

Forward: Claiming the Life God Gave You
The Things You Can't Forget To Do!
Joshua 23:1-24:33

Introduction: In football, the head coach does most of the pre-game pump up the player's stuff; however, as a position coach, you're less concerned with getting players pumped up than you are with ensuring they are focused on what they need to do to win! As a longtime assistant coach in charge of a position group on a team, I made sure the last thing I told the players before they went on the field were the most important things they needed to remember throughout the game. It's not that the hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of instruction and coaching I had given them before that moment were not important, but I would identify the couple of critical things that, if they forgot, would make everything I had taught them before that moment all for nothing, but if they remember would cause everything else to likely come together! Before a game, players have thousands of things going through their minds, so as a coach, you want to make sure they narrow that down to the few things that matter the most. For me, it could be a specific technique I had been working on that was fundamental to their performance, a new rule for coverage they needed to remember, a unique adjustment we were going to do against certain formations, or a tendency of the other team we felt like was going to be essential to recognize; but whatever it was, I would narrow down what I reminded them of to a couple of things, out of the hundreds of things that I had taught them; the things that I needed to make sure was front and center in their brain as they run out on the field to play.

Similarly, as we get to the final two chapters of Joshua, Joshua has sent out the tribes of Israel to prosper on the lands God has given them. He sent them to be free people who didn't need an earthly King to lead and protect them because God was their King. Moses had given them the Law that God laid out as the rules for the Covenant God made with them, and Joshua also taught it to them. They had received hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of instruction; they knew their purpose as God's people, and they knew they had an opportunity unlike any other nation on the planet. However, there were a few key things they had to remember; some points of emphasis that, if they remembered, would bring everything else together, but if they failed, it would make everything else they did all for nothing.

As you will see in a second, Joshua knows this is likely the last time he will get to speak to all his players at once. Joshua knows he's dying. He's old and shows all the signs of a person who doesn't have many days left to be able to lead the people. So, with this added emphasis and urgency, Joshua wants to make sure Israel understands the three keys to successfully being God's people. It's not that all the other instructions don't matter, but rather, if they don't do these three things, nothing else will matter; inversely, if they do these three things, it will likely result in them getting all the other things right.

So, let's finish our study of Joshua and zoom in on the three key challenges Joshua left with the people of Israel.

Proposition: In Joshua 23 and 24 there are three key challenges that Joshua left with the people of Israel.

The first key challenge is in chapter 23.

(1) Cling to God. (23:1-16)

A. 1 A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, 2 Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, "I am now old and well advanced in years. 3 And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.

1. "The covenant-renewal ceremony in the last chapter of the book occurs at Shechem, but no location is given for Joshua's charge in chapter 23. It probably takes place at Shiloh, since this is the last Israelite headquarters mentioned in the book prior to the present account."¹
2. We will return to this in the end because this is hugely important. They have SEEN God's work! It's not something they were told about; it's something they have seen!
3. However, even though the Israelites now rule the land, the Canaanite tribes have not been eliminated. Thus, once they get themselves reorganized, they will pose a severe threat to the people of Israel. In light of this, Joshua then reminds them that God, who had fought for them so far, was not done fighting for them! Joshua said,

B. 4 Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west 5 The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.

1. God tells them they are inheriting the nations, as in they will totally destroy them and take all that belongs to them—their lands, cities, wealth, and everything else that belongs to them!
2. The more significant point, however, is that this will happen because God has willed it to happen, and thus, GOD will continue to fight for them. All this is meant to get the people to understand God is FOR THEM! The God who created all things and rules all the things; the God who is the only GOD,

¹ Currid, J. D. (2011). *Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained* (pp. 237–238). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

out of all the people of the earth, has chosen them as His favored people and has proven it to them by how He has been with them! Now, based on that, Joshua challenges them,

- C. **6 Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left,**

Note: In Joshua 1:6-9 God instructs Joshua to be strong and very courageous in obeying the Law He gave Moses for Israel, and thus to do so no matter what. He was saying to Joshua, no matter if you feel like I'm fighting for you or not, no matter if it looks like your enemy is winning or not, no matter how poor or rich you are, do exactly what I commanded SO,

