

Who's David?

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ME: About 13 years ago, when I first started speaking in this church, I preached a message where I tried to fit in as many Busted song titles as I could in response to a dare. I think I managed four. I'm telling you this because my title today is from a Busted song, though not any of the ones you'll remember (if you even remember Busted!). If you're taking notes, my message is called Who's David? [**SONG:** "Who's David" clip – from Spotify]

I start off with that flippant beginning, because what I want to talk about today is a serious topic. A few weeks ago, I went to a celebration of the 10th anniversary of graduating from medical school. It was a special day – especially as we were the first ever cohort of medical students at UEA. We had lunch and a campus tour during the day; and a black tie dinner at Carrow Road in the evening. [**PHOTO:** Med ball]

This should have been an exciting prospect, right? But, contrary to what you may see up here, I'm not always the biggest fan of social occasions. I have definitely got better, but I still suffer from some social anxiety. In the run up to this event, that anxiety was through the roof. All sorts of thoughts ran through my head. "What if no-one remembers me?", "what if there's no-one to talk to?", "what if I'm left all on my own?". Even my wife wasn't going to be there for support – she strangely chose Latitude over coming to my graduation anniversary!

In the end, the day was fantastic. But the anxiety in advance was so crippling I considered not going. This got me thinking about the profound effect anxiety can have in our lives, and this is part of what I want to talk about today.

WE: Maybe you can sympathise with my feelings in the run up to that celebration. Maybe you've experienced something similar yourself. Maybe you've experienced anxiety, in one of its many forms, and you know just what I'm talking about.

You certainly wouldn't be alone if you did. Anxiety is startlingly common. Statistics from the Mental Health Foundation reveal that there were 8.2 million cases of anxiety in 2013. Mixed anxiety and depression is the most common mental illness in the UK. One-week prevalence of generalised anxiety is 6.6% - in other words, about 6 and a half people out of a hundred will experience generalised anxiety in any given week.

Those statistics though only cover the percentage of the population who suffer with anxiety extreme enough for it to be considered a diagnosable mental illness. Chances are, there are many more of us who experience some anxiety, and anxiety to a debilitating or life-impacting degree.

Anxiety. Worry. We all experience it sometimes. Maybe we worry about ourselves. Maybe we worry about others. Maybe we worry about our job, our future, our

relationships. Maybe we worry about our health or our finances. This anxiety can steal our joy, sap our strength, and limit our lives.

Anxiety has a close cousin which is equally problematic – stress. Stress is another of those nebulous words that we will all use at some point. The dictionary defines it as *“a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances”*. But you likely know what it is, right? We will all experience stress at some point in our lives.

Take work for example. The Health and Safety Executive notes that up to 5 million people in the UK are ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ stressed through work. Stress costs industry £3.7 billion a year. 11.7 million days work are lost through stress each year. In 2015/16 stress accounted for 37% of all work related ill health cases and 45% of all working days lost due to ill health.

So chances are that you’ve either experienced stress or know someone who has. Chances are, you’ll experience it in the future too.

So far, so encouraging, right?! These twin problems – stress and anxiety – are huge. They can feel unavoidable and insurmountable. For those experiencing stress or anxiety, it can feel like they will always be there and can never be beaten. From a societal perspective, they represent two of the great afflictions of our age.

Stress was first brought into the medical literature in 1936. In the time since, we have seen great advances in the treatment of almost all major health conditions – including cancer treatment, the treatment of infections, and the wider scope of mental illness. Yet stress feels more prevalent now than ever before.

These two problems loom large – like giants in our lives and in our world. But what if there is an answer for our anxiety? What if there is a solution for our stress?

We’re going to look at how to kill the giant today. And indeed if you’re facing other giants at the moment – if something looms large in your life that I haven’t mentioned – what we cover today will help you to overcome it.

GOD: For those of you that have been around church for a while, the account I want to explore today probably won’t come as a surprise. Indeed, even if you wouldn’t call yourself a Christian or normally come along to church, you may well have heard of the account we’re going to read; or at least know the key players in it. Today, we’re going to look at the account of David and Goliath. Because there is something in this account which identifies with our stress and anxiety; and a surprising solution. Indeed, I heard Louie Giglio speak on this recently and his message turned my understanding of a well-known story upside down.

