

EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

STUDY THREE

A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17

Every one of us has giants in our lives. They are not nine feet tall, they don't wear armor, and they don't have a name like Goliath, but they're giants nevertheless. Unless I miss my guess, you're afraid of yours. Stay realistic rather than run scared. Remember, greater is He who is in you than whoever may be in this world.

—Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYONE likes to see an underdog take on a champion. Perhaps the most famous of all underdog contests was when the scrappy shepherd boy David challenged mighty Goliath. Have you ever been in a lopsided battle like that, overmatched and underequipped against some Goliath in your life?

All of us face giants. Whether powerful opponents or menacing problems, giants are terrifying . . . until we see, just as David did, our bellowing Goliaths from God's point of view.

In this study, we'll examine the biblical account of David and Goliath from what may be a new perspective: *David's victory was not the result of a miracle.* Indeed, the battle belonged to the Lord, but David still utilized his long-held talent as a master slinger. And although no one could overpower Goliath hand-to-hand, his hidden weaknesses made him vulnerable against David's skill. Giants are not always what they seem.

So, we wonder. Who was the *real* underdog in this epochal event featuring history's most mismatched foes: David or Goliath? Let's find out!



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God's Word, think about any giants that may be casting a threatening shadow over you. In his message, Chuck Swindoll lists four types of giant-sized challenges that can paralyze us with fear and defeat us if we let them.

- *Domestic:* Marital discord is one type of domestic giant. So are divorce, death of a loved one, or a wayward son or daughter. These giants attack, heaping upon us deep grief, confusion, and heartache.
- *Personal:* This type of giant may involve individuals who threaten us, a serious health issue, fears about aging, a distressing lawsuit, or an unwanted move to a strange new place. These giants hurl spears of loneliness, depression, negativity, and bitterness.
- *Economic:* The name of this bellowing bully may be unemployment, financial collapse, or out-of-control spending. Perhaps your business has gone under or your savings are dangerously thin.
- *Spiritual:* The most dangerous giant of all is unbelief. We must overcome this giant first, with the aid of the Spirit who helps us trust that Jesus bore our sin on the cross and promised to be with us always.

Unfortunately, ignoring these problems won't make them go away. There's only one way to handle a giant: face it head-on. What are your giants?

Now take a moment to commit these giants to the Lord. Invite His Spirit to strengthen your faith and ask Him to help you see them through His eyes.



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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Open your Bible and read *1 Samuel 17:1–3*. These verses describe the Philistines' invasion against the Israelites via the Valley of Elah, a strategic gateway to Israelite hill country. You can locate the Valley of Elah in your atlas or Bible maps. Or, at insight.org, you can view the “*Kingdoms of Israel*” map, which shows Philistia and the city of Gath, Goliath's home. To view a satellite image of the Valley of Elah, a diagram of the possible site of the battle between David and Goliath, and photographs of the valley, see “*The Valley of Elah*” at biblewalks.com.

As you can see from these maps and diagrams, the Philistines' invasion was like the thrust of a spear into the heart of Israel. What was at stake if Saul's army could not defeat the Philistines and send them back to Gath?



Observation: The Combatants

Now that we've set the scene, let's observe the characters and action surrounding the Israelites and their giant enemy.

Goliath's Challenge

As the Israelite and Philistine armies faced each other on opposite hills, the imposing Goliath strode to the valley floor with his challenge. Read *1 Samuel 17:4–10* and write down what made Goliath a terrifying foe.



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Goliath's taunt took aim directly at Saul, who was Israel's obvious choice to fight the giant. How is Saul described in *1 Samuel 9:1–2*? And what was the reason he was made king, according to *1 Samuel 8:20* (NASB)?

The Philistines' strategy was not just to divide Israel but to demoralize the nation by humiliating Israel's king. What did Saul do in response to Goliath's challenge? Let's see.

Saul's Fear

Read *1 Samuel 17:11* and *25*, and write down how Saul responded to Goliath's confrontation.

While Saul's knees knocked in fear, David's heart pounded with courageous determination. Both men heard the same taunts from Goliath—but how different were their responses!

David's Determination

For forty days, twice per day, Goliath "strutted in front of the Israelite army" (*1 Samuel 17:16*). When David arrived at the battle camp with food for his brothers, he heard the giant "shout his usual taunt to the army of Israel" (*17:23*). What did David ask the soldiers (*17:26*)? How did his brother, Eliab, react to David's questioning, and how did Saul react (*17:28–31*)?



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While Saul and his army saw only Goliath’s colossal size, David measured Goliath against the true object of the Philistine’s taunts: the Lord. What was Goliath’s might against the Almighty? How could this blasphemer shake his fist in God’s face and win?

Observe closely David’s conversation with Saul in *1 Samuel 17:32–40* and write down evidence of David’s perspective as he viewed the situation from God’s point of view in contrast with Saul’s human-oriented perspective.

Evidence of David’s Godly Perspective	Evidence of Saul’s Human Perspective

From Saul’s earthly point of view, no teenage boy could overpower the heavyweight champion. But that was Saul’s problem all along. He couldn’t see himself or his problems from the perspective of an all-powerful, faithful God.

 **Interpretation: The Contest**

In the interpretive phase, we seek to understand the meaning of David’s victory. Take a few minutes to read the account in *1 Samuel 17:40–51*. What do you think were the reasons David was able to defeat Goliath?

David acknowledged the Lord as the true victor (1 Samuel 17:46–47). And yet, the Lord won the victory not by thundering from heaven, as He had done in a previous battle with the Philistines.¹ Instead, God prevailed *through David* and his stone-slinging skills. No miracle was done that day.



