

# CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON + + +

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Well, good morning church. So good to be with you. If you are just joining us today, we're in the second week of a sermon series called Game On, where we are collectively looking at the life and times, especially of David in the Old Testament, but we're comparing it and pairing it with these pixelated worlds called video games. It's an amazing series.

If you missed last week, one of the things we talked about is how Jesus was such a master at using common, ordinary images in his day to illustrate biblical kingdom principles. Video games are one of our culture's most powerful storytelling machines. So we're looking back into the life of King David, but today we're doing it through the lens of our second video game, one of the most iconic video games of all time.

How many of you have heard—let me hear if you have—about The Legend of Zelda? Wow, Fremont was so loud, I heard them. That's crazy. No, it's a really amazing story, and this video game has spanned generations. It's not your typical kind of run-and-jump sort of game. It has quite a storyline, like last week's as well, where it's an epic quest where a kingdom is in danger and the princess is stolen or kidnapped, darkness has covered the land. Kind of like the plotline of Mario, except in this case, the princess's name is Zelda—that's where we get the name from. Zelda. Her name is Zelda.

This time, it's not a mustachioed plumber named Mario that gets the call to rise up, it's a young boy named Link, the most unlikely of heroes. Last week's sermon was all about knowing your mission, helping you see that God has equipped you and called you for a mission. Even if this world has cast you aside or forgotten you, or you feel overlooked or maybe thrown to the margins, you have a mission. And God equips you.

So I want to kind of build on that. How does God equip you? With today's message being called "Choose Your Weapon." Everybody say, "Choose your weapon."

Before Link does anything heroic, he's got to choose his weapon. And if you played the original Zelda game, which came out in 1987—I did play this one quite regularly growing up—you may remember a scene where the room is dark and there's a glowing weapon with a message about the sword that appears on the screen: "It's dangerous to go alone. Take this." It's one of the most iconic quotes in video game history, and I think it's more than a gaming tagline; I think it's a spiritual truth as well. "It's dangerous to go alone; take this."

So when God calls you on a mission, which He did last week, He then gives you what you need for the mission. Take it. He gives you weapons to fight with so that you're not alone. So that even when temptations and fears and struggles and battles come, moments you feel overwhelmed, you are not alone. You have a weapon to fight with.

But what is your weapon? And what weapon are you gonna choose? Link was given a weapon at the very beginning, but over the course of time, Link's weapons change—there are swords and shields and slingshots and so much more—and he doesn't necessarily get all the way to the end because he's the strongest, but because he's willing.

The Bible gives us the ultimate "choose your weapon" story about another young boy, not named Link, but this time he's named David, and he would fight this giant named Goliath that breathed down murderous threats. David shows up with a sling, five stones, but the most important and unstoppable: God.

And I think that's how you show up in life, at least it's how you ought to show up—that you've got an unstoppable God on your side. But how do you know what your weapon is? What weapon is God calling you to fight with? I want to press into that.

But before we get into the specifics of the David and Goliath story and your story, I want to just put a reminder out there that we all are in a fight. We are in battles, and yes, we face some different day-to-day battles that are unique to you or unique to me. But at the same time, we face this macro battle, this bigger battle that's going on right now that sometimes we forget about: a spiritual battle.

That there is a spiritual battle happening. There's God for you, and there's a devil against you. Jesus said in John chapter 10 verse 10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." So God wants you to have that abundant, that full, that great life. You want to live with meaning and purpose and significance, but the devil is trying to do everything he can: steal you away from that, to kill you, and destroy you.

And those three words—steal, kill, and destroy—are rather extreme words, but that's not often how the devil shows up, right? It's not like the devil announces, "I'm going to come at, I don't know, 9:45 this morning, and I'm gonna steal you away from the life God has for you." But he comes in subtle, sneaky ways, bringing temptations that are unique to you, luring you in to try to get you to settle for the life that he wants you to have, which is so far away from what God's life is for you.

