

CALEB FOLLOWED THE LORD WHOLEHEARTEDLY

Joshua 14:6-14

June 19, 2022

To celebrate Father's Day – I want to tell the story of a man found in the Bible that we need to model our lives after – especially as we get older. This man was one of the twelve spies that Moses sent to check out the Promised Land shortly after the Israelites left Egypt. This man along with another one of the spies, Joshua, gave a good report, while the other ten spies gave a bad report. And it was because this fearless man had faith in God, he gave a good report in spite of the giants living in the land, and as a result was blessed by God with a very long life and with extraordinary strength, energy and courage at age eighty-five to go to war and defeat the giants that occupied the hill country of Hebron. As a result, Hebron became his inheritance in the Promised Land. This man's name is Caleb, a man who followed the Lord wholeheartedly!

We first hear about Caleb in Numbers 13 – the Lord said to Moses, *“Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of the leaders”* (Numbers 13:1-2). So, from each of the twelve tribes Moses sends out their leader; the leader of the tribe of Judah was Caleb son of Jephunneh. These twelve men cross the Jordan River, explore the land for forty days, and then return to give a report of what they had discovered, even bringing back with them some of the produce – a cluster of grapes, pomegranates and figs. As each man gives his report, they all agreed that it was a bountiful land, indeed it is a land flowing with milk and honey just as God said; however, there's a problem – the people that live there are powerful (they specifically mention that the descendants of Anak live there, a race of giants – Goliath was of this race), plus the cities are very large and heavily fortified. In fact, as they travelled throughout the land, they felt like grasshoppers compared to those who lived there.

As the spies are giving their report, the people were filled with fear and started to grumble and complain – so Caleb stood up to address the crowds' concerns.

Numbers 13:30, *“Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, ‘We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.’”* And *“If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and give it to us”* (Numbers 14:8). Caleb and Joshua encouraged the people to not be afraid but trust in the Lord, with the Lord's help they can definitely take possession of the land, regardless of the overwhelming odds against

them. But the ten spies spoke against Caleb and Joshua, causing the people to become fearful, discouraged, and persuaded the people to rebel, saying ***“We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are. And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored”*** (Numbers 13:31-32). The people didn’t listen to either Caleb or Joshua, but listened to the other ten spies, and as a result spent 40 years (one year for every day the spies spent in Canaan) wandering in the desert wilderness, until every one of that generation, 20 years old or older, had died, never entering the Promised Land. And because of their lack of faith, God struck down the ten spies responsible for spreading the bad report about the land, but blessed Joshua and Caleb. Moses writes, ***“These men who were responsible for spreading a bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the Lord. Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived”*** (Numbers 14:37-38).

Then after forty years of wandering in the desert – Moses gives his farewell speech to the Israelites, as they stood ready to enter the Promised Land. However, before entering the Promised Land, Moses reminds them not to make the same mistake their dead ancestors made. Moses reminds this new generation of what happened to the disobedient followers that lacked faith in God, by recapping what God had said would happen to the grumbling disobedient people that left Egypt: **Deuteronomy 1:35-36, “No one from this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give your ancestors, except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly.”** What God continues to look for today are those that would follow Him wholeheartedly regardless of the obstacles before them!

Forty-five years after this promise was given by God – at age 85 Caleb was eager to cash in on God’s promise, and the account is recorded for us in **Joshua 14:6-14**. Joshua gives Caleb the city of Hebron in the hill country, just South of Jerusalem, as his inheritance. However, Caleb won’t be able to walk right in and occupy the city of Hebron, because it is still being occupied by the Anakites (a nation of giants who were greatly feared by the Israelites); so, Caleb will have to drive out the Anakites before he can occupy his inheritance from God. This man of great faith, Caleb, who follows God wholeheartedly, responds to Joshua – **NO PROBLEM!** Caleb is not concerned in the least bit because he knows that the battle is God’s! Caleb knows that God had promised him this city 45 years earlier,

and he will be able to take it and occupy it because God is a promise keeper. Here's eighty-five year old bold, fearless, and courageous Caleb, still as strong and vigorous as a forty year old, ready and more-than-willing to battle the giants that are standing between him and his inheritance. Nothing will stand in your way when you know that God is on your side!

To find out more details of what happened, we need to turn to **Judges 1** – which takes us about 25 years into the future, giving us more details of the conquest, *“As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove from it the three sons of Anak”* (Judges 1:20). Caleb defeats not one giant, not two giants, but three giants, and occupies the land. And **Joshua 14:14** gives us this summary, *“So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly. Then the land had rest from war.”*

What does it mean to follow the Lord wholeheartedly well into old age? Or could we also look at the life of Caleb to answer the question, *“How to survive at 85?”* I have often thought about what I will be doing to serve the Lord when I am 85 if the Lord blesses me with long life? Well, I am hoping, fifteen years from now, that I will still be strong, healthy, and vigorous so that I can still be faithfully serving the Lord in some capacity.

