

*The*

*COST*

*and*

*GRACE*

*of*

*DISCIPLESHIP*

A RIDE NATURE  
MINISTRY RESOURCE

AN 8 DAY LOOK AT THE  
REALITY OF DISCIPLESHIP

# **"THE COST AND GRACE OF DISCIPLESHIP"**

AN 8 DAY LOOK AT THE REALITY OF DISCIPLESHIP

PUBLISHED AND PRODUCED BY THE RIDE NATURE  
ORGANIZATION AS A RESOURCE AND TOOL  
FOR ACTION SPORTS FOCUSED DISCIPLESHIP.

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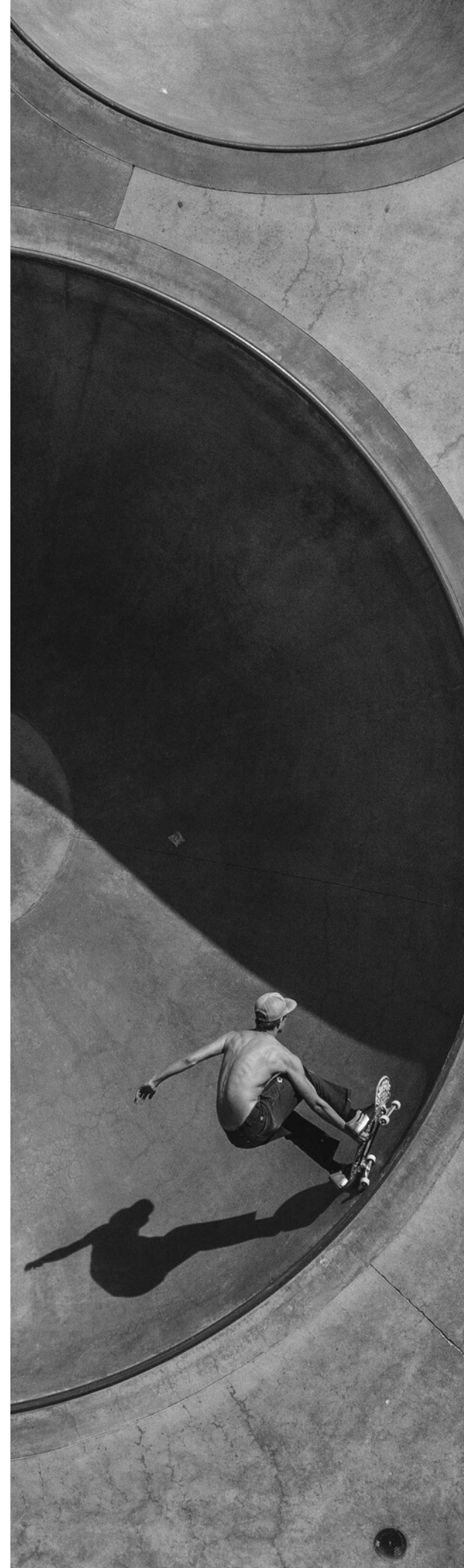
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**THE COST AND GRACE  
OF DISCIPLESHIP**





PICTURED (BOTTOM RIGHT)  
RYLEY AND A MISSION TEAM  
SERVING IN PANAMA

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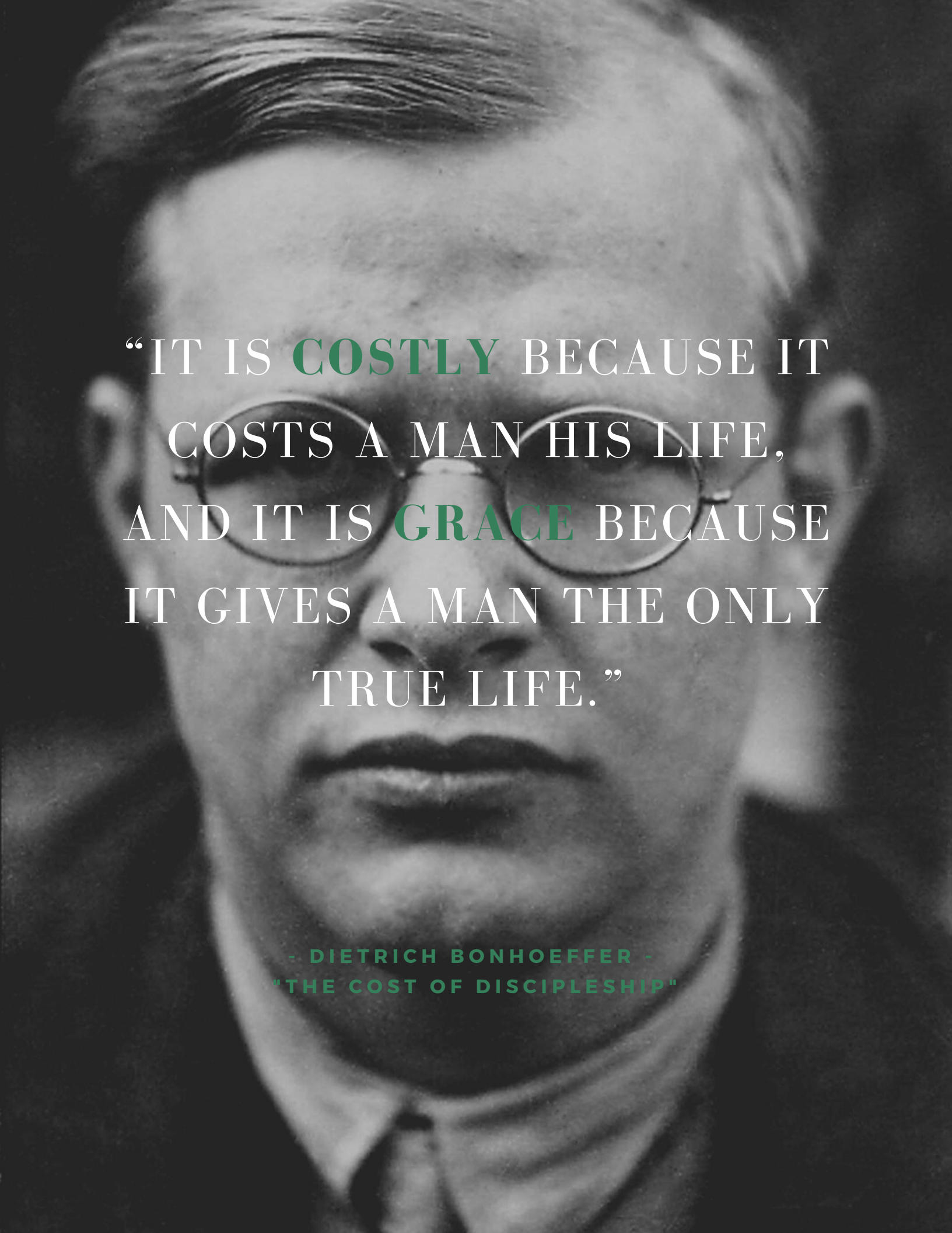
# THE COST AND GRACE...

WRITTEN BY:  
RYLEY HEPPNER

The following is a series of devotionals to help you start your day with a thankful heart, a prayerful soul, and a mind focused on Jesus. Each devotional is focused on and wrestling with the costs of discipleship. We always find it interesting that Jesus puts such hard demands on his followers (take up your cross daily; deny yourself; lose your life) and still so many people in the Gospels get up and follow Him with joy and in extravagance. It seems that in light of who Jesus is and the life that he offers, that even the most difficult demands are no longer seen as costly, but as grace.

**“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”**

**- Matthew 13:44**

A black and white portrait of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a man with short hair and glasses, wearing a suit and tie. The image is the background for the text.

