

How to Handle Your Fears 1 Samuel 17

I read that at least 322 unique phobias have been identified. Phobia comes from the Greek word for fear or horror and refers to a panic that is completely out of proportion to the perceived threat behind it. Extreme cases of a phobia can result in escalated anxiety and full-fledged panic attacks.

Let me give you a few examples:

Agoraphobia is the fear of public spaces like a park, department store; (who has this phobia? So that's why you're here. This is n)

Claustrophobia is the fear of being trapped in a small, confined space. (who has this phobia? So why are you here?)

Acrophobia is the fear of heights (I have this; that's why I don't want to get near Swen)

Now, the #1 is **Arachnophobia, or the fear of spiders**, affecting half of all women. Any women here afraid of spiders? Let's see if there's at least half of you.

Now, here are two other phobias. Can you guess their definitions?

Ecclesiophobia Fear of church

Homilophobia Fear of sermons

If you have these two fears today, our church is in trouble.

We've all experienced fear at one time or another. One person writes that fear is "*the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind.*" What is your greatest fear?

One pastor writes: "***So many Christians never achieve the maximum potential in their lives because they never conquer the thing they fear the most.***"

The nation of Israel had an intense fear that we could call **Megalophobia, or the fear of... large objects or giants.** Now, I'd like to borrow a phrase from Max Lucado's outstanding book "Facing Your Giants" right at the beginning of this

message. If you get this, you'll get the sermon today: *Focus on giants – you stumble; Focus on God – your giants tumble.*

So today, we're starting a new 3-part series on "Conquering Your Giants". In today's message which I've entitled, "How to Handle Your Fears", we're going to take a look at what is perhaps the best-known Bible story of all time. The downside of doing this is that some of you will be tempted to say, "I already know that story" and then check out. Please don't do that. Let's learn together from God's Word.

Please turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 17 where we read the account of David and Goliath. We see that the Philistines were the arch enemies of Israel and had gathered for war against God's people. Notice verse 3: ***"The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them."*** Neither side wanted to come down into the valley where they would be vulnerable.

Now, as we walk through this encounter, I want to draw out **seven strategies** to help us go down into the valley and meet our fears head-on.

1. Describe your problem.

In verses 4-7, we read about a Philistine champion named Goliath who was more than two feet taller than Victor Wembanyama. Most commentators estimate that he was 9 feet 9 inches tall. He was decked out in body armor that weighed 125 pounds and was armed with a javelin, and a spear. He also had a shield bearer out in front. This mammoth of a man challenged the Israelites to a smackdown fight as he belched out blasphemies against God. Have you ever noticed that the enemy is always well-armed?

In verses 8-10, Goliath lays out a challenge. Look at verse 10: ***"This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other."*** The word "defy" is used three different times in this passage and means "to treat with

contempt or scorn; to taunt, ridicule and humiliate.” What Goliath is proposing was quite common back then. It’s like a one-on-one contest, with the winner taking all. Each side would send a representative to the valley and the two would fight. If the Philistine won, then the Israelites would have to surrender; if the Israelite won, the Philistines would surrender. The problem was that no one wanted to engage the enraged giant. In fact, according to verse 11, they were **“dismayed and terrified.”** These are powerful words which mean broken and filled with fear.

This giant of a problem wasn’t going away either. Verse 16 tells us that Goliath had come out and challenged them 80 times – every morning and every night for 40 days. In the Bible, 40 days is often associated with periods of testing and trial. The question before them was this: *Would they flee or would they put their faith in God?* According to verse 24, **“...they all fled from him in great fear.”** Pastor and author Chuck Swindoll, adds, **“Intimidation is our major battle when we face giants.”**

