

Our one smooth stone



Nothing visible protects us. Nothing visible commends us to anyone. We barely have enough clothing. We live for food and water and light and heat. Our cars are old. The members of the church we belong to are scattered to the four corners of the earth. No organization claims us.

We are the opposite, now, of what we shall be.

The world has lapped us; ten times. Now a hundred times. We are losing the race of life.

This is the David and Goliath Syndrome. It is God making sure that we appear to be the opposite of what we are. When we finally do become

ONLY OUR CHANGE WILL JUSTIFY OUR EXISTENCE

what we are destined to be, the universe will stop in its tracks at the manifestation (at last) of God's grace and power.

God's grace and power.

Rodney Dangerfield got no respect. He should have tried being a member of the body of Christ in an era of apostasy—not a Christian, mind you, but a member of the body of Christ. Christians are rich and popular, while members of Christ's body are poor and despised. It is doubted by most that they could be anything but deceived.

All our armor is now invisible—Ephesians, chapter 6. To the world, we are stripped. Only our change will justify our existence.

It is our one smooth stone.



Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

"If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong" --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

The David and Goliath Syndrome

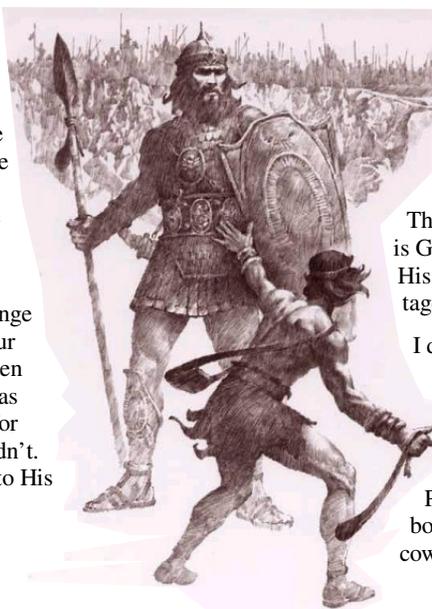
This may be a pity party. I guess it will be if we can muster that emotion for the kid, David, as he approaches the champion of the Philistines, Goliath. Yes, *that* Goliath. Goliath of Gath. Problem is, we know that the kid is going to knock out the nine-foot, nine-inch armored giant with a sling and a stone, and jump-start his career. Due to the reputation he will establish this day, in this valley, David will eventually become a) king of Israel, b) a type of the coming Messiah, c) a man after God's own heart, and d) one heck of a psalmist.

Yet no one in the Israelite army knows this. The Philistines certainly don't know it. We assume that David knows it—but does he? I wonder. If he knew he was going to topple the giant with a single stone, why did he take five stones from the brook?

Here's how I see it now: David knew—but he didn't. It's a strange and horrifying phenomenon. Our Lord experienced it in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew He was destined for the cross, and yet for one agonizing moment—He didn't. "If it is possible," He cries out to His Father, "let this cup pass."

If it is possible?

He knew, but He didn't.



David experienced this same thing; his humanity compromised his faith. Thus, it became faith like that of the man who asked our Lord to heal his son. "Do you believe I am able to do this?" asked the Lord. "Yes," said the man. "I do believe. But help my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24)

It's the best we can do. Our greatest acts of faith have doubt sewn into the fabric. It is apparently a necessary part of our weakness that we be absolutely certain of things—sort of. It belongs to the David and Goliath Syndrome.

The David and Goliath Syndrome is God working hard to make sure His people have every disadvantage before He gives them victory. I need to repeat that so that you can be certain you heard me correctly: The David and Goliath Syndrome is God working hard to make sure His people have every disadvantage, before He gives them victory.

I dislike this syndrome.

David's case defines it. One can hear his voice squeak as he asks the army of Israel why they're allowing the Philistine dog to taunt God. Nobody really knows. The answer is cowardice. David announces that he

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Clanging Gong News CHECKLIST

Do you have what it takes to make it through this life?

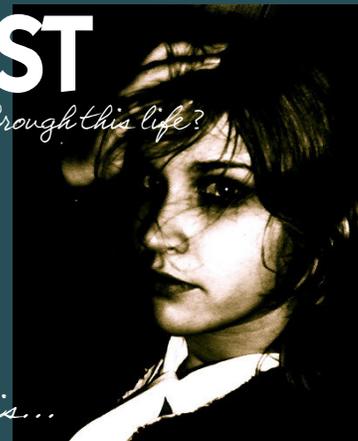
BOX A

Strength.
Confidence.
Talent.
Support system.
Cash.
Friends.
Reputation.
Unwavering faith.

BOX B

Christ.

And the winner is...



...David and Goliath syndrome

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will do what the thousands of grown men cannot do: he will kick the Gathman's ass. Apart from God's spirit, this is David. Apart from God's spirit, David is an impetuous youth who uses the "a" word. It is God's spirit that alchemizes this potentially sordid water into wine.

See how "wrong" your faith is today. Whatever your sling may be, it is ridiculed as "not enough." Hear your antagonists deride the irresponsibility of refusing legitimate armor. They attempt to cover you with whatever sustains *them*, but it does not fit you—you and your "exalted dreams" and "visions of grandeur."

"Go back to where you came from," they say. "You think you are so much higher than us. You have knowledge and audacity, but no love." Love, apparently, negotiates with God-taunting Philistines. Or ignores them altogether. Or doubts their existence. "Let them taunt the Most High God. Come, let us sing Christian songs."

They dally with the armed of Israel, admiring their shields, sharpening their swords—to no purpose. Instead, they seek the sun. "Nothing can be done," they say, "so we rest and wait." When you rise to do what



they cannot do, they say, "You are but a boy." When you go without them, they say, "You walk alone, accountable to no one. Embrace the world. Submit to a qualified priesthood, that you may know God."

David's skin was fair. He hated metal. He ate bread and tended sheep. He dreamed dreams. He talked to himself in the hills. He wrote poems. He stared at the stars for the longest time. He ate honey with his fingers. He wrung his hands, alone.

He approached the Philistine. ■

"I cannot go with these"

SHEPHERD DAVID REFUSES THE ARMOR OF SAUL



"Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor. And David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, 'I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.' And David took them off" (1 Sam. 17:38-39).

If God wants you to "go," (i.e. work for Him in whatever capacity), then the David and Goliath Syndrome will see you stripped of many of the things the world deems essential for the job. This is because the work must be of God, not of you. It can *only* be of God—absolutely speaking—but the source of your power must become evident to the naked eye, that is, manifested to the world. If the army of Israel beats Goliath with sword and spear, then Israel gets the credit. If God uses a shepherd boy unarmed except for a sling and a stone, people will say, "See what *God* did."

David explained this to his home army as he walked out to meet Goliath in the valley of Elah: "That all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands" (1 Sam. 17:47).

Greek athletes contended naked. Paul says we are in a race, and encourages us to set aside those things which would hinder godly progress. We do not often voluntarily give up these things; God takes them. When He does, we agonize; it is hard giving up what the world considers legitimate strengths. And yet when God redirects our reliance to place it fully upon Him, we cannot fail because our weaknesses now count as strength, and our failures as successes. Only God works this way.

Once you breathe this air, it's hard going back. David agreed to try the armor, but he was too used to walking free in the pastures, killing lions with his bare hands. I suppose he enjoyed the wind in his face as well. ■

What a Revelation!

WHAT HAPPENED TO DAVID'S FOUR LEFTOVER STONES?

"And he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherds bag" (1 Sam. 17:40).

In scripture, five is the number of grace. David chose five smooth stones, suggestive of the grace of God that sustained him. And yet, in battle against Goliath, David only needed a single stone—one being the number of God. Four stones remained. What might their significance be?

Four is the number of world-wide coverage: the four corners of the earth; the four seasons; the four parts of the day; the four points of the compass. God will yet cleanse this earth of taunting antagonists for the sake of His people Israel—speaking of the Day of Indignation. When Israel's enemies surround her, God will rise to smite them with—symbolically—the four remaining stones.

And then David's Greater Son shall assume His rightful throne.

