

DEFEATING THE GIANT

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



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Samuel 17:1-58
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1 Samuel 17:1-58

I was never a great wrestler. It was my middle school PE teacher, Mr. Weir who convinced me to take up the sport. He was convinced of two things: that being a good wrestler took brains and that I had them. Therefore, he thought I was destined to win a lot of wrestling matches. Mr. Weir was wrong.

Instead of winning a lot, I lost a lot. I was a scrawny tenth grade kid with brains, but not much more. I'd be up against boys much stronger and tougher. During many of those moments, I did what lots of underdog athletes do: I prayed. And there was one particular Bible story that always came to mind: David and Goliath.

This is the story that gives hope to scrawny tenth grade underdogs. The young shepherd who brought down the warrior giant. If David could beat Goliath, then surely I could win this wrestling match, right?

We are right at the beginning of our ten month journey through the life of David that we're calling *A Life of Passion*. We've seen a picture of who Saul was—the king who came before David and provided a contrast to his character. Last week Andy Burnham led us through the time of transition when David was introduced as the new king. First, as he was anointed by Samuel, and secondly, when he was invited to play harp for King Saul.

This week we'll be looking at the third story that introduces David. It happens to be one of the most well-known stories of the entire Bible, perhaps even in all of Western literature. We've met David as the eighth son, the runt of the litter. We've met David as the gentle harpist who calms the king. Now we meet David as the giant killer. Today we'll talk about defeating the giant.

The story of David and Goliath is well known for good reason. It is absolutely brilliant because it operates on a hundred different levels all at the same time. We teach it to our children because we want them to know that God can defeat even the undefeatable things in our lives. That is certainly true.

But there is more going on.

I learned something from years of losing wrestling matches. This story isn't about defeating all the giants in your life. At least not in the way I wanted it to be. Not if your giants are high school boys who are better wrestlers than you. The story of David and Goliath is a character study. It is a detailed, complex, and at times confusing introduction to this boy who has been anointed king.

This is the first story where David is a hero. He is shown saving the nation. It's a stark contrast to the man who is currently their king. More than being about David and Goliath, this story is about David and Saul. At the end of the day, David comes out looking far more kingly than the man who is sitting on the throne.

But even in this early story, we see some curious things about David that might concern us. We've said that David's heart is really important. This story raises some questions about his heart. We don't know exactly why he does all the things he does. It's not that we know there's bad stuff there. We just have... questions.

This is going to be important for us because we constantly ask the same thing about our own hearts. What is really going on in there? Why do we do the things we do? Are our motives pure or selfish? We think we're pretty good most of the time. Aren't we?

All of this leads to an age old question: What is more important: The things we do or why we do them? Is it really the thought that counts? Or does the result matter? God sees our heart, but does he care about what we do? How do we sort through our own motivations and do something good?

David's story will help us with that question. We won't come away with answers, but it is a story that might guide us and give us hope. First we're going walk our way through this story. It's a long one so we won't read all 58 verses, just a few significant ones along the way. Then we'll reflect on how David comes across in this story. Finally, we'll think about ourselves to see if we can get some help understanding our own motivations and actions.

David defeats a giant

The story in 1 Samuel 17 begins by describing the armies of Israel and Philistine arrayed against each other on two opposing hills with a valley in between them. This was a common military standoff in ancient times. Whoever charged down into the valley first lost the high ground and became more vulnerable to the other. But in the midst of this impasse, a champion named Goliath steps forward.

Goliath is impressive. His armor alone probably weighed about 125 pounds. He carries a massive javelin and spear. But he is most remembered for one feature: he is unusually tall. There is some debate about his actual height, but it was probably right around seven feet tall—about the height of an NBA basketball player.

Goliath comes out and challenges Israel.

1 Samuel 17:8:

He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.

