

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Great Omission

by

Dallas Willard*

The beauty of *The Great Omission* is that it presents Dallas Willard's basic ideas about discipleship in stand-alone bite-size pieces. Because it consists of twenty of his articles (from five to twenty-five pages each), each of your meetings can have a single focus. Participants need not be confused if they miss a meeting or join later in the flow. Often each chapter has only one question to guide you, so you may want to add questions like these: What stood out to you the most in this chapter? Are there ideas in the chapter that you would like others to comment on because they seem unclear to you? Get ready to be exposed to ideas that you will enjoy processing together.

* Study guide by Jan Johnson.

CHAPTER 1 DISCIPLESHIP

1. What does Dallas Willard say are the two current “great omissions” (p. 5) from the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20)? Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Willard says that the churches of today’s Western world now consider it possible to be a Christian without being a disciple of Jesus. What does nondiscipleship cost a person?

CHAPTER 2 WHY BOTHER WITH DISCIPLESHIP?

1. What are the four advantages of *practicing* Jesus’s words, as his apprentice? Why might a person want any of the things mentioned as advantages?

CHAPTER 3 WHO IS YOUR TEACHER?

1. Early Christians had confidence in Jesus as one in whom are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3 NAS). Willard interprets this as meaning that these early Christians thought of Jesus as “master of every domain of life” (p. 20). Today “every domain” might include such things as loving family members, studying for a class, or tackling a difficult project. If you have ever trusted Jesus in such practical

circumstances, tell about it. Is there an area of your life in which you have not trusted Jesus but would like to?

CHAPTER 4 LOOKING LIKE JESUS

1. What are the three sides of the “Golden Triangle” (pp. 26–30)? How do they work together? Is there a side you need to pay more attention to? Less?

CHAPTER 5 THE KEY TO THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

1. How do solitude, silence, and fasting help us find our way into Sabbath as “a way of life” (p. 34)? How can these three disciplines set people free from bondage to their own efforts and help them come to the power and joy of a radiant life?

CHAPTER 6 SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN CHRIST IS FOR THE WHOLE LIFE AND THE WHOLE PERSON

1. How do Willard’s ideas about spirituality differ from common ideas about what Christian spirituality is (such as reflecting, praying, and reading the Bible)? How do you respond to the idea that spirituality is “supernatural because obedience to Christ is supernatural and cannot be accomplished except in the power

of a ‘life from above’” (p. 52)? Are you surprised? Hopeful? Skeptical?

2. In what ways do Willard’s ideas about spiritual formation involve the whole person? How is the self transformed? When in your life (or the life of your child or sibling or friend) have you seen this happen?

CHAPTER 7 SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN CHRIST

1. While a person’s spirit (also called “will” or “heart”) is “the ultimate source of life” and may intend us to be and do good, the body may lag behind (pp. 73–74). How does the process of spiritual formation help the body “catch up” with our intentions, so to speak? What is the Holy Spirit’s role in this?

CHAPTER 8 THE SPIRIT IS WILLING, BUT ...

1. We are a “servant of the body” when we routinely act on our automatic tendencies (such as criticizing people, remembering wrongs people have done to us, or staring in curiosity at someone who needs help instead of lending them a hand). What kind of behind-the-scenes work is needed to retrain these automatic default tendencies (p. 84)? Consider the example of blessing a driver who endangers or displeases you in traffic (p. 87).

CHAPTER 9 LIVING IN THE VISION OF GOD

1. “The love of God, and only the love of God, secures the vision of God: keeps God constantly before our mind” (pp. 99–100). What are some simple, manageable ways we can keep God in our thoughts? What practices work or would work best for you?

CHAPTER 10 IDAHO SPRINGS INQUIRIES CONCERNING SPIRITUAL FORMATION

1. Of the ten questions posed and the answers given in this chapter, which did you find most helpful? Why?
2. How is the fruit of the Spirit (pp. 115–16) involved in spiritual formation (101–7)? How are gifts of the Spirit involved (or not involved) in spiritual formation? In your experience, how does the fruit of the Spirit or spiritual gifts affect the formation of your inner life?

CHAPTER 11 PERSONAL SOUL CARE

1. While ministers often focus their energy on what they are *doing* for the kingdom, Willard maintains that the “most important thing happening at any moment ... is the kind of persons we are becoming” (p. 124). How do the following practices affect this process of transfor-

mation: practicing the presence of God, love and worship, replacing anger with joy? How might such practices affect character?

CHAPTER 12 SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES, SPIRITUAL FORMATION, AND THE RESTORATION OF THE SOUL

1. Jesus insisted that “you cannot keep the law by trying not to break the law. That will only make a Pharisee of you and sink you into layers of hypocrisy” (p. 152). So if trying to be good doesn’t make people good, what *does* change people? How do spiritual disciplines help? If you have experienced change through a spiritual discipline, describe your experience.
2. What are the advantages of scripture memorization—“focusing of the mind upon God’s works and words” (p. 155)? What does it enable us to do?

CHAPTER 13 CHRIST-CENTERED PIETY

1. Willard says that discipleship is learning to live “interactively with [Christ’s] resurrected presence (through his word, his personal presence, and through other people) as we progressively learn *to lead our lives as he would if he were we*” (p. 166). What ideas in that definition fascinate you most? What aspects of the definition do you find confusing? If people were to experience

Christ himself discipling them in this way, what might that look like?

CHAPTER 14 WHY?

1. How do you respond to the idea of a morning in which “*you don’t have anything to do*” (p. 176)? If you were to have a morning of solitude or silence, what might you do? Take a walk by yourself? Unplug from all technology? How would you need to approach it so that you might “find joy” in it (p. 177)?

CHAPTER 15 JESUS THE LOGICIAN

1. Of the four examples of how Jesus used logic in his teaching, which one (if any) stood out to you, possibly strengthening your “confidence in Jesus as master of the centers of intellect and creativity” (p. 195)?
2. In what area might it be helpful to you to consider Jesus “maestro of all good things” (p. 191): for example, solving a plumbing problem, crafting the proper words you need to say to your boss, troubleshooting software, or finding time in your schedule for what you really want to do?

CHAPTERS 16–18

LETTERS BY A MODERN MYSTIC
THE INTERIOR CASTLE
INVITATION TO SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

1. Why might someone be interested or uninterested in having “continuous inner conversation with God” or keeping “God constantly before the mind” (p. 200)? What experiments or methods might someone use to do this?

CHAPTERS 19–20
WHEN GOD MOVES IN
A ROOM OF MARVELS

1. Willard says that while reading *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* he was amazed that quite ordinary people had a “drive toward holiness, toward a different and a supernatural kind of life” and a “readiness to sacrifice all to achieve such a life” (p. 215). How do you respond to the idea that ordinary individuals can seek God and that God does “come to them and convey His reality” (p. 217)? How does this description differ from our usual idea of being a Christian?
2. As a follow-up, have you ever experienced a desire for a different and supernatural kind of life? How did that happen? Did it happen in any way as you read this book?