

# A Boy Named David

1 Samuel 17

July 1, 2018

## Read all of 1 Samuel 17.

Have you heard the story of David and Goliath before? Have you heard it maybe at least 5 times? 10 times? More than 10 times? What's the story about? How to slay a giant? Slingshot warfare? Or... maybe something else?<sup>1</sup> The story of David/Goliath is not about how to beat a bully. It's not really even about facing the giants in our lives, although that's getting closer I suppose. The story of David/Goliath is about...something else. It's about passionate spirituality. David was a man with spiritual passion. This is why I'm so drawn to spending our summer, in a new sermon series, learning from his example. He was not a perfect man. He was a sinner like you and me. But, what is most distinctive about him is his devotion to God; a devotion driven by a passion for God Himself above all other things. Today's story, demonstrates how a young shepherd boy, who was basically a nobody, had his heart and his passion in the right place.<sup>2</sup>

Before we dig further into 1 Samuel 17, let's look at a few verses from the preceding context that leads up to this amazing duel. In many ways, in order to understand this duel between David/Goliath, we need to understand some things about King Saul.

**The Israelites' hope was in King Saul.**<sup>3</sup> Israel asks for a king back in 1 Samuel 8:5, "...now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." We learn that the prophet Samuel is disappointed that Israel asked for a human king, but God then tells Samuel in 1 Samuel 8:7, "...it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me (God) as their king." God then picks a handsome, TALL king for them in 1 Samuel 9:2, "Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else." Samuel had tried to warn them that having a human king was not a good idea, but here is how Israel responded in 1 Samuel 8:19-20, "...We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." We later read in 1 Samuel 17:11 that, "On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified." Where is their king now? Saul certainly was not "going out before them to fight their battles." He was hunkered down with the rest of the soldiers afraid of this towering giant. Goliath even taunts the Israelite king when he says in 1 Samuel 17:8, "...are you not the servants of Saul? ..." <sup>4</sup> From this vantage point, it really seems that it ought to have been a duel between SAUL/Goliath, not David/Goliath.

**The Philistines' hope was in Goliath.** 1 Samuel 17:4-5 describes, "A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels;" Goliath was VERY Tall. At best, as a Hebrew young man, David may have been 6 feet tall. Goliath, however, was 9 feet and 9 inches tall. Goliath was also VERY Strong. His armor alone weighed 125 pounds. That's like carrying 3 bags of solar salt while you fight someone. David's entire body weight may not have been much more than 125 pounds. Even if he was a "beefy" young man, maybe 200 pounds at most.<sup>5</sup> Goliath's fellow Philistine warriors seemed to have every reason to put their hope in their champion.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is a new show called, "Goliath" on Amazon Prime video starring Billy Bob Thornton. It's rated TV-MA so I haven't watched it. But, it's yet another stereotype of the little guy fighting against a giant. This may work well for a TV plot, but it's a distraction from what we should learn from 1 Samuel 17.

<sup>2</sup> Read 1 Timothy 4:12.

<sup>3</sup> Saul BEGAN with a proper sense of humility, see 1 Samuel 9:21, 10:22, and 10:27. Compare this with 1 Samuel 16:2 for example.

<sup>4</sup> There's an interesting note about Saul in 1 Samuel 10:6, "The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person." You see, there was an earlier time in Saul's life when he was filled with spiritual power and zeal for God.

<sup>5</sup> Consider 1 Samuel 17:33.

<sup>6</sup> Even the Israelites could see what a formidable and threatening opponent he was. 1 Samuel 17:10-11 summarizes it well, "Then the Philistine said, 'This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.'" On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were

This is where a shepherd boy named David comes on the scene... There's a major shift in the story line when David delivers some supplies to his older brothers who are fighting in Saul's army. Right as David is talking with his brothers, 1 Samuel 17:23 tells us, "Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual **defiance**, and David heard it." David HEARD it. The others had been hearing it for 40 days straight, but this is the first time that David heard it. Verse 24 tells us that all the Israelites fled in great fear. But that's not what happened in David's heart. There was no fear. There was an entirely different emotion and an entirely different reaction. David asks a question in 1 Samuel 17:26, "...Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should **defy** the armies of the living God?" In other words, David says, "Are you guys gonna let him talk that way!? them's fightin' words!"

This word "**defy**" is repeated five times throughout our story. And it provides a clue as to what this story is actually all about.<sup>7</sup> David changes the tone of the whole story here. Goliath isn't just defying Israel, he is defying the living God! David sees in one moment what all the other Israelites hadn't seen in over a month of lining up for battle...

**David's hope was in the LORD.** His confidence was not in himself and his own strength/abilities nor was it in King Saul. His hope was in the LORD.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, King Saul heard about what David was saying and he sent for him. 1 Samuel 17:32 tells us, "David said to Saul, 'Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.'" Now, a very strange thing happens next. Not only does David decline the offer to use King Saul's sword and armor, but Saul then sends David out to battle with just a slingshot. 1 Samuel 17:37 tells us, "Saul said to David, 'Go, and the LORD be with you.'" But why? Why would King Saul do this? Was he really so desperate that he just had no other option? I don't think so. I think the answer lies in 1 Samuel 16. We learn 2 important details: The Spirit of the LORD had now left King Saul. (1 Samuel 16:14) The Spirit of the LORD was now with David. You see, Samuel had secretly anointed David. 1 Samuel 16:13 tells us, "from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David." This is just one chapter earlier when these 2 things happen. In verse 13 the Spirit comes on David, and in verse 14 it leaves King Saul. This puts 1 Samuel 17 in context for us. Why did King Saul let David represent his whole army in battle? I believe that Saul could sense the LORD's anointing over David, the anointing Saul used to have himself. He saw a fearless confidence in David.<sup>9</sup>

Earlier when Samuel was looking for whom to anoint as Israel's next King, 1 Samuel 16:7 tells us, "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" Here's how I think of it: The real giant in this story is the sleeping giant that was awakened in David's heart/soul. This defiance from Goliath, this taunting provoked in David a righteous anger. It revealed within David's heart, a spiritual fervor and zeal for the Lord which prompted him to action!<sup>10</sup> Sometimes our passion can blind us but other times passion helps us see with absolute clarity. It awakens us; it launches us out of our lethargy and into the activity that God has for us.

Here's the application for us: What will it take to awaken the spiritual sleeping giant in you? To shake you out of any spiritual lethargy? This story begs the question,

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dismayed and terrified." Here we find Saul, the handsome and tall, head/shoulders above the rest, leader of the Israelites, filled with terror. He is hunkering down behind enemy lines. Verse 16 tells us Goliath kept up this taunting for 40 straight days.

<sup>7</sup> Consider this pattern we find repeated throughout the story of 1 Samuel 17. In verse 10, "Then the Philistine said, 'This day I **defy** the armies of Israel! ...' In verses 25-26, "Now the Israelites had been saying, 'Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to **defy Israel**. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel.'" David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this **disgrace** from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should **defy the armies of the living God?**" In verse 36 David says, "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has **defied the armies of the living God.**" And in verse 45, "...I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, **whom you have defied.**" (See Davis, Dale Ralph, *Looking on the Heart, Vol. 2: 1 Samuel 15-31*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994.) (Defy = דָּפַי verb Reproach, 1<sup>st</sup> person singular (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 357). Oxford: Clarendon Press.))

<sup>8</sup> Consider 1 Samuel 17:45-47.

<sup>9</sup> Consider how David's oldest brother is bothered by David's comments in 1 Samuel 17:28. Then contrast this with how Saul responds by calling for David and then sending him down into battle.

<sup>10</sup> Consider Jesus clearing the temple courts in John 2:13-17.

**“Where is your passion?”** Personally, I’ve found that one of the most difficult commands in the entire Bible is in Romans 12:11, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” (NIV) The *ESV* says, “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.” The *NASB* says, “not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;” What a strange thing to command – Keep your spiritual fervor. What a difficult thing to do!<sup>11</sup>



Do you remember having greater zeal/fervor in the early days of your faith? Recently, I received a Facebook post from an old college buddy named Mike. We went to UNWSP together back in the late 80s. We used to serve Christ and study Youth Ministry together. Back then, we were full of spiritual zeal and did street evangelism in downtown Minneapolis with a ministry called NETworks.<sup>12</sup> Mike wrote to me explaining that “back in the day” he used to volunteer at his church relentlessly. Recently, he volunteered at a youth retreat, for the first time in 25 years! The youth leaders there were mostly in their 20s. Mike said that when he saw all the “young” youth pastors at this retreat, it made him want to cry. It made him realize that he had lost his passion for serving God a long time ago. But, he went on to say that recently God had rekindled that passion in him; he is back to investing in what lasts eternally.

Zeal matters! Even in northern MN, where our passion lies, is significant. We tend to be a bit reserved, a bit more stoic. But, in the life of each Christ-follower, there needs to be a certain pursuit of zeal for the Lord. It doesn’t necessarily have to be outward and bubbly and gregarious, but it should be deep and devoted and life-altering. Sometimes we need to stir it up.<sup>13</sup> Other times, God stirs it up for us. He creates a thirst in us or He shows us some injustice or evil that makes our blood boil. That anger wakes the sleeping giant within Christian women and men. When you feel that spiritual passion rising up within you, don’t ignore it or quench it. Run with the energy and zeal it provides. Live in the fullness of it!



**What stokes your spiritual passion?** Do you need to go on a personal spiritual retreat? To take some time for reflection or fasting? Deeper time in God’s Word? Journaling? Is your heart hungering for a mission’s trip? Is God prompting you toward serving or volunteering? Do you need to attend church more regularly? Find a small group? Is there an event like the Global Leadership Summit or United in Christ that would get you fired up? Do you need to find a new devotional book? Write a book? Write a song? Create some piece of art? For some of us, maybe we need to pull out our old 80’s Christian music and let it fire us up? (An old song by Petra comes to mind, “All Fired Up.”) Or maybe, for you, it’s a Gaither album or downloading some music by the rapper NF. Whatever it is, pour some fuel on your faith this week! A Boy Named David teaches us that this story is about passionate spirituality. It calls us to rekindle our fire for God!

How does the story end? It goes further than just a slingshot to the forehead. 1 Samuel 17:51 says, “David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.” Back in verse 46, David had told Goliath he was going to come down their and cut his head off – SO THAT “the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.” David was zealous for the whole world to know! As if this isn’t already gruesome enough, after cutting off Goliath’s head, David takes it with him! 1 Samuel 17:54 goes on to describe how, “David took the Philistine’s head and brought it to Jerusalem...” In fact, in the final verses of this story, 1 Samuel

<sup>11</sup> **Fervor** = ζέω ptc. ζέων (literally ‘boil...’) figurative of emotions, anger, love, eagerness to do good or evil, to be stirred up emotionally, be enthusiastic/excited/on fire. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 426). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. If you are in your 40s or 50s, you may be able to hear the Petra song “All Fired Up!” playing in the back of your mind.

<sup>12</sup> An acronym: Northwestern Evangelism Team works = NETworks.

<sup>13</sup> Consider 1 Timothy 1:6-7, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”

17:57 tells us, "As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head."

For me, this illustrates one of the most vivid object lessons of all times: It is not about being a head taller than someone else.<sup>14</sup> In fact, it's not about physical stature at all; it's about spiritual stature. David illustrates for us that... This story is not about how tall you are. This story is not about how "the bigger they are, the harder they fall."

**This story is about living with passionate spirituality!**

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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<sup>14</sup> But, also see the *2011 NIV Study Bible* note on 1 Samuel 5:4, p. 417. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI) Also read 1 Samuel 31:9.