



Untapped potential - choose wisely

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Last November, I attended the 142nd Annual Meeting and Expo of the American Public Health Association in New Orleans, Louisiana: <https://apha.confex.com/apha/142am/webprogram/meeting.html>. The theme of the conference examined the intersection of health and geography and was appropriately termed Healthography: How, Where You Live Affects Your Health and Well-being. The opening speaker for the general session wove a story of the hardships faced by African Americans in the post American Civil War Reconstruction Period migration from the south. As I listened, it began to dawn on me how the circumstances she discussed applied to another oppressed population around the globe, the unborn.

The opening speaker was Isabel Wilkerson, Pulitzer Prize winning author of The New York Times best seller, *The Warmth of Other Suns*. She laughed as she confessed that, had she known it was going to take her 15 years to complete the novel, she never would have started it. Ms. Wilkerson stated that her book was about freedom and how far people would go to obtain it. Wilkerson described these heroic treks as attempts to flee a cast system: a place or a role in an artificial hierarchy to which people had been assigned.

Wilkerson had the audience spellbound as she introduced historic African Americans whose lives were forever changed as a result of their family's decision to bravely leave the south. Brief biographies were shared of the families of four-time Olympic gold medalist, Jessie Owens; novelist, editor, and professor Toni Morrison; record producer and songwriter, Barry Gordy; one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century, Miles Davis; American Jazz saxophonist and

composer, John Coltrane; and American playwright, Lorraine Hansberry. While highlighting these individuals, Wilkerson noted: On those tobacco, cotton, and rice fields were musicians, surgeons, opera singers, and playwrights. Then Wilkerson made a statement that brought tears to my eyes. Her statement referenced the power of an individual decision. She commented how the people who made these brave decisions had no idea that their children, and yet unknown grandchildren, would bring gifts to the world: gifts that would change the world and improve it.

Tears began to flow down my cheeks as Wilkerson continued to talk about the power of an individual decision. I knew she was talking about African Americans fleeing the south, and yet my mind kept drifting to additional sources of untapped potential. She shared that this trek was a young person's endeavor, a journey for those on the cusp of life. Those on the cusp of life! There it was! Her words helped me make the connection. As she continued to talk, I continued to see parallels. The world is forever grateful for the brave decisions those African Americans made. Their contributions to society affected every area of life from science to music, from sports and entertainment to effective leadership. The power of each individual decision to leave the south resulted in influence and inspiration that has forever shaped mankind. On the other hand, we will never know or experience the gifts, talents, and contributions of those who have been at the mercy of the powerful decision of abortion. Just as one decision moved field workers from potential surgeons and playwrights to actual surgeons and playwrights, one decision can also extinguish the same reality for the unborn.

Between 1922 and 2013, 938,000,000 abortions were reported globally.¹ Abortion has not always been legal; therefore, the actual number of abortions is unknown and is undoubtedly higher. Consequently, it is conceivable that the scientists who would have discovered the cures for cancer and Alzheimer's disease were never realized. It is also plausible that the talents of an unborn humanitarian, who would have brought peace to war zones, will never be appreciated. It is reasonable to think that others would have created a new form of music or solved current unsolvable equations. Those of us who were given the gift of life will never know. On the inside wall of the American Adventure in Epcot Center, US cartoonist and movie producer, Walt Disney (1901-1966), is quoted as saying, "Our greatest national resource is the minds of our children." We will never know how the world would have been made better by those who were never able to share their gifts because of, as Ms. Wilkerson stated, the power of one individual decision.

It is a social virtue for us as a society to reconsider our future that is in the hands of individual choices. We need to help educate women around the globe to understand that abortions not only destroy the lives of individuals, but they also rob all humanity of the many potential benefits these individuals could contribute to society. The decision for abortion is powerful and irrevocable, and in addition to depriving gifts from society as a whole, it has multiple negative repercussions for the health of the mother, including suicide, early death, post-abortion syndrome, relationship break-ups, and future relationship problems.^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9} All of these consequences negatively impact the health and strength of families, communities, and nations.

The devastating effects of abortions globally do not create a foundation for thriving, healthy, or productive communities or nations. "Civilized societies do not kill children as a solution to any problem, no matter how grave."¹⁰ We need to support women facing crisis pregnancies with

understanding, material assistance, and lots of love so they will not feel that their only choice is abortion.

Deuteronomy 30:19 states,

Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!

While this passage literally reflects the exhortation for Israel to follow God's law, the passage also echoes God's will for us, his beloved children. The Bible is our guide book. For starters, it teaches us how to manage time, interact with one another, view money, develop character, build our faith, and respond to difficulties. It is filled with hope, guidance, and direction for Godly living. In every situation, regardless of how difficult, God's response to us is always to reflect His character that includes choosing love and life.

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