



Last month, the director of the CIA resigned because he was guilty of adultery and failed in his attempt to keep his unfaithfulness hidden. David Patraeus' fall from grace seemed to shock everyone. He was widely regarded for his strong ethical standards and unbending personal discipline. He had endured the deprivations and hardship of long deployments and danger on the battlefield. Yet, in the easier conditions of commanding troops from headquarters he succumbed to temptation. This is a contemporary story and an old story. We turn to a similar tale of another commander, King David, found in 2 Samuel 11 and 12.

We began consideration of David last week, noting that unlike Saul his qualifications as king were qualifications of the heart, not of appearance. David led his people in worship and left behind psalms that have shaped the prayers of Jews and Christians for 3000 years. When it began, David's reign displayed the possibilities of a godly nation—a bright hope for a world trapped in idolatry. David's early years as king foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who enables God's people themselves to 'reign in life' (Rom. 5:17). David's strengths make us long for a righteous king, but his weaknesses make clear that the coming Messiah must first save his people from sin and death.

Jesus' gift of abundant life is only possible because he sacrificed himself for sinners. David's 'heart for God' proved inadequate and we must consider the evil choices he made in the last half of his life. David's moving prayers and horrible failures both prepare for the mission of Messiah.

At a recent staff meeting, Rolana Smith was discussing her ministry to junior highers, many of whom have been raised in Christian homes. She commented that almost all of them knew the story of David and Goliath, but that none had heard the account of David and Bathsheba. We might prefer to avoid it too, but we must face these painful truths about David and their implications for understanding ourselves.

2 Samuel 11:1-5:

¹In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men

and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

And music in a minor key begins to play in the background. David remained in Jerusalem.

²One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" ⁴Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.)"

This phrase is a reference to her monthly period. It makes clear that Bathsheba was not pregnant by her husband when David took her.

Then she went back home. ⁵The woman conceived and sent word to David saying, "I am pregnant."

David saw her, sent for her, took her, slept with her, and she left. There is no tenderness or personal connection in these verses. A powerful man gave vent to his lust, nothing more. He had been told that she was the wife of his friend—a chance offered by God for him to turn aside—but his desire was not denied.

But where did the rebellious choice begin? It started with David abdicating a responsibility, didn't it? David should have led his army in battle but sent Joab instead.

It seems that David had grown tired of living up to his responsibilities, grown tired of hardship and battle. In this frame of mind, he decided to pamper himself and use his royal prerogatives for personal benefit. Laziness and petty selfishness are not the worst of sins, but there is a warning here. Self-indulgence often opens the door to greater defiance and greater failure.

To be clear, there are times when God intends for us to

rest, when responsibility can be shifted for good reasons. Resentment and pouting are not good reasons.

After David learned of the pregnancy he sent word to Joab to send husband Uriah home from the battle. David expected that Uriah would spend the night with his wife and allow an alternative explanation for her pregnancy. But when he returned from battle Uriah refused to sleep with his wife.

2 Samuel 11:10-13:

¹⁰When David was told, “Uriah did not go home,” he asked him, “Haven’t you just come from a distance? Why didn’t you go home?”

¹¹Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!”

This speech of Uriah was a powerful rebuke and should have awakened David to regret and repentance, but it did not.

¹²Then David said to him, “Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home.

The story gets much worse from here. Uriah was God’s voice speaking to the king. David could have repented of adultery, and begun the work of humility, confession, and restoration but in fact he chose a terrible means to cover his sin, his heart becoming harder day after day.

David instructed Joab (in a note that Uriah himself carried) to put Uriah in harm’s way and then pull back so he would be killed. Joab knew this strategy would make him look bad so he arranged for a cohort of men, not just Uriah, to endanger themselves and eventually to die in battle. David’s choices connect to one another as steps descending into a pit, a process described in the text below.

James 1:13-15:

¹³When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted

by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Temptation, desire, sin, and death. The road to deadness of heart is predictable and is well illustrated by David. We cannot blame God for our sin or its consequences. In fact we may cry out for help and chose repentance and restoration at any point. James’ description and David’s experience should sound a warning for those on the path from temptation to ruin. Cover-ups will fail—choose to turn to Christ now!

David did not rein in his desire when he learned the identity of the woman he saw, nor did he repent when he encountered Uriah’s example of faithful discipline. Sin gave birth to spiritual death. So when David learned that his troops were killed, he was unmoved. “Swords and battles are unpredictable after all.” The man who once had a heart for the things of God had become a remorseless agent of lust and violence.

2 Samuel 11:26-27:

²⁶When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

God’s displeasure leads him to take action, first by penetrating David’s conscience. Though outwardly untroubled, David was suffering anguish of the soul as we learn from the king’s own pen.

Psalms 32:3-4:

**³When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
⁴For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.**

Returning to 2 Samuel 12 we find that David’s pain-filled conscience was only the beginning—his sins will be exposed in public with the king unwittingly pronouncing judgment on himself.

The prophet Nathan was sent to tell David a story of

injustice. A rich man with vast resources killed the beloved lamb of his poor neighbor to feed an unexpected visitor. This story of the rich exploiting the poor caused David to “burn with anger.” Of course, it is not uncommon for anyone to be outraged by failure in others that is closest to one’s own weakness.

2 Samuel 12:5-14:

⁵David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! ⁶He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

⁷Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. . . .’ ⁹Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own. . . .”

¹³Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. ¹⁴But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die.”

David’s words here are nothing like the ‘confessions’ of modern celebrities who call attention to bad behavior in order to call attention to themselves. “I have sinned before the Lord,” is a statement of genuine lament and leads finally to David’s redemption. In a moment we’ll consider Psalm 51 which was written after these events (like Psalm 32) and builds on this word of confession.

However, there is a foreshadowing of Christ in Nathan’s speech that we should observe first. In 12:13-14 Nathan announces to David, “You are not going to die. . . . the son born to you will die.” This statement had both an immediate and much later fulfillment.

Bathsheba’s infant died as predicted. However, Nathan’s statement also looks forward to the death of another son of David, Jesus. It is because of his sacrifice that David was

pardoned and we also may live and not die in judgment for our sins as we deserve. You may live—the Son will die.

Let us observe Psalm 51—written by David after he was forgiven and restored. A prayer to God, it was written to teach “transgressors your ways” and offer “sinners a way back to you.” Here we can only touch on a few phrases of this powerful text.

Psalm 51:

**¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.**

The Hebrew word translated, ‘unfailing love’ is filled with meaning. It identifies God as one who keeps his promise. Because of God’s covenant with his people, undeserving David can ask for mercy. David deserves punishment but appeals for mercy because of the promise-keeping love of God.

**⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.**

Scars, stains, and defilements—the permanent attachments of failure may be indelible as far as human purification is concerned. God’s cleansing removes them all.

**¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
¹¹Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.**

Here, David recognizes that it is not enough to be taught a lesson. Without inward change; if my heart is not broken and repaired, if the Spirit of God doesn’t take up residence in me, I’m going to do again what I did the first time. We require new birth, not just a change of mind.

**¹⁶You do not delight in sacrifice,
or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.**

David was a wise and capable man who would have fixed himself if he could. Similarly, in the face of failure most of us would prefer to save our pride and act heroically to set

things right, but that option is not available. God accepts contrition and honest admission of weakness and answers them with hope and new life.

In conclusion, we see that the record of David's lust and violence should sound a warning—we are capable of such behavior and worse. It is not too late to stop a downward spiral now; not too late to reverse course before the most deadly consequences take hold.

Also David's confession, his appeal to God for mercy, and his restoration are a message of hope. They have served countless other prodigals in finding a way out of rebellion and back to the arms of a loving Father. We must not let despair have the last word. Resurrection is always greater than death.

David's life story and the record of his prayers all point forward to his 'greater son,' the Lord Jesus Christ. Nathan told David that his life would be spared and that his son would die. Christ has died for us and with him we are raised to newness of life. Let our speech be filled with gratitude and our behavior bring him honor.