SLAYING YOUR GOLIATHS

HOW GOD CAN HELP
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JOHN OHMER

FORWARD MOVEMENT
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DEDICATION

TO
DOUG ESTELL AND BILL PLACHER,
TRUE TEACHERS
Acknowledgments

Thanks to those who have formed me and allowed me to minister among them: William Placher and Eric Dean of Wabash College, the faculty and students of Virginia Theological Seminary, the Rev. Andrew Merrow and the people of St. Mary’s, Arlington, Virginia, the people of St. James’, Leesburg, Virginia, and now the astonishingly gracious and welcoming people of The Falls Church Episcopal. Thanks to Scott Gunn and Richelle Thompson of Forward Movement for believing in this project and bringing it to fruition. Thanks to Bill and Lucinda Michel for loaning me their Deep Creek cabin for uninterrupted writing time. Thanks to the Rev. Jeunee Godsey and the Rev. Mary Davila for their help in writing the discussion questions, and to the Rev. Cathy Tibbetts, Julie Huang Tucker, Nina Bacas, the Rev. Michael Hinson, Kathy Thomas, Jim Councilor, Terri Katon, the Rev. Rosemari Sullivan, and the Rev. Jean Milliken and now the Rev. Kelly Moughty, and my other good colleagues at The Falls Church. Thanks be to God for the Diocese of Virginia’s belief in, and fight for, The Falls Church Episcopal. Even though I don’t know them, thanks to Glennon Doyle Melton and Rachel Held Evans for spiritual writing inspiration. Thanks to my Jesuit spiritual directors and to counselor John Goll for grounding and regrounding me over the years. Thanks—twenty-seven years of daily thanks—to my wife, Mary, for her belief, patience, and love. Most of all, thanks be to God for putting our children, Graham, Will, and Elizabeth, plus all these people, in my wonderful life. And to God be the sole glory.
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It’s fair to ask: “Why another book on David and Goliath?”

The answer to that question is contained within the hope-filled promise of this book: *How God can help you, like David, overcome seemingly impossible odds.*

Take a look at each word and phrase:

How. This David and Goliath book comes from a working pastor—a parish priest—and it is intended to be a practical, how-to book. For the last twenty years, my chief responsibility and joy has been to help make God and the Bible real to people and applicable to their lives and work. I’ve sought to do that through sermons, Bible studies, retreats, and everyday conversations.

In late 2012, I left my job as the rector (senior pastor) of a relatively large, well-established church in order to accept a call to become the rector of a much smaller congregation called The Falls Church Episcopal, located just outside of Washington, DC, in Virginia. I joined this faith community—at the time consisting of about eighty people on a Sunday morning—shortly after they were allowed to return to their massive property in the midst of what would be a six-year divisive legal battle that was litigated all the way to the United States Supreme Court (and only finally resolved in 2014).

Together, we have wrestled with a lot of “how” questions: How are we going to heal the divisions of the past several years? How are we going to grow membership and fill our buildings? And even: How are we going fix the leaking roof and pay the bills?

Against this backdrop, the David and Goliath story has taken on fresh meaning. Because underneath a lot of our “how” questions is a
deeper question that almost everyone asks at some point or another: How am I going to make it? And underneath that question is a deeper question yet: Is there a God “up there” who will help me? And if so, how?

This book pulls together practical lessons that I’ve learned in my most recent struggle in helping to regrow a congregation—as well as principles I’ve discovered over the course of twenty years of parish ministry.

I’m confident that if you take the principles of this book seriously and put them into practice, you will learn how...

*God can help you.* While this is a how-to book, unlike a lot of others in that genre, this is not a self-help book. That’s because the David and Goliath story, as originally told and as explored here, is a spiritual story. It is a story told by people of faith to people of faith. The hero of this story is not David, but God.

Yet God is an unusual hero, because God does not barge into the story—David’s or yours—but waits to be invited. God does not kick down the door to our hearts but stands at the door and knocks.

