

Stories of the Hebrew Bible

Lesson 9: Heroes of the Oppressed: Solomon, Samson, and David

4.23.2017

Objectives: Exploring stories of celebrated heroes in the Hebrew Bible.

Materials: flipchart, lesson attachments.

Time allotments suggested and meant to be adapted for **75 minute class**.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ Name someone you admire as a role model or hero. Why?
 - ▶ From your most recent worship (likely Easter Sunday, April 16), what’s one thing that you remember as interesting or meaningful?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.
- **Please take a few minutes to invite reflections from youth about their recent worship experience. Use copies of worship programs as helpful reminder.**

2. Silly Fun: Never Have I Ever (5 minutes max)

Youth play one round of “Never Have I Ever” (aka Five Fingers) to see how well they know one another:

- a) Ask everyone to hold up five fingers and keep that hand up throughout the game.
- b) The goal is to think of things YOU (not others) have **never** done or experienced that others will likely have experienced, thus making you unique. Go around the room, taking turns, each person sharing ONE “Never Ever,” hoping that others will have done it. Whoever HAS experienced that thing must put one finger down.
- c) After you go around the entire room, see who has the most fingers still up. That person is quite unique!

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from Sam Wells, theologian and ethicist)

“Almost all of us know this story of David and Goliath... You can bet that 99% of people who read this story identify with David. Stand up for the little guy. We want our movies to be about David, but we spend our lives trying desperately hard to be Goliath. We think it’s quaint and clever that David got by with five smooth stones and a sling, but we spend our own energies stockpiling swords and spears and javelins. We admire the fact that David forswore Saul’s armor and gadgetry, but just look at our car, just look at our house, just look at our country: we’ve beefed them up to look like Goliath, with so many safety and security features we can hardly move around in them.”

4. **Joys and Sorrows** (10 minutes): Listening is a precious gift that we offer one another at church. Using the balance scale and the blue (sorrows) and yellow (joys) stones, invite youth to share a joy and/or a sorrow from the past week, as a way of meeting one another with our lives and sharing in community. You will want to set limits (e.g. two stones max per person) so that no one monopolizes sharing time.

Each Sunday, a copy of the congregation’s Embracing Meditation will be made available to your class, so that stones can be put in for those whose names are being spoken in the Sanctuary.

5. **Introduction to Solomon, Samson, and David** (10 minutes)

Teacher talk: What do we already know about King Solomon, Samson, or David? Just as with many popular stories we have heard, from *Cinderella* to *Batman*, these stories about Solomon’s wisdom, Samson’s strength, and David and Goliath have been told in many different ways. What do youth recall about these stories?

- On a flipchart, make three columns – one for Solomon, Samson, and David & Goliath – and write down what youth feel they already know about each of the stories, and what message/meaning the stories are trying to convey.

6. **Samson and Solomon** (20 minutes)

Hand out copies of the two attached stories of “*Samson and the Philistines*” and “*Solomon’s Wisdom*” and invite volunteers to read portions aloud.

**** Share this important note** about how we should read stories from the ancient world: Bible stories can be dangerous if we are not careful about how we read them. Three common dangers to highlight:

- (1) **“God is on our side” danger:** We assume that we are the good guys in the story and therefore, God must be on our side. But if we read carefully, it may not always be clear whose side (if any side) God takes.

- (2) **“Heroes are morally perfect” danger:** Once we determine the “good guy” from the “bad guys,” we assume that the hero can do no wrong or have any character flaws. But the Hebrew Bible often has heroes who are complex human beings like the rest of us.
- (3) **“God approves of violence” danger:** Yes it’s true: the stories of the Hebrew Bible contain a lot of violence, reflecting the way things looked to people in the ancient Middle East. They show how people related to God, to one another, and to the world in ways that seem supernatural or “primitive” and often violent to our modern worldview. But we have to remember that the worldview 3,000 years ago is quite different from ours today. **So just because violence is in the Hebrew Bible does NOT mean that it is being endorsed.**
- There are parts of scripture that critique other parts; violent stories are modified or corrected by other differing stories
 - More basically, judging ancient views on violence by modern standards of violence is rarely a simple task. In the intervening 3000 years, religions and cultures have continued to change and develop, reinterpreting the meaning of these stories again and again.

Questions for Discussion:

- Both Samson and king Solomon are often regarded as heroes of the faith? Do YOU think they are heroes? Take a vote on each. Why or why not?
- What power or special ability makes them different from others?
- Like kryptonite to Superman or the heel to Achilles, what weaknesses do they have, if any? (e.g. *Samson’s hair, but his strength itself may be both strength and weakness? Was Solomon so sure that the false mother would actually allow the child to be killed, even if not her own?*)
- What or who do they fight *against*? What or who do they fight *for*?
- Are there others in these stories whom you see as heroes? (e.g. *the true mother willing to give up her child?*)

7. David and Goliath (15 minutes)

Hand out copies of the attached story of “*David and Goliath*” and invite volunteers to read portions aloud.

Questions for Discussion:

- Does the story of David and Goliath add anything different to our understanding of heroes from that of Solomon and Samson? (Consider: *Much more obviously than for Solomon or Samson, God is seen as source of strength and reason for action for David.*)

- What power or special ability does David have that makes him stand out from others? (Hint: Ironically, David's power is in what he does NOT have: he's the youngest, not a soldier, no strength to carry weapons. He's a nobody whose faith turns him into a hero.)
- David and Goliath, and other "underdog stories," reverse our understanding of power and strength. Goliath mocks David for coming out to fight with "sticks" (staff and slingshot) but David comes out "in the name of the Lord." How is faith in God his greatest strength?

8. Heroes and Goliaths in our Times (15 minutes)

Hand out copies of the attached stories of Ruby Bridges (backside of painting) and Jackie Robinson. Give youth a moment to look especially at the Norman Rockwell painting. Invite volunteers to read stories aloud.

Questions for Discussion:

- Many people have likened Ruby Bridges and Jackie Robinson as modern stories of "David and Goliath." Who is "David" and who/what is "Goliath"?
- What power or special ability did they exhibit?
- So many of the stories we have considered from the Hebrew Bible are stories of faith – an impossible faith of the David-and-Goliath kind, when the odds are stacked against us. What are these stories trying to say to us?
- Is there a purpose or dream that feels like an impossibility for you? What would make it worth risking?

9. Say goodbye until next time: Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."

10. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- return blue/yellow stones to containers
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets