

It Can Happen To Anyone

The Bible is realistic and candid about the human failings of its greatest heroes. We see that in the story we come to today. David stood up against the giant Goliath. Then he trusted God, and showed so much strength through years of running for his life and refusing to take vengeance. He wrote beautiful psalms. He became the king and restored worship to the heart of the nation. He showed mercy to the children of his enemies. But in this story, David gives in to temptation. When the woman, Bathsheba, gets pregnant, David tries to cover up his sin. He arranges for her husband to be killed. When the backwash of his sin runs its course, horrible damage is done. David, although he will be forgiven, is never the same again. This story serves to show us that it can happen to anyone. No matter who you are and what you have going for you, it can happen to you. You can indulge passions and weaknesses that will cause terrible damage and displease God.

I. BECAUSE IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU, YOU NEED TO TAKE THE POWER OF TEMPTATION *VERY* SERIOUSLY.

David had had written Psalms in which he said things like: *"I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."*¹ And yet in this one story, he breaks most of the Ten Commandments. He doesn't put God first. He covets, steals a man's wife,² commits adultery. Maybe she consents, but did she have much choice? He has power. She has none and is never blamed. It's sketchy enough that some people today argue that this not simply adultery. By today's standards it is a kind of rape. Then there is the murder and lies to cover it up. He does all of this to a man named Uriah who was one of the "mighty men" who had come to his side during his years on the run and risked his life for David. What he did was terrible. That is the point. What that teaches us is that the capacity for terrible things lives on in every human heart.

A. Christianity is uniquely equips us to understand humanity as a whole and ourselves as individuals.

It teaches that we all have, at the same time, both great dignity because we are created in the image of God and great depravity because we are all infected with the soul-sickness of sin. We are loved by God, but we are vulnerable to sin and temptation, and so often it comes from within. We're all capable of terrible things.

We need to make an effort to believe this. There is a dangerous disconnect with this reality because of a major shift that has taken place in our culture. For a long time, there has been a shift away from Christianity toward secularism. Because of this, the idea of humanity having both dignity and depravity has been diminished and into the vacuum come all kind of misconceptions. Some view humanity as devoid of dignity – a cancer on the planet. Others view humanity as having no depravity. Every dysfunction in behavior or psychology is entirely the cause of culture or circumstances. FDR admitted that had a hard time believing the Germans were capable of committing the kinds of atrocities they committed because after all, they were the people gave us Bach and Mozart. The unstated implication was that sure there are primitive savage cultures in the world who are capable of terrible things but not white, western, European nations. He was wrong. Minorities are also wrong when they say the white western culture is the problem. Throughout history, every culture or nation that has gained power over others has abused that power and exploited those who are weaker; it isn't at root a racial problem but a human problem. It Communism and socialism say capitalism is the problem. But in every communist or socialist system, human beings abuse the power they are given, corruption becomes rampant, and the oppression of people is justified in the name of the ideology. Some would say it is a masculine problem. There is not question it is that. It's a sad example of a man in a position of power and privilege abusing a woman. But the point of the story is not primarily to condemn men but to reveal sin. It is in all of us. Psychology weighs in on a personal level, often suggesting that every struggle in the soul can be traced back to some circumstantial cause. Scripture tells you that while the particular struggles you experience may be shaped by the story you have lived, and the things you have suffered there is a self-obsessed, self-justifying, self-pitying, grasping, entitled, hungry art of the heart and soul that is capable of terrible things. we need to know it.

B. Sin is powerful because our passions and desires are never satisfied in this world.

Verse 2 stresses the beauty of Bathsheba. Maybe someone might think, *“Well, there is no mystery here. She was just stunningly irresistible. That makes what happens more understandable.”* But it really doesn't. If you go back to **2 Samuel 3**³ you have a list of six wives David already had. Then in **2 Samuel 5**⁴ it says that when David came to Jerusalem, he added *more* wives and concubines. We know that one of his wives, Abigail, was explicitly described as beautiful.

It is more than likely in the case of David with his power and popularity that all of his wives were beautiful. And that is what is striking. It wasn't as if his sexual needs or desire for beauty were not being fulfilled.

Here is a man who has more than one beautiful woman, and he sees another, and it is not as if he says: "*Finally a girl who reads the same books as me.*" He doesn't know anything about her, just seeing her he wants her, and he takes the next step and the next step into what will turn out to be a devastating sin. It is not within the nature of our passions to ever be satisfied. Desires and passions and compulsions - the more you indulge them, the stronger they grow, the more they demand. They are never satisfied.