It is up to you to invite God in. Once invited, however, God can help you. Indeed, God will help you...

*like David.* David worshiped the same God that Moses did. When Moses encounters God at the burning bush and asks what God’s name is, God says “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6).

In other words, God is not some remote, distant, indifferent god, but a God who gets involved in the lives of real-life, specific, named people.
What do Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and you have in common? They were, and you are, real living people whom God stands ready to help…

*overcome seemingly impossible odds.* It is often said that God helps those who help themselves. But that statement is found nowhere in the Bible. In fact, the Bible consistently teaches that the exact opposite is true: God is constantly helping those who cannot help themselves. God helps the helpless.

In fact you might say God is a God of the helpless, not to mention the hapless and the hopeless. Those are the people whom God helps the most. This is good news.

In other words, God tends to favor the underdog. And nowhere is that tendency more powerfully told than in the David and Goliath story.

Better news is that David's story can be our story. Because whether it is bullies in school, mounting personal debt, health problems, or professional challenges, at some point, we all face “Goliaths” in our lives: seemingly insurmountable odds that wear us down or threaten to destroy us.

The even better news is that no matter how insurmountable the odds—however large the giants—they only seem insurmountable. Their size is a matter of perspective. Measured against our size, our abilities, our resources, they can be intimidating. Measured against God's size, God's abilities, and God's resources, however, these challenges can be overcome.

So, why this book? To show how the same God who helped David slay his Goliath stands ready to help you overcome your Goliath.

*John Ohmer*
*Rector, The Falls Church Episcopal*
Like many people—like you, perhaps—I thought for most of my life that David and Goliath was a children's Bible story. I thought it had a simple plot: David, a brave, young shepherd-boy, slays, with his trusty slingshot, the heavily armored giant named Goliath. And I thought it had a simple point: Sometimes, against all odds, the little guy wins.

But recently I discovered the story in a whole new way. In particular, the last few years, as I struggled with personal and professional ministry challenges, I found myself drawn back to this ancient story, as if it were an old and trusted friend. And each time I revisited the story, it offered me new insight and new encouragement.

In rereading the story, I have discovered something primal about it. Far from being a simple children's story, it addresses deep emotional yearnings of adulthood; far from having a simple plot, it is full of complex and nuanced storytelling; and far from having just one point, the story has many things to teach us about a variety of modern, real-life issues.

For example, when we read about Goliath's pre-battle taunts, we learn a lot about psychological intimidation and bullying. David's encounters with his older brothers show us that while twisted and broken family dynamics are nothing new, sibling rivalries and petty jealousies can reveal insecurities in even the most confident people. When we see how David handles those who question his ability to take on Goliath, we learn a lot about faith in God and where calm confidence comes from. And when we see David reject Saul's armor and go down to the river to pick out his five smooth stones, we realize we are reading a masterful metaphor about the importance of
rejecting ideas or customs that don’t fit us so that we can be free to use our God-given gifts.

Most of all and best of all, when we read the David and Goliath story as a spiritual story, it addresses a deep spiritual hunger within us: our longing to know if we are alone in our struggles.

The answer, as we’ll discover together in the following chapters, is an emphatic no. We are not alone in our struggles, because the same God who cared for David cares for us.

The story of David and Goliath is found in 1 Samuel 17. (You can read it in the Appendix). We will spend the rest of the book looking further into those ideas. But first, let’s make sure we understand some of David and Goliath’s backstory.
The David and Goliath story takes place at an unusual time in Israel’s history—during its first kingship. Up until this point in Israel’s history, from the time of their liberation from slavery in Egypt until King Saul, judges and prophets had ruled over Israel, not kings. That was the way God wanted it because God wanted Israel to think of God as its only sovereign and protector, not some earthly king. But the Israelites kept insisting, “We are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.” (1 Samuel 8:19-20)

Eventually, God allows Israel to have what they want, and the people anoint Saul as their first king. But God remains unhappy with the idea of an earthly kingship in general and with King Saul in particular.

Finally, God gets so fed up with Saul that God decides to reject him as king and anoint someone else in his place. To implement this plan, God tells the prophet Samuel to go to the city of Bethlehem, to a man named Jesse who has eight sons, and once there, to follow the instructions that God will give him.

Here is how the story of the anointing of the new king goes (you can read the full accounting in 1 Samuel 16):
Jesse’s first son, Eliab, is brought before the prophet Samuel. Eliab is tall and handsome. More importantly, he is the oldest of the eight sons, and so everyone thinks that he is going to be anointed king. But God tells Samuel it’s not Eliab who should be king: “I have rejected him,” God says to Samuel, “for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” So Jesse’s next-oldest son, Abinadab, is brought to Samuel, but he, too, is rejected. The same thing happens with Jesse’s third-oldest son, Shammah.

Jesse then makes his next four sons go before Samuel, one at a time. But it’s the same story: “The Lord has not chosen any of these.”

Finally, Samuel asks Jesse, “Are all your sons here?”

And that is when we first learn about David.

“There remains yet the youngest,” Jesse says, “but he is keeping the sheep.”

“Bring him,” Samuel says.

When David is brought inside, God tells Samuel, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”

Then Samuel takes the horn of oil and anoints David in the presence of his brothers. (Keep this in mind for later in the story!)

The next thing that happens is “the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward,” and at the same time, “the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul.”

So God’s spirit—the divine favor or protection of God—flows into young David and out of King Saul—leaving Saul technically the king but now spirit-less. Favor-less. Unprotected. Actually, it’s worse
than that: Not only does God’s good and holy spirit depart from King Saul, but also an evil spirit, a foul spirit, a distressing, agitating, unhappy, and paranoid spirit, takes its place.

A bit later, back home in the palace, King Saul’s servants notice this evil spirit tormenting the king. Because music and musical instruments were considered things that could tame or banish evil spirits, Saul’s servants ask the king for permission to find someone who can play the lyre for him, to comfort him.

When King Saul agrees, guess who is suggested. “A son of Jesse the Bethlehemite.” David himself! So King Saul summons David to serve him. David acts as the king’s armor-bearer, and over time earns the king’s trust and affection and even love by playing the lyre for Saul whenever Saul feels under attack by the evil spirit. And sure enough, each time David plays the lyre, the evil spirit goes away and King Saul feels relief.

So that’s our backstory. That is where the story of David and Goliath begins. Do you see why this backstory is important? David will eventually re-emerge as one who is willing to battle the Philistine giant Goliath. And eventually, after Saul’s death, David will become king—and one of the most well-known figures in the Old Testament. (This is the same David who will achieve fame as a military hero and shame as one who succumbs to temptation when he sees Bathsheba bathing; it is the same David who is credited for composing many of the psalms. And this is the David that the gospels of Matthew and Luke list as a direct ancestor of Jesus.)

But before all this, we know:

✔ God did not want the Israelites to put their trust in an earthly king because it would lead them to believe that protection and security come from the king’s weapons and resources and not from God.
God has rejected Israel’s first king, King Saul, and anointed David as his successor.

David is a surprising choice to be the king’s successor: He is only a shepherd boy, and he is the youngest and therefore least likely of his eight brothers to be selected.

David is a controversial choice to be the king’s successor because he was anointed king in the presence of his older brothers, breeding resentment.

David, presumably having kept his anointing a secret, is now working for King Saul, comforting him over the loss of the very God-spirit that David now possesses.

A CHURCH IN NEED

The Falls Church Episcopal has a rich history going all the way back to the 1730s. For most of its history, it had been moderate in size and a full and cheerful part of the wider church of the Diocese of Virginia and The Episcopal Church. But in the mid-to-late 1980s, it went through a period of massive numerical growth, in its heyday having about 3,000 baptized members and drawing an average Sunday attendance of about 2,000. During this time, its leadership began expressing increasingly strident opposition to the wider Episcopal Church, particularly around the issue of full inclusion of gays and lesbians in all aspects of church life and its policy of allowing women to become bishops.

