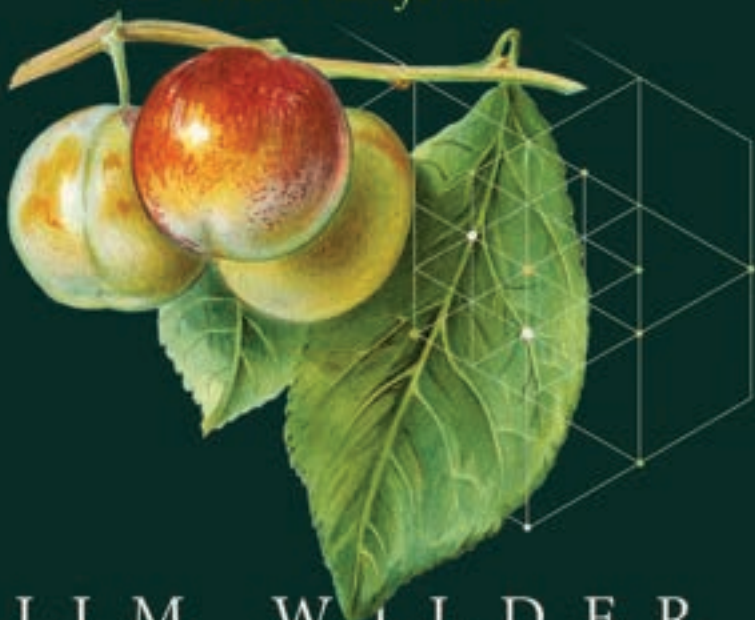




# RENOVATED

*God, Dallas Willard & the Church  
That Transforms*



J I M W I L D E R

Now this is a rich read! I've long been convinced the healing of our humanity comes through attachment to God. Jim shows you how.

JOHN ELDREDGE, *New York Times* bestselling author

Just when I thought I had extracted all that Dallas Willard had for me, Jim Wilder integrates something fresh from neuroscience into a revised model of transformation. Read this book one page at a time, or you will miss what it has for you and the people you lead.

RANDY FRAZEE, pastor; coauthor of *The Renovation of the Heart* student edition

Building on a classic understanding of the spiritual formation of the whole person with the latest relational discoveries in neuroscience, it is easy to see that this is what we are created for—and what joy the world so desperately needs to see in the lives of Jesus' apprentices. A practical primer for disciples who long for a richer life with God and others.

AMY PIERSON, founder of Burning Heart Workshops; former executive director of the Spiritual Formation Alliance

Transformation occurs as we are renovated from the inside out, formed and reformed emotionally and relationally, changed and developed most powerfully in the context of the community of Christ. It all begins with love for God, from which our characters are healed and redirected toward the active presence of God. How kind of Jim and Dallas (and Jane), for guiding us thoughtfully and graciously toward a radical maturity based in healthy attachment love.

STEPHEN A. MACCHIA, founder and president of Leadership Transformations, Inc.; author of several books, including *Crafting a Rule of Life*, *Broken and Whole*, and *Becoming a Healthy Church*

No one has taught me more about intimacy with God and relational discipleship than Jim Wilder. If he writes a book, I read it. The opportunity to sit in on this cutting-edge discussion between a giant of the faith like Dallas Willard and my friend Jim is a rare treasure. I guarantee this book

will open new doors in your understanding and take you deeper in your walk with God.

MARCUS WARNER, president of Deeper Walk International

Jim Wilder offers a genuine hope in *Renovated*. He uniquely combines the truth of Scripture with the truth in developing brain science to give us a path of renewal and restoration.

DUDLEY HALL, president of Kerygma Ventures

A breakthrough on so many levels. *Renovated* is a must-read for everyone who is serious about discipling people and seeing life transformation.

BOB ROBERTS, global senior pastor of Northwood Church; founder of Glocal.net

There is a fearful lack of intensity and low expectancy for releasing New Testament Christianity in a mad and muddled world today. You just might be holding in your hands the key to a massive return to a world-transforming Christianity, both corporately and personally, as we learn to think with God.

JACK TAYLOR, president of Dimensions Ministries

Dr. Jim Wilder has spent most of his adult life researching, praying about, observing, field-testing, pondering, and validating how God has designed people to mature and Christ followers to be conformed to the image of Jesus. His research and understanding are truly groundbreaking and provide vital missing pieces regarding how so much of Western Christianity has lost its relational foundation and focus. *Renovated* is his most important book to date.

