



Theme: Many Faces of David
“Facing Life’s Challenges”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, August 27-28, 2022, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

⁴⁰ [David] picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them into his shepherd’s bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd’s staff and sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine. –1 Samuel 17:40

VIDEO Sermon Starter

40 years ago, this month, I was a freshman at the University of Colorado in Boulder. It was an exciting time but also felt overwhelming and huge to be at this large university and wondering if I could do the coursework that was way more than what I had experienced in high school. I remember those first set of mid-term exams that came a couple months later. The first one loomed large, and then I got done with that, and there were several more days of exams. We finally get through that stretch and then you have finals on the horizon. I got myself psyched up and stayed up late cramming before that first final and then I woke up at 9 a.m. for the 7:30 a.m. final! I raced panicking to

that first final and made up a story about sick grandparents (yes, your pastor lied that day!) The professor just looked at me and said I had three choices: take an F; take an Incomplete and then come back next semester and take the course again; or sit down and take a 3-hour exam in the 1 hour I had left. I'll let you know at the end of the message today what I decided!

Have you ever had something in your life that's felt like a giant in your path like that? Has there ever been something that has seemed overwhelming, and you wonder how you are going to make it? Sometimes it's a final exam; sometimes it's an issue at work; sometimes it's a relationship with a spouse or child that is struggling; sometimes it's a health issue. This is part of our human experience, and today we are going to look at a story that every one of us has heard of, even if we are not a follower of Judaism or Jesus. It's a story from 3000 years ago that most of us feel like we understand well but has some layers to it that maybe we haven't thought of before.

The Kingdom of Israel is relatively young and being led by its first king, Saul. There are constant enemies attacking this region because it is a critical trade route connecting the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The strategic way to attack this region is to come up from off of the Mediterranean Sea and the coastal plains and enter one of the valleys up into the hills to cut the country in two and keep the north and the South from being connected. This is exactly what the Philistines do as they are the biggest enemies of Israel during this period of time. The Philistines have come from the island of Crete and now occupy the coastal plains and control one of the major trade routes along the sea. They ascend the Valley of Elah where they are met by king Saul and the armies of Israel.

GRAPHIC **Valley of Elah Map**

GRAPHIC **Battle in the Valley of Elah**

Saul's camp was above the valley and the philistines were below

as you can see in this photo. The two armies sit there for weeks staring at each other because they are deadlocked. Neither can attack the other because in order to do so you would put yourself out in the open of the valley and would risk certain defeat. To break the deadlock, the philistines send their mightiest warrior out on the battlefield and demand the Israelites send their mightiest warrior and the two of them will settle the dispute by fighting one another. This tradition of single combat was common in ancient warfare. You could settle a dispute without having major bloodshed in a battle that was large scale.

The philistine is a giant who is 6 feet 9 inches tall and outfitted from head to foot in a glittering bronze armor. He has a sword, a javelin, and a spear, along with a helmet and a bad attitude that makes him terrifying to the Israelite army. None of the Israelites want to fight him because it seems to be a death wish. Finally, a young shepherd boy who arrives to bring supplies to his brothers in the Israelite army shows up and tells Saul that he will fight this giant. Saul at first thinks this is ridiculous, especially since this young shepherd boy will be fighting on behalf of Israel. He is small and insignificant and not prepared to fight a mighty warrior on the battlefield. The shepherd boy is insistent because he has been defending his flock against wild animals since he was a child.

No one else comes forward so Saul relents but insists that the young boy wear his armor. The shepherd boy refuses the armor because he has never worn such heavy metal and instead reaches down to the ground and grabs 5 smooth stones from along the riverbed. He puts the stones in his shepherd's bag and begins to head down the hillside with his shepherd staff towards the battlefield to face the giant. The giant sees him coming and shouts out, "Come to me so I can feed your flesh to the birds in the heavens and the beasts in the field."

The shepherd boy comes closer with just his shepherd bag and a staff and the giant is insulted, saying, "Am I a dog that you would come

to me with sticks!”

