

The Faith of David

Devotional Reading: [Psalm 27](#)
Background Scripture: [1 Samuel 17:1–58](#)

[1 Samuel 17:31–37, 45, 48–50](#)

³¹ What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

³² David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

³³ Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

³⁴ 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, ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁸ As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. ⁴⁹ 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 facedown on the ground.

⁵⁰ 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.

Key Text

The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”—[1 Samuel 17:37a](#)

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 1: Profiles in Faith

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Give the reason for David’s confidence.
2. Explain the most important parts of David’s initiative.
3. State one or more ways to have the courage of David when facing the figurative Goliaths of life.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Courage Without Risk?
- B. Lesson Context

I. David’s Initiative (1 Samuel 17:31–37)

- A. Bold Volunteer (vv. 31–32)
- B. Skeptical King (v. 33)
Weak Believer, Strong God

- C. Confident Rejoinder (vv. 34–37)

II. Battle’s Outcome (1 Samuel 17:45, 48–50)

- A. David’s Taunt (v. 45)
The Christian’s Source of Courage
- B. Combatants’ Movements (v. 48)
- C. David’s Victory (vv. 49–50)

Conclusion

- A. Faith and Responsibility
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Philistines Fuh-*liss*-teenz or *Fill*-us-teenz.

Goliath Go-*lye*-uth.

terminus ad quem (Latin) *tur*-muh-nus ehd **kwem**.

Sabaoth (Hebrew) *Sab*-a-oth.

Introduction

A. Courage Without Risk?

Many individuals in history are known for their courage. One such person is Rosa Parks (1913–2005), a Black woman who lived in the segregated South. On December 1, 1955, she challenged segregation laws by refusing to take a different seat on a city bus after the seat she was sitting in was redesignated from “Black” to “White.” This turned out to be a key incident in the American Civil Rights Movement.

Rosa believed in having the courage to do what is right. Courage by definition is exercised at the risk of something—a person’s freedom or even one’s very life. If there’s no risk involved, then there’s no courage involved.

B. Lesson Context

The events of today’s text occur sometime before 1010 BC, the year that Israel’s kingship transitioned from Saul to David. Prior to the events of this lesson’s text, the prophet Samuel had anointed David to be Saul’s successor as king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:1–13). Having been rejected by the Lord, Saul’s days as king were numbered (see 1 Samuel 15). Even so, Saul looked on David with favor and employed him in personal service (16:14–23)—at least for a time.

David entered the army encampment in 1 Samuel 17 as part of an episode of an Israelite war with the Philistines. David was a late arrival due to the fact that he had been left to tend sheep while his older brothers went off to war (1 Samuel 17:13–14). After several weeks, the war degenerated into something of a stalemate. But the Israelite army seemed ready to break due to low morale (17:11, 24). The reason was the relentless taunts of a Philistine named Goliath, who stood about 9’9” tall (17:4–10). As our text begins, David had heard the taunt (17:23) as well as the promise of reward for defeating Goliath (17:25–27). David had also just borne the criticism of his oldest brother for an apparent neglect of duty to attend to sheep left in David’s care (17:28).

I. David’s Initiative

(1 Samuel 17:31–37)

A. Bold Volunteer (vv. 31–32)

31. What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

What David said seems to be his volunteering to accept Goliath’s challenge to a one-on-one duel (1 Samuel 17:8–10). King *Saul* had been looking for just such a volunteer (17:25), and David’s inquiry was promptly passed up the chain of command to the king himself. Saul, for his part, seemed to waste no time in sending for David.

32. David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

This verse is linked to 1 Samuel 17:11, 24, which reveal the emotional state of the army. History is witness to many instances where low morale was the decisive element in an army’s defeat (compare

[Deuteronomy 20:3](#); [1 Samuel 14:15](#)). Low morale leads to (and results from) fear, fear leads to panic, and panic leads to rout. David, a shepherd and a musician, was also “a brave man and a warrior” ([16:18](#)). As such, he instinctively knew all this, thus the direct and immediate offer we see from him in the verse at hand.

