

One of the most common genres in the Bible is that of narrative. As a result, sermons are very often expounding a narrative of one form or another. There are many different ways that this can be done, though it is possible to identify four main approaches. In what follows immediately below, I describe each of the four approaches with reference to the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Following these descriptions are further comments on a few of the practicalities of preparing a narrative sermon as well as sermon outlines that illustrate each of the four approaches.

1. *Deductive #1: story serves as starting place to discuss theological truths.* In this approach, the preacher identifies certain truths illustrated by the story and uses these truths as the starting place for the sermon's various points. Once the point is identified, however, the sermon swings away from the story itself to focus on what the rest of the Bible teaches us about this point. This is often because the story is not being read as a whole; rather, it is being treated as a mine from which isolated nuggets of truth may be extracted.

As an example, the sermon will have as its first point that fear causes us not to trust in the Lord (1 Sam 17:11). The sermon will then go on to discuss how those who know the Lord do not need to be afraid, with references being made to other places in the Scriptures that speak of people who are not afraid in the face of challenging circumstances or to verses which affirm the Lord can be trusted. In this approach, however, these verses are typically from outside of the immediate story and are typically not related back to the story. Instead, once these other verses have been expounded, the sermon goes on to the next point, e.g. "The second thing we see is that those who have a deep heart for God's glory are incensed when his name is defamed (1 Sam 17:26)."

This approach may do well to identify various truths that the story is trying to get across. Its greatest weakness, however, is that it can decontextualize these truths. As a further result, it can also miss how the story functions as a whole to present various truths for the people of God. And finally, it does not model for those listening how to read a story contextually.

2. *Deductive #2: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.* In this approach, the preacher also identifies certain truths illustrated by the story and uses these truths as his sermon's main points. Unlike the first approach, however, he endeavors to show how the story itself demonstrates these truths and relates them to one another. That is to say, in this approach the preacher focuses on the truths in the context of the story and uses the story itself as the illustration of how these truths play out. In this way, the story is not simply a mine containing

nuggets of truth, but a tapestry in which the various pictures of truth can only be understood in relation to the tapestry as a whole.

As an example, the sermon will have as its first point that fear causes us not to trust in the Lord (1 Sam 17:11). It will then show, however, why Saul had every reason to trust in the Lord (including the Lord's deliverance in immediately preceding chapters). In other words, it takes time to set the truth in the context of the story. It certainly may go on from there to discuss verses outside of the story but only once the point has been firmly grounded in the context of the story. Moreover, it tries to relate this point to the next point that is being made. For example, in going on to describe that those who have a deep heart for God's glory are incensed when his name is defamed, the sermon carefully explains how David is serving as a contrast to Saul and that this contrast is a way of reminding Israel of the type of king they really need.

This approach not only identifies various truths, it does well to set them in the context of the story and thus also to see how the truths relate to one another. It also models well for the congregation how to read the Bible well. This approach is perhaps the easiest one to take while remaining faithful to the original context.

Note: if this is the form you are most comfortable with, you can easily turn it into an inductive approach by turning each of your main points into questions. For example, instead of point 1 being, "Fear defeats us by causing us to forget who the Lord is and lose our trust in him (1 Sam 17: 11)," point 1 would be, "Why does fear defeat us?" and the sermon would proceed by describing what takes place up to v. 11 and then using v. 11 as the way to supply the answer. This is not a big switch to make, but it will serve to keep the listener more engaged as they follow the story to get the answer.

3. *Inductive #1: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.* The main difference between this approach and the preceding one is that the truths of the story are gotten at inductively rather than deductively. That is to say, instead of starting with a point and then illustrating it, the preacher begins by telling the story and then gets to the point that is being illustrated. Typically, the preacher best prepares for this approach by breaking the story up scene by scene, identifying the truths being communicated, and then putting it all together by telling the story scene by scene and incorporating the truths along the way.

As an example, the preacher would begin by describing the place that the battle was occurring (1 Sam 17:1–3), the size of Goliath (1 Sam 17:4–7), and the way in which his defiant cry was really blasphemy against the Lord (1 Sam 17: 8–10). Before getting to the first point—namely, that Saul was not prepared to meet this challenge because his fear caused him not to

trust in the Lord (1 Sam 17:11)—the preacher might take time to note from the surrounding context that the Lord’s previous deliverance should have enabled Saul to meet this challenge. This then sets Saul’s failure in sharper relief and also provides a good comparison when applying it to us: we too have seen the Lord do mighty things, and yet we too sometimes fail to trust him because of fear.

This approach has all the advantages of the former as well as any added benefits that come from presenting truths inductively versus deductively. Some will find this a bit more difficult to prepare than the former approach and that it therefore requires more time. For an example of this being done with a parable (Luke 18:9–14) see otpentateuch.com (Narrative Preaching tab). See there also for an example with an Old Testament story (Ruth) (note: the Ruth sermon is somewhat in between Inductive #1 and Inductive #2).

4. *Inductive #2: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.* The main difference between this approach and the previous is that in this approach the preacher becomes a straight narrator, adopting either a third-person or first-person voice and maintaining that voice for the majority of the sermon. Thus while there may be a lot of third-person narration in the previous approach, the preacher will often use this in shorter bursts with other types of explanation or exhortation in between. In the fourth approach, however, the third- or first-person voice is used much more consistently, giving the entire feel of the sermon a much more narrative feel.

As the attached example shows, the way to do application in this approach is by having a transition sentence out of the narrative to the point of application and then a transition sentence back in from the point of application to the narrative. Be careful of two things. First, do not do too much “preaching” when you go into the point of application, otherwise the narrative feel of the sermon is lost. Second, beware of putting all the application at the end of the sermon (when the story is over and the tension has been lost).

For an example with a third-person voice, see the David and Goliath sermon on otpentateuch.com (Narrative Preaching tab). If this were done with a first-person voice, I might choose one of the Israelite soldiers as the person who was telling the story. An example of a first-person sermon on Gen 22 may also be found on otpentateuch.com (Narrative Preaching tab); the same is true for a sermon on Lev 16 (the Day of Atonement).

Once again, this approach has all the advantages of the previous two. Many preachers, however, will either feel uncomfortable with trying to do this approach themselves or will find

that it takes way too much preparation time (it can take almost twice as long to prepare this kind of sermon).

A few further suggestions on the practicalities of preparing a narrative sermon—especially inductive #1 or #2—will be helpful. The following comments will at times refer to the full sermon manuscript of 1 Sam 17 that is included below as an illustration of the inductive #2 approach.

1. *Always* start with the exegesis of the text. Remember: your goal is not to tell a good story and entertain; your goal is to feed people the Word of the Lord!
2. Bear in mind the particular issues that you need to be aware of for reading and interpreting stories. That is to say, stories are a specific genre; to read them well, you need to be aware of literary issues like foreshadowing, plot and character development, etc. For a full discussion, see Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 1993).
3. Doing the exegesis well will allow you to answer the questions concerning points of application most clearly. Here are those questions and my answers in this case:
 - a. (where applicable): What did the original characters in this passage learn—or what should they have learned—about the Lord, about themselves, and about the Lord's ways with man?
 - i. The Philistines in this passage learned that Israel's God is the true God.
 - ii. The Israelites in this passage (including Saul) learned (or should have learned) several things:
 1. David is a demonstration of the type of leader who pleases the Lord (note that there is a contrast between David and Saul in this passage; note as well that this contrast is a part of the larger theme of 1 Sam 9–18:5, in which Saul is shown to be a king like the nations [1 Sam 9–15] and David is shown to be the type of king that the Lord delights in [1 Sam 16–18:5]).
 2. In particular, this type of leader is someone who has a deep trust in the Lord (1 Sam 17:37, 45–47) and a deep desire for God's glory to be made known in Israel and in all the nations (1 Sam 17:26, 46–47).
 3. The Israelites here should also recognize that these traits are not simply to be true of the leader of Israel, but that the leader is a

personal example of how each Israelite is to live life, namely, with a deep trust in the Lord and a desire for the Lord to be glorified.

