

## In it to Win It

Many a person has failed in life because he has given up too soon! Too many people are not in it to win it! In **1 Corinthians 9:24** the apostle Paul says, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run your race that you may lay hold of the prize and make it yours”* (AMP). Another translation simply reads, *“Run in such a way as to win.”* Are you in it to win it, or are you simply making up the numbers? In **Philippians 3:13-14** Paul confirms his heartfelt desire to stay the course and get the prize, *“I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it (the prize). But one thing I do; forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

**Joshua** chapters **13** and **14** deal with the distribution of the land to the various tribes of Israel. The wars of Canaan were, for the most part, over. Israel had found temporary rest in the Promised Land, even though there was much territory yet to be possessed. The enemy had not been totally defeated. It's in these chapters that we find a familiar name, *“Caleb.”* Caleb was part of the children of Israel who left Egypt. He was there when God divided the waters of the Red Sea. He was one of the twelve spies who had gone in to survey the land. More than that, he and Joshua were the only two who 'believed' God and recommended that they press forward. Yet, as a whole, Israel chose not to believe God and as a result wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Here's a vivid picture of the Christian life. God saves us, and promises us that we can have a life of victory and spiritual joy, but rather than claim what is rightfully ours many choose to live in a spiritual wilderness (defeated and depressed). Even at 85-years of age, Caleb never forgot the **promise** that God had made to him. This man was out of the ordinary. He was in it to win it!

There are many Bible heroes who were in it to win it! The story of Caleb records that for forty years he waited for a promised reward. Through no fault of his own the reward was postponed. If Caleb had looked at the circumstances, or listened to the people around him, he would have lost his **faith** and given up. Yet he trusted God and refused to quit. 45 years is a long time to wait for a promised reward. Most people Caleb's age would have just given up and made a graceful exit into retirement, but not Caleb. He wholeheartedly followed the Lord with steadfast **faith**. He stood on God's Word and held onto God's Promise, no matter what!

It was **faith** that believed God could overcome every difficulty or obstacle. Giants in the land or walled cities did not frighten Caleb. It was **faith** that expected God to keep all His promises. Caleb's testimony in Joshua 14 (verses 10 and 11) shows that at 40, Caleb had expressed his **faith** by declaring openly that he “believed” God could and would do something for him. Now at 85, he thanks God for the fact that the Lord had kept him alive (verse 10). Note, his generation were all dead, except for Joshua and himself, who had survived the "wilderness wanderings" and the casualties on the battlefields of Canaan. Hence, Caleb could now claim his inheritance as 'one who had lived through it all'. His life was a testimony to God's goodness and mercy. But his **faith** was what the Lord had honoured - he had decided to finish his race in victory. He was in it to win it!

Caleb never took life for granted, because life is a God-given privilege. He was still as strong at 85 as he was at 40 (he was still able and willing to face giants). The secret is this; those who serve the Lord in their youth will have nothing to fear as they grow older. Caleb was obviously a man who could testify to having vigour and strength and health and healing as a product of his close walk with God. Verse 12 shows us that he was not

living in the past. Many people his age live in the past, but not Caleb. He was in it to win it!

Caleb remembered his past with gratitude for God's faithfulness, but he had not lost his vision for winning the race. What's more, he did not ask for any easy place where he could spend his remaining years in peace and quiet. In fact, Caleb asked for a mountain with great fortified cities! He wanted to finish strong and be victorious for the Lord.

Caleb took the promise of God; not as a deserved reward, but as an opportunity to exercise his **faith** and claim new conquests. So he asked for the hardest place of all, a place where giants were entrenched and where the fierce Anakim guarded the cities. In war, the officers sent the most trustworthy, faithful soldiers to the hardest places to fight. After all, how can anyone experience a great victory unless he is willing to face greater opposition and great difficulty? You will notice that although he thanked God for his vigour and strength, he was not depending on that. Instead, he confesses his need of God's help and demonstrates a **faith** that is firmly grounded on God's promises. Time had not dimmed his faith or spiritual vision.

Even though Israel had disappointed Caleb 45 years before, he did not complain when he had to wander in the wilderness with them. There will be times when we do not understand why disappointments come our way, often through no fault of our own. But new opportunities will surely come our way if we are steadfast in **faith** and keep on walking closely with the Lord. Your inheritance is never too far away! Hebron became Caleb's inheritance. *“And Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he ‘wholly followed’ the Lord God of Israel”* (Verses 13-14). He was truly blessed, he received his inheritance. But remember, he still had to possess it (take hold of it)!

