

# **SIN REIGNS IN DAVID’S LIFE**

*SERIES: DAVID: A MAN AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART*

**By Judy Herminghaus**

The first time I remember doing something wrong, I was four. My mother had taken me to a restaurant for lunch. In those days restaurants always had gum and candy for sale near the cash register. I wanted a certain candy very badly, but my mother said I couldn’t have it. So while my mother was paying at the cash register, I took that candy and put it in the pocket of my dress. Then my mother noticed I’d spilled chocolate milkshake down the front of my dress, so she decided to wash it off in the bathroom. When she started scrubbing the front of my dress, the candy flew out of my pocket and hit the floor. Several nice ladies in the bathroom said, “Oh, don’t punish her. She just wanted a little bit of candy. It’s okay.” My mother didn’t listen to them. She spanked me really hard, and then she made me go up to the lady at the cash register, admit my sin, and pay for the candy.

No doubt you can think of things you wish you hadn’t done. We wish the wrong things we’ve done had not really happened. We don’t want to suffer the consequences. So we try to hide our sin—but that’s the trap of sin. Unconfessed sin will actually increase sin and pain. It is in confession that we find freedom, although that idea is counterintuitive. David’s story in 2 Samuel 11 and 12 demonstrates this reality.

Before we hear that story, I want to review what we've covered in the last two messages (Discovery Papers 5255, 5256). We've been following David's early life, trying to see what God meant when he called David "a man after His own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). In the first message we heard about David's great victory over Goliath on behalf of all Israel. David was only a teen then and demonstrated a remarkable trust in the unseen God. The narrator reveals David's attitude and describes his actions with the verb "run." David enthusiastically entered the action knowing God was with him. David ran toward the conflict with Goliath when all Israel ran away from him, and he defeated Goliath with a well-aimed stone from his sling. He gave the credit to God: "This day the LORD will hand you [Goliath] over to me....The battle is the LORD's..." (1 Samuel 17:46-47.)

Then in the last message we followed David as he ran into the wilderness to escape being killed by the jealous and insane king of Israel, Saul. David had to forge a life in the wilderness for ten long years, the entire decade of his twenties. That ended when Saul died and David could then take his place as king. He was thirty years old when he became king of Judah; it took another seven years for all Israel to accept his reign.

In the wilderness David deepened his life with God and wrote many of the psalms that still lead God's people to worship God in honesty. And in the wilderness God brought a community to David that would become the foundation for his reign.

Psalm 78:70-72 summarizes David's life:

“He also chose David His servant  
And took him from the sheepfolds;  
From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him  
To shepherd Jacob His people,  
And Israel his inheritance.  
So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,  
And guided them with his skillful hands.”

However, there was a sad event that became a turning point in David’s life as king and as a man. It is the pivotal point in 1 and 2 Samuel. When David committed his greatest sin, he was fifty years old, mature, a successful and good king for Israel. At this point he had led Israel into victory over all of her greatest enemies, and Israel was at relative peace. David had restored the worship of God to his people Israel, and he was a well-loved and prosperous monarch.

2 Samuel 11:1-27:

**Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.**

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."

Then David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and a present from the king was sent out after him. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. Now when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to

lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing.” Then David said to Uriah, “Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will let you go.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. Now David called him, and he ate and drank before him, and he made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his bed with his lord’s servants, but he did not go down to his house.

Now it came about in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter, saying, “Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die.” So it was as Joab kept watch on the city, that he put Uriah at the place where he knew there were valiant men. The men of the city went out and fought against Joab, and some of the people among David’s servants fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died. Then Joab sent and reported to David all the events of the war. He charged the messenger, saying, “When you have finished telling all the events of the war to the king, and if it happens that the king’s wrath rises and he says to you, ‘Why did you go so near to the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who struck down Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?’—then you shall say, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.’”

