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Speaker: Pastor Jeff Poush
Bible passage or verse: Joshua 14:6-15
Title of Sermon: Old Faithful
Series: Courageous Living in a Dangerous World

14 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. ⁷I 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, ⁸but 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. ⁹So 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 is helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

¹³ Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. ¹⁴ So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly. ¹⁵ (Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.)

Then the land had rest from war.

I love the Scriptures because they're so diverse. There are passages that, when we come to church, sometimes these passages are a little convicting. Sometimes we come across passages that are challenging. Sometimes we come across theology that's perplexing. And then sometimes, we come across passages like this that are inspiring. It's the story of Caleb -- 85-year-old man.

Last week, right here in the lobby, I was talking to a friend, and halfway through the conversation, he just looked at me and he goes, "You're getting old!" He wasn't being mean, he was just making an observation. "You're getting old! You got this gray hair over in your sideburns." I'm like, "Yes, I am." I wanted to say, "So are you," but that would've been snarky. But -- isn't that true? I mean, all of us are getting older. My last birthday was one of the cool ones. Last December I turned 50. Yes -- I mean, come on. I mean, seriously. I mean, come on. I turned 50! And that's the birthday that we kinda do weird stuff to our friends, right? Everything's black. "You're over the hill." You think Caleb had "over the hill" anywhere in his vocabulary? Anywhere in his mindset? "Fifty, you kidding me? I'm 85, and I'm ready to go over another hill! I'm ready to take another hill!"

The story of Caleb is inspiring. Eighty-five years old, and I know that -- you know, I was raised -- there are certain questions you never ask people. But as I've been

studying this, I'm looking at everyone, going, "I wonder if that -- 85, is that person 85?" Eighty-five's pretty good. The older I get, 85 doesn't sound as old as it used to. I remember -- I remember the first fiftieth birthday party that I was at. I think I was about 18, and I was like, "Dang, he's old!" Not anymore! I don't think 50 sounds so bad anymore.

The aging process is real, and we're gonna be looking at a really cool story about an 85-year-old man. And the aging process is something we all have to deal with, and you'll know -- you'll know when you get there. Maybe you can relate to some of these signs that you might be getting older.

You'll know you're getting older when your back goes out more than you do.

You'll know you're getting older when your knees buckle but your belt won't.

You'll know you're getting older when you sink your teeth into a nice steak and they stay there.

You'll know you're getting older when you try to straighten out the wrinkles in your socks and then realize you're not wearing socks.

I've got 30 minutes of these -- so -- that's all we're doing. It's all I got.

You know you're getting older when you're at your breakfast table and you can hear "Snap!" "Crackle" and "Pop!" but you're not eating Rice Krispies.

You know you're getting older when it takes you two tries to get up off the couch. That's embarrassing.

Getting older is a fact of life. Every single day, you and I add another day onto our personal resumé. It's a reality. But the question is, how are you and I going to deal with the reality of the aging process? Are we just going to passively submit to it and go along for the ride? Are we going to bitterly rebel against it and complain at every turn? Are we going to naively ignore it and pretend that we're really not getting older? Or, like Caleb, are we going to lean into it and embrace it wholeheartedly?

Today, we're going to look at the life of a senior citizen. A man named Caleb, who, at 85 years old, was still asking God for another battle to fight. He wasn't asking God for a rocking chair to sit in. He wasn't asking for a time share in Florida where he could spend his golden years. He wasn't asking for rest and relaxation. He was asking for another hill to take. Because Caleb was a different breed. He was unique. In fact, in Numbers, God refers to Caleb this way. He said that Caleb was a man with a different spirit. What made Caleb so unique? What attributes and qualities did he have that made him stand out as different? Sometimes when we use that word, we can use it in a pejorative sense, in a negative sense. Like, "Oh,

that person's different." In fact, when my wife Tammy was courting me, she used to say, "You're weird. You're different." I'd be like, "Tammy, could you please say, like, 'unique' or 'special'? It's got, like, different connotations." "Different" can kind of sound negative. But today I would like to suggest that every single one of us ought to strive to be a little weird. A little different. A little more like Caleb and less like the status quo. Because following the status quo is easy -- going against the grain, that's hard. Coasting downhill is easy, because gravity does all the work. And we just follow along for the ride. But the easy road is rarely the road that leads to victory. The easy road doesn't teach you anything. But taking the road less traveled is the one that makes you different. And it's the road that Caleb took.

