

## David: Use what's in your hand. 1 Samuel 17

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There was once a wise woman who lived by herself near a small village. Rumor had it that she could always accurately predict when the rains would come, help heal a sick child with herbs, or calm angry neighbors and help them to resolve their fights and arguments. People came from all over the land to meet with her and seek her advice on matters both small and great. Her reputation was such that it was said she was never wrong — not ever.

A boy in the village didn't believe that it was possible to always be right. Surely she could not know everything! So he decided to test her knowledge. Hatching a devious scheme, he told all of his friends to meet him at the woman's home the following afternoon so he could prove she was a faker.

Having caught a small songbird in a net and holding it behind his back so no one could see what was in his hands, he walked triumphantly to the wise woman's home. "Old woman!" he called. "Come and show us how wise you are!" The woman walked calmly to the door. "May I help you?" she simply asked. "You say you know everything — prove it — what am I holding behind my back?" the young boy demanded.

The old woman thought for a moment. She could make out the faint sounds of a bird's wings rustling. "*I do not say I know everything — for that would be impossible,*" she replied. "*However, I do believe you are holding a bird in your hands.*"

The boy was furious. How could the woman have possibly known he had a bird? Thinking quickly he came up with a new scheme. He would ask the woman whether the bird was alive or dead. If the woman replied, "alive," he would crush it with his hands and prove her wrong. If she answered, "dead," on the other hand, he would pull the living bird from behind his back and allow it to fly away. Either way he would prove his point and the wise woman would be discredited.

"Very good," he said. "It is a bird. But tell me; is the bird I am holding alive or dead?" The wise woman paused for a long moment while the boy waited for his opportunity to prove her wrong. Again the woman spoke calmly, "***The answer, my young friend, is in your hands. The answer is in your hands.***"

The boy realized that the wise woman had once again spoken correctly and truthfully. The answer was indeed in his own hands. Feeling the bird struggling feebly in his hands as it tried to escape his grasp, he felt suddenly very ashamed. Slowly and gently he brought his hands to the front of his body. Looking into the eyes of the delicate bird he apologized, "I am sorry little one," and he opened his hands to let her go free. (*adapted from an Indian folk tale*)

In a similar way, an old carpenter's truism states that **the best tool for the job is the one that's in your hand**. While not always true, both of these stories illustrate a profound Biblical truth. **"What is in your hand" means whatever is in your care or control**, making this question, 'What is in your hand?' one of the most important questions for every Christian to answer. What you withhold and retain in your hand reveals what is in your heart. God our Father is waiting for us to use whatever He has placed in our hands.

Moses used a shepherd's staff to free Israel from slavery and lead them to the promised land. Sampson used a donkey's jawbone to slay a thousand men. David used his sling and stones to defeat the Philistine champion. The unnamed boy had his five loaves and two fishes. The woman had an alabaster jar filled with oil to anoint Jesus. We all have something in our hands. As we release what is in our hands, God releases what is in His! He is ready and willing to anoint what is in your hands. Are you willing to let him?

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Of course from our Sunday School days we have known today's story of David versus Goliath. Even non-Christians recognize this as a classic illustration of the underdog winning against overwhelming odds, but that's not really what the story is about. When you unpack it in more detail you will see that David versus Goliath is more about **knowing and being true to who you are and trusting God to use whatever He has given you**.

As our story opens, the Philistines are once again at war with Israel. Placing their war camps on opposite hill tops, the Philistines have sent their champion down to the valley between them to challenge Saul's army. Goliath is truly a formidable foe; by our measurements standing nine feet nine inches tall, wearing a coat of mail weighing over 125 pounds and carrying a spear that weighed fifteen pounds. According to the story Goliath offered his challenge to the Israeli army from morning until evening for forty days (17:16). Now forty days seems a long time to stand around waiting for a fight, but we know from other Biblical stories that **the number 40 is symbolic of "being tested by God."** A test which Saul was obviously failing, which also affected his army: *they were dismayed and greatly afraid* (17:11). So, everyone just stood around waiting for someone else to do something.

