

“How To” - with David

2 Corinthians 6 : 3-7

Paul writes:

“We don't want anyone to find fault with our work, and so we try hard not to cause problems. But in everything and in every way we show that we truly are God's servants. We have always been patient, though we have had a lot of trouble, suffering, and hard times. We have been beaten, put in jail, and hurt in riots. We have worked hard and have gone without sleep or food. But we have kept ourselves pure and have been understanding, patient, and kind. The Holy Spirit has been with us, and our love has been real. We have had only weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left. We have spoken the truth, and God's power has worked in us.”

from 1 Samuel 17

Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and pitched camp. King Saul and the Israelites drew up their battle line to meet them. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armour of bronze weighing 125 pounds (that is, 57 kilos). Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why do you come out and line up for battle? Choose one man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us!” On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

Goliath repeats his challenge day after day – but no-one comes forward to fight him. Among the Israelite soldiers are David's older brothers.

One day Jesse gives David the job of taking them food and bringing back news for him.

Next morning, David gets up early, leaves his sheep with another shepherd and goes off to the army camp as requested.

David ran to the battle lines and greeted his brothers. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear.

David asked the men standing near him, “Who is this unbelieving Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger 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 what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?"

What David had said about Goliath was reported to King Saul, and Saul sent for him. David said to the King, "Let no-one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."

Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you".

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armour on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.

Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield-bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was only a good-looking boy and he despised him. He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field." David said to the Philistine, "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 defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone,

he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

I don't know whether you've ever read any of those "How To" books ? – How to : Win friends and influence people; How to : Get that job / Build your own home / Find the perfect partner / Grow tomatoes..... The list is endless! And people read these books because we'd all like to know how to do things better - at work; at home; at church; with friends, family, free time.. Well, this part of David's life story that we've just heard – 1 Samuel 17 - actually offers a wealth of "How To" guidance – in a whole range of situations.....We begin at the beginning..

When the Philistines invade, David's older brothers are of an age to be called up. So off they go as soldiers. But David is still too young. So he just carries on doing his everyday job - looking after the family's flock of sheep. One day his father gives him an errand – “ Take food parcels to your brothers and come back and tell me all the news”. The Bible is very careful to tell us that David makes sure that the sheep will be looked after before he sets off. And then he does exactly what his father has asked him to do.

We'll come on to Goliath in a minute ! – but isn't it significant that our first sight of David here is of a young man just doing his ordinary job; and just doing what his dad tells him to do? Sometimes, it can be easier to focus on the glamorous incidents in someone's life – and try and imagine ourselves being extraordinarily helpful or heroic like them – but for most of us, for most of the time, life is about dealing with the ordinary, mundane things, the things we do to earn a living or run a home; all the simple chores, including fetching and carrying

So I think the first proof we have that David is a real hero is the way he deals with the Everyday.. he takes responsibility; he's conscientious - and he does what needs to be done - without moaning about it.

It is perfectly obvious from what he does later on in life that looking after sheep – and running errands – are not making the most of his talents! – but he does these things anyway; he pulls his weight in the family and he takes his responsibilities seriously.

I suppose we all have things to do that aren't in themselves exciting – or perhaps things that don't make proper use of our talents - but one of the marks of God's people is that they aim to do their best, even in the simple things. People should be able to rely on us when we take something on. And Jesus himself made it clear that we need to be faithful in little things before we can be given more important ones. The Bible tells us that whatever we do, we should do it for God's glory – which means even the simplest jobs become dignified and significant.... Whatever our own equivalent of shepherd and delivery boy might be, let's take pride in doing them right!

Doing what his father's told him to brings David to the Israelite camp. The Bible actually says he gives the food parcels to the appropriate person first – *job done!* - and then he goes to find his brothers... and at that point he hears Goliath's challenge. The effect of the challenge on the soldiers is dramatic – they draw back in horror. But the effect on David is quite different. Now it could have partly been the confidence of youth ... But there's one feeling in David that overrides any other – and that is, righteous indignation. “Who is this unbelieving Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” *How dare he?! Who does he think he is?!* Perhaps some of the men he said this to felt a bit dismissive: “If you were a soldier, lad, you'd not feel quite so uppity! – no-one's going to take him on!” But the effect on David's eldest brother is more serious and more personal. Big brothers can be very unforgiving when they think a kid brother is getting above himself! And big brother Eliab turns on David. “What are you doing here anyway?” – a bit unfair, considering he was sent. And then - “Who did you leave those few sheep in the desert with?” In other words, you only do a piddling little job – and p'raps you're not even doing that properly! Then we get the full frontal attack – “I know how conceited you are”! “I know how wicked your heart is!” Now it's down to name-calling : “You always were a bighead! And a nasty piece of work!” And on top of that – “you only came to watch the fight” – *well, what would be so bad about that?* – except that Eliab isn't going to fight – and neither is anyone else – so what's cheeky little David doing there, making them feel even worse?!

