

IT'S COMPLICATED SEASON 2

Crosswalk Daily Study

INTRODUCTION

We are excited to jump back into Season Two of our series on the life of David that we've called, It's Complicated.

If you remember the premise, the idea is that though we often desperately want a black and white world where right and wrong are easily determined, and our answers are clear, the life we experience each day is much more complicated than we care to admit at times. Especially in the world of faith.

Have you ever had someone say to you, "Well, the Bible is clear." I always recoil at that line, not because I don't think the Bible has any clarity, but because it's a blanket statement that is often used to shut down any further discourse on a subject. I, for one, don't think the Bible is clear on everything. I think the Holy Spirit continues to speak to us through the Word in our time, and in our place, and continues to reveal to us the character of God which we will never fully plumb the depths of.

So when we come to a character like David, it's "clear" to see that his life was complicated. In Season One we talked about David the Shepherd, the anointed, the warrior, the successor, and the man who came in-between the son and the father (Saul and Jonathan). Each of these stories were complicated, in that the Shepherd was also a man with blood on his hands, the anointed king didn't become king for years to come, the warrior was also said to be a man after God's own heart, and so on.

In Season Two, our complicated journey continues as we talk about David the king, finally, as well as David the worshipper, the murderer, the adulterer, the parent, and the broken. Through David's life, we will see our own, with all of its ups and downs and twists and turns that cause us to celebrate one moment, and weep the next. However, with as complicated as life can be at times, we believe we have a God who meets us in all of our messy moments, and desires to help us learn, heal, grow, and ultimately become the best versions of ourselves.

Like last season, we'll touch on themes of mental health, sexual assault, repentance and forgiveness that involves guilt and the battle with shame; worship, parenthood, death and grief, and all the ways God's grace reaches out to us as His voice whispers in our ear, "Hold on, I got you, we'll get through this chapter of life...together."

Looking forward to the journey with our Crosswalk community as we wrestle with the realities of life in the context of our faith, and our ever-present, ever-loving, and ever-gracious God.

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IT'S COMPLICATED SEASON 2 - WEEK 1

WEEK 1 – 2 SAMUEL 2:1-7 – DAVID THE KING

By Paddy McCoy

WEEK 1 – MONDAY

2 Samuel 2:1a

2:1a After this...

A lot has happened from where we left off at season one of It's Complicated. Back then, David continued to be an outcast that King Saul hunted, even though Samuel had anointed David to be the new king of Israel. Shockingly, David continued to support Saul, because Saul had been God's anointed one.

As we begin chapter 2 of 2 Samuel, Saul has been killed after being wounded in battle and falling on his own sword. Equally as tragic, Saul's son, including Jonathan, were killed in the same battle.

In chapter 1, David mourns the loss of God's anointed, and as sad as he was for Saul, his heart would have been crushed at the loss of his dear friend, Jonathan. You can see some of his grief in a song he wrote for them both...

24 O women of Israel, weep for Saul,
for he dressed you in luxurious scarlet clothing,
in garments decorated with gold.
25 Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen in battle!
Jonathan lies dead on the hills.
26 How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan!
Oh, how much I loved you!
And your love for me was deep,
deeper than the love of women! (2 Samuel 1:24-26, NLT)

Notice how David encourages others to weep for Saul, but he weeps for Jonathan. I'm sure he was sad over Saul as well, but Jonathan was his confidant, his support in some of the toughest times of the last 8-12 years. Losing someone that close to you not only brings the struggle of grief, but the task of trying to figure out how life will look now with that hole in your heart.

I have journeyed with many people through the stages of grief, and have traveled them myself. No two journey's are the same. Grief is such a difficult and odd companion. Sometimes you think you've healed, moved past it, then a word, a fragrance, a memory pops up that sends you right back into the middle of it. You don't get over grief, you work through it, but I believe it's remnants stick with you until the day when there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Revelation 21). Until then, may we be gentle with each other as likely, we're all grieving something or someone.

And for all the trouble Saul caused David, he continued to show him love and respect as God's anointed. It is an example of how we can disagree with one another, and still seek to love one another even in times when we're perceived as an enemy.

1. Who have you, or are you, grieving over?
2. What helps you in your grief, or what ways do you help others in theirs?
3. How do you think David was able to continue to love and show respect for Saul even when Saul tried to kill him?

WEEK 1 – TUESDAY

2 Samuel 2:1b-3

1b...David asked the Lord, "Should I move back to one of the towns of Judah?" "Yes," the Lord replied. Then David asked, "Which town should I go to?" "To Hebron," the Lord answered. 2 David's two wives were Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel. So David and his wives 3 and his men and their families all moved to Judah, and they settled in the villages near Hebron.

In a heartbeat, David's life has been turned upside down. Even though, years before, he was anointed king by the prophet Samuel, he never got the opportunity to step into that role because of Saul. But here we are, his king and his brother have been killed, and the moment he was anointed for 8-9 years before, is finally happening.

Likely, he had thought long and hard about what he would do in this moment. He may have even drifted off to sleep, thinking about these things, when he was on the run. And not because he felt like he wanted Saul to step aside, not because he wanted the power, but because he knew God had called him to something and he wondered what he would do when given the chance.

His first act is to inquire of the Lord, YHWH. Much like Nehemiah that we discussed a couple of sermon series ago, David wants to make sure that his actions are in step with his God.

God's response was to send David to the city of Hebron, in the middle of Judah. David wasn't going to be king over all of Israel, not yet anyway. He had to start with his own tribe. God would continue to lead and guide, but for now, David had to learn to trust God at every step and not run ahead of him.

How much I struggle to follow my leader, instead of running ahead of him, especially when I think I know what He wants me to do. David would have several more years to wait for the ultimate fulfillment of the prophet Samuel's act oh so long ok. Maybe it's why he wrote this line in Psalm 27, one of my favorites...

14 Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord. (Psalm 27:14, NLT)

1. What helps you turn to God first with your life's decisions?
2. Are you someone that finds waiting on God easy, hard, somewhere in-between? What helps you wait?
3. Is there something in your life that you've been waiting for a response from God? What can you do today to lay that down at His feet, trusting in His timing over your own understanding?

WEEK 1 – WEDNESDAY

2 Samuel 2:4a

4 Then the men of Judah came to David and anointed him king over the people of Judah.

As we alluded to yesterday, at this point in the story, it's been roughly 8 or 9 years since Samuel anointed David as the new king of Israel. Here, we have the men of Judah anointing David king, not of the whole nation of Israel, but of the tribe of Judah, which David was a part of.

It certainly was a step in the ultimate fulfillment of the promise, but after all this time and struggle, David was still on the journey to where God wanted Him. I'm sure there were moments, like when he was hiding in a cave, where he may have written these lines from Psalm 22...

1 My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help?

2 Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief. (Psalm 22:1-2, NLT)

Many times in my life I have wondered what God was up to, feeling at times as if He had abandoned or forgotten about me, only to discover that He was there the whole time, prepping me for whatever was to come next.

In fact, as I look back over the course of my life, the times when I felt most stuck, abandoned, alone, were often the times when God was about to do something I wouldn't have believed Him if He told me. In those moments, I've often felt like I was standing on the edge of a cliff, not knowing what to do next. The way forward looks tough, nearly impossible. But then God either picks me up and places me where He needs me, or, He gives me wings.

Yes, His ways are always better than my ways, always. It's trusting in Him as He prepares me for the unknown, that's the hard part.

28 Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding.

29 He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.

30 Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion.

31 But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31, NLT)

1. Have you ever felt stuck, no idea what to do next, as if maybe God was either not listening, or didn't care? What was happening in your life in those moments?
2. Assuming you're either not in one of those moments now, or you've gotten through other moments in the past, what helped?
3. What's one area in your life today that you need to trust in Him more, let go, and learn how to fly?

WEEK 1 – THURSDAY

2 Samuel 2:4-6

4 Then the men of Judah came to David and anointed him king over the people of Judah. When David heard that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul, 5 he sent them this message: “May the Lord bless you for being so loyal to your master Saul and giving him a decent burial. 6 May the Lord be loyal to you in return and reward you with his unfailing love! And I, too, will reward you for what you have done.

Jabesh-gilead wasn't just the place where they buried Saul, it was in Israel territory, the northern kingdom; otherwise known as the place that David was not yet king over. So sure, you could see this as enemy territory for this newly anointed king of Judah.

David offers the people of this town a peace offering in the form of a blessing. He loved Saul, and was thankful for their kindness to Saul and his family. David doesn't want to be their enemy, he doesn't want civil war any more. He wants to unite the kingdoms and God's people, as Samuel foresaw all those years ago.

So in order to unite the kingdoms, David would have to expel a great deal of energy to win them over, to earn their trust, and to help them see that the best way forward is together, not apart. Of course, this would take time, almost 7 years to be precise. Was it hard, easy to want to give up at times? Absolutely. People would have to lay down their egos and self-interest to put not only others first, but God first. Was it worth it? Without a doubt.

We live in a day of division, fear, and anger. We cancel people for the use of a word we don't like, or for an action we only can see part of. We see people with different opinions than ours not just as different, but wrong, or worse, an evil that must be stopped.

But our call as followers of Jesus is to be different. We are to love our enemies, turn the other cheek, pray for those who persecute us. Our table is to be open and welcoming to those with differing opinions, cultural backgrounds, even lifestyle choices. And our call to love well as a church, is something better done together, than apart.

I wonder if this is why Jesus took a servant-leadership approach in his time here on earth. Just look at the Last Supper. While his disciples, 12 of the most different people you could ever find, argued about which one of them was the best, Jesus quietly washed their feet. Maybe the way we win people over, is not by trying to prove how right we are, but through our quiet acts of love and kindness.

I recently listened to an audiobook I highly recommend by the late Eddie Jacku, WWII holocaust survivor. It's called, The Happiest Man on Earth. He had so many gems to share, but for today I'll leave you with this one...

“Your efforts today will affect people you will never know, it is your choice whether that effect is positive or negative. You can choose every day, every minute, to act in a way that may uplift a stranger, or else drag them down. The choice is easy. And it is yours to make.”

1. What kinds of divisions do you see in our world that cause you the most pain?
2. What kinds of divisions are there in your world, friends or family, that desperately need healing?

3. What's one act of kindness you could perform today to help work towards unity over division?

WEEK 1 – FRIDAY

2 Samuel 2:5-7

7 Now that Saul is dead, I ask you to be my strong and loyal subjects like the people of Judah, who have anointed me as their new king."

