1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Joshua
Theme: Strong and Courageous

Overview: Israel had longed for the Promised Land for years, and now God was about to keep his word. In this unit, students will learn from the book of Joshua that God is faithful to keep all his promises, that he is a God who saves even the most unlikely people, and that his people must choose to serve him faithfully.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The book does not name its author, but Jewish tradition credits Joshua himself, who "recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God" (Joshua 24:26). Some details, such as the account of Joshua's death and burial (24:29-33), were likely added later by another inspired writer, possibly Eleazar the priest or his son Phinehas.

Audience

Joshua was written for the people of Israel to remind them how God brought them into the land he had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to call each new generation to choose to serve the Lord.

Date

The events of Joshua span roughly 25 years, from Israel's crossing of the Jordan River to Joshua's death at age 110. Many conservative scholars place the conquest around 1406 BC, about 40 years after the exodus.

Setting

After 40 years in the wilderness and the death of Moses, Israel stood on the east bank of the Jordan River opposite Jericho. The lessons in this study move from the miraculous crossing of the Jordan at flood stage, to Rahab's house in the wall of Jericho, to Shechem, where Joshua gathered the people to renew the covenant before his death.

Theme

Be strong and courageous because God keeps his promises. God told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). In the end, "Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled" (21:45). God gave the land, saved those who trusted him, and called his people to serve him alone.

Why Study Joshua?

Joshua reminds believers that God is faithful, that he saves, and that serving him is a choice each generation must make. This study calls believers to be strong and courageous because God keeps all his promises, because our God is a God who saves, and because we, like Joshua, can declare, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1:	Joshua 3:7-17; 21:43-45; 23:1-5
WEEK 2:	Joshua 2:1-16; 6:15-25
WEEK 3:	Joshua 24:1, 14-28, 31

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Be strong and courageous; God is faithful to keep all his promises.**

STUDY: Joshua

THEME: Strong and Courageous

LESSON TEXT: Joshua 3:7-17; 21:43-45; 23:1-5

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Genesis 17:3-8; Deuteronomy 1:8; 31:6-8; Romans 4:16, 17

THE PROMISED LAND

BY MARK SCOTT

Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (*English Standard Version*). Israel had longed for the Promised Land for years. Their hearts were sick for their real home. Their desire was about to be fulfilled. All they had to do was cross the Jordan River—at flood stage.

Joshua's leadership was firmly in place (chapter 1). Israel's spies had been successful in their scouting mission—aided by Rahab (chapter 2). Now Israel was ready to move toward the Jordan River (chapter 3). Israel was to follow the Levitical priests who were carrying the ark of the covenant.

The Promised Land Entered

Joshua 3:1-17

The progression of the text is that God spoke to Joshua, then Joshua spoke to the Israelites, and then Israel crossed the Jordan. To bolster Joshua's leadership clout in the eyes of Israel, God promised that he would *exalt* (magnify or make great) him as he had done with Moses. This was accomplished by crossing the Jordan River (Joshua 4:14). God's promise of his presence always reassured his leaders.

Joshua passed on God's message to the Israelites. He beckoned them to come and *listen* ("hear" from the Hebrew word, *shema*). He promised that they would discern the presence of the living God by how he drove out the seven "ites" who occupied the land flowing with milk and honey. Joshua's words were emphatic. He said God would *certainly* drive out these nations. When the Hebrew language wants to strongly emphasize something, it piles up the same word. That is what happened here. Literally, "In driving out, I will drive out" these peoples. Israel did not have to worry about it getting done. God would do it.

The rock crew (one man from each of the twelve tribes, Joshua 4:2-10) would assist the priests in this crossing. While the priests bearing the ark of the covenant stood in the water allowing Israel to cross, the rock crew was to select stones to build a memorial to commemorate this historic moment. The people broke camp and the event happened as promised. Reminiscent of the Israelites' departure from Egypt—and perhaps close to where Elisha would later strike the Jordan (Exodus 15:8; Psalm 78:13; 2 Kings 2:8), the river dried up so the people could cross into the Promised Land.

The Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee in the north (which is 654 feet below sea level) south for 70 miles to the Dead Sea (1,300 feet below sea level). The change in elevation is significant—especially with the river at flood stage. We know that the crossing was opposite Jericho. If Adam near Zarethan can be rightly identified, then the waters heaped up 15 miles north. That breadth would actually be needed for the thousands of Israelites to cross over. (See Mark Ziese's *College Press NIV Commentary: Joshua*, 113-115 for the logistics of this event.) Two earthquakes at different times dammed up the Jordan River (once on December 8, 1267, for 10 hours and once on July 11, 1927, for 21 hours), but what is described in this Scripture seems miraculous. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck) suggests that through this event "God was glorified, Joshua was exalted, Israel was encouraged, and the Canaanites were terrified."

The Promised Land Secured

Joshua 21:43-45; 23:1-5

Crossing the Jordan River did not secure the land. There was a healthy tension between God "giving" Israel the land and Israel having to "take" the land. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility have to work in harmony. Many battles had to be fought. And while not every enemy had been defeated completely, Israel secured the land. The first part of this text took place following the allotment of the land and before the eastern tribes (Reuben, Gad, and one-half the tribe of Manasseh) headed to their home.

God gave Israel the land and fulfilled his promise to their *ancestors* (fathers). In addition, he gave them *rest* on every side. God did this in pieces (Deuteronomy 7:22), but not one of his good *promises* (words) *failed* (was cast down). After a long time (10 to 20 years), Joshua gave his farewell speech to his people. He reminded them of what God had done for them and of what they had yet to do. The land from the Jordan River on the east to the Great Sea on the west was to be Israel's land. The Promised Land was a gift from a God who kept his promises.

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HOW FAR CAN YOU SEE?

BY DAVID FAUST

How far can you see into the distance? With 20/20 vision you can read the optometrist's eye chart accurately at a distance of 20 feet, but healthy human eyes can see a lot farther than that. Those fluffy white cumulus clouds floating overhead are probably more than 2,000 feet away, and you can see the moon though it's 238,855 miles from Earth and the sun though it's 93 million miles away.

How far can you see into the future? Maybe you've heard the advice, "Dream 20 years ahead, think 10 years ahead, plan five years ahead." The problem is, we don't even know what lies one day ahead. Sometime in the future the return of Christ, the resurrection, and the final judgment lie ahead. And here is another sure thing: Our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will live with the consequences of decisions we make today.

Joshua's Error

Tim Underwood preaches for a church in a neighboring state. He's about half my age. For the last five years we have eaten lunch together once a month at the same restaurant (Skyline Chili). We talk about sports, life, and ministry. I learn a lot from him and hopefully he learns some things from me. Because his name is Timothy, and because he has wanted to be a preacher since he was young, Tim says his favorite Bible verse is 1 Timothy 4:12: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers."

During a recent lunch conversation, Tim brought up the biblical character Joshua. He asked, "Do you know Joshua's biggest mistake?"

"No," I said. "Joshua did a lot of things right. He even gave us the inspirational quote, 'As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'"

"Yes, he did great things," Tim replied. "But Joshua had one big flaw. He didn't prepare a successor."

It's a good point to ponder. The Bible says, "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel" (Joshua 24:31). It didn't take long, though, for them to forget God's covenant. "After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

Overcoming Generational Entropy

Every generation needs to know the Lord. The gospel's progress must never stall or stop. Moses passed the leadership baton to Joshua. David handed the kingdom to Solomon. Timothy and Titus extended Paul's ministry. Who will succeed you? Who will continue your work? How can you help the next generation reach the Promised Land?

The Lord wants his precepts taught "so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children" (Psalm 78:6). Immediately after Peter's exhortation in Acts 2:38 (repent and be baptized) comes the vision of Acts 2:39: "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off."

An 8-year-old boy told my friend Tim that he wants to be a preacher himself someday. The boy said, "I feel like I'm a little one of you." That boy can see pretty far. I hope we can, too.

Personal Challenge:

Invite someone from a different generation than your own to meet you for lunch or coffee. Whatever else you discuss, include this question: "What can we learn from each other about faith in God?"

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are you most grateful for right now?

