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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
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Series: Courageous Living in a Dangerous World

24 Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. ² Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, ⁴ and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt. ⁵ "'Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. ⁶ When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. ⁷ But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time.

⁸ "'I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. ⁹ When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. ¹⁰ But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand. ¹¹ "'Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. ¹² I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. ¹³ So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.' ¹⁴ "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ 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 beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." ¹⁶ Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! ¹⁷ It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."

¹⁹ Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you." ²¹ But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD." ²² Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied. ²³ "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." ²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him." ²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD. ²⁷ "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

²⁸ Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance. ²⁹ After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ³⁰ And they buried him in the land of

his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ³¹ 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. ³² And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants. ³³ And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.

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So, the year was '49 BC. They were standing in a river; it was by the name of Rubicon. It was quite small. The 13th Legion led by Julius Caesar had made their way. They had conquered what is commonly known today, or – known by France – and Pompey was his competitor. He was actually kind of his, if you will, supervisor, and Pompey sent message to Julius Caesar: "It is time to cease and desist and to disband the 13th Legion – to come home." Caesar cried in front of his men, "The die is cast," knowing that if he crossed the bridge it would be treasonous and there would be a bounty on his head. You know the rest is history. Caesar did cross that river, and his troops went with him, and they conquered the government.

Today, if you are a historian at all, then you know the phrase, "To cross the Rubicon." It's that phrase that people use that, when you get to a point in time and life, it's that line in the sand where you're gonna make a decision that you know is gonna affect your family the rest of your life, or it's gonna affect you the rest of your life. It's that moment, like Joshua experienced, where God seems to put us kind of back into a corner and He asks us a question. So did Joshua. And long before the Rubicon, Joshua had a phrase. It's a phrase I guarantee you I've seen in 50, maybe a hundred homes. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." It's everywhere. It's a great phrase. And if you put it up on your wall, my hope is that you've actually come to that place where Joshua did, where Julius Caesar did, where you're kind of pinned up against the wall and you kind of ask yourself the question -- What is going to be my future? The die is cast. And in that moment, Joshua, much like Jesus – Jesus at one point turned to His disciples and looked them in the eye and said to them, "Who do you say that I am? It's time for you to draw a line in the sand and cross over. I'm either the Messiah or I'm not. It's time for you to make the decision."

And Joshua looked at his soldiers, and he knew he was going to die. His time was done. He didn't have any fights in front of him, no battles ahead of him. But he did have a challenge for the Nation of Israel, and because God put it in Scripture, He has a challenge for you and me. And the question's very simple. But here's the question: Who are you going to allow to be king of your home? It is gonna be you? Or it is gonna be God?

He asked them a number of questions. Number one, "Are you gonna serve God or are you gonna serve yourselves?" 'Cause you can't serve both. You can't have you and your agenda and your financial records and your kind of philosophy. You can't have that and God both. It's either God or you. Either God sets the tone of your home, God sets the tone of your marriage, God kind of establishes the values that you're going to

live by, or it's going to be you. One or the other. You can either serve God or you can serve yourself. And you can either depend upon God or you can depart from this dependent relationship and depend on yourself.

It's a question that Joshua felt was important. It's a question that I think Jesus felt was important, and so, we wrestle with it today. And every one of you, at the end, God is going to ask you a question. Not me – God is going to ask you a question. And the question is going to be the same that Joshua asked: Who are you gonna let me king of your home? Who are you gonna let be king of your business if you own one? Who are you gonna let be king of your marriage? Who are you gonna let be king of your family? But before you answer that question, Joshua takes us down some paths of things that we need to reflect on. Because a defining moment, that line in the sand, that moment where you sign your name to it, should never be done without a context. It always needs the context, and that's why Joshua took him down this road of contemplation. They needed a moment to kind of reflect back, "What's happened to us?" And Joshua had four things that he wanted to make sure that they were reminded of before he ever asked them this question. "Who you gonna serve? Is it gonna be you and your interests, or is it gonna be God?"

