

SECOND NATURE



Develop your Christian muscle memory.

Suppose I asked you whether you brushed your teeth this morning. Hopefully, you would say yes. But let's say I wanted to dig a little deeper and I asked you to describe the *experience* of brushing your teeth.

Awkward silence.

It's not because you didn't brush them; it's just because you don't give a lot of thought to brushing your teeth. You probably thought a lot about it when you were a kid, making sure you hit all the uppers and the lowers; maybe you even sang "The Alphabet Song" in your head to make sure you spent enough time brushing. But now you've been brushing your teeth for many years, and it's become a routine you go through without even thinking about. Brushing your teeth has become second nature to you—an action so often repeated that it now exists in the realm of muscle memory.

In Christ, Christians are given a new nature, new desires, new tastes, and a new lifestyle. As we continue to grow in Christ, we will develop consistent patterns of living that are the spiritual equivalent of brushing your teeth—patterns of thinking, believing, and acting that become so ingrained in us that we scarcely even think about them.

Through the lives of seven biblical characters, this study will bring out some of those patterns that grow out of our belief in the gospel. By exploring these stories, we'll be challenged to actively develop these character traits until they become second nature.



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Second Nature: Choosing Christ-Centered Living in a Self-Centered World

Session 1 **Caleb: Unwavering Faith** Numbers 13:26-30; 14:6-10,21-24

Session 2 **Solomon: Unfailing Wisdom** 1 Kings 3:3-14; 4:29-34

Session 3 **Ruth: All-In Commitment** Ruth 1:8-17

Session 4 **Barnabas: Ongoing Encouragement** Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-27; 11:19-26

Session 5 **John: Single-Minded Focus** John 1:26-34; 3:26-30

Session 6 **Hannah: Trust-Filled Prayer** 1 Samuel 1:9-11,17-18,26-28; 2:1-3

Session 7 **Andrew: Active Witness** John 1:35-42; 12:20-26

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CALEB: UNWAVERING FAITH



When have you felt like you couldn't believe your eyes?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

Christ-centered living chooses trust in God, not in circumstances.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I never saw it. Most of my family and friends saw it—or at least they claimed they did. I remain convinced they were all in on an elaborate hoax that started in the mid-1990s. Back then the latest fad was 3D holographic prints. You were supposed to unfocus your eyes, stare blankly at a repeating pattern, and then claim you saw a different image suddenly popping out at you.

"It's a rocket!" "It's a grasshopper!" "It's a panda bear!"

It's hogwash! Or at least that's what I told myself. It became a big joke around my house at the time, but the truth is I was a little unnerved in thinking something really was there, but my eyes just couldn't see it. I didn't like the idea that I couldn't trust my own eyes.

Can we trust what we see around us? As Christians, we must accept the reality that our senses will sometimes lie to us. That's why living in a Christ-centered way means making the choice to place our trust in God, not in our circumstances.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Numbers 13:26-30

²⁶ And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ And they told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.” ³⁰ But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.”

The Israelites were desperate for God to make good on the promise He had given to Abraham centuries before: the promise of a land of their own. As we read Numbers 13, we find God’s people on the brink of finally seeing that promise fulfilled. But there was a catch.

True enough, the land was fertile and expansive. The spies sent to evaluate the situation even brought back evidence of that fruitfulness to show to the people. But while this promised land contained oversized grapes, it also contained oversized residents—powerful armies with oversized strength and oversized resolve. All the military evidence indicated the Israelites had made a terrible mistake.

Surely we can relate, can’t we? We all have moments when our circumstances contradict our faith—when the sickness, the failed relationship, the job loss, or the financial downturn looms large, and all God’s truths that once gave us such confidence suddenly seem insufficient. We look to the promises we find in God’s Word, yet we find it difficult to see them at work because of the giants towering before us.

***What people or circumstances
have helped you learn how to trust?***

QUESTION #2

One of the spies was not overwhelmed, however. Caleb had his eyes fixed not on the extent of the circumstances, but on the promises of God. Caleb's statement in verse 30 was more than an expression of optimism; it was an expression of obedience.

"Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." The key word here is *able*.

The other spies apparently thought their mission objective was to assess what was before them and decide whether or not they would do what God had told them to do. For Caleb, they had no decision to make. Regardless of what he faced circumstantially, Caleb had resolved to actively trust in God. The mission to him was simply to find out how big an obstacle God was going to overcome on their behalf.

Numbers 14:6-10

⁶ And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. ⁸ If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the LORD. And 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." ¹⁰ 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.

G. K. Chesterton once wrote, "A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it."¹ Joshua and Caleb, very much alive in their faith, went against the stream. In this case, the "stream" was the entire Israelite community.

TIME TESTED

Use the chart below to record moments when you actively trusted God in the past. How did those moments influence your life?

| | I trusted God by: | What happened next: |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| A moment from long ago. | | |
| A moment from my recent past. | | |

What did those moments of trust teach you about God?

Christians know what that's like, given that Christ-followers have always lived set apart from the culture. In fact, those of us in the church are literally "the called out ones." We are willing to stand in conviction when everyone else bows to the winds of the times.

What gives us that kind of resolve? The same thing that empowered Joshua and Caleb: the knowledge that God is with us. Such knowledge offers a number of benefits, as well:

- ▶ **The presence of God means we are never truly alone.** God has given us His Word with more than enough direction for us to follow His will. When we make the choice to live faithfully by what God has already said, we can be confident we're living inside of God's revealed will. When we are doing what He's told us to do in His Word, we can do so with confidence. He is with us.
- ▶ **The presence of God means we never walk without direction.** Joshua and Caleb didn't know the specifics of how the conquest of the promised land would pan out. They simply trusted God to give them the direction they needed when they needed it. The same is true for Christians today.
- ▶ **The presence of God means we're never away from His power.** Numbers 14:10 shows God's emphatic support for Joshua and Caleb. Similarly, Christians have the blessing of God's Holy Spirit. When we're walking in God's will, we can rest assured we're also walking in His power.

What makes fear a significant obstacle to faith?

QUESTION #3

Numbers 14:21-24

21 But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, 22 none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, 23 shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. 24 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.

People have short memories—even when it comes to the things of God. We can live for decades with God providing for us physically, emotionally, and spiritually, yet wake up one day overwhelmed with doubt. It’s that way with us, and it was that way with the forgetful Israelites. The same people who saw the wonders of God at work in Egypt were now doubting God’s deliverance on the cusp of the promised land. As a result, the word of the Lord came to the people and pronounced judgment: an entire generation would die in the wilderness rather than take possession of the promised land. Only Joshua and Caleb, who had stood faithfully, would be the exceptions.

Both the Israelites’ punishment and Caleb’s reward prove God’s faithfulness. God always keeps His promises, even when not all of those promises are happy.

We shouldn’t be shocked when trouble comes. We shouldn’t be surprised at being insulted or marginalized. We shouldn’t be dismayed when God’s people lose their jobs or lie sick in the ICU. Why shouldn’t we be surprised? Because Jesus told us it would be so. (See John 16:33.)

Not every promise is a happy promise. But every promise is an opportunity to reflect on the faithfulness of God. Let’s not shrink back when we face difficult circumstances. Instead, let’s commit again to follow God wherever He might lead. We can do so with the confidence that God, who is faithful, says what He means and means what He says.

When has God kept His promises in a way that helped you trust Him more?

QUESTION #4

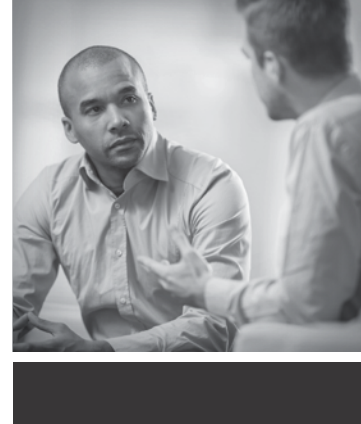
How can we continually remind one another of God’s faithfulness?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you actively trust in God this week, rather than circumstances? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Share.** Share with your group one set of circumstances that is causing you to waver this week.
- ▶ **Think.** Think about one specific person you know is dealing with difficult circumstances. Write a note of encouragement to that person.
- ▶ **Time.** Spend some time researching and gathering some of God's promises to His people. Write these on note cards to carry with you as reminders of His faithfulness.



An unwavering faith doesn't mean circumstances won't be daunting. It certainly doesn't mean you'll never face opposition or trouble. Instead, an unwavering faith trusts that your circumstances are not the final say. It means choosing to trust in God, regardless of what your senses might tell you.

My thoughts

1. G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* [online, Cited 6 March 2017]. Available on the Internet: <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100311.txt>

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLsecondnature**