

Three Chairs: Commitment, Compromise, Conflict

Joshua and Judges show how faith can fade in three generations, and how you can make it your own

When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.

JUDGES 2:10

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	In Joshua and Judges, faith faded in three generations: Joshua's commitment, the next generation's compromise, and a third generation in conflict with God. Secondhand faith doesn't last. Each of us must know God for ourselves.
SCRIPTURE	Joshua 1:8; 23:3; 24:15, 31 · Judges 2:6-14 · 1 Kings 11:4 · 2 Chronicles 12:14 · John 4:42 · 2 Timothy 1:5
LENGTH	About 25 minutes
BEST FOR	Middle school and high school
YOU WILL NEED	Three chairs in a row, labeled <i>Commitment</i> , <i>Compromise</i> , and <i>Conflict</i>

SET THE STAGE

Place the three labeled chairs at the front. As you teach each generation, sit in (or stand behind) its chair. Students will remember the picture long after the words.

Start here: a sad pattern

The Bible often shows a three-generation pattern. The first generation follows God wholeheartedly. The second follows Him halfheartedly. The third walks away. Think of David, a man after God's own heart; his son Solomon, whose "heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David" (1 Kings 11:4); and his grandson Rehoboam, who "did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD" (2 Chronicles 12:14).

We see the same pattern in Joshua and Judges. Let's sit in each chair.

1 The first chair: Commitment (strong faith)

Joshua spent time with God, and God worked through him in amazing ways: the Jordan River parting, the walls of Jericho falling, the sun standing still. His faith wasn't borrowed. It came from daily time in God's Word:

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it." **JOSHUA 1:8**

Joshua shared his faith with others. Near the end of his life he reminded the people, "You have seen all that the LORD your God has done" (Joshua 23:3), and declared, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (24:15).

2 The second chair: Compromise (weak faith)

"Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel" (Joshua 24:31; see Judges 2:6-7).

That sounds good. But this generation leaned on what they had seen in Joshua's life more than on knowing God for themselves. They went through the motions. They didn't finish driving out the idol-worshiping nations, and they made deals God had told them not to make (Judges 1:27-2:3). Their faith was real enough to keep them going while their heroes were alive, but it was secondhand.

3 The third chair: Conflict (no faith)

"Another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals." **JUDGES 2:10-11**

This generation never saw God working through anyone's life. Maybe they heard stories about what God did for other people long ago, but they didn't know what God was like. So they chased other gods, and God allowed their enemies to defeat them (2:12-14). The book of Judges goes on to describe a long cycle of rebellion and rescue.

GOD HAS NO GRANDCHILDREN

You can inherit your parents' eye color, but not their faith. When the Samaritan woman told her town about Jesus, they came to see Him. Afterward they said, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). That's first-chair faith.

Which chair are you in?

The pattern isn't destiny. Timothy had a sincere faith that "dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice" (2 Timothy 1:5), passed down faithfully and made his own. Kings like Hezekiah and Josiah broke the cycle and turned back to God, though their fathers had not.

FOR THE LEADER

Some students come from homes where no one follows Jesus. Encourage them: they can be the first generation of commitment in their family. Others grew up in church and may be sitting in the second chair, believing because their parents do. Gently challenge them to know God personally. No one should leave feeling labeled; the goal is to move toward the first chair.

We all need to be like Joshua: fully committed, growing in our knowledge of God, and seeing Him work in and through our lives. That starts with meeting Jesus for yourself and spending time in His Word.

TALK IT OVER

1. What made Joshua's faith strong? What habits did he have?
2. What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God?
3. Why do you think the second generation's faith didn't get passed on?
4. What does "God has no grandchildren" mean to you?
5. Which chair best describes you right now? What is one step toward the first chair?

TAKE IT HOME

Read Joshua 1:1-9 this week and write down every promise and command you find. Then start your own "Joshua 1:8" habit: ten minutes a day in God's Word. Ask God to make your faith your own, and to use you to pass it on.

Don't borrow your faith. Know Him for yourself, and pass it on.

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · qrprogramming.com/livingroom

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