



BelPres Church

Hill Country

Joshua 14 (additional reading: Numbers 13-14:10)

Speaker: Dr. Scott Dudley

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Well, hello, great to see all of you people here. I want to say hi to all of you, those of you online. I also want to say hello to those of you in the community center. Thank you all for joining us. And New Hope, I know you're joining us as well in the community center. So great to all be together as one family.

In the church that I worked at in California, sometimes in our staff meetings, those of us who were younger on staff would start to talk about how hard ministry can be, a.k.a. complain about how hard ministry can be. And the senior pastor would always say, Yeah, I've been at it for 40 years, and it just gets worse. We're like, thanks, that's not super helpful. And then he'd say, but we wouldn't want it in the other way, would we? And we're all like, no, we would want it another way. Easy is another way that we might want it. But I think he was right about, in some ways at least, in that many of the best things in life are also hard.

And that's the spirit of a guy named Caleb in the Bible, who doesn't show up much. He has kind of cameo appearance in the Bible, but he has two great speeches in the Bible. The first one is after Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, he brought them to the edge of the land that God had promised to give them. And he sent 12 spies to scope it out, and they came back, and 10 of those spies came back and said, yeah, it's a good land, but the people who live there are powerful. We even saw descendants of Anak, the Anakites were giants, big huge people. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.

So basically, be afraid, run away, we can't do this. Then all the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron and said, we should choose a leader and go back to Egypt. Right, where you were slaves, right? Such an insult to Moses, right? All the trouble to get him out of slavery, and let's go back. But Joshua and Caleb said, do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. So yeah, we can do this. But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. See, ministry is hard. This is what happens.

So then God says, y'all aren't ready for the promised land yet. So they wander around in the desert for 40 years until all the whiners die. But before that happened, he said, but because my servant Caleb has a different spirit, I will bring him into the land he went into. So he's going to be able to live to go into the land. My servant Caleb has a different spirit. May that always be said of us as individuals and collectively as a church. But my servant Bel Pres has a different spirit.

Now, fast forward decades later after Moses has died, Joshua led them into the promised land, and when they're distributing the land, Caleb gets his second speech. And he says, I was 40 years old when Moses sent me to explore the land, but my fellow Israelites made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. 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. So here I am today, 85 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.

Isn't that a great speech? Like this is the stuff of good literature, right? Like Shakespeare's Henry V, you know, we few, we happy few, we band of brothers, let's go. And it shows how Caleb's spirit was different. What his different spirit was composed of. For starters, Caleb wasn't afraid of hard. You know, in the military campaign, the lowlands are easier to conquer than the hills. But at 85 years old, Caleb is saying, give me the Hill Country. He could have been settling in to a nice retirement, a little garden somewhere, but at 85 years old, he says, no, give me the harder bit. Give me Hill Country. Because even though it's harder to take, it's the best part of Israel. It's the best part of the land.

Some of the best things in life are hard. It is hard to work on a marriage, but it often leads to something so much better. It is hard to participate in God's rescue mission to this world, but it adds meaning and purpose and joy in our lives. And in fact, brain research even shows this, that actually easy is not good

for us. We need hard. So, for instance, rats, if rats that had to overcome obstacles to get to their food, had way better developed brains and were way better at problem-solving than rats that just watch Netflix all day. So, if you love a rat, give it problems. And it's the same with us. God has wired us to require challenge.

For the last four weeks, we've talked about eight projects that our elders have discerned God is calling us to do, and we've gone through them before. I won't go through them all now, but these are designed to unleash the greater potential of this church. And we are under no illusions. They will not be easy. But they will change people's lives. People who get mentored as part of Anchor and Flame will grow in their connection with Jesus, experience more of his power, his presence, his hope, and the people doing the mentoring will be changed as well, because it always goes both ways.

Refugees who have escaped violence and persecution, gone through the vetting process to be here, we're going to be able to help them by helping them to have affordable housing. We're going to go buy some places to give affordable housing to refugees who are here. For 50 years, this church has been involved in refugee ministry. And over those years, immigration policies have varied all over the place, but whether there were a lot of refugees or a few refugees coming, we were there to meet their needs. And right now, there are a lot of refugees here, right now, including in our own church in New Hope, in our New Hope African Congregation. And affordable housing is one of the biggest obstacles to thriving. We're going to help provide that.

A transformed lobby that can be used even on Sunday morning to help us build community better. Do things like have a meal together even on Sunday mornings when we're all here, which is the best time to do it, because that builds community when you share food. We can't, don't have space for those kinds of things right now, but a transformed lobby will create that space so that a big church starts to feel more like a family and more connected.

