

Designated Champion

1 Samuel 17:4 And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height [was] six cubits and a span.

1 Samuel 17:8-9

8 And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set [your] battle in array? [am] not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

9 If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.

In January 2011, the Wall Street Journal ran a piece titled, “Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior” by Chinese-American Amy Chua.

The piece itself was an excerpt from a book called, “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother.” In the book, Chua discusses her experiences being brought up in a home and then raising her own children within a home with high expectations of behavior. The article begins:

A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what these parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what it's like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it. Here are some things my daughters, Sophia and Louisa, were never allowed to do:

- Attend a sleepover
- Have a playdate
- Be in a school play

- Complain about not being in a school play
- Watch TV or play computer games
- Choose their own extracurricular activities
- Get any grade less than an A
- Not be the #1 student in every subject except gym and drama
- Play any instrument other than the piano or violin
- Not play the piano or violin

The article launched a firestorm of controversy. Even now the Wall Street Journal web site has nearly 9,000 comments posted on this one article.

Many people were outraged that someone could be so brazen and mean to her children. The fact that the book was partially tongue-in-cheek and self-deprecating was lost on many of the people who read it.

What really struck me when I first read the article were the observations on human behavior that she makes in the book.

Some of the things she says:

- “Chinese parents can order their kids to get straight As. Western parents can only ask their kids to try their best.”
- “Western parents are concerned about their children's psyches. Chinese parents aren't. They assume strength, not fragility, and as a result they behave very differently.”
- “Chinese parents spend approximately 10 times as long every day drilling academic activities with their children. By contrast, Western kids are more likely to participate in sports teams.”

- “What Chinese parents understand is that nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work, which is why it is crucial to override their preferences.”

That last statement really hit me. She is right: most things are not fun until you are good at them.

Sometimes we need to be pushed beyond what we think we are able to do before we find out what our limits are.

We don't become a champion by accident; sometimes the role of champion has to be assigned to us.

What Is A Champion?

A champion is one who fights on behalf of another. In the book of Samuel there is the story of Goliath and David. Goliath is the champion of the Philistines.

He comes out onto the battlefield and challenges the army of Saul.

1 Samuel 17:9: If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.

Goliath doesn't suggest that the two armies fight on the field. Instead he suggests that only two men fight.

Rather than wasting all the time and the bloodshed on hundreds or thousands of men fighting, just have two people fight. Winner takes all.

If the Jewish champion wins then all Philistines will be slaves, but if Goliath wins, then all of Judah becomes their slaves. It is an all-or-nothing proposal. Rather than having a war, they have simply a battle between two Champions.

This is the nature of a Champion. In modern terms we sometimes think of the word, as being the “winner” of a contest but in reality a Champion is one who

fights on behalf of someone else. The Champion fights so that someone else doesn't have to, but the outcome still counts.

That is why it is so surprising that Saul chooses David to be his Champion.

Remember the stakes are, "...but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us." David's brothers are going to be slaves to the Philistines.

Saul will probably be killed but if not he will have his thumbs and big toes cut off along with his nose. When you see ancient statues with the nose missing that is not because of some accident; someone removed the nose of the statue later, on purpose, because that is what they did to conquered kings.

Yet despite all of this, whom does Saul send out to the field to be the Champion? He does not send his best swordsman.

He does not send his best archer.

Saul sends a musician.

It would be as if a high school football coach were to say,

"Boys we have no chance of winning against this team. I talked to the coach and we have decided that instead of having the whole team go out onto the field we are just going to send one guy from each side. The other team has a guy who has been held back a few grades; he is a 22-year old High School sophomore who is 6-6, 340 pounds, and can run the 100-yard dash in 8 seconds. I could send one of you guys, but I don't want you to be injured so instead I am going to send in a guy from the marching band; an instrument that doesn't matter like the tuba. Those two will run a few plays until our guy is unconscious. Then we will put on skirts and high heels, perform 'I'm a little teacup,' put the equipment back in the bus and go home. What do you say?"

Yet that is essentially what Saul was doing. He was sending out a little kid against a champion warrior. The implications were not just that this would kill David; David's brothers and all of Saul's army would become slaves or put to death on the spot.

Yet Saul chooses David to be his Champion. Why?

We know why David chose to be Champion: Saul offered a lot of money to anyone who would do it.

1 Samuel 17:25: ...it shall be, [that] the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

So the man who kills Goliath gets money, he gets to marry into the king's daughter, and he doesn't have to pay taxes. (For those of you who hate tax abatements, remember that it is a sound Biblical principle.)

Saul asks for volunteers for his Champion. When David hears this he stands up proudly in righteous indignation and says,

1 Samuel 17:26: ...who [is] this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

We tell the kids this story and say the words with such drama. Actually this is the second thing he says.

Before that he says, "How much did you say that the king would pay?"

1 Samuel 17:26: And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who [is] this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

David As Champion

But David had something else: confidence.

David had been out in the fields with the sheep and he had been tested.

David's brothers assumed that he was weak. They assumed that he was only coming out to see some cool battles.

They ridiculed him and accused him of being a poor shepherd, leaving them with some hired hands.

What they did not know is that God had sent events into David's life long before he met Goliath. Like a Tiger Mom, God didn't allow David to think of himself as weak; he forced David to see himself as strong.

1 Samuel 17:34-36

34 And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered [it] out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught [him] by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

We talk a lot about the courage of David against the giant, but we forget the training that he went through to get there.

God was like David's "Tiger Mom," demanding that he practice his talents. God didn't allow David to just sit out all night and look at the stars; he sent lions and bears to attack him.

David didn't want to practice his fighting skills; he wanted to play his harp and write music. God sent bears and lions into David's life to train him.

