

GOOD HEALTH ON THE INSIDE

1 Samuel 17

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Today we look at 1 Samuel 17. It's one of the really great chapters of the Bible. It's the familiar story of David and Goliath. I'll let you read this on your own. I'll make continual reference to the text as we go through this message today. I've called today's message "Good Health on the Inside."

One of the dilemmas we have in approaching a Scripture that is very familiar to us is that we might have danger with the familiarity—that we might simply see this text through the lens of a child's eyes. We need to come to the text today as adults and see what fresh things God may be saying to us through it. The simple fact is—all of us have a Goliath in life. All of us have something bigger than us that is threatening us, and we don't know quite how to deal with it. The same thing that happened when the ancient Israelites faced their Goliath happens to us when we face our Goliath.

I. First, we get stuck.

Chapter 17:1–3 reflects that. The text notes that on one hillside the Philistines were encamped, and on the other hillside the Israelites were encamped. They were in that position for forty days.

No one was advancing towards the other. The Philistines knew that the Israelites were tremendous mountain fighters—great at hand-to-hand combat and great in the terrain of the mountainside.

The Israelites knew that the Philistines were great in fighting on the valley floor, since they had the advantage of their heavy weaponry and chariots. The Israelites didn't have those. The Israelites didn't want to go to the valley, and the Philistines didn't want to go into the hills. So there's a standoff. They can't retreat, and they can't go forward.

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Isn't that where we find ourselves sometimes in life? We're simply stuck. We can't advance. I'm reminded of a prayer request from a single person. His request communicated the fact that he would like to get unstuck. The prayer request simply asked for a new wife, a new job, and a new place to live. Who of us, at one time or another, may have thought of similar things? The Israelis cannot advance and they will not flee. As a result, they're immobilized and paralyzed. Maybe you're at that point of your life today, where you feel trapped and you are immobile and paralyzed. That brings us to a second thing when we face our Goliaths.

II. The problem we face always appears larger than our resources are to deal with it.

Goliath was a giant—about nine feet tall. He was a walking armaments factory. Look at what the guy had on! He reminds you of the A-Team—all sorts of exotic devices ready to come out and slay you. He represented an advanced civilization. A civilization much more technologically and culturally advanced than the Israelis. Don't think of the Philistines as some primitive people. They were displaced people from the Aegean Sea. They had the advantage of Greek culture behind them. The archeological digs going on show us what a formidable power they were on the western coastland of Israel. They were highly organized. They were builders of cities—monumental cities. The Israelis largely lived in a farm-like environment with simplistic structures.

The Philistines had a monopoly on iron making, and they controlled olive oil production. In the archeological site that has recently been dug up, they have already discovered 204 olive presses. It's estimated that all of the olive presses in the city produced an amount of three tons of olive oil a year. A tremendous export and production rate considering that particular era! They also had olive oil presses that were high tech. These presses produced thirteen to twenty-six gallons, compared to any other presses of the period that produced seven and a half gallons. They were a

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very sophisticated people, and they had a giant to represent them in war. They had an army that was much better mobilized, trained, and equipped than the Israelis. And that was a large problem for the Israelis. It is a formidable problem for us when we look at the external pressures in our life. We look at the pressures and say to ourselves, “I don’t have the capacity to deal with that.” When I was thinking about how to internalize the principle of Goliath, I thought of the word “stress.” Stress represents the people living in southern California—the kind of Goliaths we’re up against. Stress represents those problems which we get anxious about. We wonder how we’re going to meet all the obligations and demands that are being thrust upon us. Whatever your Goliath is, the attitudes of the Israelis to their Goliath transfer to our lives. When faced with extraordinary difficulties compared with our feeble resources—we feel pressure, fear, worry, frustration, and inward collapse. Our problems often become greater than our ability to deal with them.

III. Thirdly, keep up good appearances while facing your Goliath even if inwardly you’re falling apart.

That’s what the Israelis did. According to verse 16, this went on for forty days and forty nights. Every morning and night Goliath would stride out to the valley floor and say, “I’m going to make mincemeat of anybody who comes out here.” What is even more interesting in verse 20, as the Israeli army went out to their battle positions every morning and night, they were shouting the war cry. Then verse 24, “When the Israelites saw [Goliath], they all ran from him in great fear” (NIV). What’s going on? Every morning the troops would get together in a huddle—defense. Then they’d go out, and Goliath would come out. They did not want to engage the battle, so they all began shaking and ran away in fear—inwardly falling apart.

