

# Matthew 5: 14-16



**"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house."**

# LIFE IS GOOD

## Mike's Story

### ***1 Samuel 17: 4-7***

***"A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>5</sup> He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels<sup>[b]</sup>; <sup>6</sup> on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. <sup>7</sup> His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels.<sup>[c]</sup> His shield bearer went ahead of him."*** (NIV)



Do you recall hearing the story of David and Goliath as a small child and the excitement you felt as the battle between a young man and a giant-sized seasoned warrior began to unfold? Given the fact that the top of your own head only reached the waist of the adults that surrounded you at that age, when analyzing in your young mind the description of Goliath in Scripture, it had to make goose bumps form all over your body.

Folks, although soldiers in King Saul's army were known to be tough, they all stood with feet paralyzed and almost unable to breathe when Goliath strutted out in front, shouting and taunting them from across the way. Scripture even describes King Saul, a very tall man, quaking in his sandals as his mind was flooded with fear at the prospect of going up against the giant. Hearing the following words from 1 Samuel 17: 8-11 *"Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. <sup>9</sup> If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us."* <sup>10</sup> Then the Philistine said, *"This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other."* <sup>11</sup> **On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified,"** will allow you to internalize the depth of the challenge and emotions the army of Israel experienced at the time.

Folks, are you developing a photograph in your mind of how the soldiers in both armies appeared as they faced one another? Even from a distance, the body language of Israel's opponent had to speak as loudly as their braggart's words. In contrast, totally disillusioned, King Saul and his generals must have been at a loss for a battle plan in the situation. Clearly, they were out of options.

Then, adding insult to injury, a small ruddy faced shepherd boy named David looked up at Saul saying, *"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."*

Consequently, as Goliath and his army watched these happenings unfold, are you conjuring up images and actions that would probably be written as a script for a comic book? Then, adding insult to injury, when they saw David swallowed up by the large tunic they dressed him in, along with the sword fastened on his body that was probably hanging heavily on the ground, they were without doubt bent over in raucous laughter. Ladies and gentlemen, at this point, David in all likelihood resembled the writer when she dressed up in her Aunt Dollie's dresses and shoes as a little girl. Certainly, the image in photographs showed wads of material dragging the ground, and tiny ankles protruding out of high heeled shoes that were impossible to walk in.

Yet, in spite of the humorous image we might have drawn in our minds regarding the appearance of this ridiculous scene in Scripture, it was a matter of life or death for Saul's army; so drastic that it meant being free or slaves of the enemy. However, when God is on your side, absolutely nothing is impossible.

Just think, the little shepherd boy that had spent so many hours alone in only the company of his sheep and a harp, unbeknownst to even his own brothers had fallen hopelessly in love with his Heavenly Father. Are you able to imagine the possible conversations (Prayers) they enjoyed with one another, as well as how special the music David played for only God's ears were to both of them?

Thus, given this background, are you concluding where David's courage and faith of the assurance that God would be on his side emanated from over the course of time? Not only did it allow the young shepherd boy to pick up the gauntlet, but also have the courage to block out the horrific mocking from the enemy and handle the knowledge that even his own people thought him a lunatic.

However, if you read on in Scripture, the victory David experienced over Goliath because he first placed his faith in God, and then chose to be himself by not wearing the trappings of a soldier, resulted in felling a giant with only the sling shot he was so familiar with as a shepherd.

Folks, at this juncture, you might be wondering what the story of David and Goliath has to do with that of a person that journeyed through life on earth during our time. Thus, if your interest has been peaked at this point, you are going to thoroughly enjoy Mike's story titled, "Life Is Good". Read on!

### Mike's Story

Let's begin Mike's story by pretending to view a photo of a first-grade class where all the students are lined up according to size; meaning those that are taller are always seen peering with ease over the heads of the "little duffs" that inevitably have to wait until last to take their positions in the front row. Now folks, if you happen to be a little fellow that has been created using a very tiny mold, this can be a rough situation, indeed.

Then, as time goes on and the calendar's pages turn at an alarming rate of speed, most of the students in the picture are told by their family members, "You are growing just like a weed. In a single month, your pants that were perfect when purchased, make you look like you have been wading in high water."

Unfortunately, these age-old remarks that have been spoken repeatedly by mothers over the years were never heard by the ears of a little boy named Mike. Since he was physically small from the beginning, and weighed only 115 lbs. as a senior, you can imagine how he measured in comparison to classmates his own age. However, in spite of his small stature, his clothes wore out at the same rate of those that towered over him due to his active nature; so energetic and quick that his movements were like "white lightning" resulting in the deterioration of the fabric.

Still, most individuals of this size would have succumbed to the pressure of cruel remarks that children can throw around; words that can cut so deeply that it would be impossible for even the most secure adult to endure the hardship.

Also, given his size in relationship to his peers, one would suspect that he was quiet in nature and extremely subdued. However, due to his magnetic personality, it was just the opposite for little Mike. When this tiny guy walked into a room, his charisma and individuality literally filled every space with such drama that people of all ages and genders were drawn to him; all due to the compassion, gentleness, and love he displayed toward his fellowman.

Consequently, these personality traits emerged when, as only a young boy, he served on the school patrol; a position that allowed him to use his desire to impact others in a big way. One such story that came to light regarding this very thing was when he spotted a young classmate that had physical challenges brought on by the disease called polio. After watching others bully the boy by shoving him to the ground repeatedly, Mike stepped up to the plate and loaded his friend on his back; carrying him to and from school every day; a behavior that sent a clear message to his classmates that their cruel actions were to cease immediately.

Ladies and gentlemen, draw a picture in your mind of Mike with his much larger friend draped over his shoulders; so out of proportion that the boy's legs that were in braces dragged along the ground behind the two. Are you imagining the expression on Mike's face of determination as he huffed and puffed his way under the weight of this burden every day? Does it give you a feel as to how he felt about the downtrodden folks that were being treated unfairly by the Goliaths of society? And...that was just the beginning.

Friends, considering this amount of compassion and love for his fellowman, are you able to imagine the path set before him by his Maker at this early point in his life? Given this level of determination and courage to stand up in the face of injustice, are you able to bring to mind the number of Goliaths Mike would slay during his journey on earth? Since this little guy never knew a stranger, you will be thrilled to hear about the hearts God would use him to touch.

Thus, when Mike reached junior high school, his "can do" attitude motivated him to try out for the team in football, basketball, and any sport that caught his attention. Even though all the team players were taller and bigger than he, it did not bother him one iota. *What this little guy lacked in size was overcome with speed. Trying to catch Mike was like chasing a speeding bullet. This approach plus the fact that he gave 110% every time in every game, made life good in his mind.*

With this behavior as your focus, you will chuckle at a time after entering high school that this little ball of energy was brought to a complete halt when spotting a young lady named Barbara that took his breath away; so much that he confidently proclaimed to all his friends that he was going to marry her.

However, considering him to be a "nerd", her strong reaction was one of enormous discouragement; an interpretation that most people would have clearly understood as a negative response. Not Mike! He set his eye on this future wife and never wavered.



Therefore, following graduation he made it his business to suddenly appear in the midst of a trip Barbara took with her sorority and convinced the chaperone to allow him to take the love of his life to the movies; a date that brought about an October wedding. Strangely enough, having not enough finances to purchase an engagement ring, Mike presented his bride to be with one that had belonged to his grandmother; a person, unbeknownst to both of them, had been an individual that played an enormous role as a mentor in Barbara's life during her earlier years; thus, making this piece of jewelry priceless in the eyes of his bride.

Then, in order to make a living as the breadwinner of the family, Mike chose to become a fireman; a job that, in spite of all the hazards associated with smoke and fires, became a lifetime career. Thus, in his usual manner, the approach he applied in saving lives was a winner and commanded respect from his fellow firemen and the entire community.