2. When did you need courage and strength this past week?
   - What challenges did you face as you sought to obey God and the leaders he has put in place?
   - Who did you encourage last week?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Joshua 3:7-17** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Repeat the process with **Joshua 21:43-45** and then **Joshua 23:1-5**. Ask the third person to retell the story from all three passages as if telling it to a group of fifth-graders at Vacation Bible School.

3. What stood out to you from these passages?

4. Let's look more closely at some of the specifics in the narrative.
   - Consider the scene in Joshua 3. What challenges did Joshua and the people face through different parts of the story?
   - Look through the passages for the names Joshua used when he spoke about God. What do each of these names imply about his view of God?
   - What do they tell you about his relationship with God?
   - What do they reveal about Joshua's leadership?

5. Based on what you have learned about God from this passage and your own life, what name would you use for God? (for example, Living God, Lord, Faithful, Provider, Promise-Keeper).

6. What do you learn about your own faith and about obeying God from these passages?

7. Based on today's passages and our discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

8. Suggest someone we as a group can be praying for this week from among your friends who do not know the Lord.

9. What big challenge will you be facing this week?

For Next Week: Sometime over the next week, read and reflect on **Joshua 2:1-16; 6:15-25** as we continue studying Joshua and the theme, "Strong and Courageous." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Be strong and courageous; our God is a God who saves.**

STUDY: Joshua

THEME: Strong and Courageous

LESSON TEXT: Joshua 2:1-16; 6:15-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Hebrews 11:31; Psalm 20:6-9; 34:7

RAHAB SAVED

BY MARK SCOTT

Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." Rahab the prostitute did that. Psalm 34:7 says, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them." Rahab the prostitute experienced that. As we continue our study in Joshua and Judges this month, we focus this week on Rahab. Her name occurs 14 times in the Bible (albeit some of the references refer figuratively to Egypt or one of God's enemies). But Rahab the person is mentioned in four books of the Bible (Joshua, Matthew, Hebrews, and James). Her name means "wide." Even though she had been a prostitute, she married Salmon and gave birth to Boaz, which placed her in Jesus' genealogy (Matthew 1:5).

Two passages from this book of conquest were selected for this lesson. Following God's commission of Joshua in chapter 1, Rahab hid Israel's spies in chapter 2. In chapters 3 and 4 Israel crossed over into the Promised Land, and in chapter 5 God's covenant was renewed with Israel in the new land. Chapter 6 tells the story of the conquering of Jericho.

Rahab's Lie

Joshua 2:1-7

While Israel waited at Shittim (seven miles east of the river) to cross the Jordan, Joshua sent two spies to *look over* (inspect) and *spy out* (search) the land. Jericho was a very ancient city and a key city to rout to begin the conquest. How the spies found their way to Rahab's house is not known. But they *stayed there* (lay down there). Someone squealed about the spies coming to Rahab's house so the king sent a message to have the spies *brought in* (arrested?).

Rahab had hidden the men in her house, which was "part of the city wall" (2:15). Rahab told the Jericho police that the men had been there but left. That was a lie. Rahab had hidden the spies under some stalks drying on her roof. But Rahab was not commended for lying. She was commended for acting in faith (Hebrews 11:31). This was not the first time God leveraged a lie to accomplish his larger purpose (Genesis 12:13). Rahab not only lied, she gave false directions and sent the Jericho authorities on a wild-goose chase. The police headed toward the *fords* (passages) to the Jordan River. The city gate was shut for the night, so the Israeli spies were safe.

Rahab's Lord

Joshua 2:8-16

Rahab gave what amounted to a confession of faith. She switched sides and began to play for God's team. Rahab had heard the word on the street. She must have emboldened the spies by telling them a reassuring bedtime story. She had heard of the exodus (Exodus 14). She had heard of the defeat of the kings (Numbers 21:21-25). She knew the gig was up for the nations living in the land of Canaan. Three times she referenced how great fear had fallen on them. No doubt, this caused them to remember God's words (Exodus 23:23; Deuteronomy 2:25). As a result, Rahab acknowledged that *the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below*.

Rahab requested that the spies *swear* (take an oath) to show *kindness* (the great verb "*chesed*" which appears 250 times in the Old Testament—and three times in this text—meaning mercy or loving-kindness) when they conquered the city. She pleaded for her life and the lives of her family members. The spies agreed to her terms so long as she kept their secret. She helped them escape by a rope through the window—the Israelites would see the rope as they marched around the city for the next six days.

