

# THE RADICAL CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Dear Friend,

When we open our lives and experience the reality of the living God, manifested through the resurrected Christ, a whole new world opens before us. As we experience this reality we come to an understanding that salvation through Christ is a direct result of the grace of God. This grace is extended to us through Jesus Christ. It is Jesus, the gift of God, who causes us to say yes to the radical call of discipleship.

In the New Testament, the call to radical discipleship is accompanied by a call to a life of devotion to Christ in pursuit of His purpose for ones lives. Colossians 3:16 and 17 says, *“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

Discipleship means to do all in the name of the world’s greatest revolutionary, Jesus Christ. Once we experience this radical call to discipleship, we will begin to see that there are two religions at work today in America. The first one is the religion of self-centered consumerism; the looking out for number one. The second is true Christianity which stands directly opposed to the false religion of consumerism because it calls us to seek first the Kingdom of God and not our own self interests. True Christianity takes Jesus at His word when He says, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21).

Storing up our treasures in heaven, as a radical disciple of Christ involves protecting His creation. Calvin B. De Witt stated, “A perplexing puzzle exists. Those who follow Jesus Christ largely neglect the claims of Jesus Christ on the world as Creator, Integrator, and Reconciler. Instead, many Christians overlook, neglect, and in some cases even despise Christ’s creative, sustaining and reconciling works in creation. These beautiful works of Jesus Christ are expressed in the beautiful hymn of Col. 1:15-20. Jesus Christ is Creator, Integrator, and Reconciler yet many, who call on His name, abuse, neglect and do not give a care about creation.”

“The irony is there for all to see. Honoring the Creator in word, they destroy God’s works in deed. Praising God from whom all blessings flow, they diminish and destroy God’s creation here below. The pieces of this puzzle do not fit! One piece says, we honor the Great Master! The other piece says, we despise His great masterpieces! Creation’s degradation by those who confess the Creator while trampling, muddying, and degrading the Creator’s works remain a great puzzle. Why should those who love and honor the Creator act in creation as though they despise God’s masterpieces that are displayed across the great canvas of the biosphere and the heaven beyond?”

The radical disciple who is totally devoted to Jesus Christ will recognize that all of creation is the manifestation of God’s work (Genesis 9:12-17, Hosea 2:21,22; Matthew 4:45). It is good and valuable (Genesis 1:31, Job 38-41, Psalms 148:1-10) and connected to God by His word (Genesis 1:3-9, John 1:1-5, Hebrew 1:3).

Each and every human being is made in the image of God. “*Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness’*” (Gen. 1:26). It is for this reason that while much of society treats the poor and homeless as second class citizens, we as believers are advocates of justice. This means we will work to help the poor, homeless, fatherless, widowed, elderly and others in need. As Christ’s disciples we realize that each person, regardless of his or her social status, is invaluable because they are made in the image of God.

I wish I could say I was always that radical disciple of Christ that Scripture calls me to be. I must confess that all too frequently, I find myself paralyzed by fear or unbelief, like Jesus’s 12 disciples frequently experienced. Like Peter, I have often denied Him by not acting by Faith in the moment of crisis. My doubts are like Thomas, and along with the rest of the disciples, I have often run when Jesus needs me the most.

My only hope in responding to the call for radical discipleship lies in the mercy of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Scriptures I experience the promises, and the reassurances of God’s love at those moments my faith is wavering.

Radical discipleship is a result of radical faith and faith comes from hearing and applying the Word of God. Jesus tells us in John 6:37, “*Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.*”

As we come to Him, often struggling and stumbling, we can know that Jesus will not cast us out. Instead, Ephesians 2:10 tells us, “*We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*”

We are God’s invaluable work of art. We are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus and given the opportunity to join Him in the work of creation through the good works He has prepared for us to do.

What a privilege it is to serve the Lord by caring for God's special people in need and God's creation. We cannot afford to ignore this privilege. We must let God's love flow through us into the lives of the poor, elderly, sick, hurting and homeless.

Jesus is calling each of us to a radical life style where we surrender all to him. Our hearts and desires are focused on eternity. Jesus declares in Luke 12: 33,34: "*Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*"

Our treasure must be our Lord and Savior as we desire Him more than anything else. Only as we allow Jesus to deliver us from our addictions to things, can we be set free to have a true relationship with God, His people, and the rest of creation. If God blesses us with resources we must continue to ask Him how they can be used for His glory, as we share with those in need.

Is Jesus Christ your Lord and your Savior? Have you dedicated your life to serving Jesus by caring for His people and His creation according to the word of God? If so, what are the results? The hour is late and now we must realize the reality of Jesus words when He said, "*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money*" (Matt. 6:24).