- iii. David would have had his trust in the Lord confirmed.
- b. What would have been most applicable to the original audience to whom this passage was written?
- i. The reference to the “kings of Judah” in 1 Sam 27:6 suggests that this book was written after the division of the kingdom in 930 BC. This verse also suggests that the book is written before the final exile of 586 BC since the kings of Judah are said to possess the city of Ziklag “to this day.” As a result, the original audience would have been living sometime between 930 and 586 when the kingdom was divided. On the one hand, then, it would have served to underscore the legitimacy of the Davidic line. On the other hand, it would have served as a reminder to both the people and the king that the type of king that the Lord wants for Israel is one who is marked by this deep trust in the Lord and zeal for the Lord’s glory.
- c. In light of the above, how does this passage apply to us today? (In what ways does it not apply to us today?) In particular, are there appropriate places to discuss how the truths of the passage relate to the life and ministry of Jesus, e.g., ways in which Jesus fulfills or demonstrates or accomplishes the things spoken of in this passage?
- i. This text is a testimony to the fact that the Lord of the Old Testament is the true God. In this regard this text has an evangelistic and missional application.
 - ii. This text also teaches believers what to look for in those who are leading the people of God (e.g., church officers). The focus here is upon character, and in particular, the leader’s trust in the Lord and focus upon his glory being known by all.
 - iii. Related to this, the believer is reminded that Jesus is the one who has come as the ultimate leader of God’s people and the ultimate victor over the enemy of the people of God. He is the ultimate Davidic King and the one to whom we are to look as our leader. He is the one who gives us confidence that the enemy can be defeated. See final application in attached sermon.
 - iv. Finally, the individual believer is still challenged by this text to consider whether they have a deep trust in the Lord and whether his glory is what matters most to them.

- d. Note: you do not need to focus upon every possible area of application. Who is your audience? Know them well and choose the appropriate application in light of that. For this sermon I am assuming a largely Christian audience in a Sunday morning service. I have chosen to focus in particular upon the last two points of application mentioned above.
4. Once you have done the exegesis and determined the main truths of the story and how they might apply, you can begin to prepare the story, following along the scenes as given in the biblical text. Remember that all stories consist of three basic parts.
 - a. *An introduction.* The purpose of the introduction is to grab hold of the attention of your hearers. Naturally, there are many ways to do this. One way that is more unique to stories than to sermons is illustrated in the following, namely, beginning with an interesting scene from later on in the story and then “flashing back” to the start of the story.
 - b. *The main body of the story.* This is where you will follow the scenes of the story as laid out in the biblical text. You will also want to choose two or three places here to incorporate the spiritual truths and applications. In order to incorporate these truths you will want to use “bridging sentences.” These are sentences that help to “bridge” from the flow of the narrative to a point of application and then “bridge” back to the flow of the narrative (examples may be seen in the following story). Bridge sentences help you to avoid bumpy transitions from “story-telling” to “preaching” and then back to “story-telling” again. Instead, they help keep the story seamless.
 - c. *The conclusion.* This is where the “problem” of the story is resolved. Consequently the tension that has kept your listeners interested also tends to disappear! For this reason, do not make the mistake of incorporating all of your spiritual truths and points of application after the conclusion. What is said after the conclusion of the story should be concise and directly related to what your listener has just heard. And while you do not want to incorporate all of your truths or applications after this point, it may be appropriate to follow the conclusion with very concise yet direct questions or statements of application for your listeners.
5. Points to be aware of when telling and/or preaching biblical stories:
 - a. Do not invent details! You must stick with the biblical text. In the following story, for example, the third sentence had originally read as follows: “His body armor alone weighed 125 pounds, and his spear – *which he could hurl just as easily as*

you or I could hurl a dart – had a tip on it that was as heavy as a fifteen-pound bowling ball.” The section that is in italics has been removed from the story—even though it makes the story sound better!—because we simply do not know how easily Goliath could throw his spear.

- b. In connection with the above you will note that there are times in the following story that I wonder aloud what people were thinking or feeling (e.g., the third paragraph on the third page of the story: “It is hard to imagine what emotions were going on in the hearts of those who watched one young man...”). This is not wrong in and of itself since these stories are not told in a vacuum but in an actual historical context. *But these sections are clearly identified as things that we might wonder, not as things that we actually know! Moreover, no conclusions or points of application are built directly upon this part of the story.*
- c. Make sure that your audience is aware that the story you are telling is a biblical one! In today’s culture there are some (many?) who might not even know that the story of David and Goliath is from the Bible. You can let them know this by having the person introducing you make note of this or even by having them read the story ahead of time. You can also combine this with reading directly from the Bible at various parts, e.g., dialogue or certain descriptions (some of the dialogue in the following story I end up reading directly from 1 Samuel 17).
- d. Who is the hero of the story? Remember, David’s ability to be trusting is due to the fact that *the Lord* is trustworthy! Indeed, David’s own statement is that “the battle is the Lord’s” (1 Sam 17:47) and that “the Lord will deliver him” (1 Sam 17:37). For this reason you will note that throughout the story I have sought to emphasize that while David sets a model of faith for us on the one hand, the ultimate reason that we can be as brave and faithful as David is because the Lord is the One in whom we trust! Stated differently, if you are telling a biblical story that highlights a model for us to follow, make sure that your audience is aware that the person who is modeling faith for us can do so only because the One in whom they believe is trustworthy and faithful! It is the Lord, not David, who is the ultimate hero of 1 Samuel 17!
- e. Finally, as much as possible, I always look for a place where I can naturally show how the truths of this story are exemplified or fulfilled in Jesus. The last paragraph of this story in particular is meant to encourage people that they can have trust in the Lord because of what Jesus has done as the ultimate second David.

6. **Finally, while the above hints for telling a story are meant to aid you in communicating God's Word, they are by no means a formula for success in preaching or teaching. True success comes when the Lord's Holy Spirit comes down in power and opens the eyes of our hearts and minds to the holy truths of God's Word. For this reason, never trust in your power as a storyteller but always cry out to the Lord that he would be pleased to bless the preaching of his holy Word with the power of his Holy Spirit! Remember: "the battle is the Lord's!"**

USING 1 SAMUEL 17 (DAVID AND GOLIATH) TO ILLUSTRATE THE FOUR APPROACHES TO PREACHING STORIES

Deductive #1: story serves as starting place to discuss theological truths (this approach is to be avoided!).

SO WHO DO YOU TRUST IN AND WHAT DO YOU CARE MOST ABOUT?

Intro: story about a time in life when it was difficult to trust; today's message is about learning to trust in those difficult times.

1. Fear defeats us by causing us to forget who the Lord is and lose our trust in him (1 Sam 17:11).
 - a. The reason Saul and Israel did not trust was because their fear caused them to forget who the Lord is.
 - b. When we forget who the Lord is, we become fearful and fail to trust.
 - i. This is exactly what happened with Israel in Numbers 14 when they were afraid to march into the Promised Land.
 - ii. It is exactly what happened with the disciples in the storm on the lake (Mark 4:35–41).
 - iii. Application: when we fear and fail to trust, it is probably a sign that we have forgotten who the Lord is.
 - iv. Transition: so how is fear defeated?
2. Fear is defeated when we focus on the Lord's glory (1 Sam 17:26, 45–47).
 - a. The first reason David did not fear is because he had a heart keen for God's glory.
 - b. When we are focused on God's glory, we will not fear.
 - i. The psalmist shows us this focus: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, because of your lovingkindness, because of your truth" (Ps 115:1).
 - ii. Jesus teaches us to pray for God's glory: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9–10).

