



Michael Lindsay: [\(00:02\)](#)

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Joanna Meyer: [\(00:21\)](#)

We're listening to the Faith and Work podcast, where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor and society through our daily work.

Joanna Meyer: [\(00:33\)](#)

Hello, and welcome to the Faith and Work podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, the director of public engagement at Denver Institute. And I'm joined today by Jeff Haanen, our founder and CEO. How is it going, Jeff?

Jeff Haanen: [\(00:43\)](#)

Really good. The sun is shining, spring has come, and feeling good today.

Joanna Meyer: [\(00:46\)](#)

Yeah, after a crazy, snowy March here in Denver, April has turned out to be beautiful, so we're enjoying the spring weather at last. Our topic today is navigating life's transitions. And as we get started, Jeff, I'm wondering if you could describe in your life, a time in your life when you didn't make your way through transition well?

Jeff Haanen: [\(01:04\)](#)

Well, that is probably most days I didn't make my life in transition well, but I'm actually thinking about a particular time when we moved, had our fourth kid, and my wife was changing jobs all in the period of a year. And the stress and the difficulty and the feelings of I am just crushed with, I don't know if I'll be able to make it, it was there, really present in a moment by moment. So I'm looking forward to hearing from Michael about these critical moments in our life and how we can maybe navigate them better than how I did.

Joanna Meyer: [\(01:38\)](#)

Yes, I can relate to that. I think at times when I've had surprise transitions, I just have not had any kind of disciplines or tools to figure out how to get through it. I've just been shocked and floundering. And one thing I love about what Michael's going to talk about is that there definitely are some things that we can do in those moments. And really, today's topic matches a number of the themes we've talked about this spring here on the podcast. We've talked about how to survive job loss, how to respond to business setbacks. And this is how do we find her way through transition, which just seems so fitting at this stage in the pandemic, that we can prepare for this.



Joanna Meyer: ([02:12](#))

So today, we have the privilege of speaking with a leader that we admire greatly. His name is Michael Lindsay. He's the president of Gordon College and he'll soon be the president of Taylor University in Indiana. Michael has shepherded thousands of college students through the great transition into adulthood, and he's interviewed many of the world's top leaders on this topic, which makes him an expert at transition. Jeff, would you tell us a little bit more about Michael?

Jeff Haanen: ([02:36](#))

Yeah, sure. So prior to getting to Gordon College, he was a member of the sociology faculty at Rice University, where he won all sorts of awards for both the teaching and his research. He was author of a couple dozen scholarly publications, as well as his book, *Faith in the Halls of Power*. Was nominated for the non-fiction Pulitzer Prize in 2007. And his latest book is called, *Hinge Moments: Making the Most of Life's Transitions*, which will be published at the end of April. And that's what we're going to talk about today, so I'm looking forward to hearing from Michael Lindsay.

Jeff Haanen: ([03:10](#))

Well, Michael, welcome to the Faith and Work podcast.

Michael Lindsay: ([03:13](#))

Thanks for having me on.

Joanna Meyer: ([03:17](#))

Michael, for much of your career, your writing has focused on lessons learned from the world's top leaders, but this book has a more personal feel. I'd like to know what motivated you to focus on the theme of navigating transitions.

Michael Lindsay: ([03:29](#))

You're right, it does have a more personal feel, in part because I work with college students every day, and I originally thought I was writing a book that would help recent college graduates navigate the big choices that they face about their mission, who might be their spouse, and the big directions they take in life. But as I got into it and began looking over the data that I had spent 10 years of my life collecting, I became more convinced that there's a real opportunity for a book that could speak to a wider audience.

Michael Lindsay: ([04:03](#))

And then, of course, once the coronavirus pandemic hit, I recognized that we were in the midst of something unprecedented, at least in my lifetime, of not just a set of changes that individuals might have to navigate, but we, as an entire culture, would have to face. In many ways, the recovery from the pandemic represents an institutional hinge moment, an inflection point in the trajectory of our society. And so, that naturally got me thinking about my own sense of calling and the work that I was about. And if you read the book, you'll hear a little bit of the story of how, while even writing this book, the Lord



began to call me to a new chapter of service, leaving my role at Gordon College to assume the presidency of Taylor University.

