

## **“ARE YOU FIT TO FIGHT?”**

### **II Samuel 17:38-40**

**“So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. David fastened his sword to his armor, and he tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them.” So David took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine.” (NKJV)**

Physical fitness is the all rage among health-spa people. Americans are not lacking in Physical Fitness programs or facilities. They are widely advertised and readily available. We are assured that we can improve our abs and our pectorals, even if we do not know what or where they are.

However, there is a more important type of fitness that we need to address and that is spiritual fitness. Why do we need to be spiritually fit? The answer: In order to fight the good fight of faith and the fight for the faith. Paul tells the young man Timothy to “*fight the good fight of faith.*” (I Tim.6:12) And, Jude challenges us to “*earnestly contend for the faith.*”(v3)

We have been challenged by the Call to Arms in Ephesians chapter 6 in the four previous messages. As we walked through God’s Armory we were reminded to “*put on the whole armor of God.*” One does not need armor unless there is warfare either present or pending. In either case, the spiritual enemy we face in the devil and his demonic hordes is a clear and present danger. Therefore, we need to, as the Boy Scouts of America motto says, “Be Prepared!”

The emphasis in some Christian circles is solely upon the believer’s *welfare* to the total exclusion of the believer’s *warfare*. The Devil is waging war 24/7 against the cause of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we Christians need to be spiritually fit in order to contend against the world, the flesh and the Devil and extend the cause of Christ in the world.

Are you fit for the faith fight? How can we, female and male, youth or adult, be fit? In 1st Samuel 17 we have recorded the classic story of David and Goliath from which we can learn some principles for spiritual fitness. The story of David and Goliath is one of the all time great adventure stories in any literature. And, since it is recorded in God’s literature, it is all the more fascinating.

On one of my trips to Israel, I was delighted when our guide took us to the Valley of Elah where David and Goliath met. I stood there by the brook in the valley and let my imagination recreate the confrontation between David and Goliath.

I imagined that giant of a man appearing and opposite him a youthful boy, dressed in a shepherd’s tunic, carrying a staff and a slingshot and wearing sandals. Being there on the site enhanced the story for me. The sacred record graphically relates what happened next:

David, *“chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag”* and *“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.”* (1 Sam 17:40 & 50)

Who would not be intrigued by the encounter of a shepherd boy with a slingshot going up against an evil 9 foot giant? *“He was a giant of a man, this Philistine from Gath. He wore a bronze helmet, a two-hundred-pound coat of armor, bronze leggings, and carried a bronze javelin several inches thick, tipped with a twenty-five-pound iron spearhead, and his armor-bearer walked ahead of him with a huge shield.”* (I Sam. 17:4-7 TLB)

The Philistines and the Israelites, facing each other that day, assumed that this contest between the fair headed lad and the fearfully large man would be over before it started. However, they miscalculated. It is always an error in judgment when you leave God out of your calculations.

You know how the fight went: the giant was so big David could not miss! Before long he was stone dead. You could say he got rocked and lost his head! On Goliath's tombstone could have been written: *“Pride goes before a fall.”*

From this story let us glean the following principles that are essential for all who fight the good fight of faith. First,

### **I. BE OBEDIENT IN THE MOST MENIAL TASKS.**

David's father sent him on an errand. David obeyed. Here is the account: *“One day Jesse said to David, “Take this bushel of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread to your brothers. Give this cheese to their captain and see how the boys are getting along; and bring us back a letter from them! ..... Saul and the Israeli army were camped at the valley of Elah.... So David left the sheep with another shepherd and took off early the next morning with the gifts.”* (1 Sam. 17:17-20 TLB)

David went because he was sent on a mission by his father to learn of the welfare of his brothers and to take them food. That was a comparatively simple thing to do. David was happy to be an obscure shepherd and an errand boy. His lot in life at this time was perhaps not as glamorous and public as being a soldier in Saul's army like his brothers.

There are many who want to be known as giant killers but few who are willing to be known for doing small deeds. There are those who want to do only big things. Menial tasks are below them. They want only to do things that will bring them fame and fortune.

In the parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25, Jesus told of a master who commended his servant in these words: *“Well done, you good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.”*

Richard Nixon was driven from the office of President of the United States in shame and upon leaving that office said these self-condemning words: *“We did the big things rather well.”* It was not the big things that ruined him but it was the little behind the scenes things that brought him down.

David did not go to the Elah Valley looking for giants. He obediently went on a simple, non-glamorous mission to serve others and it was while performing that menial task that he met Goliath. A life of acceptable service and assured victory begins with little obediences. That is the first requirement for spiritual fitness. Second,

## II. CHOOSE GOD'S SIDE EARLY IN LIFE.

David delivered the food to his brothers and then observed as Goliath made his daily challenge to the Israeli army. He was infuriated that this heathen giant was allowed to go unchallenged. David said to Captain Saul: *"Don't worry about a thing," David told him. "I'll take care of this Philistine!" "Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "How can a kid like you fight with a man like him? You are only a boy, and he has been in the army since he was a boy!"* (1 Sam. 17:32-33 TLB)

*"A kid ....only a boy"* Saul said. But what a boy! Humanly speaking this confrontation was a no brainer. A mere boy without armor fighting two well armed and experienced soldiers. Yes, two: the giant *and* his armor bearer! Read again: *"He (Goliath) wore a bronze helmet, a two-hundred-pound coat of mail, bronze leggings, and carried a bronze javelin several inches thick, tipped with a twenty-five-pound iron spearhead, and his armor-bearer walked ahead of him with a huge shield."* (v. 4 TLB)

This was a suicide mission David was on – unless David had some secret weapon. And he did have! Notice David's boldness: *"Goliath walked out toward David with his shield-bearer ahead of him, sneering in contempt at this nice little red-cheeked boy! "Am I a dog," he roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods. "Come over here and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals," Goliath yelled. David shouted in reply, "You come to me with a sword and a spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of the armies of heaven and of Israel - the very God whom you have defied. Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head; and then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And Israel will learn that the Lord does not depend on weapons to fulfill his plans - he works without regard to human means! He will give you to us!"* (vs. 41-47 TLB)

Goliath was bigger than Shaq, the basketball player! And here was a boy with a slingshot who aspired to be a giant killer. I imagine that there was laughter in both armies as the soldiers looked out and saw a midget compared to the monster!

Do you remember why Saul was King? Saul was king because he was, as 1 Sam 9:2 says, *"An impressive young man without equal among the Israelites - a head taller than any of the others."* (NIV) The people chose Saul based upon his physical stature. However in I Sam. 16, when Samuel, obeying God's instructions, went to anoint Saul's replacement as King, God said, *"Don't judge by a man's face or height, .... I don't make decisions the way you do! Men judge by outward appearance, but I look at a man's thoughts and intentions."* (1 Sam 16:7 TLB) One does not have to be a giant physically to fight in God's army.

David had no physical characteristics that commended him as a gladiator. By comparison he was not a physical giant but he was a spiritual giant. David's unseen power was the God

whom Goliath defied. He made his boast in the Lord. He knew the truth of Zech. 4:6 that it is *“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty.”*

God is the Great Equalizer. He chooses differently from who and what man chooses. 1 Cor. 1:26-28 puts it like this: *“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.”* (NKJV)

David was not physically a giant but he was spiritually a giant. The youngest son of Jesse may have been too young to be in Saul’s army but he qualified for God’s army. Let us learn this: One does not have to be a physical giant to fight anti-God giants! When you are spiritually strong you have nothing to fear. Remember this principle: *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.”* (2 Cor 10:4 NKJV)

God’s armor, which is catalogued in Ephesians chapter 6, is a “one size fits all” armor. You do not have to wait until you are an adult to wage spiritual warfare. Choose God’s side early in life, put on the *“whole armor of God”* and *“stand against the schemes of Satan.”*

### **III. BE PREPARED FOR UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES.**

*“So David left the sheep with another shepherd and took off early the next morning with the gifts. He arrived at the outskirts of the camp just as the Israeli army was leaving for the battlefield with shouts and battle cries. Soon the Israeli and Philistine forces stood facing each other, army against army. David left his luggage with a baggage officer and hurried out to the ranks to find his brothers. As he was talking with them, he saw Goliath the giant step out from the Philistine troops and shout his challenge to the army of Israel. As soon as they saw him the Israeli army began to run away in fright. “Have you seen the giant?” the soldiers were asking. “He has insulted the entire army of Israel. David said, “Who is this heathen Philistine, anyway that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?”* (1 Sam. 17:20-27 TLB)

When David left home that morning to take bread to his brothers, little did he know that performing that simple task would result in a life changing experience. His life would never be the same after that day for as he arrived at the battlefield.

David discovered two challenges: the challenge of opposition and the challenge of opportunity.

