



THE STORY



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Speaker: Matthew Eckert
Scripture: The Story – Chapter 12

There's an amazing Psalm in the Bible that speaks to the ebbs and flows of life. It's Psalm 32. Let me read this for you and see, perhaps, what we can glean from this.

Psalm 32

¹ Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!

² Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

³ When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.

⁴ Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.

⁵ Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

⁶ Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment.

⁷ For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory.

⁸ The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.

⁹ Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."

¹⁰ Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the LORD.

¹¹ So rejoice in the LORD and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

What would cause someone to write that? What have they experienced or gone through that they would put pen to paper and write those words. Understanding the joy; understanding the guilt and sin and discipline; confession; God begging out 'I want to guide you and lead you'. Who would kind of live and understand that ebb and flow of life?

You know, we've been on this journey and we are on week number 12 right now of this 31-week journey called *The Story*. And, actually today, we are going to pause after this message and Pastor Paul will lead us next week into Christmas and a series called *Leading Into Christmas*.

But as we've been on this journey, we've talked about God and this amazing upper story, something that He's leading us through. That's why we want to go through the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and the story actually continues with us here today. And there's the beauty of this, and as we've gone through the upper story, we've talked about our lower stories and how God steps into our lower stories. In many ways, He's calling us into His upper story. The beauty of this – and we've looked at all kinds of characters so far who God has kind of stepped down and said 'come on, I've got something for you to do. Enter into the story', and some people have entered into it in a beautiful way and others have kind of, and not really, and rejected it and we've seen all these ebbs and flows.

I have been reading my Bible for years. I read it through on a regular basis. I have a Master's degree in Theological Studies. I journal about Scripture all the time. I think I have an understanding of what

Scripture says and where God is calling me, and yet – and maybe you’ve experienced this, too – ever had those moments where you know what God is calling you into and it’s almost like a surreal moment where you are outside of yourself and you watch yourself knowing you should go here but you go there. Ever experience that? I am so frustrated with myself at times. I should know. I have pretty good insight of Scripture. I think I know where God’s story is and where He’s calling me and yet too often I watch myself instead of going there go here. It’s a rhythm of life that I wish I could stop. Maybe you’ve experienced that rhythm. Maybe you’ve experienced this ebb and flow. Why do I choose this when God is calling me to this?

C.S. Lewis has this great quote. He says the following. He says:

The Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

I am not sure if you can relate to that quote, and as I ebb and flow in my life and I know where God is calling me and I settle for this, at times I step back and go you are far too easily pleased with such short-term kicks and you are missing the beauty of the upper story where God is calling you into.

Last week, Pastor Paul shared with us about King David. He wasn’t King David at that time. He was young David and he was called. He was anointed to be King. He was the runt, as Pastor Paul said last week. If you missed that message, you can go online and listen to him. He was the most unlikely of characters yet we find out more often in *The Story* that God steps in and chooses the most unlikely of people. And David now, in this part of *The Story*, Chapter 12, has now become King and

he is, in Scripture, known as *a man after God’s own heart*. And yet, you may be wondering like I have if you’ve read about his story, he made so many mistakes still. Like how could the Scriptures say ‘he was a man after God’s own heart’? And as I kind of enter into one of the stories of his life today, there’s a piece in there that I think helps me start to understand what this really meant, that he really sought after God despite his foibles and his failings.

I want us to look at one of the stories of David’s life today. It’s a fairly well-known story, actually, whether you are a regular church person and Bible reader or not. It’s a story of David and this woman called Bathsheba. David and Bathsheba. And as we go through this story, we are going to find that there is this ebb and flow to David’s life that, I think, is so much my life, and I really wish it wasn’t. And I think there are things for us to glean out of this as we go through it.

You see, in these rhythms of life, when we start to miss the upper story, it begins with what I want to call *distraction*. Distraction - losing sight of the upper story. So in David’s case here.

2 Samuel 11:1 or page 161

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.

It doesn’t seem too distracting right now, does it? Or is it? Because at a time when kings go out to war, the King doesn’t go out to war. Now you may, like me, wrestle sometimes with the Old Testament and the battles and kind of the wars that take place. I’m not going to go into that here today. Pastor Paul touched on that a few weeks ago in one of his messages. But suffice it to say that there is a rhythm of life that the King was supposed to be in. There are rhythms of life that we are called to step into. And at a time when the King should be going out to war, the King does not go out to war and the King is going to get distracted. He’s missing the call of what he is supposed to be doing. Ever been there? I’ve thought about this amazing phrase ‘at a time

when I should be' I am actually not. I am doing this. Ever been there? Here are some examples I just pondered in my own life:

At a time when I should be eating dinner with my kids, I choose instead to go and watch a show.

At a time when I should be home with my spouse, I choose to stay at work late because, well, we are not getting along that great anyways right now and the people at work are so much more fun to be around.

