

Choices: An Issue Of Rights And Responsibilities

Rivqah Coover, December 2015

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Hi. Today I would like to talk to you a little bit about choices. Every day we are faced with choices, and lots of them. Choices can be overwhelming sometimes, but they are good too. If someone else had to make all your choices for you, it would take away a good deal of your freedom, wouldn't it?

The freedom to make choices grows with us as we grow older and more responsible. As a baby or a small child, many of our choices were made for us. As each year of our childhood passed by, we began in small steps to have the freedom to make more and more choices. We may think of free choice as a right that we have, but really it's something that we grow into and earn as we develop reason and maturity.

Making choices is a serious thing. When faced with decisions, there are some questions we should ask ourselves: 1) Is this choice going to have a positive or negative impact on my life? 2) Is this choice going to have a positive or negative impact on the lives of others? 3) Am I going to regret this choice later on?

Some choices are very big and some are very small. Most decisions we make, though, are going to have some impact on our lives and / or the lives of others.



I know of a woman who loves music. When she was in high school, she took flute lessons. She wanted to play in the band. Unfortunately, she found flute to be difficult and unnatural, and she didn't do well with it. She was faced with a number of choices. One thing she could have done was to ask for extra tutoring so that she could become an accomplished flutist. Another thing she could have done was consider learning to play another instrument that would perhaps come easier for her. Or she could just skip out on being part of the band altogether. She didn't really want to skip out, so that wasn't a good option for her. But she was embarrassed to admit that she didn't know what she was

doing on the flute. So instead of acknowledging her weakness and asking for help, she pretended she was playing the flute. She showed up faithfully for every flute lesson, put her lips to the mouthpiece, put her fingers on the buttons, and pretended to play. All of the other flutes covered up the fact that her flute wasn't making a sound, and nobody knew that she was just pretending. Was that a good choice? It didn't hurt anybody else per se, but what did it do for her? She wasted a lot of her own time and she never learned to play the flute or any other instrument.

Our choices will follow us through the years. The decisions that we make will have a lot to do with determining our destiny. Pretending to play the flute was not a good choice. It did nothing to benefit this woman's present or her future. It didn't hurt anyone else, but it still was not a good choice. Some poor choices that follow us through the years, though, really will hurt us a lot more than the inability to play a flute. Moreover, our choices can hurt others as well. We each have the right to make choices, but it is imperative that we realize that RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES REALLY GO HAND IN HAND. I can choose to drive, but only so long as I am responsible. That right can be removed if I fail to exercise maturity and responsibility in my driving habits. I can choose to have a pet, but once again, the right to

have a pet is accompanied by the responsibility to care for that pet. In other words, free choice is not just about doing whatever we feel like. We each have the right to choose for or against lots of things; at the same time, we each have the responsibility to make proper choices.

One thing is very certain – we have the responsibility to be sure that our choices are not bringing harm to others. Let's suppose there is a man who has his driver's license. Do we all agree that he has the right to drive? Of course. He can choose to go out and drive, because he has demonstrated the knowledge and ability to do so. Now, let's suppose that this same man has been drinking. Does he still have the right to drive? No. What is going to happen if he gets behind the wheel and drives while he's drunk? He can make the choice to do so, but does that mean he made the right choice? Just because he is capable of choosing to drive while he's drunk, does that make his choice acceptable? You see, there are boundaries we reach with choices. We each have rights, but we also each have responsibilities. If a choice we are going to make is potentially going to bring harm to another, then we have the responsibility to choose a different path. No one has the right to quench someone else's rights. Did you all get that? **NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO QUENCH SOMEONE ELSE'S RIGHTS.** Someone who is driving drunk stands a huge chance of running into somebody else. I have the right to live. It is not fair for my life to be damaged or perhaps even extinguished because someone who is drunk wants to have the right to drive. You see, when we're thinking about rights and choices, we need to think about everyone involved. We ought to carefully weigh any serious choices we make, but especially those that will affect others besides ourselves.

Sometimes, we make choices that harm others without even really realizing what we're doing. Someone who is under the influence of drink does not really plan to kill another person when he crashes head-on into their vehicle. But because of poor choices he has made, his ability to think and reason wisely has been destroyed for the time being. In this state of confusion, he can kill someone without even realizing it.