- D. **7 that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them,**

Note: It takes us back to the purpose of the Law God gave Moses. Its purpose was to shackle them to the Covenant God made with Abraham. After God parted the Red Sea, they proved unwilling to follow God by faith, so He gave them the Law that bound them to the Covenant. As Paul wrote in Galatians 3, what God gave Moses was a temporary covenant because they were essentially acting like children who could not be trusted with the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, so they had to be given a guardian to protect them until the time came for the fulfillment of their ultimate purpose, that is, of being God's chosen people to bring forth the Savior of the World—Jesus! Therefore, the primary purpose of the Law that God gave Moses was to keep them from walking away from God and thus from walking away from His purpose for them and through them. The Mosaic Law was given so that in their faithfulness, they would not wander into idolatry nor go back to Egypt but would instead cling to God! Therefore, Joshua then says,

- E. **8 but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. 9 For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. 10 One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.**

1. On so many occasions, they defeated armies they should have never been able to defeat. God had been so faithful to them! He had clung to them despite their lack of faith, so there could be no other rational conclusion than to cling to Him as well.

2. The Faithlife Study Bible says of the Hebrew word translated as “cling,” **“The Hebrew term *davaq* is elsewhere translated “hold fast,” speaking of a tenacious loyalty to and trust in Yahweh (2 Kgs 18:5–6).”²**
3. That tenaciousness implied in the Hebrew word is highlighted by the fact that Joshua tells them to be very strong in obeying the Law God gave them. To cling to something takes strength and effort. You can’t casually or haphazardly “cling” to something.
4. As a receiver in football, there are times that you know you are going to get your head taken off, and there's nothing you can do about it. You can feel it coming. No matter if you catch the ball or don't catch the ball when the Quarterback decides to throw you a ball that's floating in the air while some Safety or Linebacker has a full head of steam headed directly at you, then you know you are getting ready to have your body separated from your soul no matter what, so you might as well catch the ball and make something good out of it! You can get pounded for nothing or get pounded and accomplish something, but getting pounded is going to happen. Therefore, the choice is only whether you want something worthwhile from the experience. Do you want the highlight to be how great a hit the defensive player made on you or how great a catch you made while getting blasted? If you want the highlight to be about you positively, then you, as a receiver, only have one choice: relax your body and focus on catching and clinging to the ball. If you're near the sideline, getting your feet in bounds in the process!
5. Let me illustrate this differently for those who could care less about sports. Imagine you're caught in a terrible winter storm on the deck of a boat with your child. The freezing wind and waves that blast across the boat sweep everything on the deck into the ice-cold churning waters. You will not casually grab a hold of the boat and your child! No! You'll cling to your child and the boat with every ounce of strength in your body! You'll cling to that boat and child no matter how tired you are, how cold the water is, or how injured you may be; you will cling to that boat and child with every bit of strength you have!! No matter what you think of the boat, the captain steering it, or how much better other people's boats appear, at that moment, you will do nothing but focus entirely on clinging to the boat and your child! This is precisely the appeal that Joshua is giving to the people of Israel. Letting go of the boat means you and your child will be swept into the sea, and letting go of the child means the one you love with all your heart will be swept into the sea. Therefore, you have no choice but to trust the boat and its captain and cling to the boat as you cling to your kid, no matter how painful it is! Likewise, Joshua says,

² Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Jos 23:8). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

F. 11 Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. 12 For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, 13 know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.

1. To love God is to cling to God! What we cling to most is what we love the most. If you cling to alcohol most, it's because you love it most. If you cling to affirmation and recognition, it's because you love yourself most. If you cling to your job more than your family, it's because you love your job more than your family. As much as I love preaching and leading the church, if it came down to it and I had to let go of it to save my family, I would hope to God that I would not hesitate to let go of preaching and leading the church to do it!
2. Now understand that it's not wrong to cling to the people God has called you to love or the things God has called you to do, but not at the expense of prioritizing clinging to Him. For instance, when you're carrying a bunch of groceries into your house. You cling to all of them because you don't want anything to fall, but you pay particular attention to the bags with glass in them! If stuff starts falling, you want to make sure that what doesn't fall out of your hands are the bags with the glass in them! So, it's not that we don't cling to other things in life while clinging to God, but rather, the thing we need to ensure we never stop clinging to is GOD. Just as a parent clinging to a child and a boat amid a storm, no matter what happens with our job or even our family, we can in no way entertain the idea of doing anything other than clinging to GOD and His Gospel no matter what!
3. What we cling to most is what we love most, and God literally made us to love Him most! Furthermore, if we will cling to Him most, then everything else we are supposed to do will take care of itself! It's why Jesus said, **"33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)**
4. Joshua then finishes up this first key challenge with these words,

G. 14 "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed. 15 But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the LORD your God has given

you, 16 if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you."

