ADULT BIBLE STUDY

Preparation the Lesson

David and Goliath
1 Samuel 17

Key Point

As David struck down the giant Goliath, so David’s greater Son—Jesus—struck down the Goliaths of sin, Satan, and death through His own death on the cross.

Law/Gospel

Left to fight sin, death, and the devil myself, I would perish. Jesus fights triumphantly for me against my adversaries of sin, death, and the devil because they are too great for me. His victory is my victory.

Context

The Philistines, who lived along the coast of the Mediterranean, had been Israel’s archenemy for generations before David. Gradually moving eastward, they presented more and more of a challenge to God’s people—a challenge met by such men as Samson and Saul. Their threat was not only geographical (they took Israelite land) but also religious. Wooed by the sensuality of the Philistine religion, many would fall prey to its seductive charms.

Goliath challenges the Israelite army to send out someone to fight him. This practice of two warriors from opposing sides going head-to-head against each other was not unknown in the ancient world. Each soldier embodied the army he represented. Should Goliath win, all Philistia would win. Should an Israelite win, all Israel would win. At this point in the story, David is known by Saul (16:14–23), but David’s lineage is evidently not known (17:55–58). He has also already been secretly anointed by Samuel as the successor to Saul (16:1–13).

Commentary

In this classic story of the underdog, we see a premier example of the theology of the cross. That means that God does things in very ungodlike ways—ways we ourselves deem ungodlike. He who is all-powerful chooses something weak with which to fight. He who is all-wise acts in a way that makes the world double over in laughter. God works in a way that is hidden, behind masks, so that only those who see Him through His Word really see Him at work.

Goliath, armed to the teeth and a pro at warfare, is the embodiment of everything the world considers a sure bet. Worldly experience and rational knowledge both say, “David doesn’t have a snowball’s chance in you-know-where against this Philistine Hercules.”

David describes the real weapon he wields against this ungodly giant: “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a 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” (17:45). His weapon is not the sling but the divine name. Just as Moses’ staff was really “the staff of God” (Exodus 4:20; 17:9), so this sling is really the sling of the Lord. It bears His name.

This event in David’s life serves as a preview of the deeds of the Son of David. As David defeated Goliath, so Jesus, the Son of David, defeated the jeering huge Goliaths of sin, Satan, and death. With what did He defeat them? His own death! What a weapon! By taking on our sin, He slew sin. By letting Satan slay Him, Christ slew him. By dying, He killed death. In the same way as David used Goliath’s own sword, so Jesus used the very stuff of His (and our) enemies against them.
Lesson 12  

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1 Start  
(5 minutes)

Pray  Almighty God, the world that we live in is a battlefield. The devil and his forces are arrayed for battle. They are giants, threatening to destroy us in our sin, and we have no strength in ourselves to stand. Yet You are our strength. Enable us to see Your power as we study Your Word. As we study the victory over Goliath that You won through David, remind us of the victory over Satan that You won. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Say 1. Remember a time when you first put on a pair of glasses or turned on a light and your perspective suddenly changed. What were you feeling when you could not see clearly? How did it feel when you suddenly saw the world correctly?

Allow the members of the class a few moments to discuss these questions. All of us experience times when it is difficult to see. Darkness may cause us to stub a toe during the night. A snowstorm may suddenly make driving impossible. But when we put on our first pair of glasses or turn on a light after tripping over toys in the dark, we are suddenly able to see the world correctly. Clear perception is essential if we are to function at our best in the world.

In the story of David and Goliath, everyone except David sees the battlefield incorrectly. Their poor perception fills the Israelites with fear and leads to a forty-day standoff against a single Philistine warrior. When Goliath stands between the armies to taunt Israel and their God, only David is wearing the faith that brings the world into proper focus. He had the "glasses" that showed him the situation as it really was.

2 Study  
(15 minutes)

Say 2. Read 1 Samuel 17:1–11. What effect did Goliath have on the Israelites? How did he accomplish his goal?

Goliath’s words, actions, and appearance were all intended to have one effect on Israel: intimidation. The Philistines are camped on Israelite land, and the arrangement of the camps on two hills with a dry streambed running between is perfect for Goliath's displays of power. The Israelites lining the hill opposite him might as well have been in an auditorium as the giant waded through his own people to make his speech.

As you discuss the description of Goliath, you may find it useful to help the class comprehend the sizes involved by using images they are familiar with. Goliath stood 3 inches shy of 10 feet tall. He would have had to hunch to walk under a basketball backboard. His main body armor weighed more than 120 pounds (three 40-pound
bags of salt), not to mention the weight of the helmet, the leg armor, and his weapons. His spear with its 16-pound tip would have been unwieldy, to say the least. (Imagine throwing a spear with two bags of flour tied to the end!) Taken together with his overwhelming height and armor, it made a very impressive display.

That display was Goliath's purpose. The massive weight of his armor would have made combat exhausting and difficult, even for Goliath. His weapons were so large that they would have been much easier for the enemy to avoid than for Goliath to fight with. Goliath's appearance was better suited to bullying than to battle.

Goliath was dressed to impress and intimidate. The fact that he had to describe to Israel what his challenge meant indicates that fighting a battle through a single representative was not a standard practice. By issuing the challenge to single combat, Goliath is winning a powerful mental battle. In the minds of the Israelites, the battle is no longer between the army of Israel and the army of Philistia (or between the God of Israel and the army of Philistia). Instead, each man on Israel's side was now picturing himself going alone into battle against a man whose weapons and armor weighed as much as some of Israel's soldiers.

**Say** 3. David comes onto the scene in 1 Samuel 17:12–16. Read these verses and 16:18–19. What kind of young man is David?

David's most outstanding physical characteristic for this story is his youth. He is the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse, the oldest of whom is still young enough to be in combat. According to 1 Samuel 16:18, David is “skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him.” While his youth makes this story memorable, it is the last of these characteristics that will make David a fit hero in the battle against Goliath.

**Say** 4. Read 1 Samuel 17:17–37. How does David's view of the situation differ from that of his brothers and the rest of Israel's army? How does it differ from Saul's?

David arrives in the morning, just as the two armies are lining up for battle, with their war cries ringing in the air. The forty-day standoff has no doubt strained the army's resources, and so the supplies David brings for his brothers and their commander would have been most welcome. David has also been sent by his father for word from his brothers, so he hurries to the front line to meet with them.

The army of Israel has been subjected to Goliath's taunting for forty straight days. For almost six weeks, they have heard the giant shout his challenge, and they have gazed up and down their battle line hoping to see a man of valor step forward to silence the giant's threats. For forty days, they have been disappointed. For forty days they have silently prayed that God would deliver Israel—but that He would choose someone else for the purpose. For forty days, they have returned to their camp at night, ashamed of their own fear and ashamed of Israel's inability to produce a champion.

David, on the other hand, hears the words of Goliath with fresh ears. This might have been the first time in his life that he has heard anyone blaspheme the God of Israel. Whereas the army of Israel looks at Goliath and sees the ancient equivalent of a Sherman tank, David sees only that the living God is being taunted by a man who worships a block of wood. Goliath is uncircumcised, outside the covenant people of God. In David's eyes, the giant cannot even hope for victory in battle against the living God.

David is taken aback that no one from Israel has stepped forward to fight Goliath. His surprise shows up in his repeated questioning, “What shall be done for the man
who kills this Philistine?” (v. 26). When his brother rebukes him, David just goes elsewhere and continues to try to determine why no one has stepped forward to meet the challenge. His inquisitiveness manages to make enough of an impression that word even reaches Saul, and soon David is standing again before the king he once served as a musician (see 1 Samuel 16:14–23). Saul knows little about the young man who had been his court musician (see 17:55), and the young shepherd finds himself trying to convince the king to turn him into Israel’s champion in the battle against Goliath.

Saul’s perspective on the situation is summarized in verse 33. David is a youth. His ability to fight is untested. He does not have the strength of even the average Israelite soldier, much less the Philistine champion. Goliath, on the other hand, has been fighting since he was a little child. If Saul sends David onto the battlefield, he will be sending weakness against strength, naiveté against experience, and a boy against a man. When Saul heard that there was someone in the camp inquiring about the reward, he was hoping to see someone much more impressive than David. The words of verse 33 are Saul’s royal dismissal. The conversation should have been over.

