

Having a different spirit

Alliance prayer week

12-19 January 2014

Introduction

The Czech Republic has been one of those countries living under Communist rule for 40 years. There is a striking similarity with the people of Israel who lived 40 years in the desert after they had left Egypt.

Oppressive circumstance tends leave its mark on people. This is also the case for Christians. On one hand it can create submissive and passive people, people with a loss of hope and perspective. The result being a people who do not challenge the situation and do not stand up.

On the other hand a time of oppression can also lead to bring forth people who resist and choose to not be content with the status quo. They are usually the minority and have to swim against the tide. They are of a different spirit.

There is yet another important issue: Whoever comes from an oppressive situation and regardless of the response people choose, they are marked by that time. It needs time to get rid of those marks, a time in the desert.

The 2014 Alliance Prayer Week focuses on a person who was shaped by the oppressive time but also chose to resist the general trend of submission. The name of this special person is Caleb. He stood firm when things turned difficult. He went against the majority view and trend. He suffered for taking a stand but he also gained a lot through it.

If we want to see things changed in Europe we need to be or follow people like Caleb. They are among us. We just need to spot them, give them room and get behind them. This will inevitably have its effects on us and those around us.

Let us embark on this journey by being part of this prayer week. Let us pray and expect that God will make his Calebs visible and that they will live their God given calling. Let us get behind them.

Many thanks to the Czech EA for producing these excellent and prophetic materials. This very relevant topic comes at a very crucial time in the history of the European church and provides an excellent challenge.

Praying with you

Thomas Bucher

General Secretary European Evangelical Alliance

Why we need new Calebs?

The theme of this year's Alliance Week of Prayer is the life story of Caleb from the Bible. How his story can be an inspiration for the church in Europe today is not very hard to see. Many Christians in Europe today look with awe at the dynamic Christianity in India, China, Africa and South America. There are things happening on the other side of the globe that we want to happen here. God's Spirit is working there and many miracles are happening. Looking at Europe however it's as if everything is different. Is God dead in Europe? How are we supposed to look at spiritual experience and the reality of the gospel around us?

The church in Europe can no longer boast of its mighty institutions and massive influence in society. It is learning how to be a minority and to find a new form of strength in its weakness and in the discovery of how it is without a connection to political power. The 20th century proved in a very painful way, not only the moral weakness of the European church, but also a weakening of its spiritual authority. The knowledge of these failures has put the church "on its knees" and it seems to be somewhat "somber and graver." Its earlier triumphalism has left, and it is now in the position of someone who is silenced by her past and can't hide her weakness behind a mask of power anymore, but has to learn to live with the hard truth of her own self. Feelings of shame, resignation and nostalgia have truly risen in the European church and there is a risk that it will "infect" the next generations of young Christians, who are leaving the church in large numbers.

In this situation, it is extremely important to look through God's eyes at the lesson that we as the European church are currently going through. If scepticism has the upper hand, vitality and life are lost. That is why we can be inspired by the character of Caleb, who is described as being "of a different spirit." He had a completely different perspective than most of the people around him despite the high price he could have paid. He experienced historical failure, wandering and the loss of the whole generation of his contemporaries, which did not reach its destination in life, but he was able to enter the Promised Land and experience the fulfilment of the personal promises that he had received from God. Europe needs new Calebs, young and old, who are either afraid of giants nor the failure of their community, but are willing to go on. I hope that this Alliance Week of Prayer will be an inspiration on your journey of discovering God's view of the commission that we have in Christ as individuals, communities and churches in our own surroundings and in the whole world.

Sunday 12. January - He had a different spirit

Bible readings

Num 14:6-19; Num 14:24; 2 Tim 1:7-10

Thought for the day

What does it mean that Caleb had a different spirit? Who is a modern-day Caleb in our community? And what would it mean today “to have a different spirit” in the context of the church in our nation?

In our lives, we meet many people who are in some way distinct from others, who are different. These are people who inspire us, who trouble us, who threaten us or have a different way of challenging for us.

