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CHAPTER I



WHEN WILL I FEEL CHOSEN?

Who's going to want me? . . .

Whoever's going to want me? Nobody will.

—GRACE IN NICHOLAS EVANS'S *THE HORSE WHISPERER*

I roam around this snowy Pennsylvania neighborhood as the wind at my face feels like tiny teeth biting my cheeks. My teenage daughters will soon arrive home from school, and I'll welcome them with snacks of robust cheese, fresh bread, and dark chocolate while I prepare the lasagna, just like my friend—the neighborhood Italian Mama—taught me back in the days of our Italian cooking lessons. But first, I walk the streets I've now walked for ten years: past the glossy shrubs where I'll find sparrows' nests with speckled eggs in the spring, past the parking lot where I once led the neighborhood children in jump rope games, and back to the oak tree that one autumn provided enough acorns to make acorn flour for hearty bread. In a few months, the weeping cherry outside the bedroom window will bloom like pink fireworks. Then, I'll search the garden for yellow daffodils and the first signs of green leaves on the raspberry canes. *This is the life God gave me. This is the life He chose for me.*

But winter won't leave yet. And it feels like a bitter winter in my heart, too. I'm walking to calm a brewing storm inside of painful emotions that ruin the beauty of a winter walk and embarrass me with their immaturity: Once again I feel overlooked, ignored, and rejected because of an array of infractions like unavailable friends who socialize without me or how other women broadcast their writing and speaking success on social media as if to personally hurt my feelings. It's terrible. If someone else receives an honor at Penn State, I wonder why I wasn't picked. If someone else gains adoration and influence on social media, I wonder if I've squandered my time and should work harder at promoting myself so everyone will choose me to quote and to headline as their keynote speaker.

I don't want to feel this way anymore. It's killing me inside.

But these thoughts feel so familiar they arrive like regular guests in my heart. I think back to all those times I wanted to be chosen for something or someone—a boy, an award, a school, a sorority, a job, a book contract. The list goes on. Even into adulthood, my heart jumps up and down like a rambunctious first-grader screaming, “Pick me! Pick me! Pick me!” And I'm that little girl Grace in the novel *The Horse Whisperer* who, even after undergoing a partial amputation of her leg, has only *one concern*. She cries out to her mother as she sobs on her bed, “Who's going to want me? . . . Whoever's going to want me? Nobody will.”¹

*Jesus, heal this ache in me. When
will I stop wanting to feel chosen?*



I slow my walk and consider the truth: The feeling of needing someone to choose us doesn't go away—even after we find our

marriage partner, our job, or any other person or experience we think will soothe this inescapable need. We shape our identity on how chosen we feel at any given time, both by people and for opportunities. As one of the deepest and sustained longings of the human heart, the need to feel chosen drives us to arrange our whole lives to chase that chosen feeling that might depart at times but always returns into our hearts as predictably as the seasons.

As I walked home on that snowy day, I remembered these words from Jesus as He speaks in John 15:16: “. . . I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last . . .”

I chose you.

I chose you and appointed you to bear fruit.

As the snow fell in soft flakes, I knew that if God taught me more about my chosen identity, it could offer the remedy for past, present, and even future rejection. It would also provide certainty that God chose me for this exact life I'm living—to bear the fruit He appointed for me.



Can you imagine firmly settling in your mind that you've been chosen for Someone and that each new day you will step into a life chosen for you? Imagine the intimacy with Jesus available to you. Imagine the joy and peace of living a chosen life.

God *chooses* us—described most clearly in Ephesians 1:3–13 where the apostle Paul writes to help Christians understand their identity in Christ. I had spent years studying chapter 2 of Ephesians and learning about my “seated” identity (2:6) that prompted the book *Seated with Christ*, but I somehow overlooked an even deeper and primary need of my heart in the chapter before: living

as *chosen*. Knowing I was seated with Christ solved the problem of jealousy and comparison, and now this new word—chosen—promised to repair an enduring fear of rejection from both people and opportunities. I could live in the reality of having already been chosen by the One my heart most wants.

Paul writes in Ephesians 1 that we are blessed “in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing” (v. 3). He insists that God “chose us in him before the creation of the world” and that He “predestined us for adoption” (vv. 4–5). Paul reminds us once more that “in him we were also chosen . . . according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (v. 11).