David, however, cannot see the situation the same way. As he pleads his case with Saul, he testifies to his strength, to his experience, and to his perspective. David does not see a battle between a boy and a man. He sees a battle between a soldier of the living God and a soldier whose god is made of wood. David sees the difference between weakness and strength, but not as Saul does. David sees all of the strength of the hand that parted the Red Sea and devastated Jericho lining up beside him. Goliath, however, has no such strength with him. Even 9 feet and 9 inches of human strength is nothing compared to the power of God.

Say 5. Read 1 Samuel 17:38–47. How does David’s rejection of Saul’s armor represent the difference in the way that they consider the kingship of Israel? How do David’s words testify to the difference in perspective between David and Goliath?

Saul offers David a prayerful blessing in verse 37, then he proceeds to provide him with the finest military equipment that Israel could muster: the king’s own armor and weapons. David tries the armaments for a moment, but quickly realizes that this is not how the battle will be won. He arrived at the battle as a shepherd, and as a shepherd he will win the battle.

The brief episode highlights the difference between Saul and David’s approaches to the kingship of Israel. Saul was made king when Israel wanted to be like the nations, and his kingship is modeled after the kings of those nations. He understands that battles are won by the armies with the best soldiers and soldiers with the best armaments. Naturally, he extends these advantages to the champion who will represent Israel in combat against Goliath.

David, on the other hand, does not model his life after any other human. Instead, he is a man after God’s own heart (see 1 Samuel 13:14). He understands that his victory does not lie in the strength of his arms or his armaments, but in the strength of his almighty Lord. David is a shepherd. He will fight as a shepherd, and when he becomes king, he will rule as a faithful shepherd, serving under God.

After forty days of taunting, Goliath will finally have to back up his threats. He must have watched with a mixture of excitement and apprehension as a soldier finally emerged from the Israelite battle line. However, as David draws near enough for the giant to see him clearly, Goliath cannot help but be filled with disdain. “Am I a dog?”
he asks. He expected a warrior, but he was confronted with a shepherd. He expected the strongest of men, but he was confronted with a boy. The giant cannot see anything but weakness in his opponent.

As David approaches, the young Israelite continues to see the world through eyes of faith. Where Goliath sees weakness, David sees only the strength of the God he serves.

Of all the people in this story who do not perceive the strength of God with His people, Goliath is the only one that we would expect to make that mistake. It is shameful that the Israelites were more impressed by Goliath's size than by the power of their God. It is revealing and unfortunate that Saul was more concerned about the enemy's strength than David's faithfulness. Goliath, however, is an outsider. He cannot be expected to perceive the danger that he is in. It is no wonder that he treats David with disdain; he believes that David is alone.

In David's rousing speech, the Israelite champion points to this all-important difference. David does not promise to save Israel. He guarantees that the Lord will deliver Goliath into his hand. David understands that he does not represent Israel's strength but the Lord's. He is not Israel's champion. He is God's champion, and his victory will demonstrate that "the Lord saves not with sword and spear. "For the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47). Throughout the speech, David's words continually point to the real difference between him and Goliath: David is a member of God's people, while Goliath is not.

This difference is important in our day too. God used David's faith to save Israel from the enemy Goliath and to demonstrate to all the earth "that there is a God in Israel" (v. 46). God and God alone saves people from the enemies of the devil, the world, and their sinful nature. Martin Luther, in the second stanza of his hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," put it this way: "With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected; But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord, and there's none other God; He holds the field forever" (LSB 656).

Ask 6. How does David's victory over Goliath illustrate God's power to work in ways that we do not expect? What is the greatest example of God working through a means that we never would have predicted? How does God's presence in Christ change our view of our greatest enemies, sin and death?

When David's brother realized that David was considering fighting Goliath, he treated him with scorn. When Saul realized that David would fight Goliath, he dismissed him out of hand. When Goliath saw David approaching from the Israelite camp, he was filled with disdain. The people standing on the battlefield looked on in disbelief. No one expected David to triumph over Goliath.

When Saul heard that there was an Israelite prepared to fight Goliath, he pictured a seasoned fighting man with bulging muscles. The appearance of a mighty champion would tell Saul that God was still defending His people. The appearance of a shepherd boy did not fit Saul's picture of how God would deliver Israel, nor did it fit Goliath's.