The shepherd boy takes one of the stones out of his pocket and puts it in his sling. He rotates the rock in the sling a few times and then let's it fly, hitting the giant directly on the forehead and knocking him to the ground either unconscious or killing him. The shepherd boy runs up and takes the giant's sword and cuts off his head. The Philistines see the result of this battle and they turn and run back towards the coastal area, down the valley. Of course, we all know this as the story of David and Goliath.

GRAPHIC David vs Goliath – The Valley of Elah

You can tell from this photo that it's a beautiful valley, and this is a story which has captured our imagination for generations because we love this idea of the small and insignificant shepherd boy defeating the large and terrifying giant. there is something about this story that brings us comfort, to know that with the power of our God we can defeat any giant that stands in our way. Remember that, in the middle of this battle, David says these words and 1 Samuel 17 where we find this story.

BIBLE

“You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies...”

Those words are meant to inspire us and encourage us and hold us up in the face of giants in our lives. This story has become a part of our common understanding about what it means for an underdog to stand up in the face of adversity. But over the past few decades, historical and biblical scholars and archeologists have given us a different lens from which we might look at this story. It is one that has been made popular by the author Malcolm Gladwell in his book about David and Goliath, and his popular Ted talk from about 10 years ago.

We typically read this story and are inspired by David because he

is a young shepherd boy who is facing an experienced warrior. David shows up with just five smooth stones and a sling and a shepherd staff against a full coat of armor and shield and sword and spear. What we may not know is that during the time of David and Goliath there were three groups of people that fought in battle. The first category is those on horses who rode chariots or stallions. These were not common as horses were not prevalent in that region, so they were reserved often for the leaders in each battle.

The second group were foot soldiers armed with shields and swords and heavy armor on their bodies. The final group were those who used a bow and arrow or slings. Slingers used a leather pouch with two long cords attached to either side. They would use a projectile that was either a rock or a lead ball in the pouch. After whirling around the sling several times, they would let go of one of the strings and send the projectile flying towards its target. David has one of these slings and would have been proficient with it from using it out in the fields guarding the sheep from lions and bears and wild animals. This was not a Childs toy but a devastating weapon.

When a Slinger would get the sling moving at 6 to 7 revolutions per second, that means the projector would be released at more than 110 mph, faster than any pitcher can pitch a baseball. In addition to this fact, it's important to know that the stones and the Valley of Elah are made of barium sulfite which is twice the density of a regular rock that we would find on the edge of the Animas River. Archaeologists have worked with ballistic experts to determine that the stopping power of one of these rocks out of a sling from an experienced Slinger would be equivalent to a 45-millimeter handgun.

We know from historical records that experienced slingers can hit a target at distances up to 200 yards. Some could hit birds in flight because of their high level of skill and accuracy. When David lines up to sling his rock at Goliath from 20 or 30 feet, he has every expectation of being able to hit his target at his most vulnerable spot on his forehead

and render him unconscious or dead with one stone. When we look at historical records of ancient battles, we find that it was a very regular occurrence that slingers were the deciding factor in most battles against infantry or even those on horses.

Remember that Goliath is heavy infantry, and his expectation is to do battle up close, in hand-to-hand combat. King Saul has that same expectation as he tries to give David his coat of armor, but David refuses because he is approaching at this moment very differently. Twice Goliath says these words which tell us what he is expecting. “Why do you **come to me** with a stick? **Come over here**, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!”

BIBLE

“Come to me!”

David even replies to him, “You **come to me** with sword, spear, and javelin, but **I come to you** in the name of the Lord.” there is a very real sense that David is approaching this battle with a much different perspective than Goliath. There is a sense that wisdom and skill will overcome brute force which is how David approaches this confrontation. this duel in many ways captures that saying from several movies, **“Why do you bring a knife to a gunfight?”**

Goliath is in many ways a sitting duck in this story who doesn't stand a chance with his lumbering armor and close combat tools against someone with a weapon that can be used from many feet away with deadly accuracy. This information, in and of itself, shifts our understanding of this story as we often think of David as the underdog and his victory a miracle.

