

A Legacy of Leadership

Joshua 24:15

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On Mother's Day, pastors often preach messages with titles like this:

"How to Honor Your Mother."

"A Mother's Unfailing Love."

"Ten Ways to Appreciate Mom."

Then Father's Day rolls around, and the sermon titles suddenly change:

"Five Ways You're Failing as a Father."

"Seven Mistakes Men Make."

"How Not to Be a Deadbeat Dad."

Moms get flowers. Dads get a diagnostic exam. On Mother's Day, the church encourages moms. On Father's Day, every man gets an exhortation to step up, grow up, measure up, straighten up, man up, and shape up.

One pastor joked, "*On Mother's Day, we tell moms they're doing better than they think. On Father's Day, we tell dads they're worse than they think.*"

While no father is perfect, and every man has room to grow, today I want us to celebrate the high calling God has given men, fathers, and grandfathers. Instead of focusing on failures, let's delight in God's design and the tremendous kingdom impact men can make when they faithfully lead where God has placed them.

I'm not interested in tearing men down because I'm acutely aware of the ways I fall short as a man, a husband, a father, a grandfather, and a pastor. Instead, I want to build men up by holding Joshua up as a good example of manhood. Men need both encouragement and exhortation because none of us gets it right all the time.

Our world today twists, cheapens, corrupts, distorts, and redefines what it means to be a man or a woman. In a culture confused about gender, femininity, masculinity, and the roles of mothers and fathers, we're taking a fresh look at what the Bible says about cultivating faith at home on Mother's Day and Father's Day.

In short, mothers are to nurture faith, fathers are to lead faith in the family, and the church is to partner with them in raising the next generation.

Pastor Chris has helped us see that discipling is both a family and a church family responsibility. The home is the primary place disciples are formed, but the church is the extended family where that faith is affirmed and strengthened.

- Every generation has a role in raising the next generation.
- Every believer is called to be a spiritual mother or father to someone.
- It takes more than parents to raise a disciple – it takes a church.

Please turn to Joshua 24. We're going to hit some highlights in this chapter to help us learn *that when a man faithfully follows Christ, his leadership leaves a legacy that impacts generations to come.*

Before we jump into the text, it's important to understand some background. Covenant making was a common practice in the ancient world. Kings were known as "suzerains," and those under their authority were called "vassals." The suzerain promised protection and provision, and the vassals pledged loyalty and obedience. If they rebelled, they would face the consequences.

At Sinai, God, who is the ultimate Suzerain, established a covenant treaty with the children of Israel. He revealed His expectations in Exodus 20-23, and the people promised to obey in Exodus 24.

The Bible often speaks of "cutting a covenant," which comes from an ancient ceremony. Animals would be cut in half, and the pieces were laid opposite each other. Then the two parties would walk between the pieces, symbolically saying, "*May what happened to these animals happen to me if I break my word.*" It was a solemn, binding commitment.

In Genesis 15, God did something stunning in His covenant with Abraham when He alone passed through the cut-up animal pieces, demonstrating that He would faithfully keep His promises even when His people fail in their faithfulness. God is a covenant-keeping God.

Unfortunately, the children of Israel repeatedly broke their covenant obligations by worshiping the golden calf, engaging in immorality, and complaining constantly. They refused to enter the Promised Land and wandered for forty years because of their unbelief. After God had brought them safely into the land, Joshua gathered

the people one final time and called them to renew their covenant commitment to the Lord. Joshua 24 is, in many ways, a covenant renewal ceremony.

As Joshua the old warrior nears death, he gives one final challenge. More than conquering cities or dividing land, Joshua wants the people to remain faithful to God and to live out their faithfulness in their families.

That's what faithful men do. They understand that leaving a legacy is about more than possessions or accomplishments. It's about passing on a faith that will outlive them. I see three imperatives in this passage that will help men leave a legacy of leadership.

1. Rehearse God's faithfulness (1-13). Notice verse 1: "***Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.***" The people gathered at a place called Shechem, located between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerazim. This location had a long and important history, showing us that geography matters when interpreting the Bible. Speaking of that, Audrey Ellis and Lori Wilson taught a class for women recently called "Bible Geography" and people loved it.

