

The Courage to Change

Rich Nathan

January 26 & 27, 2019

The Challenge of Change

Hebrews 11:31; Joshua 2:1-13

We just heard an incredibly courageous testimony during our announcement time from a member of our congregation named Angel.

Angel was raped by her husband and beaten so violently that she had to get a protective order against her husband and sought a divorce. But as you heard, to her total shock and dismay, Angel discovered that she was pregnant. Now remember she was a single mom with three kids already. There are lots of people – maybe even some of you – who would have counseled Angel if she came to you and said, “I’m on my own. I’ve got limited finances. I’m leaving an abusive situation. I’ve got three kids and now I find out I’m pregnant. What do you think I should do?” Lots of people would say, “Angel, you can’t have another child. It’s too much at this point in your life. You don’t need to do this. There are options for you. You can get an abortion.”

That’s what Angel’s first thought was: “Yes, that’s what I need to do. I’m going to end this pregnancy.”

But then, after not being in church for a while, she came and heard about an incredible ministry we’ve had here at Vineyard for the past 25 years, a ministry we call Value Life! Angel met a loving, supportive, non-judgmental friend named Angie through Value Life. With Angie’s help, Angel made the courageous choice to change her mind and give birth to a beautiful baby boy who she named Gabriel.

It takes incredible courage to make big changes in our lives.

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Courage to overcome inertia

The easiest thing to do, the path of least resistance, is almost always staying put in our situations even if our situations are really bad. Inertia keeps us fixed in place.

How would you define courage? Eddie Rickenbacker, the World War I fighter pilot from right here in Columbus, Ohio (his grave is at Greenlawn Cemetery) defined courage this way:

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Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.

Mark Twain defined courage in a very similar way:

Slide (with pic)

Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear – not the absence of fear.

Eleanor Roosevelt said:

Slide (with pic)

You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.

You don't lack courage when you're afraid. You lack courage when you allow your fear to be the reason why you won't do something. Courageous people feel fear. They just decide that they're not going to be controlled by their fear. Only psychopaths don't feel fear. Emotionally and psychologically healthy people feel fear, but they choose to pursue it. It takes courage to change.

Think of someone who is in an unhealthy or an abusive relationship with a friend or a family member, a child or a parent, a boyfriend or a girlfriend, a spouse or someone they're living with. It takes courage to break free from someone who is constantly disrespectful to you, unfairly mistrustful, someone who puts you down or threatens you, uses you, lies to you, isolates you, steals from you, breaks things that you love.

Any of you who are in relationships that are really unhealthy or abusive, it takes courage to break free. And it takes courage to change personally and not be stuck in your own brokenness. A woman named Liz in our congregation shared about a Vineyard support group that she joined 20 years after her abortion. The support group is called Heart.

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H.E.A.R.T. – Healing Effects of Abortion-Related Trauma

Liz wrote,

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Sometimes you have to tell God exactly where it hurts so He can help. And He CAN help. In the HEART group, God healed deep wounds I kept hidden away for 20 years. Why did I wait so long to let Him help me? Shame. Depression. Hopelessness. There must be something wrong with me, I thought, because I can't just "get over it." I must be crazy and I'm sure nobody understands what I've gone through. But that wasn't true. In HEART, I found out that I wasn't alone. I found out God could heal even my deepest,

scariest pain. It took courage to reach out, but I am so glad I finally did. God used HEART to heal me, to restore me and most importantly, to give me my freedom. – Liz

In our series titled “The Challenge of Change”, we’ve been looking at Old Testament heroes – Abraham, Moses, Joshua and, today, Rahab. All of them were called by God to change. Today, we’re going to look at this wonderful biblical heroine named Rahab in a message I’ve titled “The Courage to Change”. Let’s pray.

I did want to mention that next week I’m starting a new series here at Vineyard titled “Family Matters”. This is a great series to invite friends to. Our topics:

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Marriage Matters – February 2 and 3

Singleness Matters – February 9 and 10

Breaking Free of Family Mess – February 16 and 17

Parenting with Purpose – February 23 and 24

Here’s what we read in Hebrews:

Slide Hebrews 11:31

³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

Rahab is a remarkable figure in the Bible. She is one of only two women listed in the Hebrews 11 “Hall of Faith” alongside the matriarch, Sarah, Abraham’s wife. Rahab is one of only five women listed in Jesus’ genealogy in the book of Matthew. She is an ancestor of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Most surprisingly, at least to me, the book of James couples Rahab along with Abraham as two people who exemplified genuine faith. If you were back in the first century and you wanted to illustrate faith, as a Jew you would, of course, choose Abraham who was the Father of Faith. But if you were then to be asked from the whole Old Testament, who else would you choose to illustrate faith, James the apostle answers with Rahab, the prostitute.

