

Whose Life Are You Living? by Curt Martin

an excerpt

Introduction

What does it really mean to live the unique and incredible life that God designed for us? And how might that life be different than the average Christian's life? God would awaken us to the specific purpose and kingdom missions that He has for us. These would become our primary focus. The important priorities of family, work, friendship, etc. would take on greater meaning and be approached more effectively. Accordingly, we would become as the Apostle Paul described in the book of Ephesians: "God's masterpiece." In other words, we would be transformed through God's specific journeys of "walking in His Spirit" rather than in our flesh. We would live Christ's life instead blocking Him and living for ourselves.

Most Christians miss much because they are not being led or mentored to understand and live as God designed. Some Christians miss out because they are simply trying to fit in with the general church culture with which they have aligned. Others are Christians in name only. And others, including longtime Christians with deep conviction, believe they already have it all figured out. Many Churches are following these same patterns.

This book is written for Christians who sense, at least viscerally, there is much more to being Christians than they are experiencing. They are willing to devote their lives to becoming His unique masterpieces, since them doing so will help propel other Christians forward as well. It is also written for all who are seeking the true purpose for their lives and are willing to consider Christ.

The idea of God's Spirit living and working both "In and Through Us" is often misunderstood. God's Spirit is always engaged in both activities if we are living under His authority and obeying His voice. We experience His many facets of relationship, teaching, and transformation. Many Christians understand at least part of this concept. What is totally missed by many, however, is God's design that it is to be His Spirit, not our flesh, which is flowing through us to achieve His will. Yes, God utilizes every part of us as instruments for impacting our environment, but His work is to be accomplished by Him, in His gifts and power, and not by our flesh (which is our minds, wills, emotions, and bodies.)

We are to learn the incredible difference between walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh. The first results from total surrender; we live under the control of God's Spirit and operate in His power. God commands this life which glorifies Him. The second is operating in our own initiative, skills, and power, which the Bible teaches is detrimental to His kingdom purposes because the Spirit and the flesh are always opposing each other.

Living His way is not easy. Many in your family, culture and church will not understand you and will pressure you to conform to their expectations, even when you are fully obedient to Christ. However, it eclipses all lesser attempts at life. As a result of following Christ's Spirit, you will find that every aspect of your life (including marriage, parenting, profession, ministry activities, and overall enjoyment) is better than it ever could have been if you were doing it in your own strength. You will experience the enormous differences between simply being a nominal Christian, being content with living as a safe and comfortable club-member Christian and walking with Christ to be all He created.

We are all either becoming more like Christ and experiencing His life as He impacts others through us, or we are missing His design by attempting to be the one doing the impacting. The first way brings greater faith, positive productivity, freedom in Christ, and fulfillment. The other way leads to us being less effective, less fulfilled, and often destructive.

Being able to walk with God does not simply require greater knowledge of Him. It also requires greater knowledge of who He created us to be, and how we are to live uniquely for Him. We need to ask ourselves if we are living God's truths in His Spirit vs attempting to use Christian principles to support our own initiatives. And we need to ask ourselves if we are using our time, energy, and resources to express our faith in every aspect of our lives in a way that is aligned with our unique, kingdom missions. We are to honor this uniqueness in ourselves and others.

Our unique walk with God is not about trying to “act like Him” or coping the life of some impressive Christian. We are to permit Him to live in and through us as He transforms us into the masterpieces that live in His likeness. In doing so, we become the unique individual that He designed as He guides us through both failures and victories.

“Becoming” what He has designed for us to be in the future is always occurring as we walk with Him. Each step includes newness in every moment, is ordered by God, and leads into growth and maturity as it results in becoming all we are to be. In a simple analogy, an eagle that is raised in a healthy environment does not have to try to be an eagle. It “is one” and is naturally maturing in all the skills and behaviors that are appropriate for age and environment. We are much more complex, and we have choices that include saying “No” to Him and becoming less than God designed. But the analogy holds if we chose a truly healthy walk with God.

