

Kerry Mansir
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We all know the story of David and Goliath, right? Or at least we think we know the story. It was definitely a highlight in our children's bibles, though if you read the books of First and Second Samuel and the beginning of First Kings, you'll realize that David's story is actually a lot bigger than most of us ever knew. David gets forty-one chapters of the Bible. I'm guessing that's only second to Moses in the Old Testament.

David was a complicated, in some ways tragic and sensitive figure. He will be the subject of our Old Testament readings for most of the summer. And while David may not exactly be a role model for us, his experiences definitely make space for us to reflect on how we live our own lives, particularly in the face of challenges, temptations, and even tragedies.

Last week, we heard the story of David's anointing, thrusting him to the forefront of Israel's story. Displeased with King Saul, God sends the prophet Samuel to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem to anoint one of his sons. God passes up the seven older brothers of David before laying the mantle of kingship on this, the youngest brother, who spends his days tending the sheep in the fields. That may seem like an inauspicious start for a king. But as we see in our story today—shepherding may have given David the very gifts that he needed to defeat a mighty warrior and propel himself into the high ranks of the Israelite army and into the hearts of all the people.

In that story of David's anointing, we heard that when Samuel poured the horn of oil over David's head, the "spirit of the Lord" came upon him. I don't know that some special power was transferred in that anointing or if the anointing just made David aware of who he already was—a discovery of his deepest self. That would explain his confidence and trust in God when he decides to take on Goliath.

This is one of our greatest stories of the Old Testament. David's oldest brothers are off fighting in Saul's army, and they are up against the Philistines—one of the toughest, most brutal, nations that Israel will fight in their efforts to take and defend this land that they believe has been promised to them by God.

David's father sends him from the fields where he has been tending the family's sheep to check on his brothers on the frontlines of the battle and to bring them some food. When David arrives, he discovers that this huge giant of a man, Goliath, has made an offer to Israel. Rather than fight a battle where the Israelites and Philistines kill each other by the thousands, Israel should send one man out to fight Goliath. If that man wins and kills Goliath, the Philistines will concede and become the servants of Israel. But if Goliath wins, Israel will become the servants of the Philistines.

Saul hears this challenge and is terrified. Saul whom the people anointed, you will remember, because he was strong and tall, and they wanted to be like other nations with a king to lead them into battles. This, however, is not a battle that Saul is willing to fight. In his defense, Goliath must have been a terrifying figure. He was said to be six cubits which is something like 9 and a half feet. He was covered from head to toe in

heavy bronze armor that weighed something like 125 pounds and he had a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders and an enormous spear.

So Saul decides to pawn off this challenge on someone else. He offers his daughter in marriage, great wealth, and a lifetime exemption on paying taxes to anyone who can defeat the giant. David hears of this and decides that he is up to the challenge. He goes before Saul who is in disbelief that this mere boy wants to fight Goliath, but David insists, claiming that it is his very experience as a shepherd that will make possible his defeat of Goliath. To protect his sheep, he has killed lions and bears with his bare hands. Could Goliath be any more vicious than a lion or a bear?

Saul tries to help out by David by putting his very own armor on him, but they just weigh him down, making him clumsy and weaker than he is without them so he takes them off and goes out to battle with no armor.

David knew that he would never defeat Goliath in a conventional way. Saul's armor and shield wouldn't protect him. Even a sword wouldn't make it possible for him to take down someone twice his size. David believed that he already had within him the skills necessary to defeat Goliath.

And so he goes out to meet Goliath. And before Goliath even realizes what is happening, David takes a stone, runs at Goliath, and uses a sling to propel that stone at the speed of a bullet that strikes Goliath in the forehead, lodging in his brain, and killing him.

And while we tend to think of this story as a surprising victory of the little guy over the big, who really had the upper hand here? Why should we assume that Goliath would be victorious? David was swift and smart and skilled, going up against a giant of a man who had a huge sword and javelin, but was so weighed down by his armor and size that he must have been slow and lumbering in battle.

David claimed that he could defeat Goliath because God was on his side. But David's skills with the sling, his speed and dexterity, and his confidence were not miracles from God. He channeled the strengths he already had in the face of a great challenge.

So where do we find ourselves in this story? Overly confident in our supposed advantages that like Goliath, we might be taken down by an unexpected threat? Fearful and hiding like Saul, certain that we don't have the strength to face the challenge at hand? Or might we be like David or at least strive to be like David? Taking on the mantle of "the spirit of the Lord." Allowing ourselves to be anointed by the spirit so that we become more fully what God already knows us to be. Drawing on the skills and talents and strengths that we have spent a lifetime developing to meet the challenges of life.

How might we recognize that while we may not have David's sling and stone, we have weapons of the spirit—those things in our heart, soul, and imagination that give us the strength to do the things that need to be done—in our relationships, in our work, in all the aspects of our life. The gifts we need are already within us. For no other reason than that we are all the beloved children of God and God does not leave us defenseless but inspires in us enough strength and wisdom, spirit and love to defeat even our biggest goliaths. Amen.