Even in the Bible, we find many significant and godly people, but only about one person was it written that he “had a different spirit” and that was Caleb. In Numbers 14:24 we read, “But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.”

Here we see a man, who was so different from all the other people in his mentality, his spiritual view of reality and his understanding of God that he stood against the whole community of his nation. While others fell into doubt and fear, he encouraged them towards hope and victory. While ten of his fellow scouts saw mainly giants, he saw that their strength had left them. Why was he so different? What formed him? Where does the courage to go against the flow come from? Caleb had a different SPIRIT. His “differentness” came from a relationship with God and from his commitment to Him. His relationship with God was the defining factor while circumstances and the voices of others were secondary. Why are there among us so few people who are willing to stand up against evil and corruption even at great personal cost and not even complain? A relationship with God gives a different spirit. The spirit of Christ.

Key point

During this week, think about what it means to you specifically to be someone who has a different Spirit – the spirit of Christ. When you look at Caleb’s story, to what one thing did it inspire you? What can you do already tomorrow? Who is your Caleb? Encourage him.

Points for prayer

- Pray for Calebs in our congregations. People with courage to acknowledge reality and to bring hope.
- Pray that God would help us to correctly see the spiritual reality in our country.
- Pray for the planting of new churches and the renewal of the church and dying congregations.
- Pray for leaders who have lost the spirit of Caleb.
- Pray for the economic situation in your country and Europe.

Monday 13. January - Giants of today and the grasshopper mentality

Bible readings

Numbers 13:25-33

1. Corinthians 1:22-31

Thought for the day

Czechs have a reputation of being sceptics. Especially for Americans and other foreigners who come to their country, it is often surprising what scepticism they meet; that they know for sure why some things don't work, can't work or certainly won't work. Scepticism and cynicism is for some people a sure protection from megalomania, gung ho Christianity and the disappointment of things not going well, even though great hopes were put into them. Cynicism and scepticism are at the same time that which takes away hope and produces passivity. So many people, including young Christians, are passive and complain that they can't change anything. At the same time, they don't see that in reality they have far more opportunities than they can make use of and that there are always plenty of options how to change at least something and not wait until someone else does it. Cynicism destroys the church, the community, politics, and even the institution of marriage. People who think they know that in the end everything will turn out badly, that behind everything is a dark cloud, that the church only wants power, that marriage is only a piece of paper will in the end most likely live to see the fulfillment of their fear and end up with just complaining and indolence. Are we so little that we can't change anything? Don't we also suffer with grasshopper mentality?

After the insistence of the people and then God's instruction, Moses sends a group of 12 spies into the Promised Land. Ten of them came back with the following message (Num 13:31-33 ESV):

Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are."

So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

Caleb brings a different perspective: *"Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it."... "Do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them."*

How do we ourselves suffer from grasshopper mentality? In what way do we worship our own helplessness and our pettiness and disregard God with our unbelief? Who are our giants--in our own personal lives, communities, jobs...?

Listening prayer

Prayer isn't just about quieting down and feeling God's presence. It is also about listening to what he wants to say to us. It isn't necessary to hurry. Give God time to talk to you.

Points for prayer

- Ask God for forgiveness for useless skepticism and passivity and complaining tongues.

- Pray for the “giants” in our personal lives, communities, fellowships and in the whole world. For things that we don’t believe can change, but need to change.
- Pray for the destruction of the structures of evil or corruption in your country and for the government of our country.
- Pray for your city and bless it.

Tuesday 14. January - The Generation of the Desert

Bible readings

Numbers 14:1-5

Numbers 32:7-11

Matthew 11:16-26

Thought for the day

You can rarely find full justice on this side of paradise. Bad things happen to good people, their children die of cancer... On the other hand, it seems that bad and cunning people get away with a lot more than is normal. There is a lot of struggling and wandering that we can't influence, and so sometimes it seems that the most realistic book of the Bible is Ecclesiastes. It doesn't paint any elusive rose gardens, but finds foundations of hope and happiness in the imperfect and fallen world.