Notice how he refers to Israel. He is the Philistine and they are the “servants of Saul.” This is important. The story begins as if it is about Saul. This is his nation. He is the king. How does the king respond to a situation like this? That question is answered quickly. Verse 11 opens up, “When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine,…”

Goliath has made a challenge and Saul has heard it. Think about what is happening here. A tall giant has come to challenge Israel. Now remember who their king is. What was the most remarkable thing about Saul? Why were the people so impressed with him when God selected him as their king? He was tall!

So when the story opens, we are immediately hopeful. The Philistines might have a tall champion, but Israel has a tall king. This is exactly the kind of situation that Israel can handle. Everything so far says that this challenge is Saul’s to accept.

Everything except the ending of verse 11 which reads, “...they were dismayed and greatly afraid.”

Nothing can adequately describe the disappointment we feel with Saul. This was his moment and he has backed away from it. He is supposed to step up, but he doesn’t. He’s just as scared as the rest of Israel.

A few years ago, I took the college group camping at a lake just south of Gilroy. We should have known by the farm of wind turbines visible from the campsite that it would get windy. But we had no idea how windy it was. In the tent at night, you could hear the wind start as a rumble on the hills above us and then rush at us like a tidal wave. When it hit the tent, everything shook violently for several seconds.

I had taken my oldest two children along with me who were probably 5 and 6 years old at the time. All night I was terrified that the wind would pick up the tent with all three of us in it and dump us in the lake. I even slept holding my pocket knife so I could cut the fabric if we ended up in the water.

At one point in the middle of the night, we are all awake listening to the wind and my daughter turns to me and says, “Daddy, I’m scared.” I looked at her and all I could say was “me too.” I had nothing to give—I was just as scared as my six year old girl.

This is how Saul responds to the nation. He has nothing to offer them as their king. He is just as scared as them. A challenge has been thrown. He should be the one to rise to accept it. But he doesn’t. He shrinks back.

Right after this verse, we are introduced to David again. He is described as the youngest of eight sons. He is only a messenger to his three older brothers who are doing the real work of soldiers. But when he gets to the camp he does something very surprising. Read verse 22: “And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers.”

It’s a small detail, but this is not what a messenger does. David leaves his goods with someone else and goes to the battlefield. He doesn’t act like a messenger. And notice who he leaves the food with.

Do you remember when Saul was being publicly chosen as king? No one could find him because he was hiding under the baggage. Saul shrank back even then. Now, when David comes, he leaves the food in the care of the baggage keeper. I think this is a kind of inside joke. A jab against Saul. In his moment of glory, Saul shrank back under the baggage. David leaves his stuff with the baggage and steps forward.

Remember that I suggested that this story is about David over and against Saul. Score one for David.

As David approaches the battle line, he hears the challenge of the giant named Goliath. But what really interests him is the reward that King Saul has

promised to the man who defeats Goliath. Saul has apparently promised great riches, his daughter in marriage, and freedom for the victor's family.

This is a huge reward—economically because of the money; professionally because you'd be invited into the royal family; and socially because your family would be free. David is very interested in this reward. In fact, the first words we hear from David in this story are him asking for clarification about the reward.

1 Samuel 17:26:

And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

In this scene, we realize something about David: He wants to be king. He is an ambitious young man. Last week Andy pointed out that after being anointed king, David allowed God to bring him into the king's court as a harpist. He didn't force anything.

But this week, we see a different side of David. He wants to marry the king's daughter—that becomes a huge theme for him. Samuel has anointed him as king and he wants to make it happen as quick as possible.

Again, here is a contrast between David and Saul. Saul never wanted to be king. He hid from it. But David is ambitious. He is eager for this great reward.

So much so, that his brother gets mad at him.

1 Samuel 17:28:

Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle."

His brother's accusation is fascinating. He challenges David's heart. But just like Saul's defining trait is being tall, David's is his heart. He is supposed to be a man after God's own heart. But here Eliab says, "I know the evil of your heart."

