

Dirty Places

Dear Friends,

What we see in the natural realm is what is also seen in the spiritual world. This is because both are woven together. In John 12:24 Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain”.

The fact is, it is hard being a seed in the ground. It is lonely there and dark. Yet Jesus said unless we like seeds are not buried in what seems like dirty places, we can't produce much fruit or grain.

When a love one dies, or a person gets a divorce, or ends up homeless, they naturally find themselves alone, and buried in dirty lonely places.

The challenge is how we, like seeds, germinate in those lonely dirty places. When we find ourselves like seeds buried in dirty places we have a tendency to rush for something, anything to fill the brokenness and loneliness. When we do this we miss what God desires to do in our lives.

We may at times feel lost in the loneliness of the dirty places. When that happens we must remember we are not alone. Christ is with us and He has also sent the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and the angels, to directly assist us as they convert those dirty places into good nourishing soil.

In the midst of the dirty places, we must take seriously our angelic inheritance described in verses like Psalm 91:9-12 where it says, “If you make the Most High your dwelling - even the Lord, who is my refuge -then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

It is faith in the fact God will protect us which turns the lonely dirty places into nurturing soil.

Elisabeth Elliot, who has experienced the death of two husbands, wrote “if the loneliness of the dirty places can be a wilderness, it can also be a pathway to God.”

Paul Tillich writes in his work *The Eternal Now*, “Being alive means being in a body—a body separated from all other bodies. And being separated means being alone. This is true of every creature, and it is even more true of man than of any other creature. He is not only alone; he also knows that he is alone. Neither can he escape it. It is his destiny to be alone and to be aware of it. Not even God can take this destiny away from him.”

Such a statement can make us feel totally hopeless in the midst of the lonely dirty places unless we can see that we are not truly alone. The one who has created all that we see, hear, smell, taste, or touch around us is the same one who continues to declare, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

When Elizabeth Elliot stated that loneliness “can be a pathway to God” she was challenging us to transform loneliness into solitude with God. Elliot goes on to explain that because of the sin that entered the world, “loneliness now means pain. The other aspect of being alone is solitude which need not mean pain. It may mean glory. Loneliness is a wilderness, but through receiving it as a gift, accepting it from the hand of God, and offering it

back to Him with thanksgiving, it may become a pathway to holiness, to glory and to God Himself”.

“In solitude Isaiah saw the Lord, and the revelation was more than he could bear. ‘What a wretched state I am in! I am Lost!’ (Isaiah 6:5) So, it is with all who enter into real solitude. The layers of acquired knowledge, conditioned behavior, and self-confidence are sloughed off. The vision of the self without all its accustomed accretions is shocking. Forced with the truth of the unknown self, so disquieting in its strangeness, Isaiah knew where to turn. Standing in the uncreated Light he knew himself to be naked, guilty, and powerless. There was nothing for him to do but to cast himself on God’s mercy. And mercy met him, not with sympathy but with cleansing fire.”

Following the advice given by Elizabeth Elliot turns the lonely dirty places we find ourselves buried in, into nourishing soil. This involves surrendering those dirty places to God.

As we surrender to God and ask Him to use us in these dirty places a light we have never seen before will begin to shine. It will provide us with a peace that passes all understanding. This peace changes loneliness into solitude with God. This allows us like seeds or grains of wheat to burst through the soil and begin to sprout into the sunlight of God’s presence.

Jacob found himself in a lonely dirty place. He was homeless. Life appeared, at that moment, like a disaster. The word “disaster” is made up of “dis” which means separation and “aster” which means star.

When we are facing a disaster, in a dirty place, it is easy for us to feel totally alone. We feel separated from the stars, others and even God Himself.

In Genesis 28:12-15, God assured Jacob that he was not alone, nor was he separated from the stars. In fact, He gave Jacob “a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” (Verse 13) God goes on and assures Jacob that He is with him in verses 14, 15.

When I am going through hard times, I must ask myself, “is my heart and mind open to the extent that God could place a dream within me in the midst of those lonely dirty places? Do I recognize His voice when He speaks to me?”

The phrase “the voice of the Lord” is used seven times in Psalm 29:3-9. In John 10:27, 28 Jesus says, “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.”

Can you hear the voice of Jesus to the extent you are not lost in your present dirty place? Can you let God use that lonely dirty place as a pathway back to Him? Jacob did as he took the stone that he had used for a pillow and set up a pillar of worship before the Lord. Then he declared, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it” (Verse 16).