Rahab's Liberation

Joshua 6:15-25

God gave the Israelites very specific instructions about how to take the city of Jericho (6:1-14). When the seventh day came, the people marched around Jericho seven times, a total of perhaps three hours. On the seventh circuit, the trumpets blared and the people shouted. The wall *collapsed* (lie prostrate or fall flat), and they took the city. But Rahab and her clan were *spared* (allowed to live). The spies kept their word.

Israel was allowed to put the silver, gold, bronze, and iron into their treasury. But the *devoted things* (cursed things) were to be burned. The Ras Shamra tablets indicated that these devoted things were idolatrous and very licentious. Sin is desperately contagious, as Achan learned (Joshua 7:10-26), so God ordered the devoted things destroyed. Rahab was liberated, but through her womb the whole world would one day be liberated.

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THE RAHAB REHAB

BY DAVID FAUST

Most family trees contain some bad apples. My parents proudly informed me that our ancestors include notable figures such as Johnny Appleseed, William Penn, and General George Patton. However, in German my last name means "fist," so I suspect my family tree also includes some horse thieves and barroom brawlers.

Jesus' family tree in Matthew 1 includes some shady characters. Names that appear on the first page of the New Testament remind us of Jacob's conniving, David and Bathsheba's adultery, Solomon's hundreds of marriages, and the wickedness of King Ahaz and King Manasseh. These ragged-edged stories remind us that the people we read about in the Bible are not make-believe, fairy-tale characters. They are real flesh-and-blood people with messy lives. And so are we.

Jesus' genealogy includes Rahab, who lived in a pagan city so morally depraved that even its elevation was low. (If you search Google for "What is the lowest city on earth?" the answer is Jericho.) The guest register at Rahab's inn was like a logbook of her past sins, and her story in Joshua 2 reads like a movie script complete with spies, cover-ups, and daring escapes. Her name, which to me sounds a lot like *rehab*, appears three times in the New Testament. Matthew 1 includes Rahab in the family tree of Jesus, Hebrews 11 recognizes her faith, and James 2 says she put her faith into action. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the blood flowing in his veins contained some of rough-edged Rahab's DNA.

Rahab serves as a vivid example of what Jesus told his self-righteous critics: "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Matthew 21:31). God specializes in rehabilitating, reconciling, and restoring broken people. You and I could benefit from a Rahab rehab! Here are three questions to consider.

Will You Invite the Lord into Your Mess?

We all have done unsavory and embarrassing things. None of this surprises God. Instead of trying to hide from him, we should invite the Lord into the ugly stuff and seek his forgiveness. Just as the tax collectors Matthew and Zacchaeus did, let's invite the Lord into our homes and hearts.

Do You Have Now-and-Then Religion or Everyday Faith?

Rahab put her faith into action, risking her life to protect the spies. Her example reminds us that faith without works is dead (James 2:25, 26).

Our faith should be active 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Now-and-then religion comes and goes, but everyday faith affects how we handle our time and money. It shapes how we manage our relationships with others at home, work, and school. Now-and-then religion might generate an occasional spiritual high, but everyday faith brings us into the Lord's presence 365 days a year. Why settle for now-and-then religion when Jesus offers the adventure of everyday faith?

Is There Hope in Your Window?

The scarlet-colored cord in Rahab's window served as a symbol of hope. Rahab trusted God to save her, and that was the best homeowner's insurance policy in Jericho.

God can make our scarlet sins white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). Like a scarlet cord, the blood of Christ offers hope that rough-edged sinners like us can be included in the Lord's family tree.

Personal Challenge:

In your prayer journal or on a sheet of paper, write down one area of your life that you would like God to "rehab" (rehabilitate and make new).

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What answers to prayer did you receive over the last week?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Joshua 2:1-16** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask the same two readers to each read **Joshua 6:15-25**. Ask the third person to retell the story in their own words as if telling it to a group of adolescents.