- Abraham built an altar at Shechem to mark God's promise to bless his offspring (Genesis 12:6-7).
- Jacob buried the household idols stolen by his wife under a terebinth tree near Shechem (Genesis 35:1-4).
- Moses challenged God's people at Shechem to keep their covenant by promising blessings if they did, and curses if they didn't (Deuteronomy 27:4-8).
- Joshua built an altar and read from the words of the law as half the people stood before Mount Ebal and the other half before Mount Gerazim (Joshua 8:30-35).
- The bones of Joseph were buried at Shechem after being brought out of Egypt (Joshua 24:32).

Shechem is a place where the words of God were affirmed by the people of God. It represented a crossroads of decision, a place where every generation must respond to God's faithfulness by renewing their covenant commitment. Interestingly, the words "***father***" or "***fathers***" are used eleven times in this chapter.

In verses 3-13, God rehearses His faithfulness as He speaks in the first person 18 times! Here are just a few: ***“I took your father Abraham from beyond the River...I gave him Isaac...and I sent Moses and Aaron...then I brought your fathers out of Egypt...then I brought you to the land of the Amorites...and I sent the hornet before you...I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards you did not plant.”***

God has always demonstrated His power, His presence, and His provision for His people.

When a man faithfully follows Christ, his leadership leaves a legacy that impacts generations to come.

2. Recommit to be faithful to God (14-24). Because of God’s faithfulness, we’re called to be faithful to Him. We see this in verse 14: ***“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”*** The word **“now”** means, **“right now”** and **“therefore”** refers to what we just read about God’s faithfulness.

- **Revere God.** We’re to **“fear the Lord,”** which means to revere Him as heavy and holy. Proverbs 15:33 says: ***“The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom.”***
- **Render obedience.** This high and holy view of God should lead us to **“serve Him.”** To say it another way, our worship of Him must lead to working for Him. We’re to do so in **“sincerity”** and obedience which propels us to full faithfulness. The word **“serve”** is used 13 times in verses 14-23, showing the importance of putting into practice what we know to be true.
- **Remove idols.** The phrase **“put away the gods”** means, **“to leave, turn away, quit, desert.”** The implication is that they had some secret generational sins they were holding on to. Is there anything you need to quit doing? What do you need to leave behind because it is mastering you?

It’s amazing how many times God’s people were tripped up because they wouldn’t throw away their idols. To **“put away”** literally means **“to turn**

off.” The idea is that we throw all idols so far away that their power over us is extinguished. The problem for many of us is that we don’t throw them away; instead, we keep them close by. In fact, we can infer from this verse that God’s people still had some idols with them according to verse 23:

“Then put away the foreign gods that are among you...” Idolatry was a huge problem throughout Israel’s history. It’s as if they wanted a spiritual security blanket; something they could fall back on if God didn’t work out.

Joshua drills down deeper in verse 15: ***“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*** The word “evil” refers to something that is unpleasant, sad, or bad. In other words, if serving the Lord seems burdensome or undesirable to you, then make your choice who you will serve. I’m reminded of how God rebuked His people because they treated worship like a chore in Malachi 1:13: ***“But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts.”***

Joshua made it clear that serving the Lord is a choice: ***“choose this day whom you will serve.”*** The idea is to deliberately examine the options and intentionally select whom you will serve. Neutrality is impossible because not to decide is to decide. Elijah laid it out clearly in 1 Kings 18:21: ***“And Elijah came near to all the people and said, ‘How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.’ And the people did not answer him a word.”*** Did you catch that last part? The people said nothing. Silence.

There’s something within us that resists making a commitment. We’d rather stay neutral because we like to keep our options open. We could call our condition spiritual FOMO—the fear of missing out. We want God, but we also want the world. We want Heaven, but we don’t want holiness. We want forgiveness, but we don’t want faithfulness. We want satisfaction but we don’t want to fully surrender.

