

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

(1 SAM 17)

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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!*