

**Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Allison Watts, DDS**

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## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Welcome to *Practicing with the Masters* for dentists with your host, Dr. Allison Watts. Allison believes that there are four pillars for a successful, fulfilling dental practice: clear leadership, sound business principles, well-developed communication skills, and clinical excellence. Allison enjoys helping dentists and teams excel in all of these areas. Each episode she brings you an inspiring conversation with another leading expert. If you desire to learn and grow and in the process take your practice to the next level, then this is the show for you. Now, here's your host, Dr. Allison Watts.

Allison Watts: Welcome to Practicing with the Masters podcast. I'm your host, Allison Watts, and I'm dedicated to bringing you masters in the field of dentistry, leadership, and practice management, to help you have a more fulfilling and successful practice and life.

Dr. McDonald is a graduate of the university of Texas dental branch at Houston. He's a fellow of the Academy of General Dentistry and the International College of Dentists. He's also a visiting faculty member at the Pankey Institute in Spear education. He's given presentations for dentists and assistants at the Southwest Dental Conference, the Texas Meeting, the Chicago Midwinter Dental Clinic, the Yankee Dental Congress, the Greater New York Dental Meeting, and the CDA Anaheim in San Francisco.

He has authored articles for Dental Economics and Inside Dentistry. He was chairman of the 2015 Southwest Dental Conference, and he is chairman of the 2019 annual session of the Texas Dental Association. His interests include volunteering with ServingHIM International Healthcare Ministry on dental and medical mission trips to Braila ... Is that right?

Dr. McDonald: Yes.

Allison Watts: Braila, Romania? Okay.

Dr. McDonald: That's very good.

Allison Watts: Oh, thanks. Also, Dr. McDonald is enrolled at the Naveen Jindal School of Management at the University of Texas Dallas, pursuing a

**[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS**

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

graduate certificate in executive and professional coaching. In February, 2017, Dr. Mac published his first book, *Unchanging Points of Light*. It is his personal effort to shine a very bright light on eternal and unchanging principles that each of us can gain strength from as we attempt to navigate this difficult and often complex world.

He maintains a private practice in Plano, Texas, limited to aesthetic, restorative, and implant dentistry. Gosh, Mac, I've known you for a long time. You are a fantastic dentist, and I'm, and person, and I'm honored ...

Dr. McDonald: Well, thank you.

Allison Watts: To have you here. Yeah. I'm honored to have you here.

Dr. McDonald: Ditto.

Allison Watts: Thanks.

Dr. McDonald: I appreciate the opportunity.

Allison Watts: Yeah, I'm so looking forward to this. As soon as I saw the title of the book, I got excited. I ordered it, quickly read it, and I've got some notes and some questions for you, so, and I just want to mention ... I know some of you have been on here before, and you already know, but if you have questions, questions or comments, Mac's totally open to you guys raising your hand. You do that by pushing star 2, and I'll see your hand go up, and then I can call on you and unmute you, but we're going to keep you muted just so we can have a clean line.

Thanks everybody for being here on your time off, to learn and be with us. Mac, if you want to start, I don't know if you want to say anything else about your story, but I was just kind of curious about why you wrote this book, and then we'll jump in about what the book's about.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah. Thanks for the question. Allison, you said earlier, when we were talking about how much you loved learning, and I know that about you, because as long as I have known you, I haven't known anyone as devoted to education as Allison Watts, even sometimes to the point

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

where I worried about how much time you were spending doing that. You were really rocking and rolling, so I, and I know that's why Transformational Practices exists, is your passion for all of that, your energy, and wanting to build into the lives of people, so just kudos to you for doing all that.

Why the book kind of came from some of that. I just love learning. As I looked at the world, it just bothered me, meaning there were a lot of things that I didn't understand, that were hard for me to wrap my arms around, and I wanted some answers. When I would talk to friends and colleagues who were really bright people, really successful people, it just seemed like sometimes those answers weren't right there.

We were kind of all equally confused, so the idea of the book, the ideas, I should say, kind of spun around in my mind for several years before I actually put them down into writing, into a book form. That kind of started January of 2016. A lot of different ideas, half of the chapters that I had thought about, or titles, I threw away, didn't actually include them, and half the chapters that are there came up in the last few months of writing, just as the world unfolded before us, and one idea led to another. That was really kind of the why of it, if you would.

Allison Watts: Yeah. I love that about it, that it was very timely. I agree with you about the state of the world, and I think it's awesome that you chose too. I think this is a courageous book. To write this book, I can tell that you're like, your heart and soul is in it, and I also think it took a lot of courage to write it, because you are taking a bold stand, which is ...

Dr. McDonald: Yes.

Allison Watts: In today's world, not that common, without it being like an egotistical righteous kind of a thing. Yours is like a more grounded stand where you're, which is pretty much what the book's about, where you're, you've actually done a lot of research and homework, and I can see that all through the book, you know? It's beautiful. Well done.

Dr. McDonald: Thank you. You're very generous in your remarks, and I will tell you, Allison, I hope there's no ego in this, really. A lot of the

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

motivation to write came, honestly, from the pain of failure, I mean, going through some personal struggles and some things that kind of drove me to really ask some very difficult questions about myself, my heart, the life I was trying to lead, and what did it really mean?

Really, to quote many other people's statement, I'm just a beggar telling other beggars about where to find bread, and that's really, I hope that's, the idea that comes through there, as well as the idea that I get that I do take some very specific and strong stands, but also, I respect the fact that people I love and that are my friends feel differently about a lot of these things. That's just a part of it, so I hope I was respectful of other ideas.

