

## 12 Keys To Spiritual Maturity

### David's Sin – Purity (#7)

By [Derek Thomas](#)

#### 2 Samuel 11

The Bible is a book full of peaks and valleys of spiritual experience. Few valleys so deep and dark as that of 2 Samuel 11. The description of the fall of David is as tragic as it is gripping. The writer seems to slow down in the telling of the story of the great events of the times in order to concentrate on the spectacular fall of Israel's greatest man. This chapter and the one that follows details for us how easily a servant of God can find himself in a morass of sin. The tale is like something from a modern Hollywood movie. It has all the elements of dramatic hyperbole: fame, adultery, lies, denial, and judicial murder. Except this is not hyperbole, but reality. This actually happened, and happened to one of God's best and finest. Written all over it are the warning: "if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

The Scriptures gives us two maps by which we may chart it this fall. One is the historical narrative that is recorded for us in this chapter, and the other is the personal, poignant and plaintive reflection of this incident in Psalm 51.

1 Samuel 11 is deep and dark because of the significance of David—he was the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), the man that God had chosen to be king (1 Sam. 16:1-13). But, it was also deep and dark because of nature of the sin. Sexual impurity receives the disdain and opprobrium it does in this chapter because it is something God frowns upon. It is a violation of the way he has told us to live. It breaks the rules. It violates trust. It destroys love.

In 1988, *Christianity Today* interviewed 1,000 of its subscribers who were not pastors. 45% admitted to having done something, which was sexually inappropriate. In the same year, *Leadership* magazine did a survey of 1,000 ministers and found that the figure was 23%. Now, as then, this sin continues to erase all that is pure and lovely and of good report.

Like all Old Testament narratives, this one has a specific function. It "is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (cf. 2 Tim.3:16). Scripture seems to describe the events here with care (and sensitivity!). It does so, not because the sin is sexual, but because David's actions are so very sinful. Several features are worth noting.

## 1. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS TEMPTATION

The earlier chapters of 2 Samuel have described David's activities in battle, particularly with the Ammonites. But all that changes here. After perhaps a decade of activity (success, we might say) in which David's name grows in popularity and esteem, something happens to him on the inside. Outwardly few, if any, might suspect a problem; but, inwardly, coldness of heart has gripped David's spirit and he is vulnerable to a fall. Who knows precisely what the factors are that lead to such a catastrophic collapse as this one! Pride? Greed? A belief that he was invulnerable? One thing is sure; he is clearly not the man he used to be. He is about to let himself down, his family down and the LORD down in a way that we might suspect will prove fatal. The author underlines the circumstances:

### **(a) A time of neglected duty.**

The opening verse sets the scene (and the problem): it is a time when kings go off to war! It is spring and wars were fought at seasons most conducive for battle. The Ammonites have still to be subjugated, despite the fact that ten years have elapsed since David's coronation. David sends his Commander in Chief, Joab to take care of them in a battle at Rabbah. Joab was a powerful man and sometimes ruthless in his actions. He was later to be executed for his wanton assassinations and his part in the conspiracy of placing Adonijah instead of Solomon on David's throne. Though the writer does not give us all the details, David will need his support and expertise in ensuring the death of one of his own men in battle. He was evidently loyal to David.

The point of this detail about Joab and the battle at Rabbah is to inform us that David himself did not go. David remained in Jerusalem while "the king's men and whole Israelite army" are at war (v.1). Worse, the focus of the King is not the battle of Operation Rabbah (10:14), but the beauty of a young woman called Bathsheba, bathing (provocatively?) on the rooftop adjacent to the palace and in view of the King. His mind is not on military strategy, but sexual strategy: he is trying to work out how he may ensure that she visits the King's bedroom. This story has all the features of some tawdry afternoon soap opera special.

(b) It was also a time of neglected devotion. Times of neglected duty are invariably accompanied by temptations for which we are unprepared and unarmed. There is no record of David's spiritual fight against temptation because there was none. His zeal had evaporated. His energy for God that we see displayed in his beautiful psalms is gone. He evidently cannot sleep and takes a walk on the roof of the palace (v. 2) Is it the guilt for not being with his men, or is it that he already knows what he desires and his body aches for fulfillment?

