

under Your watchful eye, and thus grow to be like You in every way; You who are our Heavenly Lord; our Creator and our Saviour. AMEN

Prayer

Lord God of happiness and joy, remind our stubborn hearts to rise above the things that occupy our minds, and look with joy upon the people who love and care for us. May we never take them for granted, but inspired by You, may we bless our loved ones with our smiles and happiness; not for anything in particular, but because they love us and in them we see something of Your love, O Lord. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The gifts of the Spirit

Pray that all God's people will be generous hearted towards the gifts of the Spirit, both in terms of receiving them personally, and accepting them as God's blessing in others.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the efforts made in your country to help the economy*
- *Give thanks for the music you listen to and enjoy*
- *Pray for the world as it reacts to the elections in the USA*

Meditation

Forgive us Lord, we have not understood.

The love You show us is not our personal possession,
It is Your saving graciousness transcending time and space;
An indescribable power that moves the heart and soul and will,
Yet shows itself in One who died upon a Cross, and now,
It touches our emotions like nothing else.

We have felt it in the spirit;
It is the life of One who lived two thousand years ago
And reaches out unerringly to exactly where we are;
Men and women in need of spiritual help and renovation,
In need of re-creation of the heart and soul and will.

Your love cannot be turned away;
It will not go away, despite our infinite capacity to rebel.
The only way to circumvent this love is to refuse it; walk away,
Reject it all by heart and soul and will; but there it stands
Awaiting our return. True love never goes away.

Forgive our misunderstanding, Lord,
Turn back my heart and soul and will, by love.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 11:1-5

¹ *In the spring of the year, the time when kings go on campaign, David sent Joab out with his officers and the whole Israelite army; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. However, David remained at Jerusalem.* ² *Late one afternoon, when David rose from his siesta and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, it so happened that from the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful.* ³ *David sent someone to find out*

*about her, and was told, 'This is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, and wife of Uriah the Hittite.'*⁴ *So David sent messengers to fetch her. She came to him, and he had sex with her; and this was just after she had purified herself after her monthly period; then she returned to her house.*⁵ *The woman conceived; and she sent a message to tell David, 'I am pregnant.'*

Review

This is the beginning of one of the most famous stories in the Old Testament, about David's adultery with Bathsheba and its consequences. It is obviously a moral tale, but behind the scenes of this powerful story lies a very important scriptural themes, concerning David's dynasty and God's eternal covenant (2 Samuel 7:12,16), for any child born to David had a potentially important role in the divine drama of the Old Testament. It is easy to be carried away with the compelling moral story line and what it teaches us about sin, repentance and forgiveness, but if we keep an eye on this higher theme, then we will eventually find more than we thought within this story.

The passage for today begins the story with a simple human story of temptation and sin. It is told from a male point of view, for nothing is said of Bathsheba's role in the whole affair and we are left with many questions about what actually happened. As usual, however, scripture gives us only that information which is necessary for its long term objectives of describing God's salvation plan through the life and dynasty of David.

An idle David, tempted! David was strolling on the roof of his house at a time when the entire Israelite army ('all Israel') was engaged in territorial warfare (11:1), laying siege to Rabbah, an Ammonite stronghold in the hills some distance to the east of the river Jordan. He had retired from the battlefield to leave Joab to lead the army, and the decision led to his downfall.

The second verse of our text describes the seeds of temptation which drew David towards his sin. David rose from a contented afternoon siesta and strolled on the roof of his house, where he saw a woman bathing. Much is left to the imagination, and many questions are left unanswered. Why should Bathsheba be within sight of David's palace? Surely bathing and ritual purification was done in private? Did David realise that from a human point of view he could have anything he wanted? Where in fact was David, for the ancient palaces of Jerusalem were well away from any general housing, and the story later describes Uriah's house as significantly beyond the palace of David (see 2 Sam 1:9,13)?

Few of these questions can be properly answered, but one thing is clear; David did not resist the sexual temptation of Bathsheba. Consequently, scripture paints David as trapped in the way temptation always works, from the 'fall', in Genesis 3, to the present day. It is unexpected, appears good, natural and attractive to our basic desires, feeds off idleness, and presents itself as something which can be done without consequences.

David's sin David sent for Bathsheba, and she did not refuse the King; but although he had not stepped over the boundaries of his divine authority (as Saul had done years earlier to incur Samuel's wrath, see 1 Sam 13), he certainly acted outside of God's will for his life. Having received the Covenant promise of God that one of his offspring would 'be on the throne of Israel for ever', one would have thought David might consult the Lord about the loves of his life. He had done this previously with all the major decisions about his life (for example, 1 Sam 22:15; 2 Sam 2:1; 5:19, 23); but he did not do this here.

David had sex with Bathsheba, and the reference from scripture about the completion of purification after her monthly period makes it very evident that Bathsheba would become pregnant, which she did. In all this, scripture tells us nothing about any feelings of love on the part of Bathsheba; she appears to have acted with consent, but who are we to say how any woman should respond to the advances of a King in ancient Israel? When we meet

her later in the story of King David, she comes across as a self possessed woman who was capable of achieving her will by manipulating those around her (2 Kings 1&2). The most we can say is that whatever she felt about the event, she was able to use what happened to her advantage, as we shall discover in the rest of this story as well.

Consequences? The sad story of David's adultery describes the age old way in which temptation works through appealing to our base desires and presenting evil in an appealing light. Clearly, this passage sets up a complex story, but it has its own points to make. Not least that we should consult the Lord about sexual relationships as well as other important matters of life.

Underneath all this is the sad concern observable to any reader. Who will David marry, and who will bear him the son through whom God will establish his dynasty? Abraham and Sarah were barren, and the Lord had to work a miracle in order to fulfil the Covenant promise of a child. Jacob had to work sacrificially to obtain the wife whose child brought deliverance to the covenant family at a time of famine (Joseph). The sons of Eli and Samuel had not been worthy of the leadership of God's people, so this led to the appointment of a King by Samuel. Now then, which son of David would the Lord use to fulfil His promises, now that David had committed adultery? Read on!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How does temptation work, and does it work differently today to how it has worked in previous centuries?
2. Which parts of this famous story do you know well, and which are relatively new to you?
3. What other information would we like to know today in order to make the story comprehensible for today, and why does scripture not include it?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The story of David is quite important for us today, because it focuses on sex, and there are not many scriptures which give us any teaching about this subject. There is a presumption on the part of scripture that once adultery has taken place, there will be a powerful connection between David and Bathsheba which is important for the future story of David. We should note that sex does not merely reflect relationships, it creates them, strengthens them and give them meaning. This is why people who have had many sexual partners can find it difficult to have meaningful relationships in later years. Their own 'commitment' has already been widely spread and the mind finds it hard, consequently, to focus on one.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Read through the rest of the story of David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11 & 12 to gain a better understanding of the whole text. What does this story tell you about temptation and sin today?*
- *Pray for those who you know have casual relationships that may include sex. Pray for them and ask the Lord to help you to counsel such friends or family wisely, and without sounding unwelcomingly moralising.*

Final Prayer

Heavenly Lord, smile on us with the passion, delight and love of a father, and comfort us with the care, attention and tenderness of a mother. May we, Your children, live and work