

Choosing to Change when Change Happens

BRENDA STROHBEHN HENDERSON

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PREFACE

Change happens. Not only is that a true statement, but that was the title of a recent four-week ladies' Sunday school class at my church. Little did I know how things would change when the pastor's wife called and asked me to teach one of those weeks. I was to choose a Bible character from whom we could learn lessons on change and prepare a thirty- to forty-minute lesson. I was free to choose the person as well as my approach to the topic.

God put, as Joe (my husband) likes to say, a “fire in my belly” from the very minute I began working on the lesson. I chose Moses and initially planned to look at all of the changes in his life: the bulrushes, the burning bush, the ten plagues, the Red Sea crossing, the Ten Commandments, to name a few. The goal for my study time each morning was that I hoped to saturate my mind with all of the events, their correct order, and the changes God walked Moses through.

But God changed my thinking.

The more I read in the Bible (starting in Exodus 2 with Moses's birth and ending in Deuteronomy 34 with Moses's death), the more the *facts* did not jump out at me. Instead, I was struck over and over again by Moses's growing knowledge of—and relationship with—God as he saw God working in each of the changes he was going through.

Oh. My. Heart. There was that topic that I loved so well: “Knowing God!” I began to see that the *more* we know of God and the *better* we know Him, the more we can choose to change how we view the changes that come into our lives. The lesson (and therefore the study times) took a drastic turn toward the personal and the practical!

After I taught the lesson, I was speaking with Joe about the fact that I had put in so much study time and had gathered so much material that I probably could have taught a whole series of lessons just from the life of Moses. As I began to pray about it over the next few days, I knew what I needed to do. I needed to focus on pouring my heart and my efforts into providing the Moses study for other ladies to use as well.

When I tossed the idea out to Joe, he enthusiastically supported the idea, and he has greatly encouraged me in “gittin' 'er done” these last few weeks. The goal has been to just power write in order to take the passion burning in my heart and put in on paper ASAP!

So it thrills me to no end to share what God has done, because you are holding in your hands this copy of *Choosing to Change when Change Happens*, a seven-lesson Bible study designed for use in either personal or group study! May you be enlightened, exercised in your faith, equipped, empowered, and encouraged as you study through the spiritual changes in the life of Moses.

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LESSON TWO CHANGE IS ENTRUSTED TO US

As an editor of marketing publications and books, I saw many interesting sentences and paragraphs in a day's work. One of the errors I saw most often was the "passive" voice.

In passive-voice sentences, no one is doing the implied action. For example: The chair was set next to the desk. This sentence is passive. Who set the chair there? Did the chair actively participate?

But if I say, "Sharon set the chair next to the desk," Sharon is the one acting out the verb *set*. This simple change turns a passive sentence into an active one. An occasional use of passive voice is fine, but the power of the document is weakened when, in the majority of the sentences, no one is acting out the verb.

When change happens, we can choose to allow the change to change us.

Sadly, many of us treat change with a passive approach. We say, "Change happens. There's nothing I can do about it." And then we sit and pout because of the change that was "inflicted upon us." But there *is* something we can do! When change happens, we can choose to allow the change to change us.

Read Philippians 4:8, aloud, if possible. This is one of the greatest tools you can use when choosing to change your viewpoint as changes occur.

In this list of qualities that should be true of our thoughts, what is the first thought quality we are told to think on?

What is true is that this thing—this *change*—happened.

God didn't withhold something or someone from you because He is mean.

God didn't stop loving you.

God didn't love someone else more than He loved you or love you more than He loved someone else.

God *entrusted* this change (trial, blessing, disappointment, gift, heartache, loss) to *you*. View it as an honor, a privilege—an assignment, even. View it through God's heart. His compassionate, loving, caring, wisdom-filled heart caused Him to choose you as the recipient of this change.

Generally speaking, how do you view change when it comes?

In Exodus 3, Moses faced the prospect of a pretty major change in his life. Living as a “refugee” in Midian (because he had killed an Egyptian taskmaster in Egypt and was himself about to be killed for it by the pharaoh whose daughter had raised him), Moses was tending his father-in-law's sheep out in the desert when he looked over and saw a bush that was on fire but that wasn't being destroyed by the fire.

Read Exodus 3:3. What was Moses's reason for going over to the bush? (NOTE: His reason was not as spiritual as we often think that it was!)

Once Moses approached the bush, God called out to him from the bush. Imagine how startled he must have been. Seriously. A bush that was on fire but didn't burn up, and now the voice of God was calling him by name! Wow. Just wow!

Moses clearly began to approach more closely, because God admonished him with the words that we read in Exodus 3:5. Write the verse here:

When God next identified Himself to Moses in terms that Moses would understand—"I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"—what was Moses's response (Exodus 3:6)?

The reason for this was that Moses was "afraid to look at God" (ESV).

Why might Moses have been afraid (list both good reasons and "bad" reasons)?

The truth of that matter is that we aren't told exactly *why* he was afraid. In fact, the possible conclusions we each gave to the question on the previous page were probably influenced by and filtered through what our own responses may have been.

But I do think that one thing is clear: Moses wasn't *fully* familiar with the holy, powerful, and all-knowing (omniscient) God who was about to entrust an important change to him. Why do I think this?

1. God had to identify Himself with names familiar to Moses's lineage.
2. God had to tell Moses to remove his shoes because he was on holy ground. (NOTE: In those days, removing one's shoes was a way of showing respect for someone who was to be revered due to his or her status.)
3. Once God identified Himself, Moses was afraid—either due to his shame over his sinful heart or his awe that he was in the presence of a holy God. Perhaps it was a perfect combination of the two: reverent awe.

When changes came, Moses began to change his view of God and therefore chose to change his habits, relationships, reactions, actions, etc. So don't write Moses off or think poorly of him. In fact, in Exodus 33:11, the very human Moses was eventually called a friend of God!

But I'm getting ahead of where we need to be in this lesson, in this moment, because Moses will first need to scrape his knees on the gravel a few times as he falls down on the job and fails to rise to the occasion. So let's return to Exodus 3 and read Moses's response to God's assignment.

Read Exodus 3:7–10. Note that God shares with Moses His desire to help the Israelites, who are being held in bondage in Egypt. Verse 10 states the plan that God is entrusting to Moses's care. What is He asking Moses to do? Summarize or write the entire verse here:

Exodus 3:11 begins sadly. Write the initial words of the verse.

Thus begins a back-and-forth conversation between God and Moses—Moses objecting; God entrusting, enlightening, exercising, equipping, empowering, and encouraging.

Five times—yes, five!—Moses objects to or questions God regarding the task that God has entrusted to him. Let's take a few moments to look at those objections, because we will most likely find them to be similar to our own possible reactions when changes come our way.

Objection 1: “Who am I?” (Exodus 3:11).

Answer 1: “Certainly I will be with thee” (Exodus 3:12).

When God entrusts us with the task of moving forward, He promises to walk with us through the changes!

One thing to remember here is that Moses, undoubtedly trained and taught during his time in the palace by some of Egypt's most scholarly educators, now tended sheep—and they weren't even his! They belonged to his father-in-law. (See Exodus 3:1.) This was *not* a

step *up* on the social ladder. He had moved in the wrong direction, and his opinion of himself was most likely pretty low at this point.

Oh friend, just because you've fallen doesn't mean that you can't get back up. Just because you've made wrong—and perhaps sinful—choices doesn't mean that you are through. It's called grace. And it's amazing!

How does God describe His grace to Paul (and us) in 2 Corinthians 12:9?

My dear husband often reminds me that God's grace is almighty, astonishing, abundant, and amazing! And it is because of this grace that we can keep moving forward in our Christian walk. It is why Paul said in Philippians 3:13–14 (NASB), “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Additionally, let's take a quick look at the end of Moses's journey to see how it played out. Remember that as the reply to his first objection at the beginning of this leadership task God had promised him, "Certainly I will be with thee." Are you ready for this? In Deuteronomy 31:6, 8, and 23, in his final address to the children of Israel before his death, Moses, who has by this time seen God in action and has come to know Him as no other human has before or after him, reminds them of something in these three verses. What is the common thread that Moses repeated three times in this chapter (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8, 23)?

Moses had seen it firsthand. He knew it to be true.

And it's still true today! When God entrusts us with the task of moving forward, He promises to walk with us through the changes.

Objection 2: "When I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" (Exodus 3:13, NKJV).

Answer 2: "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14, NKJV).

In verse 15 (NKJV), God adds, "This is my name forever."

God wanted Moses (and us!) to know that He *does not* change, and He *will not* change! He can be trusted. He keeps His word. This knowledge should change how we respond to the unexpected. In the midst of our changes, there is great comfort in the fact that God doesn't change!

Several years ago, I visited my brother, who was then living in New York City. I was living in Minnesota at the time and had previously lived in Iowa and Central Indiana. In other words, I was basically a small-town girl from farm country (though I had never lived on a farm).

