

## INTRODUCTION

This is the final message in the series from Joshua entitled "Making the Leap from Good to Great!" The title is based on the excellent book by Jim Collins called *Good to Great*. Our thesis has been that there is a level of Christian living that can be described as "good." It is living with the knowledge that your sins are forgiven and you will go to heaven when you die. This good life can be compared to the Israelites, who wandered in the wilderness for forty years; a Christian who has settled for the comfort zone of the wilderness experiences boredom and dissatisfaction. But we've learned there is another level of Christian living represented by entering into the Promised Land. It's a land of adventure, warfare, and victory. And every Christian has the opportunity to make the leap from good (monotony) to great (victory).

In this lesson we're going to learn about an 85-year-old man named Caleb who made the leap from good to great. The title of the message is "How to Thrive at Age 85" and it applies to anyone who hasn't reached that age, too!

You're getting old if you can remember when:

1. Soft drinks only came in bottles and you could get a deposit back.
2. Gasoline was 26 cents per gallon and ethyl was high at 30 cents.
3. Nobody owned a purebred dog.
4. Coffee shops had tableside juke boxes.
5. Telephone numbers had a word prefix.
6. Refrigerators were still called "the icebox."
7. Coke bottles had names of cities on the bottom.
8. Letter jackets and sweaters were only for athletes.
9. You not only didn't wear a seat belt, but you slept on the rear hat rack!
10. When the Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan show!

Someone said that old age is when you've got it all together; you just can't remember where you put it. Let's read about Caleb—he had it all together and he knew where it was at!

Joshua 14:6-13. "Now the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, 'You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.' Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites [giants] were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the

Lord helping me, will drive them out just as he said.' Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance."

Last week we studied Achan, who is a bad example to avoid. We learned the hard truth that sin will take you farther than you ever wanted to go; it will keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay; and it will cost you more than you ever wanted to pay. In this lesson Caleb serves as a good example of three important spiritual qualities:

## 1. CALEB'S EXAMPLE OF PERSISTENCE

Caleb had been promised a piece of property forty five years earlier. Since that promise, he spent forty years wandering in the wilderness with a bunch of dissatisfied, unfaithful, whining people. Then under Joshua's leadership, Caleb spent the past five years fighting as a soldier against the Canaanite kingdoms. Even after 45 years, he still held onto God's promise. He said, "I remember God's promise to me, now give me this hill country!" He never let go of that promise—that's what the Bible calls persistence.

### **Application: When God gives you a promise—you should never release it!**

Here's the application for us: When God gives you a promise—you should never release it! Has God given you a promise? No, he has given you hundreds and thousands of promises right here in His Word. According to the author, Herbert Lockyer, there are 7,457 of God's promises in the Bible. (*All the Promises in the Bible*)

They are all yours to claim. But until you take hold of them, they don't do you any good. An unclaimed promise of God is like not claiming a winning lottery ticket. Last week, the news reported on the winners of largest lottery prize in history—\$365 million. Eight workers in an Omaha, Nebraska meat packing company split the winnings. What if someone held a winning lottery ticket, but never cashed it in to claim the prize? Actually, they'd be doing themselves a favor, because a recent study revealed that 80% of lottery winners end up declaring bankruptcy within 5 years.

I tell you what's a lot sadder than not claiming a winning Lottery Ticket—having the precious promises of God and not taking hold of them. In order to claim God's promises, you have to read them, and then take hold of them—claim them. And then, once you find a promise, never release it—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. One of my favorite stories is about a scrawny high kid from West Texas who attended a small high school. They didn't have a wrestling program, but he read a book on wrestling and asked one of the assistant football coaches if he would enter him in some of the wrestling matches in that region.

The coach agreed to help the kid. This little guy was neither strong, nor skillful, but he had one enduring quality—he refused to give up. He won every single wrestling match, because he tenaciously held on to his opponents and wore them down. By the end of the season, he was undefeated and made it to the state finals for his weight classification. The kid's opponent was a

two-time state champ and a bona fide college prospect. As the scrawny kid faced the state champion, the state champion made a couple of quick moves, and soon had the West Texas kid pinned. The coach knew his athlete was about to lose, and he couldn't bear to watch it, so he turned his head away. Suddenly, the coach heard the roar of the crowd and when he turned around, his kid was on top of the state champ, pinning him. He had won the match! The little guy bounced across the mat and hugged the coach and said, "Coach, I won! I won!" The coach said, "Sure, son. But I missed it. I turned away just before you were about to lose, what happened?" The kid said, "Coach, that guy was good. He had me twisted like a pretzel on that mat. But you know me, coach. I NEVER quit. I refuse to give up! So I opened my eyes, and there in front of my face was a big toe. I don't even know if it's against the rules or not, but I bit into that big toe with all my strength...and coach, it's amazing what you can do when you bite your OWN toe!"

If you're ever tempted to give up on God and his promises, just remember that little guy. Take a grip on the promises of God and never release them—God honors persistence.