Why is Rahab so remarkable? She is someone who exhibited:

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Courage to overcome her culture

Let’s read the story of Rahab from the book of Joshua:

Slide Joshua 2:1, 8-13

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. “Go, look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

⁸ Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof ⁹ and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. ¹⁰ We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. ¹¹ When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

¹² “Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death.”

Rahab, a prostitute living in Jericho, found the living God. Did you know that Jericho is physically the lowest built city on planet earth? It’s 750 feet below sea level. Jericho was not just physically low, it was morally low. The gods the Canaanites worshiped, engaged in incest between sisters and brothers. These gods demanded child sacrifice. They were violent.

Because we always imitate the gods we worship, if you worship the Canaanite gods you become like them. So, Canaanite culture was filled with violence and sexual immorality. In the same way, if you worship Jesus, you become like him – patient, kind, truth-telling, humble. In this Canaanite culture of violence and sexual immorality and child sacrifice, Rahab had the courage to overcome her culture and place her faith in the God of Israel.

In every age and in every country, whether we’re talking about America in the 21st century or Germany in the 1930’s and 1940’s or England in the 19th century or the Roman Empire back in the first century, in every age and in every country, the surrounding society uses whatever means it had at its disposal to make sure that people line up with the values and practices and identity of the culture. The people who control every culture want everyone else to get in line, to conform, to maintain the value system and practices and world view of that culture.

There are lots of features of non-Christian culture, lots of things that the larger society wants to pressure you to believe or pressure you to do. I want to mention just one thing today. This weekend, Vineyard Columbus is celebrating the value of human life from conception to natural death. As many of you know, this past week there were marches around the country to commemorate the sanctity of life.

You know, one feature of every culture that has not deeply been influenced by Christianity is that virtually every culture has killed its young. Virtually every culture outside of Christian influence is stained with the blood of innocent children. Archeologists have found evidence of human sacrifice in every part of the world. Unwanted infants were left on the walls in Rome to die of exposure to weather or attacked by animals. Greeks gave pregnant women harsh medicine, abortifacient, to cause abortions. Chinese women used to tie ropes around their stomachs so tight they either miscarried or actually made themselves unconscious. The Canaanites and the Mayans used to take their children and throw them into the fire as an offering to their gods. Children were sacrificed by the hundreds in Peru as an offering to the gods. Japanese women used to straddle pots of boiling water to force an abortion. Egyptian women would kill their babies after birth and then use the products of their babies' skin as cosmetic cream for makeup.

If you look over the pre-Christian world and you read the great philosophers, people like Plato and Aristotle, they were very callous in their discussion of child killing. They recommended infanticide and they recommended abortion. You could say that virtually every society outside of Christian influence supports a culture of death, especially the death of infants and the unborn. Women today in our post-Christian society face enormous pressure to abort babies they're carrying in their wombs.

A recent study done in the Medical Science Monitor revealed the following statistics:

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- 64% of post-abortive women in America said they felt pressured by others to have the abortion
- 54% said they were not sure about their decision at the time
- 50% actually felt that abortion was morally wrong at the time they got an abortion

Now, I know that in an audience of this size, we all have very different views regarding abortion. It's an incredibly hot button culture wars topic in America and it's been white hot for the last 50 years. Many of you feel that abortion is a woman's choice, perhaps an unfortunate choice, but nevertheless it's a woman's choice and to restrict that choice is radically anti-woman.

Many of you have had an abortion. There have been over 60 million abortions since Roe v. Wade struck down the abortion restrictions of all 50 states in the United States. Certainly, in a crowd this size, many of you have had an abortion or you helped someone – a child, a spouse, a girlfriend, a sister, a friend – get an abortion. If you had an abortion in the past, you probably have a variety of feelings about your decision to abort or to help someone abort in the years following the abortion. Some of you may think often about what you've done. You may regret your decision now. You may feel

deep shame. You may feel that the decision you made was right and you would do it again or you may rarely think about it. You don't feel shame. You've just moved on.

Wherever you're coming from regarding the issue of abortion, will you indulge me as I share with you one reason why I've taken a pro-life perspective for more than four decades? You can go to my website, RichNathan.org (I am myself an organization). There I've listed 10 reasons why I'm pro-life.

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www.richnathan.org/articles

The main reason why I oppose abortion and am pro-life is because the God I worship is a God of life.

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God is a God of life

One reason that I'm pro-life is because 45 years ago I entered a personal life-changing relationship with the living God who is obsessed with life. It says that when God created the waters, they were literally teeming with life. Jesus Christ is called the Bread of Life. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the Word of Life. He calls himself the way, the truth and the life. He offers us a promise of life, a crown of life, the tree of life. For those receive the Prince of Life, Jesus offers eternal life. It says in 2 Timothy that Jesus' mission was to abolish death, invade our culture of death and to break our agreement with the spirit of death.

Do you know what the last act of history is going to be? What is the last thing that God will do before time ends and we all enter eternity? It says in the book of Revelation that after God judges people and after he judges Satan and the beast, he will throw Satan and the beast into hell. The very last act of history before heaven comes down and we enter the New Jerusalem is that God is going to take death, the culture of death, the spirit of death, our obsession with death – God is going to take death and throw it into the Lake of Fire then he's going to usher in the age of life where you and I will eat from the Tree of Life and we'll drink from the fountain that pours forth the water of life.

I am pro-life because I have given my heart to radically follow a God who is a God of life.

Do you know a woman or a teenager who is facing an unintended pregnancy? That woman does not have to stand alone in defiance to our culture of death. Have her contact our Value Life ministry or stop by the lobby counter after the service.

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www.vineyardcolumbus.org/ministries/value-life

They will receive completely non-judgmental spiritual, emotional and material support. We help women with things like: maternity clothes, baby clothes, blankets, bottles, diapers, formula. There are opportunities to connect with classes at our Community Center for job training, managing finances, GED classes. Vineyard Columbus is a church that rejects the culture war's either/or approach to the subject of abortion. Either you're for the woman and against the baby or you're for the baby and you neglect the woman and her needs. Vineyard Columbus has said for 25 years, why can't we do both? Why can't we support women AND their unborn children? That's what Value Life ministry is all about.

You know, we hear a tremendous amount in the culture war surrounding abortion about a woman's right to choose. Listen – we have come alongside of more than 5,000 women who were facing unintended pregnancies in the past 10 years. These women come from every conceivable background – religious, irreligious, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, atheist, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, native born, immigrant, rich, poor and everything in between. And with very, very few exceptions almost every woman who has encountered our Value Life ministry has chosen to give birth and not abort because she was supported and helped and was not left to fend for herself and face her pregnancy alone. Moms choose life for their babies when they are supported and loved by people who care!

You know, Rahab not only had the courage to overcome her culture, she had

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Courage to overcome her past

Slide Hebrews 11:31

³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

Whenever Rahab is mentioned in the Bible, she's always called "the prostitute". Imagine that kind of label as your last name. Beth the adulteress, De Shawn the alcoholic, Jason the wife abuser. Historically, people would often be named for their occupations. If you worked with metal, you'd be named Smith. If you ground grain into flour, you'd be named Miller. If you made carts, you would be named Carter or Cartwright. If you made clothes, you'd be named Taylor. Imagine if your last name was prostitute. Rahab the prostitute. Rahab the hooker.

No matter how much Hollywood tries to dress up prostitution as an empowered choice of women or glamorous like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*, the real story of prostitution

in every country, whether it is legal or illegal the reality of prostitution is horrifying and dehumanizing in every age and every culture.

Let me give you some stats regarding prostitution in America.

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- The average age of someone entering into prostitution is 14 years old (Rich's comment: This is not the empowered choice of a liberated woman. This is the decision of a predator who decides to destroy the life of a child.)
- At least 75% of prostitutes are sexually or physically abused as children
- 70% of prostitutes have experienced multiple rapes by their customers, pimps and strangers
- According to one study, more than 75% of prostitutes have considered suicide
- Having to endure unwanted sex creates the same emotional responses as does repeated trauma – disengagement, disassociation, disembodiment and distancing.
- To cope with unwanted sex, many women who are not already using drugs and alcohol become addicts after entering prostitution

Far from the Pretty Woman glamorous prostitute being rescued by Richard Gere, the knight in shining armor, prostitution destroys people and requires drugs or alcohol to anesthetize the pain.