Allison Watts: Totally. You totally were. You did a great job at that. Yeah. I guess my first question is, I mentioned this to you the other day, that when you're talking about this, Unchanging Points of Light is the title ...

Dr. McDonald: Yes.

Allison Watts: As I read it, you're talking about having a set of ideals or beliefs or philosophies, and you state your own. Are you saying that everybody should have the same beliefs and philosophies and agreement about what we all agree on, or are you saying that each of us should have our own set of unchanging points of light?

Dr. McDonald: Yeah. Great question. My answer is yes and yes. Number one, I do think it's a very personal journey, and as Shakespeare said, "To thine own self be true."

You have to develop and decide on these ideas in a very personal way, so it has to be true to you, and there's just not a way to, I think, really understand and benefit from it, and at the same time, just conform to the group, but there also needs to be some commonality in a culture or a society, in my observation, it will degrade into chaos and conflict, which is much of what we have today, and so I think that the commonality piece, that there are some common standards that all of us, or at least a great majority of us would conform to, I think is really helpful.

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

As an example of that, I think I may have mentioned it to you the other day, the word university comes from two different words, unity in diversity, meaning that, how can there be unity in an academic setting when you have a diverse group of faculty that have been trained in different disciplines and have different viewpoints. Well, the way that you can have unity from that is if those different disciplines are surrendered to the truth.

The truth is the commonality, so push come to shove, maybe we have differences, but if the data, the research, begins to lead us in a certain direction, then sometimes we have to leave behind old ideas, or Allison, even ideas that are really attractive to us, but they just don't hold up to investigation. To me, it's kind of both.

I think it needs to be very personal, and I know that there will be a variety of beliefs around it, but also, I think we need unity, and I think we don't have a lot of that, and I think part of that has come from the role of truth in our lives, to me, has been degraded or diminished over time, and that's why Chapter One is about the truth.

Allison Watts: Yeah. Let's talk about that. I love what you said about that. Actually, I wrote that down. I love that you said in the book, that truth, that you said truth, devotion to the pursuit of truth is a unifying principle.

Dr. McDonald: Yes. I believe that's ...

Allison Watts: Yeah.

Dr. McDonald: I believe that to the depths of my soul, yes.

Allison Watts: If we all agreed to pursue the truth, that is a unifying principle that the whole world could agree to, and then we each go on our own, on our way, you know, of trying to figure out what that is for us, or what that, what the truth is.

Dr. McDonald: Sure, and actually probably benefit by people taking those journeys, because they contribute to the whole, but yeah, at the end of the day, if we're still willing to surrender to principles that both have stood the test of time, and stand the test of research, and then our personal journey,



## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

where we really put things to the test. I think all too often, we don't really test what we believe.

I mean, we just believe it because our family did, or our culture did, or that's just what we knew, but if we really put things to the test, I think it kind of deepens our convictions and really helps us to establish our identity, so that's kind of what I was thinking with that.

Allison Watts: This feels like a dumb question, and I'm going to ask it anyway.

Dr. McDonald: It's not a dumb question.

Allison Watts: When you say put things to the test, what do you mean? Does that mean research it? Does that mean try living by it and see what happens? What does that mean?

Dr. McDonald: Well, I think it means a couple of things. One is like, as an example, faith. This is, I'm a Christian, so a lot of this book is written from that standpoint. Well, if I'm going to attempt to live that way, and vocalize that, I really need to test the standards, the foundation of that. Do they hold up? Can I just examine them and find good support for these ideas, or are they just kind of all from left field? I think that's one version of that.

We all know the half-life of a scientific fact is getting shorter with time, so I think we need to retest assumptions like, you know, Allison, I'm older than you are, but in our careers, over time, dentistry has really moved towards an evidence-based profession, right? That has become important to all of us.

When I was starting, there was a lot of dogma, because Harold working in New York used an appliance that worked for TMD patients, and Peter Dawson in St. Petersburg used something much more like what I use now, and L.D. Pankey and John Kois and Frank Spear and all, so we have a lot of, there was ... Not that John Kois and Frank Spear were dogmatic. They never were, but we'll say back in the '80s, there was a lot of dogma.

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

When you really put all that dogma to the test, and you filter through it, you begin to find that some of that dogma, it just didn't hold up, and yet we believe it passionately, so we're benefactors of really testing it and then complying or conforming our practices to what appears to hold up in peer reviewed research. Does that make sense?

Allison Watts: It does. Yeah, it does. I think your book is just a testament to that all the way around, because you talk about apologetics, and studying philosophy, and you've searched and searched for proof or lack of proof for what you believed. That's basically what you're saying. We all ...

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

Allison Watts: We all probably are living by a set of principles or beliefs, whether we're conscious or not of it ...

Dr. McDonald: Right.

Allison Watts: And most them may not be, like you said, we haven't really tested them, haven't really ... I mean, it gets passed on to us pretty unconsciously, and becomes sort of the collective or the familial or the cultural belief system, and then we just, or like the postmodernism that you talk about has become very much, you know, a way of thinking. Maybe you want to explain that a little bit. You know what I want to say, though, Mac?

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

Allison Watts: I do want to make sure, as we're talking, because you and I talked about this, and I do see this as a leadership conversation, too. I see that this could be very much, not just in our lives, which is very important nowadays, but in our practices and in our, obviously in our home, that if we have a set of principles that we stand on, it just makes life a lot more solid. We have a solid foundation to stand on.

