

Caleb: A Man With A God-Sized Vision, Part 2

Joshua 14:8-12

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, December 3rd 2023

Last week we started looking at the inward characteristics that made Caleb such a godly and effective leader. And I think that everyone of us can aspire to have these God-given characteristics in greater measure. We may not be exactly like Caleb, but we can certainly grow in each of these inward characteristics. So let me very briefly review what we went over in verses 6-8. And I'll review them in the order that they appeared in the text.

The first inward characteristic was that Caleb thrived *under* authority and therefore was able to exercise godly authority over others. Too many people are pushed into leadership because they evidence obvious leadership *skills*, but there is always a danger if a person assumes leadership when he or she cannot operate *under* leadership. There is a spiritual disconnect when that happens. And this is one of the missing things in at least some of the national leaders who have flamed out in the last decade or two.

Second, because he had learned to lean on God's supernatural grace, he was driven to achieve things *beyond his own ability*. We should not be content with operating in the flesh - in other words, what we can achieve on our own. Our passion should be to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit's filling.

Third, his God-given vision helped him to focus on what *God* thought of him more than on what *others* thought of him. He was not dependent on the approval of others. It's very important that people get past the idolatry of needing the approval of others *before* they become leaders. Otherwise they will have a huge hole in their armor.

Fourth, he showed initiative rather than always being reactive. Initiative is the ability to make needed decisions and to act on them without always needing to be told what to do.

Fifth, he had no doubts about God's promises. Those were an anchor for his soul.

Sixth, his vision was big because it was grounded in God's Word, and he had obviously internalized God's Word. He was a man of the book.

Seventh, he did not allow dry spells, discouragements, or the passage of time to rob him of his God-given vision. If God gave the vision, circumstances did not matter. He pushed on through them.

Eighth, like William Carey, he expected great things from God.

Ninth, his heart, his words, and his actions matched his vision - with the emphasis being on the heart, since out of the heart proceed men's words and actions. It wasn't just a formality. His heart gave him passion.

Tenth, he shared his vision with others. Leaders can't help but share their vision. It is something that so grips their lives that it spills over into the lives of others.

And eleventh, he did not allow the fear that was being generated by others to kill his faith. Fear can be contagious, but leaders don't catch it.

And I know it's odd to end a sermon in the middle of a verse, but that's what we did last week. Caleb is such an important figure that I didn't want to rush my treatment of him.

A. He pressed into the Lord (v. 8b,9b,14b)

So that brings us up to the last clause in verse 8, which says, "but I wholly followed the LORD my God." The same thought is brought up again when he quotes Moses talking about him in verse 9 - "because you have wholly followed the LORD your God." And again in verse 14. Actually, the Bible uses that phrase five times of Caleb. so it is obviously a *very* significant characteristic of his leadership.

The Hebrew is a little bit hard to translate. Some loosely translate it as "he was fully loyal to the LORD God of Israel." Others translate the idea with "he wholeheartedly followed the LORD." But one author translated it as "he fully closed the gap with the Lord." I love that translation. That commentary points out that the Hebrew phrase is a phrase used by hunters to express the closing of the gap between themselves and their prey. In other words, Caleb kept the gap between himself and God as small as possible. But I especially like the Hebrew word for "wholly." That same author, Alan Carr, says,

The word "wholly" literally means "to fill." It carries the idea of "filling a sail with air." It is the picture of sails filled to capacity with all the available air so that the ship can move across the water with maximum speed. Every inch, every ounce, every nerve, every fiber of Caleb belonged to God.¹

And that's why I've labeled this point as "he pressed into the Lord." I think that captures the Hebrew well. Brothers and sisters - you can only press into the Lord if you have a constant walk with the Lord and love Him supremely. There are so many things that can keep a leader from pressing into the Lord. Busyness many times robs people of their heart devotion to the Lord. But can you imagine anyone more busy than Moses? I can't. Or can you imagine anyone more busy than Jesus? I can't. Yet both pressed into the Lord on a daily basis. This is yet another leadership characteristic that I am praying into your lives. Press into the Lord on a daily basis. It is only as you stick closely to Him that you will achieve a God-sized vision.

