

1 Samuel 17
The Heart of a Giant Slayer
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No other Bedtime Bible story is more requested in my house than the epic account of David and Goliath (in our family he's called *Goliniff*). Apparently at an early age, even Christian can sense the smell of fear and defeat wafting off the pages of Holy Scripture.

Few stories in Scripture are as captivating as the Shepherd Boy, who takes on the giant... and prevails. It is such a consummate tale, that almost every underdog story is described as a David and Goliath story.

But perhaps things weren't what they seemed in this story. Looks can be deceiving. What appear to be mountains in front of us, may just be molehills, if we have the eyes of faith to see things the way they really are.

So I want to invite you take out or turn on your copy of Scripture. Open it up to the book of First Samuel—it's located right before Second Samuel—and turn with me to chapter 17. Lay it open on your laps or turn your attention to the screens because we are going to be referring to it throughout the message.

Before we listen and reflect on this great chapter in Scripture, let's turn to God in prayer. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, how often it is that things are not quite what they seem. What is fearful and treacherous to us is miniscule in your sight; and what is small, overlooked, insignificant in our sight in reality has monumental worth and value to you. Help us, Lord Jesus, to see the difference. Grant us the courage, like David, to charge ahead in faith, knowing that the battle is already won, because you, God, are with us. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer, amen.

Starting at verse 1: **Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.**

Eugene Peterson calls this the greatest children's story ever told. Many of the greatest stories we know began as children's tales.

Within this beloved Bible story lies one of the most valuable lessons we will ever learn—and we learn it from our children. Read it again, dad. Read it again, mom. I want to see the pictures and hear the words again. Again. Again. Again. You see, children are captivated by the world of imagination. Most days, these days my son pretends he is the Millennium Falcon—or the Millellium Vulcun. But as we'll see, this imagination is what won the day in the Valley of Elah.

Standing in front of the Israelites was a formidable opponent. His name was Goliath. Goliath stood between them and their destiny. When David shows up at Ephes-dammim (anyone here from Ephes-dammim?) and joined Saul's Army, Goliath was all they saw. The nine-foot tall warrior, wielding a twenty-five pound spear, held their hearts and their imaginations captive to fear. Verse 25 says: **Have you seen this man who has come up?** Goliath was all they could see, his taunts and jeers were all they could hear.

My first point is this: The moment we allow evil to infiltrate our imaginations and shape the way we think and our responses, we lose the power that God promises through His Spirit.

While his brothers and all the other soldiers, and even Saul himself, were captive to a Goliath-dominated imagination, David strides into the valley with a God-dominated imagination. While Saul and his army cowered in fear for the giant that loomed overhead, David walked in knowing that the God of the universe was with him.

There's a story of farming family who was struggling because of a severe drought. Dad was out working in the fields, while mom raised the kids at home, and one night at suppertime, not knowing what else to do, mom says to her children, we need to pray for God to make it rain, otherwise we won't have any crops this year. And just as she was done praying, her youngest boy got up from the table and walked outside. "What are you doing?" "I'm just bringing my toys in so they won't get wet."

You see, David was used to facing large obstacles. When he was off tending his father's sheep, they were always getting themselves into tough spots. Do you know what the spiritual gift of sheep is? Doing dumb stuff. David was used to saving their wool from lions and bears. In the process, David had developed such an intimate awareness of God's presence and power that instead of a lion's roar, all he heard was the purr of a little kitty cat. Instead of a ferocious bear, all he saw was 'ol Baloo singing the "Bear Necessities."

So when David strode into the Israelite camp, he couldn't believe what he heard. Everyone else around him was incapacitated by the Philistine, but David knew who was going before him, David knew the battle was already won. Out in the fields it was just him and God, and God had prevailed every time.

Now picking up at verse 32: **And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." 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, 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. 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." 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!" Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not**

tested them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.” So David put them off.

The second lesson we learn from this passage is that God has uniquely equipped David for the battle. Imagine David in this moment with all of Saul’s armor; he looks like a kid wearing his dad’s clothes. There is no question that Saul is doing his best to prepare David. But the truth of the matter in this moment is that David can’t be Saul. Saul’s tools are of no use to David, because David comes to this fight with his own set of gifts.

This is a more common experience than you might think. How many times in your life have you looked to “a professional” who’s giving you advice on how to do your job or how to raise your kids? But after a while, all this advice does is just weigh us down, right? As parents, we feel this especially. I’m pretty sure that there is a different parenting philosophy for every single child on earth. Two billion experts telling you how to raise your kid. No wonder we get so testy when people tell us how to raise our kids.

But in this moment, David, who loved, honored, and respected Saul, kindly and politely took off his armor and walked down to the stream and knelt down to select 5 smooth stones. Imagine this picture: David, in plain sight of every soldier and general, even Goliath, walks out and kneels down, making himself completely vulnerable and exposed to the enemy. This would have been the easiest kill ever.

But what David in this moment reveals is the way we approach the giants in our life, by bending the knee in prayer. If David would have walked into battle with Goliath with second hand equipment, it would have been a disaster. But David used the unique gifts God had given him. And here’s where we get a glimpse of the true greatness of David. In humility and in complete trust 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 what happens next is the stuff of legend. Goliath and David approach one another in battle, Goliath with his armor, his size, and his intimidation, and David with his sling, a couple stones, and a faith that could move mountains. And as Goliath approaches, David runs to meet him. David reaches into his pouch, loads up a stone, whips it around, and fires it at the giant’s forehead.

David RAN to meet Goliath. Obviously, David knew something that the others didn’t. David knew that God had gifted him for battle, he believed that the God who helped him defeat lions and bears had already given him the gifts to face this enemy head on. But the other thing he knew, and this is my third point, is that underdogs aren’t always what they seem.

Malcolm Gladwell has written a book about this with the surprising title *David and Goliath*. In it, he examines military strategy from this day. In any army, there would have been three types of soldiers: cavalry (horseback), infantry (hand to hand combat, swords spears armor), and projectile warriors (bow and arrow), and the deadliest projectile warriors were the slingers. And while slingers had a hard time with cavalry warriors because they moved too fast on horseback to take deadly aim, slingers were absolutely lethal to infantry warriors.

Goliath was an infantryman. He was weighed down with heavy armor because he was used to doing battle hand to hand, face to face. In verse 44, Goliath says to David, **“Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.”**

So as David runs to meet Goliath, he puts his hand in the bag and pulls out a stone, loads it up, and then begins to swing it around and around, faster and faster. When it’s released, it heads for the one place in the giant’s armor that was most vulnerable—his exposed forehead.

A ballistics expert in modern day Israel determined that the average stone shot from a sling would travel at a velocity of 34 meters per second, and hit with the impact of bullet from a pistol. And because this all happened so fast, David coming at Goliath like a Spider Monkey, it’s possible that Goliath would not have known what kind of soldier it was that was coming at him until it was too late. Because slingers beat infantrymen every time.

One historian wrote, “Goliath had about as much chance against David as any Bronze Age Soldier with a sword would have against an opponent armed with a 44 magnum.”

What Saul and the other Israelite soldiers saw when they looked across the field was this impressive intimidating giant of a man, but what David saw was that the very thing that made Goliath so feared was also his source of greatest weakness.

Two things: 1. Giants are not always what we think they are. The same qualities that give the giant his apparent strength are also their greatest source of weakness. On the outside, Goliath was an intimidating overwhelming foe, but in reality, his armor made him slow, his helmet restricted his vision, and his sword was too clumsy to match the pinpoint accuracy of David’s sling.

2. Sometimes our apparent source of weakness is actually our greatest source of strength. Everything about David’s life to this point was preparing him for this moment. His weapon, his age, his background, sometimes being an underdog can be our best preparation. While Saul was obsessed with the outward marks of being a leader, David spent his life trusting God and letting God win the battles. While Saul was pondering the trappings of being King, David was looking to God to help him guard his father’s flock. While Saul was musing about his own greatness, David was writing poetry about the greatness of God—we know them as the Psalms.

What gave David his edge in life was a soul that was totally alive for God. **“You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts.”**

During WWII when France fell to Germany in 1940, French Jews were rounded up and sent off to internment camps all over France, except for this one little town of Le Chambon. And in Le Chambon, there was a protestant minister by the name of Andre Trocme, and he preached a sermon one Sunday and said, “Loving, forgiving, and doing good to our enemies is our duty, yet we must do this without being cowardly. We shall resist whenever our adversaries, our giants demand obedience contrary to the gospel. And we shall do so without fear.”

Students and teachers all over were required to salute to Nazi Germany; not in Le Chambon. Then later in the winter of 1940, a Jewish refugee arrived cold and hungry in the church in Le Chambon. She had heard this was a safe place. Pretty soon, more and more arrived, and Pastor Trocme

arranged for all Jews who had escaped from internment camps to come there where they would give them safe harbor.

Later in 1942, a German dignitary was scheduled to come for a visit to Le Chambon. There was a parade and banquet and a celebration scheduled in the stadium. Well, everything didn't go according to plan. During the banquet, soup was "accidentally" spilled on the dignitary. During the parade, the streets were totally empty. And when they arrived at the stadium, no one had showed up; it was really awkward. Then a group of students gave an official letter to the dignitary who read it aloud. "We feel obliged to tell you that among us are a certain number of Jews. If our comrades, whose only fault is to be born of a different religion, come to us, we will try to hide them as best we can." And then it ended with this... "We have Jews. You're not getting them."

Now why didn't the Nazis come into this tiny town and make an example of Le Chambon? They weren't trying to hide the fact that the people of Le Chambon were harboring Jews. Why didn't the Nazis come in and round up all the people and ship them off to Auschwitz? And this is where we see this David and Goliath story once again. Malcolm Gladwell points this out and it's absolutely fascinating. The powerful are never quite as powerful as they appear, nor are the weak as weak.

Turns out, the people of Le Chambon were descendants of the earliest French Protestants, the Huguenots. The Huguenots broke away from the French Catholic Church during the Reformation, and for decades and decades, they were persecuted because of it. There were massacres in which thousands were sent to the gallows, French children were sent to Catholic foster homes to rid them of their Protestant faith. This happened for over 100 years. And because of it, these French Protestants learned how to live underground and build towns in remote mountain areas that were hard to get to. They learned, as Londoners did during the Blitzkrieg of WWII, that they weren't really afraid, they were just afraid of being afraid.

It turns out that they understood persecution better than anyone else, because they had experienced it themselves. So when that first Jewish refugee woman showed up hungry and cold at their door, it never really occurred to them to say no.

A little later, the Germans came and arrested Pastor Trocme and took him to an internment camp. There they said to him, "Listen, we'll let you go, you just have to sign this one little oath of loyalty, then you're free to return home." He didn't do it. The Germans were beside themselves. "Why are you being so stubborn?" And Pastor Trocme said this, "If you let me go, I will just return home and keep hiding Jews, so why would I sign this paper now?"

This tiny little town stood face to face, toe to toe, with the evil empire of Nazi Germany and did move an inch.

I want to close with this quote from Malcom Gladwell: "You see the Giant and the Shepherd in the Valley in Elah and your eye is immediately drawn to his sword and his shiny armor. But so much of what is beautiful and valuable comes from the shepherd, the shepherd who has more strength and more purpose than we could ever imagine."