



# The Blessing Choice

*Change the way you make choices,  
and the choices you make change*

Graham Honeycutt



## INTRODUCTION

# THE UNEXPECTED PATH

This isn't a book that I thought I would write. No, instead this is the book I am supposed to write. I didn't go in search of a book topic. I may be one of the most reluctant authors of all time. I am not one of those aspiring authors just waiting for my chance to shine or get my big break. I didn't even enjoy reading books or writing in high school. In fact, I still remember a well-meaning high school AP English Teacher named Mr. Stachura pushing me to write something of substance. To push myself to tell a story that meant something to someone. He was all but telling me I shouldn't have been in that class. He was right. I shouldn't have been in that class. I didn't have any interest in making an impact through writing. I guess that is why I chose to be a Spanish major in college. Perhaps I could do better in another language.

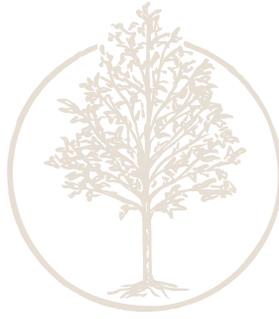
*No fui buscando a este libro.* I didn't go searching for this book. This book found me, and for that I am eternally grateful. When you learn of the circumstances that preceded the writing of this book, you may find it surprising that I choose the word grateful. Sometimes I still find it surprising too.

The words that became this book started as therapy for me. They became therapy to heal some wounds, to make sense of my ever changing and broken reality, and to write a new story for my life. The circumstances surrounding that word therapy I will share with you in the first chapter. They are an integral part of the story, and the words on this page today wouldn't be here without those humble beginnings on my first blog, Dandy Walker Ranger.

You may have picked up this book because you wanted to know what a blessing choice is, or you may have picked it up because you are desperately in search for more purpose in your life. Those are good places to be as you start reading the book, not because I have all the answers that you seek. The answers you seek lie within you. I am just a guide for this

material. Remember as you read that this is an unexpected path and I didn't go in search of this material. It found me.

I don't have some carefully crafted plan for you to follow. As Jeff Goins says in his book *The Art of Work*, "a calling is not some carefully crafted plan. It's what's left when the plan goes horribly wrong." This book is about what happens when the plan for your life goes off track, and you are left to make sense of it all. You are left to find meaning in your brokenness and pain, and to seek a clarity of purpose that gives your life much greater meaning than you had before. This is a path that God showed me, and continually gives me the strength and wisdom to follow. It can be your path too if you want it to be. The path of changing the way you make choices. The path of the blessing choice.



## CHAPTER ONE

# SIX WORDS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE...TWICE

“There’s a problem with the brain.”

“There’s a problem with the brain,” she said again.

There they are. The first set of six words that changed my life.

Those were the six words from our ultrasound technician during our daughter Mikayla’s 20 week ultrasound. She quickly shuffled over to the phone to call a doctor immediately, and ask for our doctor to come in and corroborate her readings. The doctor was not available right away, so they guided us back out into the waiting room where we would sit with the other patients and mothers-to-be at the OB/GYN office. This seemed like such an invasion of privacy for two first time parents who just found out that there might be something wrong with their child’s brain. We fought back the tears, and you could tell the other patients in the waiting room could sense that we had just been delivered some tough news. We waited there for 15 minutes, but at the time it felt like an eternity before we could see the doctor.

When we finally did see our doctor she told us not to freak out quite yet. The initial results came back looking like there was a significantly sized cyst in Mikayla’s brain. They referred us to a high risk pregnancy office so they could perform a more extensive analysis and give a diagnosis, if there were one to give. We had an appointment across town after lunch. My wife and I walked with painful precision to the car and went out to lunch together at

a Jason's Deli in midtown Nashville. We went through lunch trying to keep it all together. There wasn't really much small talk to be had, so we stayed pretty quiet and joined hands to pray for Mikayla's brain.

We arrived after lunch at the high risk pregnancy office, and didn't have to wait very long before they took us back. We met a very cordial and supportive doctor who told us she was going to take her time and do an extensive ultrasound. I had never been in any ultrasounds before, but it seemed pretty obvious that the brain of the life inside my wife's body was anything but normal. Before our doctor could say anything, I could feel a pit inside my stomach. I started to feel nauseous. Our nice and cordial doctor's face became stern and serious. What she would say next would change the course of my life. The life that I was living was about to be severely altered, and I was about to become a new man. I just didn't know it yet. It is hard to believe that your life can change in an instant, for when I woke up that morning, it seemed like any other day.

I am not sure I heard every word that our doctor said that day after her initial sentence, but these are the basics of what she said. Your daughter has a condition called Dandy Walker Syndrome. She has excess fluid that has built up in her brain that has formed a cyst in the back of her brain, otherwise known as hydrocephalus. It is hard to say anything for sure, since the outcomes of children with this syndrome varies so greatly. It is a rare congenital brain malformation that affects around 1 in 2500 children (which comes out to .04%). Your daughter has a 1 in 4 chance of surviving this pregnancy to full-term. When she is born she will most likely require immediate surgery to relieve some of the pressure that is building up in her brain from the excess fluid, and it is very likely that this child will have significant special needs. It is my legal obligation to inform you of your right to terminate this pregnancy. As soon as those words of terminate this pregnancy left her mouth the room was dead silent. Words became a precious commodity at that point. The moment had swallowed up all the meaningless pleasantries and polite conversations that we have on a daily basis. Every word that would come out of my mouth in those moments was extremely important.

I remember her saying that you guys seem pretty calm right now for the serious news she gave us and asked if we understood it fully. She decided to step out of the room with the ultrasound technician to give us time to talk it over.

When the door shut behind them I remember feeling like I was in one of those war movies where the bomb goes off, and all you can hear is the ringing in your ears. I was in shock. After having stared at an ultrasound screen for the past 45 minutes, I remember my gaze finally returning to my wife Heather. We finally looked at each other and embraced. I remember Heather being amazingly calm. She tends to be a crier, and I expected her to be balling her eyes out at this point. How do you start a conversation like that with your wife? How do you begin to discuss if you are going to keep your daughter after hearing news like this?

Both my wife and I have strongly held beliefs about a child's right to life, and we are both pro-life. However, I will tell you with conviction that when the choice becomes real to you, it completely changes your perspective. Suddenly, it not just some debate you have over a beer with some friends at the dinner table. When you are presented with a real choice it becomes a totally different ballgame. When you are faced with the decision yourself, you get to see a bit of your future flash in front of you. Either way I chose, my life would change forever. If I say "yes we are keeping this baby," I am accepting all the challenges that come with the decision. However, if I say "no we aren't keeping this baby" then I turn my back on my beliefs. I turn my back on an actual life. I would end the life of our baby. I am not one to have large political debates with people, but I know it is a life because I saw her move around during the ultrasound, and I listened to her heartbeat. She was real, and she was real to me. She still is.

In that moment, my wife and I somehow had the clarity of conviction to say that we were going to keep this child. No matter what, we were going to give this child its best chance at life. We called the doctor back in and told her we are keeping this baby. Looking back on this day I still say that it was the most terrifying day of my life. Some parts of the day are very hazy and other parts are still crystal clear in my memory. I remember quite vividly calling my mother that night to deliver the news. I cried so hard when I had to deliver that news. I have never felt the feeling of devastation that I felt that night nor have I ever since. I had a new reality, and I would never be the same person again after that evening. God ripped me out of the life I had been living up to that point, and he called me to a new life and a new way of living. He called me to a new purpose. Sometimes it feels good to be called, and sometimes it doesn't. At this particular point in my life, it didn't feel good to be called. I was called to be Mikayla's father. The responsibility of that weighed on me heavily, and I went to sleep that night just asking God to help me to be the man my wife and my daughter need to see us through this. I had always thought in my relationship with God that I was putting my faith in him. This was the first time I remember thinking that God was also placing his faith in me.

The days, weeks, and months that would follow this day would be filled with a flurry of activity. We had regular ultrasounds, appointments, and meetings with the neurosurgeon who would make the call on when they would decide to deliver Mikayla. Mikayla wouldn't be able to go full term to 40 weeks, since the pressure in her brain was increasing with each passing week. When Mikayla was 34 weeks, the neurosurgeon said it was time to take her out of the womb. It was a Thursday, and they scheduled the caesarian section (c-section) for the following Monday, April 8th. It was time to bring Mikayla into the world.

The morning of Mikayla's birth was wrought with nervous energy for my wife and me. We didn't know quite what to expect. All the months of late night conversation, prayers, and consternation had finally arrived. We had done all we could to prepare our lives for welcoming this life into the world, and we couldn't fully comprehend the magnitude of the

moments. How much would our lives change? How hard would it be? Can we really handle this? The questions and thoughts grew louder as the morning pressed on, until I walked with my wife towards the operating room. I wanted to be fully present for the moment. My wife had some serious drugs in her system, and my wife and daughter needed me to be fully present to them. If a difficult quick decision needed to be made, I wanted to be on full alert for it. Our same doctor who had been with us at the high risk pregnancy ultrasound would be the one to perform the birth. She had taken us on as full-time clients, and we still see her from time to time. She began the process, and I remained focused on my wife and being supportive to her. The next thing I remember is watching them pull Mikayla from my wife's body. There was a whole team of doctors and nurses in the room, and they immediately took her to wash her and place her in an incubator since she was born so prematurely. I could hear our little Mikayla's cry. It was so soft and sweet. She had beaten the odds just by being born. She was alive, and in that moment that was all that really mattered.



