

FAKE

OR

FOLLOWER



Andi Andrew, Fake or Follower

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My prayer is that when I die, all of hell rejoices  
that I am out of the fight.

C. T. Studd



For Jenny, my mum-in-love

You fought the good fight. You finished  
the race. You kept the faith.

You followed Jesus with everything and  
left behind a stunningly beautiful legacy.

You refused to stay in the shallows but  
waded into the depths of His great love.

Back here on earth, we miss you and  
yet are so grateful that we have forever.

To my four world changers—Zeke, Jesse,  
Finley, and Sammy

This is a love letter for you.

xoxo

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## Introduction

Being confronted with death has a way of causing us to take a look at our lives and ask the question, “What *really* matters?”

The diagnosis tore us apart: an inoperable brain tumor. A ticking time bomb, barring a Hail Mary miracle, was growing in the beautiful mind of the woman I called Mum, my Australian-born husband’s mother, Jenny. She was young and beautiful and, as an accomplished pianist, just beginning to compose some of the most stunning, heaven-breathed music. She spoke an eternal language through her fingers and into our hearts. Even in her last days, when she could no longer speak, we’d put on her music, and she’d cock her head sideways, registering with the language that had always made sense to her—music.

On November 17, 2017, she left this planet and walked into the arms of her Savior. Selfishly, I felt robbed. Robbed of all the years ahead that *I* wanted her to be a part of—my children graduating, getting married, having *her* great-grandchildren so that she could hold them in her arms and bless them with innumerable kisses. And I wanted her for *me* too, not just for my kids. We had worked so hard at our relationship. It

was tender, real, connected, honest, and beautiful, but not without a fight. She truly had become my mum, and just like that, the breath in her lungs was gone.

In the middle of a yearlong battle that our family walked through together, I was beginning to write this very book you hold in your hands. The way she lived her life got me deeply pondering my own. Inspiration for the words you're about to read came with a somewhat morbid thought: *If I were to die in a year's time, what letter would I want to write to my children, the church, and the generations to come? What would I want to leave with them?*

As quickly as I had the thought, the answer came to me—I would want them to know the difference between a life lived faking it with a hollow religion, obligation, mediocrity, people pleasing, and rule following and a life lived passionately following Jesus. A life lived drawing a line in the sand, committing to a beautiful journey of discovery on the road less traveled, full of revelation, mistakes, and honest moments; relationships lived in reciprocity, simplicity, and power. A life lived discovering how to powerfully walk in the ways of Jesus on a daily basis, learning and adhering to the truth and stepping into the life that Jesus died to give them, seeing His kingdom come and His will be done here on earth as it is in heaven. Following Jesus is a daily invitation for more, and it's not always easy. This is how Jenny, my mum-in-law, followed Jesus, and it was beautiful to behold.

In our padded, materialistic, overstimulated Western society, Christianity has become more of a “rote religion”—a list of things you should and shouldn't do, devoid of a relationship with the One who loves you the most—than a passionate relationship with the living God manifest by internal

and cultural transformation. I believe there is a generation alive today shaken with a holy discomfort of simply going through the motions. In response, they are crying out to know what following in the ways of Jesus really means for our everyday lives. I believe many are willing to fit the bill; we need not dumb down the price tag.

Jesus came for a revolution inside our hearts that would transform our entire lives and, in turn, society. The more we know Him, the more we discover our true identity and our destiny here on earth; the two go hand in hand. Following Jesus is about the pursuit of His heart and a deeper understanding of the gospel and how the Good News is worked out in our lives and the lives of those around us.

*Gospel* means “good news,” which indicates there was bad news to start with that Jesus came to reverse. Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection are both timely and timeless. There is no other gospel but death and resurrection. First Jesus’s death and resurrection and then our own as we are crucified with Christ *and* resurrected in *His* life as a new creation. Jesus said:

And anyone who comes to me must be willing to share my cross and experience it as his own, or he cannot be considered to be my disciple. So don’t follow me without considering what it will cost you. For who would construct a house before first sitting down to estimate the cost to complete it? Otherwise he may lay the foundation and not be able to finish.  
(Luke 14:27–29 TPT)

Let us consider the cost and then willingly pay the price as we follow Jesus, daily becoming more like Him. May we run our race with perseverance and passion until the day of completion.

Friends, Christ is my *only* message. It is my passion to ignite and awaken hearts all around the world to His goodness and love. My hope is that you will stop settling and welcome the discomfort of what it looks like to truly follow Jesus on a daily basis, allowing the wise Teacher to sculpt you until you breathe your last breath. My prayer is that you will step out of the shallows and into the deep with Him. Colossians 1:28–29 is a life verse for me:

Christ is our message! We preach to awaken hearts and bring every person into the full understanding of truth. It has become my inspiration and passion in ministry to labor with a tireless intensity, with his power flowing through me, to present to every believer the revelation of being his perfect one in Jesus Christ. (TPT)

The truth is we are all imperfect people walking in His perfect love. We are pilgrims on a journey, discovering new things every day, learning in the moments life brings while being transformed as we go. With that premise, I humbly present to you in the pages of this book a snippet of the personal revelation I have attempted to walk in during my twenty years of following Jesus.

We'll touch on the entertainment culture, salvation, and the profound invitation to follow Jesus, who embodies the way, the truth, and the life we are to live. We'll look at the reality of living out the Sermon on the Mount, what true love really is, the identity crises we face, and our misplaced worship in today's society. We'll talk about God's healing and transformation taking place in community, not isolation, while holding in tension the need for purposeful solitude in a world that's overstimulating and demanding. We'll talk

about discipleship, “a long obedience in the same direction” over a lifetime.<sup>1</sup> We’ll discuss the Western cultural captivity of the church and whether we’re posting a life mantra on social media or actually living it out in our daily lives. And, of course, we’ll talk about others—we’re free to set others free; we are reconciled reconcilers. This is not a self-help gospel; it is good news for all.

As you read these pages, may you dig deep, weigh every word, and bring them before God. Agree or disagree, but whatever you do, always let it point you back to the Father because Jesus made a way to His heart and gave us the Word of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit to remind us of all truth. Keep putting one foot in front of the other, living this beautiful, messy, intricate tapestry of a life, following Jesus one day at a time, and humbly learning as you go. You’ll make mistakes and blunders; you’ll get hurt and you’ll hurt some people along the way too. But don’t lose hope or heart, and never give up. There is so much more to discover. Please, just don’t fake it, because a genuine life before God is worth the cost. May you boldly continue to walk along the road less traveled.

My mother-in-law’s life was a *lived* love letter to the church, and this book is my love letter to you.

Jenny followed Jesus with everything she had, from the moment she gave her life to Him until the moment she breathed her last and walked into her Savior’s arms. The music she composed will echo into eternity and our hearts forever and so will the trail she blazed for generations to come. Her life has left a passionate legacy of following Jesus with complete abandon. She has made an eternal imprint on our hearts.

May this book awaken you to the breath you *still* have in your lungs so that you don’t waste a single one.

## Refuse to Fake It

A disciple will be repaid for what he has learned and followed, for God pays no attention to the titles or prestige of men.

Colossians 3:25 TPT

She said I was “cute and entertaining.” Cute and *en-ter-tain-ing*. Take me now, Lord.

I had just finished speaking at a church, having completely poured myself out and at my most vulnerable, when a well-meaning woman said I was cute and entertaining. I’m sure she thought it was a compliment, but she may as well have slapped me across the face, and I didn’t feel like turning

the other cheek. My internal dialogue went into an unholy nosedive.

Her words may have had more to do with what she came to the gathering to receive than what I was actually giving, but they hit me hard, and so they should have. Instantly, I went into a contemplative, internal spiral. If thoughts could be heard, mine would have sounded like deep, guttural cries for God to search my heart: *Am I really only cute and entertaining? Is that all I have to give? Is that what I've been doing all this time, feeding consumers with entertainment? If so, then what is the point? God, if that's the case, forgive me . . . oh, and also, I quit.*

A tad dramatic, but that's truly how I felt in the moment. God has given me the gift of humor when I communicate, and it often comes out right before I bring a truth in love that's potentially hard to hear. Laughter has a way of softening the heart to hear what God desires to say. But upon hearing her "compliment," I had to ask myself a hard question: *Am I entertaining people, or am I teaching and, more importantly, living in the fullness of the gospel?* Humanity is desperate for the good news that we are restored in Jesus to our redemptive and created purpose in the middle of a world full of pain and suffering. All eyes are on the church to see if we're really living out what we say we believe. Again, I had to ask myself, *Am I following Jesus and leading others in the way to follow Him, or am I faking it, putting on a show and aiding in implementing Western consumerist culture in the church?*

The last thing I want to do is be fake or put on a show—ever.