The apostle Paul talks about us being in a battle in Ephesians chapter 6 starting in verse 10, where he calls us to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. We're to put on the full armor of God so that we can take our stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle ultimately is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, and the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So make no mistake about it: the devil is out to get you. And sometimes we get distracted in this world and we think that other people are our biggest problem. And I'm not gonna say that people aren't a problem for you, but they're not that—like underneath, over, and all around it—the devil is your biggest problem. And sometimes we got to remember that we're fighting a spiritual battle.

We're not going to be called to rescue a princess named Zelda, but all of God's children are called to rescue all of God's children. And that's the call for you and for me. So how do you do that? How do you know you're on a mission but then know how to fight? How do you choose the right weapon?

So I want to look today at this very, very familiar story of David and Goliath. Maybe share some things that you already know, maybe even that I've talked about before, hopefully unpack a couple of new things for you. And what I want to do is I want to find, I want to locate three places where you might find your weapon—like Link would go around, and like many video games, we have to go around and find weapons that you add to your arsenal.

What are three places that you can look to locate what weapons you might have and your mission, should you choose to accept it? Once you know what your weapon is, as you put it to use.

I've said before that I really believe the way that David and Goliath has been taught is incorrect for the most part. It's really taught as this underdog story, and I don't think it's an underdog story. Malcolm Gladwell wrote a book called David and Goliath—it's actually not even a Christian book, it's a secular book—but in that case, he makes the argument that this is not an underdog. And it's true, right?

First, from a purely spiritual standpoint, I just want you to know that anytime you show up to battle with God on your side, you are never an underdog. Amen? Like, if God is with you, you are not an underdog. But secondly, David wasn't an underdog. Yeah, he was young, he was a boy, he was a shepherd, and he would have been an underdog if he'd fought Goliath in the way that Goliath wanted to fight him.

But he chose to fight him in a different way, using his weapon. And that's the power of knowing your weapon and knowing how to fight: you get to see some really cool outcomes.

And so let me set the scene for you. I'm sure you remember a lot of this if you've been in church.

But there's the two camps, right? There's the Philistines, which were the enemies of the Israelites, and there's the Israelites, which were God's people. In the middle was the valley, the Valley of Elah. And so you've got the sidelines kind of both camps.

And stepping out into the middle of the valley was this nine-foot giant named Goliath, breathing down murderous threats and issuing a call, a fight: that if you come and fight me and I win, then you Israelites worship us and our Philistine gods. But if you win, us Philistines will worship your Israelite gods. Like that's going to happen.

And it caused fear and panic, especially in the Israelite camp. David's three oldest brothers got a chance to go—the brothers, the double portion, big dog Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah—all got to go and witness this. David didn't get invited to the family meeting, and even after anointed king, didn't get a chance to go to this place, up until 40 days later when David's dad Jesse sent David to be like an Uber Eats delivery boy—to deliver some bread and cheese, some modern-day lunchables, right? He's just Grubhubbing a little charcuterie for his bros.

And the moment he stepped onto the scene, what he heard and what he saw shook him. And he was unsettled. Something holy, something discontent, something courageous rose up in him, and he issues some Old Testament smack talk:

"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that defies my God?" It's not cool that he's doing that.

And David knew that he was there for more than just delivering some food.

From here, we usually again teach that this young shepherd underdog—what an amazing thing that he took out Goliath—but in ancient battles there were more than one type of warrior, of course. Goliath was the typical warrior you think about: that was, you know, hand-to-hand combat with swords and shields and maybe a javelin.

But there was another type of warrior called a projectile warrior, where they were really good at archery or slinging, and in David's case, we know it was, of course, slinging. And in the case of an experienced slinger, that slingshot and stone was a devastating weapon.

So when Goliath calls out the Israelites and he's wanting to fight somebody, of course Goliath is not thinking about slinging. He's wanting hand-on-hand combat somebody, and can you imagine how hard from a human perspective that would have been? Can you imagine the reach of a nine-foot man? Trying to get your sword into his side or into his heart? Are you kidding me?

But David never intended to fight Goliath in this manner because he wasn't a hand-to-hand combat warrior. But nobody else could see or picture this, even the king Saul couldn't see it when David came up and he didn't give a chance to beat Goliath.

