

Building Christian Character
From Comfort to Character
Joshua and Calab: Portraits Of Commitment

Numbers 13:26 - 14:26

We've looked at the example of Noah and Abraham, as we considered the importance of faith and obedience. Now, we're going to look at Joshua and Caleb, who gave us portraits of commitment.

You're familiar with the term "oxymoron" aren't you? An oxymoron is defined as "a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction.

" Examples are:

Dark light;

Guest host;

Science fiction;

Living dead;

Evil hero; and

Stupid professor. Even though I'm not positive that last one is.

"Certain characteristics are so inherent to Christianity that to neglect them is to become a walking oxymoron.

A Christian without commitment is such an oxymoron." - Chuck Colson

For a person to claim to be a Christian and yet not be committed to following Christ daily, is a walking contradiction.

A believer who is not living out a commitment to Christ isn't living as God has designed them to live.

They are destined to live without purpose or passion; to wander through life aimlessly and end up not being part of anything of eternal significance.

But that's not God's plan for His children. That's why He works in our lives to call us to leave our comfort zone and live in the character zone. He often does this in the same way He did in the lives of the children of Israel: bringing us to a defining moment, a moment of decision.

We read here about such a moment. Moses sent 12 spies into the land promised by God, to bring back a report. They did so; and when they did, the decision facing the people was a defining moment. Would they believe God or not? Would they obey God or not? Would they remain committed to following God or not? (Read 13:26-14:4; 6-9).

What a contrast between the commitment of Joshua and Caleb and the lack of commitment on the part of the rest of the people!

What caused the lack of commitment on the part of the people? Two things:

1. They had a vision problem - 13:31-33

They couldn't look beyond the obstacles to see their opportunities. They had a vision problem.

"Great opportunities often come disguised as hard work." - Anonymous

Many fail to make the most of opportunities God places before them, because they are fixated more on the work of overcoming obstacles than on reward to be gained and possibilities to be fulfilled by doing so.

Look at the life of Thomas Edison. At 21, he patented his first major invention: the Electrical Vote Recorder (a device 100 years ahead of its time!). At 26, he invented the automatic telegraph and paraffin paper. At 30, the phonograph (earliest record player). At 32, the light bulb. At 32, electric generators and motors. At 38, a wireless communications system for ships at sea. At 44, the motion picture camera. At 50, the x-ray tube. At 55, the alkaline battery. At 58, a dictation machine. At 65, the talking motion picture. At 67, the telescribe. At 70, sonar, radar stealth technology, and the list goes on... His life was full of successes? Yes. For the light bulb alone he "successfully discovered over 6,000 ways that didn't work!" (his words). Edison was a success because he constantly asked questions and he never stopped trying. He was curious. He was courageous.

Look at the life of Abraham Lincoln. At 23, he lost his job, lost his first election, and was elected captain of an Illinois militia group. At 24, he failed at his first business endeavor. At 25, he was elected to state legislature. At 26, his sweetheart died. At 27, he had a nervous breakdown. At 29, he lost another election. At 33, he was permitted to practice law in the District Courts. At 34, defeated for nomination for Congress. At 37, elected to Congress. At 39, election defeat: lost his renomination. At 40, rejected for land officer. At 41, his 4-year old son dies. At 45, defeated for US Senate. At 47, defeated for nomination for Vice President. At 49, defeated again for US Senate. At 51, elected as President of the United States. Lincoln never gave up. He was courageous. He was committed.

Yes, stepping out in faith and obedience to claim the land of Canaan would involve fighting battles, even battles against giants, but the opportunity for reward awaiting them would've been worth the effort!

"Success is determined not by whether or not you face obstacles, but by your reaction to them. And if you look at these obstacles as a containing fence, they become your excuse for failure.

If you look at them as a hurdle, each one strengthens you for the next." - Dr. Ben Carson, *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*

Joshua and Caleb were ready and willing to step out in faith and obedience to the call of God because they looked past the obstacles in their way and instead saw the opportunities before them,

opportunities to be stretched and blessed by God! But unlike Joshua and Caleb, the

people had a lack of commitment because they had a vision problem.

“This is it guys!” he shouted as the Piper bounced onto the beach. They’re on their way!”

Lunch over, the men busied themselves fixing up a miniature “jungle” and model house in the sand, with the intention of demonstrating to the savages how to build an airstrip, should they be interested enough to want the white men to come and live among them. Then the five missionaries sang together, as they had so often done spontaneously and joyously.

Committing themselves and all their carefully laid plans to Him who had so unmistakably brought them thus far, they waited for the Aucas.

Before four-thirty that afternoon the quiet waters of the Curaray flowed over the bodies of the five comrades, slain by the men they had come to win for Christ, whose banner they had borne. The world called it a nightmare of tragedy. The world did not recognize the truth of Jim Elliot’s credo: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

2. They had a memory problem - 14:2-4

They had forgotten that the same God who called them to step out by faith and obedience and claim the land of Canaan was the One who had delivered them from Pharaoh's tyranny; and parted the Red Sea for them to cross over on dry land; and had fed them with manna from heaven; and had supplied them with water from a rock. Surely, He had not done all that to allow them to now experience defeat and death!

