

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: God's Life-Transforming Work**

(Studies in the life of David)

## **Giant Lessons**

Study #1

(Backstory - 1 Samuel 19; 1 Samuel 16-17)

### **Introduction: Stories that shape the soul...**

The Bible is a really big book. And, in the Bible, there are varied types of literature, everything from to prophecy to poetry to wisdom to teaching.

I estimate that there are more pages in the Bible given to story than to anything else.<sup>1</sup>

I think that the human soul is shaped to love stories, and we find the best stories in the world in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

There are a few select characters who star in a lot of the Bible's stories. One of the biggest stars is the Old Testament shepherd, poet, and king, David. This morning we begin a multi-week, biblical, exploration of David's life.

How to describe David?

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<sup>1</sup> Here is Eugene Peterson's translation of Matthew 13:34-35:

*"All Jesus did that day was tell stories - a long storytelling afternoon. His storytelling fulfilled the prophecy:  
I will open my mouth and tell stories; I will bring out into the open  
Things hidden since the world's first day.*

<sup>2</sup> I would insist, too, that behind all the teaching and poetry and prophecy...is story.

He was the runt of the litter, the youngest of eight sons. He wasn't much of a role model as a parent or as a husband. Some historians describe David as a barbaric chieftain of an emerging nation.

That's not a very complimentary way to describe David. But none of it is far off the mark. While David did have his exemplary moments, he wasn't a great moral role model.

But David's importance is found elsewhere. We look to David to see a flawed man, but a man who unfailingly, honestly, dealt with God.

David's life consisted of sheep and family and kingdoms and kings and battles and enemies and friends and hardships.

And, while he often dealt poorly with these issues and people, he passionately dealt with God. David never forgot - at least not for long - that it was ultimately God with whom he had to do.

Today, our lives consist of food and traffic and texting and travel and friends and sexuality and sickness and fear and diapers and weather and family and government.

For us, as it was for David, above it all and behind it all is God. God is the One with whom we must deal. And we're tempted to forget that. David reminds us to remember God.

During the weeks of this series, we'll hear David stories that tell us that God is committed to transforming us into the image of Jesus. We will see that God will use anything and everything that comes our way, redemptively.

Now, if you're familiar with the Bible, you'll recognize the main story we'll hear today. That's OK.

You'll find that the Bible's stories improve with your age. They get deeper. The details never change, but different details take on added significance at each telling of the story.

If you are hearing the story for the first time, you've got a treat in store.

David was the second king of Israel, and today's story took place years before he took the throne.

Another man, Saul, was the first king of Israel. Saul is the king as our story begins.

### **David's FIRST Steps to the Throne (1 Samuel 9 and 16)**

#### **The Short, Tragic Reign of King Saul (1 Samuel 9:1ff...)**

The Bible gives us a description of Saul's physical appearance.

*He [1 Samuel 9:2] ...a young and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people.*

He looked kingly. And he served well as king - for a while.

But God had given King Saul one job. He was to lead the people to God. He failed miserably in that one assignment. And his failures revealed that his heart was a spiritual wasteland.<sup>3</sup>

It was these failures that prompted the LORD to reject Saul and to tap another man with a different spirit to succeed him on the throne.

#### **The Anointing of the "Some-Day" King David (1 Samuel 16)**

God told Samuel, who was the last of the Jewish judges,<sup>4</sup> to travel to the home of a man named Jesse. Jesse was a member of the tribe of Judah, and he lived in the Judean hills in the town of Bethlehem.

There, at Jesse's home, God revealed the next king to Samuel.

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<sup>3</sup> Saul's first disobedience was refusing to wait for Samuel to offer sacrifice at a place called *Gilgal*. He offered the sacrifice himself, acting as priest AND king, something forbidden by God. God then decreed that Saul's descendants would not reign after him. (1 Samuel 14) Then, when God told him to utterly destroy the Amalekites, Saul disobeyed. Because of this disobedience, God rejected Saul from being king altogether, and removed His Spirit and blessing from Saul's life.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel also served as a prophet and in a priestly role in Israel.

When Samuel arrived at Jesse's home, he had Jesse line up his sons for review.

The seven men who stood before Samuel were impressive, strong and healthy. But none of them were God's choice for the throne.

God told Samuel, *[7] ...“Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God does not see as man sees, since man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”*

After viewing these seven sons, Samuel asked Jesse, *[11] “Are these all the boys?”*

Jesse slapped his forehead, and said, *“Oh, I DO have another son. Forgot all about him. He's out tending my sheep. His name is David.”*

We don't want to miss this. David was so little thought of that his dad didn't bring him when Samuel came to anoint one of his sons.