The Scriptures are filled with the cries of the suffering and the groaning of creation. It is the voices of the hurting which the Holy Spirit often uses to awaken us to the just and creative solutions provided by God Himself. These sounds of suffering can break through our walls of indifference so that we become the radical disciples and prayer warriors Christ is calling us to become.

Jesus knew that hearing the cries of the hurting under the anointing of the Holy Spirit would develop a passion within the soul resulting in direct action and prayer. He compared the passion, of His radical disciples to that of salt and light. In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus declared, "*You are the salt of the Earth. But if the salt loses its saliness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men (and women), that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven.*"

There are so many opportunities God gives us daily to let our light shine as we hear the groans of those in need and respond with prayer and direct action. Jesus tells us we must let our light shine. He knew that the light of our good deeds in this dark world would cause the corrupted imperial cockroaches to run whenever the light came on in the darkness of their evil deeds.

The lack of lament in the worship service in church eliminates the questions of justice. As a result issues of structural violence get accepted and legitimized. God's response is, "*When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong, learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow*" (Is. 1:15-18).

When we take serious the radical call to discipleship, we will start praying and responding to the cries of the suffering and the groaning of creation. As we do this we open ourselves up so the Holy Spirit can bring forth transformation, renewal and restoration in our lives.

The cries of human and ecological suffering are both a sign of judgment and hope. They call the Body of Christ to question the structures of power until they seek God for answers and then by His grace step out in faith to bring about the needed solutions.

Scripture clearly teaches that salvation is a result of the grace of God, extended to sinful human beings through Jesus Christ. At the same time the word of God makes it clear that those who have received this grace will desire to pray for and shelter the homeless, feed the hungry and care for the sick and imprisoned. For that reason we see Jesus telling us in Matthew 25:34-46 that the saved are those who are praying and caring for those in need. They are the radical disciples who will not sell out to political power brokers who destroy affordable housing and shut down shelters for the homeless.

The Old Testament tells believers that providing for the poor and homeless is an essential mark of godliness. Micah 6:8 says, "*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*" To "act justly" and "love mercy" means to pray for the homeless and oppressed and step out in faith and provide for them the necessary resources to live. This clearly involves a place to sleep, food to eat, and the direct assistance needed to break the cycle of homelessness.

Jesus made it clear in the story of the Good Samaritan that one can't say they have a sincere love for God and then leave the homeless, hurting, and wounded on the road of life. The scriptures make it absolutely clear that doing justice and mercy for the hurting and homeless is a clear sign that someone has justifying grace and faith at work in their life.

Students of the scriptures, who are Christ's radical disciples, will also see another version of the teaching given in Matthew 25:34-46 in the book of James. In James 2 verse 14 to 18 we read, *"What good is it my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith: I have deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do.'*"

As radical disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must fight those who try to stop us from helping the hurting and homeless. We must fight them in the courts, in our prayer closets, in the public media, in our churches, and anywhere else the tyranny of a few try to tell us how we can't practice our religion as a community of faith. For us to do otherwise would be nothing less than for us to renounce Jesus Christ in word and deed.

There can be no compromise when it comes to helping the hurting and homeless. Jesus, by identifying himself with those in need, made that perfectly clear when he said, *"As often as you have done it to the least of these even so you have done it to me."*

It is faith, which enables us to awaken not only to God's presence but also His eternal promises. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). For that reason I must daily read and abide in the Scriptures. It is faith in Christ that causes me to hear His voice, follow Him, and receive His daily provision. Jesus explains in John 10:27, 28, *"My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."*

Wow, what a promise! *"Therefore, my dear brothers (and sisters), stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"* (I Cor. 15:58).

Remember standing firm involves as I Cor. 15:58 says: 1. Let nothing move you. 2. Always giving yourself to the work of the Lord. 3. Know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

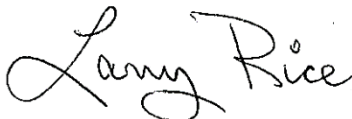
As radical disciples of Jesus Christ we must stand firm, be bold, and courageous because *“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose”* (Rom. 8:28).

By God’s grace you can be a radical disciple and standing firm in earnest prayer, no matter how hopeless the situation may be. Remember you are not alone. God plus one (you when you are in His will) are a majority.

2 Peter 1:3-8 tells us, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a Godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

God has given us what we need to be radical disciples. Now we must stand firm in fervent prayer as we let our light of love shine as we earnestly pray and work to help those in need. In order to do this, we must let the power and love of Jesus Christ flow through us daily. It is then that we will be the radical disciples of Jesus Christ who are effective and productive in the work of the Lord.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry Rice". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Larry Rice