

Some Faith Strategies for Slaying Giants

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St. Luke's United Church of Christ, Lititz, Pennsylvania
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1 Samuel 17:32-49

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!" Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them.

Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine. The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said 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." But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very 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 Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there

is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.

David is rightly celebrated as a man of great faith—the kind of faith which could slay giants! David was a man of exclusive devotion to God, in an era when idols were everywhere to be found. Israel had promised to be loyal to God alone, but the majority of them also worshipped many and various idols—with David being a very bold exception. Having delighted in David's faith, we often feel a frustration for our own lives. David had great faith in God and was able to crush giants. We too have faith and we do not worship other Gods, yet the giants which torment our lives are not so easily defeated. Why not?

The joy of studying David is not only observing his great faith, but also studying the *strategies* and wisdom which helped him harness and direct that faith. Are you turned off by that word *strategy*? The word may bring to mind some charismatic preacher who has built a great church and leads seminars on "Strategies for Better Living," which may sound impressive, but do not actually impart any helpful knowledge to make our lives better. Or one may think of a businessman who is always telling of their great strategies to make huge sums of money. But David's life presents us with simple strategies which we truly can apply to our own lives. We all believe in prayer, faith, and hard work, and this is a great start. David shows us how to direct those energies in ways which will make a difference. There are many lessons to be drawn from David's life, but time is short so we will be looking at just three.

As the Bible passage begins the armies of Israel, led by Saul, and the armies of the Philistines, are lined up against each other. For many days Goliath, the great giant warrior of the Philistines, stepped toward the armies of Israel and cursed them. He boasted, and cursed Israel's God, and then challenged them to send a man forward to engage him in combat. It was not uncommon in those days for a battle of champions

to begin a great battle. The Philistines had put forth their champion, but who would fight for Israel? All were afraid, and day after day they were humiliated by the curses and insults of Goliath. But one day there came a young man to the army of Israel bearing food and supplies. David had come to bring food to his older brothers who were in Saul's army. Upon entering their camp and hearing the curses of the giant he was horrified. How could anyone allow the God of Israel to be so insulted? David wasted little time in declaring his willingness to fight the Philistine and was soon after brought to King Saul. Along with being humiliated by this terrible situation, Saul was embarrassed that this young man was offering to fight while no one else, himself included, would step forward. Here is where our passage, and the lessons, begin.

The first lesson young David teaches us is that we must **Build Upon Previous Victories**. David did not become a giant slayer overnight. He was already a giant slayer in the making. When brought to King Saul young David confidently explained that he would fight the giant, and the king responded with a strong warning. *Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth."* David was a young man, full of energy and faith. Most would have said that he was naïve and overcome by the emotion of hearing God so terribly insulted. Indeed, David was young and full of emotion, but he had also thought through the matter before him. How could he face such an experienced warrior? He thought of the training which he had already received as a shepherd. *But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God."* David said, *"The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine."* So Saul said to David, *"Go, and may the Lord be with you!"* David had a history of victories, first over the lion and then over the bear. These were formidable foes and his triumph over them taught him a lesson he carried with him: God will defend him as he faced ferocious enemies, and God will continue to do so.

What lions and bears have you slain over your lifetime? In our day when we speak of training for life's great challenges, we are quick to point to our colleges and institutions of higher learning. We are quick to put our faith in one who has engaged in great study and formal training, and while these things may be of value, they are greatly overrated. We are trained to face life's great battles and challenges by the lesser battles which we have first had to fight. What battles have you had to fight, and what lessons have you learned by your involvement in such things as athletics, the military, home life, raising children, working, problem solving, Sunday school, or by the hardships and tragedies you have faced? In these and many other ways we have learned to fight life's battles. Think of our *Lunch with Luke* program. From the start

we could have said, “We don’t know how to feed 120 people a week,” and this would have been true. We could have walked away from the challenge, convinced that we were not properly trained for that battle. Instead, some of you wisely said, “Hey, I know how to feed a family. I know how to entertain guests. We know how to get such a ministry started, and as it grows, we will simply figure out each new challenge and problem as it appears!” And so you did! Although you may not have realized it at the time, God had long been preparing you for such service to our community.

