

# Keep going

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[0:00] We all have people who have affected us for good or ill.! Sometimes we have deliberate role models, people that we can look up to.! Other times just role models are coming to our lives by sort of happenstance.

People that we've worked with, manager maybe. Some are good and some are bad. Some have been really unhelpful. Here we are on Father's Day and some of us can look back with enormous gratitude to our fathers and some with some regret or unhappiness in spirit. God does this in the Bible. He gives us role models. It's very clear by the crafting of the Word of God that God wants us to learn from particular people and as we learn from those people, these are people who have characteristics which are to be followed, to be admired, to be seen. Caleb, who we've encountered last week in the book of Numbers, we encounter him again in the book of Joshua. It's really quite interesting.

He's mentioned in one or two other places in the Bible, but there are these two dominant places when he is 40 years old and when he's 85 years old and God gives this snapshot of this man at those two particular points in his life.

[1:38] It's almost like saying to us, just want you to stop and to look at this particular character. Just want you to think about this.

This 40-year-old man and the way he behaved at that particular point in his life. Now here we are, 45 years later, and we're going to look at Caleb again.

God is saying, I just want you to look at the way he behaved. He's a great role model for us. If I was to say at this particular point, think about the person who's sitting next to you.

You can't do that, Ross. If you could think about the person sitting next to you, could you describe that person in a few words?

If I was giving you sort of three words and I was to say, please give a description of that person to the left or the right of you. You might say they're a happy person.

[2:45] They're fun to be with. They're the life and soul of a party. You might say, they're a very conscientious person. Very hard worker. Give them a job to do. They finish it.

That's what immediately sort of springs to mind. Well, here in the Bible, we find out what God thinks about Caleb, this one man.

And it's repeated five times in the Bible. This phraseology, he followed the Lord wholeheartedly. That was the stamp of this man. You look at this man when he's 40, he followed the Lord wholeheartedly.

Look at this man, he's 85, he followed the Lord wholeheartedly. He followed. He tracked the Lord. He saw the way God went and he followed that way.

[3:53] He was a man who knew what it was to see the pillar of cloud going before the people. And he was doing that in his own life as well.

He was listening to what God was saying. He was finding out God's purpose and following. He followed the Lord.

You'll notice in the Bible that in this passage that we've read, the Lord is given in capital letters, verse nine there. You followed the Lord, my God.

The Lord, my God. This is the covenant God. This is not any sort of a God. Not God of the other nations. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The God who has revealed himself and the God who has made promises to his people.

Commitment promises. I will be your God and you will be my people.

[4:56] And this was the God that Caleb was pleased to follow and pleased to follow wholeheartedly, uncompromisingly.

without reservation. He followed the Lord wholeheartedly. Interesting to see the things which God is really concerned about.

When the obituary comes to be made of any of us, what would God say about us?

How different the world's estimation of people is to God's estimation. How important for us to remember that today. What does God really care about?

Well, you only have to read the Bible to see the things which God counts to be precious, which are completely ignored and of no importance in the eyes of the world.

[6:07] The eyes of our neighbours, the people we work with. Their values are different values. The thing which God really loved about this man, Caleb, many things could be said about him, but this is what God points out about him.

He followed the Lord wholeheartedly. I was thinking this week of Tim Farron. On Wednesday, Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal Democrats, resigned.

I look at this picture and it's a curious one. This is what Tim Farron said.

The consequences of the focus on my faith is that I have found myself torn between living as a faithful Christian and serving as a political leader. A better, wiser person may have been able to deal with this more successfully to remain faithful to Christ while leading a political party in the current environment.

To be a leader, particularly of a progressive Liberal Party in 2017 and to live as a committed Christian and to hold faithful to the Bible's teaching has felt impossible for me.

[7:28] And I was thinking, what are those people behind him thinking when he's making that statement? I don't think they can understand that.

Just as the news reporting on this particular moment, which was overwhelmed by the tower disaster, of course, but the news reporting was bafflement.

People were utterly surprised. Why should there be any problem about being a sort of mainstream liberal liberal and being faithful to the God of the Bible?

I couldn't understand it. I've looked at some of the newspaper articles that responded to it and they are sort of scathing in their response to this man.

He's had a rough few weeks, hasn't he? He's found himself in a very difficult place.

