

“A Father’s Stand”
Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.
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Sometimes a person has to take a stand. A decision has to be made. E.g., I recall on our youth trip this week we literally sat in the car at the crossroads, and a decision had to be made. It was about 6:20 PM on Wednesday, and we did not have supper yet, but it was our only free night on the trip and we wanted to go to the beach. The questions before us were difficult— do we stay at the camp and have a free supper, or take the free supper in the car with us, or do we go to Whataburger down the road— my preference because I was hungry and getting hangry!--- or do we leave and go to the beach and not eat until a few hours later and have more time at the beach since sunset was a little before 8:00 PM and the beaches were about an hour away. Also, if we went straight to the beach, which beach? We could go to Dauphin Island, or Orange Beach? There we sat in our minivan at the crossroads to either exit the camp or go back to camp and get food. The clock was ticking, and we had different opinions in the van. Sometimes life is like that— we have multiple options about how we are to live, and let’s face it, time is running out, and will not wait forever. This is every person’s delimna in life, and especially the Dad’s dilemma as the leader of the family— which path at the crossroads of life do we take as a family? We will see there was a Dad in the Old Testament who sat at the same crossroads, and made a clear decision.

READ Joshua 24:14-15 (p. 216)

CONTEXT: Joshua’s life is about to end. He has just helped the Israelites conquer most of the Promised Land, and he wants to address the Israelites before he leaves them. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges, and officers of Israel and reviewed the history of the Israelites beginning with Abraham and going on to Moses freeing the people from slavery in Egypt and going on to the conquering the Promised Land.

“Joshua is coming to the end of his life, so he gathers the Israelites at Shechem, in the heart of Israel, to remind them of their history and the Lord’s faithfulness.” Keeping stock of what the Lord has done in our lives is very important. E.g., I recall my Dad telling me that every year, after he would complete our income tax return, he would do an analysis of his personal net wealth. This process of doing this was an encouragement to him, as well as a time to give thanks to the Lord for all the ways the Lord had blessed him. His Dad had all the way up to a sixth grade education, and learned to work on automobiles and eventually opened his own car repair shop and gas station. He could see the Lord’s sustaining him through it all. Have you ever done that? E.g., one of the encouraging things to do when you receive your end-of-the-year giving statement from the church and the other such statements and calculate the total amount you were able to give toward God’s work over the past year— it is a reminder of the privilege of giving, and the way the Lord has blessed you and me. Joshua is doing that type of thing with the Israelite leaders.

READ v 14. “In this final speech to God’s people, Joshua puts before them a choice they must make between two options: will they serve the gods of the regions— who are clearly ineffectual and defeated, though oddly tempting? Cf. Judges 2:11-13; 6:10.” Old Testament scholar John Gray in his commentary on Joshua (*Joshua*, p. 180) states that archaeologists have found figurines of the types of gods they worshipped in this area— figurines of hippopotomuses, apes, cats,

Horus' eye (for prosperity and protection), etc. From our vantage point in history we can see the obvious error of worshipping such things. And yet there was a mystery to their strength and life and domination of their environment, so they worshipped the animals. This was very tempting to the ancient Israelites, especially since it seemed all the people surrounding them were doing this. We see a little later in Israel's history during the Judges the Israelites fell into this temptation; READ Judges 2:11-13. We recall Paul in Romans 1:22-25 addressed the pagans' worship: "Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." We may scoff at this and wonder, why was this so tempting? But then we don't have really far to look at our own world to see the temptation to serve and worship the gods of the age. Men know what that is like. We worship at the altar of success and money and recognition. Men have been willing to give up their marriages and children in order to gain what they want. E.g., I recall when I was in Monroe and in my early 30s and I was juggling what I wanted to do— be in ministry full-time and teach a course at Northeast Louisiana University (now, University of Louisiana, Monroe). It was tough juggle. As a pastor I get one day off a week, usually Thursdays. And I found myself having to work on my one day off to get things done. In the home office I had at the parsonage where we lived, I had a window that looked out onto the backyard, and as I worked on grading tests or writing a lecture I noticed Elena in the backyard playing with Norwood, Emily perhaps too. I wanted to go out and join them, but I knew I could not. As I sat and looked out that window, I could see I had a decision to make, a stand to take— was I going to chase a career and drag my wife and family behind me and

in effect have them serve the career, or was I going to have the career serve my marriage and family? The Lord was of course first in my life, and I needed to seek Him on this, and I could tell the stand I had to take was to commit to my wife and family and then career, i.e., my job. So after that course, I recall, I gave up teaching. E.g., Dr. James Dobson and the letter he received from his Dad and the hectic rate of his career taking him from his family. His father wrote him in the early 1970s while Dobson lived in California, “Danae [referring to our daughter] is growing up in the wickedest section of a world much farther gone into moral decline than the world into which you were born. I have observed that the greatest delusion is to suppose that our children will be devout Christians simply because their parents have been, or that any of them will enter into the Christian faith in any other way than through their parents’ deep travail of prayer and faith. But this prayer demands time, time that cannot be given if it is all signed and conscripted and laid on the altar of career ambition. Failure for you at this point would make mere success in your occupation a very pale and wash-out affair, indeed”. Dobson comments about his father’s words, “Those words, written without accusation or insult, hit me like a blow from a hammer. It contained several themes which had the rising of eternal truth. First, it is more difficult to teach proper values today than in years past because of the widespread rejection of Christian principles in our culture. In effect, there are many dissonant voices which feverishly contradict everything for which Christianity stands. The result is a generation of young people who have discarded the moral standards of the Bible. . . The second concept in my dad’s letter was the one that ended my paternal complacency. He helped me realize that it is possible for mothers and fathers to love and revere God while systematically losing their children. You can go to church three times a week, serve on its governing board, attend the annual picnic, pay your tithes and make all the approved religious noises, yet somehow fail to communicate the real meaning of Christianity to the next generation” (from Dobson’s book *Straight*

Talk).

READ v 15. “Or, will they fear and serve (a verb [in the original language, עִבַּד] found seven times in these three verses!) the Lord? Joshua makes quite clear where he and his household stand exclusively. Cf. King David in Psalm 3:1-8.” The world is ok with this stand of Joshua, just so long as it is not *exclusive*. For the world, there have to be cracks in the wall, compromises to be made, pragmatism must prevail, right? But is important to be exclusive to lead our children. E.g., in a sermon by pastor Dr. John MacArthur earlier this year he stated, “In this culture, I think the thing that distresses me most is the war on children. This culture is weaponized to destroy children; it’s systematically designed to do that. 62.5 million of them have been slaughtered in the womb since *Roe vs. Wade* in the ‘70s. We all understand the breakdown of the family. If a child an escape abortion and be born, that child has about a 50/50 chance of being born of a married couple. It is likely that that married couple will get a divorce. It is likely that they will be unfaithful to their marital vows. It is likely that the child will be sent to public school and come under the influence of those whose agenda is anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Scripture. And as you know, our country, the politicians who lead it, are making laws that are devastating to children under the pressure of freedom, homosexuality, transgenderism. The desire is to make that normal, and to punish people who speak against it with laws in the category of hate speech” (from Dr. James Dobson Family Insinuate’s newsletter, June, 2021). Godly men are needed to protect children today and take a stand on these issues in the culture. And godly men are needed to live the Christian life, not just talk it. E.g., I recall in Pete Maravich’s life when he became a Christian he would go on these all-star game tours with retired players and travel on a bus with them, and once they stopped at a Hooters, and everyone was going in, but Maravich stayed inside the bus— his exclusive relationship with the Lord meant he would not betray his wife and go where there was temptation

like that. I recall talking to his brother Ronnie Maravich, who told me when his brother became a Christian, it stuck—he was the real deal. There are many ways to express this exclusive commitment to the Lord— such as through tithing, through church worship, through commitment to a small group Bible study, through sharing the gospel, through daily quiet times, and through serving others. E.g., I love that Scott Bond has a sign in his house saying that God is first in their family.

“Do our households know where we stand with clarity?” We did make a decision on the youth trip and went straight to Orange Beach, and we made it in time and had 40 minutes on the beach. We ate at Lambert’s Cafe at about 9:00 PM, getting there just before they closed. Where do you as a Dad need to make a stand, to make a decision for Christ?