Q&A

I understand the theory behind 2 Cor. 12:10—"When I am weak, then I am strong"—but it doesn't work. How can I make it work?

First of all, 2 Cor. 12:10 is a fact, not a theory. As an objective truth, it "works" whether you acknowledge it or not. When you are weak, then you are strong. What you mean to ask is: How do I tap into this fact?

Whenever I get depressed, or discouraged, or whenever I run out of money or feel like a total loser (it happens more than you would imagine), I have to consciously remind myself of this truth. And every time I do it, I'm re-shocked by it. Weakness as strength is so contrary to the way the world works, it's hard to believe it's true.

Do what I do: pause for two seconds, remind yourself of this verse, acknowledge the literalness of it, and then exclaim something like what I usually exclaim: "Holy cow. I'm actually *strong* because of this."

I kid you not: it's a shock every time. I never get used to it. It's always a new revelation, that weakness is *actually* strength. It stuns me how quickly I keep forgetting it.

Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur.
Therefore, I shall rant (Philippians 2:14).

I'm Being Set Up Big Time

God is setting me up big time. This is not a bad thing, ultimately, but it hurts in the interim. The only thing that gets me through is the realization that this is God's *modus operandi*. The set-up? It's the David and Goliath Syndrome.



I am surrounded by churches with million-dollar budgets. I drive past huge construction sites and I think, *Hm, must be an airport going in*, or, *Hm, that's going to be one heck of a shopping mall*, or, *Hm, they must be laying the foundation for a new amusement park*. It is only later that I see the cross and read the inevitable sign: "Future Home of the Epic Baptist Church of the Holy Trinity of Rome and Babylon."

And I think, *Mother of Abraham. Another man-made institution spreading the apostasy via song and interpretive dance. Another bastion of organized religion that*

will nullify Christ's sacrifice and deify man as the arbiter of his own salvation, while serving really goeey and delicious donuts—with colorful sprinkles.

It is easy to get mad at God for this, especially when I struggle every month to meet my extravagant expenses, such as heat, water, electricity, and food. I stand at Wal-Mart and literally debate for several minutes over whether or not to buy name-brand or generic garbage bags. Did I mention that I am one of the few people on the planet—*on the planet*—who is heralding the true gospel of God and the glorious outcome of infinite grace? If I didn't mention that, it was a heck of an oversight.

And so I cry out to God: "What are You doing, God? You supply your enemies with mil-

lions upon millions of dollars to ruin Your name and demean Your cross, while at the same time causing the man You have appointed to herald Your purposes to stand at Wal-Mart and actually start sweating over how much to spend for trash bags. Why, God? *Why?*"

It finally hit me: the David and Goliath Syndrome. Folks, God must be preparing for some epic thing. How do I know? He is making Goliath taller and taller. He is arming him with bigger and sharper swords. He is fattening his belly, expanding his muscles, improving his wardrobe, and carpeting his training facilities.

I, in the meantime, opt for the generic trash bags.

But here is the one thing I forgot. Oh, it's only a slight little detail that anyone could miss—the elephant in the living room:

David wins.

I'm being set up. And so is Goliath. Big time. ■

Dear Wife

YOU SHELTER ME FROM THE STORM

I have never taken anything or anyone more for granted than you. How could it have happened? The bitter world? My selfishness? The burden of this calling? The certainty of your love? My naïve belief that the love between a man and a wife sustains itself?

Many years ago, you introduced me to the Living God. Before, I had heard of Him; through you, I saw Him. I went on to read about grace and teach about it, but you demonstrated it—and I grew accustomed to it.



Until today. How could I have missed such a gift? Grace is not like oxygen, which we breathe by default. It is more like rain, which comes whenever it pleases God to water the earth.

Every day for twenty-six years, you watered me. You caused it to rain on my justness and my unjustness alike. My deepest regret is that, until now, I have failed to treasure this gift.

Husbands and wives: Love one another. Do not fret over your many imperfections; you will never be rid of them in this life. Instead, see them as opportunities from God for the exercise of grace. And then, when you have tasted the benevolence, never—ever—presume upon it. ■