2. What, if anything, surprises you from these passages?

3. Let's look more closely at some of the details:
   - In what parts of this narrative do you see faith displayed?
   - What did the people of Jericho know and how did they feel about the Israelites?
   - How would you describe Rahab's faith in God? (Would you say it was based on facts or feelings? How "mature" was it? How did she put it into action?)
   - How would you describe the relationship between Rahab and the spies?
   - What did Rahab surrender and accept in order to put her faith in Israel's God?
   - What commands does God give the Israelites in our passage from Joshua 6?

4. What do you learn about God and his power from this story?

5. What do you learn about human nature?

6. What do you learn about obeying God?
   - How are faith, obedience, and devotion to the Lord connected?

7. How will you show kindness this week . . . and to whom?

8. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

9. What challenges will you face this week?

For Next Week: Sometime over the next week, read and reflect on **Joshua 24:1, 14-28, and 31** as we finish studying Joshua and our theme, "Strong and Courageous." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Be strong and courageous; serve the Lord faithfully.**

STUDY: Joshua

THEME: Strong and Courageous

LESSON TEXT: Joshua 24:1, 14-28, 31

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Timothy 3:10-17

SERVE THE LORD

BY MARK SCOTT

T. S. Eliot wrote, "For those who serve the greater cause may make the cause serve them." A remarkable deception of the enemy is in duping believers into thinking they deserve God to serve them (cf. Luke 17:10). But everything good that happened for Israel (or the church, for that matter) occurred only by the grace of God.

We come to the end of this book of conquest. After God's judgment on Achan for his covetousness (Joshua 7), the land finally was settled by the tribes of Israel (chapters 8–21)—though not all of the enemies had been defeated. The two and one-half tribes from the eastern side of Jordan had returned home (chapter 22). Joshua made his farewell speech (chapter 23), and the covenant was renewed (chapter 24). But with Joshua soon to be gone, would Israel serve the Lord?

Serve Him with Faithfulness

Joshua 24:1, 14, 15

The place where Joshua chose to renew the covenant was significant. Abraham built an altar in Shechem the first time he ever passed through Canaan (Genesis 12:6, 7). Shechem was where Jacob stopped to bury the foreign idols when he returned home (Genesis 35:4). And Shechem was where Joshua renewed the covenant with Israel the first time (Joshua 8:30-35).

So, Joshua got everyone together—the *elders* (ancient ones), the *leaders* (heads or chiefs), the *judges* (defenders or avengers), and the *officials* (rulers or overseers). Joshua reviewed the Israelites' history (24:2-13); he spoke of the wandering of the patriarchs and the exodus from Egypt.

Serve is the key term in these verses and in this lesson. The word appears at least a dozen times in the lesson text and 290 times in the Hebrew Bible. Joshua called on the people to fear and serve God with all *faithfulness* (truth). The way this faithfulness would be evident was in Israel's "throwing away" (a phrase that appears again in 24:23) foreign gods. Idolatry was in their DNA (via Abraham before he heard God's call, while being tempted in Egypt, and in their current experience with the Amorites).

Joshua placed before Israel a challenge. If it seemed *undesirable* (evil) to them to serve the Lord, they could elect to be idolaters. But in a moment of tremendous self-disclosure, Joshua famously announced, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Even if he were the only one, Joshua would remain faithful (cf. 2 Timothy 2:11-13).

Serve Him in Contrast to Others

Joshua 24:16-24

This part of our text is a dialogue between Israel and Joshua. They spoke, and then he spoke, and then they spoke, etc. Joshua had warned the Israelites against being idolaters. They said they would not worship idols. Then Joshua told them they could not serve God (because God was holy, and they were not). They replied, "No! We will serve the Lord." Then Joshua said, "OK, you are witnesses against yourselves." They said, "OK."

Israel said they would not *forsake* (loosen or depart from) the Lord. Israel acknowledged that God had redeemed them out of the *land* (house) of Egypt, performed miracles, provided for them in the wilderness, and *drove out* (threw out) the nations from their homeland. Israel agreed to serve God because God was God.

Joshua reminded the people that Israel's God was holy and jealous. Their God would not take lightly to *rebellion* (transgression) and sin. In fact, if Israel forsook the Lord and served idols, then God would bring *disaster* (evil) on them. Israel claimed loyalty to God by pledging (establishing a witness) to serve the Lord. Joshua told them a second time to throw away the foreign gods and *yield* (extend or stretch) their hearts to the Lord. Israel agreed to *obey* (hear) God.

Serve Him in Covenant

Joshua 24:25-28, 31

Joshua renewed God's covenant with Israel for a second time. He *reaffirmed* (put in place) the *decrees* (commandments) and the *laws* (judgments) at Shechem. Joshua did two things to underline this moment. First, he *recorded* (wrote) these things in a book. Second, he buried it by an oak tree under a stone. He even personified the stone by saying the stone had heard this renewal of the covenant. Then Joshua sent the people home.

In verses 29 and 30, we read of Joshua's death. He lived to the age of 110. Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and of those Joshua equipped to lead. But next came the book of Judges.

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YOU HAVE A CHOICE

BY DAVID FAUST

It's unfortunate that expressions like "pro-choice" and "the right to choose" have been co-opted by abortion advocates. When properly understood, the ability to choose is one of God's greatest gifts.

We don't get to choose our birthdays, our height, or the color of our skin. But we decide what we believe, what we value, and who our friends will be. Faith, hope, and love are choices more than feelings. At age 20, I decided to ask a young woman named Candy to marry me, and I remain grateful she chose to say yes.

Rock or Sand

What kind of relationship will we choose to have with God? He determines what is right or wrong, but we decide whether we will do right or wrong. We can't escape all hardship and suffering, but we decide how we'll respond to them. When the coronavirus pandemic struck this year, many things were out of our control, but we could choose to live by faith and love our neighbors well. Every day we choose the Lord's way or our own way, the narrow gate or the wide gate. We decide to honor the Lord or dishonor him, to build our lives on rock or on sand.

In his farewell speech to the Israelites, Joshua challenged the people to choose wisely. He used a form of the word *serve* six times in two verses:

> *Now fear the Lord and **serve** him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped . . . and **serve** the Lord. But if **serving** the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will **serve**, whether the gods your ancestors **served** . . . or the gods of the Amorites. . . . But as for me and my household, we will **serve** the Lord (Joshua 24:14, 15, emphasis mine).*

Choosing to Serve

If we have made bad choices (and who hasn't?) there still is hope, because, as Max Lucado points out, God even "repurposes bad decisions and squalid choices," turning "debris into the divine, pig's ear into silk purse." Here are three important points that can help us choose wisely.

Serving God is a personal choice. "Choose for yourselves," Joshua said. No one else can make this decision for you. Even if you grew up in a Christian home with parents who love the Lord, you must make a personal choice. Will you serve him, too? Has God blessed you with spiritual shepherds—godly friends and faithful teachers who help you understand God's Word? Merely hearing God's truth isn't enough. Have you decided to trust and obey?

Serving God is an urgent choice. "Choose . . . this day." Don't wait for a more convenient time. Don't wait till all your problems are resolved. Don't wait until you graduate or retire. "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Serving God is a far-reaching choice. "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." This emphatic declaration came from an old man. Joshua died at age 110 (Joshua 24:29), so by now his offspring were senior adults themselves! Our choices have long-lasting consequences, affecting generations yet to come. That's why Moses exhorted the people, "Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Personal Challenge:

In your prayer journal or on a piece of paper, write these words and fill in the blank: "To better serve God, this week I will decide to _____."

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you show kindness to someone this past week?
2. What struggles have you faced over the last week?

Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **Joshua 24:1, 14-28, 31** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. (Option: Read Joshua 24:1-31.) Ask the third person to retell the story in their own words as if telling it to a group of kids at Vacation Bible School.

3. What key terms do you see in this passage?
4. Let's look more closely at some of the details:
   - What are some specific ways the people could demonstrate they were choosing to serve and obey God?
   - How would you characterize Joshua's challenges to the leaders?
   - What words and phrases are used to describe God in this passage?
   - What did these leaders say and do to help the following generations continue to make the right choices?
5. What do you learn about God from this narrative?
6. What do you learn about human nature?
7. What do you learn about obedience in this passage?
   - What is the relationship between forsaking other gods, yielding your heart to God, serving him, and obeying him?
8. What can you do to pass on your choices to serve and obey God to the next generations?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenges will you face this week?

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.