More fundamentally, we resist choosing God because choosing Him means relinquishing the right to rule our own lives. We want a Savior, but not necessarily a Lord. We prefer autonomy over authority, and self-determination over submission.

But indecision is itself a decision. Refusing to choose Christ is choosing against Him. As the old saying goes, if you choose not to decide, you have already made your choice.

They could go back and worship the gods that Abraham's father did. These gods offered spiritual highs and a reliance on mysticism and astrology. Or they could go back to the idols of Egypt. This religion was steeped in materialism. Or they could commit to the idols of the Amorites. This way of life offered sensual pleasure, emotional fulfillment, and an emphasis on outward success.

Joshua knew if they didn't get rid of their idols, they would eventually forsake the Lord. That's what's behind Hebrews 3:12: ***"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."*** Lest we think this was just an issue in the Old Testament, the very last verse of John's first letter ends with this warning in 1 John 5:21: ***"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols."***

Bob Dylan is known for his classic song, "You Gotta Serve Somebody." Here are a few of the lyrics: *"Well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody."* In fact, you're serving somebody or something right now. It's either self, Satan or the Savior. If you're not serving God, you are choosing to serve self or Satan.

Jesus said it like this in Matthew 6:24: ***"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."*** He also spoke these challenging words in Matthew 12:30: ***"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."***

God is not asking you to add Him to a list of priorities. He is calling you to choose Him alone as worthy of worship because every man is serving someone or something. The only question is this: Who will you serve?

Joshua not only exhorted the people, but he also offered himself as an example at the end of verse 15:

- **He made a personal commitment - "But as for me..."** The word **"but"** sets Joshua apart from those who worshiped false gods and the pronoun **"me"** is emphatic. Joshua is saying, *"I, me, myself."* Fathers cannot lead spiritually if they are not personally following Christ.

- **He accepted spiritual responsibility for his family - “...and my house...”**
After getting things right in our hearts, we’re called to live it out in our homes. Godly leadership begins with personal devotion and extends to those God has entrusted to our care as we read in Ephesians 6:4: ***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”***
- **He established clear priorities - “...we will serve the LORD.”** This isn’t a “maybe” or a “we’ll see” how it works out. It’s a settled direction. In a culture filled with competing gods, competing loyalties, and competing values, Joshua courageously declares where his household will stand. This is not merely a plaque on the wall, but a defined purpose fueled by a man living on mission. True manhood requires a decisive, vocal commitment to Christ.

Fathers today face a similar challenge. We may not have statues of Baal or Asherah in our neighborhoods, but we are surrounded by countless rivals for our devotion. Every day our families are being disciplined by voices, values, and influences that compete with the Lord. It’s not easy to swim against materialism, entertainment, busyness, and our sports culture.

For every father, grandfather, husband, and man here today, the challenge is clear: Will you lead your heart and your home toward Christ so that your family can say with Joshua, ***“As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”***? You don’t have to be perfect to lead spiritually. Simply decide that your family will faithfully serve the Lord.

Unfortunately, it’s easy for men to look for their mission and purpose somewhere other than at home. We sometimes think real ministry happens on a platform, on a mission trip, or in some faraway place, while looking past the people sitting around our own dinner table.

Recently, I came across a satirical article from the Babylon Bee with this title, ***“Father of 3 Wonders When He’ll Get a Chance to Influence Others for Christ.”*** The post explains how a father wished God would place someone in his life for whom he could make an eternal difference, all while spending his evenings talking, playing, and investing in his children. He longed for “important Kingdom work,” unaware that he was already immersed in it.

I've always liked what Jesus said in Mark 5:19 to the formerly demon-possessed man who wanted to join Jesus' ministry team: ***“Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”***

Chuck Swindoll captures it well: *“Whatever else may be said about the home, it is the bottom line of life, the anvil upon which attitudes and convictions are hammered out...home is where life makes up its mind.”*

Joshua didn't merely influence his family accidentally. He led them intentionally. He didn't delegate spiritual leadership. He embraced it. He didn't leave his values undefined. He made them unmistakably clear.

