

# Taking First Steps

## A Person On Fire

Joshua 14:6-12

Well, today we have come to the last message in this first steps sermon series. We have tracked first steps as a nation under God, and the need to make them more than words on a page, whether that be the Declaration of independence, or the verses out of the bible. We have looked at first steps of a community that spiritually awakens very often comes through an unisolated person who is a person who does not have or a person who has but takes what they have and joyfully serves those who do not have. Last week we reflected on a church on mission is a church that does all the right things, but on top of that they are a church that remembers their First Love.

Today we come to the place where all of that starts – A Person On Fire:

God designed it that way: Without a person who is totally sold out, a person who is fully given to the mission, a church will not stay on mission, a community will not awaken, and a nation will not remain under God. It all starts with a person who is on fire for the things of God.

### Story

I have chosen Caleb, to represent a person in the bible who was totally given to the mission of God. If you know anything about this man it probably comes from the fact that he was 1 of the 12 spies who went across the Jordan river and into the land of Canaan, to check out the land 10 spies came back saying we can never defeat the enemy that lives there, and Joshua and Caleb were the only two that said God is with us, we can do this.

That story was way back in Exodus, today we are reading from Joshua 14, and again we run into Joshua and Caleb. Now it is 45 years later. 40 years of wandering in the desert, and 5 years of battling to gain control of the promised land. It is only 7 verses, but out of these 7 verses come 4 massively important qualities that drove this man on fire.

### A Person On Fire – Hears and Remembers what God said

*Now the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb said to him, "You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. Joshua 14:6-7a*

I don't know if you are seeing a pattern here or not, but the biblical model that is put in front of us time after time, is that forward movement of the people in scripture came as a result of them hearing and obeying God. In my very first message to you over a whopping month ago I said that after my last message if I do not help you Hear God's voice and respond to it, then my ministry here will have been for nothing.

Caleb was a person who heard and remembered God's voice, no doubt in taking much of his time over those 40 years in solitude, where he walked away from the business of the camp and opened his soul to God

A pastor in Abilene Texas that I have been corresponding with over the last few months who is establishing a discipleship focus in his church just wrote something about this:

*The soul is like a wild animal - tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, self-sufficient. It knows how to survive in hard places. But it is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that*



*the last things we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out. But if we will walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently by the base of the tree, and fade into our surroundings, the wild animal we seek might put in an appearance.*

*Henri Nouwen calls solitude the "furnace of transformation". Solitude is a classic spiritual form of prayer where one allows the soul to speak (and listen) to God. In doing this, it is important to not try to interfere or control with one's mind what the soul is speaking (or hearing).*

Then the verse goes on and shows us that:

### **A Person On Fire – Lives by their Convictions**

It says:

*“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 melt with fear. I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.” Joshua 14:7b-8*

This is a rich verse. This verse seems to capture two ways of approaching life, doesn't it? We either, like Caleb, live life by our convictions or, like the 10 spies, we live life by fear.

If fear is too prevalent, in a nation, in a community, in a church, it seems to always win out. And like the Israelites, whatever group of people that listen to and give into that fear, seem to just drift, they just travel in circles, no sense of direction, no sense of power. But when people begin to get on fire, when convictions, begin to emerge, and find voice - direction returns, energy increases and the power of God runs throughout the camp. It has been interesting in these small groups, that Kathy and I have attended. There have been many great questions, but I also have asked primarily one question, not in all the gatherings but in several. The question has been “What do you want to see happen at this church?” As soon as I ask that question the room has gone silent, then slowly answers begin,. All the answers have all been positive and I see conviction emerge. People who live by their convictions feel the push from behind to make something happen, unlike a person who lives by guilt. Guilt pressures you from on top, and says “You better do this, or else? . Conviction nudges you from the back and says “What might be the possibilities?”

## A Person On Fire – Remembers Promises Made

*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.' Joshua 14:9*

The power of promises are without measure in our society. We see this when we are reminded of the negative impact of promises broken.

- The young boy standing in the front yard, with ball in hand, watching his Dad get in the car and drive away from their home for the last time.
- The business deal, gone south that had been sealed with a hand shake

Then the impact the other way, toward the positive:

- “This was your great grandmother’s and she made us promise that when you got married it would be yours.”
- “I told you I would finish what I started and here it is”

People who are on fire for life: have dealt at a very deep level about being trustworthy. About allowing their Yes to be Yes and their No to be No.

No matter how difficult it is to keep that promise, they will sacrifice to keep so that at the end of the day, they can go to sleep and know that their ‘trustworthiness’ is in tact.

Caleb was such a man: He had waited patiently for 45 years for his inheritance, he had done what was asked of him and now he was coming to collect.

In this case though Joshua was willing to give him the land, there was still a problem, the land he was to inherit was still occupied. So there was a battle that still had to be fought and Caleb was now 85 years old.

Which leads us to the last quality of a person on fire:

## A Person On Fire – Is Not Defined by Limitations

*"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 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 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."*

*Joshua 14:10-12*

Responding to what God told him Caleb is heading into the hill country. You have to love a person, like this.

Too often: 'I can't' is the beginning of people's sentences.

I can't quit my job                      I can't I'm too young                      I'm too old                      I'm too short                      I'm too fat

The only "I can't" that still stands for me was: I was in a men's restroom and a guy came in and asked, "Are you married?" "YES" I exclaimed. He then said, "Well I can't understand my wife?" Taking a sigh of relief, "I said, "Well, I can't help you their" That is one of God's great and wonderful mysteries.

But most of the rest of life begins with too many people saying "I can't...because"

A person on fire: Is not defined by limitation and Caleb is a perfect example of this. We are facing some of the biggest issues we have ever faced as a nation, as a community and as a church. It will take people who do not limitation define them, in order to overcome these obstacles.