Let me share with you a story of a member of the Vineyard who participates in a sex trafficking Bible study. Her name is Beth.

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When I was in high school, an older neighbor took advantage of my vulnerability. I had never been in trouble before, but I didn't know how to say no. He was married. He persuaded me to have sex with him. [After he broke up with me] I started to call him repeatedly and hang up. His wife called the police about phone harassment. I was willing to take all the blame because I wanted him to like me. I was so naïve! I walked out of the police station as a criminal. After that, I was easily manipulated by men. In my mind, it was all my fault. Relationships with men led to more drug use and ultimately to prostitution.

You know, everyone loves stories of people who beat the odds. It's inspiring to hear about people who never should have made it, but did.

The other day at the Martin Luther King, Jr. breakfast that's hosted downtown – we had about 3 dozen staff members attend – it's the largest sit down breakfast on Dr. King's birthday in the entire country. The keynote address was given by Dr. John King.

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Photo

He's the former Secretary of Education under President Obama. Dr. King grew up not too far from me in New York City. He was the son of two teachers – his mom was from Puerto Rico. She learned English in New York City's public schools. His dad was an African American and also a New Yorker. Mom died when John was eight. Dad had undiagnosed early onset Alzheimer's. Sometimes Dad would talk to John and sometimes he wouldn't. Sometimes he'd be angry and sometimes he'd be nice.

One evening Dad woke John up at 2:00am and tried to drag him to school. John grabbed the handrail on the stairs and cried, "Dad, it's the middle of the night! It's not time for school." But Dad dragged him outside at 2:00am because he believed it was time for school.

John was orphaned at the age of 12 when Dad died. John was then shuttled from relative to relative. He was angry. He was defiant of adult authority. He's likely the only Education Secretary in history who was kicked out of high school.

But teachers gave him a second chance. And John King made the most of it. He ended up getting into Harvard, getting a law degree at Yale, and a Doctorate in Education at Columbia. Of course, not everyone with John's background does as well as he did. Many people are regarded as hopeless, beyond repair, irredeemable, incurable, but every once in a while there's some loving person who sees not just problems but potential in a child or potential in a teen or potential in a young adult – and that child or teen or adult is given another chance.

The young gal I talked about earlier who was preyed upon by her married adult neighbor and ended up in prostitution found healing for her life. She says:

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I was at a breaking point where I felt like a waste of human life. I remember sitting on a step near an abandoned building seriously contemplating suicide. I was talking to God and I said, "There's GOT to be more to life than this." Shortly after that I got arrested again and was sent to the penitentiary for the fourth time. I said, "God, this is your last chance! If you don't work out for me this time, it's over!" I was like the woman in the crowd who reached out to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. There on the top bunk of my jail cell bed, I prayed the sinner's prayer and began to humbly seek God. And just like that woman, he turned to me and called me his daughter. I was baptized in the penitentiary and I've been a Jesus girl ever since!

You know, there are so many people in the Bible who failed miserably at some point in their life. The Hebrews 11 "Hall of Faith" could easily be called the "Hall of Shame".

Noah was found drunk by his sons. Abraham trafficked his wife. Jacob was a liar and deceiver. Moses murdered an Egyptian. David had someone murdered and committed adultery. Rahab committed prostitution. And Samson visited prostitutes. But God transferred their membership up from the Hall of Shame to the Hall of Faith.

You know, we often hear the statement that God is a God of second chances. But the grace of Jesus Christ is not just a second chance. The grace of Jesus Christ is not just one more chance to redeem yourself. It's not just one more or ten more chances to become the person you want to be. The gospel message is this: Jesus Christ came to pay the penalty of our failures and if we receive him, his record becomes our record. Loving, patient people might say, "OK, I'll give you one more chance to get your life together or five more chances to get your life together." But you trying to fix your life will never get you in.

Jesus says to you and me: I've done the good deeds for you. I lived the perfect life. I died the perfect death. I put myself in your place and I paid your penalty. Now, if you trust in me and you lay down all your self-improvement attempts, if you trust wholly in me, if you embrace me, God the Father will welcome you as perfect and complete, cleaned up and made whole. Jesus didn't come to be our model of moral behavior. He came to be our sacrifice and our Savior. It's faith in Jesus which enables us to overcome our pasts! Let's pray.

The Courage to Change

Rich Nathan

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The Challenge of Change

Hebrews 11:31; Joshua 2:1-13

#TheChallengeofChangeVC

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