Dr. McDonald: Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, for sure. Go ahead.



## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Allison Watts: I think there's a little delay. Like in our practices, we have a philosophy and a vision and a mission and, you know, things that we stand on.

Dr. McDonald: Yes. Absolutely, and so, I would, yeah, I would say that this, to me, really is a leadership piece, because creating that culture of your family, and creating that culture of your practice and then attracting the people to that, that that really requires the people around you to know, I mean, what do you stand for? What's really important to you? What is your promise to me, in essence? As a mother, your promise to your daughter or to your children is certain things, and that's grounded in the standards or the principles that you believe in.

Over time, they know that, because you've taught them and they've seen you live that out, right? That's essential to, I think, good relationships. The practice is the same thing. In essence to me, and I can't remember where I got this from, but somebody said, a brand is about the promises that we make, and do we keep them?

Keeping a promise is very much a foundational of our character and what we're committed to, and the fact if something's not right, we're going to make it right, whatever that is. I do think that principles are really the foundation of good leadership and good culture building.

Allison Watts: Perfect. Yeah. Okay, good. That's what I, I just, I think ... Didn't you also say, when we were talking about leadership, was that the part that you talked a little bit about that facially generated treatment planning you were mentioning?

Dr. McDonald: Yeah, yeah. Thank you. We did. I was trying to create some commonality for dentists that would be on the podcast, and then, Allison, you and I have trained ... I haven't trained as many places as you have, but we've trained several of the same places, so the Pankey Institute, Spear education, and we were both trained in Frank's facially generated treatment planning.

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

When we combine concepts of occlusion and facially generated treatment planning, really, to me, it's about treatment planning by reference points, so that when a patient shows up in your office or mine, or some other dentist that's on the phone call, then I, sometimes, their teeth are in the wrong position, their gingiva's in the wrong position, their bone is in the wrong position, their smile has been destroyed or damaged, their occlusion and their jaws are, nothing is in the right place or functioning the way it should.

They show up and our job is to first diagnose and then begin to formulate a plan of how we're going to rehabilitate that dentition, and what resources we need.

The thing that I loved about the facially generated treatment planning was that every time I'm going to look for the incisal edge position of tooth number 8 and 9, and that's going to be an anterior reference point, and from that, I'm going to establish an incisal plane related to an occlusal plane, proportion teeth, emerge them, do all the things that we would do in an aesthetic treatment plan, and then I'm going to go posteriorly to centric relation, going to learn how to locate that, establish that, reproduce that, and then I'm going to marry the two together, between other functional and aesthetics reference points.

In other words, overbite, overjet, create an envelope of function at a disclusive angle, all those kind of things that would bore a non-dentist, but are very important to a dentist. It all is about reference points, some of them absolute, some of them relative, knowing the difference, and then how that you can put them to work.

It's the same idea, like the title of the book is a metaphor for a captain who was navigating his ship 200 years ago in the middle of the Atlantic and it's a pitch black sea out there, and there are no reference points unless he's trained and he can look at the night sky, and he knows astronomy, and he knows the patterns of the stars. From those patterns, he can guide his vessel and he can get home, but without that, he has no way, he has no reference point, so he's just lost.

**[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS**

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

I think life can be like that. If there aren't some established really foundational reference points for an individual, then we just live lost, and that's just never very good, or very healthy. Does that make sense?

Allison Watts: Yeah. Totally. When you have your titles of your, the titles of your book, you have truth, life, love, identity. You talk about race, money. What ... Are those the areas that you have ... You said earlier, when you talked about the book, how you put the chapters in. Are those the areas that you see that are important to have reference points, or have our, or was that just ... How did you choose those topics? How did you choose those titles?

Dr. McDonald: Yeah, so if it's okay with you, I'm going to spin backwards a little bit on the truth, to kind of, because I really worked through that a lot before I went on to other topics, because I thought they kind of depended on it, and then I'll just comment on a few of them. I said in there, and it's the truth, when I started talking about the truth, I thought it was a very simple subject, and I was wrong, because it was anything but that. I just thought there was truth and not truth, and it was pretty black and white.

Well, if I talk to a lot of my conservative Christian friends, they would say the truth really took a detour when we took prayer out of school. Well, that was a detour, but that's really not when it started. If I talked to my agnostic friends, they would say, well, you know, I think they think truth is something each individual determines, and it's not something that would be common to all the culture of society, and I wouldn't see it that way, but they would see truth a different way.

When I started looking into this just a little bit, and Allison, I've never had a class on philosophy, so I'm totally unqualified to write about this, but I have listened to and read some really, really great people over the years, and they pointed back to the 17th century to a really famous philosopher named Immanuel Kant. A lot of commentators would say all modern thought begins with Immanuel Kant, and what they mean is this.

He was kind of a part of the age of reason, like when enlightenment came out and we moved away from the mystical meaning of foundation

**[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS**

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

and the supernatural God, to more of the reason of the mind of man, so Kant was a revolutionary that way. Now, he was still a person of faith, but he thought that morality and other things could be developed from reason. A lot of people would still agree with Kant. I'm not one of them, but a lot of people would. What he said was this. He said he was here to bring about a Copernican type of revolution.