“IT IS **COSTLY** BECAUSE IT  
COSTS A MAN HIS LIFE,  
AND IT IS **GRACE** BECAUSE  
IT GIVES A MAN THE ONLY  
TRUE LIFE.”

- DIETRICH BONHOEFFER -  
"THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP"

# "THE RADICAL DISCIPLE"

"THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND MY SHIELD; IN  
HIM MY HEART TRUSTS, AND I AM HELPED; MY  
HEART EXULTS, AND WITH MY SONG  
I GIVE THANKS TO HIM."  
- PSALMS. 28:7

BIBLE READING - MARK 8:34-38

It seems that in the Christian world we've heard the term "radical" pretty often. Speakers at youth conferences urging students to return to school as radical disciples. Authors telling stories of radical missionaries in the South Pacific. Pastors that try to persuade congregations to become radical for Jesus. It's easy to think, "Why is it necessary to include the word radical? Are there varying degrees of discipleship or Christians? Is it possible to be a moderate disciple?" There is nothing wrong with asking these questions, but lets dive into this scripture text to see what Jesus says.

Notice who Jesus addresses in the beginning of his instruction in Mark 8: "If **ANYONE** wishes to come after me..." The commandments that follow this statement applies to every disciple and every person in the crowd, or any person who is thinking about becoming a disciple of Jesus. The same level of commitment and the same radicalized life is required of every single follower. "If anyone wishes to come after me he must deny himself." (Mark 8.34). Living this idea of a radical life with Jesus begins with self-denial. Jesus doesn't just suggest, but demands the complete denial of self.

Now don't overthink this demand too much. Denial is not a complex subject. It might be a radical thought but it is not complex. I am sure we have all had some experience of denying or being denied. Maybe you were denied by a girl/boy you liked or denied more dessert after dinner from your parents.

Simply, denial is the refusal of something or someone. Perhaps, it is best displayed in the life of Peter, as he refused ever knowing Jesus, saying, "I do not know this man you are talking about."

To deny yourself is to say to your old self, "I do not know this man/this woman you are talking about." It is to refuse every habit, every inclination, every desire, every thought, every dream that is not in agreement with God's will. It is complete surrender.

## Reflection/Thoughts/Questions

- 1) Have you ever thought of the radical demands of Jesus as optional? Can you be a disciple and not be radical?
- 2) Does the idea of complete surrender make you nervous? In what ways?
- 3) Are there some areas in your life that still need some serious denial?

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# "JESUS OVER EVERYTHING"

"WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT YOU? THERE IS NOTHING ON EARTH THAT I DESIRE BESIDES YOU. MY FLESH AND MY HEART MAY FAIL, BUT GOD IS THE STRENGTH OF MY HEART AND MY PORTION FOREVER."  
- PSALM. 73:25, 26

## BIBLE READING - JOHN 12:1-8

When I was in high school wakeboarding was my life. I spent every hour of daylight thinking about it, training for it, practicing, or watching it. I can remember when I first sensed Jesus calling me, I got concerned that my wakeboarding time might suffer and I wasn't sure that was a sacrifice I was willing to make. Eventually the Lord grabbed hold of my heart and I ended up working at a bible camp summer and after summer, 6 days a week with no lakes and no boats, and definitely not enough money to even buy fuel. My old self would have thought this to be a complete tragedy, and yet there was never a summer at camp that I would have traded to be back behind a boat.

Isn't it funny and beautiful how things of this world lose their value in light of Jesus? On the one hand, He makes demands of us and those demands are often hard; "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." (Mark 8.34) On the other hand, when we truly encounter Him those demands just begin to happen. We start making extravagant sacrifices without even thinking about it because He is just that worthy.