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Classic example of what happens to us. We may be having the greatest challenge of our life, and someone comes along and says, “How are you doing?” And we say, “Fine. Doing well.” Inside we say, “If you really knew how I felt.” We keep up good appearances while inwardly falling apart. To me, the relevance of Scripture is always so amazing. In two thousand years, people haven’t changed. Then there’s this fourth thing that’s going on when we face our Goliath.

IV. The problem becomes of disastrous proportion when we have lost our reliance on the Lord.

That’s when things really get bad. We’re not factoring Him into our situation. This is the case with Saul. What a change in his personality! When he’s first introduced to us in Scripture in 1 Samuel 11, he’s consumed with righteous anger, and he’s not at all afraid. His first act as king, after he has been anointed by Samuel, is to go into battle against the Ammonites because they threatened Jabesh Gilead. He takes his oxen, kills them, takes the slabs of meat, and then sends them all over Israel and says, “Anybody who doesn’t show up for this battle is going to get cut up just like these oxen.” He goes against the Ammonites and wipes them out. He’s not afraid at all. The Lord is with him.

Now the Spirit of the Lord has left him—tragic consequences of disobedience to God. He’s not the person that he was just a few years earlier—just a few chapters ago. It is different. Now we find him immobilized. He is sitting in his tent. It’s devastating when the leader becomes demoralized because the people around him also become demoralized. Jonathan, his brave son who has done this marvelous exploit told earlier in 1 Samuel, is also not volunteering to fight Goliath. Jonathan had wiped out a whole contingent of Philistines on one occasion. Saul’s lead general, Abner, likewise a brave man, is demoralized. All Saul has left to offer is material things. “Anybody who goes and kills Goliath, I’ll give them great wealth, my daughter in marriage, and

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tax exemption” (see 1 Samuel 17:25). That’s not a bad deal! But no one takes the challenge.

There are some contests in life that require an intrinsic motivation, the rewards of which cannot be monetarily calculated. They have to do with courage, faith, valor, and confidence. “Fear makes cowards of us all,” someone has said. Shakespeare said that you cannot reason with a man who is full of dread. Saul faced a situation that was full of dread. No one would take his challenge, and Saul did not take his own challenge. He was unwilling to put himself on the line, and he was a pretty brave fighter in his day. How do we deal with our Goliaths?

Enter David—this beautiful person who is introduced to us for the second time in Scripture.

What enormous potential when he stands before us in 1 Samuel 17! He is probably in his late teens or early twenties—a magnificent person. Look at the potential that was in him!

So we can all appreciate the grandeur of this individual, look at the potential that’s there—evidenced by what later develops in his life. He had the literary ability of a Shakespeare. Look at what he wrote! He had the musical creativity of a Beethoven or Bach. He had the talent—the hand-to-eye coordination. He had the valor and courage of a decorated war hero. He had the executive leadership of a Washington or Lincoln. All those tremendous qualities rolled into one person. Add to all that, he was handsome and ruddy. And his brothers didn’t think much of him! Isn’t that life? People around us put us down. We can thank God that He has confidence in us, believes in us, and is able to develop the potential that’s there. God sees that potential in David. If we’re going to deal with difficulty, if we’re going to deal with Goliaths in our experience, I think we have to follow David’s pattern of good health on the inside. Because before he ever won the battle with Goliath, he had won it in a different context. He had won it within himself. He won it with God. The battle with Goliath was only the logical external result of an internal

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resolution and an internal dynamic present in his life. Look at the factors that made for his good health on the inside.

V. David looked at the spiritual dimensions to a problem.

He didn't just approach the problem and divorce it from spirituality and relationship with God. He looked at spiritual dimensions. He says words like, "Remove this disgrace from Israel." He saw Goliath as not just a nation-versus-nation conflict, but a conflict that involved God's honor. He said in verse 26, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (NIV). Emphasis on "the living God." David was not a functional atheist or a practicing agnostic. I say "functional atheist" because that's different from a theoretical atheist who actually believes there is no God. There are many people who can sign a doctrinal checklist and say, "I believe in God." But they live as functional atheists. They live as though God doesn't exist at all. That's the way the army of Israel was. They believed in God, but what were they going to do about it? Nothing. Functional atheists. Practicing agnostics. David, however, has this dynamic faith in God. He'd be able to say within a Christian context "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fears are gone." He took that living presence of God and said, "That's got to relate and apply to my life and the situation I'm wrestling with." When our hearts are clear with the Lord, we face our stresses with much greater clarity and power.

