

CHALLENGED

Faithfulness grows through reflection, evaluation, and renewed commitment to God.

JOSHUA 24:14-28

MEMORY VERSE: JOSHUA 24:15

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** Joshua 23:1–24:33, First Thoughts (p. 64), and Understand the Context (pp. 64-65). Make notes about words and phrases that may require additional explanation during the Bible study session.
- **STUDY** Joshua 24:14-28, using the commentary found on pages 65-69. Be prepared to discuss the qualities of Joshua's devotion and how Jesus demands our complete devotion.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 70-71). Modify your group plans using More Ideas (p. 72) and ideas online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Recruit a volunteer from the group, possibly a potential apprentice leader, to review the ideas with you and offer suggestions.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Group Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: ☐ **PACK ITEM 12** (Poster: Joshua 24:15).



KEY DOCTRINE

Salvation

Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Shechem" in the Winter 2016-17 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

BIBLE SKILL

Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation.

Write Joshua 24:15 in your preferred Bible translation on one side of a card. On the other side, write the verse in your own words. Use the card to memorize and reflect on the verse. How does sharing the affirmation of Joshua 24:15 with your household provide a foundation for that household? How can you use that testimony to witness to others?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Several colleges and universities provide a last lecture series. This is an ongoing series of lectures where professors and other academics are asked to present a lecture as if it is their final "talk." The intent is for them to think deeply about what wisdom they would impart if they knew that the presentation they were about to make would be their last.

(In PSG, p. 63) **If you were asked to present such a lecture to a school or at work, what key points would you want to make?**

At the end of the Book of Joshua, we find Joshua making his last public address to the Israelites. Joshua would soon die, and he challenged the Israelites to follow the Lord faithfully into the days ahead. Having personally witnessed many occurrences, he knew the Hebrews could be unfaithful to the Lord. He remembered many of them dying in the wilderness because of their unfaithfulness (see Num. 14:26-34). Joshua undoubtedly knew that faithfulness grows through reflection, evaluation, and renewed commitment to God.

Faithful living can help us become the people God wants us to be. Joshua challenged the people to move ahead in a dynamic relationship with God in light of all He had done for them. Today, God still uses the faithfulness of His committed followers to challenge and influence others. He expects His followers to be fully devoted to Him, with no divided allegiances.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOSHUA 23:1–24:33

After the Lord had given Israel rest from their enemies, Joshua summoned his leaders and reminded them of all God had done for them (Josh. 23:1-5). Joshua encouraged Israel to stand strong in faithful obedience to everything in the Law of Moses (vv. 6-8). The people were to serve the Lord alone. He had driven out many peoples in front of Israel, so God's people needed to respond to His faithfulness (vv. 9-11). Joshua warned the Israelites that if they turned away from the Lord and worshiped other gods, the Lord would no longer drive out enemy nations before them (vv. 12-13). Joshua knew he would soon pass from the scene, but God had fulfilled every promise He had made to Israel (v. 14). Joshua assured the Israelites the Lord would bring judgment on them if they turned from Him and violated the terms of His covenant (vv. 15-16).

Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem and reviewed Israel's history for them (24:1). Their ancestors had lived in a different land

and worshiped other gods (v. 2). However, God had brought Abraham to Canaan and blessed him with Isaac (v. 3). At the end of the Book of Genesis, Jacob's family was in Egypt (v. 4). Then, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, God brought the people out of Egypt and rescued them from the Egyptian army (vv. 5-7).

Joshua also described God's faithfulness to His people in the wilderness (vv. 8-10). When the people crossed the Jordan, God provided victory at every turn (vv. 11-12). He gave them a land for which they had not labored, and He gave it to them by grace (v. 13).

Joshua encouraged the people to serve the Lord faithfully and told them that he and his house would serve the Lord (vv. 14-15). When the people responded that they also would serve God (vv. 16-18), Joshua warned them of the serious nature of their commitment (vv. 19-20). They heeded Joshua's words, and Joshua established a covenant with them at Shechem that day (vv. 21-28).

