

Women's Bible Study Fall 2009
What's in the Heart?
November 11, 2009
A Heart of Lust and Murder
2 Samuel 11-12
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Going to our church's Family Camp is always a big exercise in packing. We bring our own bedding, towels, clothing for all weather, games, snacks and athletic equipment, Bibles, books... It's bad enough for the five people in my family, but last summer I also packed for six others from out of town. We had two friends camping outside our cabin plus my brother in law and his family from England. It took two large vehicles to get everything in, but finally we were all on the road. I was passing Lake City when suddenly I realized that I had left my bike at home.

This may sound minor in the big scheme of things, but it hit me like an anvil on the head. No bike? I ride every day, miles and miles, at Family Camp. It's one of the few times that I have genuine free time to bike. I was as unlikely to forget my bike as I was to forget one of my legs! But there I was...a moment's inattention, a hasty departure, and the bike was left hanging in my garage. My husband was kind enough to offer to turn around. But we were too far on our journey to inconvenience everyone.

The happy ending is that extremely kind and tolerant friends brought my bike to camp two days later – after I made several long distance phone calls. But for miles of the drive I berated myself, “How could I have been so stupid as to forget my BIKE?”

It happened because I was paying attention to other, less important things. I remembered the extra bottles of sunscreen and the spare blankets. But in dwelling on the trivial I lost sight of what was truly important to me.

We are in 2nd Samuel 11 and 12 today, the passage that tells us about David's adultery with Bathsheba and its consequences. In our study of *What's in the Heart* we've seen nobility and honor and friendship in David's heart. But today, we see something very different. Please turn to 2 Samuel 11:1 in your Bibles as we look at:

I. Why did David do it?

You may not think that Bathsheba and my road bike have much in common. But forgetting something as important to me as my bicycle helped me to empathize with David's forgetting something way more important than my bike – God. Because when David was thinking about trivial things, his attention wandered and his gaze fell upon a beautiful woman, bathing on her rooftop.

And the first clue to his mental state is found in verse 1 of 2 Samuel 11, where we see that

A. His guard was down

“In 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.” (2 Samuel 11:1)

This is how it all started. David wasn’t with his armies, where a king should be. Yet the war was going well; the fighting was only at Israel’s borders and his kingdom was well established. So perhaps he was getting complacent. His guard was down and his attention was wandering from the responsibilities of the kingdom.

But I suspect, too, that

B. His soul was weary

David was more than fifty years old. He’d been fighting, or on the run, pretty steadily since age 20. And he was a sensitive man – a poet and musician – not naturally a killing machine.

We get a glimpse of this from the account in Chronicles. At the end of his life, David said to his son Solomon: **“My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. But this word of the LORD came to me: ‘You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.’” (1 Chronicles 22:7-8)** The bloodshed had somehow defiled David, and because of it, he was stopped from building God a temple – something that was his heart’s desire.

At 50 years many begin reflecting on how we’ve lived our lives and what we want out of our remaining years. A man with the tenderness of heart to write poems like Psalm 23 must have found it grueling to continue killing, year after year, on the battlefield. Even though he was obeying God’s command to drive out God’s enemies, it must have taken a terrible toll. So his guard was down, and his soul was weary.

David had always been a king who was considerate of people, and had never misused his great power. Instead, he brought glory to God rather than to himself. Here’s an example. Once, in David’s early days, he and his men were surrounded in their stronghold, fighting the Philistines. It was hot work and David longed aloud for water from the well at Bethlehem. But his men were so loyal that three of his thirty mighty men made a daring raid on the well at Bethlehem. At night they broke through enemy lines, drew water from the well and carried it triumphantly back to David. **“But he refused to drink it; instead he poured it out before the LORD. ‘God forbid that I should do this!’ he said. ‘Should I drink the blood of these men who went at the risk of their lives?’ Because they risked their lives to bring it back, David would not drink it.” (1 Chronicles 11:18-19).** David was beloved by his men, because he inspired them. And he always honored God. But this measured, godly, thoughtful ruler was off his guard. And his soul was weary.

So

II. What Happened to David?

First,

A. He was captivated

David was walking on his rooftop in the cool evening, looked out and saw a beautiful woman bathing on HER rooftop. This wasn’t unusual; the roof was the place to catch cool breezes

at sunset. Since the palace was taller than any other home you'd think she would have realized she was visible. Bathsheba was purifying herself from her period. There was a mandatory seven day time of uncleanness, followed by ritual purification. The Bible gives us this detail in v. 4 so that we know she was not pregnant by her husband when she slept with David. And this timing put her right at ovulation. David saw her, inquired, identified her as the wife of one of his most trusted lieutenants, sent for her, and slept with her. And she became pregnant.

