

Facing Giants with Confidence

1 Samuel 17:1-37

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In our society, we have devoted a great deal of energy and money to help people develop better self-esteem and self-confidence. Still, most people struggle with some type of fear or anxiety. This may involve phobias – being afraid of things like heights, small spaces, spiders, snakes or bridges. Or it can be a little more abstract.

In the movie, “Annie Hall,” a 12-year old Woody Allen has stopped doing his homework and has basically given up on life because “the universe is expanding.” His mother responds, “What does the universe have to do with anything? We live in Brooklyn, and Brooklyn is not expanding.”

Yet, I think our most common and often most significant fears involve social anxieties. Those include being afraid of public speaking or meeting new people. Yet, it often boils down to a fear of what other people are going to think of us.

I am convinced that most individuals, not everyone, but most, are focused on *trying to convince themselves and convince other people they are OK*, that they are a significant person, that their existence is a good thing for the universe. We want other people to like us. And we are afraid that if we say or do the wrong thing, which may really be the right thing to say or do, other people will reject us. We often long for the approval of others, thinking that somehow their approval validates our significance. If we sense we don't have that approval, we often struggle with self-esteem and confidence.

Friends, this morning our journey through the book of 1 Samuel brings us to chapter 17, where we will look at the first 37 verses. So, if you have your Bible, 1 Samuel 17:1-37 (page 239 in the pew Bibles).

This is the true story of David and Goliath. Next week, we will focus on David's amazing victory over this huge giant. Today, however, we are going to explore the surprising confidence that David has as he faces Goliath, a confidence that comes from the Lord, a type of confidence that we can have even in the face of the giant challenges we may face in life.

Let's pause and pray that we would hear and heed what the Lord has to say to us through his word this morning.

In 1 Samuel 17, we have the army of Israel, led by King Saul, facing the army of the Philistines by the Valley of Elah, about fifteen miles west of Jerusalem.

1 Samuel 17:2 – The Philistines were standing on one hill, and the Israelites were standing on another hill with a ravine between them.

In the ancient world and up to the 20th century, battles were usually fought with opposing armies lined up facing each other. Not the most creative military strategy! The Philistines controlled five major cities and much of the territory in western Israel and are the primary adversary of the Israelites during this time. Now, their army is in Judah, eastern Israel and threatening to take over the entire nation.

1 Samuel 17:4-5 – Then a champion named Goliath, from Gath (one of the five Philistine cities), came out from the Philistine camp. He was nine feet, nine inches tall and wore a bronze helmet and bronze scale armor that weighed one hundred twenty-five pounds.

Goliath is a huge dude! “But, Pastor Dan, could someone really be that big?” Well, the tallest man in recent history was Robert Wadlow. He was 8'11” when he died in 1940 at age 22.

Goliath was apparently one of the last of a race of giants who inhabited that part of the ancient world. About 300 years earlier, the people of Israel had been afraid to enter Canaan after leaving Egypt because of giants who lived in that land. As a result, they spent 40 years wandering in the Sinai wilderness. Now, a fear of one giant will paralyze the Israelite army for 40 days. The giant Goliath issues them a challenge.

1 Samuel 17:8b-9 – “Choose one of your men and have him come down against me. If he wins in a fight against me and kills me, we will be your servants. But if I win against him

and kill him, then you will be our servants and serve us.”

This is a very practical and efficient way to fight a battle. One on one, winner take all. Yet, considering what a huge, powerful, skilled warrior Goliath is, it is no surprise that...

1 Samuel 17:11 – When Saul and all Israel heard these words from the Philistine, they lost their courage and were terrified.

Things are looking pretty grim. Israel is clearly the underdog against the powerful Philistine army. The odds, however, look even worse in a one-on-one battle against the giant, Goliath.

And then, the author says, there is David (vs. 12-15). His father is Jesse of Bethlehem, and he is the youngest of eight sons. His three oldest brothers are in Saul’s army. We have already been told (chapter 16) that David sometimes serves in King Saul’s court, playing music for him on the lyre; and he still spends time at home, caring for his father’s flock of sheep.

As Goliath continues to issue his challenge and mock the Israelite army for 40 days, Jesse sends David to the Israelite camp with food for his brothers and to check on their welfare (vs. 16-19). So, David sets out...

1 Samuel 17:20b – He arrived at the perimeter of the camp as the army was marching out to its battle formation shouting their battle cry.

David quickly greets his brothers.

1 Samuel 17:23-24 – While he was speaking with them, suddenly the champion named Goliath, the Philistine from Gath, came forward from the Philistine battle line and shouted his usual words, which David heard. When all the Israelite men saw Goliath, they retreated from him terrified.

Everyone is terrified, except one.

1 Samuel 17:26 – David spoke to the men who were standing with him. “What will be done for the man who kills that Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? *Just who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*”

He is told that King Saul will give the man who kills the giant his daughter to marry and a big financial reward. Plus, that man’s father will be exempt from paying taxes. However...

1 Samuel 17:28 – David’s oldest brother Eliab listened as he spoke to the men, and he became angry with him. “Why did you come down here?” he asked. “Who did you leave those few sheep with in the wilderness? I know your arrogance and your evil heart – you came down to see the battle!”

Wow! Where did that come from? No doubt, there is a lot of frustration with the situation the army is facing, and likely there is some latent envy over David having already been anointed as the next king. And I think Eliab guesses what David will volunteer to do, something that he considers ridiculous. David continues to ask about what will happen if someone defeats Goliath.

1 Samuel 17:31 – What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, so he had David brought to him. David said to Saul, “Don’t let anyone be discouraged by him (literally the Hebrew says, “Don’t fall over because of this giant); *your servant will go and fight this Philistine!*”

For 40 days, Goliath has been continually taunting the army of Israel with this challenge, and not one of Saul’s soldiers has been willing to respond. And now this young shepherd boy, who is good at playing the harp, tells King Saul, “I, your servant, will go and fight this giant.” Saul replies, probably in genuine shock...

1 Samuel 17:33 – “You can’t go fight this Philistine. You’re just a youth, and he’s been a warrior since he was young.”

In other words, you would be an extreme underdog, with astronomical odds against you. Yet, David does not believe this is a suicide mission. His confidence is not just hubris (cockiness), or willingness to gamble his own life for the rewards the king has promised. There are some reasons David is not afraid of Goliath. He tells Saul, “As I have been tending my father’s sheep...

1 Samuel 17:34b-35 – Whenever a lion or a bear came and carried off a lamb from the flock, I went after it, struck it down, and rescued the lamb from its mouth. If it reared up against me, I would grab it by its fur, strike it down, and kill it.

Literally, the Hebrew says “by its beard,” so maybe he grabbed the animals by their throat. But, you get the point. These are pretty amazing accomplishments!

Then David concludes by telling Saul...

1 Samuel 17:36 – “Your servant (David is referring to himself) has killed lions and bears; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.”

That is the main problem here. It is not that Goliath is a foreigner. It is not that he has a different color of skin. It is not that his victory would mean the people of Israel would lose land or wealth or even become slaves. It is that he has defied the armies of the living God. Goliath has no respect for the Creator and Sovereign of the universe, the God, who has chosen Israel as his people.

1 Samuel 17:37 – Then David said, “The LORD, who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.” Saul said to David, “Go, and may the LORD be with you.”

OK, that is as far as we will go with this story, this true story, today. Next Sunday, we will see what happens in the battle between David and Goliath. Some of you already know or think you know, but I suspect a lot more happens than we remember from third grade Sunday School class.

So, what is the Lord saying to us today through these first 37 verses of 1 Samuel 17? Probably a variety of things, but I am hearing something very clearly.

No matter what we are facing in life, no matter how big the giant, we ought to have confidence, not a self-confidence, but a confidence in the Lord. I think that is the message we all need to hear, understand, believe and apply. What do I mean?

#1 All of us, like David, have reasons not to feel confident.

We don't have a lot of details, but I don't think David had it real easy growing up. Oh, I don't believe his father, Jesse, was abusive, but things seem a little dysfunctional in this family. David is the youngest of eight sons. Now, in some families, the youngest child ends up being kind of spoiled and over-protected, both by parents and older siblings. I don't think that happened to David.

In the book of Genesis, we read about Jacob, a man with twelve sons, and he seems to have a couple of favorites – his two youngest, Joseph and Benjamin.

That is not the case with Jesse and David. Remember in chapter 15, when Samuel, the great judge and prophet, comes to Jesse's house to anoint a new king, David is not even there. He is out in the field, the back 40, taking care of the sheep. It doesn't seem to enter Jesse's mind that David could be the one whom God has chosen.

We saw a couple of weeks ago that David was a good-looking fellow, probably 13-14 years old, but he was the youngest son, maybe a little short for his age, and it sure doesn't seem like he was anyone special.

There also doesn't seem to be much concern about protecting this youngest son. As we saw in our text, being a shepherd could be dangerous. There were lions and tigers and bears out there after the sheep. Well, maybe not tigers, but lions and bears. Why would a young teenager be left out there alone with the sheep?

We saw today that when David arrives at the battlefield, his brothers, especially Eliab, are not exactly glad to see him. We don't know if they even expressed gratitude for the gifts David brought. They are not really concerned about his safety. They just seem to find his presence irritating.

So, the impression I get is that David is growing up in a family, not where he is abused, but where he is frequently ignored and often put down by his parents and siblings.

Friend, did you grow up in a home like that? Some of you did. Some of you may be growing up in a home like that right now.

“But, Pastor Dan, that happens to many people, and most of them turn out okay.” Well OK, perhaps, but people ignored and put down often seem to lose their confidence. Because they don’t experience a lot of approval and love while growing up, they are constantly looking for approval and love wherever they can find it.

