# River of Life Christian Centre, Felixstowe

**Bible School 2019**

Studies in Discipleship

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# Module 2: RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP—the call to FORSAKE EVERYTHING TO follow christ

* Discipleship is a lifetime commitment to follow Christ, not the church
* Believers are called to LEAVE EVERYTHING to follow Christ
* The 12 Apostles left everything to follow Christ
* The apostle Paul suffered the loss of all things to follow Christ
* A disciple’s lifestyle only makes sense in the light of eternity
* Believers are called to have the MIND OF CHRIST

# Key Verses

*Mt 4:18-22: “As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.  (19)  "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."  (20)  At once they left their nets and followed him.  (21)  Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, (22) and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

1. When Jesus called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew to follow him, he was not taking them for a stroll. He was a rabbi calling for their radical commitment to be his disciples. The implications were obvious—*leave what you are doing!* There was no negotiation, just a very high expectation.
2. Jesus had a different task for them to fulfil: *“I will send you out to fish for people”.* They were being called to join Jesus’ team and they knew it. Matthew lets us know that their obedience was immediate and radical: *“At once they left their nets and followed him”.*
3. Accompanied by Simon Peter and Andrew, Jesus called two other brothers, James and John. They were working with their father, Zebedee, but immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Jesus. *Peter and Andrew’s first success as fishers of men, or evangelists was with the two sons of Zebedee.*

It is hard for many to relate to the audacity and implications of such a radical call to discipleship. Did Jesus really call the disciples to abandon their former lifestyle? If so, was there a transition period? Did the disciples really abandon everything to follow Christ?

Whether we like it or not, Jesus really expected his early disciples to make a radical break with their former lives. The disciples not only understood this to be true—they acted upon it. Hear the words of Simon Peter: *“We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” (Mt 19:27).* Peter was speaking on behalf of all the disciples—they had all left everything to follow Jesus! Jesus’ response to Simon Peter shows that the practice of total abandon included all the 12 apostlesm but also other disciples:

*Mt 19:28-29 Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.  (29)  And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.*

The 12 apostles were promised a place of honour in the New World in testimony of their faithfulness to Christ. But notice, Jesus also refers to other nameless disciples who have left *“houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for the sake or cause of Christ.* Clearly radical discipleship was not an uncommon practice. These radical disciples are promised an amazing return on their investment in this life, together with eternal life. Mark adds that such blessings will come *“with persecutions” (Mk 10:30b),* In other words—radical discipleship will make the disciples a target for persecution.

On that note, Jesus promised his disciples that they would be his *martyrs* in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

In fairness to the gospel record, there are reasons to presume that some of the disciples may not have forfeited their business ownership when they came to Christ. Peter for example, still had access to a boat and nets even after the death and resurrection of Jesus (Jn 21:3). However, the disciples no longer devoted themselves to their former lifestyles—they were committed disciples of Christ!

There are many lessons that we can learn from the radical obedience of the early disciples:

1. A commitment to follow Christ takes precedence over any other responsibility we have accepted. It takes precedence over any and every relationship we had before Christ’s call: *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.  (27)  And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Lk 14:26-27).* Let these words sink into your soul so that you can realize just how demanding is the call to follow Christ.
2. A true disciple of Christ is no longer defined by their profession or job—they are defined by their radical obedience to Christ. Eugene Petersen called this type of discipleship *a long obedience in the same direction.*
3. The response to the call of Christ should be immediate. That was the experience of Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John and also Matthew, the gospel writer Mt 9:9. Matthew remembers how he was sitting at his tax booth when Jesus called him and he left his post to follow Jesus. That night he hosted a celebratory meal with Jesus, his disciples and his friends. The indignant Pharisees were there too, wanting to know why Jesus ate with tax-collectors and sinners (Mt.9:11).
4. The concept that a tax-collector could be transformed into a devout disciple was totally beyond the frame of reference of the Pharisees. Jesus defended himself from their criticism with the now famous words: *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.  (13)  But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mat 9:12-13).*
5. Sinners called by Christ will not stay sinners—they are called to be saints: The apostle Paul said: *“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men (10) nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.  (11)  And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1Co 6:9-11).*

# The Apostle Paul Suffered the Loss of All Things to Follow Christ (Php 3:7-8).

*Php 3:3-11 “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— (4) though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: (5) circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; (6) as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.  (7)  But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.  (8)  What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,* ***for whose sake I have lost all things.*** *I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.  (10)  I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (11) and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

As we consider the implications of radical discipleship, Paul’s life is a great challenge. His conversion to Christ cost him everything: *“for whose sake I have lost all things” (Php 3:8b).* Please note that Paul had no regrets—he received a *new set of values* when he came to Christ. He was no longer enamoured with his former achievements that had been the core of his self-identity and self-worth. *“I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ . . .” (Php 3:8c).*

As you reflect upon Paul’s testimony ask yourself:

1. If following Christ has not cost me anything, am I a truly his disciple
2. What (if anything) did I lose when I became a disciple of Christ?
3. What has been my attitude to what I lost when I decided to follow Christ?

Many gospel preachers in Africa preach the benefits of coming to Christ, but never mention the high cost of following Christ. *Come to Christ and prosper* is the shallow and superficial message they bring. This bears no resemblance to the demand of Jesus recorded in Luke’s gospel: *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23).* The message of the cross has been written out of the script of so many so-called preachers of the gospel.

Summarizing his life after coming to Christ, Paul told the Galatians: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).* After his conversion he resolved: *“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14).*

Radical discipleship is a challenge to many believers. Like some of those whom Jesus called in the gospels, they want to follow Christ, but without sacrificing their personal agendas:

*Luke 9:57-62:  As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."  (58)  Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."  (59)  He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."  (60)  Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."  (61)  Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."  (62)  Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

When it comes to embracing radical discipleship, Jesus’ challenge to the *Rich Young Ruler* has to top the charts:

*Mark 10:17-27: As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"  (18)  "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.  (19)  You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.'"  (20)  "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."  (21)  Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."  (22)  At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.  (23)  Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"  (24)  The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!  (25)  It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."  (26)  The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"  (27)  Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*

There are so many lessons in this short story:

1. The young man was aware of his spiritual poverty— *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 17)*
2. Jesus does not care for flattery— *“Why do you call me good?” (v.18).*
3. Jesus treated the young man with respect, as the adult he was: *“You know the commandments . . .” (v.19).* Jesus deliberately examined the young man on the social commandments: *“murder, adultery, stealing, lying, cheating, and a lack of respect for his parents.* It is all too easy to pretend to love God, while abusing others who are made in the image of God.
4. The young man was clearly very sincere *“all these I have kept since I was a boy” (v.20)*
5. Jesus loved the young man and his responses. In love Jesus put his finger on the young man’s problem—*the lack of a social conscience*: *“one thing you lack, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (v.21).* Matthew remembers that Jesus condensed the entire Law of God into 2 commands: *a) “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'  (38)  This is the first and greatest commandment.  (39)  And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'  (40)  All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments* (*Mt 22:37-40).* The young man was lacking in the area of the second great commandment.
6. The young man was unwilling to risk everything to follow Christ—*his face fell—he went away sad, because he had great wealth (v.22)*
7. Jesus was disappointed with the young man’s response but used the moment to warn his disciples*— "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God” v.23)*
8. The disciples were shocked! Jesus repeated his statement, using an impossible illustration (*hyperbole*) to underline the difficulties of the rich— *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (v.25).*
9. The disciples were even more amazed, probably taking Jesus’ statement literally. They had thought riches and prosperity were a sign of God’s favour. Now if the rich would find it difficult to enter the kingdom of God—*who could be saved?* (v.26)
10. Jesus used their confusion and conclusion to teach them—*salvation is humanly impossible, but with God—all things are possible! (v.27).*

Reflecting on the story of the *Rich Young Ruler*, takes me back to the first sermon I ever preached, it was in a Methodist Chapel in Yorkshire. My text was Mt 6:19-20: *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.  (20)  But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal”.*

At 18 years of age I preached with all my heart against the folly of storing treasures on earth, and urged the congregation to live their lives in the light of eternity. At the end of the service, one of the members gave me a lift to the bus stop. He asked me politely if I thought it was a sin to be rich. I replied, it is not necessarily a sin, but riches can be a problem to your spiritual progress. As he left me at the bus stop, I noticed that he was driving a brand-new car. As I mulled over my message, I concluded that perhaps God had used my innocence and enthusiasm to bring a worthwhile challenge to this believer.

Riches are not a problem in themselves. In fact if you have done any travelling, you will realize that wealth is a very relative commodity.

*The story is told of the rich man who received special permission from God to take a suitcase full of his most precious possessions with him to heaven. Just before his death, he filled it with gold bars. When he arrived at heaven’s gates, Peter met him and asked about the suitcase. The man explained he had special permission to bring it along. Puzzled, Peter checked his document, and concluded it was all in order and let the man pass with his suitcase. However, it needed to be inspected by one of the angels on duty. Two minutes later Peter received a telephone call asking him why the man had brought a suitcase full of paving stones to heaven! In heaven the streets are paved with gold!*

As missionaries we have often remarked that we live a strange reality—on the mission field we are the *RICH* missionaries, butwhen we are in Canada, we are the *POOR* missionaries. One study on poverty suggested that if you wake up in the morning with a choice of what to wear *(more than 1 set of clothes)*, and also a choice of what to eat *(more than 1 item on the menu)*, you belong to the richest 10% of the world’s population!

Jesus realized that the young man’s riches were his major problem— *“one thing you lack”.* Jesus promised him *treasure in heaven,* but that was a bridge too far for the youth. *He went away with his riches, to a sorrow-filled life!* The lesson of the story is that to truly follow Christ, we need a radical commitment! Like Paul, we need to consider *all our gains as losses* in order to gain Christ! That does not mean that we will be paupers, but it does mean that God will control our budgets! We will still have the fun of making and spending money—only this time our treasures will be invested in heaven!

If Jesus had been a modern preacher, he would have told the young man that if he sold everything and gave it to the poor today, God would repay him a hundredfold tomorrow.

One such Zambian prophet arrived in Malawi and convinced many that God had sent him to solve their financial problems. If they would only bring a sacrificial offering, within 24 hours they would receive a hundredfold. People left the building to withdraw cash from the bank and deposit it at the prophet’s feet. Of course it did not work, the people were plundered and the prophet made off with his loot. Thankfully he was arrested at the border with sacks full of cash but the damage was done. It was impossible for the foolish believers to retrieve their cash.

The only promise that Jesus made to the rich young man was eternal life and *treasure in heaven.* That was not enough for the youth to accept. He kept his riches, left Jesus, and went away sorrowful!

# A DISCIPLE’S LIFEstyle ONLY MAKES SENSE IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY

*“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1Co 15:19).*

We could change this slightly and say:  *A disciple’s lifestyle does not make sense if there is no life after death!*

On one level, the problem of the rich young man is everyone’s problem. We want to have our cake and eat it! We want the best of both worlds—this present world, and the world to come. Some believers actually say that if there should be no life after death, if the blessed hope is only a blessed myth, it does not really change anything—*they have still had the best life.* That was certainly not Paul’s perspective!

Paul had suffered the loss of all things to follow Christ. He had considered all his gains as losses, for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus. The Corinthian church was in a state of confusion about the truth of the resurrection. Some believed there was no such thing. Paul’s response was swift:

*1Co 15:1-4 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.  (2)  By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.  (3)  For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

The truth of the resurrection is the cornerstone of a believer’s lifestyle.This life is only a fragment of the life to come, but it is *this fragment of time* that will determine our eternal reward or punishment. When we die the books will be opened and we will be judged according to what we have done and not done. On that day, no one will regret their investments in heaven, but many will weep and gnash their teeth when they realize what a wasted life they lived! *“Only one life to live—it will soon be past; Only what’s done for Jesus will last!”*

The conversion of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9), shows how a believer’s worldview is transformed when he or she comes to Christ.

*Luke 19:8-10 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."  (9)  Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.  (10)  For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Before meeting with Jesus, Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and wealthy, and spiritually lost. After meeting with Jesus, he was still a chief tax collector, still wealthy, but a true son of Abraham! However, a seismic change had happened in the centre of his soul. He no longer considered his wealth his own—he saw it as a chance to serve the poor. He also promised to repay 4 times the amount of any funds he might have swindled! Jesus’ response is categoric: *Today salvation has come to this house!*

Anyone who comes to Christ and does not experience a transformed worldview has not truly met Jesus. We are not talking about purchasing salvation by good works, we are talking about stepping out of our egotistical existence into the kingdom of God. In the kingdom our values are different, even if our net worth remains the same! Kingdom people have kingdom budgets, and the Holy Spirit is the Minister of the Exchequer!

# BELIEVERS ARE CALLED TO HAVE AND DISPLAY THE MIND OF CHRIST

*Php 2:5-13 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: (6) Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; (7) rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.  (8)  And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!  (9)  Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.  (12)  Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, (13) for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.*

Our closing consideration on the call to forsake everything to follow Christ, is based on Christ’s own example of forsaking everything to please God. Paul told the Romans *“for even Christ did not please himself” Ro 15:3a).* He told his disciples: *“My food, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work . . . For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” “(Jn 4:34; 6:38).*

1. Christ is Paul’s supreme example of selfless living.
2. He surrendered everything to redeem us.
3. Christ’s obedience earned him the moral authority to command the unswerving allegiance of his disciples.
4. Christ was faithful unto death, and he demands the same of his brethren.
5. Following Christ requires the type of paradigm shift that is impossible without receiving the mind of Christ.
6. Naturally we are oriented towards our *rights—*Christ was oriented toward his responsibilities.

Consider, then, the example of Christ, as a model for your own discipleship, built upon the concept of following Christ, and forsaking all:

1. He refused to exploit his advantages to protect or advance himself—*"* *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage (Php 2:6).*
2. He lowered himself: *“he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Php2:7)*
3. He humbled himself: “*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!” (Php 2:8).*

If Christ did not live to please himself, what possible justification could a disciple possibly have to live a self-centred life? A true disciple of Christ is no longer in charge of his own life. He is no longer in charge of his own ambitions. His overarching plan is to follow Christ, and he has surrendered all of his rights to God.

One of the greatest signs of superficial discipleship in the church, is the present state of the unreached and least-engaged peoples of the world. With a world population of about 7.5 billion people, 3 billion people have no viable access to the gospel. The Joshua Project ([www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net)) shows that just in Africa, there are over 350 million people with no access to the gospel. How is that possible, when 2,000 years ago, Jesus sent his disciples into all the world to preach the gospel? People seem to have forgotten the words of Jesus to go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone.

If we are going to reach the world for Christ, it will call for a resurgence of radical discipleship, such as they type that was seen in the early church. When it comes to missions, the tragic story of the church is that we have mobilized the minority and immobilized the majority. We have sent out the hundreds, and disempowered the millions. You need to know that your *forsaking of everythin*g is nothing less than accepting the call to be his disciple in *Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).*

The major question is whether you believe that Christ is worthy of your total commitment? Some years ago, Ralph Winter revolutionized missional thinking. He took the statistics of true believers in terms of the world population, and stood them on their head. True disciples of Christ were seen to be about 10% of the global population. Instead of leaving it there as many others had done, he divided the world’s unreached by the number of disciples. The result was astounding—*if every believer would win 9 people to Christ*, the whole world would be saved! The question for Christ’s disciples, today is: *“When did you last win someone to Christ?” When will you surrender your all to follow Christ and to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations?”*

# ALL TO JESUS I SURRENDER

All to Jesus I surrender,

All to Him I freely give;

I will ever love and trust Him,

In His presence daily live.

I surrender all,

I surrender all.

All to Thee, my blessed Saviour,

I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender,

Humbly at His feet I bow,

Worldly pleasures all forsaken;

Take me, Jesus, take me now.

All to Jesus I surrender,

Make me, Saviour, wholly Thine;

Let me feel Thy Holy Spirit,

Truly know that Thou art mine.

All to Jesus I surrender,

Lord, I give myself to Thee;

Fill me with Thy love and power,

Let Thy blessing fall on me.

All to Jesus I surrender,

Now I feel the sacred flame.

Oh, the joy of full salvation!

Glory, glory to His name

Songwriters: Winfield S. Weeden / Judson W. Van DeVenter