[8:41] But on Wednesday, instead of just getting up and saying, do you know what, I've done my best, I just want to leave this, you know, someone else can take over from now on. He actually bared his soul and he said, these are the things which are really important to me.

And although I don't know him, I love the fact that he was brave to say those words. To live as a committed Christian and to hold faithful to the Bible's teaching has felt impossible for me.

He's planting himself on the Lord's side. He wants to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. That's a very lonely place for that man to be.

He stood surrounded by his colleagues as if they were there supporting him. The reality was he was standing by himself. I'd like to suggest that you write a note of encouragement to Tim Farron, who is a member of Parliament, London SW1, and say, well done.

Well done. Because Christian people who believe the things of God in the Bible, we need to stand together on these matters. We can imagine what his colleagues thought about him, but what really counts is God's verdict for every one of us.

[10:16] God's verdict for every one of us. So, last time, and I'm just going to repeat this process, we saw that what marked out the life of Caleb was that he practiced his faith.

He had a practiced faith. he behaved on the basis of the word of God. God had promised a land to his people.

And despite all the difficulties and the problems that would come from getting that land, he believed that God was going to give that land. He believed that God is always good.

That whatever happens in our life, all those things worked together for good. And what an important and precious place that is for us to be.

What a strong thing that is for us to hold on to. That God is always good. We may not understand it. We may not be able to interpret it. We cannot see the reasons for some of the things that happen. [11:18] One day, God willing, we may. But we have enough evidence to be able to say, God is good. And he knew that he needed and all the people needed to rely upon the power of God.

The land was not to be taken by human strength, but only by the power of God. There were plenty of examples when the people tried to do things in their own strength and failed.

You and I, if we try to live this Christian life in our own strength, we will definitely fail. We need the power of God and every day we need to say, Dear God, I need your strength.

I need your help. I need your wisdom to live this Christian life. A threefold cord is not easily broken. And we said that we need to spiritually exercise in these three areas.

I have another example this morning for you. Dealing with personal sin in our lives. A personal sin. You may be here today and you may be weighed down with an issue that is causing you some frustration and some guilt.

[12:38] And here is the word of God. 1 John 1 verses 8 and 9. If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

That's very blunt. It's a very clear statement, isn't it? If you think you come in here and you don't have sin you're absolutely wrong. That's God's verdict on your situation.

There is sin. And it's the world's lie that says such a thing doesn't exist. God says there is sin. Don't deceive yourself.

What do you do about that when you face up to it? That reality. If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Oh the goodness of God that he loves this fallen world so much as to send his own son. to be our saviour. Oh the power of God that he's found a way in which we who are sinners can find forgiveness of our sin.

[13:46] The word of God the goodness of God the power of God we need to exercise ourselves in this area. Now I'm just going to have a little pause it's a hot day so I'm just going to give you a little minute so you can just stretch your arms or do whatever you want to before we go on to the next part.

It's always a good moment for waking up. all right here's the map again the situation that Caleb lived most of his life in the context of his life so Kadesh is down here it's a bit fuzzy the focus but Kadesh Barnea we've heard of that in several times in the reading it was from Kadesh Barnea that the twelve spies went into the land and explored the whole of the land over forty days top to bottom from west to east the river Jordan to the sea they went out and Caleb says I was forty years old and we know the outcome of that that ten of the spies gave a bad report and the hearts of the people were melted with fear so he said we can't take this land there are giants in the land the walls of the cities go up to the sky they're too numerous for us we'll get swallowed up we're just like grasshoppers and that very night the people cried out in their in their sorrow and their unhappiness can't go back to Egypt it was a terrible time terrible time because God passed a judgment upon the nation at that point and he said everyone twenty years old and upwards they're not going to see the land they're going to die in the desert you're going to wander in the desert for forty years and that's exactly what happened so they wander around in this lower part of the desert here promised land being so tantalizingly close but they've not got any permission to go into it because God's judgment is that that whole generation will die in the desert their children will go into the land but only Joshua and Caleb would live to go into the land so here he is and we read in that particular passage verse 10 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