These differences of opinion led to a formal church split in 2006, with the vast majority voting to leave The Episcopal Church and only a hundred or so members voting to stay within it. Shortly after the vote, three longtime lay leaders of church—Bill Goodrich, Bill Fetsch, and Harry Hudson—met to decide what to do next. They made a decision that any course of action had to follow from praying and worshiping together. Shortly after, about thirty people gathered for worship in the living room of Bill and Robin Fetsch as the “continuing congregation” of The Falls Church Episcopal.
Meanwhile, the “departing” congregants (now calling themselves The Falls Church Anglican) attempted to make a legal case that they were entitled to remain in the possession of the buildings and grounds and that the property belonged to the local parish, not to the diocese or wider Episcopal Church. While other area congregations that chose to leave The Episcopal Church made similar arguments, they settled at some point or another with the Diocese of Virginia. (For example, at least one Anglican congregation now rents church property back from the diocese.)

In 2012, the Virginia Supreme Court unanimously ruled against The Falls Church Anglican and in favor of the Diocese of Virginia. That decision required the departing group of parishioners to leave the property they had attempted to claim as their own. (They now occupy office and worship space nearby.) The Virginia Supreme Court decision also allowed the group of “continuing Falls Church Episcopalians” to return to the property.

Unfortunately, even after the Virginia Supreme Court decision, the leadership of The Falls Church Anglican chose to continue litigating the matter, which meant the case dragged on for several more years. The US Supreme Court declined to hear the case in 2014, which officially let the Virginia Supreme Court decision stand, finally ending the legal battle.

The Falls Church Episcopal still had major challenges, even though they were back in the building and the lawsuit was settled. The congregation had about eighty or so people attending Sunday worship services in the fall of 2012. Sure, they had outgrown the parishioners’ living room and even their space at a Presbyterian church, but now, there was plenty of space to fill—and expenses to meet—in the newly reclaimed church building.
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

1. How does knowing his humble beginnings inform your understanding of David’s story throughout the Bible? How does this backstory influence your reading and understanding of the psalms? Does it change your view of the story of David and Goliath? How?

2. Before you face your Goliaths, why is it important to know and understand the backstory? How might this context shape your next steps?
John Ohmer has more than twenty years of experience as a parish priest in The Episcopal Church. He joined The Falls Church Episcopal as rector in September, 2012, after having led the growing, vibrant congregation of St. James’ Episcopal Church in Leesburg, Virginia for thirteen years. He is a graduate of Wabash College and earned a Master of Divinity from Virginia Theological Seminary. Prior to ordination, he had a brief career in government and politics, working as a Capitol Hill staff member and as a press secretary and speech writer in his home state of Indiana. John and his wife, Mary, an elementary school teacher, have three children. John blogs at Unapologetic Theology, unapologetictheology.blogspot.com.
About Forward Movement

Forward Movement is committed to inspiring disciples and empowering evangelists. While we produce great resources like this book, Forward Movement is not a publishing company. We are a ministry.

Our mission is to support you in your spiritual journey, to help you grow as a follower of Jesus Christ. Publishing books, daily reflections, studies for small groups, and online resources is an important way that we live out this ministry. More than a half million people read our daily devotions through Forward Day by Day, which is also available in Spanish (Adelante Día a Día) and Braille, online, as a podcast, and as an app for your smartphones or tablets. It is mailed to more than fifty countries, and we donate nearly 30,000 copies each quarter to prisons, hospitals, and nursing homes. We actively seek partners across the Church and look for ways to provide resources that inspire and challenge.

A ministry of The Episcopal Church for eighty years, Forward Movement is a nonprofit organization funded by sales of resources and gifts from generous donors. To learn more about Forward Movement and our resources, please visit us at www.forwardmovement.org (or www.adelanteenelcamino.org).

