

## CHAPTER ONE

# One Choice Can Change a Life

*In their hearts humans plan their course,  
but the LORD establishes their steps.*

—Proverbs 16:9

**H**ave you ever taken a vacation and come back more frazzled than before you left? My husband, Ron, and I always wanted to go to Europe. So, along with my parents, we decided to visit eight countries in seventeen days on a tour bus to minimize worries about meals, hotels, rental cars, and so on. After a long day on the way to Vienna, Ron and I decided we were tired of touring by bus. My parents seemed unfazed by the ride and wished for a walk around the hotel for some sightseeing. We gathered our luggage, waited for forty people to check in, and trudged up five flights of stairs. “I have a headache,” Ron said. “Let’s not walk around the city but rest for a while.”

“That’s a good idea. I’m tired too,” I replied. I put a few items away and lay on the bed. Soon after, the fire alarm went off. Ron jumped up and sprinted for the door before he realized I was not following. He turned back to me. “Aren’t you coming?”

“No,” I said.

“What?” he replied with a shocked look, adding, “The building may be on fire. We have to leave.”

“I don’t feel compelled,” I replied and did not budge.

My husband of five years looked like he was weighing the full measure of his life at that moment. He pleaded, “But we have barely begun life together, and I want to spend more time with you. I don’t want to leave you.”

“I’m staying,” I said. “I don’t feel compelled to leave.”

“But the building may be on fire! If I leave, I may never see you again!” To which I replied, “I hope you have a nice life.”

Sounds cold, doesn't it? That happened when I was in my twenties. I was convinced I was not going to waste my energy by running downstairs when I was certain I did not need to.

Ron looked at the door, then at me as he quickly processed this information in his head: life or wife, life or wife, life or wife. Life eventually won out; he took one last look at me and left.

Twenty minutes later Ron returned, looking frazzled. "There really was a fire," he said. "It was in the kitchen, and I watched as people ran around and finally put it out." What if the fire had really gotten out of control? What makes one person heed the warning signs, while another totally ignores them?

When I think about choices, consequences, and God's response in the Bible, I see a message of grace that far outweighs the warnings. If I were to describe the whole Bible in three words, I would say, "God is love." If I were to describe it in one sentence, I would use 1 Kings 18:21: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." In other words, do you want the God of love or the enemy resolved to destroy? God loves each of us unconditionally and demonstrates that He is actively involved in our lives.

When I was in college, the transit system ran a special: With just ten cents and a student card, you could ride the bus one way into town. Often I did not even have that much.

One day the college sent me a letter, stating, "You need to pay two thousand dollars, or else you will not be able to register for next quarter." Have you ever received a letter to cough up money or else? I worked in credit unions before college, and I had seen vehicles repossessed. So when I received my college letter, I was desperate and fell to the floor before God to plead and pray. "Heavenly Father, I need Your help! My parents and grandparents are all tapped out. I don't have any money. You are all I have. You see the letter I received and can get me in next quarter. Only You can solve this." A half hour later, I got up and headed over to see the finance person. "I just don't have anything for next quarter," I said.

She replied, "Would you believe that right before you came in, I received a phone call from someone that will donate two thousand dollars? You can have it. All they want is a thank-you note." She pushed paper and a pen across the desk to me. Awestruck, I took the pen and wrote a heartfelt thank-you note. That is amazing grace! My desperation drove me to prayer, and God responded to my cry for help.

## **God speaks to individuals**

Jonah received a warning message from the Lord, stating, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me” (Jonah 1:2). Jonah finally went, after spending three days in the belly of a big fish, saying a prayer of distress and receiving the message a second time.

What did the Ninevites do? They repented, fasted, and prayed. Even the king covered himself with sackcloth and ashes. Jonah 4:2 says that God relented from sending calamity. Everyone that turns to God is His favorite, but, even then, we do not always receive instant results. Instead, there are many verses that encourage us along our journey through life: Jeremiah 29:11; Proverbs 3:5, 6; and this one, which I really like, in Proverbs 16:9, “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.” This verse is easier to understand and accept when we look in hindsight; when looking forward, it is easy to become discouraged. In fact, sometimes God’s involvement takes several years to unfold.

During my senior year at a Christian academy, my friend Jennifer asked me to go with her to an upcoming regional Christian Bible conference. The conference was not in an exciting location nor did it sound like fun. So I responded, “No, I do not want to go.”

Jennifer replied, “But maybe God wants you to do this. You should pray about it.”

How could I answer that without praying? So I spent a few days in prayer and was surprised to find God saying, “Go!” Oddly enough, Jennifer got sick a few days before the event and was not able to attend. Since I knew God had said, “Go,” I went by myself. On Friday evening, there was a get-together in a large hall. I walked in, headed clear across to the other side of the building, and sat in the back where I could view the whole crowd. *Hmm, I feel a little awkward sitting by myself without a friend. Lord, show me why I’m here.* Just then two teens walked in the door. These girls appeared to be head and shoulders above the crowd. Just as I thought, *They are really tall. I wonder how tall they are,* God said to me, “*Pray that they will be your friends.*”

*What? Is God kidding? I don’t even know these people. They don’t go to my school.* Very curious about how God could get these tall people to be my friends and knowing God said it would take prayer, I started praying about it.

Praying about something you cannot see takes faith. The Bible says, “We

live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). This was the fall of my senior year, and I continued to pray about it for a few months. After that, I did not think about it much. Imagine my surprise when I saw the two tall girls in my summer college English class and also sunbathing on the roof while listening to loud rock music. Except for small chit-chat that whole summer, we did not become fast friends. So I resumed praying.

Summer turned into the fall quarter, and out of hundreds of room combinations it seemed to be divinely directed that the tall girls moved in next door. I went over to say hello. They were nice enough; and in the days that followed, I kept making excuses to visit. Teri gave me a hot chocolate and coffee drink every time I came over. It tasted good, so I kept going back, all the while remembering God’s words in my head, “*Pray that they will be your friends.*” I wondered just what God was going to do with this story. One time curiosity got the best of me, and I asked, “Jackie and Teri, how tall are you?”

“We get that question all the time,” Jackie said. “I’m five feet nine, and Teri is five feet eleven.”

They drove my roommate absolutely crazy. Bonnie\* was into Christian music and thought the tall girls were to be avoided at all costs. I do not know how many times she warned me to stay away because their loud rock music played right through the walls and, as she put it, “Surely these girls are evil. They even go to parties.” But Bonnie had not heard God’s voice in my head, and I was not about to tell anyone what God had said. So I just kept visiting Jackie and Teri. By the end of first quarter, though, Teri had grown weary of college, probably because of too much time spent partying and not enough time spent on classes, so she moved back home. I was sad that my prayers for her to stop partying did not seem to be answered. Bonnie continued to be horrified and finally said, “I am moving out because you have the wrong type of friends.” Looking back, it is easy to see that this was divine involvement. Jackie and I were without roommates, so we decided to room together and, yes, we became good friends.

### **One choice makes a difference**

Little did I know then how this academy prayer was going to affect the rest of my life. After my sophomore year, Jackie and her boyfriend Kevin moved to another location, where Kevin would be taking nurse’s training. *Hmm, Lord, who should be my next roommate?* I prayed about it and then

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\* Bonnie is a pseudonym.

called the dean. “There is a woman named Lois you should go visit,” she said, giving me a phone number. “She needs a roommate next year.”

We spoke over the phone, and I asked to visit her. Lois was into classical music, and I was listening to rock music and some Christian stuff (a big deal when sharing a small room). However, we both liked to pray. Sometimes we would talk about what worked with prayer and what did not. Other times we would pray about our future husbands.

At the end of our first year as roommates, Lois shared that she was going away to be a student missionary for a year.

The last day of school as I was saying Goodbye to Lois, God whispered to me, “*She’s going to be your prayer partner fourteen years from now.*”

*What?* I shuddered. *I can’t even imagine what I’ll be doing fourteen years from now.* Sometimes it is difficult to grasp how some of God’s statements tie into the future.

Late in my senior year of college, I received a call from Jackie. “I’m getting married, and I want you to be a bridesmaid,” she said.

“I would be honored to be one,” I replied excitedly.

“It’s going to be two days after your graduation, so it won’t interrupt school for you or my fiancé, Kevin,” she said. What an answer to that prayer at the Bible conference in academy! Now I would be a bridesmaid!