**So the messenger departed and came and reported to David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, “The men prevailed against us and came out against us in the field, but we pressed them as far as the entrance of the gate. Moreover, the archers shot at your servants from the wall; so some of the king’s servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead.” Then David said to the messenger, “Thus you shall say to Joab, ‘Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another; make your battle against the city stronger and overthrow it’; and so encourage him.”**

**Now when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. When the time of mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife; then she bore him a son. But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.**

## **Confession and forgiveness**

There is a rather deplorable commercial on television these days that says, “What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas.” The implication is that you can have a fling

during your Las Vegas stay, and no one will ever know what you did. It makes me angry every time I see it, because it is a lie. “Be sure your sin will find you out,” it says in Numbers 32:23. In David’s story, what happened in Jerusalem didn’t stay in Jerusalem. It’s a great mercy it didn’t, because when our sins are brought to the light, God can heal us and restore us to him and save us out of them. But hiding something from God just makes us get worse, not better.

David’s sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah have been recorded in God’s word so that every generation may know that God will not tolerate sin, even in his dear King David. Why? Because God loved David too much to let his sin remain hidden, and he also loves us too much to let us get away with sin indefinitely. God brought David’s sin to light so that David might receive God’s mercy and so that his life would not be destroyed by guilt. For unconfessed sin brings death physically, psychologically, and spiritually. Even worse, it separates us from God. It makes us smaller and less effective. Shamed people are not bold for God. It makes us hard and unusable. Our heart becomes like a little, hard, clenched fist.

But sin confessed and forgiven releases God’s people to live in freedom and joy.

One of my favorite Christmas stories depicts this well. In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch’s heart is described as two sizes too small. That is why he is bitter, mean, joyless, destructive, and alone. But when he tries his best to ruin Christmas by stealing all the presents and decorations and special food out of *Who*-ville, and the *Whos*

still celebrate, he realizes that Christmas might be something more powerful than he thought.

“And what happened *then*...?”

Well...in *Who*-ville they say

That the Grinch's small heart

Grew three sizes that day!

And the minute his heart didn't feel quite so tight,

He whizzed with his load through the bright morning light

And he brought back the toys! And the food for the feast!

And he...

...HE HIMSELF...!

*The Grinch carved the roast beast!”* (1)

Repentance begins the process of recovering your sin-damaged heart and becoming fully alive again. Results can probably be seen and experienced right away as in the Grinch's story, but the full recovery of our hearts in real life takes time. Our hearts can grow to be a hundred times the size they began with when we submit to God's will and ways.

Jesus said, “Or what man among you, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?...How much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:9, 11.) God will give us what we ask for in prayer.

Forgiveness is available. This is the good news of the gospel. Guilt, bitterness, and anger do not have to rule our hearts and ruin our lives.

If a man like David could fall into such sin, then so can we—and if David can be forgiven for so much sin, then so can we!

But what on earth happened to David?

### **Sin begins with the heart**

Let's look at 2 Samuel 11:1 again: "Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem." This opening scene sets up the problem that is going to unfold in the rest of the chapter. It is the time when kings go out to battle, but this time David doesn't go as he should. Rather, he sends his commanders and warriors out to fight. The king of Israel is not where he ought to be—in many ways.

David has become king of Israel because of his relationship with God. David's foundation is not his abilities, although he has many, but his trust in God. When I was studying this passage, I kept seeing an image of an iceberg. What shows above the surface of the water is only a little tip of the whole iceberg. David is a mighty man for

sure, but the reason for his greatness is the unseen God who is his foundation. But somewhere along the way, David has forgotten that it isn't he who is great, but God. He has broken away from his firm foundation and drifted out to sea in sin. Sin never begins with the act itself. It begins with the heart.

