



Choosing

THE opposite

How the Sermon on the Mount Helps Us Rethink Our Assumptions,
Recalibrate Our Instincts, and Rediscover

THE WAY OF JESUS



Tammy Melchien

FOREWORD BY DAVE FERGUSON

Tammy has given the church a remarkable gift—equal parts courageous, convicting, and compassionate. *Choosing the Opposite* is not just an invitation to rethink our assumptions; it's a road map back to the radical heart of Jesus' Kingdom. Reading this book felt like sitting across from a trusted friend who loves Jesus deeply and wants to help you live like him too. With pastoral wisdom and prophetic clarity, Tammy helps us confront our cultural entanglements and rediscover a way of living that is beautifully upside down. Rooted in the Sermon on the Mount, this book will comfort the weary, challenge the comfortable, and guide us toward a faith that looks a lot more like Jesus. It's bold, honest, refreshingly clear—and exactly what the church needs right now.

IAN SIMKINS, lead pastor of The Bridge Church

Choosing the Opposite is a bold, countercultural master class that will make you laugh, cry, and crave the ways of Jesus. Tammy Melchien is a genius—her scriptural insights and prophetic voice have long inspired me. In this book, she brings the words of Jesus to life, offering a fresh, relevant, and deeply challenging path to follow. With wit, wisdom, and spiritual depth, she delivers an invitation to a richer, more meaningful way of living. You might as well buy multiple copies now because you're going to give this one away!

DANIELLE STRICKLAND, author, advocate, and speaker

The most important thing about this book is that Tammy Melchien lives out what she writes about. As a result, *Choosing the Opposite* is a book I highly recommend for everyone who is determined to live like Jesus in these challenging times. Make the choice!

GREG NETTLE, president of Stadia Church Planting

This book delivers a much-needed wake-up call for those serious about following Jesus in a world that often distorts his message. With sharp biblical insight, cultural awareness, and prophetic challenge, Tammy Melchien dares us to rethink our instincts, reject fear-driven faith, and embrace the radical way of the Kingdom. She challenges the status quo, exposing the ways we've been shaped by fear, power, and division rather than by Jesus himself. This book is a wake-up call for a compromised church and a road map for those who long to live differently. If you're ready to move beyond comfortable Christianity and follow Jesus with fresh conviction, read this book, wrestle with it, and seek to live it!

DEB AND ALAN HIRSCH, authors of missional discipleship, spirituality, and leadership resources and founders of Forge Mission Training Network and Movement Leaders Collective

When Jesus finished his now-famous Sermon on the Mount, the first response was one of amazement, and the second one was a kind of disagreement: The crowds recognized that Jesus exceeded their expectations for what Jesus could claim. Most of us, if we were but honest in our reading of the Sermon, would join the crowds in thinking that what Jesus says is counter to many of our expectations—which is the excellent angle taken in this book by Tammy Melchien, *Choosing the Opposite*. Here the reader will find a clear explanation of the Sermon on the Mount with one insight after another. What if we, in discovering the kingdoms that are shaping our lives, were to choose the opposite of the well-worn direction we have been traveling in this Christian-life journey? If we did, we just might find ourselves walking with Jesus. Over and over Jesus carved a path opposite of the ruling kingdoms of this world, and he calls us to choose his opposites. Excellent for small groups as well as for teachers and preachers preparing sermons.

SCOT MCKNIGHT, theologian and author

Like most followers of Jesus, I'm very familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. As I opened *Choosing the Opposite*, I wondered if I would find anything new. What a delightful, surprising, challenging, convicting, and ultimately deeply encouraging book! Tammy Melchien writes with the same winsomeness, authenticity, and straight shooting that I experienced with her in person back when we met occasionally for lunch in the Chicago area. Reading this book underscores the basic big-picture truth that our belief in Jesus must lead to simply doing what he says.

NANCY BEACH, leadership coach and coauthor of *Next Sunday*

Tammy Melchien's fresh take on the Sermon on the Mount is a lifeline for anyone tired of culture-war Christianity. She combines her patented deep wisdom with genuine humility on every page. And, as her friend, I've watched her live these truths in the "hidden corners" of her life, which makes her message all the more powerful. If you're looking for a path forward that actually looks like Jesus instead of like our polarized world, this book is for you.