Last Sunday, Pastor Jason Cartier (U-Turn Ministries) spoke about the importance of role models for our youth – those that impart to them faith, love, revelation and understanding of Christ. Role models that are continuously emptying their cup into the lives of others that are models of Christlikeness. We all need good examples to follow – but men in particular need good examples to follow, and I pray that all of you have had, or still have, some good godly men in your lives as models and mentors. And I also pray that there are some younger men in the faith who are looking up to you as their role model to follow as well. In this Father's Day message, I want us to look at three important spiritual qualities of Caleb that will help us be good role models well past 85 years of age:

1. CALEB'S EXAMPLE OF PERSISTENCE

Caleb had been promised a piece of property forty-five years earlier, and since that promise was made what has he been doing; he has spent forty years wandering in the wilderness with a bunch of dissatisfied, unfaithful, grumbling and whining people, yet was not discouraged. Then under Joshua's leadership, Caleb spent

another five years putting his life on the line as a soldier fighting against the various Canaanite nations that were occupying the land and was not tired of fighting God's battles. And for all that time, even after 45 years, Caleb was still holding onto God's promise. So, one day he comes up to his long time friend Joshua, and asks this favour, *"I still remember God's promise to me, now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day!"* After all of this time of waiting, Caleb never let go of that promise – that is what the Bible calls persistence.

The question for us is this: *"Am I being persistent; when God gives me a promise, do I hold on to it, do I persevere, do I wait patiently for it, even if it takes 45 years?"* According to author, Herbert Lockyer, the Bible contains 7,457 promises from God (*All the Promises in the Bible*), and he states that all of the promises within the pages of the Bible are there for us to claim, but until we take hold of them, they're worthless. Think of it this way, an unclaimed promise of God is like never claiming a multi-million dollar winning lottery ticket – an unclaimed lottery ticket is just a worthless piece of paper until you claim it. Likewise, the promises of God that we find throughout the Bible are only worthless Words written on paper unless we claim them as our own and take hold of them. Once you find a promise that God has given to you, claim it, and never let it go – even if you have to wait 45 years for it to be fulfilled! Caleb teaches us to never give up on God or His promises. So, the first lesson here for us is to never-ever be tempted to give up on God and His promises. We are to take a strong grip on the promises of God, and never release them, no matter what – because God is a promise keeper, and God honors persistence!

2. CALEB'S EXAMPLE OF ENDURANCE

Both Joshua and Caleb were eighty after forty years of wandering in the desert, and even older after another five years of battles in Canaan, but God reminded them in their old age that He wasn't through with them yet. We read in **Joshua 13:1**, *"When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the Lord said to him. You are very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over."* Even though Joshua was very old, God still needed him; God still had kingdom work for him to do; God could still use him and He did use Joshua until he was 110. This tells me that God needs seniors to stay active; God needs seniors to stay in the game because seniors are very important in the ministry of every church. Maybe, you would have expected God to tell Joshua something like this, *"Joshua, you've*

worked hard serving me all these years and you have done a great job; take a rest for a while, go ahead and spend the winter months somewhere warm, and the summer months at the cottage by the lake, you deserve it; put your feet up, take a back seat, I'll use some of these younger guys now.” Instead, God not only preserved the promise for both Joshua and Caleb for forty-five years, but God also preserved their health as well so they could claim God’s promise. I believe that God will do the same for us, God will keep us healthy well into our senior years if we are willing to continue to serve Him wholeheartedly. Caleb was 85 years old before he settled down and moved into his home in the Promised Land, a place he and his family could call their own and raise future generations. Even at 85 Caleb never felt like it was time to slow down, step aside, and let the younger guys take over; instead, Caleb was eager and more than willing to claim his inheritance through warfare because he served God wholeheartedly!

Here’s our application: When you follow God wholeheartedly – you will never want to retire from serving Him. God can continue to use you at whatever age to accomplish great things for the kingdom of God! Even though we are very fortunate that we can retire from our jobs and careers after a certain number of years, God can still use us, especially now that we have more time to serve Him. Retirement from a career is a great idea – I am all for it – I am very fortunate and thankful that I have been able to retire after working 33 years at my secular job, and then given the opportunity to start a second career. However, retirement from serving God is always out of the question, no matter how many years you have already served Him. How can we put our feet up when there are so many needs around us and so many who need Christ in their lives? And God certainly could use more people as prayer warriors!