Note: With the same certainty that God promises to bless them if they cling to Him, He promises to curse them if they commit idolatry! This leads us directly to the second key challenge.

The second key challenge gets into a massive failure of the Jewish people.

(2) Stop excusing your idolatry. (24:1-28)

Note: "The section we are about to consider is a covenant-renewal ceremony that takes place at the site of Shechem in the central highlands of Canaan. It has long been recognized that this passage is set up according to the structure of a common ancient Near-Eastern suzerain/vassal treaty: In the ancient Near East, there existed two types or forms of covenant: those governing relationships between *equal* parties and those specifying relationships between *unequal* parties. The second type of covenant was between an overlord (the superior, also called a suzerain) and a vassal (the inferior party). Many of these covenants were between a king and his subjects. Within this form, the suzerain, as the more powerful party, took on most of the responsibility for the stipulations of the covenant. Although the vassal also had some obligations, because of limited capabilities and resources, he was not held accountable to the same extent and degree as the suzerain. Most of the treaty documents discovered in the ancient Near East through archaeology are Hittite covenants that come from the second millennium bc. Some covenant documents, from the Assyrians, Egyptians, Hittites and others, have been found that date to the first millennium bc. However, the covenant-renewal ceremony in Joshua 24 most closely resembles treaty documents of the second millennium bc from the Hittites. A comparative study of the ceremony in Joshua 24:1–28 with extant Hittite covenant documents reveals many common features and elements. In addition, the order of the elements is closely matched between the two: preamble (24:2); historical prologue (24:3–13); stipulations (24:14–15); oath (24:16–18); sanctions (24:19–21); witnesses (24:22–24); and a statement of display (24:25–26)."³

- A. Joshua began this challenge by reminding them of some of the specific things God had done for them.
- B. **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. 2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates,**

³ Currid, J. D. (2011). *Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained* (pp. 246–247). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. 3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac. 4 And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. 5 And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out. 6 "Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. And the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. 7 And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness a long time. 8 Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan. They fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. 9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, 10 but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand. 11 And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. 12 And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. 13 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 that you did not plant.'

Note: Verse 13 brings the history of all God has done for them into their present context. God has given them land, cities, vineyards, and orchards that somebody else labored to create. They received move-in ready land! God did the same thing with Israel in the Promised Land that He did when He gave Adam and Eve the Earth, and all on it, in a state of maturity with a created history. Adam didn't have to wait billions of years for the light of the newly formed stars to arrive on Earth and decorate the night sky. Adam didn't have to wait for the seed to germinate and mature into a fig tree that bore figs. God gave Adam a move-in, ready earth perfectly suited for him and Eve to do what He had called them to do and live as He had blessed them to live! Israel has received the same thing from God! Against overwhelming odds at almost every turn, God has clearly fought for them and given them this land, with all its wealth and opportunity fully ready for access! So, because of that truth, Joshua says,

- C. 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. 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."

1. Joshua says, I'm want nothing to do with those family heirlooms of the Egyptian gods because I'm going to serve God, the one who is actually the only God! Joshua had no intention of allowing them into his life or home, he made no excuses for them or room for them!
2. But did you catch the context of why Joshua said this? This is one of those stop-the-press moments in the Bible! When you read this, you might think it's a typo!! In verse 14, Joshua tells them to put away the gods their fathers served in Egypt, as in they still have them! So, how did they end up conquering the land? Aren't they living in sinful idolatry? First and foremost, we need to remember that God is giving them this land because God made a promise to Abraham, and God never breaks His promises. But it also needs to be noted that they have conquered the land with these idols present in their homes, which shows us that they were not successful because of their faithfulness to God, but instead because of His faithfulness to them! Nobody truly deserves the blessings and favor of God; it's only by His Grace! "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)
3. So how did this happen? How did they end up with these idols, and why would they keep them? Well, many of their forefathers who had lived in Egypt had died during the forty years of wondering that resulted from their refusal to follow God into the Promised Land. In addition, by this point, others had died in battle or for health reasons, but either way, the fact is that when they died, their children kept the gods they served in Egypt as family heirlooms! It would be like me having a regular, consistent relationship with an old girlfriend after Keri and I got married! If I'm leaving and clinging to Keri, there's no rhyme or reason to maintain an active relationship with somebody I once considered marrying. But that's precisely what they are doing. They still have these false gods on display in their homes! Imagine walking into our house, and on our family photo wall, there was a picture of Keri with one of her old boyfriends framed up right beside one with me and one of my old girlfriends! Many of the Israelites had kept the graven images of the false gods of Egypt and were still putting them on display in their homes.
4. Remember, the Israelites had been in Egypt for hundreds of years. Hence, it's very likely that these gods and some of the associated customs had found their way into the family traditions of many of the Israelites. When they gave up on God at Mount Sinai, they didn't have to think hard about making and worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 32). Perhaps this is why we see the peculiar statement in verse 15. "**And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the**

LORD.” Why would somebody think it was evil to serve God? Well, if you had generations of traditions involving the gods of Egypt in your family, then it may seem evil to forsake those and worship God alone.

5. This is a question that has never gone away. Whether it's the Rich Young ruler who couldn't forsake his riches and power to follow Jesus or the Israelites who were struggling with the idea of giving up something that had become a part of their family heritage, when we are faced with the reality that we must forsake all to cling to the Lord, we find out how much we love what it is we have to forsake! Whether it's religious practices that make us feel holy or deserving of God or sinful lifestyles and practices that we believe to be our identity, when we realize that God demands us to give them up to follow Him, we feel such a demand is evil! How dare God tell me I must surrender my finances to Him? How dare God tell me I can't participate in the religious practices and customs of my forefathers? How dare God tell me I can't continue with the lifestyle I've always had? How dare God tell me I have to trust in Him alone? You could almost hear the people complaining to themselves as Joshua demanded they give up these heirlooms. Joshua then clarifies that it is impossible to obey the Law and serve God as long as they have these idols in their possession.

D. 19 But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good." 21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD." 22 Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." 23 He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel." 24 And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey."

1. When Joshua says God will not forgive, he means that if you keep these other gods in your life, God will not forgive you! God does not share space with anybody or anything! They've gotten away with it up until now, but no more! They are about to go off and serve God on their own. Therefore, the unspoken sin that everybody has been looking past for decades now has to be dealt with. However, Joshua is dealing with this because despite the fact they had gotten away with it, you can't serve God while you serve other gods! It's why Jesus said,
2. **"24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." (Matthew 6:24)**

3. In Matthew, Jesus applied that principle directly to money, saying you cannot serve God and money simultaneously. You can't follow Jesus and money; it is Jesus or money! But the principle can be applied to anything, but most obviously to gods! To be a god is to be a master worthy of total allegiance and service. It's the very definition of being a god; thus, Jesus says you can't serve two gods! It's not even logical. By definition, if you are serving one god, and therefore one who demands total allegiance, then you cannot serve another one! You cannot follow false gods and follow God at the same time because GOD refuses to allow it! It's why the call of the gospel is to repent, believe, and follow. You can't just add Him to what you want to believe in and follow Him when He goes where you want to go! In that case, you are the one functioning as a god and not GOD, who is the only GOD!

E. 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. 26 And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. 27 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." 28 So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.

1. The stone was a symbolic monument. The stone didn't hear anything because stones can't hear. The point was that it stood as a marker that everything that had taken place, mainly that the people said they were going to serve God alone and, by clear implication, get rid of the idols and idolatrous practices they continued to keep around their homes!
2. Interestingly, as sincere as their response sounded, history proved it wasn't. More on that in a minute, but let me first address a misapplication of this passage. Some read this and believe it's wrong to participate in customs or traditions that aren't 100% purely about God. This was a debate that raged in the early church, and it was primarily driven by Jews who were offended by Gentiles who had converted to Christianity but still participated in festivals rooted in the worship of Rome and other gods. Some Jews even decided it was wrong to eat meat or drink wine because they could unknowingly be eating meat or drinking wine that somebody had sacrificed to an idol before it was sold in the marketplace. Now certainly, a follower of Christ should not actively participate in the actual bowing down and worship of the idols, nor in the actual ceremony of making a sacrifice; nor should a follower of Christ participate in the part of a festival where they ate meat sacrificed to idols as an intentional act of worship to their gods. Still, the New Testament did not demand Christians abstain when it came to the broader cultural events and festivals that surrounded these customs. Paul addressed this very issue with the church in Rome and in Corinth. Below are two of the passages that dealt directly with it.