On the fortieth day, David having brought provisions to the battlefield for his older brothers and having overheard Goliath's challenge, is utterly amazed that no one has answered him. Because while Goliath's challenge was issued against *"the servants of Saul,"* David knew that he was actually defying, *"the armies of the Living God."* (17:8,26).

Thus the first thing which David had in his hand – that we all need to also be holding – was an unshakable faith in the power of God to deliver His people whatever the circumstance. Both remembering the stories of God's repeated deliverance of Israel and his own experiences of God delivering him, a shepherd with only a stick and sling

from the mouths of lions and bears, David knew that God could use anyone who was faithfully willing to face this giant.

It is also interesting to notice that David had not actually volunteered to fight Goliath – he was just asking why no one else had done so when another person having overheard his comments reported such to Saul who then sent for David. This illustrates how desperate Saul was to find any solution to his giant of a problem.

Now standing before Saul, David does volunteer for the task only to be scoffed at both for his youth, his lack of military training, to which David relays his lesson on having faith in God's ability to deliver from lions, bears, and Philistines. He said, '*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* (17:37). A thought which David would later include in one of his victory Psalms ...

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;  
His steadfast love endures for ever! ...  
**With the Lord on my side I do not fear.**  
**What can mortals do to me?**  
Psalm 118:1,6

This then is our first lesson from the story of Goliath: Like David, **we should be holding in our hands an unshakable faith in God's ability to accomplish through us whatever task He has given to us.** As our Bible assures us – in multiple places ...

God will equip you with everything good  
for doing His will, [to] work in us  
what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ,  
to whom be glory forever and ever  
Hebrews 13:21

The second lesson we can learn from Goliath is **to know yourself and be true to who you are as you seek to serve God; use what is already in your hands, Don't try to be what you are not.**

In his desperation to find anyone who would fight Goliath, Saul, who called David just a "stripling youth" (the modern expression would be a "skinny kid"), blessed him to the task and then tried to outfit David in his own armor. What an honor it would be to wear the king's armor, but can you visualize David – the skinny kid – trying to wear the equipage of a man who famously stood head and shoulders above everyone else?

David's reply again revealed both his faith in God and knowledge of his own abilities.

*David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.' So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine (17:39-40).*

Another Sunday School question often asks, "why did David pick up five stones?" The answer we are told was that "Goliath had four brothers." Wow this is true, whether or not David was thinking of such, who knows? But, knowing that the battle was the Lord's not his, David approached Goliath the same way he went about his daily shepherding tasks, with his staff in one hand and his sling in the other.

Seeing David approach, Goliath is now the third person – after his older brother and King Saul – to underestimate both his abilities and his faith. David replied to Goliath's taunts that his death would be a lesson both to the world and to the faithless army of Israel watching from the hillside behind him.

*This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, **so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand.'** (17:46-47)*

From this point you know the rest of the story. Having slain him with a stone slung from his shepherd's sling, David uses Goliath's own sword to cut his head off. And while the now emboldened Israelis rout and plunder the Philistine army, David is presented back to the king

*When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan [Saul's son] was bound to the soul of David ... Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (18:1-4).* Thus began one of the greatest and truest friendships ever recorded in history, with Jonathon working faithfully to protect David from his father's jealous rage. But theirs is a story for another day.

What then should we now take home from the story of David and Goliath.

First, that if we keep our faith lodged firmly in God, we can move mountains and we can slay any giants who come against us.

But second, we also need to know who we are in the family of Christ, what we have in our own hands, and not try to be someone else. In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul urged them

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.* (Romans 12:2-4).

Had David gone against Goliath in Saul's, or even Jonathan's armor, he would have become bird food just as Goliath promised he would be. But David used the tools he had in his own hand and left the rest of the work to God.

What you withhold and retain in your hand reveals what is in your heart God our Father is waiting for us to use what He has placed in our hands.

That's something we should always remember and be praying about.