- iii. Application: when we are focused on God’s glory we will not fear but move forward in confidence in him.
 - iv. Transition: but there is a second way that fear is defeated.
3. Fear is defeated when we remember who the Lord is (vv. 37, 45–47).
- a. The second reason David did not have fear is that he remembered who the Lord is.
 - b. If we remember who God is, we have no reason to fear.
 - i. Jesus makes this clear: after rebuking the wind and the waves, he says to his disciples, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark 4:40).
 - ii. Application: when we fear—especially in the midst of the storms of life—we need to remember who the Lord is.

Conclusion: return to story of how I was fearful but overcame it by remembering who the Lord was and focusing on his glory.

(Note: everything said in the above sermon is true. The problem is that it does not show the listener how these truths are rooted in the story’s context and thus does not model how to read the Bible well. In preaching, we should want to model for the listener how to read the Bible well.)

Deductive #2: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.

SO WHO DO YOU TRUST IN AND WHAT DO YOU CARE MOST ABOUT?

Intro: story about a time in life when it was difficult to trust; today’s message is about learning to trust in those difficult times.

1. Fear defeats us by causing us to forget who the Lord is and lose our trust in him (1 Sam 17:11).
 - a. It is important to remember what has happened just before this story. In the chapters just before this story, the Lord has helped Saul and the Israelites to defeat the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, kings from Zobah, and the Philistines (1 Sam 14:47; see also 1 Sam 15:1–8)!
 - b. But somehow Saul and the Israelites forgot this. To be sure, Goliath was a huge man: the text in fact goes out of its way to describe how big he is (1 Sam 17:4–7). But what is a man before the Lord? Less than dust on the scales. The Israelites had every reason

- to trust that the Lord could defeat him. Their failure to do so means one thing: they had forgotten—or stopped believing—in who the Lord was.
- c. Application: when we fear and fail to trust, it is probably a sign that we have forgotten who the Lord is.
 - d. Transition: so how is fear defeated?
2. Fear is defeated when we focus on the Lord's glory (1 Sam 17:26, 45–47)
- a. As we go through the story, we see one man who does not fear, and one reason he does not fear is he is focused on the Lord's glory.
 - b. The man's name is David. He is not at the battle at first; he's left shepherding his father's sheep. But eventually his father sends him to find out how David's brothers are faring in the battle (1 Sam 17:14–19).
 - c. When David arrives, he witnesses the scene that has been going on for the past forty days (1 Sam 17:20–25). While the scene fills the other Israelites with fear, it fills David with anger (1 Sam 17:26). David recognizes that Goliath is not simply defying and belittling Israel but defying and belittling Israel's God. And because David has such a deep love for God and God's glory, he does not shrink back in fear; he moves forward in faith (1 Sam 17:32).
 - d. Application: when we are focused on God's glory, we will not fear but move forward in confidence in him.
 - e. Transition: but there is a second way that fear is defeated.
3. Fear is defeated when we remember who the Lord is (1 Sam 17:37, 45–47).
- a. David was not going into battle in blind confidence; he was going into battle knowing that his God had already proven himself to be powerful and strong (1 Sam 17:37). Indeed, he knew that God would defend the honor of his holy name and would be faithful to his promises to his people: to fight for them, to care for them, to watch over them and protect them (1 Sam 17:45–47). And in this confidence of who the Lord is, David went forward in faith, not backwards in fear.
 - b. Application: when we fear, we need to remember who the Lord is. Indeed, we have seen with even more clarity in the person of Jesus that God is faithful to his promises! We have seen the lengths that he will go in order to rescue and save and deliver his people. Brothers and sisters, we have no reason to fear. King Jesus is with us and will deliver us. Let us follow him in faith!

Inductive #1: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.

SO WHO DO YOU TRUST IN AND WHAT DO YOU CARE MOST ABOUT?

Intro: begin by describing the scene in 1 Sam 17:40–42, then flashback to the beginning of the story.

