

LOVE TAKES TIME – Seeking Family Time  
(Joshua 24:14-24) **“How Do You Choose to Love Your Family?”**

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Do you ever have those “Aha” moments when you realize something isn’t quite right, and you need to make a change? Maybe someone said something to you. Perhaps you realized things aren’t going in the right direction. But trying to adjust is like an exercise in futility at times, as frantic and side-tracked as you might feel. Ahh, but if only we had more time, right? Parents need time to change diapers, stop fights, dry tears; to feed faces and shuttle kids to lessons, practices, games, parties. How about time for your spouse or parents? Children have commitments, too: chores, homework, sports, friends. Our lives can become so overly committed, that we might as well *be* committed (to some institution). It’s crazy how we get so caught up in the world’s way of setting priorities, and we often overlook what’s most important! Let’s take a few steps back and listen to Joshua’s challenge to put the Lord at the center of our families.

When we think of the children of Israel, we often think of big events in their history: the 10 plagues, the Passover, crossing the Red Sea, Mt. Sinai and the 10 commandments, crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the walls of Jericho tumbling down. But let’s not forget about the 40 years spent between the Red Sea and the Jordan River just wandering in the wilderness. That’s a lot of “normal” days and weeks and months...a lot of routine! And now they were in the Promised Land – it was finally theirs! The previous chapter said, **“...a long time had now passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from their enemies and Joshua was old and advanced in years.”** (23:1) The past was full of big events, but now it was just normal, regular living: getting up, working, eating, resting, taking care of family, visiting friends, going to worship. Everyday life was going on, just like it goes on today.

Over 3,000 years later we pause and listen to what Joshua had to say: **“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness, throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped and serve the Lord. Choose this day whom you will serve.”** The Israelites (men, women, teenagers, and children) might have been tempted to ask at first, *“Why is Joshua getting so worked up about this? Of course we’ll serve the Lord! We’re his chosen people, his believers. Why do we have to hear this again?”* The answer seemed so obvious and easy, but it wasn’t so obvious, and it wasn’t so easy. They had gotten so used to what their culture and society said was okay, which is why Joshua now had to lay it out there for them. **“Get rid of all those false gods! They’re no good! Follow the Lord, and serve him with 100% commitment.”**

Anything less than 100%, God says, makes him “jealous.” The basic meaning of that word “jealous” has to do with marriage, the relationship between the Lord and his bride. God made this relationship: he planned for it, he sacrificed himself for it, and he reconciled us for this marriage. He deserves 100% of our respect, our love, and our trust every moment of every day, because he’s loved us more than anyone else ever could. To love anyone or anything more than the Lord is adultery and threatens our relationship with him.

How many times have you told God that you love him, that you want to serve him with all your heart, soul and strength, but just not yet? *“Lord, you know how busy I am, and when my schedule frees up, then I’ll make more time for you and your word. But I still love you.”* If you said that to your spouse or your children, *“If I have any time left over for you, then I’ll spend it with you,”* do you think they’d feel taken for granted? And when you think that God’s okay with whatever time you have left over, that’s when your relationship with him gets taken for granted...forgotten even.

Look at the Israelites who at first said they loved God but gradually drifted away. They complained and cheated on him, running back to their gods from Egypt or chasing after some of the new gods in the Promised Land. They figured they could handle ‘flexibility’ in their relationship with God, telling themselves it was okay to assimilate some of the lifestyles and practices of the people around them. And one day, when they were ready, they would return to the Lord completely.

Joshua knew that day would never come, unless they stopped relying on their own good intentions and returned to relying on God’s promises. He told them, **“You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”** (23:14). GOD has given you these undeserved blessings and will continue to do so, because of his love for you. How will you respond to that love?

That’s the challenge we still face today: not taking for granted but remaining faithful to the One who has always loved us. Joshua said, **“<sup>14</sup> Fear the Lord your God and serve him only.”** Joshua isn’t just talking about believing in God; he isn’t just talking about being in church, either, or coming to help out with something big like VBS or a work day or attending meetings at church. Fearing the Lord and serving him only is what you do in your normal, day-to-day lives when you sit in your living room or behind a desk at work or school. It’s the way you communicate with others, not just with your words but with your actions, too. Do you think people see that in you? Could your own family and friends recognize that your God is the Lord, and not some other priority that takes up so much of your attention and time?