Think about this: every painter's work is imperfect, but even the imperfections of a master craftsman can make their

work incredibly valuable. But a fake is worth almost nothing. In fact, in most industries, producing fakes is a crime. A fake *isn't* what it's pretending to be. The seller of a fake is hoping you'll be fooled and pay full price for something that is only a cheap imitation. Fakes rip people off. And the one who "sells" us a watered-down, fake, impotent Christianity is the enemy of our souls. As followers of Jesus, we should have endless grace for imperfections but zero tolerance for fakes. Sometimes we are simply more influenced by modern culture, accepting it as our highest form of reality and allowing it to become our ecosystem rather than creating a heavenly culture and ecosystem here on earth.

It took me a while to unwind that evening, but once I calmed down, I dozed off and entered a vivid dream state. The first place I found myself was in downtown Brooklyn, close to where I live, with my two youngest children, Finley and Sammy. My guardian angel was also with me and at my right shoulder the entire time. We were peaceful and safe, but the scene around us was far from either. I looked over to the subway entrance and saw a crowd gathered, taking pictures and videos with their phones of people who had been executed and piled on top of each other the night before. Policemen were trying to move the people on, but they were making a spectacle of death, exploiting others' pain and tragedy in broad daylight. As I turned into the square and walked past Borough Hall, severed heads charred by fire were everywhere. I looked down and realized that land mines had been set throughout the streets and the square to take out unsuspecting citizens. I knew in my gut that we were surveying the damage from a raid that had occurred the night before—the enemy was on the prowl, destroying lives, and I

had brought my children with me to open their eyes to the realities of the world they were living in and called to love. I had no desire to hide them from it. With a confident nod of assurance from my angel, I walked hand in hand with my children right into the minefield without any fear.

In the next scene of the dream, we found ourselves underground in a secret passageway that led to safety. We all had total peace in the midst of chaos as we walked home, picking up supplies from the stark shelves of the underground convenience store for the journey. Before I knew it, the scene switched again. All four of my kids, my husband, my mom and dad, and I were sleeping together in a room in an apartment building on the eighth floor in Crown Heights. I knew another murderous raid was about to take place, so I went to the window to keep watch. A mob was gathering on the street, lighting bombs and running into the building where we were sleeping. I quickly stirred everyone, and we hastily escaped.

I woke up from the dream disturbed and shaken, asking God if it was a nightmare or if it had any meaning. As I processed with the Holy Spirit, I began to understand that the dream represented the times we're living in. The enemy is setting traps and land mines for unsuspecting citizens roaming the earth, while at the same time humanity makes a spectacle of death via news channels and social media, exploiting the pain and trauma of the vulnerable. Sometimes this even happens in the church. If we could simply put our phones down more often and intentionally be about our Father's business—unfolding before our eyes—we'd see the change and transformation we long for that we post about on our feeds.

Taking my children by the hand into the chaos showed me that we aren't to shield them from the pain we see in this world but to show them how the gospel fills the gaps. I was reminded that we don't live out this life for ourselves only. We are charged with the mission to intentionally raise up the next generation, walking hand in hand into the middle of a broken world and passionately living out the good news of His great love and salvation together.

Being underground in the dream represented the truth that He has granted every life safe passage home, but there are still so many who need to know the way to go. We have the ability to open the door and show them the way (2 Cor. 5:18–20). Being in the apartment on the eighth floor in Crown Heights with family symbolized our new beginning (represented by the number eight) with Christ, crowned (Crown Heights) as sons and daughters of the king, living life together in family and community while watching and praying over one another (Matt. 26:41). We do this so that when attacks and invasions take place in our lives, we have one another to help us shoulder the burden and get through. Life is a battlefield full of land mines, both seen and unseen. It's important that we have friends and loved ones to keep watch when we are anxious, weary, and in the middle of a fight. As followers of Jesus, we can walk right into the middle of it all with confident assurance, and our lives can show others how to walk into the fray without fear. Following Jesus isn't safe. It's an adventure that will take us to places inside ourselves and outside ourselves in this beautiful, messy world that He loves so deeply, but only if we're willing to go. I love what Mr. Beaver says of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the*