But we’ll get to the bit I stole from him later! First, let’s set the scene. The Israelites, God’s chosen people, are at war with the Philistines. In 1 Samuel 17, we read of how

they assembled for battle in the Valley of Elah – Philistines on one hill, Israelites on another. After the armies had assembled...

1 Samuel 17:4 - 4 A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span.

That's about ten feet tall. This guy was big. And rude. He comes out to offer them a challenge; shouting at them from the Philistine lines...

1 Samuel 17:8b-11 – 8b ... Choose a man and have him come down to me. **9** 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." **10** Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." **11** On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

As Ande pointed out a few weeks ago, this was common practice for the day. Rather than a whole army fighting, on occasion each side would send out a champion to fight on their behalf. It reduced casualties. And probably seemed like a really good idea if you had a ten foot tall chap on your side!

Into the mix comes David. David was a shepherd boy. The youngest of eight sons of Jesse. Three of his brothers were fighting for Saul, the king. David was sent to bring them supplies. For forty days, Goliath came forward to shout out his challenge. Forty days of no fighting, only threats and fear. No-one in the Israelite camp is willing to fight the giant. One day, David is there, delivering supplies for his brothers...

1 Samuel 17:22-24 - 22 David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were. **23** 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. **24** Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.

Let's take a moment to pause here, to consider this in the context that we're talking about today. The passage describes how the Israelites here are paralysed by fear. For forty days, this giant has shouted at them – challenging and threatening – and none of them has done anything in response. They came for a battle, but they're afraid. They're living in fear, unwilling and unable to move forward, because of this giant.

This, of course, is an account from thousands of years ago. How do you think we'd describe this situation if it happened today? What words would we use to describe the brothers' predicament? If this was us, going to work each day, how would we describe it? We wouldn't say we were living in fear, would we? We'd say we were under stress.

"How was work today, Phil?". "Oh, it's terrible. There's this massive giant that keeps threatening to kill us all. We can't do what we came for. We're meant to be soldiers, but we're stuck in the camp. Even the king can't help us. It's so stressful."

I think facing the prospect of death at the hands of a ten-foot giant would be enough to induce stress in any of us! But stress isn't the word used here, is it? The word used here is fear. This fits with the wider scope of the Bible too. Here at Proclaimers we believe in the power of the word of God. We believe the Bible is relevant and authoritative – that it is God's wisdom for us today. Yet we don't find the word "stress" in the Bible. We don't even find "anxiety" that much either. Instead, we find the word "fear".

This is not just a translation issue. This is actually a helpful distinction. I heard an interview recently with a Clinical Psychologist called Dr Robert Maurer; a published author, scholar and expert in the field of neurobehaviour. His research primarily involves collating the findings of large, long-term studies. He has an interesting take on stress. He looked at the findings of several long-term studies of people who were successful across all areas of life. He found that successful people, in the studies they looked at, and in other case study examples, rarely referred to stress. Instead, they used a different word. They used fear.

When facing opportunity or challenge, the successful people studied spoke of being afraid or scared – not of being stressed or anxious. I think this is really significant. It could be life-changing for some people in this room. Because stress can feel rather intangible and therefore unmanageable. It can feel like something we cannot conquer because it is all around us. It feels like it is inflicted on us by our situation or our circumstances; by our boss or our job or other external forces.

Fear though feels much more personal. It is more tangible, more focused. It is not about what's around us; it's about what's within us. Recognising this is so powerful - because we may not be able to control what's around us; but we can control our response.

This is actually much more consistent with the original paper on stress which was written back in 1936. As Dr Maurer points out in his interview, if the author knew then that it would be used as it is now then he would likely not have used the word. Stress was never intended to describe the external pressures – those are stressors – it was meant to describe what happens in us.

What if we started to look at our stress in these terms? What if you're not stressed, you're scared? What if you looked for the fear that underlies your anxiety? What is that you're afraid of? What scares you?

Identifying this could be the beginning of resolving it. Trust me, I'm a doctor! In medicine, we look for symptoms and signs which help us to understand the underlying condition. The symptoms are not the condition – they are markers of it. What if the same is true of stress and anxiety? What if they are just the symptom; but the underlying issue is fear?

What is it, under it all, that scares you? When asked what we fear, we often think of the tangible but trivial fears – like spiders or snakes or heights. But there are much deeper fears that affect us much more significantly – the fear of failure, the fear of rejection, the fear of isolation. Coming back to Dr Maurer, he points out that spiritual literature puts all our fears into one of two camps. The first is the fear that we are unloved or unlovable; that we are unworthy of love. The second is that we fear the loss of control –we fear losing the control of ourselves or our lives.

What is it then that scares you? Under it all, what is that fear? For some, this alone will be the most significant thing you will come to realise today. It will change your understanding of stress and anxiety. It will transform your situation. Because once you identify it, you can start to deal with it.

Speaking of which, what then can this account in 1 Samuel 17 teach us about how to address our fears?

Into this fearful situation strides David. David asks his brothers what reward is on offer for the man who kills the giant. His brothers tell him, but they're not too happy. Who does this kid think he is – coming down here, telling them how to do their job?! David doesn't shut up though. He makes such a big deal of it that the king's men overhear. They bring David before the king; and he stays just as bold. David offers to take on the giant. The king is reluctant. This is just a shepherd boy. What hope does he have against the giant? But David remains insistent. He's killed lions and bears protecting sheep – he's confident that God kept him safe through all that – and he's more than happy to have a crack at the giant that dares defy God's own people. Saul tries to give David his armour, but it doesn't fit. So David, well, let me read it...

1 Samuel 17:40-51 - 40 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.

41 Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. **42** He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. **43** He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

44 "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!"

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. **46** This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. **47** 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."

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.

51 David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the sheath. 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.

David is fearless in his approach. Confident that God is on his side, he takes on the giant; and kills him. This huge obstacle to God's chosen people; this looming giant; defeated.

This is such a hopeful story. The shepherd boy who triumphs over the giant. It raises hope in us that we too can triumph over the giants that we face. We can defeat fear. There is an answer to our anxiety. There is a solution to our stress.

What is it then that we can learn from this account? How can we overcome those fears? At this point you're probably expecting me to draw out some keys on how we can be like David. You're probably expecting some principles from his approach. Yet this is where that Louie Giglio message hit me right between the eyes.

Because the truth is that you're not the hero of this story. I titled this message "Who's David?" and the good news is that it is not you. You are not the one who has to triumph over the giant. You are not the solution to your stress, the answer to your anxiety or the one that can overcome your fear.

Elsewhere in scripture, David described as a man after God's own heart. Yet there is another who knew the heart of God more closely and followed it more passionately. David was born in Bethlehem – but there is another boy born in Bethlehem whose impact and influence was even greater. David was anointed as king, yet came as a servant and shepherd, but there is another greater servant, shepherd and king. David strode out on behalf of God's own people – to save them from their enemies and stand in the gap on their behalf. But there is another, who stands not just for the Israelites – but stepped into the battle on our behalf. There is another who took our place, who can take on our giants, to whom belongs a victory not just in the face of death but over death itself.

His name is Jesus Christ. God's own and only Son. Who stepped out of eternity, born in the body of helpless baby. Who lived a perfect, sinless life; and offered His life on our behalf. Jesus Christ is that shepherd, servant and king. He strides into battle on our behalf. He offered His life in our place. He and He alone is the ultimate answer to our anxiety; the one true solution to our stress; the saviour of our very souls.

Jesus is the true giant killer. He is the hero of the story. He is the David to our Goliath. Time and again, we see Jesus challenge His disciples fear. He comes to challenge fear in our lives too.

We fear that we are unloved or unlovable – yet God's love for us was so great that Jesus came to offer His life on our behalf. We fear that loss of control – yet the Bible

tells us that Jesus has the final word on everything. His love and power and grace are greater than any mistake we'll ever make, any challenge we'll ever go through and any fear we'll ever face. Whatever giants we encounter, Jesus Christ has overcome.

