



PLAIN AND SIMPLE SERIES

The
Choice

HYPOCRISY OR REAL CHRISTIANITY?

NANCY
MISSLER



The Choice: Hypocrisy or Real Christianity?

Copyright 2001 by Nancy Missler

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“Today I have given you ***The Choice*** between life and death, between blessings and curses. I call on heaven and earth to witness ***The Choice*** you make. Oh, that you would *choose Life*, that you and your descendants might live! Choose to love the Lord your God and to obey Him and commit yourself to Him, *for He is your Life.*”

(Deut. 30:19-20, New Living Translation)

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Dedication

To My Beloved Meshell,

You are the inspiration and the reason for the following pages; without you, this book would not have been written.

. . . Philippians 1:3

Introduction

Choose Life

I had never seen her before, but I will never forget her.

Her name was Lauren. She was about 19 years old, with beautiful long blonde hair, creamy skin and large, deep blue eyes. She reminded me of Cameron Diaz, with her vibrant smile and sparkling eyes. Even though I only met her one time, it was enough to make a lasting impression.

Lauren was the day nurse at a hospital I was visiting. She was so outgoing and friendly that we began to talk. She was in her last year of college and was headed to Costa Rica for five months to study to be a translator. She said it was important, not only to learn the language, but also to live in the country for awhile to achieve the proper dialect and become familiar with the culture.

I was so impressed with how she had taken hold of the direction of her life at such a young age. Truly, she had “life” all figured out and it was a delight to see.

I asked her how long she had worked at the hospital and she said, “about 11 months.” Then she volunteered that working there had totally changed her outlook on living and dying. I questioned her as to how. She kind of groped around for the right words, and then simply came back to her original

statement: it had “totally changed how she looked at living and dying.” I thought perhaps she meant a changed spiritual outlook. So, I questioned her a little further and asked if she meant spiritually. “No,” she immediately responded. “I tried that once and it really didn’t work!” Then, she went on to explain why. She had gone to the same Christian church for most of her life, but unfortunately, many of her church friends *did not live what they preached*. There were some horrible conflicts. She ended up disillusioned and finally decided to drop the whole thing.

She said she was now happily into “karma.”

(Her response really broke my heart.) I was saddened that this beautiful young woman, with so much to offer the world, had totally turned away from Christianity because of the actions of her so-called church-going friends. I was heartbroken because Lauren really believed that what she had seen in those people at her church, who “did not live what they preached,” was *true* Christianity!

What’s Real Christianity?

Authentic Christianity, however, is *not* what Lauren saw in those friends of hers. Real Christianity is not *saying one thing and doing another*. An *authentic* Christian is one who has the Life of Jesus showing forth in his actions, in his words and in all he does. He is not trying to “act like Jesus” or “say what He would say” or “do what He would do,” but he is simply *choosing to let Christ live HIS Life out*

through him. Real Christianity, therefore, is the moment-by-moment surrendering of *our lives*, so that *Christ's Life* can shine through.

Lauren's church-going friends are Christian phonies or hypocrites because they only *talk* about Jesus, but never really reflect His Life. (Many of us are doing the very same thing.) Now, it's not that we mean to be hypocritical or that we set out to be phonies, we don't! It's just that we don't know *how* to let Jesus live His genuine Life out through us. We're convinced that everyone else around us is living the "perfect" Christian life and we're the only ones having trouble. Consequently, we put up our masks a little higher and continue to "act like Jesus" in our own strength and ability, talking the talk, but certainly not walking the walk.

It's interesting that the two groups of people who recognize this phoniness, right away, are young people and non-believers. Others of us are fooled because we, often, are doing the very same thing.

Now, being a real Christian *does not* mean being "perfect" or "faultless," but simply knowing how to relinquish ourselves to God, so that He can live *His perfect Life* out through us. Thus, real Christianity is *not* rules, regulations and taboos. On the contrary, real Christianity is the most freeing and unrestricted way to live that there is!

That's what this little book is all about: how to be a real and authentic Christian and how this radically differs from being "religious" or "churchy."

My prayer is that this book will reach the “Laurens” of this world, and that through God’s mercy and grace, they might come to know, not only what true Christianity is all about, but also that they might see the diametrical difference between real Christians and the phony counterfeits of this world. Thus, rather than be turned off by what they so often see in churches, they might, instead, be drawn to the real Creator of the Universe and the incredible freedom and Life that He offers.

John 10:10b tells us that, “...I [Jesus] have come that [you] might have Life, and that [you] might have it more abundantly.”

This is God’s promise to all of us!

How Did Phony Christianity Ever Begin?

How did we get so far from what God intended the Christian Life to be? What has caused the problem? How did this phony type of Christianity ever begin?

In order to understand the whole picture, it might be helpful if we go back to the very beginning...

In the Garden of Eden, everything was perfect. Adam and Eve genuinely knew God and they experienced His abundant Life. In fact, they knew God so well that He would often call out to them, come and visit them and fellowship with them. Then *sin* came: the choice to *live life as they pleased*, rather than *live as God designed*. When God called out to them after this, they *hid and covered themselves* with

“fig leaves” because they knew they had quenched His Spirit (Genesis 3:7). At this point, all communion, fellowship and communication with God ceased and an impenetrable barrier was erected.