Copernicus is the astronomer you remember that developed or established the idea that the sun was the center of the solar system. When Copernicus established that, he made the entire world mad at him, because the world, human beings, wanted to be the center of the solar system. They wanted Earth to be that. It was very attractive to him, but the truth was, the sun is, and so he got lots and lots of pushback, so to speak, but it was a revolution.

Well, Kant said he was going to create a revolution in philosophy, and his revolution was going to be that he did not believe that there was such a thing as truth or reality. There was only truth in reality as it appears to you. He gave us the freedom to, in essence, begin the very long process of, we'll just say self-creating what truth and reality was. From Kant, we went into the modernist, where we had, in essence, a revolution from Darwin, who gave us a theory that created life without a God.

We have Nietzsche, who essentially killed God, philosophically. We had Marx and others who wanted to reorder society. You had all these modernists contributing ideas that were revolutionary. The problem with the modern revolution was it failed, because the idea was that the ideas of man, education, and technology, would solve the problems of society and our world.

They resulted in, instead of utopias, dystopias, because we had Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao, and between all of the people who adopted a Marxist, godless, Darwinian, if you would, society, the 20th century became the bloodiest century in the history of mankind, just as Nietzsche predicted it would.

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

You had a failure of modernism, and from modernism, you had postmodernists that evolved, and instead of trying to fix the problems of modernism, they just said, "There's no such thing as truth in reality, period," that it's an illusion, so any efforts to conform to it are just a waste of time. That all sounds like philosophy classroom stuff, and it really is, but the problems with it is the philosophy may not leave the classroom, but the student does.

The student, leaving the classroom with those ideas, brought them to life as they matured into positions of leadership and so fit. Now, we would hear a lot of things, in conversations with our friends, commonly said something to the effect of, "Well, what's true for you is true for you, but what's true for me is true for me."

In other words, "I'm going to self-create truth," if you would, "and it's going to be different one person to the next," and I do respect what they're saying, but it has led us to a lot of chaos where they're, instead of historically philosophical perspectives were intended to create and conform us to the best version of the truth, the most accurate perspective, now it became, not only is it self-created, it was self-directed, it's just that it's an illusion, philosophically, so we have a postmodern mindset.

That's a very quick overview, but it resulted in the Oxford Dictionary system, in December of '16 released their word of the year. Their word of the year was post-truth. Post-truth is an adjective defined as relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion, rather than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

Well, that's the 10:00 news every night, because we just see that at work, that we have just tremendous disconnect from one side to the other, and much of what people believe is really about their emotion and their personal belief, really not about objective facts. That's kind of the feeling that a lot of people would have.

It was certainly a feeling that I had. It was confusing and disorienting to me. That's kind of an overview, if you would, of what I would say about

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

the road that truth has taken over time, and it just, well, 2016 is the definition of a difficult time to really discern truth, if that makes sense.

Allison Watts: Oh, yeah. I totally, I'm totally picking up what you're throwing down. I agree that it's, even as you were talking about it, I could see it differently. I mean, we've all been in it.

Dr. McDonald: Right.

Allison Watts: It's almost like, it's like a fish swimming in water. We didn't even realize that we were in that, but it feels very unstable. It feels crazy. It feels unstable. It feels unsafe. It feels like I, like we, you know, if we have to accept everybody's truth, which is kind of what's been happening, then what is, what do we stand on? There's nothing. That totally makes sense.

Dr. McDonald: Exactly.

Allison Watts: Thank you for going back to that. That was your ...

Dr. McDonald: Sorry, that was ...

Allison Watts: Foundational setting.

Dr. McDonald: It was, because you know, kind of if there's no truth, then what difference does anything make, but if there is a truth, and I believe that there is, then we need to be able to identify it and begin to conform ourselves to, we'll just say the most essential pieces of it, knowing that there's going to be some human experience and variance of that.

It kind of led right into life, the subject of life, and that's a very controversial subject, so I want to handle this well for your podcast, but it really is, I think it's one of the places where personal belief and emotions get very, very squarely in the middle of that, because on one side, there's the scientific foundation, and on the other side, there's very personal beliefs about life and the beginning of life, and do people have the right to end their own life at the end, when they're suffering, and all those kind of things?



## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Was there any particular perspectives on life you wanted to talk about, or you just want me to ramble a little bit?

Allison Watts: Well, you know what I loved that you said? What I grabbed ahold of was the ... I mean, I guess you and I are philosophically aligned in the fact that life is intentional and caused, so that makes it very precious and valuable, and each one, like it's a way of coming to the world that I think is beautiful. I mean, that's really the, in that chapter, that's the piece that I really highlighted and wrote down. I didn't have any particular questions written down.

Dr. McDonald: If I could just make a couple of comments, then, because I think with life is what you're saying, Allison, and it would be exactly what I would say, that life is sacred. I think that sacredness comes from the intentionality and cause of it that I believe people were made for a purpose, and given meaning and dignity just by that. I just think life is sacred, and I would hope for us that we would treat it that way. Often, we are not treating it that way, at this point in time, but I think, just, you know, life is sacred.

I think you can make a very strong scientific case for life, and when it begins, and what it means, and all of that, to help support the idea that life is sacred and it's worth fighting for. That would be it. A lot of the life chapter kind of, I'm a nerd, I'm really kind of a chemistry major nerd at heart, so I like the science piece of it.

Allison Watts: Yeah. I love that you put that in there, and that adds to the credibility and the groundedness and the proof. That's what you're standing on. I mean, that's, yeah, I love that.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

Allison Watts: I sometimes think I'm a nerd. Not in a necessarily a scientific way. I actually feel like, in my practice, with my patients, I see that whole scenario as sacred. I see ...

