FELLING THE GIANTS IN YOUR LIFE

1 Samuel 17

By

Steven J. Cole

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Lessons from David (2)

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Have you ever met a giant? It makes you feel kind of small and weak. When I was a teenager, I once went to a basketball clinic put on by the Los Angeles Lakers. We sat in the stands at first and watched these oversized men run through some drills. Next to each other, they didn’t seem all that big. But then we went down on the court to meet the players. The shortest was Jerry West, a midget at 6’2”; most were well over 6’6”! At 5’10” I felt like a five-year-old, especially when I shook hands with some of them!

Of course, these were friendly giants. No way would I have gone anywhere near them if they had been out to get me! But some of you live with hostile giants. I’m not referring to your mate or your teenager (or, if you’re a teenager, to your parents), although you may view them as hostile giants! I’m referring to a sin problem that dominates your life. It comes out daily in full battle array and dares you to try to stand against it. It’s an impressive foe. You feel powerless against this mighty monster. It taunts you and holds you captive like a cat with a mouse.

For some it may be the giant of lust or pornography. Perhaps some have gone further and are enslaved by the giant of sexual immorality. It would not surprise me to learn that some here fight the giant called homosexuality. The giants alcohol and drug abuse dominate some who name Christ as Savior. Another giant named greed keeps many others enslaved to their work and their things. The giant self-centeredness keeps many others in tow, dressing in the different outfits of self-pity, jealousy, anger, and pride.

But whatever the giant’s name, like Bunyan’s Giant Despair, which held Christian and Hopeful captive in his Doubting Castle and beat them and made them miserable, so these giants hinder the progress of God’s people in the purpose for which He called them. They rob them of joy in the Lord.
How can we fell these giants so that we can live in freedom and victory and joy in the Lord’s service? The well-known story of David and Goliath gives us some clues. It is a story filled with instructive contrasts—Saul and the armies of Israel viewing the situation from a human perspective (“Have you seen this man?” [17:25]), while David views things from God’s perspective (“Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?” [17:26]). Saul had confidence in his armor (as long as David was the guy wearing it! [17:38]); David had confidence in his God (17:45). Saul was concerned about his own image (18:7-8); David was concerned with the honor of God (17:26, 45-47). So from David we learn that...

To fell the giants in life, we need a spiritual perspective, a practical faith, and a deliberate focus on God’s glory.

1. To fell the giants in life, we need a spiritual perspective.

From a human perspective, Goliath was quite a man! He stood over nine feet tall, his armor weighed 125 pounds, and the tip of his spear alone weighed 15 pounds. He challenged Israel to a representative battle—their champion against him. The loser’s people would become the slaves of the winner’s people. Goliath was a single problem, but he threatened to undo the entire nation of Israel. This illustrates a biblical principle: Our private sins are never really private. If we don’t conquer them, they will not only destroy us, but also wreak havoc on our families and even on the whole church. Sin, even private sin, always has harmful consequences far beyond the individual.

From a human perspective, Goliath was a formidable enemy. But that was precisely the problem—Saul and his soldiers were viewing the situation with Goliath from a human perspective: “Have you seen this man?” (17:25). They were allowing the worldly viewpoint of Goliath to go unchallenged: “Am I not the Philistine and you servants of Saul?” (17:8). Was that right? Yes, from a human perspective. But David saw things from God’s perspective, and he challenged what Goliath said: “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should taunt the armies of the living God?” (17:26, 36).

Did you catch the different perspective? He isn’t just “the Philistine.” He is the uncircumcised Philistine!” And the Israelites
are not “the servants of Saul.” They are “the armies of the living God!” There is David’s spiritual perspective! Saul and the armies of Israel were afraid because they saw it as a conflict of their puny muscle against Goliath’s mighty muscle, of their little weapons against Goliath’s impressive weapons, of their experience in warfare against Goliath’s experience (17:33). But David saw it as a conflict between God and the forces of evil. Saul and his men saw Goliath and thought, “He’s so big we can never kill him!” David saw the same man and thought, “He’s so big, I can’t miss!”