The rest of the year flew by, and my parents came up for my graduation. Out on the lawn after the ceremonies, while everyone was being congratulated, my mother said to me, “Since you did not find a man in college, he will be even harder to find.” And she went on to share some statistics. I was startled by her words (she later said she was joking), but I had a quick comeback: “Mother, God knows just exactly where my man is; and when the timing is right, we will meet.”

Two days later I was a bridesmaid in Jackie and Kevin’s lovely wedding. Later, at the reception, people were chatting and eating cake. Usually, I look for someone to talk with, but I started to feel uncomfortable, as if I was not supposed to be where I was. To shake the feeling, I decided to go outside for a few minutes. As I exited the building, I saw a lone man with a video camera. The night before, at the rehearsal, he had said hello to me, but I did not know his name.

Now, at the reception, I was prepared as I said, “Hey, Ron, is that your video camera?”

At our wedding one year and four months later, we shared the story of my mom’s words after my college graduation. Of course, Jackie and Lois were

bridesmaids, and Kevin was a groomsman. That was about four and a half years after I prayed that the tall girls would be my friends.

God wants to be first in our lives in everything. He is eager for us to trust Him with all the details. Trusting Him now and each day that comes will help to develop a pattern for trust when an emergency decision arises. My husband and I are extremely grateful that I made the right choice about going to the Bible conference and then prayed when God asked me to. Sometimes an earthly choice can make an eternal difference.

### **Sometimes one choice can save another**

One April day I went to my mother's house to care for my father while she took a break. However, as I sat at the kitchen table, I realized I was too tired to help. *How long have I felt like this? I feel a little strange. I should go home and lie down.* Thirty minutes later, while lying down, I realized my heart was beating irregularly. *I'm so busy and must have been in denial. I think this has been going on for a while. This is not good.* I called a paramedic friend. "Lewie, I have lost all my energy, and my heart is beating double beats."

"Go to the emergency room," he said.

"I don't want to go to the emergency room. Are you sure this isn't just one of those menstrual times women get?"

"You don't want to play with your heart. You need to go to the emergency room."

I thought, *Well, that was not very fun advice. I need a second opinion.* After all, who wants to go to the emergency room? I have gone before with my mother to the emergency room, and they usually admitted her—sometimes for days at a time. *This could disrupt my whole week,* I thought. So I called my regular doctor's after-hours number. His advice? "Go to the emergency room now!"

*Oh, good grief, there's no way around this one.*

"Ron, we need to go to the emergency room," I said as I stood up, walked into the kitchen, and grabbed my purse. This was news to him because I had not shared my warning signs with him. While Ron drove, I notified four close friends, asking for prayer.

If you mention the word *heart*, they call you right in for an electrocardiogram (EKG). However, they kept sending me out to the waiting room because they did not have a room for me. All twenty-five emergency rooms were full. Between tests, they sent me out to the waiting room. Ron was pacing back and forth. Several hours went by, and I finally sent him to Taco Bell

for food. *Good grief, it feels like I'm by myself*, I thought. Except that I was holding on to God's hand, "For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you" (Isaiah 41:13).

While Ron was away, a man came in, stood in front of me, and asked, "Is someone sitting beside you?"

"No," I responded. Even though there were plenty of seats, he sat down one seat from me. Then he grabbed his side, doubled over, and loudly moaned.

I leaned in toward him and asked, "Are you in pain?"

"I was debating whether to kill myself or come here," he sighed.

Instantly, I knew I had chosen wisely to come to the emergency room. Good thing we both finally heeded the warning signs. It is interesting that in order to reach someone in an emergency situation, I had to be in an emergency situation myself.

The man, whose name was Richard, and I had a good hour-long conversation. At the end, when they finally called his name, he said, "You have been an angel. I don't know what I would have done without you. You kept me calm and gave me hope." Praise the Lord the emergency room beds were full, I made a good choice, and God was involved. "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

### **Moments of Reflection:**

1. Read Revelation 1:1–8 for the rest of the story of how God will rescue us from this world's emergency situation.

2. Have you ever felt impressed to pray about someone or something? Did you note the date and circumstances in your journal and begin to pray about it? If you did, lift up a prayer of praise to God for looking out for you. If you did not, plan to do so the next time.

3. Jot down any emotions you may feel about similar circumstances to those mentioned here. Also jot down any Scripture promises you find to claim for yourself.

4. If you have been impressed to pray about someone or something and you have seen at least a partial answer, write it down or share your testimony with your group.