Next,

B. He tried to clean up

Here is where David's life started to spiral out of control. Remember the story about the 3 men and the well at Bethlehem? The three were among his 30 top fighting men. And in that group of thirty was Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband. His first impulse is to cover up this act from his friend Uriah by making it look as though Uriah had fathered this child. So David calls him back from battle, suggests that he take a break and go home to see his wife, only to discover that Uriah is so honorable a soldier that he will not sleep with his wife when his comrades are at battle. **"Uriah 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!'" (2 Samuel 11:11).**

Listen to Uriah's innocent and honorable response. He was not meaning to reproach David, but his words must have fallen like acid on David's conscience. Yes, everyone's at the battle and the visible presence of the Lord - the ark - is there too. And here I am, making love to this honorable soldier's wife - a man who is ready to lay down his life for me and for our nation. How very painful this conversation must have been for David. His attempt to clean up the mess by making Bathsheba's pregnancy look legitimate has failed.

So David becomes desperate, and

C. He tried to cover up

David now compounds his adultery and lies by adding murder. He has Joab send Uriah into the worst of the battle with the intention of getting him killed. Look at verse 16: **"So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died."** (2 Samuel 11:16). Notice how innocent Uriah dies honorably, giving his life for David and his country, and also, other soldiers die as well...needlessly. And Joab, that complicated, unruly commander, becomes complicit in murder. Joab's conscience is stained by getting involved in David's dirty work, and this gives Joab a hold over David which David regrets bitterly in the future.

But on the face of it, life goes on. David tries to preserve the proprieties by marrying Bathsheba, and in time, she gives birth to a son. Maybe people whispered; maybe they didn't. But David was powerful enough to squelch any comment. And for a period of time, things seemed to be fine. Except for one little warning, which we read at the end of chapter 11:27. **"But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD."**

Next,

D. He was caught

Perhaps no one accused him, but getting away with it in terms of public opinion is not the same as getting away with it in God's sight.

We have, in effect, David's diaries in his writings in the Psalms. And even though he carries on in public, this is what it felt like in private, to be carrying such awful sins: **"Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly...I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart."** (Psalm 38: 3-5; 8)

His conscience was killing him. But nothing happened until the High Priest Nathan, sent by God, unmasked David. Nathan began by telling David a little story about a rich man and a poor man. The poor man had only one little lamb, but the rich man had all he could want. Yet when a traveler came, the rich man took the poor man's lamb and killed it for his dinner. And David burned with anger at this story and said, "The man who did this deserves to die!" (12:5). **"Then Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'"** (2 Samuel 12:7)

Nathan lists the gifts that God has lavished on David. He recalls the trust that God has placed in him. He warns David that calamity will arise "out of his own household" – a prediction which is fulfilled by his sons Amnon, who raped his half sister Tamar; by his son Absalom, who led a rebellion; by his son Adonijah, who also tried to take the throne. Calamity indeed! These children saw the immoral behavior of their father and followed his example, as David reaped the consequences of his sin.

But to his great credit, David listens humbly to Nathan and responds instantly **"I have sinned against the LORD."** (2 Samuel 12:13). According to the Law in Leviticus 20:10, both David and Bathsheba should have died for the sin of adultery. But Nathan responds, **"The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die."** (2 Samuel 12:13-14).

He was caught, he repented and he was forgiven – "The Lord has taken away your sin." But still,

E. He faced consequences

The little boy sickens and David prostrates himself, fasting, in front of the LORD, begging for the life of his son. Seven days later, the child dies, and David then gets up, washes himself, and 'went into the house of the LORD and worshiped.' (v. 20).

But look at what he learns about God. David now understands that God is sovereign in the giving and taking of life. He writes in Psalm 139: **"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."** (Psalm 139:16). He is not angry, but accepting. And I find it intriguing that his first action is to worship. In worship we praise God and glorify him. And we give thanks for what comes from his hand. This is not the action of a resentful or rebellious man, but a deeply repentant one. **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."** (Psalm 51:17).

