

## The Cost of Change

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Rich Nathan

January 12 & 13, 2018

The Challenge of Change

Hebrews 11:23-28

Next week, America celebrates Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

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Photo of MLK

King was the son of Martin Luther King, Sr. who was a very prominent Atlanta pastor. He was raised in relative privilege for African Americans in the segregated Jim Crow South. He was obviously an incredibly gifted speaker, but his speaking skills were displayed early on – he won an oratorical contest in high school. He was so bright, he skipped the ninth grade and the twelfth grade.

He entered Morehouse College, a respected historically black men's college – which is the alma mater of our own Dr. Charles Montgomery. King entered Morehouse College at the age of 15 and graduated at the age of 19. He went on and got further theological education at Crozer Theological Seminary outside of Philadelphia. He obtained his PhD in Systematic Theology from Boston University.

After he completed his schooling, he received a number of very attractive career offers. A college offered to make him a Dean. Another offered to make him a professor. And he received a very attractive ministerial offer for a church in the northeast. But King decided to move his family to the Jim Crow segregated south to answer a call to be pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

It was a prestigious church – known as a silk stocking church – catering to a certain class of elite people, the movers and the shakers in the African American community. But King told the church in an early message that he wanted the church to be open to all classes and to work for justice for all people. King's decision to not take the academic route, to not pursue career success, eventually cost him his life.

Only a tiny percentage of humanity will become world changers, like King or Nelson Mandela who spent 27 years in prison because of his protest of the South African Apartheid Regime. But their lives speak to fundamental truths,

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To achieve any real, lasting change a price must be paid.

Real change costs. When you were in middle school, you may have learned Newton's first law of motion: a body at rest will remain at rest unless it's acted upon by an external force. Inertia is hard to overcome. All change comes with a cost.

If you want to get in shape in the New Year, it costs. You have to throw away some of your favorite go-to junk food, clean the house out. You have to join a gym and then actually go to the gym. You'll probably need to get a workout partner to keep you going. It's hard to lose weight. It's hard to get in shape. It's much easier to sit on the sofa and binge watch Netflix while you eat a box of Oreos. All change requires the payment of a price.

If you want to improve your marriage in 2019, it will cost you. You may actually need to go to a marriage counselor and learn how to communicate, how to resolve your differences, how to fight fair, how to show love to each other in a way that the other person understands. You may have to take a few nights and go out and attend one of our marriage seminars. All change requires the payment of a price.

If you want to reconcile with a family member, an alienated child or sibling or parent, it costs! You may have to push through the quitting points of their negativity. They may never admit that they were wrong or ask forgiveness. You may have to give up a grudge or do the hard work of forgiving and forgiving and forgiving again. Making peace with someone costs.

If you want to improve your relationship with God in 2019. It will cost you. It will cost time you could spend working or being on social media or watching TV. It may even cost you some sleep. You may have to stop pushing the snooze button on your alarm in the morning and get out of bed.

Anything worth doing in our lives, anything worth changing in our lives costs. And what is true at an individual level is true for us collectively. If we as a church are going to remain available to God here at Vineyard Columbus in this changing world and changing community, it will cost us. Our leaders have to be open-handed regarding our own roles and give up position and power to see God's kingdom go forward.

It will cost us service. Thousands of us need to step up and serve. It will cost us money and time and prayer and obedience. If we want to see our community change and we believe that the church is God's primary instrument of the kingdom in the world, then we together must pay the price.

In this New Year, I started a new series titled "The Challenge of Change". Today's message is titled "The Cost of Change." Let's pray.

We're going to continue to look at four figures from the Old Testament. Last week we looked at Abraham. Today we're going to be looking at Moses, and then Joshua and Rahab, all of whom modeled to us faith in the face of changes in their lives. We're going to be looking at those stories from the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Hebrews. Today, let's look at Moses, the greatest of the Old Testament heroes. No one was greater than Moses in the estimation of Jews in ancient times.

Let's read Hebrews 11:23-28:

Slide Hebrews 11:23-28

<sup>23</sup> By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. <sup>25</sup> He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. <sup>26</sup> He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. <sup>27</sup> By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. <sup>28</sup> By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

I'd like us first to consider:

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The cause of change

Many people seem to think that change is somehow inevitable or automatic. A Martin Luther King, Jr. or a Nelson Mandela are just hard wired to change the world. Some people are just like that. But others are not. Certainly, we all have different talents. People in the history of the world have the oratorical gifts or the leadership, wisdom and magnanimity of a Dr. King.

But changes in the world, changes in our home or even changes in our waistlines are not inevitable or automatic. Change is a choice. Look with me at verse 25:

Slide Hebrews 11:25

<sup>25</sup> He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

There's a new, very hot movie on Netflix called "Bird Box" starring Sandra Bullock.

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Bird Box photo

Apocalyptic horror movies are not exactly Marlene and my cup of tea. In Bird Box, Sandra Bullock stars as Malorie, a woman who is first seen firmly yelling at her two young children, a girl and a boy, never to remove their blindfolds. The three of them enter a row boat and Malorie, also blindfolded, sightlessly guides the boat down river. It's a horror movie where the end of the world comes in the form of mass suicide. I'm not giving you a spoiler, you'll find this out in the first few minutes. It turns out that what drives people to instantaneous self-destruction is seeing a certain thing, which first manifested itself in Eastern Europe in Russia and quickly turns up in the United States.

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The only way to stay safe is to not see at all.

The cause of change is the exact opposite of the message of Bird Box. Anyone who wants to change anything must first choose to see. Of course, seeing makes us vulnerable. Seeing puts us at risk.

Change comes about when a person decides to see and not look away. This is certainly the case in Moses' life. If you look back at the story in the Old Testament book of Exodus, we read this:

Slide Exodus 2:11

<sup>11</sup> One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.

A couple of summers ago, I was sitting outside of a coffee shop in German Village reading when a woman entered the outside area and began shouting, "Will someone help me? I need money to buy gas for my van." She went on yelling about her problems. Everyone in that outside area did what folks do in that situation, they looked down. They didn't want to acknowledge her existence. Her whole approach was embarrassing. She was dirty. Her hair was wild. She was loud and pushy.

Everything in me wanted to do what the other folks were doing – look down and look away. Jesus spoke to my heart and said, "Look at this woman. You need to look at her and catch her eye." We looked at each other and she saw that another person was acknowledging her existence. I said, "I'll help you out." I walked to the street and sat down on a bench and talked with her and offered her some help. Change is the result of a choice to see and not look away.

So let me ask you a question. What might God want you to choose to see and not look away from, to see and not look down? Rather than take the Bird Box approach and blindfold yourself because the only way to stay safe is to not see at all, what might God want you to see? Maybe for you, it's foster children in our city – to look at them, to see

kids in the foster system. God might want to put his heart in you and put a child in your home. Maybe God wants you to see an elderly person who's isolated in some assisted living facility, to really see them. To allow God to move your heart so that you choose to visit and relieve their loneliness.

Maybe God wants you to really look at the state of your marriage, not distract yourself with busy-ness and social media, but to really look at your marriage, to be honest about it, to feel the pain of the low level that you and your spouse are living at, that you might become motivated to make a change in your marriage and believe for improvements in 2019.

Or to really look at an addiction in your life and not turn away or compartmentalize or rationalize or defend yourself or say, "Well, it's not as bad as so-and-so." Maybe God would have you look at an addiction in your life and deeply consider the cost of this addiction in terms of your relationship with God, in terms of your relationship with significant others in your life, in terms of your inner peace and your integrity, in terms of the actual dollars and cents you'll be spending on this addiction.

Moses saw and he didn't turn away from the oppression his fellow Israelites were living under. Martin Luther King, Jr. saw and he didn't turn away from the impact of Jim Crow segregation upon African Americans in the south.

What is true of individuals is true for us as a church. Vineyard Columbus has always been a church that's willing to look long enough at the needs in our community and not turn away and distract ourselves with church activities. We saw a need in the public schools. Columbus City Schools have scored an F – an absolutely failing grade – for the last several years on the state report card. Many people in central Ohio would say, "Hey, I'm glad I don't live in the city of Columbus. I'm glad my kids go to a suburban school. Or I'm glad I don't have any children." Instead, the folks at Vineyard said, "This is an all hands on deck moment. We're going to look at the state of the schools and not turn away." Now there's over 100 Vineyard Columbus church members who volunteer to mentor children in several Northside Columbus public schools every month.

Years ago, we saw the situation of immigrants living in our community – immigrants who were working hard, trying to provide for their families. They needed legal help to deal with our broken immigration system. So, we opened up one of only three non-profit immigration law clinics in central Ohio.

We teach hundreds of immigrants English as a second language every year. And dozens of people from this church volunteer to teach English because that's the ticket to opportunity and success in America. You've got to learn English.

We offer GED classes so that folks in our community, mostly native born but some immigrants, can get their high school diploma. Without at least a high school diploma, you're not going anywhere.

Do you want to understand Vineyard Columbus? If you're new to our church and you wonder what this church is about, the heart of this church is to see needs and not turn away.

We considered the cause of change. Let's consider next:

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The cost of change

Here's what we read:

Slide Hebrews 11:24-25

<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. <sup>25</sup> He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Slide Exodus 2:10

<sup>10</sup> When the child grew older, [Moses' sister] took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

If you've seen the cartoon Prince of Egypt, you know that Moses became Pharaoh's grandson. He was Pharaoh's daughter's son. And for the first 40 years of his life, he moved effortlessly from success to success. Here is what we read in Acts 7:22:

Slide Acts 7:22

Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Moses was great looking. He had a fabulous education. He went to the finest universities in Egypt. And again in Acts 7:22:

Slide Acts 7:22

Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Josephus great Jewish historian indicates that when the Ethiopians attacked Egypt and were on the verge of defeating them, Pharaoh appointed Moses to be General over the Egyptian army. Under his dynamic leadership, the Ethiopians were driven back and defeated. We don't know if this is just part of tradition, or if this is historically true, but

we do know that Moses was not only handsome, not only exceptionally well-educated, but he was also a brilliant leader and a brilliant communicator. Moses at age 40 was at the top of his game. He was a person we would say had a really high ceiling.

What does change cost? To achieve change may look like a choice to commit career suicide, a choice to get on the down escalator. Change may cost us financial security. Change may look like a choice to become vulnerable, to not live the safe life, to not do the sure thing, to take a risk. Change may look like a choice to take the hard road rather than the easy road, to do something unconventional.

You know, one of the filthiest lies that Satan whispers in ears of so many people today is that leadership is a choice of privilege, not sacrifice. Satan whispers in the ears of people that becoming a leader is a form of recognition, a kind of accomplishment, a path to privilege. Being declared a leader is like winning an award, finally getting the gold star on your paper, getting the applause of the crowd. That's the message of the world all the time. It screams at us at every turn. Our politicians and our business leaders, many of our pastors, the leaders of our academic institutions often model this message – leadership is privilege, not sacrifice. Leadership is privilege, not service. In the midst of all of this glitz and private jets, people waiting on leaders hand and foot, Jesus comes along and says, "I have a very different definition of leadership."

Slide Matthew 20:25-28

<sup>25</sup> Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—<sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus' perspective on leadership is if you choose leadership, if you choose to step out of the line and follow his call to be a leader, it's not a call to privilege or a fight for position. Jesus' is a call to service. It's a call to sacrifice.

Let me share with you a story of a man that many of you may not have heard of. Perhaps if you come from East Africa you are familiar with the name Charles Mulli.

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Mulli photo

Dr. Mulli is a Kenyan. He was born in poverty, abandoned by his parents and reduced to begging in the streets when he was six years old. At 17, he walked into a church gave his life to Christ.

He began working construction and with the money he earned, he started a company. Eventually, because of his incredible entrepreneurial skill, the company that this poor, abandoned young man started made millions of dollars and Charles Mulli became incredibly wealthy. At the age of 40 in 1989, Mulli sold all of his property and all of his businesses and he dedicated the proceeds to helping street children by providing rescue, shelter, medical care, psychological and social support and education. Currently, Mulli's Children's Family has just under 3,000 children in their centers in Kenya and Tanzania. Since 1989, he and his wife have taken into their centers over 23,000 abandoned children. Change costs.

There's always what I'd call an attractive alternative to the sacrifice demanded by real leadership and real change. F.F. Bruce, the great New Testament scholar of this past century, wrote this – he's commenting upon Hebrews 11:25:

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The privileges and advantages which are attached to high rank and political power are not sinful in themselves; they can indeed be used very effectively to promote the well-being of others and to help the under-privileged. Moses might have argued to himself that he could do much more for the Israelites by remaining in Pharaoh's court and using his influence there on their behalf than by renouncing his Egyptian citizenship and becoming a depressed group with no political rights. But for *Moses* to do this, when he had seen the path of duty cleared before him, would have been *sin*...

Even if (as some have imagined) the crown of Egypt was within Moses' reach had he remained where he was, and his name had been perpetuated in history as the greatest and wisest of the rulers of that land, he would never have attained such a reputation as he did by making *the great refusal*. But when Moses made that refusal he did not foresee the reputation which he was going to establish for himself; he had nothing to look forward to but privation, danger, scorn and suffering... To have remained at Pharaoh's court would have been lasting dishonor, and that dishonor would have been too high a price to pay for material advantages which at best would be short lived. – F. Bruce

You know, when God's Spirit begins to put an impulse in your heart that something needs to change, when you become aware of something not being right, something is not the way that God wants it to be, when we feel a nudge, maybe God is asking you to pay a price to see something change. But I guarantee you that if God is calling you to sacrifice, you will be tempted by an attractive alternative. Satan will whisper in your ear, "You know, you could accomplish that same thing at a much lower cost. There's a way to get to this goal that does not require sacrifice. Don't get on the down escalator. Don't give away your hard-earned money. Don't give up this promotion. You can do a whole lot more good by staying on the sidelines and cheering on those who have decided to enter the game. And you can still enjoy the good life while you cheer others on."