Ever since then, many have sought to repair and bridge the gulf between God and man, but to no avail. Man invented “religion” (rules and regulations in order to reach God) to address this void—*our own “fig leaves.”* But, according to the Bible, “religion” has not been the answer. It has not worked. Rules and regulations can *never* bring us closer to God or pay the penalty for our sins.

God had His own way of fixing the breach between man and God, and *it wasn't religion.* Jesus, God's Son, was *not* religious. In fact, He was the most anti-religious person who ever lived. He continually hung out with the “wrong crowd,” and attracted to His cause the “wrong types of people”—fishermen, prostitutes, tax collectors.

He was born in the Middle East, a Jew, and in Palestine, without the fanfare of a modern-day aristocrat. He didn't come to Washington D.C., or Salt Lake, or Moscow, or Rome, or Beijing, or Tokyo or London. He was born in Bethlehem, in the Middle East, before cars, planes, radios, TVs and even glass-bottom boats. The fishing boats of His day didn't have depth finders or swivel seats. In fact, if we were to see Jesus, Scripture tells us that He was a man of no esteem (Isaiah 53:3). He wasn't built like John Wayne or Tom Cruise; he was dark skinned, had a Jewish nose and probably was short. He was born in a manger, not in a hospital. The God of the universe

didn't pack a North Face tent when He traveled. He didn't snap His fingers for dinner to magically appear; He simply started a fire and cooked His own fish.

Thus, God's way of fixing the breach between man and God was to send Jesus, His humble, yet radical own Son, to make peace between the world and Himself. Jesus came to earth and died in our place in order to save us from the penalty of sin (which is death) and to give us His Life. *Christianity is the only religion in the world where God Himself comes to dwell within each of our hearts.* All that is required of us is to reach up, confess that we can't make it on our own and take a hold of His hand. In other words, it's *His Life* that is offered, but *our choice* to receive it or not!

Thus, God's ways are *not* our ways. In fact, most of the time, God's way of doing things is completely opposite to the way we would do things. God isn't a bulldozer. He is ever so gentle, soft and comforting. Scripture even tells us that God loves us so much that He wants an ongoing personal relationship with us so that He *can* teach us individually *how to live Life as He designed.* In other words, He doesn't just call us to Himself and then drop us, He takes us even further by desiring to live His Life out through us. *This is what real Christianity is all about.*

Unfortunately, this way of living does not come about naturally, even for Christians! And this has been the big problem! As Lauren experienced, some Christians can often be unloving and unforgiving and frequently use God's Word like a club. These

Christians seem to find it easier to judge, criticize and be opinionated, rather than listen, lend a helping hand, love, serve and humble themselves before others, the way Jesus did. The latter describes a *real* Christian.

The Choice

Thus, as Christians, we are constantly faced with **The Choice** of: either living the Christian life in our *own* power and ability (like Lauren's friends); or, surrendering ourselves to God and letting *Him* live His Life out through us. One way leads to hypocrisy and phoniness, and the other to genuineness and real Christianity.

Again, most of us don't intend to be hypocrites or put on "fig leaves." It's simply that we don't know *how* to let Christ be our Life itself. We don't understand that as Christians we are *not* to try and "act" like Jesus, but simply relinquish our lives so that *He* can live His Life out through us. Also, because we don't know the difference between His Life and our own natural life, we don't recognize the times that we *are* phony. We can spot it in others, but seldom see it in ourselves. We know something is basically wrong, but we're unable to pinpoint the cause.

Thus, it's not by chance that you have picked up this little book, because God has a challenge for you. In Deuteronomy 30:19, He says: "Today, I have given you **The Choice** between life and death, and blessings and curses. I call on heaven and earth to witness **The Choice** you make. Oh, that you would **choose Life**, [so] that you...might live" (New Living Translation).

God's challenge is that you might *choose Life*—learn to let Christ live His Life out through you—and by doing so, you will live the abundant Life He designed! In other words, that you might experience *real* Christianity—life as He meant it to be!

If you are already a Christian, “choosing Life” means that God wants you to learn how to allow *His* Life (inside) in your heart to come forth and be your Life in your soul (outside)! If you are not sure where you stand with God, “choosing Life” means that He wants you to learn how to receive His Life into your heart so that you *can* begin to live Life as He designed.

Again, it's always *Jesus' Life*, but *your own choice* to accept it and then, moment by moment, pass it on.

Live Life as He Designed

Just like some of Lauren's “Christian” friends who only mouthed their faith, many of us do the very same thing. “Words” are so easy. The difficult part is living them out! God wants the Life of Jesus that He has *already* placed in our hearts, if we are believers, not just to remain in our hearts (and be words only), but to be shown out in our lives. He wants us to genuinely *live His Life*. Then, others will “see” God's abundant Life *in us* and *through us* and want what we have.

John 13:35 says, “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you [truly] have Love one to another.”

As we said before, *living Life as God designed* does not come naturally. It’s only possible when we make **The Choice** to set ourselves aside and let God live His Life out through us. The question then becomes: *how do we do this?* What’s the practical application of getting God’s Life from our hearts out into our lives? If it doesn’t happen automatically, then how does it occur? The answer is in the very next verse of Deuteronomy 30:20: by loving the Lord your God, by obeying Him and by committing yourself to Him, **for He is your Life!** In other words, if we learn to love God in the way that He intends, then we’ll be able to live as He designed and have that abundant Life that He promises (Luke 10:28).