Joshua warned, **“If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods...(make other things more important)...the Lord’s anger will burn against you...”** (23:16) **“...so “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...”** (24:15). The fact is, none of us deserves that choice to serve the Lord. We deserve to be stuck in a downward spiraling existence of serving our own selfish desires and short-lived thrills, bitter

and angry at God that he doesn't give in to our sinful whims and wants. And that's because he wants only what's best for us, because he loves us. He always has. Remember how he sent his Son into our world to become our Brother, and how our Brother lived a perfect life as our Substitute. Jesus was always 100% committed to serving his Father...and you. He shed his blood and died to redeem you from death and an empty way of life. He rose from the grave to guarantee your resurrection and a place with him in eternity. Just look at the promises God has kept – a perfect record! Through water and the word He seals you as his own child. Through his own body and blood He feeds you, strengthens you and gives you peace and comfort. Because of God's love in Christ, the choice to serve Him above all is clear.

(II.) When Joshua says, <sup>15</sup> **Choose you this day whom you will serve,** do you realize how often TV ministers get it wrong? Joshua is speaking to believers not unbelievers. An unbeliever can't make the choice to obey or serve God; they're spiritually dead, and only the Holy Spirit can make them alive. But as a believer, the Holy Spirit works in you, so that you can respond to God's love and choose. It's like we have one foot in and one foot out, one that serves God alone and another that wants 'other options.' But that doesn't work. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus said, *"You can't serve two masters; it's one or the other."* Joshua told the others, on that very day, he and his family were rededicating themselves to serving the Lord. Even if they were the only ones, they knew what God had done for them.

That confession of faith, the expression of reliance on God's promises, got the people's attention. They responded, *"Yes, God has done wonderful things for us. We too will serve the Lord because he is our God,"* (24:18). What an awesome day this had become! You could imagine how encouraged and inspired these people were! They were ready to do battle, cross the Red Sea or march around the walls of Jericho! But do you know what they did next? They went home. <sup>28</sup> **Joshua sent the people away, each to his inheritance.** They went home to their daily lives and routines. It doesn't sound so tough, make no mistake. One of the greatest challenges is serving God whole heartedly in daily, normal lives.

<sup>15</sup> **...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.** Joshua is talking about his own home, his family – the place where God continues to speak so powerfully through us. Joshua spoke for his whole family, recognizing the responsibility fathers have for the spiritual health of their families. Dads, make sure God's mouth is open in your homes, that his words are heard. Take time for family to sit together around God's word. Make time to discuss God's love. In a world that tries to undermine his will, Christian parents, fight to protect your families! Fight by building up the most important relationship for the members of your family, the relationship you have with Christ our Savior. Be God's mouth in your family.

God also wants you to be his masks in the world. You are the faces that the world can see, the ones through whom God takes care of his people and his creation. He shows his love through you. Did you know God pushes five-year-olds on swings and puts band-aids on skinned knees? He listens to the frustrations and gives hugs (which are always needed.) He does all that through you. He's entrusted your family to you as a gift to care for, where his love can be modeled and learned. And this LOVE TAKES TIME, when (\*) husbands and wives show love and respect for each other as a reflection of the love between Christ and the church; when (\*) parents carry out their roles as spiritual leaders for their children to exhibit the heart and will of God and pass on their faith and values to the next generation; when (\*) children learn to show obedience, honor, and respect for their parents (even caring for them in their old age).

Thank God for your family. Think of their names and their needs, and pray for them. Pray that God give you a clearer understanding of what's most important, a deeper desire to spend time nurturing God's gift of family, and the ability to better balance your time and commitments. Can you afford to remove or rearrange other priorities to make time for them? Can you afford *not to*? How will draw them out of the idolatry of the world into the arms of their God; out of self-centered activities into a passionate commitment to their Lord?

Coming to worship today has probably felt like any other ordinary Sunday. And when you go home today or back to work tomorrow, I'm sure it will feel normal, too. But remember, even in these ordinary moments of everyday life, you are God's redeemed, precious child. Listen to Joshua say, **Choose this day,** and respond to God's love. It doesn't have to be an altar call or anything dramatic. Rather in the quietness of your heart, ponder the love of God for you and his Spirit's power to overcome complacency and backsliding. Then you can pray, *"Let me rededicate myself to serving you and you only."* Say with Joshua, **As for me and my house we will serve the Lord. Let my life be an act of worship to you, Lord.**

Those who live alone, and maybe family is far away, still face this challenge to let your lives be an act of worship and service to your Lord. But you are not alone. You have a Christian family here to challenge you, to hold you accountable, to inspire and encourage you through their words and actions. Give thanks for this communion and fellowship, to serve God individually and together.

On their deathbeds few (if any) regret not spending more time with work. Many, however, regret not spending more time with family and showing them what a great God they have and how awesome it is to serve him. **LOVE TAKES TIME for family.** Hugs, attention, listening, planning special events and tending to routine responsibilities at home – it all takes time. So take time for what matters most. Make certain times "non-negotiable" (prayer times, devotions, date nights) – or other things steal them from you. Let your family be a place where Christ's love is evident to all, that he is the one you follow and serve today and forever. Amen.