Brothers and sisters, there are billions of people who live in this world who have no relevant indigenous church bearing witness to them in their community. There might be a church 100 miles away. There might be a church that speaks a different language or a church that's completely irrelevant to this group of people. But if the gospel is going to be heard by people who have no relevant indigenous church bearing witness to them. Somebody needs to go start that church.

Here at Vineyard Columbus, we've seen the needs of people around the world for a relevant indigenous church in their own community and language and we've chosen to not look away. We sent Marsha and Keith Wilson to Brazil to start a church.

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Photo of the Wilsons

They are way out in the Amazon region of Brazil.

So are Steve and Elba Dolan

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Picture of the Dolans

They live in the region of the Amazon and are partnering with a thriving Vineyard church there.

There's Brooke Christensen

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Picture of Brooke

Went to assist Eric and Julia Pickerill (who are going to be my successors) to start a church in Amsterdam, one of the most secular cities on earth. Brooke is finishing her time in Amsterdam after 11 years of service there.

We have "Ali" in "North Africa", another couple in a different North African country, a couple working with the Muslims of Iran, a person in Lebanon, another in South East Asia, and a couple in Central Asia.

By the way, if God is putting international ministry in your heart, why not get in touch with our International Ministry Pastor Bill Christensen.

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[Bill.christensen@vineyardcolumbus.org](mailto:Bill.christensen@vineyardcolumbus.org)

I've talked about the cause of change and the cost of change. Let me quickly close by speaking with you about

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The consequence of change

One more hero. Let me tell you about Maggie Gobran.

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Photo of Gobran

She's known as Mama Maggie. Mama Maggie was born a very wealthy woman to a successful business woman in Egypt. She was a university professor in Computer Science. She loved jewelry and nice clothes and cars. One day with some friends, she visited one of Cairo's garbage slums. She decided not to look away. In the midst of unbelievable filth, something we could not imagine here in the United States, were thousands of men, women and children living in a garbage dump. Maggie was instantly drawn to them, especially to the children. She's been running this huge charity called "Stephen's Children" to minister to impoverished children of all faiths – Christian, Muslim and Bahai. She herself is a Coptic Christian.

Have you ever wondered why people choose to sacrifice, to get on the down escalator and not opt for the attractive alternative, the easy way out? Look with me at verse 26:

Slide Hebrews 11:26

<sup>26</sup> He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

The word "regarded" literally means "accounted" or "balance this against that". Moses carefully weighed the pros and cons as he was thinking about the cost of change. He didn't just make a snap decision to give up the power and the wealth of his career. He didn't just wake up one day and say, "You know what? I think I'm going to commit career suicide." He thought about it. He weighed things out. Then he said to himself, "I'm going to pursue true greatness."

Slide Hebrews 11:26

<sup>26</sup> He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

It's interesting that the people who have really made a difference in this world never feel like they're making a sacrifice. Mama Maggie said,

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God wanted to promote me by having me leave the best and the smartest and go to the poorest of the poor. God wanted to promote me.

Those who follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit never feel like they're really making a sacrifice. They feel just like Mama Maggie "God wanted to promote me." That's the calculation that faith makes. Mama Maggie went through this thought process, this weighing, this accounting after repeated visits to the garbage dump when she chose to not look away from the children. She weighed her options. She could have remained a Computer Science Professor and continued to enjoy a really pleasant, easy life. But she said, God wanted to promote me.

I would not dare class myself alongside of Mama Maggie, Charles Mulli or the greats in history like Dr. King. But I can tell you that every call of God is with a cost. When Marlene and I felt like God was calling me to become our first senior pastor, we weighed the cost. I was just about to be tenured, get a lifetime appointment as a professor at Ohio State, making a really good salary. I had just signed a text book contract. God said, "Now it's time to leave." The salary was immediately cut in half. I lost all of my university benefits, football tickets, parking in the A lot during the game. The Lord said, "You are called to serve this church." We had no idea all that God would do in the past 32 years. Eric and Julia, my successors, will have to pay a cost. Guaranteed. And so will the church as we change.

But brothers and sisters, God wants to promote us. It may cost us some money or some security or some time, hard work, sleepless nights. God is speaking and asking each of us in this New Year "Will you pursue true greatness, paying the cost of change?" Let's pray.

## The Cost of Change

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Rich Nathan

January 12 & 13, 2018

The Challenge of Change

Hebrews 11:23-28

#TheChallengeofChangeVC

- I. The cause of change
- II. The cost of change
- III. The consequence of change