
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES, SPIRITUAL FORMATION, AND THE RESTORATION OF THE SOUL

DALLAS WILLARD
University of Southern California

After clarifying background assumptions, I proceed to a description of the soul as the source and coordinating principle of the individual life, referring to classical and biblical sources. The soul is presented as distinct from the person, but the entity that makes the person and life one person and life. The psychological reality of sin is seen in the incapacitation of the soul to coordinate the whole person, internally and externally. The gospel word and the Spirit of God bring new life to persons “dead in sin,” and make it possible for them to become active in spiritual growth by utilizing disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, and scripture memorization. The effect of these on progression toward wholeness is discussed, and the importance of psychological research and teaching on spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines is emphasized.

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. (Ps. 19:7, New American Standard Version)

He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (Ps. 23:3)

Currently there is much interest in spiritual disciplines and the process of spiritual formation. This derives from a sense of our urgent need for mental and emotional health, as well as spiritual depth, and from the simultaneous realization that recent standard practice of American Christianity is not meeting that need.¹ Many serious and thoughtful Christians are looking for ways into an intelligent and powerful Christlikeness that can inform their entire existence and not just produce special religious moments. Practices and concepts that have had a long life in the Christian past are being experienced and explored anew, and many involved in

Requests for reprints may be sent to Dallas Willard, PhD, School of Philosophy, University of Southern California, University Park, 3709 Trousdale Parkway, Los Angeles, California 90089-0451.

the field of psychology are taking a professional interest in them and in the soul.²

This is a very hopeful development. But unless the interest in spirituality, as it is now sometimes called, finds a foundation in the nature of human personality and in God's redemptive interactions therewith, it will be at most a passing fad. Moreover, it is possible for people not only to be disappointed in this area, but seriously harmed. We need to think deeply and clearly about spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation and, in particular, about their relationships with the human soul, the deepest dimension of human personality.

ASSUMPTIONS FOR THIS DISCUSSION

In what follows I shall not deal with the specifically philosophical questions about the soul, though I shall have to touch upon a number of them. Fortunately, Dr. Moreland's (1998) article in this issue, "Restoring the Substance to the Soul of Psychology," (pp. 29-43) gives an excellent treatment of the philosophical issues, and a thorough reading of that article is an excellent background to what follows.

As Moreland (1998) carefully explains, the human soul must be treated as an entity in its own right, with its own peculiar nature and relationships. It is the fundamental but not the only component of a human person and life. That is the position uniformly maintained by the Western tradition of thought up to Hume, and in many quarters long thereafter.³ The soul is, as Moreland indicates, a substance, in the sense that it is an individual entity that has properties and dispositions natural to it, endures

¹This condition is described in detail in Chapter 2 of *The Divine Conspiracy* (Willard, 1998).

²On the amazing current revival of interest in the soul, see "Soul in the Raw," 1997.

through time and change, and receives and exercises causal influence on other things, most notably the person, of which it is the most fundamental part.

The soul is not a simple or noncomplex being, except in the sense of not having spatial parts. This in fact confuses many people who, when they think *part*, can only think *spatial part*. Of course anything with spatial parts could, precisely, not be a soul. One is likely to forget that there are many other things with no spatial parts, such as a chord played in music or the flavors in a soup. Concepts like part, property, complexity, and so on have to be handled with extreme care when one comes to deal with persons. Moreland (1998) does this in an exemplary fashion.

Now a soul is essentially the component of a person—as are the mind and will, which are among the soul's essential parts—and does not exist without a person whose soul it is. A soul or its parts cannot lie around like a spare part of an automobile or computer. But it is equally true that persons do not exist without a soul. A person is a living entity that has a certain kind of life: primarily one of self-determination in terms of adopted values, with the possibility (and vital need) of worship. The soul is that entity within a person that integrates all of the components of a life into one's own, singular life.

The soul is not a physical entity, of course, and efforts to think of it in such terms underlie most of the modern objections to the soul in intellectual contexts. Consequently, knowledge of it cannot be achieved on the basis of sense perception. But that is no objection against it. For sense perception gives us knowledge of very little of significant human interest, least of all knowledge of knowledge itself.

