

## ***Advent 3: Facing Down Our Giants***

Ken Wilson, 12/15/19

Giants occupy a position between the **historical** and the **mythical**.  
On the mythical a very strange portion **Gen. 6: 1–4** (Alter).

Sons of God = Nephilim (fallen or causing to fall, like a bully) Next portion is a commentary on human violence, beginning with sexual violence. ***“The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.”*** (5–7)

In book of Numbers Moses sends spies into land of Promise before entering land. Spies report: ***“The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”*** This terrifies the people. Moses & Aaron bow down to people, a gesture of submission to their fear. **Joshua & Caleb** say, ***“Don’t be afraid, the Lord is with us!”*** The fearful people turn on Joshua-Caleb, ready to “pelt them with stones” but God prevents them.

Giants in Bible seem represent those who so frighten us, they seem other than/more than human. In 20<sup>th</sup> Century, rulers like Pol Pot, Hitler, Stalin. In 1920’s resurgence of anti-immigrant fever and ranks of KKK swelled supporting Jim Crow laws that targeted black people. Legalized campaign of terror including lynchings (more than 1/4 outside South, including Michigan; cross burnings in last 20 yrs in SE MI, Oakland County, Howell)

Best known giant: Goliath in 1 Sam. 17. In story (I’ll recount in a minute) Goliath is a kind of **mirror image of a corrupt king Saul**. Saul, Israel’s first king, anointed by prophet Samuel was ***“head and shoulders taller”*** than all people. **But power corrupted him**. He goes into rages that were described as “evil spirit.” David, youngest son of Jesse is summoned to sooth Saul’s rages with his lyre and songs. Imagine: King with no checks or balances on his power, falling into rages, and it is your job to calm him down.

Soon Samuel realizes Saul is bad news. He withdraws his support for Saul introduces a very tense situation in Israel: rupture between the ruler and the prophet who legitimized him.

**Sidebar:** Secular Rulers using religious people to bolster their power is nothing new. Religious leaders being duped by secular rulers is nothing new. It began with Samuel.

Back to Goliath: Philistine army, from coastal plain on Western edge of Israel (today Tel Aviv/Gaza Strip) is traversing a region of rolling hills/valleys called the **Shfelah** to attack cities of Judah in the mountains on East side of Israel. Saul hears of this and brings his army to meet the Philistines in one of the valleys of the Shfelah.

Philistines camped on northern elevated ridge of valley, Saul and his army on southern elevation. Standoff. Neither side wants to leave their high ground. Philistines try to break the standoff employing an ancient warfare convention called “**single combat**”

Day after day Goliath goes out hurling insults at Saul and his army, Strongman bully behavior designed to intimidate. And it works!

Saul’s army is terrified by Goliath, armed with 150 lbs of armor and over 8 feet tall. This kind of height usually a form of **acromegaly** caused by a tumor pressing on pituitary gland.

Meanwhile Jesse, father of David, has 3 sons in Saul’s army so he sends youngest son David, tending flocks, to the battlefield with provisions for David’s brothers. When David arrives, he can’t believe how terrified Goliath has made Saul’s army. When he comments on this, David’s oldest brother tears into him: “**Why is it you have come down, and with whom have you left that bit of flock in the wilderness? I’m the one who knows your impudence and your wicked impulses!**” *David replies, “What have I done now?”* (Obviously, he’s used to being bullied by older brothers.)

Echoes time when Israel terrified by reports of “giants in land” wanted to stone Joshua- Caleb when they said, “**Don’t be afraid!**”

When groups are intimidated-terrified by bullies, their **fear** will often **morph into anger** toward anyone who challenges the bully.

Saul hears ruckus and calls for David who offers to challenge Goliath. **Saul gives David his own armor.** David puts it on, but when he tries to walk, he staggers and says, *“I can’t use this, it’s not my style.”* Instead, he takes his **sling** and picks up **5 smooth stones** and walks down into the valley to challenge Goliath.

In fact, David is not at a disadvantage. Because he is operating from his own distinctive different than Goliath’s strength. Goliath is a heavily armored infantryman, designed for combat at close quarters and David is a young shepherd who has honed his sling skills to protect his flock from lions and bears. Accomplished slingers known to be highly accurate. Could hit birds in flight, accurate up to 200 yds; their long sling (different than sling shot) could generate speeds far in excess of best Major League pitchers

**With one shot, David brings Goliath down.**

We often face people in power or systems that exert power over us or over targeted groups by intimidation, often with a smile. And it *is* intimidating: A corrupt boss can fire you. A religious system can shame and threaten to expel you.

Fear of any bully is amplified in groups by our high capacity to mirror each other’s emotions, especially fear. So it’s not just our individual fear of the bully ... it’s the multiplied fear of the entire group mirroring fear. When we dissent—Why fear this bully? —the fear of the group morphs into anger toward you.

But David, away from all that fear has tuned into God. He’s a shepherd—out in the fields alone a lot. He is tuned in to nature, ways of sheep, and their predators, lions, bears. You do that by listening, observing, **skills of meditative practice**. David also a **musician**, credited with writing many Psalms. People sing their way through trauma and fear. Meditative practice.

Recent brain research indicates meditative practice activates the **calming system**, dials down **alarm system**, especially **amygdala**, fear-aggression center. Also know **fear narrows our vision**, so we hyper-focus on the threat and can’t see anything else. This narrowing of focus **constrains creativity**. David’s God-connection gave him a strategic advantage over Saul and his army riddled with fear. He could see what they couldn’t: **Oh, this calls for a good slinger and some stones. I can do that!**

This freedom from fear helped David to see what others couldn't and to realize **he didn't have to meet Goliath on Goliath's terms. HE COULD MEET GOLIATH ON HIS OWN TERMS!** He had a different set of skills that could take Goliath down. He refused Saul's armor, because it would have played in Goliath's hands.

David leaned into a different set of skills: a sling and five smooth stones, and slinging skills honed over the years as a shepherd.

When we're facing giants, we can't overpower them on their own terms. But we may have skills, perspectives, that—once we are free from fear—we can employ against them. **Two examples:**

**BLM:** was co-founded by three black **community organizers: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi**. They began to question how to respond to what they saw as the devaluation of black lives after Zimmerman's acquittal for the unprovoked murder of Travon Martin. Garza wrote a FB post titled "A Love Note to Black People" in which she said: "Our Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter." Cullors replied: "#BlackLivesMatter." Tometi then added her support, and Black Lives Matter was born as an **online campaign**

Between 2012-2015 Evangelicalism faced an internal challenge to its homophobic policies. But in 2012 a young single gay woman in an evangelical-charismatic church in Minnesota, faced down her own internalized homophobia, her own fear of her own sexuality. Not an easy struggle.

She had a remarkable gift honed through her training as a social worker to listen/understand suffering of others. She interviewed other gay women in non-affirming churches, heard their stories, saw how they suffered, and **got mad at this giant** in the land called Evangelical Homophobia—backed by Evangelical Machine, run by white, straight men. Everyone in this had been cowering in fear generated by the threat of expulsion, threat of eternal damnation—enforced by a hierarchy of men beholden to large donors.

A call went out in her denomination for papers for a meeting of scholars. She offered a paper based on her experience as a lesbian follower of Jesus in an evangelical church, and

her interviews with other women like her. I was in the room when she presented. Crackling with tension as she named the harm caused by these

My late wife, Nancy, who was a non-voting member of the board of the denomination, knew the hostility to this young woman's position, stood next to her after her presentation—like Obama's bodyman—to make sure no one with their passive-aggressive Christian hostility could mess with this woman after she was done.

This woman was functioning like a David in face of **Evangelical Power Structure**. She was not a pastor, not a man, not a woman married to a powerful man (the only ticket to power in this denomination) She was a single woman, and a lesbian.

But like David, she had her own skills: a clear conviction that she was right and the evangelical power structure was wrong. She had her highly refined gift of empathy and skills of listening to those without a voice in the power structure. She had a prior track record of overcoming her own internalized homophobia. And she had righteous anger at suffering caused by Evangelical Power structure, on behalf of the women she knew harmed by it.

When the opportunity presented itself to speak her truth, and to give her witness she took it.

2 years later, she met Emily Swan, who fell in love with her, and today they are married. Rachel Murr fired shot heard round the world in Evangelicalism. There were a handful of Evangelical leaders, men mostly, plus Emily, who later made their moves to challenge same Goliath. I got my 15 minutes of infamy, Danny Cortez, Stan Mitchell, Fred Harrell ... but it was Rachel, so far as I can tell, who **fired first salvo ... launched first of five stones.**

And Goliath is staggering, if not defeated: 60–100 congregations formerly evangelical, now fully inclusive—affirming. I hear from evangelical pastors nearly every week who want to make a move against the power structure but lack the ovaries of Rachel Murr.

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