- a. **“1** As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. **2** One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. **3** Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. **4** Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. **5** One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. **6** The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. **7** For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. **8** For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. **9** For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. **10** Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; **11** for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." **12** So then each of us will give an account of himself to God." (Roman 14:1-12)
- b. **23** "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. **24** Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. **25** Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. **26** For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." **27** If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. **28** But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience--**29** I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? **30** If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? **31** So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:23-31)
3. My point is this. Some have heard that if they love Jesus, they shouldn't have a Christmas tree, take their kids to see Santa Claus, give them Easter baskets with candy, dress up on Halloween, etc. However, it's clearly not a problem in the New Testament. But, if I thought for a second, I should serve Santa Clause, the Easter Bunny, or the latest Marvel hero everybody wanted to dress up as; if for a second my life was about those things, or any other thing (football, money, power, fame, sex, alcohol, a drug, or anything else other

than GOD), then at that moment I have entered into idolatry. At that moment, I have chosen to SUBMIT my life to something or someone other than God, and by definition, that means I cannot also be submitted to HIM!

- F. You and I need to be honest about the idols we are covering up with our excuses and realize we cannot abound in God's life as long as we continue to justify idolatry! Repent and rid yourself of the idols in your life—period!

Joshua's life actually preached the third key challenge, and thus, it was preached at his death by those who did the final edit of the book.

(3) Don't just teach the next generation about God, invite them to labor with you in what God's doing. (24:29-33)

- A. **29 After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being 110 years old. 30 And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. 31 Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel. 32 As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money. It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph. 33 And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas his son, which had been given him in the hill country of Ephraim.**
- B. "Recording three burials is a strange way to end a book like Joshua! But these three peaceful graves testify to the faithfulness of God, for Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar once lived in a foreign nation where they received God's promise to take His people back to Canaan. Now all three were at rest within the Promised Land. God kept His word to Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar—and to all Israel. And this encourages God's children today to count on God's unflinching faithfulness."⁴
- C. "The book of Joshua ends with three burials and obituaries. On the surface it all sounds despairing and hopeless. But, in reality, that is not the case at all. These three graves are memorials to the fulfillment of God's promise to give the land of Canaan to his people. Joseph longed to be buried in this land (Gen. 50:24–26) which God had promised to Abraham so long ago (Gen. 12:7). Joshua fought for this land, and now he is laid to rest in it. Eleazar had been the spiritual leader of the people during the last part of the wanderings, during the conquest and during the settlement. He was one of the leaders who allocated the land to the people, and now he too is buried in the land of promise. The deaths of Joshua and

⁴ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 370–371). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Eleazar also mark the passing of the conquest generation; these two, the covenant mediator and the high priest, were the principal leaders of Israel during this time. ... **Death and burial of Joshua** (24:29–30) This concluding section opens with the death of Joshua, the covenant mediator between God and Israel. For the first time in the book Joshua is given the title, **‘the servant of the Lord’**. This description was commonly used of Moses (see Deut. 34:5), and it is often applied to him in the book of Joshua (1:1; 8:31, 33; 11:12; 12:6; 13:8; etc.). The use of this title serves as an *inclusio*, or a bracket, for the entire book. The first verse of the book tells of the death of Moses, ‘the servant of the Lord’, and here at the close of the book we find the narration of the death of Joshua, ‘the servant of the Lord’. What a fitting epitaph for these two covenant mediators and leaders of the people of God! Joshua dies at the ripe age of 110 years. This is the same age that Joseph was when he died in Egypt (Gen. 50:22). The Egyptians viewed this figure as the ideal lifespan. This demonstrates that God blesses and favours Joshua for the rest of his life. Joshua is further commended by being buried in **‘his own inheritance’**, which had been deeded to him in Joshua 19:49–50. He received his promised possession in the land of Canaan, and that is where his body is entombed! **Serving the Lord** (24:31) This is a summary comment that describes Israel’s fidelity to the Lord and to the covenant. It is important to note that there is a time restriction on this devotion and obedience: the Israelites serve the Lord faithfully during the life of Joshua and the lives of the elders of his day who outlive him. The verse is ominous because it anticipates a time when Israel will not serve the Lord. That time will come quickly. The next generation lives in the period of the judges. Judges 2:11–19 describes this time as one of great apostasy. It is an era of cyclical history with regard to Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant: the Israelites begin by serving other gods (vv. 11–13); God responds in anger and he delivers them into the hands of their enemies (vv. 14–15); the people then cry out to the Lord and he raises up a judge to deliver them (v. 16); the judge succeeds for a short time, but Israel quickly returns to idolatry (v. 17). It is important to observe also that the people not only revert to their wicked ways after each deliverance, but that they become more corrupt than they were before (vv. 18–19). Thus the book of Judges reflects a downward spiral of Israel into apostasy. What a contrast to Joshua’s generation, as described in Joshua 24:31! Certainly one reason that Israel kept the covenant during Joshua’s generation is that their leadership **‘had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel’**. In other words, the elders of Israel did not have a mere head knowledge about God’s work in the conquest and settlement of the land; rather, they truly experienced it. The verb ‘to know’ can often bear the idea of an intimate, personal knowledge, understanding and experience. These leaders had seen the great works of the Lord, and that experience encouraged them to keep faithful to the covenant. **The bones of Joseph** (24:32) At the close of the book of Genesis, Joseph made the Israelites promise that they would bring up his bones from Egypt to Canaan when the people were delivered by God out of Egypt (Gen. 50:24–25). This promise is now fulfilled at the end of the book of Joshua, at least four hundred years after the oath had been taken. Burial in the land of Canaan appears to have been very important to the Hebrews (see, for

example, 1 Sam. 31:11–13; 2 Sam. 21:12–14), and especially the preservation of a person’s bones (see 1 Kings 13:29–31; 2 Kings 23:16–20). Interment in the land of promise may be in anticipation of a resurrection there (2 Kings 13:20–21; Ezek. 37:1–14). Joseph himself may have believed in the bodily resurrection of the dead (Heb. 11:17–22). This verse ends by saying, literally, ‘And *they* became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.’ To whom or what does ‘they’ refer? Some commentators argue that it can only refer back grammatically to the antecedent ‘**sons of Hamor**’, which must then be understood as referring to the plot of land that Jacob bought from them. In reality, the ‘they’ may refer to the bones of Joseph. In a sense, then, the bones of Joseph become an ‘**inheritance**’, or ‘possession’ of the sons of Joseph. They are, in other words, a legacy or a heritage for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. By this bequest the two tribes are continually reminded of their past history; as they settle into the land of Canaan, their presence there is a fulfilment of the desires and hopes of the patriarch Joseph. **Death of burial of Eleazar** (24:33) Eleazar was installed as high priest in place of his father Aaron during the wilderness wanderings (Num. 20:22–29). He is a prominent figure in the Pentateuch (Exod. 6:23–25; Lev. 10; Num. 19:3–4, etc.) and in the book of Joshua (14:1; 17:4; 21:1). He now dies, and he is buried in Gibeah. This town had apparently been deeded to Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, during the allotment of Canaan to Israel. Phinehas is the grandson of Aaron, and he now becomes high priest of Israel (Judg. 20:27–28).”⁵

- D. **31 Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel.**
- E. Unfortunately, the key to this challenge is seen in how and why Israel ended up worshipping false gods not long after Joshua and the elders who served with Joshua had died. The book of Judges follows the book of Joshua, and it's depressing! It's a downward spiral of one generation after another moving farther and farther from God despite all that God did to demonstrate His power and love to them! The reason is that the people of Israel did not do what God told them to do and rid the land of the Canaanites. As such, a generation grew up that didn't witness "the work that the LORD did for Israel" while the Israelites labored with God in what He called them to do—conquer and prosper in the Promised Land! The reason they didn't see it is because they didn't do it! The Israelites decided to let the Canaanite tribes that remained dwell on the lands God had designated for the people of Israel. Instead of another generation growing up seeing God work miracles as God drove out the Canaanites, they instead saw Jewish people compromising and worshipping the gods of the Canaanites, sometimes as a way of establishing trade and other times out of pure lust and lack of faith in God!