Michael Lindsay: ([04:45](#))

And my hope is that I'm able to relate my own story and journey of parenting a special needs child, and also wanting to try and lead in the best way possible. And I went back to the examples of people who I had spent 10 years of my life interviewing to see how had they navigated significant changes in their own lives in helping to prepare themselves for transitions that occur over a lifetime.

Jeff Haanen: ([05:09](#))

All right, Michael. So your book introduces us to the concept of hinge moments. So for our listeners today, what are they, how do they differ from the kind of change we experience maybe in our day-to-day lives?

Michael Lindsay: ([05:20](#))

Well, just as there is a hinge on a door that allows a door both to remain open, you need a hinge in order for the piece of wood to remain open and in place, but also to allow it to remain closed. And so a hinge actually functions in multiple ways in helping open up pathways of possibility and closing them off at different points in time. And so it is with decisions that you and I face.

Michael Lindsay: ([05:44](#))

Now, some of those hinge moments that we experience are ones of our own choosing. We apply to grad school and get accepted to the school of our dreams, or we date somebody and then ask them to marry us and they say yes. But there are also hinge moments that come to us that we didn't expect. A loved one who's given a cancer diagnosis, or a job that you've loved doing is somehow no longer possible because the company is downsizing, or they're asking you to relocate in a way that you're not going to be able to take them up on the offer. All of these are significant inflection points in our life.

Michael Lindsay: ([06:18](#))

There are millions and millions of minutes in our life, but when you look back on 67 years of a life, we can all point to probably 10 or 11 significant minutes of our life around which the whole rest of the time is oriented. And it's those hinge moments of our life that really determine the trajectory of the rest of our days. And so, I've written this book to try and help guide us into this process of better understanding those inflection points as they come and how we can be prepared for them so they don't catch us quite by surprise, but also how we can maximize the opportunities and the benefits that come from them, and minimize some of the downside and some of the difficulties that we might encounter along the way.

Jeff Haanen: ([07:01](#))

I love this quote from your book, I'm going to read it. So you have to listen to your own writing for a second here, but here's what it says. Like a hinge, a hinge moment changes everything. It entails an



abrupt turn from one thing to another, but it also means new possibilities, new avenues to new spaces. These are the moments when we are tested, when we either make the most of our transitions or we waste them, or worse, we let them waste us. When we aren't properly prepared for our hinge moments, we can panic and make choices we regret later and maybe the rest of our lives. But if we have robust, reliable hinges, we can make the choices and take actions that lead to successful transitions.

Jeff Haanen: ([07:39](#))

Or worse, we let them waste us. I was thinking about my third kid right there, and we have four now. Or maybe when my third turned two, that was maybe one of those I don't know if we're going to be able to make it through right now. Talk a little bit about that. How do we waste them? How do they waste us? How can we make the most of them?

Michael Lindsay: ([08:02](#))

Well, I think so much about responding to the hinge moments with integrity and successfully is a lot about the preparation. I'm reminded of the fact that the Lord is using every single day to prepare us for the next hinge moment. We just may not know it. And so, part of it is having an attentiveness to recognize there are significant changes that could be around the corner and we have to be prepared for that.

Michael Lindsay: ([08:27](#))

Ten years ago, when I was thinking about the call to Gordon, I was approached about the opportunity. And when the search consultant called, I said, "I'd love to do that, but I'm just not sure that it's the right time for me. Maybe in 10 to 15 years, I'd love to be college president, but I don't think it's the right thing for me right now." And he said, "Well, would you just pray about it and see if you'd be open to it?" And I said, "Sure, I'll pray about it," but I didn't really take it very seriously.

Michael Lindsay: ([08:51](#))

Over the next several weeks, every once in a while, I'd think about Gordon and say, "Oh God, please help those people in snowy Boston to find the right person. And I don't think it's me, but if it is, you better make it really abundantly clear." And after four or so, four or five weeks and my thinking about that, we actually had a tragedy in our family and my 32 year old cousin, Trent, was killed in a car accident. I'm an only child, so my cousin's like a little brother to me. I loved him deeply. I performed the wedding for he and his wife. And he left behind not only as his wife, but also three young kids.

