

OVERCOMING THE GIANTS IN YOUR LIFE

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We all face giants in our lives!

They seem most often to hang out right around the edge of our destiny!

When the Hebrew people ventured from Egypt to the Land that God had promised to give them, Moses, their leader, sent twelve men to spy out the Land. Upon their return, *“this was their report to Moses: “We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak! We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are! All the people we saw were huge. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!”* (Numbers 13:27-28, 31-33).

They’re bigger than life. They’re über scary. We feel altogether unprepared to meet them.

Maybe your giant was a loss—your job, your friend, your marriage, your health.

Maybe it was your competition—at school, at work, at the gym, in your career.

Maybe it was an enemy—who doubted your integrity, who opposed you, who maligned you, who slandered you, who soiled your reputation, who tried to harm you.

Maybe it’s you yourself—a distraction, a habit, an addiction, a besetting sin, a negative mindset.

In any case, this is war! Defeat your (aggressive) enemies or be defeated by them.

Three Tips To Win

First thing to remember: *We all face them!*

No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he’ll never let you be pushed past your limit; he’ll always be there to help you come through it. (1 Corinthians 10:13; MSG)

Second thing to remember: *We never face them alone; God is always with us!*

Third thing to remember: *If you trust and obey, you will ALWAYS come out on the other side.*

How It's Done

Let's follow the story of 1 Samuel 17. In the Valley of Elah (valley of the oak), a battle was pitched. The Philistine army assembled along the hills on one side, and the Israelite army of Saul gathered on the opposite hills. But it seemed that no one could pull the trigger to begin the battle.

It reminds me of the only fight I've ever been in. I was twelve and there was an older, taller, but skinnier boy who said something unkind to me. Instead of shrinking back, I drew myself to my full height of 5'4" and pushed back. Literally, I shoved him. He shoved me, and I shoved him again, all of this salted with threatening words. I think he was a little surprised by my aggression, so we continued like this for several exchanges, as a crowd of bloodthirsty children gathered around us in the schoolyard. Finally, as he raised his hands to defend himself from my final shove, I accidentally scratched his wrist with the metal band of my watch. Seeing blood on his flesh, I declared myself the winner and strutted away, my young heart racing with pride (and adrenaline), amid the acclaim of my newfound fans.

Of course, the bluster in Elah that day was considerably more menacing. Here's the text, according to The Message (1 Samuel 17:4-11, 16):

A giant nearly ten feet tall stepped out from the Philistine line into the open, Goliath from Gath. He had a bronze helmet on his head and was dressed in armor—126 pounds of it! He wore bronze shin guards and carried a bronze sword. His spear was like a fence rail—the spear tip alone weighed over fifteen pounds. His shield bearer walked ahead of him.

Goliath stood there and called out to the Israelite troops, "Why bother using your whole army? Am I not Philistine enough for you? And you're all committed to Saul, aren't you? So pick your best fighter and pit him against me. If he gets the upper hand and kills me, the Philistines will all become your slaves. But if I get the upper hand and kill him, you'll all become our slaves and serve us. I challenge the troops of Israel this day. Give me a man. Let us fight it out together!"

When Saul and his troops heard the Philistine's challenge, they were terrified and lost all hope.

Each morning and evening for forty days, Goliath took his stand and made his speech.

That was a long month of war!

Here enters David, the youngest of Jesse's eight sons. In the previous chapter, Samuel anointed David to be the next king of Israel, after Saul; and David had joined the royal staff as King Saul's favored musician. Whenever, Saul felt depressed, David would play his harp and lift the king's mood.

David's three oldest brothers were among Saul's soldiers during those days in the Valley of Elah. During that long and disturbing month of Philistine taunting, Saul's depression swings repeatedly brought David from tending his father's flock of sheep to the battlefield to bring the king relief.

On one such visit, David heard Goliath's challenge. He was offended for the honor of the Lord, whom Goliath despised, but the Israelite army fell back again to their camp.

Eliab, his older brother, heard David fraternizing with the men and lost his temper: "What are you doing here! Why aren't you minding your own business, tending that scrawny flock of sheep? I know what you're up to. You've come down here to see the sights, hoping for a ringside seat at a bloody battle!" (1 Samuel 17:28).

David is our example for beating the giants in our lives. Yet, consider his background and the circumstances he had to overcome just to reach that day, that golden opportunity.

He was chosen by God and destined to be the king of God's people (but it was for "later," not yet, and it was not yet apparent to others; there was a long and difficult delay for David).