David's second anointing as king of Judah would have contrasted sharply with his first anointing by the prophet Samuel. Back with Samuel, is what a private ceremony, family only, secretive even. The current king, Saul, was not mentally stable and would have seen this act as a direct threat on him and his kingdom; which it was.

But now, David's anointing would have come with all the pomp and circumstance the Jews would have done for Saul back in the days. This was a public, popular, and very political act. In fact, unlike with Samuel, there's no hint of the religious aspect to this anointing at all.

Truth is, however, David was God's choice whether in public or private. He didn't have to be publicly recognized to act as God's chosen, did he?

We live in a world that loves to celebrate fame. You can be an influencer tomorrow if you want to, and work towards 100's of 1,000's of followers. And I'm not saying that's all bad, but what I am saying is that in the kingdom of God, fame happens differently.

First of all, Jesus said...26..."whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:20, NIV)

So if we want to be "great" in the kingdom of God, we must become servants. But there is another key ingredient to becoming "famous" in the kingdom of God.

When Jesus began his public ministry, and he was gaining more of a following than John the Baptist, John's disciples became jealous. When they shared that with him, John said one of my favorite lines in all the gospels. He said, "[Jesus] must become greater and greater, I must become less and less." (John 3:30, NLT) So we become "famous" in the kingdom of God by serving one another and by continuously pointing others to Jesus, through our words and our deeds.

In God's eyes, David was the king from the moment He chose Him, even if it would take the people a while to get there. You and I are all children of God, in whom He loves and with whom He is well pleased (Luke 3:22 and 1 John 3:1). And that is the most important truth about us. Whether the world chooses to recognize it or not, that is how we are called to live.

1. Have you ever wanted to be publicly recognized for something you did that you weren't recognized for? If so, did the lack of recognition change the impact you had?
2. What are some ways that you and I can remain humble, living our lives to lift up Jesus instead of ourselves?

IT'S COMPLICATED SEASON 2 - WEEK 2

By Dave Ferguson

WEEK 2 – MONDAY – The Ark

Psalm 132:1-5

LORD, remember David
and all that he suffered.
He made a solemn promise to the LORD.
He vowed to the Mighty One of Israel,
“I will not go home;
I will not let myself rest.
I will not let my eyes sleep
nor close my eyelids in slumber
until I find a place to build a house for the LORD,
a sanctuary for the Mighty One of Israel.”

2 Samuel 6:1-3

David again gathered all the elite troops in Israel, 30,000 in all. He led them to Baalah of Judah to bring back the Ark of God, which bears the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim. They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab's house, which was on a hill.

This week, we examine 2 Samuel 6 and what David's life teaches us about worship. If it seems like the study starts with a simple rearrangement of religious furniture, don't be fooled. There's much more to it than that.

Worship, at its core, celebrates that the “I Am” of Exodus 3:14—the One who “was and is and is to come” in Revelation 1:4—chooses to draw near and live with us. The creator of all things adopts the name Immanuel, ‘God with us’ (Matthew 1:23). The first chapter of the book of John describes Jesus' mission of redemption. He is the Word. He is God. He was in the beginning. He is the Creator. And in verse 14, John says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The literal translation of the Greek is that Jesus “tabernacled” among us.

Throughout the Old Testament, God describes Himself and His desire for closeness using various metaphors and symbols. One of the most vivid images appears in the wilderness tabernacle that God commanded to be built at the center of the Israelites' camp during their exodus from Egypt. God outlined every detail of this structure so that the story of salvation could be revealed. It included symbols representing the cross of Christ, His resurrection, prayer, and forgiveness. In the innermost part of the tabernacle sat a gold-covered acacia wood box called the Ark of the Covenant.

Two golden angels faced each other on the lid of this special box. The space between them was called the mercy seat. It was here that the most unmistakable evidence of God's presence, called the Shekinah Glory, shone and hovered, announcing that Yahweh dwelled among His people. The Glory of God was no longer high atop Mount Sinai delivering the Ten Commandments, or drifting across the night sky guiding the people through the desert. God had closed the gap and come to dwell in the heart of their mobile town.

Time has passed since those desert wanderings. It is now about 400 years after the Exodus from Egypt. King Saul has died, and David has taken the throne. Recently, in our story, the northern and southern kingdoms have been unified, Jerusalem has been captured, and made the capital. David leads all of Israel as a passionate follower of Yahweh. However, there are two issues. First, there is no permanent house for God in the City of David. And second, the Ark of the Covenant is missing from the people. Because of mistreatment and neglect, this symbol of God's presence has been stolen by enemies, exiled, and then returned. Now, it sits neglected in a house on a hill in Kiriath-jearim.

David's response to the absence of Yahweh's presence is an act of worship. He sets out to elevate the Ark to the heart of the nation. The longing to be right with God, to give Jesus space at the center of our lives as He stands at the door knocking (Revelation 3:20), reflects this same impulse. So open up, feel His acceptance, receive His forgiveness... worship.

1. What big items are on your to-do list for today? Which ones still exist from yesterday's list? What makes it easy to neglect one of these tasks?
2. Is there a place that you find it easiest to experience the presence of God? Where is that? Why do you think this location makes God feel close?
3. What are three priorities in your life? Which one competes most with the space you believe God should occupy? What would you like to say to God about that?

WEEK 2 – TUESDAY – Lucky Charm

1 Samuel 4:2-3, 10-11, 19-21

The Philistines attacked and defeated the army of Israel, killing 4,000 men. After the battle was over, the troops retreated to their camp, and the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD allow us to be defeated by the Philistines?" Then they said, "Let's bring the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD from Shiloh. If we carry it into battle with us, it will save us from our enemies."

So the Philistines fought desperately, and Israel was defeated again. The slaughter was great; 30,000 Israelite soldiers died that day. The survivors turned and fled to their tents. The Ark of God was captured, and Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were killed.

Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near her time of delivery. When she heard that the Ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth. She died in childbirth, but before she passed away the midwives tried to encourage her. "Don't be afraid," they said. "You have a baby boy!" But she did not answer or pay attention to them.

She named the child Ichabod (which means "Where is the glory?"), for she said, "Israel's glory is gone." She named him this because the Ark of God had been captured...

David is on a mission to return the Ark, the symbol of God's presence, to a central place of worship in the new capital city. But before he does, let's consider where the Ark has been, why it was missing, and the attitudes of worship our story warns against.

Before Saul became Israel's first king, the nation was led directly by God. Since Moses' time, the Levitical priesthood has played a key role in mediating between God and His people. God's guidance was sought for major decisions. Israel was a theocracy, where priests guided the narrative of salvation through sacrifices and festivals, all aimed at bringing the people closer to God's heart through worship and dedication.

By the time we read 1 Samuel chapter four, corruption and self-interest had deeply infiltrated the priesthood, causing the image of God in temple services to become greatly distorted. The high priest's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were extorting worshipers for personal gain, coercing sexually immoral acts from women serving in the temple, and God's reputation had suffered significantly. The entire nation had come to see God as a lucky charm used for personal exploitation rather than the Savior of their souls and their rightful king.

Pause here and reflect. Are there ways we do this today? Is it tempting to approach worship with selfish pride, murmuring prayers for personal gain? Do we treat God like a rabbit's foot keychain, frustrated when He doesn't meet our demands? Have we ever marched into the battles of our day, wielding a scripture promise taken out of context, wearing a religious slogan on our shirts, and judging if God is real based on how quickly we get what we want from Him?

In the third verse of 1 Samuel 4, the people carry the Ark of the Covenant into battle without invitation. Instead of God leading the Israelites, they assume control of Him. They ignore the detailed instructions for moving the Ark from place to place. God's people have become their own gods. In many ways, they have exchanged the Glory of God for their own desires, all while cloaking their selfishness in religiosity.

The battle that follows is a devastating defeat for the Jewish people. Many soldiers are killed, the sacrilegious priests are slain, and the Philistines seize the Ark. The day ends sadly with the birth of a child named Ichabod, which means "the Glory of God is gone."

Twenty years later, David hopes to return the Ark of the Covenant with the Shekinah Glory to its rightful place of true worship. Instead of a transaction of incantations and gestures designed to fulfill selfish desires, this worship requires submission to the Almighty Creator of the universe.

Today, let us bow in recognition of the One who is worthy of our adoration. May we trade our tendency toward self-centered, half-hearted worship for the acknowledgment of our deep need for forgiveness, grace, and guidance from the One who has crossed the galaxies to redeem us.

1. What items do you own that require special care? How do you care for them? Are you ever concerned that someone else might not take good enough care of them?
2. What are some ways you've seen others treat God like their lucky charm? How are you tempted to do the same?
3. What parts of your life do you struggle to submit and surrender to God's guidance? How can you turn that into an act of worship today?

WEEK 2 – WEDNESDAY - Uzzah

2 Samuel 6:3-11

They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab's house, which was on a hill. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, were guiding the cart that carried the Ark of God. Ahio walked in front of the Ark. David and all the people of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments—lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.

But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out his hand and steadied the Ark of God. Then the LORD's anger was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him dead because of this. So Uzzah died right there beside the Ark of God.

David was angry because the LORD's anger had burst out against Uzzah. He named that place Perez-uzzah (which means "to burst out against Uzzah"), as it is still called today.

David was now afraid of the LORD, and he asked, "How can I ever bring the Ark of the LORD back into my care?" So David decided not to move the Ark of the LORD into the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-edom of Gath. The Ark of the LORD remained there in Obed-edom's house for three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and his entire household.

It's tempting to skip this part of the story. The death of Uzzah raises many difficult questions, and I want to be honest from the start—we won't be able to address them all thoroughly. Sadly, we might overlook the concern that matters most to you. I encourage you to participate in a Crosswalk small group experience to explore even further.

Uzzah's death feels sudden, brutal, and capricious. Isn't Uzzah just trying to help? Stories like this highlight a stark contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the love of Jesus in the Gospels, creating a divide in how we understand God the Father and His Son. It gets even more complicated when we hear Jesus' claim to be the I Am, the Yahweh God of the Old Testament (John 8:58). Wait, this isn't a comparison between an angry Father and a loving Son? This is the same God all along? Maybe that's the key to understanding. Let's compare this story with one from the New Testament, assuming Jesus is the God of both.

The Gospels tell the story of a woman desperately seeking healing (Luke 8:43-48). She limps through a crowd, weakened from twelve years of bleeding, trying to reach Jesus to ask for relief. Suddenly, the center of the moving mass shifts toward her, and Jesus appears just inches away. On impulse, she reaches out to touch Him.

The woman reaches out, touches Jesus, and is healed. Uzzah reaches out, touches the Ark with the presence of Jesus, and dies. How is this different?

The Children of Israel received detailed instructions on how to transport the Ark from one place to another. It was to be carried on poles resting on the shoulders of Kohathite men, a specific family of Levites tasked with caring for the most sacred symbols of the temple. For the past 20 years, the Ark had been kept in the house of Abinadab, a Kohathite priest. His sons grew up caring for it. Now, as priests themselves, Uzzah and Ahio were entrusted with transporting the Ark at the king's request.

As they evaluate their task, these priests choose to imitate the methods used by their Philistine enemies instead of following God's instructions. They consider the eight-mile journey to Jerusalem, which ends with a steep uphill climb, and decide to place the ark on a cart rather than carry it on their shoulders. While David and his companions engage in spirit-filled worship, the words of Jesus describing the care that should be taken are overshadowed by the opinions of Uzzah and Ahio

The climax of our story happens at a bend in the road where the team of oxen shudders and stumbles. The Ark wobbles dangerously, and Uzzah faces a choice. The decision to ignore God's words has caused this problem. He knows not to touch the Ark with his hands. But if the Ark shatters on the ground, it will be a disaster. He will be the center of scrutiny as a nation seeks an explanation for why the word of God had been set aside. He believes he is strong enough (the name Uzzah means strength) to fix his failure, so he reaches out to save God, and Jesus stops the procession. Uzzah's life ends, and this bend in the road will be called "breach of strength."

While we don't know Uzzah's eternal salvation, it is clear that Jesus is uncomfortable letting us believe we are the appropriate architects of worship. Our lives are at risk when we ignore His voice and depend on the strength of our efforts. Worship is submission to Him, rather than control over Him.

Touching Jesus is not the problem. When we reach out for Jesus, understanding our need, we find healing. However, when we reach out to adjust Him to our opinions, biases, and selfishness, to reposition Him on the cart of our compromises, we forfeit the life He intends for us.

1. How many times have you moved homes in your life? What is your least favorite part of the moving process?
2. On a scale of 1-10, how opinionated are you? What feedback do people give you about this?
3. What unresolved questions do you have about the story of Uzzah? Who would you like to talk with about them?

WEEK 2 – THURSDAY – David Dances

1 Chronicles 15:1-2; 13

David now built several buildings for himself in the City of David. He also prepared a place for the Ark of God and set up a special tent for it. Then he commanded, "No one except the Levites may carry the Ark of God. The LORD has chosen them to carry the Ark of the LORD and to serve him forever."

[Then David said to the priests...] Because you Levites did not carry the Ark the first time, the anger of the LORD our God burst out against us. We failed to ask God how to move it properly."

2 Samuel 6:12-15

Then King David was told, "The LORD has blessed Obed-edom's household and everything he has because of the Ark of God." So David went there and brought the Ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the City of David with a great celebration. After the men who were carrying the Ark of the LORD had gone six steps, David sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. And David danced before the LORD with all his might, wearing a priestly garment. So David and all the

people of Israel brought up the Ark of the LORD with shouts of joy and the blowing of rams' horns.

The tragic death of Uzzah stopped the joyful procession heading for Jerusalem. Feeling angry and afraid, David refused to continue and left the Ark in the home of Obed-Edom, a Levite. In his confusion, David must have turned to the Scriptures to find out what had gone wrong. There, he discovered the detailed instructions for how the Ark should be transported and rededicated himself to restore corporate worship of Yahweh.

For three months, David prepared to retrieve the Ark. During that time, he received hopeful reports that God's presence had blessed everyone in Obed-Edom's household, and his determination grew stronger. Finally, David led the crowd of priests and worshipers to Perez-Uzzah to continue the process of bringing God back to the center of Israel.

Several aspects stand out in the descriptions of that day. First, David is so devoted to God that he stopped to make a sacrifice after just six steps on the 8-mile journey. Sacrificing a bull and a fattened calf symbolized submission, repentance, and acceptance of forgiveness. In reality, David isn't primarily making a sacrifice to God but is accepting God's sacrifice on his behalf. Some translations suggest that the process paused after every sixth step for additional sacrifices. Echoes of the Sabbath resonate as the group labors every six steps and then rests in God's salvation on the seventh.

Second, David dances with all his might. Whatever you make of this detail, it is undeniably joyful, loud, and heartfelt. The description leaves no room for spectators to remain neutral about the activity. Just like today, this would have been objectionable to some and liberating to others. Some must have joined in, while others shrank back. David's dance prompts us to consider the essence of worship. From person to person, God's greatest desire is that we worship with all our might in the style or language of our most meaningful expression.

Third, David removes his robes. He sheds his identity as king and embraces the attire of an ordinary person. Whether with head bowed, hands lifted, shouting at the top of your lungs, or whispering quietly, true worship is the response of a sinner meeting their Savior. This kind of worship isn't about style, reputation, or achievement. It is the expression made when accepted in the presence of the only One worthy of praise.

Finally, you probably noticed that David appears to dance and worship in the same way on the day Uzzah died. In both cases, he engaged with his whole spirit. However, the second instance is different. The book of John tells the story of Jesus meeting a woman at Jacob's well in Samaria. This woman asks about the right way to worship, and Jesus replies that God desires us to worship in spirit and in truth. As it turns out, listening to God and embracing His Word are just as important as our expressions of adoration toward Him.

So, David danced before the Lord, in spirit and in truth.

1. What is your first memory of attending a worship service (if you have one)? What was it like? What made sense, and what didn't?
2. Have you worshipped in different styles? What were they?
3. What element of worship do you find most meaningful? Why do you think that is?

4. Spend a minute contemplating Jesus' love and acceptance. Consider listening to the worship playlist for the upcoming weekend from your campus or another campus as you go about your day.

WEEK 2 – FRIDAY – Worship Critics

2 Samuel 6:16-23

But as the Ark of the LORD entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she was filled with contempt for him.

They brought the Ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the special tent David had prepared for it. And David sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD. When he had finished his sacrifices, David blessed the people in the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies. Then he gave to every Israelite man and woman in the crowd a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people returned to their homes.

When David returned home to bless his own family, Michal, the daughter of Saul, came out to meet him. She said in disgust, "How distinguished the king of Israel looked today, shamelessly exposing himself to the servant girls like any vulgar person might do!"

David retorted to Michal, "I was dancing before the LORD, who chose me above your father and all his family! He appointed me as the leader of Israel, the people of the LORD, so I celebrate before the LORD. Yes, and I am willing to look even more foolish than this, even to be humiliated in my own eyes! But those servant girls you mentioned will indeed think I am distinguished!" So Michal, the daughter of Saul, remained childless throughout her entire life.

Contempt is such a strong word. As the Ark of the Covenant and the dancing procession approach the city center, the loud throng passes the palace. Michal, David's wife, gathers at a window to observe the parade. Suddenly, her jaw drops when she catches sight of her husband, barely recognizable in the crowd. He has stripped off the robes that identify his royalty. She sees him twirl and jump, twisting and shouting. Has he lost his mind? How humiliating. Michal feels nothing but contempt.

Have you noticed how often we look down on things we don't understand? We turn our noses up at food we don't recognize, make fun of accents from incredibly complex languages, and mock ideas because they aren't our own. I'm not sure if it's a way to feel better about ourselves or a defense against having to learn something new. Either way, most of us are quick to judge our differences and eager to share those judgments with others. Maybe we should slow down and be forewarned.

David comes home after an intense day of full-bodied worship, hoping to share the blessing with his family. It's been a wonderful day placing God at the center of his world. Then, as he kicks off his shoes and sets aside his barely worn robes, he is met with angry insults. Michal's judgment is that David's worship is completely wrong.

The core of Michal's intensity is her humiliation that David has not upheld his superiority over the people. He took off his royal robes and dressed in simple undergarments, then danced like a fool. The main point for us? She feels very comfortable judging David's worship. This, the scriptures condemn.

High church vs. modern worship, drums vs. the organ, T-shirts and jeans or suit and tie—there are many ways to divide into arguments. However, ultimately, most of these debates come down to a readiness to judge others in ways that are harmful and offensive to Christ. We can learn from respectful, open dialogue, and we should align our worship practices with Scripture, always aiming to grow closer to Jesus. But don't assume that God welcomes our criticism of anyone's worship. We are called to care, to love, and to end the worship wars.

A final thought. How should you respond when faced with unfair judgment about your sincere worship? Do what David did: examine your motivation, surrender yourself to God, and double down. If your spirit is in the right place, commit to worshipping more fully than you did yesterday. Dance, my friend. Dance.

1. How many different countries in the world have you visited? How many different states of the Union? What are your favorites?
2. Have you ever been told you have an accent? Where from?
3. Which form or aspect of worship do you find easiest to criticize? What have you found that takes away a critical attitude?

IT'S COMPLICATED SEASON 2 - WEEK 3

By Dave Ferguson

WEEK 3 – MONDAY – Little Things

2 Samuel 11:1-5

In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home. Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, "I'm pregnant."

Psalms 32:1-2

Blessed is he

whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man

whose sin the LORD does not count against him
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

Over the next two weeks, we will study 2 Samuel 11 and 12, focusing on the story of King David, Bathsheba, Uriah, and Nathan. While reading the verses in chronological order, we will examine two themes one at a time. This week, I invite you to reflect on David the murderer. Next week, we will explore David the adulterer. I hope this approach helps clarify why we focus on certain parts of the text now and save others for next week.

As I write this morning, online media is flooded with videos showing the horrific assassination of a public figure. Of course, social media quickly reacts by offering sides, dehumanizing discussions, and sharing many ghastly takes on the situation. It all makes me wonder, how does a person come to the point where they are willing to take another person's life in cold blood?

You, like me, are a good person. Sure, you face problems, temptations, and failures. But murder? We're far from that, right? Our passage suggests otherwise.

King David has been a model follower of God. The phrase, "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22), seems to apply, at least up to this point. In the story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah, everything goes off the rails. It all begins with a simple phrase.

The opening verse of our study states, "In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites." (2 Samuel 16:1) A sequence of events unfolds in this story, ultimately leading to premeditated murder. It is remarkable how quickly David

progresses from innocence to deep, unpleasant guilt. Notice the first step on the escalator: “When kings normally go out to war.”

The Israelite army does what armies usually do. They go to war in the springtime. But their king is missing. Instead, we find him crawling out of bed in the middle of the day, indulged and pampered, while others risk their lives on his behalf. David moves from absence to lust, coercion to adultery (and maybe even rape), deception to bribery and entrapment, murder plot to mass execution and cover-up. It's a story of how to lose your soul in ten easy steps.

