

TRANSFORMING LOVE

STORMIE
OMARTIAN



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

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Cover design by Bryce Williamson

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Transforming Love

Previously published as *Choose Love*

Copyright © 2014 by Stormie Omartian

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-7581-0 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-7582-7 (eBook)

The Library of Congress has cataloged the trade paper edition as follows:

Omartian, Stormie.

Choose love / Stormie Omartian.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-7369-5897-4 (pbk.)

1. God (Christianity)—Love. 2. God (Christianity)—Worship and love. 3. Love—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BT140.O48 2014

231'.6—dc23

2014017271

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Printed in the United States of America

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 /VP-CD/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*“You shall love the LORD your God
with all your heart, with all your soul,
with your entire mind, and with all your strength.”*

This is the first commandment.

And the second, like it, is this:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

There is no other commandment greater than these.

MARK 12:30-31

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FIRST CHOICE



Choose to Receive
God's Love for You

See Yourself the Way God Sees You

I will never forget the day I first looked in one of those lighted magnifying mirrors. You know, the ones you can buy for your bathroom counter? They come in different levels of magnification. The one I bought was five times magnification because I needed to see certain things on my face and skin more clearly for the sake of good grooming.

I set it up, turned on the light, looked in the mirror, and nearly frightened myself to death.

I am warning you now that this is not for the faint of heart and you must prepare yourself in advance. First of all, be assured *before* you look in it that no one on earth sees you the way the mirror is reflecting you, with every pore and blemish enlarged; every brown sunspot, broken capillary, wrinkle, and line enhanced; and each imperfection—many of which you never even knew were there—illuminated.

I have since recovered from that initial shock, but it took a while. And as time goes on there is more to see, so it actually doesn't become an increasingly pleasant experience. It's just something you know you have to do and you are more prepared to endure it.

Seeing yourself the way *God* sees you is like looking into a giant magnifying mirror of your entire being. But He sees you from the perspective of all He made you to be. He sees all the gifts, purpose, and potential in you, having been put there by the One who not only thought about you *before* you were born but had a plan for your life.

We too often see only the negative things in ourselves. We painfully observe where we are weak, lacking, or failing. God sees all that too, but He doesn't consider it all bad.

For example, God sees your *weakness* as an opportunity for you to trust Him to be strong in you. Your weakness surrendered to God enables you to gain strength from Him beyond anything you could ever have without Him.

God sees whatever you *lack* as a possibility that you will turn to Him and declare your dependence on Him so He can supply all your needs.

God sees your *failure* as an invitation for you to walk closely with Him, so He can empower you to accomplish what you couldn't begin to do on your own.

If you are not certain about all of this, then I invite you to seek God beyond what you ever have before and come to know Him better. The better you know who God really is, the more you will recognize how much you need Him. And needing Him is always a good thing.

Understanding God's Perspective

The more we seek to know God in greater depth, the more He shows us about *Himself*. When we truly open up to God and invite Him to reveal Himself to us, He will do that. And this is something we must do. For we will never know who *we* really are until we understand who *He* really is.

God also shows us the truth about ourselves when we ask Him to do so. That can seem daunting, but don't let the idea scare you.

The good news is that He doesn't let us see everything at once—both about *Him* and about *ourselves*—which would be overwhelming in either case. He lets us see a little at a time as we seek Him.

If you have a heart that longs to know the truth and yearns for a way to become all you were created to be, spend time with God every day getting to know Him. When you understand His amazing goodness, holiness, perfection, and love, it is healing for your soul. It also exposes any lack of goodness, holiness, perfection, and love in you. But don't be afraid of that. He doesn't expose these things to shock or demean you. He does it to let you know that He loves you enough to not leave you the way you are. He wants you to become all He created you to be even more than *you* do, because His desire is for you to live in a way that opens you to the countless blessings He has for you. What He has for you is nothing less than transformation.

From God's perspective, He sees all you will be missing if you don't seek His presence and His will in your life.

Even when we think we have walked with the Lord long enough to have taken care of most of our imperfections, we find there is always more work to be done on a deeper level. That's why we can never assume we are beyond our weakest tendencies. Or that we can make it through a day without total dependence on God and His Spirit in us enabling us to be the person He created us to be.

God wants us to become more *like* Him every day.

Notice I did *not* say we *become* God. I said we become more *like* God.

The truth is, we all need to be changed. God said we are made in His *image*, but He wants us to become *partakers of His "divine nature"* (2 Peter 1:4). That means *opening our heart to God and allowing Him to mold and expand it so that we can contain more of His character.*

How does that happen?

That question will be answered as you read this book. For now,

just know that God wants you to become more like Him. He wants you to not only see in yourself what needs to be changed, but also to see yourself through His eyes of love.

God is lovingly forgiving—something a magnifying mirror IS NOT.

