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Go and Don't Stop

"We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance." (2 Thessalonians 3:4-5)

When I grow up someday, I want to be like Caleb. There are many people that I admire in the Scripture, and Caleb is near the top of that list.

Caleb is one of the twelve spies who were sent into Canaan early in Israel's exodus from Egypt. Ten spies returned and reported to Moses that entering the Promised Land was next to impossible. Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, said that it could be done. Israel listened to the ten, refusing to enter. God then punished their disobedience and lack of faith by letting them wander in the wilderness for forty years—one year for every day that the spies had spent on their mission. Forty years later, when they finally entered, only two people remained who originally left Egypt—Joshua and Caleb.

It is what happens at this point that makes me want to be like Caleb. They are dividing up the inheritance of the land. Some parcels of that land are better than others. Listen to what Caleb says:

"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).

At eighty-five years young, Caleb is asking for some of the toughest and most formidable property that exists. "Give me the hill country." No beach-front property for this man. "Give me the hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified." There is still a good fight left in this faithful senior citizen. "The Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as He said." His confidence is not in his strength but in God's.

Go and don't stop. There is so much that can stand in the way of our going. Maybe right now you find yourself discouraged, defeated and tired. Is there any good fight left within you? Go and don't stop.

History is marked by great people who would not let anything stand in their way. Winston Churchill seemed so dull as a youth that his father thought him to be incapable of earning a living.

Thomas Edison's first teacher described him as slow, and his father was convinced that he was a dunce. It took thousands of experiments before the light bulb was perfected.

Albert Einstein performed so badly in high school, except in the area of mathematics, that a teacher asked him to consider dropping out.

Then, of course, there was the man who failed in business at age 22. He ran for Legislature and was defeated at 23. He

failed again in business at 24. Elected finally to Legislature at age 25, he had a nervous breakdown at 27. He was defeated for Speaker at 29 and defeated for Elector at 31. He was defeated for Congress at 34 and then elected to Congress at 37. Then two years later he was defeated for Congress, and then again defeated for Senate at 46. He was defeated for Vice President at 47, as well as being defeated for Senate again at 49. Finally, he was elected as the 16th President of the United States at age 51—Abraham Lincoln.

Go and don't stop.

Going forth in the name of Jesus can be very discouraging at times. We can end up feeling, "What good does this do? Who really cares after all?"

It is in those moments when I am haunted by these types of questions that I find strength not in my desire or my ambition, but in His command, "Therefore go and make disciples." No one may care. It may do little good in my eyes. This does not matter in the end. What matters is that I am going in response to His command. He does not let me go it alone. Jesus offers a promise to accompany His command, "*and surely I will be with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28: 20).

When I think about His promise, a picture that comes to my mind is something that occurred in the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona. From his seat in the top row of the Stadium, Jim Redmond saw what 65,000 others were seeing unfold. It was the semi-finals of the men's 400-meter race. A British runner by the name of Derek was in trouble. While others gasped and watched as Derek fell to the track surface, Jim Redmond reacted in a far different way. Derek was his son. Derek had ripped his hamstring and was now picking himself up in a brave effort to go and not stop. Jim Redmond left the stands. He raced down the stairs, brushed aside a security guard and bounded over a 4½-foot wall, rushing onto the track. When Jim reached his son, he told him, "You don't have to do this." Derek was

determined to finish. So arm in arm the young sprinter and his father limped toward the finish line. As they did, the stadium fans arose and applauded what was unfolding before their eyes. Millions of viewers across the world watched an unforgettable demonstration of a father's love (Branon).

So often has God done this very thing for you and me? Hurt and limping, He comes by our side to help us to go and not stop. The beauty of this is that He has already secured the victory for us. Yet, as we run the race set before us, He is there by our side to assist and strengthen us. Remember Caleb's words and faith: ". . . *but the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said*" (Joshua 14:12). So many times I have experienced this when in a quiet moment His Word has spoken to my heart at just the moment when I no longer wanted to go, when I just wanted to stop. So often He has come by my side through the workings and teaching of the Holy Spirit, as He did with the men on their way to Emmaus. So often He has sent Christian friends to walk along my side who encourage me and remind me that I am not alone.

Go and don't stop. Along the way, should you find someone else limping in their race, take the time to walk by their side and remind them of these words:

"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance" (2 Thessalonians 3:3-5).

Perseverance

When all the world is looming dark
And things seem not so clear,
When shadows seem to hover 'round
Lord, may I persevere.
When it seems everything's been tried
And there's no way to go,
Just let me keep remembering

Sometimes the journey's slow.
I may just need to stop and rest
Along the path I trod,
A time to try to understand
And have my talk with God.
As I gain new strength to carry on
Without a doubt or fear,
Somehow I know things will be right,
And so, I persevere.

(By Anne Stortz from Chicken Soup for the Unsinkable Soul; Copyright 1999 by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen)

When the going is a little rough . . .
When you find your strength sagging a bit
. . . Remember Caleb. Forget about going
down hill. Say with Caleb, "Give me the hill
country," and start climbing. Go and don't
stop.

Prayer: Send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever me from any tie but the tie that binds me to your service and to your heart. **Amen.** (David Livingstone)

Challenge: Who do you know that is a bit discouraged right now and wants to stop? Pray for them. Ask them how you might be able to encourage them in what they are facing.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11-12

From the Book of Concord: "From these things it is clear that James does not contradict us when he distinguishes a dead faith from a living faith in order to condemn idle and complacent minds who imagine that they have faith when they do not. He says that faith which does not bring forth good works is dead, but he says that faith which brings forth good works is alive. Furthermore, we have frequently shown what we mean by faith. We are not talking about an idle knowledge, such as is also to be found in the devils, but about a faith that resists the terrors of conscience and which uplifts and consoles terrified hearts. Such faith is not an easy matter as the opponents imagine; nor is it a human power, but it is a divine power by which we are made alive and by which we defeat death and the devil. So Paul says in Colossians [2:12] that faith is active through the power of God and conquers death, 'You were also raised with him through faith in the power of God.' Since this faith is a new life, it necessarily produces new impulses and new works. Accordingly, James rightly denies that we are justified by a faith that is without works" (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV: Justification, pp. 158-159.248-250).