Here's what Saul said: "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him. You are only a young man, and he's been a warrior from his youth."

He's still getting shafted and cast aside. "You're too little." You see, the world, what they saw in David was "you're only a boy. You're only a shepherd. You're only a charcuterie sharer," I don't know.

But what David knew is, "I'm the only one who's willing to step up." And sometimes being the only is not a bad thing—you just got to flip it.

David insists, and Saul tries to give him armor. It doesn't fit here. But David doesn't want it or need it.

Here's where the verses say that Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around because he wasn't used to them.

"I can't go in these," he said to Saul, "because I'm not used to them." So he took them off, and he took a staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag, and with a sling in his hand, he approached the Philistine.

And the moment David used stones rather than swords is the moment that Vegas should have flipped the odds in his favor. Amen?

David said to the Philistine—when I read these next words, by the way, I want you to get rid of the image of little soft, passive harpist shepherd boy David because I see a bad man here. Listen to what he's saying:

"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. We don't teach this next part in Sunday School these days: 'The Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I will strike you down and I will cut off your head. And this very day I'm going to give the carcasses of the whole army behind you to the birds and the wild animals, you punk. And the whole world will know there's a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it's 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.'"

So we know how David went to the stream and he picked up five smooth stones, and how he only needed one to knock his opponent down. Goliath's hit on the forehead falls to the ground and is defeated.

Some Southern Baptist preachers will say, "Well, the reason David had five stones is because, well, he needed one to knock down Goliath, but he had four more for all of Goliath's brothers." I don't know if that's true or not, but anyway, it's fun to think about.

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, and then he's going to make his prophecy come true.

That wasn't the end of it. Verse 51 says David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the sheath, and after he killed him, he cut off his head with Goliath's sword.

Sword! I love thinking about that. Don't you? They said, "I'm gonna take your head and I'm gonna take..." And actually, if you keep reading the story, David like takes this head with him. That's like a crown. It's like a trophy. Keeps it in his tent.

And I think every now and then, when the Israelites got a little bit upset or a little bit frustrated, I think he picked the dead head of Goliath up and said, "This is how you get ahead in life." Yeah, thank you. It's only the fourth time I've used that joke at King of Kings in the last four years, and it's still awesome.

I didn't notice until this iteration of going through it, though, I never noticed the fact—and maybe there's something deeper here for us to examine in the future—I never noticed that when David grabbed Goliath's sword, that it was still in Goliath's sheath.

Because I think sometimes we think of the enemy as big and bold and powerful and mighty—and he is—but if the enemy is proud and arrogant, can't the Lord's people sneak up on the enemy and just cut his head off then? Anyway, something to think about that's fun.

David knew he was called for a mission, and he knew specifically what God had gifted him with—the gift of a sling and a stone. And just as David and just as Link are called to big missions and given gifts and given weapons that they need for the mission that they're supposed to go on, I want you to know that you also have a weapon.

God gives you a weapon. So how do you find it? I want to look at three places that you might find your weapon.

First, I want you to take a look at what advantages you have in your life. What advantages are a part of your life that maybe aren't a part of anyone else's life?

In Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*—the second of his books I'm referencing today for some reason—he points out that many of the people we celebrate as extraordinary are extraordinary, but many of them had a unique, really extraordinary advantage in their life.

Take Bill Gates, for example. He's brilliant, but he had the unique advantage to be born at the exact right time, in the exact right year, in the exact right place, to be in the exact right family that had the exact right amount of money to get him in the exact private school where they had an exact computer terminal in the 1960s when nobody else had one.

So that by the time he dropped out of Harvard, he had more than 10,000 hours of coding in this thing called a computer that most people hadn't even heard about. Do we celebrate him for his hard work and his brilliance? Of course we ought to do that, but part of what made him great was recognizing and capitalizing on the advantage and leaning into it.

And that's a worldly example; from a scriptural, biblical example, God has given each and every one of you an advantage. The Bible uses the word spiritual gift—that when you are in Christ, you have a gift from above. It is your advantage.