Three times in Joshua 14 – we read these words describing Caleb, ***“he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.”*** This tells me, that if you aren’t following God with your *whole* heart, you’re only a half-hearted Christian, and of limited use to God. Caleb was definitely not a half-hearted believer! God has called *every* Christian to serve Him wholeheartedly, but the problem with many of us as we age is that we become too cautious, and too careful, our courage subsides – and we tend to lose that sense of wonder, adventure, passion and drive we had when we were younger – we no longer want to take risks, change careers, move, or take on a new endeavor – we want to coast through our remaining years because it’s safe. However, to God, coasting through your golden years when you have so much experience to offer is tragic!

We must also never think of serving the Lord as a job – but as a lifelong calling. When we become a Christian, we become a member of the family of God, and God calls all of His children to serve Him – it's not something we can take a vacation from, or retire from – it's our lifelong career, our lifelong profession. Don't ever think that God can't use me because I'm too old, I don't have any gifts, or special training, or abilities. One of the greatest servants of God in the 19th Century was a shoe salesman from Chicago named Dwight L. Moody. He was never ordained, and never attended college or seminary. But one time, D. L. Moody heard a preacher speak these words: *"The world has yet to see what God can do **IN** and **WITH** and **THROUGH** and **FOR** a man wholly committed to Him."* And, at that very moment, D. L. Moody said, *"By the grace of God I will be that man."*

As a result, Dwight L. Moody shook two continents for Christ – and has a Bible college named after him, and the fact that he was so uneducated that he literally murdered the English language every time he spoke, never stopped God from using him. As bad as his grammar was, God used him to bring thousands of British and American citizens to Christ because he had the one ability that God always honors in His followers – **AVAILABILITY!** The point of the example of Moody is that God isn't through with you – whatever your age, whatever your education, whatever your gifts and abilities – you can't use any of them as an excuse for not serving Him in some capacity. God used Caleb because he made himself **AVAILABLE**, and God can use any one of us if we make ourselves **AVAILABLE**. The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint – we keep on serving – we keep on praying – we keep on making ourselves available to God right up to our very last breath. There's no retirement plan for Christians, and I pray that I have the same endurance as Caleb when I reach the age of 85 and beyond that I'm still in the race, heading for the finish line!

3. CALEB'S EXAMPLE OF COURAGE

The third lesson we can learn from Caleb is the lesson of courage. He had been a courageous brave soldier at age 40 and continues to be a courageous brave soldier at age 85. He was still ready and more than willing to go out to battle the giants that were standing in the path to his inheritance. The definition of courage is not the absence of fear; courage is the ability to face your fears head-on and keep on moving forward. Every soldier who stormed onto the beaches of Normandy on D-Day during WWII was terrified of what laid before them, the great unknown of

whether they will make it across those beaches or not; however, they stormed those beaches anyway in spite of their fears. They weren't fearless, but they were courageous. Whenever you are afraid, it's not the lack of fear, it's courage that keeps you moving forward. Because of courage, Caleb moved forward to claim the promise of God, despite his fear of the giants that occupied the land, saying: ***"with the Lord's help, I will drive them out just as he said"*** (Joshua 14:12).

Application: When you fight in God's strength – you will never retreat from the enemy! When you follow the Lord wholeheartedly, you will never back up, shut up, or give up until you are caught up – caught up to heaven! But we can't ever do any of this in our own strength, we need the power of the Holy Spirit. We read these stories in the Bible and think, *"Well, yeah, that was back then;"* however, we fail to realize that God is still at work today through His people who are filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit, believers who are willing to follow God wholeheartedly. The problem that needs to be defeated is lack of courage! From the beginning of the Bible to the very end, we read about followers of God who were filled with courage – there was this confidence in all of them that *"my God will come through."* We read about these heroes of faith: David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego in the fiery furnace, Elijah on Mount Carmel, but we lose the application for us today. We become fearful to trust in God to come through for us – for our jobs, our finances, our families, our church and we are particularly afraid to share our faith, or stand up for what we believe, and stand up against the degradation of society that's rampant around us. And yet, from the beginning of the Bible and all the way to the end, it's about people who said, *"NO, I'm not afraid. I will continue to trust in God."*

The second last chapter in the Bible, Revelation 21, gives us the following wonderful promise – one day we will dwell with God in a new heaven and new earth. However, there's a condition, God says only those who are victorious in this life, only conquerors will be the ones God is going to bring to be with Him in the end. God says in **Revelation 21:3**, ***"I'm going to be their God, and they are going to be my children,"*** and then God goes on to make it conditional in **verse 8**, ***"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*** This makes it very clear to me that His followers not only need to believe and be free of their sins, but also need to be bold and courageous, who remember how much authority and power is within them, as the Holy Spirit empowers them!

