

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

Lesson 2: The Battle Is the Lord's: David and Goliath -- 1 Samuel 17:32–51

For forty days the two armies had faced each other across the Valley of Elah, and for forty days nothing had happened. Every morning a mountain of a man came down from the Philistine line and bellowed his challenge across the valley, and every morning the soldiers of Israel found something urgent to do at the back of the camp. Goliath was over nine feet of armored contempt, his spear like a weaver's beam, his voice rolling over the hills like thunder. Send me a man, he roared, and let us settle this. And the men of Israel, including their head-and-shoulders-above-everyone king, looked at the ground and said nothing. Fear has a way of making an entire army very quiet.

Into this stalemate walks a teenager with a sack lunch. David has been sent by his father to check on his brothers and bring back word, and he arrives just in time to hear the giant's morning taunt. What strikes David is not the size of Goliath but the nerve of him. Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? Everyone else has been doing the math, comparing the giant to themselves and coming up terrified. David is doing different math. He is comparing the giant to God, and the giant is shrinking by the second.

They bring the boy to Saul, who tries to talk sense into him and then, failing that, tries to dress him for the part. Saul's own armor goes on, bronze helmet and coat of mail, and David clanks around in it for a moment and takes it off. He cannot fight in another man's armor, and he will not try. Instead he goes down to the brook and picks up five smooth stones, the most ordinary weapons imaginable, and walks out to meet the giant with a sling and the name of the LORD. Goliath looks at the boy and is insulted. David looks at Goliath and announces the outcome before the fight begins: this day the LORD will hand you over, so that all the earth may know there is a God in Israel.

We love this story, and we should, but we have a habit of shrinking it down to a motivational poster. Face your giants. Believe in yourself. The little guy can win. That is almost the opposite of what is happening in the valley. David does not believe in himself; he believes in God. He does not tell Goliath that he is stronger than he looks. He tells Goliath that the battle is not even really between the two of them. The battle belongs to the LORD, and David has simply shown up to watch God win. That is the truth this lesson presses on us. We all have our valley and our giant, the thing too big for us that has us frozen and quiet at the back of the camp. The question is not whether we are big enough. The question is whose battle it really is.

Group Discussion: Most of us have heard the David and Goliath story turned into a lesson about believing in yourself and facing your fears with confidence. After reading the passage, how is what David actually says and does different from that popular version? What difference does it

make whether we tell this story as “the little guy can win if he believes in himself” or as “the battle belongs to the LORD”?

Personal Reflection: Think about the “giant” currently standing in your own valley, the situation, fear, or person that feels far too big for you and has you stuck. When you look at it, are you mostly measuring it against your own resources, or against the size and faithfulness of God? Be honest about which comparison your mind runs to first.

Read 1 Samuel 17:32–51

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 20:7, “some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God”; 2 Chronicles 20:15, 17, Jehoshaphat told “the battle is not yours but God’s” and to stand firm and see the LORD’s deliverance; Ephesians 6:10–13, being strong in the Lord and standing in the armor of God against spiritual foes; Hebrews 2:14–15, Jesus sharing our flesh so that through death He might destroy the one who had the power of death; 1 Samuel 17:1–31, the full setting of Goliath’s defiance and Israel’s fear