There is one more piece of information that shifts this story even further from our typical understanding. We may also be misunderstanding Goliath and who he pretends to be in this story. The biblical text points to some interesting facts about the giant Philistine. After describing all of the armor that Goliath is bringing with him, we

read these words in 1 Samuel 17:7b.

BIBLE

His armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a shield.

Typically, attendants would follow the warrior and not lead the way, carrying a shield no less which seems like an act of weakness, like they are protecting the great warrior. The text also notes that Goliath walks slowly and stands almost 10 feet tall, 9.75 feet to be exact. Finally, we see Goliath reacting pretty slowly to David approaching him and shouted at David, asking why he was coming at him with sticks, when David was only carrying one stick, his shepherd's staff.

In 1960, the Indiana Medical Journal published the first paper speculating about Goliath and some of the physical issues he may have been dealing with as he stood almost 10 feet tall. the most common form of giantism is a condition called acromegaly, a condition where a benign tumor on the pituitary gland causes and overproduction of human growth hormone. Almost all famous giants have had acromegaly, such as Robert Wadlow who was still growing when he died at the age of 24 and was 8 foot 11 inches tall.

GRAPHIC Robert Wadlow

GRAPHIC Robert Wadlow vs Andre the Giant

Andre the Giant at 7 feet tall had acromegaly and didn't reach near the height of Robert Wadlow. These pictures give you an idea of how tall that is where we see those two together along with John Wayne at almost 6'4"; Maverick or Tom Cruise at almost 5'8"; and Peter Dinklage from Game of Thrones at 4'4"; and Goliath was even taller than all these!

Acromegaly has some distinct side effects, including vision which is affected when the pituitary tumor pushes against the visual nerves in the brain, often causing double vision or near sightedness. Medical experts look at some of the strange behavior from Goliath and begin to

wonder if he had acromegaly which would explain him needing someone to lead him out on the battlefield and how slow he might have been to respond to David, even misreading his shepherd's staff for some sticks. The demand of Goliath for David to come near to him may have been a defense mechanism because he needs to be up close to see his combatant and to be successful.

While we don't know if any of this speculation is accurate, it does explain some of the peculiarities in the biblical text, but it doesn't change the power of the story for us today. You see, the very thing that was supposed to be the strength of Goliath may very well have been the source of his weakness and vulnerability. The important lesson of this story, regardless of how we look at David and Goliath historically or archaeologically, is that giants are not as strong as we think they are.

SLIDE Giants are not as strong and powerful as they seem.

I wonder what the giants are in your life that seem overwhelming? With the power of God, can you begin to see those giants from a new perspective in ways that might help you not live in fear or anxiety? In today's world, that might mean reading less news or taking time away from a toxic relationship. There are times in our lives where we need to stand up to those giants, like David, and lean on the power of God and the power of others to face those moments. Sometimes, there are literal giants who are bullies that we need to stand up to in school but maybe we do so by using the tools God gives us, like those of mercy and grace and love. All David needs is a stone and a sling because he is looking at this battle from a different perspective which brings us to the next point of this story for us today.

SLIDE The shepherd needs the right perspective.

I was visiting recently with a young couple struggling in their marriage and one of the problems they were having was that it was really difficult to see outside of their own perspective. Some of the issues they were facing seemed like giants, until they were willing to

look at from the other person's perspective. Suddenly, what seemed like something insurmountable became a challenge they both were able to lean into. Laying down their armor and being willing to look at their problem together from that different perspective enabled them to move forward as they both worked with counselors.

Their story actually points to another layer of this story. As this couple began to take a look at themselves and their own family history, they realized they had even more giants to face from their past in order to make a relationship work in the future. This is exactly what happens to David in the next part of his story. While it seems like conquering Goliath would set him on a better path, it actually begins to make things worse in his life! David discovers that nothing makes a king angrier than showing him up in front of his troops. Before long, Saul is jealous of David's victories.