Michael Lindsay: ([09:25](#))

His death was really a wake-up call for me that we're not promised tomorrow. And we really have to live our life thinking, okay, God, today I want to be a good steward of what you've given me and I want to be prepared for that. But that kind of a hinge moment can come just as quickly as a highway patrolman coming to your front door and it can change your life dramatically. And so much about scripture is that



we are reminded, there's this little verse in the gospel of John, where Jesus says, "Night cometh." We don't know what tomorrow is going to hold, and so, we had to be prepared for that.

Michael Lindsay: ([09:59](#))

In God's providence, I have found that the hinge moments that have come on my life, both those of my own choosing and then others that have come to me that I wasn't expecting, the Lord has actually, I can look back and see how he was preparing me for some of those journeys. And he really grows us and develops us in the crucible of that moment. But I also think we have to have a set of regular disciplines in our life, regular practices in our life that put us in a position so that we'll be well-prepared for whatever the Lord will bring to us in that moment. So in much of the ways that we want to try and be good stewards of the opportunities, we also want to be good stewards of the moments that come our way.

Joanna Meyer: ([10:41](#))

Yeah. As I was reading the book, I started reflecting on transitional moments in my life, and I realized how inadequate I had been for the needs of the moment, simply because I lacked a plan for how to respond to the initial shock. And then, maybe I didn't have any vision for what it looked like to move forward. And I just floundered through those moments. One thing I appreciate about the book is that you provide a very specific model that explains both the practical and emotional aspects of transition. I wonder if you could give us a high level introduction to the model that you created.

Michael Lindsay: ([11:13](#))

So, it's basically a graph that tries to map out how we respond emotionally and spiritually to two things. One is the progression of time, and also a degree of confidence in our ability to respond to the challenge. And I think it's interesting, even when we have a hinge moment that was not of our own choosing, we can look back and see how there were signals or indications that might be preparing us for that. And so, there is a sense of being more attentive to discernment and even anticipation signals.

Michael Lindsay: ([11:47](#))

Oftentimes, the Lord has used butterflies in my stomach as a way of preparing me for change when I'm not even fully expecting it. So we have to be attentive to both the discernment and then the anticipation phase that something might be going on. Pay attention to your body. When you're having sleepless nights or when you're finding yourself more anxious about a situation, it very well may be, this is a way in which God is trying to nudge you to be prepared for something.

Michael Lindsay: ([12:13](#))

Then we hit whatever that moment of change is and it's an inflection point. And I think it's really the low point of our confidence level, because in many ways, we're caught by surprise or we're not anticipating it. It's this moment of being betwixt and between. I call it the intersection phase of a transition.

Michael Lindsay: ([12:31](#))



And the reason it's so difficult is because in one way or another, we have to give up or move away from the sources of support and encouragement that we've relied upon in this past chapter, but we've not yet been grafted into the new group. And so, we're sort of left out on our own. It's this liminal moment of being betwixt and between, and I liken it to the threshold of a door.

Michael Lindsay: ([12:52](#))

And when you're sort of in that moment, it feels very unnerving. And I found this in my own life after I reached the conclusion that God was telling me I needed to step away from the presidency at Gordon College, which felt like a very difficult decision because I love this job. I wanted to be in this job forever, but I felt this very strong sense from God that I should be willing to lay it down.

Michael Lindsay: ([13:14](#))

And then, for several months, I didn't know what I was going to do next. I talked to people, but I didn't have another job lined up. And in many ways, I never guessed that I would wind up at Taylor University. And in that season of this intersection phase, it was very difficult for me. There were moments of self-doubt and real questioning. And it's in those low points we really have to rely most directly upon a deep relationship with God and the love and support of our family and very close friends.

Jeff Haanen: ([13:44](#))

Hi, this is Jeff Haanen, the founder of Denver Institute for Faith and Work. Hey, thanks for listening to the Faith and Work podcast and for letting me interrupt you briefly to share just a request. I want to ask you to consider becoming a financial contributor to Denver Institute. Each day, thousands of people listen to our podcasts, engage our short courses, and grow spiritually as a result of generous donors like you. Each podcast episode is a hundred percent funded by generous donors who believe that work is a way to love God, serve our neighbors and demonstrate the gospel to our world.

Jeff Haanen: ([14:13](#))

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Michael Lindsay: ([14:48](#))

Over time, however, we eventually find a new chapter, a new place of service, or a way of beginning to make sense of a new reality. After you have the death of a loved one, you begin to see after a few weeks that there will be a return to some degree of a previous understanding of normalcy. It will be a new normal and you begin to move into that landing phase, where you're beginning to recognize that, okay,



there's going to be something that's new, but I'm going to be able to make it. And then, eventually you become integrated into a community which gives you a higher degree of competence.

Michael Lindsay: ([15:22](#))

And then, before you know it, you become a source of inspiration for other people, because you look like you've landed in a good place, when in fact, you know in your deep, dark moments, you're still struggling and you still have questions. But you become a resource, somebody that people can turn to. And then, in God's providence, we eventually get to this place where we're actually fully realizing how the Lord has used this dip in our life, which created this hinge moment and to change us, and we're actually living into a deeper sense of calling, a deeper relationship with the Lord. It certainly means we may have scars that remain, but the Lord has redeemed those in ways.

Michael Lindsay: ([16:00](#))

And so, actually what I find, and this is based upon my social scientific, empirical research, every single person that I interviewed, after they got on the other side of the hinge moment, even those difficult ones, even ones they did not choose, somehow they were able to be in a stronger place. One of my favorite quotes is by the pastor, writer, Frederick Buechner. And he says, "Even the saddest things can become, once we have come to a place to make peace with them, a source of both wisdom and strength for the journey that still lies ahead." And I've found that to be true in my own life and certainly in the lives of the people that I studied.

Jeff Haanen: ([16:36](#))

Yeah, that's such good insight, Michael. I was thinking about my own life and my own career. And you had said times of self doubt or difficulty, I think everybody goes through those. And I can go into a dark and stormy place, and sometimes figuring out how to deal with conflict or even my own self doubt, it feels like, oh, I'm never going to work out here. And we at Denver Institute are continually walking with people that are in some sort of workplace challenge, right? And to know that there is another side of the graph is, I think, intrinsically helpful. Tell me a little bit about, what are some of the key disciplines that, as we feel like we're either moving to or maybe in that slew of despond-, right at the bottom, what are the key disciplines we can practice that will help us journey through these transitions?

Michael Lindsay: ([17:24](#))

I think there's three or four things that really make a difference. One is, I am a big believer in the value of Sabbath keeping in our life. It's the way of bridling ambition and, on a weekly basis, recognizing that we are not the solution to our problems, and that having a time for rest renewal and worship, I think, is really one of the key things that we do to stay grounded.

Michael Lindsay: ([17:47](#))

Second is I think it's very helpful, if you do not have somebody that is a prayer partner in your life, I want to encourage you to develop that. And actually, my prayer partner lives across the country in Los



Angeles, but every Sunday night, we get together to talk and to pray. And we've had that in place for several years. And throughout my own journey of going through this hinge moment, that was a source of great support and encouragement. Of course, my relationship with my wife is the most important relationship I have, but I would say having somebody who can also be an accountability partner in my life has been really useful. So that's the second thing.

Michael Lindsay: ([18:21](#))

Third is I started a practice about a year and a half ago of keeping a gratitude journal. And it's really simple. Every day I record three things for which I'm grateful. And I send it as an email to myself and I have a little folder in my inbox that allows me to just keep track of the things that I'm grateful for. It's now such that sometimes I go back and look to see, a year ago today, what did I say I was grateful for? And it's been really helpful for me to be reminded, particularly in those darker moments, those more challenging moments, to be reminded the Lord actually is doing great things, even in the moment of sadness or difficulty. And in all honesty, most of us, when we're going through difficult moments, we're a mix of emotions. We feel fear, insecurity, anxiety, loss, dread, but we don't name all of those different emotions. We just feel bad.

Michael Lindsay: ([19:16](#))

And there's something about the process of enumerating three things every day that you're grateful for. And sometimes, it's I'm grateful that I live two miles from the beach and I can run there and see God's creation. Or I really love the way my wife has decorated our house. It's beautiful and it's a welcoming place for me. Or I had a really sweet time with my daughter when we walked around campus yesterday. Just simple little things, but it's a way of reminding yourself the Lord is at work in good ways, even in those challenging moments. So gratitude journal has been a third thing I've done.

Michael Lindsay: ([19:52](#))

Fourth thing that's a specific for you when you're going through hinge moments is to have a way to mark off the season. So my wife and I decided that we would take what we would call a discernment walk every day. And so, it did not matter if it was raining, sleeting, snowing or sunny, every day, we would take a little walk. We would use it as a chance to pray out loud and to really process what we're thinking. And that has been a really helpful thing for us to mark off the season, to be able to say, we're going through a particular season and we really want the Lord to guide us in this. And thankfully, the Lord did that in a great way for us.

Joanna Meyer: ([20:32](#))

Hmm. So cool. You also identify a few hinge virtues, which I had never heard anyone describe that concept of hinge virtues, that it's not just what we're doing as we're navigating change, but how we're doing it. Can you tell us a little bit more about what those virtues are and what it actually looks like to embody them in daily life?



Michael Lindsay: [\(20:52\)](#)

So here's the cool thing. The Latin word for hinge is where we get the language of cardinal. And if you know anything about classical antiquities, you know that the classical era identified four cardinal virtues, of being prudence and fortitude, temperance and justice. Those four things become hinges for our life. And so, in the book, I talk about how we take those four concepts, prudence, this is about wisdom or having the right kind of discernment. And so often in a hinge moment, the real question is, when do you act and when do you hold back from acting? It's when do I take the initiative to send this resume and when do I say, no, I'm going to wait? Or when do I decide to follow up with this potential business partner or when do I wait until they make the first move? So a lot of it is about having the wisdom and demonstrating good prudence in making decisions.

Michael Lindsay: [\(21:55\)](#)

Second is the importance for fortitude, or in some ways, we understand that to be endurance or a sense of courage. It is the sense that you're going to stick with something, not in a foolish way. It's not like a white-knuckled, I'm going to always do this, even if it's not the right thing. It's actually having a sense of faithfulness, as the Bible describes it. And it's a stick-to-it-ness, so it's a sense that I'm going to stay in this calling.

Michael Lindsay: [\(22:22\)](#)

One of the things that I say in the book is that you should not leave your current calling until the Lord has definitely called you to something else. Even when you don't feel like it's exactly what you're doing, you don't give it up until you have a strong sense that that's what God wants to do. Well, how do you know that? The Lord makes it abundantly clear when he wants you to move. It will come over a process of conversations, over things that you read, scriptures, prayers, sermons you hear, and eventually, you'll get a lot of clarity. Until you get that, you stay in your calling. As Eugene Peterson said, you just stay in that long obedience in the same direction, wanting to be guided by that.

Michael Lindsay: [\(22:58\)](#)

Temperance is a large measure about self-control. I find that so often, self-control is like an emotional muscle we have to exercise and there's a lot of neuroscience research that's come out about this. It's interesting that if you exercise a lot of self-control to not eat a piece of cake and you successfully don't eat the piece of cake, the next hour or two, you are more likely to succumb to temptation than any other time during the day, because you've used up all that self-control muscle.

Michael Lindsay: [\(23:31\)](#)

So one of the things that we have to do is we have to put ourselves in environments that we, frankly, build up a degree of temperance, of self-control, and it's like a muscle you have to exercise. You can't push the muscle too hard, but the more you exercise it, the stronger it's going to get, which is why if you've learned a degree of self-control in your diet, you can also take that same idea and apply it to your



spiritual life so you can be more disciplined in Bible reading or prayer. So it's interesting to see how we develop that in our neuroscience and then how it gets acted out in our souls.

Michael Lindsay: ([24:07](#))

Finally is this sense of justice. And really, the concept here is that we're here to serve a larger calling and a larger purpose. It's not just about our individual life getting all perfect, but it's actually about being a contributor to the common good. And how are we using the gifts and abilities, the blessings and opportunities the Lord has given to us to be able to be a positive force for good in the wider community. Unto him much is given, much is required, we're told in Luke 12:48. And so, all four of those become cardinal virtues in our life, much like the hinge on a door that helps guide us in those significant moments of decision.

Jeff Haanen: ([24:46](#))

I'm kind of feeling a little hungry for a piece of cake right now. I'm trying to build-

Joanna Meyer: ([24:51](#))

I felt like the toddler with the marshmallow test, Jeff, where they put a toddler alone at a table with the marshmallow. Will they have the self-control not to eat it?