David has access to power, privilege, and resources you might not. However, we all have the same starting point. It begins with neglecting our responsibilities. The consequences of shirking our commitments go beyond just earning a reputation for laziness. It opens the door to much worse steps ahead.

It's not always easy to be where we've promised to be or to do what we've committed to. However, following through on these simple things is our best defense against ending up imprisoned behind the bars of deeply consequential regret.

1. Are you someone who keeps a physical to-do list? Why or why not?
2. Is there something on your list of responsibilities that you're avoiding? Is there something you keep delaying and find easy to neglect?
3. What have you been avoiding that could lead to regrettable consequences or compromise your character? What would you like to tell Jesus about that?

WEEK 3 – TUESDAY – Multiplication

2 Samuel 11:6-11

Then David sent word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” So Joab sent him to David. When Uriah arrived, David asked him how Joab and the army were getting along and how the war was progressing. Then he told Uriah, “Go on home and relax.” David even sent a gift to Uriah after he had left the palace. But Uriah didn't go home. He slept that night at the palace entrance with the king's palace guard.

When David heard that Uriah had not gone home, he summoned him and asked, “What's the matter? Why didn't you go home last night after being away for so long?”

Uriah replied, “The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and Joab and my master's men are camping in the open fields. How could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I would never do such a thing.”

Psalms 32:3-5

When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped

as in the heat of summer. Selah

Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the LORD"—
and you forgave
the guilt of my sin.

A simple lack of motivation or indulgence in excuses allows David to nap while his men are at war. He has shown the heart of a warrior in the past. So he's entitled to sit this one out, right? With this one mistake, momentum builds, and lustful eyes lead to a coercive affair with Bathsheba. Ah-oh, she's pregnant.

Missing his appointment with the army was a mistake. The affair with Bathsheba was a sin. Now David is so deep into it that he can't easily back out. The snare has fully tightened around his ankle. It won't be long before the truth comes out. David must act quickly to control the story and protect his reputation. So he sends for Uriah.

Can you feel the pace of events speeding up? It begins with a small mistake that no one would see as sinful. It's just a poor choice. But things escalate quickly, and once momentum takes hold, the weight of sin pulls David down a dark path into a deep hole.

This is how it works. This is the dark truth about compromise. Once we begin negotiating our values or bargaining with character, we quickly find ourselves caught in a multiplication of problems that pulls us into the quicksand of sin. No wonder God warns us against playing around with morality. It makes sense that Jesus describes righteousness as freedom (Galatians 5:1).

Today, I invite you to experience a free life found only in Jesus. May we diligently show up for the small things, seek guidance from the footprints of Christ, and be released from temptation by bathing in His grace.

1. What pyramid schemes have you been asked to join? How do you feel about them?
2. Have you ever been trapped or stuck in a room? What actions did you take to escape?
3. Are you feeling spiritually stuck in any way today? What would you like to say to God about it?

WEEK 3 – WEDNESDAY – Scheming

2 Samuel 11:11-15

Uriah replied, "The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and Joab and my master's men are camping in the open fields. How could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I would never do such a thing."

"Well, stay here today," David told him, "and tomorrow you may return to the army." So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. Then David invited him to dinner and got him drunk. But even then he couldn't get Uriah to go home to his wife. Again he slept at the palace entrance with the king's palace guard.

So the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. The letter instructed Joab, "Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed."

Psalms 32:6-7

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you
while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters rise,
they will not reach him.
You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

Every once in a while, the painful consequences of our failures are easily avoided, cleverly sidestepped, or simply don't happen. However, as we feel the floodwaters of our poor decisions rise around us, we often turn to more deceptive schemes in an effort to escape. First, we try to create opportunities for our guilt to sink into the shadows. Eventually, we move from passive strategies to actively manipulating our surroundings, hoping to change the circumstances.

David's problem is that Bathsheba cannot claim her pregnancy is the normal family growth resulting from her marriage. Her husband, Uriah, has been dutifully serving the king at the battlefield. Unless... The guilty mind searches for loopholes and opportunities, scanning the horizon for off-ramps of deniability and convenience. David finds one. There is a tiny window of time in which he must act. Uriah needs to be called home so David can rewrite the truth and avoid the consequences of his sin.

One of the biggest problems for the morally compromised is relying on a person with unwavering standards for their escape plan. Uriah has such high ethics that, when offered a stay-at-home vacation from the war, he refuses to switch from warrior mode to husband. Uriah does what David has not: he fulfills his responsibilities. All that is needed is for Uriah to sleep in his own bed for one night. Instead, he stays on the steps of the palace, guarding his betrayer. The bait remains untaken. It will be clear that the child is not Uriah's. David must shift from passive opportunity to decisive action. He writes a letter to his general, orchestrating the death of his loyal neighbor, places it in the hands of his victim, and widens the circle of guilt.

Do you see the slavery of sin? Each step makes it harder for David to turn around, repent, and set things right. What about your footsteps? Are you headed in a direction filled with regret and distance from

Jesus? If so, there will never be a better time to turn to Him, receive forgiveness, and unload the baggage of sin weighing you down.

1. When you travel, do you pack lightly, or do you bring as much as possible? Why do you think that is?
2. When you problem-solve, do you prefer a wait-and-see strategy or an aggressive approach to the situation? Why?
3. Is there something in your life you know you need to repent for and turn away from? How is that going for you? What help could you get from Jesus?

WEEK 3 – THURSDAY – Disciples

2 Samuel 11:14-21

So the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. The letter instructed Joab, “Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed.” So Joab assigned Uriah to a spot close to the city wall where he knew the enemy’s strongest men were fighting. And when the enemy soldiers came out of the city to fight, Uriah the Hittite was killed along with several other Israelite soldiers.

Then Joab sent a battle report to David. He told his messenger, “Report all the news of the battle to the king. But he might get angry and ask, ‘Why did the troops go so close to the city? Didn’t they know there would be shooting from the walls? Wasn’t Abimelech son of Gideon killed at Thebez by a woman who threw a millstone down on him from the wall? Why would you get so close to the wall?’ Then tell him, ‘Uriah the Hittite was killed, too.’”

Psalms 32:8-10

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you and watch over you.

Do not be like the horse or the mule,

which have no understanding

but must be controlled by bit and bridle

or they will not come to you.

Many are the woes of the wicked,

but the LORD’S unfailing love

surrounds the man who trusts in him.

In the course of our story, David has moved far from being the heroic good guy. His cover-up is in full effect as Uriah dies in battle alongside his fellow soldiers. Maybe the king will get away with it.

David is not in the movie frame as Uriah falls. In fact, he is miles away, engaged in plausible deniability. Here is a scary truth: the deeper we go in our sin, the more likely we are to draw others into a compromise along with us. Sin spreads wider, not just deeper. In this part of our story, Joab has been tasked with a horrific deed. Whether or not he feels free to argue or refuse is unclear. But, in short order, he is imposing his own strategic spin on the plans, ensuring their success.

This principle is reliable. When we compromise our character, we inevitably plant seeds of rebellion in others. Parents, our lack of integrity fosters habits of hypocrisy in our children. When our stories involve

gossip and rumors, our friends often join in to tear down our targets. Business owners or team leaders, it shouldn't surprise us when employees start to shade the truth about finances if they see the same behavior in us. Sometimes by invitation, often by example, our weaknesses become contagious.

The good news is that there's something infectious about gentleness, kindness, and following Jesus as well. In a world filled with terrible acts and chaos, a loving, steady character stands out in bold relief. There are really only two choices: moving toward Jesus or away from Him. When we choose to move toward Jesus, it often inspires others to do the same.

1. Is there someone you can mimic or imitate? Who is it? What famous person would you like to be able to impersonate?
2. Who are two mentors you admire? How have they influenced your life?
3. What habit would you like to break? What would you want to say to Jesus about it?

WEEK 3 – FRIDAY – Guilt

2 Samuel 11:22-25

So the messenger went to Jerusalem and gave a complete report to David. "The enemy came out against us in the open fields," he said. "And as we chased them back to the city gate, the archers on the wall shot arrows at us. Some of the king's men were killed, including Uriah the Hittite."

"Well, tell Joab not to be discouraged," David said. "The sword devours this one today and that one tomorrow! Fight harder next time, and conquer the city!"

Psalms 32: 11

Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, all you who obey him!
Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

The messenger shows wisdom and doesn't wait for David to get angry as he reports the failed attack, during which many of the king's men died. He mentions Uriah's name from the very beginning. This part of the story highlights two points.

First, awareness of David's plot is beginning to leak past his inner circle. The pool of those with insight into what he has done is steadily growing. We all know how people talk. Several individuals are likely starting to compare details gathered from whispers and observations. Messengers have been sent to communicate with Bathsheba, bring her to the palace, and exchange notes. Many must have seen the beautiful woman coming and going from David's quarters not long before her husband's strange visit, during which he sleeps on the palace steps instead of going home. Weird. Now, a messenger returns with tales from the battle, knowing it's wise to mention the name Uriah when describing a poorly planned battle. Does his tone hint at a wink as courtiers listen? These are the kinds of things people love to talk about.

Second, the difference between David's usual response and this specific situation is revealing. David would naturally be furious about losing his good men due to poor leadership. Most likely, those nearby would have overheard the king, experienced in warfare, criticizing those who failed to meet his standards. Here, he reacts to the bad news by saying, "Well, you win some and you lose some." Onlookers would have noticed the sharp drop in his standards because of his sin.

There is one more problem to recognize, a silent one. Have you ever noticed how exhausting it is to carry guilt? With each passing moment, the burden on David grows heavier. Likely, over the next few months, his personality will diminish, and depression will take over. He will struggle to live with his new identity as a mass murderer, abuser, and the opposite of everything he had hoped to be as king. Years later, David would describe what it was like. "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." (Psalm 32:3)

By the end of next week's study, Nathan will confront David, and his humiliation will be complete. This will lead to confession, repentance, forgiveness, and the healing that comes from stepping into the light. There is more to come. But for now, listen carefully to another part of David's reflection on this experience: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalm 32:5)

1. When was the last time you were asked to deliver bad news? What did you do to try to make it more palatable? How was it taken?
2. Have you ever suffered a change in personality from guilt? What did you do to change that? Are you still suffering? What could you ask Jesus to carry for you?

IT'S COMPLICATED - WEEK 4

By Dave Ferguson

WEEK 4 – MONDAY – The Look

2 Samuel 11:26-27

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. When the period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her to the palace, and she became one of his wives. Then she gave birth to a son. But the LORD was displeased with what David had done.

Psalms 51:1-3

Have mercy on me, O God,
because of your unfailing love.
Because of your great compassion,
blot out the stain of my sins.
Wash me clean from my guilt.
Purify me from my sin.
For I recognize my rebellion;
it haunts me day and night.

Last week, we started studying 2 Samuel 11-12, focusing on David's rapid decline into the life of a mass murderer. Today, we go back to the beginning of the story to examine David the adulterer and his sexual sins.

Today's passage concludes both themes as Uriah is dead, and Bathsheba goes to the palace to join the king's harem. Soon, everything will become public when Nathan confronts David. But, before we reach the showdown between the prophet and the king, let's take a moment to revisit how it all began.

The second verse of chapter 11 states, "Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath." There is nothing inherently sinister about viewing the city from above, and it's reasonable to understand that when his eyes caught sight of a beautiful woman, naked in her rooftop bath, during what she likely believed was a private moment, he would notice. It's important to recognize that there is a significant difference between temptation and sin. Temptation occurs when the opportunity appears through no fault of your own. Jesus was tempted. You and I will be tempted. Sin happens when we yield to the temptation and deliberately choose to do something we shouldn't.

The opportunity David encounters is available to you and me every day. Roadside billboards, social media algorithms, entertainment, and even the presence of those around us can be trivial chances for our minds to wander into dangerous, lustful territory. Ubiquitous online invitations urge us to take things a step further and engage in pornographic materials. Once our eyes linger, we are a heartbeat away from crossing the line from innocence to guilt.

If only David had tried something I learned years ago—the practice of "bouncing your eyes." The idea is that, in the inevitable moment we see something that triggers the warning lights on our radar of God's call to pure thinking, we look away (bounce our eyes) while repeating a protective phrase. The mantra I find most effective is from Job 31:1, "I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a woman."

So here's the hope: during the time between stimuli hitting my cornea and registering on my retina, my defenses activate, eyes bounce, and the thought, "I have made a covenant with my eyes," flashes through my brain. Commitment restated. Disaster averted. Make no mistake, this takes practice.

Whatever previous efforts David made to protect the purity of his heart, he fails at this moment. He looks long enough to entertain inappropriate possibilities, inquires about her identity, and finally, sends for her to meet him. In a short afternoon, he indulges his eyes and falls into selfish actions that will change his life, his family, and his kingdom forever.

1. Which sense do you value most? Why?
2. What are your thoughts on the idea of "bouncing your eyes"? Which scripture mantra would be most helpful for you to memorize for moments of temptation?
3. What temptation have you recently needed to be delivered from? What do you need to ask God for forgiveness today?

WEEK 4 – TUESDAY - Objects

WARNING: Today's topic touches on rape and abuse. If you have struggled with these issues, please proceed with caution. If you are triggered in any way, you can ask for help by reaching out to a pastor at your local campus, requesting a referral at office@crosswalkvillage.com, or by calling the Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.4673.

2 Samuel 11:2-5 NASB

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."

It is helpful to notice the verbs used in this fairly literal NASB translation of today's passage describing David's actions. He saw, he inquired, he took, and he lay. His problems develop gradually from the initial moment of observing a woman to full, undeniable transgression. It is difficult to escape the sense of possession and objectification that overtakes him.

This makes me wonder: is the first step in an adulterous affair often, or even always, to objectify another person for our pleasure, conquest, distraction, or healing? The murder of Uriah is similar. David treats both the husband and the wife as chess pieces for his selfish interests. They are his to manipulate, his to possess, his to take. Last week, we asked what it takes to reach the point of murder. The same question can be asked of adultery: does it require dehumanization and objectification?

There is an additional dark cloud over this story. While commentators debate whether Bathsheba is complicit in the affair, several troubling factors are clear. We know that women can be just as willing as men to break marriage vows. It's possible she intentionally puts herself in David's line of sight, responds happily to the king's messengers, and quickly joins him in bed with a heart forged by adulterous betrayal. However, we can't ignore that the power imbalance between them is significant. Refusing his advances

could lead to serious consequences, including the murder of her husband, albeit for different reasons. The language describing Bathsheba's role is passive, making it read like something is being done to her rather than by her. Then, she sends the king the terse message: "I am pregnant." Is she essentially saying, "Now look what you've done. You have more than violated me—you've made me a disgrace to my husband." Finally, when she learns of Uriah's death, she mourns rather than experiencing relief. Honestly, there is as much evidence of coercive sex or even rape as there is of consensual adultery.

Many things get ruined during those few days. The once admirable king makes small compromises, succumbs to temptation, and embraces power and entitlement to take what isn't his. Then, as often happens, there are consequences to deal with. Making things even worse, David involves other good people. The cover-up creates a whole group of deceitful, murderous allies. Could there be a more powerful example of God's warning that sin kills—first on the inside, then, eventually, spreading to your wider community?

Hopefully, you're not contemplating an affair or murder. But you might be using dehumanizing language in an online argument, treating someone as less valuable than your loved ones, or thinking about how to manipulate someone for your gain. If so, while you still have time, repent, seek forgiveness, and turn to Jesus.

1. Have you or someone you love experienced the kinds of abuse suggested in this story? Who have you turned to for healing and relief? What passages of scripture bring you hope?
2. Do you connect with this story because of something you've done? Is there something you need to confess, make right, or seek counseling for?

WEEK 4 – WEDNESDAY – Obvious

2 Samuel 12:1-5

So the LORD sent Nathan the prophet to tell David this story: "There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle. The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter. One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest."

David was furious. "As surely as the LORD lives," he vowed, "any man who would do such a thing deserves to die!"

Psalms 51:7-11

Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Oh, give me back my joy again;
you have broken me—
now let me rejoice.
Don't keep looking at my sins.
Remove the stain of my guilt.
Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Renew a loyal spirit within me.
Do not banish me from your presence,
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

Have you ever felt your face flush with embarrassment when you realize how wrong something you did was? Maybe someone repeats what you just said, and you respond, "When you put it like that, it sounds awful," even though all they did was echo your words. This is David's situation as he sits before Nathan.

Unaware of where things will end, David invites the prophet into his court and listens as his guest tells a story. Nathan is wise. He doesn't just blurt out the king's faults. Instead, he crafts a narrative that quickly sparks empathy in anyone listening. David leans forward with interest at each new detail. As the story reaches its climax, he can no longer hide his anger. "That presumptuous thief deserves to die," he yells. There it is, the mirror's glance that shows how far you've strayed from your original intention. David's stomach drops at Nathan's conclusion, "You are that man."

It's a tough moment, coming face to face with your selfishness, rebellion, and sin. Somehow, the shock of Nathan's reproach causes the king to bypass the common practice of denial and excuse-making and go directly to confession.

Do you have people in your life who have the character and permission to tell you the truth? Is there someone close to you with enough integrity to risk your friendship rather than watch you destroy the important things in life? Or have you carefully surrounded yourself with people who are either too weak to confront your flaws or have such obvious problems of their own that they couldn't risk damaging their own glass house?

When someone offers you a message that feels critical, slow down and think about what you might learn from it. And when you're delivering tough feedback to someone who has strayed from the right path, consider holding back on direct accusations for a moment. Use stories, metaphors, and questions to help your friend listen without becoming defensive and to give the Holy Spirit space for conviction.

1. Who are your five closest friends outside of your family? Do they realize how close you feel? Should you consider telling them?
2. Who have you given permission to tell you difficult truths?
3. What is something you've noticed in a friend that worries you? How can you use Nathan's example to craft a conversation?
4. What has someone told you lately that you should spend more time thinking about? What would you like to say to God about that?

WEEK 4 – THURSDAY – Guilt

2 Samuel 12:5-10

David was furious. “As surely as the LORD lives,” he vowed, “any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are that man! The LORD, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. I gave you your master’s house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. Why, then, have you despised the word of the LORD and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife. From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah’s wife to be your own.

Psalms 51:12-15

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and make me willing to obey you.
Then I will teach your ways to rebels,
and they will return to you.
Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.
Unseal my lips, O Lord,
that my mouth may praise you.

We’ve reached a point in our story where David is overwhelmed with guilt. He has taken what isn’t his, betrayed his family, ruined neighbors’ lives, shed innocent blood, and become a cautionary tale of power and entitlement. Tomorrow’s lesson will examine the consequences of wrongful actions that are never completely avoided, no matter how much we repent. But today, we see the grace and salvation Jesus offers to everyone who confesses.

Before we go further, I have to admit that part of me feels relieved to read this story. Some Christians jump between Biblical success stories, skipping the troubling ones, in a way that makes following God seem impossible. In contrast, between the stories of Moses crossing the Red Sea, David slaying Goliath, and Peter preaching the resurrected Christ, we have opportunity to read about their failures and flaws, allowing space for me to follow Jesus despite my imperfections.

The book of 1 John clearly states that no one has walked so far from Jesus that salvation is impossible if they choose to repent. It says, “If we confess our sins to [Jesus], he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness” (v9), and, “if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.” (v7)

Guilt and shame are not the same. While these two words are often used interchangeably and have similar meanings, understanding their difference is important. Guilt means feeling remorse for a specific action or behavior. Shame is a feeling that you are beyond redemption. When responded to correctly, guilt reminds us of our need for forgiveness and draws us to Jesus. Shame, on the other hand, makes us believe we can’t be forgiven and creates a barrier between us and Jesus. Guilt is about what you did. Shame is about who you are.

So, if you feel guilty about something you've done, that is likely the Holy Spirit prompting you to confess at the feet of Christ, where forgiveness is abundant. But if you believe your only option is secrecy and silence, while an inner voice torments you with shouts of God's rejection, I encourage you to let Jesus remove the shame, listen to His voice of compassion, and immerse yourself in the pardon of His grace.

1. What words would you use to describe your typical inner voice's commentary? Where do you think this originates from?
2. When is a time someone showed you unexpected grace? How did it make you feel?
3. What word of encouragement would you like to receive from Jesus today? Is there a passage of scripture you can turn to for this message? What is it?

WEEK 4 – FRIDAY – Consequences

2 Samuel 12:7, 11-13

Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man!

"This is what the LORD says: Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes, and he will go to bed with them in public view. You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel."

Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Psalms 51:16-19

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.

You do not want a burnt offering.

The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.

You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Look with favor on Zion and help her;

rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Then you will be pleased with sacrifices offered in the right spirit—

with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.

Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.

