

With its exotic locations, cut-throat competition, back-stabbing relationship twists, immunity challenges and tribal councils where they vote each other off the island; Survivor-the grandfather of reality television-has lived up to its tag line: **outwit, outplay, outlast.**

After its first season in May 2000, Survivor was a top ten show for several years. We tuned in to see how the castaways would handle the search for food, water, shelter and fire. After a few weeks we made our own choices about who we thought should stay and who we thought should be voted off the island.

Like so many games that teach us about life; Survivor reminds us that life is filled with **hard places** and **difficulties**. We are not immune to personal **heartache and pain**. We often have no control over the circumstances and situations of life. Sometimes **we make wrong choices**, and the fruit of those choices are adversity and hardship. Sometimes **we are victimized** by the wrong choices of others, and we experience incredible pain through no fault of our own.

Maybe you hear your story in those lines. Your survivor story; your story of survival or maybe your story of being the one voted off the island.

Those lines certainly speak of one historical character from scripture whose story plays out over the course of more than 40 years. And what we are going to see in his story is a reminder to us of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:37, ***In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.***

Look at your neighbor and tell them, you are more than a survivor; you are a conqueror.

Many people have experienced the game of life in such a way that they **feel less like a survivor and more like one defeated by a world that has sought to outwit, outplay, and outlast them**. If you feel that you are not a conqueror I want to introduce you to an inspirational story of one man who outlasted nearly everyone in his generation and came out in the end as more than just a survivor; but as a conqueror!

We meet our conqueror in the Old Testament book of Numbers. Not long after Moses led the people of God out of captivity in Egypt; God commanded Moses to send 12 spies ahead to the Promised Land. These 12 men had as their task to explore the land and bring back a report.

After 40 days, they returned. The report started like this: 'We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.' (Numbers 13:27) Good start! You can even hear the people starting to cheer and licking their lips at the sight of the fruit.

BUT. That word has thrown cold water on more parties and celebrations. I like you, BUT... This is really tasty, BUT... You have the skills we are looking for, BUT... I can do this, BUT...

The land flows with milk and honey, BUT the people who live there are powerful...they live in big, fortified cities...

As the party poopers started to turn the people's smiles upside down; our conqueror spoke up. Caleb, one of the 12 spies, silenced the people and said, ***We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can do it!*** But Caleb gets shouted down as the other spies

continue: We can't attack these people; they are stronger than we are. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes!

Moses suddenly had a problem on his hands. Ten of the spies were telling the people that they were about to face defeat if they moved forward to the Promised Land. But Caleb and Joshua, the two dissenting voices from the original 12 spies had a different picture:

"The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And **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. Do not be afraid of them.**"

If you know the rest of the story, the people settled on the majority report, *which by the way the majority opinion is not always right, but that's another sermon*, and as a result God sentenced the people to wander the desert for the next 40 years. No Promised Land for anyone 20 years old and older. No Promised Land for any of the spies, except for Joshua and Caleb, the two who believed that through God they were conquerors. But even in the midst of God's judgment on the unbelievers; I love how God singles out Caleb '**my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly.**' Numbers 14:24

There is something different about conquerors; particularly those conquerors that take God at his word and live like they believe that God is faithful to his word.

In a world where we too often find ourselves struggling merely to survive; *conquerors believe that the outcome of their struggles and hard places in life are not dependent on their own resources or lack thereof.* **Conquering happens when we take God at his word and trust his power to conquer the giants in the land.**

I'm sure that Caleb appreciated the affirmation from God; but unfortunately he was about to spend the next 40 years watching people get voted off the island (if you get what I mean). Caleb knew who was going to win this season of Survivor – The Desert!

Now I don't know about you, but if I was Caleb I don't know if I would have walked through each day of the next 40 years feeling like a conqueror. I think Caleb could have easily fallen into the pit that we often find ourselves in.

We've heard that we are conquerors through Jesus; but it is hard to live day to day as conquerors when life seems to be battering us with the worst it can throw at us. Instead of standing up and standing out, we give up and then give out.

John Piper said: "Life is not a straight line leading from one blessing to the next and then finally to heaven. Life is a winding and troubled road ... God is not just showing up after the trouble and cleaning it up. He is plotting the course and managing the troubles with far-reaching purposes for our good and for the glory of Jesus Christ."

Paul understood that it is easy to feel like everything is against us. And Paul not only understood it; he experienced it! But listen to what he writes:

See Romans 8:18-39

Caleb could have given up. Face it, Caleb wasn't getting any younger as they circled for 40 years... or was he?

When we turn ahead to Joshua 14 Caleb is 85 year old. He reappears in the history of Israel as Joshua and the army of God is conquering the Promised Land and portioning out the land to the 12 tribes.

Joshua 14:10-14

So what made Caleb more than just a survivor, but a conqueror?

Caleb *lived by faith* in God who promised to be with us and for us!

If you go back to that day when the spies were giving their report, Caleb talked about winning even before he went out to fight. Caleb lived by the promise echoed by Paul in Romans 8:31, If God is for us, who can be against us.

Faith gives us the confidence to believe God's promise. After all how many 85 year olds can you imagine picking a fight with giants?

Caleb *demonstrated courage*. He stood up and spoke out even when his opinion was in the minority.

Courage is in the heart of every conqueror. But the courage isn't self-made; it is evidence of a conviction that God is and will do what he promised.

Paul says in Romans 8, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... through v. 39.

Courage, as demonstrated by Caleb, comes from knowing God's promises and believing that nothing can keep us from experiencing the victory that is ours in Jesus Christ.

Caleb also *maintained a wholehearted devotion to God*. I think Caleb held onto his faith in God throughout those 40 years of circling the desert because of his devotion to God.

Conquerors maintain a wholehearted devotion to God. They follow God with a single focus; a single-minded devotion which entails loving the Lord with all one's heart. It means putting Him first. As a result they know God because of the time they spend with him; and they cherish knowing that God is pleased with their wholehearted devotion.

It must have been fascinating to grow up during those 40 years in the desert. While everyone else was falling to the wayside; Caleb remained strong, confident. I think the reason that the new generation of Israelites were able to conquer the Promised Land was because of Caleb's enduring spirit and faith to trust and believe in God.

Caleb and Joshua were conquerors. Even when they were walking the desert path for 40 years; a spirit was burning deep inside them because they knew what they had seen, where they were going and that God is faithful to lead us to the Promised Land.

So what is holding you back from living each day as a conqueror?

Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. And when we live with God's promise that he is always with us; we can say that we are more than survivors, we are conquerors!