He was smaller than his brothers (the language suggests he was the "runt" of the family).

He was but a teenager (young and inexperienced).

He was a simple shepherd (untrained and unarmed, unlike his older brothers).

He was the youngest of eight brothers (inevitably overlooked, often belittled).

Yet, he was a brave young man (bold and persevering).

And he was an avid worshiper of God (faithful, resourceful, and courageous).

When David returned to Saul, they had this conversation: *"Master," said David, "don't give up hope. I'm ready to go and fight this Philistine."*

Saul answered David, “You can’t go and fight this Philistine. You’re too young and inexperienced—and he’s been at this fighting business since before you were born” (1 Samuel 17:32-33).

Not the Usual Suspect

David was not the likely winner of this death match. All of the office pools favored the gargantuan Philistine.

By human standards, David was unprepared for the challenge.

However, as to character and skills, David had been providentially prepared for the challenge.

More than any others, David had been uniquely prepared by God. That unique preparation is what qualified him for this battle.

David said (to Saul), “I’ve been a shepherd, tending sheep for my father. Whenever a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I’d go after it, knock it down, and rescue the lamb. If it turned on me, I’d grab it by the throat, wring its neck, and kill it. Lion or bear, it made no difference—I killed it. And I’ll do the same to this Philistine pig who is taunting the troops of God-Alive. God, who delivered me from the teeth of the lion and the claws of the bear, will deliver me from this Philistine.”

Saul said, “Go. And God help you!” (1 Samuel 17:34-37).

Every divine appointment is preceded by a season of preparation. Mark Batterson wrote (Soul Print): “In God’s grand scheme, it’s never about orchestrating the right circumstances. It’s always about becoming the right person.”

We usually want to create the right circumstances (“Where can I meet available Christian men?” “I want to have a corner office with a view.”), before discovering that we need instead to become the right kind of person to attract the right man or gain the promotion. If you find that you always attract the wrong kind of men, or someone else always gets promoted, it’s not because “they’re all idiots.” It’s because you’re trying to skirt the preparation phase and leapfrog to the celebration phase.

Then Saul outfitted David as a soldier in armor. He put his bronze helmet on his head and belted his sword on him over the armor. David tried to walk but he could hardly budge.

David told Saul, “I can’t even move with all this stuff on me. I’m not used to this.” And he took it all off.

Then David took his shepherd's staff, selected five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the pocket of his shepherd's pack, and with his sling in his hand approached Goliath (1 Samuel 17:38-40).

Becoming the Right Person

Let's review the life of preparation that made David "the right person"...

David was used to waiting his turn (he was the last of eight brothers).

David was used to mistreatment (he was the last of eight brothers).

David had been sidelined by his seven older brothers. Can you imagine the testosterone-fueled competition in that household?

Out of frustration, sometimes, David may have thought his was a "wasted life," tending sheep while his brothers defended the nation. But God redeems the years, the experiences, even the mistakes. He makes all things "*work together for good*" (Romans 8:29).

David's advance in privilege had been delayed; he was not only last, but least (the runt of the family).

However, David's perceived disadvantages were, in reality, his disguised advantages.

As a direct result of those pressures and hindrances, David developed certain compensatory skills. Mark Batterson said, "Your destiny is hidden in your history" (often where you would least expect to find it). It is revealed in the compensatory skills you had to develop because of the difficulties you have endured.

Couldn't that also be said of you? In order to survive the pressures and difficult circumstances of your unique life, you have had to develop certain compensatory (survival) character skills, like self-defense, negotiation, prayer, self-encouragement, initiative, resilience, persistence.

It's generally true that we are largely shaped by a small handful of meaningful experiences, whether they were trying or encouraging, or both. Every past experience is preparation for some future opportunity. That is how God "*works all things together for good.*"

God used a seemingly random skill with a slingshot to strategically position David. No armed soldier could compete successfully with Goliath. It required an approach that was entirely out of the box.

You cannot fight a giant on the giant's terms. You have to change the rules of engagement.

The resolution of difficult circumstances is never God's first aim (It often is ours, as evidenced by the way we pray about them), but the evolution of your character is. (And that's usually the opposite of the way we think of it.) God is more interested in your holiness than your happiness. Holiness is eternal; happiness is fleeting.

