

First Presbyterian Church, Grand Junction, CO  
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Tom Hansen, Pastor

**Toughing It Out: When Following Christ Gets Hard (Lenten Series)**  
**“Facing the Giants”**

*1 Samuel 17:32-49 and 18:6-16; Matthew 8:23-27*

Something had gone terribly wrong with Israel’s very first king – King Saul. The ‘spirit of the Lord’ was no longer with him and he was tormented by an evil spirit. If he were alive today he would probably be diagnosed bi-polar; he was growing more and more insecure with every passing day. In the midst of this change in his leadership abilities, God taps the prophet Samuel on the shoulder and says, ‘Go to Bethlehem and find Jesse and his sons. I want you to anoint one of them to be the next king of my people.’ When he arrived, Samuel was sure the oldest son Eliab must be the one God had chosen. (SLIDE) But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected [Eliab]. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

Son after son stands before Samuel, but he gets no clear word from the Lord for any of them. But there’s one more boy tending the family’s flock of sheep – young David. So they fetch him and, when he appears, Samuel receives instructions from God to ‘rise and anoint him.’ All this is done behind King Saul’s back.

Meanwhile, the troops of Israel are in a standoff with the Philistines out on the battle field in the Valley of Elah. And a giant warrior named Goliath shouts across the valley that he’d be glad to settle up with the soldier of their choice – mano a mano. Winner takes all. For forty days the armies stare at each other from a distance, and for forty days, Goliath trash talks the God of Israel.

One day, Jesse calls David in from his shepherding duties and sends him to the front lines with some food for his brothers and their comrades. He arrives on day 41 of Goliath’s verbal assault and is outraged that anyone would talk like that about his God. He’s livid and wants to know why nobody is doing anything about it. And then he steps forward.

Read 1 Samuel 17:32-49 and 18:6-16

(SLIDE) At a mere 5’ 9” NBA point guard Nate Robinson knows what it’s like to be the little guy. But with a 43” vertical leap (SLIDE) he also knows how to slam dunk with the best of them. In fact, just last month, (SLIDE) Robinson won his third ‘slam dunk’ title at the NBA All-Star game. He knows what it means to face giants.

In 1989, Chinese students and intellectuals gathered to mourn the loss of Hu Yaobang, a pro-democracy and anti-corruption leader. On the eve of his funeral, 100,000 people crowded into Tiananmen Square and began a 7 week protest. What followed was referred to around the world as the ‘Tiananmen Square Massacre’ in which an estimated 7,000 people were killed. In the People’s Republic of China it was called the ‘June Fourth Incident.’ Though the event has faded from our memories and been replaced by

new atrocities, I don't think anyone of us alive in 1989 could forget (SLIDE) this picture – taken on June 5th. [Man in front of tanks.] Sometimes God calls us to face the giants.

Although Saul and his troops were paralyzed with fear for 40 days, young David steps forward to take care of the Philistine giant. His confidence comes not from a youthful arrogance, but from a life that has experienced deliverance time and time again. (SLIDE) “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” (1 Samuel 17:37)

King Saul is relieved that, finally, someone was willing to step forward. Even though Saul himself was ‘a whole head taller’ than anyone else in his army, he had not been personally willing to put his life on the line with Goliath; nor could he bribe any of his men to fight the giant. But he’s thrilled that David would take a shot at it, and tries to help the shepherd boy by giving him his armor. David says, ‘no thanks.’ Not only is David brave, but he’s comfortable in his own skin. He realized what Chuck Swindoll gives voice to in his book on David’s life: (SLIDE) “What works for one person will not necessarily work for someone else. We’re always trying to put our armor on someone else or put someone’s armor on ourselves – but that’s not the way to do battle. It was a great breakthrough in my own life when I finally discovered that I could be me and God would use me.” (Chuck Swindoll in David: A Man of Passion & Destiny, p.44)

David has the confidence needed to step out and face the giant. And it turns out that he can do a little trash talking himself! But, again, his confidence is not in himself – it’s in the Lord. He says, (SLIDE) “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” (1 Sam. 17:45) His love for God fuels his confidence even more. (SLIDE) “The Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into our hand.” (1 Samuel 17:47) And he wins! In the words of Chuck Swindoll, (SLIDE) “Goliath was the dwarf and David was the giant.”

But after the victory, David now faces a new giant; King Saul.

Have you ever conquered one giant, only to face another one?

