

Renovation of the Heart

Dallas Willard quotes with Wayne's responses

Quote 1

"we are like farmers who diligently plant crops but cannot admit the existence of weeds and insects and can only think to pour on more fertilizer. Similarly, the only solution we know to human problems today is 'education.'" page 46.

It's easier to find groups with book studies than it is to find groups who do what the books suggest to be done.

Everyday I have weeds and insects attacking my crop. I could use more farmers sharing experience on how to handle such things. How can we better handle pride, self-seeking, fear, and worry?

I try to get humble. Sometimes I get caught up in my ways and forget about God's. When I am burdened, stressed, anxious, or whatever, the solution seems to involve a deeper reflection of my heart and mind. I need to look at my weeds. I need to see my underlying thoughts, desires, beliefs, and temptations. Then I need to bring more clearly into my consciousness God's good. I need to bring into my consciousness patience, peace, love, and a God reliance. My agenda, wants, and ideas can sometimes push or lead me with an ungodly demeanor. When I can orient my inwardness to wait and follow God, life improves. It's important to tend the crop, but I also ought to be aware of the weeds. That means a deeper inward education. It means taking what I learn from classes or books and applying it my life. I have to have some form of humility to be able to see my weeds.

2 Corinthians 2:6 "who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

The main purpose of the Bible is to give us direction on how to be with God; love, peace, mercy, compassion, truth, justice, patience, forgiveness. All these are actions, attitudes, and character. They are principles to think about and live by. We can choose to be in them or not. Inward Authority offers Biblical guidance on how to set our minds better with God.

"I looked back over my experiences and came to understand that the people who loved me were the ones I helped with compassion. The more I cared for others, the more I experienced love. Even people I helped for the sake of helping showed me love. I believe the words are like sign posts. They are guiding. If I see a sign that says, "this way to find love," I don't just stay there at the sign."

Quote 2

"Few are ready to deal with the realities of the deeper self, in themselves or in others. And these few are not exactly welcomed by others." page 49

This inward journey of the deeper self goes as deep as I am willing to travel. There is always more to discover. I believe each of us are situated differently for such a journey. Some of us are already interested and looking, while others have no clue how to sit still in order to look. In some such cases, the first lesson is to practice sitting still. Yet for those who already know how to sit still, it becomes more a matter of disciplined thought direction. These days I seek where I am weak with God and ponder the steps I can take to make improvement. Deep down within myself are sloth, worry, fear, and self-seeking. I need to recognize when these thoughts/beliefs are active. I need to identify them and bring them to God in prayer for help and redirection. I also need to understand the redirective faith I am to walk in grace/righteousness/goodness/kingdom. I need to understand these in my senses at an experiential level. And to Willard's next point, when I talk like this I usually don't feel very welcomed.

On that note, because I have so much experience of feeling unwelcomed, doubt in other people being interested is at large within my memory. It is another obstacle to bring to God with prayer. So I go deep with others, feel unwelcomed, go to God, and repeat. Not sure why, but this group has been the most supportive one I've experienced. Brings Hope. Thank you!

Quote 3

"The intelligent person recognizes that his or her well-being lies in being in harmony with God." Page 50

I found that God is described in the Bible with character traits of love, peace, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, truth, justice, and generosity. If I am going to improve in harmony with such character, then it will be a continued focus within me. In order to improve in it, I will need to practice it more. Improvement means my character will grow inwardly and outwardly to be more like God's. I need to do different. "I was told doing the same thing over and over expecting different results is insane." To grow, I need new inward action.

Through such experiences I have found that the better I am with God, "being in harmony," the better my life becomes. My soul improves. I need to pay particular attention to the senses beyond the physical senses. Love can be difficult to measure, but if we look for it, we can find it. I first had to remove or let go of resentment, dishonesty, self-seeking, and fear. These inward conditions blinded me, my senses, from witnessing spiritual good. My heart required some circumcision. I needed humility and my mind needed to be more open. All these are practices that continue to be required for growth in harmony with God.

Quote 4

"Denial of reality is a capacity inseparable from the human will as we know it, and it has its greatest power when it operates without being recognized as such." Pg. 52

This last week I did some studying on cognitive bias. On wikipedia there is a Cognitive Bias Codex. From this page I can click on any one of around a 100 types of bias to learn its definition. Many of these forms of bias have come from studies. I want to learn them for various reasons. One reason is so I can learn more about how I am fooled by my own thinking. I believe deception exists in us all and agree with what Dallas is saying here. If I am not practicing a conscious awareness of my potential to be self-deceived then I'm probably active in self-deception. There is a common saying in 12 step meetings "first thought is wrong." To grow spiritually is to cease functioning by our current methods so that we can practice new ones. Therefore, as 2 Corinthians 10:5 describes, we need to identify and stop thoughts which miss the mark and apply new ones which are in more agreement with God. We all have cognitive problems and we can correct them, little by little, each day. Some skills will be required; honesty, discernment, introspection, knowledge of good and evil, humility, self-discipline, and others. This identification and correction improves self-awareness. It's increased my faith and well being. It's self-sacrificing and feeds my soul.

Quote 5

"In 'intellectual' circles (and don't we all live there now?) evil, like sin, is a non-category. It is impolite and politically incorrect to speak seriously of it." page 58

I had to have people around me ready and willing to discuss evil, for I lived in it. I surrounded myself with evil. I felt it. Anger, hurt, fear, self-seeking, lies, wrath, idolatry, and more. Love, peace, and goodness were fairy tails that seemed to be talked about by people who looked to me like they were faking it. I had to have someone who could love me enough to hear my anger and hurt, then help me out of it. I needed someone to say, "yeah, I get it. And here is what I did to get

free and find love." When I honestly shared my anger, instead of trying to calm me down or change the subject, I got acceptance, and thankfulness for my being real. I was encouraged to keep coming back.

Jesus seemed to welcome uncomfortable truth, even in ways antisocial or uncustomary.

In order to keep growing, I need to face the evil within me on the regular. It's there, whether I like it or not, so it's best to see it. That means I need to look for it and keep looking until I can see it. Then I can look at how to make some Godly corrections and take action. It's how I grow. But I can't grow with correction if I can't or won't see the evil in my thoughts and beliefs. I also need to talk about it, own it, confess it, and go to God with it in prayer. I need to see the steps to take on the renewal path and walk in them.

Quote 6

"yet without this realization of our utter ruin and without the genuine revisioning and redirecting of our lives, which that bitter realization naturally gives rise to, no clear path to inner transformation can be found. It is psychologically and spiritually impossible." page 60

I believe what Dallas is getting at here is what recovery circles call "a bottom." This is the point where addicts become "sick and tired of being sick and tired." They decide their way of doing things has failed and become ready to give their life over to God. This decision is complete self abandonment. They have a "willingness to go to any length." Self-denial and picking up our cross takes a willingness to let much of ourselves go.

However, I don't believe it's impossible. Our "bottom" or Y in the road comes whenever I decide to give myself more to God. I decide to give up another form of self-seeking/idolatry and embrace more disciplined reliance with God's righteousness. There is a saying

around meetings, "you hit your bottom whenever you decide to stop digging."

In order for me to continue transformation deeper and richer with God I need to continue to discover where I can grow more grace within my thoughts, words, and actions. I need to think and respond more with love, peace, kindness, truth, justice, compassion, and gentleness. Am I willing to give myself over more to God in a new area of my life?

Through committing myself slowly, gradually, and continually over time, through trial and error, I do continue to transform. My wife sees it, my family sees it, and people I help have witnessed it. Yet I come from a dark place and will always have much room for improvement. I am not on a spiritual hiltop, just climbing out of a hole.

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In order for me to continue transformation deeper and richer with God I need to continue to discover where I can grow more grace within my thoughts, words, and actions. I need to think and respond more with love, peace, kindness, truth, justice, compassion, and gentleness. Am I willing to give myself over more to God in a new area of my life? Through committing myself slowly, gradually, and continually over

time, through trial and error, I do continue to transform. My wife sees it, my family sees it, and people I help have witnessed it. Yet I come from a dark place and will always have much room for improvement. I am not on a spiritual hiltop, just climbing out of a hole.

Quote 13

Dallas quotes Calvin, "Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote our whole energy of our minds to the service of God." pg. 63

My mind can follow systems and groups without much thought. I can drive a few miles in my car navigating traffic lights while thinking about work or leisure activities and then realize that I am driving.

Wherever I am, I can be elsewhere in my mind. I can attend groups and go through motions without the application of much thought energy.

This lack of focus practiced over time can wither my spiritual condition. I need to apply thought energy toward God's love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, etc. And not just thought energy creating an idea, but thought energy leading me to respond, feel, sense, and act.

I need to think about my feelings and sensations in order to love. And when I choose to respond and act with God's love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, etc, I can then apply much thought energy into what follows.

I can pay very close attention to the inward response of others and myself. When I bring sincere affection freely outward toward others in service to God, it brings results. This practice, for me, means everything to spiritual development and understanding. Also, this event unfolds slowly over time. Who goes and waters a tree and then immediately complains because it doesn't bare fruit? Development of peace and love takes time. I believe in this practice, "devote our

whole energy of our minds to the service of God," is precisely the goal. However, I have found, that I can apply "whole energy" of my mind to God briefly throughout each day, one situation at a time, and witness good spiritual affects.

I encourage others, test yourself, bring about in a relationship a new level of sincere truth in love with patience. See what happens. Pay close attention to your heart and mind with senses. Be humble doing it for God, as a gift to God, a free gift. If you are willing, do it more than once. Watch your thoughts and how others respond.

Quote 14

"Christian spiritual formation rests on this indispensable foundation of death to self and cannot proceed except insofar as that foundation is being firmly laid and sustained." page 64

This is beautifully written. I've been trying to find ways to describe the necessity of quantifying God reliance over self-reliance. I've found few people who will agree with this point. I looked up the definition of the word "insofar" and it said, "to the extent that." This means, to the degree I give myself over to be formed or abide in God will be the degree or measure of my spiritual formation.

My experience has proven this truth over and over for 30 years. It's ongoing. There is a common sense of settling for slight improvement. For instance, I became spiritually formed to be a productive citizen with respect and responsibility. I had a good job, marriage, house, etc. A couple of people even looked up to me. But yet, in many areas, I fell far short of God's ideas, principles, and character. I was by no means a loving person. I trusted God in certain ways; truth, justice, service. I lacked patience, humility, compassion, gentleness, generosity, and kindness. Thankfully I was honest enough to see the truth about God in the Bible, that God commanded me to grow in what I was lacking. When I realized this, I knew that meant I was consequently being commanded another round of dying to self in a similar manner I did when I gave up other forms of sinful character.

That meant tough times. I knew this death to self meant serious challenges, diligence, and effort. To act contrary to my beliefs is not easy. It meant I was going to commit to be different . . . again.

It feels good to settle, coast, and go with the motions, for a while. The last part of the above quote is crucial for deeper transformation or recovery, "insofar as that foundation is being firmly laid and sustained." A book could be written about this.