He took them back, and he reflected on four things. Number one, he said, "Have you noticed – or did you notice – God's pursuit of your life? Did you notice that you didn't seek God out?" Verse 3 makes this statement: He goes, "But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the river, and I led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau and I assigned the hill country to them." If we go back and read that, it's the same as your life. Abraham didn't come out of the woods going, "Wow – I want to seek a God who's going to call us to live by faith, He's gonna send His son Jesus Christ to die for us." Abraham – that wasn't Abraham's life. Nor was it mine. There's not a person in this room who took the first step towards God. If you trust the Scriptures – and I think we do – John 16 says that the Holy Spirit, when He came into this world, sent by Christ and the Father, He came with an agenda, and that is to convict us, to draw us, to convict us of faith and sin and judgment.

Jesus made the statement this way. "I will keep – I will not lose any of which the Father has given to me." It wasn't, "You made a choice. Oh God, I've discovered you. I've discovered your grace. I've discovered your forgiveness. I've discovered the cross." No, God sought you. Have you noticed God's power in your life? Have you noticed His ability to do things? "But they cried to the Lord," verse 7, "for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians. And then you saw" – Joshua says, "You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. And then you lived in the desert for a long time." Do you have those moments where you just kinda look back and say, "Wow. My life is evidence of God's power."

A good friend who – Kerri and I knew his daughter, Annie, and we got to know Dr. Chittick. He used to teach at George Fox years and years ago, and – he was just a profoundly godly man, and one time we were together, he was doing some – I think he

was doing a debate at Oregon State, on creationism, and he was talking to me later, he says, "Hey – I want you to come out and see my God-inspired tires." "Huh? What do you mean, your God-inspired tires? Rubber like everybody else, right?" "Oh, no no no. Take a look at 'em! Feel em'!" And I did. And he goes, "Aren't those amazing?" "No, they're tires like everybody else." He says, "Not when they're rated for 20,000, and I'm coming close to 40." I felt them again, because I was like, "Yeah! These things are slick!" No, they weren't. He was so convinced – as was I. Now, you say, "Well, a lot of tires are rated for 40,000." Not in 1984. 1984, those things, man, were made to burn up and put on new ones. But he was so convinced of the power of God in his life – that God could take tires and stretch them.

Do you remember God's presence in your life, Israel? Do you remember that there was never a day that you lived without God's presence? Do you remember – have you ever taken notice that you've never had a moment in your life where God has taken His gaze off of you?" Have you ever thought about the fact that you've never lived one moment of your life that God wasn't attentive, prevenient grace that goes before you, securing grace that goes behind you, protective grace that goes to the side of you? Have you ever just thought to yourself, "I have never had a moment in my life where God has been distracted to somebody else"? Never. And if you realize that God's provision is with you, every step of the way? Verse 13, "So I gave you a land on which you did not toil. I gave you cities that you did not build. Given you to live in them and to eat from the vineyards and the olive groves that you did not plant. Do you realize that you're walking in a world that you didn't create?"

What Joshua wanted us to do -- and all he was doing, he was taking them through, because he's gonna ask them a question. On this day, who you gonna serve? Who you gonna allow to be the king of your home? And if you think that you can do this thing better or equal to God, you're not gonna need Him – set Him aside. But if you think the reality is that it was God who found you, it was God who pursued you, it was God's power who has protected you and guided you, it is His presence that has walked with you, and it is His provision that has provided for you, then you might want to be shaped by that reality in answering the question: Who am I gonna let be king of my home? Who am I gonna allow to establish the authority and the directives in how I live my life as a husband in my marriage?

So, Joshua comes to them. And like every defining moment, there's a time of confrontation. And he's not afraid of this. I think sometimes maybe today we're a little softer on this. You've watched it in coaching, where coaching has moved from, you know, the old days of "Brian" to now we have to have PhDs in psychology just to take care of everyone's self-esteem. Joshua didn't get raised in that day. It wasn't high on his list. So, he turns to them, and he says, "I got a command for you. Number one" – and he starts this off in verse 14, where he starts to tell them. He says, "I have three things that I want you to hear. Number one, I want you to fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Number two, I want you to throw away all of the gods of your forefathers that worshiped beyond the river and into Egypt. And I want you to serve the Lord."

We've softened fear. We don't want to have some ogre view of God. We don't want to have some view like Oz was in The Wizard of Oz where everyone trembles and is scared of him. That was my idea of God when I was a kid. And we don't want that, but the reality is, there's a danger of softening God. And the danger is, you create a different one. You create one that's not holy. You create one that didn't speak and the world came into existence. You create one that didn't separate the land from the sea. You create a God that maybe didn't display and put all of the stars and name every one of them, and you create a God who doesn't have a standard of holiness and sent His son to die on the cross so that you and I could come into the presence of a Holy God. And Joshua says, "If you're gonna answer this question carefully and correctly, then you might want to bow your knee when you stand before God. And you might want to put away all of the other gods, all of the things that compete with God.

My friend Harry used to go and – he's retired from this, but he used to go into churches that were declining and kind of infected and usually had all kinds of fights, and they'd lost their pastor, and he went in as an interim. He went into these places that were always just kind of infected with sin. And I said, "Harry, what's the first thing you do when you go into these churches?" He goes, "I sacrifice all of the sacred cows." It's like – "Well, that sounds fun. What's that look like?" He says, "I start walking around the church and I listen to anything that they have allowed to become more important than God." "Like what?" He goes, "Chairs. Carpeting. Hymnals. It doesn't matter. Whatever they've fought over, I get rid of, and if there's a church left, I lead it." Now you say, "Whoa! Man, he probably doesn't have too many" – oh, he's probably one of the most successful transition pastors I've ever seen. I know of at least somewhere in the vicinity of 12 that I have been associated with that Harry has gone in and sacrificed. What he has done is nothing different than what Joshua said – "Get rid of anything that stands between you and a 'yes' with Jesus."

Some of you have really nice carpeting. And you want to protect it, so you don't want to invite anyone over to the house. You're not hospitable. You haven't had somebody to eat in your house in 30 years. The reason why is because you go from white carpet to white carpet to white carpet, and you think, "I don't wanna invite anyone over to my house – it's gonna make the carpet dirty." Then, great – burn the carpet! Get rid of it! Because if you own something that is prohibiting you from acting like Christ, get rid of it! Some of you bought a couch, and it's pristine, and you put coating on it so that stains could be just sucked right up. "But no, I'm not gonna test that! I'm not gonna let anyone within 30 feet of my couch!" Burn it. Go home today and get rid of it. Put it out. I'll pick it up. And I'll test your Scotchgard. No, no – I'm not trying to be frivolous with your money. Joshua said, "My friends, if there is something that is in the way of you saying 'yes' to God" – if there is something in your home, something in your life that is more important than God, Joshua says, "Get rid of it!" Why? Because when Jesus comes into the house, He doesn't care that much about your white carpet. He's quite interested in people's hearts.

“Put away the other gods, and serve the Lord with sincerity.” This is not gonna preach well today, because he actually says, “I want you to become a slave to God.” That’s the phrase. “I want you to serve the Lord with faithfulness, with sincerity. I want you to become a slave.” It’s likened unto what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 4. In Ephesians 4, where Paul is writing to the church, and he’s given them this vision in chapter 3 -- “Now through the church, the manifold wisdom of God is gonna be revealed to the principalities and the heavens and the earth, and God is gonna put on display the glorious power of his life through the church.” And Paul, in Ephesians chapter 4 says, “As a prisoner of the Lord, then” -- you ever talk with a prisoner? What kind of freedom do they have? I talk with one every Thursday. He’s told what time to get up. He’s told what time they eat. He’s never given a choice of what to eat – he eats what they put in front of him. He’s told what time he goes to work; he’s told what time the day is done. There’s not a decision in his life, other than the decision of what to think about, that he’s in control of. Paul says, “That’s the life you and I live with Christ. As a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you.” Joshua says, “I want you to see yourself as a slave. Your options, your days are over.” 1 Corinthians chapter 6 says: “You have been bought with the price of Christ’s blood. You’re not your own.” Joshua has a question that he wants to ask you. And it’s really God. Who you gonna let me king of your home?

