

Three Chairs: Do You Know Where You're Sitting? – Joshua 24 and Judges 2.
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Introduction:

A few years ago, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson developed a concept based on three different categories of spiritual commitment that everyone in society falls into—the three chairs. Each chair represents how people view spiritual things. We all know that where we sit in our relationship with God is important. And ten minutes into the message today, you'll have a pretty good idea of where you're sitting, and where people you know are sitting. But let me warn you that this message is not about legalistically labeling other people. Instead it's a way to measure your own heart.

Although many of the examples are generalities and there are always some exceptions, the chairs usually serve as a good visualization to help determine where our commitment level is as Christians. I hope it will deepen our walk with the Lord. So for the next several minutes I am going to give you a list of about 15 words.

I. Key Word of each category. When you think of the first chair, I want you to think.

A. First Chair: Commitment.

First chair Christian is totally sold out to Christ. There is no question who this person lives for. They have an ongoing relationship with Jesus.

B. Second Chair: Compromise.

This chair encompasses a wide range of people. They may or may not be Christians. Some are Christians who once had a strong commitment to the Lord, but they have backslidden and compromise is the norm. Maybe they grew up in the church, but when they went to college they fell out of it; or maybe they were committed, but all of a sudden they gave up or stopped going to church. They believe in God, but circumstances dictate their behavior.

Others in this chair only THINK they are Christians. They profess to be Christians when it's convenient, but they've never actually gotten around to accepting Jesus as the Lord of their life. Or they said a prayer at revival one time, but they never followed through with repentance and baptism.

C. Third Chair: Complacency.

The person in this chair might be a very nice person, a super servant. Or they might also be the most carnal person, or violent. There's a wide range, but the people in this chair are lost. They do not have a relationship with the Lord. They are complacent with the idea that they have plenty of time later on to deal with spiritual things. And they keep the idea of eternity at arm's length, but they don't know if or when they will be ushered into it.

Now the neat thing is that the story of Joshua in the OT chronicles all this for us. If you have your bibles, turn to Joshua 24 or p169.

II. Key Verses of each category. I want you to see how Joshua was a 1st chair person, and how those who followed him faded in their commitment.

A. First Chair: Joshua 24:14-15.

Joshua 24:14-15: Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua says, Make no mistake I am committed to God, and I want that faith to permeate my family. That's the kind of comm. Joshua had, but the next generation weakened.

B. Second Chair: Judges 2:6-7

Judges 2:6: After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had SEEN all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. (First generation experiences, 2nd generation weakened; They still love God and serve God, but they compromise. Scripture goes on to tell us that the generation after Joshua was commanded to completely conquer some other lands in the area, but they chose not to obey what God had said. They compromised, and their cultures intermarried.

The person in the second chair Knows About God. They know of things God has done in the past. They've heard about it, but they choose not to trust the Lord. But look what happens next.

C. Third Chair: Judges 2:8,10-12

Judges 2: 8, 10-12: Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten... After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who *knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel*. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. (Did you catch that in verse 10?)

This is a long way from Joshua: as for me and my house... Do you see the regression? Chair One Knows the Lord. Chair Two Knows About the Lord. Chair Three Doesn't Even Know Him. And notice in just two generations how far people had drifted. The first generation had seen some of the biggest miracles in the Bible. The sun stood still. The armies marched around Jericho 7 times and the walls fell down. The Jordan River was parted. But the third generation didn't even know the Lord or what he had done. Well, that kind of spiritual erosion is not limited to the Old Testament.

III. Attitude Toward Christianity. When you think of the 1st chair, I want you to think of the word:

A. First Chair: Relationship.

This person is a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ- They don't see God as some cosmic being in the distance. They see God's power, but they also see God's unconditional love. They know Jesus as both Lord and Savior. And they see that God wants a loving relationship with you.