And thousands of years later, his declaration still echoes with conviction and courage: ***“But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*** Men, will you do the same? If you don't intentionally disciple your family, someone else will because the world is eager to catechize your children. Joshua reminds us that God has called fathers to lead the way...and I see that happening in our families today!

Our culture often talks about *“toxic masculinity,”* and rightly rejects the kind of behavior that is harsh, selfish, abusive, or domineering. But the answer is not the absence of masculinity. The answer is biblical masculinity. Jesus was the strongest man who ever lived, yet He used His strength to serve, protect, sacrifice, and lead others to God. The opposite of toxic masculinity is Christlike manhood that rejects both abusive domination and passive disengagement. God is still looking for men who will lovingly and humbly lead their families toward Him.

This is an immediate imperative: ***“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”*** Joshua has decided that he and his household will serve the Lord. Too many of us waver and hesitate and capitulate to what is politically correct. We want to keep one foot in and one foot out. It was G.K. Chesterton who said, *“The Christian life has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.”* Spiritual indecision leads to disorientation.

The late Paul Harvey used to tell the story of an indecisive soldier during the Civil War. Wanting to play it safe, he put on a blue Union coat and gray Confederate pants and cautiously stepped onto the battlefield. Unfortunately, both sides opened fire, and he ended up getting shot at from both directions.

Don't miss the fact that Joshua is setting the spiritual temperature in his home because he sees himself as the pastor of his family. Instead of parents dropping off

their kids at church, I love this idea from Roland Martinson: *“What we ought to do is let the kids drop their parents off at church, train the parents and send them back into their mission field to grow Christians in their home.”*

In verses 16-18, the people respond quickly, maybe too quickly: *“Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods...we too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.”* Notice that Joshua doesn’t put up with any shallow easy-believism or sappy spiritual sentimentality. In short, he won’t take “yes” for an answer. Perhaps he detected some insincerity. Verse 19 is a shocking response: *“You are not able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God...”*

The people respond in verse 21 by saying, *“No, but we will serve the Lord.”* Joshua finally backs off a bit but tells them that they must serve as witnesses against each other should any of them break their vows. In verse 23, sensing they were still reluctant to rid themselves of idols, Joshua challenges them again: *“Then put away the foreign gods that are among you and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel.”* In verse 24, they declare definitively: *“The Lord our God we will serve and His voice we will obey.”*

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3. Remind yourself of your commitment (25-28). Knowing how easy it is to say one thing and do another, Joshua wants them to put some practices into place.

- **Rededicate yourself right now.** Look at the first part of verse 25: *“So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day...”* Notice the last two words: *“that day.”*
- **Put new habits in place.** We see this in the second half of verse 25: *“...and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.”* Joshua knew that good intentions aren’t enough because commitments require new habits. If you want to lead your family spiritually, you’ll need to establish rhythms of grace because priorities are reinforced by patterns.
- **Write your commitment down.** Listen to the first part of verse 26: *“And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God...”* There’s something powerful about putting your commitments in writing. Maybe you need to write out a personal mission statement, a family purpose statement, or a prayer for your children and grandchildren. Daily, I use a typed-out

prayer for each of our 10 grandchildren. Written words have a way of reminding us of promises we are prone to forget.

- **Establish visual reminders with your family.** Notice the last part of verse 26 and verse 27: *“And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.’”* Joshua erected a memorial stone so future generations would remember. When our daughters were young, one of them asked me how we could be sure our family would still believe in God when she was older. That prompted us to find a rock and to write Joshua 24:15 on it on June 13, 2000. We still have that rock, even though the verse has faded, our faith has not.

Men, what visible reminders have you placed in your home? Maybe it’s a plaque with Joshua 24:15 on it. Perhaps it’s praying before meals followed by a short devotional. Maybe it’s celebrating baptisms and anniversaries of salvation. Maybe it’s gathering your family to dedicate your home to Christ. Maybe it’s a commitment to gather with God’s people every weekend for worship or to go on a mission trip together.

Look at what happens in verse 28: *“So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.”* While it was good they gathered as a faith community, the fathers needed to live it out in their families. Like an inheritance, their families were a gift to be treasured and stewarded for the Lord.