What Will You Choose?

How about you? What will you choose? Will you live Life as God designed or will you settle for a pale and phony imitation of Christianity, like Lauren’s friends? Will your life make people run towards God or will it turn people away? God yearns that you might **choose Life!**

Choosing Life—*choosing to let Christ live His Life out through us*—is what this little book is all about. In these pages, we are *not* going to learn ways to “act like Jesus” or “talk like Jesus” or “love like Jesus,” because *only* Jesus has the Life that we need and we can never *be* what only He *is!* What we will be learning, however, is *how to, moment by moment,*

make **The Choice** to love Him so that His Life from our hearts can shine through us and flow to others.

It doesn't matter how long we have been Christians, how often we go to church, how many Bible verses we know or how sincere our prayers are, *authentic Christianity* is simply recognizing our own sin and self and then, choosing to surrender these things to God so that *He* can live His Life out through us. Again, it's His Life, but always our choice to give way to it.

God says in Matthew 7:14, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads to **Life**, and [only a] few will find it."

The question is: Will you be one who does?

The Key to “Choosing Life”

The *key* to letting Christ live His Life out through us, is the application of four truths and these will be the subjects of the following chapters.

- 1) First of all, learning *what Christ’s Life really is* and how it radically differs from our own natural, human, self life. Learning how we can acquire God’s Life in our *hearts* and how we can choose, moment by moment, to let it flow out into our own *lives*.
- 2) Learning that the foundation for living Christ’s Life is knowing, without a shadow of a doubt, that *God loves us* with an unconditional and never-ending Love—a Love that is not based on *what we do* for Him, but simply on *who we are* in Him. This solid foundation is the only thing that will give us our security and identity in this life.
- 3) Learning what our own responsibility is in living Christ’s Life—i.e., *learning to love God*. Learning, not only what quenches His Life and His Love in our hearts, but also how to make the appropriate choices to yield and surrender these things to Him.
- 4) And finally, learning how we can *pass Christ’s Life along* to others. In other words, learning how to become cleansed and open so we can put their will and desires above our own. Only God can enable us to do this and this is only possible *after* we have learned to love Him.

Holy Masquerade

- 1) Underline up to three words that you believe best describe acts of hypocrisy by the average Christian?

Typical	Opposite	Honest
Self-righteous	Sinful	Rebellious
So!	Two-faced	Necessary
Sad	Fake	Selfish
Smart	Intolerable	Evil

- 2) Is it better to believe in Christ and not live the Christian Life, than to not believe in Christ at all? Write out your answer.
- 3) What do you think?
- Adults are more hypocritical than young people
 - Young people are forced to be hypocrites by their parents
 - The church should lower its standards so there would be less hypocrisy
 - Most people do not see their own hypocrisy
- 4) How often do you live what you believe? Write your answer out.
- 5) Read each of the following verses and circle the one that comes closest to describing your life. Matthew 23:28, Romans 7:15-20, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 4:22-24, Philippians 2:12-13, 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

Chapter One

What is Christ's Life?

Christian Hypocrites

Someone once said to me: "I'd rather not go to church anymore because they're all a bunch of hypocrites. They don't know how to really love. They all talk about it, but they sure don't live it. I work with 'so and so' (a church goer) and you should see what he does during the rest of the week! How on earth can he call himself a Christian? I don't want to have any part of it!"

Sounds like what Lauren encountered, doesn't it?

The Open Bible defines hypocrisy as "pretending to be something *we know* we are not." The word comes from the Greek theater. It's literally used of an actor, and means to "answer from under a mask." This means that the person recognizes the aspired goal or category—i.e., to be a good Christian—and pretends to be one, knowing all the while he is not.

The question: Can a Christian ever be guilty of this? *Absolutely!* Not only did Adam and Eve try to cover themselves and hide in Genesis 3:7, but six times in the New Testament, hypocrisy is talked about concerning Christians: Paul in Galatians 2 and James in James 5 are two examples. James 5:12 even warns the brethren that they not fall into *hypocrisy*. (This

is not to mention the numerous times that Christ specifically speaks to the Pharisees about hypocrisy.)

Now, it's interesting because the two groups of people who seem to be able to spot phonies a mile away are young people and non-believers. We can't tell young people, "do as I say" and not expect them to look at our lives and see if it works for us. If it doesn't work for us in our lives, we can't expect them to want it either. *Our lives need to be examples of what we say, otherwise it's not the truth!* And this is the same kind of witness we need with our friends and our families. We need to live what we speak.

Now, it's not that we must be "perfect." No way! There is only One who is perfect and that's Christ. We simply must be running to Christ as the "answer" to all our problems, and by so doing, leading others to the only One who is perfect.

What's so tragic is that God must often, not only combat unbelief in a person, but also the damage other so-called Christians have done to them. The only thing that is ever going to truly touch another person's heart is seeing God's genuine Love and Life through us. Our flowery and empty words "about Jesus" are simply not enough. They need to see *a real changed life*.