REV. MICHAEL SULLIVANT, CEO of Life Model Works

Elegant, clear and bountiful in hope . . . a magisterial work that weaves together wisdom, application, and most of all, relational connection. If

transformation for yourself and of your community is what you seek, I can think of no better place to start.

CURT THOMPSON, author of *The Soul of Shame* and *Anatomy of the Soul*

A gold mine of truth exposing the mother lode of God loving us and sharing love for us to love Him, love others, and love ourselves. Take as much as you want. The supply is eternally limitless.

JIM HYLTON, staff pastor of Northwood Church

An answer to prayer for those asking the question, *How does God transform people into the likeness of Christ?* The answer is found in the way human beings have been created: in attachment love with God and others. I highly recommend this book for anyone working in the field of spiritual formation and for all believers who are seeking guidance and understanding for how God transforms lives.

JOHN Y. LEE, academic dean of the John Leland Center for Theological Studies

A must-read for your continued growth in faith and life.

KEN R. CANFIELD, founder of National Center for Fathering

If the goodness of a book could be measured in how many times I spontaneously smiled or exclaimed, "I'm loving this!" then *Renovated* is *very good!* Dr. Wilder shines in his understanding of the way of maturity and offers practical steps to get there.

JERRY REDDIX, Member Care International and Vineyard Missions, USA

A comprehensive, Trinitarian, and human-friendly way to carry out the great commission. It opens a revelatory door that will empower the body of Christ to actualize a more relational Christianity, even a relational revolution in Church and culture.

DR. TIMOTHY M. JOHNS, founder and overseer of Rock International

For too many people, this will be the book that finally connects their soul to the Father of creation. Dr. Wilder writes with compassion,

graciousness, and understanding, all interspersed with bright humor and warm anecdotes about real people. Here is the gentle sharing of a sensitive pastor who is equally at ease in imparting biblical truths and counseling troubled and searching people.

BERNARD FRANKLIN, PH.D., vice president of student life, Mount St. Mary's University

For those of us who consider ourselves to be the most hopeless of cases in spiritual formation, our backs against the ropes, this book rekindles confidence that even spiritual-transformation underdogs have a puncher's chance of becoming more like Christ.

JAMES HENDERSON, cofounder of Ashrei Center for Spiritual Formation, Mexico City

Jim Wilder takes us deep into the heart of the question, *How do people change?* This practical and provoking work is greatly needed today. With many messages on transformation and maturity swirling in the world and in the church, Jim and Dallas together bring clarity and hope for God's people to walk in wholeness. This is a *must-read!*

LINDY BLACK, associate US director of The Navigators

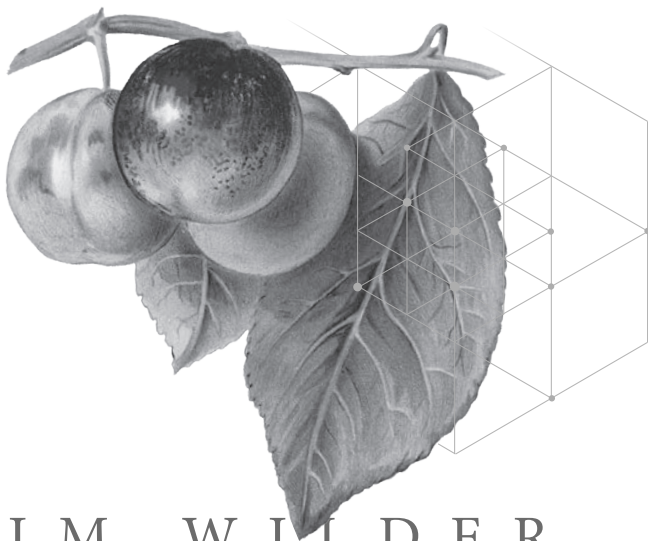
Mining the timeless truth of Holy Scripture as well as neuroscience, James Wilder builds on the profound teaching of Dallas Willard, adding clarifying insight regarding the primacy of attachment love in divine design and in the formation of emotional and spiritual maturity. This excellent book not only reframes prevalent spiritual-growth paradigms but also provides practical guidance to more fully experience the *with-God life*. I highly recommend it.