Maybe you don't know Jesus personally. If that's your situation, a little later I will give you an opportunity to invite Him into your life. For those of us that call ourselves Christians, that identify as followers of Christ, He is the one who defeats our fear. He is the hero of our story. Victory over our giants will be found in Him and Him alone.

YOU: What then can we do in response to Jesus' victory? If He is our David, what can we do?

Our application is found in the response of the men that David saves on that day...

1 Samuel 17:51b – 52 - When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. **52** Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron.

Three keys we can see in the response of the Israelites...

1) Recognise the rout

A rout is defined as *"a disorderly retreat of defeated troops"*. The Israelites saw their enemies were defeated. We need to recognise the same. As Pastor Tom has often encouraged us, we fight FROM victory, not FOR victory.

How does this make a difference? Well, you need to change how you think. You cannot consider that fear too big. You cannot consider it insurmountable. You need to challenge the idea that you cannot beat it; and remind yourself that in Jesus, you have already won.

2) Raise a shout

The Israelites raised a shout as they chased after the Philistines. We too need to speak victory. We need a positive voice – both outwardly and inwardly. We need to consistently remind ourselves that Jesus is greater than the challenges we face. His power in us enables us to overcome.

This is why worship is so essential. David was known as both a warrior and a worshipper. In our lives, they are one and the same. As we worship, we wage war with negative thoughts and anxiety-provoking ideas. We declare victory; we remind ourselves of God's greatness; we emphasise to ourselves and declare to our world that Jesus has overcome.

This is why we encourage you to shout sometimes. I think people sometimes assume it is just about hype – about pumping people up. But it's actually about reminding ourselves of the victory. I've watched a lot of football over the years: you shout when you score and you shout when you win. When we shout, it isn't about hype – it's about hope. It reminds us of the victory that Jesus has won.

So firstly, recognise the rout; secondly raise a shout; thirdly...

3) Run 'til you've chased fear out

The Israelites pursue the Philistines. They chase them down and drive them out. We need a similarly relentless approach. For all our positivity today, I know there will be challenges ahead. I know it is not easy always to tackle these issues. As in this account, the battle is won, but it is not over. There is work still to do.

The solution still is not in ourselves, it is in Jesus. We need to show a relentless commitment to reinforcing what He has done for us. That means a consistency in reading the Bible. It means a consistency in prayer. It means a consistency in turning up to church. We need to relentlessly pursue Jesus – to follow Him – if we are to live in the victory He has won.

It doesn't need to be more specific necessarily, but if you've identified a particular fear, you may want to specifically address it. There are plenty of Bible reading plans that will help. YouVersion is an ideal place to look for them [PHOTO: YouVersion logo]

In summary then, we are not the hero of this story. We are not the answer to our anxiety or the solution to our stress. That belongs to Jesus. Who's David in our story? It is Jesus. He has already won. Our response then is to recognise the rout; to raise a shout; and to run until we've chased that fear out. In other words, to remind ourselves that Jesus has overcome; to speak positively and worship passionately; and to keep going until that fear is nothing more than dim and distant memory.

US: As I finish, imagine what it would do in our lives if we applied what we have spoken about today. Imagine identifying the fear that underlies our stress and anxiety – focusing on something tangible than can be overcome. Imagine knowing a confident hope found in Jesus' victory. We don't have to save ourselves. We don't have to win the battle. We simply follow Jesus because He has overcome.

Imagine knowing a life that is not limited by stress or anxiety. Imagine the hope and peace and joy that we can know instead. Imagine what it would do in us to live in confident expectation, righteous optimism, and steadfast hope. Imagine too what it might do in our world if we lived this out. How many in our city are trapped by these same forces? How much freedom could we see in Norwich if we become examples? We are not the answer; but we know the answer. His name is Jesus. He's our David. He's the hero. He's the answer and solution. He has won the victory. He has overcome.

So please stand to your feet. Join me. Let's get this process underway right now. We're going to lift up the name of Jesus. We're going to declare the victory. We're going to call time on stress and anxiety and fear in our lives and in our world. We're going to shout in a moment; then we're going to sing. Let's get this off to the best possible start – let's give it everything we've got. On three, let's lift our voices; let's raise the roof; let's sing like we know we have won – because Jesus Christ has overcome.