An Example: "Supposed to be Like Jesus"

Joe was a brand-new Christian. He had come from a life of drugs, promiscuity and alcohol, but even in that circle he had many loyal friends. Now, these guys were not Christians, but Joe could always

count on them. Thus, it was very difficult for him when he decided to move away to live with his aunt in another city. His aunt assured him, however, that she knew many young people at her church and that he would fit right in.

Joe's aunt was so delighted that he had finally become a Christian. She attended a church where half of the congregation was young people, and so she felt sure that Joe would be right at home. After years of praying for him, his aunt was so thankful that he was finally on the right track. Joe moved in with her, made new Christian friends and began attending her church. His aunt felt that, finally, she could relax. Joe was "home"!

But, not for long!

These new Christian friends turned out to be the "religious phony" types that we have been speaking about—Christians in name only. At first, they befriended Joe with open arms and included him in everything. They seemed so nice that Joe naively opened up and shared much of his background. That's all they needed. When Joe began to flounder and really needed the support of his new friends, that's when they turned on him. And, oh, how they flourished on the gossip!

One fellow who had befriended Joe early on, unexpectedly used all that Joe had confided in him as ammunition to control and manipulate him. Pretty soon, the whole church was buzzing about Joe. Poor Joe had made the mistake of trusting his new friends about his past because they were "Christians." He

felt sure that “Christians” wouldn’t talk. But, to his amazement and devastation, they did.

Joe was so crushed by this chain of events, that he decided to run back to his old ways. He determined to go, *not* because he missed the drugs or the booze, but because he missed friends who were loyal and “who really cared about him.” He felt his old circle of non-believing buddies were a hundred times more true and more loving than these new “Christian friends.”

Just before he left, he asked his aunt, “Tell me something. If people claim to be Christians, aren’t they supposed to be like Jesus? Wouldn’t *He* have kept my confidences? Wouldn’t *He* have loved and comforted me when I was down? Wouldn’t *He* have supported me no matter what? I thought Christianity was all about Christ’s acceptance and Love. I guess I was wrong.”

His aunt cried for three days!

Now, it’s easy for us to judge others for being phonies and not loving as God desires, but we need to ask ourselves, “Am I being a phony too? Am I loving others any better than they are?” And, we need to be honest! In other words, we can’t blame hypocrites for our own choices not to follow Christ. Each of us has to answer to Christ for ourselves. We have to obey God for ourselves and we can’t use others as an excuse!

Another Example: Bumper Sticker Christian

A few years ago, we flew back to California late one Sunday night from a seminar in Washington State. Tired and hungry, we still had to face another one-hour drive home from the airport.

Trying to check out of the airport parking lot, we found at least 30 cars in the line ahead of us, moving very slowly. After sitting in the line for over 25 minutes, 10 or 15 cars from the very back of the line pulled out and went around the long line of waiting cars and tried to butt their way into the front of the line from the side aisles of the parking lot.

One big magenta truck jammed its way in front of us. We rolled down the window and politely said, "Please, you need to wait in line just like the rest of us." The man just laughed at us and jammed his big truck in front of us all the more. His kids were in the back of his truck and they, too, were laughing as he maneuvered his way in front of us.

To our complete disbelief, the man then stopped the whole line of cars behind him and let the 10 cars that had followed him, get into the line in front of him, adding another 10- to -15 minute wait for the rest of us. We were appalled that someone would be that self-centered and that rude. However, as we got closer to the lights and the checkout booth, we saw plastered clearly on the back of the big magenta truck, a Christian Ichthus (fish) symbol. We regret now that we didn't get out of our car and say to the driver of the magenta truck, "Is this is how a Christian acts?"

1 John 3:18 says it all, “Let us not love in word, neither in tongue [or stickers], but in deed and in truth.”

Real Christianity

In the mid-1930s, a German pastor was handcuffed and taken from his church. Suspected of aiding Jews, he was immediately taken to prison and put in a five-foot cell. There was no hearing, no trial—not even time to let his family know what had happened to him.

For weeks, this gentle pastor asked the prison guard outside his cell door if he could use the phone at the end of the hall to call his wife and family and, at least, let them know he was alive. The guard, however, was a horrible man who hated anyone and everyone that had to do with Jews. He not only wouldn't let the pastor use the phone, he also determined in his heart to make the pastor's life as miserable as possible.

The sadistic guard purposefully skipped the pastor's cell when meals were handed out; he made the pastor go weeks without a shower; he kept lights burning in the pastor's room so he couldn't sleep; he blasted his shortwave radio hoping the constant noise would break the pastor; he used filthy language; he pushed him; he shoved him; and, when he could, he arranged for the pastor to have the most difficult job in the labor force.

The pastor, on the other hand, prayed over and over again not to let his hate for this guard consume him. He prayed instead to be able to forgive him and show him God's Love. As the months went by, whenever he could, the pastor smiled at the guard; he thanked him when his meals *did* come; when the guard was near his cell, the pastor told him about his own wife and his children; he even questioned the guard about his family and about his goals, ideas and visions; and, one time, for a quick moment, he had a chance to tell the guard about Christ and His Love.

The guard never answered a word, but, obviously, heard it all.