We all have various giants in our lives, and they may or may not be the same for all of us, however, let me mention two enemies that every one of us need to overcome:

1. You need to defeat your grasshopper complex!

The first enemy the Israelites had to conquer was their grasshopper complex. The spies reported there were giants in Canaan, and said, ***“We saw the Nephilim there. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them”*** (Numbers 13:33). Ten of the spies suffered from a grasshopper complex. They were already defeated in their minds before any physical battle took place, because they thought that they looked like grasshoppers to the mighty warriors of Canaan. Maybe they *did* look like grasshoppers in their own eyes, but once they crossed the flooded Jordan River, we read this about the Canaanite nations that lived there, ***“Now when the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until they all crossed over, their hearts melted in fear and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites”*** (Joshua 5:1). The Canaanite nations never saw them as grasshoppers but feared them! At times we may also be suffering from a grasshopper complex, thinking that we are too small in number, and we are too insignificant to matter or make a difference, but how can we go around with this defeated and hopeless attitude, when we have the almighty power of God on your side; knowing that Satan fears those who follow the Lord wholeheartedly!

To claim God’s promises and live in the land of victory – we have to overcome the grasshopper complex that we easily fall into. Instead, we need to have the attitude of Caleb. Caleb didn’t deny there were giants in the land, instead, he confidently told the people in **Numbers 14:9**, ***“do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them.”*** While the cowardly spies were whining, *“Look how big those giants are compared to us!”* Caleb was confidently saying, *“I will eat them for lunch!”*

2. You need to defeat your inner giants!

Most of the giants we face are ones we create in our own lives – most often we are the problem. When it comes to spiritual victory, the old comic strip character Pogo, was right when he said, *“We have met the enemy, and he is us!”* Our greatest enemy is looking back at us in the mirror. We all have to face and fight the same three giants that Caleb had to fight, which is our identity: *“Who I am”*

that's our ego; "*What I am*" that's our enemy of pride; and "*What I can do,*" which is our enemy of self-reliance. Sure, there may be giants on the outside, but we'll never be successful against the external giants until we learn to defeat those three internal giants – our ego, our pride, and our wanting to take control and do things in our own strength.

Do you have the courage to fight against the giants you face? When you follow the Lord wholeheartedly like Caleb did, you can face any giant. **Ephesians 6:10-11** gives us the secret to winning any battle the enemy throws at us, "***Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.***" In our own strength, we are as helpless as a newborn baby, but when we depend on God's strength, by putting on the full armour of God, we have all the power of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah fighting on our behalf!

I would like to close by reading a poem about Caleb's courage that captures the great faith of this man of God:

*He stood before Joshua with flashing eyes;
"Give me this mountain before I die!"
"But Caleb, you're old and the mountain is high;
Choose a peaceful spot on this plain to die;
The people who live on the mountain are strong;
The battle you fight will be bloody and long."
His eyes never wavered as he spoke without fear;
"I've been promised this mountain for 45 years!
And as for the people being mighty and tall;
The bigger they are, the harder they fall!
For it's not my strength on which I'm a countin';
For the Lord is going to give me that there mountain;
So let's quit talking while it is still light;
For the Lord and I have a battle to fight!"*
(Author unknown)

So, looking at your life, who do you resemble? Do you resemble Joshua and Caleb, or do you resemble the other ten spies looking at their impossible unsolvable problems in life? Are you looking at God's divine calling for your life, or are you listening to those negative voices telling you that you can't do anything great? Do you have any dreams from the Lord and things He has called you to do,

but you have not done them yet because of fear, or because you feel that you are too old and out of the race? If so, stop listening to the ten spies network; instead, be a **Caleb**, we must take hold of God's perspective and trust every promise He gives us from His Word. Then like **Caleb** – believe wholeheartedly in the Lord and follow Him wholeheartedly in whatever He asks you to do, believing that I can do all things IN CHRIST, as Christ strengthens me, regardless of my age, and regardless of any giants standing in my way – because I'm not done yet – God can still use me! I will never leave anything the Lord has called me to do – undone – because I'm not done yet!

I will live with a reckless abandonment to the will of God! I will never use my age as an excuse for not doing what God has asked you to do. The key is to continuously bear fruit, regardless of my age. I will take hold of God's promise in **Psalm 92:12-15**, ***"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'"***