

# life groups

## David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17:8-50

**Main Point:** Faith and courage in God alone is powerful.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

- **Looking back over your life, what's the biggest challenge you've had to face? What would you change about how you handled that situation?**
- **Who in our society today do we consider to be courageous?**

Our three main characters in today's reading are going to teach us a lesson about courageous faith. King Saul lacked it, and the giant Goliath misunderstood it, but the shepherd David stands in contrast as the one who deeply understood God as the source of it. God is not in the business of anointing and calling the intellectually gifted, the physically blessed, and the unusually charismatic. God tends to do His most significant work through humble, submissive, ordinary people who have a sense of the true source of courage.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 17:8-11.**

- **What is most intimidating to you about the way Goliath is described in these verses? How did the Israelites, including Saul their king, react when they saw Goliath?**

The Israelite army looked out every day and saw Goliath mocking them and their God, but because of their perspective on the situation, they were unwilling to act. All the giant had to do was speak and the Israelites "lost their courage and were terrified" (v. 11). Their first mistake was placing too much focus on the giant and not enough on God.

- **Think about the last trial you had to face. What overwhelmed your mind during that time—thoughts of the giant's power to destroy you or thoughts of God's victory through you?**

The Israelites' second mistake goes hand-in-hand with the first: losing focus on God. They saw their problem as bigger than their Creator. It's important to be realistic about the seriousness of the challenges we face, but we can't forget to be realistic about the power God has over those challenges.

- **How had fear of Goliath spread throughout the people of Israel? How have you seen fear spread to others in your life?**
- **How has facing challenges allowed you to understand God's power?**

During the six weeks Goliath roared out his challenge both in the morning and in the evening, he became emboldened and more arrogant. Under Saul's leadership, Israel shrank in morale and confidence and remained immobilized in fear. When we base our courage on our abilities, it's easy to lose confidence and give into despair. There is always someone a little bigger, a little stronger, or a little smarter. We've got to remember in whom our faith should be.

**Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 17:32-50.**

- **Why do you think David was willing to face Goliath when none of the Israelite soldiers were?**

Saul and the Israelite army give us examples of what not to do, but by looking at David's actions, we see how to courageously respond to our giants. David was a simple shepherd, but because his trust was in God, He was able to stand up to Goliath when everyone else was cowering in fear.

- **What are some experiences David remembered in his testimony (v. 37) that enabled him to truly rely on God?**
- **David didn't allow the size of his opponent to keep him from taking on the challenge. Why do you think David was able to have this kind of confidence?**
- **Read 1 Samuel 17:8-10,16 again. How does David's attitude (vv. 32-33) compare with Goliath's? How does his attitude compare with Saul's?**
- **Is your attitude toward the challenges in your life more like Saul's or David's? How does this attitude need to change?**

Like Saul, we often express reliance upon God, but then we continue to rely on our abilities, intellect, experience, and plans. We may even ask God to bless our plans. But that approach will usually cause us and our plans to languish in ineffectiveness or defeat. We need to learn from David's example. As we learn to trust God as He works in our lives, our faith in Him grows, enabling us to be used by God to accomplish even more. David knew God took care of him in the past, so he didn't have any trouble deciding what to do when he faced Goliath.

- **Why didn't David feel small in front of such a massive opponent (vv. 45-47)?**
- **When he walked out in front of Goliath, David never wavered in his faith. He fully believed his spiritual weapons were greater than the physical ones of his enemies. How would having that kind of faith change your approach to life?**

#### **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- **Knowing God may use challenges to equip us for other challenges, how will your attitude toward God change when you feel like you're being tested?**
- **Consider a challenge you're currently facing. What larger missionary purpose might be accomplished for God if you would look to Him for strength?**
- **What do we demonstrate to those around us when we stand up to our challenges in God's strength?**
- **What can you do to encourage others who are facing life-altering challenges to take courage in God's strength for their fight?**

#### **PRAY**

Spend some time praying for those in your group who are facing giants. Life is tough and we're all hurting. Devote the last few minutes of class to praying for courage to faithfully walk with God in the midst of struggle.

## COMMENTARY

### 1 Samuel 17:8-50

17:8-11. The Philistine champion issued a challenge. Instead of fighting a battle in which many would be killed, he proposed that two men settle the issue. He challenged the servants of Saul to choose their own champion to fight with him. Goliath explained the rules of the winner-take-all combat. The contest would be a battle to the death between the representative champions. The nation represented by the defeated warrior would become the servants of the nation represented by the winner.

The Philistine added scorn and abuse to his challenge. The extremely harsh word translated “defy” literally means “I heap shame on.” Goliath was so sure of his strength and abilities that he taunted his enemies with no hesitation. The huge warrior’s words and appearance accomplished the intended effect. The Israelite army’s leader, King Saul, and all the other Israelites were terrified. As goes the leader, so go the followers. The Hebrew text translated “lost their courage” presents the picture of one beaten down by violence, confusion, or fear—the opposite of confidence, hope, and faith. The hearts of God’s people sank as they saw and heard the arrogant Philistine. They were totally intimidated. Goliath was their worst nightmare come true.

17:32-36. David was distressed by Goliath’s blasphemies and disappointed that none of Israel’s army had defended the honor of the living God. David’s vocal concerns were overheard and reported to King Saul. The king ordered this potential champion to be brought to him. Imagine his disappointment when his men brought in a young shepherd. David was no more intimidated by the king than by Goliath. To Saul’s astonishment, David volunteered to be Israel’s champion and fight the giant. David was acting on his faith in God, as had Joshua and Caleb, who also expressed faith and courage about overcoming the giants (Num. 13:30; 14:8-9). Saul immediately rejected the idea of David fighting Goliath. He was certain that an inexperienced youth going against an exceptionally powerful and fully trained soldier would be folly. David’s death would be inevitable. Though he was desperate for a solution to the military problem facing him, Saul sought to dismiss David.

17:37. When Saul questioned David’s chances of facing Goliath, David gave his testimony of faith. As a shepherd, he had faced dangerous animals. “Lions” and “bears” (17:36) are strong and deadly, and no one would relish taking them on with primitive weapons. David successfully had done just that. He acknowledged, however, that the Lord had rescued him from those predators. David believed that God would rescue him from Goliath as He had rescued him from wild animals that had attacked his sheep. To this Spirit-filled shepherd boy (16:13), no power was comparable to God’s power. With God helping David, nothing could stand against him.

In what must have been a most stressful decision, King Saul consented to let David be the champion to represent Israel against Goliath. He expressed the sincere prayer that the Lord would be with him. Saul was influenced by outward appearances, however, and he most likely was convinced that David had no chance against the Philistine warrior. As a seasoned soldier in his own right, the king knew that he was sending a boy against a man, a shepherd against a soldier. Saul simply failed to factor God into the equation.

17:38. Even though Saul knew that David’s only hope was a miraculous deliverance from God, he wanted to give the novice soldier every possible advantage. Thinking as a military man, the king insisted on dressing David in his own fighting gear. Saul put his own military clothes on David. He applied the armor (an outer garment that gives partial protection in deflecting blows). David’s head was protected by a bronze helmet. Saul equipped David the way he would have equipped himself if he were fighting Goliath. Though David was young, he must have had most of his full growth even to put on the tall king’s armor.

17:39. The remaining piece of equipment was the “sword.” When David tried to walk in his armor, he concluded, “I can’t walk in these.” He was neither accustomed to such armor nor trained in its use. With his inexperience in the art of conventional battle, David realized Saul’s armor would hinder rather than help. He took off the armor and put on his regular clothing.

17:40-44. Feeling his natural freedom and maneuverability, David set about to prepare for the conflict. He was armed only with the tools of a shepherd as weapons. The staff was a long club and could be used both to attack and to defend.

The sling—two long cords with a pocket in the center—would be his main offensive weapon. Shepherds of David’s day were incredibly accurate and deadly in the use of the sling. His ammunition was chosen from the wadi (the stream bed)—five smooth stones. Clothed in his shepherd’s garb and his faith in God, David approached the giant.

Relishing the opportunity to engage in combat with Israel’s champion, Goliath moved forward only to be shocked and angered on seeing his opponent. Instead of a man in a warrior’s armor, he faced a youngster in a shepherd’s garb. Feeling insulted, Goliath insulted and cursed David. He boasted that he would feed David’s body to the birds and beasts.

17:45. David responded to Goliath’s curses and threats with a declaration of faith. The giant expected to win the contest with a dagger, spear, and sword, but David announced that he came with a far greater weapon. He came to fight the Philistine in the name of “the LORD of Hosts,” the God of Israel’s armies. Faith in the Lord linked David to the power of God, the God whom Goliath had defied. The Philistine did not believe in David’s God, but God’s reality and power are not affected by people’s unbelief.

In 17:45 David compared the power in which he trusted with that in which Goliath trusted. Goliath, a veteran warrior, trusted in his weapons. He was convinced that was all he needed. David trusted “in the name of the LORD of Hosts.” In Scripture a “name” is a revelation of character and indicates some moral or physical aspect of its owner. “Hosts” translates a word used to describe an army. The concept of the Lord leading a heavenly army vividly expresses His matchless power. David was not using “the name of the LORD of Hosts” as a magic formula. He was naming the Almighty God who was with him and who would provide the victory over Goliath and his fellow soldiers that day. While Goliath had great strength and experience, he and the Philistine army could neither compare nor compete with the power represented by the name of the LORD of Hosts.

17:46. For forty days the Philistine had bragged about what he would do to the army of Israel. Now David announced how the champion’s battle would end. Goliath would be struck down and decapitated. Instead of the beasts and birds eating the young shepherd’s body, they would gorge on the corpses of the Philistine camp. Spiritually, the result of this great victory would be that all the world would know that Israel has a God. Even though the Philistines worshiped other gods, this battle would demonstrate that the true and living God is the Lord God who has revealed Himself to the nation Israel. David was not depending on his own skills and weapons. He simply made those along with himself available for the Lord’s use. He declared to Goliath that the Lord would hand Goliath over to David.

17:47-49. In the eyes of both armies, David did not stand a chance against Goliath. Nevertheless, David had claimed the victory by his faith in God. By his defeating the giant, the whole assembly would understand that the battle is the Lord’s. The end result would be God’s being glorified. The actual conflict was brief. Before coming into range of the Philistine’s weapons, David slung the stone with pinpoint accuracy and hit the Philistine on his forehead. The most open lethal spot on the Philistine’s body was the unprotected space above his eyes. The giant fell on his face to the ground. David was victorious over the Philistines’ most effective warrior.