

LIONS AND GIANTS and BEARS

by Bryan Hupperts

1 Samuel 17:34-37. 'But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock. I went after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth; and if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him and killed him. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."

Long before he was the great King of Israel, David was the runt of the litter, the youngest kid in the family. He probably got the hand me, hand me, hand me downs from his seven brothers. Nobody expected too much from the baby of the family.

What I love about David is that he learned to worship God at a young age. Something in this kid cried out to know God. He learned warfare at a young age. Part of his family duties included tending the family sheep flock. I laugh when I hear kids complaining about chores, taking out the trash, weeding the flowerbed, and so on. David had to fight wild ravenous animals as part of his family chores.

I have a friend who lives on a small rural Missouri farm. One of his sons owned a 10-gauge shotgun. He and his kid sister were walking back from the family shooting range when a rattlesnake suddenly appeared right between his kid sisters' ankles. He carefully loaded and aimed his shotgun and shot the snake in half - right between his sister's legs. While I admired his heroism, I asked him if what he did wasn't rather dangerous. If his aim had been even a few degrees off, he would have shot his sister.

He retorted that he was a marksman (my phrase) and the only dangerous thing in that garden was the snake. He was protecting his sister.

In David's time, wealth was measured in livestock. For every lamb that was lost to lions and bears, the family's financial security was diminished. Most shepherds hurled stones using a leather sling in order to scare the wild animals away. It's interesting that David wouldn't let them take even one lamb. He would fight to snatch them right out of their mouths. If they fought back, he would kill them. He was intent on stopping the danger to his family at the source. His duty was to protect the lambs even at the cost of his own life.

Years later, another monster came on the scene. This one, a giant named Goliath, was terrorizing the armies of Israel. A lion's paw, a bear's paw, a six-fingered hand of a loathsome giant, what's the difference? The lambs were in danger and one monster kills as easily as another. David sought the king's permission and blessing to go and kill this monster. It was all the same to him.

Fighting bears and lions were his training ground. He had been faithful in the small tasks of defending the lambs. David would grab the beards of the wildest animals that prowled the lands and kill them - all for the sake of delivering defenseless lambs.

Who was watching David fighting alone on those obscure mountains? No one except God. And God found in this young man both the heart of a warrior and of a shepherd, one who would willingly fight and, if necessary, lay down his life for the flock. And no man has greater love than this.

The bears and lions that meet you in your younger years are often disguised training grounds for God's greater purposes. If David had not first fought and felled the lions and bears that tried to ravage his father's flocks, he would have not been "proved" to fight Goliath.

Most saints of God I know that are mightily used of the Lord often spent years going through one trial and hardship after another. Circumstances seemed to say they were accursed of God.

No matter what happened, they seem to find sorrow and suffering at every turn. Yet it is these very trials that begin to refine their hearts so that they come forth as gold, as useable vessels in the King's service. Unfair hardships were God's hidden grace to train them for His higher callings and purposes.

After a time, you begin to see danger merely as another opportunity for God to show Himself strong on your behalf. So much of modern Christianity has removed the risk factor of faith - we have it all too well oiled and planned. When David was a lad, if the Lord had not delivered him from the paw of the lion and bear, David would have been mauled to death. He was the first and last line of defense for the flock. If God did not strengthen him, he would have perished, and the lambs would have kebob for any hungry beast that happened to find them...

If you will not throw yourself into the fray to fight the bear and lions, what will happen when the real strongholds, the giants, finally come to mock you and your God? The devil, in the person of Goliath, came using fear to war and make slaves of God's people again. Will you suddenly rise up and learn to war? No, the proving and training comes by stages. David was thoroughly trained for the battle by the time he was a teenager, because he faithfully did his assigned tasks when no one but God could see.

That's why the whole army of Israel sat cowering in fear; not a man among them had been perfectly faithful to God's training in his life. Only one was finally ready to fight the defiant giant in the Lord's strength and prevail.

Think of the lions and bears that attack your life as stepping stones to ultimate victory, and God's ultimate purposes for your personal destiny. David was anointed as king years before he was crowned king, and I suspect that battling lions and bears was a necessary part of his training to one day shepherd his nation. He who is faithful in the small things will be found faithful in the big things.

-Bryan Hupperts (c) 1998.

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Envoyé : jeudi 20 octobre 2016 12:50

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