

WD August 26, 2024

“The Freedom of our Decision Making”

Ever need a little space? After a hard week isn't it nice just to have a little quiet time? For me it's the opportunity to get into the barn and do a little woodworking. Such opportunities allow me to let my mind rest and relax. Space is also important for relationships. Dallas Willard in his book, *Hearing God* speaks about how important space is for our relationship with God.

He speaks on Genesis 3:8 speaks about God walking in the Garden. The Lord went looking for Adam and Eve. From this littler verse Willard goes on to speak about how God is interested in our lives but also gives us space. He doesn't stand over us or smother us but gives us opportunity to work and be our own. He gave Adam and Eve distance but came to visit. So, when Adam comes out of hiding this distance gave Adam opportunity to respond. God comes to us and closes the distance that sin creates. He literally walks in our midst with Jesus becoming flesh. Jesus regularly said the Kingdom of God is near. The Kingdom happens to be wherever the King happens to be. It is well revealed in the same way as when Moses took off His sandals because God's presence made that spot holy ground. The Lord's ultimate goal is to seek fellowship with us because it benefits us.

Dallas goes on to mention how God has a counseling session with Cain. He warns Cain that sin is crouching at his door eager to take Cain down. Dallas asks, ‘Could God have stopped Cain from killing Abel?’ We know the answer is, of course. Yet, the Lord allows Cain to make his choices. And it's in such scenarios that we may ask ourselves, “Why didn't God stop such and so from happening?” Willard's answers, “Well, a conversational relationship with God is not always or primarily about God telling us what to do. A relationship with God cannot simply be defined in being told what to do any more than any friendship is one telling the other what to do. Being in the will of God requires that you go beyond that. On the other hand, a relationship with God is defined by knowing what God wants of us. Jesus says, “You are my friends if you do what I command” (John 15:14). Jesus invites us to be co-workers. Sometimes we listen. Sometimes we are told what to do. Yet, then there is distance to follow His will or reject it. And here is where this conversation becomes important to us today; The Lord never directs us as much as he draws us to Himself, by His goodness and to His beauty, and Saving promise in Jesus. The Lord gives us freedom and by doing so respects our wants and our wills and refines them and helps us to be the individuals He has designed us to be. It is never forced upon us.

What we should realize in our day in age is how much we are being manipulated or directed into certain kinds of behavior. It's not necessarily evil. It's marketing. It's also a lot of psychology. For example, my insurance company has a tracker in my car to evaluate my braking, turning, speed, and acceleration. It is said that I save money because of it. Is it purely to save money? Is it just for my safety? That tracking provides a lot of useful information.

How about that loyalty card so many of us carry. Without it we pay more. With it what we buy is tracked. Is this merely to help us with our shopping?

It's interesting to me that God chose to give us space while everything else is trying to hover over us watching every movement and attempting to direct our every move. And as such things direct our behavior it should not be lost on us that such directing is to benefit the insurance company or store or online stuff that tracks us. It is used to manipulate us. It in effect turns consumers into a resource rather than people—it's not a relationship. Like it or not we rely on such things to get stuff done. (Side Note—Notice they watch our behavior, not just our words. They understand well, “By their fruits you shall know them.”)

But what happens when ungodly types take hold of such things. Ungodly types almost universally insist on a forced conformity to their will. Via law and courts secularists can't help themselves. They routinely look for more power over others and usually target God's people. Daniel 3 is perhaps the most famous when King Nebuchadnezzar made a statue and then made a law that everyone must worship it when the band plays. The Punishment for not conforming was death in a fiery brick furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't bow down and were thrown into the fire. They survived but note the lesson. The law created was a deliberate attempt to put the Israelites in a position that would compromise their faith, enforced with a punishment by brick furnace.

A similar case happens in Daniel 6. By chapter 6 Daniel was much older and a new king of Persia had come on the scene. The king liked Daniel and elevated Daniel to the right-hand position, making the other officials very envious. So, they plotted to trap Daniel by convincing the King to pass a Law that forbade anyone to worship or pray to anyone else except the king. Daniel hears of the Law, prays anyway, and is eventually thrown in to the lion's den. Again, notice how officials in this case plotted and manipulated the king, only to have Daniel thrown into the lion's den, to die. The goal was again to force Daniel, a follower of the Lord, to conform to their will, to ruin him before the king, and be rid of him.

Today secularists just take Christians to court to bleed them of savings while attempting to destroy their reputations in the public eye. Such people are easy to spot because they do such things to promote self over others. It's all about them.

The goal of the secularist is to corner the believer just as much today as in Jesus' day. Secularists today deliberately set traps on life issues, gender issues, morality confusion, and then position themselves in a way that paints Christians as hateful, unkind, or even dangerous. It is all a deliberate effort to put social pressure on us via our employer, cancel culture, and other means. They want automatons that will simply just do what they want them to do and compromise their faith. That leads to some very hard decisions to make for Christians. The secularist is betting that we will fold and bow to their will over the Lord's.

So, as we round out this week, rejoice that the Lord would give us so much freedom in our decision making. So much freedom to choose is a signal of His desire to have a relationship with Him. He has created opportunity for a true relationship that gives us space to be ourselves. He comes to us and invites us to follow Him as a friend not as someone forced into labor or manipulated to conform or something else. The Lord desires us to know Him fully. Finally, regardless of what pressures may come to force us to compromise our faith, remember those who didn't, like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, Abednego. As Hebrews 11 talks about, remember the great cloud of witnesses who held their ground because of their relationship with the Lord. Heaven celebrates their bravery as well as their faith. May the Lord give us courage as well. Blessings on your decision making. May it bear much godly fruit. In Jesus. Amen.

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John 3:30