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David vs. Goliath
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I faced a giant once. I played one year of football in high school, which was about two years too many. I wasn't built to play football; I was built to be the team manager. I ended up as a wide receiver because that was the position that was farthest from the ball and had the least amount of contact.

I always dreaded the drills we had to run in practice. My least favorite was the tackle drill. Two people stood about 20 yards apart. One person's job was to take the football and run full-speed at the other person; that person's job was not to die and to try and tackle the ball-carrier in the process.

One day when we were doing these drills, I realized that I was matched up against Tim Blankenship, who played middle linebacker. I think Tim was on steroids before it was popular to be on steroids. Although he and I were in the same grade, he was a head taller, about 40 pounds heavier, and he shaved three times a day. Plus, he was mean.

So there was Tim, about 20 yards away, football in his hand, smirk on his face, saliva drooling from his lips. And there was me, knees knocking together, trying to figure out how far I could run in the opposite direction before Tim caught me. The coach didn't blow his whistle to start the drill; he played "Taps" on the bugle. The last thing I remember seeing was Tim barreling toward me, and then a bright white light with angels and harps. When I came to and sat up, I saw Tim sitting next to me – actually I saw about three or four of him sitting next to me. He looked at me and smiled and said, "Nice tackle."

In our story today, King David also faced a giant, although I bet Goliath didn't shave as much as Tim Blankenship did. This was a great story to hear as a kid, the underdog David defeating the giant Goliath with only a slingshot. The story becomes even more amazing when you hear it in its context. Young David has been anointed as the next king of Israel, but the current king, Saul, is still ruling, so Saul's not thrilled about this. Now settled in the Promised Land, the Israelites are constantly fighting off foes who want to invade and take their land from them. The most current challenger is the Philistines.

The two armies meet in the Valley of Elah with the Israelite army on one hill and the Philistine army on the other. As they are surveying each other, out of the Philistine camp steps Goliath, who is described in terrifying detail which would mean nothing to us today. We are told his height is four cubits and span, which translates to about 6-foot-9-inches. He'd probably play small forward on Kentucky's basketball team, but back then, they didn't grow 'em that big, so Goliath literally stood out. He wore armor that weighed almost 200 pounds, and he had a shield so big that it took a full-grown man just to carry it for him.

He steps into the valley and begins taunting the Israelites. "Send me one person to fight. If they win, we surrender. But if I win, you surrender. Today, I defy the ranks of Israel." Ooo, I love some good old-fashioned biblical trash talk! I'm sure there were a few "nanny-nanny-boo-boos" thrown in there, as well. Verse 11 tells us that when King Saul and all the Israelites heard these words, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. This went on twice a day for forty days: Goliath would issue the challenge, and no one from Israel would be brave enough to answer.

David's three oldest brothers were in the army, but David was stuck at home tending the sheep. One day, his father tells David to take a bunch of supplies to his brothers on the front line.

While he is there, he sees Goliath and hears the challenge being issued. And then, he sees the whole Israelite army run away in fear.

David says, "What's the deal? You're going to let a Philistine defy the armies of the living God?" And the Israelites say, "Have you SEEN this guy? King Saul is offering a huge reward for whoever kills him: the king's blessing, the king's daughter, and no taxes for the rest of his life." Personally, I wouldn't interested in the first two, but that last one would have been pretty enticing. David doesn't get their fear. The soldiers had looked at Goliath and said, "He's so big, how can I win?" David looked at him and said, "He's so big, how can I miss?"

David's challenge to the Israelite army gets back to King Saul, who calls for David, which sets up this interesting conversation. David, God's anointed king, tells Saul, the king God has rejected, "I'll take him on." Saul says, "You're kidding, right? Have you SEEN this guy? You're just a kid." David responds, "As a shepherd, I've killed both lions and bears to protect my sheep." Verse 37 says, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So, Saul says, "Go, and may the Lord be with you," which is Saul's way of saying, "It's your funeral. If you die, I get to stay king."

