



# **The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship**

*Dallas Willard*

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The last command Jesus gave the church before he ascended to heaven was the Great Commission, the call for Christians to "make disciples of all the nations." But Christians have responded by making "Christians," not "disciples." This, according to brilliant scholar and renowned Christian thinker Dallas Willard, has been the church's Great Omission.

"The word *disciple* occurs 269 times in the New Testament," writes Willard. "*Christian* is found three times and was first introduced to refer precisely to disciples of Jesus. . . . The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ. But the point is not merely verbal. What is more important is that the kind of life we see in the earliest church is that of a special type of person. All of the assurances and benefits offered to humankind in the gospel evidently presuppose such a life and do not make realistic sense apart from it. The disciple of Jesus is not the deluxe or heavy-duty model of the Christian -- especially padded, textured, streamlined, and empowered for the fast lane on the straight and narrow way. He or she stands on the pages of the New Testament as the first level of basic transportation in the Kingdom of God."

Willard boldly challenges the thought that we can be Christians without being disciples, or call ourselves Christians without applying this understanding of life in the Kingdom of God to every aspect of life on earth. He calls on believers to restore what should be the heart of Christianity -- being active disciples of Jesus Christ. Willard shows us that in the school of life, we are apprentices of the Teacher whose brilliance encourages us to rise above traditional church understanding and embrace the true meaning of discipleship -- an active, concrete, 24/7 life with Jesus.

## **The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship for online ebook**

## **David says**

This book is the compilation of a series of essays and other works from Willard. The overall theme that holds all works together is that there has been a great omission from the great commission. The Great Commission comes at the end of Matthew's gospel where Jesus commands his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded. Willard sees a contemporary Christianity that has failed to "make disciples". This is not just about obedience to rules, it is more akin to apprenticeship to Jesus.

The positive of this book is that since it is a compilation of many points, the most important points of Willard's thoughts are repeated throughout. For that reason, I almost think this would be the best book to suggest to someone who has never read Willard but wants to. It is not as heady a read as *Knowing Christ Today* or *The Divine Conspiracy*. Willard often goes back to the importance of spiritual disciplines here, emphasizing that God's grace is not opposed to effort but to earning. This is one of the clearest lessons to come through my reading of Willard. The Protestant Reformation did right in returning the Church to the truth of God's grace, that nothing we do can earn God's love. But over the years this has grown into an almost knee-jerk reaction against any sort of effort. It is as if the idea of training yourself in your faith by certain disciplines is seen as working to earn God's love. Willard identifies this as the reason why so few Christians mature in faith. We expect God to just zap us and automatically change us and it does not work that way. Like anything else we must train ourselves, never forgetting that in this we are not earning God's love for we are already loved.

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## **Jake Thurston says**

I love Dallas Willard, and this is a great collection of superbly written articles and entries over spiritual formation—but it's just that which takes away from what I was originally hoping the book would be. I stopped half way through realizing if I ever want to read a good article over this topic, and I'll just look up the chapter in this book, rather than having the motivation to finish it

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## **Gregory says**

This book is a collection of Willard's shorter pieces, written for various publications. There is some overlap, and a fair amount of repetition. However, given the depth and profundity of the material, as well as the general ignorance in the Church regarding the nature of "discipleship" and "spiritual formation," the book is worth careful reading. Challenging at many different levels!

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## **Jacob Aitken says**

Spiritual Disciplines

He has a beautiful chapter on “solitude” and “silence.” My only concern is that it is completely unworkable to anyone who has kids, a job with pressing demands, or both. This leads to the uncomfortable conclusion that there is “okay” spirituality, which is the basic stuff someone like you does every day (read the bible, pray, etc), and then there is “next level” spirituality for those unhampered by kids or work. Of course, this sounds exactly like monasticism. To be fair, Willard is not arguing for this point, but this is precisely the direction the early church took it.

### Towards a Christian Anthropology

In technical language, Willard is a soul-substance dualist, which is generally the Christian position. “The soul is a substance in that it is an individual entity that has properties and dispositions natural to it, endures through time and change, and receives and exercises causal influence on other things” (Willard 139).

“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” (140)

It is the source of life (143).

The spirit is a central part of the soul, the part of determination (is this what Dabney called connative powers?). It is the heart or will. This isn’t trichotomism, though. Trichotomism sees the spirit as a separate entity. This view sees it as a subdivision of the soul.

### The Good in the book

Logic as a spiritual discipline. This was a wonderful chapter, “Jesus the Logician.”

It requires the will to be logical (182).

freedom from distraction

willingness to follow truth wherever it takes

Committed to logic as a “fundamental value” (183). Jesus uses enthymemes. He understates logical points which require the hearer to draw the conclusion--psychologically, this was a very effective move.

As noted previously, his take on anthropology and its suggestions for a Christian psychology was wonderful. And despite his weak soteriology, he upheld the law-gospel distinction (162).

### Criticisms

Dangerous models:

Per Laubach: language of ascent to God (200). This is chain-of-being ontology. Note how the Christian “logic” works. We do not ascend to God. Christ descends to us. I understand that “inner” language has Augustinian precedents.

This theme is heavier in Teresa of Avila’s Interior Castle. The “rooms” are ways of living in relation to God. Interestingly, Willard notes that this book has become an interfaith manual. Ironically, or perhaps precisely because when the spiritual life becomes “mystical absorption into the One,” then why does it really matter which “One” it is?