Dr. McDonald: Absolutely.

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Allison Watts: I don't, I see the whole thing. They're trusting me with some, I don't know, it just feels like a sacred relationship and a sacred responsibility, and I don't take it lightly that a human being is coming here with real, I don't know, it's much deeper than just, I'm going to work on somebody's teeth.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah, and I know that about you, and I know that that comes across, and I know that's why you have and had a successful practice, and why people would trust you to do significant cases on them, because they know that you value them, and that comes from their sacredness, that each person is a gift, and we are given a responsibility to take care of that gift as good as we can.

We're all going to make mistakes and have issues, but when they know that and we know that and our team knows that, that's a real foundational block that's like, that's how we make decisions in this practice, because my first obligation is to tell my patient what I think the truth is about their conditions, honestly, openly, good and bad, "This is what I found. These are my concerns. This is what I expect to happen if you do nothing. This is what's possible," but I mean, as truthful as you can be, because when we do that, I think we're fulfilling our main obligation to our patient.

It's hard to do that if there isn't something such as the truth. I know that Allison and Mac and Mike and whoever else is on this phone call will diagnose some treatment plan a little bit differently, so I knew that there's room there for some variance, but if we're doing it from our heart, because we believe that person's valuable, then that's a boulder in our practice, in our life, in our culture. That's something we can hang on to.

Allison Watts: I love that you said each person is a gift, and I think, also, the other cool thing about that, and I can't remember, but I think you probably mentioned it in a chapter, but it's important to remember that we are a gift, too, like ourself.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Allison Watts: I think we get so judgmental and so, we get wired from childhood with these ... This comes into identity, too, and why, I know, when you're going to talk about it later, but you know, we think there's something wrong with us and we're not good enough, or whatever those beliefs are about being a human, and we forget that we're a gift. We forget that we're precious. We forget that we deserve love and we deserve, you know, and we are valuable. Yeah, I love that.

Dr. McDonald: That sounds like that came directly from Brian Deroche, his experiences in the past.

Allison Watts: It came from a plethora of personal growth reading and counselors and therapists and coaches. Yeah, and your book, and every ... Yeah, it came from a plethora of work that I've done.

Dr. McDonald: Yes.

Allison Watts: Yeah, I'm actually starting to believe it now.

Dr. McDonald: Awesome. Awesome. Well, you know, and being dentists, we're pretty self-critical, aren't we, of ...

Allison Watts: Yes.

Dr. McDonald: Ourselves and our work, and things like that?

Allison Watts: Totally. I want to just mention, in case anybody has a question, just push star 2. I feel like I need to say that throughout because some people haven't been on here before, so if you guys want to raise your hand, push star 2. Actually, that comment leads kind of right into love. Unconditional love, I think, is a great idea. I think we've, it's kind of what I just said, because of all of our stuff, like our stuff that we bring with us, it's hard to love others, it's hard to love ourselves.

I love the story in the book that you tell about the ISIS story, and I really think, how did your minister get you to ... Like I'd love to know how you see us, how do we actually be loving, when we are judgmental or we are critical or we are hard on ourselves?

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Dr. McDonald: Yeah, yeah, so thanks for bringing that up. I love that story, too. I loved the experience, even though it was painful at the time. Kind of the beginning of that book will get me a lot of hate mail, because I push back hard on the idea of diversity and tolerance. My presupposition was backed up by Harvard Business Review in July/August of this year, so I love them for that.

My basic thing was, we've become such experts at what's different about us, that we've forgotten what's in common about us, what we have that's the same, and that's really what connects people, not knowing what's different, it's what's the same. I think the first piece of the answer to your questions are common experiences, like the World War II experience that I put in there about integrating troops, and after the black troops and white troops fought side by side and realized one another was a soldier, fighting the same battle, they became closer, and they accepted and understood one another what's better.

That's just common sense, but for about 50 years, we've tried to push back against that and teach one another what's different. I think the first piece of it is just common experience, and then, maybe really the first piece, but for sure equal to that, if not greater, is I would just go back to Genesis. Genesis 1:26, "God declared, let us make man in our own image, according to our likeness."

For a Jew and a Christian, that piece of Scripture just says that a Holy God declared the value of each and every human being that He created, and therefore, as such, I am, if I'm going to follow Him, I am to view other people that way. Allison, the tough part is, when the worst person I know, if I'm commanded to view them as being made in the image of God, according to His likeness, that's really hard. I don't like that. I want to push back on it, and yet, that's what's there to conform me to His spirit, that I might view people that way, and it's just really hard.

I think the second piece of it's just really that, that if I looked for the worst person that I know, and in the case of the ISIS story, it's these executioners on a beach in Libya, executing some Coptic Christians, I have

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

to realize that person, because God said so, is made in His image, therefore has, He's deemed that person sacred and of an extraordinarily, well, of the greatest value He can bestow, and He's the only one that can do it. Fast forward to church one Sunday.

My pastor at the time, Buddy Liles, who's just a fabulous teacher, he just is great at what he does, and occasionally he uses words to teach, and this day, he used words in a photograph. It was the Sunday after 26 Coptic Christians were executed on a beach in Libya for nothing they had done. They were just working in Libya trying to earn some money to help support their families, and they would not denounce their faith. We've all seen that photo, and Buddy throws that photo up there on the screen, and he said, "We need to pray for these ISIS executioners."