B. Second Chair: Religion. To the second chair person, Christianity is just religion. They see Christianity as a long list of do's and don'ts, laws and legalism. As long as I do this or that, God will be happy. To the 2nd chair Christian or those who just claim to be, they see Christianity as more of a ritual to be endured rather than a relationship to be cultivated.

These people go to church, but when they leave the building, they are unchanged, but they can check that off that they went to church.

C. Third Chair: Rejection. When you think of the third chair, I want you to think Rejection.

Because they somehow at some point, knowingly or unknowingly, reject a personal relationship with the Lord. And by so doing they have rejected the only one who can provide salvation for them. They have rejected the relationship, they've rejected the do's and don'ts for how to live their life, and the idea that it would have some bearing on their decisions. And in most cases they are totally content. They don't need the Lord, and they certainly don't need the church.

I've met people in my ministry who are pleased with the course they are on, and when I ask them about their life, they say they don't need God to be happy. You know, if I'm wrong and they are right, then I've lost nothing. But if they are wrong and I'm right, then on the day of judgement, they will have lost everything.

And I am continually saddened and bewildered at how people will roll the spiritual dice on where they will spend eternity. And whether through apathy or outright rebellion they reject

Jesus Christ. Something else about this chair, the longer you're in it, the harder it can be for you to get out of it.

IV. Power Source.

When you think of the Power Source for these people, how do they make decisions, and what motivates them. Where does their sense of value come from? What fuels your everyday life?

A. First Chair: Spirit.

The first chair Christian walks by the Spirit of God. The Bible says when you became a Christian, you received the Holy Spirit. When Peter preached in Acts 2:38: repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ. He goes on to describe a transaction that takes place. Withdraw and a deposit.

A First Chair Christian listens to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Not an audible voice, but you will sense at times more clearly things you can do that would be pleasing to God. And as a result, you see the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Galatians 5:23, NIV

"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Romans 8:14, NIV

First Chair Christians listen to the Spirit of God, and it will dictate your decisions. But what about the second chair?

B. Second Chair: Spirit/Self.

The 2nd chair is the chair of duplicity. We fade back and forth. Sometimes they are guided by Spirit and other times they are just guided by Self. If you're in the second chair, you're interested in knowing God's will, but it depends whether you LIKE the instructions you get. If you like it, you will go with the Spirit, but if not, you're gonna go with what Self wants to do.

Now, every Christian struggles with this. Paul wrote in Romans 7 about the thing he wants to do he doesn't do, but the evil he doesn't want to do he does. But we're not just talking about that tug of war, because the first chair in the end will listen to the Spirit, but the second chair only listens when they like the instructions.

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." Galatians 5:16-18, NIV

If you're here in the 2nd chair, there's an easy way to see if you've been here a while. Here's a good test question. If the Holy Spirit were to completely withdraw from your life, would you even notice? Would you sense that He wasn't there, or have you been so driven by the flesh and living by your own wants that you don't even rely or count on the Holy Spirit. Who's calling the shots? Well, Spirit, Spirit/Self, and the 3rd chair...

C. Third Chair: Self.

There is no duplicity here; there's just self. There's no inner conflict, and truth be told you and I probably know lots of people in chair three who are great people! They might be incredibly nice and hospitable. But the person in the third chair has no concern for God's will in their life. They base their decisions completely on their wants and needs. You aren't interested in God getting the glory, YOU want the glory for your hard work. Your goal is to be a self-made man or woman who climbed their way to the top. They didn't need God. The problem is the Bible says every good and perfect gift comes from God.

“Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.” Proverbs 21:2, NASB

“Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.” Proverbs 3:7, NASB

And that leads to an important question. How do these chairs view the Bible? I think that will tell us a lot about these chairs, because what you believe about the Bible dictates all your decisions.

V. View of the Bible.

A. First Chair: Submits to the Bible. They are wrapped up in it. They say the Bible says it, and that settles it. They go to it on a regular basis to see how their life matches up to it.

A George Barna study recently showed that only around 8% of Americans actually agree that the Bible is God's Word and that it is the absolute authority for our lives. And in case you're wondering, that's what this church believes and teaches. We believe God's word is our ruling authority, so we will bring everything back to the Bible. And that's exactly what a first chair Christian believes.

But...

B. Second Chair: just Respects the Bible.

It has some good things in it, But they will go on to say but I don't want to O.D. on it. You don't want to be an extremist, or some fundamentalist.

And when push comes to shove, the 2nd chair person believes the Bible is on the same plane as any other good author. It's good advice, and helpful material, but it's not absolute by any means. And yeah, God wrote it, but when pinned down God's word may say one thing, but they may choose to do something different. God's word may say no, but they may do it anyway. Because they just respect it.

C. Third Chair: Owns a Bible.

Maybe. And if they do, it's probably one of these big-mammas right here. They don't consult it, they can't really find anything in it, and they've never read it. They think the Bible is a decoration, but that's about it. Something to have on the shelf, or to set out on the coffee table when the preacher is coming over to visit. And they're proud of it. But to them, the Bible is just another book with no more authority than the newspaper.

Plus, most third chair folks don't think it even relates to them. It's just some book from antiquity that has nothing to say to them about life today as we know it in 2008. And they don't see it as a love letter written to them by the Creator of the Universe.

Now each of these chairs, and their commitment level to God and His Word shapes all your values. Every area of your life. Let me give you three examples.

How do they view Church?

First Chair sees it as a COMMUNITY. It's a living organism where being together is about worship and encouragement and serving.

Second chair sees church as a CLUB. Like a Country club, or a club meeting. They might even go to church once or twice a month. Maybe three times if it's a good month, but there are a lot of things that might pop up. They may say, “We just got in late Sat. night, or the rain fell, my nose ran,” or a hundred other excuses. “I got tix to see that game, no way I can make it.”

And that's because they're not there for serving others or for worship. They're just there for the social connections, and just to be with family or friends.

Third Chair sees church as a custom. Hey on Easter and Christmas, I'll be there. Why? Well, because that's just what you do." They like to get dressed up and see the Easter lilies, But that's all it is. It's not about life change. It's just a custom.

How about Marriage:

First chair sees marriage as a covenant. It's an irrevocable trust, life-long commitment. Marriage is till death do us part.

Second Chair sees marriage as a Contract. It's a contract with some loopholes. I'm in unless things get tough, or if I'm not happy. After all, God want's me to be happy, right? So if things go in a direction I don't like, I'll be looking for a way out of the contract and I'll get a divorce.

Third Chair sees marriage as just a convenience. It's a legal convenience, maybe help us with our taxes or buying a home. Or sometimes is not even marriage, but just living together. We'll just live together rather than being committed to each other.

When it comes to Parenting:

First chair parents want to raise Godly kids. They want their children to be sold out for Jesus Christ. And that dictates their decisions.

Second Chair parents want to raise good kids. Now what's the difference between good kids and Godly kids. Good kids may not be sold out for Jesus, but second chair parents just say to their kids they never want the police to knock at the door, I never want to get a phone call from the principle saying you were causing trouble. And what they say to their kids is that they just want their kids to behave right on the outside, while they neglect what's on the inside.

You may have heard about the second chair family that decided to dedicate their little boy during their church service. Driving home, boy was crying in the back seat. They stopped the car and asked what was wrong. "The preacher said he wanted us to be raised in a Christian home, but I wanna stay with you." There may be some truth in that. Godly kids, Good kids...

Third chair parents want to raise successful kids. What college did their child get accepted to? And what is the earning potential of the career their son or daughter chooses? And the reason is, for these parents, image is everything. They want their kids to be successful, because somehow it makes mom & dad look better.

Notice that the 2nd and 3rd chair are most concerned with how they look to other people, but first chair people want to look good to God.

