

David: A Man After God's Own Heart, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: The Battle Is the Lord's: David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17:32–51

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This beloved narrative is far more than a tale of an underdog. Historically, it falls early in David's rise, while Saul still reigns and David is newly anointed but unknown to the nation. The Philistine champion Goliath has paralyzed Israel's army for forty days, and the shepherd boy alone reads the situation rightly. The doctrinal heart of the passage is stated plainly by David himself in verses 46 and 47: the LORD saves, not sword and spear, and the battle belongs to the LORD. The episode teaches the nature of true faith (confidence grounded in God's character and proven faithfulness, not in self), the proper motive of God's servants (the honor of His name), and the means by which God works (not human armor but trust in Him).

The teacher's first task is to rescue the story from the sentimentality that surrounds it. The popular reading, "believe in yourself and face your giants," is nearly the reverse of David's own confession. David explicitly disclaims his own strength and stakes everything on the living God. Make sure the class leaves understanding that the point is not human courage but divine power, and that the appropriate response is faith, not self-confidence. There is also a genuine forward look to Christ here, since David fights as Israel's representative champion and wins a victory his people share; handle this as careful typology, pointing to Christ's decisive triumph over sin and death on our behalf.

Aim at formation as well as doctrine. Everyone in the room has a giant. The lesson invites students to stop measuring their giants against their own resources and to start measuring them against the size and faithfulness of God, to remember His past deliverances, to lay down the human armor they instinctively trust, and to care more for God's honor than their own comfort. Press these home concretely so that students leave not merely admiring David but trusting David's God.

Question 1

Student Question:

As he goes out to fight, David declares, "the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand" (vv. 46–47). What does this declaration teach us about who actually wins God's victories, and about the difference between fighting for God in our own strength and trusting God to fight through us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David's words in verses 46 and 47 are the theological center of the whole account, and the teacher should linger here. He does not say, "I am stronger than I look," or "I have a secret technique." He says the LORD will hand Goliath over, and then states the reason: "the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's." The victory will be God's doing, and the means (a sling, a stone) are almost comically inadequate precisely so that the power will be unmistakably divine.

This is a thread that runs through all of Scripture. God repeatedly reduces the human means so that the glory cannot be claimed by people. Gideon's army is whittled from thirty-two thousand to three hundred. The walls of Jericho fall to trumpets and a shout. The lesson is consistent: God saves in ways that make clear the salvation is His. David has grasped this, and it makes him fearless, because the outcome does not finally depend on him.

The teacher should draw the careful distinction between fighting for God in our own strength and trusting God to fight through us. David is not passive; he runs toward the battle line (v. 48). Faith is not inaction. But his action flows from dependence, not from self-reliance. He acts because he trusts, and he trusts the God whose battle it is. This guards against two errors at once: the passivity that does nothing and waits, and the self-confidence that acts as though everything rests on us.

Bring it home to the ordinary battles of the class. The same God still saves, and He still saves in ways that humble us and exalt Him. The believer's task is not to muster enough strength to win but to entrust the battle to the Lord and to act in faithful dependence on Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The truth that God, not human strength, wins God's victories
- God deliberately using weak means so the glory is unmistakably His
- Faith as active dependence, not passivity or self-reliance
- The living God versus the false confidence of "sword and spear"
- Trusting God to fight through us rather than fighting for Him in our own power

Discussion Prompts

- What is the practical difference between fighting in our own strength and trusting God to fight through us?
- Why does God so often save in ways that make His power, not ours, obvious?
- Where do you most need to entrust a battle to the Lord this week?

Question 2

Student Question:

Every one of us has some giant standing in the valley, a fear, a temptation, a circumstance, or a relationship that feels far bigger than we are. What is yours right now, and in what ways have you been trying to face it in your own strength rather than entrusting the battle to the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks each student to name their giant honestly. The aim is specificity. A vague admission that “we all face challenges” changes nothing; naming the actual fear, temptation, diagnosis, conflict, or stronghold is where faith begins to engage.

Help the class see the instinctive move we all make: we measure the giant against ourselves and conclude we are not enough. That math is correct and beside the point. We are not enough. David’s breakthrough was to change the comparison, measuring the giant against God instead. The teacher can gently expose where students have been running the wrong comparison.

