

believe that if we are good and holy, then our lives should be fine; but this is not the case. The important message from today's reading is that whenever sin afflicts us, we have a duty to respond immediately by bringing it to the Lord. If we 'confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive ...' (1 John 1:9). We will only ever make sense of the sin that rises in our lives or afflicts us, in the light of His Word.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Read through Psalm 51, and listen for what the Lord would say to you through this great psalm. It has spoken to people for centuries, and the Lord has used it to change lives completely. Let it speak to you.
- Pray for those who struggle with sin and do not know how to deal with it. Pray for those who bury sin and are unaware how much it affects them.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, may we always be prepared to confess our sin and accept its consequences, and thus show our faith and trust in You, who are always prepared to hear the cry of the repentant sinner. Save us and heal us we pray, O Lord; AMEN

Prayer

All praise be Yours, Living Lord; for You have a plan for the whole of Creation which has both a beginning and an end. While we live between the two, help us to enjoy the work You have given us to use, maintain and sustain the world. May we honour our important role in Your Creation, and be alert to the dangers of those who would destroy Your creation. We praise You, Living Lord, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Faithfulness

Without faithfulness, where would we be? It is an essential aspect to human life, and all true faithfulness comes from God. Pray that you might grow in faithfulness day by day.

On-going prayers

- Pray for people who do menial but important work for low pay
- Give thanks to God for the Sabbath and the importance of rest
- Pray for scientists whose work is to monitor the health of our planet

Meditation

Where, my Lord, are the tears we need to shed

For the lost, the unhappy and the unloved
Who endure the world today with no hope for tomorrow?

For those who have no voice in our complex world
Who suffer the indignity of being trampled upon by others?

For the people who do not know they have a loving Lord
Who have never heard that Jesus heals the broken-hearted?

For those who walk on past us every hour of every day
Who would rejoice to know eternal truth if someone told them?

For those who worship You but do not know Your love
Who have been sold a lie instead of taught a faith in Christ?

You wept for them, Dear Lord; may we then hear Your cry.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 12:7-14

⁷ Nathan said to David, 'You are the man. Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; ⁸ and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." ¹¹ Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes,

and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.”

¹³ David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die.'

Review

'Atah ha'ish' These are the Hebrew words Nathan said to David, and they cut him to the heart. In a moment, these sharp words which mean, 'You are the man!' destroyed the gloss which David had placed over the whole sordid affair of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, and they forced him to listen to the truth which he had attempted to bury together with Bathsheba's husband Uriah. Nathan's story about a rich man who abused a poor man by stealing a ewe lamb and slaughtering it for a hospitality meal (12:1-6) had its due effect. Under the guidance of the Spirit of God (12:1), Nathan had found a way to draw David's attention and ultimately make him face the truth. The story of the 'ewe lamb' had re-ignited David's sense of injustice, and Nathan used it to force him to accept that he had sinned in the sight of God. Nathan continued and told David about the consequences of his sin, for as with all sin whether we repent or not, there are always consequences.

Nathan's prophecy Nathan's words are clearly a prophecy. He began with 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel', and these are words which formally declare God's Word. It was used by Moses (Ex 5:1, 32:27), Joshua (Josh 22:16, 24:2), and Samuel (1 Sam 10:18, 15:2) before Him, and Nathan continued this important prophetic tradition to deal with this crisis. Everything God had done for Israel and for His people through the Covenant was being sorely tested by the arrogance and presumption of David's sexual sin.

I have come across those who believe that what happened when David committed adultery was a mere 'blip' on the path of a great man, and they value the story mainly because it gives rise to a great psalm of repentance (51). I have also come across those who refer to David's adultery as if the problem was sex itself rather than the heart of David, and this enables them to preach against the sins of sexual excess in the world today. Both such approaches miss the point. David's compound sin of adultery, murder, and the sin of arrogance by which he attempted to make it go away compromised his relationship with God, when the Lord had clearly given him an important role in the salvation history of the world.

The consequences of sin The consequences of it all are laid out in what Nathan prophesied (12:10-12). God had been gracious in giving David almost anything he wanted (12:7,8), but his turning away from the Lord through the use of violence meant firstly that a violent future that would affect his entire dynasty (12:10). The second consequence arose directly from his adultery, for Nathan prophesied that at some time in the future, David's relationships with his wives would be the cause of public humiliation (12:11). Finally, with the whole matter already being the subject of court gossip, the Lord declared that David's sin would be universally known; 'I will do this thing before Israel and before the sun.' What David sought to hide, God would tell the world!

David was shamed by this damning prophecy, and all three prophecies came true. Firstly, violence continued in Israel as long as David was on the throne, as the rest of 2 Samuel demonstrates. Secondly, at the height of civil war later on in his reign, David's wives were indeed shamed when his own son, Absalom, had sex with them and exposed them to

public humiliation after throwing his own father out of Jerusalem (2 Sam 16:20-23). Thirdly, the fact that we are studying this incident now is proof of the prophecy! David's sin therefore affected his whole future. However, at the time, I suspect that David may have been relieved, for the penalty may have seemed not severe as it might have been. David did not have the kingdom torn from his hand (as did Saul, see 1 Sam 13:14, 15:26) and no mention was made of his relationship with Bathsheba.

Eternal consequences What he did not know, and what we often forget, is that the sins of sex and violence continued generation after generation amongst David's physical dynasty, leading eventually to its collapse against the Assyrians (721BC) and the Babylonians (597-587BC). It is highly likely that the reason for the inclusion of this story in scripture is to inform us formally of the origin of the hereditary sins which led to the downfall of Israel and Judah. Many commentators have noted that whilst David is highly praised as a great king, he does not receive as much credit for the founding of Israel as his son Solomon, in Chronicles; again, the reason may be because early Jewish historians were quick to see how David was responsible not just for Israel's greatness, but also its failure.

However, from a purely personal point of view, David accepted the judgement God placed upon him, and his acceptance of guilt is an important part of the whole story. His simple words 'I have sinned' (12:13) show not just that he accepted what he had done, but also that he accepted Nathan's prophecy. He could do no other than confess his sin. Nathan, however, had one final message to give once David accepted his guilt, and it affected him the most, at the time. Nathan said that Bathsheba's child by their adultery would die. This sounds terrible, but the Lord added this prophecy so that David would recognise the truth of what God had said when this happened. It was a sign of God's word, and we will find out more about this next time.

Psalms 51 As an addendum to this brief study, we look briefly at Psalm 51. David wrote the psalm as a result of this incident to express his shame and guilt. It is one of the greatest of the psalms and a model of repentance, used to this day in church worship and liturgy (e.g. the confession 'have mercy on me O God, according to your steadfast love ...'). Sin and repentance are an important part of the spiritual life, and all of us discover that the Lord requires us to confess sin and accept the consequences of our actions. Sometimes our response is expressed in deeper faith and greater trust in the Lord; this is the 'fruit of repentance' (Matt 3:8) which pleases God, and through it, the Lord can work for good, despite the human condition of sin demonstrated so clearly by David.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Is David's punishment appropriate for the crime? What further punishment might have been appropriate for David.
2. Does the Lord God punish us for our sins now, or is this taken away from us by Jesus? Why does sin have consequences if Jesus has died for us?
3. How does Psalm 51 help us to understand this scripture; what does it add to the story in 2 Samuel?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There are a number of discipleship issues worth considering after reading this story. Whilst Jesus has removed the power of sin to separate us from the love of God, it remains true that most people still suffer the consequences of their own sin and those of others; that is another way of saying that we still live in a fallen world. Unfortunately, some Christians