

# Learning From Jesus

## Week 10

### Theme: How Spiritual Change Happens

#### Video Vignette With Dallas Willard, John Ortberg and Larry Crabb: “Spiritual Change: The Reliable Pattern”

One of the things that strike you when you open the Gospels and you look at Jesus and the people who were responding to him is how much joy was there. The amazing generosity of Jesus stands out everywhere. Whoever came to Jesus with a need was met by the response, “Yes, of course.” “If you wanted,” the little leper said, “you could heal me.” “And I do want to,” Jesus said. And he put his hands out and took him in. The generosity of the kingdom. Jesus operated from the understanding of how great God was and how available he was, and he came to bring us that message and to bring us into that.

And what Jesus shows is that real change is possible. You don’t have to live the way that most of us see around us and have experienced ourselves—in hopelessness, fear, impotence, not having a very loving attitude toward ourselves and others, but always thinking, how am I going to manage this?

And all of sin comes in that way. It tempts us to think that we have to reach out and grab things and control them. No wonder the human situation is hopeless then.

What we want to think as we listen to Jesus is that things really can be different. We can be different. The sense that we really are our own worst enemies can pass as we watch Jesus take over our lives and begin to change all of those dimensions.

We have in this culture something that used to be known as “miserable sinner” Christianity, which is just the idea that no matter how far you go you really always remain the same. You can’t really change. Many people actually believe that and think that [it] glorifies God to say we are still just as bad as we ever were. That’s not what Jesus had in mind, or Paul. It goes against all the wonderful progressions in Scripture such as Romans 5, or Colossians 3, or 2 Peter 1, where [Paul and Peter] talk about moving from faith to a life that is pervaded by love, through the Holy Spirit, and through the word growing in [the person of a believer].

We grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean to just grow in forgiveness, but to grow so that everything you do is a product of grace that is received. It isn't the sinner that burns a lot of grace; it is the saint. Saints burn grace like a 747 on takeoff. Everything they are doing is an act of grace.

There is a general pattern to how we change. Look at the diagram. I use the word VIM. It is actually a Latin word.

When you think of the V, think of vision. You have to have a vision if you are going to change. No matter what it concerns. It need not just be in things we consider religious. Illustration: learning to speak a language. Our schools are almost universal failures in teaching languages, and the reason is the lack of a vision for the goodness of speaking the language. All over this world people learn to speak English with almost no equipment. But they really have a vision for the goodness of learning to speak English.

And they intend it. That's what the "I" stands for. Intention. This is where we are most lacking, having the intention to become serious disciples, apprentices of Jesus. Our religion has separated being a Christian from being a disciple. It permits you to be a Christian forever, without ever becoming a disciple of Jesus. This has deep historical roots. But the fact of the matter is [that] we don't have discipleship evangelism. We don't evangelize people to become disciples. And we don't have programs with Jesus Christ as teacher. In fact, many folks feel uneasy about talking about Jesus as teacher because they think it is just cut-down language to say Jesus is only a human teacher. Some are afraid of this because they think it emphasizes the humanness of Jesus.

But if you don't have a teacher, what else do you not have? You don't have disciples. Jesus as teacher must come back so that we can have the intention to learn from him and do all the things he said, by becoming a different person.

And this brings us to the M in VIM, which is the means. We are long on means but short on vision and intention. And without vision and intention, the means don't work.

There are many ways we can illustrate this, but perhaps the best model is the AA model, one of the clearest illustrations of the VIM pattern. There's more to being a Christian than being sober, but this is an outstanding application of the VIM model. But if your issue is sobriety, you need something that works. AA models vision, intention, and means.

We can go deeper than that. We can see at the spiritual level a transformation that can move us into a deeper world than anything like AA can give. We must keep in mind that discipleship should not be designed to

change behavior. The principle here is one of **indirection**. Christian transformation is not designed to teach or focus on behavior.

**You change the soul, you change the mind, you change the inner person; and the behavior follows** indirectly. If we focus on the behavior, that will put the focus on willpower and take us to legalism, with an infusion of grace every now and then. The secret is not trying; that will throw us back into legalism and put the emphasis on willpower, with a little infusion of grace now and then. **It isn't trying, it's training**. And training transforms all those dimensions of the self so that instead of trying to keep the law, we become the type of person for whom keeping the law is the most natural thing for us to do.

### ***Video Vignette: (Session Five: Conversation)***

JO: Let me ask both of you a question about that [spirituality rightly pursued]. I think partly that comes back to community. Most of grew up with pictures of spirituality wrongly construed—a major source of human misery and rebellion against God. Most of us grow up with pictures of that. **Who is somebody in your life that gave you a picture of spirituality rightly pursued** or understood, that gave you some idea of what grace might look like.

DW: Actually there've been a lot of people I've come across like that. Some are ministers that have a sense of grace about them, humorous, sensible, strong. So real. I remember an old minister.

JO: Let me stop you. You said humorous, sensible, and strong. Those are qualities that are so appealing, but not ones we usually think about when we think about a godly person.

LC: You didn't say someone who spent 10 hours a day in the Bible.

DW: But that's what made them attractive to me.

LC: They were living real life, the life that God intended.

DW: That was in my youth...there was a huge difference between them and other people. I remember an illiterate man I used to work with in the fields by the name of John Barnes. He didn't speak very good English. My older brother led him to the Lord when he was fairly old. He had trouble not cursing, because that had been his whole life. And yet how humbly and sweetly he would struggle with that. Just a very simple man full of the grace of God. You know **I think the word that goes with grace is "realism."** It frees us up to be real and not pretend.

LC: I felt something as you said that. As a kid, on into my teens and perhaps still, when I see people with a zest for life, I've always assumed they were

just faking it. Get into my office, and I'll strip that away from you pretty quick. Perhaps a touch of cynicism.