Before we move on from these troubling passages, there's one more point to consider. The pages of scripture show that it is unrealistic to believe forgiveness and acceptance conveniently eliminate consequences. Engaging in sinful behavior threatens our relationship with God. Not because He will eventually forsake us or be unwilling to forgive, but because sin subtly drives us far enough away from salvation that we would no longer reach for the hand of Jesus. The Bible suggests that God won't give up on us before we give up on Him. Our sins lead us to reject God, rather than the other way around.

The story of salvation throughout scripture shows that the effects of sin are destruction, suffering, and death. The same is true in David's life. He is forgiven, but his actions still carry consequences. I believe God has the power to intervene and administer punishment through divine action. However, if we examine closely, we see that most consequences occur organically. The ultimate example is Jesus on the cross, bearing our sins and suffering their effects. While some say Jesus' suffering results from the

angry hand of God's vengeance, the Bible clearly indicates that God steps back and allows sin to take its natural course with His Son. That is why Jesus cries out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)

Another classic example that raises questions about the origins of consequences is the story of the Exodus and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Several passages say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 7:3, 9:12), while others say that Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God (8:15, 8:32). The same author presents both perspectives. This is enlightening. The intersection of choices made available by God and those selected by Pharaoh results in the rejection of Yahweh. Pharaoh's mind is set because God has given him the environment to cement his choice. Who is responsible for that outcome? Both are.

David has made numerous disastrous choices. They would, very naturally, affect his marriages, parentage, friendships, military leadership, direction of the country, and legacy without God doing much of anything. So, as we read today's verses, it is fair to ask if God is making a punitive threat or announcing a cause-and-effect prophecy that starts with the words, "Because of what you have done." (2 Samuel 12:11) This we know for sure: our sins have consequences that are difficult to bear—one more reason to ask God to grow us more and more like Jesus.

Finally, we seldom discuss the general effects of sin. The initial acts of rebellion set in motion deadly consequences that compound daily. The results of sin accumulate moment by moment and across generations, spinning uncontrollably like a buzz saw of destruction. Today, there is often no clear link between suffering and the sins that set it loose. A child is abused, or a drunk driver kills a family. The innocent often suffer while the guilty seem to escape.

Meanwhile, we debate what all of this means. Is God not loving? Or was He telling the truth when He warned that choosing to sin would bring death—pervasive, sometimes random death?

1. What is something you bought recently that you wanted to return? Were you able to return it? Have you ever been stuck with a purchase that couldn't be returned?
2. What is something you have done that set loose a series of negative consequences? Have you received forgiveness for those actions?
3. How are you currently suffering from the "general effects of sin," and how would you like to cry out to God about it?

IT'S COMPLICATED SEASON 2 - WEEK 5
WEEK 5 – 2 SAMUEL 13:1-39 – DAVID THE PARENT (ABSALOM)
By Paddy McCoy

WEEK 5 – MONDAY -

WARNING: This week's topic will introduce acts of rape and abuse by family members. If you have struggled with these things, please proceed with caution. If you are triggered in any way, or realize you need more help, you may reach out to a pastor at your local campus, or call the Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.4673.

Life is messy, broken, complicated, and painful. This world is not the one God designed for us back in the Garden of Eden. And though there is beauty to celebrate, there is also evil that will one day be eradicated. Whatever we have experienced or are experienced or will experience, part of the hope we share with one another is in the coming day when God Himself will announce, "[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:4, NIV)

I mentioned him in week one, but I love the importance Eddie Jacku, WWII holocaust survivor, puts on hope. He says, "Hope costs us nothing, but it changes everything." So I put my hope in Jesus, His resurrection, and in where I know our story is going even through our darkest times.

And that line from Revelation 21:4, know that it's what God wants. That's what He's working towards. In the meantime, we have some pretty awful stuff that was never a part of His plan for us, that we have to navigate on this earth from time to time because of evil.

The story for this week is one of those things, and I'll admit, it's not a story I like spending time with. That said, like with any story, there are things we can learn from it for our life today.

The other preface I'll give to you before diving into the story, is to recognize that the clearest revelation of God you and I have been given, is Jesus. When we wonder what God is like, we look to Jesus. When we wonder if God is really loving, we look to Jesus on the cross, laying His life down for ours. So when we read through some of the painful stories of humanity, just know that our God loves us more than we can imagine, meets us in our pain, our grief, and the horrible things we've endured, and seeks to bring hope and healing back into our lives.

With that said, imperfect as it may be, let us read today's story from 2 Samuel 13...

2 Samuel 13:1-7

1 Now David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar. And Amnon, her half brother, fell desperately in love with her. 2 Amnon became so obsessed with Tamar that he became ill. She was a virgin, and Amnon thought he could never have her.

3 But Amnon had a very crafty friend—his cousin Jonadab. He was the son of David's brother Shimea.

4 One day Jonadab said to Amnon, "What's the trouble? Why should the son of a king look so dejected morning after morning?" So Amnon told him, "I am in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

5 “Well,” Jonadab said, “I’ll tell you what to do. Go back to bed and pretend you are ill. When your father comes to see you, ask him to let Tamar come and prepare some food for you. Tell him you’ll feel better if she prepares it as you watch and feeds you with her own hands.”

6 So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. And when the king came to see him, Amnon asked him, “Please let my sister Tamar come and cook my favorite dish as I watch. Then I can eat it from her own hands.” 7 So David agreed and sent Tamar to Amnon’s house to prepare some food for him.

This has all the makings of a very bad story. An unhealthy obsession, a half-brother who is obviously not well, and a cousin willing to conspire to horrific ends.

Oddly, we also see a loving father who is concerned for his sick son, who unknowingly opens the door for how the rest of this story will unfold. But if we’re honest, David had a weakness for women that caused him to make some bad choices too (remember Uriah and Bathsheba?). So though this loving father will soon have a shattered heart, he is not without blame.

Family trauma and cycles don’t break on their own; they get passed on from generation to generation until someone is brave enough to confront them and choose a different route. May we have the courage to be those kinds of people, people that choose to seek whatever means we can to be the best versions of ourselves, which is the best gift we can ever give to another person. And as followers of Jesus, we think He helps us to that end, and He has given us incredible resources like counselors, social workers, doctors, teachers, pastors, and faith communities that can help us along the way.

1. If you know enough about your family history, are there cycles or trauma that happened in the past that have been broken along the way? If so, do you know how that happened?
2. How do you think Jesus helps us become the best version of ourselves? What does this process look like?
3. What do you think Amnon could have done differently to avoid a different outcome in this story, one that could have been redemptive for him and for Tamar?

WEEK 5 - TUESDAY

WARNING: Today’s topic specifically deals with rape and abuse. Again, if you have struggled with these things, please proceed with caution. If you are triggered in any way, or realize you need more help, you may reach out to a pastor at your local campus, or call the Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.4673.

2 Samuel 13:8-14

8 When Tamar arrived at Amnon’s house, she went to the place where he was lying down so he could watch her mix some dough. Then she baked his favorite dish for him. 9 But when she set the serving tray before him, he refused to eat. “Everyone get out of here,” Amnon told his servants. So they all left.

10 Then he said to Tamar, “Now bring the food into my bedroom and feed it to me here.” So Tamar took his favorite dish to him. 11 But as she was feeding him, he grabbed her and demanded, “Come to bed with me, my darling sister.”

12 “No, my brother!” she cried. “Don’t be foolish! Don’t do this to me! Such wicked things aren’t done in Israel. 13 Where could I go in my shame? And you would be called one of the greatest fools in Israel. Please, just speak to the king about it, and he will let you marry me.”

14 But Amnon wouldn't listen to her, and since he was stronger than she was, he raped her.

Talk about a gut punch. I hate reading this story and I really hate the horror of those last three words in verse 14. All I can think is, these kinds of things were never supposed to be a part of our story.

I don't know if you, or someone close to you, has been raped or sexually assaulted. So many victims end up blaming themselves, and they live with the same word Tamar uses in verse 13, shame. The word in the Hebrew is kher-pah, which can also be translated as disgrace. It is a sense of unworthiness, and it causes us to shrink away from others, even those who have shown us nothing but love and kindness.

This is why I make sure people know that shame is not a tool God would ever use on you. Why would God put something on you that would make you feel like you couldn't come to Him? Everything He has ever done is about drawing you near. No, shame is a tool of the devil and must be rebuked in the name of Jesus. If God is the God of amazing grace, then disgrace is the opposite; it is not of God.

But there is something else to discuss in today's story. Amnon became obsessed with Tamar, to the point that he was willing to do anything to have her, even justifying violence and rape. We'll see in the coming verses what his consequences would be, but we all need people in our lives that can speak truth into our lives and help us see where we may be in err. Sometimes, we're too close to see these things ourselves. This is why community is so important for all of us, but ever so important in the community of faith. I'm not saying Amnon did what he did because he didn't have a community to tell him to stop it, I'm just saying we need each other to help us from becoming the worst versions of ourselves.

And to the women reading this story, may you never blame yourselves for the things that have been done to you that should never have been done to you. You are all beautiful children of God, yet this world can be such an evil place. Don't let the world steal your beauty or your strength. And if someone has tried, please, I pray you find the courage to get the help you need to have your strength restored, and that you would let God remind you of what's most true about you - you are his daughter, in whom He loves, and with whom He is well pleased. Did we say that already in this series? Good! We'll say it as many times as it takes until you start to believe it.

1. I'm guessing we've all fought shame at some point in our lives. How do you fight shame when it tries to rear its head in your life?
2. Do you have people in your life that you know love and care about you enough to help redirect your path when you're heading down a road you may regret?
3. There is no more healing place than in the arms of Jesus. I pray you have a place and a community that helps you know that you are wrapped in His arms, always.

WEEK 5 - WEDNESDAY

WARNING: Today's topic continues with the aftermath of a story involving rape and abuse. We want to make sure you are well cared for, so if you have struggled with these things, please proceed with caution. If you are triggered in any way, or realize you need more help, you may reach out to a pastor at your local campus, or call the Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.4673.

2 Samuel 13:15-22

15 Then suddenly Amnon's love turned to hate, and he hated her even more than he had loved her. "Get out of here!" he snarled at her.

16 "No, no!" Tamar cried. "Sending me away now is worse than what you've already done to me." But Amnon wouldn't listen to her. 17 He shouted for his servant and demanded, "Throw this woman out, and lock the door behind her!"

18 So the servant put her out and locked the door behind her. She was wearing a long, beautiful robe, as was the custom in those days for the king's virgin daughters. 19 But now Tamar tore her robe and put ashes on her head. And then, with her face in her hands, she went away crying.

20 Her brother Absalom saw her and asked, "Is it true that Amnon has been with you? Well, my sister, keep quiet for now, since he's your brother. Don't you worry about it." So Tamar lived as a desolate woman in her brother Absalom's house.

