

The Spirit of the Disciplines

Willard's Core Philosophy (Framing Quote)

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

He believed that grace is not opposed to effort — only to earning:

"Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is action."

Summary Table

Abstinence Disciplines	Engagement Disciplines
Solitude	Study
Silence	Worship
Fasting	Celebration
Frugality	Service
Chastity	Prayer
Secrecy	Fellowship
Sacrifice	Confession
	Submission

I. Disciplines of Abstinence

These are practices of **letting go** — they create space to hear from God and detach from the false self.

- **Solitude**

"Solitude frees us, actually. It may be the most radical of the disciplines for life in the world."

- **Silence**

"Silence is frightening because it strips us as nothing else does, throwing us upon the stark realities of our life."

- **Fasting**

"Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food."

- **Frugality / Simplicity**

"Simplicity involves the spiritual discipline of intentionally living with less in order to make room for more of God."

- **Chastity (when appropriate)**

"The discipline of chastity enables us to gain mastery over our sexual desires rather than being ruled by them."

- **Secrecy**

“Secrecy is the discipline of abstaining from letting our good deeds and qualities be known... to root out our desire for approval.”

- **Sacrifice**

“To the degree that we give up power and wealth, we learn to trust God to provide.”

II. Disciplines of Engagement

These are practices of **participation and connection** that form our character in the likeness of Christ.

- **Study**

“The mind is the place where we can cooperate most directly with God in the transformation of our lives.”

- **Worship**

“To worship is to see God as worthy, to ascribe to Him the greatest worth.”

- **Celebration**

“Holy delight and joy is the great antidote to despair and is a wellspring of genuine strength.”

- **Service**

“Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness.”

- **Prayer**

“Prayer is the means by which we engage the kingdom of God. To pray is to interact with God about what we are doing together.”

- **Fellowship**

“In fellowship we engage in a kind of spiritual strengthening that we cannot find alone.”

- **Confession**

“Confession is a discipline that brings forgiveness and healing. In it, the soul is relieved and the body strengthened.”

- **Submission**

“In submission we engage the crucifixion of the self-will that lies at the root of all sin.”

4. EMBODIMENT – What He Lived

“The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God Himself at the center as its prime Sustainer and most glorious Inhabitant.”

— *The Divine Conspiracy*

- Dallas practiced what he preached:
 - He spoke slowly
 - He listened deeply
 - He was never rushed
 - He *radiated* a peace that was hard to explain but impossible to ignore

Ortberg again:

“I would go to Dallas with problems, and he would sit there quietly — and say very little. But the *weight* of his presence would calm the chaos inside me. It wasn’t just what he said. It was what he carried.”

6. IMPLEMENTATION – How You Can Begin Today (5–6 min)

“You cannot trust Jesus — and not intend to obey Him. It’s a mental impossibility. The idea that you could trust Him, and not try to follow His way of life, is absurd.”

— *Dallas Willard*

Three Ways to Begin:

- **Pick One Practice**
 - Start with silence. Or Sabbath.
 - 5 minutes of stillness before any screen
- **Read to Be Formed, Not Just Informed**
 - Don’t just use books. *Receive* them.

“To receive a book is to let it reshape your inner world. To use it is to master it. Only one of those will transform your life.”

— *Renovation of the Heart, Preface*

- **Ask New Questions**
 - Not “What do I want?” → “Who am I becoming?”
 - Not “How do I feel?” → “What am I being trained to desire?”

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