

The Problem of Fear

1. Warm-up question: Some of our fears are superficial (like spiders or clowns), others far more serious. To start us off, what is one of your superficial fears?

2. Now let's talk about the fears we face that run much deeper.
 - a. What is one of your deepest fears? And where do you think that particular fear is so prominent for you?

 - b. Some of us have personalities that are more anxious and fearful than others. Where would you plot yourself on the following scale?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lots of fear			Moderate amounts of fear				Very little fear		

 - c. When was the last time you felt like fear was holding you back from doing something important?

3. Our scripture reading for this week – the story of David versus Goliath – offers us a penetrating glimpse into the psychology of both fear and faith – and what happens when fear intersects with faith. So let's dive in. Read I Samuel 17:1-33, selected verses, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Imagine yourself as an Israelite soldier hearing this champion Philistine warrior of gigantic size and strength daring one of you to step up to fight him to the death. If you volunteer and prevail, you will save the lives of many of your people and become a great hero. As you stand there listening to Goliath issue his challenge and hear his taunts, what do you imagine you'd be thinking and feeling? What kinds of fears would swirl inside you?

 - b. Have you ever found yourself in a situation of grave physical risk? What happened? What kinds of thoughts and feelings rushed through you?

 - c. Let's also try to get inside David's head. What kinds of thoughts and feelings do you imagine he experienced in this situation?

 - d. Who do you relate to more, David or all his reluctant comrades – and why?

4. Jeff suggested that David's words to Goliath starting in verse 45 offer insight into his perspective differed from his peers and why he was so willing to step up to this fight. David said, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts. . . . This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand . . . , so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel . . . , for the battle is the Lord's."

- a. Jeff said, “When everyone else was focused only on the physical reality that surrounded them and its limitations, David was focused on the greater reality that surrounds us and its possibilities. If you really believe that a Supreme Being exists – all powerful, ever present, all loving, and completely good – that means you believe in a greater reality. That means you believe in eternity and the supernatural. If you really believe all that, you realize that your purpose in life is much greater than mere survival. If God is and you are eternal, you don’t have hoard and conserve your life.” Should our belief in a Supreme Being and eternal life affect the way we approach risky and fearful situations in our life? If so, how and why?
 - b. Jeff shared a story from the book and movie “Big Fish” where a little boy looks into a witch’s eye and sees how he will eventually die in his old age. That then frees him to act with great courage throughout his life because he knows that between now and his appointed death, nothing else can kill him. Does the fact that God promises you life after death make you more willing to do bold things in this earthly life? Does it make you less risk adverse? Why or why not?
 - c. Jeff said, “If we cling too tightly to this life, hoarding and conserving it like a scarce commodity, maybe we haven’t yet truly internalized the promise of eternal life.” Your thoughts?
5. We often make the mistake of thinking that courage is the absence of fear, but that’s not true. Fear is often a rational reaction to risky situations. Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear.” General George Patton said, “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.” In short: Fear + Faith = Courage. Faith reminds us that we are eternal, and that God is great, and that God calls us to do what’s right even when it’s risky.
- a. Tell us about a time in your life when you did something cowardly. What did you learn from that experience?
 - b. Tell us about a time in your life when you did something courageous. What did you learn from that experience?
 - c. What’s the difference between being courageous and being careless? What’s the difference between being courageous and being crazy?
 - d. Tell us about something you’re facing right now that calls for great courage. Describe what it might mean look like for you to act courageously in that situation. Do you think you can do it?
 - e. Given all we’ve talked about, what are some practical ways we can grow our courage?

I Samuel 17:1-37

17 Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. . . . ² King Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. ³ The Philistines stood on the mountain on one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. ⁴ And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. ⁵ He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armored with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. . . . ⁷ The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam. . . . ⁸ He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, 'Why have you come out to draw up for battle . . . ? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. ⁹ If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.' ¹⁰ And the Philistine said, 'Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together.' ¹¹ When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

12 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. . . . ¹³ The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. . . . ¹⁴ David was the youngest ¹⁷ Jesse said to his son David, 'Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. . . . ¹⁸ See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them. . . .'

²⁰ David . . . came to the encampment . . . and greeted his brothers. ²³ As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

²⁴ All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid. ²⁵ The Israelites said, 'Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel.' ²⁶ David said to the men who stood by him, 'What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God . . . ?'

³¹ When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. ³² David said to Saul, 'Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' ³³ Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.' ³⁴ But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. ³⁶ Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.' ³⁷ David said, 'The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the LORD be with you!'