



Years ago, when our kids were still at home, we decided to get a dog. We already had an aging Golden Retriever, but we wanted a smaller dog to keep her company. We did the research and decided to get a dog like Toto in *The Wizard of Oz*. I'm not sure why we decided that because if I recall Toto was quite annoying in that movie, but that's what we wanted. Toto was a Cairn Terrier and the closest litter of Cairns we found was in Sacramento. So we packed up the kids in our minivan and drove there in hopes of finding the perfect little lap dog and companion for our Golden. When we arrived we were a bit surprised there were only two puppies left. Now I'd done some research on puppy shopping and knew to watch out for the runt. Besides having poor self-images, runts grow up to have all kinds of health problems. Don't bring home the runt! But we had a hard time figuring out which one was the runt and the owner wasn't letting on. So we chose the one that seemed the most alert and brought him home. We named him Mitch. He did prove to be a good friend to Samantha but there's no question in our minds now that, indeed, Mitch was the runt. Besides being an annoying dog, Mitch had many health problems and passed away at age six.

You'd think Samuel wouldn't make the same mistake. But sure enough God led him to choose the runt of Jesse's litter, a young man named David to be Saul's future replacement and the next King of Israel. He was just a boy at the time, the youngest of eight, whose list of chores had mostly to do with tending his father's sheep. David might have been the runt, but he had a talent for playing the harp. When King Saul needed some comfort for his troubled soul, he said to his attendants,

**"Find someone who plays well and bring him to me." One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the Lord is with him." Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep" (1 Samuel 16:17-19).**

Even if he was the runt, his talents brought him into the palace court as a musician. Later, he also became one of Saul's many armor bearers. This was kind of like going off to West Point. So David would stand guard for Saul, play the harp for him, and then go home to tend sheep.

And it was on one of those days, after David had arrived back home, his father summoned him and gave him an assignment.

**"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'" (1 Samuel 17:19).**

So David was sent to the battle lines not as a warrior, but as a delivery boy with take-out food for his three older brothers fighting on the front lines. David doesn't get much respect at home; he's still the runt, but at least this is a break from watching sheep and a chance to get a sneak peak at the war.

David arrives just as the army is moving into attack position. What he doesn't realize is they're really just going through the motions. It's like it's late in the third quarter and they're behind 53 to zip.

**"Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were. 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" (17:20-23).**

Imagine young David mesmerized as he looks for his brothers across the mile wide Valley of Elah. Israel's men are moving in silence to the lip of the canyon. Some are shoving the last bits of bread and cheese in their mouth. Others are adjusting their spears and war gear. When they're finally in place there's an eerie silence before an officer raises his arm and shouts, "Ruah," their war cry. From the other side of the valley, there should be a response from the Philistines. But where are they? David sees movement over on the Philistine side. It sounds like a tank rumbling into place, but they don't have tanks. For a moment he thinks it's a huge rock or tree, but, no, it moves. A roar from the valley floor removes all questions. "Oh my, it's a man!"

This scene had repeated itself for 40 days. Earlier in the story, the writer set the scene:

**“A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. 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” (17:4-7).**

He's nine foot six. This human tank wears a bronze shirt that weighs 126 pounds. The head of his spear alone weighs more than an Olympic shot put. He comes with a challenge to one-on-one combat; winner takes all; a customary way to settle things in that day. Goliath stands and shouts 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. This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other” (17:8-10).**

Did I hear Goliath mention Saul? Are they really “the servants of Saul?” If so, why can't Saul fight this guy? When Israel first asked for a king, they said they wanted a man to lead them in their battles. Saul is head and shoulders bigger than any man in Israel. He'd led Israel to victory over the Philistines at Mikdash. But now Saul is running for cover like the rest of his men:

**“On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified” ... “Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear” (17:11 & 24).**

What's the problem? Saul and his men are looking at life from ground level. Giants are overwhelming to those who look at life from that perspective. Giants are impossible to handle on your own. Israel ought to know because they've had “giant” issues before. Remember the report of the spies way back in Joshua before Israel entered the Promised Land? They said to Moses, *“We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there”* (Num. 13:27-28). The descendants of Anak were giants! Many of them were known to live in the city of Gath, Goliath's hometown. They had an incredible basketball team!

