

The hot July sun was just beginning to set in the west as 17 year old Joni dove into the waters of Chesapeake Bay. As her body entered the murky water, she immediately felt the refreshment of cool water on a stifling hot, summer day. But in a flash, Joni's life was to change permanently. She felt her head strike something hard and unyielding. Suddenly, Joni's body was out of control. She heard a loud, electric buzzing in her ears. It was like a heavy metal spring snapping loose. Yet there was no pain - just a sensation.

Joni felt the crunching, grinding sand of the bottom of the bay against her face. *Why are my arms tied to my chest*, she thought. *I feel trapped*. She thought she must have become caught in a fishnet or something. Panic seized her mind. With all of her willpower and strength, she tried to break free. But nothing happened.

Joni - she heard a voice. It was the sound of her sister Kathy. *Joni, are you O.K.? What are you doing? Looking for shells? Did you dive in here? It's so shallow.*

Joni felt Kathy's arms around her shoulder, lifting. After Kathy struggled to pull her to the shore, Joni looked down at her body. Her arms were not tied to her chest. Her limbs were just dangling motionless. All at once, Joni realized that she had become paralyzed.

An attractive teenage young woman who suddenly became a quadrapalegic could respond in many different ways. Guilt and self-blame could have plagued Joni's mind as she berated herself for diving into such shallow water. Bitterness and anger could have obsessed her as she asked *Why me?* But Joni Eareckson has responded in a most remarkable way. She has tackled this giant which came unwanted into her life and has developed in many areas that she possibly never would have known otherwise. Joni has become an author of best-selling books, she has become an accomplished musician both composing and singing her own songs, she has developed the art of painting by using a paintbrush clenched between her teeth, she is a motivational speaker who is in demand all across our country, she hosts her own radio program, and the foundation that she has started called *Joni and Friends Ministries* provides encouragement and resources for disabled people throughout the world. And this has all come about because one teenage woman faced a seemingly unconquerable giant in her life with courage.

We have been looking these past Sunday mornings at the subject of finding meaning and purpose in our lives. *What is my basic purpose in life?* is the most pressing question that the average American struggles with today. We have already seen from Psalm 39 that we must first understand the basic nature of life if we

are to find its purpose. Then we saw from Psalm 139 that we must realize that God has ordained a plan for our lives, a plan that He knew even when we were being formed in our mother's womb. We saw from the example of Christ's childhood the necessity for developing balance in our lives.

Now this morning, we come to see an example of courage from a teenager in the Bible. There are several quality illustrations of courageous teenagers which we could pick from in the Scriptures. Joseph and Daniel are certainly worthy of consideration – both taken away to strange, foreign countries while just teenagers, but both remaining true to their convictions and through their faith, changing the world. But I have chosen one of the most familiar stories in the Bible for us to look at together this morning. For even with people who know very little about the Bible, whenever a small underdog meets an opposing favorite, they will talk about David meeting Goliath. And this story is important for our consideration, for nobody is able to fulfill his or her purpose in life and find the meaning that God intends unless he has the courage to face some giants. Everyone has giants in life. One's giants might be perverted family relationships that we had growing up; one's giants might be physical or mental or emotional disabilities; one's giants might be a besetting temptation that the enemy has used over and over again in our life to bring about a series of defeats and discouragements; one's giants might be an internal personality trait or habit that we have wrestled with for years; one's giant might be work related - the list is almost endless. But the simple fact is we all face giants. And these giants will divert us from fulfilling our purpose in life if we let them. We must have the courage to face these giants in our lives if we are to find the meaning that God intends for us. For just as Goliath the Giant immobilized Saul and the nation of Israel so that they could not move forward, so the giants that we face in life can paralyze us so that we don't fulfill our purpose in life. If we set victorious patterns for battling giants early in life, even as a teenager - as David did - this will stand us in good stead for the entirety of our lives. But it's never too late in life to gain victory over our giants.

The famous story of David and Goliath found in the 17th chapter of 1 Samuel naturally falls into 4 sections: the giant who demands courage, the obstacles to courage, the test of courage, and the rewards of courage.

1. The giant who demands courage - David was sent by his father, Jesse, to see how the 3 oldest boys in the family were doing in the army and to bring some provisions to them. It is likely that Jesse was concerned about the welfare of his boys - and we can certainly understand that.

Now the Israelites were battling the Philistines at this time. The Philistines were people from the Aegean Sea region who had migrated down the Mediterranean coast and settled in the Southwest section of the land of Canaan. They brought with them a sophistication from their Greek culture of origin, and they also

had advanced military weapons. They had developed a strong iron sword and armor and chariots which were more advanced than the Israelites had known at this time. So the Philistines became a thorn in the side of the Israelites from the latter period of the judges until David as King finally subdued them.