Caleb's whole generation died in the desert. He saw his friends who were dying and never got to see the destination for which they had left Egypt. He lived 40 years with people who had to live with a feeling of failure, wasted opportunity (although they wanted to take it, it was already too late) and wasted hope. At the same time, he also had to face their anger. Imagine how we would feel if someone told us: *Surely none of the men who came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, because they have not wholly followed me.* Imagine if the church in your nation heard something similar.

How can that be fair? But, what if that generation had not been capable to enter, or if it had entered, hadn't been able to stand? Because they weren't wholly following God, the challenges that awaited them were bigger than their faith. They were prisoners to their own minds, the Egypt in them. Prisoners of the past.

In the former Soviet bloc, several generations were subjected to situations where their hopes and aspirations became the victims of outside circumstances. Many hopes were lost. The church wasn't immune to this pressure; it let itself be driven into the ghetto and it was not prepared for new challenges. In the church today though, there's a completely new generation that is very different in its mentality from people who grew up under Communism. In the West is the church struggling to find its new role as a minority stripped of its privileges? But there is a new generation, which is ready for a new calling. We need to support them, so they can find new ways and forms for the church. They need open doors and support.

Points for prayer

- Pray for the relationships between the generations in our churches.
- Pray for the generation that lost many of its life opportunities during the time of Communism, and today is one of the most closed toward the gospel.
- Pray for law and justice in our country.
- Pray for teachers and for those who have the greatest influence on the next generations.
- Pray for the people all around us, who are falling under their failures, disappointments or hopelessness.
- Pray for Israel.

- Pray for people without a home.

Wednesday 15. January – They wanted to stone him

Bible Readings

Numbers 14:10-21

Psalm 55:12-14

2. Corinthians 4:8-18

Thought for the day

Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel. (Num 14:10)

Did it ever happen to you that you were “rewarded” for your good efforts by those who you were trying to help and who you care about? It is a quite well-known fact that the worst conflicts happen between those who are working for the same thing and who are close to one another. The most painful conflicts are the ones that occur with those to whom we are the closest --our families, friends, and people with whom we would not expect to have a conflict.

How do you think Caleb must have felt, when all his friends and fellow-tribesmen turned against him and wanted to stone him and Joshua for their words? They both were leaders and important people in their tribes and families. This was not the response they would have expected to receive. In Psalm 55, we can find a description of a similar situation and feelings they could have felt.

For it is not an enemy who taunts me— then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—

then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. (Psalm 55:12-13 ESV)

Despite that, Caleb lived with those same people for another 40 years and also influenced their children, the new generation that now entered the Promised Land with a different mentality--one like Caleb's. He had to be a man of forgiveness and reconciliation, just as the Calebs of today must be.

Points for prayer

Pray for the relationships in our marriages, and for marriages that you know are going through a crisis or hardship.

Pray for those with whom we have or had a conflict or disagreement.

Pray for good relationships in our communities, unity and forgiveness.

Pray for relationships inside denominations and between them, that they will be able to resolve the conflicts in the Spirit of Christ and truth.

Pray for the Evangelical Alliance and other organizations that work on developing good relationships between Christians.

Pray for missionaries in other countries.

Thursday 16. January - A new generation

Bible readings

Joshua 2:1-24

Deuteronomy 1:25-40

1. Timothy 4:10-16

Thought for the day

A new generation of Israelites grew up in the desert. Of those who didn't remember the Egyptian slavery, most of them probably didn't even remember the failure in Kadesh-barnea. How do you think Moses, Joshua and Caleb influenced them? How did they prepare this new generation so that they wouldn't make the same mistake their fathers had made?

Joshua has decided to send two spies before the invasion of Jericho. They are hidden by Rahab (who is named in Jesus' genealogy), into whose home they entered, and they hear with their own ears how great a fear of the Israelites the people of Canaan had both now and back 40 years ago:

And she said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

The spies don't doubt that God will give them the land and they promise Rahab mercy. They are prepared to enter the land.

A new generation of young people and leaders has grown up in the Czech Republic also. A generation of those who no longer remember Communism, who don't remember that we were forced into ghettos and were on the defensive. They are more free; they aren't afraid of "giants" in the community or in the church. They want change and believe in it. They only need an adequate call to take up the challenge and Calebs around them, opening doors for them and supporting them. Do you see any one like that around you?

Intercessory prayer

Intercessory prayer isn't only submitting our list of our requests to God, but the willingness to go out and be available if God wants to use me in answering them. It is an expression of our relationship with God and with others.

Points for prayer

- Pray for new Calebs and the generation who grew up in the last 20 years.
- Pray for our youth groups and their outreach activities and challenges that they have (or don't have).
- Pray for an awakening and for evangelistic projects among young people. Pray for young leaders with the desire to plant churches or be a part of their renewal; that they wouldn't let themselves be discouraged.

- Pray for the work of Christians in schools.

Friday 17. January – A Kenezite

Bible readings

Numbers 32:12

Numbers 13:1-16

Ephesians 2:10-22

Thought for the day

There are several rabbinic explanations that show why Caleb and Joshua stood firm, while the other spies failed. They say that Joshua stood firm because, before he was sent out as a spy, he had received from Moses a special blessing and a new name –Joshua. Up until then his name had been Hosea. In that way, he was forewarned by God and Moses that it would be a turning point which would require a different approach and a different type of godliness than the godliness of the desert and manna, which is similar in some ways to Christian awakenings when many things just somehow happen by themselves. On the other hand, the conquering of Canaan would require action, determination, and reasoning. According to Rabbi Rashi, the other spies were righteous until the time when they were sent out, but their godliness was a godliness “before the hour,” a godliness of the past, that would not be enough anymore.

According to the rabbis, Caleb got his different spirit because he was the only one who went to Hebron (Num 13:22), which in the end he received from God as an inheritance, and prayed there in the cave Machpelah, where the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried. Because of that, he resisted the temptation. He wasn't confused into thinking that, even though the conquest of the land was promised to them, they were being sent to give their own opinions about it. But maybe there is still one more explanation.

Caleb was a Kenezite. Even though among the tribes he represented Judah, he most likely came from a different ethnicity that was derived from Kenaz, who was the grandson of Esau. The Kenezites lived in parts of Palestine even before its capturing by the Israelites. Part of them as proselytes were swallowed up by the tribe of Judah. Despite the fact that Caleb had long since become a delegate and one of the leaders of the tribe of Judah, he was still called a Kenezite. Maybe his differentness came from this: his mentality was different than that of his companions because they let him know that he wasn't one of them, but that they knew of his origins. Jesus met with a similar reaction with regards to his Galilean origins.

We also need the perspective of people who are different from us. In Europe, ethnic and migrant churches very strongly bring this outlook on the life of the church and its forms. They have, for example, at least partly changed the face of Christianity in London or other big cities. They show us that it is possible to live out our faith differently, even in the Europe of today.

Prayer of benediction

A benediction is a wish for God's action, blessing and presence in the life of another person. Bless each other at the end of your services.

Points for prayer

- Pray for newly converted people in our churches, that they would bring new vitality and views to shape the church.

- Pray for foreigners and for churches of different nationalities and ethnicities in your countries. Pray for relationships between native churches and these ethnic churches.
- Pray for the Roma people and the situations in areas of conflict. Pray for Roma churches and the spiritual awakening in them.
- Pray for the opponents of the church, people who are different and come from different values. May we not build useless walls, but rather may we be able to preach the gospel even in unexpected places and to unexpected people.

Saturday 18. January – Caleb's daughter Achsah

Bible readings

Joshua 15:13-19

Judges 3:9-11

Luke 18:1-8

Thought for the day

And Caleb said, "Whoever strikes Kiriath-sepher and captures it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife." And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it. And he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife. When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she got off her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Give me a blessing. Since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water." And he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

How would you feel if your own father announced you as a reward, or rather the loot, to the one who conquered a city with a very strong defense system during the war? How would you react if as a dowry and "blessing" you got the dry Negev semi-desert, when you have lived in the desert in tents for your whole life and now you finally have a chance to settle down? How would it be to grow up as a girl whose whole generation is preparing for a war that is unavoidable? How would it be to grow up in the family of your father, whom half of the people look up to and half want to stone? That is the story of Caleb's daughter, who in the end became the wife of Caleb's brother Othniel, the first judge in Israel after the death of Joshua. She also had "a different spirit."

How was she exceptional? We can find only a little about her in the Bible, but despite that we can see that she was a very purposeful and decisive young woman. In the situation where her father promised her to the best warrior, she might not have been too enthusiastic, even though arranged marriage and the word of the father meant completely something else in those days. She had to be submissive, but she wasn't satisfied with a little. When her father wedded her into the barren lands, she wasn't afraid to confront him and ask him for springs of water, that in this area of southern Israel were the source of water and fields. And Caleb gave them to her. From that time on, they were a refuge for many who came through that area and a source of water for the cities of refuge in this area.

Even her "choice" of a husband in the end wasn't that bad. Othniel was the first of the judges after Joshua's death and, it seems, the best. God's spirit settled in him, he defeated enemies and the country lived in peace for 40 years. Without his wife, though, he might not have had anything to eat or drink, or a place to live.

Prayer Points

- Men, pray for our women and thank them for their help and support.
- Pray for women who are in leadership or have different responsibilities in their service in the church and for those who are trying to balance their role as a mother with their jobs.
- Pray for associations of women believers and their development.
- Pray for the ministry to young women in your country
- Pray for the restriction of prostitution and trafficking of women in our country and Europe and good legislation in this area.

Sunday 19. January - As strong as ever

Bible readings

Joshua 14:6-15

Psalms 91

Hebrews 12:12-15

Thought for the day

And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. And now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming. So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said."

Here we see Caleb after 40 years of being in the desert and another five years of fighting. He is standing at the same crossroads and seeing the same fortified cities of the Anakites that he did when he was sent by Moses as a young spy. He is eighty-five years old, but he hasn't lost any of his strength or any part of the promise that he received, but even so, still has to be fought for. They aren't promises that won't cost him anything, but promises that he hasn't abandoned, even after decades. So Caleb receives Hebron for himself and his descendants, who will stay in this territory until the Babylonian exile.

Caleb must fascinate us with his vitality. God, who kept Caleb alive while all of his peers died in the desert, usually by natural death, also gave him enough strength so that he could finish the work that He had prepared for him. Older people filled with experiences and the depth of a life lived in relationship with God are some of the greatest and most persuasive pieces of evidence for God's existence. The prayers of those who have lived their whole life in faithfulness and devotion to God usually have a quite different dimension and depth. That is why we also need eighty-or ninety-year-old Calebs. Those with courage to finish their mission and inspire others.

Prayer Points

Pray for our oldest generation in our churches, that they would finish their race well, would not resign on their mission and open doors to young people

Pray for the leaders and elders of the church

Pray for our parents and grandparent who haven't yet heard the gospel

Pray for people, who entered into their professions with high ideals and are now fighting for their preservation--lawyers, doctors, teachers, social workers, etc.

Pray for the poor and those lacking in relationships--orphans, elderly people, prisoners, prostitutes etc.--in our city and for all of the organizations which serve them in our communities

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Tuesday 14. January	The generation of the desert	Num 14:1-5 Num 32:7-11 Mt 11:16-26
Wednesday 15. January	They wanted to stone him	Num 14:10-21 Ps 55:13-15 2. Cor 4:8-18
Thursday 16. January	A new generation	Jos 2:1-24 Dt 1: 35-40 1Tim 4:10-16
Friday 17. January	A Kenezite	Num 32:12 Num 13-1-16 Eph 2:10-22
Saturday 18. January	Caleb's daughter Achsah	Jos 15:13-19 Jdg 3:9-11 Luke 18:1-8
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