

I grew up in a home consisting of a Mom, a Dad, an older brother, and a younger brother. Looking back I feel a little sorry for my mother. Living in a household with four guys isn't easy; let's just say that my Mom was thrilled when her boys got married and the odds became even again.

Growing up in a house filled with guys, I didn't wrestle with what "maleness" entailed. My Dad never sat me down and talked to me about what it meant to be a man, but at the time I grew up there were all kinds of stereotypes. The generation before me watched TV shows like *Leave It To Beaver* and *The Brady Bunch*—the father figures were loving (without being too emotional), they were dependable, they did the right thing, and they were wise—their wives and children looked to them and they always knew what to do. This is what it was to be a man.

I grew up watching shows like *The Dukes of Hazard* and *Magnum P.I.* These were a different breed of men: strong, good-looking, and adventurous—they weren't exactly the marrying type, but women desired them, and other men wanted to be them.

The world that I grew up in, and the world as it is today, has competing pictures of what it means to be a man. Even in the church, our guiding script on masculinity has been more influenced by cultural stereotypes than it has been by God's Word. Further still, for better or worse, the men in our lives—our fathers and grandfathers, coaches and mentors—have profoundly shaped our understanding of what it means to be a man.

Without realizing it, some of us carry around a broken image of maleness everywhere we go. Subconsciously, we compare ourselves

to this image, or to the men around us, to see if we are measuring up. *Am I strong enough? Am I competent enough? Am I significant? Can I stand on my own two feet? Do people respect me?* You may be asking these questions of yourself.

In the 1930's and 40's, a famous bodybuilder—Charles Atlas—used cartoons to market his unique exercise system, claiming, "*I can make you a new man in only 15 minutes a day!*"

What you see before you on the screen is one his marketing cartons. It features a 97-pound runt, Mac, who is sitting beside an attractive woman at the beach, when he gets sand kicked in his face by a bully. **Read the comic.**

According to Atlas' cartoon, what make a man a "real" man? Muscles, and, the ability to throw a good punch.

In recent years, a number of the blockbuster movies have focussed on the same theme—masculinity is equated with physical size and strength; take Captain America for example. Before he became Captain America, Steve Rogers was a small, skinny, man—too weak to protect himself, and too small attract the attention of women, or the respect of other men. But a scientific experiment transformed Rogers' body, and he went from zero to hero overnight.

This stereotype is at play in our culture today but largely in a different form. Physical strength continues to be prized but the value has expanded to include the idea of independence. Real men, real women, are self-made people; they get things done, they get ahead, they rely on their intellect, skills, and abilities. They may not be Lone

Rangers, they are connected in relationship, but when push comes to shove, they stand on their own two feet.

Call it what you will—independence, autonomy, or self-reliance; it's become the Western way of life, and the lens through which we assess who we are and how we're doing. But here's the thing, **this script is all wrong**; humanity was made for reliance on God.

Last Sunday we launched a new sermon series entitled, *A Heart After God* that focusses on the life of David as portrayed in the books of 1&2 Samuel. By far, the most well-known story concerning David is the one in which he squares off with Goliath. This story is so engrained in our culture that even people who have never read the Bible are familiar with the reference.

In the realm of sports, this reference is used all the time. A David vs. Goliath match is one in which an underdog goes up against a Super-team, a Giant, that is expected to crush them underfoot. Of course in life, many of us root for the underdog. When a person succeeds against great odds we celebrate their victory as a triumph of the human spirit, a celebration of courage, strength, or resolve.

Unfortunately, this is how many of us have read the story of David vs. Goliath—as though we were secular humanists. We read this story and make a hero out of David—David the brave, David the mighty. We are subsequently encouraged to “*be like David*,” to “*face our own giants*,” and God barely gets a footnote.

Do you know what I think? If David were to hear his story being told in this way, he would insist that such a telling completely missed the point. Last Sunday we discussed the phase that marks David's story

from beginning to end; David was “*a person after God's own heart*.”

When the Bible refers to the “heart” it isn't speaking about a physical organ that pumps blood. In the Biblical way of thinking, the heart represents the centre of a person—one's character and will. A person “after God's own heart” is one who centres their life around God—following, obeying, and relying upon Him.

This morning we're going to take a fresh look at David and Goliath. Let me encourage you to open your Bible with me to 1 Samuel 17; that's page 227 in the Blue Bibles. As I re-tell this story I'm going to summarize certain parts, read other parts, and draw attention to what I think is central. I'll make sure to let you know where I am in the story so that you can follow along in your Bible.

Re-telling the Story: When David showed up in the Valley of Elah, all anyone was talking about was Goliath. And after reading the description in vs. 4, who could blame them? When a giant shows up to a fight, twirling a 30+ pound spear in his fingers like a drum stick, it gets people talking. But the army of Israel wasn't just talking, they were terrified. Every morning and evening, for 40 days straight, Goliath would approach the battle lines and challenge Israel's army.

Vs. 8, “*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. 9 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. 10 Then the Philistine said, 'This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.' 11 On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.*”

Israel's soldiers were in awe of Goliath; they looked at him, and then at themselves, and concluded that they were overmatched. *I'm not big enough, strong enough, or skilled enough to face him—I cannot win!*

Vs. 23-24: At one point, David was sent by his father Jesse, with supplies from home to feed his brothers, who were soldiers in Israel's army. *“As he was talking with them, Goliath...stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.”*

Israel's soldiers had fallen prey to the same lie that plagues many of us today—that a “real” man or woman must go it alone, independent, standing on their own two feet, without relying on anyone else.

David's perspective was different from the soldiers'; they saw a giant defying them, David saw a giant defying God. Goliath was big, but wasn't God bigger? Had God gone missing? Was He sleeping, on vacation, or otherwise unavailable?

We might be tempted to charge David with being too young, or naive, to know how things work in the “real” world; I'm sure he was brushed aside by most who heard him. But let's think together about David's experience to this point. David was the youngest of 8 sons and he was charged with the responsibility of looking after his family's small flock of sheep. Being a shepherd meant long days and nights away from home, searching for grass and water to nourish the sheep. David would have spent a lot of time alone. Isolated as he was from human contact, you might think he would adopt a posture of

self-reliance, after all, there was no one else to rely on. But it seems this “aloneness” propelled David into a deep reliance on God.

David had never been a soldier before; he'd never been in a fight to the death with a giant, but he wasn't exactly untested. In defending his family's sheep, he'd faced bears and lions before. But listen to David's description of these encounters, and where he places the emphasis (vs. 34-37):

*“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 the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, **because he has defied the armies of the living God. 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.**”*

Not, *“I can take this giant; I'm strong enough; he'll never see it coming;”* but **God is strong. He can rescue and save.** It was these truths that David knew in his bones—not self-reliance but God-reliance.

Word was going around that King Saul had offered a reward to any soldier who could defeat Goliath—wealth, the hand of his daughter in marriage, and a tax-free exemption for the soldier's family. But no matter how sweet Saul made the pot, no one was tempted—it's pretty hard to enjoy wealth when your dead. David was willing but he was an untrained young man. The King listened to what David said about

the bear, the lion, and God, but what Saul did next makes it clear that he did not share David's confidence in God.

Remember, Saul was not a man after God's own heart; he blazed his own path when it suited him best. He didn't trust God—or the people around him—nearly as much as he trusted himself. Saul was concerned about sending David to face Goliath and so he insisted that David put on his own royal armour. The King was well-intentioned; he wanted to help, but in this case, the help he offered would only hurt. Exchanging God-confidence for self-confidence is a poor trade.

Eugene Peterson writes, “This is a common experience in the Valley of Elah, when an amateur ventures into a field dominated with professionals. All around us people who care about us are suddenly there helping—piling armour on us, dressing us up in equipment that's going to qualify us for the task... We get advice. We get instruction. We're sent off to a training workshop. We find ourselves with an armload of books... We listen to them and do what they tell us. And then we find we can hardly move.”¹

David tried walking around in Saul's armour but he couldn't move. If armour and training were all that was required, there were hundreds of other Israeli soldiers that could have faced Goliath. The help Saul offered—his armour—is a classic example of self-reliance: *if you have the right tools, the right skills, and expertise, there is nothing we can't accomplish!* Saul wanted to give David confidence to stand on his own two feet, but as I've already said, self-confidence is a poor substitute for a proper confidence in God.

After David had taken off Saul's armour, vs. 40 tells us that he went over to a stream, bent down—maybe even kneeled and prayed—as he chose 5 smooth stones. In that moment, David—the man of God—was being formed. Years later, David would be crowned King of Israel, but kneeling at the stream, the foundation was already there—not superhuman strength, extensive expertise, or self-confidence, but an unwavering faith and reliance upon God.

When Goliath looked at David, he didn't see a “real” man; vs. 42 tells us that Goliath “*looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy...and he despised him.*” In response to Goliath's curses, David said the following (this is a Mark Peters' paraphrase):

Goliath, your confidence is in your strength, weapons, and skill, but my confidence is in God. Today the Lord will defeat you, you will fall by my hand, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. And more, every soldier here today will know that it's 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.”

And with those words, David ran towards Goliath and moments later the giant fell. David was the one who slung the stone, but God won the battle.

Application:

I want each of you to think about your life. **Think about the complexities**, the pressures, and the decisions that you face.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall*, 41-42.

Think about the conflicts you have to deal with—with clients, colleagues, suppliers, or supervisors. **Think about the complicated relationships** you may have with friends, with your spouse, or your kids. **Think about the health challenges** that you face, or that your loved ones are facing. **Think about the financial pressures** you may be experiencing.

How often do you say to yourself, *“I can’t fix this”*? David had a sense of the immediacy of God—he lived as though God were real, and, right beside Him. Again, think about your life—*do you live with this same confidence? Are you living from a place of self-reliance or from a place of reliance on God?*

The God who loves you, the all-powerful, all-knowing God is real, He’s present, and He lives within us—this should change us, it should change the way we walk in this world. A Christian man or woman knows their own limitations and chooses to rely upon God’s strength, mercy, and wisdom. A person after God’s own heart doesn’t stand upon their own two feet, they find their rest in God, they wait upon God—praying, listening, and following God’s lead.