Empiricism (later often called positivism) is simply a failed ideological gambit in Western culture that prevailed from, roughly, the 18th century on, and should be regarded as nothing more than an instructive historical episode. It arbitrarily specifies the senses as boundary markers for knowledge and

reality. But it cannot guide us in the interpretation of knowledge and reality, for it fundamentally misconstrues them. Empiricism's primary function was to replace religious orthodoxy with a secular, epistemological orthodoxy, as cultural authority was passing from religious to merely intellectual institutions in modern Western society. As an orthodoxy, it is of course repressive and, among other things, makes impossible knowledge of the human self. One can judge for oneself the cost of this by candidly observing the intellectual and moral chaos that rules modern society—not least, intellectual society itself. Of course empiricism is not itself an empirical theory, and in the nature of the case could never be.

So in what follows I shall presuppose, pointing to Moreland (1998) for details of argument, a classical view of the soul and the person, along the above lines. People in our intellectual culture today vaguely suppose, by and large, that “something has been found out” that proves this view wrong. Adopting postures and phraseologies of thinkers such as Hume and Nietzsche, they often heap scorn on Plato, Descartes, and dualism. But nothing has been found out to that effect. Apart from the unfortunate, though historically necessary, episode of empiricism/positivism and its paralyzing after effects, one would never have supposed it had.

I shall also presuppose in what follows that biblical revelation is a source of knowledge. We have knowledge of a subject matter when we are able to represent it as it in fact is, on an appropriate basis of thought and experience. Authority is one source of knowledge, provided that it is good authority. Most of what we know, we know on the basis of one authority or another—much of it from reading books or listening to outstanding scientists and thinkers. Of course any authority should be open to any fair and reasonable question, and we should always evaluate authorities in whatever appropriate ways are possible. Similarly for the Bible. When it is properly used, it is a source of knowledge about the most important things in human life: the nature of the human being and its relationship to God.

DESCRIPTIVE DISTINCTIONS WITHIN THE HUMAN BEING

Now any thoughtful treatment of the human being will eventuate in a list of our natural capacities and their interactions. You see this over and over in the works of philosophers and psychologists and even literary people, East and West. The list neces-

³Major historical figures in this tradition are Plato (*The Republic*), Aristotle (*On the Soul*, and *Nicomachean Ethics*), Plotinus (*Enneads*, and especially the fourth Ennead). These have appeared in many editions. In the Christian tradition, Tertullian wrote his own *On the Soul*. There are numerous works by St. Augustine on the nature of the soul. About the same time as Augustine, Nemesius, Bishop of Emesa, wrote his *On the Nature of Man*, which is largely a treatment of the soul. The definitive classical treatment from the Christian point of view is still St. Thomas Aquinas' “Treatise on Man,” in his *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Questions 75-90.

sarily includes our capacities to represent or think, to feel (sensate and emotional), and to choose or will. In addition, there are the bodily and social dimensions of the human self. These latter are of fundamental importance to incarnate personal beings such as we. Human life, human capacities, are inseparable from them.

But these capacities and dimensions of the human being are all interactively related to one another in that they are the capacities and dimensions of a single person. It is my thought of a disaster that evokes my fear and causes my palms to sweat. It is my perception of brake lights ahead that leads me to put on my brakes. It is my anger or my lust that sways me toward doing what I know to be wrong, my reverence for persons or for God that enables me to treat others with compassion and truthfulness, and so forth.

Moreover, acts and states within the range of each of these distinctive capacities are essentially interrelated. My anger affects my other feelings, and conversely. The representations and judgments in my train of thought affect each other. My selection of inclusive goals affects my particular choices, and conversely. Out of the rich texture of interrelationships within and between the various capacities and dimensions of the human being there arises the individual human personality and its life.

This much, I think, we must take as simple description. It is hard to imagine a theory that would seriously deny any of it. But we have to go beyond description to make sense of what it brings to light, and it is in so doing that conceptualization and theory have their proper place.

SOUL AS SOURCE AND COORDINATING PRINCIPLE OF LIFE

The most illuminating and rational way of thinking about the soul is to regard it as that component of the total person which coordinates all of the capacities and dimensions of the human being and leads to their interactive development to form an individual life.

Modern thinkers from Hume to Derrick Parfait, driven by empiricism or at least antisubstantialism, have tried to avoid this uniquely coordinative source within the human being by talking the descriptive elements of life as atoms and reconstructing the whole person in terms of various relationships between those atoms. It seems clear that this

attempt fails, as Hume himself acknowledges with regard to his own attempt. Rather than being reconstructed, the person is simply lost. The loss of the self is the central reality of 19th and 20th century thought in all its dimensions. This is something upon which, I suppose, most informed people will agree.

The Classical View

By contrast, the route taken both by the most influential Greek thinkers, Plato and Aristotle among them, and by the biblical writers was to take the soul as an entity in its own right. The soul was thought of by them as the source of life within the individual and, simultaneously, as its ordering principle.

Thus, Plato (*Laws*, X) presented the soul as a self-moved mover. The element of spontaneity that characterizes living things over against non-living things (stones, chairs) was attributed to the possession of soul, and the differences in kind between living things (plant, animal, human, divine) to possession of souls of different kinds. That is, souls which originate different types of spontaneous activities (growth, nutrition, reproduction, sensation, emotion, thought, will) and which arrange and order those activities in diverse ways conducive to the well being of the living thing in question are souls that differ in nature. The differing activities and life flow from the difference in inner character.

Although soul was a cosmic principle for both Plato and Aristotle, their overwhelming concern was to understand the human soul. They knew all too well that things often go badly in human life, and they understood this to be, precisely, the result of a malfunction of the inner source of life. It is an expression of disorder in the soul itself. Specifically, for them, it is a failure of reason (the capacity to think and understand) to supervise appropriately human emotion and appetites, including bodily feelings. Such failure of supervision occurs, as they well understood, on both the individual and the social level.

The solution to the problem of a proper ordering of the soul lay, for Plato, in providing a proper education for those who would lead society in various capacities, and especially in the area of legislation. Aristotle differed very little from him on this point. In his view (*Nichomachean Ethics*, II) the legislator must carefully study the human soul because he legislates entirely with a view to producing good human souls. Aristotle's presumption was that if society is

rightly organized by legislation, all will go well both in the individual and in society. If the inner source and ordering principle is functioning rightly, the life which flows from it can only be as it should be.

The Biblical Picture

One sees in Plato and Aristotle the same assumption about human existence as is found in the biblical sources. "Watch over your heart"—the source and center of life—"with all diligence," the Proverbialist wrote, "for out of it comes your life" (Prov. 4:23). But of course the ultimate point of reference in the biblical context is not human education and legislation, but divine. "My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their whole body" (Prov. 4:20-22).

The same basic idea is expressed in Jesus' teachings that a good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, and that what defiles the human being comes only from the heart (Mark 7:15-23). In the biblical teachings, of course, the force of revelation is added to the human insight that the source is within, in the deep levels of personality, and that the order or disorder of life as a whole is to be traced to order and disorder at that deeper level.

A Useful Analogy

One can compare the soul to the computer at the center of a computerized production system of some sort, say an automobile factory or a print shop. More crudely still, it is like the timing mechanism on an automatic appliance such as a dishwasher. The computer or timer is a distinct entity in its own right. It has an inherent nature (parts, properties) which allows it to coordinate the various activities and states in the system as a whole. Its own ability to function depends upon it being appropriately positioned in the larger whole.

Of course the computer or timer is a strictly physical entity, whereas the soul is not. But then the whole which it runs is also a physical entity, as the person is not—even though the human person has essential physical components in his or her life. Granting significant dissimilarities, it is helpful to think of the soul as the computer that operates all dimensions of the human system by governing and coordinating what goes on in them. It has its own

nature, parts, properties, internal and external relations, as indicated above.

THE SOUL DISTANCED FROM THE PERSON

It is this sense of a deeper level of the self that accounts for characteristic "soul" language found in the Bible and elsewhere. For example the soul is typically addressed, or referred to in the third person, by the very person whose soul it is. It is treated as if it had, in some measure, a life of its own. And in fact it does. Thus: "Why are you cast down, O my soul? ... Hope thou in God" (Ps. 42:5). "Bless the Lord, O my soul" (Ps. 103:1-2). "My soul has kept thy testimonies" (Ps. 119:167). "My soul doth magnify the Lord" (Luke 1:46).

One reason why the book of Psalms so powerfully affects us is that it is a soul book. It touches us at the deepest levels of our life, far beyond our conscious thoughts and endeavors. It expresses and helps us to express the most profound parts of our life. This element of depth and distance is a primary characterization of soul. It is of the very nature of the soul. Thus Thomas Moore (1992), in his *Care of the Soul* offers nothing more in the way of a concept of soul than that it is the deep part of the self.

Now, just because the soul is the source and unity of our life, it is sometimes used as equivalent with the person. This is common biblical usage as well as an ordinary way of speaking. "Poor soul," we say, when we mean "Poor person." And one does not respond to the international signal of extreme distress, *SOS* ("Save Our Souls"), by trying to save anything other than the persons involved. Along with the soul, the person is of course saved. When the Psalmist says "My soul is among the lions" (Ps. 57:4), he means that he is among the lions. And when the writer of Hebrews speaks of "the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:38), he means the saving of the person. With the soul everything else comes along. But the person is not identical with his soul. There is much to the person other than the soul, and in this lies hope for the restructuring of the broken and corrupted soul.

Sin As Psychological Reality

The condition of normal human life is one where the inner resources of the person are weakened or dead and where the factors of human life do not interrelate as they were intended by their nature and function to do. This is sin in the singular: not an act

but a condition. It is not that we are wrong, but that our inner components are not “hooked up” correctly any longer. The wires are crossed, as it were. We are wrung, twisted. Our thinking, our feeling, our very bodily dispositions are defective and connected wrongly with reference to life as a whole.

All of this comes to a head in the will (the same as the heart or the human spirit). The will stands, so to speak, in the shambles of the human system, flailing about in ineffectual and sporadic jerks or driven into complete passivity.

Paul gives us definitive language for our condition before the broken and corrupted soul: We are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). “For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). We know the phenomena even if we know nothing of Paul. Of course there is some matter of degree here. But no human being entirely escapes the blight of the will, and in some it becomes a matter of total dysfunctionality and misery, no longer rebellion but sickness. The person is effectively turned away from his or her own good. Individuals may and often do wish to be good and to do what is right, but they are prepared, they are set to do evil.

In this condition the mind is confused, ignorant, and misguided. The emotions are simultaneously dominant of personality and conflicting. The body and the social environment are filled with regular patterns of wrong doing and are constantly inclined toward doing what is wrong. In this condition the intellect finds reasons why what is bad is good—or at least is not bad—and what is good is bad—or at least is not good.

Paul, that deeply thoughtful man, once again has the apt description of the situation: “And, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Rom. 1:32).

Always, we may be sure, with elaborate justifications! For that becomes a major function of mind in the broken state of soul. It is the source of the saying from ancient Greek culture, that “Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.” This self-justifying activity is a perverted expression of the natural role of mind in the human economy. Its natural role is to find the right way to act: the way that is just and right and leads to what is good. When the person as a whole is committed to doing what is wrong and evil, the mind turns from reason to rationalization. From establishing what is right in order to do it, it turns to

establishing that whatever is done is right and good, or at least necessary. That is the madness.

The Light of the Gospel

Hence the traditional pattern of Christian conversion or recovery must begin with a new thought that comes from outside the entire human system. It is one which leads to new emotions, and makes possible a new act of will. The new thought is of course the information content of the gospel. It is a new picture of the real world I live in. That world turns out to be made and governed by a person who loved this world and myself so much that he sent his son to save me from total ruin. I am unable to discover this on my own, surrounded as I am by layer upon layer of thought, feeling, and custom turned against it, and especially since I have through long usage internalized all this and identify it with real life and my own life.

This new thought, which is the gospel, breaks through the intellectual shroud of my spiritual death by a supernatural force. That is grace in action, the approach of the graceful God. And as it breaks through it brings a new emotion. This new emotion is a complex one, combining longing for the new thought to be true and grief in the realization that I am set against it in the deepest reaches of my being. It is classical conviction of sin, and with it a force begins to move within the broken soul that can lead to its restoration. But the force is not yet owned by me. Conviction of sin can be resisted, and usually is resisted for a time. During this period, I have not yet identified with the touch of the divine hand upon my soul. The new thought and the new emotion is not yet mine, but is an imposition, a foreign presence in my life which I may even resent and reject.

Yet they make possible a new choice which will make them my own. The will, a fundamental dimension of the human soul, can only act from ideas or representations on the one hand and emotions or feelings on the other. It is a power of self-determination, to be sure, and an inherent part of a human soul. But it does not have absolute independence and self-direction. That is for God alone. Now, given the new thought and the new emotion, with the accompanying grace, I am capable of a new choice. I can side with the thought; I can side with the emotion. I can say: “Yes I want this thought to be true, and the response which I feel toward God and myself on the basis of it is my attitude.” In so doing I chose to trust God.

The divine hand that has moved of its own initiative in the darkness of my broken soul and life is now grasped by what little strength I may have, and my grasping hand is then grasped in turn by the person whose hand I take. This is the reality of the “birth from above.” Flowing back and forth across the hands clasped is the reality of a personal relationship. My mind, emotions, will, and embodied socialized self begin to feel, throughout, the presence of God’s life. My broken, corrupted soul begins to reform its powers. I begin to rise toward light and wholeness.

The grand old Wesleyan hymn is amazingly deep, theologically, and accurate as psychological description:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound by sin and nature’s night,
Thine eye dispersed a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.
My chains fell off, my spirit free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

BECOMING ACTIVE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

While the initiative in the revival and reformation of the soul originally comes from what lies beyond us, we are never merely passive at any point in the process. This is clear from the biblical imperatives to repent and to believe and—for the persons with new life already in them—to put off the old person and put on the new, to work out the salvation that is given to us, and so forth. It is certainly true, as Jesus said to his friends, “without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). But it is equally true for them that “If you do nothing it will be without me.” In the process of spiritual reformation under grace, passivity does not exclude activity and activity does not exclude passivity.

Hence the invasion of the personality by life from above does not by itself form the personality in the likeness of Christ. It does not of itself restore the soul into the wholeness intended for it in its creation. It does not alone bring one to the point where “the things I would, that I do, and the things I would not, I do not,” where “sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom. 6:14). Rather, I must learn and accept the responsibility of moving with God in the transformation of my own personality. Intelligent and steady implementation of plans for change are required if I am to loose the incoher-

ence of the broken soul and take on the easy obedience and fulfillment of the person who lives ever more fully within the kingdom of God and the friendship of Jesus.

Planning for Routine Progress in Wholeness

The question then is: How, precisely, am I to go about doing my part in the process of my own transformation? What is my plan? The answer to this question is, in general formulation: by practice of spiritual disciplines, or disciplines for the spiritual life. We may not know or use this terminology, but what it refers to is what we must do.

What is discipline? A discipline is an activity within our power—something we can do—which brings us to a point where we can do what we at present cannot do by direct effort. Discipline is in fact a natural part of the structure of the human soul, and almost nothing of any significance in education, culture, or other attainments is achieved without it. Everything from learning a language to weight lifting depends upon it, and its availability in the human makeup is what makes individual human beings responsible for the kind of people they become. Animals may be trained, but they are incapable of discipline in the sense that is essential to human life.

The principle of discipline is even more important in the spiritual life. Once in a seminar a wealthy and influential leader said to me that he could not help “exploding” when he tried to talk to his rebellious son. I said, “Of course you can.” He looked at me in astonishment and denial. “Just tell your wife,” I continued, “that the next time you blow up at him you will contribute \$5,000 to her favorite charity, and also every time thereafter.” He paused, and a smile of recognition tugged at the corners of his mouth.

But while this sort of case makes a point, it does not really convey the main point of discipline in the spiritual life. Spiritual disciplines are not primarily for the solving of behavioral problems, though that is one of their effects. That is why, contrary to popular opinion, the various twelve-step programs are not programs of spiritual discipline. They are disciplines of course. Quite precisely, they focus on things we, for the most part, can do—attend meetings, publicly own up, call on others from the group in times of need, and so forth—to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort—stay sober. But staying sober, while desperately important for the alcoholic, is

hardly a mark of spiritual attainment. The same is true of not exploding at one's son.

The aim of disciplines in the spiritual life—and, specifically, in the following of Christ—is the transformation of the total state of the soul. It is the renewal of the whole person from the inside, involving differences in thought, feeling, and character that may never be manifest in outward behavior at all. This is what Paul has in mind when he speaks of putting off the “old man” and putting on the new, “renewed to resemble in knowledge the one who created us” (Col. 3:10).

The genius of the moral teachings of Jesus and his first students was his insistence that you cannot keep the law by trying not to break the law. That will only make a Pharisee of you and sink you into layers of hypocrisy. Instead, you have to be transformed in the functions of the soul so that the deeds of the law are a natural outflow of who you have become. This is *spiritual formation* in the Christian way, and it must always be kept in mind when we consider Jesus' teachings about various behaviors—in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere.