B. He expected promise-keeping to be reciprocal (v. 9a)

Look at the first part of verse 9 for the next characteristic: "So Moses swore on that day, saying..." and then he gives the oath-promise in the rest of the verse. Moses swore on that day. Moses swore an oath-promise to Caleb, and now Caleb is expecting Joshua to follow through on this prior commitment. We've already seen that Caleb counted on *God* to keep

¹ Alan Carr, "Give Me My Mountain (Joshua 14:6-15)," in *The Sermon Notebook: Old Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 733.

His promises. And that is involved here as well since Moses was speaking prophetically. But there is more. Caleb pointed to a commitment made by the leadership (Moses) and now asks the leadership (Joshua) to follow through on that commitment.

The point is that promise-keeping is reciprocal. Caleb kept his promises and he was confident that Moses and Joshua would keep their promises. When you are in an organization that follows through on their commitments it is a blessing indeed. Let me read you the testimony of how an incredibly busy pastor finally learned this lesson. I am quoting from a letter that he sent to a friend. He said,

In the first years of my ministry, I sinned against my family. I spent an inordinate amount of time with the church family away from my own family. From time to time, I was convicted and said to my wife, “We’re going to establish a family night each week.” We did this for one or two weeks, but then I allowed other things to take priority. Again, several months would go by and I would make another half-hearted (or quarter-hearted) effort and again failed to live up to my word. I’ll never forget how one night I was home and overheard my three-year-old daughter ask my wife, “Mommy, how come Daddy’s home? Is he sick?” I lamented to my wife, “Is the only time my kids see me at home is when I’m sick?” I again said, “For sure, we’re going to have a weekly family night no matter what!” But tragically, what I said was priority really wasn’t my priority in practice. My belief system wasn’t aligned with my value system.

Several more months went by. The oldest of my three children was now about eight. One of my sons asked me one evening if I would help him build his model airplane. I responded by saying that I had a meeting at the church, but I would do it the following night. The following evening came and my son asked me with great expectancy, “Daddy, are you going to help me build my model tonight?” What do you think I said? I explained that since the previous evening, a very important issue had come up that required my attention and then asked, “Do you understand?” With tears running down his cheeks, my son said “Yes, Daddy, I understand, but you promised!” Well after I helped build his model that night, we had a family night every week without fail. If you were to ask my adult children today about the highlights of their upbringing, one of them would be “family nights.” By the way, I can’t even remember what that “important issue” was. What I do know is that my family was far more important. I didn’t want to lose them and I thank God that I learned my lesson before it was too late.²

Now *he* learned the lesson of valuing his family, but when I read that I took home the importance of leaders being promise-keepers. Are you a leader who follows through on your promises? We want those who follow us to know that they can count on us to keep

² Don Jensen, “Learning the Significance of Decisions,” in *Lessons in Leadership: Fifty Respected Evangelical Leaders Share Their Wisdom on Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 154–155.

our promises. When we are promise-keepers, it creates a healthy environment where everyone thrives.

C. He was multi-generational in his vision (v. 9b)

Of course, the rest of verse 9 relates to family as well. It says, “Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance *and your children’s forever...*” Caleb’s vision was a multi-generational vision. And we will see that especially in the latter part of chapter 15 in his interactions with his daughter. But it is succinctly stated here as well. Caleb wasn’t in this just for himself. He was after all, 85 years old. He was leading in a way that would benefit the next generations. That’s long-term vision. And the book of 1 Chronicles shows name after name in Caleb’s descendants who proved to be leaders themselves, and had places named after them. Knowing Caleb, that is not surprising. After dealing with the faith being passed on from Moses to Caleb and to his children, Michael Anthony said,

Mentoring is a concept and process that every responsible Christian who is serious about passing on the faith should be involved in at some point. It is a critical component of parenting as a parent guides, nurtures, and prepares a child for life. As believers, we should be committed to the process of mentoring another in order to ensure the ongoing success of the church.³