Is David bored? He has fought all the big enemies of Israel at this point. Perhaps he is bored with the smaller campaigns. There are hints of boredom in the passage. He is asleep late into the afternoon (he is a man of leisure now, not a man of war). He is strolling rather aimlessly on his rooftop. If we had followed David's story thoroughly up to now, we would have seen him a man of action, usually moving swiftly; hence the narrator's frequent use of the verb "run" in the earlier chapters of David's story. This is a different David. Strolling, not going out to fight, sleeping late—this is not the David we know and love who was leaping over walls, running into battle. This scene seems to paint a picture of David as a better man in a fight than in leisure. Maybe work is an antidote for lust in David's life. Isn't it often? Too much money and too much time and too much power are a setup for trouble. Just check the daily news reports on which movie or rock star is in recovery or in some big mess.

Is the illness of David's heart arrogance? The narrator repeats the word "sent" relentlessly in this passage:

Verse 1: David sent Joab and his servants and all Israel out to battle.

Verse 3: David sent and inquired about the woman.

Verse 4: David sent messengers and took her.

Verse 6: David sent to Joab, 'Send me Uriah,' so Joab sent Uriah to David.

Verse 8: David sent a present to Uriah, trying to get him home to Bathsheba.

Verse 14: David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah (his death warrant).

Verse 27: David sent for Bathsheba at the end of her mourning time.

Every minute kings can send off imperious commands to those serving them. David has become a king in his heart. The skillful narrator is using the word "sent" to portray David's imperious abuse of power.

The narrator uses "sent" for some of the most personal encounters a person can have. But the word normally has to do with distance, impersonal arrangements, and the exercise of authority. Arrogance depersonalizes other people; they become objects to be used rather than people to appreciate, and this certainly seems to be what David is doing throughout this story.

But David's imperious sending is interrupted by Bathsheba in verse 5: "She sent and told David... 'I am pregnant.'" This is the first hint that all is not going to go well in David's plans to do whatever he pleases with impunity. David is instantly disproven as sovereign over all things. David cannot control this.

And Joab does some sending himself. Joab goes beyond David's evil instructions and kills many of David's men to cover killing Uriah. Joab now has something on David, and he will use it. He is wickedly political. So David is not in control of Joab, either.

## **The steps to a fall**

This is the oldest story in the book, isn't it? It goes all the way back to Eden. Look at the similarities between the fall of Adam and Eve and the fall of David. In both cases, God gave them an abundance of everything with a very small restriction. In both cases, the restriction became their singular focus, and they put God out of their minds as they chose to do what God had commanded them not to do.

The verbs say it all.

David (2 Samuel 11:2-4):

- Saw, coveting, that the woman was beautiful.
- Took her.
- Lay with her in adultery.

Result: the death of Uriah.

Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:6):

- Saw, coveting, that the tree looked good and made one wise.

- Took the forbidden fruit.
- Ate the forbidden fruit.

Result: death.

There really is nothing new under the sun.

God gives an abundance of everything for life, and prohibits something he knows will bring harm to us. We have to trust God for the prohibition. What we put in front of our faces can entice us. When we look at things we don't have, they can become our idols. Idolatry says, "I have to have this to have life, and if God isn't going to give it to me, I'll go out and get it for myself." We become takers instead of receivers of God's gifts. This is what happened to David. It is a warning to us.

There is a TV show called *Dog Whisperer* that my husband and I watch sometimes. On the show the dog whisperer makes the point that without rules, boundaries, and limitations, dogs are out of control. They are not the pets they can be, and they are not even happy dogs. In the same way, we are not the people we can be when we don't respect the rules, boundaries, and limitations God has put in place. We become less human when we live out-of-control lives and hurt ourselves and others pursuing our selfish desires. Sin is dehumanizing.

Observe the steps to David's fall:

Step 1: David's vision is focused on what he does not have, and he begins to lust.

Step 2: He plays around with his sin thoughts: "Who is this woman?" The servant goes out of his way to let David know to whom this woman belongs. David does not care.

Step 3: David takes what he wants.

Step 4: His disobedience brings death to many.