*Wardrobe:* “’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”<sup>1</sup>

I think we can all agree that the last thing a lost and dying world needs is an army of cute entertainers who are only interested in putting on a show with an impotent gospel that temporarily fixes our symptoms but doesn’t heal the heart, soul, and body. Faking it is not how we intend to live, and sometimes, when we do find ourselves doing so, even unintentionally, we’re not really sure how we got there. We *all need* the reality of Jesus, not just a religious concept of who He is. And we need to see the manifestation of the good news He brings in and through our lives in the midst of the darkness, where bad things are still happening to good people on a daily basis. To be clear, God does not cause bad things to happen; He is good to the core and has only goodness to give. We live in a fallen world that is in grave need of the good news of the gospel through Jesus Christ who reconciles all things. We are empowered to pray that His kingdom come and His will be done here on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10) to thwart the darkness and cancel every assignment of the enemy, releasing God’s goodness wherever we go.

My husband, Paul, has often spoken of the time he gave his life to Jesus at age sixteen. His passion for Jesus and the house of God became so extreme that his parents, who weren’t believers at the time, thought he had joined a cult. He had become a new person, turning from the life he once lived and choosing to walk with passion in a completely different direction, following Jesus with his entire life. His internal world was leading his external world. Before this, Paul had gone to Catholic school and to church for Easter and Christmas each year with his family to be, in his words, “inoculated

with just enough Christianity not to take it too seriously.” I think somehow in our Western, consumerist culture, the Good News has been lost on some of us—maybe because we’ve mixed in just a little bit of Jesus, inoculating ourselves with Him rather than gladly surrendering our whole lives.

In some ways, we’ve relegated the Christian life to a moment of conversion, a lifting of our hand in a service with eyes closed and head bowed, when this moment is only the beginning of a beautiful, deep, and wide adventure full of twists and turns. Instead, after our moment of turning from our ways and turning to God, we often become consumers of the Christian life on our own terms. We look for a church that meets our needs and attend as regularly as possible, but if that church stops meeting our needs or offends us, we go and find another one, sometimes as easily as we buy a new pair of shoes. We’ve got to ask ourselves, *Since when did the church become all about us?*

There are social structures, systemic injustices, and corporate sins of the nations we are a part of that are in need of the transformation only the kingdom of heaven can bring. But as long as we are simply looking to be fed, entertained, and have only *our* needs met, the corporate needs of our communities go unnoticed, ignored, and neglected. True community is messy, but it is where sanctification, revelation, confrontation, activation, and transformation take place. When we try to follow Jesus on our own because “I’m the church and don’t need to go to church to be a part of it,” we miss out on the fullness of being part of a body—we miss out on becoming more like Christ as we rub shoulders with imperfect people who give us the opportunity to repent, forgive, and grow. Just as severed toes and limbs are useless

and dead to the body, I'd go so far as to say that *so are we* when we run away from what we became a part of the moment we surrendered our lives to Jesus.

Following Jesus is a long game, an adventure that requires us to lay down our lives and follow Him daily but not out of a loveless obedience. We follow Him out of a knowing that we are so loved that our lives were worth dying for. As a result, we are saved and reconciled back to our created purpose, and then we willingly lay down our lives for others. When the good news of the gospel becomes a genuine reality for us, we stop faking it through religious obligation and begin to lovingly and passionately follow Jesus anywhere, anytime—no matter the cost. Friends, just imagine your guardian angel giving you a nod of assurance to step right into all that God has for you—without any fear.

### **I Could Sing of Your Love Forever**

Spokane Christian Center, July 31, 1998, are the place and day I fell in love. I was literally blindsided by God's pure, extravagant, overwhelming love in the most beautiful way. Growing up with parents who were imperfect and flawed but deeply loving reflected something of the heart of God, so when I encountered His heart so clearly for the first time, I clung to it with desperate passion. My moment of conversion was radical, real, and raw. I had no desire to go back to my old life after experiencing that kind of love and acceptance. That moment on a summer evening was as real as they come.

It had been a roller coaster of a year for nineteen-year-old me. I was in the midst of a big breakup and near the end of my first year of college at the University of Washington

when it came to a crashing finish when my best friend's mom passed away during finals week. I woke up crying one morning with a gut feeling that something was wrong. I called my mom only to hear her crying and telling me that Janet's time was near. Janet wasn't just a friend of my mom's; she was like a second mother to me. Her daughter Brittani and I played together our entire upbringing and went to high school together. She was my best friend and is still like a sister to this day.

I ran across campus to the house of my older sister, Kristin, in my pajamas to tell her Janet was dying and I needed to get to Brittani to be with her. My shoulders were heaving as I ran sobbing through the quad. This was before cell phones, and my sister wasn't picking up her landline. When I got there, she held me for a moment and then went into big-sister mode, got on the phone, and bought me a plane ticket home. Hours later I was in the plane, but Janet left her earthly home while I was in the air.

Broken that I didn't have a chance to say good-bye, I needed closure. The next day I walked alone into the room where she lay at the funeral home to view the open casket. Upon seeing her face, I gasped and covered my mouth, quietly sobbing. She was gone. Her body was there, but her spirit, the essence of Janet, was not. Something deep ricocheted into my heart—eternal life is real; our bodies are an earthly home that will one day pass away. I wasn't following Jesus at the time, but I was so close. That moment drew me nearer to the truth.

That summer I traveled around the United States as a professional cheerleader and taught at summer camps for teenagers. This tour was my last crazy hurrah in search of

love before I came face-to-face with the real thing. Arriving home after the end of my tour, I went with my parents to the night meeting of the summer camp at their new church. We arrived late, the lights were down, and the chorus of a song by Delirious? was being sung over and over again: “I could sing of your love forever.”<sup>2</sup> And just like that, I hit a wall of love that melted into what felt like liquid, enveloping every inch of my body and seeping into hidden crevices of deep brokenness from prior years of suppressed pain. I was done for—in all the best ways.

When the evangelist for the evening spoke about what following Jesus means, it took everything in me to stay in my seat. My body was physically buzzing with this new infiltration of love, as if every cell in my body were vibrating, transforming my DNA into love. I wanted to shout at the top of my lungs to everyone in the room what was happening inside me. When the speaker asked who wanted to give their life to Jesus, we were encouraged to lift our hands. Instead, I shot to my feet and ran to the front—I didn’t have time for this “hand raising” business—because all I wanted to do was crash tackle Jesus with everything in me. I was done with my way; it wasn’t working. I was completely undone and in love. As I stood there in front of God and everyone, I whispered under my breath to the God of heaven who had come into my heart, “This is all I want to do—I just want to build Your church.” I had no idea what I was really saying or where that desire would take me, but all these years later I am still on the greatest adventure with the One who is always near, faithful, kind, and true.

That night I went home and cracked open the Bible my dad and mom had given me for my eighteenth birthday in

hopes that I'd read it. I hadn't really until that night, and the pages just "happened" to open to this passage:

"Come now, let us settle the matter,"  
says the LORD.  
"Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson,  
they shall be like wool." (Isa. 1:18)

Weeping with joy and gratitude, I was still overcome with a visceral response to this extravagant grace and love, welcoming them with open arms. Jesus and His great love for me settled the matter. I was clean, new, and restored to my created purpose as a reflector of God's image on earth. For the first time in a very long time, I felt like me.

### **The Problem and the Solution**

Why do we begin to fake it after we find, and are found by, such honest and real love? I believe the problem is that we live in a world filled with a lot of bad news, obsessed with self, and consumed with the need for more. At times it may even feel like the world is falling apart as we're confronted daily with racism, classism, sexism, suicide, anxiety and depression, and the collapse of the family unit. Not to mention shootings, the refugee crisis, mass incarceration, sex and labor trafficking, a nation divided, the threat of world war, and Christians being beheaded and killed in various nations. Even the church, which is created to be one body, has been tearing itself apart with prideful arrogance, all in the name of being right as though we've found some corner on God

no one else knows about. So we stand on our soapboxes and simultaneously mutilate the body of Christ we are meant to be one with.

I am a local church girl who believes that a healthy, thriving, imperfect, honest community of people who continue to grapple with the depths of the gospel and their created value *can absolutely* change the world one person at a time—together. I pray that we would continually be challenged individually and corporately by the reality of the gospel in our lives.

One of the hurdles we face within the Western church in regard to the gospel is twofold: either we believe in a gospel we can attain with our bare hands and then maintain with rules, or we operate in a comfort-driven gospel in which we are told, “If you’ve had a hard year or a tough life, come close to God today (as if He is far away) and He will make your life better.” When we walk out of the four walls of the church into the places we’re divinely positioned to *be* the church and make a difference, we can feel ill equipped to do so.