So he was talking about covenant succession in family *and* church. Leaders should always be preparing the next generation. They are interested in leadership succession and covenant succession. In stark contrast, you have amazingly gifted leaders like King Hezekiah who missed out on this important point and raised helions. Hezekiah had other very good leadership qualities, but he missed this one. And Isaiah chapter 39 shows how disastrous it was. In that chapter, God warned Hezekiah that because of his pride in showing off his kingdom and his riches to the Babylonian envoys, that Babylon would (after he died) carry away his children and make them eunuchs and plunder his nation. His response was weird. He said, “The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good!... At least there will be peace and truth in my days.” Ach!! That’s astonishingly shortsighted. It’s not breaking his heart that his children and grandchildren would miss out. And he obviously did not pass on the faith to his sons. Though Hezekiah tore down the high places in Judah, his son Manasseh restored them, sacrificed some of his own children in fire to Molech, killed Isaiah, and was so wicked that 2 Kings 24:3-4 credits the exile to *Manasseh’s* wickedness. Obviously other later kings were also very wicked, but he apparently spread his wickedness so effectively that the passage credits him. That’s a complete reversal in just one generation! One commentary on Isaiah asks the question, “Could it be that Hezekiah’s lack of any concern for the future led him to be a derelict father who failed to impart to

³ Michael J. Anthony et al., *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 460.

Manasseh a vision for the glory of God and the future of Judah?”⁴ And my reading of Hezekiah’s life convinces me that this assumption is exactly correct.

The point is, you can be a good leader like Hezekiah, but if you lack Caleb’s multi-generational vision *and discipleship into that vision (in other words, leadership development of your kids)*, what you do will only last for one lifetime. May it not be so of any of us here. And I have a booklet called Leadership Development that can help you to improve your serve.

D. He was humble - attributing his longevity and success to the Lord (v. 10a)

The next characteristic that makes Caleb stand out is that he was humble, attributing his longevity and success to the Lord. He says, “And now, behold, *the LORD* has kept me alive, *as He said*, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses...”

We must be convinced of the truth of Psalm 127:1, that “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” If we make great accomplishments, give God the glory and thank Him. If we have great health, give God the glory and thank Him. If your children have turned out well, give God the glory and thank Him. We must not take glory for things that God Himself has done. May God increase humility within each of us.

E. He had endurance, patience, and tenacity during the years of wandering (v. 10b)

But that same verse that speaks of wandering in the wilderness speaks to his endurance, patience, and tenacity. Not every leader has tenacity as his working genius, and that’s OK. We can still grow in tenacity. And even if it doesn’t come naturally, all of us should seek to have a good work ethic, with endurance, patience, and at least some degree of tenacity. Everyone needs tenacity, whether it’s a working genius or not.

Last week I shared a lot of comparisons between Caleb and William Carey, the great missionary to India. And Carey definitely had this point in spades. To use Pat Lencioni’s label, I think it was his working genius. He had enormous endurance, patience, and tenacity. It took a lot to get to India, but once there he faced obstacle after obstacle. First, he was an illegal alien. Any European who wanted to live in India had to get a license from the East India Company, which refused to grant any licenses for missionary work - no exceptions. It wasn’t until 20 years later that Parliament finally permitted missionaries to get a license. But Carey was called by God and he insisted on living there despite the law being against him. So he worked around the system by doing things like setting up schools, printing presses, and other things, and did his missionary work at the same time.

⁴ Andrew M. Davis, *Exalting Jesus in Isaiah* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 226.

Once there, another missionary was caught in dishonest schemes almost destroying their fledgling work. Then his printing press burned down, and he started receiving severe opposition from government authorities and from the East India Company.

