

Introduction.

We continue today in our series on the life of David “Shaping a Heart for God”.

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If there is one story in the Bible that you can be certain everyone has heard, it is the story of David and Goliath. So well known is it that it is used as a metaphor for all sorts of contests. A recent business internet posting is titled “David vs Goliath: How To Overcome Your Giant Competitors Using Your Limited Budget,” and the late Ronald Reagan is quoted as saying "The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip." Military tacticians teach it as an example of the use of superior firepower, and even sportswriters use the term: “Everyone loves March Madness, a fast paced (one and done) college basketball tournament that takes place every Spring. And, of course, everyone has their favorite Cinderella team (last year: Butler), or as we also refer to the big match up: David vs. Goliath! We all love the "little man," the underdog, the gritty fire power and courage behind the team that doesn't stand a chance against the giant programs of North Carolina, Duke, Michigan St. and Syracuse.” (Ryan Miller)

Our title is thus “Facing your Giants”

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So what really happened in Israel almost 3000 years ago? And what does it teach us about our own battles? Let us look at the beginning of the story in 1 Samuel 17:1-10

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1 Sam 17:1-10

Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Socoh in Judah. They pitched camp at EphesDammim, between Socoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

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1. The Facts of the Case

Let's set the stage here. First of all, who were these Philistines, and why were they threatening Israel? The Philistines are generally believed to have come originally from Crete, and they invaded and settled along the southern coast of the nation of Israel, in an area roughly corresponding to today's Gaza strip.

Slide (map)

They were not content simply to occupy this relatively small area, and perhaps naturally coveted the whole of the land of the nation of Israel.

Slide (aggressive)

They were *aggressive* in pursuit of this goal.

Slide (strong)

In addition they were well equipped to do this, because they had learned the secret of smelting iron, and so their swords were superior to those of King Saul's army, which were largely made of the softer metal bronze.

Slide (idolatrous)

They were also idolatrous; they worshipped the same gods as the Canaanites; Baal, Astarte and Dagon, religions which were associated with things like ritual prostitution and child sacrifice. Obviously if the Philistines had succeeded in their conquest, God's purposes for Israel would have been thwarted, and Israel might even have ceased to exist.

So they drew up their forces and faced off against Saul's army around the valley of Elah in central Israel. The valley has a range of hills on each side of it

Slide(valley)

Slide(valley)

And is the home to some large oak trees

Slide(valley)

Saul's army was on one side of the valley and the Philistines on the other.

Slide (Champion)

The Philistines also had a fearsome champion.

The problem for the Israelites was the nature of the Philistines' champion. Goliath was a huge man, something like 9' 9" tall. The VT basketball coach Seth Greenberg would have loved him! And not only was he huge, he was well armored, with a coat of mail and a helmet and leg protectors that weighed about 175 pounds. To the Israelites he must have looked as impressive and as threatening as a Sherman tank! And what did this champion do?

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I Sam 17:8-10

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other."

Their idea was to challenge the Israelites in a representative contest. Their best man would fight Israel's best man, and the outcome would determine who won the battle. This was a common feature of warfare at the time. "No need for everyone to be involved in this; just send your best man and I will take him on: I am the greatest!" And note that Goliath did not just issue this challenge once and then go home. Verse 16 of our passage tells us that he did it every morning and every evening for 40 days.

Slide (Swindoll quote)

Chuck Swindoll comments on this passage "How applicable to any "giant" we encounter! That's the way with the giants of fear and worry, for example. They don't come just once; they come morning and evening, day after day, relentlessly trying to intimidate. They come in the form of a person, or a pressure, or a worry. Some fear that that hammers on your heart every morning and every night, day in and day out, yelling across the ravine in your own personal valley. Few things are more persistent and intimidating than our fears and our worries..... especially when we face them in our own strength."

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2. The Fear of the Israelites

And that is exactly how the Israelites felt; they were scared out of their wits!

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1 Sam 17:11

On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

Notice that Saul was among those who were afraid. If any Israelite could stand up to Goliath it would have been he. He was a head and shoulders taller than any other man, and he had a suit of armor, just like Goliath, so it would have been an interesting match. But Saul was having none of it; instead he tries to bribe someone else to do what he should have done by offering his daughter in marriage, and promising tax relief and riches to the successful champion.

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3. The Fresh Face on the Scene

Three of David's brothers had enlisted in Saul's army and so his father Jesse sends David to this fearful and dispirited army to take them some food and bring back news that they were all safe. David would have been a teenager at the time, perhaps 17 years old or possibly even younger:

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1 Sam 17:17-19

Now Jesse said to his son David, "Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines."

So David gets up early the next morning and heads for the Valley of Elah. When he gets there he sees the army getting into their battle positions, so being the high school age kid that he is he wants to watch what is going on. While he is there Goliath comes out and makes his boast for the 41st time. David is incensed: he sees Goliath not just as a challenge to Israel, but also as an affront to the LORD, the God of Israel.

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1 Sam 17:26

David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? *Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*"

David, apparently alone, sees the situation for what it is. The battle is not just Philistines vs. Israelites, but it is the godless uncircumcised Philistines against the people of God. Goliath is not just challenging Saul and his army, he is challenging the Lord, the God of Israel, Himself! And his understanding of this profound truth is what gives him the faith and the courage to do something about it. But before he can act he faces another challenge, this time from his own brother.

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4. The Faultfinding of His Brother

David's anger at Goliath's challenge and his enquiry about the rewards gets under the skin of his oldest brother Eliab.

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1 Sam 17:28-29

When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle."

As Sandy reminded us last week, Eliab was a fine looking man, so much so that Samuel felt sure that he was the one God had chosen to be king of Israel. But God know Eliab's heart, and told Samuel

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1 Sam 16:7

"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. *Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*"

So Eliab had to look on as Samuel anointed his kid brother as the future king of Israel. And we can see in this passage why God rejected him; he was jealous of David and small-minded. Look at the way he puts David down "Why have you *really* come down here? And with whom did you leave those *few sheep* in the wilderness? I know why you are here; you have only come to see the battle! You have a wicked and conceited heart!" You can hear the scorn in his voice as he puts David in his place.

But note David's response. I Sam 17:29

"Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?"

He does not land a punch on his brother's nose; this is not the battle he has come to fight. David here is giving us an example of a meek response to persecution, and in this sense he was a true ancestor of his greater Son, Jesus. Peter tells us of Jesus:

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1 Peter 2:23-25

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

So he simply turns away and asks someone else about the reward the king is offering. Personally I do not think that David was that interested in the reward; asking these questions was his way of saying "Hey, I am interested in taking on this Goliath chap."

Eliab's small-minded attitude to David and David's peaceful response shows us why God chose David; the person with the conceited and wicked heart was Eliab, not David!

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5. The Faith of David

Word of David's interest in Goliath reaches Saul, as David intended, and Saul sends for David.

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1 Sam 17:31-37

What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."

Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth."

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But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

These verses give us the key to David's willingness to face Goliath: David had a deep faith in the living God.

Let us note three aspects of David's faith:

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a. The past tense of faith; it rested on God's actions in the past. David was able to look back and see how God had protected him and blessed him in the past, when he faced the lion and the bear. Our faith in God today is also based in the past, above all on what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, dying for us and rising again. David did not know about Jesus, but he did know that God had protected and blessed him. So too for us: as we face the giants in our lives, whether they are job loss or sickness or death of a loved one or difficulties in our marriage or a taskmaster of an organic chemistry instructor, we can do so knowing that God has blessed us in the past, and He is still the same God today.

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Chuck Swindoll says of this passage "So often, when facing our giants, we forget what we ought to remember, and we remember what we ought to forget. Most of us can recite the failures of our lives in vivid detail, but we're hard pressed to name the specific, remarkable victories God has pulled off in our past."

b. The present tense of faith

David looks at the present situation, and sees it not as a reason to fear, but as a reason to stand up for God. This uncircumcised Philistine ...has defied the armies of the living God." David looks at Goliath, and does not see

him as a fearsome and invincible enemy, but as someone who is in big trouble because he has defied the armies of the *living* God. For David, God was not an abstraction, a theoretical concept that might or might not be true, but he was the living God; the one who was and who is and who is to come; the ever present, almighty, and holy God. That was how David knew God, as he later wrote in Psalm 64

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Ps 68:1-4

May God arise, may his enemies be scattered;
may his foes flee before him.

2 As smoke is blown away by the wind,
may you blow them away;
as wax melts before the fire,
may the wicked perish before God.

3 But may the righteous be glad
and rejoice before God;
may they be happy and joyful.

4 Sing to God, sing praise to his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds--
his name is the LORD--
and rejoice before him.

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19 Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior,
who daily bears our burdens.

