

## A Father's Day Challenge

This is Father's Day & I want to bring an appropriate message. I have been thinking a lot lately about that Old Testament character named **Joshua!** He is a most striking example of godly fatherhood! Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel. The torch of leadership had been passed from Moses to Joshua, & Joshua carried on the work by leading Israel into the Promised Land. **Joshua was an outstanding leader!**

In the Book of Joshua, chapter 24, we find Joshua gathering the Israelites together, & then he gave an appeal that **throughout the centuries of time has moved the hearts of many!** After giving a brief historical sketch that reminded the Israelites of the great things God had done for them, Joshua laid down a challenge that **called for a response!** In **Joshua 24:14** he issued this challenge: **"Now, therefore, fear the Lord, & serve Him in sincerity & in truth."** And then in verse 15, Joshua clearly states his own intent: **"As for me & my house, we will serve the Lord!"**

**Oh, that fathers everywhere would say the same!** Our text reveals the **consecrated attitude** of a great man of God in relation to his own household! Joshua makes a decision, then makes an announcement! First, he decides that he personally is going to serve the Lord, & He makes that decision for everyone in his family; his wife & his children! Secondly, he made an announcement! He said, "As for me & my house, we will serve the Lord!" **That is a big statement!** As a responsible father, Joshua established God as the center of his home! **The subject before us this morning is one of great & grave importance!**

An article found in the *Evangelical Advocate* a few years ago asked the question: "Where Are The Fathers?" At a women's Bible class, one wife asked wistfully: **"What can I do as a wife, to encourage my husband to be the religious leader in the home?"** The leader of the group was amazed at how nearly every woman in the group picked up on this question. You would have thought they were all married to non-believers, which was not the case at all. Most of their husbands were Christians; some even leaders in their churches, **yet** nearly every woman in the room felt they had the total responsibility for the religious training of the children! **Oh, that fathers everywhere would take responsibility for the spiritual leadership in the home, & say with Joshua: "As for me & my house, we will serve the Lord!"**

I read about one father who made such a decision! He had a little plaque hung in his home with this very text on it: **"As for me & my house, we will serve the Lord!"** He was very successful in leading his entire family to serve the Lord, with one exception! His son named **Henry.** He could never get Henry to serve the Lord! His daughters served the Lord; his other sons served the Lord; his wife served the Lord; but **Henry** would have nothing to do with Christ or religion! The father wept & prayed much about it! Years went by, & one day while sitting in the room looking at the plaque **"As for me & my house, we will serve the Lord!"** -- he said, "Lord, I meant that when I hung it on the wall. I've done my best to get my family to serve the Lord, but I haven't succeeded with Henry. And I cannot go on proclaiming the lie any longer; my house is not serving the Lord. I must change the plaque, or take it down altogether." He did not want to take it down, because most of the members of the family were serving the Lord. So he took a pencil & added two words: **"except Henry."**

Henry came in a few days later & saw what his dad had done. "Daddy," he said, "what do you mean, 'except Henry'? Don't you want me to serve the Lord?" "Yes, Henry," the father said, "I want you to serve the Lord. But I have begged you to accept Christ. I have prayed for you. You won't go to church nor have anything to do with Christ or religion. So I couldn't have that lie on the wall any longer. It will have to read like it is if it stays on the wall."

Henry's heart was broken; the Holy Spirit convicted him of his sinfulness, & then & there Henry trusted Christ as Savior. His father then erased the words, "except Henry" & the plaque stayed on the wall of the family home!

We may not always succeed in leading our children to the Lord, but as fathers, we ought to first resolve that we personally are going to serve the Lord, then we ought to do all within our power to help our family members to do the same! **I believe you can tell the home where Jesus lives!** There is a blessed peace, a happiness, a gentleness, & a love not found in the homes of the world! The storms may beat upon the Christian's home, but it stands firm & fast! Sorrows, like sea billows may roll against its walls, but it stands! The sun may refuse to shine for weeks & months & years, but the **Christian home** has comfort & cheer!

The first great essential in the building of a Christian home is **to receive Jesus personally into our own heart!** After our acceptance of Christ personally, there are still some things we need to do in order to make our home a Christian home. There are three steps we can each take in this great effort: --

### 1. The First Step is: -- Honor the Church!

One reason for the sinking condition of so many homes is the failure to attend the house of God faithfully! The church is here to minister to the spiritual needs of the family! We all need to be apart of a good Bible-believing church!

By being faithful in your own church attendance, you set the tone, & the example, for the rest of your family! Your children will pick up quickly just how important the church is in your life, especially as they grow into teenagers. **Fathers, set the right tone! Show them by your example how important church attendance truly is!**

Stay true to the church, even through difficult times! I can name a number of examples where the mother & father use to attend church regularly, & their children came with them! Today, the parents come only occasionally, & the children not at all! **The first step to a backslidden Christian life is to absent oneself from the house of God!**

When I say that we ought to attend the services of the church, I speak of all the services! May I say it kindly, **too many people have a Sunday-morning only type of religion!** You cannot build a solid Christian home on anything as shallow as that!

Not only do we need to be faithful in attendance, but we also need to honor the church by the giving of our **tithe**; & we need to honor the church by giving our **talents** to the Lord's work! **There is such a desperate need for fathers who will get involved in the Lord's work!**

## 2. The Second Step is: -- Honor the Word of God!

You cannot hope to build a Christian home without daily consulting God's guide Book! Almost every home in America has a Bible, but the Bible is read in so few homes. Oh what a shame! We **revere** the Bible far more than we **read** the Bible!

**Here is the rule book for your home!** The Bible should be read aloud, in the presence of your family, hopefully every day! Find a time suitable to the family, & read at least a verse from the Bible every day! Use a good daily devotional if you need! It may be at the breakfast hour, or it may be at the evening meal -- or it might be before retiring at night. If you are willing to pay the price to put first things first, then your home will truly be blessed by the reading of the Word of God! **A dusty Bible will never bring blessings to your home.** The Bible should be read, yea, even to be worn out with much reading!

Richard Baxter (a reform preacher of a century ago), as a young preacher, was called to a large parish composed primarily of people who seemed more interested in their social status than in their understanding & obeying the Word of God. Young Baxter was disturbed by the spiritual coldness of his church members, & found his work extremely difficult. After much prayer & heart-searching to know the will of God, the young pastor felt he had received the answer! He said to a friend, **"I believe the way to save the church & this community is to establish family altars in the homes of my church members."**

He spent the next three years in visitation, earnestly pleading with his people to set aside a time each day for prayer & Bible reading. Soon his congregation began to catch fire with a new zeal for God! As a result, the church was revived. The ministry of that church became increasingly effective, because many of Baxter's people had followed the example of the patriarch Joshua, who declared unequivocally, **"As for me & my house, we will serve the Lord!"**

## 3. The Third Step is: -- Honor the Place of Prayer!

You will find that **serious prayer will put your home in direct contact with God!** Prayer is the key to every needed thing! Prayer is the way to victory! Prayer is the cord which binds us together! Prayer will drive out bitterness, harshness, & a lot of other unwanted attitudes! **The more we pray, the more blessed & happy will be the home!**

Children should be taught the meaning of prayer! Prayerless young people come out of prayerless homes!

Years ago, a couple by the names of John & Janet Paton felt the need for serving God. They lived in a simple cottage on a small piece of land, but they successfully raised 11 children. This godly couple would have been unknown to the world, had not one of their sons become **the famous missionary, John G. Paton!** As a small lad, young John would often press his ear against the door of the little room where his father was **praying**, for he wanted to hear every word!

Many years later, Paton praised his father by saying: **"Never in temple or cathedral, on mountain or in glen, can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking & talking with men, than under that humble cottage roof. There were 11 of us brought up in that home, & all of us came to think of the church as the dearest spot on earth, & the Lord's day the brightest day of the week, all because our dear father knew how to pray!"**

Although forgiveness & eternal life cannot be transmitted automatically to children from their parents, Christian faith can become a family affair! **Strong parental leadership can influence a household to walk in godliness!** Joshua set the tone for his family when he said: **"As for me & my house, we will serve the Lord!"** A child may not inherit his father's talents, but he will **absorb** his father's values!

**America needs Christians homes**, where the church & where the Bible, & where prayer are honored! **As goes our homes, so goes the nation!** Joshua said: "Choose you this day whom you will serve, **as for me & my house, we will serve the Lord!**" You can train up a child in the way he should go, but be sure you go that way yourself first!

**Conclusion:** -- In conclusion, let me draw your attention to three things we see in this text: --

Notice first of all that **we must make a choice!** "Choose." All fathers everywhere must make a choice, between the narrow road that leads to bliss -- & the broad road that leads to eternal destruction; -- between life & death; between heaven & hell; between God & the devil! To refuse Christ leaves us automatically on the devil's side! Jesus said: "He who is not with me is against me."

Notice secondly, that this choice is a **personal** choice! "Choose **you** this day whom **you** will serve." Choose for yourselves! Through faith in Jesus Christ, we can be born again, & made a child of God! But **you** must do the believing for **yourself!** No one else can make that choice for you; not your wife; not your children; not your parents; not your pastor! You must choose for yourself!

Notice thirdly, there is an **urgency** in the charge! Choose you **this day** whom you will serve"; not tomorrow; not a week from today; not next month; but **this day!** -- for "you know not what a day may bring forth!" (Proverb 27:1).

Now let me ask you today, father, have you made that all-important choice? Have you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Can you say, dear father, "**The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of my life personally, & He is Head of my home**"? If not, **why not do so right now!** Remember, the choice is **yours** to make!

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Father's Day -- June 15, 2014 -- Sunday Morning