Now when David came into the Israeli camp, he found the atmosphere to be a very fearful one. A Philistine Champion, named Goliath, had been intimidating the Jewish soldiers. It is interesting to note that our English word Champion in the text is a translation of 2 Hebrew words which literally mean *a man between*. This is literally what Goliath was - a strong soldier who walked out between the 2 armies challenging someone to fight him.

Now we often forget that the period of the Judges melts into the early period of the monarchy. Samuel was both the last judge and the prophet who anointed Saul and David. So Samuel the man actually links these 2 periods together. So at this time, Samson, had not been dead long. Undoubtedly, the memories of Samson and the legends that had been told about him were commonplace amongst the Philistines. Samson had killed thousands of Philistine soldiers at a time. He had performed great feats of strength culminating with his toppling the great temple of Dagon. So we can understand why the Philistines even though they had superior weapons and manpower were very nervous when Jonathan walked up that hillside and killed 20 or so Philistine soldiers. 1 Samuel 14 tells us that the whole Philistine army was thrown into panic as they fled from the scene. They were undoubtedly fearful that the Israelites had produced another Samson.

To counter this successful strategy of the Hebrews, the Philistines had produced their own Champion, their own version of Samson. And Goliath was quite a man, wasn't he? Standing between 9 and 10 feet tall (according to what measurement of the cubit we use), with a suit of bronze armor weighing about 125 pounds and a spear that had a point weighing 15 pounds, Goliath must have presented a formidable picture. No wonder the Israeli soldiers quaked in fear before him. For 40 days, Goliath had challenged someone, anyone to fight with him as he stood in the valley of Elah some 15 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Twice a day in the morning and evening, he had taunted the cowardly Israelites. We can just imagine how the morale of the Hebrew army had degenerated as fear and terror permeated the camp. By the time David arrived on the scene, Saul and his soldiers had probably already conceded defeat in their minds.

Now here comes David on the scene. He immediately sizes up the situation. There is a giant named Goliath who stands before the Israeli army and victory. And David somewhat naively to his fellow compatriots asks *who is this Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*

2. Let's move now to see the obstacles to courage - for David faced 2 major obstacles.

First, there was the inner obstacle. David wasn't a trained soldier. He wasn't even old enough to be in

the army. David had been a shepherd to this point in life. He certainly must have had thoughts of inadequacy as he looked over this situation. But nobody else was doing anything, and something had to be done. So he rose above his own lack of formal training and natural hesitations.

But there was not only an inner obstacle that David faced, but there was also an outer obstacle - and that was criticism. David's older brother wasn't happy with the baby of the family pointing out the obvious features of the predicament that they were in, was he?

READ 1 Sam. 17:28:

²⁸ *When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle."*

Now we certainly can understand some of Eliab's chagrin. He didn't want to be shown up by his little brother. It was an embarrassing situation for him. But it is interesting to note that all 3 of his attacks against David were ungrounded. *Why have you come down here?* This question assumes that David initiated this trip to satisfy his own curiosity. We know from the text that Jesse sent David on this mission and that David was just obeying his father's directives. *With whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert?* Not only sheep, but few sheep suggesting that David's job is not only menial but also trivial. But verse 20 is careful to tell us that David made arrangements for his flock before he left on his mission. He was conscientious in his duty. Eliab's 3rd attack was against David's motives. *I know how conceited and wicked your heart is.* But we know that David's heart was not conceited and wicked. In fact, we have already been told that he was a man after God's own heart. David just wanted God to be glorified as He should be, and it grieved him to witness this pagan cursing God.

Whenever we attempt to overcome giants in our lives, we will also face inner and outer obstacles. Giants are foreboding. It is natural that we feel inadequate and unprepared. We will often lack confidence and wonder if we have the abilities to slay them. But this is good for it drives us to our source of strength and courage. Just as David trusted in the Lord for the victory, so we must also trust in God if victory is to be secured. And there will always be the criticism. Criticism will always be there because there are thousands of people around us that have already surrendered to the giants in their lives and they don't want anyone else to defeat their giants either for the victory of others just magnifies their own cowardice in their eyes. If we are to have the courage to defeat giants we will have to overcome these inner and outer obstacles.

3. Now comes the test of courage - David approaches Saul and asks for the privilege of fighting Goliath. Where in the world could a young man like this get such courage? How could David think that he

could succeed where Israeli's best had failed? How could he think that he could just walk in from off of the farm and defeat this giant who had gone through all of the best military training available?