So, what made Caleb different? What kind of spirit did he have? And more importantly, how can you and I strive to be more like Caleb? In this text, there's a word that's used three different times. That same word is used three more times in the book of Numbers, and it's the word "wholehearted." The text says that Caleb followed the Lord wholeheartedly, and I believe that a wholehearted follower sees adversity differently. In the Bible, Hebrew and in the Greek, they used repetition to accentuate a point. In English, you and I have dozens of different techniques and tools that we can use to emphasize a point. At the end of a sentence, you can use an exclamation point, my favorite punctuation mark. I have to go back in my emails regularly and delete exclamation points, because every single sentence has one -- or nine! I type and write the way I talk. It's in the superlative. We got exclamation points. We can bold-face. We can underline. We can italicize. We can change the font to 90. We can -- I do that too, it's fun. We have all these different things in English that we can do to accentuate a point to emphasize something.

They didn't have those punctuation marks. So, in the Bible, when you see repetition, your eyes should perk up and you should pay attention. Just like in Isaiah 6, when the text says, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." When you repeat something thrice over, it's important. When Jesus said, "Truly, truly I say to you," you'd better listen up -- repetition's important. Three times the word "wholeheartedly" is used to describe Caleb, and in the Hebrew there's a really neat nuance to define or to describe the word "wholeheartedly." The phrase means "to close the gap," and it's a term that's used to describe what a hunter does as he's pursuing his prey, as he's watching his prey, his target, he's slowly moving closer and closer to his target. He's closing the gap. He wants to get close to his prey.

Caleb followed the Lord wholeheartedly. That means that day by day he was creeping ever closer to his target, because Caleb wasn't content to observe God from afar. Caleb wasn't content to be at a distance and see God way over there. He wholeheartedly followed, which means Caleb closed the gap on his Lord and moved ever closer to Him. And it made him a different person.

When you're up close to God, your perspective changes, because you see the things the way He does. Think of the way Jesus interacted with Peter. When He

approached Peter, He said, "Follow me. Come with me, and along the way, you are going to see things the way I see things. You will see people the way I see people. You will be changed because you will be in my presence." He didn't say, "Hey, Peter -- you could use a bath. Or maybe two. You smell like fish. Your beard's a little bushy -- trim it up. Work on your language -- little salty. I'll come back in a month, and maybe then you'll be clean enough to be on Team Jesus." Huh uh. Jesus said, "Hey, I want to close the gap between you and I. I want you to get close to me, and as we go, you will be changed. Your perspective will change." Caleb wholeheartedly followed, and it gave Caleb a different perspective on life.

Verse 7 gives us a little glimpse into the back story to Caleb's life. In verse 7 it says, "I was 40 years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land" -- the Promised Land. "And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, but my fellow Israelites who went with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly." How was Caleb different than those other ten spies? The story goes that God had promised this land to the Israelites, and Moses said, "Hey, would you please go scout this thing out? We need an intel report of what we're getting into before we take the land." Twelve of them went out. All 12 of them saw the exact same thing. They saw the exact same 9-foot-tall giants. Ten came back and gave a report that caused the Israelites hearts to melt in fear. The ten said, "Oh, we're toast. There is no way we can take those guys! They're too big! They're too scary! Compared to us, they're huge, and we're like grasshoppers."

You know what Caleb said? "Compared to God, those giants are tiny." Caleb compared the obstacles to His God; the ten compared themselves to the challenges before them. They saw their adversity from the ground up, and it looked insurmountable. Caleb had a different spirit. Caleb saw his adversity, he saw his obstacles from Heaven down, because he was close to God. He had closed the gap, and he saw a spiritual perspective. Those giants looked tiny from that perspective. We've all looked out the window in an airplane, haven't we? You ever looked out over the mountains when you're in an airplane? Those mountains don't look quite as big from up there, do they? You stand at the foot of Mt. Hood, and it's beastly. It's big. You can't see that whole mountain from the foot. If you look from the ground up, that obstacle looks insurmountable. But if you look from a different perspective, when you look from the perspective of Heaven down, these obstacles down quite look as big.

