

How God Can Take You From the Underdog to the Top Dog

We all love rags-to-riches and tragedy-to-triumph stories. We're inspired when someone overcomes overwhelming odds and obstacles to rise to the top. We cheer when an unknown underdog upsets a favored champion.

The Bible contains many stories of God using unlikely underdogs to win great victories. "The Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath" (Deut. 28:13, NKJV). Modern translation: "I'll take you from being the underdog and make you the top dog!"

An underdog is a person or team that is expected to lose in a contest or conflict. The ancient Israelites were serious underdogs against their nemesis, the Philistines. Backslidden King Saul ignored the prophet Samuel. Outnumbered, they had just lost a big battle, and morale was low in Israel's army (1 Sam. 13). The Philistines had a big military advantage, but Israel had a spiritual advantage: they served Jehovah God, not false idols. Against all odds, Jonathan and his armor bearer attacked—two against hundreds. There was no way they should have survived, much less won this battle.

Jonathan was either courageous or crazy, or both. He boldly stated, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6). Israel won a great victory because two guys dared to act in faith. God turned the underdogs into top dogs.

By now you've heard the amazing story about Rich Strike, the horse that won the 2022 Kentucky Derby. Do yourself a favor—google it and watch the replay. Rich Strike won a \$ million prize. He only got in the race because the 20th horse

had to withdraw at the last minute. He started from the worst position, on the outside of the track. He maneuvered his way through the field of 19 other horses from the back. His jockey, Sonny Leon, had never been to the Kentucky Derby. His trainer, Eric Reed, had never raced a horse in the Derby. His owner, Richard Dawson, bought him for \$30,000 (peanuts for racehorses). His odds to win were 80-1. Yet Rich Strike outran million-dollar steeds to win on the grandest stage. The underdog became the top dog!

The Bible records the greatest underdog story in history—David versus Goliath. Goliath was an oversized ogre at 9 feet, 6 inches tall! He was so big people thought he couldn't lose. David thought he was so big he couldn't miss! Oddly, David brought five rocks to a sword fight. Some say it was extra ammunition in case he missed. Others see it as an act of faith—one stone for Goliath and four for the giant's brothers and sons he'd fight later (2 Sam. 21:16-18; 1 Chron. 20:4-8). You see, life is a series of battles. You're either in a battle, fresh out of a battle, or about to face another one. David believed God would help him bring down not only Goliath but every other giant he had to face!

One Hebrew word for *giant* is *nephil* (plural, *nephilim*), meaning "a bully or tyrant." All giants in the Bible were enemies of Israel. Goliath was a big bully barking out blasphemy against God and terrorizing Israel. Satan is also a bully who tries to intimidate us, but "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31, KJV). David stunned Goliath with a stone to his skull. Then he used Goliath's own sword to decapitate him. With their champion dead, the Philistines fled. That day the world witnessed God take an underdog and make him the top dog.

What about Gideon's 300-man, underdog army? (See Judges 6-8.) The Midianites invaded Israel like a swarm of grasshoppers. God let them oppress His people due to their chronic idolatry. The Israelites survived by hiding in caves. The enemy swooped

in at harvest time and destroyed their crops, causing a dire food shortage. On the brink of starvation, Israel desperately cried out to God for help. Then God raised up another unlikely underdog to deliver them—Gideon. Hungry and scared, Gideon was hiding behind a wine press threshing wheat to make bread when an angel appeared saying, “The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!” (Judg. 6:12, NKJV). Gideon sure didn’t look like a hero; he looked like a wimp, a coward and a chicken! He made this excuse: “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Judg. 6:15). Talk about an underdog! Gideon was a nobody going nowhere. But God saw his potential.

Gideon blew a trumpet to rally the troops, and 32,000 men showed up. Not bad! However, there were 135,000 Midianite soldiers, so the Israelites were outnumbered 4-to-1. God said there were too many men and told Gideon to dismiss the men who were fearful. His army shrank by two-thirds as 22,000 went home. With 10,000 men left, they were outnumbered 13-to-1. Then God said, “The people are still too many” (Judg. 7:4). So God tested them at the water and sent 9,700 more men home, leaving a puny, 300-man army. They were outnumbered 450-to-1. Did someone say underdogs? At God’s order, they sneaked into the Midianite camp at night and all 300 men simultaneously blew trumpets, broke clay pitchers, waved torches and shouted, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” (Judg. 7:20). The Midianites woke up out of a dead sleep terrified and panicked. In the chaos, they scattered and started slaying each other. Israel miraculously defeated the Midianites, and God turned a group of underdogs into top dogs.

Finally, there is the woman Jesus called a dog—the Syrophoenician woman (Matt. 15:22-28). She begged Jesus to deliver her demonized daughter. At first Jesus ignored her. “He answered her not a word” (v. 23). Tough luck, lady! The disciples asked Jesus to send her away, but she was persistent. “Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord,

help me!'" (v. 25). Then Jesus insulted her: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (v. 26). She was Greek (Mark 7:26), and Gentiles were often called "dogs" by Jews. If she was a dog, she must have been a bulldog because she wouldn't take no for an answer! She humbly replied, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Matt. 15:27). Wow! Jesus was so impressed by her response that He said, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire" (v. 28). (Incidentally, the only two people Jesus said had great faith were both Gentiles: the centurion from Matthew chapter 8 and this woman.) She was an underdog, but when Jesus answered her plea and delivered her daughter, she became a top dog!

Friend, you may feel like an underdog today facing overwhelming odds, but God can turn your situation around 180 degrees overnight. He promised to "make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath" (Deut. 28:13). Trust in Him to turn yet another underdog into a top dog. Howl-lelujah! {eoa}

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