

SALT CO 1/25/26

“Redemption Through the Word of God”

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.”

Matthew 5:13, 14

Table Talk I

Take a moment to meet your Table Guide and share your name and where you were born.

SALT TALK

We are currently in a series “Growing a Conversational Relationship With God” based on Dallas Willard book Hearing God—and today we’re going to explore highlights of Chapter 7

Redemption Through the Word of God

How does a conversational relationship with God lead to character transformation? One of the themes in this chapter is how we experience change through “long conversations”.

One of my most vivid memories of the powerful effect of “long conversations” on my life goes back 50 years ago to UCSB where Suzanne and I met during our senior year...

Suzanne and I met at UCSB in our senior year. Along with falling head over heels-our conversations quickly deepened after our long bike ride-first date and we soon were spending hours holed up in the Music Department library where you could close the door in a soundproof room, put on music and talk...really. We sat in stair wells at the library so we would not disturb fellow students so we could keep on talking. My roommates couldn’t believe that I looked forward to getting to the library when it OPENED (!) to “study”, but truthfully, it’s where Suzanne and I met up. I don’t even remember the specifics about what we talked about, but I can tell you those conversations changed my life, and hers too. They were the beginning of a conversation that has continued now for over 50 years

that, I can bear witness, continues to work changes in me, some of them difficult, but also inspiring, refreshing and challenging. Some of the changes are taking a long time, and along the way the acquiring of new habits, and the putting away the old.

We all have relationship conversations that change us. It might be with a good friend. or someone in your family and hopefully—with others who are brothers and sisters in Christ

Some conversations just continue on, don't they? We learn, we face things, we grow. We are changed by them.

The essence of Willard's message in this chapter is that our conversational relationship with God changes us over time—AND it changes us *for a reason*. Today's theme is "Redemption Through the Word of God". By "redemption" we mean more than being "purchased"; it includes what we are purchase FOR, why we are "bought back".

Willard casts a much richer and biblically informed vision of redemption:

"Redemption is understood to cover the transformation of whole persons and their lives into Christlikeness."

And "Word of God" means everything we have been talking about the last several SALT CO's. Word of God written- our Bibles- word of God in creation (Psalm 19:1-4); word of God spoken through others, word of God in the "still, small, voice" inviting us into a conversational relationship with God.

Here's Dallas Willard:

"God speaks not just for us and our purposes, nor does he speak primarily for our prosperity, safety or gratification. Those who receive the grace of God's saving companionship in his word are by that fact also fitted to show humankind how to live. They and they alone are at home in the universe as it actually is. In that sense they are the light of the world [and salt of the earth!]. Their transformed nature authentically suits them to this

task. Therefore, this task is not an opinion or an after-thought. The light they radiate is not what they do but who they are."

Hearing God, p. 190

For example. Maybe you've had this experience. You are in a conversation with someone who shares with you something difficult. Maybe they are worried about their health. Or a family member is struggling. Or they've lost their job. Or they just feel like no one cares. You listen as deeply as you are able. You seek to validate their feeling- fear, scariness of this situation, feeling pulled in many directions, of loneliness. But then you can do something more. You ask, "Would it be alright with you if I pray with you right now?" I've very rarely been turned down. So you pray, "*Dear Father, thank You that you love this person so much, that you have LIFE in mind for him or her. I pray for (whatever is the need-for strength, means, guidance, healing, insight, community), and you conclude, "I pray in Jesus' name". Amen.*

What have you just done? *You have invited that person into your conversational relationship with the Lord.* And you have helped them experience what a relationship with Him is like. And, hopefully, that person is stepping into the rest of their day watching, noticing, looking for how He will answer.

Willard writes,

"The friends of Jesus who have learned to work shoulder to shoulder with their Lord stand in this world as a point of contact between heaven and earth, a kind of Jacob's ladder by which the angels of God may ascend from and descend into human life (Jn 1:51; Gen. 28:12).