Next David's thoughts to turn another sufferer: his wife Bathsheba. **"Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah."** (which means 'Loved by the Lord')

So out of all this anguish comes eventual good, in the form of Israel's greatest king, Solomon. And God keeps his covenant promise to David that he shall never lack a descendent to sit upon the throne of Israel, keeping that promise in a way David could never have anticipated, when Jesus is born of Mary - a descendent of David by both blood and marriage.

Before we leave the consequences, let's think for a moment about who suffered in this story. **David**, but at least he brought it upon himself.

Bathsheba, who was apparently willing, but who really had no choice. Today we call it sexual harassment if a much more powerful man exerts pressure on a subordinate to have sex.

Uriah lost his life, but at least he died not knowing that he was betrayed by the king he loved.

The soldiers around Uriah died, fighting where they never should have been placed.

Their infant son died. This is one of the most difficult aspects of the story. But only God knows what that child would have faced because of his birth circumstances. He loves our children more profoundly than any of us as parents can. Taking him to heaven may have been the most merciful act of all. And David is comforted by the knowledge that he'll see his little son in heaven: **"Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."** (2 Samuel 12: 23)

Others were disillusioned or corrupted by observing the king's sorry behavior. His son Amnon learned that power can be abused.. His sons Absalom and Adonijah learned that it's all right to pursue what you want at whatever cost. And Absalom slept with his father's concubines, having learned that kings don't have to respect women.

Joab learned that David wasn't as pure as he thought, and began the fractious behavior which David no longer had the moral authority to check.

And **the nation** learned that their king was flawed.

So what is our sin costing those around us? We are living in a culture that tells us that love trumps everything - our marriage vows, our promises to our children, our commitment to God. Adultery, often followed by divorce, is common. Christian leaders are not immune; on the contrary, Satan targets them for attack, saying "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will scatter."

I think that the only true antidote to sin is to understand, with the core of our beings, what David says in verse 13: **"I have sinned against the LORD."** (2 Samuel 12:13). There's always collateral damage, like Uriah, and the baby, and everyone else who got hurt. But the real danger is failing to understand that when we sin, **we sin against God**. Because if we love God, we will have the deep pain of knowing that we have brought dishonor on the name of the One who already gave his life for ours. Yes, perhaps the people around us can be deceived...but God? **"O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways."** (Psalm 139:1-3) He sees every act, no matter

how secret, and he knows our thoughts and motivations. There is no hiding our sin from God. So the only way a Christian can sin deliberately over a period of time is by hardening the heart that so we progressively turn away from God, and make more and more selfish choices. Then faithlessness leads to a loss of faith.

But contrast that with obedience.

You see, there is something gained in a long obedience towards Christ. By walking faithfully over a long period of time, not only do I love God more, but obedience gets much easier. Paul explains why: **“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16)** Wouldn’t you rather be a slave to God rather than to sin?

A couple weeks ago I read a book by Carol Kent called *Becoming a Woman of Influence*. It’s a book about mentoring, and it was quite well written. I enjoyed it, but also walked away with a slight impression of smugness. This author was someone who had it all together. It was bright, informative, biblical and helpful. But I made no human connection with the author.

This weekend I read another book by Carol Kent called *When I Lay My Isaac Down*. This book was gutwrenching. In the four years since the earlier book, her only son, a Navy Seal, had shot and killed his wife’s ex husband after he became convinced that the man was molesting his stepdaughters. This wasn’t a crime of passion, either; he assassinated the man in a public place. After 2 ½ years in jail, he was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

This young man, Jason Kent, had a great future with the Navy. He had a wife he loved very much. He was a committed Christian. Why did he do it? His mother concluded that he became obsessed with the need to protect his stepdaughters. But instead of trusting God and working through the system, he took the law into his own hands. And suddenly the consequences of his sin spill out into many lives. Carol Kent writes about what she learned from suffering the consequences of her son’s sin:

We realized the world is a mess. [Horrible things happen even to Christians because of sin.]
We asked for help. [You cannot survive a tragedy like this alone.]
We recognized everything trivial was just that – trivial. [It puts everything in perspective.]
We admitted our sense of control was an illusion. [A need to control life actually is putting ourselves in the place of God.]
We were humbled as never before. [No guarantees for Christian workers here.]
We had to affirm or reject our faith. [We’ve been saying it for years. Now we had to live it.]

Reading the Kents’ story caused me to think that, perhaps, David benefited in the end – not from his sin, but from discovering his true need for God’s grace and forgiveness. Only a person who has passed through the fiery consequences of sin, can discover the reality of grace. And perhaps this is the reason that God permits Satan to roam in our world. Unless we learn firsthand the pain of repentance and the sweetness of forgiveness, we cannot really know what it cost Christ to purchase that forgiveness. And then, I hope, we’ll be more reluctant to crucify Christ all over again, in a sense, continuing to sin.

I believe this is what happened to David. He learned not to betray God's trust in him. He learned from what he suffered.

But what about us?

III. What Can We Do?

I have five pieces of advice.

A. Start with the heart.

Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that sin is a matter of the inner heart (and, after all, the heart is what we are studying this year). Sin begins with thoughts and emotions long before it ever progresses to action. And God considers the thought stage just as important as the action stage.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-29)

That's some pretty strong advice. It's telling us that to dwell wistfully on fantasies about other men, when we are married, is a form of adultery. And it's so important to halt the process that it's worth losing an eye over. Better not to see at all than to see, and to sin. So start with the heart.

Next,

B. Learn to flee.

Putting this in practical terms, halt the process at the thought stage. One way is by fleeing temptation. You flee by not putting yourself “on the rooftop” – don't be seductively lurking around waiting to get into trouble; don't read books or watch movies or form internet relationships that draw you away from your commitment to marriage. Run from the first sign of danger.

But also,

C. Learn to fight with God's power.

You fight by putting your armor on and standing your ground. **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground...” (Eph. 6: 12-13)**

This passage puts sin in a whole new light. It's not just me making an individual decision, that affects only me. I'm part of a much bigger picture. I'm part of the Lord's army, deciding whether I'm going to sell out to the other side. Am I going to be the betrayer, the quisling, who jeopardizes everyone around me by my selfish choice? And if I'm foolish enough to fight the spiritual forces of evil alone, by my own willpower, I haven't got a chance. So learn to fight with God's power.

Next,

D. Learn who our comrades are.

Because the battle against sin involves spiritual forces, we need to have the Holy Spirit as our comrade. **“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my**

name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26). If we understand that the Spirit is next to us, observing what we write and say and do and think, do we really want to go on in the paths that we’re treading?

Our other comrades in arms are our fellow believers. And among them should be a few who know us well enough and are bold enough to call it like it is. To tell us when we’re on dangerous ground, or are being jerks, or are about to stumble. This relationship takes practice, and it takes intimacy. We need to permit others to come into our life. So seek out a spiritual friend with whom you can have this kind of truthful relationship. Learn who your comrades in arms are, and lean on them.

Finally,

E. Learn what our limits are.

We’re in more danger when we’re tired, depressed, discouraged or angry. Or when we’re so busy we’re letting our spiritual disciplines and relationships slip. Like David, we may be bored, or reflective, or soul weary, and that leaves us vulnerable to getting captivated by something forbidden.

So there are practical things we can do. Build some rest and a Sabbath day in to each week. Don’t get out of the habits of prayer and reading and regular worship. Have honest relationships with Christian friends.

Use simple safeguards. I correspond with a lot of people, and some of them are male. But I have a mental rule that email correspondence ends after two or at the most three exchanges, and then there should be a silence, so that I’m not getting overly chatty with someone who’s not my husband. Anything I write should be able to be read by my children, who use my computer regularly, or my husband, or that person’s spouse, without embarrassment or misunderstanding. This doesn’t mean we can’t have any male friends – they just have to be within boundaries. Every Wednesday night I come home from Women’s Bible Study to the “Man Group” - John’s small group. They’re standing in my kitchen, eating dessert and chatting away. I like those guys a lot – but our interaction is in public and within the bounds of Christian hospitality. Simple rules, but good safeguards.

Remember the outcome of David’s sin and repentance? Yes, there were consequences, but God gave David a clean slate and a wonderful gift:

“She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.” (which means ‘Loved by the Lord’) (2 Samuel 12:24-25)

The Lord loved him. And this child, not any other one from David’s many wives, became the child of the promise. God comforted both of them with a child called “Loved by the Lord”.

I began this talk with a very trivial illustration about forgetting my bike, to show what happens when we drop our guard. But there was a time when dropping our guard in terms of parenting resulted in the death of our daughter. A moment’s inattentiveness, a spot of soul weariness, and the consequences may be far greater than you think. That is what David found out. And that is what I found out.

Whatever is in your past and my past, is done. By God's grace and Christ's sacrifice we can stand in the present and know that, if we are truly repentant, he's given us a new name. We will be called Jedidiah - "loved by the Lord".

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