TOM NELSON, president of Made to Flourish, pastor of Christ Community Church



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J I M W I L D E R

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*Renovated: God, Dallas Willard, and the Church that Transforms*

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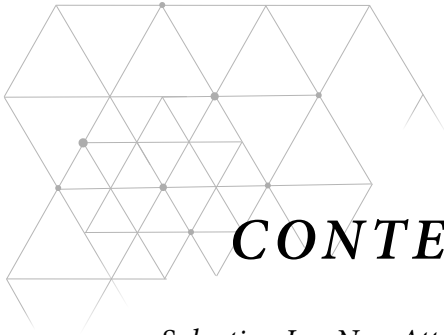
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*To Nemesius, bishop of Emesa (AD 390), the first neurotheologian of the church. His book, De Natura Hominis, written in the fourth century, expressed how God designed the lobes of the brain with different functions. His Doctrine of Ventricle Localization of Mental Functioning stood without peer for over a thousand years.*

*And to Dr. Lee Edward Travis (1896–1987), who handed me the baton of neurotheology, the science of spiritual maturity.*

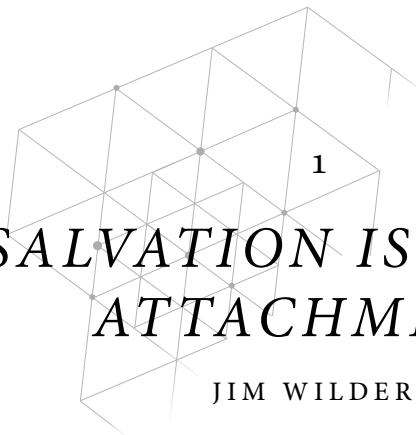




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1

# SALVATION IS A NEW ATTACHMENT

JIM WILDER

Dallas Willard sat across from me with tears in his eyes as he looked at the floor. Dallas had only weeks to live, but his tears were not for his own life. “What I have learned in this last year,” he told me, “is more important than what I learned in the rest of my life. But I have no time to write about it. I will try to finish the projects I have started.” He looked up at me. I wondered if he was thinking about our conversation or something else.

“You need to write about this,” Dallas said. His voice was steady but with mounting passion: “I know of no soteriology [doctrine of salvation] based on forming a new attachment with God.” He offered no arguments in favor or against the idea. Dallas, for as well as he knew history, could think of no previous proponents. His body slumped back into his chair, tired from the energy of speaking.

I glanced at his wife, Jane, sensing that it was about time for me to leave. Dallas needed rest. A fast message of understanding passed between our minds without words.

Jane was always an astute observer and pragmatist. As both a licensed therapist and spiritual director, Jane had constant contact with people who experienced less success at the Christian life than they had hoped to have.

Traumatized people were not achieving the degree of transformation they expected. She noticed that commonly proposed solutions worked for some people but not as well for others. Good-hearted people were working very hard using both theological and psychological approaches and still not seeing their desired change into the character of Christ.

Jane had been one of my first supervisors<sup>1</sup> after I finished my doctorate. It was her training that brought the presence of God into the healing experience for me. Jane joked that she discovered both Dallas and me, but there is much more to Jane's influence than that. Jane applied the same rigor to psychological interventions as she did to spiritual solutions. Over the last thirty-five years, Jane had challenged both Dallas and me to find broader, deeper, and more complete means of transformation. Dallas wanted to see empirically verifiable effects after encountering God. Jane wanted methods that would work regardless of someone's wounds or maturity, and she expected solutions that were both theologically and academically defensible. All of us wanted means of transformation that were accessible and enduring.

Jane caught my eye. We all prayed together before I headed out the door. My mind went back to 2011, when I felt strongly pressed in my spirit to have a dinner honoring Dallas for his contributions to Christian life. I had been impacted by both his books and his presence. As an author myself, I knew that most Christian books came and went. Few books would be remembered in a hundred years. Yet, I am certain that Christians will continue reading Dallas. People who are serious about godly character will find guidance in his work.

Honoring Dallas would not be easy. While he was as warm and kind as he was brilliant, Dallas did not like attention. He did agree to do a conference with us on the topic of spiritual and emotional maturity, and to submit to a dinner as part of that event. Our goal was to examine best practices to achieve "transformation of character" in contrast to what Dallas called "sin management." The 2012 Heart and Soul Conference would bring together thought leaders who designed and taught methods to achieve transformation and people who had "tried it all." Ordinary Christians would meet brain specialists and theologians, and together we would explore, for the first time, how the brain learns Christlike character. We would examine whether current brain science would change the understanding of human nature that had dominated Christian theology

since the Middle Ages. Would knowing how the brain learns character revise how we teach ourselves to be Christian?

Heart and Soul began a discussion between Dallas and me that became this book. How does the brain develop an identity and normal human maturity? The human-identity systems in the brain generate our emotional reactions to life—reactions that often lack Christlike character. Changes in the brain's identity systems will change both our character and our reactions. Dallas and I wanted to compare how the brain changes character with the methods Christians use for discipleship and spiritual formation. Could spiritual disciplines like prayer, fasting, and Bible study be better tuned to produce character change?

