Caleb: man of faith, man of war

Faith’s hall of fame

I am wondering why CALEB is not included in the 'hall of fame' of Hebrews 11. Surely he was as much a man of faith as any of them? Here's my version of his entry:

'By faith Caleb followed God wholeheartedly, and when called to spy out the land brought back a good report. Even though he waited forty five years to receive the promise he remained strong in his conviction that he would enter the land. By faith when he was eighty-five he took possession of Hebron and drove out the giants.'

We may never appear in anyone's 'hall of fame' but we are writing our own faith story. Most of us live in quiet obscurity yet are called to live by faith and trust God for the circumstances of our lives. How is faith at work in you? How would your paragraph read?

A different spirit

Caleb was of ‘a different spirit’ from the other spies. His attitude was one of faith whereas they demonstrated unbelief. Faith is about how we see the world and how we respond to our circumstances.

Scripture reminds that we are to live by faith, not by sight (2Corinthians 5:7). Caleb saw that the people of Canaan were strong, their cities were fortified and that there were giants in the land, but he saw beyond that to the promise of God to lead them into Canaan. It was after all the *Promised* Land. Therefore he declared, ‘We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it (Numbers 13:30).’

True faith is not a denial of reality, neither does it minimise difficulty. It faces things head on, calls them as they are, but sees past the visible to the invisible realm where God is at work. There is no pretence in faith, only the assurance that God is as good as his word.

How might you need to demonstrate your faith today? Don’t allow negativity and unbelief to weigh you down. Choose to be a person of faith who believes in the goodness of God, depends on his power, and trusts in the outworking of his purposes. Let your words and actions reflect your spirit of faith.

You are not a grasshopper!

The spies whose default setting was one of unbelief were overwhelmed and intimidated by what they saw in Canaan. Yes, they saw it was a good land and they brought back huge bunches of grapes, pomegranates and figs to prove it, but their gaze was elsewhere. They saw only the enormity of the task and the impossibility of dislodging the enemy: ‘We can’t attack those people,’ they said, ‘they are stronger than we are.’ They magnified the difficulties and minimised their potential. ‘All the people we saw there are of great size …. We seemed like *grasshoppers* in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them (Numbers 13:31-33).’

Grasshoppers are frail, fragile creatures of no great substance. They are earth-bound insects with a limited perspective. To say you are a grasshopper is to express a poor self-image and deny your true identity as God’s child. Think of yourself rather as a majestic eagle that soars high above circumstances and is not intimidated in any way. You have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6) which means you share in his rule and are to see things from heaven’s perspective.

People of faith refuse to denigrade themselves, belittle what God has done in their lives or deny the power that is at work in them. That doesn’t mean they are boastful or arrogant or have an inflated ego. Their confidence is in the Lord, not themselves, but they are confident *in him*.

Caleb saw himself by faith, as God saw him, and he avoided the grasshopper mentality. We can do the same and we glorify God not by bewailing our limitations and weakness, but by bearing witness to the positon we have in Christ. You are not who you think you are, or who other people say you are; you are who God says you are!

Waiting in faith

Caleb waited forty five years for the promise of God to come to pass in his life. He was forty when he first spied out the land, and eighty five when eventually he received his inheritance (Joshua 14:10). In all the years of wilderness wandering he never lost heart and his faith did not waiver. How easily we are disappointed when things don’t happen for us immediately; how quickly we become discouraged when things don’t seem to be working out. But faith is being sure of what we hope for, and being certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). True faith is not impatient and is content to wait for God’s time, knowing that God is never slow about his promises as some count slowness (2Peter 3:9).

At the moment it is a cold, dark, miserable, rainy day in the middle of winter. It seems to have been this way for ages but we know that it will not last for ever. Spring will come again, and summer will follow. We wait patiently for it, and the hope and expectation that the seasons will change keep us going even though we have forgotten what it feels like to sit outside in shorts and T-shirts. The skies will clear, the sun will shine, the birds will sing, the flowers will bloom again. That is the essence of faith, being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.

If you find yourself in darkness, or a season of the soul akin to winter’s cold, take heart and do not lose hope. Faith believes that it will not last forever. Like Caleb, keep trusting that the day will come when the promise of God comes to pass and hope becomes reality.

Giants in the land

Caleb’s faith was never passive. He didn’t simply sit back and expect things to happen. His faith was active; we may even say, assertive. It compelled him into action, but not in a foolhardy or presumptuous way. He set out to receive his promised inheritance only after receiving the blessing given to him by Joshua, and in the assurance of ‘the Lord helping me’ (Joshua 14:12-13).

Giants stood in his way. The three sons of Anak were entrenched in the hill country around Hebron. They had been in control there for generations, but Caleb drove them out and then went on to capture Debir. This man of faith was inevitably a man of war.

What are the giants preventing you from becoming the person God wants you to be? What powerful forces might hinder you from doing the things God wants you to do? What is Satan’s strategy to stop you enjoying the inheritance that is yours in Christ?

Sometimes we must rise up in faith and confront the giants of unbelief, fear, besetting sin and so on. ‘Fight the good fight of the faith’ Paul urges young Timothy, reminding him that ‘God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (1Timothy 5;12, 2Timothy 1:7).’

Caleb’s story teaches us that we have a part to play in shaping our God-given destiny. We must be willing with God’s help to fight for it, and to take our stand against Satan and his schemes.

Age is no barrier

We may be tempted to think as we get older that our best years are past and our most significant contribution has already been made. Caleb’s experience shows that to be a lie. His greatest moment came when he was eighty-five years old.

Admittedly in his day people lived longer than we do now, but he was still by anyone’s reckoning on the far side of life. By the grace of God he still had his health, and was as vigorous as he had been at forty. Not all us can say that, for aging inevitably involves some slowing down and some physical deterioration. But Caleb’s story reminds us that spiritually there does not need to be a tailing off, for even if outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day (2Corinthians 4:16).

The elderly Simeon and the aged Anna lived in the same spirit of faith as Caleb, and both were privileged to greet the Christ Child in the Temple. We too may flourish like a palm tree; we can still bear fruit in our old age, and remain fresh and green (Psalm 92:12-15). It may be in a different way than before, and at a slightly slower pace, but there is still a contribution to be made.

Do you feel the temptation to ‘hang up your boots’ as you get older? Do you feel that you are ‘past it’ now because you are old? Don’t give up too soon. Let Caleb’s example inspire you to keep going for as long as you can, in whatever way you can. It may surprise you what God has yet in store for you.

A legacy of faith

One section of Caleb’s story in Joshua 15:13-19 if often missed out in the re-telling of his exploits, but it concerns a very important principle – that of encouraging the next generation.

Caleb’s inspirational challenge for someone else to capture the city of Debir, and the generous offer of his daughter’s hand in marriage for whoever does so, causes Othniel to step up to the mark. Inspired by the example of his noble leader Othniel responds to the stirring of God within him. As we get older it is vital that we make room for others to grow and demonstrate their faith in God. Too many hold on to power and do not want to share the limelight with others. Caleb not only finds a worthy husband for his daughter, but is also instrumental in the development of a great new leader.

His generosity in responding positively to his daughters request for a piece of the land, and for springs of water to go with it, show his desire to share whatever he has received from God with others. Her request is surely illustrative of a desire to live in the fullness of God’s blessing (water being a symbol for the life of God through the Holy Spirit). What greater joy can we have in later life than to point others to the fullness of life that there is in Christ?

By setting a good example, opening doors of opportunity and being there to mentor and encourage a younger generation we too can leave a legacy of faith just as Caleb did. It may well be our most significant contribution.