Later, as fatherhood approached, resulting in three daughters, his commitment to making sure Barbara could be a full-time mother propelled him into action on a search for supplementing his salary; meaning in addition to being a fireman, he worked at least a total of 3 or 4 jobs.

As a father, Mike taught his girls, Cindy, Amy, and Shelly to always respect their mother; so much that he would never allow them to refer to her using the word, "she". She was to be called by "mother" and nothing else.

However, as a disciplinarian, he felt his children should never be struck as a method of punishment. Instead, parents could mold their children's behavior through words and being role models as guides. Thus, all their mother had to say when one of them misbehaved was, "Although I am not happy with your behavior, think how disappointed your father will be to hear about it." This would make all three daughters break into tears.

Once when daughter Cindy broke a cardinal rule of never fighting with others, the offense was so serious that it was decided that Mike would have to spank her as a reminder to never do it again. However, after entering her bedroom and seeing her little face, he could not follow through with physical punishment. Instead, he said to her, "When I hit the bed beside you, yell out, "Daddy don't! Daddy don't!" Mother Barbara heard the commotion and assumed the opposite of what transpired; learning the truth some years later.

As a stay-at-home mom, Barbara would not only take care of the three girls, but spoil her busy husband, as well. He had some funny quirks about how he wanted his lunch to be prepared daily. Only red starburst jelly beans, all seeds out of watermelon, and mayonnaise spread on both sides of the bread, all the way to the boundary lines, meat separate, with the smooth side of the bread at the top; allowing him to eat the sandwich with wrapper still on, made up the list of directions for daily lunch preparation.

Yet, in spite of the busyness of life as a father, the level of energy displayed in childhood carried over into adult life allowing Mike to complete a 24-hour shift at the fire department, come

home in the morning, shower, and go paint all day long; followed by playing two softball games at night at the local park. Busy father! Busy times!

Yet, throughout his day, lives were touched by gestures of kindness to everyone he met. Without fail, the departing goodbye from Mike's lips to each new acquaintance would be, "It has truly been a privilege and an honor to meet you." Just like Jesus, when he met an individual, that particular person was the very center of his world. His entire focus was on the heart of the individual from beginning to end; thus, touching deeply to the core. This little guy's hands were extended to each child of God as a way of helping them fight off the Goliath being faced at the time. Thus, these huge acts of compassion for others, caused total strangers to be friends forever. It happened so frequently, that it was not possible to recall all the names, prompting him to greet each one with, "Hi, buddy."

Then, as the years passed, fighting fire after fire with the only equipment available at the time, resulted in Mike inhaling smoke that was laden with dangerous toxic chemicals. Unlike now, more modern breathing equipment that would keep the fumes from penetrating simply was not available; resulting in a physician issuing the diagnosis of "esophageal cancer" to Mike and his beloved Barbara.

Thus, when all test results revealed a gloomy prognosis, at best, it was obvious to the family that the Goliath being faced was equal or larger than the one recorded in Scripture. How does a tiny guy that has stated, "Life is Good" to so many people hold up under this kind of battle and still proclaim the joy of living to those he has encouraged along the way; not to mention new faces he would now encounter on this rocky mountain trail?

Yet, against all odds, that is exactly what transpired in Mike's final chapter of life. He would go to ballpark after ballpark and play or watch; all the while growing physically smaller and smaller. Instead of drawing inward and feeling sorry for himself, his inner spirit appeared to grow larger by the minute; so much so that even when walking into the ballpark with tubes protruding from his body, people would gravitate to him from all fields throughout the facility.

Once when speaking with a man that had dislocated his shoulder and wore all types of protective equipment to prevent injury and promote healing, Mike noted the challenge and called his name saying, "Look at it this way. It could be raining." Knowing what Mike was dealing with, the guy could only laugh.

Later, when asked by an individual, "Mike, as much as you have done for others, do you ever wonder, (WHY ME)?" Not missing a beat, Mike retorted, "Why not me?"

