

Giants

*And what more shall I say?
I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson,
Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets...*

Hebrews 11:32

At the championship meet in my senior year in college, I had the chance to break a record: the 200 yard butterfly. On a good day, the 200 fly was hard. On a day where I had already raced the mile freestyle, the 1000 yard freestyle the day before, and one relay – it was near impossible. During the preliminary heats that morning, I felt alright – my arms were hurting by the end of the race, but it was the end of the season and I knew I just had to make it to the final heats that night. I made it to the finals, but when I stepped up behind that block, I knew I had nothing left. My coaches came up to me before the race and said, “I know you can do this. Keep your head down, don’t breathe, and just swim like I know you know how to.” I looked at my coach and I said, “Coach, I want to break this record. But I have nothing left. I don’t even know if I can finish this race.” My coach looked at me and said, “Go out there and swim. I’ll be proud of you no matter what. And look – your teammates are all at the end of the lane, ready to cheer you on. Go get ‘em, Scarecrow.”

There was a giant in my way that day – in the form of 200 yards of butterfly. One start. Seven turns. Eight laps. One finish. One. More. Race.

As I put on my goggles, I prayed, “God, just give me the strength to finish this race. I want to finish strong.” I stepped up onto the block, and at the gun, I gave it all I had. It wasn’t near enough to break the record, but that mountain in my way was removed. It was a hard climb, and I fought for every breath, every stroke, every turn. But with God, I was able to finish. There’s no way I could have touched that wall without His strength.

Today in our Hebrews study, we come to David, Samuel and the prophets, who faced giants of their own. David faced a literal giant and some figurative ones, while Samuel and the prophets faced many figurative giants. Their faith in the God of the Universe gave them the victory over these giants, and ultimately brought the glory back to the One in whom it belongs: God.

David

The youngest son of Jesse, David was a shepherd. And I'd be willing to bet that even if you didn't grow up in Sunday School, you've heard of him before.

What stories of David come to mind?

Perhaps you mentioned the story of David and Goliath, or that he was King of the Israelites, or maybe his flight from the other King, Saul, or maybe you mentioned that David is referred to as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). David is no stranger to us, but often we overlook the things that he did that *weren't* so great: namely, his lust after and affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. But, let's start from the beginning of David's story.

The prophet Samuel probably showed up at Jesse's door without warning, and without much explanation. Jesse starts bringing his sons in front of Samuel and each one Samuel doesn't choose. Finally, after all of the present sons had passed by, Samuel says, "The Lord has not chosen these. Are these all the sons you have?" (1 Samuel 16:10-11) David, his youngest son, is tending the sheep, and Samuel says that they will not sit down until he arrives. When David comes in, Scripture describes him as "ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features." (1 Samuel 16:12). And this man, the shepherd, the youngest son, is who God chose to be the next King of Israel.

And yet, David didn't go straight from the fields to the throne. He actually entered the service of the current King, Saul, first as a musician and then as an armor bearer. While in Saul's service, David stands up to fight Goliath, the Philistine Giant, with just a sling and a stone, and God on his side. After defeating Goliath, Saul becomes jealous of David, and tries to kill him. After escaping a close call with death at the hand of Saul, David goes on to fight and win many battles, and the people begin to exalt him higher than Saul, singing songs about him in the streets. Saul becomes consumed with pursuing and killing David, but David spares Saul's life more than once, and God protects David from Saul. After Saul's death, David is finally anointed King. His success on the battlefield continues, and God promises him a bright future for his family.

Read 2 Samuel 7:5-16.

I don't think David realized the extent of what God was promising him. In fact, God was promising that His Son would be a descendent of David, that this was indeed the lineage of not just a King, but the King of Kings.

But as amazing as David seems up to this point in the story, he's about to show just how human he is, and just how much he can screw up.

To begin with, David sends Joab out with the king's men to battle. Traditionally, the king would lead his men out into battle, but this time, David did not. Then, things really start to go downhill.

Read 2 Samuel 11:1-27.

In just one chapter, David has broken two commandments (Do not commit adultery and do not murder). Even though Uriah's murder was not by his own hand, David was the one who ordered his premeditated murder. And it seems that he doesn't realize quite what he has done until the prophet Nathan pays him a visit.

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-25

Although God forgives David for his sin, there are still terrible consequences. But even though he screwed up, God doesn't pull back His promises. And David still ends up in the Hall of Faith. David's story is proof that God uses broken, sinful people for His purposes. David is proof that God doesn't give up on those who aren't perfect. David's actions are proof that faith is lived out in what we say and do. And we can't forget that David is called a man after God's own heart – a man who, in faith, defeated giants and armies, led a people, and ended up in the lineage of the King of Kings.

Samuel and the Prophets

In Old Testament times, the prophets were the men and women who brought the words of God to the people.

Which prophets come to mind from your previous study of the Word?

Probably two of the most well-known prophets are Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah. Elijah is only one of two mortal men in the Bible to be taken up into heaven without dying (Enoch is the other). Elisha is probably most well known for the healing of Naaman the leper and Isaiah, well, he gets a whole book of prophecies in the Old Testament.

But the only prophet mentioned by name: Samuel. Samuel came from humble beginnings. His mother, Hannah, was barren. Her husband's other wife had many children, and Hannah cried out to the Lord in the temple, promising to return the child to the Lord if only she could have a child. The Lord heard her cry, and Hannah gave birth to Samuel. Hannah keeps her promise, returning her only son to the service of the Lord under the priest Eli.

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-21

Samuel grew up and grew in his faith, and becomes the leader of Israel for a time, until the people ask for a king. Samuel wasn't a big fan of that request, but took it to the Lord, who appointed Saul the king over Israel. Much of Samuel's story and David's story overlap, as David was the next king over Israel when Samuel was a prophet.

Remember when Samuel was choosing from Jesse's sons for the next King of Israel? The first son that Jesse had walk before him was handsome and tall – he looked like a King. But the Lord did not choose that one. The Lord chose the shepherd, the least of the brothers. Samuel probably didn't understand why the Lord chose David, but in faith he anointed him the next King over Israel. When Israel wanted a king in the first place, Samuel didn't think it was a good idea, but in faith followed God's commands instead.

David faced a giant and, in faith, with God on his side, rose victorious. And yet David wasn't perfect. He was an adulterer and a murderer, yet God used him, and commended him for his faith. Samuel faced figurative giants – kings that lost the favor of God, confusing directions from the Lord, and the voice of the people of Israel. In the face of those giants, in faith, he still did what the Lord asked of him.

What giants are you facing today? What seems to be standing in your way? Put your faith in God today, knowing that He can move mountains, no matter how big or how small. And

remember that He can use you, no matter your past, no matter your mistakes – after all, look at who he used in the Bible – David, Samuel, and the prophets along with Rahab, Abraham, Noah, Moses, and so many more.