In John 12 Jesus and his disciples are having dinner at Lazarus' house. As they are dining Mary takes a jar of expensive perfume and pours it all over the feet of Jesus. Without getting in to the purpose of the pouring, just think about the cost of that perfume, Judas rightfully wonders why it was not sold instead of poured out; after all it was a \$20,000 bottle of perfume!

The money could have been used to clothe people, feed people or send Mary on an all-inclusive vacation, but instead it was dumped out! According to the world's economy it was a huge waste. However, in the eyes of Mary who saw Jesus for all He was, it was the only use of the perfume that made sense and it was the least she could do.

Jesus is so good, so glorious, so strong and beautiful, and so loving toward us that in His presence everything else loses its value. Suddenly everything of this world, including perfume and wakeboarding, only have value in as much as it can be used to make Jesus look great. He indeed makes hard demands, but when we encounter Him, those demands become the only logical response.

### Reflection/Thoughts/Questions

- 1) When was the last time you sought the Lord and enjoyed His presence?
- 2) Are there things in your life or parts of your life that you refuse to let go of?
- 3) Are there sacrifices you have made for Him that the world thinks are odd or crazy?

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# "TAKING UP CROSSES"

"FOR AS HIGH AS THE HEAVENS ARE ABOVE THE EARTH, SO GREAT IS HIS STEADFAST LOVE TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM; AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST, SO FAR DOES HE REMOVE OUR TRANSGRESSIONS FROM US."  
- PSALM 103.11, 12

READING - MARK 8:34; JOHN 15:18-26

The New Testament Scholar, N.T. Wright once wrote of following Jesus, "[He] is not leading us on a pleasant afternoon hike, but on a walk into danger and risk. Or did we suppose that the kingdom of God would mean merely a few minor adjustments in our ordinary lives?"

I don't know about you but when I first started following Jesus I absolutely assumed Christianity would be merely a few minor adjustments, and I absolutely expected that pleasant afternoon hike. I thought Jesus would be a great addition to my life, like a sweet new piece of furniture that made me even more comfortable than I already is. It was only time and Scripture that eventually showed me that this was the complete opposite of what Jesus had actually called me to and promised; that actually the call was for all of me and the promise was suffering.

In Mark 8.34 Jesus tell his disciples and potential disciples that if they want to follow him they must deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow. I will readily admit that I sometimes struggle to understand the words, 'take up your cross,' but I think that's only because I haven't seen any crucifixions. I suspect that when the crowds around Jesus first heard him make this demand that they had a good idea of what he meant. Most people living in 1st Century Rome would have seen enough crucifixions to know that when someone took up his cross he was as good as gone. He was on a one-way journey into suffering, and no matter how much pain and difficulty he might have to face, he was never coming back.

For his first listeners, Jesus' demand then was probably a pretty clear way of saying that to follow Him was to go all-in with no option of turning aside, even in the likely event of excruciating suffering.

The call to take up our cross is the call to get onto a one-way journey, with one destination and one objective in mind; to be all-in. It's to understand and embrace the fact that as long as we unite ourselves with the truth that is in opposition to the world, we will be in opposition to the world; that as long as we follow the Savior who was rejected by the world, we can expect the same rejection. Without a doubt, following Jesus is the most glorious life possible, but by no means the safest.

## Reflection/Thoughts/Questions

- 1) Did you expect following Jesus would equal safety, security and a few minor adjustments?
- 2) Why would Jesus allow me to suffer for being a Christian?
- 3) What it does it mean/look like to be "all-in"?

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# "THE GIFT OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING"

"FOR THE LORD GOD IS A SUN AND SHIELD; THE LORD BESTOWS FAVOR AND HONOR. NO GOOD THING DOES HE WITHHOLD FROM THOSE WHO WALK UPRIGHTLY."  
- PSALM 84:11

READING - PHILIPPIANS 1:21-30

It's one thing to know that suffering is a part of the Christian life and so to be expectant of it; its quite another to actually rejoice in the midst of it. But that is exactly what you see in the Bible over and over again, disciples being beaten and imprisoned and rejoicing. And all I can ever think to ask is how? How can they possibly be rejoicing in such agony? How do they suffer so well?