It's this reality that leads us to the second truth in the story...

II. BECAUSE IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU, YOU NEED TO FIGHT TEMPTATION VIGOROUSLY.

When David went up against Goliath, he did so with such commitment to God and faith, and risk and energy and resolve. You don't see any of that here. Sometimes we fight with such energy against the Goliaths that come against us on the outside of our lives while we secretly indulge and play around with some giant issue on the inside.

David's story, by means of his negative example, suggests three things we can do to fight the temptation. First,

Look at **verse 1**: *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.* This is significant. It had been David's practice to lead his armies that was part of his role as king. In **verse 1**, everyone goes off to war but David. In fact, it is even more striking that the Hebrew word for "remain" literally means *to sit*. So while everyone else goes to war, David sits at home. ***The picture is that of a man who has been blessed but now seems bored.*** He has fought battles, endured hardships, accomplished much, but at this point in his life, he seems to have detached, disengaged from the higher purposes of God and his leadership of his people and into this emptiness, this vacuum, comes temptation. Nature abhors a *vacuum*. The best defense is a good *offense*. There is a principle of spiritual life here. One of the most effective ways to resist dangerous temptations is to stay passionate with a higher purpose.

So the first positive practical lesson is to...

A. Keep Your Passion for God and His Causes Alive and Well.

If your life seems pointless, temptation in general and sexual temptation, in particular, can seem to promise an excitement and fulfillment to which you are very vulnerable. I heard one person say, "Sometimes temptation is not a physical lust thing but a miserable soul thing." *That's why one of the most effective ways to fight temptation is to keep your heart engaged in God's higher purposes.*

If you are here and you are just checking out the Christian faith, one thing you need to know is that what Christ wants to do in your life is not only to forgive your sins but also to impart a new sense of purpose to your life. Jesus calls you to know only trust in him for the forgiveness of sins but to follow him into a purposeful life.

If you are a Christian, what are your spiritual goals? *Are you actively serving God, and pursuing God and your knowledge of him?* If you make it your life's purpose to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and you wake up every day and say: "Lord I want to serve you, guide me through my day, let me seek not to be served but to serve, not to be understood but to understand, let my inner and outer life reflect your grace and truth." If that God-centered purpose doesn't integrate your life, temptation will disintegrate your life. If you actively cultivate your spiritual life, that, engaged spiritual life will be your first line of defense against sin, the destruction it brings.

Keep stoking your passion for God. Then second.

B. Keep Clear of the Snares.

There is a progression in the fall of David. He is in a frame of mind that makes him vulnerable, and he is in a place that exposes him to temptation, and then, as if he is just curious, he just sends someone to find out more, and it goes on from there. As we watch how this gains such a grip on David, one thing we learn is that it is better to fight temptation at the outset than to wrestle in the grip of sin. Or as an old saying puts it: *It is better to shun the bait than to struggle in the snare.*

Illustration: As Martin Luther supposedly said, "*if your head is made of butter, don't get close to the fire.*"

1. Questionable things that we allow today can set us up for terrible things to come later. Multiple wives were culturally

acceptable in the days of David, but that doesn't mean it wasn't sinful or harmful. What is legal and culturally acceptable can be sinful and harmful. This was not God's design from creation. When you come to this part of David's life, it seems like a shock that he does this, but the reality is he had been hardening his heart, subverting his strength and cultivating this compulsion. The things that we allow today may be building up a pile of highly combustible material. All it takes is a spark and it can set off a fire that can burn down your life.

2. Every step in the wrong direction makes us more vulnerable to sin and temptation. David walking around on the palace rooftop in the evening, overlooking the houses in the neighborhood and getting drawn into to lust over a beautiful woman might be a lot like many of you surfing the web. Temptation isn't something to play with. One up-to-date application of this principle would be to install a program like *Covenant Eyes* on your computer. There are a couple of apps now for computers and smartphones. You should use these things to protect your life, your soul, your heart. Why? Because *it is easier and better to avoid temptation than it is to resist sin*. Men and women should use these programs. Wives and mothers should ask the men in their lives to use them. **1 Corinthians 6:18** says: *Flee from sexual immorality.*

This idea of fighting hard and immediately against temptation at its earliest stages does not just apply to sexual temptation. If you are putting up with anger, bitterness, resentment, envy, revenge fantasies, materialistic lusts and desires, self-pity and self-obsession, you're harboring things in your heart which are so highly combustible that all it takes is a little nudge, a set of circumstances and your life catches fire. In the New Testament in Colossians 3, Paul talks about these things and says get rid of them, put them to death. John Owen said if you aren't killing sin, it is killing you!