Think about what is required to firmly develop and sustain any behavior or skill. What I believe we are to firmly develop and sustain is our improved abiding in God. It's a continuation of death to self, self-denial, God reliance, setting aside our ideas for God's, taking captive thoughts and reforming them to Christ-likeness, etc. To firmly develop and sustain means to do it to the extent of it becoming automatic, like breathing, or drinking water. It grows upon us in a way where we know it is good and seek it out because of the good in it.

Quote 15

"Some pain is included, no doubt, because the old attachments are still there in our hearts and lives. They never all disappear at once. And we may experience some uncertainty from time to time, especially at the start. But the progress of spiritual formation will soon take care of that." Page 68

So much to break down in this quote. "Old attachments" can be many different things. We each become attached to ideas, habits, traditions, physical belongings, customs, and so much more. On page 58 of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* it says, "Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely."

For me, I never let go absolutely, but results greatly improve to the extent I am willing to let go. When I am holding on to worry, anxiety, fear, or anger, love will have little room to enter in. When I am insistent upon things going the way I want, God's ways will have little chance

of being with me. Much of the time it seems that God's ways are different than mine. God wants me to travel a road I do not want to go. So there is a choice, I can let go of my ideas, attachments, fixed way of thinking, and trust in a new way, idea, and path. I can do this.

Although it can be unfamiliar, unpredictable, and uncertain as to what will happen. Giving up my way of doing things for God's way, which I will have no control, is to trust in uncertainty. This can be scary. It is not scary because God is scary. It is scary do to my reliance upon self-seeking and attempts to control. It is scary to think and behave contrary to what I am used to.

The most difficult step each day is making that choice of trusting in the mysterious ways of God, progressively with improvement, in small steps. Loving enemies, turning the other cheek, generosity, patience, peace, and mercy done in God's standards is a choice. It's my choice to make. And choices will have action. I must choose the path I will go. Thy will, not mine, be done.

The last line in the quote is a powerful part the whole transformation process, "But the progress of spiritual formation will soon take care of that." Having had a "Spiritual Awakening" as the result of the 12 steps I was able to taste God's good. Imagine going to your favorite restaurant, but only being served food you don't like. Would you want to go back? How many times would you go back? When we get to taste something good, we will want it more. There is an old saying around meetings, "stick around until the miracle happens." That miracle is to taste the goodness of God. Once we can learn through experience how living increasingly with God is wonderful, we will want it more. We can, if we are willing to go through self-denial, examination, confession, restitution, and other growth actions, we can taste and see the good in them. Of course this means a very different way of living than the world around us understands. Yet, we can still do it. It's a choice.

Quote 16

“Although there is much talk about ‘changing lives’ in Christian circles, the reality is very rare, and certainly much less common than the talk.” page 78

I agree with this statement. What is this saying about the church process? What would a church look like that was “changing lives” in a rate that was not rare. What would the sermons sound like? Would there be sermons? How might the church be different? What would your dream church look like?

I believe false flattery would be rare and sincere truth would be common. The pastor would be a volunteer leader in authenticity in all areas living without falsehood. The mission would involve self-examination, repentance, restitution and knowing how the Bible defines good and evil. Real emotion in service and groups with tears and anger would be common. Conflict would happen and people would be heard. Precautions would be created to guard against Group Think and Heard Mentality. People would use scripture to define love and then do it. Worldly pursuits of material things would be devalued, while loving relationships would be demonstrated and discussed in the lobby. Fear of what other people think would be almost non-existent. We would focus on transformation because of the good we would witness about it. Testimonies in transformation would regularly occur. New attendees would be inspired by the depth of people sharing. People would be amazed at the honesty, truth, sincerity, unity, love, and humility. The message would get out and the church would grow rapidly. What if we all contributed one description of our dream church and shared it? I would love to learn new ideas.

Quote 17

“The possibility of denial and self-deception is something God has made accessible to us” Page 79

I have studied self-deception at length. Did you know there are over 100 different identified forms of cognitive bias? There is a cognitive bias codex at wikipedia where you can click on each one to see the

definition. I've always been fascinated by how easily we are fooled. Think about it, if we weren't fooled, we wouldn't sin. Practicing sin, to me, is literally, practicing foolishness. I apologize for using such a word, but it is a Biblical word. In fact, in the NKJV it is used 196 times.

We are all deceived to sin and continuing in sin is to continue following deception. I've done concordance studies in the Bible with deception. There is a lot going on with this in each and every one of us. But who concentrates upon it to Bring it to light?

In my experience, transformation involves me recognizing my foolishness and how I follow it. I need to discover my flawed thinking patterns and then correct them. Sometimes the correction come through new action. There is a saying around 12 step meetings, "you can't think yourself into a new way of behaving, but a new way of behaving can produce a new way of thinking."

I believe I need to maintain an awareness as Paul describes in Romans 7. There is evil within me and there is an opportunity to go to God to practice good. I can meditate upon my self-seeking, fear, and deception. I can improve if I can see where I can improve. I can abide more in God, if I am willing to concentrate more diligently on how I can abide more in God. And because growth happens slowly over time, this requires a regular practice.

Side note

I participated in 12 step meeting last night and we discussed the following.

"During this process of learning more about humility, the most profound result of all was the change in our attitude toward God. And this was true whether we had been believers or unbelievers. We began to get over the idea that the Higher Power was a sort of bush-league pinch hitter, to be called upon only in an emergency. The notion that we would still live our own lives, God helping a little now and then, began to evaporate. Many of us who had thought ourselves religious awoke to the limitations of this attitude. Refusing to place God first, we had deprived ourselves of His

help. But now the words “of myself I am nothing, the Father doth the works” (John 5:19?) began to carry bright promise and meaning.”

Page 75 from the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

This principle of putting God first has been the corner stone of my transformation. I’ve been all in with God, mostly in with God, half way in with God, partially in, barely in, not in yet with the thinking about being in, and being out without any concern with God. I’ve been in these various places over the past 30 years. I read the above instructions 31 years ago. This is how I learned to trust God. Not the words I read, but my experiences. The words only validated my experiences which convinced me they were indeed true. The results are predictable. The more I embrace this humility and God reliance in my thoughts, words, actions, and attitude, the more peace I can experience.

I found freedom and contentment through God reliance. Then I sought after education and career. Self-reliance stepped in. A little over a year later I was inwardly miserable. I improved with the world, but I was not happy inside. It got dark. I recommitted to God and went through the steps again. I found peace again. The first few years of my development were convincing evidence to Deuteronomy 6 and John 15. Yet keep in mind, at that time, I was still a few years away from beginning to read the Bible or going to church.

This seems to fit with Willard’s material. In fact, much of the spiritual development writings in the 12 step material seem to agree with Willard’s teaching.

Quote 18

Page 79 “Without the gentle though rigorous process of inner transformation, initiated and sustained by the graceful presence of God in our world and in our soul, the change of personality and life clearly announced and spelled out in the Bible, and explained and illustrated throughout Christian history, is impossible.”

Here is an example of how I have participated in this process. I work with kids at some tough schools. There was kid who was defiant to

the point of getting suspended. Phone calls home were frequent. One day I switched from a professional distancing demeanor to sincere compassion. I opened my heart, took a knee to his level, and inquired what was going on within him. Tears began to fall from his eyes.

This was one of many explorative ways I have practiced sincere compassion with others. Emotional responses like these happen. Yet such grace, which I was able to momentarily give myself over to, was not “sustained.” Unfortunately, my job and my spiritual condition, did not enable me to walk with such grace in a sustained manner.

Initiating and sustaining a graceful presence of God for me is similar to someone running a marathon. The runner sustains a pace of running for a long distance. But first there is walking, then running short distances, then increased frequency, and then longer distances. It’s not like I prayed one day and became christ like. Because I was rescued from the pit, I had a lot of hurt to be healed before I could begin testing the waters of caring for others.

As Dallas wrote, it’s a “rigorous process of inner transformation.” In order for it to be “initiated and sustained,” I need to persevere with choosing God with obedience. When I experiment with sincere compassion in servitude with God toward others (grace) and remain attentive to the spiritual reality, I am encouraged with the results. My faith grows seeing that it is real. It is here. Yet like a new runner, I can only go short distances. The more I can sustain such sincere love inwardly and outwardly in both frequency and duration, the better I am conditioned spiritually.

Quote 19

This quote follows the one I shared a couple days ago. page 79

“But on the other hand, the result of the effort to change our behavior *without* inner transformation is precisely what we see in the current shallowness of Wester Christianity that is so widely lamented and in the notorious failures of Christian leaders.”

Inner transformation - Before reading the Bible or going to church, I found God. I practiced self-examination of my inward thoughts and desires, redirecting them in prayer, and seeking to do good. I confessed my anger and fear. I practiced restitution for harm done to others. The goal was to transform my inwardness to make it right with God. Over the years I've looked for groups in churches that desire to go deep like this. I've found groups for grief, catharsis, prayer, study, and recovery. I'm looking for a groups where people are ready for spiritual correction in thought, attitude, and deed. This would be much deeper than as Dallas puts it, "the current shallowness of Wester Christianity."

I would enjoy having conversations with anyone who is ready for such deep inward work.

Inward participation with resentment/self-resentment, self-seeking, false-hood, idolatry, flattery, vanity, pride, etc not only can be corrected, but will need to be corrected for a cleaner conscience and purified heart. I believe Jesus emphasizes this with Matthew 23:25 - 26. Most the time I don't want to do it, because it is hard to do and it's uncomfortable. It's inconvenient and a struggle. I want to do it because it is fulfilling and spiritually good. I know the peace and contentment that comes through the doing of it. And how did I learn such peace and contentment, through doing it and taking time to observe the results. Having the knowledge of the good that comes from it builds confidence, trust, and belief in the process. This means going deeper. This is far deeper than merely memorizing scripture or going from book to book. This is corrective action with transformation of mind, heart, and soul.

Quote 20

"In the spiritual life one never rests on one's laurels. It is a sure recipe for falling . . . Past attainments do not place us in a position of merit that permits us to let up in the hot pursuit of God for today, for now."
page 81

Alcoholics Anonymous page 85

“It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do”

“Hot pursuit of God for today, for now.”

Now, means now. Today, means today. But what is “hot pursuit?” For me it is living more as Jesus did. I believe Moses tried to describe what “hot pursuit” might be like in Deuteronomy 6:6-9

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and think about how Jesus stayed with God. Think about how Paul and Apostles gave themselves day in and day out with God. I began asking myself, “Can I live more like that? Can I make improvements?” Am I going to follow the heard/mainstream or align myself more with God as people did in the Bible? Will I increase my time, diligence, frequency, sincerity, and humility to build love and peace inside and out?

I know what it’s like to fall away.

After two years of getting sober and building a relationship with God, I began to fall away. My “hot pursuit” switched from God toward worldly success. I dedicated myself to school and work. By year three I ended up in a seriously depressed state of mind. My soul was empty, alone, and miserable.

I reached out for help with a mentor/sponsor in the 12 step program. This man with long hair and tattoos was crying from the podium

sharing extreme joy. He had 9 months of sobriety at the time and I had three years. He was fresh, new, and active with God. I was trying to get by on past experiences/learnings. I wanted that joy back. I was humble enough to ask him for help. Thank God for my desperation.

