



Eternal Living: Reflections on Dallas Willard's Teaching on Faith & Formation

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Curated by Dallas Willard's longtime colleague and friend Gary Moon, *Eternal Living* is a medley of images, snapshots and "Dallas-isms" that seeks to move and motivate readers toward deeper experiences of God through the sharing of stories from the lives of the writers. Whether influenced by Dallas as a family member, close friend, advisor, professor, philosopher, minister or reformer, contributors bring refreshing insight not only to his ideas and what shaped him, but also to his contagious theology of grace and joy.

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"How does one assess such a person, such a life?"

For us a great light has gone out. We are diminished by Dallas's passing. How does one assess such a person, such a life?

Dallas's published writings will endure and no doubt increase in importance as time passes. He left many unpublished writings (I have seen them in stacks scattered throughout his study), and I can well imagine that others will be working with this huge legacy so that eventually more books by Dallas will be published than he ever published in his lifetime. His massive contribution in his chosen field of philosophy has barely been touched, and I expect scholars will be exploring his thinking in this arena for some time.

Of course Dallas's brilliance, as important as it is, is far from the whole story. He possessed in his person a spiritual formation into Christlikeness that was simply astonishing to all who were around him. Profound character formation had transpired in his body and mind and spirit until love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control were at the very center of the deep habit-structures of his life. He exhibited a substantively transformed life. Dallas was simply soaked in the presence of the living Christ.

Now, I say these things not as someone looking admiringly from a distance. Dallas and I worked together and knew each other for more than forty years. I knew the warts and the wrinkles. Still, I saw rich character-forming realities deepen and thicken in Dallas over many years.

I am struggling for the words to share with you what I mean. To put it negatively, Dallas was amazingly free from guile and manipulation and control. To say it positively, he showed graciousness and kindness and gentleness to everyone who came in contact with him. The old word for what I am trying to get at is *holiness*. But in our day this word has been so corrupted that it cannot carry the weight of what I am after. Perhaps the phrase *unadulterated goodness* captures what I saw in Dallas as well as anything I can think of. He truly was a good man.

Such a life formation does not occur instantaneously or automatically. The practice of Christian spiritual disciplines is fundamental to such character transformation. Dallas, of course, taught us about these matters constantly: classical disciplines of abstinence such as solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy and sacrifice; classical disciplines of engagement such as study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession and submission. (See *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.)

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These are the disciplines Dallas engaged in throughout his life in order to train his body, mind and spirit into deep, inward habits of goodness; as Paul admonished, “Train yourself in godliness” (1 Tim 4:7 NRSV). And we are witnesses to the effects of such a life of training. Dallas was someone whose life was penetrated throughout by love, who possessed a faith that could see everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, and who could access the supernatural power of God to overcome evil and do what is right. In our own lives and in the days that lie before us we will do well to follow his lead.

– Taken from part I, chapter 1, “If Death My Friend and Me Divide,” by Richard Foster

Longtime friend of Dallas Willard, **Richard Foster** is founder of Renovaré in Denver, Colorado. He is the author of many books, including *Celebration of Discipline*, and most recently, *Sanctuary of the Soul*. Foster said, “The friendship that Dallas and I experienced in those early years of ministry together grew rapidly. I would do the preaching but Dallas and I would trade off teaching assignments at the church. Years later I would explain that when I taught people might come, but when Dallas taught they brought their tape recorders.”

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