At a time when I should be having that hard conversation, I choose to avoid it and instead mock the person behind their back.

At a time when I should be paying off debt, I am actually going to go and buy more stuff and just turn a blind eye to it.

At a time when... and I lose sight of what I believe I'm called into. And these could actually maybe not even appear to be bad things. I have a rhythm of life where, on a regular basis, daily, I open the Bible and I journal. I want to know who God is. It's a rhythm of life that I think is critical for my own journey, yet there have been seasons at a time when I should be sitting down and doing what I think I need to be doing. Instead, I go off and, I don't know, I exercise. There's nothing wrong with exercise. I'm a big proponent, but at the time when I know I should be engaging in this, I get distracted and do something that may not appear to be wrong.

At a time when I should be with my smaller group of guys and when we should be kind of challenging each other in life and praying for each other, at a time when I should be with them I choose to go and watch a game instead.

At a time when God's asking me for financial generosity, I choose to buy a new car or a bigger house. At a time when... I get distracted. And I wish I could say that I've conquered that one in my life, but there are far too many times in my life and I don't head into where I should be. And for David, at

a time when kings go off to war, David does not go off to war. He's distracted.

Well, distraction leads to *alteration*. We start writing a bad chapter. We start writing a bad chapter. In David's story here:

One evening, David got up from his bed and walked around the roof of the palace. From the roof, he saw a woman bathing. Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him and he slept with her. The woman conceived and sent word to David saying, 'I am pregnant'.

And David begins to write a bad chapter in his lower story, a chapter that should have never been written, a chapter that didn't need to be written, but David got distracted and now starts writing a bad chapter.

How many bad chapters have I written in my story? And the reality is once a chapter is written the chapter is written. The ink is dry. It is always there. How many bad chapters do you have? Are you in the middle of one right now? It's the rhythm, right? Distraction leads to altering our life story, the story that God never wanted you to be writing, yet we write the story.

Well, what happens after alteration? Well, then you have to start covering up the bad story, don't you? You have to start justifying your lower story and oh, how well, how good I've been at justifying some of my lower stories.

So David sent this word to Joab:

Send me Uriah, the Hittite, and Joab sent him to David.

You see, Bathsheba is pregnant. How do we figure this out? Well, I'll just have her husband come back and he'll go home to be with his wife while he's kind of on leave from the battle and he'll sleep with his wife and then everyone will think 'well, it's their child'. Amazing. I've covered it up. It's all

good. No one will ever know. And David is about to be schooled in integrity by the non-Jew, the Hittite. Here's a man that comes back and David gets him drunk one night and he's sure he'll just go back to sleep with his wife, but Uriah – see, Uriah lives for a bigger story. Uriah knows that he has been called to something and he will not get distracted from what God has called him to. How dare he go enjoy some time with his wife while his buddies are out fighting. No, no, he will not do that. He will keep himself focused, so he simply goes outside the palace gate and sleeps outside, and telling David you have no idea what it means to be a person of integrity.

And then, David gets frustrated. He said, well, surely, two nights in a row this guy can't hold himself up so he gets him drunk a second night, and a second night Uriah just goes outside the palace gate and sleeps on the ground. He will not go to his wife because he lives for a bigger story. He cannot get distracted.

It's not working out for David. It's not working out. So what happens when our cover ups don't cover up? We escalate the cover up, don't we? We escalate the whole thing, and now we start ruining other people's lower stories. David had already ruined Bathsheba's story, and now he is just going to spread the wealth around. And how many stories have I altered and ruined because I am simply trying to cover up a story because I got distracted.

In the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it to Uriah. In it he wrote:

Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.

And he's going to ruin, he's going to eliminate someone's lower story to protect the lie of his lower story because he got distracted from the beauty of the upper story. And how often do we enter into these moments and keep forgetting what we are called to do, and we escalate and we escalate.

Surely no one else will get hurt, right? And surely my wife won't find out if I take one credit card to pay off another credit card, to try to do that whole financial juggling thing. You know, my wife, she just isn't meeting my needs anyways so I deserve to... and I start ruining other people's stories, and on and on it goes.

You know, up to this point this is a pretty depressing message, right? It's not that beautiful and maybe some of you are feeling twinges of guilt. You are going 'what is he talking about?' and you don't want to go there. Maybe you are in this moment right now.

But the beauty of the story is one of the rhythms of Scripture, and one of the things we can never forget. It's been happening since Genesis, and it's who God is. In the midst of David and of us escalating and covering up bad chapters, God always enters in and there's the voice, isn't there, calling us back into the upper story. And if you miss anything, don't miss this. God is not a God who is here to condemn. God is a God who is always reaching down and calling you back into a better story.

