

JULY NEWSLETTER

Numbers 13:31-32

What Made Joshua and Caleb Different?

The 12 twelve men sent by Moses to explore Canaan came back with a very disturbing report: "We cannot go up against those people, for they are stronger than us...The land which we have journeyed through and scouted is a land that consumes its inhabitants; and all the people we saw were tall and broad to a man."

Later we discover in the book of Joshua that the inhabitants of the land were afraid of the Israelites. When Joshua sent spies to Jericho, Rahab told them "A great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you." When the people heard what God had done for the Israelites, "our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you" (Joshua 2:9-11).

Exodus 15:15-16 The spies were guilty of an assumption error. They believed that others felt as they did. They said, "We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so we were in their eyes" (Numbers 13:33). They were entitled to make the first claim, but not the second. They knew how they themselves felt, but they had no idea how the people of the land felt. They were terrified of the Canaanites and failed to see that the Canaanites were terrified of them.

Why did ten spies make this mistake and why did two of them, Joshua and Caleb, not make this mistake? Why do some people fulfill their potential, while others do not? Why do some people thrive when they face challenges and difficulties? Why do others get easily discouraged and are quick to give up? What makes some people grow through adversity, while others become anxious and demoralized?

The way we react when we face crisis in our lives is a matter of mindset. Some see their abilities as a given and they believe that there is not much they can do about it. They have a fixed mindset. Others believe that in life we have something we call "growing pains" - that we grow and mature through our difficult times and challenges. They don't define this as failure, but as a learning experience. They have a different mindset, a changed and transformed mindset.

Those with a fixed mindset tend to avoid difficult challenges because they fear failure. They think it will expose them as inadequate. They are reluctant to take risks. They play it safe. They thrive when things are safely within their grasp.

People with a transformed and renewed mindset react differently. They don't just seek challenge, they thrive in it. The bigger the challenge, the more they stretch. Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2).

Parents often tell their children that they are gifted, clever, and talented. This encourages the child to believe that he or she has a fixed quantum of ability. This, in turn, discourages them from risking failure. Such children often grow up to say things like, "I feel that my parents won't value me if I'm not as successful as they would like". Parents who want to help their children should praise them not for their ability, but for their effort and their willingness to try hard, even if they fail.

The person with a fixed mindset lives with the constant fear of failure. Those with a growth mindset don't think in terms of failing at all.

The spies were people with reputations to guard. People had high expectations of them. They were princes, leaders of their tribes. They did not want to be seen as failures. That may be why they came back and said, in effect: we cannot win against the Canaanites, therefore we should not even try.

There were two exceptions, Caleb and Joshua. Caleb came from the tribe of Judah, and Judah, we learn in the book of Genesis, had been the one who proposed selling Joseph into slavery. But he matured. Later, when the prime minister of Egypt (Joseph, not yet recognized by the brothers) threatens to hold Benjamin as a prisoner, Judah offers to spend his life as a slave so that his brother can go free. Judah is an example of someone who takes adversity as a learning experience rather than as failure, he had a growth mindset. Evidently he handed on this trait to his decedents, Caleb among them.

As for Joshua, the text tells us specifically in the story of the spies that Moses had changed his name. Originally he was called Hoshea, but Moses added a letter to his name (Numbers 13:16). A change of name always implies a change of character or calling. Abram became Abraham. Jacob became Israel, Simon became Peter. Saul of Tarsus became Paul. When our name changes, it is as if we or someone else were saying "You are not the same person as you were before". In Christ, through repentance and a renewing of our mind, God gives us not just a new identity, but a new mindset, a new call. People with the growth mindset do not fear failure. They relish challenges. They know that if they fail, they will try again until they succeed. It cannot be coincidence that the two people among the spies who had the growth mindset were also the two who were unafraid of the risks and trials of conquering the land (Joshua 14:12-15).

The story of the spies holds a significant message for us. God does not ask us to never fail. He asks that we give of our best. He lifts us when we fall and forgives us when we fail. It is this that gives us the courage to take risks. That is what Joshua and Caleb knew, one through his name change, the other through the experience of his ancestor, Judah.

In Mathew 5 – 7 (Sermon on the Mount) Jesus Christ speaks about a new King and a new kingdom, but He also focuses on having a new mindset. One of the major themes in Pauline theology is about what it really means to be in Christ, to live and walk daily having a kingdom of God mindset. Paul says that a true Christian is the one who walks led by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). Joshua and Caleb were led by the Spirit of God. They stand strong as a practical illustration about what it means: "But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world". (1John 4:4).

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord". (2Corinthians 3:18).

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1John 3:2).

Ovidiu D Druhora