I'm like, "I don't want to pray for them. I want to go take a two by four and beat the ever-living daylights out of them, is what I want to do, because I'm really so angry at the evil here." Then he said, "But one of them could be a Paul," meaning Saul of Tarsus that God converted from being a persecutor of the church, and it just hit hard. He was right on.

I knew he was right at the time, as much as I hated it, because I didn't, I hated those men that executed those other men, but I knew I was wrong. The idea needed to work on my heart, to say, "Buddy's right," and that was one of the best teachings that I ever got about that aspect. Did I answer your question about kind of ...

Allison Watts: Yeah. I love that.

Dr. McDonald: How we're supposed to ...?

Allison Watts: Yeah, it feels like ...

Dr. McDonald: So, like ...

Allison Watts: Go ahead.

Dr. McDonald: No, I was just, I'm sorry for interrupting. It's just, that's just, I think that's a really critical boulder, if you would, or an unchanging

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

point of light, something to really hang onto, of how am I to think about other people, even when they irritate me and they aggravate me and I'm mad at them, I need to back off, take a breath, and think about them as they truly are, not as I see them right there, but as God sees them, because He sees them differently, and that's hard, and I fail at it frequently, but I do have that weapon, that tool to back away from and rethink through it and try to think about them differently.

Allison Watts: Yeah. It feels to me like it's having compassion and really ...

Dr. McDonald: Yes.

Allison Watts: Seeing them as human, which we all are. Some of us are, we can look at somebody else and see the evil, but they have God, I mean, they have, they are a child of God. They have God in them. They are, you know, and they've just got ...

Dr. McDonald: Right.

Allison Watts: Have got messed up psyches.

Dr. McDonald: Right.

Allison Watts: Their human parts are kind of screwed up, but there still, in there, is a child of God, right? It's ...

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

Allison Watts: Yeah. Yeah, having, just seeing that.

Dr. McDonald: In the tension, the ... Yeah, the idea that in the tension of living between the image of God thing, and the sin nature of man, that we all live in, some people just surrender more to the evil side, you know?

Allison Watts: Yeah.

Dr. McDonald: They're just trying to find their way in this world, and they got lost, and they're more on the evil, and, you know, so it's hard to watch that and see what they do.



## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Allison Watts: Yeah. Let's see, was there anything else? You mentioned something, and I just wrote this down, the importance of purpose and meaning.

Dr. McDonald: Mm-hmm.

Allison Watts: Is that something you want to say anything about that in the chapter of love? I just remember you saying something about, I think you were telling a story, and you said, try taking away people's meaning, and ... You know what I'm referring to?

Dr. McDonald: Yeah. I do. All right, or at least I think I do. In there, you know, we'll just say, in a postmodern thought, Jean-Paul Sartre, the great existentialist, he exhausted himself about writing of purposelessness and meaninglessness, and nothingness, essentially, as the, what you're taking on when you're following his existential philosophy, meaning that he is more about experiencing this world and pleasure as the chief in demand, because he's eliminated any kind of an eternal being from that, so he exhausted himself in writing about that, and he's brilliant.

I mean, there's no question he was brilliant, but at the end of the day, if we called every psychiatrist in town and said, "How do your patients do that don't believe they have purpose and meaning in their lives?" I propose to you, they're not doing very well, because a human, you know, a human being has that essential need. We need to know that there's meaning for our life, and some purpose, even if it's very simple, still, that's necessary.

I think, Ravi Zacharias, he's one of the people I've listened to a lot over the years, would say that there's four big questions that people need to answer, and that is, origin, where did I come from, destiny, where am I going, meaning, what's the reason I'm living, and then morality, what are the rules about how I get along in this world? I just think it's very, very difficult to live without some sense of meaning and purpose. Again, even if it's very simple, I think we all need that, just as human beings. I think it's hard to argue against that, really.

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

I think that's, Sartre, on his deathbed, it's written that he recanted his philosophy and said it was totally unlivable, but there's a lot of people that would say that would be what you would take on when you took on that kind of philosophy.

Allison Watts: Yeah, that feels, and grounded, also, it feels a lot like that craziness that we described at the beginning.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

Allison Watts: Yeah.

Dr. McDonald: It kind of fits with, if life is a result of a random process, there's really no meaning associated with that, so as you had said about yourself, you believe you were created with intentionality and purpose, and I do, too. I think meaning comes from there.

Allison Watts: Do you want to go through each part, or do you want to say particular ... Do you want to go through, we have ... Gosh, we only have 15 minutes, Mac.

Dr. McDonald: Well, you tell me what you think would fit with the podcast. I mean, I can talk about a couple of things, but if there's something around leadership that you think would be helpful, or the themes of your work that you remembered. If not, then I'll throw a couple of things out there.

Allison Watts: You know, the identity piece, I think, we've sort of talked about it a little bit, but I do think one of my favorite conversations is about knowing yourself, you know, who do we really believe we are?

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

Allison Watts: We sort of talked about that. I don't know if you want to get into that, but I do also, I think, power and light are the two worth talking about ...

Dr. McDonald: Two ones that ...

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Allison Watts: If we don't ... Yeah, if we don't want to get into identity too much, we could talk, focus on power and light.