Jeff Haanen: ([24:57](#))

That's me every day. I'm like, "Hey kids, there's just too much. You can't eat all that candy." And then they go to bed, right? I don't know if you've ever done that as a parent, but I've done that a couple times. I hope my kids are not listening to this podcast right now. So let's take a final question. Take a little bit of a pastoral role for a moment, Michael. Whether this be you walking a loved one, a student, a staff member at your school through this, it can be easy to question God's purpose in our lives, our own abilities, whether I belong here, whether I have something to contribute. How would you come alongside them? The person that's listening to this podcast today, what would you say to that person saying, "I really have some significant doubts in either God's purpose for my life or my own abilities?"

Michael Lindsay: ([25:43](#))

In the book. I relate a story that I have never told publicly about the journey that my wife and I experienced of finding out that our oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was born with a rare genetic disorder that's produced profound special needs in her life. Elizabeth is now 17, but she has a cognitive development of a toddler. She doesn't have language. She can certainly make her will known by noises and requests, but she doesn't speak words to us. She's never said, "I love you, daddy." And without a miraculous intervention of the Lord, she never will. Elizabeth is legally blind. She has problems with internal organs. She has a condition known as neutropenia, which means that she has dangerously low white blood cell counts, so if she gets an infection, it can become quite serious very quickly.

Michael Lindsay: ([26:30](#))



For three years, Rebecca and I really struggled with what it meant to parent Elizabeth, because we expected parenting our firstborn child would be this season of extraordinary joy. And there have been joys along the way and we're really grateful for that. But if I'm being honest, it's been a hard joy. We've faced so many ups and downs, and the milestones Elizabeth has been able to achieve have been hard-fought. And we recognized after a few years of trying a variety of interventions and therapies and seeing her to different specialists that probably short of a miraculous intervention, caring for Elizabeth was going to be part of the rest of our lives, and probably the lives of our family until the Lord takes Elizabeth.

Michael Lindsay: ([27:17](#))

So being Elizabeth's dad has taught me a lot about hinge moments, both seeing the experience of the particular moment when this doctor told us, when Elizabeth was nine months old, that she didn't know what was wrong, but that she was convinced something was very wrong and that it was going to be a long time before we had greater clarity. And then, the process in the intervening years of walking alongside Elizabeth, loving her, but realizing that many of the hopes and dreams that we had for her life will just not be part of her journey. And yet, I can testify to the way in which parenting Elizabeth has fundamentally made me a better person and has fundamentally changed our family to be richer and fuller and I think, frankly, more Christ-like than we would be if we didn't have Elizabeth in our life.

Michael Lindsay: ([28:10](#))

And so, for those folks who are going through the difficult moments of, maybe you're just coming to grips with whatever the equivalent is of your journey of parenting Elizabeth was for us, I can offer a word of great hope, because I'm someone who's on the other side of that journey and I've seen how God has redemptively cared for us. There's never been a day when I have not felt that the Lord is sustaining us. Not one day. There's never been a day when I have been without an existential hope for possibility for Elizabeth. I've had that hope that, frankly, if I didn't have my faith in God, I'm not sure that I would feel it, but I can say in my bones I have felt it. And even in the dark, difficult moments, we have seen how God has miraculously provided for us friends, advisers, doctors, spiritual candles of hope that the Lord has lit along the way to guide the way.

Michael Lindsay: ([29:10](#))

Now, he's not shown us what the end of the road looks like, and there've been so many moments when I've asked him to intervene. I've prayed for a miracle in Elizabeth's life for 17 years, and it still hasn't come. And yet, I have seen tiny miracles every single day. And so, the good news about the God that we know in Jesus Christ is that ours is a God who doesn't sit off to the side and watch us suffer. He comes alongside us and walks with us in the journey. He is Emmanuel God with us, and in the redemptive, amazing grace of the Lord, he helps sustain us through the dark moments and then give us new horizons of what might be possible so that we get on the other side of this hinge moment and we are stronger, better and fuller because of the redemptive nature. And ours is a God who redeems even the difficult moments for greater good.



Jeff Haanen: ([30:08](#))

Amazing. Michael, thanks for being on the Faith and Work podcast with us today. Thank you for sharing, not only about your book, but about your own life and journey. It's a real gift.

Michael Lindsay: ([30:17](#))

God bless you all.

Joanna Meyer: ([30:24](#))

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