We must understand that when David called Goliath an “uncircumcised Philistine,” he wasn’t calling him a dirty name. To be uncircumcised was to be outside of the Abrahamic covenant and the promised blessings of God. When God instituted the sign of circumcision with Abraham, he was living in the land of Canaan. The people of that land were morally corrupt. Sodom and Gomorrah were at the zenith of their immoral ways. Every variety of sexual sin was rampant. But God wanted His covenant people to be morally pure and holy--set apart unto Him. And so He directed Abraham to remove the foreskin of every male as the sign of His covenant with them.

I’ve never heard a preacher speak about it, but have you ever wondered why God chose the male foreskin as the place where the sign of the covenant should be enacted? Why not have them wear pierced earrings or get a tattoo on their right arm?

The reason is that God wanted His people to be morally pure. If a Jewish man was going to get involved in sexual immorality, it would involve the use of his male organ which was different from the pagan’s. The Jew thus had a practical and graphic reminder in the most obvious place that he was to be sexually pure because he was in a covenant relationship with the Holy God. And if he ever got so far as to be unclothed in the presence of a pagan prostitute or homosexual, the pagan would notice the difference and the Jew would find himself in a most awkward witnessing situation!

Thus when David called Goliath an uncircumcised Philistine, he was saying, “Hey you guys! This guy is an immoral pagan who is outside of the covenant promises of God. And he has taunted the armies of the living God.” David had the spiritual perspective on the problem.
If you want to fell some Goliath in your life you must begin by calling it what God calls it. You will not conquer it if you do not see things from God’s perspective. For any problem you want to name the world has a euphemistic label that makes it sound O.K. The world makes sin sound like it’s not so bad and like everybody does it and it won’t hurt you. But God hates sin and says that it will destroy you. You start fighting it by calling it what God calls it.

Take the problem of anger. The world calls it “having a short fuse” and even tells us that it is emotionally healthy to vent our hostilities. God’s Word says that being wrongfully angry toward another person is to murder them and that we can and must control it.

Or, take adultery. The world calls it “having a fling” or an “affair” and makes it sound adventurous and exciting. The Bible calls it sin and shows that it will ruin lives and have devastating effects on families. It is the way of death (Prov. 7:26-27).

Take homosexuality. The world calls it being “gay” or refers to it as an “alternate lifestyle.” The Bible calls it perversion and an abomination to God. It is not sexual preference, but sin.

Take abortion. The world covers the atrocity by calling it “pregnancy termination” or being “pro-choice.” The Bible calls it murder or shedding innocent blood.

Take alcohol addiction. The world calls it a disease from which you must recover. The Bible calls it drunkenness, a deed of the flesh from which you must repent (Gal. 5:21), and attributes it to a lack of self-control.

Whatever the problem, if you want to conquer it, the first step is always to do what David did here, namely to call it what God calls it and to call yourself what God calls you. This problem is not a Philistine champion; it is an uncircumcised Philistine; it is sin, it is offensive to the living God. And I’m not just a servant of Saul; I’m a member of the army of the living God; I’ve been redeemed by the blood of Christ and the battle is His! That’s the starting point for victory.

2. To fell the giants in life, we need a practical faith in the living God.
David didn’t just have a generic, “I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows” kind of faith. He didn’t have faith in faith itself. He didn’t buy into the common notion, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, just so you believe.” David believed in the living God who was in a covenant relationship with His people. David not only had faith in the Lord; he also had faith in the Lord in him in this difficult and challenging situation. As Paul expressed it, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). David didn’t say, “Well, trust the Lord, Saul, and good luck to you.” He said, “Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine” (17:32). That’s faith in shoe leather! Such faith is always active and aggressive; it goes out after the problem and takes it on (17:35, 48). Note 2 things about David’s faith, the kind of faith we need:

A. We need a faith rooted in personal experience.

This wasn’t David’s first outing in the school of faith. Even though he was a teenager, he had proved God in his own experience. When the lion and the bear had taken one of the sheep, David didn’t say, “Oh, well, that’s the way it goes. I’m not going to risk my neck for that dumb lamb.” He went after the beast, grabbed it by the beard and slew it (17:35)! Wow! And then afterward, he didn’t attribute it to good luck nor did he go around boasting about his bravado. Rather, he only spoke of the incident here to convince Saul that he could beat Goliath, and he was careful to attribute the victory to the Lord in whom he was consciously trusting (17:3-7).

Saul should have had that kind of faith. He had seen God provide victory in battle before. But Saul had a track record of partial obedience (= “disobedience”), and had drifted far from the reality of the personal faith which David knew. Saul was a “cultural believer.”

Cultural believers go to church and believe in God. They know all the right religious cliches. Outwardly they seem to be believers. But their faith is not personal and practical because they don’t want to confront and deal with their sin (often, like Saul, it’s the sin of pride). Whenever they face a problem, they mouth religious cliches (“May the Lord be with you” [17:3-7]), but they know nothing of personal, practical faith in the living God. If Saul
knew the reality of the Lord’s presence, then he could have gone out and taken off Goliath’s head. As it was, he had a form of religion, but he did not know its power. He might just as well have said, “Good luck!”

Do you have the kind of personal, practical faith in the living God which David had? It means that when the lion or bear or giant comes into your life, instead of tolerating it, you recognize that you can’t allow it to have its way. You can’t live in peaceful coexistence with sin (15:18-33). You must confront it and cut it off. Either you destroy sin or sin will destroy you. That’s what Jesus meant when He said, “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:29). As you learn to confront the so-called little sins in your life, you gain an experiential, practical, personal faith that enables you to fell the “giant” sins.

B. We need a faith in the living God Himself, not in human methods.

David’s faith was in the living God, not in human methods. After Saul says, “May the Lord be with you,” he shows where his trust really lies when he tries to outfit David in his own armor (17:38-39). That’s the way of the cultural believer: You fight the enemy with all of the latest worldly techniques and methods, with some religious cliches tacked on to make it sound spiritual. Many Christians today face giants in their lives--sins which the Bible tells us how to deal with. But instead of turning to the Bible which shows us how to trust in the living God, they turn to the wisdom of the world with some Bible verses thrown in to make it sound spiritual.

But--picture the humor here--David gets all this armor on, and he can’t move! He’s like a little kid dressed up in a snowsuit put on over 14 layers of clothes. He’s as stiff as a zombie! And so he takes it off. And then, please notice (17:40), he does use a method--five smooth stones (five in case he missed?) and his shepherd’s sling plus a stick (I don’t know what he planned to do with that). But the method David used was consistent with his faith in the living God and with the glory and power of God (17:45-47). David didn’t magnify his sling or his own expertise, but rather he magnified the Lord (17:45). I can picture him nodding his head
back toward the faithless cowards of Israel as he says (17:47), “That this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or spear...”

There is nothing wrong with methods, as long as your trust is truly in the living God and not in your slick method, and as long as the method does not detract from the Lord’s glory and power. The way to fell that giant sin in your life is not by some latest method, but by genuine trust in the living God. Faith always honors God, not methods, and God always honors faith, not methods (Ps. 33:13-22).

Thus to fell the giants in our lives, we need a spiritual perspective and a practical faith in the living God. But also,

3. **To fell the giants in life, we need a deliberate focus on God’s glory, not our own.**

When David heard Goliath’s taunt, he didn’t think to himself, “Hey, here’s the opportunity I’ve been waiting for! Here’s my chance to become a national hero!” Rather, he was concerned about God’s glory. God’s name was bound up with His people, and as long as this uncircumcised Philistine taunted God’s people, God Himself was being taunted (17:45-47). So David was moved with righteous indignation because God’s honor was being dragged through the mud.

Saul was more concerned for his own glory than for the Lord’s glory. After he won a victory, he set up a monument for himself (15:12). Outwardly, he practiced religion for the sake of a good appearance, but his real motive was his own honor, not the honor of God who is called, “the Glory of Israel” (15:24-30). One sure mark of a cultural believer who is out for his own glory is that he gets jealous over the success of other Christians. When David became popular after his victory over Goliath, Saul should have rejoiced that God’s name had been vindicated and God’s people had been delivered from this oppressive enemy. But instead, he sulked and tried to bring David down, because he was motivated by promoting himself, not the Lord (18:6-16).

That brings us to an important question: Why do you want to fell the giant in your life? Do you want to overcome your problems so that you’ll be successful and happy? Wrong motive! Do
you want to overcome your problems so that people will look up to you and think of you as a good Christian? Wrong motive! Do you want to overcome your problems so that you can build a large ministry and become known as a great Christian leader? Wrong motive!

David publicly states why he wanted to defeat Goliath (17:46-47): First, so that all the earth (pagans) may know that there is a God in Israel. He wanted unbelievers to see that God is real and that He is mighty to save those who trust in Him. Second, David wanted all the professing believers who weren’t really trusting in God (“this assembly”) to know that the Lord does not deliver by the latest methods (“sword or spear”), but rather, “the battle is the Lord’s.”

The reason we ought to desire to fell the Goliaths of sin in our lives is that sin drags God’s honor through the mud and that we truly want God’s name to be lifted up and honored through us. We should want lost people to see how God helped us conquer overwhelming problems through trusting in Him so that they, too, will put their trust in Him. We should want other believers who are locked into a human perspective, who aren’t really trusting in God, and who are living to promote themselves rather than God, to see by our lives how God Himself will work on behalf of those who trust Him and seek His glory. Then they, too, will trust in the Lord and He will be all the more glorified through them. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your loving kindness, because of Your truth” (Ps. 115:1).

**Conclusion**

A number of years ago, a 14-year-old boy spent a Saturday night until the wee hours of Sunday morning playing cards and drinking with some friends. The next morning he dutifully went to confirmation classes and returned home to find his father waiting to tell him that his mother had died the night before and to take him to her funeral. Neither her death nor the confirmation classes made any impression on him. Three or four days before he was confirmed, he was guilty of gross immorality. The day before he was confirmed, when he went to confession, he defrauded the clergyman by only giving him a twelfth part of the money which his father had sent for that purpose. At 16 he was thrown in jail be-
cause he ran up bills at a couple of nice hotels and skipped out without paying. His father paid the bills and then severely beat his son. But the boy continued his profligate, deceptive lifestyle.

At age 20, he went with a friend to a home gathering where he saw simple Christians who had a genuine faith in the living God. He felt strangely compelled to return and he did so until, constrained by the love of Jesus who died for all his sins on the cross, he was converted. He began to grow in faith and obedience until, about ten years later, he was moved by reading the biography of another Christian, to found an orphanage to meet the needs of the many homeless children in his city. He determined that he would give away all his earthly possessions and not ask anybody for money to support this orphanage. Rather, he would live by faith in God alone so that God would be glorified. He wanted unbelievers and believers alike to know the reality of trusting in the living God who is faithful and hears the prayers of His people.

That man was George Muller. His life shows that God is still in the business of felling the giants of sin if we will view those giants from God’s perspective, if we will trust in the living God and deliberately focus on His glory, not our own. The God of David and of George Muller wants you to fell the Goliaths of sin in your life, to His glory!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to call sin “sin”? Does it matter if certain sins are proven to be genetically related?
2. Can a person expect instant, total victory over a life-dominating sin or does it involve a lifelong struggle?
3. How do we know when we cross the line from trusting God to trusting methods?
4. Is it wrong to honor “successful” servants of God? How can we be successful and yet give proper glory to God?