Dr. McDonald: Well, I'll make a brief comment on identity. I mean, the whole idea is just really how do you develop that? In today's world, sometimes, we develop our identity with things that are not really lasting or powerful, so we, you know, as a young person, we may identify ourselves with beauty or success in sports, or money, or whatever, and those are things that, all too common, just don't serve people, so I think it's, a quick comment would be to look for something more substantial and enduring with your identity.

In there, there's a quote from Tolstoy that just says something to the effect of, I can't remember it exactly, but it's, "As long as we're intoxicated with life, essentially, life is great, but when we're looking into the abyss," meaning when that bad diagnosis comes up, that financial reversal comes up, we're betrayed by friends, now we really get tested on how we identify ourselves, what's really there to combat that, so I think that's really the thing I would say about identity, is just that. That's not news to anybody listening here. They all would know that's important.

The power piece is, really kind of started with one of my favorite books of all time, and that's Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. It's been a while since I've read it, but I reread some pieces of it for this, and I just find it fascinating, his story about surviving the Holocaust, and that, really, his essential statement was that his captors could take everything from him, they could take freedom, food, water, everything, but they couldn't take away from him what he thought in his own mind.

All day long, every day, he created a life in the future worth living for, in his mind, and it's part of why he survived, if not a big piece of that. I think the first message in power was just, everybody has some, and it's sometimes the hardest thing to take every thought captive, but that's essentially what Viktor Frankl did in the worst possible human circumstances imaginable, was he took every thought captive and used the

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

power that he had to survive, and then thrive, after he was released from his, from being captive.

When we think about power, a lot of times, we think about the abuse of power, or, in today's world, we think about political figures, whether it's Bashar Assad in Syria or Vladimir Putin in Russia, or political figures in the United States and other nations, and how they abuse power, or we think about an adult figure that had power over us when we were younger, that abused that power. Power can have a bad connotation, but essentially, nobody can live without it. You have to have some to live, and if you want to accomplish anything, you for sure need that.

I was just trying to kind of throw a little different perspective on power, and in the second half, I really wanted to point to a story in Isaiah, Isaiah Chapter 42, where prophetically, Isaiah was writing about the Messiah to come, and he painted a picture of power different than almost any other belief system you would find in the modern world, and that was this. He described this one that was to come, and he said that this one would bring joy to the islands, or all the nations of the Earth, and that a bruised reed he would not break, and a smoldering wick he would not put out.

The metaphor there just means this. Reeds were very valuable in that day, for building things, but if a reed was bruised and it was, and was broken, it was not as strong and as valuable, so the message was that, for humans, oftentimes the external pressures and forces and events of our lives tend to break us, and so then we're not as useful, or a smoldering wick, the metaphor is about a lamp, an oil lamp from those days, and there was water in the bottom of it to put it out once the oil was exhausted.

Sometimes we, including me, get exhausted on the inside and all our oil is gone, and so we're just, we kind of hit the wall. The metaphor was that this person would use his power to restore, to restore those who were broken by external forces, and to restore those who were broken by exhaustion from internal things. I think that that, Allison, is just a great metaphor for a leader.

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

I wrote that to a good friend when he was about to take on a position of leadership that, I really see great leaders acting that way, that their position is to help build and develop and restore people around them, remind them of who they really are, and what's possible for them, and find ways to take their brokenness and help them rebuild it, or take their exhaustion and help them to reenergize themselves. I know that that fits exactly into transformational practice ideas, or I'm guessing that, so I really like that piece. Tell me what your thoughts are about leadership that way.

Allison Watts: Oh, I love that. I think that's ... Gosh. I mean, if I could be any kind of leader, I would love to be, you know, I've worked to be the kind of person who, again, it does take being conscious. I love what you said about taking captive of our thoughts, because so many things happen just unconsciously, and we sort of believe our thoughts, and we, I don't know, we can just act unconsciously, and so I think if we're being conscious to build and develop and restore people, it's incredible, and remind them of who they really are, which is, that's amazing. I love that. Yeah, that's totally what I'm about.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah, and you know, I know that from knowing you, and I also know that from studying your website and looking into some of the podcasts, and so, anyway, I think that's awesome. I really admire the work you're doing, so kudos to you.

Allison Watts: Aww, thanks. You too, Mac. Do you want to end? We can talk about light a little bit, and then just maybe do a little recap, or ...?

Dr. McDonald: You bet. Light really, it was, you know, from the beginning, that was going to be the closing chapter, at least in my alleged mind, it was going to be the closing chapter. It's really a question about, where do human beings look for light, or enlightenment, if you would? Of course, they look a lot of different places and in a lot of different belief systems. It's just an effort to look at most of those, or at least the big ones, and throw out some of the concepts about them.

What I mean is, we would look at everything from Hinduism to Buddhism to Islam to secularism, to really New Age movement in the

**[Practicing with the Masters](#) with Allison Watts, DDS**

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

United States, which is really, has its roots in Eastern thought of Hinduism and Buddhism, so really trying to wrap our lights around, our minds around what that is, and what's present there, because they're obviously extraordinarily influential forces around the world. We go to, I've been to India once.

I really want to go back there, and I loved the Indian people that I met, and I would love to see more of the country and perhaps try to protect my stomach while I'm going around the country. Everybody that I know comes back a little sick from India, when they go.

Just too many parasites or too many things that might not agree with you, but I would love to go back, and yet, I left with this burden, because I would be on, one minute, I would be standing next to this beautiful building that was, on the other side of a wall, the slum of all slums, and I had a hard time reconciling that, and other things about the culture. At once, I loved it, and yet, at the same time, I was really, I just had a hard time with that. I couldn't reconcile it. It's really a look at how did those ideas come into being, and what do they mean?