TED CONIARIS, lead pastor of Community Christian Church

Wow, this is such a great read! Tammy is an engaging, funny, and insightful guide to the Sermon on the Mount. While she's clearly read widely and thought deeply, she carries that lightly, resulting in an accessible yet trustworthy companion for this profound section of Scripture. Throughout the book there are regular challenges and invitations to respond, making *Choosing the Opposite* ideal both for groups and individuals.

HANNAH AND ALEX ABSALOM, founders of Dandelion Resourcing

With theological precision, honest grace, and wry humor, Melchien's debut book offers the church a much-needed perspective on what it really means to follow Jesus in our day. Along the way, Melchien pastors the reader, ministering to the longing in our hearts for a different way, a truer home, and intimacy with Christ.

AUBREY SAMPSON, MA, pastor, podcaster, and author of *What We Find in the Dark*, *Big Feelings Days*, and more

Whenever we forget that we were created in his image—and not the other way around—*Choosing the Opposite* serves as a gentle yet powerful reminder of the beauty of our Savior's ways. Tammy's writing invites you into the heart of the biblical narrative, painting vivid scenes that draw you in. Through thought-provoking questions, she encourages deep reflection, making each revelation feel profoundly personal.

NOEMI CHAVEZ, lead pastor of Revive Church



Choosing

THE opposite

How the Sermon on the Mount Helps Us Rethink Our Assumptions,
Recalibrate Our Instincts, and Rediscover

THE WAY OF JESUS



Tammy Melchien

FOREWORD BY DAVE FERGUSON

NavPress 

Published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers



NavPress.com

Choosing the Opposite: How the Sermon on the Mount Helps Us Rethink Our Assumptions, Recalibrate Our Instincts, and Rediscover the Way of Jesus

Copyright © 2025 by Tammy Melchien. All rights reserved.

tammymelchien.com

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers

NavPress is a registered trademark of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO, registered in the United States of America. The NavPress logo is a trademark of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. *Tyndale* is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Ministries, registered in the United States of America. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

The Team:

David Zimmerman, Publisher; Caitlyn Carlson, Senior Editor; Elizabeth Schroll, Copyeditor; Lacie Phillips, Production Assistant; Eva M. Winters, Cover Designer; Cathy Miller, Interior Designer; Sarah Ocenasek, Proofreading Coordinator

Cover and interior illustrations of random arrows copyright © Giovanna/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved.

Author photo copyright © 2024 by Evan Laux. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked HCSB are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible,® copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible,® Holman CSB,® and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 978-1-64158-934-5

Printed in the United States of America

31 30 29 28 27 26 25
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents



Foreword by Dave Ferguson *xi*

CHAPTER 1	The Opposite	<i>1</i>
CHAPTER 2	Thinking Upside Down	<i>9</i>
CHAPTER 3	Choosing Kingdoms	<i>25</i>
CHAPTER 4	Chasing Grander Dreams	<i>45</i>
CHAPTER 5	Living the Scriptures	<i>61</i>
CHAPTER 6	Loving Radically	<i>81</i>
CHAPTER 7	Performing for the Right Audience	<i>101</i>
CHAPTER 8	Prioritizing the Kingdom	<i>119</i>
CHAPTER 9	Growing in Relational Maturity	<i>135</i>
CHAPTER 10	Hearing and Obeying Jesus	<i>153</i>
	Epilogue	<i>175</i>
	Acknowledgments	<i>179</i>
	Discussion Guide	<i>181</i>
	Notes	<i>197</i>

Foreword

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WRITE BOOKS about following Jesus, and then there are people who live it. Tammy Melchien is one of those rare individuals who does both. I've had the privilege of walking alongside Tammy for over two decades, and from the very beginning, I have known her to be a disciple. Not in the abstract or theoretical sense but in the most practical and powerful way I know how to define it: a disciple is someone who hears from God and does what he says. And over and over, I've watched Tammy do just that—especially when it means choosing the opposite.