When the apostle Paul writes his letter to the Philippians, he is probably in prison in Rome and towards the end of his life, which means then he has already endured at least two other Roman imprisonments along with multiple floggings, lashings, stoning's, and shipwrecks. And yet as he writes the letter he keeps speaking of joy and rejoicing, as if he couldn't be more content. In chapter one he gives a brief glimpse as to why this is, as he writes, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel..." (Phil 1.12).

Whatever Paul did or didn't understand about his suffering he at least knew this, that it had a divine purpose. He knew he wasn't suffering randomly or meaninglessly but that God was allowing his suffering and accomplishing things through it; God was using his imprisonment for the greater progress of the Gospel.

Paul saw his imprisonment as an opportunity to preach the Gospel, to prisoners and guards, and so he did just that. Then he watched as the Gospel went forward through his preaching; something that would not have happened had he not gotten arrested and put in prison.

Since Paul's joy was ultimately tied to God's glory, his imprisonment became a source of joy. In other words, his suffering led to the progress of the Gospel and that led to his increasing joy.

This situation isn't unique to Paul. The Bible says that God is at work in the suffering of all of his people, and that all of our greatest joys will be found in Him being glorified. If even in our suffering then God is at work in bringing glory to himself, than even our suffering is cause for joy. We too can persevere and even rejoice knowing that in our circumstances God is creating a new opportunity for His greater glory and our greater joy.

## Reflection/Thoughts/Questions

- 1) Are you in the midst of any pain right now that just seems meaningless?
- 2) How would you suffer differently if you believed God had allowed it for a purpose?
- 3) How can your present pain or suffering be opportunity for you to bring God glory?

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# "FOLLOWERS"

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT.  
HE MAKES ME LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES.  
HE LEADS ME BESIDE STILL WATERS."  
- PSALM 23.1, 2

READING - MARK 8:34//MATTHEW 4:18-22

In the halls of my high school there was a clear hierarchy where leaders and trendsetters reigned and followers were stuffed in lockers. The goal was to avoid the follower label at all costs, even though that's what most of us were. As I grew up and social media blew up, the same hierarchy appeared, where the highest number of digital followers became the ultimate sign of power. Once again I saw everyone doing everything they could to attract followers and achieve leader status. If society has taught me anything, it is that to be a follower is a bad thing. I need to be a leader. Interestingly, that is nearly opposite of what Jesus says.

In Mark 8.34, Jesus tells those gathered around him that if anyone of them wants to be his disciples they must deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him. He says in not so many words, "these are the basics of discipleship, that you would let go of your life, entrust it to me at all costs and then get behind me and follow." Isn't it interesting how simple that command is? No call to greatness; no demand to lead thousands of people into salvation; no big legalistic burdens, just the words follow me; just the call to get behind Jesus and stay there; to fix your eyes on Him, and to go where he goes, learn to do what he does and to listen to what he says.

Now don't misunderstand and think even for a minute that Jesus doesn't also want us to be leaders. There are millions of lost, broken and dying people who need Christians to love them and lead them well. Christian leaders are needed everywhere: on the playgrounds, in hallways, in churches, in governments, in friend groups and at skate parks.

But we can only lead in as much as we are following, since our ability and reason to lead comes directly from that following relationship. In other words, first we follow.

I grew up trying to avoid being a follower. I've since realized that to be a Christian is to become the biggest follower the world has ever seen. It's actually to follow so closely behind Jesus that the dust from his heals ends up all over our face.

## Reflection/Thoughts/Questions

- 1) Everyone follows someone or something? Who or what other than Jesus do you sometimes end up following
- 2) What does it mean or look like to follow Jesus?
- 3) The call is simple: "follow me." Do you ever exhaust yourself by complicating that call?

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# "THE COST TO FOLLOW"

"YOU ARE MY GOD, AND I WILL GIVE THANKS TO YOU; YOU ARE MY GOD; I WILL EXTOL YOU. OH GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD; FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER!"  
- PSALM 118.28, 29

## READING - MARK 10:23-31

I can still remember my first big purchase. I worked and saved all summer. Eventually I drove with my family to the big city. I walked into the board shop with \$700 in my wallet, and I bought a brand new wakeboard. That was a lot of money but I didn't even question the price. In fact the price probably could have been higher and I still would have paid it. I had counted the costs and for me that wakeboard was worth all the money I had. Isn't it interesting what we will pay big money for and often not even question the price; watches, cars, pieces of art and wakeboards. Whether we think of something as too expensive or not all comes down to the value of what we are getting; is it worth it?

When Jesus approaches the first disciples and says, "follow me," (Mt 4.19) he is asking a huge price. He is calling them to leave their homes, their families, their friends, and even their jobs and to literally follow him out of town. It seems ridiculous and yet without question they all pay it and go. At one point in Jesus' ministry, Peter recalls that price, saying to Jesus, "Behold we have left everything and followed you." (Mk 10.28) And when Jesus later asks him if he would like to pack up and go home, Peter responds, "Lord to whom shall go? You have words of eternal life." (John 6.68) He is still happy with his decision, because Jesus is worth it. Where else is Peter going to find forgiveness from sin and peace with God and eternal life? Where else is he going to be able to walk with His creator? For Peter and the other ten, Jesus is worth everything and more.

Two thousand years later the call and the price have not changed. Jesus is still calling us to follow him, and the price is still everything.

Following Jesus is still costly, and yet the price is not even a question when we realize whom we are following. When we see that for the price of our lives we get to follow the gracious, kind and powerful King Jesus and that in Him we find freedom and new and eternal life, then suddenly the price isn't even a price anymore. Suddenly we start saying with Peter, "where else am I going to go? You have words of eternal life and you are the Holy one of God."

### Reflection/Thoughts/Questions

- 1) When you think about the costs of following Jesus, do you think about the fact that Jesus already paid the ultimate price for you?
- 2) What do you still need to surrender to be able to say with Peter, "Behold, I have left everything to follow you?"
- 3) If you won't pay the price to follow Jesus, to whom are you going to go?

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# "GO AND DO"

"THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF, THE  
WORLD AND THOSE WHO DWELL THEREIN, FOR HE HAS FOUNDED  
IT UPON THE SEAS AND ESTABLISHED IT UPON THE RIVERS."  
- PSALM 24:1, 2

## READING - MATTHEW 28:16-20

There is a huge difference between a suggestion and a command. If your mom suggests that you should not swim right after you eat, you can take her advice or leave it. The decision is left completely up to you without any real consequence other than some potential stomach cramps. However, if the lifeguard commands that you don't dive in the shallow end, there is only one option, to not dive in the shallow end.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus is about to ascend into heaven, but before he goes he gives one last overarching command to his disciples. Just in case they are confused about what they should be doing after he goes, he gives them this simple but consuming command, "Go therefore and make disciples..." In other words, "as you go now, wherever you go, always be making disciples." He speaks these words not as good advice or a recommendation but as a final command.

I will be the first to admit that making disciples is hard; it's uncomfortable and it's usually not convenient. It means getting real with people; embracing their messiness; journeying with them and being intentional about spiritual things. It means dying to self for the sake of others. It takes work and it takes vulnerability, but I am convinced that if it is a command of Jesus then it is also the route to a fuller life. It is what we've been created for; it's how God is most glorified and it's a source of increasing joy; And to treat it as a suggestion is to not only miss out on that new life but it is also to find ourselves living in disobedience and straying from what it is to be a Christian.