There are times in our lives that God seems strangely absent. But the problem is not that God has disappeared. We simply lack a God mindset. When we develop our sensitivity, we soon begin to see His work everywhere. That's the difference with David. He was looking for God while he was facing his problem. And God was there. When you look for Him, He's there. David saw the spiritual dimension. That was a good sign of the inward health in his life.

VI. David did not buy into the negativity and harmful emotions of others.

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It's hard not to. Eliab, his oldest brother, really put him down hard. He said to David when he came out, verse 28, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert?" (NIV). Get the sarcasm dripping from his chin? I have a hunch David had more than a few sheep. "I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle" (NIV). Nasty little put down. If I had been David at that point, I'd have said, "You're not so hot yourself! You think you're so big? Why are you shaking in fear every morning and evening when Goliath comes out? You're a coward." David chooses to sidestep the argument and says, "Can't I even talk?" And he walks away from it. Saul likewise puts him down. "You're not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him. You're only a boy. He's been a fighting man from his youth. You're too young and inexperienced" (see verse 33).

David, at that point, could have been capsized by the opinion of other people. His eldest brother and his king say, "You can't do this." How many times have you or I been dissuaded from doing something we felt God would give us the ability to do because someone came along and said that we couldn't? "You're not up to that. You're not spiritual enough. You're not good enough."

Don't buy into the negativity and harmful emotions of others.

VII. David made a connection between God's past help and His present help.

When Saul said, "You're only a boy, you don't have any experience." David said, "Oh, yes. I've got experience. I was out there watching my sheep, and one day a lion came along and another day a bear came along. I killed them both." Then he makes a very significant phrase "The Lord who delivered me, will deliver me" (see verse 37). That is a confession of faith that Saul was no longer making. Saul could say, "The Lord delivered me." But Saul had quit saying, "The Lord will deliver me." The Israeli army had experiences in their immediate past where they could say,

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“The Lord delivered me.” But they had quit saying, “The Lord will deliver me.” They had severed the connection between the past and the present and the future.

This is a common problem to people of faith. We see it in the disciples, for example. When they were in the storm at sea, they were filled with fear. Mark 6:51-52 said they had forgotten about the loaves, that is, Jesus’ miracle of food multiplication with twelve baskets left over. It’s as if He was saying to them, “Guys, in that storm you were sitting on the remnants of your last miracle. Can’t you make the transfer? If I was able to multiply bread and fish, I’m also able to still natural elements.” But they severed the connection between the Lord’s past work and His present and future work.

We do that when we’re in trouble. We must believe that the God who called us, the God who saved us, the God who filled us with His Spirit, the God who has visited us with salvation is the same God who can provide for us in every need of life. He is here. There is no break. There is no severing. We must make that connection. God was for us yesterday, and He is for us today. It is Jesus Christ—the same yesterday, today, and forever.

VIII. David used good common sense.

I get nervous around people who get too spiritual and flake out. They stop taking into account things that need to normally, naturally be done as part of the reasoning process. We’re called to follow Christ. We’re to worship Him with our mind as well as our heart. David does some very common sense kinds of things. He sidesteps an argument with his brother. He chooses not to put on Saul’s armor. That’s good commonsense. Think about how hard it was to say no to his king! It’s hard to say no to people who are in a superior position to you—especially when they’re trying to do something nice for you. Saul was trying to do something nice for David. David, as

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he waddled around in all the armor, knew this was going to tie him down. He had the courage to say no. Common sense said that this was not going to work.

He also had the good common sense to develop a strategy. He looked at Goliath and knew he had one weakness. That was right in the middle of his forehead where he had an exposed part. So David went for his enemy's weakness, and David played to his own strength. His strength was throwing stones. Every problem we face has an Achilles heel—a weakness. If we attack that weakest point with our strongest point, with God's help, we can do something.

Also, I think another mark of common sense was he put five stones in his bag. Some people say, "He didn't have faith. If he had, he'd only have taken one stone." I'm saying that David was a sensible person, and he thought to himself, "I may miss the first time. I may miss the second time. I may need all five." There's a difference between foolish faith and prudent faith. David let the stone go, right on target. But he had the common sense to have backup.