B. Skeptical King (v. 33)

33. Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

This was not the first time that King *Saul* had encountered *David*. The two were actually well acquainted, given David’s service in the king’s court heretofore ([1 Samuel 16:14–23](#)). Saul’s reference to David’s youth may indicate that the young man was under the age of 20, thus ineligible to be in the army ([Numbers 1:3](#); [26:2](#)). We know that David was age 30 when he became king ([2 Samuel 5:4](#)); this fact establishes what is called a *terminus ad quem*, which is a final limiting point in time. But David’s ascension to the throne is at least several years away at this point in the text. This lends credence to the “under age 20” proposal.

King Saul could only see the contrast between David as a weak youth and the Philistine as *a warrior from his youth*. But David stepped forward with a confidence that seemed to defy this logic.

What Do You Think?

What current situation requires you to show brave leadership?

Digging Deeper

Can you choose to grow in courage?

How, or why not?

Weak Believer, Strong God

Janna identified as a “young Christian.” She began to profess belief in Jesus just a few years ago, so when an idea popped into her head to start a Bible study with her non-Christian friend Sammie, she suppressed it. Sammie, who had been a friend since their freshman year in college, noticed a change in Janna. Aware of Janna’s weekly church attendance, Sammie would occasionally ask questions about her friend’s faith.

Janna had been praying for the courage to dive deeper with Sammie and others regarding Christianity. But leading a Bible study sounded like a job for ... well ... *leaders*. Janna had never taught anyone anything before.

Saul’s feedback to David on his chance of defeating Goliath echoed Janna’s self-talk. David was young in years; Janna was young in Christianity. But their weaknesses are infinitely less relevant than God’s strength. As the apostle Paul noted centuries after the life of David, God’s power is made perfect in human weakness ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). When have you experienced this personally—if ever?

—D. D.

C. Confident Rejoinder (vv. 34–37)

34. 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,

David’s salutation *your servant* reveals self-awareness of his status as being subservient to King Saul. David maintained this respectful attitude consistently, even when being hunted down later by an increasingly irrational and paranoid Saul (see [1 Samuel 24](#) and [26](#)). Even so, the statement in the verse at hand indicates a pushback against Saul’s skepticism. Those who think that it’s safer to tend sheep rather than being in the front line of battle should think again ([17:13–15](#))!

35. “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.

David established his capabilities by explaining encounters with predators that are often more dangerous than human adversaries. The sequence of events is noteworthy in being *struck/rescued/killed*, not *struck/killed/rescued*. The actual sequence indicates David’s focus had been to deliver the victim lamb from the jaws of a predator that he had only wounded, which increased the danger to David. The *struck/killed/rescued* sequence would have indicated an intent to ensure the predator was dead first; the additional time this would have required before the rescue of the lamb put the lamb at greater risk while decreasing the risk to David. His choice reveals something about his character (compare [John 10:11–13](#)).

36a. “Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them,

David believed his work as a shepherd warding off predators had prepared him to act quickly, skillfully, and decisively, more than qualifying him for battle. The phrase *uncircumcised Philistine* is thoroughly derogatory and dismissive (see also [Judges 14:3](#); [1 Samuel 17:26](#); [2 Samuel 1:20](#)).

36b. “because he has defied the armies of the living God.

The phrase *the living God* is a favorite of biblical writers, appearing more than two dozen times across both Old and New Testaments. It stands in direct contrast to lifeless idols representing fictitious gods ([Leviticus 26:30](#); [Psalm 106:28](#); [Jeremiah 10:14](#); [16:18](#); [51:17](#); [Habakkuk 2:19](#)). There is only one God, and the Philistines in general and Goliath in particular oppose him. How foolish!

Joshua had declared hundreds of years previously that the Israelites would know that the living God was among them when he drove out their enemies ([Joshua 3:10](#)). Hundreds of years after David, the prophet Jeremiah equated “the living God” with “the true God” ([Jeremiah 10:10](#)). David was within this stream of faith, confident of the Lord’s present, powerful, and ongoing involvement in history.

37a. “The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Here, David can be said to be using a “from the greater to the lesser” type of argument. Lions and bears are often more dangerous than human opponents, especially in an era before gunpowder. A lion may weigh between 265 and 550 pounds; bears may weigh about the same. Their paws conceal deadly claws. Both predators are well equipped for and inclined toward paws-on combat. Biblical writers sometimes compare God’s wrath to the tactics of lions and bears ([Lamentations 3:10–11](#); [Hosea](#)

13:7–8). Other passages use bear-and-lion imagery to make vital and radical points ([Proverbs 28:15](#); [Amos 5:19](#); [Revelation 13:2](#)). Since *the Lord* had *rescued* David from these more dangerous foes that specialize in ambush, would the Lord also not do so regarding a non-ambush situation with *this Philistine*?

The situation at hand involved a change of tactics by the Philistines from their previous war against King Saul and the Israelites. Rather than being characterized by relative sizes of forces ([1 Samuel 13:2, 5, 15; 14:2](#)), maneuvers ([13:3, 16–18](#)), and quality of weapons ([13:19–22](#)), the outcome of the current war was to be decided by a one-on-one combat (see [17:8–10](#)). Victory in a previous war against the Philistines had been set in motion by two Israelites defeating at least 20 Philistines ([14:6–14](#)). The Lord had been behind that victory ([14:15](#)), and David expected him to be behind the victory to come as well.

What Do You Think?

What situations from your past give you confidence in your own abilities?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance confidence in yourself and in the Lord so that it doesn't become arrogance or yield dependence on yourself?

37b. Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

King *Saul* didn't attempt to challenge David's logic and passionate belief. Although Saul realized that he himself no longer had the favor of *the Lord* ([1 Samuel 15:10, 26; 16:14](#)), his entreaty on David's behalf seems genuine. The expressed desire is therefore a reaffirmation of what Saul had previously been told regarding David's favor with the Lord ([16:18](#); compare [20:13](#)). This prayer expression gives us insight into Saul's belief that the Lord would still act on Israel's behalf. Later, the Lord's favor toward David and disfavor toward Saul will become a source of fear for the king ([18:12](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can you encourage young people to exercise wise leadership?

Digging Deeper

What cautions need to be considered when empowering a leader of any age?

II. Battle's Outcome

([1 Samuel 17:45, 48–50](#))

A. David's Taunt (v. 45)

45. 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.”

In the intervening verses not part of our lesson text, *David* rejected wearing battle gear; instead,

he chose to take his staff, stones, and sling (1 Samuel 17:38–40).

David’s identification of each combatant’s support is insightful. For David to *come ... in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel* indicates reliance on protection from a divine source. Note that David did not say, “I come to you with a sling and a stone!” By contrast, mention of Goliath’s *sword, spear, and javelin* indicate that man’s reliance on his own skills. The nature and dimensions of his weapons as described in 1 Samuel 17:5–7 do not seem to have intimidated David in the least.

The title *the God of the armies of Israel* is unique to this passage in the pages of the Old Testament. *The name of the Lord Almighty* is also military language. The underlying word translated “Almighty” is *Sabaoth*, which you might recognize from the second stanza of the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”:

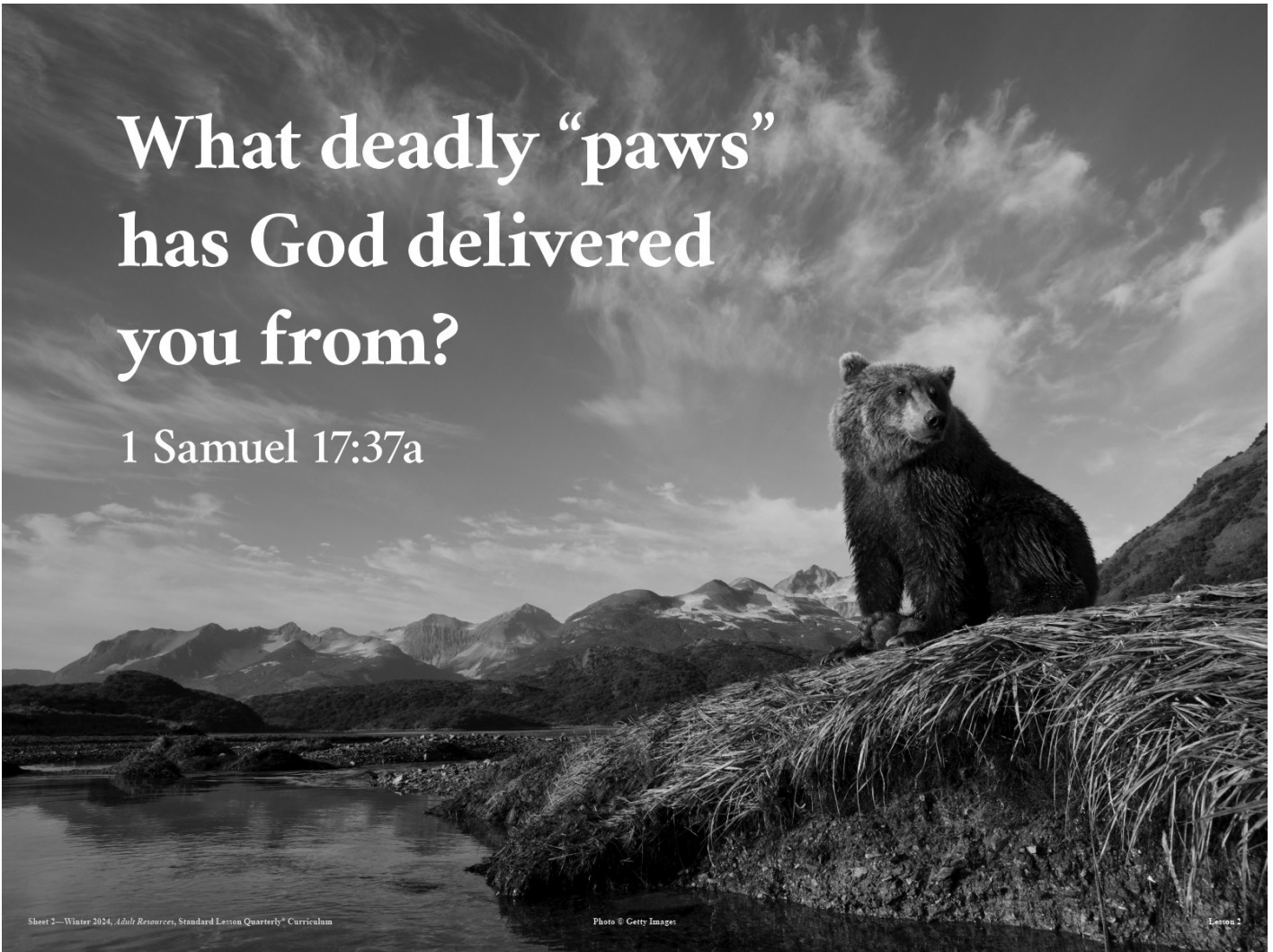
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

The Hebrew word *Sabaoth* occurs hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Used as a verb, it occurs in contexts of fighting or doing battle. Used as a noun, it often refers to elements of an army (divisions, etc.). The word is also part of the phrase “heavenly array” in Deuteronomy 4:19 to refer to literal stars in the sky (similar are 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 5; Isaiah 40:26; etc.). Some passages seem to use the word *host* to refer to angelic beings (examples: 2 Chronicles 18:18; Psalms 103:20–21; 148:2–3).

Whichever sense is intended here, the one true God is highest in the chain of command over them. David had great assurance in the fact that his Lord, the God of Israel, was the God over all things and beings. This is the same God whom Goliath had blasphemed, as evident in the phrase *whom you have defied*. This isn’t David’s conclusion; Goliath himself had said he was defying “the armies of Israel” (1 Samuel 17:10). To do so was tantamount to defying the God to whom those armies belonged (compare 2 Kings 18:28–35 with 19:4–6, 22–23).

What deadly “paws” has God delivered you from?

1 Samuel 17:37a



Visual for [Lesson 2](#). Pose this question as the class discusses today's key verse, [1 Samuel 17:37a](#).

The Christian's Source of Courage

Only an inch of playground separated the two second-grade boys at recess. Stepping furiously into Lucas's personal bubble was Jackson. Moments earlier, Lucas had shoved him to the ground during a game of tag. And it wasn't the first time.

"Stop touching me," Jackson growled.

Jackson—all 3'6", 45 pounds of him—made his threat looking up at his much taller, stronger classmate. Lucas appeared taken aback by Jackson's boldness. "Wait until my cousin sees you after school," Jackson continued.

The confusion on Lucas's face turned to anger, but he backed away. Jackson's cousin starred on the fifth-grade football team. For the rest of recess, no one tagged Jackson roughly.

Where did Jackson's confidence lie? Certainly not in his own ability to protect himself. He still had trouble opening heavy doors. He knew someone, however, whose strength was superior to his enemy's. Jackson looked not inside, but outside of himself for confidence—to a protector who just so happened to be family.

Christians in the trials of life do not work up courage by looking in the mirror. They look to the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Heaven ([Matthew 26:53](#); [Revelation 19:14](#)). When a threat arises, where do you look to first for deliverance—to your own abilities or to God? Before you answer, read [2 Kings 6:15–17](#) carefully!

—D. D.

B. Combatants' Movements (v. 48)

48. As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.

The nature of the weaponry ([1 Samuel 17:6, 40, 45](#)) and the contents of the combatants' "trash talk" ([17:44–46](#)) indicate that a relatively close-range battle was to come. No archery would be involved (contrast [2 Kings 9:23–24](#)). So each combatant moved to close the distance, presumably to reach the optimum range for their respective weapons. Goliath's sword would be useful only within arms' length; but both the sword and his arm were quite long! He might have been able to throw his spear a few yards.

David's sling, by contrast, was a type of artillery, able to launch a projectile. Under certain circumstances, a sling could out-range a bow and arrow, but only if the stone was slung in a high trajectory. This tactic (known as "indirect fire") would be suitable against a group of enemies who were close together in a tight formation; accuracy would be relatively unimportant—the stone was likely to hit *someone*. The effective range of a sling launching a stone on a low-trajectory range ("direct fire") depended on many factors but was perhaps between 50 and 100 yards.

David therefore may have seemed to have an advantage over Goliath because David's weapon had greater range. He could start to fight from further away than Goliath was able. But that advantage could be negated by Goliath's armor ([1 Samuel 17:5–6](#)). But in the final analysis the ultimate advantage was with David—the Lord was on his side.

C. David's Victory (vv. 49–50)

49. 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 facedown on the ground.

David's tremendous courage is matched by his skill with a sling. To hit a forehead—which is only a few square inches—with a sling involves incredible marksmanship! Expert slingers would come to be seen as the snipers on ancient battlefields. The weapon is deadly when slinging a stone with enough force, as here (compare [Judges 20:16](#)). Before Goliath even knew what was happening, the stone hit the very spot that his armor didn't cover. He had received the penalty due for his blasphemy ([Leviticus 24:16](#)).

With David's skill and courage duly noted, the battle was ultimately between the one, true God of Israel and the fictitious gods of the Philistines; we take special note of how each combatant saw it this way ([1 Samuel 17:43, 45–46](#)). Goliath's falling *facedown on the ground* is somewhat mirrored in an earlier incident where the Philistines' idol Dagon fell on its face (twice!) in the presence of the ark of God

(5:1–4).

50. 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.

This passage again notes the minimal weaponry of *David*. As the encounter had begun, David had predicted that he would cut off Goliath's head (1 Samuel 17:46), but David prevailed *without a sword in his hand*. This meant that for David to cut off the head of *the Philistine*, he would have to use Goliath's sword to do so. And that's exactly what happened (17:51).

This battle validated David's anointing as the king to replace Saul (1 Samuel 16:1–13). And it would not be the last time David would use Goliath's sword (21:9–10).

What Do You Think?

What are some spiritual weapons Christians have that the world might consider weak or ineffective (consider 2 Corinthians 10:4)?

Digging Deeper

What Bible verses inform your answer?

Conclusion

A. Faith and Responsibility

Faith and responsibility are key aspects of walking with God. Faith is our decision to follow the Lord, and responsibility is how we live out our faith on this earth. If we step out in confidence to bring the living God to others, we love as the Lord loves us.

My own faith and responsibility shined bright when I was a life skills educator for teenage mothers. I worked with teen moms to prepare them for life, school, and work. The mothers were often judged for being pregnant, and many people did not see their potential.

My role was not an easy one because of their lack of self-confidence and support. However, I brought my love of the Lord to work every day to show them that God's love for them was mine as well. Many times the love I demonstrated led to conversations about God's loving them. The young mothers opened up to me and appreciated my company, which I attributed to the presence of the living God in my life.

What made the job harder was the fact that many teen moms were foster children or had been sent to us by the court system. They had experienced many childhood traumas; they didn't trust adults. But that was all the more reason to show them the love of God. That was my fundamental reason for coming to work every day. I wanted them to know whom I was following as I served as his hands and feet. And that is the key factor of the violent encounter of today's text: there was no doubt whom David served and whom Goliath served. Can the same be said of you?

What Do You Think?

Consider the cautions discussed with verse 37b (above). What situation(s) might call for throwing caution

to the wind?

Digging Deeper

How can you discern when caution is the less faithful choice?

B. Prayer

Lord, may we grow in courage in our faith. May people see the love of Jesus as he guides our steps through the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Make sure others know
whom you serve.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Poll your class regarding which animals they think they could fight off bare-handed: a rat, a house cat, a goose, an eagle, a large dog, a king cobra, a crocodile, a lion, a grizzly bear. Jot notes on the board as you go. Ask volunteers to share why they feel confident about defeating one animal but not another. Then compare their responses to the results of a 2021 poll that asked a group of Americans the same question: a rat (72%), a house cat (69%), a goose (61%), an eagle (30%), a large dog (23%), a king cobra (15%), a crocodile (9%), a lion (8%), a grizzly bear (6%). Which results surprised the class? Where did the class differ significantly from these other polling results?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Lions, Tigers, and Bears?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it as indicated.

Next, say, “David, as a shepherd boy, was able to expertly fight animals that threatened his flock. Let’s see how he brought down a giant with just one stone.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read today’s Scripture aloud. Following the reading, divide the class into thirds, designating one group as the **David Group**, the second as the **Saul Group**, and the third as the **Goliath Group**. Have each group read [1 Samuel 17:1–37](#) among themselves. Distribute handouts (you create) of the following questions for in-group discussion based on the information found regarding

their assigned person. Some questions might require research beyond the assigned Scripture: 1—How would you describe this man’s character overall? 2—Does this man command respect? Why, or why not? 3—What accomplishments can this man brag about? 4—What made this man feel confident or insecure? Ask the groups to give a summary of their assigned characters based on their discussion. Then have the same groups read [1 Samuel 17:38–50](#) and consider whether their answers changed based on the events recounted there.

Option. Distribute copies of the “David and Goliath Acrostic” exercise from the activity page. Give groups time to complete as indicated before discussing their conclusions as a whole class.

Ask learners to recall examples from Scripture 1—of situations in which people trusted in God in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulty and 2—of similarly difficult situations in which people did not trust God. Did faith or lack thereof make a difference in the outcome? *Option.* Point readers to [Hebrews 11](#) as a starting point, using a concordance to find these examples in their original context; examples of faithlessness are likely also found nearby in these Old Testament texts.

Into Life

Ask the class for examples of times when faithfulness (or a lack of faith) has made a difference in their own lives. Though this could include miracles, encourage the class to highlight seemingly more ordinary ways God shows his care for his children. With partners, have learners discuss how these times have encouraged them in their own skills and in their trust in God’s plans and care.

Distribute a note card and pencil to each learner. Give learners one minute to write down at least one personal “Goliath” they can anticipate facing during the coming year. Then ask each learner to write down personal experience(s) they can recall to reinforce why they can trust God with those situations. Explain to learners that they will not be required to share these answers.

Allow time for participants to write a prayer to use during the week that encourages them to face their Goliaths with faith and trust in the Lord. Ask a volunteer to end the class in prayer that each member would have the courage of David’s faith while facing their Goliaths.