Then turn toward trust. Entrusting the battle to the Lord is not a feeling but a decision, often a daily one. Invite each student to name one giant and one concrete way they will hand it to God this week, whether through prayer, obedience, seeking help, or a specific act of faith, while refusing to face it as though everything depends on them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honestly naming the specific giant we face
- The wrong comparison (giant versus self) and the right one (giant versus God)
- Self-reliance as a subtle form of unbelief
- Entrusting a specific battle to God as a decision, not a feeling
- The difference between God-dependent action and anxious striving

Discussion Prompts

- What giant are you facing right now, and how have you been sizing it up?
- Are you measuring it against your own resources or against God?
- What is one concrete way you will entrust this battle to the Lord this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

David’s confidence was not wishful thinking; it was built on memory. He recalled how “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” (v. 37). What does this teach us about how God uses our past experiences of His faithfulness to prepare us for present and future trials?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 37 reveals the engine of David's courage: memory. Before he ever faced a giant, he had faced a lion and a bear while guarding the sheep, and God had delivered him. So he reasons from the proven past to the threatening present: the God who rescued me then will rescue me now. His confidence is not reckless; it is built on experience of God's faithfulness.

This is a vital pattern for the believer. Scripture constantly calls God's people to remember. Israel was told to recite the exodus, to build memorials, to keep feasts, all so they would not forget what God had done. Forgetfulness is the seedbed of fear and unbelief; remembrance is the soil of faith. David remembered, and the memory made him brave.

The teacher should note that the lion and the bear were not glamorous. They came in the lonely, unwatched work of shepherding. God had been preparing David through trials no one saw, and those hidden deliverances became the foundation for the public victory. Often the very seasons we would skip if we could are the ones God uses to build faith for what is coming.

Apply this directly. Encourage students to keep an actual, specific record of God's faithfulness in their lives, because we forget so quickly. When the next giant appears, that remembered faithfulness becomes the ground of present courage. The God who has been faithful is faithful still.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith built on the memory of God's proven faithfulness
- The biblical command to remember what God has done
- Forgetfulness as the seedbed of fear; remembrance as the soil of faith
- Hidden trials as God's preparation for public tests
- The unchanging faithfulness of God across time

Discussion Prompts

- What specific times can you recall when God carried you through something hard?
- Why are we so prone to forget God's past faithfulness?
- How could remembering God's track record change the way you face your present fear?

Question 4

Student Question:

David faced the giant by remembering specific times God had already come through for him. Can you recall specific occasions when God carried you through something hard? How might deliberately remembering God's past faithfulness strengthen you to face what frightens you now, and why do we so easily forget it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns David's remembering into a personal discipline. Many believers carry real anxiety about the future while sitting on a forgotten history of God's help. The teacher's aim is to help students retrieve that history and let it speak to present fear.

Encourage concreteness. Not "God has always been good," but particular moments: a provision that came just in time, a strength that was not their own, a door that opened or closed, a comfort in grief. The more specific the memory, the more strengthening it is.

Then address the forgetting. We forget because we are busy, because fear is loud, and because the next crisis crowds out the last deliverance. Practical remedies help: writing things down, telling the stories to others, giving thanks specifically. Invite each student to recall one deliverance and to let it speak directly to the giant in front of them now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Remembering God's faithfulness as a spiritual discipline
- The strengthening power of specific, not generic, memory
- Practical means of remembering (recording, retelling, thanksgiving)
- Letting past deliverance speak to present fear
- Gratitude as an antidote to anxiety

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific time God carried you that you tend to forget?
- What practice could help you remember God's faithfulness more consistently?
- How does that memory speak to the fear you are facing now?

Question 5

Student Question:

David is indignant that Goliath has "defied the armies of the living God," and he fights so "that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (vv. 26, 46). What does this reveal about David's deepest motive, and what does it teach us about making God's honor, rather than our own comfort or reputation, the thing we are most concerned to defend?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David's indignation is revealing. What offends him is not merely that Israel is threatened but that Goliath has "defied the armies of the living God" (v. 26). His deepest concern is God's honor. And his stated purpose in fighting is evangelistic in the widest sense: "that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (v. 46). David wants the living God to be known and glorified.

This exposes the motive that should drive God's servants. So much of our courage, or lack of it, is really about us, our safety, our reputation, our comfort. David's zeal is for God's name. The teacher should help the class feel the difference between defending ourselves and being jealous for God's glory, and how that reorientation frees us from a great deal of fear, since a person consumed with God's honor is less captive to their own.