I'm not sure how the forty and the forty-five combine apart from the fact that it took some time we don't know how long but it took some time for the promised land to be subdued and it seems that it was one of the last acts that took place when Caleb was able to take Hebron so forty years in the desert five years of fighting and I want to point out firstly his spiritual perseverance verses seven to ten here I was forty years old when Moses the sermon to 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 sink 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 don't think there's an exclamation mark in Hebrew but I think the sense of that whole sentence is this what a miracle this is what an amazing thought this is I can remember when I was a young man at forty I'm forty five years older I'm eighty five years old this is heartwarming maths this is heartwarming maths that he can look back over those forty five years and see the way the Lord has kept him and see the fact that by God's grace he's been able to keep on following the Lord wholeheartedly it's a great picture I want to say eighty five is actually an old age it is an old age for that time there were earlier periods in the book of

Genesis people who lived for a very very long time and there are some different examples in this period of time of people who lived a long time Moses lived to be 140 Joshua lived to be 110 Aaron lived to be 90 we don't know how old Caleb was but most people died much younger so when he says I'm eighty five years old he means it's actually a rather remarkable thing well of course the Lord had kept him hadn't he because in the Lord's providence it was 40 years for the people to be in that desert place and Caleb and Joshua were still given that promise that they would go into the promised land so God does arithmetic as well and he'll take a person and he says I've got plans and purposes for you and you will be kept alive for as long as the Lord wants you to do whatever the Lord wants you to do that it may be a marvelous thing to you to be able to say

[20:26] I'm eighty five years old today dear Enid you were just reminding us this morning it was eight years ago you had your heart attack exactly day and here you are today praise the Lord he's kept you alive for gracious purposes I think we know what those purposes are when we have your fellowship in the church eighty five he spiritually persevered he had the same spirit the same attitude the same priorities in spite of losses and disappointments because he would have had a lot of those he saw many friends die it's a tough thing think about this he was forty years old everybody twenty years old and upwards died in the desert there's a twenty year gap minimum between him and everybody else in the land that's a lonely thing isn't it in spite of busyness he had a family we read elsewhere in the bible he had at least three boys and one girl in spite of nothing much changing they wandered around in the desert in really quite a small area for forty years what was the purpose what was going on there in spite of days where he probably felt

I'm not sure that God is ever going to fulfill this promise when he woke up with a sense of dread or unbelief about him and we all know that such times nothing much changing is God really going to carry out his purpose in my life he seems to have been a man who knew how it was to count off the days and to remember his birthday and so I can just imagine what he felt like when he was 60 got to his 60th birthday he thought well it's 20 years since I did all this stuff nothing seems to have changed birthdays are difficult things aren't they when you're getting older mark off the seasons 65 70 70 70 you know at all those moments there it's easy to get rather down about that and a bit discouraged so he had to battle with that he had he's not a superman he is a person who has to live like you and me but here he comes to his 85th birthday and he says the Lord has kept me and I can see I can look back and see the way God has provided for me and here's the big question for us will we carry on to the very end will we carry on for as many years as God wants us to be alive how important this issue is

Matthew 10 verse 22 says he who stands firm to the end will be saved no encouragements in God's word at all for those who stop following the Lord in their lives your life is not to be measured by how wonderful things were when you were 40 but how it is when you're 85 and how it is on the day of your death are you seeing the persevering power of God in your life is it evident that you have been taken hold of by the almighty God and you have been kept by him we can only have confidence as Christians if we are carrying on in the ways of the

Lord Jesus Christ spiritual perseverance I'd like you also now to look at his spiritual ambition verses 11 and 12 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 this then that the Anarchites were there and their cities were large and fortified but the Lord helping me I will drive them out just as he said I want you to notice the spiritual ambition of Caleb this is not so much an arrogant demand as an expectant request he remembers 45 years ago as he says in verse 9 that

Moses swore to him the land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance of that of your children forever that was the promise and now was the day upon which that promise was going to be made good so his spiritual ambition is based upon the fact that God has promised him something and he's now expecting that that promise will be made good this is the moment it's interesting to see that Moses says the land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance of that of your children forever it's almost like he's saying look at the map again he walked over the whole of the land he could have had his pick of any point in that territory but what he has his eye on is Hebron why does he have his eye on Hebron because he sets the bar high he sets the bar high he looks at that land there is a hill country hill country is a very difficult place to take if you want to defend your territory you go up a hill there are fortified cities fortified cities it's not just pasture land the fortified cities that the other spies had said had walls that go up to the sky and there are the anarchites do you remember the anarchites these are the people who were the giants these are the people who made the people feel like grasshoppers

[27:45] Caleb says do you know what I want a hill country I want a fortified city I want an an an an an an an an an an an!

an! an! an! an! an! or embracing challenges.