Peter says it this way: that each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Every one of us in Christ has an advantage, has a gift that we are called to put to use, to choose that weapon to fight against the enemy with.

And we've tried to be really helpful this year to help you see that you can discover what that gift is. And so for about six or seven months, we've rolled out a spiritual gift test that is unique to our congregation that I'd love for you to take if you have not yet taken it. We'll put the QR code on the screen, and that is your homework for those who have not done that yet: grab that link and spend seven to ten minutes today, and it'll give you what your top spiritual gifts are.

Might that be your advantage? Might that be the weapon God's giving to you to fight the enemy with?

David wasn't the tallest, wasn't the biggest, but he had something the rest of the army didn't have that day. He had trained with a sling, and he had the opportunity to craft that skill.

And before Goliath, we know from the other verses in that text that he had fought lions and bears, and that gave him the courage that nobody else had—the unique advantage.

Just like Link and Zelda. Just like our lives. Just like David. We don't start with everything, but we start with the advantage of having something, having a weapon.

And I believe that God gives you what you need for the season that you're in. And I don't think we think about it as often enough that the exact place you are, where you live, with who you're connected with and what your work is and who your neighbor is with—you are here for a reason.

I need to remind you that you are not an accident. God has designed you specifically and purposely for this season, for this time, in the group of people that you're with, to be used by Him and to use your weapon for Him.

Part of my story, I think, is one of the weapons God's given to me I get to hold in my hand right now. And sometimes we got to look at what's in your hand. What's God given to you? What's your advantage?

And for me, I love being able to speak into a microphone and somehow miraculously, it's coming through speakers and streams and hits somehow your ears in a way that God can perfectly kind of give you the words that you need to hear.

And maybe just maybe there's a freedom or hope or joy or new life or second chance or grace that you might get on that side.

And I love the fact that God gives me the ability to do this. But here's the other thing I know is it's an advantage for me.

What do I mean by that?

You know my story. Some of you know that whether subconsciously or consciously, I had an advantage growing up with a dad that had this as his weapon. And I got to learn and see whether I knew I was learning and seeing or not, that in those years God was preparing me.

And if you know my dad, you know his story—that his dad Ron, my grandpa—was also—this was his weapon. He was a preacher. And if you know my grandpa's story, you know that his dad, my great grandpa CR Clement Zender, this was his weapon.

And so to think that I would get this weapon with, like, only my own power and grit and hard work and determination would be erroneous, and it would be a lack of appreciation for God gifting me a certain way and also putting people in my life that gave me this unique advantage.

I get to stand on broad shoulders, is what I'm saying.

And it's not just in ministry—I found out this week that if you are a mom or dad who is a politician or a professional sports athlete, you are 10 to 25 times more likely to be that.

Why? Because you have an edge. You've got an advantage. You get to be in rooms and around people that most others don't.

So my question to you is, what is your unique advantage? What's God placed in your hand? What's around you that you can just naturally pick up because it's there?

Are you good with words? Are you good with numbers? Are you strong with empathy? Are you a visionary? Is a hammer a better tool for you than a microphone? Do you have financial means where you can open hands and generosity can make a difference?

Do you make people laugh? Are you good at organizing chaos? Are you particularly gifted in raising children?

Like, what is your unique advantage?

God gives us advantages, He gives us gifts. And again, if you are in Christ, you have one.

But some of you may still be like, "Yeah, but I just have had many things working against me in life."

And that's actually where I want to turn your attention to next.

The next place to look to find and to choose your weapon is in what you thought to be disadvantages.

So let me tell you some of these truths and see if you can guess which golfer I'm talking about.

He was an African-American that broke barriers, inspired generations, overcame obstacles, won 14 PGA Tour events in his first seven years, and for a decade straight led the tour in driving accuracy. And still far and away is the number one most accurate golf ball driver in the world.

On the count of three, tell me who I'm talking about. One, two, three.

Let me make sure I heard Northwest Omaha. One, two, three.

It's a guy named Calvin Peete.

Gotcha.

Calvin was way before Tiger Woods, and his story is quite incredible. The man didn't pick up a club until his 20s, and he taught himself to play.

But here's the most amazing part about him that I think Happy Gilmore 2 stole a little bit of his story: His left arm was broken as a child, and it never properly set and never fully strengthened.

And in the game of golf, you'd have thought that had been a disadvantage. But somehow Calvin didn't see it as a disadvantage, and somehow, with an arm that never properly straightened or set, somehow he figured out a swing and a rhythm that was unique to him, that literally he became—and still is—far and away the most accurate golf ball driver in the world.

What if your disadvantage might be the thing that distinguishes you?

Another guy I love to listen to, he's a comedian, he's a Christian comedian, he's got a great testimony. His name is Michael Jr.

And part of his big story is that growing up he had a disadvantage, at least a perceived disadvantage, called dyslexia, where he twisted some things and rearranged some things, and so it allowed him at times to feel rather foolish.



But he found out that because he sees things differently than most—differently than most—he actually has a different worldview and perspective and can bring a type of comedy that nobody with dyslexia, unless you had dyslexia, could bring.

Some of you need to hear that—it's in your disadvantage that your strongest weapon may be located.

Most people think David being in a pasture was a disadvantage—a humble, low-class, dirty job. And yet it was because he was in the pasture that he was able to become a slinger.

And when all the Israelites sat on that hillside and just took the murderous threats and the mockery of their God because they could only see a world of hand-to-hand combat, David saw a different story.

The Israelites all saw Goliath and were like, "Man, that guy's too big to take down."

And David looked at him and said, "Man, that guy's too big to not take down. Are you kidding me? I have taken down lions and bears that bit and roared and chased, and I've got a nine-foot giant. This is easy work. Light work."

Are you kidding me? It's all about perspective, and what we would have thought would be a disadvantage became his advantage.

And the apostle Paul quotes Jesus in these words, so powerful: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in what?"

Come on, "My power is made perfect in what?"

Weakness.

And that's exactly what God's gospel is all about: that Jesus went to the weakest place, a thing that was perceived as a great disadvantage—a torture instrument called a cross.

And he walked up the hill carrying part of that cross that he would eventually be nailed to, and as he was hoisted on the cross, he carried your weaknesses and my weakness called sin on his shoulders.

He who had no sin, the Bible says, became sin, so that through his death and righteousness, we would also wear God's robes of righteousness ourselves.

This thing that nobody had ever come back from, that had killed, that was torturous, that was excruciating—there was a disadvantage in that world, and God said, "I will flip even this disadvantage."

You think devil, you're going to take me down in this most humiliating of moments? What if the most humiliating of moments, what you perceived, might be the most glorified moment in my life?

And it was: at the cross that he died, and on the tomb three days later that he rose and defeated sin, death, and devil.

So that when we fight, we already know the ultimate battle against the devil's already been won, so we can walk into our battles with confidence and certainty and assurance.

Some of you have disadvantage in your life because of your own sin, weaknesses, sin that may have led to bad habits, that may have led to addiction.

Some of you have a weakness that you can sum up in one decision you made three decades ago, and you thought it was in that moment that you could no longer be God's soldier and fight and be worthy of a second chance and living out another chapter.

And it's actually in your weakness that God, His grace, shines through the most.

Some of you have disadvantages not because of your own sin, but because life's been unfair to you and the sin and brokenness or, I don't know, just randomness of this world has put you in a difficult place.

And the goal for you is to see that just because it's a disadvantage today doesn't mean that it's always a disadvantage, and that might actually be the thing that distinguishes you in the future.

It's why most addiction recovery specialists were at one time an addict and struggling and in recovery themselves. Why are they so good at their job? Because they know that story. They know what it's like to have been through that.

And some of you just need to hear that story, that truth again today: that the thing that the enemy meant to take you down and destroy you with is not meant for the enemy to take you down and destroy you with, but it's actually meant for you to grab out of the sheath and hold into your own hand so that you can destroy the enemy with it.

