

Risk-Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith

Session 4

June 22, 2025

David: A Faith That Meets Adversity Head-on

The Point: Faith moves with confidence in God.

Session Passages: 1 Samuel 17:3-8,32-37,45-47

1 Samuel 17:3-8

Connection to the Point. The Israelite army faced a great challenge from Goliath.

The Philistines (v. 3). The Bible first mentions the Philistines in Genesis 10:14 in what is called the Table of Nations. After that mention, both Abraham and Isaac are described as having related to the Philistines at different times in their lives (Gen. 20:1-2; 26:1).

A ravine between them (v. 3). As the armies of Israel and the Philistines prepared to go to battle, they stood on opposite hills with a *ravine*—probably a wadi, a dry riverbed—dividing them. Just as there was a physical chasm between the two armies, there was also a spiritual chasm of fear (v. 11). It was into this valley, both physically and metaphorically, that the Lord’s anointed stepped in order to overcome the Israelites’ fear through a demonstration of faith in the power of the Lord to overcome even the most overwhelming enemy.

Goliath (vv. 4-5). The first probable reference to giants in the Bible is in Genesis 6:4 where the Nephilim are mentioned. These men, whose name is derived from the Hebrew word for “fall,” were likely giants. They serve as an example of the rampant sin and resultant fallen state of the world that led to God sending the great flood. The next example of giants comes when Moses sent the spies into the promised land in the book of Numbers. The spies returned with reports that giants were in the land. Showing a lack of faith, the people of Israel feared the giants instead of trusting the Lord. This sinful fear drove them to disobey the Lord. As a result of their disobedience, they were not permitted to enter the promised land. The exceptions to this ban were Joshua and Caleb who, contrary to the other ten spies, declared that God would give the people of God victory—even over the giants. By mentioning giants here in the story of David, the author of 1 Samuel seems to have been calling back to that time when the people of Israel were faithless and, as a result, were kept from entering the promised land (Num. 13–14). As the story begins to unfold, that shadow of fear, faithlessness, and disobedience was hanging over the army of Israel. Only one man would step forward and face the giant. That man of faith was the Lord’s anointed—David, the son of Jesse.

Goliath was a giant. He stood **nine feet, nine inches tall**. The Hebrew identifies his height as six cubits and a span. A cubit measured the length of the forearm from the elbow to the fingertip of the middle finger, averaging about eighteen inches. A span was the width of a hand from the fingertips of the thumb and little finger when the hand was spread out, averaging about nine inches, or half a cubit. Further evidence for Goliath being a giant is the description of his armor. Goliath’s armor was also massive, weighing **one hundred twenty-five pounds**. Only a massively powerful man would be able to wield such heavy armor and still be able to carry out his duties.

Saul (v. 8). According to 1 Samuel 9:2 and 10:23, Saul was taller than most other Israelites. Therefore, he was seemingly the man best suited in all of Israel to go to battle against the giant Goliath. However, by giving into his fear and trusting his physical eyes instead of trusting the word of the Lord, Saul walked in the way of Adam and Eve who trusted their own eyes and the words of the serpent instead of the word of God. In following in the way of Adam and Eve, Saul showed himself to be an incapable defender of Israel and, therefore, an unsuitable king, a hint to readers of things to come.

Choose one of your men (v. 8). The account of David and Goliath is an example of the ancient practice of representative warfare. In representative warfare, each side was to choose a soldier. Those soldiers would fight to the death as a representative of their respective armies. The results of this one-on-one battle were clear and so would be the consequences. The side represented by the dead man would become the servants of the victor's army and nation. Despite representative warfare being their idea, the Philistines would later show themselves to be unfaithful even to their own proposal (1 Sam. 18:30).

1 Samuel 17:32-37

Connection to the Point. God had been with David in past challenges, and David was confident God would be with him again.

Context. The events of verses 9-31 demonstrate that Saul was exactly the kind of king Israel asked for earlier in the book—one who acted like the kings of other nations (8:5). Saul trusted in what he could see, in his own abilities, and in the power of his armies instead of the power of the Lord. A truly faithful king would have trusted in the Lord and had faith in His power rather than being filled with fear. However, when Saul saw that his own abilities came up short and that no one in his army was big enough to face the giant Goliath, he was full of fear instead of full of faith.

In 1 Samuel 13:14, Samuel told Saul, “The Lord has found a man after his own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over his people, because you have not done what the Lord commanded.” By the time Saul faced Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, the Lord had already rejected Saul as king (15:23), and David had been anointed by Samuel (16:1-13). The phrase “a man after His own heart” describes King David who, instead of being the kind of king that the people's hearts desired, was the kind of king God's heart desired.

Don't let anyone be discouraged (v. 32). The king and soldiers' fear and inaction are indicative of a lack of faith in the Lord. Their relative ability is secondary to their trust in the Lord whose power is infinite and whose authority is unlimited. Earlier commands from God to be strong and courageous were based not on the strength, cunning, or size of the Israelite army but on the fact that “the Lord your God is with you” (Josh. 1:9). In an age that calls for self-confidence, we need to recover a confidence not in ourselves but in the Lord.