He emphasized to me that God had to be first in my priorities. I knew exactly what he meant. I did that before. He reminded me that I had to make my “hot pursuit” with God more important than school, work, money, pride, or girlfriend. I had to live as though I loved God with all my heart, all my mind, and all my soul.

As I rededicated myself to this process, it didn’t take long before I rebuilt that relationship with God. And when I did, I realized just how important this concept was.

This was over 25 years ago. Since that time I have I fell again and returned again. I catch myself early in the falling away because I am humble and diligent enough to investigate my foolishness. I know my mind can mislead me. I find it essential to continue to test myself to see if I am still willing to go to any length for God or am I convincing myself toward another “hot pursuit.”

My “hot pursuit” growing with God involves self-examination, repentance, confession, and restitution. I have so much more yet to learn. Fear, pride, desires for comfort, and so much more still challenge me. Yet I am improving. I witness God most days working around me in others. I have a sense of the kingdom here and now. Often times I am more the spectator than the participant. It’s a choice to step into a sincere and honest spiritual conversation about the heart, mind, and soul. It takes strength, courage, and self-discipline.

I want to emphasize that this process involves imperfection, fear, struggle, worry, doubt, long-suffering, and so much time, because it is a slow process. It’s in the decisions, the ‘y’ in the road, where the real challenge exists. Will I step into the “hot pursuit,” “today,” and “now?”

Quote 21

“Any successful plan for spiritual formation, whether for the individual or group, will in fact be significantly similar to the Alcoholics Anonymous program.” page 85

And what might that entail? Self-examination, confession, repentance, restitution, service, love, fellowship, meditation, and prayer. All done with a reliance upon God.

Alcoholics Anonymous page 69-71

“In this book you read again and again that faith did for us what we could not do for ourselves. We hope you are convinced now that God can remove whatever self-will has blocked you off from Him. If you have already made a decision, and an inventory of your grosser handicaps, you have made a good beginning.”

Alcoholics Anonymous page 75 “We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience.”

It was only after doing the steps that I could see and understand. Abiding more in God resulted in abiding less in things ungodly. I was instructed to do God’s will and let go of my own, little by little, one day at a time. The result was a purifying of my heart and a cleansing of my conscience.

The instructions were made simple and brief. The results do not materialize through reading or conceptualization. The results come through a change of heart and mind from sincerely working the steps over time.

If this quote from Dallas Willard is perceived as true and correct, it would seem to be a high priority to thoroughly practice the steps. There are certain spiritually focused sections within the book of Alcoholics Anonymous that are to be practiced daily.

Here is the quote again,

“Any successful plan for spiritual formation, whether for the individual or group, will in fact be significantly similar to the Alcoholics Anonymous program.”

Keep in mind the whole quote was italicized.

The best way I know to see if something is similar is to perform a careful comparison between the two. That means both need to be understood well. The program of Alcoholics Anonymous is unique. The Alcoholics Anonymous program is the template for all 12 step programs. It also involves what are called 12 Traditions. Twelve Traditions help keep the groups spiritual. These 12 Traditions really are something amazing. Not all recovery programs abide by them.

Quote 22

Page 88 “In everything we do we are permitted to do his work. What we are aiming for in this vision is to live fully in the kingdom of God and as fully as possible *now* and *here*, not just hereafter.”

“To do his work” means to me to do God’s will. I can become more responsible, to abide my thoughts, words, actions, and attitude, slowly and gradually with God, if I permit myself to do so.

“As fully as possible now and here.” “As fully as possible.” I was taught to thoroughly (as fully as possible) evaluate myself. I learned to honestly and more precisely evaluate my diligence in applying myself to God’s work. In order to improve my doing God’s work/will, I needed to understand it better. This is what brought me to read the Bible. I have found it necessary to keep raising the bar in my spiritual development. It’s not difficult to see where I can improve, if I’m looking. I need to ask myself if I am living as “fully as possible” with God.

I first came to God for my serious malady of dysfunctions. My life was miserable. I examined myself for inward defects, confessed anger, fear, and hurt, repented, and made restitution. Giving myself over to this process is like stepping into the classroom of kingdom instruction.

Within me exists an inward spiritual battle; to continue choosing reliance upon God and to do God's will.

After about a decade I noticed a pattern. I would seek God when trouble came and then when everything was okay, I would pursue other things. And then later, trouble would come. Over and over this pattern would play out.

One day I considered what my life might be like if I continued further. What if I pressed myself to understand God deeper than my norm? What if I continued to raise the bar and walk even closer with God? What if I dug deeper in understanding with peace, compassion, love, sincerity and an humility? What might life be like with even more alignment with God? What if I pursued God, giving my all, and tested the limits of my ability to be with God? According to the Bible my life would be significantly improved. I chose to test this idea.

I decided to zero in on and study the great commandment of God. It emphasized the word 'all.' I began to evaluate my time, effort, and application with my abiding with God. Was I loving God with my all? No. I don't love God with 'all' my heart, mind, soul, and strength. I've never loved anything that much, even in my addiction. There have always been limits, for I am a confused seeker of comfort. I misunderstand Godly comfort with worldly comfort.

The conditions of my beliefs and understandings would not permit me to obey God with such dedication. Dallas uses the word "permitted." This is a nice word. I'm permitted to get up each morning, pray, meditate, confess (anger, hurt, and fear), and repent.

I'm "permitted" to trust God's love, peace, truth, and justice. I'm permitted to be generous, zealous, and to practice sincerity, even with my enemies. I'm permitted to be patient, kind, and gentle. I have permission to engage with God's goodness and walk in it. But will I? Will I seek it out with my 'all?' Will I apply myself "to live fully in the kingdom of God and as fully as possible *now* and *here*?" Will I even ensure I am making improvement with God's work? Or will I settle for less, for convenience or comfort?

Because I had transformed already for over a decade, I was personally familiar with the experience. It was a plain fact for me that this process produced good results. This experience produced a faith that indeed life could and would be even better if I continued with God.

I knew my increase in seeking God to grow even further was going to take time and be a slow development. I knew there was power in participation with simple steps of improvement. I knew I had a lot of inward adjustments I could permit myself toward. New structure, new practices, new thoughts, new words, new actions, and new experiences. I chose to 'permit' myself toward new thoughts and actions.

I began a process in the morning of 'permitting' my mind toward peace and love in meditation and prayer. I would read specific scripture that would guide my mind into alignment with God's character. If I don't 'permit' myself to think God's will, I won't 'permit' myself to walk in it.

After a while, when new development becomes normalized, it will be time to raise the bar again. This process involves setting simple achievable goals, practicing them until it feels more normal, and then raising the bar a bit higher. I can always be more kind, gentle, sincere, honest, peaceful, and loving. I have a lot of room to grow.

My experience has taught me that the goal is not to be in perfect alignment with God, but to continue moving into it. It is not a place to arrive, but a continued experience.

My growth has involved a long-suffering of continuing to 'permit' myself to raise the bar.

This might be a helpful prayer with Willard's quote. I'll call it, "Permission to do His work."

Dear God,

Help me "to live fully in the kingdom of God and as fully as possible *now* and *here*." When my thoughts seek to convince me otherwise, please grant me strength to set them aside and do your will. Please guide me to do thy will, not mine. When I worry, please guide me with faith. Grant me strength to trust in your character, goodness, righteousness, and grace.

Please help me to think longer upon your will; to learn how to do it better. Teach me God to correct my inwardness into your will, to sense how it is good. Lead my mind and heart to ponder and practice your ways. Empower me God, to permit myself, to stay the course and stand firm with sincere love. And if I fall away, please God, help me to permit myself to return. Help me to embrace a humble and sincere position with you. Thank you God for your grace. Amen.

Quote 23

page 88

“Concretely, we intend to live in the kingdom of God by intending to obey the precise example and teachings of Jesus. This is the form that trust in him takes. It does not take the form of merely believing things about him, however true they may be. Indeed, no one can actually believe the truth about him without trusting him by intending to obey him. It is a mental impossibility. To think otherwise is to indulge a widespread illusion that now smothers spiritual formation in Christlikeness among professing Christians and prevents it from naturally spearheading worldwide.”

Matthew 4:17 “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 7:4-5 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

I find it uncomfortable to meditate upon my weakness with Jesus. Parts of me nudge me away from such activity. It can be like some chores at home or a duty at work I just don’t want to do. Yet it is a requirement to my error enough to know the direction of correction.

I use the NKJV and found a headline in Romans 12:9 that read “Behave like a Christian.” I didn’t spend too much time wondering why this wasn’t taught regularly in church (widespread illusions). Instead, I realized I needed to study it more. So I sat with a friend who I was mentoring and we dissected these behaviors line by line, one line per meeting. We would define the words carefully. If I don’t understand the Bible’s instructions

efficiently, then I likely won't be able to practice them efficiently. I believe Dallas is making it clear that obedience to the instructions is necessary.

Jesus taught repentance. I cannot carry deep anger or worry around within me and love anyone as Jesus did. Such inward contaminants affect my sincere affection for others. So there is a repentance. There is a letting go of corruption and a clinging to love and peace. When I am ready to trust Jesus more than the world and myself, I can become ready to rely upon Jesus. When I want to fault-find, complain, blame, shame, or worry, I can think what Jesus wants me to do. And if I trust Jesus as Dallas illustrates above, I will do it. I will forgive, because Jesus said so. I will have mercy, because Jesus taught it. I will wait for God, because Jesus demonstrated it.

Quote 24
page 87 - 88

“The vision that underlies spiritual (trans)formation into Christlikeness is, then, the vision of life now and forever in the range of God’s effective will—that is, *partaking* of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1-2) through a birth “from above” and *participating* by our actions in what God is doing now in our lifetime on earth. Thus, “whatever we do, speaking or acting, doing all on behalf of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father” (Colossians 3:17, PAR). In everything we do we are permitted to do his work. What we are aiming for in this vision is to live fully in the kingdom of God and as fully as possible *now* and *here*, not just hereafter.

“It is a vision that has to be *given* to humanity by God himself, in a revelation suited to our condition. We cannot clearly see it on our own.”

When I came to God, I had no “vision.” I did not know God in my heart and experience. So I could not see “God’s effective will.” Years later, after experiencing God, I went to the Bible to define God to understand how to improve this vision. I learned I had to do what the instructions say with a humble and sincere openness to be shown. I had to make my inwardness clay for the potter. This involves resisting my past learnings or my own will. I created a Biblically based formula on this process that is unfortunately complicated. Aligning with God, although a simple idea, can be very confusing.

“participating by our actions in what God is doing now” involves a continued focus and improved awareness upon “our actions in what God is doing now.” Therefore, everyday the goal is to think throughout the day what God is doing and how to improve my heart and mind with it.

For the past 17 years I’ve worked with kids at Title 1 schools. I do it because it is a fantastic place to experience the kingdom of God. Middle schoolers have unique needs and it took some time to learn how to connect with them. I had to learn to ask questions, pray, and listen a lot. I humbled myself and switched from telling them what to do, to discussing with them what we can do together. I listened to their frustrations and fears and had compassion.

I don’t believe God’s ways are black and white. Discernment is required. I looked long and hard at compassion, mercy, peace, love, gentleness, truth, forgiveness, and justice knowing that these are some biblical descriptions of who God is. What do these have in common? Inward sensations. And how do we learn them? Through intimate, sincere, honest connections with others. Because I believe this truth, I believed I needed to grow more experience through my practicing it.