I unapologetically point out that almost every belief system, if not every belief system, makes an exclusive claim. A Christian will get a lot of criticism for the outrageous claims of Christ, and they are outrageous, absolutely, but if you walk down the path with me, I can point out most of the exclusive claims that other belief systems make. It's not unique that way. It's pretty much the same. It's just a matter of, are the claims, can we substantiate them? Do they have a good basis for them?

Are they worth investing your present, your future, and eternity in? That's really what the chapter's about. Obviously, I'm going to close with a Gospel message that's intended to present my beliefs as they are, and what I think about them, so I used a couple of stories in the end, to just illustrate who I think this Messiah is that Isaiah prophesied about 600 years before he came, and I think he's very much the person that Isaiah wrote about, in the not breaking a broken reed, or snuffing out a smoldering wick.



## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

I mean, he was very much that person, so it's a unapologetic pitch for that, but a really close look at a lot of other things, and I hope a respectful look, because at the end of the day, every human being is looking for some hope, and when you're looking for enlightenment, whether it's a totally secular look, an Eastern look, or a Judeo-Christian look, you're looking for enlightenment that, essentially, will ground hope, because hope is the fuel of living. When people don't have hope, they don't live very well, and it's a dark, dark place.

I love people and I love the world, but I'm also well aware of man's inhumanity to man, and the things that we've done to one another and continue to do to one another, over all of time, including things like slavery, and modern day slavery is alive and well, unfortunately.

It's kind of a look at that, and there's some really interesting, I think, research articles in there, where some researchers from Notre Dame tried to discern or describe, if they could, the current state of affairs of young people, in terms of their belief system. It's really a interesting look, so I'd encourage you to go look at that study. I forget the study name right now, but I also know we're running out of time.

Allison Watts: Do you, did you want to, did you have a quote from Isaiah? Did you say it? I didn't ...

Dr. McDonald: You know, I absolutely can. I kind of quoted it without saying it's from Isaiah from Chapter 42. Let me just, I'll have to go there on my phone real quick, but I can do that.

Allison Watts: It's okay ...

Dr. McDonald: Tell me where we are.

Allison Watts: I don't have the book in front of me. I'm looking to see if I can pull that. If you guys, while Mac's doing that, if you guys haven't already gotten the chapter, I mean, the title of the book, it's called Unchanging Points of Light, and if you're interested in it, it is available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble, right Mac?

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Dr. McDonald: Yeah. Yes, ma'am. It's, a few other Christian sites, but Barnes & Noble and Amazon's the easiest place to do it, so if anybody buys it, thank you in advance for that, or thank you for doing it already.

Allison Watts: Yeah. It's a great book. I love it. Yeah, what else, Mac? Do you want to ... Said you might give out your email, in case anybody wanted to talk about any of this?

Dr. McDonald: Oh, absolutely. My email is drmac8454@gmail.com, so that's drmac8454@gmail.com, and that's my main email, so anybody that wants to talk about this, throw a comment out there, I would invite that. I would appreciate any feedback that you have, because I'll be doing more of this, so please do reach out. I would appreciate that.

Allison Watts: Thank you for that.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

Allison Watts: It's nice for people to make themselves available.

Dr. McDonald: The other thing, too, was I registered for Allison's website and for her podcast, because I really did enjoy them, so I look forward to that, and so, if you haven't, I just encourage you to do that, and Allison will probably tell us if she, before we get off here, how to do that. It wasn't hard. If I can do it, I promise you any of you can do it, but that was the main thing.

Allison Watts: Thanks, Mac. Yeah, you just got right on it.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah. Yeah, and you know, so, to put a wrap on the book, just, if you decide to read it, I would just ask you to think about some of these things and really let them have their way with you, and you know, force the correct answer on it. Don't give up until you feel like you've really gotten your answers for these things. Please contact me if you want to talk about those things.

Allison Watts: Great. Great. Great advice, to ponder, meditate, pray, really ...

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

Dr. McDonald: Absolutely.

Allison Watts: Spend time, because these are important things, and knowing where we stand is, I think it's the only way to make it sane in this crazy world.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah.

Allison Watts: Yeah, thanks for that.

Dr. McDonald: For sure that, I think a lot of, when you get the big things right, and these are all big things, I think a lot of the little things go away.

Allison Watts: Yeah. True. All right, so, yes on the quote, or no on the quote, before we end?

Dr. McDonald: I've got it right here.

Allison Watts: All right. You want to close with it?

Dr. McDonald: You bet. This is Isaiah 42, and it just, I'll read a few verses.

It just says, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up His voice or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged til He has established justice on the Earth, and the coastlands wait for his law."

It's a, I think, just a marvelous picture of who actually came, and what He's about.

Allison Watts: Thanks, Mac. Thanks for doing this.

Dr. McDonald: Thanks, Allison.

Allison Watts: Thanks for writing the book. I think it, like I said, I really feel your heart and soul in it, and I also applaud your courage and your

## **Ep #59: Removing the Ego and Finding Truth with Dr. Edwin McDonald**

standing for what you believe in, and talking about it. It really is brave. It's courageous today, because you know, like you said, you might get some criticism for some of the things that you said in the book, and you're just putting it out there.

Dr. McDonald: Yeah, that's okay. I applaud your courage for having me on here. Thank you for that.

Allison Watts: That's cute.

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