We learned last week that Saul was a good king to start but soon the power went to his head, and he became someone that was jealous and power hungry. David has been anointed to be the next king, but Saul does not know it, nor does anyone else but Samuel the prophet, the pastor who did the anointing because he had been commanded to do so by God. What's all does know is that David is becoming very popular, so he puts David in charge of many troops and then sends them into the most difficult battles, which backfires because David keeps winning and becomes an even bigger hero.

Eventually, Saul takes his army and goes after David, chasing him through the wilderness. We find for the next 15 chapters of 1 Samuel, from chapter 17 to 31, David is relentlessly pursued by king Saul who is consumed by jealousy. We see a powerful example of what can happen when a leader gives in to insecurities because someone who works with them becomes better. This story reminds us that the best leaders are ones that celebrate when an employee or a sibling or a child has great success, instead of becoming jealous and bitter. We are called to bring out the best in others and we see in Saul an example of what happens

when we are not able to do that but instead become insecure and unsettled. Saul thought only of himself and his own reputation. He wanted to get David and eventually David has no choice but to run away from Saul, hiding in many locations, and eventually ends up in this place near the Dead Sea called Ein Gedi.

GRAPHIC **Arial View Ein Gedi**

VIDEO **David's Cave**

GRAPHIC **Waterfall and David's Cave Ein Gedi**

GRAPHIC **Inside David's Cave**

Tradition tells us that a dramatic scene takes place in these caves outside of the Dead Sea where David and his companions hid from Saul. David is hiding in the back of a cave like this one pictured on the screen when Saul and his men come for some water and respite from the heat while searching for David and his men. Saul needs to use the restroom and he does so in The Cave. While he is relieving himself, David sees his king in front of him. It would take nothing at this moment to kill Saul and David soldiers encourage him to do this. They are back in the darkness of this cave, but David won't let them proceed. David sneaks up while Saul is squatting and cut off a piece of his fabric of Saul's robe.

Saul finishes is doing his business and comes out of The Cave. David also emerges from that same cave and confronts king Saul in 1 Samuel 24, letting him know that he is loyal to his king because he could have killed him as he shows him the corner of the robe he cut off while the king was going to the bathroom. We see a clear picture of who David is in this story and it even moves Saul to tears, even admitting that David is a better man than he is. Saul even apologizes for trying to kill David. Just a few chapters later, David spares Saul's life again and yet Saul continues to pursue David.

this passage reminds us of how we are to treat those giants at times in our lives. While David defeats Goliath during that

confrontation early in his life, later he treats his enemy Saul differently and it's a reminder of something Jesus teaches and then the apostle Paul reiterates in Romans 12.

BIBLE

²⁰ Instead, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

When we hate someone in our hearts, it eats us up inside. Part of having a new perspective when it comes to giants in our lives, is learning to face the challenge differently. God is a giving and forgiving God, and if we don't learn to look at life differently and see our enemies as human beings then no one wins. Even when someone harms us, if we are not willing to find a way to reconcile, without putting ourselves in danger or in harm's way, then the cycle of violence continues.

Earlier this summer my wife and I were able to attend the International Conference of Agape Love and Forgiveness Education. We heard from teachers all over the world working with students to help them understand how to look at giants differently. We learned that forgiveness research has found out that the beginning step in overcoming bitterness and anger is simply acknowledging the hurt and then being willing to step into the other person's shoes. We don't put ourselves in danger and we don't still seek justice and we don't admit that what happened to us was OK, but we choose to look at life differently. While we don't always have the option of choosing what giants come before us in life, we always have the ability to choose how to respond. I was especially moved by the story of Israeli and Palestinian mothers who had lost children in their conflict coming together. They recorded our sessions and wanted you to hear this powerful story of how forgiveness begins.