What happens is that they spend a great deal of time and energy trying to convince themselves and the people around them that they are an “OK person,” and that they don’t deserve to be ignored or put down.

Friends, that is what I see all around me – people who, because they are not really sure they are OK, are doing all sorts of things to convince themselves and others they are.

Yes, there are some folks who are extremely self-confident. They basically are convinced they are God’s gift to the world. Yet, I think these types of people are a small minority. If you happen to be one of those self-confident individuals, I fear you are a bit delusional because there are a lot of things in life over which you don’t have control. We will talk about that another time. But if you are really self-confident, you can keep on listening, and you will understand the rest of us better.

Now, most of the people who brag about how wonderful they are and how much they have accomplished are not really self-confident. They are just trying to convince themselves and you that this is really the case. There are a lot of reasons why people lack a healthy confidence, but on this Father’s Day, it is OK for us dads to be reminded that if we ignore or put down our children, we can really mess up their psyches.

Yet, even if we had the most loving and wonderful father in the world, I suspect most of us have people or experiences that wounded us emotionally, and so, like David, we have reason to not feel confident. But...don’t be discouraged because...

#2 Like David, we have a reason to be confident. David was confident because he

had experienced God’s grace and seen God work in his life.

The Lord had enabled David to win some pretty remarkable victories over bears and lions. He was certainly the underdog in those situations, but God had given him the ability to kill the predators and protect the sheep.

Now, he is confident the Lord will give him a victory over the giant, Goliath. He is confident because he knows God is on his side, and David knows if God is on your side, it doesn’t matter who is against you.

Friends, like David, those of us who are believers in Jesus have a reason to be confident. Family members may have ignored you and put you down. A spouse may have divorced you. A teacher may have flunked you. A boss may have fired you. A coach may have benched you. A friend may have betrayed you.

None of us think those things are fun. Some of them can be very painful. But, ultimately, it is all OK, *as long as you know that God is for you*, on your side, and will not let you fall.

Romans 8:31b – If God is for us, who can be against us?

The answer is many can be against us, but it doesn’t matter if God is for us. Lions and bears can be against us. Giants can be against us. All sorts of nasty people and difficult circumstances can be against us, but it doesn’t matter, as long as God is for us.

Knowing this is true means we never need to be afraid and can always be confident in the midst of whatever situation we may be facing. It means that what other people think of us, whether or not we have their approval, are not things that really matter. If we have God’s approval, that is all we truly need.

Now, I need to be clear about what I, and the Apostle Paul, mean by the phrase, “God is for us” or “God is on our side.” The Bible makes it clear that God’s favor cannot be earned or merited. Nor, does God see any inherent goodness or value in us. Rather, he bestows his favor and his love solely on the basis of his grace. That grace

is revealed most clearly through the death of Jesus on the cross.

Romans 5:8 – But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The cross is, indeed, the fountain from which all the benefits of God's grace flow. Through Jesus' death on the cross, God has redeemed us, forgiven us and declared us righteous. He has adopted us as his children. The Lord loves, accepts and affirms us, not on the basis of our performance, because of what we have accomplished, but because of grace and what the Lord Jesus has accomplished for us.

As Paul Tripp says: *“As a Christian, your acceptance with God is just as secure on your very worst day, as it is on your very best day, because it was purchased once and for all by your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

And friends, it is this type of security, a type of security many never experience in relationships with family or friends, which enables us to be confident. Again, this is not confidence in ourselves, but confidence in the Lord.

This is the type of confidence, the type of trust or faith that David has as he volunteers to face Goliath. It is the type of confidence that enables the Apostle Paul to say:

Philippians 4:13 – I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

It is the type of confidence which allows us to focus, not on how we can meet our own needs, but how we can meet the needs of others.

Tim Keller asks this penetrating question:

When you walk into a room full of people, what do you think about? Most folks wonder: What do these other people think about me? What do they think about how I'm dressed? Will they want to talk to me? Will someone here make fun of me or somehow make me uncomfortable?

However, those folks with a true Christ-confidence have different thoughts. They don't have to ask those kinds of questions. Through Jesus, they have experienced a “freedom of self-forgetfulness.”

They wonder: How can I honor the Lord with these people today? Who here can I tell about the love of Jesus? Are there people in this room who I can encourage in their walk with the Lord?

Friend, do you have that type of Christ-confidence? I believe by God's grace, you can. No matter how badly you have been wounded by others, no matter how often you have been ignored or put down, the love and security found in Jesus Christ enables you to have true Christ-confidence in the face of whatever challenges you may face.

Oh, you maybe won't be inclined to volunteer to go into battle against a 9'9" warrior. Sometimes your initial emotional reaction to various situations will still be “panic.” There may always be that temptation to be afraid and worried because we don't know what the future holds. Yet, with Christ-confidence, you will be able to gain a more accurate perspective and recognize that no matter what the situation or circumstance, if you trust in the Lord, you will not fail or fall. He will hold you fast!