Secular Culture Has Invaded Christ's Church

The biblical principles in this book present God's desire for each of His children to live fully in His purpose and power. They are timeless and will not change. However, as secular culture has invaded Christ's Church, many Christian leaders have focused on teaching basic truths without teaching transformation into living them through the power of God. For instance, God's command to “walk in His Spirit” has either been dropped as His living reality and lifestyle for Christians or it has been marginalized by groups that either deny it or take it to excess as they destructively imitate it through their flesh.

Thankfully, most Christians desire to have a close, personal relationship with God, a clear purpose for their life, and a deep commitment to their Christian faith. A recent Barna study evaluated what Christians from three separate groups desire to receive from their faith. These groups were Evangelical Christians, Born-Again Non-Evangelicals and individuals who define themselves as Christian but are not Born-Again. A vast majority of the first two categories, 90 % and 94% respectively, and a significant 65% of the third desire “a close relationship with God.” Additionally, 90 % and 87% respectively of the first two categories and 72% of the third desire “a clear purpose for living.” The Bible and Christ's life teach that these desires can *only* be found through salvation and learning to Walk in the Spirit instead of the flesh. Many Christians are not being taught how to live in these truths. They miss the lives God designed.

Even though a substantial percentage of Christians have these desires, significant numbers are leaving the Church. (Many others know that “something is missing.”) One Gallup poll reports that, since 1999 the percent of Americans who belong to a house of worship has declined by 23% to an historical low of 47%. Though they are leaving, another Gallup poll (2017) reports that 87% of Americans still say that they believe in a “god” but are not attracted to organized religion. There are many theories that seek to blame or explain this in manners that support one's favorite perspectives. However, since two of the greatest desires for three major categories of Christians are to have a close relation-

ship with God and to have a clear purpose for living, it seems obvious that many are not fulfilling these needs in their churches. What is happening and what needs to Change? What if Christian Churches were truly teaching attendees to move beyond learning facts and mimicking Christian truths to walking in His Spirit as God designed? What if these churches were intentionally and individually mentoring attendees to have their lives transformed as they experience ever-deepening personal relationship with God and surrender control to His Spirit as He centers their lives around their unique identity and Missions in Christ? What if individuals and churches became intent on actually “living and walking in God’s Spirit” instead of mimicking Christ’s life through comfortable, secularized Christianity? God’s power would be as explosively evident as it was in the early Church. His unique design and missions for each life would be realized in all of God’s power as His Spirit was given His rightful position. Those who are truly seeking Christ would not only stay, but they would thrive in Christ and help others to do the same. His Church and its individuals would awaken to the masterpiece lives that the Bible presents. This transformation will not be easy. The gap between secular culture and Christ’s Biblical Church will continue to widen, just as the Bible prophesizes it must. However, Christ’s Church will draw and hold God’s people, and Christianity will embrace its calling to be salt and light. Individuals and churches are being called to choose Christ’s Life or their own.

This book presents this challenge/opportunity and provides the biblical truths and guidance for life that will transform those who choose to live by them. Now is the time for you to engage with God’s word and His Spirit to intentionally embrace them with all your being. Give Him absolute control of every aspect of life. Alternatively, you may reject His life as you determine to stay in control. The first-choice results in His incredible life and purpose. The second in a futile imitation. As you walk with Him through this book, be honest with yourself about whose life you are choosing to live. Christians and Christian Churches are to return to walking in His power so that they touch all they encounter with the true identity, love and transforming presence of Christ. Anything less than biblical Christianity, lived in the power of God’s Spirit, is an imitation of God’s design and fails to please Him.

What Differentiates This Book

First, this book shares one thing with every truly God-honoring Christian book. The Bible and its verses are the foundation for every chapter and every truth that is presented here. However, it is differentiated in significant ways as it highlights biblical life through truths that are not emphasized or effectively taught elsewhere

The first is God’s truth that we are spiritual beings (who happen to have bodies) as opposed to physical beings who happen to have a spirit. Individuals who approach life from this biblical perspective are able to Be and Become all that they are created to be in Christ. Those who view themselves as primarily physical beings, who may have some mystical “spirit,” are destined to the futile life of trying to “act like Jesus.”