David's challenge was a giant from Gath (one of five royal cities of the Philistines, meaning *wine-press*). Remember, when the Hebrew spies first saw the men of Gath, they said. "*We were as grasshoppers in their sight (and in our own eyes, too).*"

Goliath stood about 9'9" tall. His bronze armor, altogether, weighed over 150 pounds. (Bronze is typically 88% copper and 12% tin, harder than iron, and 10% heavier than steel. It only oxidizes superficially, which then preserves the metal from further corrosion, making it particularly durable for outdoor use.)

We have already heard of Goliath's manner and contempt. But at the sight of a short, young, unarmed challenger, he was insulted and became incensed.

As the Philistine paced back and forth, his shield bearer in front of him, he noticed David. He took one look down on him and sneered—a mere youngster, apple-cheeked and peach-fuzzed.

The Philistine ridiculed David. "Am I a dog that you come after me with a stick?" And he cursed him by his gods.

"Come on," said the Philistine. "I'll make roadkill of you for the buzzards. I'll turn you into a tasty morsel for the field mice" (1 Samuel 17:41-44).

There is a certain sneering, contemptuous, demeaning tone that is common to the enemies of God and His people (the serpent in Eden, Sanballat with Nehemiah, Goliath, even David's brother). Hear it, feel it, recognize it, so you can identify its real source when it's aimed at you.

We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

People may oppose you, but they are not your real enemies. If you respond in kind (sword for sword) you will be defeated, even if you win. You need out-of-the-box spiritual weapons, like prayer and fasting and worship, to overcome the devil's strategies.

Having an Upward Gaze

David's resulting outlook was different from his brothers'.

David saw his past as the handiwork of God, preparing him for this moment. I cannot say that he always saw it this way, but in one blinding flash he did.

Because of his unrelenting devotion, David saw His God as infinitely bigger than the human giant that stood before him.

Most of our emotional problems are symptoms of one single, deep-rooted spiritual problem: lack of trust in the sovereignty of God. Lack of trust is more than refusing God's help. It's a prideful attempt to help God by *doing His job for Him*.

Batterson said, "Holy confidence isn't circumstantial. It's providential. Too often we allow our circumstances to get between God and us. Holy confidence puts God between us and our circumstances. And when we do that, the Almighty One dwarfs the giants in our lives."

Our control issues are really trust issues. The less we trust God, the more we have to try to control our surroundings.

Acting in Faith

David's subsequent actions were also unlike his brothers'.

David declared his faith and demonstrated his worship. And David identified with his people.

David answered, "You come at me with sword and spear and battle-ax. I come at you in the name of God-of-the-Angel-Armies, the God of Israel's troops, whom you curse and mock. This very day God is handing you over to me. I'm about to kill you, cut off your head, and serve up your body and the bodies of your Philistine buddies to the crows and coyotes. The whole earth will know that there's an extraordinary God in Israel. And everyone gathered here will learn that God doesn't save by means of sword or spear. The battle belongs to God—he's handing you to us on a platter!" (1 Samuel 17:45-47).

Trusting the One who is always in control, David acted according to his faith and his skill.

David took off from the front line, running toward the Philistine. David reached into his pocket for a stone, slung it, and hit the Philistine hard in the forehead, embedding the stone deeply. The Philistine crashed, facedown in the dirt.

That's how David beat the Philistine—with a sling and a stone. He hit him and killed him. No sword for David!

Then David ran up to the Philistine and stood over him, pulled the giant's sword from its sheath, and finished the job by cutting off his head. When the Philistines saw that their great champion was dead, they scattered, running for their lives (1 Samuel 17:48-51).

Conquering Your Giants

Remember, friends, these three tips: everyone faces giants in their lives. And you're never alone on the battle field; God will be with you. And He will see you through it, however long it takes.

Do not make light of small beginnings (Zechariah 4:10). Your preparation always starts with comparatively small wins (a lion, a bear). And it always takes time (like a remodel, usually more than you expected).

Out of the strength of your brokenness, God has forged the armor and weapons that are uniquely suited to you. Don't compare yourself with others, or try to be like someone else. Just do the thing that God has prepared *you* to do.

Don't give up during the preparation or the battle! In difficult and unyielding circumstances, God is building your emotional endurance. And, as Batterson notes, "the key to emotional endurance is experiencing high levels of disappointment that break us down so God can build us back up with a holy confidence (in Him)."

Therefore, Peter's counsel: *"Don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you"* (1 Peter 4:12).

God is able to redeem our disappointments. (Somebody say, "Hallelujah!") Disappointments are only divine appointments in disguise.

Bring on the giants! For you are *"more than conquerors through Him who loved us"* (Romans 8:37).