The antidote to the problem is that we have *the* Good News! Really good news—the kind that is full of God’s goodness, mercy, grace, and power—literally turning our lives upside down. And more than just having good news, it’s imperative that we see it working in our lives and, in turn, our spheres of influence. We can get so focused on the world around us that we forget Jesus came to set our hearts free within us to release the kingdom of heaven outside us. He didn’t come to deal merely with the symptoms of humanity but to fix the root of the problem. He came for not only our hearts but also our entire lives.

## **We Must Be Born Again**

The term *born again* has lost some of its deep meaning in our day and age, but it's not just Christianese. Let's break it down because at its core is the solution to the bad news we're surrounded with. That we can be born again *is* good news.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, *we* know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are *born again*."

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are *born of water and the Spirit*. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. (John 3:1–9, emphasis added)

Such a good question; let's explore this further. First of all, Nicodemus said, "We know that you are a teacher who has come from God." Nicodemus was part of the Jewish ruling council, those who were in charge of keeping watch over the letter of the law, and Jesus was messing with their theology. It was a compliment that Nicodemus called Him a teacher,

but he came under the cover of night, in hiding, to ask Jesus his questions on behalf of the Jewish ruling council. They knew Jesus had come from God because there was no way that on His own He could perform the signs, wonders, and miracles they were seeing. I wonder if Nicodemus had any inkling that this was the Messiah, the One who would turn the tide and save God's people from toil, animal sacrifice, and self-preservation once and for all.

I can only imagine that Nicodemus must have been pondering in his heart why we needed to be “born again.” The answer is found in the very beginning: the creation and fall of man as described in Genesis. God formed man from the dirt and breathed His image, “the breath of life” (2:7), into us for a purpose: to reproduce His image and fill the earth with His glory (1:28). When Adam and Eve were deceived into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by Satan, which God promised would surely kill them (2:17), the first result described was that “they realized they were naked” (3:7). Just one chapter earlier, the Bible noted that “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (2:25). But the fruit of spiritual death was self-consciousness—a turning to self rather than to God. From the time of Adam and Eve's sin, mankind has been born into the sin of Adam, forced to toil for protection and provision, no longer preoccupied with reproducing God's image through love and relationship but instead seeking for themselves. The *Good News* is that Jesus, the second Adam, came to reconcile us back to our Father and redeem all that was lost in the garden.

When Jesus referred to being born of water *and* the Spirit, it was in response to Nicodemus raising the question of natural, physical birth and the impossibility of us going back into

our mother's womb. It is as if Jesus was correcting Nicodemus by saying, "No, Nicodemus, you must be born both naturally and spiritually." In natural birth, before the baby enters the world, the amniotic sac bursts (hence, "my water broke"), and thus we are born of water. Think about the deep meaning of baptism in the context of being born again. First Peter 3:21 says, "This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." And Colossians 2:12 says, "Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Being baptized in water after we are born again of the Spirit declares to the world that our old life has died and we are now resurrected and made new in Christ's life.

To be born of the Spirit means we acknowledge that God is our Creator and Lord. We then purposefully turn from toiling and self-preservation to reconnect to the One who put our very breath and spirit within us while we were being knit together in our mother's womb (Ps. 139:13). When we acknowledge Jesus as our Lord, Savior, and Redeemer, who came to earth to ransom our lives *so that* we could be born again of the Spirit, we start to find ourselves living God-conscious lives, walking in the fullness of our created purpose and identity. Jesus said in John 14:6: "I am the *way*, and the *truth*, and the *life*; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (NASB, emphasis added). Acknowledging the Son is the way to the heart of the Father. In His arms we are born again, recognizing that He is our Father and we are His sons and daughters.

God doesn't hate the world and didn't come to punish it; God so *loves* the world that He sent His Son Jesus to redeem it back to Himself, and we, as Christ followers, are part of that redemption plan! We *get* to open the door to love!

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (John 3:16–21)

Truly following Jesus means that we surrender to the light of His great love and allow our deeds and heart motives to be exposed so that we begin to live true and honest lives that are God-conscious, not self-conscious. We long to reflect the glory and image of God on earth because after we understand how good this news is, we can't keep it to ourselves!

Maybe we keep the rules to stay in the good books because we've encountered a rote religion or we're indoctrinated with a fear of going to hell instead of encountering the radical love that *has* rescued us from hell. This is the kind of love that transforms a life and calls us into relationship—not obligation. It's the kind of love that causes us to jump all in

without fear of rejection. My hope is that throughout this book you will continually encounter the true nature of God, compelling you to walk in your created purpose. My prayer is that we'll all stop only consuming and start giving too.

