

Unwavering Determination
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Joshua 14:1-14

Opening: A key word in today's passage is the word "wholeheartedly." The word "wholeheartedly" simply means to do something "with all of one's heart; completely; fully committed; holding nothing back." What is the opposite of doing something wholeheartedly? Let's put this in the context of following God. When you think of someone who follows God wholeheartedly, what qualities come to mind?

Joshua 14 focuses on a man named Caleb. Okay, Bible scholars, why is Caleb famous in the Old Testament? What two things does he have in common with Joshua?

In this brief look at chapter 14 Caleb declared: *"...the Lord has kept me alive and well...for 45 years. I'm 85 years old and as strong as I was when I was 40!"* That can cause us to focus on how God supernaturally gave Caleb great vitality in old age (which was true), but his story is about more than that.

The Point: Caleb's story isn't primarily about extraordinary strength in old age; it's about wholehearted faithfulness to God every day of our lives.

Some context before the text: After years of battle, Israel had largely conquered Canaan. Now it was time to divide the land among the tribes, just as God had promised. The land wasn't divided according to military strength or personal ambition but according to God's instructions. Just as the land is about to be distributed, Caleb steps forward—not to ask for special treatment, but to remind Joshua of a promise God had made through Moses forty-five years earlier.

(NLT) — 6 ...Caleb said to Joshua, "Remember what the Lord said to Moses, the man of God, about you and me when we were at Kadesh-barnea. **7** I was forty years old when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me from Kadesh-barnea to explore the land of Canaan. I returned and gave an honest report, **8** but my brothers who went with me frightened the people from entering the Promised Land. For my part, I wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God. **9** So that day Moses solemnly promised me, 'The land of Canaan on which you were just walking will be your grant of land and that of your descendants forever, because you wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God.' **10** "Now, as you can see, the Lord has kept me alive and well as he promised for all these forty-five years since Moses made this promise—even while Israel wandered in the wilderness. Today I am eighty-five years old. **11** 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. **12** So give me the hill country that the Lord promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak [giants] 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." **13** So Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave Hebron to him as his portion of land. **14**

Hebron still belongs to the descendants of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite because he wholeheartedly followed the Lord, the God of Israel.

- The word “wholeheartedly” is repeated three times in those verses to describe how Caleb has followed God. Earlier in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy we see it again in reference to Caleb:
 - “My servant Caleb... has a different spirit and follows Me **wholeheartedly**...” (*God speaking*) — Numbers 14:24
 - “...except Caleb... and Joshua... because they followed the LORD **wholeheartedly**.” (*Moses speaking*) — Numbers 32:12; Deut. 1:36
 - Moses said it about Caleb. God said it about him. Caleb said it himself. That’s a pretty good resume for being “wholehearted” for God.
- “The Hebrew expression for following wholeheartedly “literally means “to fill/fulfill after,” conveying the sense of being loyal to someone¹. More precisely, it describes someone who “completely filled [himself] with Yahweh”²—a vivid image of total absorption or complete dedication to God.”ⁱ
- Caleb did well what Jesus commands all His followers to do: “...love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...the great and first commandment.”ⁱⁱ (Matthew 22:37-38)
- How were Caleb and Joshua exceptional in following God compared to the rest of Israel? How did wholeheartedly following God benefit them? How did the sins of others impact them?
- After 45 years of delay that were not his fault, I see no hint of bitterness in Caleb!
- Some point to Caleb's words about being as strong at 85 as he was at 40 as a challenge to God's servants to not give in to old age.
- Human experience proves that God doesn't bless everyone with longevity and unusual strength. I believe God gave Caleb supernatural strength in old age to be able to take possession of the land God promised him. On the other hand, some of God's most committed servants were not blessed with long life:
 - Oswald Chambers died at age 43. We still read his words in “My Utmost.”
 - Jim Elliot was 28 when he was martyred taking the gospel to the Aucas.
 - Robert Murray M'Cheyne died at age 29, yet his influence far outlived his years. His Bible reading plan is still used by countless Christians today.
- Serving God wholeheartedly isn't about strength in old age, it's about obedience day by day regardless of how long we live. It isn't about how many years God gives us, but how faithfully we use the years He gives us.
- In Numbers 14:24 God said Caleb had a “different spirit.”
- That tells me Caleb's wholehearted devotion wasn't something he did occasionally—it was the defining characteristic of his life.
- We might think, “*I wish I had Caleb's wholehearted spirit.*”
- Caleb never presents himself as a self-made hero. Even after 45 years of faithful living, his confidence rests not in himself but in the Lord.
- He said in verse 12: “*The LORD helping me, I will drive them out.*”
- Wholehearted devotion is a life of dependence on God, not confidence in self.

- Thanks to Jesus giving the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of His followers, we can also have a “different spirit” that helps us become more wholehearted followers of Christ. We call that process “sanctification”.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Let me engage in some speculation that is not stated in scripture.
- Between Numbers 14 and Joshua 14, we don’t hear about Caleb, yet we know he was along for the 45 years of wandering caused by the sins of others.
- Despite that, in this text, he doesn’t spend time recounting forty-five years of frustration. Instead, he says, in essence: *“God promised, God has kept me alive, God has strengthened me, now let’s go take the land!”*
- His focus was on God’s faithfulness, not on the inconvenience of the delay.
- My speculation: Caleb didn’t spend forty-five years complaining to God. I think he spent those forty-five years walking with God day-by-day in faithfulness.
- How can we become more wholehearted followers of Christ?
 - **Daily surrender** - Romans 12:1-2 says to “Present our bodies as a living sacrifice...and be transformed by the renewing of our minds by His Spirit.”
 - **Walk by the Spirit** - As we consciously follow the Spirit’s leading, He produces His fruit in our lives. (Gal.5:22-23).
 - **Do our “work” as God does His work** - Philippians 2:12 tells us to “work out” our salvation. The next verse says, *“God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”*ⁱⁱⁱ I heard a good line about this: *“It is not 50% us and 50% God. It’s 100% our responsibility to obey while 100% relying on God’s enabling grace.”*
 - **Abide in Christ** - Jesus said in John 15:4-5 to remain in Him because, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” Abiding is the daily choice to stay dependent on Christ, trust His Word, and obey Him.
- Putting those things into practice sounds like what a “wholehearted” follower of Christ would do. They sound like how I imagine Caleb walked with God.
- **2 Chronicles 16:9 (NLT)** — **9** *The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.* [That was a rebuke to a king who did NOT do that!]
- Let’s pray that God would find us serving Him wholeheartedly like Caleb!

ⁱ Kenneth A. Mathews, [Joshua](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), [122](#).

Michael A. Grisanti, [“Deuteronomy,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Numbers–Ruth (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), [491](#).

ⁱⁱ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Mt 22:37–38). (2025). Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Php 2:13). Tyndale House Publishers.