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David had honed his skills through countless lonely hours of practice in the wilderness, and it had been battle-tested against lions and bears (1 Samuel 17:34–37). Little did David know all this was in preparation for the day he would fling a stone with the accuracy and velocity of a bullet to Goliath’s forehead.²

What principle can you draw from God working through David’s competence to win the battle against Goliath?

How did David do it? He remembered how God had strengthened him in days past. He had a lot of wolf and lion and bear stories to recall. Don’t forget your own stories. Every one of us can name them. Remember and call to mind the things God did for you in the past. It will strengthen your faith for today. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God Looks at the Heart

The key to understanding the account of David and Goliath is the truth that God sees beyond externals to people’s hearts. Size and power may impress us, but God is more interested in a person’s character and devotion to Him.

Read the account of a previous episode when Samuel anointed David (*1 Samuel 16:1–13*). What do you learn about viewing people from God’s point of view? How can this perspective help you when facing giants?

Some researchers have speculated that Goliath may have had a medical condition that contributed to his massive size. But that same condition also may have limited his mobility and eyesight.³ Consequently, what made Goliath gigantic may have made him vulnerable. For an agile and experienced slinger like David, *Goliath* was an easy target. Against David, Goliath was the underdog!



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That's why we don't go by size. That's why statistics don't intimidate us when we have the right perspective. There's an important lesson here for all of us who face our own giants. The powerful and fearful in appearance are not always what they seem. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Two Lessons for Battling Giants

In his message, Chuck provides two lessons that emerge from this epochal event.

1. *Remember what God has done for you in the past.* Just as David reminded himself of God's enablement that resulted in earlier victories, we can draw courage and strength for our own challenges today.
2. *Develop a theology that gives you a God-centered perspective.* View your battles as ones the Lord fights. While Saul retreated from the fight, David took the fight to the enemy and, in that way, had the thrill of engaging in the Lord's battle and experiencing the strength of the Almighty through him.

Recall the giants you listed at the beginning of this study. What new insight do you have toward them now?

How do you plan to put into practice the principles you learned from David's victory over Goliath?

Don't overestimate the might of taunting giants, and never underestimate the power of God. Many of the giants we face are powerless, for they are nothing but empty shells, having no substance at all. And what gives the story of David so much impact is that deep within his life there was substance . . . there was truth. And there's nothing more confidence-building as a pocketful of truth when facing giants!



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A FINAL PRAYER

Close this study by praying a prayer of Patrick of Ireland and express your dependence on God's power.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, his might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward;
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.⁴

ENDNOTES

1. An example of a battle won by a miracle occurred when the Lord “spoke with a mighty voice of thunder from heaven” (1 Samuel 7:10), throwing the much stronger Philistine army into such confusion that the fearful Israelites easily routed them.
2. Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2013), 11–12. Gladwell describes the scene. David “puts a rock into his sling, and whips it around and around, faster and faster at six or seven revolutions per second, aiming his projectile at Goliath’s forehead—the giant’s only point of vulnerability. Eitan Hirsch, a ballistics expert with the Israeli Defense Forces, recently did a series of calculations showing that a typical-size stone hurled by an expert slinger . . . would have hit Goliath’s head with a velocity of thirty-five meters per second—more than enough to penetrate his skull. . . . ‘Goliath had as much chance against David,’ the historian Robert Dohrenwend writes, ‘as any Bronze Age warrior with a sword would have had against an [opponent] armed with a .45 automatic pistol.’”
3. Gladwell, *David and Goliath*, 14–15. “What many medical experts now believe, in fact, is that Goliath had a serious medical condition. He looks and sounds like someone suffering from what is called acromegaly—a disease caused by a benign tumor of the pituitary gland. . . . And furthermore, one of the common side effects of acromegaly is vision problems. . . . What the Israelites saw, from high on the ridge, was an intimidating giant. In reality, the very thing that gave the giant his size was also the source of his greatest weakness.”
4. Patrick of Ireland, as quoted in *The One Year Book of Personal Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991), 4.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

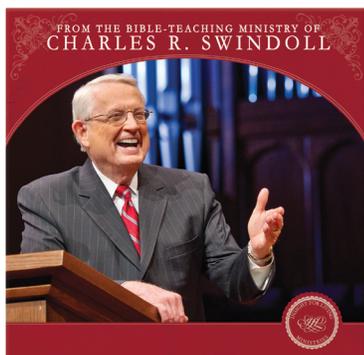
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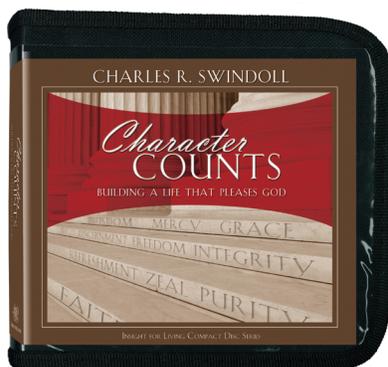
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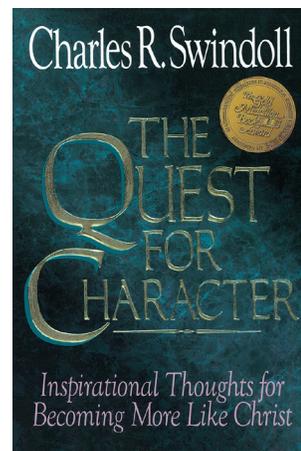
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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