Paul tells me I’m chosen and in John 15:16, Jesus tells me I’m chosen: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”

Even Peter tells me I’m part of a “chosen people” as he writes in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Just like Jesus, we are, as Peter writes, “rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him” (1 Peter 2:4b).

The Old Testament, too, announces repeatedly that God chooses people to be His treasured possession.²

This past year, I explored the single verb in Scripture—that God *chose* you and me—and I arrived at the life-changing conclusion that God not only chooses us personally for Jesus—we have, Scripture says, been “given” to Jesus (John 17:24)—but He also arranges the opportunities and fruitfulness of our lives. Yet our chosen identity extends far beyond belonging and bearing fruit for God’s kingdom. In fact, by examining this theologically rich

verb in Scripture, I uncovered seven reasons why God chooses us that transformed my life. I'll share these reasons—which are His invitations to you—throughout this book, and I pray you'll experience the same profound realization that I did:

I need no longer live in rejection. I need no longer live in confusion about my calling.

I live as one *chosen*—chosen for Christ and His purposes. The verb became a stake in the ground, a solid marker that right here in my life I'm chosen for an extraordinary God who invites me to live an extraordinary life.

The word *chosen* serves as the balm for the ache of longing I feel in my own heart and learn about through the lives of thousands of young adults, college students, and professionals I've encountered in nearly two decades of college teaching and adult ministry. And I assume this might resonate with your own heart today:

I'm tired of being ignored, passed over, and uncertain of my future. I'm mocked by my collection of rejection letters, of wedding invitations to everyone else's fairy tale, of promotions not granted, and prizes never awarded. It's always the other girl chosen, not me. Now I'm growing older and accumulating more and more rejection and uncertainty. If only I were chosen every once in a while. How different life would feel if someone chose me, if I were the special, favored one just once in my ordinary life!

Maybe you also feel like I once did in my mid-forties: maybe you did find a marriage partner and some measure of career success, but you still feel the same old ache. Before realizing my chosen

LIVE AS ONE *CHOSEN*—
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identity, I often lived with a disorienting feeling that I didn't know exactly what I was supposed to be doing. *Did God really choose me for this life, in this career, with these people? How far does His choosing work extend? And why am I still waiting to feel chosen?*

Unsure of God's choosing of my circumstances, and unable to fathom His loving, personal choosing of me for Jesus, I was waiting to be chosen for the next important opportunity that would bring significance and certainty to my life.

You know the feeling, right? You want a clear plan, grand goals, and a sense of a personal mission. Maybe, like me, you've been raised on the language of purpose, achievement, and calling. And now you worry you've missed something.

You feel confusion and dread instead of clarity and peace.

IT POISONS YOUR SOUL
TO THINK THAT YOU
AREN'T LIVING THE LIFE
YOU'RE *CHOSEN TO LIVE*, AS
IF GOD MADE A COSMIC
BLUNDER WHEN IT CAME
TO MANAGING YOU.

If you live with any degree of confusion, fear, or a sense of rejection that pollutes your life, we have more in common than you think.

It's a terrible way to live when you fight to be *chosen*. It poisons you. And it poisons your soul to think that you aren't living the life you're *chosen to live*, as if God made a cosmic blunder when it came to managing you.

Isn't there a better way to live? Is there anything in Scripture to heal us of this ancient need, this all-consuming longing? What does God tell us?



An apostle of Jesus Christ named Peter writes to scattered, uncertain, and discouraged Christians to remember their identity and their calling. Peter knows about a chosen life. Peter's the kind of man so passionate about Jesus that when he sees Jesus on the shore from where he sat in his fishing boat, he "threw himself into the sea" to swim to Jesus (John 21:7b ESV). If you follow Peter's life in the book of Acts, you'll read of how God empowered his speaking and performed incredible miracles through him, like healing a man unable to walk and raising a woman from the dead. God also speaks to Peter in a special vision and sends an angel to rescue him from prison. People were so amazed by God's work through Peter that they brought their sick near him "so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them" (Acts 5:15).

Peter knew Jesus, loved Jesus, and served Jesus in supernatural ways. This ordinary fisherman declares this:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
(1 Peter 2:9)

You are—along with others—chosen, royal, holy, God's special possession. You live in His wonderful light.

I read these words from my worn green Bible as I sit in the mustard recliner by the window. The weeping cherry, stark and icy, stretches out dark, curled fingers of branches. I'm praying that Peter's words sink in deeply as I look more carefully at the passage.