The nurses took Mikayla to the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and mywife told me to go with Mikayla while she recovered. I walked with the nurses down the hall to the NICU, where the team of nurses hooked her up to all different kinds of tubes and wires. This little baby with an oversized head and only weighed 4 pounds and 8 ounces, and she must have had more than ten times her weight in equipment draped over her body. We had access to touch Mikayla through tiny windows on either side of the incubator. You had to thoroughly wash your arm up to your elbow anytime you wanted to reach in the window. I did this so many times at the hospital that I even remember repeating this process at home a few times.

Mikayla wasn't very strong, but the first time I reached my pinky finger into the incubator window to touch her hand she wrapped it right around my finger. Her hand could just barely fit around my pinky finger. She clutched on tight. I remember feeling that my daughter of just a few hours was telling me. "It's going to be okay daddy. I am here now." Our priest arrived later that day to baptize Mikayla. Our priest actually got to touch Mikayla before my wife did, who was still in the post-operative room. Our priest would perform the baptism right there in the hospital, because we wanted to make sure she was baptized right away. We didn't know how long she had with us on this earth. She was also scheduled to undergo brain surgery the next day to place a shunt in her brain to drain the fluid from her brain into her abdomen. This is something our bodies do naturally, but it was her Dandy Walker Syndrome that was causing this pocket of excess fluid in her brain to put pressure on her brain tissue.



I never felt more out of control of anything in my life than how I felt when my day old daughter would undergo brain surgery. I had never had such a major operation in my life, and here was my little defenseless daughter about to have her head cut open and a foreign apparatus placed in her body to aid her survival. It felt almost like a movie. I had trouble connecting with my own life in those first few days. I felt like I was living in a different reality. I tried to hold it all together. I just tried to be a father and a husband.

Mikayla would defy the odds again, and she would survive that surgery as well. In fact, she has survived all 6 surgeries she has had up to this point at the publishing of this book. She handles each surgery with such grace, and she bounces back from each one. When she comes out of surgery, she just seems so helpless, but she fights on. She has taught me more about persistence and perseverance than I could have learned in a lifetime of trying to learn it on my own. Her life was teaching me so much that I decided to start a blog on

a free Wordpress site in November after she was born. I started writing as therapy, and I remember telling my wife that I just needed to write and it didn't matter who would read it. Interestingly enough, people did start to read it and comment on it. The people who were reading it encouraged me to keep writing. The traffic outgrew the free Wordpress site after about 8 months of blogging, and I took my blog to a self-hosted site. Many of the thoughts down on paper in this book came first from sharing with the small group of people who encouraged me to keep writing on that Dandy Walker Ranger blog.

Mikayla was first my coach before I ever became a coach. She continues to coach me every day even though she has never said a word to me. Her life is a testament to me of what is possible. Her progress is a testament to refusing to give up and that comparison to others is the biggest robber of joy. Her happiness and joy is innate, not because ignorance is bliss but rather because she doesn't pursue anything outside of herself to make her happy. She has a purpose and her joy comes from her purpose. Her success does not come from success in achievements, but rather success in her significance. She taught me that real humility comes from recognizing our own brokenness that we can't fix on our own. The events that happen to me in my life don't define me, but rather my response to them is what defines me. My beliefs about what I can do can limit my potential if I let them. Her birth and life has been an exercise for me in learning from her life and seeking more meaning and purpose in my own.

This brings me to the next six words that would change my life. Yes, as the title of this chapter reads I have six words that changed my life...twice. These six words would again happen in an ultrasound room with my wife.

These six words were "**there are two babies in there.**"

That was the day that my wife and I would learn that we were now called again...

Not to bring a special needs child into the world, but to bring typically developing twin girls into the world. I remember driving in the car with my wife after that ultrasound, and looking her in the eye and saying "I am continually surprised at what God thinks we can handle." So in January of 2015, when Mikayla was just under two years old we would welcome a new challenge. This time was different though. It wasn't just different because of the circumstances. It was different because now we had experience in making something I call the blessing choice. We had practice in making this choice with Mikayla, and the next chapter is all about what the blessing choice is and how to apply it to your life

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*Graham Honeycutt is a life coach and motivational speaker from Nashville, Tennessee. You can learn more about him and his coaching business by visiting [grahamhoneycutt.com](http://grahamhoneycutt.com). Subscribe to his [weekly blog](#) to get updates about the full release of **The Blessing Choice**.*