The only person in the Bible who is talked about more frequently than David is the Lord Jesus Himself. In Jesus, God became human, and not merely so that He could die for our sin, but so that we could have a flesh-and-blood example of what humanity was meant to be.

Do you ever wonder why Jesus prayed? Why did He spend so much time alone with the Father? If anyone could have lived from the place of self-reliance, surely it was Jesus; He was God after all—God in

the flesh. And yet, what we see in Jesus is not super-human strength; we see a humble reliance upon God. Jesus regularly retreated to commune with the Father, to listen for the Spirit’s direction, and rely upon His power. Jesus didn’t independently exercise His divine attributes; instead, He lived in submission to, and reliance upon, God—moment by moment.

On two different occasions, we see stark examples of Jesus’ need. You’ll remember that before Jesus began His public ministry, He spent 40 days in the wilderness and there He was tempted by Satan. We’re told that after enduring this battle, *“the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”*² It’s a twofold picture—of Jesus worn out, and, God strengthening and restoring His Son.

The second occasion came on the night Jesus was arrested and sentenced to die. He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying. Jesus was in anguish, sweating drops of blood, anticipating the agony of the cross; meanwhile, His disciples had fallen asleep, and Jesus felt utterly alone. Jesus didn’t pull Himself up by His bootstraps, or repeat a mantra like *“I can do this!”*, or, *“I’m strong enough!”* Instead, He’s praying, and we read in Luke 22:43 that *“An angel appeared from heaven and strengthened Him.”*

In His humanity, Jesus is just like us, and models the way of life He calls us into—the way of reliance.

In John 15, Jesus said, *I am the Vine, and you are like branches; I’ve designed you to be fruitful, but a branch can’t do anything apart from*

² Matthew 4:11.

connection to the Vine. So...make your home in Me, just as I make My home in you.

I am the Vine, and you are the branches. When you're united to Me, you will be fruitful in every way. But if you go it alone, self-confident, and self-reliant, you can't produce the kind of fruit I'm looking for.

Richard Neuhaus writes, "It is our determination to be...in control that makes us unavailable to God."³ When we rely on ourselves—our training, skills, personality, knowledge—what we can accomplish is limited to what we can do. But when we rely on God, we experience what God can do.

David vs. Goliath is ultimately a story about what **God** does for David and all of Israel. It's a story about both human limitation and a God without limits. It's a story about two paths—the way of self-reliance and the way of reliance on God.

Now, we need to be careful about reading into this story a promise that God doesn't make. Nowhere does God promise David, or any of us, that every giant we meet will fall. Relying on God doesn't guarantee that we will be spared from pain, suffering, or loss. As the story continues, we will discover that at times God lifted David out of trouble, and at other times, God strengthened David to endure **through** trouble.

The Lord's Supper

Weakness and limitation is a part of what it means to be human; we are not God, and we need God. In Isaiah 40:30-31 we read, "*Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*"

The Hebrew word for "renew" carries with it the idea of "exchange;" those who are weary can come and exchange their weakness for God's strength. Are you weary this morning? Tired of relying on your limited supply of strength, wisdom, ingenuity, or love? Are you ready to rely on God and experience what He can do?

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus spoke the following invitation to His disciples: "*Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.*"⁴

Whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are in part, confessing that we need to be fed, strengthened, forgiven, and rescued.

As human beings, our lives are not self-sustaining; we cannot live without food, nor can we truly live without Jesus. Jesus is the only

³ Richard Neuhaus, as quoted by Stephen Seamands, *Ministry In Th Image Of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service*, 28-29.

⁴ New Living Translation.

One who can **save** you and lead you into a forever life with God. And Jesus is the only One who can **sustain** you along life's journey. A big meal will only take you so far, you will need to eat again, and in the same way, Jesus meets us, satisfies our hunger, but we need to return again and again to receive from Him all that we need.

Left to ourselves, we tend to evaluate our lives in terms of our achievements and failures. Left to ourselves, we tend to obsess about the gap between where we are and where we think we *should* be. Left to ourselves, we are easily convinced that more power, more influence, or more money would make for a life filled with satisfaction.

But here, at this Holy Meal, we come to meet with Jesus. Here, our achievements and failures, the gap between who we are and who we think we should be fade away in the light of His love for us. Here, at this Holy Meal, we remember that we are His invited guests and that what He thinks of us matters more than the attitudes and opinions of others.

We cannot **satisfy**, **save**, or **sustain** our own lives; we need Jesus. And so we come to this Table, seeking to feed on Christ, in our hearts, by faith.

*“The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

***26** For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”⁵*

At this time I would like to invite those who are serving to come and take their place. We will have three serving station up front, and one/two in the balcony. As the band begins to play, please make your way to those serving the bread and cup; please come forward, row by row, beginning with the first rows.

I want to let you know that individually packaged communion elements are available for people in our community who are undergoing medical treatment or are immunocompromised. It will be available in the middle station on the floor or in the balcony on baptismal side.

First Service: For those in the balcony, those serving will begin on the baptismal side first, and then they will bring the elements over to the cross side.

Worship

Benediction

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.