Others had forgotten who their God was, but not Joshua and Caleb. They factored their past experience with God into the equation and Caleb declared, "We can certainly do it" (13:30).

"A man of God in the will of God is immortal until His work is done." - Dr. David Jeremiah

"Our heavenly Father is a very experienced One. He knows very well that His children wake up with a good appetite every morning. He sustained 3 million Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years. We do not expect he will send 3 million missionaries to China: but if he did, He would have ample means to sustain them all. Depend on it, God's work done God's way will never lack God's supply." - Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission

"The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!" - 1 Thessalonians 5:24 (The Message)

Joshua and Caleb were ready and willing to step out in faith and obedience to the call of God because they remembered how the Lord had been faithful to them in the past and knew He would remain faithful to them in the present.

But unlike Joshua and Caleb, the people had a lack of commitment because they

had a memory problem.

Conclusion: Their vision problem and their memory problem led to a commitment problem.

They could not see how God was committed to blessing them in the future; nor could they remember how God had demonstrated His commitment to blessing them in the past.

Therefore, they failed to be committed to God in the present.

But Joshua and Caleb did not forget. Therefore, everyday was a day of renewed commitment to God.

Because they remembered God's commitment to bless them in the past; and because they saw God's commitment to bless them in the future; they daily chose to commit to following God in the present.

The Christian life is not something to be lived out sometime tomorrow; nor is it something to be lived out in the past; it is something to be lived out every day in the present. What is important is not what commitment you've shown in the past or what commitment you plan to show in the future. What is your commitment to following Christ today?

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” - Luke 9:23 (NIV)

In the beginning of this series, we said God calls us to stretch beyond living in the comfort zone so that we might live in the character zone. We said it's only by living in the character zone that God can develop our character to reflect that of Christ and it's only through living in the character zone that we can partner with God to build His kingdom and make a difference in our world. To live in the character zone, will mean that we daily commit ourselves to following Christ. It is because of a lack of daily commitment to following Christ, that too many believers have experienced the sad condition of having a saved soul, but living a wasted life.

That is what happened to all of the people of Israel, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. They were happy to commit by faith to obey the call of God with respect to their salvation and deliverance from Egypt. But they refused to commit to responding by faith to obeying the call of God to enter the promised land (God's purpose for their lives).

They had a saved soul, but lived a wasted life. They did not finish well. But Joshua and Caleb did. They faithfully followed God to the very end of their lives. Listen to what Caleb told Joshua, after Joshua had led the next generation to enter into the land of promise:

“Today I am eighty-five years old. I am as strong now as I was when Moses sent me on that journey, and I can still travel and fight as well as I could then. So give

me the hill country that the LORD promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak living there in great, walled towns. But if the LORD is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the LORD said.” - Joshua 14:10-12 (NLT)

As the great leader of Israel, Joshua’s entire life was also marked by commitment. We even hear this in his final words:

“Fear GOD. Worship him in total commitment. As for me and my family, we’ll worship GOD.” - Joshua 24:14a; 15b (The Message)

A man was trying hypnosis to help him quit smoking. His friend asked whether he thought it would work. “Sure,” he said, “it worked the last time I tried it!” Let’s face it: starting well is relatively easy. Finishing well is a different matter! Starting a new diet is kind of fun, but hanging in for the long haul is the real test. Getting married is exciting and relatively easy. Staying married through the struggles and trials is not always an easy matter.

Becoming a Christian is relatively easy: acknowledging that you are a sinner and receiving through faith in Christ the free gift of eternal life. But then comes the hard part—hanging in there as a Christian in a world that is hostile toward God and His people. The world constantly dangles in front of you all that it has to offer in opposition to the things of God. The enemy hits you with temptation after temptation, to call you back to Egypt. The real test of your faith is, will you endure? Will you finish well?

The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Since finishing a marathon well isn’t easy, when you see someone who sprints across the finish line, you ought to try to find out his secret.

What is the secret to the Christian living a life the full? What is the secret to participating in the growth of God’s kingdom and making a real, eternal difference in our world? What is the secret to finishing well? A single-minded commitment to daily following Christ.

John Ortberg (Faith & Doubt, p. 169-170) says the word trapeze describes the bar between the ropes of a trapeze artist in the circus. It’s a Greek word, meaning table. It’s used in the New Testament when Jesus gathers his friends around the table for what we now call the Communion table. There he tells them that he can’t continue to hang on to this life but must let go so they may receive eternal life. Then He climbed up on a cross and let go of life for that very purpose.

I never thought about it like that but I guess that is what Jesus asks us to do throughout our Christian life. Will we let go of our other loyalties and reach for Him? He comes to Abraham and asks if he will let go of everything familiar to him—home, family, culture, wealth—and go wherever God tells him to go. Would your allegiance to Christ do that?