You conquer an addiction, only to realize that you now must face the stranglehold of a co-dependent family. You stand up to your supervisor, but then find out some of your fellow employees are on his side. You say “no” to the pressure to party with your friends only to wake up the next day to a new round of temptations that are even worse. You fight against cancer, enjoy remission for a few years, and then discover it’s back again. You work hard to help your child pick up her grades only to learn she’s failing two more subjects. The battle is never quite over, is it?

David comes strutting back into the city’s ticker-tape parade holding up the giant’s head as his trophy. But it doesn’t take long for him to realize the battle’s not done. King Saul is the next giant he must face. What surprises us is that David is more fearful of Saul than he was of Goliath.

As we read on we see this love-hate relationship between the two with Saul’s son, Jonathan, thrown into the middle. David goes from feeling comfortable in Saul’s

presence to running for his life. Saul tries to kill David, and then David spares Saul's life when he's got the perfect chance to kill him. [The story goes on through the end of 1 Samuel.]

Like Joseph, David keeps doing the right thing, even though he's "unjustly accused." (See last week's sermon.) There's a lot of bravery in this story; and a lot of fear.

Do you ever go back and forth between bravery and fear?

As we follow Christ all the way to Jerusalem, the Cross, and the Empty Tomb, there are a million giants along the way. Whatever it is you're facing – or will face – I encourage you to remember what David was so sure about: (SLIDE) "The battle is the Lord's." (1 Samuel 17:47) **It's a scary and wonderful thing to realize just how powerful God is.**

In Matthew 8 we are told that Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples. Suddenly, a furious storm comes up over the hillside and onto the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are desperate and fear drowning, but Jesus is fast asleep and full of faith. When they wake Him up and cry out for Him to save them, Jesus replies, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" And then he commands the wind and the waves to stop and it grows eerily calm. The disciples are beside themselves. They know the story of David and Goliath, but nothing prepares them for this. (SLIDE) "What sort of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Matthew 8:27) Scripture tells us again and again that He's the kind of God/Man who can do anything.

Sometimes we believe that, don't we? Sometimes we resonate with Paul who declared (SLIDE) "I can do all things, through Christ, who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) And sometimes we don't. The German Church didn't stand up to the racist giant, Adolph Hitler. And look what happened! The Lord was on their side, and they had way more than five smooth stones and a slingshot to fight against him. But they were silent for far too long.

(SLIDE) Rosa Parks, on the other hand, put her fears behind her and sat down on a bus. On December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, Parks refused to obey bus driver James Blake's order that she give up her seat to make room for a white passenger. She wasn't the first to make such a bold move, but her particular act of bravery led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and became an important symbol of the Civil Rights Movement. When asked what gave her the courage to face the giant of segregation and racism, she once said, (SLIDE) "Knowing what must be done does away with fear . . . It was time for someone to stand up – or in my case, to sit down." (Rosa Parks)

What about you and what about me? What or who is it that we must stand up against?

What are the giants in our lives?

(Depression, anger, addiction, legalism, greed, lust? Maybe there's a person in your life out to destroy you. Maybe you are your own worst enemy.)

What victories has God given you in the past that you can draw on?

Do you know the One who can calm the wind and the waves?

Do you believe that "The Lord is on your side?" Will you let Him win your battles?

As we come to the table we are reminded of Jesus, who defeated two giants of His day – the religious elite and the Roman Empire. The biggest giants, of course, were death and sin. And that’s what Jesus came to destroy. But, unlike David, Jesus wins by losing. He doesn’t slay His enemies; they crucify Him. He does, however, win the bigger battle against sin. This table presents to us the symbols of His victory. May you and I sense in this holy meal, that “The Lord is on our side.”

**BENEDICTION**

(SLIDE) “The best way out is always through.” (Robert Frost)

2010 Lenten Sermon Series – Toughing It Out: When Following Christ Gets Hard  
“Facing The Giants” (David)

1 Samuel 17:32-49 and 18:6-16; Matthew 8:23-27

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## **Small Group Discussion Questions**

1. What are some of the “giants” that our world faces today?
2. As you think of the story of David and Goliath (all of chapter 17), what do you admire about David? Was he justified in his confidence? What role did the anointing of Samuel (chapter 16) play in preparing him for the battle?
3. What do you notice about King Saul? David’s brother Eliab?
4. Why was David more fearful of Saul than Goliath?  
(To get the full story read all the way through 1 Samuel 18-31.)
5. If you had to list the “giants” throughout your life, what would they be and when did you face them?
6. What giants are you facing now? Do you feel like the “Lord is on your side?”
7. What “smooth stones” is God providing right now to help you with the battle?