The next critical difference is that we build on this first truth by helping Christians to receive and live in God’s life-transforming command to “walk in His Spirit” and not in their flesh (Galatians.) We treat this topic of “walking in the Spirit” in a way that we believe avoids excesses on both sides of this command of God. Included within this topic are the incredible truths that Christians are to learn and live by the revelation and transformation of the Spirit, in place of being governed by the flesh’s head-knowledge. We also demonstrate biblically how God’s design is for our spirits, souls, and bodies to voluntarily surrender all to the control of God’s Spirit. Then His Spirit, through our spirit, is in authority over our natural persons (mind, will, emotions and body.) This is the opposite of how unsaved individuals and carnal-Christians live, where their flesh is in control. Embracing this truth is second in importance only to receiving salvation through Christ. It is necessary for all who desire to truly experience the Biblical Christian life. Living and Walking in His Spirit is God’s command for all.

Third, we do not give formulas or tell exactly how God's truths and unique walks in the Spirit will be expressed in and through each of us. We teach readers to permit His Spirit to guide them as they journey through the book, and accordingly how to apply this practice to all of life. He will bring about the transformations that result in living our incredible masterpiece lives. He knows the correct steps for each leg of our journeys. You are responsible for surrendering to His authority. He will not force you. First, decide whose life you will live. If you choose Christ, we then ask you to make a life-time decision to embrace His truths and walk in His Spirit. If you reject Him or His command to walk in His Spirit, we ask you to be sure you understand the consequences of your decision. As you proceed and discuss thoughts with others, you will find many "Christians" who will provide justifications for walking away from the Bible to choose living in secular-Christian ideologies. Please choose the Bible and God's Spirit as your final sources for decisions. As you choose to intentionally live for Christ by living and walking in His Spirit, your times of imitating the Christian life in your flesh will continuously diminish throughout life.

Fourth, you will be asked to accept the empowered life that God has for you. Shift from a performance-based life to walking in the incredible freedom and joy of holding your Father's hand as you and He experience life together. He will transform you from being one who thinks you must gain acceptance by performing for Him (or others) to one who thrives as God guides you in "Being and Becoming" your true self in every moment. We have all spent some or all of our lives trying to perform on a stage for multiple audiences, including God. He does not want this. He loves you as you are and delights in walking with you as you "Be/Become" who you are through His Spirit. You cannot earn His love or destroy it; it is there for all time. Nothing you have ever done or ever will do can change the depth of His love for you. Be aware of when you are performing on life's stage for individuals and cultures, instead of living solely for God. For both good and selfish reasons, all forces other than God are trying to have us become the individuals that they desire us to be. God wants us to gain His freedom by setting these chains down as He teaches us to seek only His validation. Honor others but no longer perform for them. His Spirit's walk with you is one of teaching you to be comfortable in "Being and Becoming" who you truly are in Christ. Stop trying through efforts of your flesh.

Fifth, you will find the true purpose of your life by identifying God's unique and specific Mission(s) for you and making them your primary focus. His specific Mission(s) become the first priority of your life and all other legitimate and wonderful priorities align naturally and effectively under your calling. You experience deeper growth in Christ and find that all other priorities of life become more effectively engaged than they could have ever been if you were not walking in His Spirit.

Sixth, you will learn to live in the full nature of Christ as both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God. Christ desires to express all aspects of His identity both in and through you. Most Christians and churches have limited their focus to trying to "Act like Jesus, the Lamb of God" as they think about how His love, grace, compassion, and the fruit of the Spirit are to be expressed. As you are learning to walk in God's Spirit, He will teach you that you are not to "block" Him as you permit Him to live through you in all that Christ is as both the Lion and Lamb.

Finally this book differentiates itself by presenting a comprehensive journey with God. It begins with asking you to evaluate your salvation and continues through the significant biblical steps that enable you to grow and live all of the unique life He has for you. Each chapter asks you to turn to the Spirit for His revelation regarding both biblical content and your next transformation steps. Your journey is uniquely wonderful, though often difficult.

