

# Explore the Bible: Challenged

November 30, 2016

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 8 focuses on Joshua 24:14-18.*

We've all known people who suffered from one physical affliction or another that prevented their bodies from reaching maturity. They live out their lives, growing in wisdom, faith and maturity even though their bodies stay frozen in time.

As challenging as those lives must be, there is another challenge that often has results perhaps even more tragic. That is when people grow to full maturity physically but their faith remains that of a child. The affliction is not visual, of course, until it acts out in ways that reveal its true character.

## **A call to grow up in faith**

This text represents nothing less than a sea change for the people of God. In verse 15, Joshua challenges the people to make a choice about their faith, a faith they've only parroted up until then. To deliberately choose one's faith is something only an adult truly can accomplish.

Perhaps the greatest challenge any of us ever faces is when we choose for ourselves what our faith will be, regardless of the faith we inherited.

"Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord" (v. 14). Those are extremely potent words, much more so than may meet the eye.

Joshua is commanding the people of God to grow up spiritually by making a choice about their own faith even though, in this case, that choice demands a rejection of the faith their ancestors handed down through the

generations. Joshua was doing nothing less than asking the Israelites to become monotheistic. That transformation would do nothing less than lay the groundwork for the faith that is ours in Christ now.

### **Make faith our own**

It's possible to imagine the words of Jesus at this moment, "You have heard that it was said but I say unto you ... ." The faith of those who brought you this far is not the faith you will need to take the next step. Jesus was more than implying the faith of those who came before was meant to help us get started on the journey that would be uniquely ours.

Jesus still is asking us to reconsider our faith so it may grow to represent more fully his calling on our lives.

When I was in high school, I once told my big sister that I didn't drink alcohol because my parents taught me, by example, not to. She then said: "That's not good enough. Just because Mom and Dad don't drink won't be good enough when you actually face the temptation yourself." I never forgot those words of wise counsel from a junior in high school from well over four decades ago

### **Missing God's call to maturity**

"Choose this day whom you will serve," Joshua says. You can stay frozen in time, he is saying, but you will miss all that to which God has called you.

The Apostle Paul expressed the same thing this way: "When I was a child I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways" (1 Corinthians 13:11). In the context of that great love chapter, Paul is saying one of the most loving things we can do for ourselves, for others and for our God is to make our faith our own by choosing it for ourselves, not simply inheriting it.

If this text teaches anything, it teaches us faith is a relationship, not merely a set of beliefs. Joshua uses present tense, active verbs, to describe the nature of faith. “Revere,” “serve” and “choose” are the nature of true faith.

## **Living faith**

James later would remind believers of this great truth. “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead’ (James 2:14-17).

For all practical purposes, the faith James described and Joshua called the people of Israel to move beyond was a dead faith, because it did not serve the one and only, true and living God. So is a faith in the 21st century that is only a highly refined idealism that does not demonstrate the mature love of an adult who has chosen to live out the mercy God in Christ has shown them.

At this time of year, I always wonder if I’ll get in the Christmas spirit. Too often, I wait for the perfect weather, search for the perfect gift that no one truly needs, wait for the neighborhood to be completely lighted for the season.

As I grow in my relationship with Jesus I am increasingly reminded this time of year that our Savior was born into poverty and died the same way. He spent his entire life living out the faith of which Joshua spoke—a faith that constantly gave itself away in acts of service that demonstrated a true worship of God in action, not just words.

For Jesus, what we call Christmas was a way of life and death and life beyond.

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