The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives

Author, teacher, philosopher Dallas Willard gets right to the purpose of *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, where on its opening pages he writes: *This book is a plea for the Christian community to place the disciplines for the spiritual life at the heart of the gospel.* From there, with the precision of one of the best minds of this era, matched with the grace of one who walked in deep humility, Willard more than delivers on his objective in a manner that fans and followers have benefited from for the past several decades. And for those of us who could only read (and absorb) a page or two at a time of *The Divine Conspiracy*, the good news is that this book is measurably more accessible!

Take a look at these Book Notes to gain an overview of how to walk with Jesus from someone who did.

Title: **The Spirit of the Disciplines: *Understanding How God Changes Lives***

Author: **Dallas Willard**

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Book Description:

Dallas Willard, one of today's most brilliant Christian thinkers and author of The Divine Conspiracy (Christianity Today's 1999 Book of the Year), presents a way of living that enables ordinary men and women to enjoy the fruit of the Christian life. He reveals how the key to self-transformation resides in the practice of the spiritual disciplines, and how their practice affirms human life to the fullest. The Spirit of the Disciplines is for everyone who strives to be a disciple of Jesus in thought and action as well as intention.

Book Quotes:

Christianity can only succeed as a guide for current humanity if it does two things. First, it must take the need for human transformation as seriously as do modern revolutionary movements.

Second, it needs to clarify and exemplify realistic methods of human transformation. (ix)

We can become like Christ in character and in power and thus realize our highest ideals of well-being and well-doing. That is the heart of the New Testament message. (ix)

My central claim is that we canbecome like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole

lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father. (ix)

This book is a plea for the Christian community to place the disciplines for the spiritual life at the heart of the gospel. (xi)

The greatest danger to the Christian church today is that of pitching its message too low. (xii)

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (1)

The "cost of discipleship," though it may take all we have, is small when compared to the lot of those who don't accept Christ's invitation to be a part of his company in The Way of life. (2)

The general human failing is to want what is right and important, but at the same time not to commit to the kind of life that will produce the action we know to be right and the condition we want to enjoy. (6)

True Christlikeness, true companionship with Christ, comes at the point where it is hard not to respond as he would. (8)

By focusing on the whole of Christ's life and the lives of many who have best succeeded in following him, I will outline a psychologically and theologically sound, testable way to meet grace and fully conform to him. The secret of the easy yoke is simple, actually. It is the intelligent, informed, unyielding resolve to live as Jesus lived in all aspects of his life, not just in the moment of specific choice or action. (10)

Full participation in the life of God's kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the Spirit. (26)

The message of Jesus himself and of the early disciples was not just one of the forgiveness of sins, but rather was one of newness of life—which of course involved forgiveness as well as his death for our sins. (36)

The human body itself then is part of the imago Dei, for it is the vehicle through which we can effectively acquire the limited self-subsistent power we must have to be truly in the image and likeness of God. (53)

I believe men and women were designed by God, in the very constitution of their human personalities, to carry out his rule by meshing the relatively little power resident in their own bodies with the power inherent in the infinite Rule or Kingdom of God. (54)

A person is a "spiritual person" to the degree that his or her life is correctly integrated into and dominated by God's spiritual Kingdom. (67)

The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. (68)

Once the individual has through divine initiative become alive to God and his Kingdom, the extent of integration of his or her total being into that Kingdom order significantly depends upon the individual's initiative. (68)

But the Bible also informs us that there are certain practices—solitude, prayer, fasting, celebration, and so forth—we can undertake, in cooperation with grace, to raise the level of our lives toward godliness. (69)

Habitual reliance upon God as we dedicate our bodies to righteous behavior and to all reasonable preparation

for righteous behavior makes sin dispensable, even uninteresting and revolting—just as righteousness was revolting to us when our behavior was locked into the sin system. Our desires and delights are changed because our actions and attitude are based upon the reality of God's Kingdom. (118)

People who think that they are spiritually superior becausethey make a practice of a discipline such as fasting or silence or frugality are entirely missing the point. The need for extensive practice of a given discipline is an indication of our weakness, not our strength. We can even lay it down as a rule of thumb that if it is easy for us to engage in a certain discipline, we probably don't need to practice it. The disciplines we need to practice are precisely the ones we are not"good at" and hence do not enjoy. (138)

As a pastor, teacher, and counselor I have repeatedly seen the transformation of inner and outer life that comes simply from memorization and meditation upon scripture. Personally, I would never undertake to pastor a church or guide a program of Christian education that did not involve a continuous program of memorization of the choicest passages of Scripture for people of all ages. (150)

A discipline for the spiritual life is, when the dust of history is blown away, nothing but an activity undertaken to bring us into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom. (156)

When through spiritual disciplines I become able heartily to bless those who curse me, pray without ceasing, to be at peace when not given credit for good deeds I've done, or to master the evil that comes my way, it is because my disciplinary activities have inwardly poised me for more and more interaction with the powers of the living God and his Kingdom. Such is the potential we tap into when we use the disciplines. (157)

Disciplines of Abstinence: solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice.

Disciplines of Engagement: study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, submission (158)

But I believe the discipline of service is even more important for Christians who find themselves in positions of influence, power, and leadership. (183)

The essential point can be put into one shocking statement: under the rule of God, the rich and the poor have no necessary advantage over each other with regard to well-being or well-doing in this life or the next. (208)

Our problem is not primarily with how we see the poor, but with how we see ourselves. If we still think and convey by our behavior that in some way we are fundamentally different and better as persons from the man sleeping in the discarded boxes in the alley, we have not been brought with clear eyes to the foot of the cross, seeing our own neediness in the light of it. We have not looked closely at the lengths to which God had to go to reach us. We have not learned to live always and thankfully in the cross's shadow. From that vantage point alone is our solidarity with the destitute to be realized. (211)

For example, it is as great and as difficult a spiritual calling to run the factories and the mines, the banks and the department stores, the schools and government agencies for the Kingdom of God as it is to pastor a church or serve as an evangelist. There truly is no division between sacred and secular except what we have created. And that is why the division of the legitimate roles and functions of human life into the sacred and the secular does incalculable damage to our individual lives and to the cause of Christ. Holy people must stop going into "church work" as their natural course of action and take up holy orders in farming, industry, law, education, banking, and journalism with the same zeal previously given to evangelism or to pastoral and missionary work. (214)

We see why the gospel is for the up-and-in as well as the down-and-out, equally so and equally essential. (216)

Individual change is the answer, even though many believe strongly the answer lies in social change. (233)

The single most striking thing about the Kingdom of God Jesus invites us to enter is that in it there can be utter confidence in God's care and provision. (236)

It is in faith alone that we can find a basis from which the evil in human character and life can be dislodged. We have one realistic hope for dealing with the world's problems. And that is the person and gospel of Jesus Christ, living here and now, in people who are his by total identification found through the spiritual disciplines. (237)

There is a way of life that, if generally adopted, would eliminate all of the social and political problems from which we suffer. This way of life comes to whole-hearted disciples of Christ who live in the disciplines of the spiritual life and allow grace to bring their bodiesinto alignment with their redeemed spirits. (241)

At this point in history, every leader among those who identify with Christ as Lord must ask himself or herself: "How can I justify not leading my people into the practice of disciplines for the spiritual life that would enable them to reign in their lives by Christ Jesus? How can I fail to give them this opportunity? How can I justify not giving myself to those practices until I am a spiritual powerhouse, the angles of God evidently ascending and descending upon me in my place?"

Ministers pay far too much attention to people who do not come to service. Those people should, generally, be given exactly that disregard by the pastor that they give to Christ. The Christian leader has something much more important to do than pursue the godless. The leader's task is to equip saints until they are like Christ (Eph 4:12), and history and the God of history waits for him to do this job. It is so easy for the leader today to get caught up in illusionary goals, pursuing the marks of success which come from our training as Christian leaders or which are simply imposed by the world. It is big, Big, always BIG, and BIGGER STILL! That is the contemporary imperative. Thus we fail to take seriously the nurture and training of those, however few, who stand constantly by us. (246)

There is a special evangelistic work to be done, of course, and there are special callings to it. But if those in the churches really are enjoying the fullness of life, evangelism will be unstoppable and largely automatic. (247)

Nondiscipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10). The cross-shaped yoke of Christ is after all an instrument of liberation and power to those who live in it with him and learn the meekness and lowliness of heart that brings rest to the soul. (263)