When Tammy first joined the staff at COMMUNITY, she had other options. Bigger churches. Better salaries. Clearer paths. In every practical sense, the smart move was to go where the paychecks were large and the resources were plentiful. But Tammy had heard from God, and he had told her to come to COMMUNITY. So she chose the opposite of what culture and instinct would advise. She accepted a part-time role and raised her own support to make it work. That decision didn't just get

her on our team—it put her on a trajectory of impact she never could have anticipated.

Later, Tammy heard from God again. This time, he nudged her toward a staff role in Kids' City, our children's ministry. If you know Tammy, you know this wasn't on her radar. She didn't have a passion for children's ministry at the time, and frankly, she wasn't all that interested. But once again, she chose the opposite. She obeyed. And in doing so, she not only became brilliant at developing leaders but also found herself surrounded by peers who would become lifelong friends. That yes shaped her both personally and professionally in profound ways.

The pattern continued when Tammy became a campus pastor and started a new COMMUNITY location in Chicago. It felt daunting. Moving to the city and being a campus pastor was new territory for her. But when God spoke, Tammy listened. She said yes, even when it meant embracing discomfort and uncertainty. And in that season, something beautiful emerged—her teaching gift began to blossom. We started to see a communicator come alive in her, and so did she.

Not long after that, Tammy was offered the role of leading our teaching team—a pioneering move at a time when very few, if any, women across the country were stepping into roles like that. There was no road map. No precedent. Culture assumed this kind of leadership belonged to men. But once again, Tammy chose the opposite. She stepped into that role with humility and strength, and she has been amazing.

Most recently, Tammy made one of her most surprising opposite moves yet. After years of serving on COMMUNITY's directional leadership team—the team with the most authority,

decision-making power, and influence—Tammy felt like God was telling her to step down. I tried to talk her out of it. I really did. But she wasn't following me—she was following Jesus. And even when it meant giving up status, control, and visibility, she obeyed. She stepped away from that team to focus on her teaching and writing gifts. And it's in that space that this book was born.

Tammy doesn't just write about choosing the opposite; she lives it. Her life is a case study in what happens when someone says yes to God over and over—especially when it's hard, especially when it costs something, especially when it doesn't make sense. Tammy Melchien is the real deal. And because she is, this book is too.

Choosing the Opposite is a convicting, inspiring, and incredibly well-written book. Tammy doesn't give us a sugarcoated version of faith. She gives us Jesus—the real Jesus. The One who invites us into a countercultural Kingdom. The one who challenges our assumptions, flips our instincts upside down, and calls us to live in a way that often goes against the grain of culture and comfort.

With a perceptive look at the Sermon on the Mount, Tammy helps us see how radical and beautiful the way of Jesus really is. She shows us how the opposite way—the way of meekness, mercy, purity, sacrifice, and love—is not weakness but power. Not foolishness but wisdom. Not loss but gain.

You'll find stories in this book that make you smile, truths that make you squirm, and insights that make you think. But more than anything, you'll be given an invitation. Not to admire Jesus from afar but to follow him closely. To be a disciple who

hears from God and does what he says—even when it’s hard, even when it’s opposite of what you would normally do.

My encouragement to you is simple: Don’t just read this book. Practice it. Let it mess with you. Let it get in your head and heart and calendar and relationships. Let it shape the way you love, the way you parent, the way you work, the way you vote, and the way you lead. And then—once it’s messed with you—pass it on to someone else. Because we don’t just need another book on spiritual growth. We need a movement of disciples who are choosing the opposite, one holy step at a time.

If you’re serious about following Jesus—not just believing in him but actually living like him—then *Choosing the Opposite* is a must-read. It’s timely. It’s transformative. I believe it will be the most important book you read this year.

So take a breath. Say a prayer. And get ready to hear from God.

Because the next step he asks you to take may be . . . the opposite.

Dave Ferguson
founding pastor of COMMUNITY and CEO of Exponential

THE OPPOSITE



What if every instinct, every decision you've made up to this point, has led you further from where you really want to be?

What might happen if you did the opposite?

I'M GEN X, AND I'M A TEACHING PASTOR, so if there's a spiritual principle to be gleaned from the classic TV sitcom *Seinfeld*, I'm going to find it. Which is why the more I think about what it's like to follow Jesus, the more I'm reminded of one specific episode.

