

How does 'as for me and my house will serve the Lord' work in these times?

Times are tough - is growing up now harder than when you were a kid? Is it harder being a parent now – Why – technology, demands, keeping up with the Jones?

I don't know about you, but lockdown reminded me that we don't need so much stuff and busyness in our lives. It is good every now and again to check in with yourself, your household and God and ask are we intentional about living the life God has blessed us with or are we on a runaway train – it sometimes feels like that.

Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land – he had waited than 40 years for this. He gave a challenge at the end of the book of Joshua after they had captured the land and he was dismissing the troops to go and settle down and start living 'family life' instead of the 'soldier life'. Make your choice today of how you will live. He reminded of how far God had brought, them right back to the time of Abraham to the present – then he said this..

Joshua 24: 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.”

Make your choice – who does your household serve and follow? I know I am guilty of being swept along by the routine and the busyness of the week. I'm sure, like me, you have reached Sunday and thought, we were only just here – where has the week gone? Yes, we have seasons in our life that are busier than others, but sometimes I feel like a passenger with little control when in fact I have a choice!

Joshua 24.16 Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!

The people of course said they would only serve God – they repeated some stories of how God has brought them here. They made their choice, but Joshua wanted to point out something to them.... Its is not a easy choice to keep up!

Joshua 24.19 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.”

Joshua warned them it would not be easy to follow God – they would likely fail! He was not a prophet of doom, but he had been with these guys most of his life, he knew their weaknesses and had struggled against them as he led them. Today is the same – it is not easy to follow God. Do you think it is easier or harder for us to follow God today than it was in your parents' time?

But the people disagreed with Joshua – no, we want to follow God, we don't be rebel, turn away or give up!

Joshua 24.21 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.

Why am I bringing this passage up today? Because of each of us have to make a choice of whom we are serving with our lives. We need to be intentional in the choices we make for our households (households are simply anyone who lives in your house – not commenting on family structures etc, but anyone who sleeps under your roof on a regular basis is part of your household) and we have many different shapes and styles in our church family.

So what does ‘as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’, look like in 2020? We live in a very different age: I have become so aware of how technology is shaping and affecting our lives and our children’s lives.

”Without a doubt, compared to human beings just one century ago, we are more globally connected, better informed about many aspects of the world, in certain respects more productive, and—thanks to GPS and Google Maps—certainly less lost. But are we more patient, kind, forgiving, fearless, committed, creative than they were? And if we are, how much credit should technology receive?” (Crouch, Andy. *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Kindle Locations 564-567). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.)

Technology may have made things different, but some things are the same

In the most fundamental ways, we are still like every other human generation that has ever lived. Like every generation before us, we are made for relationship with one another and with our Maker. Like every generation before us, we live in bodies that are both beautiful and burdensome. (Crouch, Andy. *The Tech-Wise Family*)

God is still our creator and designer – He knows how we should best live our lives:

Luke 10: 25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”²⁷ He answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ ; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

In Matthew's gospel this is called the greatest commandment. So how do we incorporate these intentions in our every-day technologically filled lives? (now if technology is not your thing don't tune out – the same applies to much of this about how you spend your time, whether reading, leisure time, music etc)

- **Love the Lord through what you think about**

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

I remember a favourite quote of my computer science teacher when I was in school – he would always ask what does GIGO mean? Garbage In, Garbage Out. It was a warning given to computer programmers that if the data they were putting in was not good, the programme would not run well. Well, we are not computers or robots but what we put into our lives matters – what we think about, what we watch, what we listen to. So often the bible comments on looking after our minds: Multiple studies have found a strong link between heavy social media and an increased risk for depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts.

Now, don't think I'm for throwing out the internet and all technology. There is so much good out there and so many opportunities to connect and reach people who we could never reach in person. Through technology we can cross borders without visas, get the gospel into closed countries, get into the homes of those who are needing help – the internet is a mission field, a potential seminary, a virtual support group. Through technology we are able to keep in touch with family who are far away, we can study, we can learn new things – I was able to attend my church in Ireland! But there is equally so much bad out there – things that change our way of thinking, that undermine God's power and authority – some stuff that is plain evil. The reality is that technology has not created new sins, just new opportunities to sin. So, what should we do?

- **Engage your faith and engage your brain.**

To quote Dr Seuss: *"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go..."* Now I don't believe that YOU are the one who decided everything, but certainly God gave you a fabulous brain and you need to engage it! How much time is spent mindlessly scroll and hoping channels? Technology can suck us in and kind of turn off your thinking buttons, next think you have spend 30 minutes watching funny cat videos, or you are halfway through a movie before things get a bit dodgy! But it is not only our brain we need to engage but our faith – is this activity honouring God, is it teaching me something, is it helping me grow? Yes, there is a place for rest and relaxation, but that should too also pass through the filter of **whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.**

For our kids it is a family discussion and boundary setting of what is appropriate use of technology for their age- is it educational, is it God honouring in its content? As

adults we need to not be passive in what our kids are doing online – get the online filters that limit access and content, don't give free reign – don't allow private passwords – it's healthy to have adults know each other's passwords too! Engage and plug in with your children to see what they are doing. We face those tough parenting calls of how much to expose the kids to what is going on in the world – you have to set up and make those choices for them and set those boundaries. My kids are growing up in a world of technology I will never understand – they have never used a phone that is not smart let alone one that is attached to the wall with a round dial! Be the parent and set those filters and boundaries in place. There are so many resources out there to help you. Just google them 😊

- **Unplug and reconnect with God and each other**

This is for adults as well as kids – did you know that all these tech devices have off switches!

Andy Crouch in the Tech-Wise Family writes: *Many of us are not as captive to round-the-clock, never-ending demands as we believe we are. Instead, we are our own jailers. We are prisoners of our own insecurity (Will I still have a job if I take two solid weeks of vacation?), pride (How can people get along without me?), fantasies (What if I miss an email telling me I've won the lottery?), and cultural capitulation (This is just how the world works now, isn't it?).*

We need to set boundaries for ourselves and our household about how we spend our time. The Barna study on technology found that 63% of adults check their phones as the first thing when they wake up in the morning. They found that kids were having an average of 5 hours a day using technology. While technology has its benefits so does turning it off. I have seen with my kids that creative play happens when screens are off (I kind of miss loadshedding for that!)

Andy Crouch suggests one hour a day without technology (he does round the dinner table), one day a week (a sabbath rest) and two weeks a year (a family holiday). As for you and your house ... you need to figure out what will work best for you.

So, what will you do without that extra time? Get outside, pray, eat as a household and catch up, pull out the boardgames, sit around fire and sing songs. Reconnect with people and reconnect with God.

You see God calls us to love Him through our conversations too – and you can't have conversation with God or with each other if you are all staring at a little device.

- **Love the Lord through your conversations**

Deuteronomy 6.4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

There is so much talking and noise in our world – as for me and my house, we need to talk about God and to do so in as many opportunities as we can. Don't leave God talk to special occasions or to the Sunday school teacher! There is so much in the world telling us about our identity and who we are – we need to hear and to be reminded about who God says we are. Talk about God, put things in your house that remind you about God.

So, I challenge myself as much as anyone with today's message – As for me and my household we will serve the Lord by.....

How will you put technology in its proper place?

How will you connect with God and Connect with people?

How will you be mindful of what you spend your time and thoughts on?

Is there anything you need to change as a household today so that the things you think about and the things you talk about honour and serve God?

As for me and my house ...