The text gives to us the answer. First, David's theology was the foundation for his courage. It is obvious that David knew God. David had already been anointed by Samuel to be the next king. David knew that Goliath had defiled the righteous name of God and he was in the wrong. And David knew that he would be in the right be opposing such a blatant attack against the true and living God. When David approached Goliath and was taunted and called a dog, his only answer was, *You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defiled.* It was David's view of God that gave him the absolute conviction that he was in the right - and this gives a foundation for courage in a person's life.

Second, David drew upon disciplined preparation for courage. Saul tried to get David to wear his own armor. Now Saul undoubtedly had the best of intentions - for his armor would have been the best available. But David knew that he couldn't do his best in Saul's armor. For one thing, Saul was a large man himself. He stood head and shoulders above other men in his day. And David was in his latter teenage years. He likely hadn't grown to full stature himself - and he never would reach the stature of Saul even as a man. David knew that he would be at his best if he drew upon his disciplined preparation. For while other shepherds were wasting away their time, laying around and being lazy, David had perfected some skills with the discipline of practice. He had played his harp until he was one of the finest musicians in the country, of the caliber to play in the royal palace. And he had target practiced with that sling until he had the confidence that he could place that stone exactly where he wanted.

It is interesting how David took the initiative in the battle against Goliath. Goliath was somewhat disarmed by David's unconventional methods. David's lack of armor lead Goliath to be a little bit sloppy. When David saw his opportunity, he took off at a fast run and on the run hit Goliath right in the forehead with a stone. You don't make a shot like that unless you have practiced for a long, long time. David's disciplined practice gave him a foundation for courage.

And in the third place, David's drew upon successful past experiences for the courage that he needed. He reminded himself and Saul about the bear and the lion that he had killed defending his sheep. God had been with him then and he had been successful. God would not let him down now in his time of need. David used the momentum from past successes to encourage him for the challenge of fighting the Giant Goliath.

So we can now see how all that we have been studying these past weeks begins to fit together in our gathering the courage needed to defeat giants that would hinder our finding purpose in life.

We must have a right theology - we get this from seeing the true nature of God and of life from God's word. We get this from our realization that God has ordained a path for our lives from before we were even born as we saw from Psalm 39 and 139.

We must be properly prepared in life. We prepare ourselves by following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ having the proper balance in our lives.

And then we draw upon the past evidences of God's grace as we trust in Him for victory today. And just as God gave David courage to fight the giant that threatened the wellbeing of His people, so God will give to us the courage to defeat the giants in our lives that threaten to hinder our spiritual growth and development.

4. Finally, notice with me the rewards of courage - and the rewards were 2 fold.

First, the people of God benefited from David's courage for there was a great deliverance from the oppression of the Philistines for the Israelites. We can almost imagine the dramatic moments when Goliath fell unconscious from the stone which hit him in the forehead. When David rushed up to him, finishing him off by cutting off his head, there would have undoubtedly been a moment of shocked silence from both sides. Then, all of the sudden, the Philistines started to run in panic - and the Israelites would have started running right behind them chasing them all the way back to the walled Philistine cities of Gath and Ekron. What a wonderful deliverance! Moments before, Saul's army had been a demoralized, whipped group of men. Now they were the confident, aggressive pursuers. David's courage had given them new courage. And so it is that courage is contagious in life. One courageous Christian who is willing to battle the giants of his or her life can give courage to others in the battle to fight the good fight of faith as well.

And David also received personal rewards. We are out of time this morning, so I don't have time to deal with the controversial passage at the end of this chapter. For after all is said and done, Saul calls his general Abner to him and tells him to find out whose son that young giant-killer is. Some have wondered why Saul would ask such a thing when it was obvious that he was already familiar with David. After all, chapter 16 ends with the account of David playing his musical instrument in Saul's palace to soothe his troubled spirit. Saul's familiarity with David was one reason why he probably allowed such an untrained, young man to go out to meet Goliath in the first place - he knew something of the character of this young man. But we must remember that Saul didn't ask who David was - he rather asked who David's father was. There is no reason to assume that Saul had ever met Jesse personally. And Saul wanted to honor the father of this hero by removing him from the tax roles as he had promised to do.

Anyway, David certainly received many personal rewards from his courageous act. And aside from the

wealth that he was given and the opportunity to marry into the King's own family, he would go down in the annals of Jewish history as the young man who killed the giant, Goliath.

What are some of the giants in your life? Have they paralyzed your quest in finding purpose and meaning in life? God has a plan for your life. He will give to you the courage needed to slay the giants that stand in the way as you follow the example of this courageous teenager, David.