

# ▷ DIFFERENT KIND <sup>OF</sup> CRAZY

*Living the Way Jesus Lived*

LAWRENCE W. WILSON



Indianapolis, Indiana

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Published by Wesleyan Publishing House  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
Printed in the United States of America  
ISBN: 978-0-89827-348-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wilson, Lawrence W., 1959-  
A different kind of crazy : living the way Jesus lived / Lawrence W.  
Wilson.  
p. cm.  
ISBN 978-0-89827-348-9  
1. Christian life. 2. Jesus Christ--Example. I. Title.  
BV4501.3.W555 2007  
248.4--dc22

2007014313

Many of the Bible quotations in this book are the author's paraphrases based on various English texts, vague memories of Greek classes at seminary, and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Other citations, including the text of the Sermon on the Mount, quoted in chapter headings and reproduced entirely at the end of the book, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. *NIV*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by the permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The rendering of Matthew 7:1 on page 136 relies on *The Message*, copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

The quotation of Martin Luther King Jr. in chapter 6 is from "Loving Your Enemies," *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*, Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran, eds. (New York: IPM/Warner Books, 1998), available at [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/sermons/571117.002\\_Loving\\_Your\\_Enemies.html](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/sermons/571117.002_Loving_Your_Enemies.html).

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A decorative graphic at the top of the page consisting of several light gray, curved rays radiating from a central point, resembling a sunburst or a fan. The rays are of varying lengths and angles, creating a sense of movement and light.

# preFace

**I** know how audacious it seems to write a book that defines the Christian life. Over the years, I've observed many people who claimed to be doing that. Most of them seemed to be describing some version of themselves. It is a powerful temptation, the urge to remake the world in one's own image. So I say at the outset that this is not a book about my own experience as a Christian, as if I were the prime example of the species.

I haven't the self-confidence of Paul, who said, "Follow me as I follow Christ." I know my sin too well. My approach here is more like that of the Baptist, who, grieved by the spiritual failure of his generation, simply pointed to Jesus, saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God."

Neither do I have the intellectual confidence of my old mentor, C. S. Lewis, who said in his preface to *Mere Christianity* that our faith must be defined in terms of its creeds, that a Christian is someone who adheres to an intellectual code, who believes what Christians believe. Jesus did not say, "Repeat after me," as if the faith were a set of arithmetic tables to be swallowed and regurgitated on command. He said, "Follow me." Jesus showed us a way of living, a way of being. He showed us the Father so that we could be like him—holy, as he is holy.

Here, then, is my thesis: To be a Christian is to live as Jesus lived, and, unlikely as it seems, ordinary people can do exactly that.

Nobody comes to a discussion of religion empty handed. We bring with us the baggage we've collected over the years. So it may help the reader to know that I am an ordained minister in The Wesleyan Church, and that I greatly value my association with this congregation of saints. It is the particular manifestation of Christ's church that gave me birth and formed my thinking about the faith. It is certain that this heritage has shaped the way I think about following Jesus. Yet while my denomination is nearly always referred to as evangelical, the

older I grow the less I am inclined to accept vague and often divisive labels such as fundamentalist or emergent, mainline or evangelical to describe my own faith. Let it be like Christ—*Christian*. That should be a defining term, and a uniting one.

This book is riddled with stories from my life, all of them true. While I have changed the names and taken some liberties with the settings, each event matches my recollection. Whether I have remembered factually or only truthfully, others can decide. Also, I have related some bits of my own journey with Christ in this book, and in each case have relived the moments as they occurred. Where I have felt anger or fear or frustration at matching my life to Christ's, I've said so in the present tense. Those who wish to know whether those thoughts and emotions describe my present experience might ask my wife or my children; I've already said that I am not the prime example of Christlikeness. Yet I have grown through and beyond many of the experiences presented in this book.

Any reader who is familiar with Christ's Sermon on the Mount will recognize that it forms an outline for this writing. No other words of Christ's reveal him more clearly, and no other of his teachings are more universally recognized and admired—even by those of other religions. This is Christianity in its purest form. This book asks what those words might mean for a believer living two thousand years

after Jesus spoke them. The publisher has included them as an appendix to this writing, but that order is quite wrong. These thoughts are at best an appendix to Christ's teaching. Turn now to the end of this book, and read the Sermon on the Mount. Reread it. Internalize it. Memorize it, if you can. That is authentic Christianity.