Don't let sin destroy you when God destroyed sin.

Are you kidding me?

Take the thing that was meant to destroy you in your hand and start bringing freedom to others through your story.

The bigger the disadvantage, I'm telling you, the stronger the weapon you might have when you flip it for His glory.

And so the third place, you got advantages, you got disadvantages, and this is maybe more like in development of your weapon, is in this thing called practice.

Practice, practice.

Anyway.

Okay, David—some of you know what that means—David didn't wake up that morning and try slinging for the first time. He didn't just show up with faith. He showed up with form. He was ready to go. He was rehearsed. He was trained.

It's in practice you discover, is this really the weapon God has for me? It's in practice that you know it's trial and error.

I think it's why parents a lot of times choose to get their kids involved in just a lot of stuff—sports, activities, clubs—because it's like, “I want to see what my kid is natural at, and I want them to know: what do they love? What are they passionate about?”

At the same time, like maybe what's not so natural for them so they don't show up on American Idol and have to hear Simon Cowell say some things, you know. You should probably say that to your son or daughter before Simon does. Anyway.

But we practice, we put it to use, we develop. We develop our weapon over and over.

If you subscribe to Malcolm Gladwell's theory in the book *Outliers*, he said that nobody becomes great or an expert or a master in their field with less than 10,000 hours of showing up and practicing.

And it's not just like physically practicing. We're talking about a spiritual battle today.

And I love Paul's words to Timothy. I like the Message version where Paul says, “Exercise daily in God. No spiritual flabbiness, please.”

I like thinking about that because I've kind of given up on physical flabbiness—I just like queso too much, you know. But can I get a rock-hard set of abs spiritually? Why not?

Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever.

Put it to practice. God's given you a weapon. He's given you advantages. He's redeemed your disadvantages. Put it to practice. Spend time in relationship with God. Discipline yourself. Get rid of the spiritual fat.

You're not spiritual babies. You're not meant to be spiritual infants. You're meant to grow up in the faith and to hone and practice and develop your skill and your craft.

And you may not face Goliath today, but face whatever battles are in front of you and get ready and get prepared so that when the battle comes, you're ready.

I've said before and I'll land the plane here that God will work more through the available than the able.

You can have all the ability in the world, but if you don't show up, God can't show off. I mean, He can go without you, but it's really cool when you do show up how God shows off.

And it's not even about your name becoming great. It's not about, you know, people knowing you—even the people I mentioned today: David, Link, Calvin Peete, Bill Gates, Michael Jr.—they're all really well known, but they all started in humility, in obscurity, with advantages and disadvantages.

And maybe your name will never get shared in a sermon, and that's okay, because God needs you where you are right now.

You were born for this time, in this place, in this moment, to be around this group of people that you're around— to bring the good news of Jesus, to defeat the enemy, and to live the life God has for you: the abundant and the full life.

The enemy is going to try to rip that away as much as he can from you.

It's amazing when we look back at Link's story and David's story how similar they are: They're both called as young boys. One hones his craft in the forest; the other in the pasture. They grow and they develop.

And Link's big enemy was named Ganon. David's big enemy was named Goliath.

Link grabs the Master Sword. David grabs Goliath's sword.

They both defeat the giant.

Link rescues the princess. David rescues the Israelites.

And God's called you and me to rescue all His children.

And He's given you exactly what you need for this moment to do it.

And God doesn't just hand out swords and weapons; He also became the sword for you so that when your own weapon and your own sword isn't powerful and isn't mighty enough, you know that in the end God wins ultimately.

And all God's calling you to do is just keep putting your weapon to use, keep practicing.

And I can't wait to see what God does through all of us as we choose our weapon and put it to work.

And so God, continue to move mightily in our lives. Thank you that you've put us in unique places and spaces. Thank you that you've redeemed us, God, from our own weakness and brokenness.

Help us to be a practiced people, a disciplined people, people that are fully in relationship and reliant, connecting to you so that we can make the biggest impact, rescue as many of your kids as possible.

It's in your name we pray.

And together, all campuses say, "Amen."