Caleb didn't see obstacles that day. What he saw were opportunities for God to overcome his obstacles, because he saw things from a different vantage point. Caleb saw the exact same giants the other spies saw. Those giants were real, but Caleb had a different spirit. He had a different vantage point. And those obstacles didn't seem quite as big anymore. Because a wholehearted follower sees adversity differently. Now, I've never had to put on armor and wield a sword against a 9-foot-tall mercenary. I never have. Neither have you. But each of us has real

battles, real challenges, real obstacles that can be every bit as intimidating as a physical foe.

That health challenge that you're facing -- that's daunting. That family conflict that's been wearing you down for years, and you've gotten to a point where you just do not see a pathway to reconciliation ever materializing. That's real. Your job situation might be horrible, and you might want to just throw in the towel and quit. Or maybe, you, like one of the Israelites, is just wandering through life. You're bored and you're miserable. You're tired. You have no direction and you just want to give up. Friends, your adversity is real. But like Caleb, you have a choice to make. How are you going to view those obstacles? Like the ten, or like the two? When you stare down your opponent, when you go into battle against your giant, I want you to do what Caleb did. I want you to get super close to God. The further away that we get from God, if we allow distance to exist between us and God, you know what can fill the gap? You know what can creep in there? Fear. Doubt. Discouragement. Lots of bad things can weasel their way in there. But the closer you are, there's no room for despair. The closer we get -- if we close the gap between us and God, we leave no room for discouragement and despair. You will see adversity differently as a wholehearted follower because you will be looking down on your problems with a heavenly perspective rather than looking up at them from an earthly perspective.

When we compare our obstacles and our challenges to God's ability to overcome those challenges, that will give us hope. So not only did Caleb see his adversity differently, but he kept eyes focused on the promise that God gave him four decades earlier. And that kept him on mission, because a person of hope stays focused on the promise.

We've all heard the cliché that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. You've heard that cliché, right? And when you think about it, it's really an aspirational concept. It's something that we hope is true. Because sometimes adversity really does cause people to pack it in and quit. Sometimes adversity crushes people, and it breaks their will, it breaks their spirit to the point that they aren't even able to recover. Sometimes adversity does crush people. But not Caleb. His adversity did make him stronger. How in the world did Caleb endure 45 years of wandering in the desert while he was waiting for God to make good on that promise? How did he stay patient for 45 years? I can't stay patient for 45 seconds at a stoplight! I have literally turned right when I'm going straight because I'm sick of sitting there! And I know it takes me longer, I've done the math. But it makes me feel better to move.

Waiting can be excruciating, can't it? Waiting can wear you out, and it can ultimately cause people to just quit or to do something else because they're sick of waiting. Waiting can be wearying, but it can also create anticipation. Maybe you can remember the anticipation of Christmas morning. Maybe you've had a loved one coming to visit you, and while you're waiting them to come, that anticipation is building.

Waiting can have one of two effects on people. It can wear you out and cause you to get discouraged and quit, or it can build anticipation in you as you anticipate, the fulfillment of that thing you're looking forward to.

Isaiah chapter 40, verse 31 is a beautiful passage, it's a common passage. I think Isaiah's talking about a person with Caleb's spirit. Listen to this. "Those that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." What's implicit? Waiting wears you out! Waiting saps your strength! If you're waiting on the clerk to hurry up. If you're waiting on the gas station attendant to finally come over and fill your gas tank. If you're waiting on someone else, oh yeah, that'll sap your strength. But if you're waiting on the Lord -- you will have your strength renewed. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not be faint." For 45 years, Caleb took advantage of this promise. "I'm just gonna wait for the Lord to do what He said He was gonna do." And day by day, he got stronger and stronger -- he didn't get worn out.

Caleb grew stronger over the years because he never lost sight of the promise. He had absolute faith that God would follow through on what He said He was going to do. And friends, having faith is not merely wishful thinking. Having faith is not naïve optimism or simply looking on the bright side of life. If I could remove one phrase from the English vernacular, it would be the phrase, "blind faith." Phrase drives me nuts. I know what people mean when they say that, but God never sets up a system where He asks us to blindly jump into the unknown. God is not going to reward people for being gullible and stupid and just hoping that God exists. Faith is not a blind leap, my friends. Instead, it is a deep, settled conviction that God will do exactly what He said He was going to do. Faith is taking God at His Word and acting upon what He says.