How to Use This Book

As noted, you are guided to walk through each chapter under the revelations and leadership of God's Spirit. Before you begin, ask Him for His revelation and His specific guidance regarding what and how you and He are going to apply it. Remember, the chapters present **scripture truths** but **not formulas, rules to follow, or religious behaviors that are to govern how you measure and achieve God's success**. You are to work with the Spirit to determine what He has for you and how you and the Spirit are going to move forward. This journey helps you walk with God through eighteen foundational biblical truths. Each builds on the other and permits great freedom and maturity to blossom in your Christian life. During the last section, you work through activities that help you be specific about your identity and kingdom missions and to create plans for moving forward into the masterpiece life of God. It concludes with reminders that this life is not a game. God has entrusted much to you, and you will only learn to truly Be and Become His masterpiece as you embrace His design and walk under the control and authority of the Spirit.

Confirm everything in this book and all of life, through your own Bible study. Only as you learn to understand truths **through the revelation of God's Spirit** and **live them through the life of walking in God's Spirit**, will you be and become His unique masterpiece.

My Background

My professional interactions and Christian ministry experiences have privileged me to walk with individuals from many nationalities, cultures, races, sociological backgrounds, and economic situations. My wife and I have enjoyed twenty-five years of working with couples as both Christian marriage mentors and group marriage growth facilitators. Also, during the last twenty years I have served in various Christian Ministry positions, including board membership and individual client support for three Ministries whose focus is on individuals who are seeking God's restoration. They are dealing with challenging circumstances that include criminal histories, substance and pornography addiction, mental health challenges and the simple truth that all of us are broken and often need support as we seek the healing and incredible life God has for us. More than 30 years in management and leadership positions provided an additional perspective on releasing God to accomplish His purposes. Through each of these opportunities and our own challenges and transformations, God has taught us much about supporting others in their spiritual and natural journeys.

God has led me through deeply transforming spiritual experiences that have taught me much that He included in His (this) book. Most are difficult as they result from following Him into situations where I am totally dependent on Him. As I learn to walk in His Spirit, I am to always ask Him what He is doing, both in the spiritual and natural realms. I then ask what He wants to do in and through me. It is then His Spirit that works, not me. I am to see individuals and situations through His eyes and to permit His Spirit to lead in each circumstance. Yes, I mess up, but He draws me to Him, and I learn again. These experiences have included interactions with the enemy's forces. Without these realities of His spiritual life, I could only share theoretical religion and call it Christianity. They were and are necessary for moving forward and permitting Him to provide His truths in this book. The Bible and His Spirit are the sources of the life and energy that He has placed in this book. Through them God has developed me to care passionately about you and your walk with your Heavenly Father. My objective and commitment to Him for every concept and sentence in this book is that it is His, not mine.

Personal Example

My family demanded excellence in everything along with the requirement that I met the cultural expectations of all around me. I was also wired differently than many others as I saw opportunities that many could not and knew how to achieve them. I never understood why I was not able to communicate my ideas in ways that the majority could understand. I began to think that there was something majorly wrong with me. This became problematic in the work environment. Frustration and anger became destructive coping modes. While attending a leadership seminar at The Center for Creative Leadership, I learned that I registered “off the chart” on the Innovative scale. My instructor reviewed this and said, “No wonder you have difficulty fitting in. All organizations and families are structured to operate through individuals who conform to the central behaviors and processes. These are their cultural norms, and compliance is valued more than innovation. You are not ‘wired’ to work that way. Most of your peers are not able to understand and value why you are not like them, and they cannot hear what you are saying. They are not there yet and may not be wired to ever function there.” He also described my troubling and recurring experiences as common to highly innovative individual. I was stunned, but more importantly, **I was also liberated.** Central cultures had taken my differences as failures and weaknesses and pressed me to change. He described them as strengths. Normal cultures stifled me, and I pressed all the buttons of individuals that were comfortable there.

I had spent decades confused by these cultural differences. Now I knew that although I had plenty to learn my core identity **was not “broken.”** God intentionally created me in this way, not better or worse than anyone else, but **specific to His unique calling on my life.** The years of conflict were necessary, as they helped shape me for God’s purposes and missions.

God’s passion is for His same freedom, purpose, and victory to become your life. This is the unique life in His Spirit that He asks you to embrace. You are designed to be a one-of-a-kind, incredible masterpiece of God. He is calling you to set aside all other expectations and claim His identity, your true identity, as you walk in Him.

Conclusion

God has filled me with His passion for your life to be and become all that you are in Christ. Little touches me more deeply than caring that you find and walk in God’s true freedom and realization of Your full kingdom identity.

Embrace your incredible journey of walking in His Spirit as He lives in and through you to bring you into all of the fullness He designed for your life and missions. I pray that you permit His Spirit to reveal His truths and transform you through God’s word and examples in this book. Please join me in this journey, as I have a long way to go. God is calling all to break free from imitations and immature expressions of Christian life and release Him to awaken all that He has placed within. God always has more of Himself to share and more transformation to be accomplished in and through each Christian’s life. This book is one of His tools for touching your life.

Chapter 2

Whose Life Are You Living? Whose Life Do You Choose to Live?

Matthew 6:24

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

Gal 1:10

For do I persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

Galatians 2:20

It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me

Living each day for Christ and Him alone transforms us into being fully effective at every level of His design for our lives. Walking in His Spirit with His missions as our first priority, allows us to no longer be torn apart by trying to meet the expectations of others who make claims on our lives. Permitting God to prioritize and fulfill all other expectations according to His purpose, love, and power allows us to thrive in Christ and glorify His Kingdom as He lives in and through us. As Galatians says, we will no longer seek to please men, but will experience the incredible wonder of being the bondservant of Christ. Christ's love and power will flow through us.

If you are on God's path, this chapter will help you stay there. If you are not walking in His plan, this chapter will ask you to choose either the fulfilling and powerful life God designed for you or stay side-tracked by the controlling expectations of all other sources. Only Christ knows who you really are! You can only know and become your true self when you permit the Holy Spirit to reveal and develop His identity in you. Walking your journey with Him is the only way to experience the fullness and joy of truly living.

This chapter is split into three sections that ask, *Whose Life Are You Living?* *Whose Life Do You Choose to Live?* What realities and challenges accompany God's incredible walk?

Whose Life Are You Living? What Audiences Are You Performing For?

Are you living for Christ alone or are you defining your life by seeking to please others who want you to meet their expectations? Is God's design for your life just one more input you consider along with the rest? Do you recognize that expectations placed on you by family, culture, friends, workplace, church, and especially your self-determined identity will conflict with some of God's design for you? Many people's intentions are good, but they might not see the real you and God's purpose for you. Other's intentions are selfish and destructive to your purpose in Christ. Whose life are you living?

Consciously or not, each of us reacts to those with significant influences on us, people from our past and present, as though we're performing on a stage. Authority figures such as parents, school administration, coaches, pastors, Sunday School teachers, and police play significant roles. Social structures such as families, neighborhoods, clubs, gangs, clicks, sports teams, and our ethnicity influence our identity choices. Some are to be embraced under God's direction, but many are to be set aside. Envision yourself in the center of a large stage, surrounded by an audience. You know most of the audience, and each person is asking you to meet their needs or to be who they want you to be. Make this real because it is, no matter how mature and independent you believe you are.

Where is God in the crowd and what is His current role in your life? Let the loving voice of God's Spirit replace all others. He will help you to determine which voices you are to respond to and how to let Him provide what they truly need through you. It may not be what they are requesting. He will bring His discernment and healing into your life.

You may hear the echoes of destructive voices, but He will break their authority over you. As you choose to live solely for Him and walk in His Spirit, you will Be and Become all that He created you to be. Even life lived solely for Him is filled with challenges and victories, sad times, and rejoicing times. Only by staying in constant obedient fellowship with the Holy Spirit will you know if you are staying on the right path.

Are You Trapped or Free?

Consider the following analogies. How do they reflect your life or the lives of others you know? Are you living the purpose and passions God has wired into your very being?

An Eagle or a Chicken

An eagle egg dropped out of its nest onto the straw in a chicken yard. An industrious and loving Mother Hen got the egg into her nest and hatched it with her own. The family embraced and nurtured the eaglet, and it grew up emulating chickens. Regardless, it could not fit in. It was never healthy, and it had strivings and passions imprisoned within that it could neither understand nor fulfill. It was dying, emotionally and physically, though its family and the "wise" leaders of the flock tried to help it be a "good chicken."

The farmer was saddened by the impact of this circumstance on both the eaglet and flock and began the process of introducing the eaglet to its true nature, including how to fly, hunt and ride the winds. God had infused this nature into it.

Over time, the eagle became fully alive, physically and in its identity. Its inner being and passions began to be realized. When it was set free it **soared** into the heavens with a cry of exhilaration. For the rest of its life, "It Truly Lived."

Some well-meaning chickens were saddened. They felt the eagle was "not acting as a chicken should." They believed it had been misled. His adoptive mother understood that her child was becoming what God created it to be, instead of what she and others had lovingly but incorrectly thought it should be.

(God places equal value on all parts of His Body, the Church. The identities of both eagles and chickens have unique and equal value in His kingdom. Neither is to attempt to be like the other, even though both are to learn from each other. Even as eagles learn from other eagles, they are to always recognize and honor each other's God-given uniqueness.)

The Apprentice Juggler

The story of “The Apprentice Juggler” is one of many outstanding chapters from David and Karen Maims’ book, “Tales of the Kingdom.”

It talks about an apprentice who desires with all his heart, to be a juggler. He has the natural skills, but something always interferes with his success. The apprentice trains and trains, but he can only maintain a juggler’s rhythm for so long. Suddenly, another and stronger rhythm takes over from deep within. He hides it and attempts to overcome it. He believes he is a failure and will ruin every performance of the juggler troupe.

When the time arrives for the troupe to perform for the King, the Christ figure, the apprentice is so afraid that he is willing to quit and seek another direction. Heartbroken and in desperation, he permits himself to privately follow his own rhythm. A beggar, the King in disguise, sees him practicing and encourages him to trust his rhythm. It is **who he is**. Recognizing the beggar is the King, the apprentice performs for everyone in his unique rhythm and finds incredible success. His rhythm is that of a clown which is the most difficult and impactful juggler rhythm.

The Maims finish this story with a Godly exhortation to us all. We are all to live by the passions and gifts God has **confirmed** and wired into us. (Only He is to be the source of confirmation.) When we follow God’s calling, though we may lose something that we enjoyed, we will find the superior joy of embracing the unique life and specific missions of our true Kingdom identities.

You have Christ-given missions and passions that are only fulfilled by living in God’s unique “rhythms” residing within you. Permit Him to reveal them and be your source. It will no longer be your efforts but Christ’s life, power and results that live both in and through you for His glory.

Operate in them. Nothing else will be fulfilling, regardless of how the world or the Church embraces it.

The Canary in the Cage

A group was discussing the concept of their identities in Christ when God presented the additional example of a canary in a cage. He asked, “Whose cage are you in?”

Canaries were created to live in the open world, free and part of a flock. Some were captured and sold, and most eventually adapted to life in a cage. They gradually forgot who they were. Bred and raised in cages, they never knew their life’s potential. They thought their current situation was great. If the cage door opened, most would not know what to do and many would die in the wild. They had learned to feel safe and happy in their cages. Yet, if **they were taught to be themselves**, and then their cages opened, they would then truly live!

God’s Has a Unique Design for You as His Masterpiece

God’s question to each of us is, “Whose life are you living?” When living to please anyone but God, we are eagles attempting to be chickens, clowns attempting to be average jugglers, or canaries agreeing to be trapped in cages. Regardless of how comfortable or glamorous your situations (farmyard, vocation, or gilded cage) might look or feel, God offers real freedom and the most incredible life you could ever imagine.

Identity and validation are only to be sought from God. Unfortunately, we do not learn to interact and fellowship with God until later in life. By then, others have filled us with their expectations of who and what they want us to be. God's revelation has been minimized. We are to listen to others and learn, but in the end, nothing must replace the revelation that grows out of our intimate relationship with Christ and the instruction He provides through His Bible. Commit to follow Christ alone.

Real Life Example: The Gifted Leader

Joe "was a man of vision and action who led his organization from start-up to excellence. It had significant global impact and Joe was highly regarded. He was task oriented and, in many ways, a private man who preferred smaller group interactions to general "glad-handing." People embraced his leadership and were impacted by God's Spirit through him.

Desiring improvement, Joe brought in outside consultants. They sought to modify Joe's style to meet their desires for Him to be more of an administrator. The change proved inappropriate for the organization which became comfortable with itself and pursued only slight improvements. Much new ground was lost. Christ placed Joe in his position to be the visionary leader He designed, not an administrator.