He had this spiritual ambition. He was setting the bar high. He had a very willing spirit. Read again what he says here, verse 11. 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. Again, he's forestalling an objection.

Joshua could say to him, Caleb, you're 85.

You're 85. It's not a good time to be leading people in battle. Stay behind in the tent.

[29:31] Get the big map out. Sort out the strategy. Don't go in the front line with a big fat sword. Caleb says, I know what you're going to say.

I'm as strong today as I was then. I'm just as able to take on the enemies as I was 45 years ago.

He's an 85-year-old man, but he's got the heart of a 25-year-old.

I'm as strong today as I was 45 years ago. He's right and he's wrong. He's right because he hadn't given up fighting. And he's probably more skillful now than he ever was.

But he's almost certainly not as strong as he was when he was 40. I don't think we have to take this word on face value.

I think we just have to see it coming out of the man who has a willing spirit. He's like Corporal Jones. As you that is, for those of you who don't know this, just turn on BBC Two on a Saturday night.

[30:43] Any Saturday in any year for the next decade. It's on a continual loop to see Dad's army. Corporal Jones, who fought first in the Boer War against the Fuzzy Wuzzies.

He's right, 1890s. And here he is in the Second War, 1940s. So he's another 45 years older. And who's the one who's always volunteering?

Who's the one who's always putting his hand up? When Captain Manoring says, I need a volunteer. I'm here, sir. He always does it, isn't he?

He's always willing. He's sort of a figure of fun, but actually he's a figure of deep respect. He really is a pace setter.

Someone to be admired. His attitude. A willing spirit, a willing soldier. We might laugh, but we do so with respect. I want Corporal Jones in my team.

[31:54] I want Corporal Jones in my team. How lovely to have a church filled with Corporal Jones.

Set whatever age you like on this one. 85 is grand age, isn't it? 75, 65. Corporal Jones.

Willing spirit. Willing spirit. Willing spirit. Willing spirit. Interesting to see what happens in Joshua chapter 15, verses 13 to 17.

In accordance with the Lord's command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb, son of Jephunneh, a portion in Judah. Curiath Arba, that is Hebron. Arba was the forefather of Anak.

From Hebron, Caleb drove out the three Anakites, Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, descendants of Anak. From there he marched against the people living in Debir, formerly called Kiriath Sefer.

[32:58] And Caleb said, I'll give my daughter, Aksa, in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sefer. Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother, took it.

So Caleb gave his daughter, Aksa, to him in marriage. There's two rather wonderful things going on there. Firstly, Caleb did indeed drive out the Anakites.

He did that very thing. There came a point where he... The people living in Debir, and Caleb said, Do you know what?

Either I'm a bit tired, or I need to give someone else a chance. So he put this prize before the people and said, Right, whoever's going to take that, have my daughter in marriage.

Kind of stepped back at that particular point. He had a spiritual ambition for somebody else as well. Well, older people, we need to have a spiritual ambition for those who are younger, for the next generation, to bring them on.

[34:03] To give them their chance as well. Do Christians retire? Controversial subject. I suggest not.

I suggest not. Here's a really bad role model. Please turn to Luke chapter 12, verses 18 and 19. Do you know what this is? Luke 12, 18 and 19.

It's a story. It's a parable of the rich fool. Do you remember this man? A certain rich man produced a good crop, thought to himself, What shall I do?

I've no place to store my crops. And he said, This is what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, You have plenty of good things laid up for many years.

Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. Bad role model. Bad role model.

[35:13] It didn't end well for him, did it? I'm not making the application that's found here in the gospel, but I am making the application that that is a bad role model for us as Christian people.

I don't find this word, retire, within the Bible. But it's a very attractive possibility that is set before people of the world.

The whole idea that we work for a certain period of time and we stop working and then we just do what we want to do. It's different for everybody, isn't it?

I've noticed and seen many people in my line of business who've retired and the normal pattern is something like this, that they go and do the DIY in the house because there's a whole load of jobs they've never got around to doing.

And they might think about downsizing. They join a walking club of some sort. Many people I know do that as well. They go on long holidays and so forth.

[36:23] And really, their life goes into that mold. So as long as they've got enough to live on, they can do that as well. But I would like to suggest that for Christian people, we may have a different model to follow.

We may change the kind of service but we don't retire. There's a lovely verse in the book of Deuteronomy which people may know from the authorised version that says, as your days are, so shall your strength be.

As your days are, so shall your strength be. In the NIV it says, your strength will equal your days.

And what I think it means is this, that in our lives we go through different seasons.

And as we patiently and carefully go through the seasons of life that God puts before us, he will give us the strength that we need to do the things that he wants us to do.

The parables in the Gospels, and especially in the Matthew's Gospel, so often are rich in this thought. How will the Lord Jesus find us when he returns or calls us home?

[37:56] How will he find us? There's so many parables like that, aren't there? The parable of the talents, the parable of the foolish and the wise virgins.

When Jesus comes, when Jesus comes, will we be ready? Will we be expected? Do we have ambition?

Do we have spiritual ambition? I ask you that question. I ask that of myself. Is the clock just winding down for us?

How will Jesus find us when he comes or calls? I'd like us certainly to look at God's reward. God's reward. Back to Numbers, sorry, Joshua chapter 14.

Verse 9.

[39:12] 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. Verse 13.

Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. We need to deal with the subject of God's reward here, because it's here.

There's a connection between Caleb's behaviour and God's response. It's not just an inevitable consequence, but a deliberate, appropriate, and responsive act of God.

Because you have followed me wholeheartedly, I will give you this inheritance. Do we feel uncomfortable about this idea?

This sounds like God responding to our good works. So what about grace? Or is this just an Old Testament practice and something which is superseded by New Testament teaching?

[40:24] Here are some examples, and I could give you many more, of Bible texts and especially some New Testament texts, which make it very difficult to us to avoid the language.

Genesis 15.1 is the passage which talks of God speaking to Abraham and saying, I am your shield and your great reward. Or, alternatively, it could be translated, your reward will be very great.

This is what God said to Abraham. Hebrews 11.6 we had on the screen at the beginning. Him that comes to God must believe that he exists and that he is the rewarder of those who seek him.

Turn to the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 25. This is the parable of talents.

It says in verse 21, Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.

[41:47] What do we make of the Sermon on the Mount? What are all those blessings about? Who are they given to and when do they occur?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth. And so on and so on. There seems to be a process by which God notices the condition of his people, their response to their condition and he rewards them appropriately.

Philippians 3.4 talks about the prize as Galatians 5.21. Think about the book of revelation and the letters to the seven, letter to the seven churches. In each of those, there are references to those who overcome.

Those who overcome will receive a white stone, manna, they will eat, they will sit down with me, they will have authority over nations.

These are interesting words, deliberate promises which are given to God's people at that time.

Often people who are struggling, often people who are in situations of oppression.

[43:09] your reward will be very great. What is this subject about?

I think it's about a father's heart towards his children. So, if your child draws pictures like that, it's pretty difficult to actually make a likeness of that to your mummy or daddy.

But it's what the child sees. And it's the child's best effort. And I think God has a father's heart towards his children.

And he likes to say to his children, as they do their best with a good heart, well done. Well done. Well done. Of course, this is all of grace.

But these rewards are given to those who persevere and overcome. And they're given to us by a heavenly father. The Old Testament focuses on present blessing, which is why Caleb was given the land.

[44:20] The New Testament begins to fill out the understanding of the world to come. Present needs are met in our lives, but future reward is guaranteed.

There's something to look forward to. This is a Cinderella doctrine in the church, not just because we feel uncomfortable with the idea, but also because we are looking for all our rewards on earth, whereas we're encouraged to invest in heaven.

Matthew 6, verses 19 to 21. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. These verses are here to encourage us.

They're here to encourage us that we might invest ourselves in our thinking and behaviour in the world to come. Because there is a world to come. And we are to find encouragement and joy in the sense of the reward that will be given to all those who love him and his appearing.

[45:50] Caleb is a great role model for us, but we know he's flawed, and I just want to end with this thought. Hebrews 12, verses 1 to 3, gives us a more perfect model, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. So what perseverance is found in our Lord Jesus Christ?

coming from heaven's bliss and living a life in much loneliness, a man of sorrows, and facing cruel death upon a cross.

[47:12] But he did that for us. And what ambition was his to do all this? Because he knew that by doing this he would win a people for himself.

God's reward is his, because he's now seated at the right hand of God. And all that he did upon Calvary's cross is being wonderfully, magnificently worked out.

For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising its shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God.