Friend, what kind of giant are you facing right now? In what area do you feel most intimidated and overwhelmed? What problem is paralyzing you? What is the first thing you think about in the morning and the last thing that fills your mind before you go to bed at night? Max Lucado writes: *“Your Goliath doesn’t carry sword or shield; he brandishes blades of unemployment, abandonment, sexual abuse, or depression. Your giant doesn’t parade up and down the hills of Elah; he prances through your office, your bedroom, your classroom. He brings bills you can’t pay, grades you can’t make, people you can’t please, whiskey you can’t resist, pornography you can’t refuse, a career you can’t escape, a past you can’t shake, and a future you can’t face.”*

Describe your problem but don't stay there. Give it a name but don't live with shame. David framed it this way: ***"who is this uncircumcised Philistine?"*** (v 26)

You know, Alcoholics Anonymous has been so successful because members have to put words to the giant they are facing: *"Hi, my name is Sam and I'm an alcoholic."* This is just the first step. So, now, let's move quickly to the next principle because we'll see that when we ***focus on our giants, we'll stumble; but when we focus on God, our giants will tumble.***

2. Make sure you're prepared.

It's at this point in the story that we're introduced to David. He was the youngest of eight boys and had been out taking care of sheep. He was asked to run an errand by his dad because his three oldest brothers were at the battlefield. David's dad wants a report on how they're doing and he also wants to send them some supplies. David delivers five pounds of roasted grain, ten loaves of bread, and ten chunks of cheese 18 miles from Bethlehem to the Elah Valley...and he runs all the way. David was faithful in his tasks. He did common things uncommonly well. According to verse 20, he left the sheep in the care of another shepherd. We also know from chapter 16:13, that he was prepared spiritually because he had been anointed by God to be the next king: ***"...the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David."***

We're jumping ahead a bit, but it's also important to note that David's past experiences prepared him for this present challenge. When speaking to King Saul, he told him that he had killed a lion and a bear in verse 37: ***"The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."*** Incidentally, we know that David was from Wisconsin because he brought cheese to the front lines. We also know he played for the Packers because the Bible says that he killed Bears and Lions...and he's

about to defeat the Giants! Oh, no, but it is what it is. It is God's Word. I have to set my emotions aside.

Folks, draw on God's past faithfulness and don't discount what God is doing in your life right now. One commentator puts it this way: *"This is often God's pattern for preparation. He calls us to be faithful right where we're at, and then uses our faithfulness to accomplish greater things for Him."* He's preparing you today for battles tomorrow. Be faithful to what he's called you to do and be filled with God's Spirit. Everything that David accomplishes is through the Spirit of God. Make sure you are totally sold out.

One other thought. Adults, let's make sure we don't look down on young people today. Paul wrote these words to his young understudy in 1 Timothy 4:12: *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."* David was a teenager, and he tangled with a giant. Our young people here are tangling with their own giants. It could be the fear of flunking a quiz, fear of public speaking, the fear of being left out, the fear of socializing, the fear of sharing Jesus, or what-not. But I'm sure they're doing all they can to conquer their giant. And let's help them, let's encourage them. Young people, keep on fighting because God is the one fighting for you. And whatever you're experiencing now, God will use it to prepare you for the greater battles ahead.

But keep in mind, adults and youngsters, David was chosen for his character, not his credentials; for his faith, not his physique. He knew this to be true: *Focus on giants – you stumble; Focus on God – your giants tumble.*

3. Overcome pressure from others.

David arrives on Day 40 and hears the giant boasting and cursing. In verse 25, he finds out that the king will give great wealth, his daughter to be the victor's wife, and would grant tax amnesty (that sounds good on April 15th, doesn't it?) to

whoever kills the giant. David can't take the giant's defiance any longer and in verse 26 he declares, ***"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"***

David's older brother became enraged and basically told David to go back to his cheese curds and little lambs. Look at verse 28: ***"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 came down only to watch the battle."*** Can you hear how belittling this is to little David? Eliab is a warrior while David just takes care of a *few* sheep. He trivialized David's tasks in order to knock him down to size. He wasn't getting any support from his siblings. Let me warn you. You *will be* criticized by those closest to you when you decide to defeat some giants in your life. Expect it and then overcome it.