For example, his famous teaching about turning the other cheek. If all you intend is to do that, you will find you can do it with a heart full of bitterness and vengefulness. If, on the other hand, you become a person who has the interior character of Christ, remaining appropriately vulnerable will be done as a matter of course, and you will not think of it as a big deal.

An intelligent, balanced, persistent course of the standard disciplines, well known from the sweep of Christian history and sources, can serve the individual well and are, in fact, essential to the development of her cooperative relationship with Christ. While they are by no means all that is involved, not everything in this process, they are indispensable. They do not take the place, and they cannot be effective without, the word of the gospel and the movements of the Spirit of God in our lives. But neither will the gospel nor the Spirit take their place. Some people, of course, are unable to put them into practice. They are not in their power, at least for the time being. Such persons need help and ministry of various kinds, depending on the particular case and circumstances. But people who are not totally shattered, and who have experienced the “birth from above,” can usually, with simple instruction and encouragement, begin to make real progress toward wholeness by practices such as solitude and silence, fasting,

scripture memorization, regular times of corporate and individual praise and worship, and so on. The various disciplines minister to different and complementary aspects of our wrungness and brokenness.⁴

Solitude and silence are primary means for correcting the distortions of our embodied social existence. Our good ideas and intentions are practically helpless in the face of what our body in the social context is poised to do automatically. Jesus, of course, understood all this very well. Thus he knew that Peter's declarations that he would not deny him were irrelevant to what he would actually do in the moment of trial. And, in fact, the social setting and Peter's deeply ingrained habits moved him to deny Jesus three times, one right after the other, even though he had been warned most clearly of what was going to happen.

The wrung habits of mind, feeling, and body are keyed so closely and so routinely to the social setting that being alone and being quiet for lengthy periods of time are, for most people, the only way they can take the body and soul out of the circuits of sin and allow them to find a new habitual orientation in the Kingdom of the Heavens. Choosing to do this and learning how to do it effectively is a basic part of what we can do to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort, even with the assistance of grace.

Indeed, solitude and silence are powerful means to grace. Bible study, prayer, and church attendance, among the most commonly prescribed activities in Christian circles, generally have little effect for soul transformation, as is obvious to any observer. If all the people doing them were transformed to health and righteousness thereby, the world would be vastly changed. Their failure to bring about significant change is precisely because the body and soul are so exhausted, fragmented, and conflicted that the prescribed activities cannot be appropriately engaged and by and large degenerate into legalistic and ineffectual rituals. Lengthy solitude and silence, including rest, can make them very powerful.

But we must choose these disciplines. God will, generally speaking, not compete for our attention. If we will not withdraw from the things that obsess and exhaust us into solitude and silence, he will usually leave us to our own devices. He calls us to “be still and know.” To the soul disciplined to wait quietly

⁴For extensive treatment of the spiritual disciplines, see Richard Foster (1998), *Celebration of Discipline*; also my *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Willard, 1988).

before him, to lavish time upon this practice, he will make himself known in ways that will redirect our every thought, feeling, and choice. The body itself will enter a different world of rest and strength. And the effects of solitude and silence will reverberate through the social settings where one finds oneself.

Fasting, another one of the central disciplines, retrains us away from dependence upon the satisfaction of desire and makes the kingdom of God a vital factor in our concrete existence. It is an indispensable application of what Jesus called the cross. In the simplest of terms, the cross means not doing or getting what you want. And of course, from the merely human viewpoint, getting what one wants is everything. Anger is primarily a response to frustration of will, and it makes no difference, to the broken soul, if what is willed is something perfectly trivial. What is called road rage, now epidemic and often fatal in our society, is only a case in point.

Fasting, which primarily concerns voluntary abstention from food, all or some, and can also be extended to drink, has the function of freeing us from having to have what we want. We learn to remain calm, serene, and strong when we are deprived—even severely deprived. If our desires are unsatisfied, we learn, so what?

Positively, we learn that God meets our needs in his own ways. There are “words of God” other than “bread” or physical food, and these are capable of directly sustaining our bodies along with our whole being (Deut. 8:3-5; Matt. 4:4; John 4:32-34). Fasting liberates us, on the basis of experience, into the abundance of God. The effects of this for the reordering of our soul are vast. Christian practitioners through the ages have understood that to fast well brought one out from under domination of desire and feeling generally, not just in the area of food.