With all that said, a few years back I was reading through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation—as is my habit to do every couple of years—and on one particular day I was starting at 1 Corinthians 13. I had read that passage countless times before and knew it was the chapter on love. In fact, it was so familiar to me that I had many of the verses memorized just from reading them over and over. And anyone who is married will find themselves reading that chapter again and again, praying that their spouse will somehow really get it. (I'm only kidding. I have learned to pray that *I* really get it. I just wanted to see your reaction.)

You know how you can read a passage of Scripture many times and each time your understanding of it deepens? It becomes increasingly etched upon your mind, soul, and spirit. But then one day—as you are again reading that same passage, about which you have asked God to give you greater understanding—it's as if the heavens opened and you have clarity about it beyond what you have ever had before. You see with such sharpness of mind, soul, and spirit that you know it is only made possible by revelation from God. Well, that is what happened to me on that day.

I had walked with the Lord for decades and thought I understood a great deal about God's love for us. And I knew how to express my love for Him, even though I realized it was an ongoing growth process. I believed I was a loving person because God had given me a deep love for other people in ways I never thought possible before I began walking with Him. But on that morning—after I asked God to teach me things I had not yet seen before in this chapter, the way I always do before I read His Word—it was as though my eyes were seeing these verses in great depth and clarity for the first time. The

Holy Spirit did what I asked and gave me a profound understanding of each sentence and word, as if Jesus Himself spoke them to me.

Like a giant curtain opening in heaven, I could see what was behind it and a whole new world opened up to me. It was similar to an out-of-focus picture—that I did not realize was out of focus—suddenly coming into view with crystal clarity, and I could see things I had not seen before. It was mesmerizing. It was breathtaking. It was convicting and humbling. I was gripped by every word. It was as if I had been in a dimly lit room when the roof suddenly opened up and the sun poured in, bringing eye-squinting illumination.

Each word was instantly magnified to reveal all aspects of its meaning. And with every revelation I was deeply repentant. Every description brought to mind how many times I had fallen short of choosing to show love in that specific way to someone else. It was not that I was unloving to them. It's that *my* love fell far short of what God wanted from me. Even though I knew I had come a great distance from where I had been, I was still so far from where God wanted me to be. I realized that the way God required me to show love to others was not something I could begin to do on my own. I needed the transformative power of *His* love working in me and enabling me. That meant I had to daily come to Him in order to not only be freshly infused with His love for me, but also to express my love for Him and then ask Him to help me show His love to others. I had previously thought of love as more a feeling than a choice. But now I saw these were clear choices I had to make.

There are different levels of truth in God's Word, and we must be ready to see them as God enables us.

The first number of times I read this love passage, I understood it to be the ideal. That is, the goal we should *work toward*. And it is. But that's not all.

The next level of understanding I had with regard to this passage was that God *is* love, and we must endeavor to be more like

Him and learn to love the way *He* does. This is also true. But there is still more.

The latest level of understanding God revealed to me was that we cannot possibly love others the way He does without His love flowing through us and enabling us. That means we must not only have an ever-deepening understanding of God's love for us, but *we must also choose to receive the love God has for us in all its fullness.*

That morning as I continued to read and reread those verses describing what love is from *God's* perspective, He brought to my mind in clear detail how I had not lived up to this standard in any one of them. I knew it wasn't out of judgment that He revealed all of this. I did not feel condemnation. I felt His *conviction.*

I felt His *love.*

It was God saying to my heart, "I want you to move on in your life and receive everything I have for you, but there are certain choices you need to make."

It was me saying, "Oh, I see now." And not, "How could I have been so stupid and blind?"

God revealed to me that I was shutting off certain blessings from my life because I didn't recognize the areas of opportunity He had placed in front of me to not only *receive His love and show my love to Him, but to also choose to love others in a way that pleased Him.* I recognized how *not choosing* to show love in certain situations in my past had worked to my detriment. I had forfeited many blessings by not making better choices.

God showed all of this to me in just moments. He taught me that when I am hesitant to deliberately show love in a certain situation, I should ask Him to reveal to me—through His Spirit speaking to my heart—what the loving thing is to do at that time. He spoke to my heart that choices are to be made, and it's not always so clear without *His* revelation what that means in that moment. What we might *think* in the flesh is the loving thing to do could actually

be the *wrong* thing. That's why it's extremely important to not only have solid knowledge of God's Word, but also have the wisdom of God—especially when it requires a choice that affects other people's lives. Does my choosing to do what *I* think is the loving thing for this person actually hurt them? That can happen.

All this struck me so deeply that I nearly fell off the couch on my face before God in sorrow and repentance. This became one of those life-changing moments with God you never forget and from which you never step back. Everything—or just about everything—in this book is what God showed me in those moments.

As I continued to contemplate what happened, it became increasingly clear that none of us can begin to show love the way God wants us to without first making these choices.

Three Simple Choices That Will Alter the Course of Your Life

The first choice we must make is to not only understand God's love for us, but to actually open up and receive it. Yes, receiving God's love is a choice. We can *read* about it, *talk* about it, and *think* about it, but it's not the same as *choosing* to receive it. Choosing to receive God's love means getting close to Him, spending time in His presence, opening your heart to Him, seeking to know Him, understanding who He is by believing all He says about who He is, and desiring to become more *like* Him.

Choosing to receive God's love transforms you.

The second choice we must make is to deliberately choose to express our love for God in response to His love for us. We must understand how to communicate our love for Him beyond just “feeling” it. His love for us is so great that we cannot do nothing in response. And we really can't love others in a powerful way without first learning to show our love for God. That's because it's the actual process of showing our love for God that becomes the very means by which

He fills us with *more* of His love. The truth is, God imparts His love to us when we demonstrate our love for Him. (More about that in chapter 10.)

Choosing to express your love for God transforms your life.

The third choice we must make is to love others in a way that pleases God. That means we must seek God to understand what pleases Him and choose to do it instead of waiting for feelings to motivate us. Human love fails. We are incapable of loving consistently—all the time, in all the ways God wants us to—the way *He* does. Truly loving others happens when we choose to love God and He pours Himself into us.

Choosing to show love to others transforms your future.

These three choices make up the three sections of this book. In order to choose love the way God wants us to, we must make these three decisions every day.

The Way God Sees You

We don't naturally see ourselves the way God sees us. We see ourselves through our past. Our failures. Our work. Our abilities. Our appearance. Our friends. Our accomplishments. Or lack thereof.

We see ourselves through the prism of our flaws.

He sees us through the light of His perfection shining in our hearts, perfecting us every day on this earth that we spend with Him.

We know what we are *made of*, and we don't always view that as a good thing.

He sees us in light of all *He* lovingly *made us to be*. And that is always a great thing.

I want you to see yourself the way God sees you. God sees you through His perspective of love. I want you to see yourself from God's perspective so you can better understand the love He has for you—and the far-reaching effect His love has on your life when you choose to fully open up to it.

When you receive God's love for you, it will ignite your heart, jump-start your entire being, and energize you—mind, soul, and body.

I want you to not only know God better, but to *experience* God.

God is not just loving; He *is* love. And when you experience His love *in* you, it will change your life and affect everyone with whom you come in contact. When you choose to show God's love to others, it will not only dramatically affect *their* lives, but it will also alter the course of *yours*.

When seeing your life through God's eyes of love, the good will be magnified and illuminated. The bad will not be so ominous because God's love will crowd it out. Every day you choose to *receive* God's love, *express* your love to Him, and *love others* the way He wants you to, you will know He is working in you a pathway to becoming more like Him.

There is no greater force in the world than God's love. All the weapons of hate and cruelty cannot stand against it. The spiritually blind and intentionally evil try to oppose it, but they cannot ultimately win. That's because all creation was formed and is sustained by God. And He gives each of us a free will to choose His love for our lives—or not.

Prayer of Love

LORD, help me to see myself the way You see me. Thank You that You see me through Your eyes of love and all You created me to be. Enable me to open up my heart to receive Your love. Although it's hard to comprehend a love so great, and I don't feel worthy of it, I don't want to ever shut myself off from the power of Your amazing love working in my heart. Teach me about the ways You love me that I'm not understanding. Give me eyes to see how You reveal Your love for me by keeping me from things that are not Your greatest good for my life. I know that everything You want to do in my life cannot be accomplished without Your love flowing in me.

Help me turn my gaze from myself to You. I want to see You more clearly and understand You more fully. Thank You that You not only love me, but You will enable me to understand the depth of Your love. Show me the ways I don't open up to Your love—whether because of doubt or lack of understanding—and I have missed many of Your blessings because of it.

Enable me to see my life from Your perspective. Instead of looking through a magnifying lens to see the flaws in myself, help me to see through the magnifying lens of Your loving heart to observe the good—and potential for greatness—you have put in me. May Your presence be magnified in my life beyond what I can even imagine now. Cause Your perfection, beauty, love, and holiness to be reflected in me at all times.

In Jesus' name I pray.

Words of Love

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they would be
more in number than the sand;
when I awake, I am still with You.

PSALM 139:17-18

LORD, what is man, that You take knowledge of him?
Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him?
Man is like a breath; His days are like a passing shadow.

PSALM 144:3-4

Does He not see my ways, and count all my steps?

JOB 31:4

His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to
life and godliness... by which have been given to us
exceedingly great and precious promises,
that through these you may be partakers of
the divine nature,
having escaped the corruption
that is in the world through lust.

2 PETER 1:3-4