21 When King David heard what had happened, he was very angry. 22 And though Absalom never spoke to Amnon about this, he hated Amnon deeply because of what he had done to his sister.

First of all, I recognize that I am a man and can't possibly fathom what all Tamar went through in this story, but I can tell you it breaks my heart and causes me to feel sick inside (and I do recognize that men can experience rape and sexual assault too, and I in no way want to suggest otherwise). These sick feelings are yet another reminder that these are the stories we were never meant to experience or hear.

Secondly, it's interesting isn't it? Amnon's obsession of Tamar drives him to do the unconscionable, then once he does the unconscionable, she becomes the target of his hate as if his feelings are her fault, not his. Oh how we love to place blame on anyone or anything but ourselves.

In reality, Amnon could no longer look at Tamar without seeing the evil that was inside of him. She became a mirror to that which he feared the most about himself, and his hatred towards her was simply his hatred of himself.

Notice how God didn't have to do anything to Amnon in this moment; all He had to do was let Amnon suffer the consequences of his own choices. And no doubt, they were awful. But he is not the victim here; Tamar is, and as we're told she ran away crying and went on to live as a desolate woman in her brother Absalom's house. The other way to translate the word for desolate is to say that she lived a ruined life. My heart breaks to write that line. Oh what Tamar suffered because of the choices of another, and not just another human being, a brother, someone she was supposed to be able to trust in.

That said, even though we'll see Absalom's anger get the best of him, I am thankful Tamar had Absalom's to go to for protection and comfort. Too many people in our world don't have an Absalom. I'd like to think our faith communities could be those places of comfort and protection, but even those are full of humans who do human things. That said, if we are to call ourselves followers of Jesus, then we have an even higher calling to lookout for those that can't lookout for themselves. Or as our fourth end statement at Crosswalk says...

Crosswalk will be a community that lives beyond herself by caring and advocating for the powerless, oppressed and abandoned.

May our communities of faith truly be places of belonging that seek to protect, advocate, and care for those that need us most; and may we do so by keeping our eyes on Jesus, our Mighty God, our Prince of Peace, our Savior, our Healer, and our Redeemer.

1. What are some practical ways that you and I can live beyond ourselves by caring and advocating for the powerless, oppressed, and abandoned among us?
2. What Amnon did was truly evil, but when I read Scripture I come to realize that God would like to save Him too. How do we reconcile our own feelings towards Amnon in this story, or any of the Amnon's in our life, with the God who seeks to save?

WEEK 5 - THURSDAY

2 Samuel 13:23-34a

23 Two years later, when Absalom's sheep were being sheared at Baal-hazor near Ephraim, Absalom invited all the king's sons to come to a feast. 24 He went to the king and said, "My sheep-shearers are now at work. Would the king and his servants please come to celebrate the occasion with me?"

25 The king replied, "No, my son. If we all came, we would be too much of a burden on you."

Absalom pressed him, but the king would not come, though he gave Absalom his blessing.

26 "Well, then," Absalom said, "if you can't come, how about sending my brother Amnon with us?"

"Why Amnon?" the king asked. 27 But Absalom kept on pressing the king until he finally agreed to let all his sons attend, including Amnon. So Absalom prepared a feast fit for a king.

28 Absalom told his men, "Wait until Amnon gets drunk; then at my signal, kill him! Don't be afraid. I'm the one who has given the command. Take courage and do it!" 29 So at Absalom's signal they murdered Amnon. Then the other sons of the king jumped on their mules and fled.

30 As they were on the way back to Jerusalem, this report reached David: "Absalom has killed all the king's sons; not one is left alive!" 31 The king got up, tore his robe, and threw himself on the ground. His advisers also tore their clothes in horror and sorrow.

32 But just then Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimea, arrived and said, "No, don't believe that all the king's sons have been killed! It was only Amnon! Absalom has been plotting this ever since Amnon raped his sister Tamar. 33 No, my lord the king, your sons aren't all dead! It was only Amnon." 34 Meanwhile Absalom escaped.

As we see in this story, Absalom let his hatred for Amnon grow for two years. Two years of playing the scene over and over again in his head. Two years of seeing the woman Tamar become, after Amnon's act.

Hatred is an awful thing. To quote Eddie Jacku again, someone who faced hatred in its extreme form through the Nazis, said "Hate is the beginning of a disease, like cancer. It may kill your enemy, but it will destroy you in the process." (The Happiest Man On Earth) He also said, "Anger leads to fear. Fear leads to hate. Hate leads to death."

I am writing to you on a day where a well-known conservative political activist, 31 years old, was shot and killed at a University campus during a gathering. This is the world we are living in now. We can't disagree anymore. We have so much anger and hatred in us that we'd rather kill one another, than sit down at a table and try to listen to one another, learn from one another, and even love one another. What was that famous line we used to say in school each morning, "United we stand. Divided we fall"? Well how are we doing?

Of course, this series is about the life of David and how complicated it was. How it wasn't just a bed of roses since he was often described as a man after God's own heart. One of the most well-known, well-celebrated figures in all of Scripture had some very dark, very horrible parts of his story.

And so here, he not only had a daughter raped by a son, but now he's also lost his two sons; one to violence, and one to hatred.

As a father, I can't imagine what this must have done to David. I don't know about you, but there are times in my life when I just don't have the words to pray, and even if I could speak, I wouldn't know what to say. I have often cried out the last line of a prayer given by King Jehoshaphat when he and the Israelites were surrounded by enemy armies...

"For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." (2 Chronicles 20:12b, NIV)

I don't know what you've had to endure in this life, or what you may have to in the future, but I do know this, God is with you. He's promised to never leave us or forsake us. He didn't promise us easy, but He did promise that He'd be with us every step of the way. So maybe try this prayer the next time you're overwhelmed, beyond crushed, or at your wits end... "Lord, I don't know what to do, but my eyes are on you."

1. Have you ever let anger over something consume you? If so, are you still dealing with that anger or have you been able to work through it and find healing?
2. When you run out of words to pray, what do you do?
3. If you're a parent, take a moment just to pray over your children for wherever they are, whatever they're facing, whatever they need.

WEEK 5 - FRIDAY

2 Samuel 13:34b-39

34...Then the watchman on the Jerusalem wall saw a great crowd coming down the hill on the road from the west. He ran to tell the king, "I see a crowd of people coming from the Horonaim road along the side of the hill."

35 "Look!" Jonadab told the king. "There they are now! The king's sons are coming, just as I said."

36 They soon arrived, weeping and sobbing, and the king and all his servants wept bitterly with them. 37 And David mourned many days for his son Amnon.

Absalom fled to his grandfather, Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. 38 He stayed there in Geshur for three years. 39 And King David, now reconciled to Amnon's death, longed to be reunited with his son Absalom.

I know this story doesn't mention Tamar again after she goes to Absalom's house where we are told she lived desolate, or ruined. However, as a father to a daughter, I like to imagine that David went to Tamar and tried to console her and love her back to a place of healing and hope. That's what I like to believe happened.

But the focus of the story, as with their culture, was on the men and what happened to them. That said, we know that Absalom escapes and though for a moment, David thought he lost all of his sons, there is a moment of relief when he hears that he only lost one; even though that loss still broke his heart. Even after all that Amnon had done, David loved him.

That's hard for me to hear. I want justice for Tamar and consequences for Amnon, but if I'm honest, I lean in the direction of Absalom; I'm not sure it's justice I want for Tamar as much as revenge. There's a fine line between those two isn't there?

However if I put myself in David's sandals, I grieve for what Tamar has gone through, I grieve for Absalom as he let anger and hatred consume him, and I grieve for Amnon whose father-like weakness for women caused him to do the unthinkable. And of course, I would grieve for Amnon because I can't imagine my own children doing something that wouldn't cause me to miss them horribly if they were gone.

Of all the stories we've chosen to navigate in this series, I'll admit, this one is one of the most complicated for me. I have listened to those who have endured rape and sexual assault tell their stories. I have felt the anger well up inside of me at the injustices in the world. And I thank God that He is the one to sort all this stuff out because I'm certain I wouldn't do a good job if it were up to me.

And maybe at the end of this week, that's my takeaway. I have to trust that even though there are days, seasons, and experiences in this world that are down-right evil, I have to hold onto my belief that God will still win the day; that for every hurt and pain you and I have had to endure, God will not only wipe those tears from our eyes, but He will fill us with a joy and a love that acts as a healing balm to those scars no matter how deep they run. I hold onto the hope that this world isn't the story we were meant to live, that it won't always make sense, and when this story comes to an end for me, it's really just the beginning of the rest of the story you and I were created for in the first place.

"Even so, come Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20, NKJV)

1. Whatever rights or wrongs David's children did, they were still his children. Can you understand his grief even for those that made such horrible choices?
2. How can you and I live our lives in this present moment, as challenging as it may be at times, but continuously remind ourselves of the story to come (Revelation 21:1-5)

IT'S COMPLICATED SEASON 2 - WEEK 6
WEEK 6 – 2 SAMUEL 18:9-33 – DAVID THE BROKEN-HEARTED
By Paddy McCoy

WEEK 6 - MONDAY

2 Samuel 18:9-12

9 During the battle, Absalom happened to come upon some of David's men. He tried to escape on his mule, but as he rode beneath the thick branches of a great tree, his hair got caught in the tree. His mule kept going and left him dangling in the air. 10 One of David's men saw what had happened and told Joab, "I saw Absalom dangling from a great tree."

11 "What?" Joab demanded. "You saw him there and didn't kill him? I would have rewarded you with ten pieces of silver and a hero's belt!"

12 "I would not kill the king's son for even a thousand pieces of silver," the man replied to Joab. "We all heard the king say to you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake, please spare young Absalom.'"

In this chapter, we are in the midst of a civil war between King David and those loyal to him, and his son Absalom, who has tricked many of the Israelites into supporting him as a new king. So how did we get here?

After Amnon's death, Absalom flees Hebron to Geshur. Geshur is about 250-300 miles away from Hebron, so he is now a good, "safe" distance away from any retribution from his father, the king.

After two years, David allows Absalom to return to Hebron, but he doesn't want to see him; not yet. His feelings are still complicated. He knows what Amnon did was wrong, but he still grieves Amnon. And he loves and wants to reconcile with Absalom, but will that make it look like he no longer grieves Amnon? Meanwhile, Absalom continues to allow his hatred for Amnon's act to consume him. He has now named his daughter Tamar, after his sister that Amnon raped.