What battle has God prepared you for? Consider your victories. We are often unaware of the many battles we have won and the skills which we have attained. There are many small victories we have attained in life, and there are also the great battles in our lives which we have won at great cost. We may boast of such achievements and take pride in those accomplishments, but let us not see these victories as mere trophies to be safely shut away in a trophy case. Look for the next and greater challenge. We are presently gathering a team to put on our Vacation Bible School. Do we have an able team? How many of us have ever dealt with children? Have any of us ever read stories to little ones or helped them with a craft? Are any of us able to direct and encourage young people, or is this an endeavor which is strange and foreign to us all? Or course we know how to do such things! We have all had the experiences of engaging the little ones. We may plead inexperience, but the only real question is whether we will step up and use the skills we have learned. And trust me—some of these kids can be a challenge, but they are not quite so ferocious as the lion or the bear. What victories has God given you, and what is the next battle you need to be engaging?

Seeing how God had trained and prepared him for that moment, David courageously stepped forward. The next lesson in faith which the young warrior teaches us has to do with our weaponry. **Stick with the Right Weapons.** David came to the battle strangely armed. He brought a sling. This was weaponry for the sheep pasture, but not for the battlefield. Recognizing this deficiency Saul insisting on loaning him his armor. *Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail.* It seemed very logical that David go to war in a warrior’s armor, but God had a different plan. *David strapped Saul’s sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.” So David removed them.* David was not accustomed to such armor, so wisely, he took it off. He was about to step into combat with weaponry which would cause his opponent to laugh. David gathered five smooth stones for his sling which he tucked into his leather pouch.

But this was not the only weaponry which he brought. He carried his faith with him and proclaimed it loudly. To the cursing giant, David had a bold answer. *But David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have*

defied. This very 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 Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand." Talk about a shield of faith! David also fought with great zeal as he charged toward the battle line.

David fought as the soldier that God had made him to be. He fought with the weapons with which he had been entrusted, and this is a lesson to us all. Jesus has appointed us to be the Church and to advance the Kingdom by teaching the Good News, praying for others, loving at all times, and doing acts of mercy. With this weaponry, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are to conquer the world. The world, like Goliath, laughs at such a strategy, but look at how the Gospel has spread over the last two millennia! Sadly, we too can begin to look with scorn upon the weaponry God has given us. We look to the world and study their methods of advancing an ideology through media campaigns, political influence, through lawyers and legal maneuverings, and we want to be like them. The Church has often tried to use the weapons of the world, and it does not end well, for we become like the world and lose our real power. Let us be cautious of the world's weapons, and may we never despise the mighty shield of faith and sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word!

The final lesson which I lift up from our scripture is not so much a strategy as it is an observation of the dynamics of faith. **Let us Remember that Faith is Contagious.** More than a giant was slain on that amazing day. With one smooth stone a battle was won, and a war turned in a new direction as the power and influence of the once dominant Philistines was about to fade. *When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.* The spirit of the Philistines was broken on that day, and after years of cowering in fear the Israelites knew the thrill of victory.

Faith is terribly contagious, and David's bold loyalty to God immediately infected the whole army! Let us remember this each day as we walk with Jesus. It is so easy for us to let our spirits grow lax and our faith to become weak, and we do so, acting as if this is a personal matter which effects nobody else. How wrong we are! When our faith and joy is strong, those around us feel it, and when it is weak, we fail to support those around us, or we may even drag them down. Today is Father's Day, and the poem on the back of our bulletins presents an important truth to fathers. The little ones are watching and learning from us. Every one of our moves and actions is carefully observed and imitated. If we are walking with Christ, then our influence is glorious, but if our faith is not practiced, we have just taught those around us to do likewise!

My only argument with the poem is that it may lead us to believe that this only applies to fathers. All of us are a witness and influence upon those around us. Faith is contagious. Let us be careful that we are spreading the right germs. In Psalm 73 we find the psalmist doubting God and nearing the point of denying his faith, but then he comes to his first realization. If he would dare to deny his faith he would harm his children, and so he remained quiet, and soon after came an answer from God which joyously restored his faith!

For the past year and a half, we have been taking great care not to infect one another. Now it is time to start thinking in the other direction. Let us be contagious Christians. There is no shortage of giants out there. Our world worships many false gods of technology, medicine, and wealth. Discouragement and despair are plentiful. Political opinions divide many. The good news is that we have plenty of trained warriors, armed with very effective weaponry. Let's go slay some giants.