### **The Way, the Truth, and the Life**

After processing my wild dream, I began to ask myself if I was a *fake* or a *follower*. Was I leading others to be fake and go through the motions, or was I living and showing the way to be a follower of Jesus, walking in the fullness of the gospel's transforming love?

As this question took up residence in my thought life, it led to a journey of uncovering what I have found throughout my twenty-year love story with God, of discovering what it means to be a follower of Jesus. I have many more years of life within me and still so much to learn, but just as the apostle Paul wrote passionate letters to the churches all over the earth in his time, so this is my love letter to the church today. It's a love letter about the difference between a life lived faking it with a hollow religion, mindless obligation, fear of man, and rule following and a life lived passionately loved and in love, following Jesus. A life lived drawing a line in the sand, committing to a beautiful journey of discovery and adventure, full of revelation, raw authenticity, honest emotion, mistakes made and learned from, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and relationships lived in reciprocity. A life marked by zeal, simplicity, power, and most of all love. A life lived as our true selves, reflecting the image of God here on earth.

The question we should all ask ourselves on a regular basis is, *Am I faking it, or am I following Jesus?* I write this to

you as a daughter, wife, mother, pastor, leader, and friend. As a woman who is learning more and more each day that life is finite and our pilgrimage on earth is practice for our eternal life in heaven.

It is such good news that Jesus didn't come so we could put on a show, living from the outside in, appeasing our guilty conscience by checking the box of Sunday church attendance. It's good news that we don't have to join the ranks of consumer Christians, living impotent lives Monday through Saturday. It's good news that He came so we may know the way to live, the truth to walk in, and the life we have no matter what we face. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Jesus is the embodiment of the *way* to the heart of the Father as we live a life reconciled to love. He shows us the way to live by personifying the method, because Jesus is the method. Self-help books and worldly methods can only take us so far. Watchman Nee said, "If all we get is merely a method, we will soon discover its ineffectiveness. God has not given us a method; He gives His own Son to us."<sup>3</sup> The more we know the Son, the more we know the way in which we are designed to live.

There are many facets to Christ's nature. He is full of fire and passion and is also the Prince of Peace. He operated in righteous anger, flipping over tables in the temple, and He celebrated at a wedding, turning water into wine. He is confrontational and at times mysterious, leaving us scratching our heads in wonder. He encouraged Peter in his revelation and rebuked him in the same breath for getting in the way. He led his disciples and taught them in very personal, immersive

ways and sent them out before they were probably “ready.” He came against the religious leaders and showed everyone a new way, the way of the kingdom, by performing signs, wonders, and miracles, manifesting the ministry of reconciliation. He sat at meals with wealthy sinners and rescued the outcast, poor, and downtrodden. He healed the multitudes and spent time alone with His Father in solitude. He is the Lion and the Lamb, and He cannot be tamed.

If we can continue to humbly learn what it means to follow in the *way* for the rest of our lives, embracing mystery and being committed to discovery, we’ll stay on our knees and in love. This is not only for a lifetime but also for eternity.

Jesus is the *truth* we are longing to hear, see, taste, touch, and deeply know in a world full of lies and half-truths in which everyone has their own fluid “truth.” Before Jesus was crucified, Pilate looked Him in the eyes and asked Him, “What is truth?” (John 18:38), unaware that truth incarnate, the bedrock and cornerstone, was standing right before him. The more we get to know Jesus and follow His ways, the more we understand truth because truth is a person. Truth is not merely a doctrine we uphold; it’s the person Jesus whom we follow and know intimately. He is the truth that we are invited to know more deeply each day and that has the power to set us free.

Jesus is the *life* we are all genuinely longing to live enveloped in the midst of mundane, ordinary days; in the high-lights and big events; and even in the darkness, trials, pain, and suffering we all face in different seasons. He is our true north—the eternity that has been placed in every heart trying to find home (Eccles. 3:11). For Christ, being and bringing life was effortless, because it’s not just what He does but who He

is. How often we toil to truly live by doing what we believe to be the right thing according to the expectations of others or even the unreasonable expectations of ourselves and in the end it feels lifeless and dead—when Jesus embodies the fullness of resurrection life that can infiltrate our every day. And we have access to *all* of Him!