Men, be encouraged. God has given you a platform for ministry, wherever you are. If you have children, they are always watching. They learn far more from what we do than from what we say.

This article called, “When You Thought I Wasn’t Looking” reminds us of this truth:

- When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one.
- When you thought I wasn’t looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I believed there is a God that I could always talk to.
- When you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

- When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you pick up my favorite ice cream, and I knew that little things are special things.
- When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared, and I wanted to be someone who cared for others.
- When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked...and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw.

Men, your children are watching. Your grandchildren are watching. Your wife is watching. Our teens and young adults are watching. And while they are watching, they are learning what matters most.

So, men, choose this day whom you will serve. We all need some assistance and encouragement, don't we? Our EdgeMen's ministry is designed to help men live on mission in their families, among our neighbors, and to the nations. We have five weekly Bible Growth Groups and an upcoming Men's BBQ in August. We're also bringing back our Chili Cookoff in October. Maybe you could serve in VBS or in Children's or Student Ministry. Or perhaps you could stand in the gap and become a spiritual father to someone by serving on the Men's team at Pregnancy Resources, as a host home for Safe Families for Children, by leading a Growth Group, or by getting involved in Intentional Discipleship. We have a need for this, especially after so many who attended *Starting Point* last weekend indicated they want to get into a discipling relationship. Simply use the tap tag in front of you or mention your interest on the connect card.

I'm impressed with our new Young Adults Pastor Stephen and his wife Karin. Pastor Stephen will be starting sometime this summer. They don't have biological children but mentioned they have many spiritual children. Check out this week's 4G podcast to learn more about them.

By the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit, live in such a way that those who are watching will one day join you in saying: ***“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”***

Earlier this month, a Baptist pastor in Mississippi set an unofficial world record by preaching through the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, without stopping over the course of four days. For 96 hours, he never stopped speaking. And you thought *I* went long!

The idea for this record-breaking sermon grew out of a missionary training exercise in 2025 when the pastor spent 96 hours in the woods without a physical

Bible. The absence of God's Word created such a hunger in him that he determined to publicly read and preach through the entire Bible continuously.

By the time he reached the end, his voice was barely holding on. But with what little strength he had left, this is how he concluded his marathon message:
"Here is the most important thing I've tried to tell you every day for the last 96 hours.

*Yes, the Word of God is true.
Yes, the Spirit of God is inviting.
Yes, the church of God is on mission."*

Then he walked to a whiteboard and slowly wrote three words. He turned back to the congregation and, with one final burst of strength, loudly proclaimed:

"JESUS IS WORTHY!"

→ **Play Video**

Friends, after 66 books, thousands of years of history, countless stories, promises, prophecies, commands, and songs, that's the message of the Bible: **"JESUS IS WORTHY!"**

As the worship of Heaven declares: ***"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God...worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"*** (Revelation 5:9, 12)

He's worthy of our worship.
He's worthy of our obedience.
He's worthy of our trust.
He's worthy of our witness.
He's worthy of our fathering.

And so, fellow fathers and grandfathers, if our children and grandchildren remember anything about us, may they remember this: that we loved Jesus, followed Jesus, and worshiped the One who alone is worthy. And may we be able to say with Joshua, ***"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*** (Joshua 24:15)

Because when all is said and done, the greatest legacy we can leave is not wealth or success or accomplishments.

It is this: **Jesus alone is worthy!**

Joshua's very name means, "*The Lord is salvation.*" In Hebrew, it is *Yeshua*, which is the same name translated into Greek as Jesus. Joshua could bring people into the land, but only Jesus can bring people into the Lord. Joshua could conquer enemies around them, but Jesus conquers the enemy within. Joshua could offer a temporary inheritance, but Jesus alone gives an eternal one. Joshua could not change hearts, but Jesus saves sinners and makes them new through the shedding of His blood as full and final sacrifice. Jesus is our new Joshua, a better Savior who brings a better salvation.

And may the greatest legacy we leave our children and grandchildren be our covenant commitment. May they hear it from our lips and see it lived out in our lives: "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"