1. First scene described

- a. Our story begins with the Israelite and Philistine armies gathering for war (1 Sam 17:1–3). But this would be no ordinary war: in this war, there was one champion from the Philistines—Goliath, this mountain of a man—who was to fight one champion from the Israelites.
- b. While it is true that Goliath was a frightening figure to fight, we know by this point in the story that Saul and Israel had nothing to fear. In the chapters just before this one, the Lord has helped the Saul and the Israelites to defeat the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, kings from Zobah, and the Philistines (1 Sam 14:47; see also 1 Sam 15:1–8)! And if he could do this with entire nations, what was one man?
- c. But somehow Saul and the Israelites forgot this. They had every reason to trust that the Lord could defeat Goliath. Their failure to do so means one thing: they had forgotten—or stopped believing—in who the Lord was.
- d. It's no different with us: **Fear defeats us by causing us to forget who the Lord is and lose our trust in him (1 Sam 17:11).**
- e. Application: when we fear and fail to trust, it is probably a sign that we have forgotten who the Lord is.
- f. Transition: so how is fear defeated?

2. Second scene described (1 Sam 17:26, 45–47)

- a. It's not long after Saul and Israel run from Goliath that a new character enters the story. His name is David. He's the youngest of eight sons and has not even been sent into battle; he's left shepherding his father's sheep. Eventually, though, his father becomes worried about David's brothers who are fighting and so sends David to the front lines to get news about them (1 Sam 17:14–19).
- b. When David arrives, he witnesses the scene that has been going on for the past forty days (1 Sam 17:20–25). While the scene fills the other Israelites with fear, it fills David with anger (1 Sam 17:26). David recognizes that Goliath is not simply defying and belittling Israel but defying and belittling Israel's God. And because David has such a

- deep love for God and God's glory, he does not shrink back in fear; he moves forward in faith (1 Sam 17:32). **That's what happens when you have a deep love for God: you are so concerned that his name is honored that you move forward in faith instead of shrinking back in fear. It is your love for God that propels you.**
- c. Application: when we are focused on God's glory, we will not fear but move forward in confidence in him.
 - d. Transition: but there is a second way that fear is defeated.
3. Third scene described
- a. David was not going into battle in blind confidence; he was going into battle knowing that his God had already proven himself to be powerful and strong (1 Sam 17:37). Indeed, he knew that God would defend the honor of his holy name and would be faithful to his promises to his people, to fight for them, to care for them, to watch over them and protect them (1 Sam 17:45–47). And in this confidence of who the Lord is, David went forward in faith, not backwards in fear. **And that's just how it is for us: when you remember who the Lord is and what he has done, you realize you have no reason to fear.**
 - b. Application: when we fear, we need to remember who the Lord is. Indeed, we have seen with even more clarity in the person of Jesus that God is faithful to his promises! We have seen the lengths that he will go to in order to rescue and save and deliver his people. Brothers and sisters, we have no reason to fear. King Jesus is with us and will deliver us. Let us follow him in faith!

Inductive #2: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.

See attached sermon manuscript for a third-person telling of this story.

SO WHO DO YOU TRUST IN
AND WHAT DO YOU CARE MOST ABOUT?

(1 SAM 17)

[To hear this sermon being preached, visit otpentateuch.com and choose the “Narrative Preaching” tab.]

Read 1 Sam 17:44–46.

In the history of war there had seldom been a more mismatched pair of combatants. On the one side stood a mountain of a man, his warrior’s helmet scraping the clouds. His body armor alone weighed 125 pounds, and his spear had a tip that was as heavy as a fifteen-pound bowling ball. On top of his massive bearing and great strength, this man was a seasoned warrior, having fought from his youth.

On the other side stood a youth. He did not own warrior’s armor; his breastplate was simply his shirt. He had neither sword, nor spear, nor shield, but a staff and a simple sling. His experience fighting—what little there was—did not even begin to compare with that of his opponent. And to make matters worse, the fate of an entire nation rested on the unarmored shoulders of this young man.