Dallas and I began talking about a joint project on the nature of transformation that could become a book. Shortly after the Heart and Soul Conference, however, Dallas discovered the condition that was to take his life. It was clear that I was to take the path ahead without him.

As I drove home, my mind went back to how Dallas acted at the Heart and Soul Conference. I knew he was not well, so we set up a room for him to rest, but Dallas was having none of it. He sat at the front of the auditorium, rarely looking up but deeply engaged with all who asked him questions. Most audience members had been Christians for over thirty years. Many practiced spiritual disciplines, moved in the Holy Spirit, saw a spiritual director, and had been in therapy or inner healing. Many participants were therapists, teachers, spiritual directors, or ministers of inner healing themselves. Their questions revealed a deep desire for better results from their spiritual practices. Few could say “yes” when they applied Dallas's main test for Christlike character: whether one spontaneously responds to one's enemies with love.

Relationships and emotions were frequent issues among Heart and Soul participants. Dallas engaged each person thoughtfully. He was caring for their souls.

### *The Care of Souls*

My mind went even further back. I had opened the Heart and Soul Conference by telling the story of how I first met Dallas. It was 1982, and Jane had just become the director of training for our community

counseling center. She thought it would be great to have Dallas speak in our staff meeting. A staff member mentioned that Dallas was a philosophy professor at the University of Southern California. Some of the staff seemed quite excited. I figured this would be a dry staff meeting. The course of my life was about to change dramatically.

“Psychology,” Dallas said quietly, “is the care of souls. The care of souls was once the province of the church, but the church no longer provides that care.” He paused. “The most important thing about the care of souls is that you must love them.”

Love souls! My whole professional training had been one of learned disengagement. I carefully learned not to have any emotional connection with “clients.” That very disengagement was strange, had I stopped to think about it. My interest in psychology began during a spiritual crisis at age nineteen when I discovered a loving and relational God. As I searched for what it meant to believe in Jesus, three elements of the Christian life came into sharp focus: (1) dialogue with God about everything, (2) do nothing out of fear, and (3) love people deeply. Dallas was precipitating a collision between my professional training and the very spiritual life that initiated my counseling education.

As Dallas softly declared that we must love souls in order to care for them, this truth shattered my professional persona. I realized that somewhere during seminary, I had stopped dialoguing with God about everything. Sure, I prayed outside the office, but the active presence of God was something I no longer felt. I never taught others to experience God in the counseling hour. I did recommend spiritual practices, but people neither learned nor practiced them in my office.

Meanwhile, down the hall in her office, Jane, my supervisor, was teaching people to find God’s presence. Lives were being transformed and traumas were being resolved by God’s active presence. Word got out to the church about what Jane was doing. Many responses were not favorable. Some Christians (particularly pastors) were concerned that people claimed to be hearing from God. Was this not some form of “private revelation,” demonic deception, or, at best, a psychological delusion?

As a counseling center, we had no shortage of demonic manifestations or delusional people who thought they were speaking for God. When those hearing voices told others, the outcome was predictable. We observed a

noticeable lack of peace, an absence of healing, and the production of distress in others. With Jane's group, however, we saw healing, growing love for God, and deepening fellowship with other people.

Providentially, Dallas wrote the book *In Search of Guidance* (later retitled *Hearing God*), arguing that we can be guided by God's active presence in our daily lives.<sup>2</sup>

Over the next years, Dallas continued to explore and develop ways to become aware of God's presence. The spiritual disciplines were his focus. Although spiritual exercises had a long history in the church, their use was not widespread. Dallas explained and encouraged these spiritual practices: The disciplines themselves were not transformative, but they placed the soul in a position to be transformed by God.

While Dallas promoted spiritual disciplines, others of us were developing relational exercises to help people love each other. People with emotional wounds seemed particularly hampered in growing and sustaining loving, joyful relationships. Using the brain science behind secure and joyful attachments, we trained people how to build and sustain loving relationships with the people God placed in their lives. This science of character formation helped people thrive and became part of the Life Model—a guide to joyful, godly maturity.

Both the group doing people-with-God exercises<sup>3</sup> and the group doing people-with-people exercises showed promising growth. Each method slowly increased Christlike character. Each approach had observable limitations. People doing spiritual exercises with God often struggled in their relationships with others. People working on relationships with others often had difficulty sensing God. Neither group did overly well at loving their enemies. Were we missing something in both groups that made transformation of character go deeper and spread farther?