Before David goes, Saul tried to give David his kingly armor to wear. But Saul was a 48 long and David was a 36 regular and the armor didn't fit. Rather than trying to be someone else, David is fine just being David. If he's going to trust in God, he's going to fully trust in God, not hedge his bets by making sure all the bases are covered. "Yes, God will protect me, but just in case God forgets, let me put on this chain-mail armor." So, he leaves the armor behind, he grabs five smooth stones from the local creek, and heads out to the battleground.

When David steps into the valley, Goliath takes one look way down and snorts, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" David steps up to respond. You can just hear the orchestral music building in the background as he gives this stirring speech, starting in v. 45: "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so 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 save by sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's and he will give you into our hand." As they face off, David runs toward the big bully, takes out a stone, slings it, and strikes Goliath right between the eyes. The stone sinks into his forehead and he falls face down on the ground. The giant has been killed.

I'm amazed at David's confidence in this story. He had to be scared, right? I would think so. Despite his supreme trust in God, Goliath was still a giant and David was still human. But David knows his real battle wasn't against Goliath; it is against his own fears. Does he trust God enough to be victorious against this giant? Will he be ruled by his fears or by his faith? When we face our giants, what rules us?

We all have them, don't we? Forces that threaten to take over our lives and hold us captive. The reality of life is that we have to face these giants: a diagnosis we've received; the fear of getting older; regrets that keep us stuck in the past; problems that keep us fearful of the unknown future; a sin we can't seem to conquer; a worry we can't seem to shake. We all have giants in our lives whom we're afraid to confront, giants that confront us and challenge us and keep us from moving forward.

David shows us how we can face them with faith, not fear. He wasn't intimidated by the size of his opponent. Sometimes our giants can loom ten times larger than they really are,

making us think we don't have the size or strength to fight them. That disease is too deadly, the addiction has too tight a stranglehold on us. But it doesn't matter how big or small or strong or weak we are. We learned last week that Moses told the Israelites at the Red Sea, "God is on our side." David knew that was enough.

Something else David did to remain faithful to God was ignoring the advice of others. Very well-intentioned people will try to make you feel better by explaining away your giant. "Don't worry, that surgery is no big deal." "You just need to move on." Things will work out." But it's not their giant, it's yours. Your Goliath is YOUR Goliath. Someone else might say, "Ah, that's no big deal." But to you, it's Goliath. And no one else can battle him for you. But you never battle him alone.

Saul tried to make David into someone else by putting armor on him. But we are not someone else. We are us, the person God created us to be, the person God wants to use to defeat those giants. When we are true to ourselves, we remember that we are not alone. "The battle is the Lord's," David said. We believe in a God who's not intimidated by swords and coats of armor and bombastic speech. We believe in a God who's not intimidated by tumors and hateful words and the power of sin. Our God is the true giant in this story and in our lives. We don't have to be eloquent or strong or handsome. We don't have to be beautiful or brilliant or have all the answers. God honors our faith, no matter how wavering and imperfect it is. Jesus tells us that even faith the size of a mustard seed is enough for God. All God asks is we trust, that we stand before our giants with integrity and faith and call on God's name.

To be fair, not all battles end in a rousing victory like David's. Tim Blankenship definitely got the better of me in our collision. I wasn't the winner. But I'm still here. And so are you. You've already faced some giants, haven't you? Maybe you were victorious, maybe you suffered some wounds, maybe you still bear the scars from your battle. But you're still here. God has seen you through before, and God will see you through again.

Not everyone needs to hear this today, but somebody does, and my guess is we all need to hear it at some point in our lives. There will always be giants for us to battle. This world is full of them. But there will also always be God, standing beside us, ready to fight for us. Don't let your giant problems of today eclipse the promises of a God who is, and was, and will always be. Your giant seems so big. You are not alone. The battle is the Lord's.