After months of unconditionally loving and giving himself over to this terrible guard, God's real Love and Life finally broke through. One night, as the pastor was again quietly talking to him, the guard cracked a smile; the next day, instead of his cell being skipped for lunch, the pastor got two; the following evening, he was allowed not only to go to the showers, but also to stay as long as he wanted; the lights began going off at night in his cell and the radio noise ceased. Finally, one afternoon, the guard came into the pastor's cell, asked him for his home phone number, and he, personally, made the long awaited call to the pastor's family.

A few months later the pastor was mysteriously released, with no questions asked.

This is an example of *real* Christianity! What happened to the pastor in the above story was supernatural. Naturally, he hated the guard and was

certainly justified, by worldly standards, in doing so. But, the pastor loved Jesus more than himself, and thus he constantly made ***The Choice*** to let Christ live His Life out through him. Even though he had no human love left for the guard, Jesus did. And, that's all that mattered, because as the pastor surrendered himself, Jesus was able to pour His Love *through* him to the guard.

Houses Built Upon Sand

Letting Christ live His Life out through us might seem difficult at first, because it's totally opposite to everything we have ever been taught. It's like installing a brand-new foundation under a house. All is new! Once that foundation has been properly set, it's like a rock upon which everything else can be built.

Unfortunately, some of us older Christians have built our houses—our entire Christian lives—on quick-sand. We are born again, Jesus resides in our hearts and we love Him, but if we are honest with ourselves, we have lived most of our Christian lives in our own power and strength, and not Christ's. In other words, our foundation has not been Jesus at all, but “self.” Thus, for many of us, God must jackhammer our existing foundations, tear down the walls of our houses, and then rebuild them all over again on new, solid foundations.

If you are just starting out in life, you are blessed, because everything—your whole spiritual life—is in

front of you. Thus, hopefully, you can learn from the mistakes of others who have gone before you.

The Choice that will be continually before you: either to live the Christian life in your own power and ability and end up crashing and burning like so many other Christians you see today; or, learn to set yourself aside and let Christ live His Life out through you. The result of living the Christian life in your own power and ability is *hypocrisy* and, as Deuteronomy 30:19 says, “death and disaster.” The result of letting Christ live His Life out through you is *real Christianity* and the genuineness and freedom that everyone is truly seeking. How we make this last choice is what this little book is all about.

What is Christ's Life?

How does Christ's Life differ from our own natural, human life?

God's Life, basically and simplistically, consists of three things: God's Love, His Wisdom and His Power to perform these things in our lives. Human life or self life, on the other hand, is the life we are born with and there is nothing supernatural about it. In fact, most of the time, it's completely contrary to what God desires. It consists of our own natural love, our own natural thoughts and our own natural power and abilities. These three natural elements are completely opposite to God's Life. God's Life is super-normal and comes only with the presence of Jesus.

Therefore, it's important to understand right from the start that God's Life and our natural, human life are completely opposite. Confusing these two things is one of the reasons why the Christian "church" is having such a difficult time.

Everyone has human, self life—we're born with it. Whereas, God's Life is a gift that we receive *only* when we ask Jesus Christ into our hearts to be our Savior. Therefore, *not* everyone possesses God's Life.

Now, of course, God loves us and is always reaching out to us and drawing us to Himself even *before* we become believers. But, in order to have the kind of Life that we have been speaking about here in this book—giving us the supernatural Love, Wisdom and Power of God—we must personally receive God's gift of Life, Jesus, into our hearts.

An Example: "Because Jesus is God!"

A perfect example of how Christ draws us to Himself is the wonderful story of Art Katz, a brilliant Jewish philosopher and professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

When Art came to the point in his life where he had accomplished all that he thought would bring him satisfaction, he still had this empty and unfulfilled feeling in his gut. He, thus, set out on a spiritual quest to find the real meaning of his life.

Art literally traveled all over the world in his search to find his true Messiah. While riding a train in

Germany, he happened to sit next to a young Christian girl who had only recently become a believer. They began to talk about God. A few minutes into the discussion, Art turned and sarcastically asked the young woman, "What makes you think your Jesus is any different from all the other religions in the world?" The girl looked at him lovingly and said, "Because Jesus is God. He is Love and He lives in my heart."

This response was *not* at all what Art had expected, and it caught him totally off guard. He could not argue with her from his intellect. For months, those ten simple words echoed in his mind... "Because Jesus is God and He lives in my heart."

Finally, Art found himself in Jerusalem, Israel. A Messianic Jew (a Jewish person who has accepted Christ as his Savior) befriended him and shared his own testimony. After experiencing tremendous love and compassion from this Israeli, the Holy Spirit broke down the walls of Art's heart and he, too, accepted Christ as his own personal Messiah. And, the God of the Universe, who is Love, just as that young German Christian girl testified, came to live in Arthur's heart.

How Do We Receive Christ's Life?

Asking Christ to become our Savior is the most important decision that we will ever make. But, we must recognize that it doesn't happen automatically. In other words, we are not born "Christians." *We must choose to become Christians.*

Again, it's Christ's Life that is offered, *but our own choice to receive it.*

How do we choose to receive the supernatural Life of God? We simply say, "Jesus I can't make it on my own. I keep blowing it. My life is a disaster. I don't know what I am doing or where I am going. I have fallen so short of what You wanted for me. I need Your Love and I need Your Wisdom and I need Your Strength. Please, come into my heart and be my life itself."

Romans 10:9-10 says, "...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by *believing in your heart* that you are made right with God, and it is by *confessing with your mouth* that you are saved" (New Living Translation).

By confessing these things and asking Him to come and be your very life, God will be faithful to hear your prayer, come and make His home in your heart and give you His Life.

Definition of God's Life

As we said, God's Life consists of three things: His Love, Wisdom and Power. In this little book, we will concentrate mainly on God's Love, with the understanding that all three of these attributes are always assumed. Sometimes, we may even interchange God's Life and God's Love, as they mean almost the very same thing. "God is Love" (1 John 4:12).

To define God's Life and His Love even further, let's read how God Himself describes it in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8:

“God's Love [His Life] is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. God's Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone [with God's Love] you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him. God's Love [His Life] never fails” (Living Bible).

In your own power and strength, can you live and love like this?

No way!

Try this experiment. Put your first name in place of the word “God” in the above Scriptures. For example, “*Nancy* is very patient and kind... never jealous or envious,” etc. Now, read it out loud and see how it sounds. Pretty silly, huh? This graphically shows us how we can *never* be what God wants us to be on our own. It's only as we relinquish ourselves to Him and allow Him to live His Life out through us that these attributes can be ours.

Remember the pastor's story at the beginning of this chapter? It was only because he constantly

surrendered his life to God that the Lord's Love and Life could come forth through him. Only God could have loved that guard. In the natural, the pastor's own love was dead because it was based on how he felt and what he thought. God's Love, however, continued to flow because it was based upon God and His faithfulness. And the same thing applies to us. No matter how we feel or what we think, no matter how another person responds to us and no matter what our circumstances are, God always has Love for that other person, even when we don't.

Christ's Life Through Us is not Automatic

It's critical, once again, to stress that God's Life through us does not happen automatically. Even though we are Christians and God's Life dwells in our hearts, we can still be full of "self": our own negative thoughts, wild emotions and self-centered desires. And if we don't choose to give these to God, they will quench God's Life in our hearts. In the above example, the pastor had a "legitimate" reason to hate the guard, but he knew that if he held on to that hate and unforgiveness, it would quench God's Life in him. Thus, he chose to yield all his thoughts and emotions that were "not of faith" and become that open vessel that God could use.

And, the same thing applies to us. We must constantly make *The Choice* to yield ourselves to God, so that He can pour His Life through us to others.

The point: God's Life in and through us is not automatic. It constantly depends upon our

own choice, moment by moment. (If you want a *visual picture* of how this works, be sure to see “Supplementary Study” beginning on page 139.)

An Example: “You of Little Faith”

Charissa loved Jesus. Everybody who knew her could see it because He just bubbled out of her. When Charissa was 15, she and her older sister, Jesse, helped to start a youth ministry at their local church, and they both went every week. Even though Charissa was seven years younger than Jesse, Jesse often listened to Charissa’s advice and wisdom because she knew it was from the true source: God. Because Charissa was abiding in God and constantly choosing His ways, God’s Life just flowed through her and ministered to all those around.

One night as they were driving home from Youth Group, the two girls realized that they were nearly out of gas. They happened to be out in the middle of nowhere and miles away from any gas station. Jesse began to get nervous and begged God not to let them run out of gas, especially late at night. She prayed hard, but really didn’t believe God would actually take care of them. She imagined having to walk and walk and walk and finally, ask someone for a ride to a gas station.

Charissa said to her, “Jesse, You of little faith!” Jesse didn’t argue. Then, Charissa said, “Um...¼ Luke 12:28.” Jesse asked what Luke 12:28 was, but Charissa didn’t know. So they looked it up. It was the passage that describes how God takes care of the ravens and the lilies, and says if ‘He clothes even the

grass which only lives for a day, how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Jesse couldn't believe it. Was that a coincidence? How did Charissa know that Scripture? She really didn't mind that God had told her she had little faith, because she knew it was true. Through this Scripture, He was gently telling them not to doubt Him; that He loved them; that He would take care of them; and that He would get them safely to a gas station. Which He did.

Later that year, however, Charissa got a job at a local mall, which required her to work on Sundays and Youth Group nights. With little Christian fellowship and support, Charissa started to lose her focus, and rather than recognizing it and continuing to make the right choices, she began to look elsewhere to fulfill her needs. She turned to a particular young man, Niles, who also worked in the mall. Slowly she began the slide downward, not recognizing that without the proper choices she couldn't remain as close to God as she had been. Eventually she even gave away her virginity—which she had promised God the year before never to give to anybody, but her husband.

Everybody who knew Charissa saw the change. They didn't know what the problem was or the reasons why, but the difference was obvious. Charissa lost her joy and the sparkle in her life. She became angry and frustrated and depressed. Now, when others shared their problems with her, like they used to, Charissa would respond with immediate criticism that showed no traces of love.

After many months, Charissa finally repented and made the decision to confess to her youth pastor and the rest of her family. By this time, however, she had become pregnant. Two years later, after many struggles with temptation and difficulties caused by the complications of having a child outside of marriage, Charissa returned to her place of abiding in God. She now helps lead the worship for the youth ministry at their church and she has God's Life, once again, radiating through her. She also has a beautiful little boy.....