As we toured the city and my brother showed me the skyscrapers and the phenomenal views from multiple rooftop observatories in these historic landmark buildings, my thoughtful brother added a special event to our

sightseeing. He bought tickets for us to hear the New York Philharmonic, and this current (at the time) music major couldn't have been more excited about anything!

As we entered the building, there were steps—numerous steps!—that allowed concertgoers to have a view of the lobby as they ascended multiple flights of stairs, depending on the location of their seating for the concert. In other words, our inexpensive tickets kept this not-so-fond-of-heights middle-America girl climbing and looking down with inwardly and increasingly strong desires to beg for main-floor seating. My brave brother, who by this time was a true New Yorker, boldly climbed from floor to floor to reach our seats.

By the time we got to the top floor, I was a hiccup away from being very out of control of my emotional reaction to this big-city experience! And then it happened. The usher opened the door of the little seating box, seemingly stapled (in my out-of-control-by-this-time mind) to the side of the wall several stories up from the main floor and suggested to those already seated nearest the door that they stand and make it easier for us to climb over them to reach our seats.

Unh-uh, no way, no now. That was not going to happen—no matter *how* much I loved my brother!

At this point in time, I discovered, firsthand, what it means to go into hysterics. I couldn't breathe. I was gasping for breath as I sobbed uncontrollably, and I'm sure I plastered myself against the wall outside the box faster than the usher could shut the door (at my brother's gracious request, knowing that if I *looked* out, I'd *freak* out)!

In the midst of my gasping and sobbing, I got out the only words that could portray my thoughts to my dear brother and the world's most patient usher: "I...just...want...to see...(sob, gasp, sob)...a *cow*!"

You see, I needed to be in a building that didn't move. (Did you know that those hugely tall buildings are actually *built* to gently sway in the wind? Oh. My. Heart.) I needed solid ground. I needed for things not to change but to be consistent, reliable, familiar, safe.

Friend, I know this may be a trivial illustration of how I also need the unchangeableness of my God in the midst of life's changes, but the feeling was so very real to me that I was reminded of it this morning when seeking a way to somehow describe the comfort that should have come to Moses and to the children of Israel in knowing that the great I AM never changes!

In Malachi 3:6 (KJV), God states: “For I am the Lord, I change not....”

Read Numbers 23:19, Hebrews 13:8, and James 1:17 and summarize their truths in the space provided:

Objection 3: “But suppose they will not believe me” (Exodus 4:1, NKJV).
Answer 3: “What is that in your hand?” (Exodus 4:2, NKJV).

Read Exodus 4:3–9 and list the five miracles (“signs”) that God performed to show Moses (and thereby the children of Israel) that God truly was the source of Moses’s task.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

When change is entrusted to us—and really, on any given day, at any given time—people should see the outward display of a changed life. This isn’t about just doing or saying “the godly thing.” It is about *being* a godly person—a person whose life reflects the God he or she claims to serve.

In Matthew 7:15–20, God speaks of those who are teaching false doctrines. He warns believers to identify false teachers not only by what they are saying but by what they are doing. What does He tell them in verse 20?

I believe this principle can apply to all of us. The fruit that is evident in our lives is indicative of the changes taking place in our hearts. As we learn more about our great God and trust Him more, the fruit of His Spirit will be in us and will impact our choices—and our changes.

Read Galatians 5:22–23. List the nine fruits of the Spirit that should be evident to those around us.

Objection 4: “I am not eloquent” (Exodus 4:10, ESV).

Answer 4: “Who has made man’s mouth?” (Exodus 4:11, ESV).

It was easy to roll my eyes and get a little miffed at Moses’s fourth objection. *Seriously, Moses? God made you. So if He says you can speak, you can speak.* But Moses didn’t stop there. (He was *really* trying to get out of this, wasn’t he?)

Read Exodus 4:10. At the end of this verse, what other self-deprecating descriptions did Moses give regarding his speech?

Moses, Moses, Moses. God created you, which means He created your eyes, your ears, and the mouth that you are saying doesn't work well enough for what God is asking you to do. He will make sure that it is capable of carrying His message!

In John Gill's *Exposition of the Bible*, he writes regarding this verse: "He that made it, and made it capable of speaking, could remove any impediments in it, and cause it to speak freely and fluently."

But Moses wasn't there yet. His knowledge of God was limited. Remember that he had grown up in a godless palace, where, even though his parents had taught him the ways of the Lord during his time in their home, his spiritual training would have been halted. So at this point in time, he was still learning that what God said, He not only *would* do, but He had the *power* to do!