With this clear command, Joshua says, “I have a challenging choice that I wanna get in front of you.” You have to answer this. Every Christian has to answer this. Just like every Christian had to answer the question that Jesus had to His disciples – Who do you say that I am? And God’s gonna ask you the question after you’ve said, “You’re the Messiah. You’re my Savior.” Then God has another question. It’s not antying up. He’s not switching baiting. He’s simply saying that when you follow the king, here’s the question: Are you gonna let him rule your life? We have to answer that question as a church. We have to answer that question all the time. Are we gonna let Jesus be King, or are we gonna do this thing? Are we gonna allow Christ to set the tone and the message of our church, or are we gonna allow the whims of the political arena out there to determine what we’re supposed to think and how we’re supposed to act, and maybe even how we’re supposed to vote? It’s a challenging choice. And when you make that choice, Joshua says, it requires a commitment. It does. It requires a commitment. “Now fear the Lord. Serve Him. Serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you’re gonna serve.”

I’ve done over the years well over 300-plus weddings, and I’ve never done a wedding -- I was thinking about it this week -- I’ve never done a wedding where there wasn’t vows. No one’s even asked me. I’m not sure how I would respond. I’ve never even thought about it. If somebody came to me and said, “You know, we’re not sure of the vows. I mean, we’re gonna have one foot in this marriage and one foot out, and if it just kinda gets rough, we’re outta here. Just want you to know.” I think if somebody asked me that, I’d say, “Eh, you’re probably looking for the wrong guy to do your wedding. I’m not him.” Because the vows are those moments where you say to yourself and you say to that person that you’re marrying, “I’m in – for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer. I’m in! I’m not going anywhere.” And at 300-plus – I don’t know what it is – 347, 348

weddings -- every wedding, I've had people make those statements. But in 38 years of pastoring, I've also had a lot of people come into my office, and if it's appropriate, I will ask them, "Hey, before you come in, can you do me a favor? Can you go dig up those vows that you made to each other? Can you read through 'em -- and by the way, bring a copy when you come to meet with me." There have been people who have canceled their appointment over that request. Why? Because they made the vow and they had no intention of keeping it. And they've dumped it. And they want me to fix their unhappiness without calling them to a resolution.

A commitment needs a resolution, and a commitment, Joshua says, needs to be tested. "Now fear the Lord and serve Him." But he says, "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." You choose -- but you gotta choose someone. Someone's gonna be king of your home. If it gonna be you? It is gonna be other gods, or is it gonna be the one true God? Now, when people kind of turn around and ask this, it's uncomfortable, and you probably don't like it. But you need it. You need somebody to test you, you need somebody to challenge you. You need somebody to ask you the question, "Do you really mean this?"

I was working with a couple a number of years ago, and dad had a drinking problem. Pretty severe. And he would drink every day, and on Fridays, he'd get plowed by 8:00 o'clock, 9:00 o'clock, and he'd possibly sober up by Monday morning. He was unavailable virtually on the weekend, and, you know, baseball games didn't matter -- dad couldn't make it. He couldn't walk out there. And his rationale was simply this: "I work hard during the week. I deserve my weekends." God got ahold of his life, and we were chatting, and I asked him a question. This was over the phone. I said, "Are you serious about this commitment? Are you serious about dumping everything and becoming the kind of husband and the kind of father that God wants you to be?" "Pastor, I'm in." I said, "Good. Go to your house. I'll meet you there in about 15 minutes." We went over there. I have no idea how much money we just went down and threw down the toilet, but let me tell you what -- we were a dumping machine of all the alcohol that guy had. And every time I put another bottle down the toilet, I said, "Are you serious? Is this it? Because your family is in the other room hoping to God that you're serious. And I'll walk out of the house right now if you're gonna leave this home and walk down, or go down, drive down to the liquor store and get yourself another out in case the weekend gets tough. Are you in this thing to walk with God and to face and use His dependence in a way that you've used the crutch of your alcohol in the past?" And he looked at me with tears coming down his eyes. "Throw it all out." It's been years. He's still sober. He meant it. But sometimes, Joshua says, you need to test that. Why? Because you want to make sure that the person understands. This means business. This is my commitment to Christ. And resolutions need to be written.

