

“How could anyone ever do that?” So often this is our response when we hear about terrible events in the news. Someone using a vehicle to kill a family. A violent murder spree happens after someone impersonates the police. A police officer uses excessive force in an arrest and kills the suspect. It is right to be outraged at these evils. We ought to pursue justice and peace.

But the danger of our outrage is that we fail to appreciate the evil that can lurk in our own hearts. And in our outrage, we can fail to appreciate how sin works. We can stand in judgment over others and have an aura of superiority, which is just a different form of evil. We can change our social media pictures to support the latest cause, all the while failing to realize that we, too, may be more arrogant and selfish and sinful than we realize. And the way that we recognize that we are in danger is when we even begin to think, “How could anyone ever do that?” Because when we ask or think this question, we have not understood how sinful sin is.

David is described in 1 Samuel 13 as a man after God’s own heart. But even though he is Israel’s great king and bringing about peace, this does not mean that David is free from committing grave sins. In fact, David will sin more heinously than Saul. But unlike Saul, David will respond to sin in a very different way. How are we to understand sin and what should our response be to the sin that is exposed in our hearts?

Beware the subtlety of sin

How is it that David ended up making falling into so much sin? Sin is subtle and has a sneaky way of spreading and thriving.

First, sin comes from neglect. We are told in v. 1 that David was neglecting his duty as king. Springtime was the time when kings went to war. And what did David do? He sent Joab out to fight the battle that he should have been fighting. Instead of doing the work of a king, David neglected is role. So often, sin begins by doing nothing instead of doing something.

Second, sin comes from indulgence. Verses 2-4 are full of action verbs. The writer doesn’t spend time giving us the emotional responses or the psychological reasoning. He got up, walked, saw, sent, lay. Bathsheba was most likely going about her ritual purification that women would have done each month, following the law of Leviticus 15:19-24 would have spelled out. She was doing what was right before the Lord. It was David who is the guilty one. David is neglecting his duties, and David is indulging his desires. David is using his power as king in a way that is completely wrong. His marriage to Michal had not gone well, and 2 Samuel 6 made it clear that there were problems in this marriage. And when the king sends messengers for you to come to him, you must go. David sent and lay. And she returned.

Third, sin comes from betrayal. David is a married man. He has let his eyes not only gaze, but indulge. And when he saw that she was beautiful in appearance, he didn’t stop looking. He allowed his curiosity to continue by getting information about who this woman was, and then

The Story of Everything: Repentance – 2 Sam. 11 & 12

having her brought to him. Long before David had committed adultery, he let his heart go. It started with his eyes. Then he let his mind wander, wondering and being curious. And then he acted. But not only was David's actions a betrayal of his marriage, it was a betrayal of one of his most loyal men. Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, is one of David's top 30 men, his mighty men, as 2 Sam. 23:39 tells us. Here is a man loyal to David, and David has betrayed not only his marriage, but also one of those closest to him who supported him.

Finally, sin wants to hide. Just like Adam and Eve hid in the garden after eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, David tries to hide his sin. When Bathsheba sends word that she is pregnant, David sends for her husband, Uriah. He clearly wants to have Uriah sleep with Bathsheba to cover up the pregnancy. But when that doesn't work because Uriah is loyal, he will do anything possible to hide things.

And the result of temptation is that when it conceives, James 1 tells us it gives birth to sin. And when sin is fully grown, it ends in death. And this is the tragic result here. When Uriah won't sleep with his wife, David sends Uriah back with his own death notice in his hands. Uriah, a faithful soldier, takes David's orders to have Uriah fight in the most heated battle zone and then be killed. Once Uriah is out of the way, David can marry Bathsheba and look like a gracious king all the while covering his tracks.

You might say, "I'd never do that." But here is the Lord's anointed. Here is a man after God's own heart. Here is the one upon whom the Spirit of God rested. The minute you think this couldn't be you is the minute you are being deceived. Temptation lurks and prowls.

There's a line in the hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" that is quite striking. And the author, Robert Robinson, was once asked by a woman about his hymn and the meaning of it. Robinson, who had drifted away from the Lord, was asked how he came to write this hymn that had blessed her so much. Robinson supposedly became so agitated that he said, "Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who composed that hymn many hears ago; and I would give a thousand worlds, of I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then!"

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love." Sin is subtle. And its subtlety tempts us to neglect, indulge, betray, and hide. We must pray, "Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it; seal it for Thy courts above."

Beware of justifying sin

There is one factor that is quite shocking in all of these events. We are told that Joab sent word back that there were losses, including Uriah (v. 24). And what is David's response? "Don't let this matter displease you. The sword devours now one and then another." Literally, David says, "Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes." David has gotten to the place where he is justifying his actions and trying to convince others that this is life. Battles happen. People die. Don't sweat it!