### **The Invitation**

We are invited to leave our old ways of thinking and living, selfish ambitions, preconceived ideas, religious systems, agendas, biases, and sometimes even the ways of our family of origin to learn that we're created anew and adopted into the family of God. This is profound in every way and requires our entire self, not just our big toe. Sometimes we wonder why transformation isn't taking place in our lives. Maybe it's because we're not following Jesus at all. Maybe we're following our own way with a little bit of Jesus mixed in. Maybe we've begun to fake it.

After Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, he began to preach: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt. 4:17). The Passion Translation says, "Keep turning away from your sins and come back to God, for heaven's kingdom realm is now accessible." To repent means to be sorry and change your ways. It's frustrating when my kids (or someone else) say they are sorry but keep doing the same thing. I frustrate myself when I do that! Are we living like this with God, desiring all the benefits of relationship with Him without action on our end? Throughout Jesus's three years of ministry on earth, He went everywhere telling people to repent (be sorry) and change their ways because the kingdom of heaven had come near! When we encounter His love and

nature, we can't help but turn from self and look to Him for a new way to live.

In one of Jesus's many parables, He speaks of watchfulness, urgency, and readiness.

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (Luke 12:35–40)

When Jesus called the first disciples, they *immediately* left everything behind for an unknown adventure. They sensed the urgency of the hour and didn't waste their opportunity. Do you sense the urgency of the hour we now live in? Do you sense an urgency to follow Jesus anywhere, anytime with all that you are?

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. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. 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, and *immediately* they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matt. 4:18–22, emphasis added)

Jesus addressed Simon Peter and Andrew’s current life, a life of fishing, and then told them what they would become if they followed Him—and that was enough for them to literally leave everything behind. The invitation was clear, and so was their yes. He did it again with James and John. He simply called them and “immediately they left the *boat* and their *father* and followed him” (Matt. 4:22, emphasis added). They left their boat—their livelihood—for a promise of what? And they left their father, their family of origin, for an unknown journey. There is something about encountering Jesus that compels us to change everything because He is the life we are actually longing for. I pray that throughout these pages you’ll encounter a living God who is worth the immediacy and urgency of living a life of true repentance, purpose, and all-out love.

To leave our old lives and follow Jesus is the opposite of transactional or religious living—it’s transformational. Our lives begin to look different as we follow Him.

Is He truly our Lord *and* Savior, or are we treating Jesus as merely a good teacher whose words we can take or leave? C. S. Lewis puts it brilliantly:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would

not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic . . . or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>4</sup>

I left my figurative boat on July 31, 1998—*not* to follow a lunatic but to follow the Son of God, Jesus, my Savior and newfound friend, on an adventure that has led me down roads I've loved, savored, loathed, sometimes resented, skipped down with joy, and questioned the validity of, but nonetheless I've embraced them with every fiber of my being. I have made my choice, as we all must.

So here is my invitation to you: let's do this together. Let's dig deep and wrestle with the truth while asking our hearts some real questions. Let's refuse to fake it. Granted, discovering together what it means to passionately follow Jesus may get messy and confront some of our belief systems. But let's keep doing it until we breathe our last breath, and let's bring others along on the journey with us.

In the apostle Paul's words, "Whatever happens, keep living your lives based on the reality of the gospel of Christ, *which reveals him to others*" (Phil. 1:27 TPT, emphasis original). As we follow Jesus instead of the ways of popular culture, Christ will be revealed to others.

Let's wade out of the shallows and into the deep. Let's climb mountains and walk through valleys, lurking with mere shadows of death. Let's walk through the narrow gates of life, choosing an extraordinary faith that brings transformation

within and all around, “for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matt. 7:13–14).

### **Making It Real**

1. Faking it isn't usually intentional, nor is losing the joy of your salvation, but maybe that's where you find yourself as you read these words. If you're in that place, take some time in prayer to simply ask the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit how the joy of your salvation can be restored in your life. Try recalling the moment of your salvation or a time when you came to a deep revelation of Jesus's love for you. What did it feel like? What do you remember? What truth revealed dispelled the lies you believed? Write them down and take a moment to simply give gratitude to God for rescuing you. Pray that your *why* is restored once again.
2. Is there an area of your walk with Jesus in which you believe you are faking it? Take some time to either journal or pray to get to the bottom of why you find yourself there. What is one thing you can do today to stop faking it and follow Jesus with all that you are?
3. What is one way you can remove the distractions of an on-demand world and prioritize your relationship with Jesus on a daily basis? What things do you find hard to immediately leave behind when being called to move forward by Jesus? Is there anything you need to let go of in order to move ahead?