On the show, most things in life go wrong for lovable loser George Costanza. "My life is the complete opposite of everything I want it to be," he complains. "Every instinct I have, in every aspect of life, be it something to wear, something to eat—it's all been wrong."

So one day he decides to do the opposite of his every instinct.

The waitress at Monk's Café asks him if he wants his normal order of tuna on toast, coleslaw, and a cup of coffee, but

George chooses the opposite. He goes for chicken salad on rye, untoasted, with a side of potato salad and a cup of tea.

When Elaine encourages him to approach a woman in the diner, George reminds her, “Bald men with no jobs and no money who live with their parents don’t approach strange women!” But Jerry challenges him, “If every instinct you have is wrong, then the opposite would have to be right.” So George decides to give it a shot. He approaches the woman, blurts out the truth about his circumstances, and improbably, she becomes his new girlfriend.

As the episode proceeds, George continues to do the opposite of what his natural instincts say. In an interview with the New York Yankees, he shares horrible details about his job experience and insults the team owner to his face. The interviewer muses, “You are the complete opposite of every applicant we’ve seen,” and the owner declares, “Hire this man!”¹

Okay, you might be thinking, but Seinfeld is meant to be absurdist. After all, it’s a show about nothing. This isn’t the kind of thing that makes sense in the real world.

Well, suspend your disbelief for a moment as I suggest something that may seem just as absurd: I’m not sure whether Jesus is a *Seinfeld* fan, but I believe he is calling us to embrace our own George Costanza moment.

What if every instinct, every decision you’ve made up to this point, has led you further from where you really want to be?

What might happen if you did the opposite?

Let's face it: It can feel like most things in the world are going wrong. If you care about the future of your community and our world, it's easy to feel anxious, angry, and maybe even a little bit hopeless right now. Culture wars are raging. You're worried that your values are being trampled. You are fearful that if more people don't stand up and do something, the other side will gain even more ground.

If you've been outspoken about your beliefs, chances are a few broken relationships lie in your wake. You no longer trust some people you once cared about. Even if you haven't shared your opinions, you likely feel the damage of this divided and polarized climate deep in your soul. To combat your angst and exhaustion, you've had to mute or block friends and relatives on social media or ditch the platforms altogether.

Everywhere you turn, threats seem to loom on the horizon. Whether it is the instability of the economy, the swift judgment of cancel culture, or the stories of senseless violence filling your newsfeed, life can feel like a precarious journey through a minefield. You long for a sense of security and are vigilant about not letting your guard down.

Maybe you're feeling unnerved by all the rapid changes in our pluralistic society, the relativity and chaos you're seeing around you. You long for a simplicity that will bring a sense of clarity and calm. Or perhaps you feel frustrated that things aren't changing faster. All you see are the hurts and injustices and too many people content to perpetuate them. Nothing is as it should be, and you want to see things change.

No matter where you stand, you sincerely want to follow

Jesus and make a difference in this world—and yet it seems increasingly difficult to do so.

It's easy to look around and see everything going wrong. But I'm going to ask you—and myself—a couple of hard questions: Is it possible we are also playing a role in the disruption and dysfunction? When so much seems to be going sideways, are we just observers, or are we participating in some way? What if we're just as responsible for the problems as the people we blame them on?

What if every instinct, every decision we've made up to this point, has led us further from where we really want to be?

What might happen if we did the opposite?

Listen, I'm not trying to beat us down, but I am trying to shake us up. I'm writing this as someone who loves the church. I've spent my entire life connected in Christian community, and I've served in ministry for over three decades. I've seen and experienced the beautiful ways that Christ followers have impacted the world. The church can do a tremendous amount of good. But if we're going to be part of disrupting the status quo, we can't just point fingers at "them." We need to consider how many of our choices—the ways you and I and others who follow Jesus have been living—may have contributed to the quagmire we find ourselves in. And I think there is a core reason why we've found ourselves in this spot.

We've wandered down a path where fear and turmoil and

suspicion roil around and within us, where self-protection and a desire for comfort have led us to surround ourselves only with those who think and look and live like us. Understandably, this can seem like the best and safest way to live.

But there is a problem with this path: We can't stay on it and follow Jesus.

