



180: STORIES OF PEOPLE WHO CHANGED  
THEIR LIVES BY CHANGING THEIR MINDS

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THEIR LIVES BY CHANGING THEIR MINDS

the  studio

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## INTRODUCTION

Whenever a politician or leader changes her mind about something, critics are quick to pounce: she waffled; she's putting her finger to the wind and is only pandering to public opinion; she flip-flopped.

Whenever a politician or leader holds fast to a position or opinion, critics are quick to pounce: he's bullheaded, stubborn; he refuses to believe the facts; he's blindly supporting the party line.

Somewhere between those two extremes are ordinary people like us who want to be viewed as neither wafflers nor stubborn. We think we know what we believe and think about things, but every now and then those beliefs and opinions are challenged. We try to be open-minded without automatically accepting every new idea that comes along. Some topics almost beg for a regular change.

For example, how have you changed your mind over the years on these important questions:

*What's the best movie you've ever seen?*

*What's your favorite band?*

*Who's the all-time best athlete in the world?*

*Who's more obnoxious—Simon Cowell or Perez Hilton?*

*Mac or PC?*

Differences in personal preferences about music or movies (or sports teams or ice-cream flavors or computers) make great conversation over coffee, but a new band comes along and you have a new favorite. For the most part, we find it easy to change our minds about these sorts of things. The stakes seem to get higher as the topics become more serious:

*Should gays be given the right to marry?*

*If you oppose abortion, should you also oppose capital punishment?*

*Is it ever right to torture captured terrorists?*

*Will a devout follower of Islam go to heaven?*

Regardless of how *you* would answer any of the above, can you imagine your views changing over time?

The purpose of this book is not to get you to change your mind about anything. At the risk of sounding arrogant, we're pretty sure you will. We asked people from all walks of life to contribute essays on how they have changed their minds on something. Interestingly, not one person said they have never changed their mind. Some of you who consider yourselves Republicans will become Democrats someday. Some of you who are opposed to war will become more hawkish than Dick Cheney. Some of you who wear boxers will switch to briefs, and we don't want to hear about it!

What we hope this book does for you is help you better understand that the process of changing your mind is as impor-

tant as the change itself; and that the process for one person may not necessarily be the process another uses. As you will discover from their stories, these writers didn't just one day decide to change their minds. It was a process, sometimes taking months—even years. They confronted new facts and had to decide what to do with them. They sought the counsel of others—usually from people who were older. They searched the Scriptures. They prayed. They listened.

Even though we're not out to change your mind on anything, we hope to stretch it a little. The views expressed in these chapters may conflict with what you believe. Some conflict with what we believe. *Newsweek* religion reporter Lisa Miller once wrote, "What's dangerous about the world today is not belief in God, or unbelief, but ruthless certainty." We're pretty certain about a lot of things, but we hope we are never so certain that we become arrogant and dismissive of others. If you are quite certain that women should have the right to an abortion, let Frederica Mathewes-Green's essay on page 53 test your ruthless certainty. If you think global warming and other environmental issues are overstated by liberal tree-huggers, wrestle with Nancy Sleeth's essay on page 65. If you think Christian movies do more harm than good, check out Rich Peluso's essay on page 43. In fact, check them all out. We tackle everything from *Is the Bible true?* to *Should Christians trick-or-treat?* to the role of nail polish in spiritual growth.

By the way. What *is* the best movie you've ever seen?

-the House Studio staff

*The following experiences express the personal viewpoints of our contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of The House staff or our sponsoring agencies.*

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Before the rock and roll band, I thought I knew how my life would go. I had a very specific plan: College. Marriage. A teaching career. Motherhood.

And music mixed in there too. Maybe playing the piano in the traditional service at church and giving private music lessons at home. Or just quietly humming a tune to myself as I fixed supper, waiting for my husband to walk in the door at the end of a long day.

I grew up in church—I played there, sang there, prayed there, and even slept there a few times. My friends were church friends. I went to a private Christian college and married another pastor's kid like myself.

When I was young, my mother stayed home, washed our clothes, mended our socks, kissed us, fed us, and read us bedtime stories. The women at my church did the same with their children, chatting in kitchens while their husbands served on boards and ate their potluck dinners. I loved and admired these women and figured I would be just like them when I grew up. That was the plan.

Before the rock band.

Four children and many traditional services after getting married, I started to realize how small my world was. Neat. Compact. Easy to manage. I have never been one to leave well enough alone. It all began a few years ago when our family moved away from my childhood church and my piano was put into temporary storage. The only instrument I had was my grandma's old guitar. I picked it up, took some lessons, and learned to play. By the time my piano emerged from the storage facility, I had figured out that our new church didn't need another pianist.

What they really needed was a bass player.

So I studied and practiced and listened to music. I joined the church band, started an electric bass duo, and played in coffee shops. I played my bass at other churches and for banquets, at art shows and nursing homes. I made new musical friends and began learning about all kinds of music—music that was way different from anything I'd ever heard growing up.

One day I was invited to an audition. I sat in the middle of a room of accomplished, seasoned musicians and listened to them jam. My hands were trembling. I had no idea what to do. There was no music written down. No notes, certainly no hymnal. All that I saw and heard was freedom, joy, and sharing. When I stepped into that music, I stepped out of all my previous plans.

