

Follow the Lord your God wholeheartedly! Joshua 14:6-15

What does it mean to follow the Lord God wholeheartedly?

This has been a morning of enlightenment for us, especially when we consider what is possible and even achievable in our senior years. Three testimonies from those in their 80's. Triathlete Sister Mary Buder full of faith and vigour, Fay Mearn's, filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered for her God given purpose in the next season of life. And of course, Caleb, our example from the scripture in this matter of faith-wholeheartedly following God.

Caleb received his special inheritance within the area given to his Tribe, Judah. Here he proved that his expression of faith made forty-five years earlier was not just mere words. At that time, he and Joshua alone in Israel believed that the Israelites could destroy the fearsome people of Anak whom they saw in Canaan when they first went and spied out the Promised Land. Now, forty-five years later and Caleb was just as ready and prepared to fight. So Joshua gladly gave him permission to go ahead (vv.13-15) to follow the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly, and take his allotted and promised hill country.

After listening to our three testimonies, you might like to consider where it is that you stand today, with regards to physical vigour, spiritual strength, and power in the midst of the ups and downs of life. No matter what has happened in your journey of faith thus far, I hope this morning that each one of us would gain a firm grasp on our need to follow the LORD God. In spite of the majority of people departing from faith in Christ today, choosing not to believe, may you and I like Caleb stand and be counted as one who, "wholeheartedly follows the LORD." Adopting Caleb's attitude where we patiently wait in faith for the promised inheritance, which some day will be ours when the LORD comes to reward His followers. Then, just as Israel's land had rest from war (v.15), we too shall enter into our rest from strife and conflict.

I visited a 99 year-old lady the other day that is in her last week or weeks of life. She is waiting now, having lived long through more than enough changes to only want to have to make one more. And that is to go to be with the LORD after a life of serving God and her family except for the last 10 years of living in a rest home. She wholeheartedly believes and cannot wait to receive her last [overdue] promise from God when Jesus comes to take her home.

This is a faith and belief based on trusting in God's promises, no matter how long they take to be fulfilled, a faith that we can rely on as opposed to doubt and unbelief that is displayed by so many in our society, including our leaders. This doubt and unbelief can tend to overlap and affect even those who are in the church, including leaders. This is important because the powerful influence of faithless leaders can be seen in their ability to make the hearts of the people doubt and therefore melt as in the case of Israel. In contrast, the one who **"followed the Lord God wholeheartedly"** through faith and patience was rewarded (Hebrews 6:9-12).

Here is an example...

We know Israel wandered thirty-eight more years in the wilderness before she came again to enter the promised land, so Caleb's report of forty-five years passing tells us the conquest of Canaan had taken seven years to that time (Deuteronomy 2:14-15).

Great men and women of God, like Caleb, rely upon God to give them the strength to complete their task. [King] David was another proclaiming the power and strength of God in slaying the giant Goliath. Then there is the Apostle Paul in his old age who was strengthened by God to continue to proclaim the message. Paul knew he was blessed and gave God the glory (2 Tim 4:16-18) As with Paul, Caleb knew he had lived to be eighty-five because of God's blessing v.10. And still, at this age, knew that he could only accomplish his conquest if the Lord was with him v.12. Caleb had told the children of Israel 45 years previously that they could conquer the land. He maintained this unwavering belief so that, with the help of God, he did conquer the hill country despite the fact that he faced the strongest of the giants who lived in Canaan, the Anakites [vv13-15 & 15:13-19]. All because...

I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly: (v.8) Caleb along with Joshua were the only two spies to come back with a good report, a report of faith, believing that God had given Israel the land and would enable them to conquer it (Numbers 13:26-14:9). The other ten spies believed that Israel would be destroyed in the attempt to take Canaan, and Israel, including their leaders, believed the ten doubting spies. The ten faithless spies measured the giants against their own strength, but Caleb measured the spy's view of the giants against Gods strength.

In Caleb stating v.9

"Because you have followed the Lord my God

wholeheartedly" he is not being proud, he is just quoting what Moses had said about him. Today, we should imitate Caleb's boldness in asking for what God promised him. We may find it hard to believe, but God appreciates this kind of boldness.

Because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly

As Caleb repeats this phrase twice, we can assume it made a significant impression on him - and fittingly so, because it is a greatly important thing to **wholly or wholeheartedly** follow the LORD. We recognise that most successful people are those who have wholly given themselves over to something. Just like an athlete preparing for the Olympic games. Will we **wholeheartedly** give ourselves over to following the LORD?

V.10-11 So here I am today, eighty-five years old!

I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out:

Though he is advanced in age, his strength is undiminished. At eighty-five he was out leading the fight, and not against just any foe, but against the Anakites. This is how God wants us to be in our spiritual life as we advance in years: growing older, and perhaps bolder, but never, never weaker in Jesus Christ.

V.12 Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there:

In fact, Caleb *wants* the fight. He could have asked for an easy place, but he knows that these foes must be faced and figures that he may as well be the one to do it. He does not leave the work to someone else to do, though he could have, especially at his age. And it is all, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly: **V.13** What if *all* of Israel had the heart of Caleb? What if *no one* in Israel had the heart of Caleb? Again, Caleb's secret is clear: he wholeheartedly followed the LORD God of Israel-, which meant there was a total commitment in Caleb's life!

What about your life right now?

Are you committed in faith to wholeheartedly follow the LORD? What is your hill country, the giant challenge that you consider difficult and not easy to achieve?

Or is it that you been affected by the Spirit of the world, the doubting and unbelieving majority who have had affected you so much that you doubt God's Word and suffer a lack of confidence in God because you haven't seen God fulfil your purpose or prayers answered yet?

If that's you then where do you get your sense of purpose, strength and vigour from now?

The Bible tells us just **how strong and vigorous are those who walk with God in Isaiah 40:31**

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

If you're aging like me and you want that dynamic energy to fill you, then ask God to renew your strength, and when you do, believe that you will receive the Holy Spirit to empower you to achieve God's purpose in this season of life. In your senior years you're never too old to fight and defeat spiritual foes through continual prayer and intercession for those who labouring for the gospel, for the struggling, and for the unsaved going to hell. And old age does not prevent you from exercising the spiritual gift of Encouragement to build up the church and bring glory to God through speaking and writing spiritually true and positive things that serve to inspire and enthuse others. Old age doesn't prevent you from giving out of your money and material resources, or sharing your wisdom and discernment.

Lastly, until the day that the LORD returns to take you to heaven you can wholeheartedly share the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for you...

When you're that close to heaven, what have you got to lose? With the Lord's promises and help you can defeat the giants and take the hill country. But, whatever you do, don't waste your old age on doubt and unbelief, bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness. These attitudes are the opposite of wholeheartedly following God. We should live out our lives with a growing faith and trust in God. Believing in the LORD's promises including the gift of the Holy Spirit. But first, if necessary, focus on Christ, on your own personal need for him, his forgiveness and salvation so that you

genuinely have a personal belief to share with others, having been 'born again'.

So why not pray that your attitude will be like that of Caleb:

*“LORD, here I am today,[85] years old . . .
Now give me this hill country that You promised me that day . . .
With You helping me,
I will drive the giants out just as You promised”*

This courageous old warrior, who did not expect to receive his inheritance without exerting himself, remains a splendid example for our age, which increasingly looks for cradle-to-grave security. Caleb teaches us to never give up on God or His promises. May this truth stir our hearts and lead us to act as Caleb did. Blessing comes ultimately to the believer who like Caleb, follows the LORD God, wholeheartedly to the end!