IX. David openly confessed and acted on his confidence in the Lord.

He didn't remain verbal only. He did the nonverbal things that were necessary. The text tells us in verses 42–44 Goliath's response to David, "You're dog meat! When I get done with you, the birds in the air are going to be picking your bones, and the beasts of the field are going to come and lap up what's left. You're done, you little kid!" I love David's comeback. David doesn't take that lying down. He gets verbal!

I think this is our problem when we're facing a conflict—we buy into the power of the problem, and we don't confess back what the word of the Lord is. There is power in language. And power in making a faith statement. David is not going to take that stuff from Goliath, so he triples Goliath's speech in length. He tells Goliath what he's going to do to him. He goes way beyond. Goliath had just threatened David personally. David says, "When I'm done with you, the birds

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are not only going to eat you, but they're going to eat the army of the Philistines as well, and the beasts of the field are going to consume you. You're dead. You're dog meat." He comes right back at him. It's a great speech. He says, "I'm with the living God, and you've attacked not Israel alone, but you've attacked God himself. You're finished." That's powerful speaking. You can talk yourself into some victories. And you can talk yourself into some defeats too. Then David acts, and he acts decisively. Nobody has to drag him into battle.

It's so easy in a church setting to make a commitment to do this or that for the Lord. Then when the actual opportunity comes to put legs to what we've committed to, we drag our heels all over the place. What I love about David is when he made his verbal commitment, then he was ready to act. Nobody had to send him a reminder notice. He just stepped up, and the text says, "He ran to the battle." He's ready. He's flinging that sling as he goes. Out pops the rock, and down goes Goliath. The rest is history.

Only four verses in 1 Samuel 17, verses 48–51, relate to the battle. Out of fifty-eight verses in the chapter, only four verses about the battle. That's only 7 percent. That's a way of saying that in life, most of the time goes into preparation and has to do with the attitudes we bring to our conflict. Once we have the right attitude, we engage in the conflict. It finally comes time—the decision time is here. Bang! It's all over. And we come out with right results. But it's the preparation time that's critical.

David prevails, not because he was a good rock thrower, but because he had the right inside stuff that caused him to rise to the challenge to overcome the obstacle—the Goliath in his life. "It's not by might nor by power but by My Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). When we see what God did in the past, we have a new respect for people's faith—those who challenged the systems of this world with naked faith and trust in God. David is just like a Moses. He doesn't stand before temples

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and Pharaohs. He stands before a giant—a formidable army and a formidable culture. He has nothing going for him except his faith in God—his trust in the Almighty. He's done what he could faithfully to develop his skills. But over and above and beyond that is his trust in God. With that trust in God, he challenges. One will never win with just a good defense. One must go against his problems with an offense. David does. He puts his reliance in God, and he prevails. When God is in it, it'll go.

Where is your confidence today? Should confidence rest in financial security? That's not enough. Is your confidence in a relationship you have? That's not enough. Is your confidence based on the happiness and success of your family? That's good, but that's not enough. Friends? Not enough. Your health? Not enough. Your job? Not good enough security. Is the Lord the basis for your confidence? Is your confidence on the rock foundation? If so, you'll be good and healthy on the inside.

Closing Prayer

Our Lord, we come to You today and lift up in special prayer those in our congregation who find themselves facing Goliaths—formidable foes of one kind or the other. Maybe the foe doesn't wear a human face. Maybe it's a financial problem or a health problem or a relational problem. Or maybe it's a spiritual problem. But You are the same God for us as you are the God of David and the God of Moses. You call upon Your people to respond to You with faith and trust. The natural inclination when we face our problems is to become panicked, pressured, fearful, and collapse. The supernatural response is to rise up and be people of strength, courage, and belief—belief that You have so vested Your interest in ours that if we fail, You fail. Therefore, we can claim for our cause that Your honor is at stake. We ask, Lord Jesus, for You to prevail in our battles of life. We ask for You to prevail over any Goliaths we face. We ask You to lead us from

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victory to victory through Jesus Christ, not from defeat to defeat. Fill us with faith to trust You when we cannot see the outcome—when we cannot see how matters will turn out. Help us to put our hand in Yours and to trust You with our whole heart. Help us to say and to do our confession and deeds with strength and confidence. We ask through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.