



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"Facing the Giants" (Facing the Giants Series)

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This morning I kick off a new sermon series called Facing the Giants, which is about facing and handling the difficult and overwhelming issues and problems in our lives.

We will be studying the life of David, the Jewish shepherd boy turned king. And for today's sermon, I'm going to start with one of the classic and most well known stories in the Bible – David and Goliath!

Most of you know the setting. The army of the Philistines and the army of Israel face off in the Valley of Elah. No army moves for days because the flat land makes them vulnerable. Then out of the Philistine army comes a huge man named Goliath, which some people say might have been as tall as 6 feet 9 inches, or even taller at 8 feet.

To give you a sense of what that looks like, here is a spear that's 7-and-a-half feet tall, and yes, with the picture on top of the spear of the head of Chevas Wong, our Worship Tech Director. Chevas looks mean and terrorizing, doesn't he? Just a little like an Angry Bird!

So this spear is 7 and-a-half feet tall, and so if Goliath were 6 feet nine inches tall, he would be about 7 inches shorter than this spear. If he was 8 feet tall, just add

a half a foot to this and he'd be that tall. That was one huge, tall, scary dude!

And that's why when King Saul and the Israelites saw Goliath, they all got scared. Who will be Israel's champion to go out and fight Goliath in a winner take-all, sudden death, knockout round? It was the ancient, agreed-upon custom of single combat—with just two people (one from each of the opposing army) determining who wins the entire battle.

1Sam. 17:32 David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

1Sam. 17:33 Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth."

1Sam. 17:34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock,

1Sam. 17:35 I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it.

1Sam. 17:36 Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall

be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God."

1Sam. 17:37 David said, "The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you!"

1Sam. 17:38 Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail.

1Sam. 17:39 David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them.

1Sam. 17:40 Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

1Sam. 17:41 The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him.

1Sam. 17:42 When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance.

1 *Sam. 17:43 The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.*

1Sam. 17:44 The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field."

1Sam. 17:45 But David said to the Philistine, "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.

1Sam. 17:46 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,

1Sam. 17:47 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."

1Sam. 17:48 When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.

1Sam. 17:49 David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

1Sam. 17:50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand.

1Sam. 17:51 Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he

grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.

When we face the giants in our lives, there are four important elements to consider. These will also be overarching themes for this Bible series for the summer. In facing the giants we need the power of practicality, power of memory, power of perseverance, and the power of God's Love

Let's troll through this. Above all things, we should have faith in God whenever we face the giants in our lives. The giants can be anything – a scary illness, an injury, a broken relationship, a depression, a traumatic past, a financial challenge, or even an actual person who may be abusing us. Even in the midst of having a strong faith, which I will talk about more later in the list, we need to understand

1) The power of practicality

What do I mean by that? We see in this story that David was not thinking, "I am David. I know God. God is with me, so I will just walk over to Goliath, and he will just fall over because of my pure faith in the Lord."

David had tremendous faith in God, but he was also a very practical guy. He chose five smooth stones that were about the size of a softball. The stones were probably also selected because they were round. Why? Because round stones have a straighter trajectory when thrown.

Why five? David was practical. What if he missed on the first few attempts? He had tremendously strong faith but he also knew that he had to use the brains God gave him. They were part of the equation. Besides, Goliath

had four brothers. What if they were in the ranks and suddenly ran out to protect their brother? Hence, the five stones. Practicality plus faith.

There are times when we are sick and we might say, "I will just go to the healing service and not bother going to the doctor or take medicine." This passage would say that's not very wise. It's good that you know that part of the entire healing process is prayer and God. And most of the time doctors and medicine too.

And when the odds are really against you—like the medicine doesn't work and the tests show there is a giant chance you won't make it—you would be crazy not to come to the Sunday morning prayer team after each worship service or to a healing service that we have quarterly. (The next one, by the way, is on July 13th.)

You have heard so many stories here of people getting healed from long-term injuries and cancer that to leave God out of the equation is not wise or practical. If you are looking for a job, it would be foolish to say, "I have faith in God, so I won't apply for any job because God will pull an offer of employment out of the sky and plopp it into my lap with the salary I want." No, we need to be practical and wise to draw up a resumé, send it out, and interview for jobs. There's wisdom in being practical and having faith in God.

If there is trouble in your marriage or other relationships at home, pray to God fervently about it, but also see a therapist. Healthy people get therapy. The sick ones don't. It's a paradox—be courageous by asking for help.