Some of you are experiencing incredible pressure from your family right now. Instead of helping, you feel like they are hurting you. If you want to face your giants you're going to face opposition. Don't allow negative comments to nullify what God wants to do in your life. I love how David responds to his brother in verse 29: ***"Now what have I done?"*** Doesn't that sound like something a younger sibling would say? But it didn't discourage him. He turned to others and basically let them know that he was ready to face the giant. Here's the point: ***allow the burning in your heart that God put there to overcome any criticism you are facing.*** Related to this, stop blaming others and start believing what God can do. Instead of finding fault with your family, your friends or your foes put your faith in a faithful God. David was distressed by what his brother said but he was not deterred by him.

After being bullied by his brother, Saul, the King of Israel, heard about David's courageous candor and sent for him. In verse 32, David said to Saul, ***"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight"***

him.” Saul tries to dismiss David’s bravado but David reminds Saul how he had killed a lion and a bear. He had been up against the wall before and had seen God go to battle for him. Saul then told David to go for it and tried to give him his armor, but since it didn’t fit, David discarded it. Folks, don’t try to fight your giants with someone else’s solution.

But remember this: *Focus on giants – you stumble; Focus on God – your giants tumble.*

4. Change your perspective.

Haddon Robinson once said: *“In any situation, what you ARE determines what you see; what you SEE determines what you DO.”* This is similar to the report that the ten spies brought back in Numbers 13:33: *“We saw the Nephilim there...We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”* Everyone else thought Goliath, who was a descendant of the Nephilim, was too big to hit; David saw him as too big to miss. Friend, if you see yourself as a victim, that’s how you’ll react; if you see yourself as a victor, that’s how you’ll respond.

In 1952, a young woman named Florence Chadwick attempted to swim from Catalina Island to the California coast, a distance of 26 miles. She was swimming in record time but after several miles a heavy fog rolled in and blinded her as she was swimming. Becoming discouraged and disoriented, she gave up and her escorts in a boat pulled her out of the water but hesitated to tell her the truth – she was just a mile away from the goal. When she found out how close she was, she exclaimed: *“All I could see was hopeless.”* Her clouded vision kept her from victory. Some of you right now are saying, *“All I can see is hopeless.”*

But you know what, two months later, she tried again. The same thick fog set in, but she succeeded in reaching Catalina. She said that she kept a mental

image of the shoreline in her mind while she swam. Friend, a change in perspective helped her achieve her dream.

If you're paralyzed by fear or feel hopeless about the future, it's time to change your perspective. *Focus on giants – you stumble; Focus on God – your giants tumble.*

5. Proclaim God's Name.

When Goliath came closer to David and saw that he was just a boy, he despised him and boomed out boldly in verse 43: *“Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?”* After taunting him, he called out a curse on David and declared that he would feed him to the birds and the beasts. David now does something that no one else had even thought of – he took God off the shelf and introduced the Almighty into the equation. He alone was concerned about God's honor and the people's reputation. Friend, have you introduced God into the equation? Or, is He still up on your shelf?

I love David's response in verse 45. Listen carefully for the name *Jehovah Sabaoth*, which means “the God Almighty,” or “the Lord of Hosts”, the Commander of the Hosts of Heaven. Here's what you're waiting for, Commanders fans!

David's teenage voice was probably cracking: *“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, [Jehovah Sabaoth] the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.”* David then describes in great detail what he will do to Goliath and declares in verse 47: *“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.”* The wrestling match is over right here. Goliath the gladiator is as good as dead.

Friend, if you want to minimize your Goliaths, then you must magnify your God

Amos 4:13 describes this name of God in greater detail: ***“He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the LORD God Almighty [Jehovah Sabaoth] is his name.”*** When we truly understand this name for God we will never view Him the same again. He has unlimited power, unbridled might and untarnished glory. He is impossible to describe and incredible to imagine. In contrast to Goliath, God is the Creator of the world. The tallest man in the world makes the rest of us seem small but when viewed from the top of the Sears Tower, he’s barely visible. If you want to minimize your Goliaths, then you must magnify your God.