But listen to this: Forty years later when Joshua and a new generation of Israelites finally entered the land it says, *“At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country... Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive”* (Josh. 11:21-22). So Goliath is a leftover from a race of men God had promised victory over and Joshua had already

conquered; a big leftover! It only takes one leftover to unglue Saul and his men living their lives at ground level. From ground level, giants fill our screen. The closer we get, the bigger they look. And they don't go away. Like Goliath, they come morning and evening, day after day to intimidate us. I'll bet you have a giant in your valley, a valley you must cross if you're going to go on with God. I know I do.

Giants are those things in our lives we can't handle on our own. Left to ourselves we're helpless to overcome them. Giants oppress us and impede us from moving on and becoming all God wants us to be. What are the giants in your life that intimidate you? It may be a relationship with a parent, child or co-worker that causes you to fall and repeat the same sin over and over again. It might be a circumstance in your life like an illness or a difficult marriage that discourages you and makes you feel useless and defeated. It may be something about your personality, a critical spirit, a hot temper, or low self-esteem. It might be an addiction that causes you to live in an endless cycle of guilt and shame. It might be the giant of worry and anxiety that eats away at your heart day after day.

What will we do about our giants? Maybe the first thing we have to do is face them. Goliath is down there day after day but Israel doesn't want to face him. Isn't that strange? Israel keeps doing the same thing, expecting a different result. They prepare to fight a conventional war but scatter when Goliath shows up. They never deal with the real problem of confronting the giant. I can see Israel's officers gathering in Saul's tent each night around the planning table with a big map spread out before them. They probably even pray about it. “God, please get rid of that giant! “Amen” is heard around the tent. But the same retreat shuffle happens every day. It's amazing how we can deal with every problem but the real one, the one which takes God to resolve. Looking at life from the ground level causes us to ignore the giants God has equipped us to defeat by depending on him. You see, without God, it's impossible to face our giants because we're no match for them. This is where faith in God and his promises comes in. God promised Israel that every inch of ground they stepped on in the land would be theirs. No one could stand against them, not even the sons of Anak!

It seems David is the only one who gets that. He stands there alone as everyone runs for cover. When he asks, someone tells him the king has offered an incentive plan to the man who kills the giant. He'll make him rich and he'll never pay taxes again; he'll even be given the king's daughter in marriage, which wasn't a huge deal because she wasn't much of a catch. David isn't above wanting what Saul had to offer. What's he ever gotten at home? But the real fire that ignites his fuse is how anyone dare talk this way about the God of Israel. He says,

**“Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (17:26b).**

David has a different way of looking at things than everyone else. Israel and Saul are ground level lookers, but David is looking at life from God's level. His mental screen is filled with the God of Israel, who'd promised victory over these giants. He is the living God! The prophet Isaiah wrote of Him, *"He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff"* (Is. 40:21-24). What would it take for this God to destroy Goliath? When God fills your mental screen every challenge is like that. Goliath is blocking the plan and path of God for his people. David thinks, "You're going to let him get away with that? What's the big deal?" Someone said, "We're all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible problems." What was an impossible problem for Saul was a great opportunity for David.

You can count on the fact that whenever you start to think that way someone will get in your face. Sometimes that person will even come from your own family.

**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 wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle" (17:28).**

I love David's response:

**"Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?" (17:29).**

As a younger brother myself, I know how he feels. But somehow news of David's outrage came to Saul and Saul sent for him. He walks into Saul's tent and declares,

**"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him" (17:32).**

Saul looks at this brash rookie like he's a seventh round draft pick from Sacramento State. He says,

**"You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth" (17:33).**

Saul assesses the situation purely on human terms; God isn't part of the equation. But David's thinking, "Giant? The only giant I see is God! Goliath's a dwarf compared to God!"