I am always surprised to discover that couples who have had marriage problems for a long time or have been dealing with parenting issues for a while have never gone to see a therapist. Or sometimes they never tell us pastors about their marriage problems until they are ready to get a divorce, when we could have helped them years earlier.

It's a "both/and," not an "either/or." It should be faith and therapy because God works through therapy too. He works through people who are helping other people.

2) The power of memory.

When people ask me what is one of my all-time favorite Bible verses, I tell them 1 Samuel 17:37 from our Bible passage: "*David said, 'The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.'*" So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the LORD be with you!'"

Yes, I know it's a strange choice for a favorite verse. But I like it because it tells me, urges me to REMEMBER how God has always saved me from great misfortune in my life, aka "the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear," as it says in the verse.

In life, there are a lot of lions, tigers, and bears oh my. Lions and tigers and bears oh my. (That's a Wizard of Oz joke!) Physical, spiritual, emotional ones. But I dare say that if we really took the time to think and write down ALL of the times God saved us by bringing in the right person or event to help us, we would see the many times when God saved us from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear.

We can concentrate on the negatives or we can concentrate on the positives of how God saved us time and time again, and how He has blessed us in this wonderful state and country.

David walked onto the field of the Valley of Elah to meet Goliath carrying a shepherd's staff, ready to do battle. Why have the staff? Did you know that in ancient Israel, the shepherd's staff was actually the shepherd's journal? (Rick Clendenen, *Mentoring from the Mountaintop*, 2006, pp. 117-121). Nomadic shepherds would carve into it symbols or words of pivotal points in their lives—milestones of their life to remember. They would use that staff to tell their testimony or stories.

And that is the power of memory. David may have had something on his staff to remind him as he faced Goliath of how God had saved him from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear. We need to walk in life with the staff of God to face the Giants that remind us of pivotal times of God's grace in our lives.

3) The Power of Perseverance.

In 1 Samuel 16, the chapter before our Scripture passage for today, God tells Samuel the Prophet to anoint the next king of Israel that God was going to choose because God had become unhappy with the current king, King Saul.

Samuel is told to go to the family of Jesse. And, as you heard me talk about the Jewish principle of primogeniture last week—where the prime blessings normally go to the oldest son—Samuel is probably expecting the first son of Jesse to

be God's chosen king. But God operates differently.

Samuel asks to see Jesse's sons so that he can determine, with God's help, which one will be anointed king. Jesse shows him his oldest son, Eliab. Samuel thought, "Surely this is the one because he is tall and strong and the oldest." But God says, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature because while humans only look at the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7)

Okay, next! Then comes the next son Abinadab, who passes before Samuel, and God says no. Then Shammah. Nope. Jesse parades out seven sons in total, and God says no to all of them.

Samuel may have been puzzled by all this, and asks Jesse, "Do you have any more sons?" And Jesse says, "Oh yeah, there is the youngest who is out in the field keeping the sheep. I didn't bring him out because he is the youngest so I let him do his chores." But Samuel, says, "Bring that son to me."

That teenaged son was David, who turned out to be God's choice to be Israel's next king. God chose the youngest of the sons, and not the oldest as Samuel would've expected. Samuel took a horn of oil and poured it over David and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David.

Think of how David—the teenager—must have felt to be the future king. "I am going to be a King someday." It would not have been unusual for him to say, "I just can't wait to be king," like Simba in *The Lion King*. You know those lines from the song in the movie: "I just can't wait to be King."

No one saying do this, No one saying be there. No one saying stop that. No one saying be here.”

But guess what? David didn't get to be king till about 13 years! For 13 years he had to be a shepherd first, then later a lute player for King Saul, a warrior, and an accused traitor who had to flee for his life. But David kept his faith in God. He knew God had a future for him, even if it took 13+ years.

Some of you don't like your job, or some of you may have a health issue. The reality is that God isn't an ATM who is going to dispense solutions to your problems this second. For David, those 13+ years was a long period of pruning and molding so he could be groomed to be the kind of king for Israel that God wanted Him to be. David had perseverance.

For many of you, it's a call to be patient and to remain faithful. If you have done all you could have done humanly, and practically, then put your problem in the able hands of God and trust Him. There really is no other option, unless you want to fall into the dark pit of pessimism or cynicism.

Best-selling author Shaunti Feldhahn, wrote the best-selling book *For Women Only: What You Need to Know about the Inner Lives of Men*, and the book *For Men Only: A Straightforward Guide to the Inner Lives of Women*. (We are hoping she will come here this year to speak at First Prez.)

She has a new book out called *The Good News About Marriage*. This new book reported in extensive research that if a married couple that has identified a specific problem can hang in there for at least five years of the marriage to address that problem,

they will find out that difficult situations can indeed be worked out. It doesn't have to end in a divorce.

Five years you say?! Yes, five years, and these days being married for five years is considered perseverance!

Shaunti's book also showed that if a married couple goes to church, the divorce rate drops 25%. Faith and church community make a huge difference in marriage. Perseverance in going to church and perseverance in working through the storms in a relationship yields great benefits.

4) The Power of God's Love.

For the whole summer we will look at a variety of giants that many people face. But when we face them, we need to face them knowing of God's love. For that is where our ultimate power comes.

I told you last week that every story in the Old Testament is about Jesus. And how so in the story of David and Goliath? When we face the giants in our lives, we need to know that this is not a story of just how to be courageous like David. No, it's a story of pointing us to the real Giant Killer – Jesus Christ. It's Jesus who went out on the battlefield to defeat the curse of sin in our lives. It was Jesus who gave up his life for us that we might have life. It was Jesus who defeated one of the most terrifying giants – death itself. Death lost its sting. The devil has lost his sting. And all because Jesus faced them and gave His life on our behalf so we can have true freedom and independence today. No one has died to defeat a giant and lived to tell us about it, no one except Jesus.

Here's the spear again. Instead of Chevas's face on top of it, imagine a picture of YOUR giant on top of the spear. Whatever it may be. If Jesus lives in you, if the Holy Spirit is in you and is guiding you, you will have the power to defeat your giant, just like David did.

So here is the final kicker: You can defeat the giants in your life because you were never the underdog in the first place.

Whenever we hear of the story of David and Goliath, we always hear of how the poor shepherd boy David is an underdog to the terrible giant Goliath. Most people would say that David hardly had any chance.

But in his latest book *David and Goliath*, author Malcolm Gladwell said that it was really Goliath who was the underdog! That's right. The giant didn't have a chance. And why not?

Goliath had size, huge weaponry, and protective armor. David had a sling shot. He was what was called in ancient times a slinger. Slingers were deadly in ancient times against infantry because they could hit a target 200 yards away. They could even hit birds flying in the air.

The stones in the Valley of Elah were not normal stones. They were made of barium sulphate, which had twice the normal density of rocks.

Slingers had pouches with two cords—that's the sling. They put a softball-size rock in the pouch, swing the sling over their heads, and then let one of the cords go, causing the rock to fly at terrific speed.

After whipping the sling around six or seven times for maximum speed, a slinger could hurl a stone at 112 feet per second, which means that it could hit a target 35 yards away—in this case, Goliath—within one second. The rock would have hit Goliath's forehead with the same power as that of a .45 caliber handgun, according to some historians.

David probably fought Goliath within a close-enough range so Goliath could not have defended himself quickly. Plus, Goliath was walking so slowly under a 100 pounds of armor, holding a huge javelin, a shorter spear, and a sword. In fact, he moved so slow and encumbered that that he needed a shield bearer to accompany him to the battlefield.

On top of that, it's possible that Goliath was suffering from what is called acromegaly, which is a disease caused by a benign tumor in the pituitary gland, and which causes an over production of growth hormones.

The tallest person in history—Robert Wadlow—suffered from this disease. He died at 8 foot 11 inches and was still growing in his last year of life. The French professional wrestler-turned-actor Andre the Giant had the same disease.

Often those who suffered from Acromegaly have blurred and/or double vision. Notice in the passage how Goliath yells out, "Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?" (1 Samuel 17:43)

Hmmm, *sticks*, plural. David only has one staff, or one stick, but Goliath sees more than one. (Double or blurred vision!) He couldn't focus or line up his sites

quickly to a young shepherd boy, especially one running at him at terrific speed.

The point is David, contrary to tradition, was NOT the underdog in the story! It was Goliath who didn't have a chance, not from the second David came out on the field with his sling and five rocks. It was Goliath who was the underdog!

And I am saying to you that you may think you are the underdog in life and these challenges are giants. But you have the upper hand to win, IF you have God on your side. With God, you are never the underdog. It might feel like it sometimes, but you are not.

So size DOES matter. The size of a spear matters. The size of a sword matters. The size of a javelin and a shield matter. The size of your problem or difficulty matters. But also hear clearly, the size of YOUR GOD matters!

He's big. He's huge. He's bigger than any of your giants. With God, you can always have the upper hand. Don't give up! Don't whine! God is with you! This is the God who says to us today: *"Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will help you. I will strengthen you. I will lift you up with my victorious right hand."* (Is. 41:10)

Amen? Amen.