[here we flashback to the beginning of the story] It had all begun forty days earlier. The armies of the Philistines, Israel’s arch enemies, had infiltrated into the very center of Israel. Saul—who was the king of Israel at that time—had gone up with the army of Israel to try and halt their advance. They met near the valley of Elah, which ran east to west and was bordered by hills on each side. The Philistine army was gathered on the hills to the south, the Israelite army on the hills to the north, and the valley—a broad plain bordered on the north by a creek—stretched out in between.

Every day this mountain of a man—Goliath was his name—would come out from the ranks of the Philistines, stand before the armies of Israel, and shout his challenge: “Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us. I DEFY THE RANKS OF ISRAEL THIS DAY. GIVE ME A MAN THAT WE MAY FIGHT TOGETHER!” (1 Sam 17:8b–10). Every morning and every evening, day after day after day, this

enemy of Israel would come forward and shout the same defiant cry. And every time he did so, Goliath defied not just the armies of Israel but their God as well. In those days, when you defied someone's army, you were saying that they *and their god* were too weak to defeat you. When Goliath defied Israel he was saying that he *and his gods* were stronger than Israel and its God.

Saul—the king of Israel—knew this wasn't true. Just a short time before this the Spirit of God had come upon Saul and he had won a mighty victory over another people known as the Ammonites. Just a short time before this God had delivered the Philistines themselves into Saul's hands in battle. And so when Goliath raised his defiant cry, Saul knew better. He knew that the God of Israel's army was mighty to save. The Israelites knew better. They knew that the God of their army was mighty to save. And yet Saul, and all Israel with him, trembled and fled before the Philistine every time he uttered his defiant cry.

[Bridge sentence into first main point] Of course it would be easy to criticize Saul and the Israelites; it would be easy to shake our heads and say, "They knew better; they should have had more faith." And yet it seems to me that we are often more like Saul and the Israelites than we might realize. Like them, we know about God as well. We know that he is strong; we know he is true; we know that his promises never fail. And yet, time and again, I find myself in different situations where I act as though the promises of God—and the God who promises—cannot be trusted. I see it most of all in the things that worry me. Things that I know God is big enough to handle. Things that I know that God might not fix, but that he will be with me through. Things that I have a hard time taking from my hands and leaving in the hands of God. I know: I know that God is big enough. I know: I know that God is strong enough. I know: I know that God is good enough. And yet still—I fear. I know the truth about God and yet so often I fail to act upon it. *[Bridge sentence back into flow of story]* In so many ways, I am no different than Saul and the rest of Israel, who day after day turned and fled when Goliath uttered his defiant cry. And yet, not everyone in Israel was cut of the same cloth.

Not far from the battle, in the town of Bethlehem, was an Israelite by the name of Jesse. Jesse had eight sons, three of whom were fighting—if you could call it that!—with Saul and the Israelite army. Like any father, Jesse was concerned for the welfare of his children, and so he called his youngest son David, who was shepherding the sheep, and sent him to the frontlines. Before David left, Jesse gave him some food for his brothers, some supplies for their commander, and told David to look into the welfare of his brothers and to bring back news of them.

David arose early the next morning and traveled to the place of battle. When he arrived at the front lines, the army of Israel was preparing to go into battle, raising their war cry and drawing up into battle array. Losing no time, David left the supplies with the baggage keeper and ran to the

front lines to greet his brothers. While he was talking with them, the champion from the Philistines—Goliath—came forward and hurled out his challenge: “I DEFY THE RANKS OF ISRAEL THIS DAY. GIVE ME A MAN THAT WE MAY FIGHT TOGETHER!” This was the fortieth day that Goliath had uttered that challenge, and as they did every other time, Israel turned and fled from the giant, fear coursing through their veins.

Now whether David was afraid, we do not know; but we do know that very soon what coursed through his veins was not fear, but anger. Turning to those around him, David asked, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?” (1 Sam 17:26) You see David knew full well that Goliath was defying not only Israel, but Israel’s God as well, and this provoked David to anger. David knew that the God of Israel was a living God and his love for God ran so deep that he was provoked, he was angered, when his God was defamed.