That's what Caleb did. You know what Caleb's name means? It means "dog." And some look at that as if it's an insult -- it's kind of a bummer name to have -- dog. But when I think of a dog, I don't see him like the way I see my dogs. My dogs sleep 22 hours a day. You know what dog I see when I think of Caleb? A Retriever or a Springer Spaniel that cannot wait to get out on a hunt and to chase down some birds. I see a dog that's ready to go - "Let me out of my cage, I've got a challenge before me!" Caleb had a dogged determinism to take hold of the promise of God, and he was ready to go. Like a Springer Spaniel or a Labrador Retriever on a hunt. There's a great quote -- it's never been more appropriate than this moment. There's a quote that goes like this: "A dog in his kennel will nip at his fleas, but a dog on a hunt will never even know they exist." A dog in his kennel has nothing else to do. He's bored. He's passionless. And all he's got to do is like, "That itches. And I'm gonna gnaw on my forearm for an hour." But a dog on a hunt could have the same number of fleas on his body -- but he's ready to go.

And isn't that human nature? You get a bunch of people in a room with nothing to do, and what do they sit around and do? *Na na na na nab*. "Everything in the world's terrible. Everyone in the world's horrible." That's what people do. When

they've got no passion, no mission. They sit around and they whine. That's what the Israelites did for 40 years while they were wandering. "I want to go back to Egypt. I know I was a slave there, but at least they had good food! I'm sick of the manna!" Stiff-necked, heard of heart, whining complainers. Except for Caleb, because he was different. He had a different spirit, because he was focused on the promise. "God told me back there He was giving me that land. I'm just waiting for Him to do it." Caleb was a man on a hunt. Bored people sitting around are gonna complain. But you put those same people in an Escape Room -- they're gonna get creative. You give those same people a treasure map, and they're gonna work together. They're gonna get motivated, because they've got their eyes fixed on some sort of a promise, an attainable goal that they can strive after. And when we are living on mission, when we stay focused on God's promises, we avoid the trap that causes so many people to give up and to quit the race and to stop pursuing God.

There's a trap that causes people to stop closing the gap and to let that gap just get bigger and bigger and bigger. What is that? What is the thing that causes us to lose hope? What is the thing that causes us to feel distant from Him? Well, there are all sorts of things. Maybe for you it's a feeling of inadequacy. You've asked yourself, "What do I have? I don't have any spiritual gifts. I've got nothing to offer, I'm inadequate. God could never use me to fulfill His mission."

Maybe it's the memories of past failures. Maybe you've begun to believe that tape that runs in your head that says you're disqualified because of what you did when you were in high school. Maybe you've begun to believe the lie that you're just simply too old. You're past your prime. You've got nothing to offer because you're too old. Maybe you've lost hope because you are discouraged because of unmet expectations. You've begun to ask yourself, "Is God ever going to answer my prayer?" Or worse, "Is God even real?" The enemy will use all of these tactics and more to get you to give up the fight, to distract you from the mission, to get your eyes and your mind focused on other things, and you now have created distance between you and God. And in the gap, we've got despair and discouragement and inactivity. And I want to encourage you guys -- if that is true for you, don't give up. Don't give up! Because a strong finisher endures until the end.

In sports, coaches use all sorts of phrases to essentially communicate one singular idea, which is to finish strong. A football coach will say things like, "Play to the whistle! Keep blocking your opponent until you hear the whistle!" A basketball coach will say things like, "Leave it all on the court!" I like to tell my kids, "You can rest tomorrow!" A track coach will say, "Run all the way through the finish line," because races are often won or lost right at the end. Aren't those races exciting? Whether it's Nascar or horseracing or the hundred-yard dash -- when you see that person in second place closing the distance and getting closer, and both of those athletes are striving and straining until the finish line, and you need a photo finish to see it. That grit and determinism of that person in second place -- they're finishing strong. And we've also seen those races where the person in first is maybe a little overconfident or maybe a little disinterested. They flash the old "WHO'S NUMBER

ONE?" And you see it whether they're the, you know, the Tour de France, takes his hands off the handlebars, and he flashes the "I'M NUMBER ONE," and BOOM the guy goes past him to win. We've seen that. Finishing strong makes all the difference. Finishing well is the difference between having a promise and taking possession. Finishing well is the difference between having hope of finishing and having the reward of that treasured trophy.

If Caleb didn't finish the race, he would've never received possession of the land. Oh, the promise would have still been intact, but without crossing the finish line, there would've been no reward. Sadly, many biblical characters do not finish well. They come out of the gate strong, but over the course of their life, they peter out. Why was Caleb different? How was he able to finish this race well? Because I believe he cultivated his spiritual strength over the course of his life. He didn't roll out of bed on his 85th birthday and just get this jolt of energy! And be like, "Hey, I think I'm ready to take on a battle! Let's go!" I don't think it happened overnight. I think it happened over the course of 45 years. He built up his spiritual muscle day by day -- one good decision at a time, one step at a time. It's easy to lose sight of that spiritual growth because the text kind of makes you think mostly of his physical strength.

Verse 11 -- it's a great verse. "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." That's amazing! He was physically fit and strong at 85. But honestly -- I don't know this, this is my guess -- I betcha you could've found someone stronger than Caleb in the Nation of Israel. I betcha there were other strong, strapping dudes that could have taken Caleb in a wrestling match. Yes, he was physically healthy at 85, but what I think is more inspiring, what oughta catch our attention is his spiritual strength. And I believe that his spiritual vitality was forged through adversity. His spiritual stamina was bolstered through his relentless pursuit of God's promise, and the endurance that he developed over the course of his spiritual journey allowed him to finish the race and take possession of the inheritance that had been promised to him decades earlier.

Caleb was given a promise. And he trusted that God was going to follow through, no matter how long it took. And ultimately, he was given possession of the land. And friends, spiritual growth does not happen accidentally. It happens with intentionality and forethought. Spiritual growth happens when you follow wholeheartedly. When you see your target, when you see your prey, and you advance on it and you move closer to it. Spiritual growth comes from following wholeheartedly. Stay focused on the course set before you. Build up your spiritual stamina so that you might finish the race well. And receive the blessing that God has for you, because we know that God rewards those who diligently seek him.

And what did Caleb get? What was Caleb given because he was a diligent pursuer of God? Verse 13 says that, "Joshua then blessed Caleb, son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance." You know what Hebron means? Hebron means communion. Caleb had a spirit within him that drove him toward Hebron,

drove him toward communion and fellowship with his Lord. It drove him toward deeper intimacy with his creator. He'd been given just the glimpse of the Promised Land, but he'd never lost his passion to get to Hebron, to get to communion where he would be able to finally rest because he was in that place of fulfillment that God had given him, and he was now completing that journey that he had been set upon.

For 40 years, Caleb had to overcome physical giants. He had to endure the whining and complaining from hardhearted, stiff-necked Israelites. Caleb had to overcome the temptation to give up from the tireless waiting and the wandering in the desert. But Caleb endured because he wanted Hebron. He wanted communion. He wanted fellowship with God, so he stayed close and he wholeheartedly forged ahead toward the promise that had been given to him. Nothing was going to keep this senior citizen from finishing the race.

And friends, this message is for all of us in this room regardless of your age. If you're a young person here today, press on. Keep your eyes fixed on the promise of God and stay close to Him. And if you are more advanced in your age, press on. There's no battle too great for you and God to overcome. And the most important battle you must face is the next one, because you are not done until God calls you home. Oh, those battles will keep coming. You will have to face adversity. From the first moment you decide to follow Jesus, there will be battles that you have to face. And they are either going to discourage you or they will strengthen you. That next battle's the most important one, and that battle is winnable. Doesn't matter if you're 22 or 92, keep fighting. Keep pressing forward. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and He will give you the hill. Follow Him wholeheartedly like Caleb, and you will develop the endurance that you need to face that next battle, and one day you will hear, "Well done. You can rest now. The inheritance is yours, and you can now enter my rest, my good and faithful servant."

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