James 1:14-15 says, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." Sin always hurts someone else.

We might tell ourselves, "It's only a glimpse of pornography." "Hookups with condoms can't hurt." "Marijuana is not a hard drug." "I want...I want...I want..." "I can have it all—charge it." We are victims of the syndrome: see it, take it, eat it, and die spiritually. We do it all the time with little recognition that it is great sin. We are adrift from God, perhaps as unaware of it as David was.

But God knows.

## **Loving discipline**

In the last verse of 2 Samuel 11 God enters the scene. “But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.” David thinks he has gotten away with it, but God saw it after all. It takes a little over a year for David to find out that God is not going to overlook his sin with Bathsheba. Not one time in this whole scenario has David called on God or consulted God, and we hear nothing about God but this one little sentence.

God sees everything and does not force us to do what is right, but goes with us into situations that hurt us, others, and him. That is rather amazing and humbling. To me it demonstrates God’s heart to let us freely choose for ourselves what kind of man or woman we want to be. We can choose to be someone who has a heart after his, or not.

But it is better to live the way God desires, because look at David’s heart when he is out of God’s will. Psalm 32:3-4:

“When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away  
Through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.”

Guilt is a killer. It steals joy and produces death. But we don’t have to hang on to it. God has made a way for us to return to wholeness.

2 Samuel 12:1-6:

**Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said,  
“There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor.  
The rich man had a great many flocks and herds.  
But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb  
Which he bought and nourished;  
And it grew up together with him and his children.  
It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom,  
And was like a daughter to him.  
Now a traveler came to the rich man,  
And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd,  
To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him;  
Rather he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the  
man who had come to him.”**

**Then David’s anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to  
Nathan, “As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this  
deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold,  
because he did this thing and had no compassion.”**

Now it is God who is showing his authority by sending his prophet Nathan to convict David of his sin. Nathan tells a parable (which is a good plan, because David could just as easily kill Nathan as Uriah if his heart were disposed that way). Jesus often told a little

story when confronted with a hard heart. David judges correctly from Nathan's parable and says the rich man deserves to die!

Verse 7a:

**Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!"**

These are the words none of us want to hear, but we must. It's about us. We are never confronted with someone else's sin. We are confronted with our own. I have often sat in church and thought, "So-and-So should really hear this sermon—it is just perfect for them." Wrong! This is not what God is after in church. He is after us.

Open your heart. Hear God right now. Is he convicting you of something? If he is, deal with him.

Verses 7b-9:

**"Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight?"**

**You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.”**

Notice all that God has given David. So why would David do such a thing, take from a poor man? Or why would we? Why are we greedy?

But look at God’s heart: Does he hate David, call him names, say he will never love him again? No, he is deeply wounded that David would hurt him as he has. When we sin, we hurt God. He loves us and wants our best, but our sin has broken down our relationship with him.

Verses 10-14:

**“Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.’” Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.**

**However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die.”**

Major consequences are spelled out. That is because sin unpunished gives the impression that there is no God in the world. David has destroyed God’s image before the people. His servants know what he has done, Joab knows, Bathsheba knows. God cannot let sin go unpunished. It would seem as if there were no justice, which would really hurt people. We never want to suffer the consequences of our own sin (but boy, do we want those who have hurt *us* to suffer). But God is demonstrating here that he will not let sin go unpunished. We don’t learn much when we get away with sin. God wants to restore us to wholeness, so he will let us experience the consequences of our sins in hope that it will drive us back to him. We must trust him for the judgment.

I had an acquaintance years ago who was part of a couples group. The husband of one couple and the wife of another couple became interested in each other. They started to lust and play around with the idea of being with each other, and pretty soon they were with each other. They had a secret affair for two years. Then they were caught and exposed. Both couples got divorced, and then these two got married to each other, and they put all their kids together in their new family. Well, the person I knew who was watching all this was very upset, because it looked like they were getting away with murder, so to speak. They were happy, they had money, they had children. They had a lot of things this person didn’t have. It made my acquaintance bitter. It made this person

wonder if staying within a difficult marriage was really the right thing to do. It called into question whether there really was a God in the universe who would bring about justice.

I think that's why consequences exist no matter what we do. Our lives have an impact on other people. It's not that God has abandoned us or that he doesn't love us. But if we sin, there will be consequences. Our story tells us that God lives with us in those consequences, he will get us through those consequences, and he will get us beyond those consequences, if we will trust him. There's pain, but there's also redemption in it.

## **Restoration**

In verse 13 we hear David's long-overdue confession: "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan responds, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die." Notice how directly and simply David confesses. And notice how quickly Nathan responds that he is forgiven and is not going to suffer death. Why? Because David's heart is not dead to God, but very much alive to God. He was tempted and he fell, and humans do that. God receives him again immediately. Please hear this and keep it in mind. There is no use beating yourself up over a sin you have confessed and given to God. He is done with it, he has forgiven it, and you need to thank him, not keep focusing on it. And of course, don't go on sinning in the same way. I think God records David's huge sin because if God can forgive David, then he can forgive any of our sins. What a mercy.

Corrie ten Boom once said, “Confess your sins to God, and then put out a ‘No Fishing’ sign.” She quoted Psalm 103:11-12:

“For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.  
As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Once you confess your sins, they are taken away. Don’t go fishing for them again.

Recently a friend of our family had a magnificent horse that had won many competitions. She gave it freedom to run in open areas, and one night it somehow ripped off most of its shoulder on a steel gate. She found it in the morning writhing in pain and took it immediately to the vet, who said it was probably going to die, even after they did what they could with surgery. Everyone said it should be put down. But our friend loved that horse and wanted to save it. She didn’t think it was useless just because it was scarred and weaker than it was before the injury. The damage was so great that for months and months she had to tend an open, gaping wound three times daily. It oozed, it smelled, and it looked pretty awful. Many times it seemed as if the once-beautiful animal would not live. But finally it did recover. The injury now barely shows. All the people at the ranch were aware of our friend’s refusal to give up. It was an amazing witness to her love for that horse.

That is how God is with us. He tenderly and patiently tends the sin wounds we inflict on ourselves and that others have inflicted on us. We may suffer consequences, and there may be scars, but it is the overwhelming love and grace of God that is most visible in our lives if we let him love us. He is working tenderly to give us life again.

Once David has come to his senses and confessed his sin, God begins the healing process in David's heart. God's man recovers his heart for God, although he will suffer the consequences all the rest of his life. All the while God will tend to David's heart, bringing him back to life to trust in him. Through it all God will go with David. He promised he would never leave him, and he won't. God promises us he will never leave us either, no matter what.

David's prayer of confession which is attributed to this time in his life is a model for us today. Let's hear it and learn how to ask for forgiveness in as real a way as David does.

Psalm 51:

“Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

“For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.  
Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are proved right when you speak  
and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.  
Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;  
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.  
Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.

“Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation

and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

“Then I will teach transgressors your ways,

and sinners will turn back to you.

Save me from bloodguilt, O God,

the God who saves me,

and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

O Lord, open my lips,

and my mouth will declare your praise.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;

you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;

a broken and contrite heart,

O God, you will not despise.”

(Verses 1-17, NIV.)

God gets the final word. Love wins out over death in David’s life. And God’s love will win out in our lives if we will turn to him and let him love us.

For God did the final “sending.” John 3:16: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Jesus the sent One offers this to you: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10.)

May you receive the One whom God sent to take away your sins and wash you as white as snow. And don't go fishing for sins that God has already forgiven. Go out with joy.

## Notes

1. Dr. Seuss, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, © 1957, 1985, Random House, New York. (N.p.)

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2 Samuel 11:1-12:14

Third Message

Judy Herminghaus

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