For David, it was a prophet named Nathan. Nathan tells David a story about a really rich guy who has all kinds of sheep and goats, and there is this other family – they have one sheep, and they love the sheep. It's become almost like a pet to them although, perhaps, they know one day they will have to kill it for food, and this rich guy has friends. He wants to have a party. So instead of taking one of his many sheep, he steals the one little sheep and takes it and creates a meal for his friends. And David says, 'that man should die'. And Nathan looks him in the face and says, 'you are that man'. One of the great lines of Scripture.

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. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in His eyes?

You missed it, David. You have all that you need and here is Uriah and Bathsheba, and you go and kill him and take her. How dare you!

But the voice is always a voice to call us back. It's always a voice of God's love reaching down. We've seen it all along, haven't we? God reaching in trying to bring people back up, trying to remove them from their distractions. We're going to celebrate communion today and isn't this the most amazing example of God Himself and His voice coming down in human form and walking among us and speaking to us and saying 'I have something better for you. Why do you get distracted?' It's not a God who is distant, who you are trying to appease. It is a God who is always reaching down, always speaking to us. It's the voice.

Reading a great book these days and there's actually a quote I read just a couple of days ago. He says,

As we begin to identify and accept this voice, however we also encounter static from voices of our past. One of the enemy's most cunning forms of deception is to coax us into beating ourselves up, making ourselves pay, rejecting our true identities, in effect, hating ourselves.

Henri Nouwen knew from personal experience that self-loathing is a barrier to breaking free from shame. He quotes here:

Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us beloved. Being the beloved expresses the core truth of our existence.

And I think for us to hear the voice, we have to figure out that it is not God trying to hurt us, condemn us. It is always God trying to call us back.

Do you have those voices in your life? They will take many forms. At times, the Bible, you will be reading it and a verse just rises off the page and you know that's God speaking to you. At times, it will

be your child that says something, a friend, a co-worker. God will use Christians and non-Christians and all kinds of pieces, but you know. You've had those moments, haven't you, where someone says something and all of a sudden something in your heart goes 'ah, that's for me, I think'.

I had eight guys away at a retreat just last weekend and we had a great time together, and I just loved on Sunday morning when we were together we just shared our lives and prayed for each other, and the beauty of the conversation and guys speaking into each other's lives and being voices to each other. It was an amazing experience.

I am privileged to have a number of people in my life who, for whatever reason, they love me and I trust them and they trust me, and they are willing to look me in the face from time to time and say 'Matt, you are wrong.' 'Matt, you are going off track.' 'Matt, don't do that'. They have been the voice of God in my life.

The voice is a beautiful thing calling us back into the upper story, but when the voice speaks, I guess, the only final thing is *the decision*. The decision, right? Which story will I choose? Will I keep writing that chapter or will I close that chapter off and hear the voice and let's begin a new chapter in my story.

David said to Nathan,

I have sinned against the Lord.

I think for me this is why Scripture says that David was a man after God's own heart. It wasn't that he didn't mess up and make these dumb mistakes, but when God spoke, when God spoke to him, it wasn't like 'let me get back to You. Let me ponder that. Let me pray about that'. No, David knew the voice of God. He didn't have to hire the PR firm to make it sound better than it was. He simply looked Nathan in the eye and said 'I accept the consequences. I have sinned against God Himself'. He knew it right away. He knew it right away.

Maybe you are right there right now. Maybe the voice has been speaking to you lately. Maybe the voice has been prodding and poking you. You know you have been writing a bad chapter. You know you've been distracted and you are just holding off on the decision you know you need to be making.

It's the rhythm of our stories, isn't it? It begins with distraction, losing sight of the upper story.

Alteration, writing a bad story, the cover up, justifying my story. Maybe ruining other people's story as the cover up escalates. It's the beauty of the voice. It's the decision. I wish I could tell you I never have to live through this rhythm anymore. I wish I could tell you that I've got this thing figured out and I just get distracted for a split second and I know what Scripture says. I never go there. I wish I could stand before you and say that is me, but it's not. I still, all too often, find myself running down this list and going through the cycle over and over again.

But it's clear. It's clear. You know, the guy who wrote Psalm 32, who understood this in such a great way was David. It was David. He also wrote another amazing Psalm, a Psalm that I think is the most well-known Psalm around the world, probably. It's Psalm 23, used at many events – weddings and funerals and all kinds of things. Let me read it for you. It may be familiar to you. It says:

Psalm 23

The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows. He leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to His name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid for You are close beside me, Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honour me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessing. Surely Your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me

all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

We love this Psalm, don't we? We love the idea of having all we need and resting in meadows and being led beside peaceful streams and being renewed with strength and being guided in the right path and having no fear in dark valleys, and on and on it goes. We love this Psalm. We want to claim this Psalm, yet the amazing thing about this Psalm is it pivots on the first line. This entire Psalm pivots on the first line. How the first line reads determines how the Psalm reads. See, David says, 'The Lord is my Shepherd', and thus this Psalm flows out. But here's the reality – not all of us choose the Lord as our shepherd, do we? We, at times, get distracted and we choose something else to lead and guide us, so if the Lord is not your shepherd, replace it with something else, the Psalm will read differently for you. Is not that true? If comfort is my shepherd, then the Psalm reads differently. If financial gain is my shepherd, it reads differently. If fame – if – if even my spouse I choose to put her above as my shepherd and not God Himself it reads differently.

