Final Prayer

Jesus, You look with sadness on our sins and our weaknesses. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, show us those powers of evil which tempt us, bind us, or otherwise occupy our lives; and cast out those that lead us astray. Lead us again in Your pathways, and restore the purity of our love for You. AMEN

Prayer

In the midst of this wonderful day, Lord Jesus, breathe new life into every part of what I do, how I live, what I think and how I speak. May Your presence inspire me, Your power enthral me, Your love amaze me, and Your vision excite me; and may Your peace at the end of this day encourage me that everything is part of Your greater plan for me, for those I love and for all Creation.   AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Rural Life

Pray for those who have to task of monitoring and protecting the rural life around us in protected national parks and also on private ground. Pray for respect for God's creation.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the security of the seas and the problem of piracy*
- *Pray for little children who are abused by their parents*
- *Give thanks to God for the many good things He has given you*

Meditation

You take me by a harder path, Lord God, and lead me through it all,
So I may find the value of trusting in your guidance.

You speak to me a tougher word, Lord God, and make me face my demons,
So I may receive the benefit of Your free deliverance.

You grasp me with a firmer hand, Lord God, and ensure I feel Your power,
So I may know the real source of spiritual strength.

You show me an unyielding vision, Lord God, and test all my reactions,
So I may never shirk the truth, nor compromise the Gospel.

You place me in thicker forest, Lord God, of troubles, mine and others,
So I may learn to follow You, when others fade away.

And through it all, Lord God my Saviour, I know Your faithful love,
So I can rest secure in You, when all is said and done.

Bible Study *- 2 Samuel 11:14-21*

[14] In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it with Uriah.   [15] He wrote in it, 'Put Uriah in the front line with the fiercest fighting; then pull back from him so that he will be struck down and be killed.'

[16] As Joab laid siege to the city, he placed Uriah where he knew the defence would be most strong. [17] The men of the city came out and fought with Joab; and some of the men of David's army fell, and Uriah the Hittite was also killed.

[18] Then Joab sent David a full report of the fighting; [19] and he instructed the messenger, 'When you have finished telling the king all the news of the fighting, [20] then, if the king becomes angry and says, "Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? [21] Who killed Abimelech son of Jerubbaal? Did he not die at Thebez when a woman

threw a millstone on him from the wall above? Why did you go so near the wall?" then you shall say, *"Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead, as well."'*

Review

After David had given in to temptation, He was led down a path of subterfuge that was not of the Lord's hand. Our sense of shock continues as we read this terrible tale of evil and underhand dealing, and this is after so many chapters of scripture in which everything about David has led us to believe he was a godly and faithful man in all things.

This passage contains the story of David's engineering of the slaughter of Uriah so that he might take his wife, Bathsheba. It counts as the lowest point in David's life, lower even than the adultery with Bathsheba itself. As we read the distasteful details of this passage, wincing at the appalling and conniving actions of David, we might as well be watching a Hollywood movie, and as we watch, the 'hero turned anti-hero' is exposed and censured, but returned to us chastened and hopefully a better man. However, this is no fantasy, it is real history, and it proved to be a turning point of King David's reign. He turned aside from the Lord's path, murdering an innocent man, and whilst the Lord maintained Covenant faithfulness with David, the consequences for his earthly dynasty were everlasting.

David's secret plot The plain fact of the matter is that David ordered Joab to have Uriah killed. David's army was besieging the Ammonite capital of Rabbah, and were expecting fierce resistance, because the people of the city knew that if their city fell, they would become Israel's 'slaves'. David therefore sent a letter to Joab with instructions to arrange for Uriah's killing under the cover of battle. It is noticeable that it is only at this point in the story where David sent a truly secret message. The message to Joab was written (11:14) and not simply given by word of mouth to a courier; so was David now trying to hide his actions? The report in scripture suggests that David's adultery was the subject of general gossip, but murder was different. Perhaps just as we find in our own times, sexual misdemeanour was regarded as 'one of those things', but murder was a crime. David consequently needed to keep it a secret. However, as almost every crime writer and novelist has observed over centuries, there has always been a close relationship between sexual sin and murder.