David proceeds to tell Saul a bit more about his work experience:

**"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" (17:34-35).**

Sometimes when facing our giants we forget what we ought to remember and remember what we ought to forget. We remember our defeats and forget our victories. But David remembers the precise details of his many victories over the lion and bear. We need to track carefully the ways and means God delivers us so we can enter future battles with confidence and wisdom.

Here's David's conclusion:

**"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 rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine" (17:36-37).**

David believed God delivered him from the lion and bear. He didn't compartmentalize his life between his secular work and his work for God. He's the living God who's with him wherever he goes; in the pasture or on the battlefield. When we're living our lives for God, it doesn't matter what we're doing; we can be selling shoes, studying for an exam, washing dishes or leading a multimillion dollar company. God's with us in our work, and those attacking us are attacking God; blocking his plan. Seeing life from God's level means we see God is with us in all of life and the giants in our valley are in God's right of way.

Well, Saul isn't all that hard to convince. At this point what does he have to lose! So he says to David,

**"Go, and the Lord be with you" (17:37b).**

And then, something almost comical happens. Saul says, "Wait a minute, David. We need to prepare you for battle.

**"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" (17:38-39a).**

We like to think of David as a 36 regular and Saul as a 52 long, but the real issue is David has never worn this stuff before. He's not used to them. It's like putting a helmet and shoulder pads on a soccer player. What works for one person won't necessarily work for someone else. We're always trying make someone else's armor work for us, but that's not the way to do battle.

**"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off" (17:39b).**

David does, however, prepare to fight Goliath in own way. It's not that God can't use our skills. God will often use what we know how to do to destroy the giants we face.

**"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" (17:40).**

The sling in David's hand was a lethal weapon. It was the early version of an automatic weapon with a five-shot clip. It's been estimated a stone flung from a sling could travel 150 miles per hour. David approaches the Philistine giant, whose shield bearer is in front of him. Goliath looks at this shrimp walking towards him, sling in hand, and he snarls,

**"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 and the wild animals!" (17:43-44).**

In that day, a normal part of one-on-one combat was to hurl insults at each other, but David's response was a bit out of the ordinary,

**"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 deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, 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" (17:45-47).**

David sees life from God's level. He's not intimidated. His eyes aren't on the giant, they're fixed on *"the Lord almighty, the God of the armies of Israel."* His motivation is to protect God's name and reputation *"that all the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel"* and that *"all those gathered here may know it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's."* The secret of seeing life from God's level is to know the battle is the Lord's.

**"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" (17:48-49).**

David runs like Russell Wilson on a roll out. He darts to one side and in a blur the stone zips through the air, thumps Goliath in the head, and drops him like a sack of bricks.

**"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" (17:50).**

The next thing you know, David is standing over Goliath and the Philistines are running for their life. Meanwhile, David sits exhilarated and exhausted by it all. What a difference a day makes. He started as a nameless errand boy, delivering take-out food. Now as the sun sets, he's the champion of Israel and the king-elect. It happens with people who see life from God's level rather than ground level.

When I see David standing over Goliath, I can't help but think of Jesus. Both were born in Bethlehem. Both David and Jesus brought salvation to God's people. Both were anointed as Israel's King. Both were unlikely choices for the job. David killed the Philistine giant, but the greatest giant killer to ever live was Jesus. And we need him because we're the Israelites running away, unwilling and unable to defeat the giant on our own. We needed someone greater even than David to stand in our place and to defeat our enemies. That's Jesus. He took on the giants of sin, death and the devil and he conquered them, not through a sling but through a cross. And now he lives within us.

The apostle John wrote, *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"* (1 Jn 4:4). When you believe that you'll see life from God's level and face your giants squarely. God, not giants, will fill your screen. Your faith will be fueled by the promises of God and the ways God delivered you in the past. You'll refuse to be intimidated because you realize the battle is the Lord's and he's bigger than any giant you face.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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