What did Joshua do? He brought the people together and he made a memorial. Why? Joshua, I think under the beautiful leadership of God, understood something. That there's a huge difference between a goal set and a goal written. There's a huge difference between a resolution that you want to keep and a resolution that you write

down and you share with your friends. And Joshua's asking us the latter. Who you gonna let be king of your home? And if you're gonna let Christ be king of your home, dad, you need to have a family meeting. And you need to let the kids know – “Guys, something's changed. I'm not the king of this home. I am the spiritual father of this family. I will lead to the best of my ability with grace and humility, and I will die before you, but I need to let you know – I need to take myself off the throne. And kids, you need to understand, to the best of your mom and I's ability, Christ is the head of this home.”

They need to hear you say that – just like Joshua wanted these leaders to declare publicly, “My friends, who you gonna serve in your family? Who you gonna let be king of your home?” Joshua wouldn't let them off. He wouldn't say, “Hey – go home and think about it, make a decision at home. And hey, if you get a chance, come back and let me know.” He'd never let them out. He pinned them back into a corner and said, “I wanna know.” Why? Because Joshua said, “I'm gonna die. And I wanna know that the nation is gonna be led by people who love God.” There was a decision that Joshua wanted them to make. “But as for me and my house, I'm going to serve the Lord.” Joshua understood that when you make that decision, it ripples down into future generations.

In 1905, there was a couple. It was a couple who had four young sons. They lived in Copenhagen. They weren't free to worship God the way they wanted. There were restrictions that they felt God was leading them to get out of. And God led them to come to this country. In 1907, if you were to look at Ellis Island, you can go back and look at this and you can see the names of this family of six as they came into the US. They made their way to Illinois, and in the home in Illinois they had a little sign. It said: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” That wasn't just a line – it wasn't a slogan. It was their life. They left a country. They moved to a different country because they felt God led them. They had four sons. One of them was the name of Arnold, and he, led by God, came west at his dad's urging. He came out here – he was a carpenter, he built homes. And he had two children. And if you were to walk into his kitchen in this Pepto Bismol-colored home that was as ugly as you could ever imagine -- if your home is pink, I bet your pink is pretty – his was not. But if you walk into the kitchen, right above the table where he ate his breakfast every morning was a little line, and it said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

He had a daughter. She got married. She had three kids. Her husband wasn't faithful. He abandoned ship and he left. But in many ways, nothing significant really changed in the direction of her life. She became a single mom. Not easy. Never got a dime of child support. But she had a little phrase in her house, “As for me and my house, we're gonna serve God.” I thought about that family. I never realized in 1905 there was a husband and wife who made a life-altering decision that would affect me. When my grandfather left Illinois and he moved out here and he got married and he put that up in his house, I never realized – that wasn't a phrase to him, it was a lifestyle. It was a conviction. And then my mom – she put that up, and she weathered the abandonment of her husband, and she weathered raising three kids. But what she

never altered was a phrase that she had in her heart and in her home. “As for me and my house....” And she informed us kids that ultimately the only thing that really matters is that we’re gonna honor God.

See, Joshua understood that. And that’s why he wants you to address that question this morning. Now, you may have said to yourself, as I did, years ago – “Yup, that’s gonna be the motto of our life.” But I’ve also discovered I’m old enough to realize that there’s different seasons, and sometimes God wants you to re-up. Because what was good for me when I was 28 and became a pastor, it’s different today. Most of my friends – they’ve left the ministry. All of the guys that I went to school with, they’re out. And I realize I’m in that season of my life where I have to ask a question: “God, who’s gonna be king? Because I’ve got decisions. I’m not thinking about leaving – I’m just saying, I’m in the last kind of season of my ministry life. I don’t know how long I’m gonna live. If I live to be a hundred – I hope not -- I got some time to work. But just sheer numbers, I’m towards the end, and I have to ask a question. Just like you do. Who am I gonna allow to be king of this season of my life? And who gets to determine my marching orders, and who gets to determine my love and sacrifice?

And here’s what Joshua wants you to know. Your decision is gonna ripple down generations. I had no idea in 1905 that there was a couple who decided to follow God, and their life would significantly alter mine. But I also believe, if God tarries – hope He doesn’t – that the decisions I make today and the decisions you make today will touch generations beyond you. So, take it seriously. Be quite aware. God has a question for you: Who you gonna serve? Who you gonna allow to be the king of your home? And when you answer that, understand it will touch generations from now.

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