Now, note that David refers to God *nine times* in this passage, compared to only *two times* for Goliath. You see, we would experience much more victory if our God-thoughts would outnumber our Goliath-thoughts four-to-one. This week try to think about God four times as much as you think about your problems. Focus on His faithfulness instead of your fears.

Friend, if you want to conquer your fears, remember that it is God who fights for you. The only way to face your giants is through faith in God. You are not fighting alone.

Focus on giants – you stumble; Focus on God – your giants tumble.

6. Be proactive; don’t procrastinate.

David decided that he had to do something about the problem right then and there and so he picked up what he was familiar with – his staff and his slingshot, and then found five smooth stones and went off in search of the giant. The stones were smooth because they’d fly through the air better. Now, some have wondered why he chose five stones. Perhaps it was because Goliath had four brothers.

And David was going to kill them, too, if ever they attack him. But I think it was because he wanted some in reserve just in case he missed. Not that he doubted God, but he was just prepared because God didn't promise he would hit the giant with just one shot. David must have been surprised himself when he saw the giant went down with just one stone. I would, wouldn't you? God usually surprises us. In any case, the principle here is to use what you have. Because anything we use for God's glory, he will surely bless. Augustine once said, ***"Without God, we cannot; without us, He will not."***

By the way, there was a special on the History Channel that proved the accuracy of this account. After demonstrating that a stone from a sling can travel up to 100 miles an hour and kill a man, the narrator added these words: *"We find yet another part of the biblical story is true."*

Now, in David's eyes, God was the giant and Goliath was the ant. He was so confident in *Jehovah Sabaoth* as the commander of the armies of heaven that the Bible says that he ***"... ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him."*** (v. 48)

Friend, if you want to be victorious, you must take the fight to the enemy. In our jargon, we might say, *"Game on!"* You can't sit back and just hope it will get better on its own. And with one stone from his sling, he slayed the giant. Do you know that this is the first time that anything like that had entered his head? That reminds me of Isaiah 54:17: ***"No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you."***

Friend, it's time to face your fears! Look your enemy in the eye and flee no more. Take the next step.

Focus on giants – you stumble; Focus on God – your giants tumble.

7. Profess faith in God's Champion.

Goliath is called a "champion" in verse 4. This Hebrew word actually means "a man-between" or "middle-man" or "mediator." Just as he was a

representative for the Philistines, God's ultimate champion is Jesus, the Son of David, who is our mediator. **1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."** When Jesus won the battle against Satan at the Cross, those who he represents join in that victory. There are actually some pretty cool comparisons between David's victory and Jesus' victory.

- Both were born in Bethlehem.
- Both fought when their enemy was able to dominate through fear.
- Both were sent to the battlefield by their father.
- Both were rejected and scorned by their own brethren.
- Both fought a battle where the victory was assured before it started.
- Both disarmed the enemy and rendered him powerless.

Listen to these words from "A Mighty Fortress is our God.", a hymn written by Martin Luther, who faced many giants in his life as he led the Protestant Reformation:

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;

Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:

Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;

Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,

And He must win the battle.

If you are a Christian, then Jesus is your champion. That means you are fighting battles that have already been won. Because Jesus triumphed over Satan, so have you! 1 Peter 5:8 says that Satan is still prowling around like a roaring lion, trying to strike fear in you but we must remember that **"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."** (1 John 4:4)

Lift your eyes, giant-slayer. Go down into the valley and employ these seven tactics:

- Describe your problem
- Make sure you're prepared
- Overcome pressure from others
- Change your perspective
- Proclaim God's name
- Be proactive
- Profess faith in God's champion

Friend, who are you listening to? You can listen to the voice of your giants or you can listen to the voice of God. Be faithful, not fearful.