When David’s brave words were reported to Saul, Saul sent for him. Saul was perhaps hoping to see a seasoned warrior brought before him, or a man as big and strong as Goliath. Instead, it was David, a youth, fresh from shepherding his father’s sheep! But David’s courage had not flagged: “Let no man’s heart fail on account of him,” David said; “your servant will go and fight with this Philistine” (1 Sam 17:32). I wonder if Saul didn’t know whether to laugh or cry! Saul thought it was impossible. “You can’t do it,” he said; “you are only a youth, and this Philistine has been fighting since he was a youth” (paraphrase of 1 Sam 17:33). But David would not give up; his God had been defamed and he refused to let that go unanswered. David told Saul of times when he had been shepherding and a lion or bear had come to take away one of the sheep, and how he had risen up and killed them. “Look, the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, he will deliver me from the paw of this Philistine!” (1 Sam 17:37a). David’s determination finally won out, and Saul gave him his blessing to go.

David, of course, had not come to the front lines carrying sword or spear. He was just there to deliver some food to his brothers. And while Saul tried to provide him with some armor, David chose at the end of the day to go out only with his staff and his sling.

It is hard to imagine what emotions were going on in the hearts of those who watched one young man—one young man carrying nothing but staff and sling—separate himself from the front lines of Israel, stop briefly at the creek to collect some stones, and then walk towards this Philistine warrior. What did the Israelites feel as they watched this young man—this young man whose success or failure would decide their fate—as he stepped closer and closer to what must have seemed like certain annihilation? Perhaps in the heart of some there was hope, hope against hope.

Perhaps in the heart of others, or even in the hearts of most, there was fear, even terror, at what seemed their certain demise. And what did the Philistines feel as they saw this young man walk forward? Was there glee at what would have seemed a certain victory? Was their disappointment that a greater foe could not be found? We don't have to guess what Goliath was feeling. When he saw David—and saw that he was just a youth with a staff and sling—he was incensed. “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” he cried (1 Sam 17:43), and then Goliath began to curse David, calling on the gods of the Philistines to help him destroy his young foe.

And David? His words betray a heart full of faith, a heart zealous for God's glory: “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, 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 deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands!!” (1 Sam 17:45–47).

You see it wasn't just that David had full faith in the promises of God. It wasn't just that he knew God could be trusted or that he acted upon that trust. It was that David's love for God ran so deep that it was unbearable to him that no one among God's people would stand up for what he knew to be true about God. His love for God ran so deep that it was unbearable to him to hear his God mocked and the people of God shrink back in fear. His love for God ran so deep that it was unbearable to him to hear his God mocked and to know that the nations around would believe what Goliath was saying if someone didn't act. His love for God ran so deep he was willing to risk it all so that the world might know that his God was not just a God, but *the* God, creator of all and worthy of the worship of all. ***That's what love for God does: it makes you want to spend your life in whatever way you can that the world might know that God and God alone is worthy of our worship and praise.***

As Goliath came forward, David did not turn and flee—he *ran* to meet Goliath, loaded a stone in his sling, and hurled it right towards the giant. When the stone hit, Goliath toppled forward, crashing to the ground like a tree that had been struck by lightning. Whatever glee the Philistines might have been feeling evaporated. Now it was their turn to flee. And whatever fear the army of Israel had been feeling, they were now as bold as a lion, chasing after the Philistines and cutting them down on the road, following in the footsteps of their champion, their true king, David.

Brothers and sisters, if that is what the Israelites did in following a king who defeated an earthly enemy, how much more confidence and faith should we have in following Jesus, the

ultimate King, who has defeated sin and death and hell itself? If they followed boldly and without fear in the wake of their king, how much more should we follow boldly in the wake of ours? If they came to a place of thinking, "There is nothing we need to fear as long as our king goes before us!", then how much more can we follow King Jesus without fear? He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given, and who in all of his splendor and glory and power and authority and might looks you and me in the eye, calls us by name, and says, "Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age!" Consider how much more can we follow him without fear! Indeed, how very much more!