David does eventually reconcile with Absalom, but it's too little too late for Absalom. Absalom has allowed the cousins of hatred, bitterness and resentment, to also settle into his heart. He is angry that David wasn't on his side concerning Amnon's death, and he begins to see David as a weak king who could and should be overthrown.

So Absalom rebels against the king and convinces many in Israel to side with him. But at the end of the day, Absalom is still David's son and with all the mess that has seemingly taken over their lives, the father still loves the son, longs to reconcile with him. The father doesn't want to lose another son.

Any of that sound familiar? Even as I write those words, I think of Paul's famous line about Jesus in his letter to the Romans...

8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8, NLT)

Scripture is the story of God chasing His children even when His children rebelled. And though God could have, maybe should have, given up on us many times; He doesn't. He continues to pursue us and

even laid His life down to reconcile us to Himself. The choice is ours, will we choose to believe He loves us, choose to accept His work of reconciliation?

By the time we come to 2 Samuel 18, Absalom is on the run and David's companions are anxious to put an end to Absalom, David's enemy. But David doesn't want his son to die, he wants to save him. Families are complicated that way, aren't they?

1. Is there anyone in your life that you wish you could reconcile with? What's stopping you?
2. What does it mean to you that while you were still a sinner, while you still struggled to do that which you know you should, God has always since before you were born, and will always love you, unconditionally?

WEEK 6 - TUESDAY

2 Samuel 18:13-15

13 And if I had betrayed the king by killing his son—and the king would certainly find out who did it—you yourself would be the first to abandon me.”

14 “Enough of this nonsense,” Joab said. Then he took three daggers and plunged them into Absalom's heart as he dangled, still alive, in the great tree. 15 Ten of Joab's young armor bearers then surrounded Absalom and killed him.

We don't know the name of the soldier who obeyed the king's wishes and chose not to harm his son, Absalom. Whenever he comes up, he's just a man. But he is loyal to David.

Meanwhile, Absalom is stuck in a tree. It might seem strange that he got caught up by his hair, but in 2 Samuel 14, we're told that not only was Absalom handsome, his hair was so thick that he'd cut it every month and the cut hair would weigh five pounds (as a bald man, that's just bragging!). So his hair was thick, and as he was trying to escape, he got tangled up in a tree.

Now the man who found him knew all the trouble Absalom had caused David and the people, but he also knew that David had lost so much and he wasn't sure how David would handle the loss of another son. Of course, he's also thinking about how he'd look at the end of the day. He highly doubts that any man who took the life of the king's son, for whatever reason, would have great longevity.

But Joab is the king's faithful servant, and he will be loyal to David in his own way. He knows the pain Absalom has caused, and as a man of action he doesn't think twice. He puts an end to Absalom, an end to the civil war, and an end to the threat upon David's throne.

I wonder what Joab would have done if he had followed David's example after the death of Saul and Jonathan. David prayed before he acted. I have rarely regretted slowing down and taking more time with the big decisions in life. Maybe it would have changed the outcome in this story, maybe not, but I sure wish we could have found out.

1. What is an area in your life that you know you need to seek God's guidance on right now?
2. In looking back over your life, is there a decision you wish you would have waited longer to make, maybe sought more guidance?

WEEK 6 - WEDNESDAY

2 Samuel 18:16-18

16 Then Joab blew the ram's horn, and his men returned from chasing the army of Israel. 17 They threw Absalom's body into a deep pit in the forest and piled a great heap of stones over it. And all Israel fled to their homes.

18 During his lifetime, Absalom had built a monument to himself in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to carry on my name." He named the monument after himself, and it is known as Absalom's Monument to this day.

Joab, the soldier, was quick to end the resolution. He blows the ram's horn to signify that the war is over. He has no lost love for Absalom. Despite the king's wishes, he has not only killed Absalom, he buries him quickly, sending the message to those that sided with Absalom that their end will be similar if they don't surrender.

Absalom's story is a tragedy. A favored son of the king, had everything going for him, until a horrible event happened to his sister, whom he loved. Soon, Absalom is overcome with anger, hatred, bitterness and resentment, and so he seeks to take his revenge on the one person who should have protected his sister, his father. Though he has charisma and can attract followers, his father is the chosen leader and though Absalom could have done great things, his life ends far too soon. Absalom was meant to be heir to the throne, but instead, he allowed his circumstances to define him, control him, and rob him of his future.

How many times in life do we let our circumstances define us? Maybe it's our social class, or our job, or our families past, or an illness, or some other circumstance. Our growth and potential gets halted because we think we are little more than the things that have happened to us.

If only we could see ourselves through the eyes of our Creator. If only we could learn to trust in the one who knit us together in our mother's womb. If only we could forgive ourselves for our past mistakes, like the Lord forgives us. God has so much in store for each and every one of us if we could simply put our trust in Him and let Him define us.

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! (1 John 3:1, NLT)

1. What are some of the ways in which you've allowed the world to define you?
2. What would it take for you to come to trust in the Father and His definition of you?

WEEK 6 - THURSDAY

2 Samuel 18:19-23

19 Then Zadok's son Ahimaaz said, "Let me run to the king with the good news that the Lord has rescued him from his enemies."

20 "No," Joab told him, "it wouldn't be good news to the king that his son is dead. You can be my messenger another time, but not today."

21 Then Joab said to a man from Ethiopia, "Go tell the king what you have seen." The man bowed and ran off.

22 But Ahimaaz continued to plead with Joab, "Whatever happens, please let me go, too." "Why should you go, my son?" Joab replied. "There will be no reward for your news."

23 "Yes, but let me go anyway," he begged. Joab finally said, "All right, go ahead." So Ahimaaz took the less demanding route by way of the plain and ran to Mahanaim ahead of the Ethiopian.

Have you ever had news to tell someone else that you thought was good, but it wasn't received that way? I remember telling a coworker that the project they were worried about being given to them, was actually given to someone else. I thought my coworker would be relieved and even high-five me for lightening his load. But in reality, though he was nervous about the project he was excited about the opportunity to prove to his boss what he could really do.

Ahimaaz is excited because the civil war is over and David's throne is safe. They've been working towards this end for some time, and now it's here. He is obviously not aware of the complicated nature of David's love for his son, the rebel. He is not aware of the cost to David for the end of this war. So though Joab tries to save him from this task, Ahimaaz is set on being the one to share the "good news" with the king.

We refer to the gospel as "good news". That's what the word in the Greek, euangelos, means. But what is this good news?

The way some people describe it, it's only good news if you obey all the rules. Or it's only good news if you belong to the right faith tradition. Or it's only good news if you believe the right things. But as a preacher once said, "If it's not good news for everyone, it's not good news for anyone."

I'll tell you what I believe. I believe the good news of the gospel is that God loves us so much that He became man, to prove to us once and for all, how much He loves us. That His desire is to reconcile us to Himself so that we may live together, forever, the way He meant us to in the beginning. My job is to simply accept that truth, that God is that kind of God and did all those things for me, and you, and all of us. If that good news is for all of us, then I want all of us to know it not because I'm required to tell others, but because I can't imagine NOT sharing that good news with everyone I meet.

So do you know what the good news of the gospel really is? The sign that you do is that you are anxious to tell anyone you meet.

1. Why do you think Ahimaaz wanted so badly to be the one to tell the king? Was it strictly what he thought was good news, or was it maybe something more?
2. Put what you think the gospel is into your own words. When you do, is it good news for everyone, or just good news for some?

WEEK 6 - FRIDAY

2 Samuel 18:24-33

24 While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates of the town, the watchman climbed to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked, he saw a lone man running toward them. 25 He shouted the news down to David, and the king replied, "If he is alone, he has news." As the messenger came closer, 26 the watchman saw another man running toward them. He shouted down, "Here comes another one!"

The king replied, "He also will have news."

27 "The first man runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok," the watchman said. "He is a good man and comes with good news," the king replied.

28 Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "Everything is all right!" He bowed before the king with his face to the ground and said, "Praise to the Lord your God, who has handed over the rebels who dared to stand against my lord the king."

29 "What about young Absalom?" the king demanded. "Is he all right?" Ahimaaz replied, "When Joab told me to come, there was a lot of commotion. But I didn't know what was happening."

30 "Wait here," the king told him. So Ahimaaz stepped aside.

31 Then the man from Ethiopia arrived and said, "I have good news for my lord the king. Today the Lord has rescued you from all those who rebelled against you."

32 "What about young Absalom?" the king demanded. "Is he all right?"

And the Ethiopian replied, "May all of your enemies, my lord the king, both now and in the future, share the fate of that young man!"

33 The king was overcome with emotion. He went up to the room over the gateway and burst into tears. And as he went, he cried, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son."

Isn't it interesting that as Ahimaaz yells the "good news" he is carrying to the king, the only thing the king wants to know is how Absalom is doing? He doesn't mention the civil war. He doesn't ask about the other soldiers or if the Israelites who had followed Absalom are ready to swear their allegiance once again to David. With all the craziness that has happened between David and Absalom, at the end of the day what you have is a father who wants to know if his son is ok.

Family matters.

David presses Ahimaaz again, and Ahimaaz realizes what David cares about most. What he thought would bring the king joy, was a side dish to the main entree. David wanted to know his son was ok. Ahimaaz knew he wasn't, but at that moment, he couldn't bring himself to tell the king and he likely was afraid of what the king would do to the man who brought that news.

The Ethiopian doesn't seem to know any better. He tells the king the truth, and when he does, the king is undone. I'm surprised he didn't just collapse right there, but somehow, he made his way to a separate room and there, all his grief hit him like a ton of bricks. We even see him enter into the Bargaining stage of grief where he wishes he was the one to die instead of Absalom. Even after all that Absalom did, David wished he had died instead of Absalom.

Grief is a strange and difficult thing. We were never meant to experience it, so it's always a stranger to us, not to mention an unwelcome companion. And at this point, David has lost two of his sons, his daughter

was raped, his kingdom was nearly torn in two. Needless to say, the beginning of his role as the new king has not gone so well.

But thankfully, David didn't give up. He would somehow find the strength to continue to put one foot in front of the other, take one breath at a time, and he would survive the worst of his grief. And good things were to come. Israel would flourish under his leadership, and under his son, Solomon, Israel would see some of the greatest time of peace Israel had ever experienced.

So however difficult a time you are currently in, no matter what has happened along the way, no matter how tough it is to keep putting one foot in front of the other, please, for God's sake, don't give up. He's not done with you yet. He has plans to do in you and through you more than you can possibly imagine. Remember, he never promised you easy, he just promised he'd be with you every step of the way, even when the way leads through the valley of the shadows. Hang on, He's not done with you yet.