Scripture memorization is the final specific discipline we will mention here. It is, in fact, a subdivision of the discipline of study. Study as a spiritual discipline is, in general, the focusing of the mind upon God’s works and words. In study, our mind takes on the order in the object studied, and that order invariably forms the mind itself and thereby the soul and the life arising out of it. Thus the law of God kept before the mind brings the order of God into our mind and soul. The soul is restored as the law becomes the routine pattern of inward life and outward action. We are integrated into the movements of the eternal kingdom.

The primary freedom we have is always the choice of where we will place our minds. That freedom is enhanced by the practice of solitude, silence and fasting. We can then effectively fill our minds with the word of God, preserved in the Scriptures. To that end memorization is vital. It is astonishing how little of the Bible is known “by heart” by people who profess to honor it. If we do not know it, how can it help us? It cannot. Memorization, by contrast, enables us to keep it constantly before our minds. And that makes it possible to consciously hold ourselves within the flow of God’s life which is Torah and Logos.

There is no greater disciplinary verse in the entire Bible than Josh. 1:8 (mirrored and expanded in Ps. 1), and none more instructive on the restoration of the soul. There we read: “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it [mumble it] day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Memorization enables us to mumble and meditate, which enables us to do, which enables us to “have good success” (and God will define “success” for us) because we are walking in God’s ways with an interior character like his.

If people say they cannot memorize Scripture, they probably are living in a condition to which solitude and silence and fasting are the only answer. The spiritual disciplines require one another to achieve their maximal effect. Scripture memorization, on the other hand, strengthens those other disciplines. Together the disciplines well known among Christians through the ages can fill out a reasonable and time tested plan for our part in “working out our salvation in awe of God who is at work within us to will and to accomplish the good he intends” for and with us (Phil. 2:12-13).

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Spiritual formation, as commonly referred to now, is a matter of reforming the broken soul of humanity in a recovery from its alienation from God. Really, it is *soul reformation*. The spirit in humanity is not the soul, but is the central part of the soul, the power of self-determination. It is the heart or will: the power, embedded in the soul, of choosing. It is that in the human being which must above all be restructured. From it, then, the divine restructuring can be extended to the rest of the life, including the body. For the spirit or will also is the executive center

of the self, which—given the birth from above—enables the individual to restructure or reprogram the wrung soul, along with the body, through spiritual disciplines. These, somewhat ironically, are all matters of utilizing the body in special ways that access grace and truth to the whole person.

It is in union with these activities that God “restores my soul” (Ps. 23:3). The result is that I walk in paths of righteousness on his behalf as a natural expression of my renewed inner nature. Now my experiences and responses are all hooked up correctly. To develop a thorough understanding of this process and outcome on the basis of factual studies would be a major step toward attaining a genuinely Christian psychology or theory of the soul.

This is essential, not only to those with a Christian or even a merely psychological interest. We are now in a state of epistemic crisis in all our professions because knowledge of the human self cannot fit the categories socially regarded as acceptable. Law and education, medicine and economics—and must we not add religion?—are working in the dark for lack of understanding of the human soul, of what makes human life what it is. To develop accurate knowledge of the human soul is the primary need of our times, and who should be in better position to

provide it than the Christian psychologist? If we accept the reality of the soul we can begin to explore its nature and to seek the means, of whatever kind, that are effective in its restoration.

REFERENCES

- Foster, R. (1998). *Celebration of discipline* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Moore, T. (1992). *Care of the soul*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Moreland, J. P. (1998). Restoring the substance to the soul of psychology. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 26, 29-43.
- Soul in the raw: America can sell anything, including that most ephemeral commodity: The soul. (1997). *Psychology Today*, 30(3), 58-83.
- Willard, D. (1988). *The spirit of the disciplines*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Willard, D. (1998). *The divine conspiracy*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

AUTHOR

WILLARD, DALLAS. **Address:** School of Philosophy, University of Southern California, University Park, 3709 Trousdale Pkwy., Los Angeles, CA 90089-0451. **Title:** Professor of philosophy. **Degrees:** PhD, Philosophy and the History of Science, University of Wisconsin. **Specializations:** Philosophy of mind, metaphysics, contemporary European philosophy.