Joshua died at the age of 110 and was buried in his home territory (vv. 29-30). He had served Israel well and left a lasting legacy (v. 31). The text also records the burial of Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt (v. 32), and the burial of Eleazar, son of Aaron (v. 33).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE EXAMPLE SET (JOSH. 24:14-15)

VERSE 14

The word **therefore** highlights the beginning of Joshua's conclusion. First, he challenged them to **fear the LORD**. He wanted deep reverence and awe to characterize their relationship with God. Indeed, if they feared Him, they would not need to fear His judgment. Second, Joshua commanded the people to **worship Him in sincerity and truth**. Third, Joshua challenged the people to **get rid of the gods** to which they still clung. After everything the Israelites had seen, one wonders how this could be, but believers today also can forget God's great works in their own lives. Some Israelites still clung to the deities their fathers **worshiped beyond the Euphrates River** before God called Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Furthermore, while **in Egypt**, some Israelites had begun to worship Egyptian gods (Ezek. 20:7-8).

VERSE 15

Joshua's conditional statement, **if it doesn't please you to worship Yahweh**, again sounds shocking in light of all God had done for His people. However, it is unlikely Joshua was offering them a choice. He was determined to press them to follow the Lord. His command, **choose for yourselves today the one you will worship** challenged God's people to make a commitment of absolute allegiance. Perhaps some would choose **the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River**. We do not know of such gross idolatry during this time, but Joshua likely raised it as an unrealistic option

JOSHUA 24:14

¹⁴ “Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship Yahweh.

JOSHUA 24:15

¹⁵ But if it doesn't please you to worship Yahweh, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh.”

in light of God's faithfulness to Israel. Other people might adopt the **gods of the Amorites** in whose land they were now living. Joshua wanted the people to choose *today*, while the evidence he had rehearsed for them was still fresh in their minds.

Joshua's famous pronouncement—***as for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh***—left no doubt as to what Israel's leader would do. Joshua had long made his decision to follow the Lord. He affirmed that his family would serve God alone.

Today, many Christian homes have a plaque with the words of Joshua 24:15 inscribed on it. All who enter these homes see this commitment posted on the wall. God uses His followers' faithfulness to challenge and influence others. He also expects His followers to be fully devoted to Him.

JOSHUA 24:16-17

¹⁶ The people replied, "We will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods!"

¹⁷ For the LORD our God brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery, and performed these great signs before our eyes. He also protected us all along the way we went and among all the peoples whose lands we traveled through.

JOSHUA 24:18

¹⁸ The LORD drove out before us all the peoples, including the Amorites who lived in the land. We too will worship the LORD, because He is our God."

What kinds of idols do people put alongside their worship of God in today's world? Why is worshiping God alone so important?

THE PEOPLE'S REFLECTION (JOSH. 24:16-18)

VERSES 16-17

The people replied to Joshua with a strong statement of their own. Their resolute words, ***we will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods***, affirmed their desire to follow Joshua's example. They would maintain their word and their commitment to God.

The people affirmed the **LORD** as their **God**. He had brought them and their fathers ***out of the land of Egypt***, where they had served 430 years in slavery (Ex. 12:40-41). He had honored the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 2:24-25). The Lord also had performed many **great signs** as a demonstration of His power. The words ***before our eyes*** recall the great works the Israelites had seen personally. Many of those present had witnessed at least most of the miracles God had done in Egypt and in the wilderness.

The people's affirmation that ***He also protected us all along the way we went*** recalls God's common acts of faithfulness in providing for His people as they journeyed through the wilderness. He fed them with manna (Ex. 16:11-18) and sustained them through many difficult circumstances, teaching them important spiritual lessons (Deut. 8:3). The Lord also protected the Israelites ***among all the peoples*** whose land they traveled through. They were grateful for God's provision and protection along their 40-year journey.

VERSE 18

God's people then affirmed what He had done for them once they entered Canaan—***the LORD drove out before us all the peoples***. The Israelites first gained control over the central territory with victories over Jericho, Ai, and Bethel, along with a treaty with Gibeon (Josh. 6-9). They then conquered

the kings of the southern region (Josh. 10), followed by victories over the kings of the northern region (Josh. 11:1-15). The term **Amorites** seems to be a general term to designate the Canaanite population. They **lived in the land** when Israel entered and naturally did not want to give up their territory. Nonetheless, Israel was able to subdue them both east of the Jordan (Num. 21:21-35) and in Canaan (Josh. 10:5-15).

The Israelites ended their statement as they had begun in verse 16—with a strong commitment of faith. Their words **we too will worship the LORD** stressed the unity they felt both with Joshua and with the other tribes of Israel. Their faith in God united them as one nation. Their further affirmation **He is our God** reflected a total allegiance to the Lord. They would commit themselves to the one who had delivered them from Egypt, provided for them in the wilderness, and given them the promised land.

(In PSG, p. 66) **How has God revealed His faithfulness along your spiritual journey? How does God's past provision serve as motivation for us to remain faithful to Him?**

A SOMBER WARNING (JOSH. 24:19-20)

VERSE 19

Joshua warned the people that remaining faithful to God would be difficult. His words **you will not be able to worship Yahweh** should not be understood literally, for the people indeed had entered into a covenant relationship with Him. Rather, Joshua's words pushed God's people to sober reflection. God was **a holy God** who stood utterly separate from His creation and utterly separate from sin. He also was **a jealous God** who insisted on absolute allegiance from His people and would tolerate no rivals. Indeed, the word translated *jealous* is the same word that occurs in the commandment against graven images and idols (Ex. 20:4-5). Joshua was not communicating that the Lord would refuse to forgive Israel's **transgressions and sins** but rather that they should take their walk with Him seriously.

Sometimes people believe all they need to do is make a profession of faith and all will be well with them. However, God cares deeply about our daily walk with Him. He expects us to demonstrate our faith by doing the good works He has prepared for us to do (Eph. 2:10). Like the Israelites, we should not take our commitment to the Lord lightly. Our relationship with God does not only make life better—our relationship with God is life itself (John 17:3).

VERSE 20

Joshua warned the people what would happen to them if they chose to **abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods**. They had insisted they would not do such a thing (v. 16), but Joshua felt he needed to add an additional warning. The Lord might **turn against** Israel and **harm** them.

JOSHUA 24:19

¹⁹ But Joshua told the people, "You will not be able to worship Yahweh, because He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not remove your transgressions and sins."

JOSHUA 24:20

²⁰ If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, He will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after He has been good to you."

He might even **completely destroy** those who opposed Him. Joshua affirmed **He has been good to you**, but God's goodness in the past did not guarantee present and future blessing if His people strayed from Him.

We should not understand Joshua's challenge to the Israelites as an attempt to terrify them or to put fear in their hearts about their relationship with God. Rather, Joshua was reminding his people to count the cost of worshiping and serving God.

JOSHUA 24:21-22

²¹ "No!" the people answered Joshua. "We will worship the LORD." ²² Joshua then told the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen to worship Yahweh." "We are witnesses," they said.

JOSHUA 24:23-25

²³ "Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you and offer your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." ²⁴ So the people said to Joshua, "We will worship the LORD our God and obey Him." ²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people at Shechem and established a statute and ordinance for them.

How can a proper picture of God inform our walk with Him? Since Jesus died to free us from our sin, what should be our attitude toward sin? (See Rom. 6:1-2.)

A PUBLIC DECLARATION (JOSH. 24:21-28)

VERSES 21-22

The people answered Joshua with a resounding **no!** They insisted that the possible scenario Joshua had suggested would not come to pass. They were committed to God and would remain committed. The words **we will worship the LORD** reaffirmed their commitment.

Joshua told the people they needed to ponder what they had just affirmed. They were **witnesses** against themselves regarding the commitment they had just made, for they all had heard one another making their commitment as one nation. Joshua's adamant words **you yourselves have chosen to worship Yahweh** indicate that although he had strongly encouraged such a decision (vv. 14-15), the decision was truly theirs. The people's response (**we are witnesses**) indicates they assumed full responsibility for their commitment.

VERSES 23-25

Joshua's command to **get rid of the foreign gods that are among you** sounds similar to his words in verse 14. He wanted the people to break totally with their past worship of other gods. The command to **offer your hearts** further stresses Joshua's call for complete commitment.

Today's culture presents believers with many opportunities to compromise their faith, and many lesser things try to take God's place in our lives. The Scriptures challenge us to offer our hearts completely to the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2).

The people responded to Joshua's command with a declaration of their own. The words **we will worship the LORD our God and obey Him** further emphasized the serious nature of their commitment.

On that day, while the people's commitment was still fresh in their minds and on their hearts, **Joshua made a covenant for the people at Shechem**. This covenant further solidified the relationship between God and Israel. God had established a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob (Gen. 28:13). He had further ratified that covenant at Mount Sinai with His people after He led them out of Egypt (Ex. 24:1-8). After Joshua's army took the central region of Canaan, the people had reconfirmed the covenant at Shechem (Josh. 8:30-35). Now, Joshua again confirmed a covenant with the people, that they might walk with the Lord all their days.

The Hebrew word translated **statute** comes from a word that means "to inscribe." It often denotes laws God prescribes (Ex. 18:16; Deut. 4:6). The word translated **ordinance** also can be translated "rules" or "laws." Joshua wanted to establish for the people a baseline practice going forward as a nation. Establishing a covenant with God's people would help them do that.

VERSES 26-28

Joshua recorded these things in the presence of everyone. **The book of the law of God** may refer to part of the Book of Joshua, or it may describe a separate document Joshua prepared for that purpose. He wanted a written testimony to which the people could later refer. Joshua **also took a large stone and set it up** as a memorial marker. Earlier, Joshua had commanded the establishment of a 12-stone memorial where God parted the waters of the Jordan (Josh. 4:1-9). His establishment of this marker **next to the sanctuary of the LORD** would solidify the people's commitment that day. The reference to the *sanctuary* is somewhat peculiar, since Joshua 18:1 mentions the Israelites setting up the tabernacle at Shiloh. Perhaps it merely designated the holy place where they now stood—the very place they had stood when they renewed the covenant earlier in the Book of Joshua (Josh. 8:30-35).

Joshua affirmed before all the people that the stone he set up would stand as **a witness** of that day. Joshua's suggestion that the stone **heard all the words the LORD said** echoes similar sentiments from the prophets and elsewhere where God used the forces of the earth as witnesses against His people (Deut. 30:19; Isa. 1:2). Joshua did not want the Israelites to deny their God and was using every means of encouragement he could.

Joshua sent the people away after finalizing the terms of the covenant with them. All returned to the place of their **inheritance**—that is, to their particular tribal territories.

Believers today need to hold one another accountable for remaining faithful to God. We must help and encourage one another as God provides opportunity (Heb. 10:24-25). True Christian love cares enough to confront a believer who is caught in some kind of trespass (Gal. 6:1).

Our faithfulness to God grows through reflection, evaluation, and renewed commitment. As we consider what God has done in our lives in the past, may we find the grace we need to confirm our commitment to Him for the present and the future.

Why is it important that believers hold one another accountable in their walk with God? How can we do that without damaging relationships?

JOSHUA 24:26-28

²⁶ Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God; he also took a large stone and set it up there under the oak next to the sanctuary of the LORD.

²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, "You see this stone—it will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words the LORD said to us, and it will be a witness against you, so that you will not deny your God."

²⁸ Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

LIST: As the group arrives, direct them to list qualities that could be used to describe someone who is devoted. Record responses.

ASK: *When you were thinking of these qualities, did you have someone in mind? How has this person demonstrated devotion?*

TRANSITION: *Oftentimes the devotion we acknowledge comes from the fruit of a person's life. Joshua would challenge the people to remain devoted. Review Understand the Context for further insight (pp. 64-65; PSG, pp. 63-64).*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Joshua 24:14-15, directing the group to listen for words Joshua used to describe how they were to be different from their ancestors.

EXPLAIN: *Joshua's imperative for the people to fear God and serve Him was a call for their unfettered devotion to God.*

ASK: *What do we know of the people's worship from Joshua's statement? Why does only God deserve worship?* Read Psalm 86:9-11 to support this discussion.

DISCUSS: *What decision did Joshua place before the people? Why is not choosing the same as making a choice?* Joshua's point was not that God would accept the people's worship of false gods over Himself. Joshua was stating that the people could not worship and serve both. Use **Pack Item 12** (Poster: Joshua 24:15) to point out today's memory verse. Discuss how we must decide daily whom or what we will serve: God or our own desires.

DISCUSS: *Joshua's faithfulness served as an example to others. How can one person's faithfulness challenge and influence others for the cause of Christ?* (PSG, p. 65)

TRANSITION: *Joshua's call demanded a response.*

READ: Direct someone to read Joshua 24:16-18.