There is also a corrective here against using God for our purposes. David does not enlist God to win David's glory; David enters the battle for God's glory. This is the right order, and reversing it lies at the root of much that goes wrong in religious life. The aim of the believer is that God be known and exalted, not that we be admired for our faith.

Press the application. When we take a hard stand, speak an unpopular truth, or face opposition for righteousness, the question is what we are most concerned to protect. David models a heart so caught up in God's honor that his own safety becomes a secondary matter. That is a heart God can use without limit.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Zeal for God's honor as the servant's deepest motive
- The desire that God be known and glorified ("all the earth may know")
- The difference between self-defense and jealousy for God's name
- The right order: serving God's glory, not using God for ours
- How concern for God's honor frees us from fear for ourselves

Discussion Prompts

- What does David's indignation reveal about what he loved most?
- When you face opposition, are you usually protecting God's honor or your own?
- How might caring more about God's name free you from fear?

Question 6

Student Question:

David's great concern was for the name and honor of God, not for his own glory or safety. When you face conflict, opposition, or a hard stand, what are you usually most concerned about protecting, God's honor or your own comfort, image, and reputation? Where might God be calling you to care more about His name than your own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question follows directly from the doctrinal one. It asks students to examine their motives in conflict and pressure. Most of us discover, on honest reflection, that our instinct is self-protection: defending our image, our comfort, our being right, our being liked.

The teacher should handle this without shaming, because self-concern is deeply ingrained and often unconscious. The goal is awareness and reorientation, not guilt. Where do I get defensive? What am I really protecting? Naming it begins to loosen its grip.

Then point toward David's example as freedom, not burden. A person whose primary concern is God's honor is strangely liberated, no longer enslaved to every slight or threat to self. Invite each student to identify one situation where they could shift their concern from their own reputation to God's name, and to ask how that would change the way they act.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining our true concerns under pressure
- Self-protection (image, comfort, being right) as the default motive
- Reorienting from defending self to honoring God
- The freedom that comes from caring most about God's glory
- Awareness of motive as the beginning of change

Discussion Prompts

- When you face conflict, what are you usually most concerned to protect?
- Where do you tend to get defensive, and what does that reveal?
- What situation could you reframe around God's honor rather than your own?

Question 7

Student Question:

Saul tried to dress David in royal armor, but David could not go in it and took it off, choosing instead a sling and five stones and the name of the LORD (vv. 38–40, 45). What does David's refusal of Saul's armor teach us about the difference between trusting in human means and methods and trusting in God Himself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The detail of Saul's armor (vv. 38–39) is rich with meaning. Saul offers David the best human equipment available, and David tries it, but it does not fit and he cannot move in it. So he takes it off. He will not face this battle on borrowed human terms. Instead he chooses the tools of his own calling, a sling and stones, and above all the name of the LORD (v. 45).

The teacher should draw the contrast carefully. The issue is not that armor or means are evil; David uses a sling, after all. The issue is what we ultimately trust. Saul's armor represents reliance on human resources and methods to win a battle that is finally spiritual. David lays that reliance aside and goes out trusting God Himself.

Notice that David's confession in verse 45 names the contrast explicitly: "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." Goliath trusts his weaponry. David trusts his God. That single difference decides the outcome, and it exposes where our own trust lies when we face a threat.

Apply this to the believer's instinct to armor up. When threatened, we reach for control, competence, money, or human approval, and we can do so while still saying the right religious words. David's refusal of the armor is a call to examine what we are actually leaning on, and to go out, in the end, in the name of the Lord rather than in the strength of our own equipment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trusting God Himself versus trusting human means and methods
- Means are not evil; the question is where ultimate trust rests
- "Sword and spear" (human power) versus "the name of the LORD"
- The subtle danger of right words masking misplaced trust
- Going out in God's name as the mark of true faith

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between using means and trusting in them?
- What does David's confession in verse 45 reveal about where each man's trust lay?
- What human "armor" do you instinctively reach for under threat?

Question 8

Student Question:

We all have our version of Saul's armor, the human resources we instinctively reach for when we feel threatened: money, control, our own competence, the approval of others, careful image management. What "armor" are you most tempted to trust instead of God? What would it look like to set it aside and go out in the name of the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the armor image into self-examination. Each of us has a default human resource we reach for when we feel unsafe. The teacher should help students name theirs specifically: control, money, competence, the approval of others, careful management of how we are perceived.