As a college writing instructor and lover of verbs, I immediately note the present tense description of God's people—that includes you and me—as *currently* chosen, royal, holy, and special.

This isn't something that's going to happen to us in a heavenly future; it's happening *now*. Peter doesn't say, "You *will be* a chosen people"—he says, "You *are* a chosen people."

These verses teach we are chosen, royal, and God's special possession. We are chosen to live in the presence of God and declare how He saved us from darkness. If you were to look for other references to our chosen identity, you would find Paul writing this in Ephesians 1:11 (ESV): We are chosen "according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." God, therefore, chooses us and works out *all things* in our lives according to His good and loving plans. Before we learn anything else about why God chooses us, it matters most of all that we understand God as not only declaring our identity as His special, chosen possession, but also as a God working out the details of our lives.

This twofold understanding of our chosen identity—as called to belong to a loving God and to the life He has designed for us—answers the predictable cry of our heart to feel chosen and also anchors us when life feels confusing and painful. We can declare this:

He chose me. I belong to God. I am precious to Him. Because God brings everything in my life under His control, I trust that I'm chosen for this life, in this place, with these people, at this time in history, with work God ordains for me and enables me to do by the power of the Holy Spirit.



As I wondered about our chosen identity, I began to ask *why* God chose me. Is it for my perfect life plan to work out? In Colossians 1:16b, we read, "all things have been created through him and for him." Was I created *for* Jesus? If so, what if, instead of longing to be chosen for certain external things—people, places, and

professions—we realize we’re chosen to belong to Jesus for His purposes, not our own? What happens when we believe we are chosen for Christ and not for ourselves? And what if the point of today isn’t our plan but rather to respond to the seven reasons God chose us for Christ?

This means we’re chosen for a Person, not a perfect life plan.

Now, instead of finding the perfect calling, a personal mission, and a fulfilling life, we might search the Scriptures to learn more about how God invites us to live. In fact, by doing so, we find a set of governing principles that revolutionizes how we experience daily life. Your life plan assumes secondary importance; it comes as a byproduct of living as God intends. Your mission and vision will naturally overflow as you abide with Jesus as His chosen one.

As I explored that little verb *chose*, I discovered that the reasons why God chooses us have very little—if not nothing at all—to do with personal impact and career success. The reasons God chooses us orchestrate a biblical purpose for living that begins with living radically different lives that exalt Jesus Christ. Chosen people step into abundant life because of Jesus. We step into the life we’ve been missing all this time . . . because of Jesus.

The life you’ve been missing starts today.

GOD’S INVITATION TO YOU



Each new day let’s see our circumstances as invitations to seven biblical purposes that we are going to explore together.

God’s invitations to His chosen people include:

Worship—1 Peter 2:9

Live as God’s Treasured Possession—Deuteronomy 14:2b

Belong to a New Family—Ephesians 2:19

Complete Good Works—John 15:16

Display God's Power—Psalm 65:5

Become Like Jesus—Romans 8:29

Live Differently from the World—Romans 12:2

I think about my day so differently as a chosen woman; I look at circumstances and understand them as opportunities to experience the Christian life in these seven ways. And now, the same Pennsylvanian neighborhood walk, the same march across Penn State's campus, swinging my blue striped bag and sloshing my coffee, to arrive to my advanced writing classes, and the same ordinary rhythms of family life of baking and housecleaning mean something so different. It's a life of knowing to whom I belong and why I'm here.

Living a chosen life sets us free from the need to find validation anywhere else but in God—even when everyone else gains attention or awards. We don't need anyone else or any experience to make us feel special or valued. And we're set free to settle into our lives because we believe God chose us for the life we're living.

And now, we take the first step into this chosen life.

YOUR NEXT STEP



Read Ephesians 1:1–14 and 1 Peter 2:9–10.

1. When you read the above passages, what images and emotions come to mind when you think of God choosing you to belong to Him?
2. As you analyze the current state of your heart, fill in the blank. “I would feel chosen and special if _____ (this person) or _____ (this school / employer / group / award committee / publisher, etc.) chose me.”
3. What would change about your daily experience if you believed God chose you for Christ and for the life He’s given you?
4. Begin thinking what it could mean to be chosen for a Person (Jesus Christ!), not a plan. What does that mean to you?