

“How to Slay a Giant”  
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1 Samuel 17: 38-40, 48-50; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-23

Today’s scripture tells the familiar story of David slaying Goliath. . Slaying giants is an archetypal theme that has much to teach us about how we face the struggles in our own lives...how we tangle with our giants, whatever they may be.

And I suspect we all have them...external situations or inner conflicts which threaten to overwhelm us. They may cause acute fear, or they may bleed us dry a teaspoon at a time, in the form of low-grade, chronic helplessness. They may actually be huge, or they may just seem huge because we give them too much power. In any case, if we are alive, there are giants on all our horizons somewhere. And it seems to me that young David has some wisdom for all of us as to how we might face them.

We remember from the story that David, still apple-cheeked and fuzzy-chinned, had been off tending his sheep. He was too young for battle, and was not even at the encampment when the giant Goliath first presented himself to Israel. But Jesse, David’s father, sent David on an errand to take bread and cheese to the camp. And when he got there, David saw both the ten foot, well-armed Goliath, and the intimidated people of Israel. For scripture tells us that indeed, all were afraid, and had fled. It would seem that David was the very first to come along who refused to be intimidated by appearances. Instead of giving in to the collective helplessness and defeatism which were perhaps as much a problem as Goliath himself, David alone was able to break out of that self-defeating thought pattern and begin, first of all mentally, to cut the giant down to size. “Who is this Philistine to take on the living God?” he asked. I can practically hear him, the crystal voice of clarity in that wallowing pool of self-defeat. “People!” He might have said, “I’ll grant you he’s huge and well-armed, but have you forgotten that WE ARE EMPOWERED BY

THE LIVING GOD?" It would seem that even one voice which remembers the truth in moments of chaos and defeat can change the whole energy of a situation. And when one of his brothers challenged him and said, "David, I know your pride. You just snuck down here to be a big-shot!" David set him straight in verse 29: "Was there not a cause?" In other words, David knew that even though his earthly father had sent him on an earthly errand to take provisions, there was deeper, heavenly guidance at work. David knew he had been sent by his Higher Power, and because of that conviction, that trust in something bigger than himself, he was able to overcome the panic of the moment. Then, in addition to trusting that God's guidance had brought him there, he called to mind the smaller successes from his past. He remembered that as a shepherd, he had taken on bears and lions to protect his sheep. As victor over bears and lions was it really such a huge step to take on even an admittedly large human?

Anything here for you yet? When you stop and think about it, can you perhaps see God's guidance working through ordinary circumstances in your life, maybe even having lead you to your current giant so that you could, just perhaps, be an agent of the Divine? And do you need to remember the old saying that God's guidance will never lead you anywhere that God's grace cannot sustain you? Or are you perhaps, even unknowingly, allowing yourself to be mentally intimidated by your giant, and is it, just maybe, causing the problem to seem bigger than it really is? I know that road up close and personally...running straw scenarios in our heads and trying to do the whole thing mentally so that we are exhausted before the real event even begins, instead of taking it one, little piece at a time, and as it actually comes.

But back to the story, because the next part is my favorite part. It's the part where King Saul finally grants David permission to take on Goliath, but says, "at least wear my armor and use my weapons." So Saul suits him up, but after David is fully clothed in Saul's armor, David says,

“Uh, King, we have a problem here. I can’t even WALK in your clothes! If I am going to do this, I have to wear the suit of clothes that God gave uniquely to me!” Back came the simple shepherd’s outfit. And as to weapons, he carried a decidedly low-tech sling-shot and five smooth stones. They weren’t even jagged stones...but they were his, true to his own style and personality, authentic for him.

Have YOU, perhaps, been trying to live your life, let alone negotiate your giants while wearing somebody else’s suite of clothes? Trying to fulfill their expectations, even if it alienates you from your own soul, from the person God created you uniquely to be? Or do you compare yourself to somebody else, and try to do it their way, and in the process miss using the unique tools and talents which God gave to you for the building up of the whole body and the good of the world? I had a good lesson in this when I was a young Chemical Dependency chaplain in Minnesota. One of the other chaplains was a funny, lively, priest who could light up the room and make you feel like a million bucks. He had tons of charisma. At first, I was intimidated and even a little jealous of his popularity. I really struggled with it. But eventually I began to notice that while many of the patients went to him to do their treatment assignments, plenty came to me as well. One even brought it up and said to me, by way of a thank-you, “as much as I enjoy being around Father Ray, I am glad you are here too. I needed your quieter, more thoughtful style to do my work.” Finally, dawn came to Marblehead: Oh YA!!!! THE BODY HAS MANY MEMBERS, AND EACH PART IS ESSENTIAL IF THE BODY IS TO BE WHOLE! And if we are not true to the part of the Body that God created each of us uniquely to be, then the whole body suffers for it...If we are to stand any chance against our giants, then we had better wear the clothes and use the tools that God designed specifically for us...(And since we are on the subject let me say by way of an aside, that life gets a lot easier when we grant others that

same freedom, as much as I would LOVE to turn my husband into a neat-nick who loves home repair projects...)

And finally, the last lesson from David has to do with the fact that he only needed one of his five, smooth stones. He needed only one because he was willing to be patient, to wait for just the right moment, to discern God's flow and work with it. How often have I tried to force solutions before they were ready, to "push the river" rather than wait on God's timing, rather than seek to get into the broader, spiritual zone and let it evolve naturally. You know how different everything is then...living out of grace and guidance instead of friction and force. That's what David had, a sense of guided, non-resistant, going with God's flow. It was THAT timing that allowed that first stone find the one, little chink in Goliath's armour, and sail right through, hitting the exact mark. We can assume that David was light on his feet, ready to go or to wait, - all at a moment's notice with spiritual poise.

So what does it take to slay a giant? For David, it seemed to take first of all a sense of God's guidance as having led him to the situation in the first place. Secondly, it took a refusal to be intimidated by appearances and a willingness to break out of unconscious, self-defeating thought patterns. Thirdly, it took an insistence at using the tools and talents God gave uniquely to him rather than trying to be someone else. And finally, it took the patience and discernment to wait until the time was right, until readiness was in full-bloom, so that he could launch his one, smooth stone and have it ride God's flow on God's trajectory.

What we are really talking about here is spiritual maturity: confidence in God, confidence in the unique self God made us to be, patience and a willingness to wait for guidance. Are you facing a giant in your life right now, and does it loom large? Can you practice some of David's lessons just for today? Not even David could do it all the time. In fact, he went on to display

some of the most spectacular failures in the Bible, and in a way that's comforting. But when, assisted by the Holy Spirit, we practice the component pieces of spiritual maturity, sometimes they all line up, we get in the zone, and even a pernicious giant may finally go down. You never know. Peace and courage, dear friends, as we all do the best we can. .