Another quote from this book I am reading. It says:

No man/woman can live without worshipping something. Worship is reflexive to all of us whether you have been a Christian for decades or you are an atheist, in your heart you worship something or someone. You may worship porn or sex, you may worship achievement, money, reputation, you may worship food, material things or people's approval, but everyone worships something.

Everyone has chosen their shepherd. And depending on the shepherd you have chosen, your psalm will flush out differently. If the Lord is your Shepherd, then this is your psalm, but if He is not, then there is a different psalm that is written for you because it will not be the same as this Psalm. If you choose to get distracted from the upper story and start writing a bad chapter, this Psalm is no longer your psalm. It

becomes something else and David found that out. That's why Psalm 32 talks about being weighed down by the guilt and the pain. He no longer felt and was no longer by streams of water because he chose something else as his shepherd for a season of life.

This past week, North Park hosted a breakfast here for the Christian Churches Network of London and the person who spoke that day was a gentleman named Martin Hayward. Martin is the City Manager of the City of London. Apart from the Mayor and the Councilors, Martin has the most influence on what takes place in the City of London. He oversees everybody. They all report into him. Martin is a follower of Jesus. He connects with Open Door Church on Dundas Street downtown. Martin was sharing what he is learning about leadership and how he leads as a follower of Jesus in his context and what he has to wrestle with and work through.

In it he was talking about having purpose in life and he has to make sure that people who work under him feel like they really have purpose and to come into work is a really amazing thing. For him, his purpose in life goes beyond his job. It's who he is in Christ and that gives him purpose to step in every single day, no matter what he has to go through. But in his talk, he gave this quote and he had heard it at another event I think he was at that a child, someone in their twenties, I think, had said to their parents – and a bunch of us grabbed pens and just wrote this quote down. Here's what it said, this twenty-something or thirty-something saying to their parents:

‘You've given me everything I need to live with but nothing I need to live for. ‘

You've given me financial stability. You've paid for my education. I've got a car. You helped me get going. You gave me fun and vacations. You gave me all this great stuff, everything I need to live with. I can now step into life and go and do, but what am I living for? Simply live the same rhythm again and have my own kids and find them money

and they do the same thing? In essence, this person is saying, ‘Mom and Dad, your story is way too small. It's this lower story that doesn't connect into an amazing upper story. It's way too small. I've got everything to live with, but nothing to live for'.

How often do we get distracted and we begin this rhythm of life that God never intended for us to live. David is a fantastic example of what life can fall apart like if we choose to forget the upper story and the beauty of that and start writing these lower stories because we think we know better than the Creator of the universe Himself. What would it look like for each of us, what would it look like for you and your families, what would it look like for you at work, what would it look like for you in your neighbourhood if you chose to seek God and to enter into the upper story, the beauty of what He has? And if we all would stop getting distracted by our selfishness and our greed and our self-centeredness and truly seek to enter into the story that God truly has for us all, what would life be like if that was our reality?

Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You. Thank You for who You are, what You are calling us into. God, I am sorry. I have too often been distracted and missed the beauty of what You have for me. And Lord, I pray that I would be more attentive, more aware. God, You love me and You have another better life for all of us. God, may we know that reality. May we know the beauty of that, and may each of us choose to forever seek You with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and not to get distracted. Holy Spirit, the Voice, speak to us today individually, collectively, that we would hear from You and we would respond to whatever You are calling us to. In the Name of Jesus, I pray this for us all. Amen.

Points to Ponder

November 25-26, 2017

THE STORY

David: The Trials of a King

Chapter 12

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. When have you found yourself making decisions that you knew were not what you wanted for your life (or what you believed God wanted for your life) but you went ahead anyway?
2. How does this quote from C.S. Lewis impact you?

“Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

3. Do you find yourself at any of these stages? If so, how do you think you need to respond?

The Rhythm of Our Stores:

- a) Distraction – losing sight of the Upper Story
- b) Alteration – writing a bad chapter
- c) Cover up - justifying my Lower Stories
- e) The voice – calling you back into the Upper Story
- f) Decision – which story will I choose?

4. Read Psalm 32. How could this Psalm become a prayer for you as you journey through your own life rhythms?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed.