

**David vs. Goliath**  
**Scripture**  
**1 Samuel 17:1-11; 37-51**

**August 20, 2023**

Preaching can be intimidating, especially if you come after a good one. I was once asked to preach at a large summer gathering, 7800 people, following in the footsteps of a great preacher who preached without any notes, any script, no “hems or haws,” just a long, smooth, good sermon. So, when I followed him, I stated the obvious straight on, that the great Rev. Carlson preached with no notes, no manuscript whatsoever and I said, holding up my written sermon, “it’s too bad Rev. Carlson never learned to read.”

Today I’m following the legendary Alida, whose last two sermons have been wildly popular. She’s been doing this series on “Favorite Stories from the Bible.” The first linked the billion-dollar movie “Barbie” with the terrific Queen Esther. Esther is hardly known among Christians, but she saved her Jewish people from a sure genocide, at the hands of the ancient Persians, a plot to kill every Jew in the land. In the language of today, it’s a story of grit, women’s empowerment, nascent feminism in the forever battle against antisemitism.

Last week, Alida tackled Jonah, an amazing story that unfortunately is only known for Jonah being swallowed by a whale and living to tell about it. That may be the weird part of the story but it’s nowhere near the important part. Jonah is the most revolutionary book in the Bible making it clear that God is the God of everyone, everywhere, period. As I wrote in a long-ago poem:

God says to Jonah:

“No boundaries

no limits,  
get used to it  
I'm here, there  
everywhere you can think  
to be or go  
above or below  
I am there.  
Get used to it."

When I say that Alida's sermons were "wildly popular" I based that on two evidences: First, people are still talking about them, days and weeks later. Second, our online views on YouTube and Facebook were big, and that happens by word of mouth, when one person talks to another person, "you need to hear this sermon." Or they hit the "share" button online. So, Alida was really building something right in the heart of summer, with great stories, great application, great reaction. But with Alida in Indiana to preach Randy Minnear's funeral at 1pm, you're stuck with me... and my story is David and Goliath.

If you took a poll of the top three people in the Old Testament part of the Bible, the three winners would be Moses, Abraham, and King David. And we probably know more about David than any person in the whole Bible. We first met him at about age 13, a shepherd boy, taking care of his father's sheep, while his brothers were off to war against the hated Philistines. We last met him at his dying breath, there's actually a beautiful choral piece called "The Last

Words of David.” In between we see his rise, and fall, and rise again, and fall again. He’s a courageous soldier, a great leader of men, a powerful king, a lousy husband, a bad neighbor, a dysfunctional father, an accomplished musician, merciless, and merciful, wise, and foolish. David was so close to God that the Bible says, “he was close to God!” Or literally, “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).

And yet, he was so bloody awful, or specifically, awfully bloody, that God would not let him build the Temple in Jerusalem.” “You’re too bloody,” God told him bluntly. He’s credited with writing many of the Psalms and they show that he understood God as well as any person who ever lived. A complicated figure. You know, after he kills Goliath, he’s a national hero, the Audie Murphy, Ethan Allen, George Washington, General Patton, John Wayne of ancient Israel. He married the king’s daughter, was best friends with the king’s son...and yet, detested by Israel’s King Saul. David was hounded out of the country, fleeing for his life, he becomes a mercenary, a hired gun for other countries. Until, one day, he becomes King of Israel, an opportunity he grabs ahold of, fumbles, exploits, wastes, and benefits. Yeah, he’s complicated.

Interestingly, some of the most popular books on executive leadership and business success in the last decade are often subtitled “Lessons on Leadership from the Life of King David.” Listen to these titles:

[King Sized Leadership](#)

[The Heart of an Executive](#)

Leadership Secrets

Who's Got Your Back?

Challenging Goliath

Who's By Your Side?

The Smooth Stones

Shepherd Leadership

30 Days with King David

All of these books based on David! I don't know about that last one, I don't think any of us could stand 30 days with King David. We'd learn a lot, but we wouldn't enjoy it. I've spent enough time with abusive, selfish, egotistical, rude, vulgar, bigoted, successful leaders, and I sure learned a lot! But even their own friends couldn't stand 30 days with them. And yet...and yet, today we have the teenager David in a gripping story, teaching us a life's worth of lessons. Let's recapture the story, find some gems, and then go home, put the gems to use.

Israel is at war with the Philistines. David's mom and dad pack up some home-cooking and send him to the warzone, the frontline, to visit his brother, deliver the food, and report home. When he gets there the enemy giant, Goliath, is doing his daily routine of insulting the Jews, and challenging them to send their best soldiers, to go up against him, man to man instead of two armies slaughtering each other's. No one volunteers. Goliath was almost 8-feet tall, frightful, fearsome, scary. And to young David, infuriating. He's disgusted to see his nation's army paralyzed, mocked, and scared. So, David springs into action, and that may be

one of the first lessons from his life. David doesn't dawdle. He's a man of action from shepherd boy to warrior king.

Very quickly he volunteers to fight Goliath, rejects the overly burdensome armor of the day, walks out into the riverbed with his trusty slingshot, picks up a few smooth stones, and when he gets close enough – but not too close – he slips a stone into his slingshot, gives it a mighty twirl and lets it fly – hitting Goliath straight in the forehead, and then cuts off his head. He is immediately the national hero, fueling popular adulation and jealous fits from the current King Saul. He went on to a storied career of high drama, great success, and human failure and foible.

In many ways, he is like the other greats in the Bible, St. Peter, St. Paul, Moses, people that are so human we can relate to them, warts, and all. They are like us. We can imagine ourselves tripping over the carpet, and dancing gracefully. Pouring the wine perfectly, and having it dribble down our chin, onto our shirt. Double bogey the 8<sup>th</sup> hole and birdie the 9<sup>th</sup>. Get promoted on Monday and lose a deal on Friday. Be a jerk and be a “man after God's own heart.” Like David. And therefore, we're open to learning from him.

The phrase and the whole concept of “David vs. Goliath” is probably the most popular from the whole Bible. Then Ten Commandments are big, but most people bog down after naming about six. On “Jeopardy” this week, all three contestants could not complete the opening phrase of The Lord's Prayer. More people know the number, John 3:16, than know the

actual words. The Two Great Commandments? Most know one or the other, not both. But everybody knows the idea of David vs. Goliath. The little guys knocking off the big guy. The underdog taking on the odds-on favorite. The newcomer politician taking on the entrenched incumbent. Anybody who comes out of nowhere to become “King of the Mountain.”

Just like that teenaged young whippersnapper shepherd boy, David, saving the nation of Israel by bringing down Goliath. Here are my take-away applications from this David vs. Goliath story, that you and I can put to use: He was confident, wise, prepared, strategic, faithful; and he was capable of both righteous indignation AND knowing his limitations. Let me repeat that. David was confident, wise, prepared, strategic, faithful. He had righteous indignation AND enough humility to know his limitations. He used his head, valued his experience, knew his skill set.

The story is straightforward enough. Goliath is enormous. Formidable. Undefeated. Every “action movie” out there has a Goliath bad guy and there’s always one scene where the good guy takes the bad guy on, face to face, and it never goes well. So, the good guy rethinks strategy, uses a smarter Plan B, and succeeds. Our David decides to skip that ego-driven trap of man to man and goes with what he knows, a smarter Plan B. The Bible tells us he’s been up against bears and lions in defense of his family’s sheep, so he’s used to the Goliaths of the world, he’s used to being outgunned, overmatched, and underestimated.

That experience taught David to be prepared and to think strategically. What does he do well? What's worked in the past? What's to his advantage? David's confidence and his faith took him to the battlefield against Goliath. But he was also prepared. He had his trusty slingshot, he found smooth stones in the riverbed perfect for slings. He was prepared. As for strategy, he used surprise and distance. The surprise of his youth, the surprise of his appearance: no armor, no apparent weapon, just a kid in a loin cloth. Yes, Goliath would be surprised, advantage: David. Plus, he kept his distance. No need to get within Goliath's reach. Advantage: David.

This war was not a time for macho showboating bravado. This was a time to win. I once took 35 people on a Habitat for Humanity workcamp high up in the mountains of Peru. During work breaks the Peruvians engaged us in soccer games...and slingshotting, the old-fashioned way. The slingshot was made of two long pieces of ropes with a leather pouch at the end, put a rock in the pouch, twirl it around over your hand, and accurately. No need to walk up to Goliath, tap him on the shoulder, and challenge him to fisticuffs. David's confidence, faith, preparation, and strategy worked to perfection. One fast-flying stone to the forehead and Goliath was a goner.

The beauty of Alida's two sermons, and now this one, is that they give us clear, 'practical lessons' from simple, straightforward Bible stories. Alida's Barbie/Esther sermon shows Esther defying cultural norms and lowered expectations to rise above the prejudice of her day to save her people. At a time of threat and danger, her uncle asked her a basic question we all should



answer: “Who knows but that you were born for such a time as this?” Why are you here, alive...now? What’s needed of you...today?

Alida’s Jonah sermon showed us Jonah running away from God, being swallowed by a whale, and having second thoughts before God gave him a second chance. Brought back to life, and amazingly successful at serving God. Jonah still ends up bitter and whining. For all the hard-to-believe-swallowed-by-a-big-fish story, there’s a lot of really basic human nature material in there for any of us to consider. What do you run away from? What are the whales in your life threatening to swallow you whole? How does your whining limit your happiness?

And my sermon is equally simple, practical, and obvious. Who, or what, are the Goliaths in your life? Using the Israelite army as an example, what paralyzes you into inaction? Using David as a model, how do you use your faith to build your confidence? How can you be better prepared for life challenges? What strategies put you in the best position to prevail? In other words, how can we be more like David the Teenager when he put it all together, just right, to beat back the Goliath of his day?

Yesterday, at 5:30 in the morning, I thought I had this sermon done, so I got on the treadmill – I started reading, yes, I read on the treadmill. Almost immediately I find this article about Timothy Keller. Keller was a dynamic and popular New York City pastor who died in May, and the newspapers have had many tributes to him, including this one, and hear how it begins:

Ask anyone to name a story from the Bible, and you'll likely get the answer David and Goliath. Most Americans know it as a tale about facing your fears, steeling yourself and prevailing against long odds. "I'm here to say that's a shallow understanding, even a deceptive understanding, of how to read the text," Tim Keller, minister of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, told his congregation one Sunday morning in 2015.

Keller, who died May 19 at age 72, then indicted what he called "counterfeit courage"- the modern idea that the way to overcome fear is to "visualize success." Stoicism works only in "short-term bursts, mainly on adrenaline," and most "of the acts of courage we most admire don't come from self-assertion and self-confidence."

His church shouldn't see itself in David but in the story's terrified Israelites, who needed a savior. Christians, Keller concluded, can face life's complexities and dangers because Jesus Christ conquered death. Those who follow him are secure, and "joy is once quipped always on the way." In saying so, Keller blew open an old story with intellectual force verve.

(Wall Street Journal,

I admired Rev. Keller, and I get his point, but may I respectfully disagree? I know we don't want to see ourselves as Goliath, brutish, boastful, a bully in every way. But I don't think it's useful to see ourselves sitting on the sidelines, like the Israelite army beaten before the battle begins defeatist, spectators so caught up in worry and self-doubt we can barely move.

Hey! We may be that way sometimes, but we don't get anywhere dwelling on that. Keller's point is that it helps to see clearly how needy we are, and I get that. But I'd rather have us clearly see the way out, the way forward, and that's David.

Keller's emphasizes the mess we're in: "woe is me," "all is lost," "what a bad boy am I" or in the words of an old Broadway show, "don't bother me, I can't cope!" That certainly was the plight of the Israelite army, cowering before Goliath. I'm just saying that when we're beaten down, we know we're beaten down, so I don't need to tell you you're beaten down. We need David. And the sad truth is David needed David. Too often in the rest of his life he lost his way, took his eye off the ball, lost his focus, let himself get side-tracked. David committed one of the cardinal sins of famous people, you know the saying, "don't read your own press-clipping."

As David got older, he was too aware that he was popular, powerful, successful, blessed, victorious. He forgot another old piece of advice "dance with one that brung 'ya." David lost sight of what "brung" him to be popular, powerful, successful, blessed, and victorious:

The joy of his confidence,  
The wonderful innocence of his faith,  
The basics of his planning,  
The simplicity of his strategy.

I'll close with a final question that you'll like. Take some time today, this week, to remember the David's in your life, the people you know who stood up to some Goliath, putting

faith and preparation and confidence and strategy to work. I'm sure every family represented here today has a David or two, every team you ever played on, every place you ever worked, every town you ever lived in, every friend group you ever enjoyed, every movement you were ever part of, every family gathering you ever had – there was a David who took on a Goliath and won.

Remember them.

Honor them.

Emulate them.