“Revelation suited to our condition”

My “condition” involves my level of God’s Collective Character being lived out within my heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Dallas uses 2 Peter 1:4 which mentions “having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

If we have “escaped the corruption” we would have a testimony about it. Others who are close to us would be a witness to it, because they know us.

Dallas uses 1 John 3:1-2 and the next verse in the Bible 1 John 3:3 says this: “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”

This purifying is something we can do, little by little, one day at a time.

Quote 25

“Perhaps the hardest thing for sincere Christians to come to grips with is the level of real unbelief in their own life: the unformulated skepticism about Jesus that permeates all dimensions of their being and undermines what efforts they do make toward Christlikeness.” Page 89

“Level of real unbelief” can be learned.

Have you ever played fetch with a dog? A person throws a ball, a dog gets it and brings it back all slobbery. Have you ever tried to fake a throw? This is where you act like you're throwing the ball but don't. I was a bad kid and we did this and other destructive things. When a dog is new to fake throws, the dog will run after the ball because he saw the arm move in a throwing motion which he has learned makes the ball come out. This is how we all live our lives, seeing patterns in the world and drawing conclusions linking them together. We react by ‘triggers’ or ‘prompts.’

There are many people who have mislearned Godly love, sincerity, and truth. I was recently part of a stay-retreat where we discussed our mislearning about God. It was encouraging to witness honest self-investigation about this topic.

Serious inward damage with faith has and is taking place. Sometimes, unbelief is condoned and even encouraged.

We can choose to dig deep within our psyche to discover our “unbelief in (our) own life.” There can be uncomfortable cognitive dissonance we will need to choose to endure. Dallas keeps bringing this up, and I fully believe it is necessary.

I am full of unbelief. To correct it, I need to “come to grips with” it.

Back to the “play fetch” story. There are some mean people, as I used to be, who would enjoy the fake throw response with the dog. When I was a kid, my friends and I unknowingly retrained a dog. The dog through a series of fake throws learned not to trust the assumption about the arm moving. The dog learned to keep the eyes on the ball. So we had to step up our game. We began pretend throwing and then hiding the ball. Now the dog would see the arm moving and the ball gone, then believe the ball

must have been thrown. After a while the dog would not believe the ball was thrown, even when it was. The dog stopped believing/trusting.

I keep hearing people in groups who grew up in church who learned they were going to hell. They are not irrational or uneducated people. They likely learned it from their parents. But I question, how thorough was the church, or is the church, seeking out such misguidance and correcting it?

When I came to church, I was like the dog trained in disbelief. Not disbelief in God, but people. My friends would steal from me. My own home was robbed and broken into three different times. I lived around danger.

I believe unbelief is saying yes and then calling later to cancel. Unbelief is insincerity and covering up with pretending. It is false flattery. And it is self-seeking. Transformation is not being rid of unbelief. It's dealing with one unbelief at a time and walking in faith.

Added more here:

I need people to show me their faith, not tell me. I don't believe I'm a bad person, I just don't quickly believe things people say. I've been told yes many times and then it turns out to be no. And sometimes, I don't put on a false "I believe you" face. I need to see the evidence. I need to witness yes be yes and no be no. I need a set pattern of behavior to develop trust. This is hard wired into my soul. Social niceties are work for me. I'm a deep thinking introvert.

There exists systems of teaching like; Learned Helplessness, Heard Mentality, Group Think, Self-fulfilling Prophecy, Conformity, Social Exchange Theory, and Obedience - Milgram's Obedience Study.

I was at a meeting the other night and someone asked me what I thought about their shoes. I said I liked the colors because they match a football team I used to like. Another man asked why I changed teams. I said I didn't, I just got to a place in my spirituality where I chose to stop watching football. Then another man said, "Are you trying to one-up me?"

Defensiveness comes from "unbelief." When someone shares how they are improving with God and what works for them and I get defensive or

judgmental, I'm in the problem. Self-seeking and judging what is right or wrong is often problem thinking. I do this.

Sometimes this judgement can be at a group level. When someone is not speaking, dressing, standing, sitting, etc. like the group is doing, people in the group can unconsciously react defensively. Carl Jung developed an idea called "The Collective Unconscious." I believe the group mentality is a real thing. Even in this group.

Sometimes grace does not come to me in pleasantries. Often times it comes to me through conviction. I'm a broken man with all sorts of scars inside and out. Nothing scares me more than being around gentle strangers. It's like giving the Hulk a baby to hold. But I'm getting better at it, one day at a time, one gentle soul at a time.

My transformation began with praying for the willingness to give grace a chance. If someone was nice to me I would immediately position myself defensively and test them harshly to see how sincere they are. This defensiveness would often be too much for others and they would leave. I have missed experiencing so much grace in life because of doubt, disbelief, unbelief, defensiveness, etc.

Unbelief can manifest itself in many different ways. Any thought or idea I get that "undermines what efforts they do make toward Christlikeness" is most likely "unbelief." If I don't pray - unbelief. If I don't meditate - unbelief. If I don't forgive - unbelief. Same thing with patience, peace, love, compassion, truth, and justice. Where I am not in it exists unbelief. Renewal of the mind is an ongoing development through inwardly and outwardly walking with God.

Like the arm moving in a fake throw, the world around me, even in church, unconsciously prompts me to chase things that do not lead me to grace. When the world says, "Happiness and Joy is when you do this . . .," I need to take it to Jesus and see if it is true. I need to read the Bible and validate it. I need to pray and inwardly sense what the spirit says/informs. God does not want me to be a gullible man chasing the wind. Careful humble thought, prayer, questions, discussions, corrections, and changed godly character help me find spiritual joy, fulfillment, and truth.

Quote 26

“But we do have great freedom here, and even though “dead in trespasses and sins,” we still have the ability and responsibility *to try to retain God in our knowledge*—if only in an inadequate and halting manner. And those who do so will surely make progress toward him; for if we truly do seek God as best we can, he, who always knows what is really in our hearts, will certainly make himself known to us. It is because of this fact that we always remain responsible before God, even though we are spiritually dead.” Pg. 96

Dallas uses the line “if we truly do seek God as best we can.” When I was growing up, I got bad grades. I learned to do just enough to pass. If a ‘D’ would pass me, that’s what I earned. And yet in 7th grade I was the chess champion of the school. I got my Associates degree with a 2.75. My Bachelor’s was around that as well. But this was good for me, because none of my friends or family had such a degree. I was outperforming my peers and family.

I was in special education in high-school. My friends were drop outs. But still, even though I was achieving and outperforming my peers, I was not doing my best. When the bar is set low, it’s easy to reach the goal.

I wanted to become a counselor, but for that I would need a Master’s degree. I believed a Master’s was beyond my ability.

I got an invitation in the mail to apply for a Master’s degree. I trusted God and was willing to check it out. I went and spoke to the guidance counselor and she let me know I could bypass qualifiers through a probationary status. She said I would need to maintain a 3.0 G.P.A. I’ve never done this before and did not believe I could do it. I asked what would happen if I failed. She said there would be a 6 month suspension. Through some more questioning I learned I could complete the degree following some suspensions without the 3.0. So I accepted.

I doubted my ability, but I wanted to see if I could do it. So, for the first time I really applied myself and I graduated with a 3.9 G.P.A.. If I can do more or better, I'm not giving my all. It's not that I'm bad or wrong, it's that I'm missing out on some opportunities. I know how to raise efforts and dedication. This has nothing to do with self-condemnation. This has to do with seeing the improvement I can make and guiding myself into it. Sometimes when I talk like this others become defensive. But why? I am only encouraging improvement. Why would anyone become defensive about that? When others show me how I can improve, I get defensive, because of pride. I can become confident in my own understanding or ways and will defend them, sometimes unconsciously. It can just happen. It is mostly about pride and self-seeking. Sometimes I don't want new knowledge, even self-awareness. Such thinking is not with God. When this happens, I need to pray for humility to learn. I need to soften my heart and be clay for the potter.

Dallas writes, "we always remain responsible before God." For whatever reason, there seems to be a tendency to excuse, deny, avoid, and evade spiritual development responsibility. In recovery, such defensiveness is presented by a "ya, but" statement. The "ya" part agrees with how the information is right. The "but" statement is a decision to postpone, deny, or evade.

I've been teaching and creating materials to assist cognitive development into alignment with God. There have been few takers, yet far more "ya, buts." Creating the material helps me learn. (See Webb's Depth of Knowledge or Blooms Taxonomy). It helps me and others. Sometimes I forget how that is enough. My pride and greed want more.

Dallas says "we always remain responsible before God." If I am going to be responsible with my thoughts I will need to take them captive and adjust them to better align with God. (2 Corinthians 10:5) When I see how I can improve, I will need to correct my "ya, but."

One last point to ponder. Dallas refers to this as 'fact.' It's not a theory. The only way I know where I can move from theory to fact is

through testing. I had to give more of myself to God, examine myself, confess, repent, and right my wrongs. I had to learn to improve with love and peace. I had to apply myself, perhaps not my best, but more than status quo. I can love better, if I stop the 'ya, but.' I want to learn more spiritual good, be in it, and increasingly see the good. I want to experience how it can grow and improve.

Page 83 Alcoholics Anonymous "So we clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness, and love. The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.*"

"*We have to live it.*" Is italicized in the book for a reason. If I awake in the morning with "ya, but," then I will not set my mind and heart to be with God. And to live without God can lead me to emptiness, loneliness, dryness, withering away of the soul, spiritual bankruptcy, broken relationships, anger, many forms of self-seeking, and even death. All this is a choice. "Ya, but" or apply my best to love God.

Quote 27

"By "thoughts" we mean *all of the ways in which we are conscious of things*. That includes our memories, perceptions, and beliefs, as well as what we would ordinarily refer to when we say "I thought of you yesterday," or "I was just thinking of our meeting tomorrow." page 97

Step 11 in A.A. - "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

The spiritual program of action in 12 step groups involves a daily focus upon thoughts, attitude, and behavior for correction with God's ways. This means upon awakening I am to get inwardly right with God in my thoughts and ponder how to serve God better. If done daily, with improved effort, energy, time, and intention, my inward awareness can grow. (I created a study guide using scripture and questions to ponder inward aspects of

intention and trust with God. It helped me a lot with my growth. It's available online to anyone interested. D.M. for any questions)

My personality type is high on introspection and low on socialization or superficial conversations. I'm strong in problem solving, yet weak in people pleasing. When I understood the Bible's emphasis upon love and compassion, I felt convicted to know it more. I knew I had to begin training toward love. That meant new priorities, structure, thoughts, words, attitudes, and action. All of which comes from new ways of thinking.

I have made some improvement through understanding how God is there. For example, I have practiced prompting myself toward empathy and emotional understanding. I listen longer with improved emotional presence. I've practiced shifting from self-seeking (seeking relationships that feed me) to God serving (seeking to feed others spiritually for God). Such activity has fed me spiritually.