Not only did it allow David a chance to practice his skills, it also allowed him to see just how good he really was.

David wanted to be a musician, but God needed him to be a Champion. David volunteered to be a Champion for Saul, but before that day ever came God assigned the role of Champion to David.

In her book the Tiger Mom says, “Nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work, which is why it is crucial to override their preferences.”

God never let David take the easy way. He sent lions and bears into David’s life as practice.

Lions are scary. Bears are scary. But neither the lion nor the bear was anything compared to the giant that walked out onto a field in Judah one morning. The lion and the bear were practice.

Luckily for David, he had been trained by a tiger.

“Nothing is fun until you're good at it.” When David walked out onto the field that morning, he was having fun.

Job As Champion

The book of Job opens with a description of Job. It tells us in the first 5 verses why Job is righteous.

It tells us that not only does Job offer sacrifices to God for the sins that he and his children commit, he also offers sacrifices for the sins they might have committed.

Job is never declared to be without sin, but he does do all the things he needs to do to be right with God.

It is into this background that a trial begins in Heaven, or as the Bible says:

Job 1:6: Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.

Two things are in this verse.

First, it says that the “sons of God” came to present themselves before the Lord.

Jewish tradition holds that this first day is Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the “10 Days of Awe.” These 10 days are outlined in Leviticus 23:23-32, Leviticus 16:29-34, Numbers 29:7-11. Every year in the Jewish calendar, there are 10 days when everyone puts sackcloth and ashes and repents of their sins in the previous year.

The Days of Awe ends with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement when the High Priest enters the Temple and sprinkles blood onto the altar. The sins of the community are rolled forward for another year.

The tradition is that during this time, God and Satan actually argue in court as to the fate of everyone on earth.

In fact the name Satan comes from the Hebrew words “Ha Satan” which means “the adversary.” Not just an adversary, but also specifically a “prosecuting attorney.”

So when the Bible uses the phrases, “present themselves” and “Satan,” it is giving us the image of a courtroom. God is the judge, because he is the one to whom everyone is presenting themselves.

Satan is the prosecution, arguing for why everyone should be declared guilty. The humans are the defense, the ones who have to defend themselves against the accusations of Satan.

Into this courtroom in heaven, God gives his verdict. God declares Job to be righteous:

Job 1:8: And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that [there is] none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

God doesn't ask Job to make his argument; God declares his verdict: Job is righteous. God raps the gavel; court is dismissed, next case.

But Satan doesn't leave it there.

Satan accuses Job of not being righteous. Satan says that Job isn't righteous because he only serves God because of the blessings that God provides to him.

Job isn't righteous, but he is selfish. Job only serves God to get his stuff. If God were to withdraw his blessings from Job then God would see that Job is not righteous at all.

Job 1:11: But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

But that is not what Satan is really saying. Satan doesn't really care about Job.

What Satan is really challenging is God's verdict on Job. Satan is saying that God made a mistake. He is saying that God isn't a good enough judge to even know just how unrighteous Job really is.

Satan is accusing God of judicial incompetence.

Now God has a problem. His right to sit in judgment has been called into question, so he must respond.

On the other hand it is not proper protocol for the judge to directly confront the prosecutor. The rules of the courtroom say that the judge has to remain impartial and listen to the arguments of the prosecution and the defense before rendering a verdict. What can he do?

God chooses a Champion. God allows Satan to test Job.

Job 1:12: And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath [is] in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.

He allows Satan to take away Job's children, his camels, his sheep, and his cattle. All of Job's earthly possessions are taken from him.

What did Job do to deserve this punishment? Nothing. Job isn't being punished; Job is God's Champion.

Just like David was fighting for Israel and Goliath was fighting for the Philistines, Job is fighting for God. If David won, the Philistines would be slaves; if the Philistines won, Israel would be their slaves.

Likewise if Job wins, then Satan is proven wrong; but if Job gives in and curses God, then Satan was right about Job all along, God was wrong, and God is not fit to be judge.

The stakes are even greater than they were when David met Goliath; now the fate of the entire universe rests on what Job does.

Job 1:21: And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Job wins. Job does not curse the Lord, but he blesses Him. God's Champion has triumphed.

Are You A Champion?

Throughout the book of Job his friends keep suggesting that Job is being punished for something that he has done wrong.

Job insists that he has not done anything wrong. The first 5 verses in Job make sure that we know that he is correct.

The wind and the lightning didn't come into Job's life and destroy his possessions because Job was being punished; those things came into Job's life because God needed Job to be a Champion.

Neither David nor Job asked to be God's Champions; those jobs were assigned to them.

Goliath didn't come into David's life because of something that David did wrong,

David came into Goliath's life because David was God's Champion. David was acting on behalf of Israel. The word "Israel" comes from 3 Hebrew words:

I	He
S'ra	Struggle
El	God

"Israel: He who struggles on God's behalf."

Just like David and Job, God asks us to be Israel, to be those who struggle on God's behalf.

As you go through life you may wonder why things are happening to you, what did you do wrong? The answer may be that you have done nothing wrong.

More to the point, you should live your life so that you are sure that you have done nothing wrong just like Job.

But even if you live a completely righteous life, there are going to be Goliaths that come into your life and make fun of you.

There are going to be winds that blow down your house. The question is not if those things will happen it is what you do when they come. Do you curse God, or do you defend God and fight back?

God has an assignment for you: he wants you to be his Champion.

You are the Designated Champion in God's fight.

Will you be like a child and say, "I don't want to do this."

Will you say, "Oh no, not again."

Or will you be like a trained Champion, tested in battle, and skilled in his weapons from hours and hours of practice who says, "Oh good, this will be fun."