David was the forgotten child. He was left out of the family portrait. He wasn't mentioned in the family Christmas letter.

But, out of all eight sons, David was the one who had nurtured a heart for God.

We can only imagine the grief his older brothers might have given him, the jokes they played on him. He certainly got the dirty jobs. He was the shepherd.

All those things could leave deep scars.

When ignored, we can be tempted to grow cold, angry, bitter. If you were treated like David was treated, you might be tempted to act out in rebellion.

Or you might do what David did and turn to God to find your significance and worth.

Out in the fields, where David watched over the sheep, he prayed and sang to the God who had created the stars under which he slept.

That was who David was, and that was the son Jesse forgot.

At Samuel's command, David was brought to the house. And the instant David came in from the fields, the LORD told Samuel...

***[12] "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." [13] So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.***

With that, the die was cast.

It would be over a decade before David sat on Israel's throne, but this eighth son, this shepherd, will be the next king.

#### **David - Servant to King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23)**

But that comes later. Not now, because now, Saul is king.

Saul has been rejected by God for his rebellion, but he is still the king. He is the king of God's people but WITHOUT the LORD'S presence.

And in God's absence Saul suffered fits of madness. We read that ***[16:14] an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him.***

When Saul's servants learned that music calmed the king's troubled soul, they searched for a musician who could bring the king peace.

Their search led them to David, the son of Jesse, who had become quite the poet / musician during those long nights in the fields.

So, the future King David became the present King Saul's personal musician.<sup>5</sup>

David has now taken a couple of baby steps toward royalty. He was anointed. He was invited to the king's court. What follows is a giant step forward.

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<sup>5</sup> David was ***[1 Samuel 16:18] a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the Lord is with him.***

The story moves from the palace to the battlefield where Israel is facing an old foe: the Philistines.

#### **A Gigantic Obstacle to God's People (17:1-16)**

#### **Israel's Enemy: Philistines (vv. 1-3)**

Archeologists tell us that the Philistines were a warlike tribe of people who had lived in Canaan for centuries by the time of David.

The Philistines lived in five cities near the Mediterranean coast: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron.<sup>6</sup>

They were violent and fierce enemies of Israel.

When we turn to 1 Samuel 17, we find Israel and the Philistines armies facing off, on either side of the valley of Elah in the region of Palestine known as the Shephelah.<sup>7</sup>

***[17:3] The Philistines were standing on the mountain on one side while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them.***

It appears that a battle is imminent. But appearances can be deceiving.

There is no fighting - and now we find out why.

#### **Israel's Enemy - GOLIATH! (vv. 4-11)**

*Goliath's enormity (vv. 4-7)*

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<sup>6</sup> They were sea-faring people who had settled in Canaan / Palestine from the island of Crete. Israel had never driven the Philistines out of the land, even though God had commanded them to do so.

<sup>7</sup> The Shephelah is the area that connects the Judean hills to the wide, flat expanse of the Mediterranean plain.

***[4] Then a champion came out from the army encampment of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath. His height was six cubits and a span...<sup>8</sup>***

A cubit measures the distance between a man's elbow and the tip of his longest finger (roughly eighteen inches). A "span" - a handbreadth - was something like six inches.

At six cubits and a span Goliath would have stood something over nine feet tall.<sup>9</sup>

Those who have studied these things estimate that Goliath's equipment of armor and weapons (see vv. 5-7), would have weighed between 150-200 pounds.

Accompanied by his shield-carrier, Goliath approached the Jewish army and shouted a challenge.

*Goliath's challenge (vv. 8-10)*

***[8]...“Why do you come out to draw up in battle formation? Am I not the Philistine, and you servants of Saul? Choose a man as your representative and have him come down to me. [9] If he is able to fight me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants and serve us.” [10] Then the Philistine said, “I have defied the ranks of Israel this day! Give me a man, so that we may fight together.”***

It's not a bad idea...

Why not spare the armies and have one Israelite fight one Philistine?<sup>10</sup>

If Goliath defeats the Jewish champion, Israel will serve the Philistines. If the Jew kills Goliath (Yeah, like THAT'S going to happen!), The Philistines will serve Israel.

The stakes are high here. Freedom AND life AND God's good name hang in the balance.

So, how will Saul's soldiers respond to this challenge?

