

## **"TRIUMPH OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT: FELLING GOLIATH"**

**July 9, 2017**

**1 Samuel 17 (excerpts, *The Message*)**

*One of the most familiar, and beloved, stories of the Israelite people is the story of how the young boy, David, God's chosen hero, defeated the giant, Goliath. The people of Israel needed their heroes, and David fit the bill to a "T." Hear with new ears the old story, so that we might discover what the Spirit is saying to the church. From 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, Chapter 17:*

The Philistines were on one hill, the Israelites on the opposing hill, with the valley between them.

A giant nearly ten feet tall stepped out from the Philistine line into the open, Goliath from Gath. He had a bronze helmet on his head and was dressed in armor—126 pounds of it! He wore bronze shin guards and carried a bronze sword. His spear was like a fence rail—the spear tip alone weighed over fifteen pounds. His shield bearer walked ahead of him.

Goliath stood there and called out to the Israelite troops, "Why bother using your whole army? Am I not Philistine enough for you? And you're all committed to Saul, aren't you? So pick your best fighter and pit him against me. If he gets the upper hand and kills me, the Philistines will all become your slaves. But if I get the upper hand and kill him, you'll all become our slaves and serve us. I challenge the troops of Israel this day. Give me a man. Let us fight it out together!"

When Saul and his troops heard the Philistine's challenge, they were terrified and lost all hope.

Each morning and evening for forty days, Goliath took his stand and made his speech. David, the youngest son of Jesse, heard him bellow and stomp about.

The Israelites, to a man, fell back the moment they saw the giant—totally frightened. The talk among the troops was, “Have you ever seen anything like this, this man openly and defiantly challenging Israel?”

David did not fear the giant Goliath, and he told his brothers so. The things David was saying were picked up and reported to Saul. Saul sent for him.

“Master,” said David, “don’t give up hope. I’m ready to go and fight this Philistine.”

Saul answered David, “You can’t go and fight this Philistine. You’re too young and inexperienced—and he’s been at this fighting business since before you were born.”

David said, “I’ve been a shepherd, tending sheep for my father. Whenever a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I’d go after it, knock it down, and rescue the lamb. If it turned on me, I’d grab it by the throat, wring its neck, and kill it. Lion or bear, it made no difference—I killed it. And I’ll do the same to this Philistine pig who is taunting the troops of God-Alive. GOD, who delivered me from the teeth of the lion and the claws of the bear, will deliver me from this Philistine.”

Saul said, “Go. And GOD help you!”

Then Saul outfitted David as a soldier in armor. He put his bronze helmet on his head and belted his sword on him over the armor. David tried to walk but he could hardly budge.

David told Saul, “I can’t even move with all this stuff on me. I’m not used to this.” And he took it all off.

Then David took his shepherd's staff, selected five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the pocket of his shepherd's pack, and with his sling in his hand approached Goliath.

As the Philistine paced back and forth, his shield bearer in front of him, he noticed David. He took one look down on him and sneered—a mere youngster, apple-cheeked and peach-fuzzed.

The Philistine ridiculed David. “Am I a dog that you come after me with a stick?” And he cursed him by his gods.

“Come on,” said the Philistine. “I’ll make roadkill of you for the buzzards. I’ll turn you into a tasty morsel for the field mice.”

David answered, “You come at me with sword and spear and battle-ax. I come at you in the name of GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies, the God of Israel’s troops, whom you curse and mock. This very day GOD is handing you over to me. I’m about to kill you, cut off your head, and serve up your body and the bodies of your Philistine buddies to the crows and coyotes. The whole earth will know that there’s an extraordinary God in Israel. And everyone gathered here will learn that GOD doesn’t save by means of sword or spear. The battle belongs to GOD—he’s handing you to us on a platter!”

That roused the Philistine, and he started toward David. David took off from the front line, running toward the Philistine. David reached into his pocket for a stone, slung it, and hit the Philistine hard in the forehead, embedding the stone deeply. The Philistine crashed, facedown in the dirt.

That’s how David beat the Philistine—with a sling and a stone. He hit him and killed him. No sword for David!

