

GOD’S FIGHTING MAN

SERIES: DAVID: A MAN AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART

By Judy Herminghaus

I saw a story this week about an eight-year-old boy named Gregory Bridewell. He had cerebral palsy and couldn’t walk at all. He was watching television in his living room, when he heard a popping sound, then the television caught on fire. His father was asleep, so Gregory crawled out the front door and found his grandfather who was nearby, who woke the father and got him out of the house. By then the house was on fire. Gregory’s story caught the interest of national news almost immediately, and when the little boy said, “I saved my dad’s life!” during his television interview it touched all who heard him. He truly was a hero. He did something nobody ever thought he could do.

People like underdog stories about a very unlikely person’s being able to do something great. I think it’s because stories of overcoming huge odds give us hope. We know that somewhere deep within us there is a Gregory. We might project a façade of confidence based on success in our work, having a great education, or beauty. We might have many talents and gifts. But deep within our heart is someone who wonders if he or she has what it takes, who doesn’t seem to totally fit in.

This is why we tell the story of David and Goliath over and over again. We’ll hear it in this message. We tell it to be reminded of basic truths that help us regain hope. I want you to let it remind you that difficulties and even disasters that befall us in life do not

have to conquer our spirits or vanquish our hope, because the living God delivers us from all of these things. We are more than our circumstances. We are more than the façade that we wear to cover our insecurities. Inside us there is a David waiting to get out.

And we all face Goliath moments in our lives when we suddenly come up against something we did not expect, something that overwhelms our thoughts and emotions for days, weeks, even years. Goliath moments shake our world and can take our focus off of all else. Our child might fall sick, or our parent might die. Our nation might go to war, sending millions of people, perhaps among them our loved ones, into uncharted territory. We might fail an important test, get divorced, lose our job, break up with our boyfriend or girlfriend. An old addiction might resurface. A woman shared with me only this week that her children have come to hate her for no reason she can think of. Another woman told me her story this week as well. She had cancer when she was eleven, she has repeatedly had surgeries, and now she has cancer again. At forty-two she is undergoing her eighth surgery. How can she face that Goliath with hope?

All of these stories confront real people almost every day. These are times that challenge our heart for God: Will we trust God, or will we fall prey to fear and discouragement, wonder whether he's really out there and whether he knows what he's doing? Will we stop trusting him and run and hide? Goliath moments are frightening. We lose our compass. We don't have control and we don't know what the future holds. But David will declare in our text, "The battle is the LORD's." And each one of us will be challenged again with the choice to trust God or not.

Here is how it happened to a young teen named David: In 1000 B.C. in Israel it was spring, the time when kings went out to war. The grass was green in the meadows, the sky was an unclouded blue, the dirt roads were dry and passable. And the Philistines, Israel's archenemy, were back, challenging the Israelites once again on their own soil to come out and fight. The nation that lost would be the other nation's slave. The Israelite army was dwarfed numerically by the Philistine army. The Israelites were not as technologically advanced or as wealthy. They didn't have a champion as great as Goliath. So the deck was stacked against Israel—or so the Philistines thought.

The Philistines had taken the high place over the valley of Elah in Judah. Israel went out to meet its overpowering enemy and took its stand on the opposite hill overlooking the valley. Neither army wanted to lose the high ground by coming down into the valley first. But every morning and night the Philistines' champion (an experienced warrior) strode out from the ranks and taunted the army of Israel. His name was Goliath and here is how he looked: He was over nine feet tall (perhaps six or seven feet according to newer commentaries—which was still a giant for those times). He had a bronze helmet on his head and bronze armor weighing 125 pounds. He had leg coverings, a javelin, and a spear the size of a weaver's beam, about 17 pounds, the tip of which weighed 16 pounds. And to top it all off he had a shield carrier who walked in front of him. For forty days, Israel viewed this sight twice daily and heard his taunt: "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other."

Saul, the king of Israel, was obviously the one who was supposed to fight on behalf of Israel, in the name of Israel's God, as God's representative. That was his role as king. We know that Saul was taller than all the other men in Israel (1 Samuel 9:1-2), so the scene is set up to contrast the giant on one side and the "giant" on the other side. Two champions of opposing gods were supposed to be fighting. But because Saul had no heart for God, he was not able to get out there and fight Goliath. He stayed hidden among his men. So for forty days Goliath dominated Israel's vision, and his challenge was answered with nothing but silence and terror. They had all come down with what Eugene Peterson calls Goliath-sickness (1).

I like this expression because I can use it in my life. I can ask myself when I'm terrified of something, "Am I focusing on this so much that I'm freezing up and not taking action? Then I am coming down with Goliath-sickness." It's important to ask this question, because the enemies of our souls do not go away on their own. They must be fought. Entrenched fear gets worse over time as we continue to focus on our Goliath—bad habits, broken relationships, whatever it is—and not on God. We cannot let those kinds of enemies stay in our heart, because they take up the space that is required by God for us to be his people, to respond to him, to take action.

But God

Although Israel was both surprised and terrified by this Philistine threat, God was neither. God had planned for this day, and his sovereign hand can be seen in every detail.

You see, God had chosen a new king for Israel, who, as he said, would be “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). According to Frank Gaebelin, this means he would truly have God’s interests at heart (2). A heart for God is not a warm and fuzzy feeling about God, but a deep inner commitment to the God of the universe, a passion for God—an aliveness to God. God went out and found such a man in a young shepherd boy named David. In 1 Samuel 16:1-13 we are told that he sent Samuel the prophet to Bethlehem to anoint a new king for Israel. There Samuel learned a great lesson, which this entire story of David’s encounter with Goliath illustrates: “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7b, NASB.)

God passed over all seven of David's older brothers to choose David to be king. He was just a boy, the youngest, the lowliest, the sheepherder of the family. Samuel thought there were some bright prospects among his older brothers, but God did not agree. What was so significant about David? Remember, Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). David’s treasure was with God.

In the David and Goliath account, everyone was looking at Goliath as the sure winner and David as a helpless contender, but God looked at their hearts and knew better.

God had determined that in order for David to rise as king, Saul had to go. Saul had proved himself to be a man who wanted to please himself and others more than he

wanted to serve God. God took his Holy Spirit from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14) because of Saul's disobedience. At the time of David's confrontation with Goliath, Saul was a tormented and weakened soul. God secretly anointed David as king through Samuel his prophet, and the Holy Spirit came upon David mightily and permanently. David would write later in Psalm 51:17:

“The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit;
a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.”

Saul did not have this kind of heart. That was his problem. And Saul made David's life miserable for a very long time after David had defeated Goliath.

Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch woman who with her family hid Jews in the Holocaust and went to a Nazi concentration camp, said, “I always want to be found in the center of God's will.” Sometimes the center of God's will is a place we would rather not go. Raging fires that burn down our houses, or conflicts that arise in our families or among our friends, may not be what we would chose, but it is God's presence with us in such places that gives the man or woman of God joy and peace where others cannot imagine it. The experience of God's presence is not contingent on circumstances, but on our focus. If we focus on our Goliath circumstances, we will be afraid, and experience negative emotions and behaviors; if we focus on God, we will see things from his perspective, and his presence will us bring peace. Fortunately for us, it doesn't all depend on us. The Holy

Spirit of God will recall to our minds the truth of Scripture in stressful times, and he will nudge us to pray when we would rather faint. But we also have a part to play: we need to remember and obey. Then we can say with David the truth found in his Psalm 23:

“Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.”

(Verses 4-5a.)

David lived the truth of these words in his times of struggle and extremity, and generations since have been encouraged to make them their own.

We'll pick up our story in 1 Samuel 17:23-24. This is when David first came on the scene in the valley of Elah. After David had been secretly anointed as king, he had been sent back to tend sheep by his father. That was humbling, no doubt. But here his father had sent him on another lowly mission, and that was to bring supplies to his brothers on the battlefield. When he met up with his brothers, David first saw and heard Goliath taunting Israel.

Seeing the heavenly reality

As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear.

David heard Goliath defying Israel, which was the same as defying Israel's God. He heard the insult to God for the first time. David stood his ground. Notice the others only saw the threat, and seeing only that, they ran. They were demonstrating a marked lack of God-focus. Now, they were on the battlefield, so what a picture of cowardliness this is! All Goliath did was shout, and God's men ran in fear. If you imagine the scene, it is actually rather comical.

Verses 25-26:

Now the Israelites had been saying, "Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father's family from taxes in Israel."

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?”

These are David’s first recorded words in Scripture. He was the only one in this whole encounter who brought God into the conversation. This young man with a heart for God saw Goliath’s taunts as a disgrace for Israel. He was concerned for God’s reputation in the world. He saw the situation from God’s perspective. How dare this man outside the covenant promises of Israel defy the living God? How dare this man defy the host of angel armies that God commands? In other words, David saw the heavenly reality. The others saw only the Goliath reality.