It was appropriate for Joe to improve and refine his skills, but it was not God's will for him to become someone he was not. By attempting to be what others wanted instead of living fully in Christ's wonderful design, God's mission through him was negatively impacted until he refocused.

My Mistakes

I have made mistakes helping others find their God created purpose as well. The most difficult one, was with my son. My wife and I love our son and two daughters completely and are proud of who they are and who they are becoming.

Although I mostly understood my daughters, for years I did not understand my son. I tried to parent him to be the extraordinary and impactful person I **thought** he was. I strived to see him with God's eyes but was blind, unable to recognize and embrace the real him, as he was becoming his own unique, extraordinary, and impactful person. I created destructive situations for us and our family. It was only after the Lord intervened that I could see how I was interacting, and it broke my heart. Subsequently, I have been able to see him as the phenomenal individual that God is developing. I have reveled in that person and am proud and excited about who he is and who he is becoming. We still have residual sinkholes, but for my part, I love embracing who he really is. My son and I are not to be like each other. If we tried, neither would be effective in God's unique missions.

My wife and I truly have these same feelings about our daughters, our children's spouses, and our grandchildren. All are incredibly God-designed individuals, who are blessings to our family. All have unique callings in God's kingdom, and we ask Him to permit us to see them through His eyes.

Whose Life are You Living?

Through personal time with the Spirit, determine what He has for you to internalize. Document your thoughts as you engage in continuing discussions with Him, not only for the next few minutes, but moment-by-moment throughout life as He reveals “Whose Life You Are Living.” Consider the following and go where He leads.

- As you read, were you willing to drop your guard and let the Spirit speak to you or did you protect yourself from what He desired to introduce?
- What excites you about knowing more about yourself and your life’s potential for truly living?
- Whether you know Christ personally or only know about Him, are you willing to move forward by honestly seeking Him and His plans for you, or are you going to insist on holding the reins of your life? Will you insist on being in control at the cost of missing His masterpiece life?
- Whose life have you been living? What have been the greatest sources of influence in determining the identity and purpose for your life to this point?
- What priority have you given Christ among all forces that shape your life and daily walk?
- Are you a canary in someone’s cage, an apprentice juggler denying your internal God-given rhythm, an eagle who emulates chickens, or are you on the journey of living God’s unique purpose?
- Identify the next steps that the Spirit has for you and put them in action through His power, not yours.

Whose Life Do You Choose to Live?

As a Christian, you have three basic choices.

1. Live the victorious life that Christ designed for you, as you hold nothing back, embrace the Bible as God’s inspired word and joyfully surrender your **all** to His lordship.
2. Choose a “safe and comfortable” Christian life where you withhold much of yourself from Christ’s authority, redefine the Bible’s truths to conform to your personal desires, and seek to blend-in by pleasing your church, your cultures, and their definitions of both you and the Christian life.
3. Choose to reject Christ and the church and spend little or no time with the Bible and God as you do things your way.

If you have truly encountered the living Christ, both of the first two choices will result in eternal life with Christ, although only the first will result in the incredible journey of experiencing the masterpiece life God has for you. The third results in an eternity without Christ.

If your choice is to live for Christ, there is no guarantee of fame, wealth, health, and popularity, even though those things are appropriately part of many Christians lives. Individuals who preach that these are guaranteed are preaching a distorted and false gospel. God promises you will experience trials and tribulations and be rejected as Christ was. The lives of His apostles were far from easy and most ended in early death, yet they were incredible. His life does guarantee that those who intentionally walk fully in His Spirit will experience His abundant life. Life unlike any other. The

world may never know you, but that will not matter to you. When you leave this earth, you will have given your all to Christ. Nothing will have been squandered within.

Your choice now and every day is about releasing expectations and control and saying, “I belong totally to You, and I want only the life that You have designed. I want all of You! When I join You in heaven, my desire is that not even a smidgen of the masterpiece life you created for me will remain un-lived for your glory.”

What will life be like when you live as God created you?