What do we do with that? Is this just one brother squabbling with another? Is Eliab just defending himself because David might show him up? Or does he know

something about David? He is his brother, after all. I'd say that apart from my wife and children, my brother is the person who has gotten the clearest view of the evil in my heart. Growing up together gives you that perspective.

This accusation forces us as the reader to ask the questions, "What does lie within David's heart? What are his motivations?"

David responds like any brother would, "What's the big deal? I was just asking a question." But of course he wasn't. He keeps asking about the reward until eventually Saul notices. That's what eventually brings him before the king who tells him that he is not qualified to fight this champion. So David makes a case for himself.

1 Samuel 17: 34–36:

But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶ Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God."

This is a fascinating picture of David. Until now we've known him as the forgotten son and a gentle harpist. Now he's selling himself as a fearful warrior. He used to keep sheep for his father? That was earlier in the day! Then he describes his hand to hand combat skills against lions and bears. At first, Saul isn't convinced. He stays silent. So David says one more thing in a last attempt to convince him.

1 Samuel 17:37:

And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"

That did it. Ultimately it was David's confidence in God that convinced Saul, not his confidence in himself

It's a perplexing scene. David is qualified, but he's still an underdog. He's confident in his abilities, but he's also sure that God will deliver him. Saul is unconvinced by his skills, but likes the argument about God delivering him. Why does David want to fight Goliath? Why does Saul let him?

David is complicated. He is ambitious and reward-driven. He is confident in himself but also in the Lord. But here's the thing about David: He steps up. Whatever else is true of David, when it matters, he steps up.

Not Saul. Saul shrinks back. I suspect that Saul was trying to use David to solve his problem. That's why in the next scene he tries to put David in his personal armor. If David wins, then Saul could take the credit because he was generous enough to give him his armor. If David loses, Saul can just say that David was only a boy anyway.

But of course, David won't be owned by Saul. The armor is laid aside and David does it his way. Verse 40 is the dramatic build up to the big battle.

1 Samuel 17:40:

Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

This is the picture of David that we love. Five smooth stones securely placed in his shepherd's pouch. Confidently, he approaches the Philistine giant. It almost sends shivers down our spines. Something great is about to happen.

But before we get to the action, some words are exchanged. We would call this "trash talk." It's what you say before any kind of a competition in order to psych out the other person. The Philistine mocks David and his little staff. David replies with a similar confidence.

1 Samuel 17: 46–47:

This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."

Embedded in this trash talk is a critical statement. David says that God will give him the victory. This is what he told Saul as well. But he also explains why God will do this. He presumes not only to know that God will help him, but why God will help him. We can't ignore

this motivation. It is so that "all the earth may know there is a God in Israel" and that "all this assembly may know that the Lord saves."

We'll come back to these phrases again at the end, but let me summarize David's motivation here. He fights Goliath for two reasons: God's reputation in the world and the faith of his people. Before the battle begins, this is David's proclamation about why Goliath will be defeated.

David wants the world to know about God and for his people to trust him more.

And of course, David wins the victory. We all know that part of the story. He runs toward the giant, spinning his sling while it picks up momentum and lets loose a stone which hits Goliath in the forehead, felling him to the ground. The actual description of the battle takes only 4 verses of the 58 in the chapter. This is not an action story. It's a story about David.

And the battle is short because David is better armed. We like to think of this story as the classic underdog story, but it really isn't. Judges 20:16 tells us about the great warriors of Benjamin who could "sling a stone at a hair and not miss." Goliath was prepared for hand to hand combat, but David brought a projectile weapon. Long range weapons always beat short range weapons.

In our terms, David brought a gun to a knife-fight. So of course he won.

But what is really important is what happened after he won. Immediately after Goliath is killed, the nation rises up. David steps up and because of that, the nation rises to follow him

1 Samuel 17:52:

And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath[a] and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.

David didn't just beat Goliath. He led the nation of Israel to a major military victory.