Jesus' Kingdom is counterintuitive and radically counter-cultural, and living fully as a citizen in his Kingdom means entering an upside-down kind of life that goes against many of our natural human instincts and regular patterns of being. When Jesus invites us into the Kingdom of God, he's calling us to an opposite kind of life.

And too many of us aren't living it.

We know we aren't flourishing, but we have no idea why. The world feels complicated and scary, and our relationships can be painful and tense, but we don't know how to make things right. Too many of us aren't experiencing the life Jesus offers us because the gospel we've embraced is not the Good News of the Kingdom. Without realizing it, we're practicing a faith often more informed by inherited assumptions, cultural influences, and political ideology than by the teachings of Jesus.

The late philosopher Dallas Willard notes,

What we are looking at in the contemporary Western world is precisely what [Jesus] himself foretold. We *have* heard him. For almost two millennia we have heard him. . . . But we have chosen to not do what he said. He warned that this would make us "like a silly

man who built his house on a sand foundation. The rain poured down, and the rivers and winds beat upon that house, and it collapsed into total disaster” (Matt. 7:26-27). We today stand in the midst of precisely the disaster he foretold.²

HEAR FROM GOD

Do you realize that God wants to speak to you? If you are a follower of Jesus, God is present with you and within you through the Holy Spirit. How absurd to think he would be that near to you and not have anything to say! And yet many of us go about our daily lives without expecting to hear from him.

Throughout this book, I am going to encourage you to pause and give God opportunities to communicate with you. We’re going to be digging into Scripture, and God always speaks through his Word. God often uses other people to communicate with us, so there may be something in my writing that God wants to use to speak to you. But I believe God also wants to speak to you through your own thoughts, emotions, and spirit. I encourage you to pause from time to time to pay attention to him. When you become aware of something stirring within you—whether it be a new idea, a feeling of discomfort or anger, or just a fuzzy notion that you should be paying attention—stop and ask the Spirit to open your mind and heart to receive and understand what God is saying to you. Pray: *Lord, I want to hear from you. Come, Holy Spirit. Speak to me and empower me to do what you say. Amen.* 

Two thousand years ago, Jesus showed up on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and began teaching a group of people a new way to live. He invited them into a Kingdom that was different from anything they’d ever experienced or known. To live in

this Kingdom often required that they do the opposite of their naturally formed instincts. It requires the same of us today.

Let's stop settling for everything going wrong and instead look at our natural impulses and where they've gotten us. I consider myself somewhat of an expert on blowing it, and I'm happy to share what I've learned the hard way. But I'm not just going to speak to you from my own experience. Jesus' most famous collection of teachings, the Sermon on the Mount, tells us a lot about the opposite kind of life. This "manifesto . . . for the life of the individual follower of Christ in the midst of the community of his followers"³ very well might be *the* most important passage of Scripture for Christ followers living in this current moment.

The Sermon holds the wisdom we need to find a better way forward, but here's what we need to know up front: We're not going to like a lot of it. At times, Jesus is going to rub us the wrong way. We like the idea of being saved from our sins; we don't want to love our enemies.

And yet, if enough people decided to actually follow him, we'd turn the world upside down. After all, it's happened before.

I believe doing the opposite could help create peace in your community. The counterintuitive way of Jesus could help you mend relationships without compromising what you believe. It could bring healing to the rifts with family and friends that grieve you.

I believe doing the opposite could also bring calm to your own soul. Instead of living riddled with fear or anxiety or anger over what is happening in our world, you could live with a quiet confidence that Jesus is on his throne and the Kingdom is

not shaken. You could let go of feeling responsible for burdens that are not yours to bear. You can experience the lived reality of *the Son setting you free*.⁴

And I believe doing the opposite could bring healing to our world. If we, as followers of Jesus, do the opposite of what our natural instincts say, of the impulses that often bring us to these moments of division and distrust, we could restore our credibility to the watching world. We could make the difference we long to make. We could help people find their way back to God and together bring more of his Kingdom to earth.

I really do believe there is a hopeful way forward.

If we're willing to listen to Jesus.

If we leave behind what isn't working and take a risk together, we'll discover that Jesus is about to turn everything upside down.