## 2. CALEB'S EXAMPLE OF ENDURANCE

Both Joshua and Caleb were old, but God reminded them that He wasn't through with them. In Joshua 13:1 we read, "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." God needed a couple of octogenarians to seal the deal. You'd expect Him to say, 'You've done a good job; take a rest for a while, I'll use some of these younger guys now.

God not only preserved the promise for the man, God preserved the *man* for the promise. Caleb was 85 years old before he ever moved into his home place. That's an age when most people are feeling like it's time to slow down and step aside. Are there any men here today who are 85 or older, would you stand up? I'm proud of you for just being here!

### **Application: When you follow God wholeheartedly—you'll never retire from serving Him!**

Here's the personal application for our lives: When you follow God wholeheartedly—you'll never retire from serving Him! Many of you are involved in jobs and careers that allow you to retire after a certain number of years. And some of you have already retired. Retirement from a career is a good idea—you've earned it, now go out and spend your children's inheritance!

Six times in the Old Testament we read these words describing Caleb, "He wholeheartedly followed the Lord." In fact, Caleb's name literally means, "follows God like a dog." If you aren't following God with your *whole* heart, you're only a half-hearted Christian—and half-hearted Christians are faint-hearted Christians.

God has called *every* Christian to serve Him. And if you are following God with all your heart, you'll never retire from spiritual service. Serving the Lord is not a job; it's a life-calling. The word "vocation" comes from the Latin word "*vocare*" which means "to call." God has called all of His children to serve Him—it's your real vocation—and you can't take a vacation from your vocation.

You may think God can't use you because you're too old, or you don't have any special training or abilities. One of the greatest servants of God in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a shoe salesman from Chicago named D.L. Moody. He was never ordained and he never attended college or seminary. But one time, D.L. Moody heard a preacher, Henry Varley, 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 moment, D.L. Moody said, "By the grace of God I will be that man."

D.L. Moody shook two continents for Christ—including England. He was so uneducated that he literally murdered the King's English. On one occasion in London, D.L. Moody was preaching to a crowd of very educated and sophisticated Englishmen. This next sentence reveals how poorly he spoke. He said, "Don't never think that God don't love you, for He do." As bad as his grammar was, God used him to bring thousands of British and American citizens to Christ. He had the one ability God always honors—availability.

God isn't through with you—whatever your age. There are plenty of jobs right around here for you to tackle. Or if you listen, God may be telling you to sell all you have and go to the other side of the world and share the gospel.

Remember, the Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint, so keep on serving, keep on praying, keep on being available to God! When I was in my 30s I thought I might retire from preaching when I was in my 50s but now I realize I was just backslidden when I thought that! Now that I've reached 53, I realize I will never retire from serving God. One day in the distant future, there may be some young guy come in who has dark hair like I used to have, to serve as pastor of this church, but I will absolutely never stop preaching the gospel as long as I have a breath in my body. As long as I have teeth I'm going to chew on the old devil, and even when I lose my teeth, I'm going to gum Him to distraction! May God give me and you the kind of endurance that Caleb had at age 85!

### **3. CALEB'S EXAMPLE OF COURAGE**

The third lesson we can learn from Caleb is the lesson of courage. He had been a brave soldier at age 40, and we see he was just as courageous when he was 85. He was still ready to go out to battle.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the ability to face your fears and to keep on moving forward. Every soldier who stormed onto the beaches of Normandy on D-Day was terrified. They weren't fearless—but they were courageous. When you are afraid, courage keeps you moving forward. I found a good definition of courage recently: Courage is being the only one who knows how afraid you are!

**Application: When you fight in God's strength—you'll never retreat from the enemy!**

Here's the personal application for us: When you fight in God's strength—you'll never retreat from the enemy! Caleb was still ready to go charging into battle when he was 85 years old. When you follow the Lord with your whole heart, you will never back up, shut up, or give up until you are caught up to heaven!

You may be wondering about the identity of your enemy. Let me mention two enemies you have to overcome:

### **1. You can defeat your grasshopper complex!**

The first enemy the Israelites had to conquer was their grasshopper complex. Forty-five years earlier, Moses led them to Kadesh Barnea and they sent twelve spies into the Promised Land to investigate it. When these twelve spies returned, ten of them reported there were giants in Canaan. The Bible says in Numbers 13:33 "We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

Ten of the spies suffered from a grasshopper complex. They were already defeated in their minds, because they thought that they looked like grasshoppers to the mighty warriors of Canaan. They were only *half* right. They *did* look like grasshoppers in their own eyes. But the Canaanites, they didn't look like grasshoppers—they looked like a mighty army. According to Rahab, the Prostitute who became a Princess, the people in Canaan had been trembling in fear of the mighty Israelite army for forty years! You may be suffering from a grasshopper complex, thinking you are too little or too insignificant to matter.