And this problem surfaces in many of Willard’s works. He tries to “mix and match” spiritualities, but spirituality cannot be isolated from a larger theology. There is much that is valuable, even outstanding in this work. There is also much that is dangerous.

The biggest problem, though, is Willard's ambiguity regarding soteriology. Granted, he is responding to the happy-clappy, let go and let God Christian, it remains that he is not always clear on the relation between justification and sanctification.

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### **Jeff Borgman says**

Dallas Willard writes a culminating book. Ever convicting, illuminating, captivating and practical. he adeptly tells us why our discipleship to Christ is compelling, necessary as well as how to go about it. Thank you Dallas Willard.

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### **Stevie says**

Pure Gold!

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### **Heather says**

This is my second book by Dallas Willard, "The Spirit of the Disciplines" being my first, and I enjoyed it but not as much as the first one. This one did touch on some key points that were interesting, intriguing, and challenging, but it seemed more like an overview book. However, it was still a great read to keep me grounded and focused on Christ centered things. I like reading a vast array of genres but having a Christian based one to read to help keep me on track with spiritual disciplines is much appreciated and this book does that.

Recommend for:

Ages 16 I just dont think younger minds may benefit or find it intriguing. There was nothing in there that was inappropriate for younger audience except for mentions of sex and lust which would not be appropriate yet for children. So at youngest, 13+

Christians

Theologians

Someone looking to grow their relationship with Christ deeper

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### **Caleb says**

What a needed book!

Dallas Willard explains why "nominal has become normal" in our church today. Willard believes that post-reformation both sides focused on "Jesus the savior" so much that we forgot "Jesus the teacher". The church today seems to have misplaced the doctrine of regeneration. Instead, we stay on the topics of justification and reconciliation then stay put. We've forgotten Christ's message of repentance and following him in discipleship.

I sympathize with many complaints that the book is poorly organized. For such a needed writing, I wish it was compiled better. I'd recommend this title for every pastor to check out!

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### **Jon says**

Most people today agree something is seriously wrong with the church, because people in it seem little different than people outside the church. Christianity today has some pretty major flaws. People have been leaving local churches in droves, and Christian leaders have struggled to know what to do about it. I'm oversimplifying quite a bit, of course, but I think you have an idea of what I'm getting at.

*The Great Omission* is not only the easiest of Willard's books I have ever read, but I believe one of his most important. That's hard to say, because all of his have been very important. But to me this book, actually a collection of lectures, gets at the heart of Willard's contribution.

He addresses what is wrong with our current understanding and practice of the Gospel, and particularly of Jesus' great commission to make disciples. I think he gives a powerful post-mortem of Christian discipleship, showing we have actually omitted the heart of that, and yet presenting a clarity that should, if we follow it, bring true Christian discipleship back to life.

I think Willard presents some of the clearest teaching on discipleship, what it is, and what it isn't, that I've ever found. I will put it alongside Coleman's *Master Plan of Evangelism* as my top two books on practical ministry, and see how it holds up. Of course, being written by a philosopher, it's not exactly brimming with practicals. But he lays out the principles so clearly that I *would* say it's chock full of pointers with very practical implications.

I would love to hear what others of you think of this book. For now, it's going in my top 5 recent books. I think predict it will stay there for a long time...

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### **Robert says**

#### **Great read**

Great work. Pushes the concept of spiritual formation into the realm of the defined and helps define discipleship for the modern day. Love it

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### **Liz says**

There are other Dallas Willard books to read before reading this one. *The Great Omission* is a collection of essays and speeches he has given, mostly on discipleship and spiritual formation. The last part of the book are brief summaries on a few spiritual classics like St. Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*.

Read *The Spirit of the Disciplines* and *The Divine Conspiracy* before this one, as it's just a collection of essays. However, if you're looking for some short reads... you could read this book piecemeal, chapter by chapter.

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## Lyndon says

Somewhat difficult to digest due to the patchwork nature of the chapters, though Willard's writing isn't the problem. The structure of the book just didn't work for me. This is not a volume that develops an overarching theme (viz, discipleship), rather it's a collection of essays, talks, and reflections that address that theme. So while the message is of critical importance, it can get a bit repetitive. To what, then, does the title refer? **The Great Omission** is what believers have omitted from Christ's great commission - the call to make disciples. And in this series of lectures, Willard puts forth a clear and compelling argument for developing the spiritual life of following Jesus as our Master Teacher (thus becoming true disciples/learners of him). And this takes effort. The author is well known for his writing on the spiritual disciplines and he draws upon his book, **The Spirit of the Disciplines**, quite often. One of the big take-aways for me was this: Grace is not opposed to effort; it's opposed to earning. Chew on that for awhile and if you want to find out what that means in practice, this volume might be for you.

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## Patrick Ryan says

This is a book that never gets to its point. Its main flaw is that it's a collection of lectures given to different audiences about the same topic. Each chapter, then, repeats what all the chapters before it say. Over and over and over again.

It's also evident this book was not edited. There are many places where the writer (really, speaker) mentions some article or other supporting source that must have been apparent to his original audience, but go unexplained and unreferenced in the context of this book.

Pulled together as an unmindful afterthought, The Great Omission lives up to its name by its own substance.

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## Ken Guenther says

A series of articles that Willard wrote and compiled in this book.

Silence and solitude as essential disciplines for discipleship

Earning, not effort is forbidden

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## Rory Jones says

Great book, but suffers from the fact that it is a compilation of multiple lectures, papers, and articles.

Because of this, much of the content is repeated from chapter to chapter, although information is generally grouped into different sections.

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