking about “spiritual” war either. Paul is addressing an “ideological” war. The territory to be gained or lost is *ideas*.