*Here ends the lesson. Let us see how we might apply it to our lives.*

Who, or what, is your Goliath, you young Davids of post-modern Christian faith?

If you grew up going to church, just like our children today you undoubtedly heard the story of David and Goliath. Maybe you had a big picture book of Bible stories that you had your parents or grandparents read to you until you were old enough to read it for yourself. Such an oversized Bible stories book might have sat on the shelf in your room as did mine alongside Grimm's Fairy Tales, the Wizard of Oz, and Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes.

I loved my Bible Stories book produced by Goldenbooks. It had large print stories and full-page, full-color stories such as The Creation, Noah and the Ark, Abraham and Isaac, and David and Goliath. I especially loved David and Goliath, seeing how I was a shrimp boat for most of my young life—well, for my **whole** life actually, and I had lots of Goliaths threatening me at every turn.

As a childhood asthmatic, I faced the Goliath that stole away my breath at night while I tried to sleep. He would come into my dark bedroom in the early hours and choke off my airways. My parents would have to chase him away, and sometimes they would have to whisk me away to the hospital because Goliath had nearly defeated me.

As a young adult, Goliath was a college setting 2500 miles away from my home. This Goliath challenged me in every class, during every exam, in every awkward social gathering, and on every occasion, due to lack of funds, when I could not come home for a holiday. I wanted to quit school so many times! I wanted to lay down my sword and my shield, and give in to the giants that taunted me, scared me, and chased down my dreams.

I remember being David to the Goliath of law school, one of only nine women in my class, one of only three Colorado students in a sea swimming with over privileged, overconfident, and over rude male, Texan wannabe lawyers, judges, and heirs apparent to vast estates and ranch holdings. My professor, who insisted on calling me, "Honey" and

"Hon" in class, never saw the stone coming at his mouth from my slingshot of social justice.

I remember standing in the shadow of giant Goliath the day my first parent died, too. He came in the person of Death and that day he won the first round of battle against me. He won again nine years later as he took my other parent. I fought against him—I fight against him all too often, it seems. As Goliath slashes away at me with every succeeding, heart-numbing death, I want to give up and run away. But I don't. Curiously, in every encounter with Goliath, I get stronger.

What, or who, have been the Goliaths of your life?

Tonight's film is a special story of one nameless and faceless David, a and futureless and hopeless girl growing up in Uganda. Phiona is a girl who would remain that way—forgotten and destined for a miserable life-- but for the fact that her mind holds the key to a chess board. Phiona is destined to die poor, uneducated, and unappreciated, except that God puts a person in her life who helps her discover her

inner "David" and teaches her how to defeat the Goliath of her impoverished legacy.

The picture on the front of your bulletin is 21-year-old Phiona Mutesi, Candidate Master chess player. At age 9, she is introduced to the game when starving, she wanders in search of a cup of porridge into a room in the slums of Katwe. There she finds food *and* children who are learning to play chess. She learns the game in one day. A girl who teaches her the rules of the game explains to her, "In chess, the small one can become the big one. That's why I like it."

To Phiona, chess represents more than a way to pass the hours in a hopeless place and time. "Chess is like my life. You have to figure out your situations and the threats that come from every direction." Her teacher, Robert Katende, encourages his chess students, whom he calls his "pioneers," saying: "Planning is how you survive. Use your minds. Follow your plans, and your bishops will find safe squares!"

In her very first tournament, Phiona wins First Prize, and quickly she gains the distinction of being the Ugandan Girls Champion. Just a

few short years later, she is competing and winning in international tournaments. Along with her brothers, Brian and Richard, also talented chess players, Phiona works with her devoted teacher, Robert Katende, to bring hope to the slums and a pathway to education and a future to many youths previously languishing there.

In her chess life, Phiona wants to achieve the ranking of grandmaster. In her future life, she wants to become a doctor and bring quality medical care to the poorest people of Katwe.

How is her story even possible without God? She doesn't think it is. As her fame has grown, so has her faith. She recognizes--and tells others--how blessed her life has become because of chess. In her mother's halting willingness to allow her daughter to dream beyond selling corn maize in the streets, God has showed her how to defeat Goliath. God has armored her with an underpaid teacher who turned down a lucrative career as a water engineer to teach slum children a game that could—and does—change their lives.