Who is supposed to do that? The king. Kings lead their people in battle. But Saul didn't do that, David did. Tall warriors fight tall champions. But Saul didn't do that. David

did. Kings of Israel have confidence in their God who fights their battles for them. But Saul didn't do that. David did.

In the beginning of the story, Saul failed to rise to the challenge that he should have accepted. At the end of the story, the people followed someone else as their leader. David did what Saul was supposed to do and didn't. Saul shrank back. David stepped up.

As the story ends, we're hopeful for the future of Israel. If David is the next king, then things might be all right. We've met David as a youngest son. We've met him as a gentle harpist. Now we've met him as a confident warrior and leader. This guy is going to be a good king.

Who is David?

At least for the most part, a good king. By the end of the story, we're all excited about Goliath's head and plundering the Philistine camp and how great it is to win. But we can't let the victory make us forget some of what happened along the way.

We still don't know entirely what to do with David. Remember his ambition? Remember that comment about the evil in his heart? What about how fixated he was on the reward? Sure, it's great that he won, but how did he win? Why did he even accept the challenge in the first place? We have to ask again: who is David?

Was David acting out of ambition? Was this whole scenario a strategic political maneuver to ensure a position in the royal family? Or was he defending God's name from being taunted by Israel's enemies?

To put it simply: Did David fight for his own sake or for God's?

I was talking to a friend recently who was trying to figure out whether to make a certain decision. He was passionate about God and he wanted to do something to develop himself and serve God more effectively. What held him back is that he was unsure of his motivation. He asked me directly, "Do I want to do this in order to glorify myself or to glorify God?"

This is the question that we ask of David. Whose glory is he really seeking?

I don't think this story gives us the answer. In fact, I think the story wants us to ask that question, not answer it. The David we see here is a paradox.

On the one hand, he was appalled that a Philistine could bad-mouth the armies of God. But on the other hand, he was ambitious and wanted to rise up the ladder.

On the one hand, he was confident that God would protect him and save his people. But on the other hand, he knew that he had a superior weapon for this kind of battle.

At the end of the day, we don't know what to think about David. Was David holy or ambitious? Did he trust in God or in himself? Is he a forgotten youngest son? Is he a quiet, subservient musician? Is he an ambitious and clever young man? Is he a skilled fighter? Is he focused on God and his glory? Is he a humble shepherd? Is he a natural leader? Is he a clever military strategist? Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. David is all of those things and more.

Here's my best attempt to summarize the David we meet in this story: David is an ambitious young leader who is confident in his ability and trusts that God will bring about a victory for the sake of his reputation in the world and the faith of his people.

In other words, David is complicated. He's human. But he steps up and he takes action and he leads. With his whole heart, the good and the evil of it, David steps up.

Who are we?

So what does that mean for us? What do we do with this? I think we can recognize a lot of ourselves in David. His heart seems really familiar. He is just like us. Maybe we don't know what to do with David, but we definitely don't know what to do with ourselves. What is really in our hearts? Who are we?

When I look at my own heart, I often don't know what to do with the mixture of things that I find there. Am I motivated by things of the world? By selfish ambition and pride? When I'm honest, I have to admit that I am. Am I motivated by the things of God? By seeing him known and worshipped? Genuinely wanting others to encounter him and find life? I believe that I can honestly say that I am.

It's important to check our motivations. We are very good at making it look like we're doing something for good reasons while something dark lies beneath the surface. We are great at faking it. We need to reflect on our motivations. We need others who really know us (like our brothers) to challenge us to be honest.

I remember the day that one of my seminary professors said this. This was a man who had just celebrated fifty years serving God as a professor training young Christian leaders. He said, "I have never done anything in my life from pure motives." Never.

Pure motives are an unreasonable goal. We can barely know our exact motives, much less ensure that they are 100% in line with God's will.

If we wait to have perfect motives, then we will never do anything. Here's my suggestion: Don't worry so much about whether you have some bad motivations. Worry about having good motives. You're going to be a mix. Just make sure your good motives are really good.