...I think the word "real" is just crucial to me. The word "real" is very important to me. The first memory I have that there is something to this Christian thing, I was five years old. I remember looking at my father when I was five and thinking, he really thinks he's talking to somebody. And I had this incredible thought; is it possible to know who he is talking to? And that was an initial stirring for me. I think I've been a very cynical person, still am. Is there anything to this whole transcendent thing at all? Where are the miracles? I think about the "miracle," the "transcendent," and I think what stands out is to see a man talking and thinking he is talking to someone, and [he] was talking to the ceiling as far as I was concerned.

JO: I think [it's important] for people to identify one or two of those people who have something they want, for everybody to identify a person or two like that and try to know them better and to push to get real.

I think that often in churches there is an inflation of language. You get more status by claiming miracles. But inside, we may not believe that, and the bigger the gap gets between the things we say and what [we] really think, [the more it] tears at my soul, and it [my soul] gets thinner. And even though at the surface I look spiritual, it wounds my faith every time I do that.

LC: That's where most people are. That's where I am. I was gripped by your Renovation of the Heart. Your first couple of paragraphs got me going. You were talking about the outrageous promises God makes, rivers of living water, and then [you] compare the promise with the reality. And notice the gap is huge. I think a lot of Christians become practicing Buddhists; we'll narrow the gap by pretending we don't want all that is promised. Or will trivialize the promise. That's a sad thing.

DW: Again, here, this is an expression of our inability to believe. In the measure that we are able to really believe, we let go of the hype.

JO: Letting go of the hype is so difficult because the world runs on hype, and unfortunately, churches often run on hype. Here's what God is calling us to do. Hying up. That's what people respond to. To let go of that and say, "I don't know; I'm not sure," that's pretty scary.

DW: But if we don't do it, we fall into idolatry, and idolatry is just an extension of the soul ruin that comes from trying to control things. Idolatry is trying to use God to make our life run well. This kind of hype is actually idolatry. Trying to control our religious realm and make it come out right, by exaggeration...smothers real belief, the reality that comes from turning loose of that.

JO: I was thinking as you were saying, it's historically been the practice of the church to recite the Creeds together. That's a good thing and a good discipline. I wonder if it wouldn't be a good thing with some friends in a small group, in a safe place, to recite some type of "I'm not sure."

DW: I think that would do more for faith than almost anything.

JO: These are things I'm not sure of.

DW: Faith just doesn't grow on dishonesty.

LC: Another formative experience, in light of what you were just saying—I stood by my dying grandfather's bedside; it was my first exposure to death. I was 15. Dad was talking to my grandfather and saying things like, "Soon you'll see the God you have served so well. Soon you'll be in heaven." And I'm sitting back thinking, this isn't some Sunday school class; this is the real thing. And I'm most moved and stirred. And we're leaving, and I overhear my father say to my mother, "Well, pretty soon your father will be with the Lord, if it's all true." And I grabbed him and said, "Didn't you mean to say, 'Since it's all true?'" And Dad said, "Sometimes I still struggle." And that freed me. When I got to grad school and wanted to give up my faith, I thought that the doubt I [had might] not be an end to faith, but an avenue to a deeper faith.

JO: I was in a small group one time talking about when Elisha and a servant were at Dothan, surrounded by the enemy and he [prayed], "God please open the eyes of my servant. And God did, and they saw chariots of fire. I asked in the small group what it would be like if God suddenly opened your eyes, and one person said, "I would be amazed to find out that what I always believed turned out to be true."

DW: That's wonderful.

JO: Yes, but it gets at what it means when we say we believe, and there's this gap between what we say and what we believe. What I honestly believe and what we profess.

LC: There's an abandonment to what we believe that turns into conviction. Lewis talks about [how] you never know how much you believe in the strength of a rope until you are hanging by it over a cliff. He wrote that after his wife died. I tend to stand on top of the cliff of safety.

DW: One of the ironic things is that holding on to faith without testing it keeps you from seeing the kingdom of God. I wish that people understood this more generally, because what it does is allow you to test it [faith]. And when you test it, the reality comes through.

JO: Give an example of that. What would it look like if someone were to let go of [faith], to test it?

DW: Well, he would feel free to say what your father said. And I like your creed business. I believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth. God, now help my unbelief. Allowing people to just deal with this honestly. Because the truth is, there are different parts of the self, and people may have faith in some parts and not in others. Some believe because their grandmothers did. But if you put it [faith] at the level of intellect, they are lost.

Now that shouldn't remain there. It should be something they test out in all areas. I think that is what gives us the vision and allows it to clarify—When we stop faking it and we are honest. I'm sure that moment of admission by your father didn't weaken his faith at all. **I've never seen it [faith] weakened by honesty. But I have seen it weakened by dishonesty**—people having to stuff the doubts down until one day they just blow up and flip over. I watch that with kids out of Christian homes constantly. They come from environments where they are not allowed to ask questions. And if they tried to raise a question, they [were] met with, "You've got to be careful. That's unbelief."

## Spiritual Tool for the Week

### Spiritual Tool: Memorize Colossians 3.1-17

This is a long track of scripture, and we will work on it through the rest of the course. Remember some of the keys to memorizing that we learned with Psalm 16. Start with understanding. Read it through again and again, using different translations in order to understand Paul's logic in these paragraphs. Break it up into short sections, taking each section a week at a time. To memorize a verse or a section, write it out while you say it out loud. Do this at least three times, then try and say it out loud without looking.

### Readings for Feb 18<sup>th</sup>

Complete The Divine Conspiracy, Chapter Four

Read Study Guide pp 40-48