God gave Caleb more than he asked for! However, unless he had the **faith** to claim the promise of God, he could not have the **faith** to occupy it. Because of his **faith**, God enabled Caleb to take, possess, enjoy, and keep his inheritance. And, his offspring enjoyed it too! Jesus Christ has made us Joint Heirs to an inheritance He secured through the cross. It follows that the “faith battles” we may win, for others to also enjoy, are like parents passing onto their children the “faith-spoils” of war.

As we read on, we see that Caleb did more than set a good example and pass on a heritage to his heirs; he also provided them with an opportunity and incentive to exercise the same **faith**. After Caleb took Hebron, he offered the hand of his daughter to the man who would take Debir, a few miles to the South-west. Othniel, the young man who took Debir, not only won Caleb's daughter and shared in the inheritance, but he continued to follow Caleb's example. Othniel later became a judge and deliverer. Yes, a godly example always leaves a godly legacy.

Notice, Caleb dared to believe God when he was young and he still dared to believe God when he was older. It is never too soon (or too late) to begin a life of **faith** like Caleb's. It is never too soon (or too late) to dare to believe God, even when it seems impossible. Let's end by examining the four “C's” that Caleb had:

#### I. **He Had Wholehearted Commitment**

(a) Notice, the repeated phrase *“Wholly followed the Lord.”* This is said about Caleb six times in the Old Testament.

It is a phrase that means, "to close the gap." It is a phrase used by hunters when referring to closing the gap between themselves and their prey. Therefore, Caleb was committed to keeping the distance between himself and the Lord to a minimum. *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."*

- (a) Caleb's commitment to God was based upon his 'confidence' in the Word of God. He remembered what God had said to him through his servant Moses. He had cherished that promise during the 40 years of wandering and during many years of fierce battles. Throughout it all, he hadn't ever forgotten what God had promised!

## 2. **He Had Wholehearted Confidence**

What was it that gave 85-year-old Caleb the idea he could be a giant killer? His **faith!** His faith had not wavered! He had seen the Promised Land first hand. For 45 years that vision had burned in his heart as he wandered through the wilderness! While others complained, Caleb kept looking forward to the time when he would take the mountain. He was in it to win it! He was able to see beyond his circumstances into the promise of God. Note, it takes wholehearted faith to win any spiritual victory.

## 3. **He Had Wholehearted Courage**

Commitment led to confidence and confidence led to 'courage'. Caleb had to overcome three great obstacles in his quest for his Canaan.

- (a) He had to overcome grasshoppers. Grasshoppers? **Numbers 13:33**, *"And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."* How we see ourselves, others will see us! There are always those around us who are convinced that we cannot win the race. To live for God will often mean that we will be in the minority! Remember only Joshua and Caleb were ready to trust God and "enter" - to conquer the land in the power of God. We too need to enter the promises of God!
- (b) He had to overcome giants. Giants are simply a matter of perspective. All of us have giants in our lives. We can't defeat them ourselves, so we have two options. (1) We can say, *"Look how small we are compared to those giants."* This is the outlook of defeat! Or, (2) we can say, *"Look how small those giants are compared to God!"* This is faith's view!
- (c) He had to overcome grey hairs. What does this tell us? When God makes a promise, he will give us the strength to see its fulfilment! Never count God, or yourself out. Stay in it to win it! True faith looks beyond the present circumstance and sees the provision of God.

## 4. **He Had Wholehearted Conquest**

Caleb experienced what God had promised! He climbed the mountain and defeated the giants. He claimed his possession! The name of the place Caleb inherited used to be called Kirjatharba (city of the four giants). It is now named Hebron (seat of fellowship). Caleb was in it to win it! He refused to quit until he had obtained everything the

Lord had for him! He refused to stop until he obtained that “place of fellowship” with God.

Likewise, God has a place of peace and power for us, but we must be willing to claim our possession. But it will take the spirit of Caleb - a whole hearted spirit! There is a huge difference between a promise and a possession! God promised Israel the land, but they had to possess it before it became theirs. And this meant going into battle! God has many victories for you and me; that is His promise! Yet His promises must be actively pursued and possessed before they will ever become realities in our lives. Are you prepared to do whatever it takes to possess the promises? Are you, like Caleb, prepared to storm the mountain and defeat the enemy?

**Are you in it to win it?**