Your servant (v. 32). Saul had been rejected as king (chap. 15), and David had been anointed by Samuel (chap. 16). Here however, despite already having been anointed in the previous chapter, David still humbled himself by submitting to Saul and to Saul's kingship. This kind of submission would mark David's relationship to Saul throughout the rest of Saul's life. In the following chapters, David would have

opportunities to dethrone and even kill Saul, but he would not take them. Instead, he would continually submit himself to Saul as king. This submission was not, ultimately, to Saul but to the Lord. In 1 Samuel 24:6, David would even be convicted for cutting off the corner of Saul's robe and would confess this guilt to his men: "As the Lord is my witness, I would never do such a thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed. I will never lift my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed." David's loyalty and devotion was to the Lord—not to Saul. In this behavior, David indeed showed himself to be the kind of king whom the Lord desired to lead His people.

Just a youth (v. 33). The Hebrew word translated *youth* suggests David was likely under twenty years-old—too young to be conscripted into service in the king's army. In contrast to David's faithfulness, Saul was demonstrating faithlessness. He was showing himself to be just like the Israelites who had earlier requested that Samuel give them a king like all of the other nations (chap. 8). Just as the Israelites had done earlier, Saul was looking on the surface rather than at deeper issues. In fact, even the faithful prophet Samuel had been guilty of trusting his own physical eyes rather than having eyes of faith, "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart'" (16:7). In the New Testament, Paul would instruct his young apprentice Timothy in a similar fashion: "Don't let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12).

David answered (v. 34). David's response in verses 34-37 shows that his confidence in facing Goliath was not faith in his own abilities. Instead, his faith was in **The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear** (v. 37). David's walk with God was a walk of trust, faith, and hope. David looked at all of God's faithfulness to him in the past and demonstrated faith that God would continue to act in accordance with His nature.

1 Samuel 17:45-47

Connection to the Point. David faced Goliath confidently because his confidence was in God.

Sword, and spear, and javelin (v. 45). These three weapons (the Hebrew word rendered *shield* is also translated *spear* [Josh. 8:18,26; Job 41:29; Jer. 6:23] or *lance* [Jer. 50:42]) represented some of the most advanced forms of military technology in the ancient world. By recognizing that Goliath had all three of these weapons at his disposal, David was demonstrating that his confidence in the Lord was not naïve optimism. Instead, David had true confidence in the Lord and His ability to save.

In the name of the Lord of Armies (v. 45). These two overlapping grammatical phrases—*in the name of the Lord* and *the Lord of Armies*—both represent significant theological ideas. First, in the ancient world, and in some cultures today, a person's name was vitally important and represented something greater than the individual. The phrase "in the name of the Lord" recalls not just the vocalization of God's divine name but the entirety of God's work in the world—especially through Abraham's descendants and even more specifically through the people of Israel since they had been rescued from slavery in Egypt. God

had revealed His divine name to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3). It was in that name that David was going into battle with Goliath. The reference to the name of the Lord is a subtle reminder of the Lord's power to do the impossible—just as He had done when He brought thousands upon thousands of Israelites out of slavery in Egypt while drowning Egypt's army in the sea.

The second phrase, *the Lord of Armies*, is a less subtle reminder of the Lord's power. Some translations use the phrase “the Lord of Hosts” which obscures that David was making reference to the power of God's heavenly armies that dwarfs any and all earthly powers. David would later write in Psalm 20:7-9, “Some take pride in chariots, and others in horses, but we take pride in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand firm. Lord, give victory to the king! May he answer us on the day that we call.”

God of the ranks of Israel (v. 45). This phrase is an example of a Hebrew poetic element called parallelism, specifically, synthetic parallelism. In synthetic parallelism, the second phrase or clause builds on the previous phrase or clause. In other words, the phrase *God of the ranks of Israel* builds on the phrase *the Lord of Armies*. David was confessing that not only is the Lord the Lord over the heavens above, but He is also Lord over the earth below. The Lord's sovereignty will always accomplish exactly what He intends for it to accomplish. This phrase also reminds the reader that the people of Israel ultimately belong to the Lord and not to any human king. The incarnation of Jesus would overcome any limitations that existed when Israel was ruled over by an earthly king. As the God-Man, King Jesus will rule as the one and only true King of Israel.

The Lord saves (v. 47). The name *Joshua* means “Yahweh saves.” In the New Testament, the name *Jesus* is the Greek version of the same name. David's confidence that the Lord would save him is both an echo of the way that the Lord saved Joshua and His people as they entered the promised land and also a foreshadowing of the way the Lord would save His people through the work of Jesus. Christians are saved by the Lord—not only at the beginning but from first to last (Gal. 3:1-3). As Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, “I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

The battle is the Lord's (v. 47). David understood a fundamental principle about the life of God's people—a principle that is seen both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Whenever we are faced with a challenge to living the life that God has called us to, we need to understand that those battles will only be won in the power that God provides, not in our own power, cleverness, education, background, or anything else. All of our spiritual battles belong to the Lord. He is the “King of glory” who is “mighty in battle” (Ps. 24:8).

Hand you over (v. 47). The work of military victory would be done by the Lord and His armies—not by David or any earthly army. At the end of David's life, he would give credit to the Lord for all of the victories in his life. The consummation of this confession of God's power is that David “will give thanks” to the Lord “among the nations” (2 Sam. 22:50).