A man I know tells about a day when his boss made an incredible impression on him in a business meeting. A client was trying to persuade the boss to do something that was at least unethical. The boss said, *"Are you suggesting what it sounds like you're suggesting?"* The man hesitated and finally said, "yes." The boss stood up and said, *"This meeting is over, and so is our relationship."* Jesus said if your eye causes you to sin pluck it out. Sure he wasn't literal. He was using exaggerated language to make a dramatic point, but what point he was making and how are you applying it in your life? You need to be able to answer that question so you can stay strong in God.

C. Consider the Consequences

We didn't read the whole story, but at the end of the chapter, after the adultery has been committed and the cover-up completed and Bathsheba's husband murdered, David brings her home, and she becomes his wife and has the baby, and it looks like it has all been dealt with. Then **verse 27** says, *But, the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.* And as we will see when we continue the story next week is that what follows are the long-term consequences of all the raw and evil ugliness. A baby will die, a sister will be raped, a brother will kill his half-brother, and a son will attack his father and be murdered by his father's friend. There will be all kinds of heartache, and although David is forgiven, he is never really the same.

There are two things to understand when it comes to forgiveness.

1. The first is that God's grace is big enough and lavish enough to forgive any and every sin. In **Isaiah 1**, God through Isaiah says, though your sins are red as scarlet, I will make them white as snow. In **Ephesians 1:7**, Paul writes, *In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of his grace.* God's grace is lavish.

2. The second thing to understand is that even when sins are forgiven the consequences still linger in our lives. Some wounds heal, but they leave us with a limp, and sometimes we know we have the forgiveness of God and his loving presence in our lives, but we still have to carry the burden of the hurts we have caused others. You can't even predict the effects of your sin on your soul or on others.

CONCLUSION

It doesn't matter how strong you have been or are. ***To stay strong in God, we have to fight temptation because the seduction of sin can destroy the strongest among us.*** The final thing the Scripture insist we understand is that the heart for the fight has to come from the goodness of God and our love for him.

In the next chapter, when the LORD confronts David through the prophet Nathan, he says that in what David did, he had scorned the LORD who loved him. In David's confession in **Psalms 51**, the whole emphasis is on his relationship with God. For us, as Christians, it is fair to say that at the heart of our battle with temptation is the issue of our love for God.

The passion that fuels our fight against temptation comes from our love for the true king and Savior. He overcame temptation for us so that we can overcome in him.

In a strange way, this story can help you to love God. The whole Bible points us to Christ. This passage points us to Christ by revealing something of our human nature that shows us how much we need a Savior.

Against the backdrop of this sin and story, you see *in Jesus* the true king and only Savior. He comes into the world, not with a sense of entitlement that indulges selfish desires but instead, you have a spirit of servant-hood. He gives up his rights and serves us. And he is tempted for us. He was tempted in the desert and tempted in the garden, and at every point of temptation where we have fallen and failed, he stood for us and overcame temptation with love. He was tempted for us so that he could win the battle that we have lost. Then, the only one who has never sinned, and never crumbled in the face of temptation gave his life for sinners like us. Sin is a big deal. You need to fight it with all your might, but you will fight it best if you get your heart for the fight from the beauty and power of God's love for you in Christ. Look at his love for you. Trust in his love for you. Love him because of his love for you and fight temptation because you love him who loved you first.

Amen.

Prayer of Response:

Ask God to reveal how this story applies to your life. Thank him for the grace that forgives so lavishly. Confess where you have compromised and fallen. Commit to for your heart with His help. Create in us a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within us. Enable us by your Holy Spirit to make hard choices so we can keep soft hearts for you and your purposes. Forgive us when our passions run hot, not for you, but for other things. Forgive us for the many “little” sins we allow because we think they don’t matter. Help us to see the better and more beautiful way of faith in Jesus. Amen

¹ Psalm 40:8

² The prophet Nathan makes that connection in the parable of the lamb in 2 Samuel 12

³ 2 Samuel 3:2-5

⁴ 2 Samuel 5:13