Hundreds of families will be given a hand up through affordable child care, and they're going to learn about Jesus in the process. When we unveiled these eight projects a couple weeks ago, and there was a young couple who saw this particular one, the affordable child care, and they said to us later, well, now maybe we can have kids, because that's how expensive it is. We're going to help out with that.

And to get all of this done, the invitation is, if you're not tithing, which is the biblical practice of giving 10% of your time, not just your money, but your time,

money, and influence to the church you're part of to be used for God's purposes. And the invitation is, if you're not giving 10%, to begin to tithe or get as close as you possibly can. And if you are tithing, the invitation is to increase your giving to this church to above 10% and or give some four, five, six, or seven-figure gifts to help these things happen. And every gift matters. Two-figure gifts, seven-figure gifts, and everything in between.

And this is to help unleash us, set us free. Tithing is one of the most significant ways many of us, including myself and my wife, have experienced that Jesus is real. Because we see him provide, and we discover through his power that we actually can be happier with less than we thought we needed to be happy. Which unleashes us from the ways that time, money and influence can control us. And it's not just money. It's time, it's our influence, all of that.

None of this will be easy. But it will change our lives and the lives of a lot of other people in our church, in our community and around the world, because God's servant, Bel Pres, has a different spirit. And like Caleb, we trust God wholeheartedly. These projects aren't going to happen because of our power or our cleverness. It's going to be because of the power of Jesus working through us, in us and among us. And we trust in him wholeheartedly.

And that word wholeheartedly, Caleb says it three times in his short speech. In verse 8, he says, When Moses sent the spies out, 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. And there's a contrast here between the melting fearful hearts of the people and Caleb's wholeheartedness. Not half his heart, not a quarter of his heart, not three quarters of his heart, his whole heart.

Then the very next verse, verse 9. Moses tells Caleb he will inherit the land because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. Then verse 14 says, so Hebron has belonged to Caleb ever since because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

As we do these projects together in community, and we begin to make relationships with each other, they start to go deep, and we start to be able to help each other grow in our faith, and we see Jesus' power changing people's lives, it changes us to be more like Jesus, and that helps us follow Him more wholeheartedly.

We started this journey back in January with 25 days of prayer and fasting for the whole church. And then we had a morning of discernment where several hundred of you came to give input into what these projects were going to be.

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Well, after that morning, I got this email from a longtime member of our church, and I have her permission to share it.

This is what she wrote to me in her email. I should start with the fact that I am totally, 100% completely, firmly opposed to any new church building project. I will not, all capital letters, donate to one more building project. Hmm, where was I? Oh yes, discernment. I have to admit that I was not fasting during January. I'm sure I could think of a good reason, but bottom line, I just wasn't fasting.

But I have been asking God for discernment, both for myself and for our church. So about 10 days ago, I was telling God that a building project was absolutely not, all capital letters, the best direction for our church. Okay, so there wasn't a lot of listening going on in that particular prayer time, a lot of talking. And then suddenly, as clear as a photograph, I had a vision of a three or four story building on our north parking lot that's on the right when you drive into our lot.

This was not, all caps, what I wanted to see. Which of course, I told God. I also explained to him that there was no way we could build on that space because we already don't have enough parking. And right back at me, I heard underground parking. None of this was anything that was my idea. I argued a lot and tried to just pretend that it was some sort of weird unexplainable quirk. However, those thoughts and that picture has not gone away.

And just when I think it's all behind me, and I can go ahead with my own ideas, up it all pops again. And then today came a very emphatic thought that I had to send you an email with my story. Good grief, none of this is anything like the thoughts that are my thoughts. But fortunately, I have known Jesus for many years. And I know that when he speaks, I should listen because he always blesses obedience.

Now what's interesting is we have explored the possibility of building affordable housing on our North parking lot. And we're not going to do that right now. That's not part of these eight projects. We're not doing that. But maybe she's seeing something that's in our future at some point. But when I read her email, my first thought was you gotta love real Christians. And what I mean by that is not someone who's just going through the motions because they always have, but someone who loves Jesus wholeheartedly enough to hear and obey even when it's not what she wants to hear.

And Bel Pres, when I brag about you to other pastors, which I do, semi-sinfully actually, my church is better than your church. One of the things I always say is if Jesus is in it, and if it lines up with the Bible, the people in my church will do it.

They may not want to do it. They may even grumble once in a while about it, but they will do it. And then I usually say, and God can do anything with a church like that. And the other pastors will usually say, God can do anything with a church like that.

Because in a self-centered culture, where everyone just wants everything to be their way, or they're going to take their toys and go home, God's servant, Bel Pres, has a different spirit. And like Caleb, that spirit is unyielding. You know, the Israelites end up wandering in the desert for 40 years, 5 more years to move into the Promised Land. Caleb has waited 45 years for this day, 45 years of following God, raising his family, providing, protecting. Because here's the thing, you don't take Hill Country in a day. You have to stick with it. You have to keep at it.

