

May 12, 2019

Facing our Goliaths

1 Samuel 17

David is one of my heroes. Not because he went around killing giants. He's my hero because he blundered along, irritating people, annoying his family, at times succeeding, and more than once failing completely. Just like me.

When we read the Bible, we read about real people – just like us. Sometimes we think of people in Scripture as super spiritual beings ... not normal people. We feel like those who saw Barnabas and Paul heal a crippled man who shouted out, *"These men are gods in human bodies."* and tried to worship them. But Paul answered: *"Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings like yourselves."* (Acts 14:9-20)

Why is this important? If the people in the Bible ARE NOT like us, we cannot learn much from them. Why read the Bible at all? But if the folks in Scripture ARE just like us, we can learn a lot from them about how we can relate to God. One of the reasons many people don't read the Bible is that they do not know how to understand the experience of biblical characters in terms of their own experience.

As we read about people like David, we have a record of God's actual encounters with real people, just like us. David faced a challenge far bigger than he could manage on his own – a massive soldier named Goliath. Our challenges will (likely) not be Philistine heroes, but we all face our own Goliaths. Our Goliaths may be health, work, school, family, finances, addictions, a death in the family, peer pressure, or spiritual battles.

The specific enemy is not important. What is important is that as we read the Bible we learn about God and our relationship with Him as we face challenges. We are not the first people to face problems – life-threatening challenges – far bigger than we can possibly handle on our own. David was a real person, just like us, who faced obstacles as mammoth as any we face. What can we learn about God in such circumstances?

God leads us through our relationship. How is your communication?

God chooses David as king because David has a "heart-to-heart" relationship with God. He loves God. He spends time with God. David wants to please God, because he loves Him. David seems to understand what is right and necessary to do without God saying a word. David has such a relationship with God, a character shaped by God, he does not need everything explained; he naturally does what is right ... most times.

For instance, when David arrives at the battlefield (simply with instructions to take food to his older brothers), he hears Goliath's challenge to the Israelites. David ends up

before Saul and says, *"Don't worry about a thing; I've got this"* (v. 32). Note: nowhere do we hear God speak to David, telling him to deal with Goliath. But something in David, this person with a character shaped by God, naturally leads him to see what needs to be done and to be willing to do it. When we have a relationship with and a character shaped by God, we rarely need to hear some "special revelation" – some direct word – from God. We simply see a need and we fill it.

How does God lead us? Let's sidetrack a bit. We want God to speak clearly to us. We would like to hear a specific "word" from the Lord – audibly or by some mystical means. But the norm in Scripture is that people who are close to God – who walk with God and love God – live in a "conversational relationship" with Him. During the journey of their lives, they talk with God about His will and way – sharing their joys and sorrows, victories and challenges – with God along the way.

They do not necessarily receive special "words" – they simply know God through prayer, study, reflection, so they think God's thoughts after Him. God guides and speaks through their relationship and character without need for special messages.

We often use the phrase, "personal relationship with Jesus," to describe our status with God. But what does that look like? Too often it's shorthand for *"I've put my trust in Jesus to forgive my sins and save me to an eternity in heaven."* One day it may matter. But day by day it's not much more than a legal arrangement.

That's not much of a "personal relationship" is it? Potentially, my wife and I could be legally married and not have much of a personal relationship, couldn't we? It could simply be a legal arrangement. However, the reality of our personal relationship is we actually spend a lot of time together. We are best friends. We continue to get to know each other more and more. Over the years, Marianne and I almost think the same thoughts and speak the same words. Much of my life is centered on wanting to please her and do what she would like ... even without her having to ask.

Jesus says, "I have called you my friends ..." (John 15:15). A friendship is much different than a legal arrangement. Jesus relates to His people as a friend or a close family member. When you breeze through biblical history from Adam and Eve, through Abraham, to John and Paul, you see God relating very personally with His people. God is very personal to the great saints of history, too – from Augustine through Martin Luther, to Henri Nouwen or Eugene Peterson.

What is the "secret"? It is no secret at all. The common thread that runs through all personal experiences of God is they come out of a certain kind of life, a kind of life where the person has made a decision to love God and live with God – like a friend.