Only you and God can answer the specific details of this question as you experience life’s journey together. However, you can answer broad questions that should excite and encourage you to get serious about giving Him complete control. Think about the following with God. Explore additional thoughts with Him. What will life be like when you:

- Live each day in close fellowship with your loving Father, aware of His delight in you, even as He lovingly corrects you.
- Surrender your expectations to Him and permit Him to accomplish His purpose and missions through you each day.
- Learn to identify, enjoy, and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit
- Live the biblical Christian life, where it is the Spirit’s power, authority and love that flows in and through you to transform you and achieve His will in and through you. It is never your efforts.
- Know the joy of being loved for who you are in Christ and not for what you do
- Permit Him to have you see others as He sees you, with the same spiritual insight, love, and grace.
- Know you are being and becoming your true self, free to seek validation from only one source, your Heavenly Father
- Know He is in control, even when life makes no sense and may not be looking or feeling at all like you had envisioned it. You can fully trust Him.
- When your heart is pure, your life pleases Him and therefore brings you the joy of being and becoming all that you are created to be.

Much Will Attempt to Get in Your Way

Living in Christ as his unique masterpiece is exciting and rewarding but requires vigilance as much will challenge you.

- Your natural self, carnal nature, will always seek to wrestle control from God’s Spirit.
- The daily activities of life will seek to displace your highest priority of developing and walking in your ever-deepening relationship with God. Reading the Bible, prayer and worship may begin to feel like religious obligations, if you are not engaging them through your spirit.
- Your priorities will be continuously tested.

- Your family and peers may attempt to dissuade you from being a Christian “kook.” Even when you are on course, “safe” Christians and society will consider you as unusual, because you are. Walking in unity with Christ’s Church does not mean conformity to human expectations within His church. (If you get off God’s course, you won’t be there long as you walk in God’s Spirit.)
- Your church may not understand you. If tension is present, you need to get away and get clear about what God is teaching you, instead of becoming what others want.
- Strongholds including substance addictions, pornography, fear, judgmentalism, impatience, anger and nonbiblical sexual activities will seek to destroy your walk with God.
- Lack of balance in your use of time will deceive you.
- False areas may become sources of your identity and validation. These may include athletic prowess, academic prowess, good looks, financial accomplishments, or finding your personal identity in God’s use of your spiritual gifts.
- You may be tempted by secular wisdom and human wisdom which dominate society and many of today’s churches where they are held in higher esteem than the Bible. (Corinthians teaches that “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”)
- The enemy will seek to deceive and distract you, often posing as an angel of light.

God Walks With You

While much will seek to pull you aside, remember God walks the journey with you, and He has already defeated the enemy and made His way straight for you. Walk in His Spirit.

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you
will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

(The enemy is relentless at identifying and probing our weak areas. Listen to God’s Spirit and stand on God’s scripture truths. These stop the enemy at every level.)

Your Path Forward

Summarize all God has revealed about the wonder of releasing incorrect expectations for your life and learning to live completely in Him. You will not have to give up anything that brings real value to your life on earth or that is of eternal importance. You will have gained everything. In time, most chains will be broken as you permit God to release all of Himself in and through your life. (He may leave some challenges as He did with Paul. These insure that we stand

in His strength.) At the end of life there cannot be any comparison between the futility of life expressed through one who closes the casket and says, "I did it my way" and the miracle of life experienced through one who says, "Thank You God for living in and through me so that I lived Your way! You poured out all of me for Your glory, and nothing was left strangled within."

- What are you thinking and feeling right now? What do you accept? What do you reject? What do you have questions about?
- What did God desire to share with you from this chapter?
- Whose life have you been living?
- Whose life do you want to live? Why?
- Whose life are you choosing to live?
- Does He want you to walk with Him through the rest of this book? Are you willing to let Him show how you and He will move forward, instead of either quitting or forging ahead on your own?
- Do you believe that He has really created you as His masterpiece? Can you trust Him to achieve this in and through your life?
- Are you willing to Live for Him and Him only?
- Develop your next steps with His Spirit.

As a Christian, you are designed to choose God's life, to be the unique individual He created, and to fulfill the specific kingdom missions He designed for you. Only His approval is to govern your life, and you are not to be distracted by playing on a stage designed to please other audiences.