Some of you ask, which of these 8 projects will happen first, and when will they happen, and how long, and all of that? A lot of that depends on the response. Because, as we said, we're not going to take out debt to pay for these things that need money. We're going to do it the old-fashioned way. We're going to save up for it, which will take some time. But, you know, if everyone ties, not just money, but time and influence as well, we can move a lot quicker. And all of these projects are equally important, and our elders will decide when to proceed on each of them based on the resources that, as resources become available, but they're going to take some time. But many of the most rewarding things in life take some time. And like Caleb, we will pursue a long obedience in the same direction.

One of my favorite senior citizens that was part of this church until she died a few years ago, once told me a story of when she was 40, she heard a man talk about smuggling Bibles into what is now Russia, and what was then the Soviet Union, which was illegal back then in the Soviet Union. And if there's secret police, they were called the KGB, if they found out about it, you'd be in big trouble. Well, as this man spoke, this woman got a picture in her mind of standing before a Vincent Van Gogh painting in the Hermitage Museum, which is in Russia, then the Soviet Union. Well, she'd never been before, so she felt like that was the Holy Spirit telling her that she was supposed to go and smuggle Bibles into the Soviet Union. Even though that's really dangerous.

So she and her husband went, and they had this great adventure encouraging Christians that were there smuggling Bibles into the Soviet Union. And she said at one point she thought to herself, well, isn't this interesting? Here I am, fat 40 and dodging the KGB. I thought that'd be a great title for a book, fat 40 and dodging the KGB. Well, at the end of the trip, they went to their hermitage

museum, and she found herself in a room alone, which never happens in museums, in a room alone in front of a Van Gogh painting, which was an adrenaline rush for her because it confirmed for her that the God of the universe had spoken to her personally.

Now, I didn't know her when she was 40. I knew her in her 70s and in her 80s, and she and her husband were just as vigorous, just as courageous, even more so, because they'd been laying it down for Jesus for decades. When one of our new younger staff met this couple, he came back to us and he said, man, there are some dope old people in this church. That's a positive thing. In case you're wondering, that's a good thing.

Here's the thing, you don't just wake up one day with that kind of noble character. You don't just wake up one morning with that kind of integrity and that kind of courage. You've got to cultivate that over time. And because of her long obedience in the same direction, she got what Hill Country always gives us, amazing views. You know, adventures with Jesus, relationships that are deep because of the camaraderie that comes from being part of God's rescue mission together.

Which is why we're doing these eight projects together as a church, to feel like we are part of a community, and connected, and linking arms, and doing something significant in community together, to feel part of a community which we all need and which is lacking more and more in our divided and on-screen culture. Hill Country is harder, but the views are so much better. And not just for us, but for the generations to follow.

God said to Caleb, the land will be your inheritance and that of your children forever. Your children. It wasn't just for him. It was for the generations. On December 11th, 1955, this church had its first worship service. So we turned 70 years old on Thursday. And a couple weeks ago, I showed you this picture of that first worship service that this church ever had, and I asked you the question, what were they thinking? Which was a rhetorical question, because I knew what they were thinking, because I read all their notes and all their minutes of all their meetings and all of that stuff. They were thinking about you. Way back in 1955. They were thinking about you, and they were thinking about me.

At a time when Bellevue had only one stoplight and very few churches, if any, they weren't just starting a church for themselves. They were thinking of the generations to come that would need a place to nurture their faith and grow their relationship with Jesus. And now, here we are 70 years later, we are also

thinking of the people who are going to follow us. These projects are for our growth and will help a lot of people in our church, in our community, in the world, but it's also about our next 70 years. The church that our children and our grandchildren are going to inherit, not a completely different church, but more the church that we have been becoming all along.

And this is Commitment Sunday. And in a minute, we're all going to bring our cards, commitment cards forward. If you didn't get one, there's some in the back. When people start to move forward, you can go back and get one. And there are some boxes on that card. Just let me explain it a little bit. There's a box there to check, to talk with someone about how you're going to use your time and your influence. Or you may know exactly which project you want to be part of. Still, check that box, and we'll follow up with a conversation with you, because we want this to be relational, and not transactional, and not cold and impersonal. We want it to be about relationships, so we'll have a conversation with you.

And if you'd like some mentoring about how to get to a tithe, we got folks who are willing to coach you on that, and you can just check the box that says, I'd like to talk to someone about that. Then there's a section for your financial commitment. Just write down the total amount of money that you're going to give in 2026, or your best estimate. And this is ongoing, as we've said, this is not just for a season, this will be ongoing, so next year we'll fill out another card and all of that. And if you committed online already, then there's a place to check that says, I committed online on that card.

And then in a minute, when we start to sing, fill out your card if you haven't done that. Not yet, because I have several things that I would like to say before you do that. I like the things I'm about to say, so I want you to like them too. But when we start to sing, if you haven't filled it out, fill it out and then come to the front and put your card in the basket. In this room, if you're in the balcony, there are baskets behind you, or you can come down as well. Even if you committed online, because there is something about the physical act of laying it down for Jesus that makes it more meaningful.

So when we start to sing here and over there in Modern, come forward and lay your commitment before the Lord. And then after this service, go and get your kids and then come back to the lobby because we've got sugary things for your kids to eat that should give them tons of energy, which will be nice for you, and then activities for the kids and all of that. And we're going to take another picture, like the one I just showed you, of the First Worship Service, for people

70 years from now to look at and know that there were people here who loved them enough to sacrifice so that they could have Hill Country.

Satan will always try to get us to settle for the flat lands, but God calls us to the Hill Country. Because see, there was another man, Jesus, who was God in the flesh, who like Caleb also said, give me Hill Country. And he climbed a hill called Calvary, where he died on a cross to pay the price for your sins and mine to show us that God loves us so much he'd rather die than lose us. And so he did. And to redeem us and to put us in relationship with God and to give us God's joy.

During the morning of discernment back in January, one person said that as they were praying and fasting, all she could hear was the phrase, unleash God's joy. And as soon as she said that back in January, my first thought was, oh, that'll preach. Which is why this sermon series is called Unleashed. Because that's what it is about. Unleash God's joy in our own lives and in the lives of so many other people.

Because BelPres, to paraphrase Caleb, here we are, 70 years old as a church, still as strong today as the day that picture was taken. Just as vigorous for our God now as we were then. For 70 years, this church has done things like Sunday school and youth ministry and discipleship and worship to help people grow in their faith and then send them out. For 70 years, this church has done things like help Cambodian refugees to thrive in the name of Jesus. For 70 years, this church has done things like Jubilee Reach, which is breaking cycles of poverty here on the east side. And the Center for Champions in Rwanda that has gotten over a thousand kids off the streets, into jobs and introduced them to Jesus.

For 70 years, in one way or another, this church has been on our knees, crying out to God, Lord, give us Hill Country. And 70 years from now, they will tell stories of this moment in our church, of how Jesus unleashed us and made us an even more generous church than we already are, made us even more generous, trusting God with our time, our money and our influence. They'll tell stories of how refugees were helped to start a new life here in the name of Jesus.

In 70 years, they'll talk about how the one-roof gatherings that we're going to do outside of Sunday mornings, of all the cultures that are part of this church, African, Chinese, modern, sanctuary, older, younger. In a season when the US was divided into political, ethnic, and religious tribes, we showed the world that Jesus tears down every dividing wall of hostility and makes us one in Him.

In 70 years, there will be stories of how we were part of God's movement among Muslim refugees in Europe, becoming Christians by the thousands, some going back to the countries they came from to preach the good news of Jesus there. They will tell stories of the lives transformed, the adventures had, and even the countries that are being changed because of that. And they will tell stories of how in doing all of these things, we experience Jesus' power that can't be stopped, his inheritance that cannot be lost, grace that can't be limited, hope that never disappoints, and courage that will not quit.

Because God's servant, BelPres, has a different spirit, encouraged, equipped, unleashed, saying together in one voice, Lord, give us Hill Country. Amen.

Jesus, thank you for the ways you have had your hand on this church for 70 years, from that first worship service until today. Lord, thank you for the men and the women who came before us, who you used to bring us to this place that we are now. Thank you for their faithfulness, and thank you that you called them, and mostly thankful, thank you for the power that you released through them to heal countless and countless numbers of lives in your name. Thank you.

And Lord, thank you that you're never done, and thank you that the best is always yet to be, and thank you that you continue to call us to Hill Country. So Lord, as we bring our commitments forward and lay them down in front of you, we ask that you would take them, use them, bless them, multiply them for your glory and for your kingdom. Jesus moved through us in powerful ways. As we do these projects with your help, with your power, Lord, pray that what people see is nothing but Jesus, not our cleverness, not our size, not us, but you, Lord, only you.

Lord, work in us collectively as a church and individually in our own lives in such a way that the world will know that there is a God among us, and his name is Jesus, and he is mighty to save. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or community group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- The text says multiple times that Caleb followed God wholeheartedly. What does it mean to follow God wholeheartedly?
- In Numbers 14:24 God says, "my servant Caleb has a different spirit". What makes his spirit different? Of what does his different spirit consist?
- What parts of Caleb's "different spirit" do you want for your life right now?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.