

Why One-Size-Fits-All Therapy Doesn't Work

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[0 : 00] We are in the middle of a series called What Lies Beneath? Moving from the clouded to the clear as disciples of Jesus. And we've been spending the summer talking about the things that go underneath the surface of our lives and the way those come out in our lives.

And the past couple of weeks, we've taken a look at the story of Joseph and his brothers, and we've looked at family systems theory. If you didn't get to hear those, I got some good feedback on them. I think they were good sermons.

And you can go check them out at sermons.thetablechurch.org. And those all sort of serve as foundation for what we're talking about today. We're going to talk about trauma and healing.

Now, before we knew that our kids were going to be in the service with us, we were going to do a story in Genesis that dealt with assault. That didn't make sense anymore with kids in the room. So we're going to change to a classic Bible story of David and Goliath. So if you have your Bibles, you can turn to 1 Samuel 17. And we're going to look at David and Goliath and use that as a story to talk about trauma and healing.

[1 : 09] Trauma and healing. Before we do that, would you pray with me? God, I thank you that we are here together. I thank you for those gathered in this place, gathered with us online.

And in this room is represented all sorts of stories. Stories of celebration and victory and reasons to throw a party. And also stories of pain and heartache and hurt and harm and abuse and neglect.

And often, God, the same person carries all of those stories together. And so, God, I pray for us that your spirit, which we know, we confess, is moving in our midst, is here among us.

I pray, God, that your spirit, that she would bring healing and hope and joy and reconciliation. God, not that we would take a detour around our feelings and around our pain.

But rather, God, that you would hold our hand as we move through it. And God, is that as we take a look at your scripture this morning, that we would have eyes to see and ears to hear.

[2 : 19] Bodies and souls and spirits ready to receive what you have for us today. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So, we're going to talk about David and Goliath.

And the reason we're going to do this is I also want to teach you a tool for a way of understanding scripture. One of the primary ways that the early church and early Jewish communities, the first, second, third century after Jesus, understood scripture was through the tool of allegory.

Allegory. Now, allegory is a way of looking at a character or an event or a situation. And saying this equals that. It's related to parable.

It's related to metaphor. But allegory, the way of reading scripture through allegory is to take all of these elements and have them equal something else. Now, this is something that we've gotten away from in the modern era.

Because with the advent of historical critical ways of reading scripture that happened with the enlightenment and the rational modern age, we moved away from allegory as a church because that was sort of the way that those pre-modern magical thinking sort of folks thought.

[3 : 30] And we didn't want to be connected to that. But the reason why the early church used allegory is that they would say things like, if an understanding of scripture does not bring you closer to a loving understanding of God, then you haven't yet understood the scripture correctly.

And they would come up with these ways of reading scripture, not only for history, not only for theology, but in a spiritual sense. So here's a quote from Origen of Alexandria, who wrote in the third century.

He says, The reason why all of those that I have mentioned hold false opinions and make impious and ignorant assertions about God. So he's saying, The reason why all these people I have listed say wrong things about God, have bad theology, appears to be nothing else but this.

That scripture to them is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter. Now if you go to Bible college, if you go to seminary, you're taught these ways of understanding scripture according to the bare letter.

You have to diagram and parse and decline verbs and all of that. But the early church, all the way through the medieval church, all the way up to the enlightenment, understood in the spiritual allegorical sense.

[4 : 40] So we're going to use the story of David and Goliath, both as a way of understanding trauma and the way that we can heal from trauma, as also as a way of understanding how we can use scripture through allegory.

Today's sermon is going to be a little shorter than usual, knowing that there are kids in the room. So, you know, we get to fly through this together. We're going to start by reading. Thank you, son. We're going to start by reading 1 Samuel 17, starting in verse 1. We'll read through the whole narrative of David and Goliath. The translation I have on the screen is the New International Readers Version, NIRV, which is a Bible translation put at a, like a fifth grade reading level. If you didn't know, Bible translations are usually translated with a particular reading level in mind. So if you read a Bible translation, you're like, oh man, this seems really dense and difficult. It was probably written at a much higher reading level.

This is written for kids, the NIRV. And it says this, The Philistines gathered their army together for war. Saul, who was the king of Israel, and the army of Israel gathered together, and they lined up their men to fight against the Philistines.

[5 : 48] And the Philistine army was camped on one hill, and Israel's army was on another, and a valley was between them. And a mighty hero named Goliath came out of the Philistine camp. He was from Gath.

He was more than nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head. He wore bronze armor that weighed 125 pounds. On his legs, he wore bronze guards.

He carried a javelin on his back. His spear was as big as a weaver's rod. And its iron point, just the point, weighed 15 pounds. And the man who carried a shield walked along in front of them. Who would like that job? The man who carries the shield in front of Goliath. Goliath stood there and shouted to the soldiers of Israel. He said, Why do you come out and line up for battle? I'm a Philistine.

You are servants of Saul. Choose one of your men. Have him come down and face me. If he's able to fight and kill me, we'll become your slaves. But if I win and kill him, you will become our slaves and serve us.

[6 : 44] Goliath continued, This day I dare the soldiers of Israel to send a man down to fight against me. And Saul and the whole army of Israel heard what the Philistines said, and they were terrified.

Verse 12. So David was the son of Jesse. Jesse was from Bethlehem and had each sons. And David was the youngest. But the three oldest sons followed Saul to war.

David went back and forth from Saul's camp to Bethlehem. And he went to Bethlehem to take care of his father's sheep. Every morning and evening, Goliath came forward and stood there. He did it for 40 days.

Jesse said to his son, Get at least a bunch of grain that's been cooked. Get some bread. Get some cheese. Take it to the commander. Find out how your brothers are doing. Verse 20. Early in the morning, David left his father's flock in the care of a shepherd.

David loaded up the food and started out. And he reached the camp. And the soldiers were shouting the war cry. The Israelites and the Philistines were lining up and facing each other. So David left what he had brought with the man who took care of the supplies.

[7 : 45] And he ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were. As David was talking with him, Goliath stepped forward from his line. And he again dared someone to fight him. And David heard it. Whenever Israel's army saw Goliath, all of them ran away because they were so afraid.

The Israelites had been saying, Just look at how this man keeps daring Israel to fight. The king will make the man who kills Goliath very wealthy and give his own daughter to be that man's wife. And the king won't require anyone in the man's family to pay any taxes in Israel.

Wow, no taxes. What a life. David spoke to the men standing near him. He asked them, What will be done about this for the man who kills this Philistine? Goliath is bringing shame on Israel.

What will be done for the one who removes it? He dares the armies of the living God to fight him. Who does he think he is? And the men told David what Israel's soldiers had been saying. And the men told him what would be done for the man who killed Goliath.

David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard him speaking with the men. So Eliab became very angry at David and asked, Why have you come down here? Who's taking care of those sheep in the desert for you? I know how proud you are.

[8 : 50] I know how evil your heart is. The only reason you came down here was to watch the battle. To which David says, What have I done now? I love this response. Such like older brother, little brother energy. Can I even speak?

They turned away to speak with some other men. He asked them the same question. They gave the same answer. Someone heard what David said and reported it to Saul. So Saul sent for David. David said to Saul, Don't let anyone lose hope because of that Philistine.

I'll go out and fight him. And Saul replied, You aren't able to go out there and fight that Philistine. You're too young. He's been a warrior ever since he was a boy. But David said to Saul, I've been taking care of my father's sheep.

Sometimes a lion or a bear would come and carry off a sheep from the flock. And I would go after it and hit it. I would save the sheep that was carried in its mouth. If it turned around to attack me, I would grab its hair.

I would strike it down and kill it. In fact, I've killed both a lion and a bear. And I'll do the same thing to this Philistine. He has dared the armies of the living God to fight him. The Lord saved me from the paw of the lion.

[9 : 49] He saved me from the paw of the bear. And he'll save me from the powerful hand of this Philistine too. So Saul said to David, Go, may the Lord be with you. And Saul dressed David in his own military clothes.

He put a coat of armor on him. He put a bronze helmet on his head. And David put on Saul's sword over his clothes. He walked around for a while in all the armor because he wasn't used to it. David says, I can't go out there in all this armor.

I'm not used to it. So he took it off. And David picked up his wooden staff. He went down to a stream and chose five smooth stones. He put them in the pocket of his shepherd's bag. And he took his sling in his hand and approached Goliath.

At that same time, the Philistine kept climbing closer to David. The man carrying Goliath's shield walked along in front of him. Goliath looked David all over. He saw how young he was. He saw how healthy and handsome he was.

And he hated him. We've all been there seeing the young and healthy and being like, ah, how dare they be young and healthy? He said to David, why are you coming at me with sticks?

[10 : 50] Do you think I'm only a dog? The Philistine cursed David in the name of his gods. Come over here. He said, I'll feed your body to the birds and wild animals. David said to Goliath, you're coming to fight against me with a sword and a spear and a javelin.

But I'm coming against you in the name of the Lord who rules over all. He's the God of the armies of Israel. He's the one you have dared to fight against. This day, the Lord will give me the victory over you.

I'll strike you down. I'll cut your head off. This day, I'll feed the bodies of the Philistine army to the birds and wild animals. And then the whole world will know there is a God in Israel. The Lord doesn't rescue people by using a sword or a spear, and everyone here will know it.

The battle belongs to the Lord. He will hand all of you over to us. And as the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly to the battle line to meet him.

He reached into his bag. He took out a stone. He put it in his sling. He slung it at Goliath. The stone hit him on the forehead, and he sank into it. He fell to the ground on his face.

[11 : 52] So David won the fight against Goliath with a sling and a stone. He struck down the Philistine and killed him, and he did it without even using a sword.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. All right, so let's meet our characters and our allegory here. So Goliath in our story is going to equal trauma.

Now, Goliath is going to equal trauma. How big it is, how loud it is, how obnoxious it is, and the ways that we're going to respond to it.

Now, a quick and simple definition of trauma is anything that overwhelms our ability to cope. Anything that overwhelms our ability to cope. So trauma can come in lots of different forms. It can be measured both by time and intensity. So you can have acute trauma, something that's quick and fast, happens suddenly. You can have chronic trauma, something that happens over years or a lifetime.

[12:49] It can be based on your social situation, your race, your gender, your income level. Trauma is anything that overwhelms our ability to cope. It's stress that does something that break us a little bit inside.

And what trauma does to us is it can make someone feel afraid and paralyzed, frozen like they're stuck and can't move. It can make sure that nobody wants to fight, that they just freeze or run away. It can create a fear brain inside of us where we can't think clearly, where we can't think of other options except to stay where we are. Trauma can create anxiety, which we've talked about over the past couple weeks, that can spread through a whole community.

And it can make us feel helpless and small. Notice what Goliath does. He comes to the scene. He announces his big idea.

Anybody come and fight me? And if you win, then we'll be your slaves. And if I win, you'll be our slaves. And nobody can say, no, we're not going to take the deal.

[13:52] Nobody can say, we're not interested. Nobody can come along and say, actually, we're just going to take you on now. Everybody freezes or they battle the armies of Israel actually run away whenever Goliath shows up on the scene.

Saul, the king, the one who was supposed to lead the armies, he has no voice in this story except to gird up David or to tell David, I don't think you can do it.

The leaders are frozen. The people are frozen or running away. Now, examples of trauma can be big changes. Things like moving, divorce, death.

Scary experiences that feel too big. Being hurt by the people who we expect to protect us. Or feeling unsafe and uncertain for a long time. Chronic stress that can happen from poverty or disease or marginalization.

It can happen through discrimination or prejudice, physical or emotional abuse, neglect or abandonment. And the thing about trauma, the thing about these sorts of events in our life is that it can actually literally physically change our brains.

[15:02] It can alter our hormones, the chemicals in our body which tell us how to respond. It can affect what happens to the different parts of our brain. So here's an example about childhood trauma, the impact on the brain.

And so if you experience rejection, it's going to affect the part of your brain that deals with a sense of self-worth. And the ability to sort of move in the world and instead give you shame and social anxiety.

If you experience injustice trauma, so discrimination or marginalization. It's going to affect your amygdala, that little walnut sized piece of your brain that helps you fear, have anger and fear. Which are good and necessary emotions, but it's going to make them seem outsized and the only thing that you can feel. When you experience abandonment or neglect, the parts of your brain which give you the ability to have instincts and impulses.

They will just turn into panic and a fear of attachment. When you're betrayed, again, your amygdala is affected and the parts of you that are really deep into your brain that help you develop trust and build attachment to others.

[16:10] Those are shrunken down. Trauma can do all of this to us and it can make things that seem, that should be safe, feel scary.

So, a very silly example is I make like short form video content, like TikToks and Reels and stuff like that. And I know when I make those TikToks or Reels, they're going to be seen by hundreds or thousands of people.

I regularly get up on a stage and I talk in front of dozens or hundreds of people. I feel no fear. I do not get anxious when I do this, okay? But, if I have to make, record a short form video in front of my wife, I can't do it.

I'm too embarrassed, right? Now, it has nothing to do with Emily. Emily has never done anything to make me feel embarrassed or unsafe. But, I have a background that makes me fear the people that I should trust.

Because the people who were supposed to care for me in my childhood did not. They abused and neglected me. And so, I have a real hard time being vulnerable or like putting, like recording something in front of just the one person I should feel safest with.

[17:11] Because I'm afraid it's going to turn into some form of abuse. That's the sort of thing that I talked about last week of when we turn wrenches into guns. When things that seem like they should be safe aren't.

So, you know, you hear a raised voice and you feel like you're about to get hit. Or maybe you have a car accident and every loud noise feels like you're in the car crash again. Or maybe you've been abandoned early on in your life.

And so, anytime that somebody is late, it feels like they're going to abandon you again. When correction feels like rejection. When you've been neglected. And so, whenever you have to wait for food, it creates panic.

Those are all examples of the way that trauma can change our brain and change the way that we experience the world. So, Goliath in our allegory here is trauma.

And David in our allegory here is going to be how we cope and how we hope. Coping and hoping. And it's the part of us that even when we've been hurt or abused or neglected or traumatized in some way.

[18:15] It's the part of us that still has some ability to say, this isn't how the story ends. It's our connection to something bigger than the problem. That resilient core inside of us that hasn't given up.

Our ability to remember our past victories. Like David remembering the lions and the bears. And the good news about trauma and trauma science and trauma competent care.

Is that trauma can be healed from. It does not have to define us forever. However, healing from trauma is something that can't be done alone.

And the reason is that as relational people. People who are born into relationship. We live and exist in relationship. Relationship is often, if not always, the cause of our hurt and pain.

It is often, if not always, the cause of our hurt and our pain. And the trauma that changes our bodies and our brains. Therefore, the only way that we're going to heal from trauma is also from relationship.

[19:17] And the really twisted thing that hurt and pain can do. Is it can make us want to repel. Be move away from relationship. Which is really twisted. Because that's the only way that we're ever going to heal.

And what trauma wants to lie to us and say. Is that no, relationship that hurt you before. It's only ever going to hurt you again. And it keeps you in that frozen, in that hurt place.

But we have to heal in relationship as well. So David had some secret weapons. Again, in our allegory here. Secret weapon number one is remembering his past victories.

Look at verse 34. He says, And so part of what it takes to heal.

Is remembering that our hurt is not all that we have. We also have memories of survival. Of going through something difficult. And surviving or thriving.

[20:20] Remembering that even though we've been through difficult things. Even though people have hurt us or harmed us. Even though there's been something that's radically altered our chemistry. That's not all that's ever happened to us.

That we're still alive. We're still here. We're present. And that we can hold on to those memories. In order to keep moving forward. This is why things like journaling.

Or storytelling. Or just having a close confidence that you can start telling your story to. Is in itself a healing experience. Because it is sort of reminding your brain.

And building up the quote unquote muscles of your brain. That your hurt and your trauma isn't all there is. David's other secret weapon was staying connected to God.

He says in verse 37. The Lord saved me from the paw of the lion. He saved me from the paw of the bear. And he'll save me from the powerful hand of this Philistine too. Spiritual grounding is a powerful tool for healing from trauma.

[21:20] And that's you know this is not just like a commercial for believe in Jesus and Christianity. Any sort of spiritual practice. Prayer, meditation, ritual, sacred space, holy scripture.

They all have measurable. Make measurable difference in our ability to heal from trauma. Andrew Newberg in his book How God Changes Your Brain. Talks about the studies that have been done

on folks who have spiritual practices.

Regardless of the religion. If the spiritual practice is focused on a loving divine being. That itself can bring healing when we've been hurt. It can help right size our amygdala.

That fear and anger part of our brain. To be functioning and not over functioning. David's other secret weapon was his ability to use his own tools. In verse 39 we see that David puts on Saul's sword and armor over his clothes.

And David walks around for a little while. But he can't get used to it. It's the wrong size. It's a king. And Saul is said to be a very large man. A full grown large man. Putting his armor on David.

[22 : 31] Who's still a teenager or a young man at this point. And David says I can't go out there like this. I'm not used to it. So he takes it off. Similarly in our own healing stories.

We can't use one size fits all approaches. One size fits all approaches sounds like you should just get over it. When has that ever been helpful? You should forgive and forget.

You should be grateful for what you have. You should just pray more. Have more faith. You should think positive thoughts. Yes, positive thoughts are what's going to give me food when my parent doesn't give me food.

Positive thoughts are what's going to heal me when I'm being attacked. No, that's not how it works. Saul's armor can sound like things like good Christians don't struggle with depression. Or if you had enough faith you wouldn't be anxious.

Or God won't give you more than you can handle. Oh, I hate that one. Just surrender it to God.

Don't do any work on your own. Don't, you know, go through the process. You just got to surrender it.

[23 : 33] But David's way is to say God meets you in your authentic struggle and not in your performance. God meets you in the struggle, not the performance. You're not getting graded on how quickly you heal.

You're not getting graded on how well you're doing. God meets you in the struggle of going through the process of healing. Family expectations can sound like if it were Saul's armor.

In our family we don't talk about feelings. Strong people don't need help. You're being too sensitive. That's not how we handle problems. You're just making everyone else uncomfortable.

But David's way in this allegory is to honor your actual needs and not your inherited coping patterns. Saul's armor may sound like grown-ups saying to kids, Hey, big boys and girls don't cry. Or you're safe now so you don't need to be scared anymore. Or stop being so dramatic. Or other kids have it worse. Or you need to try harder to be normal.

[24 : 43] But David's way for kids would be your feelings are real, your healing takes time, and you get to use the tools that help you feel better.

Healing requires us being authentic to ourselves. Otherwise, we're just sort of cutting ourselves off from healing. And people who have experience with trauma, they are more acceptable to groupthink and conformity and compliance and cults.

Which is why folks who have experienced trauma need lots and lots of space and room to be able to explore their own way to stay true to themselves. So David had his five smooth stones.

One of our own smooth stones that we can use to heal from trauma. Smooth stone number one is just safe people. Like I said, you are hurt in relationship, but you're also going to heal in relationship. So you need both peers, people who are alongside you, who have experienced similar things, so that you can talk with them and share your stories. And you also need mentors, people who are further along the path, who will listen to you and accept you as you are, and not try to force you along a path that's not yours.

[25 : 59] You need those good memories. Things like journaling and writing and photographs. Things to remind you that pain is not the only thing that defines you. And you need your calm down tools.

Our family loves a good calm down tool. So things like taking care of your physical needs. Where for table kids, we train all of our leaders. It's very important that kids have access to food and water and movement at any time.

Because if you have a kid who is feeling stuck or trapped or uncertain, make sure they're fed, make sure that they're watered, make sure that they can move their bodies in a way that's safe for them and for everybody else.

Take a drink, eat a snack, take a walk, take a nap. And the thing that's so hard about that is I know when I get really worked up, if I have a difficult conversation at work, if I have a really trying, serious circumstance, I know that if I eat or drink or take a walk, I will feel better.

But I always feel stuck in my chair, right? So then I need to find other ways that I can care for my physical needs. Making sure I'm getting enough oxygen is huge. So doing breathing exercise.

[27 : 05] Anybody know the five-finger breathing? The very just slowly tracing your hand as you breathe in and breathe out and breathe in and breathe out.

With our kids, we use things like blowing on the hot soup or volcano breathing where you're stretching out your arms like lava from a volcano.

Using your muscles as a way to get your brain regulated again. So, you know, pressing up against a wall or floor or even just moving something around can help you get regulated again.

Cross-lateral movement. So things like crawling or floor swimming, which may feel ridiculous. But as you're moving cross-laterally, you're activating both sides of your brain.

You know, doing things like crossing your arms and touching opposite sides of your faces or your knees. Stimulating nerves, like doing magic mustache. You have a pressure point right here underneath your nose.

[28 : 06] And so, you know, it feels a little silly. It can make a kid laugh. It can make yourself laugh. And also activates a nerve ending right here. Doing fingertip massages. Pulling on opposite earlobes.

I love how you guys are just naturally imitating me. This is fantastic. For anybody who's in a caregiving situation, so parent, teacher, child care, elder care as well, we have to regulate before we relate.

We have to regulate ourselves before we can relate to somebody else. So if somebody else is in a highly anxious situation, we have to make sure that we are responding from a place of calm before we can relate to somebody.

We can't help anxious people very well when we are feeling anxious ourselves. We have to connect before we correct. We have to remember the person that we're caring for.

They have their own lion and bear stories of things that frightened them, that they were able to make it through. And it's our job to create a sense of felt safety.

[29 : 09] So whatever makes them feel safe as much as we are capable, to make sure that they are able to do that as well. Now, this is all just a very quick fly-by way of talking about trauma and safety.

It's also a very quick fly-by way of talking about a way that we can read Scripture in a more redemptive way. Because there's a thousand ways that we can preach on David and Goliath. We've probably heard several dozen of them ourselves.

And I had to stop myself. We talked about this. The preaching team got together last night. We were talking about ways that we problematize all of our heroes in the Bibles. And so we could have talked about all the ways that David is a problem and the ways that maybe we could have, like, redeemed Goliath.

But that's not what we're doing. We're just taking a story. And we're saying, what are ways that I can find meaning and value out of this story that don't contradict the way of Jesus, that aren't used to harm others, but give me a sense of, like, hope and peace and purpose?

And so we all have our Goliath. That's the easy go-to metaphor. And the way that we can bring allegory to a piece of Scripture so we can understand it and bring healing to the way that we interact with the world.

[30 : 24] Thank you.