Close, personal relationships with God come when we seek God and spend time with Him as a friend. Close, personal relationships happen when we read Scripture, seriously

enough to ask God to teach us from it, and when we pray, seriously enough to really desire to listen (any true relationship is as much or more listening as speaking). Close, personal relationships with God happen when we take God seriously enough to let Him come into all of our lives, shape all of our lives, direct all our thinking and our living. And close, personal relationships come when we really want to please God by obeying his word. *"If you love me, you will obey me,"* says Jesus (John 14:15, 21, 23).

Great is His faithfulness. How great is your faith?

Before we make too much of David's spirituality, we have to acknowledge that he was very human. He double – even triple-checks the benefits for the potential champion ... the rewards are pretty tempting. On the one hand, David does what he knows is right ... on the other hand he may be a bit selfish, too (I can identify with that).

God is a God of incredible grace. Sometimes we do things with selfish motives – God still tolerates us. God, like any good friend, celebrates our successes and yet, when we fail, still loves us (though His desire is that we keep growing and becoming more and more perfect).

Whatever David's motives are, today we want to focus on the source of his confidence – why is he so sure that he can defeat the great Goliath?

David's life with God over the years has demonstrated that, when he does right things (for the best or even not-so-good reasons), God always faithfully gets him through. David faced challenges before – maybe not as formidable as Goliath, but still pretty intimidating. As a shepherd he faced both lions and bears who threatened his sheep. Now his sheep are the people of Israel and the lion is this Philistine giant – the names are different, the stakes are higher – but fundamentally the issue is the same. God helped him overcome before; surely God will help him now?

It's easy to forget ways God led us, provided for us, and delivered us in the past – forgetting them altogether or shrugging them off as coincidence. One writer has said, *"It seems so often we write our afflictions in marble, and our blessings in dust; we inscribe our hurts on steel and our deliverances on water."*

As we look back, I wonder how often we have been stretched before ... and the Lord delivered us? Sometimes we rushed into situations, perhaps foolishly, but the Lord still provided for us. Most of us can think of afflictions, temptations, or challenges we have faced. They were hard; we had no resources, yet Jesus sustained us.

How easy it is to NOT see connections between past deliverances and present trials. David might have said - *"When I killed the lion I was younger ... I was stronger and quicker back then."* But He didn't. Instead he used those experiences as a foundation

to do greater things. Sometimes I feel old and think, *"What I did a few years ago I couldn't possibly do now."* How easily we forget the lessons Jesus has taught us. But we need to remember. And be encouraged.

All God required of David was a heart devoted to Him, nothing more. We can face challenges armed with the only weapon David had – faith in God – no matter what the Goliath. As we go through life, we draw strength from God's help in the past and can be confident of his presence now and in the future.

We can take courage, remembering the victories that God has given us in our lives. We remember, not so that we can boast about what we've done, but so we can glorify God by going on to do greater things. If God and God alone is the source of our power - is He not enough? Will He not continue to do great things as He has in the past? No lion, no bear, no Goliath, no difficulty can ever separate us from our God (Romans 8:35-39).

God does great things with small gifts. What can you give Him?

We can also remember that God can work incredible miracles with small things, given in faith to Him.

- David picked up five smooth stones ... he only needed one.
- God called Moses to lead His people; when Moses complained he didn't have much, God challenged him, *"What do you have?"* With a simple staff, and a reluctant brother, God performed miracles to free his people.
- When the crowds following Jesus were hungry, the disciples complained they couldn't feed them: *"What do you have?"* With a few rolls and fish, Jesus fed thousands.

Jesus asks us as individuals, *"What do you have?"* He asks you, *"Do you have a concern for hurting people? Do you have some creativity? Do you enjoy children? Can you host coffee? Can you cut up vegetables (at the Soup Kitchen)? Can you pray?"* With that small thing, God can do great miracles.

God asks us as a church, *"What do you have?"* Do you want to make a difference in the world? Do you have a passion for unchurched people? Do you have a heart for caring? Do you love God's word? With those things, given over to Him, God can work miracles.

When you help me, Lord, it is not by magic or rabbits-out-of-a-hat. It is by showing me what gifts I already possess and telling me to share them. You said, 'Give them something to eat yourselves.' Thank you for my resources. Help me use them for others.

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First Baptist Church
1614 – 5th Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB T1J 0W3
(403) 327-2082
bruce@firstb.net