Charissa learned the hard way, by "reaping what she sowed," that God's Life is not automatic. It takes work to constantly make *The Choice* to let Christ live His Life out through us. It's a daily decision.

Warning

Charissa's example, unfortunately, is all too common these days. Why?

Matthew 24:12 gives us some insight. This Scripture tells us that because many of our "spiritual" lives are built upon the sand (upon our own efforts and our own abilities and not God's), His Life in us has become quenched and blocked. Thus, as this Scripture says, "the Love of many [has grown] cold." And this is just what we are seeing.

Now, the interesting thing about this verse is that the Greek word for Love here is *Agape*, which can only mean God's supernatural Love. Thus, this Scripture is saying that in the end-times (just before

Christ returns) something is going to happen to the Love of God (or the Life of God) in Christians' hearts that is going to cause it to grow cold (or be quenched) in their lives. In other words, because these Christians will *not* be making ***The Choice*** to let God live His Life out through them, hypocrisy (or phony Christianity) will be the result. And this is exactly what we are seeing. Lauren's friends are examples.

What part can we play in turning the tide? It's obvious that we can't change others, as most of us have already tried. But, we *can* be open to learning God's "more excellent way" for ourselves and then, showing them by example, how it is done. Only real Christianity will bring others to a saving knowledge of Christ.

To Live Christ's Life Involves a Choice

We can't produce this kind of Life in our own strength or ability. To live God's Life is simply a matter of our will (or, our choice). It's saying, "Lord, I can't love this person in my own power. I don't even like them. In fact, I can't stand them right now. But, Lord, I know that You love them and will give me the Love that I need. So, I choose to relinquish my "self" (my own thoughts, emotions and desires that are contrary to Yours), so that Your Life (Your supernatural Love, Wisdom and Power) can shine through me." In other words, I ***Choose Life!***

Thus, to live God's Life is *not* dependent upon how we feel or what we think. It's simply letting God

Himself live His Life through us. God is the One doing the loving and the living, not us, and all that He requires from us is **The Choice** to allow Him to do so. Thus, only *our will* is involved in the choice, not our emotions or our thoughts. This is, again, demonstrated in the story about the German pastor. Even though the pastor didn't feel like it or want to, he chose, by faith, to allow God to use him to show His Love. And, of course, God was faithful to do so.

Matthew 26:39 tells us that God has given us the authority and the power to continually say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." This way of responding, however, is completely opposite to the way we normally would respond, which is usually based upon how *we* feel and what *we* think. What we "feel" and what we "want," is usually what we "do." However, when we learn God's way of Life and make **The Choice** to say "not my will, but Thine," God will be faithful to pour His Life through us, enabling us to do His will. (See "Supplemental Study," page 162 for a *visual picture* of this.)

Again, it's His Life, but always our continual choice to surrender to it.

An Example: "It Blew Her Away!"

Here's an example that shows the power of our choices. Kristin, the 19-year-old daughter of a pastor and his wife, was caught sleeping with her boyfriend. Kristin's mom was absolutely horrified when she found out, but even worse, she was afraid to tell her husband for fear of what he would do. He was totally rigid about this sort of thing.

After a while, however, the mom realized that she couldn't handle the situation all by herself and knew she had to tell her husband. She called him at church and told him everything. Just as she had imagined, he blew up and determined to come home right then, confront Kristin, forbid her to see her boyfriend again, kick her out of the house and take away her car.

Fortunately, the mom had been learning about *The Choice* that we, as Christians, continually have to make: either to live God's Life or our own. Thus, she knew that if the two of them reacted out of their own anger and hurt, the situation would probably get worse. Believing that God had the perfect solution, the mom prayed and asked God to soften her husband's heart. God did just that, because when he arrived home that night, she was able to convince him that they mustn't confront their daughter in anger. The pastor repented of his own critical attitude and together they went before the Lord. They gave all their disappointment, anger, frustration and bitterness to Him and chose to handle the situation as the Lord would want.

They waited up for Kristen, met her at the door and lovingly asked if they could talk. First, they shared their own hurt in finding out what she had been doing, and then they shared how grieved God must be, since He loved her far more than they ever could. Continually, they kept the emphasis on themselves and on God, without pointing fingers at Kristin.

Kristin immediately felt God's Love pouring forth through her parents, convicting her that what she was doing was wrong. And, because it was God's Love, she reacted from her heart, not her emotional defenses. She broke down sobbing and after awhile, repented not only to her parents, but also to God, asking His forgiveness. In the end, the entire family was reunited.

Kristin later shared that before meeting with her parents, she had determined to move out of the house because she knew what her dad's reaction would be. But, when she saw his genuine Love and concern that night, she said it blew her away! "It was like the very presence of God in that room tearing down all my defenses and exposing my sin."

This is an example of real Christianity!

Note something interesting about this story: When it's God's Life *through us* and not our own emotional outbursts, it will not only prompt a contrary-to-normal action on the part of the one showing love (i.e., no expectations or presumptions), but it will also prompt a contrary-to-normal response on the part of the one being loved (i.e., responding from his heart, not his defenses). In the above example, the dad (the lover or the initiator) acted differently than he normally would because of God's Love *in him*, and

Kristin (the one being loved) responded differently than she had intended to because of God's Love *to her*.

God is the light that exposes the heart of the one being loved and that light will either cause him to draw closer to God, as in the above example, or it can cause him to flee and hide. It's a very powerful thing to stand naked in front of a Holy God, totally exposed by His light and many people just cannot bear this and often, will run. In most cases, however, if the one loving continues to reach out and continues to love as God designed, the end result will be that the relationship will be healed. Again, the German pastor's story is an example. He continued to love that guard, in spite of his responses. Finally, God's Love and Life tore down the walls in the guard's heart and a relationship resulted.

God tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that His Love will never fail!

His Life in Us Proves We Are Real Christians

Again, the Bible tells us that others will know we are Christians, not by our words, our knowledge of Scripture or our spiritual gifts, but simply by showing God's real and genuine Life and Love (John 13:35). In other words, we prove we are Christians only when we live as God designed.

When we live in this way, people will be drawn to us, not only because of the freedom we experience *to be ourselves*—the freedom to be real and genuine and yet still show forth Christ—but also the freedom we give them *to be themselves*. Someone recently told me, “This is the first time in years that I have begun to like who I really am, and what God is doing in my life. I am finally free to be who I really am, and you know what? It's not bad at all.”

An Example: Hell's Angel

Here's a great example of someone who yearned to be free to be himself, and yet still show forth Christ.

Years ago, in Tasmania, Australia, there was a member of the Hell's Angels named Al, who was in a situation where he was about ready to kill a man. Now, I'm not sure of all the details, but miraculously, someone stopped him from doing so and, afterwards, shared Christ with him. Al seemed open, so the person gave him one of *The Way of Agape* tapes. Through this little tape, Al came to know Christ as his own Messiah.

God's ways are certainly not our ways. That tape was done by a Southern California housewife who was struggling in her marriage. But, somehow, the Spirit of God sent that tape all around the world and used the words shared to minister to a hardened Hell's Angel gang member down in Tasmania, Australia. Truly, God does choose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Al said later that the thing that drew him to the Gospel message was the freedom it talked about to be "who we really are" and yet still reflect Christ. This really spoke to his heart and he wanted that more than anything else in the world.

Al began to study God's Word and *His* way of Life. Eventually, he reconciled with his own wife and family, and began a church for "bikers" like himself.

The last time we visited Tasmania to do a seminar, Al showed up to meet us. He was tall, good looking and dressed in black leather with chains dangling everywhere. When he first saw us, he ran towards us, lifted us up in his arms and swung us around like rag dolls. We loved him instantly. He truly was a free man! Free not only from his past, but also free to live and love as God designed—free to be himself, and yet, show forth Christ! Isn't that what we all want?

How wonderful it is to live without masks and facades, where what we are thinking and feeling on the inside is exactly what is showing on the outside! It's not that we won't have bad days, we will. We're human. But, even in those difficult times, if we make the right choices to surrender ourselves to God, we can still show *His* Life in spite of our circumstances.

The world is desperately looking for this kind of freedom. We as Christians, more than anyone else, should be showing others how to obtain it. We have the answer...it's Christ in and through us. However, if we *don't* make *The Choice* to let Christ live His Life out through us, then we'll, once again, end up those Christian hypocrites turning more people away from Christ than bringing them to Him.

The Ultimate Question

As believers, God has given us the awesome responsibility of showing forth His Love and His Life to a very needy and dying world. The question is: Have you ***Chosen Life***? Are *you* living this kind

of Life? (“Never keeping records of wrongs, never noticing when others do you wrong, not easily angered, never self-seeking, loving no matter what the cost...”) Or, are you one of those “bumper sticker” Christians (Christian in name only)?

Be assured, there's no way any of us can fathom or understand a Life like Jesus lived, let alone produce it in our own strength. Yet, so many of us have been told throughout our Christian walk that we are supposed to “act” like Jesus, “love” like Jesus and “walk” like Jesus. So, pathetically, we set out trying and striving, as best we can, to do as Jesus did, only to fail miserably. Only God can act like Jesus, only God can love like Jesus and only God can walk like Jesus, because *Jesus is God*. And, all He desires from us is to be an open and pure vessel so that *Jesus can live His Life and love His Love through us*.

Again, the Life is always Jesus', but ***The Choice*** to implement it is continually ours!

What will *you* choose?

Questions for Chapter One

- 1) Describe *real* Christianity. Can you give an example of a genuine Christian in your own life? What characteristic of Jesus' Life do you see in that person? What is it that makes us genuine and authentic?
- 2) In your own words, how is God's Life different from your own human, self life? How can you receive His Life in your heart?
- 3) Do a laboratory experiment and for one week count the number of times you make **The Choice** to surrender yourself to God and let His Life come forth from your heart. While doing this experiment, try to also recognize your self life. What did you discover?
- 4) If you are a Christian, why doesn't Christ's Life automatically flow from your heart? What prevents this from happening? Describe a time when you experienced this. Share what you have found.
- 5) What's the "key" to genuinely living Christ's Life? How do we do this?
- 6) Real Christianity is a message of freedom. Explain how Christ has freed you. In what areas do you still need freedom?

* If you want the suggested answers to these questions, they are available on our website **www.kingshighway.org** under the *Plain and Simple Series*, or you can write us at the address on the back of the book or call us.