Yet his tenacity paid off. Though it took a long time to gain the first converts, he was successful in eventually planting churches, translating the Bible, and setting up more than one hundred rural schools for the people of India. He founded the Serampore College to train ministers who would multiply his efforts. He introduced the idea of a savings bank to the farmers of India. He established hospitals, founded the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India, and started a Bengali newspaper. He supervised the start of India's first printing press, paper mill, and steam engine. He also taught languages at a local college, wrote a Bengali-English dictionary, and later translated the full Bible into six languages and portions of it into twenty-nine other languages. Now granted, Carey was a genius in many ways. But he attributed much of his success to simple old fashioned hard work and tenacity.

And I know many famous leaders who are not geniuses and yet achieved a lot for the Lord because they learned tenacity. They pushed through despite depression; they pushed through despite discouragement. And they attributed their successes to God's blessing upon their tenacity. If you are easily discouraged and tempted to give up, ask God for the graces of patience, diligence, and tenacity. Those are all essential to a godly work ethic. And by the way, this is not just important for the men. This is important for everybody. I think all of these characteristics are important for everyone.

F. He maintained his vision into old age without becoming disillusioned (v. 10c-11)

Reading the last part of verse 10 and into verse 11 - Caleb said, "here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in." Obviously God gave him phenomenal physical fitness and health. But there is also the hint that he maintained his vision of conquest into old age without becoming disillusioned. What was there that could have made him cynical and disillusioned?

1. Despite the grasshopper theology of others (v. 10b - see Numb. 13:33)

There was the grasshopper theology of most in his generation. Doing what God called them to do was just too much for the older generation that had died off, and they whined, grumbled, and complained continually during those forty years of wandering. It would have been easy to become cynical and disillusioned in that environment, but he did not. I think it was Chesterton who said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." That is a great description of most of the people in Caleb's generation who had died off in the wilderness in unbelief. That was a testing ground for the reality of Caleb's God-given inward leadership qualities that we have been looking at. It was a testing ground. And in our faithless generation, we are living in a testing ground.

2. Despite the 40 years of wandering (v. 10c)

The long wait itself could have made Caleb doubt God's promises, but he did not. Waiting for 45 years for God's promise to be fulfilled is impressive.

3. Despite being 85 years old (v. 10d)

And he maintained his vision despite his old age.

4. Because of God's supernatural enabling (v. 11)

And I believe it was because of his faith in God's promises that he received supernatural enabling. He could reason that if God promised that he would take the land, that God would need to sustain his body to be able to do the fighting. We can claim from God any resources needed to fulfill our calling. If God has truly called us to a vision, He will answer our prayers for physical needs. He does not guarantee physical health, but if we need physical health to achieve our calling, we can claim promises like 3 John 2 - the promise that we will prosper in all things and be in health, even as our soul prospers. So don't become cynical in an age of unbelief.

G. He confidently & courageously claimed His possessions (v. 12)

And then finally, in verse 12 we see that he confidently and courageously claimed his possessions. He says, "Now therefore, give me this mountain..." He's basically saying, "I think it is God's time. I'm ready to receive it. I've done everything needed to get to this point, so please give me this mountain." And actually, it was a mountain *range* that went through the whole area given to Caleb. And the map shows that the mountain range extended beyond his territory all the way north through Israel. But the mountain area he was claiming is the whole area in the red oval on the map - and perhaps more than what I have placed in that oval, but it includes at least that area.

1. Based on the promises of God (v. 12a)

Once again he based his confidence on God's promises - "give me this mountain *of which the LORD spoke in that day...*" We don't have a record *in the Bible* of Moses specifically mentioning the giving of Hebron, but both Joshua and Caleb must have remembered Moses saying that. Thus, this was not a humanistic confidence, but a God-given confidence.

And by the way, to anticipate an objection, where some people say that Caleb didn't inherit the city of Hebron since it was a Levitical city, commentaries demonstrate that the word Hebron is referring to the whole countryside around the city of Hebron as being the *district* of Hebron.⁵ The city itself would be occupied by priests, and not by Calebites - that's true. But the *district* of Hebron included not just that city, but other towns and fortresses and

⁵ This is the view of many commentators. See for example, William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 250.

even the city of Debir (according to chapter 15). It's clear that the word "Hebron" can refer to the district. So the district of Hebron was a sizeable inheritance, as the map in your outline shows.

2. Despite the giants (v. 12c)

Let's look at the obstacles that he faced in gaining that territory. He ends verse 12 by saying that with God's help, he could do it - "for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said."

So here is another objection that liberals bring- how could there be Anakim in the Hebron area when chapter 11:22 says, "None of the Anakim were left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod." There are two theories that have been proposed to reconcile this chapter with chapter 11, and both of them are plausible. The first theory says that this section is a recapitulation and expansion of the earlier history of driving out the Anakim, but this time focusing on Joshua's lieutenant (Caleb), who did the fighting. So on that theory, this is a recapitulation; it's going back in time.

The second theory says that this section *does* come after the previous sections and it says that when the armies in chapters 11 and following moved north to other portions of the land for conquest (namely, attacking Jabin and his confederates), the region of Hebron was undefended, so the Anakim snuck back over the border from Philistia and reoccupied the mountain fortresses in the region of Hebron. I lean in that direction as it makes the most sense of the details, which seem sequential. And chapter 11:22 doesn't say the Anakim were killed. It says that none were left in the land. In other words, they fled.

Well, if the second theory is true, it certainly reflects what frequently happens to Christians. We can gain victories over certain besetting sins, but because we are not on guard, we suddenly find that things in our life that we had once conquered, need to be conquered again. You've probably experienced that. So to me, this is not surprising at all. This is exactly what happened to Jerusalem.

But whichever theory is true, Caleb tackles giants - the *very* giants that robbed the ten fellow-spies of faith and made them refuse to enter the land. Back in Numbers 14 Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in heartbreak over the unbelief of Israel. Apparently God placed upon his heart way back then that when they once enter the land, he wanted the privilege of demonstrating that these giants were not invincible. He had had it in his heart to take them on as a testimony. Caleb had said,

"The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."

What a great speech! Caleb had the attitude that with God, nothing is impossible. In Numbers 14 the people tried to stone Joshua and Caleb, but God protected them from *friends* back then and God protected him from *enemies* since that time.

3. Despite the walled cities (v. 12d)

The second obstacle was that “the cities were great and fortified.” But Caleb was willing to try, and even to die trying. His life was in God’s hands.

4. Yet he has faith and hope in the Lord (v. 12e)

And that is the last thing that I see in verse 12 - that he had both faith and hope in the Lord. To our Western ears, the phrase “It may be that the LORD will be with me” may seem to express doubt. But as Woudstra points out in his commentary, the Hebrew

“need not express fear or doubt. [Indeed] Usually it signifies hope... The outcome of Caleb’s hope is as sure as his faith is strong. The Anakim will be driven out.”⁶

It is a certain hope that is *realistic* about the difficulty and that is *humble* before the Lord. I looked up the meaning of that Hebrew word in various Hebrew dictionaries, and they gave similar interpretations. Brown, Driver, and Briggs definition of this word says, “this particle does not express a doubt, but a ‘hope mixed with difficulty.’”⁷ Another Hebrew dictionary says that this word is a humble “expression of hope, request.” (HALOT)

And faith, hope, and love go hand in hand. Caleb loves God supremely, trusts Him supremely, and has a steadfast hope that drives him to action.

But notice that he predicates victory on the Lord being with him. He can’t manipulate God (thus the appropriateness of the word “may” in the equation), but he is willing to bank on God being with him. God is not his servant (thus again, the appropriateness of the humble word “may”), but Caleb sees *himself* as being God’s servant - and it is His delight to serve the good God of the Bible.

So brothers and sisters, it is my hope that Caleb will be a model that will stir up faith, hope, and love in each of us. Lord, willing, in the next sermon we will finish off this chapter, where we will look at the *Benefits* of Having a God Sized Vision. But today, let’s close in prayer.

⁶ Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), 230.

⁷ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 109.