Jacob went forth from that dirty place and allowed the dream to burn in his heart. He hung on to the words of the Lord when He declared, “I am with you and watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”(Gen. 28:15)

For twenty years Jacob hung on to this promise and kept working for his uncle Laban. He trusted the promise of God and let the dream burn in his heart.

Moving from the loneliness of the dirty place to the solitude of nourishing soil, involves the realization that God is with us.

As loneliness tore at my heart during a very difficult period in my life, I found myself crying out to God in earnest prayer. Then later during the evening prayer meeting, as I joined others in praising God, the Holy Spirit moved into my life in such a dynamic way that I knew I had experienced a visitation from on high.

The powerful presence of the Almighty is able to turn that dirty place into nourishing soil. When we start seeing how God is using us in even the dark lonely places we are able to rejoice like the psalmist did in Psalm 68: 4, 5 where he declares, “Sing to God, sing praises to His name. Extol Him who rides on the clouds—His name is the Lord—and rejoice before Him. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (that includes widowers also) “is God in His holy dwelling.”

Psalm 68 goes on and declares, “God sets the lonely in families, He leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.”

The Almighty One, our Emanuel gives each of us a choice. We can respond to His love and allow Him to place us in the family of believers or we can remain lost in the dirty places and rebel against God’s will for our lives. This takes place when we shut ourselves off from God’s love and the love of others. Such rebelliousness results in living our lives in the sun-scorched land of loneliness and despair.

Elizabeth Elliot in her book entitled, “Loneliness”, gives us insight on how to avoid being lost in the loneliness of the dirty places of hopelessness, “Christ calls me out of my natural self-centeredness by listening to my cries and then showing me the bigger picture. The better I come to know Him, the more I become interested in what He is interested. Then I live and breathe for His Kingdom to come, for the things to be done on earth as they are in heaven”.

“My joy is becoming less dependent upon my own immediate circumstance and more attached to what He is doing. As limited as my understanding is now, I know that He is a God who never loses, a God who has taken the ultimate humiliation and defeat and turned it inside out. Somehow my ruined plans fit into his larger plans. And so in the moments when I am forced to face my own loneliness, I find I am not really alone at all!”

The day came when Jacob took his family and left his uncle. He continued on his journey. Jacob is once again alone in a dirty place. In his loneliness, he finds himself wrestling with God. When God saw that He could not break the self-serving independence that still existed in Jacob, “He touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched” (Gen. 32:25).

Now broken and totally surrendered, Jacob wanted the blessing of the Lord more than ever. He began to engage in push prayers. Jacob prayed until something happened. In verse 26 Jacob declared, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” This isn’t a cry for more materialistic goods. It is a desire for God to change the dirty place he was in, into nourishing soil.

Jacob’s prayer was answered and he was given the new name of Israel. “So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared!’” (Gen. 32:30). The next day Jacob and his brother Esau are reunited.

In the midst of the loneliness and the dirty place you are now in, are you seeking God? Do you desire the blessing and assurance of His presence that accompanies a total surrender to Him? When you do this, your heart and mind will open up to the needs of others as you let the love of God flow through you. It is then that the dirty places are transformed into nourishing soil. As this happens the seed of God’s love will germinate and produce much fruit for His glory.

Seeds of forgiveness and love will sprout in your life as you let God turn the dirty places into nourishing soil. In the nourishing soil you will relax and trust Jesus when he says, "Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

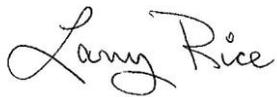
Breaking through the dark dirty soil where we are planted, enables us to arise and see the great opportunities God has placed before us. As this happens we will see the dirty places changed into nurturing soil where we can grow and be used for the Glory of God.

Jesus promised we would not be alone in the dirty places. He would be with us always even to the end of the world. In addition, Jesus has promised to send His comforter the Holy Spirit. There are also the angels, those wonderful ministering spirits who are available to those who shall inherit salvation.

In Luke 18:7, 8 Jesus tells us, "And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

It is our loving heavenly father who transforms the dirty places into the nourishing soil. It is there we we experience Romans 8:28 which says, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to His purpose." Let us rejoice in the reality of this promise, knowing that where ever we are planted that Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry Rice". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop on the 'L' and a long tail on the 'e'.

Larry Rice