God has given Phiona stones and a slingshot in the presence of persons in positions of power within the Ugandan Chess Federation that were, then in turn, called to look beyond their own prejudices and fears. God's strength and Jesus' call for justice and mercy compelled them to look beyond her tattered clothes, her street smelliness, and inability to read or write, seeing instead the talent and promise of a teenage girl invested with a rare talent for chess and an unquenchable spirit for winning.

God has been with Phiona at every turn, in every contest, every time in her life that she has faced Goliath. Just like God equipped young David, who would be King, with a slingshot, a few smooth stones, and a destiny that could not be denied, God equipped Phiona with an incredible brain, a positive spirit, and a will to be more than what her culture expected of her.

Robert tells her after one particularly tough tournament outing, "Do not be quick to tip your king, Phiona! Losses happen for all of us. What matters is how you reset the pieces and play again."

The divine-to-human connection cannot be questioned. God is using his young David to change her world and to change the way her world is viewed by others. Phiona is passing her love and knowledge of chess on to other young Ugandan girls. God is using Robert Katende to turn young persons of Katwe into the kings and queens of their own life chessboards. He continues today, through the Christian-based Sports Outreach Institute's chess academy, to bring hope to thousands of eager young students of Kampala's slums.

In 2013, Phiona was invited to the Women of the World Summit in New York City, where she was honored and given a cash prize and the title of "Woman of Impact." She used the prize to promote chess and education among the impoverished girls in Uganda, helping them to forestall having children and to see a fruitful and progressive life for themselves.

In her first girls-only chess clinic, Phiona expected 50 participants to show up for class. She had over 400 crowd the room, prompting the need to call in many, many female teachers and role

models for the girls. These teens were clamoring to learn chess and to learn how to improve their lives. Recently, Phiona was recognized as "the most influential athlete in Uganda" during the Queen's Baton Relay in the Commonwealth Games. Only one athlete from each country is selected for this title.

Like David, Phiona commits to take her fame at the felling of her Goliath and use it for kingdom-building for God. With her brothers, she intends one day to open a medical clinic in the slums of Kampala to serve the world's forgotten children. She has a Facebook page and a Foundation. If her story compels you, there you can find ways to help her realize this humanitarian dream. Interestingly, her website quotes Micah 6:8 as its mission statement: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

You know, you watch a movie like this one or you read a book such as, "The Queen of Katwe," and you are *forced* to walk humbly with God. When I look back on my week, when I count my frustrations at not being able to get my printer to work right, or my dogs to eat all their

dinner, they seem pretty silly. Or take my experience at Paneras on Friday. They were not able to get their blender to work and my granddaughter could not have the Mango Smoothie she was counting on. She was disappointed and I was put out at the inconvenience. I lose sight of David at these times and I elevate the most mundane, stupid things to the status of Goliath. I think this is sin, and I am as guilty as the next person in line of short-sightedness and privileged living.

We are so fortunate to have been born where we were, lived as we have lived, and been taught to read and write and add as a matter of right and not of privilege. Sure, we all have our tough stories of childhood or wartime or divorce or depression or illness or financial problems—the list is endless. And I don't belittle those knuckle-scraping times of our lives where we just don't seem to be able to lift our arms high enough to avoid dusting the pavement. But this girl's story is amazing; It is remarkable! It is in so many ways impossible but for the grace of God and the will of the human spirit.

David felled Goliath not with bombs and ballistic missiles, not with a grand sword or even a little-old .22. God gave him what he needed, and all he came to face the giant with was three little stones, a slingshot, and a whole lot of courage.

Phiona felled Goliath not with a fancy private education, a nanny, a racecar, or a fat bank account. God has given her what she needed, and all she needed to face the giant was to learn the rules of a game played with little wooden pieces and a board, an understanding of the importance of the word, "Checkmate," a patient and inspired teacher, a selfless mother who understood enough to let her daughter go find her future, and a whole lot of courage.

*May it be so for all of God's children, especially the forgotten ones.*