Bruce Wilkinson says in his book that he's been doing this presentation at conferences for years, and that he's made some observations over time.

It should come as no surprise that most of the time, not all the time, but usually first chair parents tend to raise first chair kids. What he didn't expect, though, was this:

Second chair parents tend to raise third chair kids. And that is frightening. But you can understand why. If a teenager grows up in a home where mom & dad are in the 2nd chair, and they see the duplicity and the hypocrisy, and they're looking for something real and genuine. But they see their mom & dad living one way on Sunday and another way the rest of the week. Then they want no part of that, because they know the real story.

Conclusion:

Well, if I could get real personal with you, I'd like to know where you're seated today, and are you satisfied with where you are? Would you be willing to relocate, and to make some changes?

The invitation I'm going to offer this morning is for everyone in the room, regardless of where you're sitting.

If you're seated in the first chair today, then I'm going to ask you to Reaffirm. This commitment is an ongoing commitment that you don't just make one time and that's it. It's something we reaffirm.

Jesus said it this way in Luke 9:23 (NIV) says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." We must daily reaffirm our commitment to Jesus.

If you're seated in the second chair this morning, I'm going to ask you to do something. I am asking you to Repent

This is a wide chair. It has the Christian whose faith is fading for years. And it has the person who just THINKS they are a Christian. They flippantly believe. They say, "Look, I believe there is a God." Well good. Because the book of James says, "You believe there is one God. Good. Even the demons believe, and they shudder." Because they are terrified by the awesomeness of God. Belief is a good place to start, but a terrible place to finish. I want to challenge you to repent.

Did you know that there is a verse in the Bible that is tailor made for second chair people? In Revelation 3:15-16 (NIV) Jesus says to a group of supposed believers, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-neither hot nor cold-I'm about to spit you out of my mouth."

This is a dangerous place to be seated. Second chair Christians have Christ on the tip of their tongue, but self on the throne of their life. They think they will barely escape the flames of hell and slide safely into heaven. But the purpose of the Christian life is not to just escape hell. It's to live such spirit-filled lives that we will bring as many people from the third chair and the second chair with you to heaven as possible. That's our goal. And if we do that Jesus promises us an abundant life, a life more fun than anybody else on the planet. Does that mean we won't have troubles? No. We will have troubles, but we have the end in sight. So repent, and move into that first chair.

And you might say, Marty, you sure are spending a lot of time in the second chair, more than any of the others. Well there's a reason for that. I know it well, because I've spent a lot of time here. And maybe you have too. Maybe you're tired of it. And maybe it's time for you to repent.

For those in the Third Chair I want to ask you to Receive. We need to receive Jesus as the Lord of our Life. I want you to know that there is a God who loves you completely.

This chair looks like a lot of fun. But it's really a hopeless disappointment. Because 3rd chair people, no matter how content you may be in this chair, when you go to bed at night, you cannot answer the most disturbing question of this life and that is, "What will happen when I die?"

Jesus says it this way in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, and whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life." For God gave. What did he give? He gave a gift, Jesus Christ His son. The gift is salvation. And a Gift is not a gift until it is received.

You may be tempted to say I've got time. But nowhere in the Bible does it say, "Tomorrow" is the day of salvation. Make a decision tomorrow. But in many places it says, "Today is the day of salvation."

I want to be clear. First chair, reaffirm. Maybe share with a loved one or your family.

There are others of you who need to repent. And I've found that sometimes when you place membership, sometimes you're falling in love with Christ again, and it's fresh again. I hope you'll think about that.

Third chair, And Some of you are already tuning me out. You say, I get it. I know what you want me to do. You want me to get out of my third chair and move over one to the second chair and join the Christians there. Nope. If you're in the third chair, I'm asking you to LEAP OVER the chair of hypocrisy. And be grounded in the first chair with a commitment to Christ.

You can Repent, you can receive, or you can reaffirm, And say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

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