COMPARE: Guide the group to find similarities between what Joshua stated in verses 2-13 and what the children of Israel affirmed in verses 16-18.

GUIDE: Explain that just as we have been called to share the gospel, we are also telling others about the work of God in our lives. Emphasize that our testimony can help others to see the redemptive power of God and the forgiveness that He offers. Invite a volunteer to share a testimony of the work of God in his or her life, either through salvation or other events.

DISCUSS: *How has God revealed His faithfulness along your spiritual journey? How does God's past provision serve as motivation to remain faithful to Him?* (PSG, p. 66)

TRANSITION: *Joshua's call for the sole worship of God was clear, and the people affirmed God's faithfulness and their desire to follow Joshua's leadership. This led Joshua to give a warning of what would happen if the people desired to turn back.*

READ: Direct the group to read silently Joshua 24:19-20, circling the adjectives used to describe God in this passage.

ANALYZE: Lead the group to analyze the warning given by Joshua. Look for clues in the tone of the warning, the reasons for remaining faithful, and the results of disobedience.

DISCUSS: Read Matthew 7:13-14 and Luke 14:27-28. Ask: *How do Jesus' words reflect Joshua's warning?* Emphasize that the call of devotion was not for the wide path but for the narrow path.

ASK: *What costs might a believer incur for remaining faithful to Jesus? What are the dangers of approaching our spiritual commitments lightly or with little thought?* (PSG, p. 67)

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Joshua 24:21-28.

ASK: *Why do you think Joshua asked the people to publicly declare their commitment to God three times (vv. 16-18, 21, 24)?*

DEFINE: Use the Key Doctrine section to provide a definition of "salvation" (PSG, p. 69). Emphasize that the people were not just committing to Joshua; they were also making a statement of faith about whom they believed and trusted.

EXPLAIN: *Joshua used a large stone as a reminder of the choice the people had made on that day. Memorials are significant because they serve as milestones or spiritual markers in life where we reflect upon God's work and our commitment to serve Him.*

ASK: *Why is a public declaration of our faith so important?* (PSG, p. 69)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

SUMMARIZE: *As we reflect upon God's goodness in the milestones of life, our focus should be on seeing God's call for devotion and choosing to serve Him daily. We are to serve God alone! He is worthy of all our worship!*

DISCUSS: Read the first question set under In My Context section on page 70 of the PSG: *Evaluate your scope of influence and how you use that influence. Identify ways you can more readily influence others for the cause of Christ. What actions will you take to be a greater Christian influence in your family, your neighborhood, and your workplace?*

PRAY: Spend time praying in pairs that God will give the group strength to live faithfully for Christ.



PRACTICE

- Contact your group members using various methods (face-to-face, phone call, text message, email, etc.). Remind them to keep up with the study by using their PSG.
- Follow up on any questions or concerns raised during the group time.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As the group arrives, read the first paragraph under First Thoughts in the PSG (p. 63) and lead the group to discuss the question: *Several colleges and universities provide a last lecture series. This is an ongoing series of lectures where professors and other academics are asked to present a lecture as if it is their final “talk.” The intent is for them to think deeply about what wisdom they would impart if they knew that the presentation they were about to make would be their last. Discuss: If you were asked to present such a lecture to a school or at work, what key points would you want to make?*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the teaching of Joshua 24:14-15, discuss: *Where do we typically see pieces of artwork that use this verse?* (Answer: in a home or on a door.) Explain: *In our culture today, there have been people who have made this verse more about the art than about its significance. Even though it is a statement about the presence of God’s principles being established in a home, the verse focuses more on being either “in” or “out” in serving God.*
- To supplement the teaching of Joshua 24:21-28 with the call for the Hebrews’ devotion, create a list of the similarities between the people’s response to Joshua and the statement made by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 7:18. Explain how the circumstances did not dictate whether or not they were devoted to God.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Take the time to reflect upon Joshua 24:15 and its significance to your individual life and family. Use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 65) to learn practical ways to memorize and apply this verse. As time allows, lead the group to discuss the third question set under In My Context on page 70 of the PSG: *Discuss what your Bible study group can do to hold one another accountable in faithfulness to Jesus. Record actions the group agrees to take in light of the discussion.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, lead the group in singing or play a recording of “Living for Jesus,” by Thomas Chisholm.