20 Our God is a God who saves;
from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.

21 Surely God will crush the heads of his enemies,
the hairy crowns of those who go on in their sins.

c. The future tense of faith

Looking back on God's past deliverances, and looking up at God's presence and God's power, David could then look to the future with faith and assurance:

The LORD (the living LORD, he might have said, and certainly meant) who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." So David could look at Goliath and say "That guy? Why, he's only a dwarf in God's sight"

6. The Futility of Human Effort.

David's confidence in God's power obviously impressed Saul, and what is more important it got him off the hook, so he tells David "Go, and the LORD be with you." It is interesting to see how pious Saul can get when he is living an empty life spiritually. As Jesus reminds us: Matt 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Saul then says "but wait a minute; you don't have any armor on. If I were to go and fight Goliath (which fortunately I do not have to do now) I would put on every piece of armor I possessed to protect myself." So we have the comical story of David trying to get Saul's armor on. The problem was, Saul was a size 52 long, and David a 36 regular. So the stuff does not fit, and David waddles around in it and says "I cannot use these, because I am not used to them." So he takes the stuff off and goes out to meet Goliath with only his simple shepherd tools, his staff and his sling.

This amusing little interlude does remind us of an important truth; God made us all different people, with different gifts and different personalities. What works for one Christian will not necessarily work for another. I heard a testimony last week from a distinguished organic chemist who said that he got up every morning at 4.30

am to read his Bible and to pray. That is wonderful, and I admire him for his discipline, but if I tried it I would fall asleep within minutes of sitting down. We cannot wear someone else's armor; we need to let God equip us for His work in whatever way He decides.

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1 Sam 17:40

Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

The stream he chose the stones from is still in the valley, although it only flows during the rainy season. There are plenty of good stones here, however!

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Chuck Swindoll comments: "The beautiful thing about this story is that it's a perfect example of how God operates. He magnifies HIS name when we are weak.... We don't have to be beautiful or brilliant or have all the answers to be blessed of God. He honors our faith. All He asks is that we trust Him, that we stand before Him in integrity and faith, and He'll win the battle. God is just waiting for His moment, waiting for us to trust him so He can empower us to battle our giant."

7. The Fall of a Giant

1 Sam 17:41-44

Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!"

Goliath tries his old trick of boastful self-confidence and intimidation. And it's true for us, isn't it? When facing our giants, sometimes all we can do is to look at the giant and worry about how it is going to ruin our life or our marriage or our job or our family. But David was not intimidated by Goliath, because he was looking to God. Listen to what he says:

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1 Sam 17:45-47

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of *the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.* This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

David's secret is that he was not expecting to win the battle based on his own strength and skill, even though he had a plan to defeat Goliath. Ultimately however he was relying on God "for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

And then comes the end

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1 Sam 17:48-51

As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.

Slide (picture)

So the defeat of Goliath reminds us that the battle really is the Lord's. For David the enemy was real and very large. Our giants may not be actual people (although sometimes they are), but they can be equally intimidating. We need to remember what David never forgot, that *the battle is the Lord's, and we can trust Him to win it.*

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8. The Fulfillment of David's Example

This story of David can also be seen at another level, as a prefiguring of another victory won against a fearsome foe. The protagonist in this battle was "great David's greater son", the Lord Jesus Christ, and we can see the parallels as follows:

	David	Jesus
The Giant	Goliath	Satan
The Person	Despised and sneered at	Despised and rejected
The Reaction	Humility	Humility
The Challenge	A huge enemy who could kill him	The Cross, which did kill Him
The Result	Goliath's defeat	Satan's defeat
The Reward	Fame and riches	Exalted to the right hand of God.

So whenever we think of David facing Goliath, we can begin to comprehend what it must have meant for our Lord to face the Goliath of the cross.

8. Final Words

I cannot do better than to use Chuck Swindoll's outline in his chapter on David:

1. *Facing giants is an intimidating experience.* It was not easy for David to face Goliath, with his heavy armor, his superior strength, and his intimidating height.
2. *Doing battle is a lonely experience.* David was on his own, humanly speaking. And we have our own Goliaths to face; no one else can do this for us.
3. *Trusting God is a stabilizing experience.* David went out to face Goliath in confidence, because he trusted God to deliver him.
4. *Winning victories is a memorable experience.* We need to remember our victories from the past, and then remember that God does not change. The same God who gave us victories then can do so now, if we but trust Him.

May God help us to face the Goliaths in our lives with the faith and courage of David and of our Lord as He faced the cross.