The plot David hatched with Joab unfolded exactly as planned, and Uriah died a hero's death fighting loyally for his adopted country of Israel. We guess he may have known something of what was going on from what had happened when he went to see David (2 Sam 11:6-13), yet in this story he was a picture of faithfulness and loyalty. His reputation was unsullied by the evil plot and poor military judgement which led both to his death and also to the deaths of others (11:17). By the end of today's passage, we are led by the story to believe that even the messenger who bore news of Uriah's death to David could have worked out what was going on including David's part in the whole sordid affair.

The report of the messenger The message from Jaob to David via the messenger is peculiar, because it refers to the death of one of the Judges, Abimelech (Judges 9:50ff). Joab suggests to the messenger that David will react to the situation by quoting this story about the death of the most despicable of the Old Testament 'Judges' (see Judges 9). We may guess that there was some secret code only known to Joab and David, but the story of Abimelech is very relevant to what happens here in 2 Samuel. The death of Abimelech 'at the hands of a woman' was regarded in David's day as a moral tale about how a king could be brought down by the actions of a woman. It is a difficult to determine exactly why this passage is mentioned, but it is possible that Joab and scripture use this story to comment almost sarcastically on David's actions, and indicate to his that although his plan succeeded he was in danger of being brought down by a woman.

Falling through sexual sin Within this story lies all the shame and distress that accompanies any sin by which a leader of God's people falls from grace, and acts firstly through temptation and eventually with direct personal wickedness, against all that is good. We can see how sin corrupts relationships (i.e. with Joab), reveals weakness, and is always capable of exposing the perpetrator. It is, like so much sin, depressingly predictable. As we read the story, we know that God will one day forgive David, and perhaps this dulls our sense of the seriousness of what happened. However, by this deed a generational sin of adultery and sexual excess was established within David's dynasty which plagued Judah's rulers for centuries, and some would argue, eventually led to the downfall of David's earthly dynasty in 587BC with the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem. Certainly sexual intrigue would continue to surround the whole life of David's sons and blight the pathway for whoever would succeed him as King when he died. His eventual successor, Solomon, was also fatally flawed by relationships with women (1 Kings 3:1,2; 11:1ff) which he never totally submitted to the Lord.

If this story teaches us anything it is about the deadly intent of sin, the entrapments of evil particularly through sex, the way sin encourages and enables more sin, and the fact that even if God's plans never fail, we most certainly can fail, with severe personal consequences. The Lord forgives, but he often has to lead us to repentance by making us face the consequences of our sin. We shall see how David does this as the story unfolds.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss what God may have felt while David wandered away from the pathway set for him?

2. How much blame does Joab bear for Uriah's murder by following David's orders in this matter?

3. Check out the story of Ahimelech (Judge 9, in particular verses 50-57) to see what we can learn about this story and why scripture uses it here.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have certainly witnessed the devastating effects of sexual sin on the lives and ministry of many I have known, and it has led some to ruin. Where people lie in bondage to their sexual feelings or their sexuality, then Satan stands ready to act to destroy people and oppose God's plans. In my opinion, two things need to happen if this problem is to be dealt with. Firstly, Satan who manipulates so much sexual sin needs to be rebuked and told to leave in Jesus' name. Secondly, the people who are subject to these desires and problems need to be helped through prayer and godly counsel to confess their sin and repent. There is great liberation for all who walk this path, and I have often seen it.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Sin lies at the door of us all, and seeks to build one sin upon another, creating a web of lies and intrigue. I ask you to consider prayerfully how the Christian church can help its own people to deal with sexual sin.*

- *Pray against any sexual temptation you feel or have felt. It is surprising how often sexual sin arises in the form of recollection of past incidents which people believe they have forgotten. Satan is cunning!*