Could it be that deep spiritual and relational maturity requires something that was missing from the exercises and disciplines we were using? Was there an additional factor or factors that Western Christianity had yet to recognize? Or could our limited success be due to a need to combine the two approaches into one? Going one step further, perhaps spiritual and emotional maturity were one thing, not two different issues.

Dallas changed my life with his teaching about loving souls. I returned the favor by telling him about attachment love in the human brain.

## *Attachment Love*

The only kind of love that helps the brain learn better character is attachment love. The brain functions that determine our character are most profoundly shaped by who we love. Changing character, as far as the brain is concerned, means attaching in new and better ways.

This realization brought Dallas to tears. If the quality of our human attachments creates human character, is it possible that when God speaks of love, “attachment” is what God means?

God is described over two hundred times in the Old Testament as being *hesed* “hesed/chesed,” a quality God also desires from us: “For I delight in loyalty [hesed] rather than sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). The Hebrew word *hesed* is translated as “devoted,” “faithful,” and “unchanging love.” Could God be speaking of an attachment love that sticks with us?

Dallas’s mind raced ahead of mine in our conversations about attachment. He wondered, “Is salvation itself a new and active attachment with God that forms and transforms our identities?” In the human brain, identity and character are formed by who we love. Attachments are powerful and long lasting. Ideas can be changed much more easily. Salvation through a new, loving attachment to God that changes our identities would be a very relational way to understand our salvation: We would be both saved and transformed through attachment love from, to, and with God.

Although months passed after Dallas first suggested a soteriology of attachment, he never produced arguments for or against the idea. Salvation through attachment was not something he had previously considered or taught. Had I suggested salvation through God’s will, the intellect, emotional experiences, ritual, good deeds, or attachment to a group, Dallas would have been full of comments. Western Christianity has long taught that we are changed by what we believe and what we choose—that is, by the human will responding to God. Attachment to God would functionally replace the will as the mechanism of salvation and transformation.

We know that loving God and loving others are the two greatest characteristics of a godly life. Yet, I had never considered that where Scripture spoke of love, it might mean “attachment.” I had never thought about how I could learn to love in attachment ways. Dallas was proposing a practical shift in theology that would change our Christian methods for developing

spiritual maturity. Christians have tried forming character through beliefs, experiences, and spiritual power. I knew how churches changed people's beliefs but not how churches grew attachments. I knew I was to (a) love God and (b) love others, but I didn't know how Christians develop attachment love.

I considered how I was taught of God's great love for me. We meditated on how much torture God asked Jesus to endure on our behalf. I was impressed by the greatness of God's love but, at the same time, not drawn toward closeness with God. Thinking of the Cross did little to enhance my attachment to God.

Neither was I drawn much toward Christian people. I did like my friends. Yet, attachments to friends did not always help me develop good character and often pulled me away from being Christlike. My reactions became more like the people in my identity group and conflicted with my beliefs. For example, my friends and fellow Christians didn't spontaneously love their enemies, although I believed I should. How would I develop spontaneous attachment love for my enemies?

What delightful harmony emerges between neuroscience and theology if building attachment love is the central process for both spiritual and emotional maturity. Suppose we focused spiritual exercises and human-relationship exercises less on changing our beliefs or choices and more on building attachment love with God and with people. Would that yield the kind of character transformation we yearn to find? The brain's need for love-that-equals-attachment could explain why spiritual practices sometimes disappoint diligent Christians. A focus on attachment would have profound implications for our understanding of human character, fellowship, and spiritual formation.

I concluded that my relationship to God needed more attachment love. My relationships with people needed more of God's character. How would this happen? Frankly, I did not expect hesed from church people if my character were to be exposed. Christians had not provided strong enough attachments for me to expose what went on in my brain. So I kept my Christian face on in church. But unless I had strong attachments with God and people at the same moment, I could not reasonably expect to see much transformation into the character of Christ. Reconciling the church's

practices of transformation to how the brain works will be our topic for this book.

Dallas passed on, but not before urging the ongoing discussion of salvation as hesed. His understanding was that salvation *should* produce disciples who spontaneously exhibit the character of Jesus. His acknowledgment was that salvation as we conceive of it too often doesn't. Dallas saw in attachment love a possible remedy.

The Heart and Soul Conference, from which this book emerges, gives us a day with Dallas. His first talk addresses the question of how spiritual wholeness and emotional maturity are related. Let us begin there.