We often kid ourselves that things "just happen" when all along we have been

urgently looking for their fulfillment. His resolve is gone; all he need is the opportunity to present itself, and though he may for a while appease himself with the thought that the temptation “just came,” but the truth is that he was probably looking for it. Lust will seek its fulfillment whilst insisting on its victim status. There are no prayers, no songs in the night to Yahweh, David's God. Obsession has taken hold as he glimpses the naked body of a woman bathing on a nearby rooftop. With no spiritual restraint to guide him the course of the night is set on a downward slope. Sin having conceived will now bring forth. There is no stopping it. He had not nourished his spiritual affections; he had no energy to resist. All he needed was opportunity and desire to coincide... and they did!

## 2. THE PROGRESS OF HIS ENTICEMENT

There is a morphology to the progress of sin. It follows a well-defined course. The writer wants us to capture it by employing certain verbs. “He saw...sent for...slept” (vv. 2-4). What happened? It is what always happens when sin is on the prow. James outlines it for us: “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14-15).

David had lost his mind! He has allowed himself to *think* lustful thoughts. He permitted the weeds of sin to take root in his mind. His understanding no longer rules his affections. And when he saw Bathsheba, he *lost sight of God*. Instead of killing sin at its root, there on the rooftop as his eyes caught sight of something inappropriate. He fondled the idea and allowed it grow and mature. He carefully nursed it until the infant thought grew too big to control. It is always the way with sin.

The same morphology is evidenced in the story of Achan in the Book of Joshua. For Achan it was material greed: a Babylonian garment, some shekels of silver and the wedge of gold. Then, the writer of Joshua employs his verbs: “When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath” (Joshua 7:21). He *saw, coveted, took, and hid*.

Short-term gratification filled his vision. He made the fatal mistake: he did not ask how long this would last and where it would lead—any more than a fish wonders whether there is a hook inside the bait. And David is caught. Just as in a million ways, you and I are caught in the grip of sin's alluring powers. We have bitten down on the morsel and have been oblivious to the sharp hook that lies inside. Sin deceives, just as it did in the Garden of Eden when it promised the earth.

This is why Robert Murray M'Cheyne's words are so valuable: think that the

seeds of every known sin lie within our hearts. We are as capable of David's sin as anyone else; as *he* was. Sin needs to be dealt with as soon as it raises its head. At the first instigations of sin allurements we are to be on our guard. *Watch* and *pray* are the key words.

Few writers have been as helpful in this realm as the seventeenth century English puritan, John Owen. Writing on the need to mortify sin at its first appearance, he added: "Rise mightily against the first actings of thy distemper, its first conceptions; suffer it not to get the least ground" (*Works* 6:62). The believer must become an astute observer of the occasions when he or she is vulnerable to sinning, and carefully endeavor to avoid them.

### 3. THE COMPLEXITY OF HIS SIN

David becomes like a man seized by an octopus; all of its tentacles wrap round him. It is almost as though, by the end of this chapter, David has broken virtually every one of the commandments:

COVETOUSNESS: He desired what was not his to have

ADULTERY: He slept with her

THEFT: David knew she was Uriah's wife

FALSEHOOD: He hoped and planned that people would think the baby was Uriah's. Read how David sends for (v.6), asks (v.7), then orders (v.8a) Uriah. He even sends him a gift (v.8b). But Uriah will have none of it. Maybe he suspects, we are not told. David even gets him drunk, putting him 'under the influence' but again, Uriah goes to bed in the servants quarters (v.13b). The writer keeps on saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house" (vv. 9, 13). The gossip in verse 10 seems to further add to it. Everyone knew that he had not gone home.

MURDER: v.14ff. He will have Uriah dead and dead in such a way that it will look as though it was just misfortune in battle. Note the way the writer tells you five times that David's intention was Uriah die (vv. 15, 17, 21, 24, 26)!