It's an example of the way families can fight. Especially when people feel they're in competition.... No doubt David has had his fair share of attacks from his big brothers over the years . But how does he deal with it? Well, rather wisely, I think. Because he avoids the 2 obvious mistakes. *no.1* – He could burst into tears or creep away and go home – in other words, he could let Eliab just squash him / rob him of his confidence... Being criticised – especially in a family – especially over and over - can certainly do that to people. *no 2* – David could start to

argue with Eliab, point for point – “I’m here because Dad sent me – I left the sheep with old Benjamin “ – etc etc. But Eliab isn’t arguing rationally – he probably knows very well that he’s not being fair –he’s really just letting off steam. David would gain nothing by trying to discuss things rationally – on the contrary, it would get Eliab even more worked up! What David does do is just reply fairly briefly: “Now what have I done? Can’t I even speak?” It’s a protest at this outburst – it’s a few words of self-defence – but it’s short and sweet and aimed at finishing the conversation – [those questions are rhetorical – he’s not looking for an answer!] By saying what he says, David shows he’s not a doormat – he marks the fact that he thinks his brother’s being unreasonable – but he’s not going to engage and have a quarrel.

If we have to face someone else’s temper; if we find ourselves personally attacked, then David is a good role model. We shouldn’t let the person get us down. We shouldn’t waste time arguing. But for the sake of our own self-respect, and for the sake of justice, we mark the fact we’re being treated unreasonably. And then we should, if at all possible, just get away - to prevent any more trouble – and to give the other person a chance to calm down.

I imagine David just walking away from Eliab at this point – and walking on - until someone rushes up and summons him to come and see the king! It seems David’s brave, indignant words about Goliath have already caused a bit of a stir....

And so now we see David with King Saul himself!

We can be impressed by the fact that he knows how to behave – he speaks respectfully in the third person – and then he immediately offers to take up Goliath’s challenge. One of the things that shows is that David is actually still focused on the bigger picture. He’s not been distracted by the spat with his older brother. It’s as if David immediately responded to Goliath’s words with a real sense of mission – he was incensed at the insult to God (as he saw it) - and he also felt a real calling to defend God’s name and take on the Philistine himself.

There are times when we hear something – a talk about a particular charity – someone asking for help with a particular job – and we just feel drawn. That’s something I could do! Something I could get involved in! In however small a way, we feel a sense of mission.

When our youngest son was 14, his youth group had an evening about a Christian organisation called CRUSOE. CRUSOE organises teams of young people to visit places overseas, get experience of some kind of church work –like children’s groups, or worship in schools – and also to

do something practical to help the local community. Paul came home from youth group that night absolutely full of it – he'd just felt immediately - this is for me! God wants me to do this!

That summer he spent two weeks working with children, helping paint an orphanage – and seeing real poverty in a developing economy for the first time. Eight years on, he's about to qualify as a professional development economist, with a commitment to trade justice and the better use of aid.. His whole career choice started with his feeling of mission that evening as a teenager.

David has this feeling of mission – and he has not let Eliab distract him – or demoralise him. Let's make sure that if God draws us to something, we test out the call; we follow it through ; and we don't let other things get in the way.....

When David makes his offer to fight Goliath, King Saul does protest - but he doesn't protest very long. After all, no-one else has come forward...

And so he gives David his blessing – and his full support.

In fact, he calls for his own battle dress and he puts it on David : tunic, suit of armour, bronze helmet and great big sword on his hip.....

Trouble is, Saul is not just a full-grown man – he actually stands head and shoulders above most other people. This heavy armour is not just a whole new experience for David – it is simply miles too big! You can just imagine him waddling around in it, completely at a loss. But the king has done him a great honour with all this stuff – what's he going to say?!

Well, he deals with it. "I can't go in these – I'm just not used to them." I'm sure he's really apologetic – but he gives Saul the whole lot back.

Sometimes other people can really, really help us. And sometimes other people can actually try and help us in a way that just doesn't suit.

Perhaps they see what would work for them but don't see it wouldn't work for us. It's so important to judge for ourselves what we feel comfortable with.... To make best use of our own talents / our own experience – and to rely on God's leading rather than the influence of other people, however well-intentioned.

And so we reach the climax of our story – David's triumph over Goliath.

The contest is a complete mismatch – Goliath is immensely large and strong. His armour alone weighs – well, more than I do!

I think it's a huge encouragement to us that when we face a threat, however large, God is able to help us face the challenge.

David says : "the battle is the Lord's".

It's an important truth to hold onto. If we know we're doing what God wants, if we're following God's way, then whenever threats and problems

come, the battle is the Lord's. It's something we can hand over in prayer and God will be there with us as we face up to it and sling at it whatever we have. There's nothing that gives us more courage than knowing that God is right there with us in the battle.

There's just so much to learn from David in this chapter –
 How to do our everyday jobs as part of our service to God
 How to deal with criticism and spite – without quarrelling and
 without losing our self-respect
 How to respond to that sense of mission that God gives
 How to deal with well-meaning but misjudged help from other
 people
 And – most famously – how to face a giant problem -
 and rely on God to see us through. Amen.

*We're going to pray now – and we shall draw on our reading from Paul's
 letter to the Corinthians...*

Let us pray.

Almighty and loving God,
 Increase our faith in your power to help us, whatever we face.
 Thank-you for the encouragement of sharing David's story.
 And help us to live the way Paul did – to try hard not to cause problems
 for others – but to be considerate; to show we serve you, even in our
 ordinary everyday activities.
 Help us to be patient, even when times are hard. Give us the stamina to
 be hard-working. Help us to live pure lives in accordance with your laws;
 to be understanding, patient and kind to others. May we draw on the
 Holy Spirit for real love for other people. May our only weapons be the
 weapons of righteousness and truth, and may you work in us - and
 through us- in power. In Jesus' Name , Amen.