These thoughts are offered in the hope that they will cause some who do not know Jesus to put their faith in him, and those who do to think and act more like him whose name we bear.

This is my aim in writing; this is my aim in living. I invite you to join me.



I

# AUTHENTICITY

“His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. . . .”

I like Jim and Barbara, but sometimes it’s hard to remember why. They’re in town once or twice a year on business and bring an enjoyable dollop of Hollywood glitz with them. Yet the talk of fashion and celebrities grows wearisome after a day or two, and I’m seldom sorry for their return to the Coast. We dined at El Ranchero, a kitschy Mexican restaurant on the north side of Indianapolis.

*Some . . . confuse authenticity, which they ought always to aim at, with originality, which they should never bother about.*

—W. H. AUDEN

“In L.A.,” Barbara began predictably, “we get the most authentic Mexican food.”

“Out of this world,” Jim agreed.

“I mean, it’s to *die* for,” Barbara whispered, as if there were some dirty secret about chimichangas.

I unfolded a napkin and put it on my lap.

“Enrique,” Barbara continued, “our chef at Las Palmas, makes the most *unbelievable* carne asada. And the chicken mole verde? *Divine*.”

“Out of this world,” Jim said again.

“Here in the Midwest,” Babs waxed on, “you simply can’t get good Mexican food. I mean really authentic Mexican.”

“You absolutely can’t get it,” Jim swore, as if affirming under oath that he’d seen George W. Bush stuffing a ballot box in Cleveland.

“But this place is so *fun*,” Barbara chirped with exaggerated amiability, patting my arm as she did so. “It must be so fun for you guys to go out for tacos once in a while.”

“I’m sure you get tired of the barbecued pork,” Jim said knowingly.

Being mostly a Midwesterner, I’m a patient man, but even a Hoosier can get riled now and then. “Barbara?” I began mildly. “Take a look at Hector over there.” I nodded toward our waiter. “And the hostess. And the busboy.”

Barbara blinked.

“These people aren’t pretending to be Hispanic. They’re honest-to-goodness Mexicans.”

Barbara looked sympathetically at the staff, then back at me. “Well, I’m sure they try very hard,” She said, as if they’d all placed third in a beauty contest.

“Sure,” Jim said. “I’m sure the food will be great. Just great.”

We sat in silence for a minute or two, trying to ignore a trio of mariachi horns. Hector wandered over with chips and salsa.

“Quiere mild or hot, amigo?”

It was the devil that made me do it.

“Let’s have the other stuff, Hector. The house salsa.”

“You mean muy caliente?”

“Yeah.”

Hector paused. He looked at Jim and Barbara, then disappeared into the kitchen.

I set the napkin dispenser in front of Barbara and smiled. “You’re gonna love it,” I said. “It’s very authentic.”

## FAUX AUTHENTIC

My friends had not heard, apparently, that Indianapolis has one of the highest concentrations of Mexican immigrants in the United States. The government of Mexico recently opened a consulate in the city, which now has about as many supermercados as it does Starbucks. El Ranchero may be

lowbrow, but it offers real tortillas served up by natives of Mexico.

What could be more real?

Yet authenticity had a different connotation to Jim and Barbara, as it does to most of us. To them, authentic cooking was that which met a subjective standard. It looked Mexican. It was called by Mexican names. It was perhaps based on traditional Mexican dishes. But it was to be found only in upscale restaurants in Southern California—the spiritual home of *real* Mexican cuisine—not in a chartreuse-and-lavender cantina in Indianapolis. And it would not, certainly, come wrapped in a tortilla and smothered with refried beans. To my friends, that which is authentic is that which is tasteful, thoughtfully done, appropriate, haute. Inauthentic is anything gauche, indecorous, or, worst of all, out of date.

Like many Christians, Jim and Barbara take their notion of authenticity to church with them. I've done it too. To them, authentic Christianity is relevant, tasteful, and highly evolved—it's *honest*, for heaven's sake. They consider their church authentic because their pastor preaches in cargo shorts and goes rock climbing on his day off. They themselves are authentic because they are candid about the neglect of their devotional life. It would be inauthentic—phony—to pray when they don't feel like it, so they don't. They are authentic because they deal realistically with issues like abortion, homosexuality, and divorce.

When Barbara mentioned in a previous conversation that she had been divorced and that her children now lived with their father, my wife was sympathetic. “I’m so sorry,” Heather offered. “He not only left but took the kids with him?”

“Oh, God no,” Barbara said, as if the oath made her denial more believable. “I left *him*. I couldn’t stand him preaching at me all the time, using the Bible to beat me down.”

Heather, seldom at a loss for words, responded soothingly. “You must have felt so lonely,” she said. “I know the Christian community can be judgmental sometimes.”

Barbara frowned as if trying to comprehend Heather’s meaning. “God no,” she said it again. “My church friends have been great. They told me, ‘Honey, sometimes you just have to do what you have to do.’”

Barbara acted pragmatically when she ended her bad marriage. Was she being authentic? Was the spiritual advice she received authentically Christian because it displayed tolerance? How are we to know? How do I know that I’m authentically Christian? How do you?

In the world of art, a painting or sculpture that is purported to be the work of someone other than its true maker is called a forgery. There have been some notable examples. In 1496 Michelangelo created his first known sculpture, a sleeping cupid. Because he was unknown as a sculptor, the young artist had little hope of selling his work. So he devised a plan.

Michelangelo buried the marble statue in acidic soil to give it the appearance of being very old. He then sold it to an art dealer who represented it as an ancient Greek objet d'art. The piece was eventually acquired by Cardinal Raffaello Riario of San Giorgio.

But the art was not really ancient, not really Greek, not really—authentic. When the cardinal learned of the forgery, he demanded his money back. Michelangelo was fortunate that the misrepresentation only enhanced his reputation as an artist; some art forgers go to jail.

That which is authentic is that which is objectively verifiable as genuine. An authentic Rembrandt is a painting known to have been created by the artist himself. Authentic Mexican food is that prepared by Mexicans—like the food at El Rancho. Taste, propriety, suitability for the postmodern world—these are immaterial to the claim of authenticity. What matters is that the item originates from its purported source. That which does so is authentic. Everything else—no matter how relevant—is fake.

What, then, would be an authentic Christian?

## TO BE REAL

My wife visited the Netherlands recently, the homeland of both her parents. Heather was raised in the New World but steeped in the Old. Like any good Dutch girl, she attended a

Dutch church, went to a Dutch school, celebrated Dutch holidays, maintained Dutch traditions, and associated mostly with other Dutch children. She is as proud of her Dutch heritage as of her American citizenship. While in Amsterdam, she bought new clothing, delighting in wearing the latest European styles. She immersed herself in Dutch culture. She became finally Dutch, so she thought.

At a grocery store, she waited in line as the clerk finalized a purchase, chatting amiably with her Dutch customer. Then the woman turned to Heather and addressed her in flawless English, “May I help you?”

There is something about being American that cannot be discarded or even disguised. Our nationality is apparent at a glance to both friends and enemies. We cannot conceal our source.

Being a Christian must be the same.

During Jesus’ trial, Peter wished to avoid being known as a follower of Christ. He tried everything to dissociate himself from Jesus, but he couldn’t. Everything gave him away—his history, his mannerisms, his speech, even his clothing. He had “friend of Jesus” written all over him. He was an authentic Christian, verifiably connected to Jesus himself.

We, on the other hand, try desperately to create the persona of Christ-follower but are often unsuccessful. We name ourselves things like evangelical and fundamentalist. We label ourselves, literally, with bracelets and bumper stickers. We

adopt a churchy way of speaking. Yet for the most part, nobody confuses us with friends of God. There are no servant girls persistently accusing us by firelight, “You—you were with him.” That may be, quite simply, because we were not. In spite of our claims of authenticity, we have spent very little time with Jesus or none at all. We lack that familiar aspect that can be acquired only by prolonged exposure. There is nothing genuine about our claim to be Christlike, to be Godlike, and everyone knows it but us.

Authentic Christianity is that which originates with Jesus. Authentic Christians are those who associate themselves with him, who know him, who learn from him, who emulate him. Christian identity is not a bracelet or a necklace or a set of lingo. It is a way of being, of thinking, and—most especially—of relating to other people that will be instantly apparent to all who meet us.

This is the authentic Christianity for which I hunger, and it begins with these words: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”