Furthermore, by comparison with Uriah: he breaches the commands concerning God's honor and glory.

Don't you think he also broke the command: honor your father and your mother?

You see what happens when his life is placed under the microscope? It is what Paul says: Sin is seen to be exceedingly sinful (Rom. 7:13).

And this is David! The man after God's own heart, the king that God had chosen,

the one whose psalms some of you read and sing every day.

#### **4. THE HEART OF HIS FAILURE**

Two little statements bring us to the essence:

##### **(a) What happened in David's heart — 2 Sam.12:10 — he despised the Lord.**

He counted his own satisfaction of greater worth than God's word and honor. You see, what had this night of passion brought him? Pregnancy, for one thing! The only spoken words recorded of Bathsheba are "I'm pregnant" (v.5)! And the writer underlines it all by calling her "the wife of Uriah" (v. 26). Stuart Briscoe "the world is littered with the debris of what sexual lust has promised but never fulfilled."

##### **(b) What happened in God's heart — displeased him.**

The tragedy was: it was this man after God's heart, who pleased him — who caused such grief. David was to cry later of his own son "O Absalom my son, my son Absalom". Here, it is as though God is crying, "O David, my son, my son David!"

Now, we are not finished with David yet — but notice some things before we leave him:

Firstly, the importance of guarding the mind.

*How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By living according to your word.  
I seek you with all my heart;  
do not let me stray from your commands.  
I have hidden your word in my heart  
that I might not sin against you. (Psalm 119:9-11)*

Constant reflection and meditation upon God's word will keep our minds Godward and pure.

Secondly, the importance of the law. The law is given to defend and protect us. It is the way God helps us know where the boundaries are. Failure to comply with notices of trespassing will lead to problems. God keeps us sweet by making sure we know where safety lies, and where dangers lurk. Cries of legalism whenever a "thou shalt" or more pertinently, a "thou shalt not" arise are out of place and immature. God's law is not a shackle to confine us but a boundary within which we are free to roam at our pleasure, and at God's.

Thirdly, there is always the possibility that this issue is exactly the area of your

temptation. It is an interesting conspiracy theory—those who raise a hue and cry about sex and adultery being openly spoken about are *Christians!* And it is altogether possible that they are the very ones who need to hear it.

Fourthly, it is vitally important for Christians to know that even though condemnation is written all over this sin, *there is a way of forgiveness.* The verse of the chapter reads, “the thing David had done displeased the Lord.” There is no word of forgiveness here, of course. David, at the end of chapter 11 has not yet confessed his sin. There is no acknowledgment of his wrong and no pronouncement of his vindication. That must await chapter 12 and David's inner struggles as recorded in psalm 51, with its expressions of conviction, confession, and repentance.

When we let the Savior down, what then? Can we ever be the same again? Is there a condition that goes beyond failure? Are we doomed to live a second class existence, *forgiven* but *redundant*? What does failure and success look like from a divine perspective? The Bible is not only a book, which records the successes of individual men and women, but also their failures. In one sense at least, the failures recorded in Scripture attests to its divine inspiration—men would have ensured a more glamorous portrayal than the one given in Scripture! Does God give a second chance at something? Or a third? or a fourth? or a fifth? Can God use a failure? The answer, of course, is that God uses the likes of David again. Just as he uses the likes of Peter again after his spectacular failure of denial.

Is this God's word to you? Maybe it's in the past and the memories of it are painful. Maybe it's un-confessed. Maybe it's just lurking there as a dread possibility that just awaits the opportunity. Some business trip, when your marriage has lost its savor and the opportunity just presents itself, or maybe, you secretly look for it without knowing that you do.

The one sure help is a healthy and strong marriage. And we will have to look at this on another occasion as we consider the keys to spiritual maturity. But for now, it is the word of grace that beckons:

“I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam.12:13).

*Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.  
Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him  
and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.*

*I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"—  
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psalm 32:1-5).*

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