We are delighted to be doing this work and invite your prayers and support.
Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were
gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between
Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. Saul and the Israelites
gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks
against the Philistines. The Philistines stood on the mountain on the
one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with
a valley between them. And there came out from the camp of the
Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height
was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head,
and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five
thousand shekels of bronze. He had greaves of bronze on his legs
and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of
his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his spear’s head weighed six
hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. He
stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why have you come out to
draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants
of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to
me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your
servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be
our servants and serve us.” And the Philistine said, “Today I defy the
ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together.” When
Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were
dismayed and greatly afraid.
Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years. The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle; the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. David was the youngest; the three eldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem. For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

Jesse said to his son David, “Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers; also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them.”

Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid. The Israelites said, “Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his
daughter and make his family free in Israel.” David said to the men who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” The people answered him in the same way, “So shall it be done for the man who kills him.”

His eldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the men; and Eliab’s anger was kindled against David. He said, “Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down just to see the battle.” David said, “What have I done now? It was only a question.” He turned away from him toward another and spoke in the same way; and the people answered him again as before.

When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. David said to Saul, “Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.” David said, “The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” So Saul said to David, “Go, and may the LORD be with you!”
Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul’s sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.” So David removed them.

Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd’s bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.” But David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s and he will give you into our hand.”

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his
forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on
the ground.

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone,
striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword
in David’s hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he
grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he
cut off his head with it.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.
The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the
Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded
Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.
The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they
plundered their camp. David took the head of the Philistine and
brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.

When Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner,
the commander of the army, “Abner, whose son is this young man?”
Abner said, “As your soul lives, O king, I do not know.” The king
said, “Inquire whose son the stripling is.” On David’s return from
killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul,
with the head of the Philistine in his hand. Saul said to him, “Whose
son are you, young man?” And David answered, “I am the son of
your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”
**GOLIATHS IN OUR LAND**

Here are some examples of present-day Goliaths.

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<td>Christians no longer trustworthy in our story and in our behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threat of lawsuit</td>
<td>People who are set in their ways</td>
<td>Polarization in church, politics, society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myself: not good enough</td>
<td>Deep conviction of keeping “their church” they way they want it</td>
<td>Fearful of “next” issue to disrupt local congregation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too many ideas, too little energy</td>
<td>Rich bullies</td>
<td>Blaming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career stalemate</td>
<td>Building maintenance</td>
<td>Anger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kids moving away</td>
<td>Balance spiritual, outreach, and worship</td>
<td>Judgment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consuming kid problems</td>
<td>Reaching the disillusioned</td>
<td>Progressive-ism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress of life changes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Racism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disorganization</td>
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<td>Financial downturn</td>
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<td>Harmful habits</td>
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<td>Distractions</td>
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<td>Drug problems</td>
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<td>Being an introvert</td>
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<td>Financial limitations</td>
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Relocation
Exhaustion
Weariness
Self criticism
Polarization of Christian faith communities

Rebuilding a parish torn by schism
Building up music and Christian formation
Missing sheep
Transition due to age and health
Privileged community: served rather than serve
Low sense of vocation
Complacency
Limited resources
Lack of enthusiasm
Difficult history
Aging demographics

We don’t speak in a language the world can hear
Greed
Poverty and income distribution
Lack of education
Conflicts, war
Inequality
Putting people in prison rather than presenting paths of healing and reform
Divisive vs. unifying
Lack of sense of Christian identity
THE SIX VISIONS OF
THE FALLS CHURCH EPISCOPAL

✔ With God’s help, The Falls Church Episcopal will grow both numerically and spiritually: we will draw increasing numbers of newcomers, and invite them into deeper involvement in the ministries of the church while equipping all our members to grow as disciples of Jesus.

**Why:** “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2)

We are a welcoming group of believers. We are proud of our heritage as Christians worshiping in the Episcopal tradition; we have love for one another, and are an open, outreach-oriented people who offer a sense of community to people seeking connection, purpose, and Christian community. Jesus told his followers that they are “the light of the world;” that “a town built on a hill cannot be hidden,” and that we are to “let our light shine before others” so that God may be glorified. We have a “message of trust in the hope-filled promises of Jesus”—in other words, we are, and we have, good news to offer, and we seek to draw others into that good news as we grow in our own discipleship.