The Story of Everything: Repentance – 2 Sam. 11 & 12

But this thing displeased the Lord (v. 27) – literally, it was evil in the eyes of the Lord. David can say “Don’t let this thing be evil in your eyes,” but God sees and knows the evil of sin. We can tell ourselves it’s not really that bad. But God sees and knows the true evil that lurks through our hearts. God sees. God knows.

Sin has a way of convincing us that it’s not all that bad. Sin wants us to quiet our conscience and reassure us we’re not as bad as we think we are. Sin is evil – it results in evil, and it wants us to keep doing more and more evil. It starts with a look, then a thought, then an action, then a destiny.

But God is gracious. He will not leave us in our sin.

Return to the Gracious God

The opening words of ch. 12 are clearly full of grace. “So the Lord sent Nathan (the prophet) to David. God hates that evil has been done. God will deal with evil. But God does not run away from evil. He moves towards it with his redeeming grace. Grace runs towards sinners. And notice that it is God who makes the first move towards David, not David towards God. It is God who sends his prophet. It is God who sends his Word. It is God who will draw David back.

So often, when we fall into sin, we wonder, “How could I ever return to God? I’ve disappointed him. I’ve let him down. Sin wants to keep us from moving back to God. But the good news is that God makes the first move towards us. This is grace. Grace is undeserved kindness. Grace moves towards sinners. Grace comes after you, pursuing you. God sees and knows our actions, words, and thoughts. Yet God is not deterred to come after us in our sin. He moves towards us.

Nathan the prophet comes and tells David a parable about a poor man who had a lamb. But when a rich neighbour had company, the rich man seized it to serve his guests. David became furious at this injustice. Then Nathan came with this devastating line: “You are the man!” (v. 7).

The irony is that God had given David so much. Verses 8-9 make this clear. I gave...I gave...I gave. And what did you do? You have taken! This was the warning Moses gave in Deuteronomy 17 – when the king would act like the nations, he would take and take and take. And now David has acted worse than Saul. David has taken another man’s wife and another man’s life.

But the difference between Saul and David is quite simple: when Saul was confronted, he justified his behaviour. He made excuses – the people wanted this! But when David is confronted, he mourns. And in Psalm 51, we have David’s repentance recorded for us. And what makes David a man after God’s own heart is not that he was sinless, but that he humbled himself before the Lord.

The Story of Everything: Repentance – 2 Sam. 11 & 12

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Notice what David does in Psalm 51. First, he admits his sin. In verses 1-4 he confesses that what he has done has been evil in the Lord's eyes. Instead of perpetuating his self-justifying behaviour and telling Joab, "Don't let this be evil in your eyes," David now says, "I have done what is evil in your sight" (v. 4).

Second, he confesses his sin. In 2 Sam. 12:13 and here in Ps. 51:4, he confesses that he has sinned against the Lord. Yes, David sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba, and against his nation. But first, David had sinned against the Lord. He had broken God's law. He had disobeyed God's command.

Third, David appeals to God's mercy for cleansing. David sees that it is God's grace that has pursued him, and he responds like a beggar wanting more. He looks at the character of God – God keeps covenant even when David does not. God brings cleansing when David has brought bloodshed. God washes clean (v. 7) we are stained. And David appeals to God's mercy so that God would not count his sins against him but that he would hide his face from his sin.

Fourth, he humbles himself. David is the king. But he is the king under the King of kings. He has broken the law of the King. And so his heart is broken. He humbles himself and admits that inwardly he is crushed (v. 8). He sees what he has done is evil. He has confessed it and he sees the consequences. Yes, he has committed adultery and murdered men. But first and foremost he has strayed from God and lost the sense of joy in the presence of God.

Finally, he receives assurance. Just as Nathan said that his sin would be put away from him, David receives reassurance that his sin is removed, that joy will return, and that he will be restored.

And this is what happens at the end of 2 Samuel 12. David heads out into battle. David is back with his troops, doing what the king should have been doing. He has been restored. There will be consequences for his sin – and the rest of 2 Samuel will show us that these two chapters have deep consequences for the rest of the book – but David has been restored to his God and to his role.

And all of this is intended to help us see the glory of Christ.

When we had fallen into sin, God did not run away from us, avoid us, or neglect us. When Adam and Eve hid in the garden, God came. And when we were hiding from God, God sent his Son. God has given and given and given. And sin has tempted us to take and take and take. But God gave his One and only Son. For God loved the world in this way – he sent his only begotten Son that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16). And the way that he washes us clean is not by hyssop branches or the blood of beasts, but only by the blood of his Son, who goes to the cross to take the penalty for our sin so that we would have joy restored of fellowship with God, the joy of our salvation.

The Story of Everything: Repentance – 2 Sam. 11 & 12

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LUKE 24:27

God does not delight in our sacrifices and offerings. God delights in a broken and contrite heart. And the broken and contrite heart delights God because it delights in his mercy. It says, “God, you are truly gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Before God requires your obedience, he wants your heart. He wants you to love him. He wants you to see that he has come near to you so that you can come near to him.