

Volume 2, Day 25: Behavior Management Systems

Dallas Willard called our religious systems, Sin Management Systems. It's all about getting people to stop sinning and living for God and working hard to do that. And yet that kind of behavioral conformity doesn't work very well. As a matter of fact, all other religions teach behavioral conformity and good character as the means to access God! You can shame people with sin and they'll try harder. You can put them in accountability groups and they'll try harder. But transformation only comes inside the work of Jesus. It's not something we do from within ourselves. And it is not about Christ strengthening us to do for the kingdom. "When we are weak, then He is strong. It is the Spirit of Christ alone that can do all things."

As long as we're focused on our sin, we're going to feel a sense of shame and a sense of unworthiness. This will not allow us to engage God in the way the cross allows us to engage Him. Sin doesn't count anymore. What counts is the invitation to come and know Him intimately and live in His life. Or to put it another way, it is letting Him live His own life in us today! Walking in the light, as John talks about it in his letter, is not about getting everything right. Walking in the light is not perfection. Walking in the light is I just being honest with God about me and bringing the reality of my stuff to God. I admit my failures, confusion and prideful pursuits. I bring those things into the light inside the relationship because God loves me.

Sin is basically this, sin is what we do when we don't think God loves us, and therefore we've got to grab for ourselves what God is not giving us.

Volume 2, Day 26: Transformation Takes A Lifetime

The more loved you are, the more you have a sense of God's affection for you. The greater your trust is in His ability to take care of you, the less you'll find an enticement to sin and the less pleasure that holds for us. That's the transformation that God wants. That's why Paul says in Romans, the mindset on the flesh is death. He's not just talking about the mind that indulges the flesh. He's also talking about the mind that seeks to abstain from the flesh because it's still a mindset on the flesh. So if you're going to wake up today and try to get sin out of you and try to be better for God, and measure how deep your relationship is based on how good you've been, oh, you're going to have to find another journey. This isn't going to work for you.

Our transformation is a lifetime journey of leaning more deeply into Him and finding myself increasingly free from the things that have bound up my life. God doesn't hate you because of your sin. God doesn't reject you because of your sin. What God calls sin is not the fun stuff He doesn't want us to have. Sin is the things that destroy us and our relationships with people around us. So even though they're forgiven at the cross, the natural consequences of sin in our lives still hurt us and the people closest to us. So God's not unconcerned about sin. You can't say, "Oh, He just loves me now. So who cares? I'll live whatever way I want." No inside a growing relationship with Him I want to be transformed. I want to be like He is in the world. And the only hope I have of becoming that is by living inside a relationship of growing affection for Him, which leads to growing trust in who He is, which means I don't have to grab for myself what God's not giving me.

Volume 2, Day 27: What To Do About Sin

So what do we do with sin and brokenness? The first thing is to recognize it where it exists. Resist it. If you can't, you can just say, "You know what? I'm not going to go that way anymore." Often I'm reading scripture and Paul will talk about anger, or the Proverbs will talk about integrity. And something in my life will illuminate and I say again, "You know what? I'm not living there and I want to be." And now I simply confess it. I take it to God.

You don't confess so God will forgive you. It's already been forgiven. Every sin you ever have or ever will commit has been forgiven. We confess so that we can see it as God sees it. Once we admit it, we invite God into our struggle with it and let Him fill up in us what that sin seeks to fill up. And then knowing Him and that His love is truly unconditional, you feel free to engage with Him in restitution or reconciliation.

If I've hurt somebody by my anger or if I've hurt somebody by my impatience, I get to go to them and say, I'm sorry. Is there some way I can make it up to you? And then we're part of one of the most redemptive things in the world, watching God overcome sin in our relationships to each other because we're quick to offer forgiveness, ready to be reconciled where relationships are broken.

Here's what's important for you to know. You are not your failures and your failures don't diminish God's affection for you. You are his beloved son or daughter. Keep living there and as you live there, this transformation will be accomplished by God and sin will take care of itself. The best reaction to committed sin is to say, "Thank you Jesus that this sin has already been paid for."

Volume 2, Day 28: Not Attached To Outcomes

Sin is not a separator of us from God. God has already covered it in Christ. We don't need the shame or unworthiness of it. We just need to invite God into that struggle and let Him become a partner in our process of overcoming something that actually can be a barrier to our affection. Unfortunately, even as Christians, it is our assumption that we know best for our life and that God somehow should meet our expectations. He should provide the things that we want. And then when He doesn't, our disappointments or our questioning the fact that He loves us becomes quite a problem.

A man took his Dad to Scotland to play golf at the original courses of the game after his father had been diagnosed with cancer. It was supposed to be that last Father-son, memorable trip to the land where golf was born and the son really wanted to make it special. So, he'd practiced hard, in the first round he played horribly, got angry, was throwing his clubs around, the trip was ruined.

After the golf round his Dad asked, "What are you doing? He said, "Well, Dad, I just wanted this to be so special. I'm trying so hard. And Dad looked at him and said, "What's special about this trip is that you and I get to be together if we play well, well, that's icing on the cake. You need to play NATO golf, NATO, not attached to outcome. Just hit your shot wherever it ends up, go there and hit the next shot, and don't be so committed to a good score that we lose the fun that we're supposed to have together. That really hit me. NATO golf. I think about it as NATO living. If I'm going to live with God attached to the outcome of the circumstances for the things that I want, this relationship's going to get ugly.

Volume 2, Day 29: Oh, God, Do This for Me

Peter found out early in his journey with Jesus that it was best not being attached to outcomes. Jesus starts telling him and the rest of the disciples, I'm going to go up to Jerusalem and I'm going to be delivered up to the elders of the city and I'm going to be executed. And Peter jumps in and says, "Oh, may it never be Lord," to which Jesus responds, "Get behind me. Satan!" What a powerful moment in Peter's life. Who wouldn't want his friend to be safe? Who wouldn't want to protect Jesus from the kinds of things Jesus was talking about? But what Jesus wanted Peter to understand and what it is that we all need to understand is that when we're looking out for our interests, we're not looking out for God's interests.

God does almost everything the opposite of the way we would. He told us, "If you want to save your life, you need to lose it. If you're trying to save it yourself, you surely will lose it." He said, "If you want to be first in the line, take the last place. If you want to be a leader, you must serve everyone else." His kingdom is counterintuitive to our normal human ways of thinking, and that strikes against our prayer requests. They are mostly the things we hope God does in our circumstances. If there's a certain outcome we want, if we're trying to get God to do it, this could be a pretty frustrating journey. It's especially frustrating if when He doesn't, you feel like He doesn't love you or doesn't care, or doesn't even know you exist.

Not attached to outcome. I love the thought of that. It allows God to be bigger than our own expectations. It means God doesn't have to revolve around our safety and our comfort. So my prayers in the situations I'm in are no longer, "God, do this." or "God do that."

Volume 2, Day 30: Satisfied with His Purposes

Sometimes I might ask God for a specific outcome. But to expect it to be granted or to push for it or to judge God in light of my disappointment, that will surely destroy my relationship with Him. Paul said in Ephesians 3, “When you know how broad, how deep, how wide God's love is, what you will discover is that He's able to do exceedingly and abundantly beyond anything we could ask or think.” That's not saying, “If you pray for a two bedroom home, God might give you a three bedroom. Or if you pray for a Toyota, you might get a Lexus.

What Paul is saying is, “God is working out His purpose in our lives in ways we can barely conceive.” So when we don't get the thing we want or think we need, what we know is that God's doing something bigger than we can comprehend. Instead of complaining or trying to figure it out, I live inside what's already real in my life, in the pains as well as the joys. And instead of embracing my outcome, I get to embrace His. That's NATO living (not attached to the outcome). I'm attached to Him, and regardless of what outcome comes my way, He doesn't change. He's still going to be with me. And when I understand what He's doing in my situation and circumstances, then my trust in Him grows. No matter what happens to me, instead of being diminished because my expectations are disappointed, I am happy that His purposes are being accomplished. God loves us more than anyone on this planet ever has or ever will. If I do need something, He'll get it to me. But some of the things I think I need wouldn't help me at all. And God has something greater in mind. If you live with Him, not attached to the outcome, then you get to enjoy the fullness of His life as it unfolds in yours.

Volume 2, Day 31: How We Honor Others or God[JH]

I had a mentee some time ago who lacked discretion to a very great degree. I mentored her for years. Then one day the Holy Spirit directed me to reply to one of her texts that came at 5:30 am, "Please do not text before 8:00 am unless it is an emergency." I had formerly taken her calls and texts at all hours of the day or night. But God wanted me to get a good night's rest each night because my wife was in great medical distress and needed much personal care from me.

Well, for a few days, this mentee waited until after eight to begin texting. Then, wait for it, ..., 5:32 am "I know that you asked me to wait until after 8 o'clock ... BUT ...". At first I was, to be honest, a bit upset with her. After breakfast, when I had gathered myself and conferred with the Holy Spirit, He guided my thoughts as I made this reply, "Would it be possible for you to **honor** my requests as a token of your appreciation for my commitment to God which causes me to serve you on His behalf? And if you can't do it as a simple courtesy to me, **would you do it out of respect and love for God?**"

She texted back, "I honor you when you say don't text. I guess you think that I don't honor God." For me there was no guessing. She clearly stated that she honored me while totally ignoring my request. She continued, "Do you want me to never text again except on Monday between 5:30 and 6:00am?" She can't see herself honestly!

It just dawned on me that many of us unwittingly do that with God. We think we honor Him by saying we understand and will do what He desires. Then we act contrary to the desire which He has made perfectly clear! Maybe a long, hard look in the mirror would help me see who I really am as opposed to who I want to believe I am.

Volume 2, Day 32: Safety in Numbers? [JH]

In a weekly men's breakfast Bible study last week a brother stood up and said, "I come here every week to have other people reinforce what I believe!" He was as serious as a tooth ache. And some others chimed in with that same sentiment. I cringed when I heard those words!

My thoughts shifted to the scene of the mock trial of Jesus the night before He was crucified. The apparent 'safety in numbers' mentality created a mob of hatred filled religious people. Jesus was being accused of atrocities which He had not committed. He was being called a blasphemer. He was being condemned to death. And this was not just 'any' death. This was the most inhumane of all criminal punishments ever administered by humanity. But, was Jesus truly in the wrong? Absolutely not!

I continued to ponder that the religious leaders of the religion of God's own people, Israel, were the ones who not only reinforce what we believe, but also have been the ones who taught us what we currently believe. Now, to be sure, the Son of God was not a criminal in any way. But, to be sure as well, He did not seek the reinforcement of what He believed from any human gathering, religion or community. And even the Holy Bible itself tells us to challenge fresh truth when we hear it. But the directive is to try to prove it to be true, not prove it to be false. **Jesus' message** was **radical**. But it was **true!**

For some reason, we feel safer following the mob of religious, but self-righteous, people than walking almost alone on the narrow way of Jesus. I strongly suggested to the men there that they seek new truth in these gatherings rather than simply restate the same truths they have believed for decades. Even science takes a **theory** of possible new truth and performs **experiments** to **prove it to be true**.