VIDEO Parents Circle Family Forum for Peace (stop at 1:17)

David made the decision in this story as he confronts Saul to try and make things right, and then it is up to Saul to respond. Eventually, Saul's jealousy and anger consume him, and he and his children are destroyed because they are unable to take a different perspective. Each of us can be like that and look at giants and people who have harmed us with a different perspective. We all have been wronged by people and hurt by others at different times in our lives. Sometimes, these conflicts become those giants in our lives and in our hearts. We can either give in to the impulse for revenge, and we try to get even or even get ahead, or we can choose the path that David took and offer grace not just for the person who has harmed us but for ourselves.

I don't know who might be coming to your mind or to your heart right now who may have harmed you, but my guess is that something has come to you, and I wonder if you would be willing to offer that person a blessing instead of a curse. How might I show agape love and compassion where it is not deserved? When David did this for Saul, we see this powerful moment of connection and repentance in 1 Samuel 24:16b-17.

BIBLE

...Saul lifted up his voice and wept. ¹⁷ He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil.

This story is an invitation for us to take a different perspective and not return evil for evil, but instead repay evil with good. These two characters of Saul and David can reflect our own lives. We have parts of each of them in us, which is why their story is so compelling. Sometimes, we are hunted down and hurt by others. Sometimes, we are jealous and petty. The question for us is what we will do in those moments. Will we turn to anger and bitterness, or will we embrace others and take a different perspective? how will we respond when we

face giants and adversity? Will we react with anxiety or invite the Holy Spirit to bring us a sense of peace as we respond.

That brings me back to my silly story about being late to my first final exam. I chose to simply sit down and take the exam and not worry about the outcome and not go back and check any answers and not be consumed by worry, mostly because I only had one hour to take a 3 hour exam and it wouldn't do me any good to do anything else but breeze through it as best I could so I wouldn't have to take the class again and hope I could get a C or better. I actually finished before most people were done and by professor just shook his head at me. And I got a B! Unfortunately, I flunked the next course in that series but that actually pushed me in a new direction and away from engineering, so in the end that was a good thing too.

What I know is that we often get anxious when facing those giants or insurmountable moments in life and I have never experienced that being helpful. Instead, we are invited by David and God to approach those giants differently and remember they are not as big as we think they are. It is believed that David wrote Psalm 57 while he was fleeing Saul in the wilderness. These are powerful words that can encourage and sustain us today, some 3000 years later. Will you say this Psalm with me as we close?

BIBLE

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy!

I look to you for protection.

I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings

until the danger passes by.

² I cry out to God Most High,

to God who will fulfill his purpose for me.

³ He will send help from heaven to rescue me,

disgracing those who hound me. *Interlude*

My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness.

- ⁴ I am surrounded by fierce lions
who greedily devour human prey—
whose teeth pierce like spears and arrows,
and whose tongues cut like swords.
- ⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens!
May your glory shine over all the earth.
- ⁶ My enemies have set a trap for me.
I am weary from distress.
They have dug a deep pit in my path,
but they themselves have fallen into it. *Interlude*
- ⁷ My heart is confident in you, O God;
my heart is confident.
No wonder I can sing your praises!
- ⁸ Wake up, my heart!
Wake up, O lyre and harp!
I will wake the dawn with my song.
- ⁹ I will thank you, Lord, among all the people.
I will sing your praises among the nations.
- ¹⁰ For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens.
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
- ¹¹ Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens.
May your glory shine over all the earth.

SLIDE PRAYER

August 27-28 Order

1. Ely welcomes people and says, **“What do we do when life seems overwhelming? How do we respond when life is great, and we have control? Today we find the key to BOTH from the life of David.”**
2. Two Songs
3. Jeff welcomes and invites people to greet each other however they are comfortable and be seated.
4. Announcements (Check News Section on Website)
 - a. River Baptism Service
 - b. Summit U and Small Groups
5. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
6. Sermon
7. Prayer
8. Two Songs
9. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
10. Offering SLIDE and Focus (Prayer Pencils, Backpack Tags, and key chain tags)
11. Care Ministers (If any are present)
12. Prayers and Closing Thoughts
 - i. Prayer focus August is Education
 - ii. Welcome New Members
13. Closing Prayer