

“Temptation and David”— 2 Samuel 11

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take your Bible and meet me in 2 Samuel 11...

We have spent a month and a half examining James words concerning our experience of temptation. In the course of those sermons we have noticed how temptation tends to involve predictable questions of identity, desires, and future outcomes. Today we will put a bow on that discussion by examining one story that just may help us avoid some temptations in our life. The story I have in mind is one of the most famous failures we find in the Old Testament.

In 2 Samuel 11 this particular man is going to get himself into a mess of trouble. He is going to sin and sin big. However, it could not be said of this man that anyone saw it coming. This is a man who had a reputation for godliness. He was considered to be a person whose life was committed to the Lord. Indeed, the Scriptures themselves—in both the Old and New Testaments—describe him at points as “a man after God’s own heart” (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). And he even wrote portions of the Old Testament. His name was David. He was Israel’s king. He would be remembered as Israel’s great king. He was the king to whom every future king would be compared, until the exaltation of Christ. But despite this awesome legacy, his life was not without a significant, dark, and infamous footnote. And that footnote is found in this chapter.

For our purposes today, this text will help us to answer a significant question: How can a godly man or woman fall into sin? Of course, James has given us the main answer to that question. Every person, including the godly individual, is so damaged by sin that they will subject themselves to temptation when they are “*lured and enticed*” by their own fallen desires. But are there things that can intensify this pattern? Are there ways that this process can be triggered with greater frequency? Absolutely. And this passage helps us to see some of that. And it helps us to see that no one is immune. Not even the godly.

This is an incredibly sobering portrayal. This is a man whom, if we had known him back then, we would never have guessed in a million years he would be capable of what we are about to read. Someone else, sure, but not David. Anyone but David. Therefore, we all should be humbled today because, if it could happen to David, then it could happen to you and it could happen to me.

I still remember the first time I heard a sermon on this passage. It was probably 20 years ago. And it came at a critical point in my life and it was preached by Voddie Baucham.¹ I took meticulous notes that I still have to this day and much of what I will share with you today builds on what I learned from that sermon. Since we are dealing with a narrative this morning, I’m going to read it incrementally as we progress so we can feel more of the suspense. Let’s begin with the first verse...

“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.” (2 Samuel 11:1)

That verse does more than just set our scene. It also helps us understand how a godly man can fall into sin. First of all, it happened because...

He Found Himself in the Wrong Place

Verse 1 shows us that David was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Look at how the narrator makes that point. He tells us that it is “*spring*” and, therefore, “*the time when kings go out to battle*”. David is a king. Yet where do we find David? *Not* at war with his troops. The verse concludes: “*David remained at Jerusalem.*”

There’s a lot about that verse that should shock us. First, because of David’s role, we would have expected him to be with his troops. Do you remember how David put his name on the map? David rose to prominence by defeating a giant Philistine soldier by the name of Goliath. Everyone one in Israel was terrified of this massive fighter, but David took him on defenseless before the eyes of two nations and defeated Goliath. And he didn’t just defeat him. He whooped him. The Lord gives him victory with just a stone and a sling. When Goliath hits the floor, so does the collective jaw of Israel. No one expected this little scrappy kid to take out this fierce warrior. But that’s what happen. And by the time David claims his head, the Philistines are fleeing to the hills in terror.

And that was just the first of many battles that David would win by the power of God on behalf of the people of Israel. In short, David was a warrior king. That’s who God had raised him up to be. David is having something of an identity crisis. To use the language from previous weeks, he has answered the identity question wrongly. He is not acting like the warrior king he was.

And now it’s springtime in Israel, the time when kings go off to war, the season of battle, but David decides evidently to sit this one out. He has sent out other men to do what is ostensibly his job. Why? We’re not told. Perhaps he reasoned that the enemy was too weak to bother. Perhaps there was another reason. In any case. He sits this one out. And that means that David puts himself in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Have you ever found yourself there?

Listen to me, friends. There is a purpose for which God has created you. There is a place for you. There is a calling for you. There is work for you to do, work that God prepared in advance for you to engage in. That place, that work, that task may change from one season to the next, but for each season of life, God cares about what you are occupying yourself with. But you and I will find ourselves in a world of trouble and heartache when we are not in the place that God has called us to be, doing the tasks that God has called us to do. That’s where David is in our story. That’s the point of that ominous note at the end of verse 1—“*But David remained at Jerusalem.*”

He refused to be where God called him to be and he refused to do what God called him to do. “But pastor, it would have been an easy victory and his men didn’t really need him.” So what? God didn’t call him to make that kind of assessment. He called him to be the king and lead his troops. “But pastor, his troops didn’t really need him.” So what? Whether he thought they needed him or not, he was called to have a role among them. By staying in Jerusalem while his soldiers were fighting his battle, he was not being and doing what the Lord had called him to be and do.

What has the Lord called you to be and do? Has he called you to be a godly husband and a faithful father? Then be that and do that. Has He called you to be a godly wife and a caring mother? Then be that and do that. Has He called you as a child to honor the father and mother God has given you? Then be that and do that. Has He called you to be a student and pursue excellence in your studies? Then be that and do that. Has He called you to a life of discipleship and service to Jesus? Then be that and do that.

It is so easy to get distracted by all the peripheral things of life that in the grand scheme of things don’t really matter and in the scope of eternity will be forgotten, instead of being the kind of people God has called us to be and doing the things that God has called us to do. David found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. And it gets even worse. Second...

He Fed His Mind the Wrong Things

Look at verse 2.

“It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.” (2 Samuel 11:2)

Now God has been far better to me than I deserve and one evidence of that is that He has blessed me with 15 years of marriage to a beautiful woman. And that experience has taught me a thing or two about beautiful women. I don’t know much, but there are some things I can help you with. One of those things I’ve learned about beautiful women these past fifteen years is that beautiful women tend to bathe or shower...regularly. You didn’t know I was that smart, did you? They appreciate it when their husbands do too. Regardless, they freshen up routinely.

Given that knowledge, you have to figure that this was not the first time that this woman David noticed had been out there bathing. I suspect that she has done it before. Probably often. Probably at predictable times. So one may at least wonder if David had seen her before. After all David was on the roof of his palace. Don’t you think he knew his surroundings? Of course he did. He was a warrior king. He had to know his surroundings. And if you are a warrior king like David, who do you want living closes to your palace? You want your most trusted soldiers living around you.

So is it any wonder that a man by the name of Uriah lives right there next to the palace? Uriah was a soldier. But Uriah wasn’t just any soldier. Uriah was one of David’s elite soldiers, one of his most skilled and trusted soldiers. He was part of a group that was dubbed David’s mighty men (2 Sam. 23). This woman that David noticed bathing happened to be Uriah’s wife. Don’t you think David would have known that given his relationship to Uriah? Or at least considered the possibility?

In any case, she’s out there. And David’s watching her. Eventually he calls over his friends (who we will get to in a moment) to ask them about the woman. Interestingly, here’s what he doesn’t say: “Listen guys, there is a woman over there. She is beautiful, like really beautiful. You don’t need to look, just trust me she’s there. So what I need you to do is go over there when she’s done and build some sort of a partition where she bathes or maybe some sort of divide here on the balcony so that I, your king, don’t have to watch her bathe.” But that’s not what he says and does. He does not guard his eyes. He doesn’t guard his heart. He continues to feed his mind that which he shouldn’t be looking at. Anyone uncomfortable yet?

Let me help you out. Those magazines that you like to thumb through in the market or keep stashed away at the house, you know that’s not right. Those searches on the phone and some of your uses of the internet on your computer, you know something’s wrong with that. Is that not why you hide it? And I’m not just talking to the men in this place. Ladies, you know what I’m talking about. We live in a culture where we are just a click away from filth, whether we are looking for it or not.

But for some of you, it’s not this sort of thing. It’s a relationship. Maybe your husband is not spending as much time with you as he once did or paying you the attention that you would like, but there is this other man at work...And he compliments you. And he’s so encouraging. And lately it kind of feels like he’s been flirting with you a little and it feels kind of nice. It started subtle. Then it became more overt. And eventually that flirtation evolves into fantasizing about the possibility of a relationship with someone who really appreciates you. What’s happening? You’re feeding yourself the wrong thing.

And, truth be told, most of the time, in our society, you don’t even have to go looking for this sort of thing. You just go to the grocery store or check out at the bookstore and right there at eye level are all kinds of magazines

with captions that I can't even read to you this morning. And these aren't even the so-called "explicit" ones. They are just the regular, mainstream, off the rack, at the checkout line of the grocery store variety.

But many of you may be regularly partaking in that sort of thing. What are you feeding your mind with? And you may rationalize that it's right on the border of decency, it hasn't really crossed the line, and, besides, it's not really affecting you. But are you so sure? I think it is affecting you because what you feed your mind always affects you.

The message that our culture is feeding our men is to get all that you can and your success will be measured by what you get and your ability to control the women around you. And our society is telling women—as any of those magazine covers attests—that the level to which you are desired by men is the level to which you are worth something. That's what the world is feeding men and women, and young boy and girls. Parents you know this. Try to go shopping at the mall for some article of clothing that you would feel comfortable letting your teenage girl go out in without adding some extra material. It's harder than you might think. And then our young men, who their entire life have been groomed in the world to objectify women, do exactly that.

We are feeding our mind the wrong things. Instead of fixing our minds on what is holy and good and righteous and true and decent, we fill it with trash. We find ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. We feed our minds the wrong things. And when these things happen, the next step is almost inevitable. As David illustrates...

He Flanked Himself with the Wrong People

Look at verse 3...

"And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, 'Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?'" (2 Samuel 11:3)

Now it doesn't say in the text, but if I were to make a wager, I would bet everything I have that when David *"inquired about the woman"*, he didn't inquire of Nathan, the prophet. I don't think that's who he called on this night. We will meet Nathan in the next chapter. He's the guy that is going to rebuke the king later. But that's not who he calls this evening. He doesn't call in the prophet and say, "Nathan, can you tell me a little bit about that girl over there?" No. He calls his servants. The guys he can throw in jail or far worse, if he doesn't like what they have to say. The guys who will pretty much say whatever the king wants just to make him happy. The guys whose morality seems just as compromised as his because when he asks about the woman they know her father and her husband, which is what makes what happens next so crazy! Look at verse 4...

"So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house." (2 Samuel 11:4)

Now was this consensual? We don't know. But when the king summons you, there's not really much choice you have in the matter. At best David is guilty of adultery (so far). But depending on a few unknown particulars, it could have even been assault. Pretty soon we are going to add murder to that list. And David has friends, servants, who are of such low character that they would not simply witness all of this, but actually help facilitate these sins.

And this, church, is a godly man! How on earth did he get there? He surrounded himself with low-lives. And generally speaking, before we fall too deep into sin we tend to surround ourselves with the same kinds of people. Why? Perhaps it's because misery loves company. Maybe mom was right when she said, birds of a feather...flock together.

Of course, when we try to excuse our actions and sins we love to give the excuse, “Well, I just got caught up with the wrong crowd.” Really? Maybe you should consider the possibility that you ran with the wrong crowd because you were the wrong crowd. Or we say, “Well, I just wanted to influence them for good.” I doubt it. And how’s it working out?

Now don’t get it twisted. I’m not talking about those circles where you indeed are there to be salt and light, ministering and influencing. I’m talking about where you spend your down time. Your hang time. Who is that with? Bad company corrupts good morals (1 Cor. 15:33). You teach your kids these lessons. Don’t you think they apply to your life too?

David was in the wrong place. He was feeding his mind the wrong thing. And surrounded himself with the wrong people. So finally, at least at first....

He Faced His Sin in the Wrong Way

Look at verse 5 and following...

“And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, ‘I am pregnant.’⁶ So David sent word to Joab, ‘Send me Uriah the Hittite.’ And Joab sent Uriah to David.⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going.⁸ Then David said to Uriah, ‘Go down to your house and wash your feet.’ And Uriah went out of the king’s house, and there followed him a present from the king.⁹ But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house.” (2 Samuel 11:5-9)

You know what that is, right? That’s a cover up. Step one: bring Uriah back from the frontlines. Step two: try to get him drunk. Step three: send him to his wife and hope that they sleep together. Step four: when the baby is born, everyone is none the wiser.

David should have confessed his sin and faced it head on, but that’s not what this is. This is a cover up. And it doesn’t work. Uriah is too loyal to David and too godly to go along with it. Look at verses 10 and following...

“When they told David, ‘Uriah did not go down to his house,’ David said to Uriah, ‘Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?’¹¹ Uriah said to David, ‘The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.’¹² Then David said to Uriah, ‘Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.’ So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next.¹³ And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.” (2 Samuel 11:10-13)

David’s plan has failed. So you know what David does? He sends Uriah back to the battlefield with a letter for his commander. The letter instructs them to enter into a compromising situation with Uriah and then to withdraw the troops and let the enemy slay Uriah. In short, David has him murdered. Uriah. One of his mighty men. One of his most loyal soldiers who had risked life and limb in service to the king. This king. David. A murderer. An adulterer. Maybe far worse. As one commentator summarizes, David’s sin:

“...is a compound of adultery, treacherous dealings, murder of Uriah, complicity in the deaths of others, and distortion of the truth, while the essential flaw is that David has lost sight of the commission the Lord has given him as covenant king and has grossly misused his power and authority in pursuit of selfish ends....[And] David’s violation of the rights of his subjects is as nothing compared to his flagrant disregard of the Lord.”²

How has it come to this? Because he found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. He fed his mind the wrong things. He flanked himself with the wrong people. And so, in turn, he faced his sins the wrong way. He buried it. He sinned more.

Have you fallen into sin in your own life? Have you also chosen to respond to your sin the wrong way? In our fallenness, trying to orchestrate a cover up is the knee-jerk reaction. We don't want to be found out. But here is the problem with that—sin is always, first and foremost, against God and you can't hide from God. There is no such thing as a cover up with God. And our attempted cover ups don't remove the consequences of sin and what it does to us. Our sins find us out. But there are greater consequences when we respond to our sins like David did because when we don't come clean before God and those we have offended, we carry the guilt and pain and the knowledge that there are no secrets from God.

And do you know the worst part of it? We find out when Nathan calls David on the sin in the next chapter. He tells him that his sin and his response to his sin has given the nations a reason to blaspheme his God. Do you see the irony? This was the king. God's chosen king. The warrior-king. The instrument in God's hand to bring and inflict judgment on the nations and avenge God's name before God's enemies. And now, this man, this king, has given these enemies a reason to blaspheme the God the king was to represent. How tragic. How heart breaking.

But fortunately for David—and fortunately for us—there is good news. The story doesn't end there. I want you to hear David's ultimate response to this situation. And you can find it in a song that David himself wrote in the aftermath of his sin. Psalm 51.³

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:1-17)

What a difference! What a different response! If only David had responded this way before he killed his friend.

Nevertheless, as broken as the king was because of his sin and as restored as he would end up being, Uriah was still dead. That's worth noting. Sometimes we have this faulty idea that because we are Christian and because God forgives our sin through faith in Christ that our sin doesn't matter and our sin doesn't cost us anything. That's just not true. Uriah was still dead. The effects of David's sins were ever before him. He even lost a son in the aftermath of his sin. Yes, there is grace. Amen and Hallelujah! But that does not give us a license to sin as though there were such a thing as victimless crimes. There are no harmless sins. At the very least, sin always costs *us*. But as sobering as that truth is, David's story does offer us hope as those who have joined him in sin.

So if you are here today and you find yourself in the wrong place, learn from David. My prayer is that you would, by God's grace, discern those gifts and talents that God has placed in you and employ them for the rest

of your life for God's glory in the place where God has placed you. It's not too late. Commit and act on that commitment. Be and do what God has called you to be and do.

And if you are here and you are feeding your mind the wrong things in any form or fashion, turn from that sin. Repent. Forsake your sin and turn to the Lord. That's what repentance is—turning from sin and turning to God, a change in attitude that is accompanied by a change of behavior.

And if you are here today and you have flanked yourself with the wrong people, perhaps you need to consider some godly people that God has put around you and include them into your circle.

And if you are here today and you are thinking, "Pastor, I wish someone would have told me this a couple weeks ago, or a month ago, or a year ago, or ten years ago," I am sorry, friend, for the aftermath and pain that sin has brought into your life. But I do know—and I want you to know—that God does heal and forgive and deliver. God can turn your trial and your tragic experiences into a testimony of His power. And He will, if you will trust in Christ.

God sent His Son to earth because He knew we have all fallen deep into sin and were without hope. Jesus took our place on the cross. He died for our sins. He rose for our justification, our right standing before God. If you will put your faith in Him to forgive you and save you by His effort and not your own, he would do that today. And maybe you could look back one day at that tragic aftermath and see how God has redeemed every tear you have shed.

The Gospel teaches us that there is now no condemnation from the Lord, for those who are in Christ Jesus. The eternal consequences of our sin have been absorbed by Jesus. He is our substitute who drank down the cup of God's wrath that our sins filled. Through faith, He will restore us to far greater heights than the one from which we have fallen in time and in glory. And for all God's people, we now possess a life that is defined not by our failure, but by Christ's victory. And all God's people said? Amen!

Let's pray...

"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah ⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. ⁷ You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. ⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you. Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. ¹¹ Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!" (Psalm 32)

¹ I still have my notes from this sermon, but I'm not sure it's possible to access the sermon itself though I have searched. Because of this, it is difficult to know what his exact wording was at certain points, but the general lessons of this sermon and the overall outline was adopted and adapted from his sermon I heard almost two decades ago. The sermon really impacted me at the time though and my notes were both meticulous and oft-consulted.

² John L. Mackay, "1-2 Samuel," in *1 Samuel – 2 Chronicles* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 368.

³ If you find that this Psalm resonates with you in this season of your life, there is a helpful devotional out that works its way through this text and you might find useful. See Jonathan Parnell, *Mercy for Today: A Daily Prayer from Psalm 51* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2020).