#### **A. The Challenge of Opposition.**

The motto of the Boy Scouts of America is: “Be Prepared.” The Christian soldier must be prepared for the unexpected. Walking by faith does not exempt us from opposition. Upon his arrival David discovered a standoff between the Philistine army and the Israeli army because of the challenge from Goliath for a man to come out and fight him. David was not a professional soldier like his brothers but he was not daunted by Goliath’s threats.

Some Christians are unnerved by opposition. They are naïve and certainly not realistic. Jesus promised that *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

And Paul, in writing to the Philippians, said, *"Whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you."* (Phil. 1:27-28)

Obedience to God will eventually result in opposition from the Devil. Be prepared! However, opposition can lead to.....

### **B. The Challenge Of Opportunity.**

David's simple errand to take food to his soldier brothers suddenly became a turning point in his life. His zeal for God was enflamed when a heathen giant of a man insulted Israel's God. When David was unexpectedly confronted with an opportunity to strike a blow for God he responded in faith. Consequently:

- Although he was the least among his brothers, that day David became 10 feet tall;
- He who fed his brothers also felled a giant;
- The shepherd became a soldier;
- An errand boy become a giant killer;
- He seized the unexpected opportunity, not for self-glory but for the glory of God!

Howard Hendricks wrote in *Taking A Stand*, "We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as unsolvable problems." The cartoon character Pogo, said in one of the strips, "Gentlemen, we are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities."

"Unsolvable problems" and "insurmountable opportunities," both are unexpected challenges. But that is the life of faith. What an exciting life! Want to serve God? Are you prepared for obedience, opposition, opportunities? If not, you are not fit for the fight!

The 4<sup>th</sup> lesson about spiritual fitness that we can take from this story is:

### **IV. DO NOT BE DETERRED OR DISCOURAGED BY FAMILY OR FRIENDS.**

The Living Bible puts the developments in everyday English: *"But when David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking like that, he was angry. "What are you doing around here, anyway?" he demanded. "What about the sheep you're supposed to be taking care of? I know what a cocky brat you are; you just want to see the battle!"* (1 Sam. 17:28)

The conversation continued: *"Don't worry about a thing," David told him. "I'll take care of this Philistine!" "Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "How can a kid like you fight with a man like him? You are only a boy, and he has been in the army since he was a boy!" But David persisted. "When I am taking care of my father's sheep," he said, "and a lion or a bear comes and grabs a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and take the lamb from its mouth. If it turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this heathen Philistine too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! The*

*Lord who saved me from the claws and teeth of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!"* (1 Sam. 17:32-37 TLB)

When undertaking a task for the glory of God, do not depend upon human understanding or support. There are encouragers, may their tribe increase! However, I have found that the discouragers outnumber the encouragers. And sometimes those closest to us discourage us the most. This should be no surprise for Jesus warned that *"a man's enemies will be those of his own household."* (Matt 10:36) I thank God that those in my own household have been great encouragers, but it is not always that way in some families, unfortunately.

David was rebuked by his older brother. *"But when David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking like that, he was angry. "What are you doing around here, anyway?"* (v.28) It's the Big Brother Syndrome. David's big brother was a pessimist. What's the difference between an optimist and a pessimist? It has been said that *"An optimist invented the airplane, a pessimist invented the parachute."* Eliab was thinking about bailing out while David was thinking about air-mailing a rock! Did you notice that David's big brother had not volunteered to take on Goliath? Eliab's anger was in part because if David succeeded Eliab would look bad. However, the big brother's anger did not deter David.

Then Captain Saul tried to discourage David. He said, in, *"Don't be ridiculous!.....How can a kid like you fight with a man like him? You are only a boy, and he has been in the army since he was a boy!"* (v.33) Did that discourage David? No! *"But David persisted."* (v.34) He went on to say, *"Don't worry about a thing," David told him. "I'll take care of this Philistine!"*

I love that! *"David persisted."* If you are going to be an overcomer living for God and fighting the good fight of faith you must be possessed by a conviction, a tenacity that propels, impels and compels you to obey your most holy instincts in spite of the nay-sayers be they family, friend or foe!

## **V. MAKE SURE YOUR MOTIVES ARE PURE.**

Why would a shepherd boy, on a mission to carry food to his soldier brothers, insert himself into their fight? The answer is in verses 28 & 29 where we read that his older brother, Eliab, impugned David's motives with these words: *"I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle."* (v. 28) David replies in v. 29 with these powerful words: *"Is there not a cause?"* (NKJV) Remember those words, *"Is there not a cause?"* Those words reveal that David's motive for getting involved was pure.

What was the *"cause"* of which David spoke? Was it not the preservation and the perpetuation of God's Kingdom Israel? Was it not Israel's God and God's Israel being insulted by the heathen Philistines and their champion Goliath? Yes!

When David arrived on the scene we read that the Israeli army was cowering before Goliath and the Philistines. Goliath had spewed his venom against Israel in these words: *"I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid".* (v.10-11 NKJV) *"And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid."* (v. 24 NKJV)

Furthermore, when David walked out to confront Goliath he said, *"I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."* (v. 45)

What was the cause that motivated David? It was the cause of:

- Righteousness vs. unrighteousness;
- Truth vs. error;
- God's crowd vs. the Devil's crowd;
- God's cause vs. the Devil's cause.

Think about these famous words from Teddy Roosevelt, *"The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena .... who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."*

David dared greatly. He was jealous for the right cause and was willing to spend himself in that cause. Are we? What are we willing to risk for the right cause of Jesus Christ and His church even if we have to stand alone?

#### **VI. HAVE SENSE ENOUGH TO KNOW WHEN NOT TO GO.**

When Saul grudgingly gave David approval to accept Goliath's invitation to come out and fight, Saul encumbered David by insisting that he wear his, Saul's, armor. This is what Saul did: *"Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor 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."* (I Sam. 17:38-39 NIV)

*"I cannot go in these."* Saul's armor did not fit David. It was out of character for David to wear such equipment. Wouldn't a shepherd look ridiculous in such garb? David had sense enough to know when and how not to go into the fight. He knew not to go in another's uniform using unfamiliar weapons.

God uses that which is innate to us, the talents and tools with which we are acquainted. Use the equipment and abilities that are native to you and if you have the opportunity to acquire additional abilities, use them also for the glory of God. Use that which is distinctively and uniquely your own. Use your own God given convictions, abilities, values, goals.

There is no evidence that God expects a plumber to perform brain surgery. As a shepherd, David was adept at using a slingshot to ward off animals that would harm the sheep. Slings and stones were his offensive weapons and who would argue that he was not a straight stone slinger?

Hear what David said to Goliath as he approached him: *"All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."* (v. 47) David's confidence was in the Lord. He had sense enough to change garb before he charged Goliath. He knew when not to go. And now, the concluding lesson:

## VII. DEPEND UPON GOD AND PRAISE HIM FOR EVERY VICTORY WON.

*David said to Goliath, "I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand... Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and He will give you into our hands." (1 Sam 17:45-47 NKJV)*

There is no way to explain David's victory over Goliath apart from God's enablement. David knew this and credits God before the fatal blow is struck. Whoever would have thought that Jesse's son, the harp playing musician, would have the audacity to confront and kill a giant madman?

Something must have been going on between God and David while he was out in the fields around Bethlehem tending sheep. And there was! David was communicating with God and God with David. How do I know? Read the songs David wrote. The Psalms of David prove that David was a God-seeker. His songs are replete with God praise. He had no problem praising in public because he practiced in private. Psalm 27 is a good example:

*"The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell. Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident. One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore, I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD." (Psalm 27:1-6 NKJV)*

So David was victorious and he gave the praise and glory to God. He did not, like Goliath, seek his own honor, but the honor of God. Remember, *"God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble."*

### **The Impact Of This Story**

*It Instructs us.*

It is preserved in God's Word to instruct us. We have briefly reviewed 7 of the many lessons that can be learned from the victory of the boy from Bethlehem over the giant from Gath. Let us also *"be doers of the Word and not hearers only."*

*It Encourages us.*

This classic story is recorded to encourage us, not to entertain us. It encourages us to, as Hudson Taylor said, *"Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God."*

### **Are You Fit For The Fight?**

A few years back a movie was released about the life of Astronaut John Glenn. It was called "The Right Stuff." David had the right stuff! Do you? Are you fit for the fight? Whose side are you on? If you want to be in on the team that has won the battle, it is time for you to give your life to Jesus!



Paul, the Apostle of Jesus said *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”* (II Timothy 4:7-8)

Let all who claim the name “Christian” be armed with the *“whole armor of God”* and stand in the gap for God and good as we are admonished to do in Ephesians 6 and as David did as is recorded in I Samuel 17.

May I take you back to the Valley of Elah for just a moment? That day that I stood in the Valley of Elah and let my imagination recreate the duel in the desert, I knelt down and chose 5 smooth stones from that brook in the valley. They have been in my study for 40 years as of this writing to remind me that you do not need to be big to serve God and slay giants. **You just need to keep fit for the fight!**

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