This is a challenge to us who live by the Spirit today. Are we going to focus on our circumstances, or are we going to focus on God? Where do we go when we are first challenged by something? Do we go to our friends? Get advice from the doctors? Get the experts to tell us what to do? Worry night and day but never bring God into our thoughts? Or do we, like David, hear the threat and know that God is able to deliver us from all our fears and challenges?

Let me ask you, what current Goliath-sized situation are you facing? Take a minute to really consider it: how would you like God to be in it with you? Ask him!

Let's continue in verses 27-37:

They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, "This is what will be done for the man who kills him."

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."

"Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?" He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. 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."

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.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

Now that you have considered your Goliath-sized problem and have asked God what to do about it, you might come up against the same thing that David came up against. How did others view David's introduction of God into the story? David's brothers saw David wrongly. They maligned his character, motives, and ability. Saul didn't believe he could conquer Goliath either. Here again we see the theme that man looks at the outside of a person, whereas God looks at the heart. A man after God's own heart is not dissuaded by people. Often when God gives us something to do, others will think we are crazy or unable to do it. They will try to protect us from it. We must follow our call anyway. Have you found yourself alone sometimes as you try to follow God faithfully? I think this is more common than unusual.

Another thing to learn from David's process here is that a man after God's own heart has learned from his past. David remembered God's deliverance from other overwhelming enemies. God had delivered him from the bear and the lion and would deliver him from this giant as well. Remembering how God has worked in your life is encouraging when you are faced with new trials. What has God done in your past that you can remember in a current or future trial?

“The battle is the LORD’s”

Verses 38-40:

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

“I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. 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.

For his battle with Goliath, David needed only the weapons with which he was experienced. God had made him a shepherd, and it was those shepherding skills that God used to win David's battle with Goliath. And God will use whatever you have at your disposal, your repertoire of talents and gifts, to win the victory. Each one of us is God's special man or woman filled with his Holy Spirit. Don't worry that you don't have what it takes. It is God in you who gives the victory.

Verses 41-47:

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!"

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."

"The battle is the LORD's." That scripture would be a great breath prayer for all of us to use when we encounter giants. A breath prayer is just a short prayer, often a verse itself, which we can memorize and pray frequently as we teach our hearts to focus on truth. We can use a breath prayer like this: During bouts with illness: the battle is the Lord's! When depression hits: the battle is the Lord's! In broken relationships: the battle is the Lord's! When we have unsaved children: the battle is the Lord's! Remember David's story, and do battle with the word of God. For he goes with us as faithfully as he did with David. The same Spirit who animated David's prayers and life dwells in us. We have Goliath-killing power available to us if we will only have faith, the kind of faith that David has here. Jesus said it doesn't even take much faith; with just as much as a mustard seed you can move mountains (Matthew 17:20). If you want that kind of faith, just ask God, and he will give it to you.

David, knowing the battle was the Lord's, plunged in. Verses 48-50:

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.**

It took only one smooth stone.

God illustrated this truth for all to see in the story of David's victory over Goliath. We can win battles of overwhelming size because it is God who battles for us. If we will give God our hearts, then he can give us the victory. David's heart was giant-sized. In this battle, God's sovereign plan was unfolding. David would be Israel's king. God demonstrated that he was worthy to be king. But the journey he would embark on after this mountaintop experience would be very messy, take turns we would never guess, and reveal sin in David that will shock us. Yet through it all I hope his story will encourage us to have a heart passionately committed to God. David wasn't perfect. He too needed a Savior.

Remember this: "When God scans the earth for potential leaders, He is not on a search for angels in the flesh. He is certainly not looking for perfect people, since there are none. He is searching for men and women like you and me, mere people made up of flesh. But He is also looking for people who share the same qualities He found in David. God is looking for men and women 'after His own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14)." (3)

David knew his salvation was coming and looked forward to that day. The young shepherd boy of Bethlehem pointed to the good Shepherd who was to come to deliver us all from sin and death (John 10:11, 14). Jesus is his name, the King of kings and Lord of lords forever (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16). May we give him our hearts and may he find them to be “giant-sized.”

Notes

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians*, © 1998, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, NY. P. 40.
2. Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, © 1992, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI.
3. Charles Swindoll, *Becoming a Man or Woman after God's Own Heart*, © 1997. Available on *Insight for Living* at www.insight.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8401&news_iv_ctrl=1966 (internet).

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Catalog No. 5255

1 Samuel 17:23-50

First Message

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September 9, 2007

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