Then, after sharing a room with a team mate that was filled with annoying crickets, and winning the tournament, Mike played a trick on the guy that still is talked about. Later on, at home when expecting an enormous ring as a winner, the team mate opened just the right size and shape of package that was shipped to him filled with only dead crickets. I will let you determine the name of the prankster. If you said, Mike, you figured out the culprit.

Unfortunately, as the Goliath Mike faced ravaged his body, his physical appearance was described by many as a “bag of bones.” Strangely, people that dreaded to enter the presence of an individual so diminished and gaunt in color, upon leaving his home or hospital room, would comment how wonderful and uplifted in spirit they felt due to Mike’s positive attitude and remarkable disposition. As per his usual behavior, he centered on each heart and offered words of wisdom and encouragement. The background music they always heard when visiting him, was his favorite song, “Can You Only Imagine; whose lyrics describe what it will be like in heaven with Jesus. Given the words, it was obvious Mike was a child of God and loved his Savior with all his heart, mind, and soul. Simply stated, he was not afraid to die because of his enormous faith in God. He knew eternal life meant that he would be a child of the King. In fact, his faith was so evident that after a pastor met him for the first time, he exited his room stating that he would never forget what it was like to be in the presence of this little guy that had a belief in Jesus so big that not the fiercest Goliath could win the battle called fear and doubt.

One special moment that demonstrated his lack of fear, faith, and humor in the face of the gravest battle of his life took place outside a restaurant where his softball friends were dining. Unable to eat due to the nausea associated with chemo therapy, rather than spoil the experience for others, he quietly went outside and was sitting alone. Noting his friend, Myrna, approaching, he smiled at her and asked, “Do you know what I have been thinking about? I have been sitting here picking out the softball team I will be playing with in heaven. I am not afraid because I am going to see God. Can you only imagine?”

Then, out of the blue one-day with his favorite song playing, little Mike looked into the love of his life’s eyes and stated, “You know that I am dying; a declaration that caused her to break into tears. As he rapidly declined, not wanting to leave his side, an exhausted Barbara was convinced by her friends to at least take a brief respite.

Thus, in God’s good and perfect time, on July 11 at 8:30 am, as a gentle breeze blew the curtains in time to the rhythm of his favorite song, “Can You Only Imagine”, and birds filled the air with notes of grandeur, the two friends standing guard suddenly witnessed beams of light stream through the window over the person of little Mike and then flow back out the window toward heaven. Waking Barbara, a friend that was not a Believer excitedly proclaimed, “Barbara, Mike’s gone! You could actually see him go!”

Later, at Mike’s celebration of life, fire trucks arrived with ladders fully extended to honor one of their own that had traveled down the pathway of life never meeting a stranger; a shepherd that touched so many hearts that it took hours for the receiving line to diminish and so many reprints of the program that a funeral home staff member was kept busy just trying to meet the demand.

Can you only imagine how many people around the world’s lives were touched by a little shepherd that loudly proclaimed, “Life Is Good? Don’t worry about dying. You are going to



heaven to meet your Lord and Savior”; a message delivered even when overpowered by physical weakness so much that his body barely moved; all the while appearing like he was going to a picnic. Beyond a shadow of doubt, life on earth had truly been good for Mike; so much that his message of hope climbed mountains, forded streams, and crossed oceans, as he witnessed for Jesus on a worldwide scale; all while wearing a smile as bright as the morning star.

#### **GIVING**

*God gives us joy that we may give;  
He gives us joy that we may share;  
Sometimes He gives us loads to lift  
That we may learn to bear.  
For life is gladder when we give,  
And love is sweeter when we share,  
And heavy loads rest lightly too  
When we have learned to bear.*

**Author Unknown**





## Psalm 23

*A Psalm of David*

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.<sup>(a)</sup>*

*3 He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness<sup>(b)</sup>  
for his name's sake.*

*4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,<sup>(c)</sup>  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.*

*5 You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.*

*6 Surely<sup>(d)</sup> goodness and mercy<sup>(e)</sup> shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell<sup>(f)</sup> in the house of the LORD  
forever.<sup>(g)</sup>*

AMEN

(Mike's Favorite)