

# CHAPTER 6: REPROACH

## THE BIG PICTURE

The story of David's rise and rule takes a painful turn in this episode. Even good men sometimes struggle and fail, and David is no different. David's sin in this story is a severe transgression against his calling and the covenant he was blessed to receive. David has been anointed to be a shepherd for God's people Israel, but in the narratives recorded in **2 Samuel 11 and 12** David plays the part of a wolf. In a shocking departure from the integrity and character David has previously displayed, David's actions are ruthless and shameful. This episode serves to illustrate the warning Samuel gave to Israel back in **1 Samuel 8:11-18** – kings are takers. Samuel warned the people when they demanded a human king: a person given such power will take what is yours and make it his own. David now lives up to the worst of Samuel's predictions about kingship. He takes the wife of one of his own men in selfish lust and then murders her husband to cover up his crime. David's actions are inexcusable; he dishonors the covenant of God by abusing his power. The major theme of 1 & 2 Samuel is the question: who sits enthroned on your heart? This story shows us that the throne can corrupt even the strongest of hearts and that even people of heroic faith can fall in failure. Over the next several episodes, we will see the consequences of David's failure as his family unravels in sin and the struggle for power. Hold on to hope, because even in failure, David's strength of character will emerge as he chooses confession and repentance when his sin is confronted.

## ENTER THE STORY:

- I. Notice the circumstances of **2 Samuel 11:1-5**. David has enjoyed security and prosperity, and this comfort leaves him susceptible to temptation and frustration. Boredom is a dangerous feeling for a person accustomed to adventure. David has done battle with giants, roamed the wild, trained warriors, and fought God's battles. Here, he is unguarded and under-challenged, and so his appetites go unrestrained. His armies are fighting the Ammonites, but David stays home. Imagine what David might be thinking as he roams the rooftop of his palace in Jerusalem. From this high vantage point, he can survey the vast city and see the lands of his kingdom for miles around. Is he starting to feel like other kings: as if he is above the law and above the people? Is the king puffed up with pride? If so, David is playing a dangerous game with his thoughts. He has been a model king thus far because he has managed to keep perspective on the truth: God is truly the only one who belongs on the throne. When David forgets that fact, his family and his kingdom will be put at risk.
  - David seems to illustrate in this story that "absolute power corrupts absolutely." Why do you think unrestrained power is so damaging to the human heart?

- If you were placed on the throne and given amazing covenant promises by God like David, would you be able to remain humble? Why or why not? How would you prevent pride from growing in your heart?
  - Why do you think we are more easily enticed by sin when we are bored?
- II. The author of this story does not provide Bathsheba's name at first. To David, she is simply "that woman." This is an effective technique to underline for the reader the way David has objectified Bathsheba. David's servant cleverly attempts to reverse this distorted perspective when he asks: "Isn't she someone's daughter and someone's wife?" This is an attempt to humanize her, to remind the king that she is a person with relationships and a story, not an object of lust. Her husband is actually one of David's own warriors, serving in the army right now, fighting David's war! This objectification is one of the great injustices of lust. Lust is a way of seeing others selfishly as objects of gratification, not as people that are precious to God and others. Tragically, David sends men to "take" her, completing her objectification in abuse. This woman is exploited and her husband is robbed as David uses his power for cruel purposes.
- Lust is so damaging because lust defines the value of another human being based on selfishness. Modern culture has taken this objectification of others to an extreme with the prevalence of pornography. Think for a few minutes about how pornography objectifies and exploits others for selfish purposes.
  - What should David have done differently when he was tempted by lust when he saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing?
  - Some have compared David's abuse of power to the crime of rape. David, fully able to use his power to get what he wants – does just that. He wants, so he takes. How does David's crime alter your opinion of him? Does this sin tarnish his legacy?
  - One of David's servants tried to remind him of the truth and prevent him from doing wrong when he told the king: "*she is the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.*" What accountability do you have in your life to help you with your struggle against lust?
  - The narrator never hints at what Bathsheba is thinking or feeling throughout this painful story. Can you imagine what she must be going through?
- III. When David's private indiscretion threatens to become a public scandal, his first thought is to cover-up his crime. **2 Samuel 11:6-17** records David's frustrated attempts to conceal his offense, culminating in David's decision to murder Uriah. The ugly truth about sin is that once it is committed, if sin is suppressed and concealed it will lead to more sinning. If left uncontested, it leads to the hardening of the heart. Such people stop caring about their sin or its consequences and become numb to the reality of their

own guilt. This escalation is common and among the most universal of human experiences. Sin is a spiritual cancer that spreads and brings death with it. David has grossly betrayed the sacred trust given to him by God and by his people. The last verse of 2 Samuel 11 ensures the reader that David will not get away with murder: ***“The thing David had done displeased the Lord.”***

- When David chooses to cover up his crime, he is placing himself above the law. David thinks that for some reason, the rules don't apply to kings. Why do you think people in power often use a different standard for themselves than for others?
- David's attempt to cover up the crime is another abuse of his power. He is trying to control the situation and everyone around him. His plans are frustrated when Uriah's integrity makes him difficult to manipulate. Have you ever tried to control other people with selfish motives?
- David is trying desperately to stay in control as he plots his cover-up. The funny thing is, David's sin is controlling his every move. Do you think David ever felt trapped by his sin? Have you ever felt trapped by sin?
- Have you ever lied to cover up a lie, or sinned to cover up a previous sin? How do you stop the cycle?
- Can you think of an example in your life or maybe with a friend of becoming numb to guilt and experiencing a “hardened heart” due to habitually ignoring sin? Why is this dangerous, spiritually speaking?
- Unresolved sin always has detrimental implications down the road. If you committed the sin and it stays unresolved, it leads to guilt, shame, and bondage. If the sin was committed against you and it stays unresolved, it leads to hurt, forgiveness, and bitterness. Can you see how David's unresolved sin continues to hurt himself and others? Read **1 John 1:9**. What remedy does God give to resolve our sin?

IV. There is a play on words throughout this episode more evident in the original language in which it was written. There is an obvious repetition of the word “send.” David has been “sending” to abuse, exploit, conceal, and murder. He “sent” someone to inquire about Bathsheba, he “sent” men to take her, he “sent” for Uriah, he “sent” Joab orders to kill Uriah, and so on. David is portrayed as someone sitting in his seat of power commanding reality around him. He is acting like someone with absolute power and authority, bossing others around to suit his selfish whim. In 1 Samuel 12:1, it is God that does the “sending.” This time, God sends Nathan the prophet to get the out of control king under control! David has abused the very people he was anointed to protect, so God needs to rein him in.

- Nathan’s parable in **2 Samuel 12:1-4** is masterfully composed to trap David and disarm his objections and defenses. Why do you think this story convicted David so sharply?
  - Have you ever been caught in the act of sin or had your sin exposed? How did it make you feel? How did you respond: defensiveness, humiliation, or repentance? Did the people that caught or exposed you show grace or judgment?
  - Why do you think God exposed David’s sin: for the sake of justice, for the sake of the kingdom, for David’s own sake, for a different reason, or for a combination of several reasons?
  - Contrast David’s reaction to the prophet’s rebuke in **2 Samuel 12:13** with Saul’s reaction to the prophet’s rebuke in **1 Samuel 15:20-31**. David owns his sin and confesses to it clearly. Saul tries to deny it, then tries to save face, then tries to squirm away from responsibility. What do these two reactions reveal about the character of these men? Why do you think genuine contrition and confession important to God?
- V. David’s response to Nathan’s rebuke is confession and repentance. Finally, we see some evidence of the character David has. He is finally acting like the person he can be and the king God hopes he will be. Two Psalms give us windows into David’s heart during this time: **Psalm 51** and **Psalm 32**. Tradition holds that these songs were written by David in the aftermath of his crimes against Bathsheba, Uriah, and God. These psalms reveal David’s anguish over his sin and his humble reliance on God’s mercy. The prophet tells David that *“The Lord has taken away your sin,”* yet the consequences of David’s sin cannot be avoided. David has tarnished his legacy and his lapse of character will lead to much more chaos and pain.
- Read **Psalm 51**. Psalm 51 is thought to be a prayer of David as he processes through his guilt and need for forgiveness. Have you ever felt like David did when he wrote this song? What parts of this prayer reveal David’s genuine repentance? What parts of this prayer do you find moving or significant? What do you think David meant when he prayed: “my sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit?”
  - If you need to be forgiven, what help can you find in David’s prayers? Compose your own prayer of repentance.
  - Read **Psalm 32**. Psalm 32 is thought to be David’s prayer of thanksgiving and celebration after being forgiven. Do you identify with any of the poetic expressions in this song? Take a moment to compose your own prayer of thanks for God’s mercy.

- Even though David was forgiven by God, the consequences of his sin were not all cancelled. Why do you think this is? Can you think of an example of this from your own life?