*Goliath's impact on the soldiers of Israel (v. 11)*

***[11] When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and very fearful.***

I'm not saying I wouldn't be afraid. So, I'm not making fun of Saul's army. And I sure wouldn't want to fight a nine-foot tall, battle-tested warrior who is armed to the teeth.

At this moment of crisis, the thoughtful Israelite might have turned his eyes toward his king. After all, ***[1 Samuel 9:2] from his shoulders and up [Saul] was taller than any of the people.***

As king AND as the resident Big Guy in Israel, Saul was the logical choice to fight Goliath. But Saul wasn't volunteering. He was as paralyzed by fear as his troops.

And here is where I want to highlight the first of three life-transforming truths we see in this story.

**Life-Transforming Truth #1:** If we don't fear God, we'll be tempted to fear everything else.

<sup>8</sup> Goliath was likely from the Anakim, a tribe of physically large people who had lived in Palestine for a long time. After Caleb drove them out of Hebron, they settled in Philistia (Josh. 11:22; See also Genesis 6:4 and Numbers 13:33)

<sup>9</sup> Some have suggested that men were smaller three thousand years ago (just as some cultures are smaller than others, today), in which case a cubit would have been shorter, and Goliath would have been less than nine feet tall. He would still have been very tall, relative to the people around him.

<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Gladwell tells the story of this happening between a Roman legion and the armies of Gaul in his book, David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants.

As Goliath walked forward to challenge Israel's army, where were the Israelite soldiers looking? They were looking at Goliath. They were thinking only of Goliath.

The LORD wasn't even on their radar. And because they forgot the LORD, they were paralyzed by a dread fear of Goliath.

In 2024, Goliaths come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Disease and physical pain, cultural upheaval and inflation, rejection and relational fractures are some of the Goliaths you and I may face today.

In fact, the chances are pretty good that you are facing a Goliath of some sort right now.

The presence of a Goliath will tempt us to take our eyes off the LORD, just like Saul and the Israelite army did. Those guys show us that when we lose our fear of the LORD, we fall prey to every other fear. Hold that thought.

What we have here is a mess. The army and the king expected to be defeated by Goliath. They believed that they were doomed.

As we keep reading, the Bible keeps our focus on what's happening in the Valley of Elah, where Saul and the army are. We learn that three of David's older brothers (Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah) had left their father, Jesse, to be with Saul.

As for David, he ***[15]...went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's flock at Bethlehem.***

And Goliath repeated his challenge to send over one Jewish warrior to fight him, one-on-one, over and over and over again.

### **Goliath's Repeated Taunts (v. 16)**

***[16] And the Philistine came forward morning and evening, and took his stand for forty days.***

In other words, by the time we come to this point in the story, Goliath has challenged the Israelite army to fight him eighty times, forty solid days, morning AND evening.

If you're a soldier in Saul's army, every morning you go out to the battle front, line up and listen to a man threaten to kill you as he challenges you to a fight. Every time, you politely decline.

Then, you lie around all day in camp, and then repeat that experience in the evening.

Can you imagine the demoralizing effect of that repeat performance on an army's spirit?

It was at that time (the forty day mark), that Jesse sent his youngest son, David, to the front lines to supply his brothers with food.

As David was leaving, Jesse told him ***[19]...“Saul and [your brothers] and all the men of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting the Philistines.”***

No, they're not. We have better intel than Jesse did. There was no fighting going on at all.

The men of Israel were standing around, shuffling their feet, hanging their heads, with their hands in their pockets.

### **David's GIANT Step to the Throne (17:22-54)**

#### **David at the Front Lines (vv. 22-33)**

*David takes in the “battle” (vv. 22-27)*

David arrived at the Valley of Elah just as Goliath's morning ritual started. He listened. He took it all in. He processed.

He watched the armies line up against each other. He heard the armies shouting at each other. He watched Goliath walk out and challenge the Israelites.

Then David watched his fellow Jews head back to their tents, thoroughly defeated in their own minds.

Each of them knew that whoever might fight Goliath, it would be someone else. *"Goliath is too big. I'm too small."*

And here is where David had the advantage. David was used to being the smallest one around.

The Jews felt the sting of Goliath's contempt. As the youngest of eight brothers, David knew all about contempt.

In fact, contempt flowed from his oldest brother, Eliab.

*David receives "no confidence" votes (vv. 28-33)*

From his oldest brother, Eliab (vv. 28-30)

***[28]...Eliab's anger burned against David and he said, "Why is it that you have come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I myself know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle."***

That's how Eliab had always treated David. David had grown up with this sort of treatment.

