

In the Mess

Facing your giants

You know them well don't you? You don't need me or anyone else to tell you what they are to you? You know because they're always there lurking somewhere. You probably get moments, maybe longer sometimes when they're not staring you in the face, but they're always there somewhere, lurking in the shadows. They lurk in all sorts of places don't they? The biggest problem is that they have a tendency to dominate you. It's not that you go looking for them but you know them well and recognise them when you see them. I have mine just as you have yours. Like you I've had some of mine a long time and I know them well, and I know they are quite capable of dominating me – filling my thinking, influencing my behaviour, my responses to others, what I will do and what I won't do, and if I let them they will tell me which way to walk every day of my life.

If you were there that day, what odds would you have given David against Goliath?

“Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Socoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them. A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armour of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighted six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him. Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man

and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.” Then the Philistine said “This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.” On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified. Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul’s time he was old and well advanced in years. Jesse’s three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war. The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah. David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s sheep at Bethlehem. For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.” – 1 Sam 17 v 1-16

The Philistines were old enemies of Israel. When they entered the Promised Land under Joshua it was the Philistines among others who they had fought and driven from the land. Yet here they are again – the Philistines on one side of a valley and the Israelites on the other. Only this time its different isn’t it? Because there was a giant called Goliath. There you see – we all have giants! I have mine you have yours and Israel had Goliath. Goliath was so huge and intimidating and terrifying that the Israelite army was dismayed and terrified. You know what that’s like don’t you?

Your Goliath doesn’t carry a sword and a shield, he comes in different forms: the threat of unemployment; the threat of abandonment; the trauma of sexual abuse; the battle with depression; the bills you can’t pay; the expectations you can’t meet; the memories you can’t erase; the drink you can’t resist; the pornography you can’t refuse; a career you can’t escape; the past you can’t be free of; the future you can’t face; the relationship you can’t restore; the marriage you can’t rescue; the children who are challenging; the parents who remain overbearing; the boss who intimidates you; the work colleagues who don’t respect you.

The Philistines were an old enemy to Israel. How long has your Goliath stalked you? As Goliath taunted Israel every day for 40 days so ours can steal our joy and

haunt us daily. Eugene Peterson in his book on David writes: “The moment we permit evil to control our imaginations, dictate the way we think and shape our responses, we at the same time become incapable of seeing the good and the true and the beautiful.”¹

We know that’s true don’t we? We can let our giants dominate us and then life becomes very hard indeed. So what odds would you have given for David to beat Goliath that day as they stood facing each other? As Max Lucado says: “Better odds, perhaps than you give yourself against your giants.”²

When Joshua and the people entered the promised land they destroyed everyone except the residents of three cities: Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. Goliath came from Gath and now he’s back to fight!

“Now Jesse said to his son David. “Take this Ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.” Early in the morning David left the flock with a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and greeted his brothers. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear. Now the Israelites had been saying, “Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The King will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel.” David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is the uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies

¹ Peterson, Eugene: *Leap Over a Wall: Reflections on the Life of David*, HarperSanFrancisco 1997 page 39

² Lucado, Max *Facing Your Giants*, Thomas Nelson 2006 page 2

of the living God?" They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, "This is what will be done for the man who kills him." When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you come down only to watch the battle." "Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?" He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him. David said to Saul, "Let no-one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." - 1 Sam 17 v 17-37

Where has David been while this battle has been on hold? He's been in the hills of Bethlehem tending his father's sheep and he's been saturated in the vastness and the closeness of the presence of the Lord. When he arrives with bread and cheese for his brothers he sees the whole thing from a completely different perspective.

He has experience God's strength in protecting his sheep as he's fought with lions and bears, and God's presence was more real to him in those moments than the roar of either a lion or a bear. He has worshipped God continuously as he has tended the sheep so that God's love and power, which he couldn't see, was more real to him than the ferocity of a lion or a bear, which he could see. He was able to see everything in a different perspective – the powerful, real and close presence of God. So when he turns up at the battlefield he simply doesn't see what everyone else sees, and he doesn't share their terror or dismay because

David is able to recognise that someone else is present. So David asks: “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” David shows up discussing God! No-one else was discussing God – not the Israelites or King Saul.

David had recognized a deep truth: this wasn't a battle of David versus Goliath but of focusing on God. Everyone present except David has their eyes fixed and focused on the size, strength, skill and threat of Goliath. David focuses almost entirely on God. He only makes two references to Goliath and both times he called him an uncircumcised Philistine who defies the armies of the living God!

His focus is on the God who has been with him while he was tending the sheep, who helped him fight lions and bears, and who is the subject of songs and psalms that he has already written or that are forming in his mind. When David arrived on the scene he can't quite believe what he is seeing and hearing because his focus and his mind is set on the presence of the living God.

What seems incredible is that Goliath seems to have grasped what David recognised, that Israel has lost its focus on God and therefore its faith in him. It's almost as if Goliath is saying: “If I'm a pagan, and you believe in the living God, how come you won't fight me? Truth is you don't believe in him at all do you? Come on ... you really believe that a giant like me is actually more powerful than God when it comes to a real fight! That's why you won't fight me!”

And yet staggeringly the people of Israel have a rich history of God defeating enemies like Goliath. Trouble is distant history doesn't help us unless it leads us now to walk in complete reliance of God and his promises. Only then can we defeat our enemies, and David and Goliath both knew that Israel's faith in God was sadly lacking.

So how about you friends? How about me? As my giants taunt me across the valley or from the shadows, what do I see? As your giants pursue you and stand in your way, what do you see?

“Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armour on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. “I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them. “ So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield-bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!” David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not the sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give all of you into our hands.” As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.” - 1 Sam 17 v 38-51

Saul was, of course, well intentioned. David had never fought a battle, let alone worn armour but Saul was trying to do the right thing by giving him his armour (perhaps health and safety is older than we know!) Perhaps it was a bit difficult for David too – until he realised he couldn’t even walk in Saul’s armour. Saul

respected David – after all Saul was King of Israel it couldn't have been easy for David to have taken off the armour saying effectively to Saul, thanks, but no thanks. But in truth, it would have been a disaster for David to have faced Goliath wearing Saul's armour. Borrowed armour is not the answer friends. The only way David could fight, was to be the real him. David was only young but he had grasped a deep and profound truth: to fight our battles we have to be ourselves and no-one else! Friends, how will you live: the only way you can? Or are you going to live and fight battles in borrowed armour – second hand? You weren't made to borrow armour from others. You were made unique, and when you put your faith in the living God, you are ready for whatever lies ahead. What will shape you: your fear of your giants, or your faith in God?

So David goes to the brook and picks out 5 smooth stones for his sling. In all probability he kneels at the brook in order to pick up the stones and at that moment he is staggeringly vulnerable. At this moment the balance of power and the outcome of a battle rests in a young, kneeling boy, without armour or fighting experience. The Philistines, especially Goliath, on one side laughing with disbelief and disdain, and the Israelites, especially King Saul, on the other holding their breath and considering their fate.

But then, isn't it a beautiful and challenging picture of how God most often chooses to do his work? God most often works in our weakness and vulnerability and not in our strength and confidence. God spoke those very words to Paul didn't he: "my power is made perfect in weakness." (2Cor 12v9) We don't have to be eloquent or strong; we don't have to be beautiful or brilliant, we don't need to know or have all the answers – what God honours is weakness, vulnerability and faith. What he asks is that we trust his word, trust his promises and trust his name; that we stand before him in integrity and faith. And God waits for the moment when we fully trust in him so he can empower us to fight our giants.

When David has chosen his stones, staggeringly we are told he runs quickly towards Goliath! Goliath sees him coming, laughs, tilts his head back and leaves himself open to the stone that David fires from his sling. And in a moment it's all over! When was the last time you faced your giant and moved towards it to meet

it head on? We tend to retreat and hide and immerse ourselves in something that, for a moment at least, makes us feel safe or strong or in control. What is needed though is for us to focus on God and renew our trust in him. He is the one who through Jesus said that he had come that we may live in all its fullness...Which I think must mean facing and defeating our giants.

May I be bold for a moment and be as honest as I can? My best guess is that the problem I have and you have is that we don't know well enough in whom we say we trust. Mahatma Gandhi said: "You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature." It tells us the truth about the one in whom we trust, the one who is with us to face our giants together. How well do you know him?

The story of David is fascinating! He is the only person in the Bible described as being after God's own heart. He had a magnificent victory over Goliath, but he messed up big time with Bathsheba. He could lead armies but couldn't manage his family. In truth he fell as often as he stood and his Goliath wasn't a one off really. In his good moments there was no-one better, in his bad moments there weren't many worse. The man and heart God loved was in truth a chequered one. David faced many giants and so do we, but neither he, nor we need to face them alone. The times the giants fell, David trusted and focused on God. The times he didn't, David fell. The story of David and Goliath speaks to us and asks: "So how will you face your giants?"

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