Hearing God, p. 191

Here's the crucial question:

"How are we to understand the ongoing process (which involves hearing God's voice) by which our present life is to be redeemed, shaped and conformed to the likeness of the Son (Rom. 8:29)? And what is the role of the word of God in this process?"

Hearing God pp. 191-192

Given what we talked about last time about the power of the word of God to create, to make new, not limited by constraints of time or space, how God's word organizes and sustains people in union with God, we can say,

"It is through the action of the word of God upon us, throughout us and with us that we come to have the mind of Christ and thus to live fully in the kingdom of God." (p. 192)

What kind of life?

We've seen that the word of God is what lies at the foundation of all the kinds of life and beings there are.

Willard compares the life of a cabbage with the life of a kitten. A cabbage can take nourishment and grow. But a cabbage can't play with a ball of string because the kitten is a different KIND of life. In the same way a kitten has no response to a math problem.

I can bear witness. We have two kittens at our house. Cute and mischievous. We think we can tell them to not jump on the dining room table. We forget they do not have a prefrontal cortex. Instead, we get our message across with a squirt from a spray bottle we keep at the ready.

There are different kinds of life. Different orders of creature in creation.

We were once "alive" to God, created to live in a conversational relationship with Him. But then we crossed the line that resulted in our demise. We became a different KIND of life cut off from the life of the Spirit. Read and think deeply about what happened in Genesis 3. This still happens. We ceased to be responsive and interactive in our relationship God's cosmic rule. We became something else- "thick", "a bit dim", no longer the sharpest tool in the shed, a quart low, an elevator that no longer goes all the way to the top, our wiring frayed.

As Willard puts it, on our own we are like kittens trying to contemplate a sonnet! (P. 194).

What would God do?

Praise God from Whom all blessings, and mercies flow!!

Willard writes,

“It would be necessary for God to confer an ‘additional level of life on humans through ‘being born from above’ (John 3:3). This would enable them once again to be alive to God, to be able to respond toward him and to act within the realm of the Spirit.” (p. 193)

In Genesis 2 God breathed into the nostrils of the clay creature (ADAM means humankind and ADAMAH means clay) and he became a different kind of life, a “living being”. Now in Christ God breathes His breath/Spirit (RUACH, PNEUMA) into the hearts of people and they become ALIVE, not only biologically, but another kind of life, a new creation.

Willard reviews the conversation Jesus has with the Pharisee Nicodemus by night where he explains “**No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above**” (John 3:3).

Those who are born of the Spirit begin to show a different kind of life that is deriving from an invisible realm and its power. This happens over time- it is a PROCESS. The Spirit of God woos us, inviting you and me through doors in our minds that lead to our hearts, where, with time, works change in our personality. More and more we find we are noticing His presence, hearing His thoughts in our thoughts, sensing His “rod and staff”, guiding us, we notice our noticing, pay attention to the kind of attention we pay.

The apostle describes the process of redemption this way in his letter to the Ephesians,

“Christ gave himself up for her [the church] in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind- yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Willard uses the analogy of doing the laundry:

“Just think for a moment about what happens when you wash a dirty shirt: the water and laundry soap move through the fibers of the shirt material and carry out the dirt lodged within those fibers. When we come to God, our minds and hearts are like that dirty shirt, cluttered with false beliefs and attitudes, deadly feelings, past deed and misguided plans, hopes and fears.

and

The word of God-primarily the gospel of his kingdom and of the life and death of Jesus on our behalf- enters our mind and brings new life through faith. As we open our entire life to this new power and as those sent by God minister the word to us, the word moves into every part of our personality, just like the water and soap move through the shirt’s fibers. God’s word pushes out and replaces all that is false and opposed to God’s purposes in creating us and putting us in our unique place on earth.”

Hearing God, p. 198

How we think, what we tell ourselves, what we have come to believe: about how power works, or prestige, or acceptance; of the need to make *myself*; the need to gain and keep control begins to change. As we “age” (a spiritual process), we are confronted by these ideas and convictions we have attached our worth, meaning, even our identity to. Perhaps now it’s less important to have the last word. Maybe now we believe more than ever in confession, and the hope of forgiveness, of the possibility for “re-sets”. We notice we are growing to revel in a sunrise, or sunset; learning to listen for his still, small voice.

Willard has a string of good questions about our prayer lives to help us think about our progress in this process of transformation:

-How long does it take to get around to bringing trouble when it comes, a car breakdown, a dispute at work or at home, to God in prayer?

-When we see an ambulance heading down the street, or see an accident, do we think to lift that situation up in prayer?

-When we go to meet a person, do we pray for that meeting, to be ready to minister in some way?

-Norita's question before entering a room, or a situation. "Lord help me see what are your purposes in this situation...help me to align with your purposes in what I say and do."

In our staff meeting we each take a turn, one person per week, in sharing our learnings on one good question, "*What's the Lord teaching you nowadays?*"

What's the Spirit working on in you nowadays?

The progress of the Spirit's redemptive work in us moves from

COMMUNICATION

-happens at a distance, even between enemies. God is communicating all the time! Communication leads to

COMMUNION

-there's a distinctiveness between two people, but also a sharing of thoughts, feelings, and objectives that make up our lives. This can lead to

UNION

-where "mine" and "thine" disappear. There is only "ours".

-This is what Paul describes as "***having the mind of Christ***" (I Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5). It is what Jesus prays for us in John 17:22-23.

-It is what He shows us at His Table, the literal character of Christ being in us! [THIS!!!].

Read John 6:53-55.

Jesus' followers were in a process too. They had faith in Jesus, but not for the longest time the faith OF Jesus. We can see how this is so when they were out on the Sea of Galilee in storm. Faith in Christ, love for Christ leaves Christ outside the personality of the believer. But Jesus sees us as

branches in His vine (John 15: 1-4) This is “union” in Christ. And this is where His Spirit is leading us in our process of redemption.

Willard writes,

“Our additional life is also God’s life in us; His thoughts, His faith, His love all literally imparted to us, shared with us, by His word and Spirit.”

Hearing God, p..203

Let’s talk about this.

TABLE TALK II

1. How have you been changed by long term conversational relationships that helped you to grow/mature?
2. Willard writes, “*God speaks not just for us and **our purposes**, nor does he speak primarily for **our prosperity, safety or gratification**. Those who receive the grace of God’s saving companionship in his word are by that fact also fitted to show humankind how to live.”* (Hearing God, p. 190). What do you think about the fact that God’s work in your life is meant to equip you to live a life that others can see as an example of “living proof of a loving God”?
3. Can you think of some examples of how God has provided for your growth so that you live in a way that bears “fruit” that will nourish and point others to the Lord and His Kingdom?
4. The new life in the Spirit of God happens in a transformational process over time. What is an area of your life where you think God is stretching you to grow/change lately?
5. How does spending time in God’s word written help you to see how God transforms people—directly and through other people—over time? What are some examples?

WRAP UP

There will be struggle. In Romans chapter 7 Paul honestly writes of his awareness of the impulses working inside his personality. He's aware of forces within and without. He accepts the full measure of his own guilt. But he is also now resolved and concerned with how to enter into the new life to its fullest.

Willard wraps up with this,

"This [struggle] requires that we take a stand as to who we are in this new life that we identify with Christ in us. [THIS], and against the sin still present in ourselves, and that we settle in our will the question of who we intend to be. This is what it means to 'consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.'" (Rom. 6:11).

Hearing God, p. 206

We ask ourselves,

Is it my will to be in the old dead life of sin? Or is it my will to be in the resurrection life of Christ, which has entered into me through the impact of His word. If you choose the latter, you (and I). still "***work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...***"

We are getting help.

My experience in a visualization with Jesus by the lake.

DOXOLOGY

BLESSING