But...David had also lived out in the shepherd's fields where he learned about the greatness of God. *"Eliab, you're right. I am small. But next to my God, so is Goliath!"*

And here is where we see the second life-transforming truth this morning.

## **Transforming Truth #2** - Fear God and you'll fear nothing else.

David did not fear Goliath. And that is *precisely* because while looking at Goliath he fixed his gaze on the LORD.

Let's watch how David's fear of the LORD manifests itself.

David was taken to King Saul's tent. He was the king's personal musician. And when he went inside, David had words for the king.

From Saul (vv. 31-33)

***[32] And David said to Saul, "May no one's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine!"***

We're impressed by David's courage, his passion, his initiative. King Saul was not impressed.

***[33] Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight him; for you are only a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth."***

Poor David. It isn't enough that he was held in contempt by his oldest brother. Now, he gets it from his king.

*"David, you are just a small, young, inexperienced little guy who doesn't stand a chance against a big man like Goliath."*

And, I've got to admit, Saul's got a point. Everything he said about David and Goliath was true.

But if you're on the receiving end of words like those, they'll do a number on your confidence.<sup>11</sup>

But David didn't bow to the contempt. He pushed against it with a confidence that was grounded in reality.  
**David Prepares for Battle (vv. 34-40)**

*David's track record (vv. 34-37a)*

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<sup>11</sup> Read about the twelve men who spied out the land of Canaan under Joshua's leadership. (Numbers 13) They reported that the land was good BUT that the sons of Anak were there, and the sons of Anak were big - just as, in David's day, Goliath was big. The majority of the spies faithlessly told Joshua that they couldn't do what God told them to do.

In his life as a shepherd, David had often had to protect the sheep from predators out in the wilderness.

Now, David sees God's army as sheep needing protection from this bear of a man - and he is just the shepherd to bring Goliath down.

***[36] "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." [37a] And David said, "The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, He will save me from the hand of this Philistine."***

So, finally, King Saul was willing to let David stand for Israel before Goliath. First, of course, he had to prepare David for the fight.

*Preparing David for battle (vv. 37b-40)*

Saul proceeded to clothe David with his own armor, which was a really nice gesture. But remember, Saul was the biggest man in Israel and David was not yet a full grown man.

Saul's clothing and armor and weapons were laughably too big for David.

So, David removed all of Saul's things, dressed as a shepherd, and prepared for battle in the only way he knew.

***[40] Then He took his staff in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, that is, in his shepherd's pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine.***

His method of fighting would be the weapon with which he was most comfortable: the sling.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, before any actual fighting broke out, there was some serious trash-talking between the two combatants.

### **David vs. Goliath (vv. 41-50)**

*First, a war of words (41-47)*

Goliath went first. He was offended that Israel had sent a youngster to fight him. He invited David to approach ("***Come to me...***") and meet his death. (vv. 41-44)

So, first Eliab, his brother. Then King Saul. Now Goliath heaps contempt on David. David got dissed a lot on that day.

But here, David gave as good as he got. David promised Goliath that he would kill him.

And David gave glory to God before the fight started. He'll win so that ***[46]...all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, [47] and that this entire assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will hand you over to us."***

David was not afraid of Goliath. He feared, He revered God too much to fear Goliath.

And if you are going to stand against the Goliaths that face you in 2024, you'll follow David's lead and nurture a fear of the LORD, a holy reverence for God.

I will reluctantly admit that I have far to go in my own pursuit of the fear of the LORD. And I know that I have far to go because I have to fight the temptation to be afraid of my relatively small Goliaths.

But I notice that when I have my wits about me and remember God's power:  
as seen in nature and marvel at the stars in the sky.  
as seen in His defeat of Satan by the cross of Christ.  
as seen in His promise to keep me eternally safe...  
...I revere the LORD and am protected against the fear of my Goliaths.

<sup>12</sup> See the Appendix for information about the use of the sling in ancient warfare.

Well, the time for speaking was over. David took action.

*The “battle” (vv. 48-51)*

***[48]...David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. [49] And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone penetrated his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. [50] So David prevailed over the Philistine with the sling and the stone; he struck the Philistine and killed him; and there was no sword in David’s hand. [51] Then David ran and stood over the Philistine, and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and finished him, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.***

The Philistines fled, fully expecting the Israelites to attack - because that was exactly what they had been planning to do if Goliath had won. But now, everything has changed because (surprise!) David won!

### **The People of God - Victorious! (vv. 52-54)**

As our passage ends, we watch as the formerly ***“dismayed and very fearful”*** (v. 11) Jews pursued the fleeing Philistines and had a great military victory.