I want you to think of an instance where such a driver hits a pregnant woman, and she dies. When the newspaper writes up her story, they are not merely going to mention her. They are also going to mention her unborn child, because in this act of wrongly made choices, the drunk driver has terminated two lives – the mother's and the baby's. It's a double tragedy. Yet with all the magnitude of this awful story, he didn't plan this tragedy. Caught in the throes of his own humanness and lack of proper reasoning, he brought death and untold pain and grief to the day.

We are all capable of making detrimental choices. Because of this, we need to carefully weigh our choices in the balance and determine which way really is correct. We need to be careful to listen to the right voices. We can always get the answer we want, but our goal should instead be to get the right answer. The drunk man can easily get someone to vouch for him driving himself home. All he has to do is ask one of his drunk buddies who's probably going to do the same thing. But if he goes to the proper source, he'll get an intelligent answer that will save him from possibly ending his own life and the lives of others.



BE CAREFUL

THINK BEFORE YOU ACT

Will you go back with me and think again about that pregnant woman? This time, she is not facing a drunk driver. This time she is facing her own responsibilities and choices. What choices is she going to make? As with everything else we've been talking about, she has the right to make choices, but she also has the responsibility to make proper choices – choices that will not bring harm to another. She can choose to terminate her child's life, just as the drunk man can choose to go out and drive. If the drunk man terminates her baby's life, he will receive a sentence from our legal system. But unlike him, she will not receive a sentence if she makes that choice. But does that make her

choice OK? Is right and wrong only determined by what our legal system defines as right and wrong? If our legal system decided tomorrow that people have the right to drive drunk, would it make it any easier for you if your mom got hit by a drunk driver? There are two sides to every choice, and you will always find some who are in favor of the one side and others who are in favor of the opposite side. Finding someone who will verbally justify a wrong choice does not make it advisable for you to make that choice.

There's something else I want to touch on in regards to choices. Free choice means being able to weigh all the possibilities, reach a conclusion, and make a decision. When it comes to the subject of the unborn, though, "choice" is often presented as though there is only ONE possibility and ONE choice that can be made. If there is only ONE choice, then there IS no choice.

If any of us are going to advocate choice, we need to understand what real choice is:

Real choice involves knowing the facts and thoroughly understanding everything involved.

Real choice involves recognizing the line where choice becomes more than personal and starts to affect others.

Real choice involves rights and responsibilities – being mature and responsible enough to properly exercise one's right to choose.

In the debate about the unborn, we hear two different terms: pro-life and pro-choice. If these two are opposites, does pro-choice mean "not pro-life"? What does that say for "choice"? Is choice equivalent to death? How many people would want to stand up and say, "I am pro-death." Choice should not mean automatic termination, or there is no choice involved. If anyone is choosing abortion because they feel they have to, because they're alone, because they're scared, because they're ashamed, because they don't know what else to do, because they feel it is their ONLY choice..... then they aren't really exercising free choice. They're doing what they're pressured to do. Anyone who is operating out of a state of fear, shame, and desperation risks wrecking their own life and others' as well.

What I want to say, then, is that we each have the responsibility to make correct choices and we also each have the responsibility to support others in making correct choices. When people have no hope, they can very easily go down a wrong path. You could be the hope for somebody else. It could be a student who really struggles with his grades and feels like giving up. It could be a student who feels like no one

appreciates and values her life. It could be a guy who is drowning in his addictions. It could be a girl facing an unplanned pregnancy. It could be a girl with an eating disorder or a boy who's self-conscious about his looks. It could be someone who picks on others because he's insecure and unhappy with his own life. It could be someone who's dealing with abuse or a broken home. You might not know everyone's story, but you can be available as a friend and as a source of hope. You can be there to encourage someone who feels helpless to make the right choices. You can help someone exercise the right to choose the things that will not leave them with lasting regret and pain.

I hope that since we have had this little talk, you will never again view choice in exactly the same way as you did before. I hope that when you think of choices, you will think about your rights and responsibilities, others' rights and responsibilities, and the importance of being a friend and a source of hope for those you cross paths with.

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