

Lives Worth Imitating

June 23, 2019

Last week I preached on the practice of imitating others. And I've spent some time this week thinking about different individuals within and outside of the Bible that are worthy of imitating and lessons we can learn from their lives. And so, this morning I want to begin this new series I've entitled, "**Lives Worth Imitating**", with an individual who I appreciate more and more with each passing year.

Many years ago I was leading a youth retreat up at Camp Lebanon. There was also a group from St. Cloud that were there at the same time. And the director of the camp stood up at breakfast on Saturday and announced that there were reports circulating that some representatives from The Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes had come to the St. Cloud area the night before and tried to announce that years winner but they weren't home. So, they would be returning that evening. Suddenly there was an increased level of excitement among those in attendance that one of them might possibly be the winner. There certainly was an increased level of excitement for those living in the St. Cloud area to return home and hopefully be declared the winner and claim their prize of over a million dollars.

This morning I want to direct our attention to an individual who had received a similar announcement that a prize was awaiting his arrival home. But this individual had to wait over 40 years to claim his prize. 40 years is a really long time to wait for something. 40 years ago I was only 24 years old and had been married just about 1 year. Connie and I were had hopes and dreams and were looking forward in just a couple of months to moving to Lincoln, Illinois and beginning seminary. Wow, that was a long time ago.

The individual we're looking at this morning was on the doorstep of a tremendous future that would be life changing. He was one of 12 spies that Moses sent into the land that God had promised would be theirs. They were sent to check it out and return with a report. What they saw in that land was amazing. The produce was huge and the people that lived there were giants. You probably know the story. 2 of the spies returned with excited for what God was about to give them. Their names were: **Joshua and Caleb**. But the other 10 spies returned terrified and highly recommended that they not attempt to go in and take this land. They were fearful that they'd all be killed by these giants.

The Israelites hearts were discouraged and became afraid, based on the reports of the 10 and decided not to go in. In response, God declared that the nation of Israel would wander in the desert for the next 40 years, until everyone had died except for Joshua and Caleb. And yet, through Moses, God promised to Joshua and Caleb that they would one day, 40 years from now, would be allowed to go into this land and receive the promise they had wanted to claim.

Right here, we have an important lesson on perspective.

1. the 10 spies **compared** what they saw in the land **to themselves** and became discouraged and afraid.
2. Joshua and Caleb **compared** what they saw to the **bigness of their God** and were excited to claim the promise God had made to them.

If the people in this Promised Land are this big, just imagine how big and powerful God must be to use us to conquer them.

Principle #1: You can choose to be consumed by your Problem or your Provider. The reality is, that often times your Provider will allow you to go through challenges, which may seem huge, to deepen your trust in Him and His capability to bring your successfully through your problems. Every time you conquer a giant sized problem with God's strength and provision your faith deepens and your trust in God grows exponentially. And you're also building up a reservoir of examples of God's faithfulness in your own life that you can refer back to when the next giant problem steps into your life.

So for the next 40 years, Joshua and Caleb have been moving around through the desert, with this group of faithless whiners, until finally everyone who refused to go into the Promised Land previously has passed away. Then God miraculously stops the Jordan River so they can all walk across into this land. They begin to wage battles against various cities beginning with Jericho. And you likely know the story of them marching around the city, under God's instructions, for 7 days and when they blew their trumpets, God miraculously caused the walls to come crashing down and the Israelite army rushed in and took the city.

So, several other battles have been waged and God's clearly been with them enabling them to win battle after battle.

Then we come to **Joshua 14**, where Joshua is dividing up the land to the various tribes and up steps Caleb. Follow along as I read this stirring account.

Joshua 14:6-12 (NIV) Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, *"You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. 7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, 8 but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear, I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. 9 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.'* 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 wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 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. 12 Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."*

How can you not be inspired by that? How many 85 years olds and older among us this morning? Let me ask you, "Are you as strong today as you were 40 years ago?" Joshua claims he is. And not only that, he's been waiting for the fulfillment of this promise for over 40 years. For 40 years, he's had this fire burning in his soul to physically claim the promise God had given him. And don't you love that at the end of his speech to Joshua he mentions specifically, the **Anakites**. Why? Because these were the very people that the other 10 spies mentioned were too big and strong and mighty for the Israelites to ever conquer. And Joshua, at 85 years young, hasn't forgotten that. And he's saying, "let's go show them God what you're capable of." Notice, he says, *"with the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as He said."*

Principles #2: Success comes from dependency upon the Lord

In this short speech, Caleb mention *"the Lord"* 7 times. He kept his focus on the Lord, not on the problem in front of him.

Principle #3: Age is not a disqualifier when it comes to God using you. With God, your age is irrelevant. He can use you at 85 just as easily as He can at 40 or 20 or 10 or 100.

In fact, a fascinating passage occurs in the chapter right before Caleb's great speech. But this time it's to Joshua. And God says to Joshua: *"When Joshua had grown old, the Lord said to him, 'You are now very old, and...'"* (Joshua 13:1) What would you guess the rest of that sentence is? Perhaps God says,

- "you are now very old and it's time to retire"
- "you are now very old and it's time to relax"
- "you are now very old and it's time to let younger people take over"

Joshua 13:1 (NIV) *When Joshua had grown old, the Lord said to him, “You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over. God has plans for your life no matter what age you are. But are you willing to trust God and seek claiming the promises God is wanting to give to you.*

Principle #4: With God anything is possible – but it may take hard work and lots of time

Have you ever questioned if God is actually listening to you or ever going to answer your prayers? Remember, Caleb had to wait 40 years to claim the promise from God. But he doesn't appear to ever question God or His timing. He just keeps faithfully following Him through it all.

Paul learned the secret to life – relying on God's strength when his was weak.

Philippians 4:11-13 (NIV) *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Here's Paul's secret to being content in every situation) 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

Principle #5 : God needs you to be all in.

There are 6 times in the Bible in which it describes Caleb as being “wholehearted in following the Lord.” Could that same description be used of you? Or is seeking the Lord more like a part-time hobby? The reality for most people is that we give God far less time than most of our hobbies. And I'm not just talking about church attendance. I'm talking about thinking about God, communicating with Him and taking time to listen to Him.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV) *For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*
Notice: seizing God's plans for your life involve seeking Him with all of your heart.

Romans 12:11 (NIV) *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord*

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV) *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

One of the greatest servants of God was a shoe salesman from Chicago named **Dwight L. Moody**. He was never ordained and he never attended Bible college or seminary. But one time he heard a preacher, Henry Varley, speak these words: *“The world has yet to see what God can do IN and WITH and THROUGH and FOR a man wholly committed to Him.”* At that moment, Dwight L. Moody said, “By the grace of God I will be that man.” And God used him in mighty ways to bring thousands of people into a restored relationship with Himself.

Application: What's keeping you from being fully used by God?

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Sermon Outline
June 23, 2019

Name the two “good” spies that went into Canaan

- 1.
- 2.

Principle #1: You can choose to be consumed by your _____
or your _____

Principle #2: Success comes from _____ upon the Lord

Principle #3: _____ is not a disqualifier when it comes to God using you.

Principle #4: With God anything is possible – but it may take _____ and lots of _____

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Dwight L. Moody: “the world has yet to see what God can do _____ and _____ and _____ and _____ a man wholly committed to Him.”

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