Oh how patient God was with Moses—and how patient He is with me! How often has God entrusted a change to me, and I've replied with, "I can't *handle* this; I'm not *capable* of this"? Or how many times have I said, "I can't do it as well as *she* can, so give me something else to do"?

Get honest with yourself (and with God) for a moment. What is it about your physical, emotional, or spiritual makeup that tends most often to be your internal excuse for not moving forward in your service for God? (Note: Some of you may be able to leave these lines blank. If so, that's great! Be an example and an encourager to those around you who struggle in these areas.)

Let's stop here and see what the Bible says about these insecurities.

NOTE: Let me first state that I think some of our insecurities are there for a reason. Perhaps this illustration can serve as an example here: I am extremely insecure about playing the French horn, because I'm not good at it, and it's clearly not what God has for me to do. So that is basically a God-given insecurity that lets me know not to volunteer to play a French horn prelude for church next Sunday!

Read Romans 9:20. In fact, it's such a powerful verse that I'd like for you to write the verse here:

When change happens and we fear what may or may not lie ahead, we have the responsibility to choose to properly view that change. Ladies, questioning what God has entrusted to us from the perspective of implying that He has made a mistake is not an option. Questioning Him by asking, "Why did You entrust this to me? How may I know You more or serve You more fully by going through this?" will allow us to know Him better. And that is a choice. The right choice.

Objection 5: "Please send someone else" (Exodus 4:13, ESV).

Answer 5: "Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses" (Exodus 4:14, ESV).

Before I continue, it's imperative that I share the remainder of God's answer. It is filled with God's mercy, grace, compassion, love, and patience—which He did not have to give to Moses, and which He did not have to give to us.

Answer 5, part 2: “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs” (Exodus 4:14–17, ESV).

Yes, the great I AM not only became angry with Moses, but He also poured out His mercy on him and didn’t write Moses off as a lost cause. In fact, God lovingly provided someone to help Moses accomplish the task—Moses’s brother, Aaron. Even though Moses begged, “Please...get someone else to do this,” God wanted Moses to do it! God entrusted Moses with not only *this* change but also the changes that were to come. God graciously forbade Moses to miss out on the lessons, responsibilities, joys, sorrows, and blessings that were intended for *him*. But in an act of unmerited favor, He gave Moses someone to help carry the load.

As an all-too-independent person sometimes (okay, fine—*most* of the time!), I find it difficult to accept help. Sometimes it’s because I know how easy the task is, and I would feel silly accepting help when I can quite easily do it on my own. Other times, however, I pridefully refuse help because I don’t want to appear incapable or don’t want others to think I’m not smart enough, talented enough, or managing my time well enough to tackle—let alone finish—the job.

Yet Scripture tells us in Galatians 6:2 (NASB) to: “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” I believe that is speaking both to the person needing help and to the person who has the time, ability, resources, talent to help.

Just as Aaron had the courage and ability to speak well and Moses apparently thought that *he* did not, we each have strengths and weaknesses that we bring with us to the table. In fact, Romans 12:4–8 reminds us that we each have different gifts and abilities, and each gift from God serves a purpose within the body of Christ.

According to 1 Peter 4:10, how are we to use the skills, talents, and abilities that God has given to us?

Friend, God has entrusted you with the changes you have faced, are facing, or will face. You get to choose whether or not you will view those changes as something to avoid because they make you uncomfortable or as something that will create in you a woman who knows more about her God for having walked through the changes that faced her. Your choice at this point will make all the difference in the outcome of the change that God has entrusted to you.

“God is pleased sometimes to make choice of those as his messengers who have fewest of the advantages of art or nature, that his grace in them may appear the more glorious.”

—Matthew Henry
Commentary on the Whole Bible

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CHOOSE to CHANGE
(Practical Application)

Look around you—at those in your community, in your church, in your small group, in your home—and ask God to guide you to someone who needs help carrying his or her load (burden). How could you use your strengths and abilities *this week* to bear someone’s burden *with* that individual or *for* individual? Be as specific as possible.

MOSES MOMENTS
(Small Group Discussion)

1. As you break into your small groups this week, discuss the five objections Moses had. Which of these are most likely to be your objections? What can you do to prevent those objections or to overcome them if they surface?
2. Discuss how acknowledging that God has entrusted a change to you can make a difference in how you view that change.
3. Share specific answers to prayer from this past week and “bear one another’s burdens” by sharing brief requests that others in the group can pray for in the week ahead.

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