I'm more aware of my demeanor and words. This is not easy. I humble myself on a regular basis. Love and gentleness is a whole new language for me. I relate to the Beast in Beauty and the Beast. If I'm not paying attention to my inward condition, the Beast can come out. This Beast personality is hard wired. Self-seeking feeds the Beast attitude. I need a mindset of seeking God's beauty at the start of each day and trusting that goodness with my actions.

I need to redirect my focus upon love, compassion, encouragement, empathy, patience, and gentleness. Such things are work for me (sincerely identifying & redirecting). Yet I have grown and improved with them through self-investigation, seeking God, confession, humbling of self, repentance etc.

Being aware of my thoughts can help me better understand my inward condition. When I can identify my thoughts and feelings, I can take a look at my "Good & Evil" guide (also available on website) to see how I can make corrections. When I am angry at someone, I can pray for forgiveness. When I am hurried, I can pray for patience and peace. When I am lonely, I can connect with someone honestly and have a sincere conversation. I can choose to get real with others. I can choose to trust God's ways of compassion, truth, and love. I can forgive myself too, because self-anger is still anger. To do any of this, I must humble myself

and make the time to identify my inward thoughts and feelings. And of course reset my thoughts to sincerely be with God.

Quote 28

"Our essential nature as active and creative beings depends upon our ability to envision what is not the case as well as what is. Our ability to plan for the future must constantly run ahead of reality. And this we do in thought. A will that runs ahead depends, of course, upon our abilities to think; and *what* we think, imagine, believe, or guess sets boundaries to what we can will or choose, and therefore to what we can create.

As our senses present a landscape for our body and its actions, so our thoughts present the "lifescape" for our will and our life as a whole. Within that "thought lifescape" (including our perceptions) we make the decisions that determine what we will do and who we will become." Page 97

I believe Dallas is emphasizing a need to increase awareness upon our thoughts. Dallas is wrting a lot about it. I also believe in order for us to gain better control over our choices, like choosing Jesus, we will need to create new Christ-like options.

When I was a therapist a long time ago I would create treatment plans. This of course is something anyone can do. Yet like anything we create, we will need to ponder, investigate, and imagine something new and different that might help us. There are materials available to provide assitance with such things as treatment plans. We can do this.

I created treatment plans for things like anger, anxiety, etc. This involves identifying the problem and the situations. We identify how we respond in thought and behavior. Then we create a new plan for thinking and behaving. Example; Instead of yelling at someone, we pause and count to ten.

As simple as this might seem, people are completely powerless to apply the easy change without having the plan set in place in their minds and being aware of it. A conscious awareness of the Christ-like behavior must exist. I can tell someone to ride a bike, but if they do not know how, they won't be able to. Practice is often required. Believe me, many people do not know how to pause and count to ten. They believe they can't, so that makes it true.

Patience for example. Many times I need to prompt myself to slow down, that it's okay to go slower or for things to take longer. I need to do this because my beliefs tell me otherwise. My mind will complain when things take longer than I had perceived them to take. When reality is different than what I thought, I need to guide myself to accept instead of fight it. I need to adjust myself and I usually don't want to be adjusted. This is all an inward battle. It takes a lot of practice and time to develop this ability. Practice and time with new learning about new choices to practice.

Quote 29

“NOW, CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION is inescapably a matter of recognizing *in ourselves* the idea system (or systems) of evil that governs the present age and the respective culture (or various cultures) that constitute life *away from* God. The needed transformation is very largely a matter of replacing in ourselves those idea systems of evil (and their corresponding cultures) with the idea system that Jesus Christ embodied and taught and with a culture of the kingdom of God. This is truly a passage from darkness to light.”
Pg. 98

I must recognize the evil within my thoughts and beliefs. Then I must replace such thoughts with God's ways.

For example, when I become bitter, angry, or resentful because the world is not the way I want or expect, I am then participating in evil. I studied with a friend Romans 12:9 entitled “Behave like a Christian” and saw the instructions “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what*

is evil. Cling to what is good.” I looked up the meaning of hypocrisy on Biblehub.com. It’s about playacting, pretending, or being fake. Then I did a thorough concordance study on “good” and “evil” in the Bible. A free summary is available on my website. Now I have copies of a quick glance of “good” and “evil” throughout my house. I could attach one here, but I’m not sure if that is allowed.

I was instructed to get with God through a Twelve Step program and the evil I was to begin facing involved resentment, deception, self-seeking, and fear. I was to create a resentment list and then share it with a sponsor/mentor.

I recently searched the Bible for resentment and found the word bitterness. Bitterness is evil. It is very similar to resentment. I did a podcast on it. Resentment, which is like bitterness, inwardly positions me away from love and peace. God is love and brings peace. Therefore, the way toward love and peace is a humbling of myself, forgiveness, and often times letting go of my expectations, demands, and entitlements. Life simply does not play by my desires, expectations, entitlements, and wants. Being bitter about it never helps. It’s simply a bad idea to think bitter thoughts. It’s good to correct them.

Sometimes I can get bitter about reality. I can become bitter about the weather, being sick, politics, other people’s opinions, parking, etc. I can’t change any of these things. Being bitter about them is a spiritually destructive attitude. I can pray to God for help to humble myself and seek to think more peaceful thoughts. I can think to myself, “God’s got this.” Thoughts can grow inward bitterness or calmness toward peace. If I am trusting God then I am seeking God’s will. That means I need to seek production of an inward loving attitude.

Sometimes, bitterness wins me over. I mean it dominates me. I can become enslaved to it for a bit. I used to live in it daily, but not any more. When it is dominating I need to go to God in prayer. I often need to confess it with a spiritual supportive person and God. I need to see how my pride or self-seeking is involved. Both of which are evil.

Dallas writes, “The needed transformation is very largely a matter of replacing in ourselves those idea systems of evil.” For me, replacing has to happen. The more I abide in God, the more I am replacing my ideas with God’s goodness.

Seeing evil within my beliefs involves a sense of conviction which is not comfortable. When I see it and get convicted, I often do not immediately change and conform with God. Usually, I need to think about it for a while. I need to ponder the change process a bit. Yet I know I need to keep looking at it and sense God’s guiding uncomfortable invitation to change. I need to experience a process of being convinced.

Quote 30

“TO CHANGE GOVERNING IDEAS, whether in the individual or the group, is one of the most difficult and painful things in human life. Genuine “conversion” is a wrenching experience. It rarely happens to the individual or group except in the form of divine intervention, revolution, or something very like a mental breakdown.” pg. 99

My governing ideas before I sought God were so bad it’s not even appropriate to share in this space. People would likely get disgusted and I’d probably get removed. And yet, it was a part of my life I cannot forget.

James 1:14 - 15 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

“Drawn away by his own desires” means, at least for me, that I am pondering them in my thoughts to pursue them in my body. Conception is the doing of them or the experience of them in action. That experience produces sin. It grows with repeated practice and if practiced in progression can destroy my soul.

Governing ideas can gradually shift through experiences. This is how addiction, anger, lust, greed, etc. can grow. Just as evil can grow, so can God's goodness. We can experience a transitioning growth in love, forgiveness, mercy, and compassion. As I give my inwardness over to align or abide in God and doing it right, I am also giving over my governing ideas to be transitioned more with God's ways. This acceptance of God's governing ways over my own can be the receiving of grace, a grace that can save. Healing, cleansing, and purifying can result. It has and does for me. I've also heard too many testimonies from others to doubt this process.

I researched information that helped me understand fixed beliefs. I've been wanting to better understand why we can be defensive against new information when it does not fit our ideas. I found a C.I.A. book that produced some information about this process. It helped me to see how I have a predisposition to defend my current understanding whether right or wrong.

When God's instructions point me in a direction; how to think, speak, walk, etc., and my governing ideas are directing me another way, I need to choose which I will obey. I will choose and act. This choice will impact my heart, mind, and soul. This choice exists every day and all day long. Progress for me is to make one better choice each day. One simple improved decision.

If I can agree that sin dwells in me and that Jesus teaches to repent, then I can examine myself for my repentance. If I am not repenting, something is amiss. I found that my mind and my desires for personal comforts guide me away from the transforming alignment process. Following crowds, fitting in, and the need to do what others want me to do can be following other people's governing ideas. This too I need to take to God.

Because this process is "one of the most difficult and painful things in human life," God has provided a way to do it more slowly and lesson the pain. We can progress slowly and more easily. Although slow, it is still improvement and more of a life with freedom, peace, love, and joy.

I was reminded over and over to “keep it simple,” “progress, not perfection,” “easy does it,” and “one day at a time.” Another good one is “this too, shall pass.” (Meaning fearful thoughts and inward struggles).

The great commandment says to love God with our all. I believe sometimes it takes my “all” to escape my/other’s “governing ideas” and grow more in God’s principles. Sometimes, I will need to give my all toward God.

Quote 31

“BUT IDEAS AND IMAGES are also a primary stronghold of evil in the human self and in society. They determine how we “take” the things and events of ordinary life. They control the meanings we assign to what we deal with, and they can even blind us to what lies plainly before us. Again, this is seen over and over in biblical and in Christian history, and in human life generally. Their power for evil cannot be overestimated and is constantly at play in most human governments.” pg 101

My transformation of “IDEAS AND IMAGES” has been an ongoing experience over decades. My teenage ideas of sex, drugs, rock & roll, and weekend warrior partying came to a quick end at the age of 21. I remember looking inside my bedroom and seeing all the images on display knowing I had to toss them out. Posters, stickers, Spuds Mackenzie, shirts, and so many little things were going to be gone. Music I listened to was to change—not the style, but the content.

How I celebrated would change. Everything I hoped for and looked forward to was to be removed from my mind.

And then there were the relationships and places which I hope Dallas wrote about. I had to be more selective with where I went and who I would associate. Such changes have taken place throughout my life, yet in smaller increments. I continue to chose adjusting how I think, speak, and behave.

What is crucial for me to maintain is a conscious awareness that my responses to ideas and images are my responses. I had to take responsibility for my choices. I chose to end the blaming game and take responsibility for my emotional and mental reactions. My choices bring learning and experiences. I choose what I hang on my wall, where I go, what I will listen to, and how I will respond to it.

I was taught to put an end to victim thinking, self-condemnation, and resentments. If I was going to grow in peace, I had to gain control over my thoughts and choices a little bit at a time. I had to invest more time and thought toward the choices I was making and consider Godly alternatives. Instead of perfection being the goal, I sought gradual improvement.

I will always be subjected to irritation, frustration, disappointment, and hurt. Yet through such struggles I can choose to trust God if God is within my consciousness. I need to choose to continually consider God in how I think and what I do. This is a daily redirection, because I shift away back to self-seeking.

Regardless of how much self control I exercise, buttons will always exist. I will always have expectations, desires, wants, and preferences. And life will not always be in agreement with them. So I will get irritated and disappointed. As long as I have habits and rituals I will unconsciously be somewhat tied to them. However, the degree at which I am tied to such things can be modified through my increased faith in God.

I was taught in recovery to surrender my own ideas for God's. When things are not going the way I want or expect I can simply say, Thy will, not mine, be done. Love and peace are not about fighting reality or trying to force life to meet my wants. I am to be clay for the potter. I am to be flexible to life's realities. I am to adjust my ideas and images to stay with God regardless of what happens in life. I am to compare my ideas, thoughts, and desires with God's.