✔ With God’s help, The Falls Church will encourage and equip all parishioners to live out their baptismal covenant promise to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.
Why: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

When Jesus summarized his own “mission,” he said he was sent to “to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” As Jesus’ followers, we are called not only to address the practical everyday needs of the poor, but in addition, we are each challenged, in our baptismal covenant, to address underlying causes of poverty and injustice.

✔ With God’s help, we will provide quality, proactive pastoral care to our members.

**WHY:** “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

This vision is already taking new wings, with the reactivation of a Stephen Ministry program, and adding staff. This frees the clergy staff to provide pastoral care to those in need, as well as to equip lay leaders who have this gift to share it with others.

✔ With God’s help, The Falls Church Episcopal will have a vibrant children and youth ministry.

**WHY:** “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your
hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:5-6).

Children and youth are not just the future of the church: They are the church. God seems to be drawing increasing numbers of families with young children to our worship services. We rejoice as children find leadership roles in worship and ministry at The Falls Church. We teach, through conscious words, programs, and example, the vital truths of our faith as we prepare children and youth for lives of Christian leadership and service in the world. Our vision is to offer a ministry that will attract youth of the community to our parish because of the quality of our offerings.

✔ With God’s help, The Falls Church will be known for its outstanding music programs. They will draw children from disadvantaged backgrounds into affordable or free music lessons, train a generation of church youth in highest quality Christian music, and continue to provide church worship services with vibrant, inspiring vocal and instrumental music.

**Why:** “Sing to the **Lord** a new song; sing to the **Lord**, all the earth….Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (Psalm 96).

Voices and instruments joined in praising God are an outward and visible—or at least audible—sign of God’s kingdom coming, and God’s will being done, on earth as it is in heaven. They offer a powerful way to worship God, creating harmony and beauty as a manifestation of
Christ and the church. Excellent music draws people to the community. Music education offers youth and adults the opportunity to become excellent musicians, trained in traditional and contemporary offerings. The vision of offering voice and instrumental lessons to children of the community with limited financial resources and have them share in the worship of the church is a powerful way to bring good news, with the potential to transform lives.

✔ With God’s help, the buildings and grounds of The Falls Church Episcopal—including our adjacent property—will be good news to the community of the city of Falls Church.

**Why:** “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

We believe it is strategically wise to build on our assets, and one of our assets is our buildings and grounds. They are centrally located, historically significant, and spacious. We have an opportunity to offer our buildings and grounds as a tangible way to serve the wider community of Falls Church. We want not only ourselves, but also the place itself—the buildings and grounds—to be known in the wider community as good news, a helpful, open, friendly resource for the betterment of the city. In addition, we have a responsibility to our city, state, and indeed the nation to share our historic building, grounds, artifacts, and historical records with all who want to understand the history of the Episcopal Church in the context of our nation’s founding and growth. Further, we wish to offer our facilities to the diocese and to other compatible faith communities and organizations as partners in the gospel.
HOW CAN GOD HELP YOU, LIKE DAVID, TO OVERCOME SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE ODDS?

The David and Goliath story offers spiritual guidance on how to prevail over obstacles. Rather than offering “self-help,” the story offers “God-help,” rooted in its history as one told by people of faith to people of faith. The ancient story of David and Goliath speaks to modern people facing modern problems, offering spiritual guidance and reassurance that God is with us always, even and especially when we face and slay our giants.

Author John Ohmer has spent more than twenty years as an Episcopal priest, seeking to make God and the Bible real to people and applicable to their lives and work. In his life and work, he is drawn to the story of David and Goliath as if it is an old and trusted friend. And each time he revisits the story, it offers fresh insight and encouragement. In *Slaying Your Goliaths*, Ohmer shares practical lessons from his ministry as well as reflections on the challenges of helping a flagship congregation heal and regrow.