And that brings me to the last life-transforming truth I want to highlight today.

**Life-Transforming Truth #3:** The courageous faith of one person always benefits the community of faith.

The Jewish army was emboldened by the victory won by David’s initiative to fight Goliath.

If David had not stepped up and begged Saul to fight Goliath, who would have? What would have happened?

We don’t know what would have happened. But the Bible does tell us what did happen. David took action and that one act produced a sea change in Israel.

David’s step of faith changed the culture in Israel from fear of enemies to a fear of the LORD.

Faith replaced fear.

David’s willingness to stand against Goliath and the victory of Israel’s army that followed tells us that the most powerful, loving thing you can do for your brothers and sisters in Christ is to courageously obey God.

David’s stand against Goliath paved the way for a great victory for God’s people. Likewise, when you walk with God today, you encourage your friends in Jesus to do the same thing - and the whole work of God moves forward.

Stand firm against your Goliath. Model faith. Take initiative for Jesus.

Your courageous faith will spur someone else to faith, and THAT creates a culture of courageous faith.



### **Appendix: Consider the Ancient Weapon: The Sling**<sup>13</sup>

In ancient armies there were three distinct kinds of warriors:

**CAVALRY** - armed men on horseback or in chariots.

**INFANTRY** - foot soldiers with heavy armor and carrying weapons.

**ARTILLERY** - men armed with bows and arrows and slings.<sup>14</sup>

Slingers carried a leather pouch attached on two sides by a long strand of rope or leather. They would put a rock or a lead ball into the pouch, swing it around in increasingly wide and fast circles, and then release one end of the rope, hurling the rock forward.

Historian Baruch Halpern says that the slingers, infantry, and cavalry balanced out ancient warfare like our game of rock, paper, scissors.

**INFANTRY** soldiers were well enough armed to stand up to cavalry.

**CAVALRY** could defeat projectile warriors (artillery) because the horses could move too fast for the slingers to get good aim.

**ARTILLERY** was deadly against infantry because a soldier weighed down with armor, was a sitting duck for a bowman or a slinger who was launching projectiles from a distance.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, it took a lot of practice to become skilled at slinging, but in experienced hands, the sling was a devastating weapon.

The book of Judges (20:16) tells us that there were seven hundred men of the tribe of Benjamin who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. Medieval hunters were known to hit birds in mid-flight with a sling. Today, Irish slingers are famous for being able to hit a coin as far away as they can see it.

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<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Malcolm Gladwell who highlights the importance of the sling in ancient warfare in his book, David and Goliath.

<sup>14</sup> Reference "New Data on the Use of War Sling in Thrace 4<sup>th</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC" (Paper written by Evgeni Paunov and Dimitar Y. Dimitrov) in *Archaeologia Bulgaria*, IV, 2000, 3, pp. 44-57.

<sup>15</sup> This is how the Athenian expedition to Sicily failed in the Peloponnesian War. Athen's heavy infantry was decimated in the mountains by local light infantry, principally by soldiers using the sling. (Halpern)

Slingers could injure or kill an opponent at up to two hundred yards distance.

So effective was the sling in ancient warfare that historian Robert Dohrenend writes, "*Goliath had about as much chance against David as any Bronze Age warrior with a sword would have had against an opponent armed with a .45 automatic pistol.*"<sup>16</sup>

We all have heard the story of the man who brought a knife to a gun fight. David brought a gun to a sword fight.

Now, none of this takes anything away from the biblical story. In fact, it enhances it.

We have never thought that David's defeat of Goliath was miraculous in the sense that the parting of the Red Sea or the raising of Lazarus from the dead was miraculous. But we might not have known that David actually had a military advantage over Goliath.

When David picked up those five smooth stones from the riverbed, the end was a foregone conclusion. As rock beats scissors and scissors beats paper, if his aim was good, David was going to beat Goliath!

To conclude...

...we are still impressed with David's courage and trust in and boldness for God.

...we are still inspired by David's desire to fight because of his love for God.

...we now also marvel at David's decision to wisely fight with the weapon he knew best and to not let Goliath and the Philistines set the ground rules for the fight.

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<sup>16</sup> Moshe Dayan, a former Minister of Defense of Israel, in an essay on the story of David and Goliath, writes, "*David fought Goliath not with inferior but...with superior weaponry; and his greatness consisted not in his being willing to go out into battle against someone far stronger than he was. It consisted in his knowing how to exploit a weapon by which a feeble person could seize the advantage and become stronger.*"