If you hear "you can't do it" enough, you may begin to believe it. There is an amazing story that comes out of Rochester, New York. An autistic student named Jason McElwain worked as the manager of the high school basketball team. Ja-Mac, as he's called, had never put on a uniform, but for the last game of the season, his coach let him dress out. Toward the end of the game, he put Ja-Mac in to play. His first shot was an air ball that missed the goal by 6 feet. But pretty soon, he got hot. In the last 4 minutes of the game, Ja-Mac scored 20 points, including six three-point bombs. After the game, the students and team lifted Ja-Mac onto their shoulders. I like his attitude. When you're different, it takes courage to get out on the field of competition and attempt to play. Remember, victory comes in "cans"—defeat comes in "can'ts."

So, before you claim God's promises and live in the land of victory, you've got to overcome the grasshopper complex. You've got to have the attitude of Caleb. Caleb didn't deny there were giants there, instead, he said in Numbers 14:9 that these giants would be "bread for us." He was saying that in God's power, they would have them for lunch! The wimpy spies were whining, "Look how big those giants are compared to us!" Caleb said, "Look how small those giants are compared to God!" The worry warts whined, "They're too big for us to fight." Caleb said, "They're too big for us to miss!"

One of my favorite poems is "It Couldn't Be Done" by Edgar Guest. It reminds me of the attitude Caleb had, and the kind of attitude all of us should embrace. It says,

*Somebody said it couldn't be done,  
But he with a chuckle replied  
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one  
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.*

*So he buckled right in with a trace of grin  
On his face. If he worried he hid it.  
He started to sing as he tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done, and he did it.*

*Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;  
At least no one has ever done it;"  
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat,  
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.  
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,  
Without any doubting or quiddit,  
He started to sing and he tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done, and he did it.*

*There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,  
There are thousands to prophesy failure;  
There are thousands to point out to you, one by one,  
The dangers that wait to assail you;  
But just buckle in with a bit of grin,  
Just take off your coat and go to it;  
Just start to sing as you tackle the thing  
'That cannot be done' and you'll do it!*

## **2. You can defeat your inner giants!**

Most of the giants we face are ones we create in our own life, anyway. When it comes to spiritual victory, the old comic strip character Pogo, was right. He said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us!" I agree. Do you know the one person in this church that I have more trouble with than anybody else? It's my wife's first husband—that guy really bugs me. (FYI—my wife has only been married once)

In Joshua 15:14, we read about three of the giants that Caleb fought. Now, remember, names were more than just identifying labels, they carried meaning. Let's meet these three giants: "From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites—Sheshai [that name means "who I am"], Ahiman [that name means "what I am"] and Talmi [which means, "what I can do"]." So, before you can ever claim victory, you have to face and fight the same three giants: "Who I am" that's your ego; "What I am" that's the enemy of pride; and "What I can do," which is the enemy of self-sufficiency. Sure, there are other giants on the outside. But you'll never be successful against the external giants until you learn to defeat those three internal giants.

Do you have the courage to fight against the giants you face? When you follow the Lord with your whole heart like Caleb did, you will be willing to face any giant. In his book, *One Crowded Hour*, Tim Burton wrote about something that happened in Borneo in 1964. The Nepalese soldiers, called Gurkhas, were known for their valor. The British command asked a squad of Gurkhas if they would be willing to jump out of an airplane into combat against the enemy. After discussing it for a moment, the Gurkha sergeant replied, "Yes, we will jump out, if the airplane

will fly as slow as possible only 100 ft. above a swamp." The British Commander said, "But that's too low. Your parachutes wouldn't have time to open." The Gurkha sergeant said, "Oh, you didn't mention parachutes." Now, that's courage! They were willing to jump out of an airplane without parachutes.

When you fight in the strength of the Lord, you'll be willing to attack hell with water pistols! That's the secret—utilizing the strength of the Lord. Ephesians 6:10-11 says, "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 your own strength, you are as helpless as a newborn kitten. But when you depend on God's strength, you have all the power of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!

You may face an uncertain future and it may seem victory is impossible to attain, but just remember, the word "impossible" is not part of God's vocabulary. It IS impossible in your strength, but you must claim this promise: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)

## CONCLUSION

A pastor friend of mine gave me a great poem about Caleb's courage that captures the valor 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 countin';  
For the Lord is going to give me that mountain;  
So let's quit talking while it is still light;  
For the Lord and I have a battle to fight!"*

*(Author unknown)*

So, let's take to heart those lessons from Caleb—never *release* God's promises; never *retire* from serving God; and never *retreat* from the enemy! If you will follow God with your whole heart and depend on his strength alone, you will still be able to thrive at age 85. If God can do that for an old man, just think what He can do with someone like you!

You CAN make the leap from good to great! In the land of victory you will be too blessed to be stressed and you'll find you there is more to shout about than to pout about!

## OUTLINE

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1. Defeat your grasshopper complex!
2. You can defeat your inner giants!

"Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the devil's scheme." *Ephesians 6:10-11*





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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes