

“Getting Through Transitions”

Based on 1 Samuel 17:32-49

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Israel found themselves in a stalemate. They were squared up against the army of the Philistines on land that had a high level of economic and strategic importance. It was land that Israel really needed to secure. But nobody wanted to fight. Both the Philistines and Israel held steady. It was as if everyone was waiting for the other side to blink, or to accidentally shoot an arrow to trigger the battle. But no one was budging. They just all stood there, frozen, not knowing what to do.

This stalemate on the battlefield revealed the frustration that everyone in Israel must have felt during this time of transition. What I mean is, there was no leadership. Saul was still technically their king. He should have been out there, leading the charge. But he was nowhere to be seen. He was abdicating his responsibility. Yet one more sign of his failure as a king. And because he was not assuming his position of leadership everything was at a standstill. Israel was stuck. In times of transition, including transitions of leadership, there is great potential to get stuck in place. With nobody calling the shots, nobody knows what to do or whether they should make a move. Being stuck like this, with no leadership and no direction, is very frustrating.

There is something else with transition that this deadlock reveals and that is fear. It appears that the Israelites were afraid of this well-organized and solid Philistine army. And they were certainly afraid of their champion Goliath. Israel's future did not look good. They feared for their lives. Everyone was afraid to fight Goliath one-on-one, knowing for sure they would be killed. They feared becoming an enslaved people again. They were afraid of losing all that they had gained. Leaderless and with no good options. That's a good recipe for fear.

Well, if David has any fear, it does not block him from responding. He is by no means frozen in place. Maybe it was his youthful exuberance. Maybe he was naïve about the predicament that Israel found

themselves in. Or maybe it was because he already knew that he was a king in waiting, anointed, filled with the Spirit, and confident of his future as well as the future of Israel. Whatever it was, David was not intimidated by Goliath or the Philistine army. Instead, in this context of frustration and fear, David was full of confidence. He had a serious amount of intestinal fortitude.

Where does his confidence come from? Surely his confidence was not placed in Saul. And he may not have had a lot of confidence in Israel's army. He seemed to have a bit of confidence in himself. At least that's what he is projecting to Saul when he expresses doubt that David has the capacity to face down and defeat Goliath. David said that there were times when he had to face down lions and bears as a shepherd. If one of those beasts took one of his sheep he would smash it in the mouth and take that sheep out of their jaws. And if they confronted him he could kill that lion or bear with his bare hands. Really? That sounds a bit preposterous. But I don't think David's confidence only was in his fighting abilities against wild beasts.

No, his confidence was rooted in God. He knew that the God that had led Israel out of slavery in Egypt, who had worked all kinds of powerful signs and wonders, who had led Israel to this point of possessing the land of promise, that surely God would somehow make a way out of no way to deliver Israel from this Philistine army and their champion Goliath. It didn't matter how dire the situation looked. God was greater than the Philistines and their gods. So that is why David was so confident that he could beat Goliath. He knew that the battle belongs to the Lord.

However, David also knew that this battle that the Lord would win had to be fought by Israel. God wasn't going to bring a big hand down from the sky and fling the Philistines aside like they were a bunch of toy soldiers. No, Israel would have to engage the Philistines in battle. Or, more specifically, someone was going to have to confront Goliath. God would take out Goliath. But it would be through the effort of David, since no one else was stepping up.

When we go through times of transition, either as an individual, a family, or even as a church, David demonstrates for us the value of having confidence in God. No matter how frustrating or fearful a time of transition is, God is sufficient. God is able to make a way out of no way. Not by magic. Not by coercion. God gets us through times of transition by working through the efforts of those who place their confidence in God. That's so important in the uncertain times of transition: to put your confidence in God and then act. Find a place where help is needed, where you can contribute, and dig in. It is those who have confidence in God who have to step up.

So with confidence in God, David steps up to do what needs done, which is to face down and kill Goliath. David doesn't just run out there on his own, however. He knows the protocol. He needs Saul's permission since he is still the king after all, even though he isn't acting very king-like. Saul tries to talk David out of it but probably not too hard. I doubt if Saul wants to be shown up by some kid. Saul knew this was a fool's errand, no matter what David said about the battle belonging to the Lord or his supposed ability to kill lions and bears with his own hands. It's probably for the best. David the shepherd boy would be the sacrificial lamb. Israel would be enslaved by the Philistines. Hopefully Saul will be able to work out some deal to at least stay alive. They would all muddle through somehow. So Saul has David try on his armor and strap on his sword. It may give the boy some protection. And, who knows. This may work out for Saul. See, if David goes out there wearing Saul's armor, including having the visor down on the helmet so no one can see his face, Israel may think that is Saul out there facing down Goliath. But when "Saul" gets killed and everyone is in a panic, Saul could run away and hide somewhere to bide his time. Maybe someday he will be able to put together a mercenary army who could then go in there and wipe out the Philistines when they least expect it. Then he would deliver the people from slavery and be a great hero.

But, that's not going to happen. David tries Saul's stuff on but it's not a good fit. It weighs him down. It doesn't feel right. And David isn't a swordsman so that won't do him any good. No, David decides to let Saul keep his things. David will confront Goliath with his own clothing

and his own gear. He's no warrior. He doesn't need to pretend he is someone else. David has the wisdom to know he just needs to be himself. David knew he didn't need to be someone else. He knew that God could use him to win this battle just as he was. So whatever ruse Saul might have been planning doesn't pan out. David was confident that God could use him just as he was to win this battle.

But, you know, it was a smart move for David to stick with who he is because it gave David an advantage over Goliath. For one thing, not being weighed down with all that armor, David could move quickly. It would be easier for him to dodge Goliath's blows with his great sword. But, the chance of Goliath even getting that close would be avoided because David's weapon of choice was not something that he would need to be close to Goliath to use. No, David's slingshot was basically a missile launcher. He would be able to hit Goliath far away from his swing. David would be able to take down Goliath before Goliath could ever get in range to do any damage to him. Goliath, of course, helped David out by not lowering the visor on his helmet, leaving his big forehead vulnerable for a well-placed river stone. And with one shot, Goliath goes down. I would say God might have had a little hand in nudging that stone along.

But now look. After this great victory, of David taking down the mighty Goliath, the people don't grab a throne and a crown and put David on it. No, he still is a king in waiting. Saul, their "leader" who was hanging out in his tent while all this was going on remains their king. The time of transition continues in spite of this great triumph of David's. Transitions can take a lot longer than we wish. People in positions of power and authority don't drift away quickly or easily. And now that David has accomplished this great feat of valor, he now has Saul's attention in a big way. Let's just say Saul isn't as enthusiastic as everyone else. David has proved himself to be a threat. And for quite some time after this victory on the battle field, Saul will seek out ways to get rid of David. So, yes, one victory wasn't enough to end this time of transition for the people Israel. Transitions can be frustrating. They can be scary. And they can stretch out for a long while.

So, whenever we find ourselves in times of transition, whether that be a change in employment, or a change of bosses, or a change in relationship status, say from married to widowhood, able bodied to disabled in some way, whatever that change is, what can we learn from David?

The first thing we learn is to trust in God. No matter what transition you are having to move through, no matter how frustrating or scary, believe that God is able. Believe that God always desires what is the very best for you. Believe that God is on your side, fighting alongside you, always at work trying to make a way forward that will be a great blessing for you. It's important to put your trust in other people who care about you. It's important to trust your own instincts and abilities. But most important of all, trust in God, who is our deliverer, our rock, our anchor in the storms of transition.

Second, do not be afraid. Or, if that's not realistic, try not to let your fears freeze you into inaction or to panic. Courage is the capacity to act in spite of fear. Fear has its benefits. It prevents us from doing stupid stuff. It is an alarm bell signifying that there is danger. Fear is a built in warning system for us. But that doesn't mean that when the fear alarm goes off we need to curl into a ball, close and lock the doors of our life and hide until the fear goes away. Times of transition are scary because we are moving into the unknown. It's prudent to be careful when you venture into the unknown. But not venturing in is not an option. Transitions happen to us and we have to make our way through them the best we can. Fear reminds us that we are in a dangerous space. But we have to find the intestinal fortitude, helped along by our trust in God, to move forward in spite of our fear. That's what courage is.

Trust in God. Do not be afraid. And third, be yourself. Do what *you* can to move forward in times of transition. David knew he didn't need to be a mighty warrior to take out Goliath. He was convinced that God could use him for that purpose just as he was, a shepherd boy. If you have some courage and are true to yourself, God can work with that. But you do have to do something. Don't be like the Israelite army and just stand around. Look around and see what is a positive productive thing you can do in whatever transition you find yourself and do that.

God is right there with you to help you as you respond the best way you know how. And don't say things like, "But, I'm not (fill in the blank)" or "but I can't (fill in the blank)." If you trust God and act with courage, then you are making yourself available for what God wants to accomplish through you. God can work with you just as you are. You don't have to be anyone other than yourself.

And finally, remember that times of transition can last longer than you would like. Most of us crave order and certainty. We have our routines. We have our relationships that mean so much to us. We have our skills and abilities that we count on to function. And when we lose any of this and we enter into a time of transition, it throws our lives out of whack. No one wants to live in a time of chaos and uncertainty for long. But, guess what. Transitions are going to take as long as they need to take and we have little say on how long that is. And if you think about it our lives are just one long transition from one phase of life to the next, until our life ends and we enter into the transition into the life to come. So maybe we shouldn't think that if we just hold on and muddle through somehow everything will sort itself out and life will be well ordered and certain. I kind of think such a life doesn't last long. No, I think we all need to settle in to the reality that our whole life is one big transition. So to make it through, let's take the lessons from David: trust God, do not be afraid, be yourself and do what *you* can do. And settle in for the lifelong adventure of transitions.