One of the most repeated psalms, at least in my circles, is Psalm 23. The very first line says, "The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want." Imagine waking up each morning without wants. We wake up with thankfulness to having a God that will provide and guide us throughout our day. We are grateful for whatever we have as a gift from God and we are not disappointed whatsoever for anything we do not have. If we are late, we

are not distressed, because we are with God. We do not worry about what others think. We desire to do God's good. God is our shepherd and a shepherd of love. The only want we continue to seek is to abide in God more and more.

Quote 32

"This is the basic idea back of all temptation: God is presented as depriving us by his commands of what is good, so we think we must take matters into our own hands and act contrary to what he has said. This image of God leads to our pushing him out of our thoughts, as discussed in previous chapters, and putting ourselves on the throne of the universe. The condition of the ruined soul and world naturally results. The single most important thing in our mind is our idea of God and the associated images." Pg. 101

I've learned that in order to grow I must face myself where I avoid God's instructions. I must see it. That means I bring it into my consciousness and evaluate why. I do this so I understand how to correct it. If I merely affirm it and do not correct it, I will be doing James 1:23-24.

There is a saying in Twelve Step meetings, "There is a God and it's not you." If I am trusting God, I am having an open mind or growth mindset to what God is teaching. If I cling to my own ideas, ways, habits, traditions, customs, etc., then I can be shutting the door upon God's guidance. Often times God is leading me beyond what I already know. My job is to listen for more information to learn the Godly good I don't know. I need to consider my understanding may be wrong or at least partially wrong. Otherwise, I'll believe I know what's best and close my mind from opportunities.

To grow with God I need to make God the priority in my day. To the level I prioritize God in all I do has often been the level and pace of my spiritual growth.

It doesn't seem possible to serve God and seek self interests. I either serve God as a student ready to learn and act or I serve my own ideas/ understanding. I learned this experientially at an early age. Then I set that learning aside and unconsciously followed the world's ways. I eventually

came back to God when things got bad and then set God aside again and then went back again and so on and so on.

After about 15 years of this yo-yo experience, I decided to apply more diligence, commitment, and perseverance. I knew I was to serve God and do God's will. I knew through experience this process worked. I was ready to raise the bar another level. Instead of setting God aside when things got good again, I decided to press further and see just how good things can get if I kept at it. But I did not know how.

No one was really teaching me in deep and meaningful specific ways what God's will looks like. Few were sharing the process of cleaning their conscience and purifying their heart. Great love stories just were not told in my groups. So I dug into the Bible to find the answers.

Here is where the internet is a true blessing. I was able to perform vast amounts of Biblical concordance studies for free. I wanted to learn from the Bible. I already learned how to connect spiritually, but I still needed help in understanding the spirit's language. I was seeking to fine tune my spiritual connection. The Bible helped provide clearer and more specific direction. I was ready to face convicting scripture and knew I had to apply new action.

Sometimes, I can learn from theories and book studies ideas that hurt my image of God.

I was once in a group from a church that studied a book. It had to do with love languages. To me, it was missing the mark. I won't get into the details, but when I compared it to 1 Corinthians 13, the Bible helped me see the truth.

The language of love I need to know is God's. Developing empathy and ability to sense love and peace is absolutely necessary for me. God is about love and peace. If I am not about such things in my attitude, actions, thoughts, and feelings, then I need some correction. My ideas and images about God are being shaped through experiences with love and peace. My journey involves sensing spiritual life that is invisible.

As Dallas wrote, "The single most important thing in our mind is our idea of God and the associated images." I verify my beliefs, understandings,

ideas, and images. I went to the Bible and searched for patterns of how it described God. Then I went to my beliefs to find the differences. I applied new action. Then I carefully observed the results within and around me. I continue to make gradual corrections, one day at a time. Amazing grace is often at work in me to the degree I inwardly align with it.

Quote 33

Page 102

“Individuals who suffer from a poor image of themselves are caught up in self- rejection and have no defenses against group pressures. They do not see themselves as the objects of God’s love, and they have no place to make a stand.”

I believe we all have access to God’s Spirit and can choose to grow with it. Inwardly, I am governed by ideas that are not Godly. I relate to the above description as rejection of the Spirit or rejection of who God made me to be.

The self-rejection behavior I have learned involves denial of feelings and love. I learned to set very thick boundaries . . . for protection, not knowing at the same time I was creating barriers against feelings/senses of love and intimacy. If I do not let people in, they cannot hurt me. I learned to reject affection, trust, patience, mercy, compassion, gentleness, and peace. I decided they were not for me. I rejected feeding my soul with God’s grace. This still occurs, although in decreasing measure.

My transformation/alignment with God involves an increased awareness of my rejection behavior and correcting it. I humble myself, my way of thinking, and become clay for the potter. I increase my focus and attention toward patience, gentleness, mercy, etc. and to walk in it. Progress, not perfection. It happens a little bit at a time, one day at a time, as I continue with the process.

Dallas writes, “They do not see themselves as the objects of God’s love.” I’m a fan of John 15. Jesus describes abiding in God like a vine and branch. As I receive love from God, I am filled. But God’s instructions are to act with it, do something with it, share it, build it, and bare fruit.

Instead, I am to produce fruit and doing so fills me even more. Another way to think of it is like being a conduit. I can choose to be a source of God's love capable of delivering God's good. First, I need to be situated to receive and be filled with it. I must set my mind upon it in a way I can maintain a conscious awareness toward it. When my thoughts are not with God's love, they often shift into self-seeking. Self-seeking withers away spiritual good. It corrupts my soul.

Rejection of God's good can be both consciously and unconsciously. When I began my spiritual journey I was against God's love. When others would talk about love, I would become confused, surprised, and even shocked, because I did not understand. The idea of responding to an enemy with love made absolutely no sense to me. Why would I care for someone who wants to hurt me? That seemed like a stupid idea, or so I thought. But Jesus said to do it. Was Jesus stupid?

This cognitive dissonance is not a comfortable place to be. Yet I knew I had to be in it. I had to be inwardly struggling to understand God at a new level. I wanted to solve this riddle of loving my enemy. I knew the only way to know, was to do it. I had to put the theory into practice and observe the results. So I did. The more I practiced it, the more I learned.

Rejection of God's love, ways, statutes, law, righteousness, goodness, and grace exists everywhere and in everything in various levels and degrees. Spiritual correction involves identify the rejection behavior and replacing it with sincere and honest Godly love.

Seeing my error, owning my part in it, and making Godly correction involves more humility, faith, and trust in God. Such action is good and fruitful.

Rejection can become so normalized I don't even know I am doing it. I found it helpful to practice careful analysis of how well I am abiding in God. My normal can be a regular practice of rejection. What's 'normal' in my groups can be guiding me toward rejection.

1 Thessalonians 5:21, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 6:4, 1 Corinthians 15:33,

My own will and ideas, self-seeking ways, are foolish. Through cooperation with God's will and love, I can become wise. When I am growing in obedience with God's love, I am growing in wisdom. When I am not, I'm following a fool.

Quote 34

"The process of spiritual formation in Christ is one of progressively replacing those destructive images and ideas with the images and ideas that filled the mind of Jesus himself." Page 103

Okay, I think this is it. I believe this is the quote of all quotes, at least thus far. I have written and podcasted extensively about this "process." I use different terms, but essentially say the same thing. I believe Dallas and I are two different people trying to describe the same thing, but from different view points.

This quote seems to define "spiritual formation in Christ." I have found it extremely important to have more clear definitions and terms to help guide me toward improvement with transformation. They can help me to have something to measure my progress. This quote is one I will likely use again and again to clarify "The process of spiritual formation."

Here is my experience. I ask myself certain questions and find answers. Questions which involve convicting truth about myself. The more error within me I can reveal, the more conviction I can feel. These feelings are often uncomfortable. Comfort seeking behavior can keep me from formation. I must be ready to walk in some discomfort.

Examples of questions:

1. Do I believe the above quote to be true? Is Dallas correct with this definition of "spiritual formation in Christ?" He either is correct, or he isn't. I need to decide, and of course, I my mind can change.

If I do believe this is correct, then I can ask the next question:

2. Am I ready for the "process" Dallas just described? Am I ready to do what it says? This where most of us can turn away as did disciples of Jesus.

If I am ready, then I can begin looking at how. Right here is where the mind can play tricks. When I reach the point of action, that's where mental sabotage thrives; to post-pone, delay, deny, and avoid. A bit of fear, doubt, and uncertainty discombobulates my faith. This is when the inward battle is at its peak. When my inward being is guiding me away, distracting me, it takes self-discipline and strength to stay focused on the goal.

Purifying the mind, cleansing the conscience, and correcting wrongs can involve a sense of uncomfortable humbling of ourselves. We can become aware of the comforting fact that we don't have to do it. Walk in discomfort or comfort, what will I choose?

Let's recall what Dallas previously wrote about spiritual formation.

"Any successful plan for spiritual formation, whether for the individual or group, will in fact be significantly similar to the Alcoholics Anonymous program." Page 85 Renovation of the Heart

3. What am I ready to change? The Alcoholics Anonymous program involves thorough self-examination, confession, repentance, and restitution. It involves cleaning house (hearts, minds, & souls). So, If I believe Dallas is correct and I am ready to act, then the next question would be choosing a mentor. Questions would focus upon my self. Self analysis would become top priority, to decide what thoughts, ideas, and images to have replaced.

4. What have I changed? What results did I experience? After a couple of weeks, there ought to be measurable improvement. Am I replacing and walking differently with God, or not. Am I evaluating myself and taking action each day? If so, what action? How much time am I practicing new Godly ideas? Am I praying for correction? Am I praying for wisdom and strength to do it? Am I seeking out others who have done it and working with them?

For me, these are uncomfortable truth seeking questions. I realized a long time ago, there is a denial system within me that seeks to avoid, post-pone, and deny such questions. It's even harder to stay with the questions long enough to find answers. For me, I have been able to very slowly in

small steps, face these questions and find answers. I often don't like the answers.

I have failed more than I have found success. The key word in the quote above is "progressively." So the most important question I keep coming back to is, "What progress am I making?" If I can change one idea or image within my being to be more with God as Jesus was, then that would be progress. I have found that once I can get going, the inward battle decreases significantly. The hardest part is simply getting going. Think of it like the law of inertia. It takes more energy to change direction than to continue in the direction we are going.

I have created a number of evaluation tools that are free to access on my website. I use continuums. They help me break down big changes in smaller steps. Most days, I can only see the step in front of me. It can be as simple as; speak sincere kindness, move slower with God, let go of worry, forgive someone, have mercy with someone, confess a struggle, right a wrong, help someone, share a meal, or let someone know me more intimately.

I believe these are all simple achievable thoughts and actions most of us can do, if we choose to do it. Praying for willingness has helped.

Quote 35

Page 103 "By contrast, to loosen the grip of fallen imagery and its underlying idea structure is a fundamental part of what mental health professionals must do to aid their patients. It is also essential to the Christian ministries of inner healing and evangelism."

Romans 12:9 "*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.*" This section is entitled, "Behave Like a Christian."

Dallas used the phrase "loosen the grip" and Romans says, "Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good."