The reality is this: that to put your faith in Jesus means to declare Him as God and as King and to entrust your entire life to Him. It is to come under his authority and therefore to come under every command. And to then shrink in fear at the thought of making disciples is to refuse to be completely surrendered and obedient.

The Christian life is a difficult and dangerous path, but if we walk it then we walk in every aspect of it, knowing that every aspect is for our good and his glory.

### Reflection/Thoughts/Questions

- 1) Are there other commands of Jesus that you treat as suggestions?
- 2) How does disciple-making show up in your life?
- 3) Do you ever struggle to find purpose? Have you ever considered Mt 29:19 to be your purpose?

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# "GOING AND DOING"

"IT IS GOOD TO GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, TO SING PRAISES TO YOUR NAME, O MOST HIGH; TO DECLARE YOUR STEADFAST LOVE IN THE MORNING, AND YOUR FAITHFULNESS BY NIGHT."  
- PSALM 92:1,2

## READING - MATTHEW 9:27-31

The command in Mt 28.19, to make disciples, is a huge one. It requires our whole life to become about Jesus and his people, and it is enough to scare us away. However the beauty of every command of Jesus is that as we get closer to Him and His heart, His commands start to flow naturally. As we encounter Him and His magnificent glory we find ourselves wanting to walk in obedience.

This is exactly what you find in the New Testament: people experiencing Jesus and then responding in obedience to commands that he hasn't even spoken to them. In Matthew chapter nine, Jesus comes upon two blind men crying out for healing. He asks them if they believe, if He is capable of healing them, and they answer yes. Immediately Jesus touches their eyes and they receive sight. He then sternly warns them not to tell anyone about what happened to them but they cant help it. Matthew writes "they went out and spread the news about Him throughout all the land." (Mt 9.31)

I use to avoid telling people about Jesus at any cost. I was terrified of what people would think and what they would say. I didn't want to preach the Gospel or make disciples; I wanted to hide underground. In stark contrast to that, these men even after being commanded not to tell people about Jesus go about preaching Him everywhere. They can't even contain it. They are like children trying to sleep the night before a family vacation; it's just not going to happen. So, what is the difference between my high school self and these men? The difference is that I didn't know Jesus other than what my pastor told me about him. I had no growing relationship or experience of his presence.

However, these men encountered Jesus for themselves. They caught a true glimpse of Him and that was enough to completely transform their lives.

To the degree that following Jesus seems too costly, I suspect we are probably failing to experience or understand whom it is we are being called to follow, because if the New Testament shows us anything its that even one simple encounter with Him is enough to make a Samaritan abandon her water pot; a taxman leave his booth; a woman pour out her perfume and two former blind men turn into missionaries.

### Reflection/Thoughts/Questions

- 1) Is there affection for Jesus in you? Is there a desire to proclaim Him from the rooftops?
- 2) Is following Jesus a burden or a joy?
- 3) When was the last time you worshipped Him; sought Him; conversed with Him?

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# "NEXT STEPS"

CONGRATULATIONS, YOU MADE IT TO THE END...  
SO NOW WHAT?

We pray that your time spent in these devotionals over the past number of days, weeks, or months has been challenging, encouraging and strengthening to your relationship with God.

We hope it has become a lot clearer to you than perhaps it was before reading through this series, that following Jesus really is costly, it does require you to be all-in, and yet in light of the goodness of the one you are following and the hope He has stored up for you in heaven, it is grace.

It is a privilege and a gift to be able to lose everything to follow Jesus. It is actually in paying the costs and surrendering our lives to his commands that we find the only life worth living.

**As Jesus himself tells us "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it,  
but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it."**

- Mark 8:35

Our hope and prayer is that you will continue to be captivated by the love of God and eager to live out your life as a radical, true self-denying, cross caring, disciple making, Jesus following disciple.

**"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,  
according to his power that is at work within us,  
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,  
forever and ever. Amen."**

- Ephesians 3:20-21

- The Ride Nature Team