⁵ Currid, J. D. (2011). *Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained* (pp. 258–262). Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: EP Books.

- F. In the book of Judges, there are flashes of God's people laboring with Him and seeing His power, but overall, they consistently rebelled! So, each passing generation would hear about the glory of God and all that He did, but seldom did they ever witness the adults in their lives living in His power and life! It's one thing to have somebody tell you about God; it's an entirely different thing to see God working in and through them. I'm not negating the importance of the Gospel being proclaimed, but I'm also saying that if what's proclaimed isn't being lived, it will likely not be believed!
- G. I'll never forget when Al Gilbert stood in the pulpit of Liberty Baptist Church and looked down to the front middle section of that old 1,200-seat auditorium the church used to meet in on Todds Lane in Hampton, Virginia, and said, "I apologize to you that my generation has not shown you a life-changing God." When a church preaches about a life-changing God but stops laboring with that life-changing God for Him to change their lives and those around them, then the next generation will grow up with no faith in the God that the church preaches!
- H. This is precisely what's happened in America. Far too many American churches have been obsessed with their denomination, Church, and church traditions. They have clung to the practices of their ancestors who worshiped God rather than the God their ancestors worshiped. Somewhere along the line, there arose a generation in the American Church that was far more concerned with protecting their traditions and cultural heritage than they were in knowing the God who sent His son for them to be the Church. They clung to that which they said was for Jesus rather than Jesus, and as a result, we have empty church buildings all over America.
- I. Venture, if our passion is for this local church to go beyond our years on this earth, then rest assured Venture will eventually cease to exist, or at best, live with no functional purpose in the Kingdom of God other than to be a gathering for Christians waiting to die. But, if we keep laboring with Christ to know and be transformed by Him, if we labor with Christ so that our families and neighborhoods can know Him and be transformed by Him, then a generation will rise up around us who SEE that He is a life-changing God and thus worthy of following in the same way! They don't need my preaching, our music, or our traditions (and yes, we have them like anybody else); what they NEED is our SAVIOUR!!! If they preach as we preached and sing as we have sung, then so be it, as long as their passion is who we preached and sung about and not how we preached and sung! Therefore, let's not cling to anything but our Savior! There's nothing wrong with what we are doing, but it better always be an expression of clinging to our Savior and not what we are clinging to for our Savior, or worse, as our Savior!
- J. There is a difference between a kid growing up seeing his dad serve in the church and one growing up seeing God convicting and changing his dad! There

is a difference between a kid who grows up in a church with a bunch of people in it who do a lot of things and a kid growing up in a church with God working in the lives of the people in the church and through the church to display His life and glory!

- K. More than anything, we need to invite the next generation into our effort to live in glad submission to Christ, our effort of walking in the Spirit so we can not only overcome our sin but also bear the fruit of His life in us! We need the next generation to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ changing us! We need the next generation to see us labor to bring the Gospel to those far from God in our lives and worldwide!

So, listen, church, you and I have an expiration date in this life. The concluding challenge of Joshua is to live our lives so that we can finish strong and hand off something worth handing off to the next generation—Jesus!

My vision for Venture is to break the generational cycle of spiritual poverty in our region that has left lifeless buildings everywhere. But to be a part of what breaks that cycle, we have to individually live our lives clinging to God, laying aside the idols in our life and laboring with Christ in His mission, surrendering our time, talent, and treasure to Him!

I'm not interested in being comfortable. I'm not interested in living and leading us towards what is safe for Venture's survival or finances. I'm not interested in creating a warm and cozy place to hang out with people we like. I'm interested in God's power transforming my life, your life, and the world around us! I'm interested in hearing about how everybody in your family and neighborhood is basking in the life of Christ. I'm interested in hearing about a revival in the halls of the schools. I'm interested in hearing about all the people at your workplace who don't just know about Jesus but now love Jesus. I'm interested in hearing about drug dealers finding new careers because they found a new God, the God! I'm interested in the children growing up in trainwreck families, not only finding life in Christ but seeing their train-wrecked family brought to life in Christ. I'm interested in hearing about those living among us who seem to have it all together in life but have no life at all, finally finding it and basking in it!

If that's what you're interested in, then let's encourage each other to do what we are supposed to do to be a part of it—cling to Him, abandon our idols, and labor with Him in His effort to produce His life in us and through us to others!