But God works in ways that we do not expect. He fights giants with shepherds and uses river rocks to penetrate bronze armor. God uses the weak, the foolish, the
low, and the despised (see 1 Corinthians 1:26–29). In short, God acts in ways that people think God would never act.

This was never more visible than in the ministry of Jesus. The people were waiting in expectation, looking for God to come, but not in the way that He did. God did not come with the glory of a king. He came with the humility of an impoverished baby. God did not mingle with the royalty. He shared dinner with outcasts and prostitutes. God did not surround Himself with servants. He knelt to wash the feet of His disciples. Our Lord did not live a life of luxury. He died the death of a criminal.

What could be more unexpected than God choosing to live a life of suffering, to die, and to be raised to life—all in order to save sinful people? God works in ways we do not expect. He saves people who are not worthy to be saved. He puts Jesus to death for our sin, and then gives us life with His Son. Our God has consorted with us sinners and made us His children! Nothing could be more unexpected than that. Praise God that He works in ways that we would never imagine!

To human eyes, the battlefield that stood between David and Goliath looked like nothing more than a deathtrap for the shepherd boy from Bethlehem. Goliath would roll over David like a tank plowing through a flower garden. But David recognized God’s presence, and David’s faith presented him with a different picture of the situation, a picture in which his enemy simply could not be victorious.

To human eyes, the battlefield in which we live looks like nothing more than a deathtrap for every person who walks this earth. Everywhere we look, we see the scars of sin: broken hearts, broken homes, broken people. When we look inward, the picture is no better. Sin continues to ravage our lives, even long after we become Christians. The obituary column reminds us daily that our sin is a terminal disease for which medicine has no cure. To human eyes, an honest look at the world reveals a bleak place.

Yet, God has given us eyes like David’s. David saw the situation differently because what he saw with his eyes was less important to him than what he knew because of his faith. Our faith changes how we see the world.

4 Send (5 minutes)

For the Family Connections section, encourage the adults with children in Sunday School to review their child’s Cross Explorations leaflet together at home. Encourage families to memorize and discuss the First Commandment along with its meaning in the Small Catechism. Remind members of the class that Martin Luther taught that whenever we break any of the later Commandments, we also break the First Commandment. Encourage them to reflect on Luther’s explanation of the First Commandment and to consider why breaking the later Commandments also breaks the first.

For the Personal Reflection section, direct students to the activities printed on the back of the Student Page, and encourage them to meditate on Psalm 23 during this week.

In the For Next Week section, encourage the class to prepare for next week by reading 1 Samuel 18:1–5 and 20:1–42. Tell students that in next week’s lesson, we will see a prime example of God’s love expressed through ordinary people.
1. Remember a time when you first put on a pair of glasses or turned on a light and your perspective suddenly changed. What were you feeling when you could not see clearly? How did it feel when you suddenly saw the world correctly?

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5. Read 1 Samuel 17:38–47. How does David’s rejection of Saul’s armor represent the difference in the way that they consider the kingship of Israel? How do David’s words testify to the difference in perspective between David and Goliath?

6. How does David’s victory over Goliath illustrate God’s power to work in ways that we do not expect? What is the greatest example of God working through a means that we never would have predicted? How does God’s presence in Christ change our view of our greatest enemies, sin and death?
Family Connections

If you have children in Sunday School, go over your child’s Cross Explorations leaflet together, sharing with each other what you learned about today’s Bible story.

As a family, learn by heart the First Commandment and its meaning from the Small Catechism. Talk together about how David kept the First Commandment when he feared God instead of Goliath. Consider what makes each member of your family afraid, and pray together that God would remind you of His strength when the world seems like a frightening place.

Personal Reflection

Psalm 23 has been a source of comfort to God’s people for more than twenty-five hundred years. If you do not already have it memorized, learn it this week by taking one verse each day and reviewing it throughout the day. How do God’s promises comfort His people in this psalm? Where do you see Jesus and His victory for us over death in these words?

For Next Week

David has been anointed as king, and he has already shown that he will be a faithful shepherd of God’s people. Yet, David’s success against Goliath does not please everyone. Saul’s jealousy will turn him against David. Still, David will have a close friend in Saul’s household—Saul’s son, Jonathan. Read 1 Samuel 18:1–5; 20:1–42. How did God create the friendship between David and Jonathan? How did God use that friendship to bring glory to His name?