I'm convinced that Saul and David both had their share of bad motives. It may even be the case that David's were worse. But I don't see Saul ever having motives as good as some of what motivates David. We never see Saul caring about the reputation of God and the faith of his people.

When my friend was agonizing over this decision in his life, the answer was clear to me. That's not often the case, but in this instance I was confident. If the only hesitation is fear of some bad motives, then go for it. There were plenty of good motives. Don't be held back by some possible bad ones. Step up and go for it.

There is a similar incident in the New Testament. At one point during his ministry, the apostle Paul finds himself in jail. While he's there, some people start talking about Christ as a way to make things worse for him. Others are preaching Christ in order to make him known in the world. He responds to this in Phillipians 1:18, "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Is it important to be honest about our motivations? Yes. Can God do good things, even when our motives are mixed? Absolutely, yes. This is the freedom that the Gospel gives us. Our sins are covered. We are free. So stop letting the fear of sin hold you back. Find some good goals and go for it.

What about you? Who are you? Are you more like Saul or David? Do you shrink back or step up?

Now let's return to what are some of the best motives for stepping up. From the moment that I started to prepare for preaching this story, I kept coming back to

David's last words before the battle, "that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear" (1 Samuel 17:47).

What if we were to step up and do things for those kinds of reasons? For the reputation of God and the faith of his people.

We live in a world where people question God every day. So much of our culture is built against believing in a good and loving creator God who acts in the best interest of his creation to bring them into relationship with him. What can we do to make that picture clearer to the world around us? How we can fulfill our responsibility to be the image of God in a world that doesn't know him? What can we do for the sake of God's reputation?

And let's be honest: it's hard to have faith in our culture. We have doubts. We have questions. We are seduced by comfort and the promise of success. We believe in our hearts but we live as if we are on our own. How can we help each other to know that "the Lord saves not with sword and spear" or stuff or degrees or money or fame or success or image? What can we do for the sake of the faith of God's people?

I know that sometimes we don't know why we do things. I know that we can be motivated by selfish reasons. We are complicated and confusing. There's always a mess of things going on inside of us. But let's not let that paralyze us. Let's not shrink back because we're worried about making a mistake or doing things for the wrong reasons or what others might think. God will deal with those things. He's already dealt with most of them through the cross. He knows our heart.

So let's step up for the sake of God's reputation in the world and the faith of his people. There's so many different ways that could look like for you. Maybe it's getting involved in Beautiful Day or helping at risk kids through Safe Families or teaching Sunday School or helping in high school ministry or contributing to the building project or something else entirely.

Don't shrink back in fear. Step up in faith.

Conclusion

I don't think the story of David and Goliath was given to us to encourage bad high school wrestlers that they could defeat the giants in their life. It certainly didn't do that for me.

This story was given to us so that we could get a proper and full introduction to this man, David, son of Jesse, the future King of Israel. Was he a good man? Yes. Was his brother Eliab right? Did he have evil in his heart? We have to keep reading to really find out.

And so the story moves forward. This scene ends with Saul asking the same question we asked. 1 Samuel 17:56, “And the king said, ‘Inquire whose son the boy is.’”

“Who is this young man?” It’s a bit confusing because we know Saul had already met him as a harp player. But it’s not that difficult to see that Saul just wants to know more about this young man who just completely showed him up as king. What in the world just happened here?

What indeed? Who is this David? He acts a lot more like a king than Saul ever did. But we have some questions. How will this whole thing turn out?

An insecure, unstable leader who has just been shown up by a shepherd boy. A brilliantly ambitious young man who has noble aspirations. A God who has already failed once in picking a good king. Where is this going?

And where are our lives going? Can we overcome our paralysis and act? Can we trust in the forgiveness Jesus offers enough to do something without knowing our motives are pure? Can we boldly step up for the sake of God’s reputation and the faith of his people?

Be careful, but not too careful. Step up in faith.