

Lifblood: Why Your Choices Are Not Just Your Own

by Rachel Pascual

It was blood. Splattered across the walls and staining the carpet, the weeping rivers of old blood contrasted sharply with the unforgiving white walls. This grisly display was discovered in a secret interrogation room within the late Rwandan president's house. With an insight born of empathy, I could almost believe I heard the guttural screams of the room's victims and smell the salty tears, iron blood, and the sour stench of pure terror. As our unsuspecting tour group stood in stunned horror, the roaring in my ears echoed with a single question: Why?

You see, when I was thirteen years old I was burning with curiosity about the world around me and had consequently developed an insatiable appetite for adventure. These desires were finally fulfilled when our family made the decision to serve on a mission trip in Rwanda. Though made notorious by the 100-Day Genocide in 1994, the small country of Rwanda no longer suffered such horrific dangers, but instead had grown into a flourishing and peaceful nation. And so I boarded the plane, completely oblivious to the new chapter of my life which I was about to enter, a chapter beginning in the ashen pages of Rwanda's history, written in the sanguine ink of over 800,000 lives.

As I think back to that despicable little room and the horrific genocide involved, I still find myself asking the same question I did 4 years ago: Why? What happened that was so devastating it led to a massacre of nearly 70% of an entire people group? The genocide wasn't a solitary act, but rather the result of almost 300 years of seemingly insignificant choices. The segregation between the Hutus and Tutsis, two rival people groups in Rwanda, is first recorded around the late 1700s. In the early 1900s, occupations first by the German and then Belgian forces only cultivated the country's discriminations by intentionally placing the Tutsis in power over the Hutus. This created an unstable and tyrannical hierarchy which collapsed following the Rwandan Revolution. With the Hutus now in authority, they began to oppress the Tutsis, much in the same way they themselves had been oppressed. Eventually, this

led to the Rwandan Civil War. The Tutsis lost this war, and suffered under the responding Hutu Power Movement. This movement would play a major role in the radical behavior displayed by Hutu extremists during the Rwandan genocide only a few years later.

The Rwandan genocide didn't just happen one day for no apparent reason. This genocide was the unavoidable climax resulting from centuries of seemingly insignificant choices. People often talk about how your choices have consequences for your life, about how the decisions you make will determine your life. They're not wrong, but there's just one problem: The world does not stop with you. In this way, your choices are not just your own. This is true to all concerned, because all are concerned. This isn't to say that we're without free-will or the ability to make decisions for ourselves. Your choices aren't your own, simply because they don't affect just you. We'll destroy the future in the name of the present unless we can finally understand that our choices have consequences that go far beyond just oneself. The choices we make are the legacies we leave behind.

So why don't we just make the right choices? At the root of this struggle between the spirit and the flesh lies a very simple explanation: We want to do what we want to do. However, the problem is that what's convenient for you may very well be debilitating for someone else. Every single choice you make matters. History never remembers the intentions, but rather the results. Legacies don't show us why a certain choice was made, but rather what the outcome of that choice was. Our choices are not just our own, because we're not the only ones affected by them.

While we may be the victims of choice, we are by no means its slaves. When I traveled to Rwanda, I couldn't help but wonder how a country, ravaged by the horrors of a genocide, became the peaceful and prosperous nation I saw before me. As the week went by, my confusion only grew. Even our team's driver was touched by the genocide; he was the sole survivor of his massacred family. I was astonished to learn this, for he had never carried himself like a victim. In fact, he now has a beautiful home, a good job, and a loving family of his own.

These unasked questions finally found rest, however, as we made last stop. It was a reconciliation village, a place where reformed perpetrators of the genocide met the families of their victims. This village was one of healing, a community of restoration and hope. What you choose to do with what's already been chosen for you matters. This mindset is why making purposeful choices builds goodwill and better friendships and would be beneficial to all concerned. For every choice we make, there must be a consequence, good or bad. If we choose bitterness, as seen throughout Rwanda's tumultuous history, it will only end in regret. If we choose healing, like at the reconciliation villages, we can build a better future.

The abortion conflict exists as a divisive blight, preventing that better future from happening. It remains, not as an issue of science, but rather of ideology. Society asks if an unborn fetus should be declared a living human being, solely on the basis of proven scientific facts and evidence. The answer must be no. Yet one must then ask themselves, "Can an unborn fetus be declared a mass of tissue solely on the basis of proven scientific facts and evidence?" Can we prove it, and if so, where is the evidence? Until there is unmistakable, scientifically proven evidence, the conflict of abortion remains an issue of ideology, not of science, an issue of opinion, not of facts. Abortion has left the realms of science willingly for the influential platforms of opinion. Until science can come to a definitive conclusion about the viability of the fetus, the topic itself remains philosophical, on both sides of the argument.

On the topic of philosophy, there is an ironic paradox in a life deciding what should be considered alive, like an ape deciding what should be considered an ape. "He is a man, who is to be a man; the fruit is always present in the seed" (Tertullian). If we cannot call an apple a pear, then how can we decide who is and isn't human? For the very definition of life to rest in the hands of man is a frightening thing indeed. Where is this momentous stage from which the fetus ceases to be mere tissue and becomes a human with rights of its own instead? If the seed has the potential to be an apple, it is

called an apple seed. If the fetus has the potential to be a human, it is called a disposable mass of tissue. What difference is there between the apple seed and the apple, the fetus and the human?

How can we become a people whose every choice is deliberate and purposeful? We must learn from the past, live in the present, and look to the future, because the choices we make are the legacies we leave behind. In this way, our choices are not just our own. This is true. This is fair, and the choices we make can build goodwill and better friendships, which would be beneficial to all concerned, because all are concerned. We change the future and prevent horrific tragedies like the Rwandan genocide from happening, by remembering that our choices have consequences that go far beyond just oneself.

In today's culture, truth has become relative to each individual. Many protest that those against abortion have no right to impose their beliefs on others, yet in doing so they themselves have imposed their beliefs on those they are accusing. In America, they protest, everyone has a right to their opinion; but are they not just imposing their truths on us? When truth becomes relative, there is no truth, merely opinions warring to be heard over the deafening silence of uncertainty. Tertullian once wrote, "Truth engenders hatred of truth. As soon as it appears, it is the enemy." Without truth, we are but masses of tissue. So, what will you choose today?