

Leader guide

In this lesson:

SCRIPTURE

2 Samuel 23:8-24:25

CORE PRACTICE

Authenticity

TAKE HOME TRUTH

When we sin, our only hope is in the LORD's mercy for we do not deserve His forgiveness, however He freely gives it to all who contritely ask Him for it.

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Where Judgment Ends



OVERVIEW OF THIS LESSON

If you are like me, when we come to the end of our study of David, I find myself weary from the humanness of this man of God. From the 50,000 foot level, David stands as one of the greatest men of the Old Testament, in fact, of the entire Bible. He is the man after God's own heart.

But 1 & 2 Samuel will not let us observe David from this altitude. The writer pulls back the curtain of David's life and lets us see all of the beauty and innocence and devotion and ugliness and arrogance of David's life. Like any one of us, David is not a single-dimension man; he is multi-faceted with strengths and weaknesses that are rooted in our fallen nature.

This week is no different. We have arrived in the twilight years of David's life. He is old and nearing death. His youthful strength as a warrior and soldier is gone. His family has been torn asunder by strife and civil war brought on by David's failings as a husband and father.

If I were writing the ending to 2 Samuel, I would have David sitting on a porch as an old man, the scrolls of Scripture next to him and the scribbles of a new psalm on the table. The rich, orchestral tones of a film score composed by John Williams swelling underneath this idyllic scene. The sun would set in the west with magnificent, glorious colors casting a warm glow upon David and the environment surrounding him. He would have the look of one wholly content and secure in the arms of his Lord as he slowly watched the sunset one more time before peacefully going to be with the Lord in his sleep that night.

But that's not how the Bible depicts the end of David's life. It's as if the writer of 2 Samuel wants to underscore a key point about mankind, whether you are King David living 1000 BC or you and I living in 21st Century America: we are prone to sinfulness until the day we die. We never outgrow sin. It will never get easier. There will always be a fight. The devil never gives up.

Job 32:9 reminds us, "Great men are not always wise, Nor do the aged always understand justice."

Good and wise men still do stupid things, David included.

In this week's lesson, we will see the last Great Sin recorded in David's life. His sin with Bathsheba ruined his family, but this sin will bring destruction to Israel, and before the day is finished, there will be 70,000 new graves to dig throughout the land.

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MEMORY VERSE

2 Samuel 24:14—Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man."

CORE PRACTICE

Authenticity (John 13:33-34): I know and understand biblical truths and transfer these truths into everyday life. Who I am on the inside and outside is a pure reflection of Christ and His Word.

INTRODUCTION

Make sure you ask this question this week. It gives people the opportunity to discuss questions or issues that come up beyond the written questions. People's responses can often lead into one of the questions in the "Digging Deeper" section. Also, some weeks this question will result in a lot of discussion, other weeks, not so much.

Do you think as you get older, the temptation to sin becomes less and less "tempting"? Why or why not?

Looking back at your notes from this week's sermon, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?

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READ THE TEXT

Chapter 24 of 2 Samuel records a perplexing episode in David's life. He orders a senseless census that is sinful. The result of David's sin is the outpouring of God's wrath upon Israel. Some 70,000 people die as a result. The chapter ends with repentance and forgiveness when David establishes an altar in Jerusalem for burnt offerings. Read 2 Samuel 24.

DIGGING DEEPER

In this section, feel free to develop your own questions to help guide your group's discussion. Below are some suggestions. Remember, if you are hearing from everyone in your group, chances are you won't have to time to discuss every question. You may start with one that catches your attention so you don't run out of time. For example, it's not odd to start with Question #6, then go to Question #5 and if you have time come back to Question #4.

What sin did David commit in 2 Samuel 24?

Without question, this is a strange and puzzling passage of Scripture. Keddie remarks,

*David's counting of the fighting men of Israel stands as one of the most mysterious of the sins recorded in the Scriptures. It would appear from the passage that the sin lay not so much in the census itself—Moses, after all, had counted the people on two occasions without penalty (Numbers 1:26)—as in the attitude and aim of David in taking this particular census and in the spiritual condition of Israel as a whole. [Gordon J. Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1990), 239.]*

The chapter begins with an odd statement: "Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah!" (24:1).

Reading this as stated, it says that the Lord was angry with Israel (for an unknown reason) and that He (the Lord) incited David to number the people. But 1 Chronicles 21:1 tells us, "then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel." (This is the parallel passage to what is recorded in 2 Samuel.)

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Commentators go back-and-forth on this issue and seem to draw from the two parallel tellings of this story a situation similar to the opening of the Book of Job. Satan is the agent of evil, but in His permissive will, the Lord opens the door for Satan.

Perhaps what bothers us more than "the who" is "the why"? Why was the Lord angry with Israel? We don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. What we do know is that the Lord was angry (v. 1), David was incited to number Israel (v. 2), Joab questioned David's motives (v. 3), David overruled (v. 4), Joab took the census (vs. 5-9), David knew what he had done was sinful (v. 10).

Was the census itself sinful? Some argue this, but in the Torah, not only did Moses number the people on two occasions without penalty (Numbers 1:26), but the Lord also gave instructions on how to number the people (Exodus 30:11-16). So, it is difficult to prove that the census itself was what was sinful.

Instead, many commentators focus on David's motivation, which appears to be at the center of Joab's objection in v. 3. Joab questions David's motives (why do you want to do this thing?) and even warns David that by doing so, he will bring harm upon Israel.

Rather than trying to read into Scripture meaning that is not defined, we need to rest in the mystery and embrace this as a known quality of our Lord. Davis states,

Does this bother us? Do we perhaps assume that God must always explain himself and justify his ways? If we cannot be content to accept the mystery of this text we may be revealing ourselves. If we are upset over a text that tells us Yahweh is angry but does not tell us why, are we not saying that we really don't trust him to be just? Is there not a strain within us that insists there must be no mysteries in God? Don't we sometimes subtly assume that God owes us an explanation? We can easily brandish an arrogance that does not worship, that comes into the presence of the Most High with a strut instead of a bow. Are we angry because God is not perfectly transparent? Can we live—and worship—with mystery? [Dale Ralph Davis, 2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 318.]

What can we learn about the role of the Holy Spirit as a result of this experience in David's life?

First, it is essential to understand a simple fact after our discussion in the previous question: while we may not fully comprehend why this is happening or why it is sinful, the Bible makes it clear that David knew what he had done was wrong and sinful (v. 8). No question about it.

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Often we see things happen in someone's life that appears to be the consequences of sin, but nothing in that person's life or testimony displays a sinful heart. But that's the problem, isn't it? We see the outside appearance, but the Lord sees the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). The Lord can see the real motivations of a person and knows when there is sin that is hidden to everyone else.

The Bible tells us that David's "heart condemned him" (v. 10 NKJV). That is the Spirit of God speaking to our conscience. Whether our sin is seen by everyone or not, God's Spirit convicts us of our own sinfulness. If no one else knows we are sinning, we know we are sinning! We think our sin is hidden, but it is not.

The problem is that for most of us, we chose to ignore the voice of God's Spirit convicting us. David was a man of many faults, but one thing is clear: when he was confronted with his own sinfulness, he didn't run, he immediately repented. David's first response was not one of justification or arguing with the Lord on technical terms ("well, you allowed Your servant Moses to number the people..."). No. David repented. "David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly" (v. 10).

Is that your response when you are convicted of hidden sin? Do you feel that sting of guilt in your heart only to pass it off as indigestion? Do you confess and repent immediately or do you start to search for other "Christians" who will affirm your desire that this action in your life is indeed NOT sinful? This is a dangerous position to take, my friends.

What can we learn about God as a result of this experience in David's life?

We understand many of God's qualities: His grace; His tender mercies; His loving-kindness; His patience.

But God is also a holy God, and He cannot tolerate sin of any kind. When we sin, the Holy Spirit convicts us of that sin. But there is also a limit to God's patience with us. If we continually reject the Spirit's prompting, Eventually, God will say enough (Genesis 6:3).

I believe that one of the severest forms of judgment God can inflict upon His people in this life is one of abandonment. We see this judgment throughout the Scriptures. Even in our study of the books of Samuel, we have seen the Lord abandon Eli and his sons because of their sinfulness (1 Samuel 3:11-14), and abandon King Saul because of his sin (1 Samuel 15). I believe the judgment of abandonment is most clearly explained in Romans 1, where Paul states,

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among

themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

26 For this reason **God gave them up** to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:24-32 emphasis added)

In each of these statements, Paul makes the point that "God gave them up" to sin. When we run from the Spirit's conviction of our sin rather than repent, eventually God will give us up to the sin that we so love. It is the black hole of a broken life that ultimately consumes us.

Yes, David was a flawed human being. That is clear. But David was also "a man after God's own heart." What sets David apart from other flawed human beings? It was his heart. It was his sensitivity to the Spirit's voice, and when God convicted David of sin, his first and only response was one of humble repentance: "I have sinned greatly against the Lord."

Side Note

When God abandons someone to their sin, does that mean they can lose their salvation? First, let me be clear: God does not abandon or forsake one of His own children. When God saves us, He will not abandon us. He will carry it through to completion (Phil. 1:6).

The question we need to struggle with is whether or not a person is truly saved if they continually reject the conviction of the Holy Spirit? I believe within the context of Romans 1, Paul is describing God's judgment against the ungodly and the unrighteous (v. 18). The fact that God abandons them to their wicked ways is evidence that they are not righteous/saved people to begin with.

A "saved" man or woman cannot adore sin in his/her life and be truly saved. The conviction in your heart could be the Spirit calling you to

repentance or calling you to true salvation. Furthermore, I do believe that in order for someone to become so comfortable in their sin that they no longer hear the Spirit's voice convicting them (God abandons them) is a sign that this person is in truth unsaved.

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What can we learn about leadership and experience as a result of this experience in David's life?

As we age, it is easy to grow in comfort and confidence in ourselves and our place in this world. Gone are the days when you question your place or hold back comment because you are intimidated by those around you. Age brings a quiet confidence.

But with age and experience often comes authority and responsibility. Those in positions of authority must remind themselves that because of their position, it is often difficult for others to speak truth to them. They often hear what they want to hear and disregard contrarian perspectives and advice.

We see this play out clearly in David's sin of the census. When David orders Joab (his commanding general) to take a census, Joab cautions him: "but why does my lord the king desire this thing?" (2 Sam. 24:3). Keep in mind that Joab is no private holding the door for the king. Joab is in many ways David's closest peer. He has been with David through thick and thin almost from the beginning. He is close to David's age and, if anyone can speak truth to the king, it is Joab.

The writer of 2 Samuel is subtle but makes his point: "nevertheless the king's word prevailed" (24:4). I think you get the picture. David was in no mood to argue. I imagine he ended the "conversation" with a short, direct order: "just do it."

This is the danger that confronts every leader in every capacity. Eventually, if you stay in one place long enough, you wear through those who will challenge you and arrive at a place where you answer to no one. Kings get there. Pastors get there. Husbands and Fathers get there. Accountability is a biblical principle, and it is one method that God uses to keep His people pure. David practiced this in his younger years. When he was considering bringing the ark to Jerusalem, David "consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader" (1 Chron. 13:1). But now, in his older years, he no longer listens to counsel, even of a trusted man like Joab.

I see several lessons we need to remember as we gain authority and power within our spheres of influence:

- 1. **As we grow in age and stature, we need to become more intentional about surrounding ourselves with men and women who will hold us accountable.** People in positions of leadership can

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unintentionally surround themselves with “yes men,” people who simply tell the king what he wants to hear. Dwight D. Eisenhower is perhaps one of the best leaders to serve as president. As Supreme Allied Commander during the Second World War, Eisenhower made decisions that impacted the lives of tens of thousands of men. Both as a commanding general and as president, Eisenhower made a point of surrounding himself with men of strong opinions, and in making difficult decisions, he would set those with opposite views at the same table and let them argue the pros and cons of their opinions concerning the topic in question. Eisenhower didn’t weigh in on the conversation. He wanted the men to be free to become as forceful and argumentative with each other as possible. He found this method of bantering back-and-forth in front of him very helpful in ultimately making the right decision.

- We need to become more intentional about listening to those God has placed around us to speak truth to us.** *Nothing blinds us more to the truth than when we have embraced a strong narrative in our mind. The way our mind works, we are always seeking to justify and affirm our belief. Every book we read, every conversation we listen to, even every Scripture we read can reinforce our opinion because we want to be right in this belief. If David had listened to Joab, this entire episode of his life would not have materialized.*
- We need to become aware of our positional authority and how our age and status can prohibit others from speaking truth to us.** *Positional authority is something that many use to their advantage to get their way in the world. We see this in this example from David’s life. He didn’t want to hear Joab’s contrarian advice or counsel, he simply pulled rank and told him, “just do it.” He was king. Joab was his general. A king’s word outranks a general’s. A good leader will recognize that he/she often hears what he/she wants to hear because of their position of authority. This must weigh into the many affirming opinions you hear about yourself and your ideas.*

NEXT STEPS

Questions to consider as you continue to reflect on what you learned this week:

- Take Action:** Dealing with secret sin. Do you have secret sin in your life that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you about right now? It is by God’s grace right now that He is leading you to confess and repent of that sin before you reap sin’s consequences. James describes for us the “cycle of sin” that can envelope

every one of us if we are not sensitive to the Spirit’s voice: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:13–15).

- **Take Courage:** Confession and repentance lead to forgiveness. The Apostle John tells us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Keep in mind, however, that the promise of this verse has a bookend of warning surrounding it: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (v. 8) and “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (v. 10). What is a sure sign of a true child of God? He/she listens to the Spirit’s voice and immediately confesses and repents of any sin in his/her life.

Work to memorize this week’s memory verse: *2 Samuel 24:14–Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.”*

Our Core Practice this week is **Authenticity** (John 13:33-34): I know and understand biblical truths and transfer these truths into everyday life. Who I am on the inside and outside is a pure reflection of Christ and His Word.

Remember to use the daily Bible reading plan as part of your walk with Christ, taking the time to reflect on each passage and what it means for your lives.

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