

LET'S BE HONEST

Author Brennan Manning wrote, “In spite of the fact that Christianity speaks of the cross, redemption and sin, we’re unwilling to admit failure in our lives. Why? Partially, I guess, because it’s human nature’s defense mechanism against its own inadequacies. But even more so, it’s because of the successful image our culture demands of us. There are some real problems with projecting the perfect image. First of all, it’s simply not true; we are not always happy, optimistic, in command.

Second, projecting the flawless image keeps us from reaching people who feel we just wouldn’t understand them. And third, even if we could live a life with no conflict, suffering or mistakes, it would be a shallow existence. The Christian with depth is the person who has failed and who has learned to live with his failure.”¹

By that definition King David certainly had a successful life. In his younger days he had made a name for himself by defeating the threat to the army of Israel. He was the only one brave enough to try. David’s great battle took him far into the hearts of his countrymen, but his power and influence went a little too far. He created a scandal for himself that caused a great many consequences in his life. Today we might call it a midlife crisis, but this was much more sordid than buying a convertible or dying your hair.

David clearly let his guard down, forgot his devotion to God, and let himself be conducted by his own personal desires and selfish wants. As we follow the progression of David’s transgressions we can see how one sin complicates and creates another sin until there is no turning back. David’s life in middle age becomes for us a cautionary tale.

David’s first mistake was being in the wrong place at the wrong time, always a bad idea. The beginning of 2 Samuel 11 tells us the event was “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle.” The problem was, David sent the troops out but he remained in Jerusalem. Here’s this great warrior, a leader of men, hanging out at the palace when his army was risking their lives. If he had been where he belonged perhaps this tragedy would never have happened.

From his palace rooftop David saw a woman bathing. She was not doing anything unseemly, for she was not aware of the king watching her. As the story goes, she was very beautiful, but she was another man’s wife. No good ever came from that sentence. David should have stopped there, but he persisted in his pursuit and had her brought to him. David momentarily disconnected from God in order to pursue Bathsheba.

He took from her what he wanted, which was not his to take, under the law, and then he sent her home. By this point they were both guilty of breaking the commandment forbidding

¹Manning, Brennan, *Reflections for Ragamuffins*, pg. 198

adultery, the punishment for which was death. Imagine if someone persuaded or forced you to engage in a sin punishable by death. It's hard to imagine anything being worth that.

As a great preacher once said, "God does not allow his children to sin successfully." We may think we've gotten away with something, but nothing is hidden from God. When his tryst with Bathsheba produced a child, David had to find a way to make it look like her husband Uriah was the father. But Uriah, a loyal soldier, was out in the battle. When David's plan to send Uriah home for a visit didn't work, he resorted to plotting Uriah's death in battle.

To do so required involving his general, Joab. He issued a letter commanding him to place Uriah at the front line, then to pull back the troops, thereby causing Uriah to be caught alone with the enemy. This was not merely a triangle David pulled others into, this was a quadrilateral. The plan worked, and Uriah died. David's words to the obviously conflicted general were, "*Don't let this upset you. The sword devours one as well as another.*" A classic case of rationalization.

David thought his problem was solved and he married Bathsheba, but he brought judgment on himself, his wife, his child, and his household. God sent the prophet Nathan to deliver a message of judgment. Nathan told a story of a man whose sheep was taken from him. David caught the sense of injustice in the story, but his own guilt eluded him. He passed judgment on himself by the words, "*As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.*"

Nathan shot right back, "*You are the man!*" David convicted himself, and yes, according to the law he did deserve to die for his crimes. The message from the prophet was a reprieve, "*You shall not die.*" We might see this as mercy, but the consequences would still remain. The child conceived by David's sinfulness would pay the price. David would lose his three other sons as well.

Nathan's role was to confront David and to hold up the mirror of reality to his face. Is there a confronter in your life? Who points you to the right track when you've gone astray? You're fortunate if you do have someone in your life who will call you on your errors and not be afraid to confront you when you've sinned, but without judgment. It's a shame we are too often filled with fear of judgment so that we cannot seek comfort from each other in our times of despair over sin.

God sees our sin even when others do not. God is under no obligation to stop us from sinning. He would rather see us remember Him in those times, but He will wait for us to come to our own moment of conviction. Let's be honest. Not all of our worst mistakes or devastating sins happen when we're young and foolish.

Even though reaching the middle of life means we have gained experience and hopefully wisdom, there are still plenty of potential setbacks out there. Should our reaction to our faults

be to shut them out of our minds? Should we accept guilt as the punishment for sin and just keep pushing it down? Mentally, emotionally and spiritually that's harmful to us.

Anger is fear turned outward, self-hatred and shame manifesting as a reason to be mad at the world. Anger turned inward is depression, and quickly can devolve into a longstanding problem. Unresolved feelings of shame or self-loathing can trigger any number of physical symptoms. And what about our relationship with God? We can't run from Him, for He sees everything we do. He knows everything we think and feel, including our remorse or lack of it.

Holding onto guilt without seeking forgiveness will force us to live in what we think is self-punishment. If we can't experience the grace of God we are limiting His role in our lives. He wants us to acknowledge our guilt, no matter how small or large, in order to free us for future obedience. Holding back on coming to Him in search of mercy can only make us feel more ashamed over time. Soon we may feel that our relationship with Him is damaged, maybe beyond repair.

Psalms 51 is David's rather public confession of sin in response to his confrontation from Nathan. David had a personal faith in God that was fueled from the moment of his anointing. That did not protect him from great sin, however. He poured his heart out to God in this psalm, asking forgiveness and declaring his sinfulness, indeed his sinful condition from conception. He pleaded with God for a chance to start again.

The one thing David feared most was losing God's presence and Spirit. Remember, God's Spirit had been with him from the time of his anointing as king. It would be frightening for him to lose that and still be king. That's what happened to King Saul. Imagine that David was just an ordinary man, not a king, just a typical guy. His sin might not have looked quite the same because he would not have as much power, but sin is sin. It can happen to anyone.

Maybe this average guy gets confronted, maybe not. Maybe it's eating him alive. There's trouble at work, there's stress at home. Something happens to make him snap and there he is, crying out to God for mercy and forgiveness. Have you ever reached that place in your life when you have asked God to give you a new heart, a clean heart that was untouched by sin? The word create used in Psalm 51 is the same verb used in Genesis to describe how God made something good out of nothing.

If only we could keep ourselves clean and untouched and pure. We share David's acceptance that we are sinful from birth, or at least we have the potential to be. By the time we reach the middle years of life, we might look back and find our path straggling all over the place. Some days it feels that God is so close we are lifted up and He is carrying us. Other days we may call His name and feel no response. Those days are of our making, of course. God is always near. It is we who move away.

The most moving part of this psalm for me is when David asked, *"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit."* Can you remember when the joy of God's salvation

first became yours? Do you find that joy remains when you're in those places of sin and despair? It's no accident that David combined the joy of salvation with a willing spirit. We don't just accept Christ and hope for the continuing relationship to work out. A willing spirit means we are accountable to Christ for following His lead.

Twice in our readings today David declared that he had sinned against God alone. This was the bottom line of the matter and he knew it. He had also sinned against Uriah, Joab, Bathsheba, their child, and his nation, but the only one who can judge sin is God. You need to deal with Him to be forgiven, and you have to make amends with others if possible. Sin leaves a mark, but that mark can be erased by God.

Here's one description of repentance. "Repentance always brings a person to the point of saying, 'I have sinned.' The surest sign that God is at work in his life is when he says that and means it. Anything less is simply sorrow for having made foolish mistakes; a reflex action caused by self-disgust."²

Studying the lives of people such as David may seem like simply a perusal of history, but the honesty of Scripture forces us to examine ourselves and see where we are making the same mistakes of our predecessors. As Paul said, "*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*"

Now, you may be thinking, that didn't work for David. However, David failed to ask for God's help. He just proceeded with his own plans. All of us have a Cain or a Judas or a David within us. Likewise, we can also possess the strengths of Ruth or Esther or Moses or Abraham or Paul. The choice is up to us.

Let us take up David's plea for ourselves, every time we feel that we have transgressed beyond what we can bear, which, in truth, might be more often than we realize or admit. Remember the joy of your salvation provided to you through the sacrifice of Christ. You don't have to live with regret as if nothing can be done to strengthen your faith. Speak words of repentance to God and free yourself from the burden of guilt's weight. Don't let sin dictate who you are.

²Chambers, Oswald, *My Utmost for His Highest*, December 7 entry