Evil and good are two subjects of which we have "fallen imagery." The first part of this process would be to discover our "fallen imagery" and learn correctly what evil and good really are. I did a concordance search in the

Bible to see first hand what it said. Then I sifted through the scripture to identify patterns. Some things stood out which I posted on my website.

Replacing ideas and imagery is not an easy thing. There will be cognitive dissonance. Struggle is part of the journey.

As they say in recovery meetings, “Let go and let God.” This is Thought Replacement and more. As I focus upon God’s good and cling to it more and more, it can reveal my grip upon ungodly things, if I am open to seeing it. Then I can pray for humility and willingness. I can pray for strength and faith to “loosen the grip.” This requires a concentrated effort and a dedicated commitment to repeat it each day. This is a path to increased peace and love. It is a path to corrected anger, fear, worry, and self-condemnation. When angry I can pray for forgiveness, even self-forgiveness. Worry or fear - strength and faith. Hurry - patience and peace. Self-seeking - empathy and compassion. This regular practice of inward redirection has been key to my transformation. These are my spiritual exercises for my spiritual fitness.

Lack of application

Here’s the problem as I have come to know it. We lack application. Inwardly exists many forms of uncertainty which promote choices not to act. Inside our minds and bodies exist ideas, hopes, wants, expectations, and desires which we are trained to achieve. It seems to me that most of us seek God in ways that fit such urges. In my experience, growth with God involves denying my understanding/things that make sense to me. If I do not engage with this setting aside my ideas to increase my abiding in God, then I probably won’t.

I experience people making choices upon unchecked assumptions all the time. A quick side note: I’m an INTJ on the MBTI. I enjoy the MBTI because it helps me understand other’s personalities. I’m the kind of personality that gets down to the truth in ways that can bother people. I can speak the truth and it can get awkward. I apologize about that. I will continue to do it and try to learn how to be less awkward about it.

Choices on unchecked assumptions. On Christmas my wife wanted to go see some lights. She assumed that there would be crowds and seemed to begin talking herself out of it. Her mom was affirming this assumption. I

informed them and myself that we have no idea. The only way to know is to go and see. It turned out there wasn't much of a line. We went got to drive by the beautiful houses twice in five minutes.

I believe many of us miss out on opportunities based upon faulty assumptions. It can be antisocial to invite others to check their assumptions. I'm okay with fantasy, as long as we realize it's fantasy. Pretending is healthy and fun. I work with kids and they help me all the time. I love it in the appropriate times.

Faulty assumptions about real life situations are the sort of ideas and images that are good to replace. We all have them. The best way I know how to replace such faulty ideas and images is testing. I can identify the assumption, test it, and then learn the truth. Yet I must be willing to accept and own the truth.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 "Test all things; hold fast what is good."

If we are obeying the instructions of examining ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 6:4) then we may be examining how well we, "Behave Like a Christian," "Abhor what is evil," and "Cling to what is good." I've meditated extensively upon instructions like these. I thought about the words "Abhor" and "Cling." Clinging is like holding something and fighting for it. It's like holding a football when other players are trying to take it away. I do not "Cling" to what is good. If I did I would be more gentle, patient, kind, compassionate, and generous. I have room to grow. I need more practice with such things to learn them. I need to test my ideas about what is good and evil. I needed to test my assumptions about good and evil and see what the Bible really says. When I found the truth, I had to be willing to let go of incorrect ideas which I was clinging to. I had ways, truth, wants, and understandings that were not correct with God and I clung to them. There were even ideas of good that I abhorred. This correction or replacement process has been very uncomfortable.

I understand this to be the Willard path, the Twelve Steps solution, and the Bible's instructions. We each will need to choose it, one step at a time, one day at a time, one morning at a time, and one hour at a time. No class, group, or church can do it for us. The choice is ours to make.

Of course I need to ensure I have a growth mindset. A fixed mindset can go through this system without the willingness to be proven incorrect.

In my first decade I let go of much resentment, fear, self-seeking, and violent behaviors. I began to learn some tact like saying please and thank you. The next decade I began letting go of some sarcastic mannerisms, practicing patience, love, gentleness, and softening my demeanor. My third decade I began practicing words of encouragement toward others and accepting differences. I've been humbled through many mistakes, but even more so through making changes and seeing the truth; that my knowledge is incorrect and I am plagued by the worlds misunderstandings which I have chosen and continue to choose to abide in.

As I abide more of my inward being to align with God, I understand more clearly how my old ways are wrong. It's when I step into correction that I can understand how it is right. This is why in recovery meetings, the solution is always involving action and more action.

In the book Alcoholics Anonymous, chapter called "Into Action" Page 76

"Now we need more action, without which we find that 'Faith without works is dead.'

Many people have become skilled at the art of letting go, but few will grow more and more into the practice of letting God.

Quote 36

I want to remind anyone who may struggle with self-condemnation that such thinking is not love. Self-examination is not about beating ourselves up. It's more to see where we are and how we can grow. Our thinking is to focus upon where God wants us to go. Forgiveness, mercy, patience, and compassion toward ourselves and others is the goal. We all fall short, but we all can inwardly shift into love and peace, one thought at a time. I want to begin and end with this.

Page 105 “We must seek the Lord by devoting our powers of thinking to understanding the facts and information of the gospel. This is the primary way of focusing our mind on him, setting him before us. When we do so we will be assisted by God’s grace in ways far beyond anything we can understand on our own; and the ideas and images that governed the life of Christ through his thought life will possess us.”

“devoting our powers of thinking to understanding the facts and information of the gospel”

Fact? I can abide more in God. I can examine myself, confess my wrongs, reduce self-condemnation, speak more sincere truth, let others love me, be more humble, speak more encouragement, forgive, have compassion, pray more sincerely for direction, and meditate more frequently upon God’s directions. Isn’t this a fact for most of us? Can’t we all grow more with God? But who will position themselves to see the evidence in their own souls? This could be the most challenging part of transformation, to reveal our souls to one another and see the truth of our make up. Isn’t this part of the process toward formation in Christ?

To think more by facts takes more concentration.

Page 107 “Bluntly, to serve God well we must think straight; and crooked thinking, unintentional or not, always favors evil. And when the crooked thinking gets elevated into group orthodoxy, whether religious or secular, there is always, quite literally, “hell to pay.” That is, hell will take its portion, as it has repeatedly done in the horrors of world history.”

It seems to me the Bible describes love as the most essential ingredient to being right with God.

This is a fact to me. 1 John 4:7-8 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

If this statement in 1 John 4 is a fact or truth, then wouldn’t it be a good idea to begin examining ourselves more carefully with how we are growing in this love? Wouldn’t it be a good idea to understand our potential to be in this love? Is this fact or truth too much for us? Are some facts or truth too

much? If so, by what measures are we deciding which facts are good for us and which ones are not?

But this is THE command of God, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Deuteronomy 6:5

Are we devoting ourselves to understand what it is literally like to Love God with our all, our inward all? Are we applying ourselves to maximize our heart, mind, and soul toward loving God? This is what I have contemplated for many years. I decided, based upon my experience, that mainstream christianity (group orthodoxy) was forming in Christ at a pace much slower than I was comfortable with. I realized I could do it faster and I believe I have. I don’t believe there is anything special about me or my intelligence. I just chose to see some truth most choose not to see. I choose to take action many avoid. I’ve walked a narrow road . . . so far.

But this is THE command of God, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Deuteronomy 6:5 (Read verses 6-9 and try to do it)

Now if I love God like this, I will be learning how to love others. And of course I will be actively learning to love as Jesus loved. Jesus loves in a way that teaches and is often uncomfortable. It involves living with cognitive dissonance. Think about when Jesus was ‘done.’

Matthew 22:40 “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Deeper understanding of “the facts and information of the gospel” is to have been there, to have experienced what is being taught.

I believe Jesus would love to have teachers who actually did what they taught and taught from personal experiences.

Look at The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. The very last thing Jesus says is so crucial. Remember, this is in response to a question, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus gives the story of the Good

Samaritan and ends it with, “Go and do likewise.” Knowing the instructions does not mean we know how to do it.

Imagine being around someone who has read every book on prayer, but yet has never prayed, who has studied church history, but has never been to one, or has heard countless descriptions of the Bible, but never read it. Experience enriches the learning. The scientific method is a good example. We can have all sorts of theories, but we need to test them to see how accurate they are. Theories need proof. “Group orthodoxy” needs testing from others who can challenge it. We ought to be willing to be challenged.

How do we think outside of the box?

Let’s pretend a man has been informed by his wife that he has a problem with his drinking. This man shares this theory with his friends at the bar. His drinking buddies affirm to the man that he can’t have a problem because he drinks the same way they do and they don’t have a problem. This process of reasoning happens all the time. People often look within their circle for understanding.

What helps us to see what we cannot see is listening to someone else who sees what we do not see and then learning how to see what they see . . . you see?

If Jesus was right there talking with you saying, “Go and do likewise,” would you do it? Would you even be willing to do it?

I want to remind anyone who may struggle with self-condemnation that such thinking is not love. Self-examination is not about beating ourselves up. It’s more to see where we are and how we can grow. Our thinking is to focus upon where God wants us to go. Forgiveness, mercy, patience, and compassion toward ourselves and others is the goal. We all fall short, but we all can inwardly shift into love and peace, one thought at a time.

Quote 37

Page 108 “TO BRING THE MIND to dwell intelligently upon God as he is presented in his Word will have the effect of causing us to love God passionately, and this love will in turn bring us to think of God steadily.”

“To dwell intelligently upon God as he is presented in his Word” requires learning precisely what the word says. I found myself cross checking assumptions many times about the great commandment of God. It is so easy to come to misunderstandings about God and what the Bible says. Improving in understanding with the word requires correction. If I am not in correction, then I may end up dwelling unintelligently upon God.

Proverbs 12:1 “Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates correction *is* stupid.”

I don’t know about you, but correction is uncomfortable and rarely convenient. I don’t like it. Does that make me stupid? Well, in some ways, I believe it does. I do and say stupid things. It happens. I’ve made many corrections and apologies. The word stupid has been stigmatized. Society does not like it and has deemed it inappropriate. And because society has taught us not to use it, we don’t. I used it because it is Biblical and makes a very important point. Am I going to stay silent about scripture that might make others uncomfortable? Such action could be spiritually dangerous.

I believe I’m the one that needs to be adjusted, not the scripture. Some verses are uncomfortable, humbling, convicting and even socially awkward. Protection from uncomfortable truth can interfere with formation. I heard a saying, “say what you mean, mean what you say, but don’t say it mean.” That said, I’m not skilled with sugar coating, but I’m learning.

The uncomfortable feelings of conviction and social awkwardness in spiritual truth has a good purpose. Jesus was socially awkward. When I’m offended by someone I try to consider and check to see if they are right. Even if they are mean. I want to improve my intelligence about God. This is exactly why I have studied the Bible through concordance studies and searched Greek & Hebrew definitions.

I believe dwelling “intelligently upon God as he is presented in his Word” will have an effect that will at times be convicting and humbling. I need to dwell upon it long enough for formation to have its way. I will need to stay in the cognitive dissonance until there is resolve. I may need to do what

the Bible says (get experience) to learn more about what it is saying to get my resolve.

James 2:20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

I am a fool. Love is so easy to experience. All I need to do is go care for others without self-seeking and diligently share my soul with them. But pride, money, idolatry, social expectations, and self-seeking block me . . . because I trust in it.

Fortunately, I have been able to grow in small steps with intelligence. I have been able to grasp uncomfortable truth and let it have its work in me. Because I am in a marathon—this race of formation, I continue to press on with convicting truth I do not want to dwell upon. I dwell upon it because in so doing I am enabled to “love God passionately” of at least more passionately.

The closer I get with God, the more I can see my corruption.

If I acknowledge God who is love and I mean the deepest most powerful love ever, then I am going to have more of that kind of love within my awareness and of course it would be convicting. Yet to be intelligent about that kind of love, I will need some experience in it.

Being in the company of that sort of love would be like playing basketball going one on one with the best ever. I would be humiliated. I would realize the truth about my soul, that I am not ‘fine.’ Everything is not Good within me. And I do need help with God. I need to dwell intelligently upon the guidance be more in that Good.

Matthew 7:24 Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

God has corrective measures for me to walk in which I must choose to do. If I walk in them with a willingness for my heart and mind to experience formation, I can be humbled and changed. But first, before I can walk with God, I must “dwell intelligently upon God as he is presented in his Word.”

Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

1 Corinthians 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

James 3:13 Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom.

Acts 17:30 “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,”

Romans 10:3 “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

I’ll never forget a few years back after I had completed a thorough concordance study on the word “righteous.” I was in a young adult bible study and a leader throws up his arms and says, “who can understand God’s righteousness?” And since I had recently studied it, I responded, “We can.” He looked at me with confusion. The next time we met, I brought a concordance study on righteousness and we all learned together.

I supposed my call is to highlight the fact that we can know God’s righteousness, if we walk in it, and the level we walk in it as Jesus did. We can dwell intelligently upon God, if we are humble enough to let him teach us. Being convicted creates motivation, but motivation does not always bring formation. To improve formation, we will need to walk in ways we do not desire.

Quote 38

“To the extent that God is exalted in the minds of people, and his very name is cherished with utmost respect, everything else goes right. You can verify this experimentally in yourself. Some decades ago J. B. Phillips brought a great message to the Christian world in his book, *Your God Is Too Small*. But while the phrase “Your God is too small” is still used today,

its message is usually misunderstood. The point is not “Your God is too small *to meet your needs*,” but “Your God is so small that you can fail *to relentlessly worship and adore him*.” In the renovated mind, God constantly stands as uniquely and supremely *worthy*. Hallowed be Thy name!” Page 108

Let’s ponder, “verify this experimentally in yourself.” In the beginning, this can be confusing. We learn by doing it, like learning to ride a bike, and we learn as we do it over time. There are various skills that can be developed if we keep at it.

We can develop skills in objective analysis, honest self-examination, improved discernment, perseverance, endurance, humility, and more. But to grow such skills we will need to practice them . . . increasingly.

I pray and hope for more of us to grow in such skills to a level where it is an obvious part of mainstream Christianity.

Dallas uses the word “extent.” “To the extent that God is exalted in the minds of people.” The word means amount or level of. Here are some of my own learnings with the word “extent:”

To the extent that resentment is permitted within my thoughts will affect my anger and the love in my relationships.

To the extent that self-seeking is permitted within my thoughts will affect how I trust God.

To the extent that self-condemnation is permitted within my thinking will affect my confidence and peace.

To the extent that I permit thoughts of fear, worry, vanity, greed, sex, food, etc, will affect mind, body, and soul.

To the extent I choose to practice extending my thoughts to be more aligned with God will affect my faith and renovation.

In John 15 Jesus gives instructions to abide in God as Jesus. In Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Moses describes what to do and how to do it. I believe

to the extent that my inwardness is with this instruction will largely impact my being with God. This is also what I see Dallas describing in his writing.

Quote 38

Page 111 "My patterns of thinking will conform to the truths of scriptural revelation, and I will extend and apply those truths, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, to all of the details of my daily life."

"Patterns of thinking will conform" and the way they conform is through choice. Choosing an action is more than believing. Faith without action is insufficient for change.

This next part, "conform to the truths of scriptural revelation" will involve a necessary ability of understanding scriptural truth. I believe this will require thinking that is a bit intuitive. Many people listen for information from others to learn their insights. But what Dallas is saying here means we will need to have our own insights or revelation that is not dependent upon someone else's ideas. We will need independent exploration and discovery from other people.

Then it says, "I will extend and apply those truths, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, to all of the details of my daily life."

Are we applying those truths? Where are people teaching how they apply those truths?

Are we under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Are we doing this to all of the details of our daily life? How much time, effort, energy, and investment are we putting forward to do such an activity every day? How could we improve?

Quote 39

"But even the followers of Jesus fall into patterns of willing ignorance about important matters, including possible objections to faith in Christ and the beliefs and practices of others who are devoted to Christ. In fact, if we are to use our minds rightly, we must live in an attitude of constant openness and learning." Page 110 Renovation of the Heart

Dallas is writing about the pitfalls with doctrine arrogance. The fact is, all of us fall into deception everyday. Learn the cognitive bias codex, group think, conformity, and herd mentality. It makes sense to me that living “in an attitude of constant openness and learning” would require having people around us that don’t think like we do. Wherever we set limits and boundaries to ideas and information, that is where we close the door. Being an advocate to spiritual growth in ways which challenge some current theology, I run into closed doors. It’s hard to keep an open mind and even harder to place my faith upon a stage for evaluation to see where it might be wrong. But that is how I learn and grow. In order to improve my faith, I need to be open to see how to improve it, which requires understanding where it misses the mark. The way I “live in an attitude of constant openness and learning” is to be around others who can challenge me and listen to them. Challenging others often inspires them to challenge me. But I need to listen to where I might be wrong. Then I need to meditate and reflect upon where I might be wrong long enough to see a solution or how I can improve. Without improved action, improvement is unlikely. How do you “live in an attitude of constant openness and learning?”

Quote 40

“A third great danger in the thought life of the disciple is allowing our desires to guide our thinking: especially the desire to prove we are right. This goes hand in hand with intellectual self-righteousness and is often associated with the desire to have the approval of others in “our crowd.””

This quote highlights the necessity for continued thought analysis. (See 2 Corinthians 10:5) This is a practice I now perform regularly. When I first began it was a struggle to consider I had faulty thinking. It was humbling and life changing to learn my ways of living had errors, that I needed to make adjustments. In recovery, I could not obey my desires. I did not desire to pray, meditate, examine myself, confess, repent, or right my wrongs. I did not desire to serve others, love my enemy, practice patience, or give money. Growth with God much of the time is going contrary to my desires. I did a concordance study upon self-seeking in the Bible and a podcast about it.

We can learn to improve our thought awareness, discern whether our desires are with God, and make adjustments. We can do this, with practice.

If I did not do it for my recovery I would be dead or in jail. If I did not do it for my marriage we would rarely talk to each other. Yet I have done it with great humility and self-abandonment. My wife seeks to be with me and talk with me. We love each other. As I grow with God's righteousness, so does my marriage. For me, this is not a theory, it is a fact. I believe, anyone can witness it with the right inward adjustments and outward responses.

Quote 41

Page 115

"We must try to remain aware of how our desires may influence how we perceive things, as well as our patterns of thought and interpretation. Many a bitter conflict among Christians could be avoided in this way."

These days my attention to inward desires and thoughts is regular and normal. Although I will never fully know and understand my unconscious prompts and deception toward evil responses, I can choose to ponder, reflect, and meditate in ways to improve inwardly with God's good. The more I take action to behave with peace, kindness, truth, sincerity, forgiveness, and compassion, the more my evil desires become revealed. I find it spiritually helpful to examine my interests, goals, and priorities to see how well they align with God's. Any excuses within my thinking that delays correction and improvement to be closer to God is not good. Am I humble or protecting my pride? Do I have resources and avoid sharing them? Am I self-seeking or seeing how I can help others? Honest self-examination is necessary to find "how our desires may influence how we perceive things." Skipping this necessary daily activity is not good. I've made many amends to others over the years, because I investigated myself, my attitude, and how I impact others with my choices. I'm to fulfill God's desires, not mine. Hence they saying, thy will, not mine, be done.

Quote 42

Page 115

"If we allow everything access to our mind, we are simply asking to be kept in a state of mental turmoil or bondage. For nothing enters the mind without having an effect for good or evil."

Renovation of the heart

Page 115

“If we allow everything access to our mind, we are simply asking to be kept in a state of mental turmoil or bondage. For nothing enters the mind without having an effect for good or evil.”

When I began learning my faulty ways--practicing evil, I found how such ways of being were the only ones I understood. I did not understand real sincere love and compassion. I had much learning to do. The learning involved new ways of thinking and practicing. This renewal process involved "taking captive" my thoughts and correcting them to better fit God's good.

This process was/is gradual and slow, yet produced good spiritual results inwardly and outwardly. My heart and conscience were being healed and cleansed as I gave myself over to it. This was the process of trusting God. When my mind was prompting and leading me toward a response, I practiced discerning whether that response would be following good or evil.

Because my understanding early on was quite limited in good and evil, I performed an exhaustive concordance search in the Bible to better understand how it described good and evil. I can't do a very good job discerning my thoughts about good and evil if my understanding of them is weak. I copied and pasted the many scriptures I thought to be helpful. Then I went through to identify patterns. Finally I created what I call a "quick reference" with good and evil. (Freely available on my website)

I use the quick reference sheet to help me in my morning meditations. I continue to create materials for two reasons; to help others and to further my understanding.

The Bible teaches me to keep a continued, progressive, enduring, and persevering focus upon God and God's ways—to do them. Without making careful thoughts corrections to grow in this manner, I will likely, as Dallas points out, "be kept in a state of mental turmoil or bondage." It's not merely thinking about them, but walking in them. I need to be in them.

One more thing about my experience. Before I exited my mental turmoil—I did not realize what I was doing to myself through my choices. It was only after struggling through the renewal process and witnessing results that I became increasingly aware of my turmoil—how it came to be. Trusting God through action—obeying God’s good, was necessary to really understand.

Page 115

“Well, then you must take the consequences. You cannot choose conditions and reject the consequences. Even a “bill of rights” cannot change that. If you choose to step off the roof, you can’t then choose not to hit the ground. The mind (the person and all its dimensions) has laws just as rigorous as gravity.”

Page 115

“If God’s eyes are too pure to behold evil (Habakkuk 1:13), we had better think it might be wise for us to look away as much as is feasible—even if it is called “entertainment.” We are to abhor evil and cleave to that which is good, and the foundation for doing that lies in where we choose to place our minds. The power to choose our thoughts is, as we said at the outset, our most basic freedom, our first and primary freedom, and we must use it well.”

Page 116

“There are many things we need not see and are better off not seeing—though, if you wish, you have a “right” to see them. Anyone who thinks that if I have a right to do X it is good for me to do X, simply hasn’t thought deeply about the matter. Paul’s wise counsel, by contrast, was, “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8). Make no mistake; this is a fundamental and indispensable part of our spiritual formation in Christ.”

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