Ten years ago I had hardly even held a guitar in my hand and I thought the new contemporary service was too loud.

Now, sixteen years after quitting my job as a first-grade teacher to stay home full time and raise a family, I am just re-

turning from a weekend gig with the world-fusion rock band I joined that night. Twenty years into my carefully laid life plans, I find myself recovering from a four a.m. bedtime at a strange hotel many miles away from home.

It's a good thing the pastor's kid I married is a patient man.

Most nights I fall into bed way later than the rest of the family. I'm working with new friends, some of whom never darken a church door. I know how to recognize the smell of marijuana now and how not to get hugged by an alcohol-soaked fan.

I am more likely to be practicing my bass, playing a gig, or running off to a rehearsal than to be fixing a home-cooked supper for my husband.

What happened to the plan?

I loved the safety and warmth of my little family at home. But as my children grew, I realized that their metamorphosis was a natural and beautiful thing. And that changing is what living is all about. So I decided to keep growing right along with them. Letting go of hand-me-downs when they no longer fit, facing the unknown, falling down and making a few messes, just like they do.

I still love my husband, contribute to potluck dinners, do laundry, and read bedtime stories. And I still make plans. I just make sure to leave room for them to grow.

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NO PASSPORTS IN HEAVEN  
DAVID C. BRUSH

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I once had the Christian thing figured out. It was a very simple and neatly contained system in which everything made perfect sense. In this Christian system there was a B for every A, a two for every one, and a big dividing line with the Bible and Jesus on one side and the world on the other. Every good Christian American was a Republican, every vote was on one issue, and Ted Kennedy was the sworn enemy. No nuance, no room for argument, and no doubt that if Jesus were born today he would be a red-state-loving American.

Like many Americans, I watched dumbfounded as the Twin Towers fell in 2001. I shared with my fellow Americans the atmosphere of shock and confusion that permeated our country in those first few days afterward. Just as the force of the planes exploding into those mighty towers weakened the steel that held them up, so we as a nation were shook to our core as militant Islam brought to bear its interpretation of Allah's judgment on our American dream. Initially there was an outpouring of compassion for the victims and their families. We watched as celebrities on television pleaded for the funds necessary to ensure the well-being of all those affected, and we responded generously.

The secondary response, if you remember or took part, was one of intense patriotism and a fierce nationalism. We were angry. For some, this nationalism turned into an intense hatred for the Muslims who had attacked us. Enraged and unarmed with clear answers to our questions, we proceeded to engage in a war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, a war that is still underway as I write this and for which there seems to be no end in sight.

Five and a half years after the Twin Towers fell, the foundation on which I had built my Christian construct finally began to crack, to succumb to the forces of the Holy Spirit, and I began an earnest spiritual quest. Up until then I had wanted to keep my Christian box right where I had it, under my control. As the political conflicts continued around the world, I began questioning the righteousness and validity of our twin wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I had friends who had seen combat or were still in harm's way. I struggled with doubt because I felt that not supporting the conflicts would somehow dishonor their brave service to our country.

I had become an avid listener of conservative talk radio in my daily commutes between home and work. If you are not familiar with conservative talk radio in the United States, it is a genre that is almost entirely fueled by the draping over and enshrouding of the cross of Christ with a veil of patriotic nationalism. Many churches today still prominently display the American flag in their sanctuaries, evidence of the common acceptance of this dualistic notion of a modern Christian empire and a testament to the depth to which this myth has permeated the body of Christ in America. An attack on America, according to this

philosophy, is an attack on God's people, and anyone who dares to oppose the wisdom of conservative politics, preemptive war, and free-market economics is a godless communist.

How did I change my mind? At first it was through small changes in my sources of information—by listening to a new podcast, for instance, or by reading news sources other than Fox News and the *Washington Times*. The linchpin linking my different ideologies broke apart as I read through authors like John Howard Yoder and Greg Boyd. It became increasingly clear to me that the way I had idolatrously linked together my American citizenship and my citizenship in the kingdom of God was an unholy and dualistic union. I began to see and accept the hurt of the Afghan people not only at the hands of the Taliban and Al Qaeda but also at the hands of my own country. The Afghans and Iraqis were no longer those people over there who had warred against God's people, but they were in some cases my own brothers and sisters in Christ.

I have changed in that God has totally blown apart my system for appropriating his good will for my own blessing. I have changed in that the Holy Spirit has given me eyes to see the humanity in everyone and the worthlessness of no one. I have changed in my perspective on nationalism in that I am first and foremost a child of the King, and my citizenship transcends the kingdoms and kings of this world. I have changed in that I am continually humbled by and amazed at the power of a submitted and contrite heart in the hands of a loving God and in communion with the Holy Spirit.

It is from this changed place of kingdom citizenship and humbled perspective that I have begun to see that there is only one allegiance that matters to me, and that is to my Lord—the Lord of all creation. He is the Lord of the American and the Afghan, of the Chinese and the Iraqi, and the Christian and the Muslim.

All will appear at the throne of judgment, and unless I missed a verse, I don't think they are screening passports for that event.

*David C. Brush is a graduate student at Fuller Seminary, where he is studying missional church leadership. He currently lives in Gardner, Kansas, with his wife and two children and is a member of Trinity Family Church of the Nazarene.*