The insidious thing about our armor is that it often works, at least for a while, which is why we trust it. The lesson is not that these things are worthless but that they make poor saviors. When they become what we ultimately lean on, they crowd out trust in God and leave us anxious whenever they fail.

Invite students to consider laying one piece of armor aside in a specific situation, going out instead in dependence on God. This is not recklessness but a deliberate refusal to let a human resource take the place that belongs to the Lord. Ask each person to name one such step for the week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying the human resources we most rely on
- Why our “armor” is trusted (it often works) yet makes a poor savior
- The difference between using resources and being enslaved to them
- Deliberately depending on God in a specific situation
- Anxiety as a symptom of misplaced trust

Discussion Prompts

- What “armor” are you most tempted to trust instead of God?
- How has that human resource become a substitute for dependence on Him?
- Where could you set it aside and go out in the name of the Lord this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

David went out as Israel’s champion, fighting the battle the people could not fight and winning a victory they then shared in simply because he had won it for them. In what ways does David, the representative champion, point us forward to Jesus Christ, who went out alone against our greatest enemies (sin, death, and the devil) and won the decisive victory on our behalf? How does Christ’s finished work shape the way we face our own battles?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it lifts the story to its highest meaning. David does not fight as a private individual; he fights as Israel’s champion. The whole nation’s fate rests on his single combat, and when he wins, the people share in a victory they did not themselves achieve (vv. 51–52). This representative pattern is a genuine pointer forward to Christ.

The teacher should draw the typology with care and accuracy. As David went out alone to face the enemy no one else could defeat, so Jesus Christ went out alone to face the enemies we could never defeat ourselves: sin, death, and the devil. Hebrews 2:14–15 says He shared our flesh and blood so that through death He might destroy the one who holds the power of death and free those held in lifelong slavery to the fear of it. Christ is the true and greater champion, and His victory becomes ours, not because we fought, but because He did.

Be precise about the connection so it strengthens rather than distorts. The point is not that every detail of the Goliath story secretly encodes the gospel, but that the representative

structure (one fighting on behalf of the many, and the many sharing the spoils of his victory) is fulfilled in Christ. This is how the New Testament itself reasons about Jesus as our representative and substitute.

Then bring it back to the believer's battles. Because Christ has already won the decisive victory, we do not fight for victory but from it. The great enemy is already defeated. Our daily battles are real, but they are mopping-up operations conducted in the strength of a triumph already secured. This is profoundly steadying: we face our giants as people on the winning side, united to the Champion who has already overcome.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David as Israel's representative champion, winning a victory the people share
- The representative and substitutionary pattern fulfilled in Christ
- Christ alone defeating sin, death, and the devil on our behalf (Hebrews 2:14–15)
- Careful typology: the structure points to Christ, not every detail allegorized
- Fighting from Christ's victory, not for an uncertain one
- Christ as the true and greater Son of David and Champion

Discussion Prompts

- In what ways does David, the lone champion, point us to Christ?
- What does it mean that Christ's victory becomes ours though we did not fight for it?
- How does facing our battles from Christ's finished victory change our courage?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage, from the giant's defiance to the stone that brought him down. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through David's stand in the valley. What is the single truth about whose battle it really is that you most need to carry into the giant you are facing this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the lesson and turns it toward response. The class has watched a paralyzed army, a defiant giant, a boy who measured the giant against God, a refused suit of armor, and a stone that brought the mountain down. Now the aim is a specific, personal step of faith.

Encourage students to name one concrete thing rather than a general resolve to be braver. One person may need to entrust a specific giant to God; another to remember a past deliverance; another to lay down a piece of human armor; another to take a stand for God's honor. Specificity is what turns a lesson into formation.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ, the true Champion who has already won. We do not face our valleys alone or undefended. The God of David is our God, and the victory of the greater David is already ours. Send the class out not merely inspired by a boy with a sling, but trusting the Lord whose battle it always was.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from admiration to a specific step of faith
- Naming one concrete way to trust God with a present battle
- Facing our valleys in union with the victorious Christ
- Letting one truth from the passage take hold this week
- Christ as the one forming courage in the believer

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this lesson is God pressing on you most directly?
- What is one specific way you will trust God with your giant this week?
- How does Christ's finished victory steady you as you face it?