



The names are all too familiar to us—Jim Bakker, Ted Haggard, Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant, General Petraeus and Bill Clinton are just a short list of powerful pastors, sports stars, politicians and corporate executives who each had to deal with the unfolding of a scandal. Today, we hardly take notice when a prominent figure falls hard. In many ways, we've come to expect it. But, why does it happen all too often? Even to men and women who have committed their lives to following Jesus?

Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely. This statement is no less true today than it was when it was first given by Lord John Emerich Acton in the 1800s. Whether you are a Christian or not, this strikes at the core of our human nature. It's why the government is set up with three distinct branches. It's why corporations are supposed to have powerful and independent board of directors who can oversee top executives. It's why in God's design, the church is to be led by a team of elders who reflect the characteristics outlined in 1 Timothy and Titus.

"Power is an aphrodisiac," says Paul Hodgson, chief research analyst at GMI Ratings, a corporate governance research firm. He writes, "Part of the problem is that the power that's given to the president or CEO gives them the impression that rules that apply to other people do not apply to them. Reduce that power and you reduce those problems."

Another reason good people fall is that it's lonely at the top. Top leaders often become isolated from the rest of their organizations, sitting in big corner offices, surrounded by "yes" men and women. "Leaders don't have enough confidantes who are willing to say to them, 'What the heck are you thinking?'" says organizational culture expert David Gebler.

As we come to week twelve in *The Story*, the great King David found himself exactly in this kind of situation. David had it all. Everything he does turns to gold. He defeats his enemies time and again, shows kindness to Mephibosheth, and expands his kingdom. The world is finally at peace and David is at rest in his palace. One minute, David is on top of the world, the next minute David falls flat on his face. David makes tragic choices that cause a pivotal shift in his life, family, and kingdom. What was he thinking? How could someone so dedicated to God let his guard down so quickly? How could we? It's one of the oldest tragedies in the Bible and it still happens to this day. No one is immune.

Overview of 2 Samuel 11-12

For the sake of time, let me summarize the turn of events that happen in 2 Samuel 11-12. In chapter 11, King David was supposed to be at war, but for some reason, chose to stay behind in Jerusalem. This is the first problem we see in David's life. David wasn't doing what he was supposed to be doing as the king; leading the war against the Ammonites. One day David was walking on the roof of his palace, getting some fresh air, and he saw a woman bathing. This woman just so happened to be beautiful. So, David sent someone to find out who she was, and learned that her name was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. What you might miss here is that Bathsheba is the daughter of one of David's best fighters, the granddaughter of his most trusted counselor, and the wife of one of his closest and most honored soldiers. Right then and there, David should have ended it.

But, temptation can be a tough fight. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his work on temptation said, "With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery over the flesh. At this moment, God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality. And only desire for the creature is real. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken away." How many of you know what he is talking about? I do. David saw something he wanted and had the power to get it. He gives into his lustful desire, brings Bathsheba into his room and slept with her. She went back home. No big deal, right?

Well, a few months later, the phone rings and it's Bathsheba with the news, "I'm pregnant." Once David finds out that she is pregnant, he plots a grand scheme to cover his tracks. Not much has changed in the human heart, has it? David invites Uriah to come home from battle hoping he would sleep with his wife and everyone will think the baby is Uriah's. But Uriah is a man of integrity, and he refuses to sleep with his wife while his men are out to war. So, David gets him drunk, assuming he would let down his guard and sleep with his wife, but Uriah still refuses.

David becomes more desperate and arranges to have Uriah killed in battle. Uriah is sent to the front lines of the fight while the battalion shrinks back. Uriah dies and after a period of mourning, David marries Bathsheba and she moves into the palace. Now, at this point, David thinks he has the upper hand. All is back to normal. His sins are covered up. David actually comes out looking honorable even for marrying a dead man's wife. But God saw what David did and it greatly displeased him.

Some time later, God sends Nathan, a prophet and advisor to David. Nathan tells David a story. The story goes like this: there were two men who lived in a town, one rich, one poor. The rich guy had a lot of sheep and cattle. The poor guy had only one small lamb that he loved very much. The lamb was treated like part of the family. The rich man wants to prepare a meal for a new traveler in town but rather than use one of his many cattle, he kills the poor man's lamb for the meal. After hearing this story, David is furious with the rich man and wants him killed! Nathan looks David right in the eye and says, "You are the man!"

Many of us have had moments like this in our life, when our secrets get found out or our sins get uncovered and our whole lives come crashing down. Or many of us have seen this happen to other people. But the truth is that one moment rarely stands out by itself. It's very rare that everything was great and then all of a sudden there is one event and that's what brings it all down. It's more often the collective effect of daily small decisions that write the stories of our lives. A large tree collapses during a storm. When inspected, the tree is diseased on the inside, the storm just knocked it over. The same can be true with our lives.

As a new Christian in college, I started dating a girl who attended the same fellowship. One compromise after another made our relationship far from what God wanted. And at a retreat, a wise staff person took me aside and graciously confronted me. I broke down and wept over my sin. It was a turning point for me and my relationship with the Lord. David, like many of us, made several small poor choices that led up to his great fall. But this is where we see David's heart.

David's predecessor, Saul, when he was confronted made excuses and blamed everyone else. When David is confronted he says six simple words, "I have sinned against the Lord." David doesn't hide it and he doesn't make excuses. He comes right out and admits his mistake. The crucial difference between Saul and David has to do with David's response to his sin. Thankfully the Bible preserves a more extended response from David and it's found in Psalm 51. It's here that we get a greater picture of David's heart and his struggle with sin. This is a Psalm for anyone who has royally messed up.

**Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;**

**so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity (Psalm 51:1–9).**

The Path of Forgiveness

In these opening nine verses David lays out a path of forgiveness. In verse 1 David cries out to God for help. He throws himself on the mercy, love and compassion of God. The only reason any of us dare to come to God and hope for a solution to our sin problem is God's mercy, love and compassion. In Exodus 33:19b God says, "*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*" Mercy, love and compassion all point to aspects of God's character and nature. Mercy is God's loving help to messed up people. Unfailing love is the continuing operation of God's mercy. And compassion teaches us that God too feels our pain. David cries out to God for help on the basis of who God is.

David is not only fully aware of his God, he also calls sin for what it is. David confesses his sin and uses two synonyms for sin—transgressions and iniquity. Transgressions is a word that describes the crossing of a forbidden boundary. This is serious rebellion. Iniquity means a perversion and points to the depravity of our human nature. And sin literally means "falling short" or "missing the mark." In verse 3 David says, "I am fully aware of my sin." Then in verse 4 David confesses, "I've sinned against you God." And in verse 5 David says that it's in his nature to sin, "I was sinful at birth!"

David understands sin in a way that most of us don't. David knows that his sin didn't just affect Uriah and Bathsheba, but it affected him and God. He said, "I have sinned against you God and you are right to judge me." David acknowledges his sin is first and foremost against God. And David confesses that openly. He does that because at this point the only hope for himself is God. According to the Law his sin was unforgivable but that didn't stop him from confession.

The problem many of us have is that we don't confess our sins because we do not believe we are sinners. David says that the very act of conception introduced him into a fallen humanity in which sin was already deeply ingrained. We are all born with a

spiritual disease, a sin nature. I see this every day in my home. I don't have to teach my kids to be bad, they are great at it. And so am I. I have to train my kids, by God's grace, to love Jesus and that often means obeying their mom and dad.

Until we see the depths of our warped and sinful nature, we will never deal with the real problem. Cancer and AIDS patients often suffer with pneumonia but that's not the real issue. David was fully aware of the depths of his sin. And until we see sin like a disease, we will only deal with its symptoms and not the root issue. The truth is, we are all like David, we've all sinned and only God is strong enough to wash that stain away. But it starts first with true confession.

Do you know why God is so insistent that we face the truth and admit our sin to Him? It's because once we've done that, He is able to do what only He can do. This is the first step towards the grace of God being released in our lives. David had nothing to bargain with and comes to God completely empty-handed. His only hope is in God's mercy. So don't water sin down. Don't rationalize it. Call it for what it is. Confess it. Take ownership of it so that you can be forgiven and the process of inward renewal can begin.

In verses 7-9 David begins to pray for help in his inward life. David asks God to do three things—cleanse me with hyssop, wash me, and blot out all my sin. Cleanse means to "purge." Literally it means "de-sin" me. Wash refers to being ceremonially clean. Hundreds of years later the Prophet Isaiah would write, "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool*" (Isa. 1:18). Blot out refers to removing writing from a book, like removing an accusation of a crime. David wanted to be cleansed and washed until he was fully clean.

Hyssop was a plant found in Palestine that was used to apply the blood of the offering to the altar in the tabernacle. To be purified with hyssop is a figurative expression that declares the need for a blood sacrifice. The Scripture claims that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. David is looking forward to that sacrifice. We know that in doing so he was pointing toward the one blood sacrifice of the perfect Lamb, Jesus Christ. David asked God to forgive him and cleanse him on the basis of the innocent victim that has died.

That is how we come to God too. We desperately need forgiveness. And it's only on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that we find God's mercy. Have you found God's mercy? Has your heart been washed clean by his blood?

The second half of this Psalm realizes that even after we are forgiven and washed, our tendency will be to sin again. David knew that unless God helps him, he would fall hard again. So, verses 10-12 deal with David's need and our need for a deeper inward

renewal. We need first, cleansing, then second, the creation of a pure heart and willing spirit. Look at verses 10-12.

**Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**

**Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.**

**Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.**

The Need for Inward Renewal

Here David asks God to do three things—create in him a pure heart, do not cast me away from your presence, and restore the joy of my salvation. Let's look at each of those requests. The word David uses for create is *bara*. This is the same word God used in Genesis 1 for the creation of the heavens and the earth. This is an activity only God can do. Only God can create something out of nothing—*Ex Nihilo*. What David is asking of God is nothing less than a miracle. To do something only God can do. To create in him a pure heart. David is saying that the only way he will have any victory over sin is by God starting over from the very beginning and giving him a new heart. And that's exactly what God does for anyone who turns to him in faith. God says, "*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh*" (Ezekiel 36:26).

David also prays for a willing spirit and the assurance of the Holy Spirit's presence. David is not talking about losing his salvation at all. David is saying that he is unable to live a holy life without the presence of God. He, like us all, needs the help and power of the Holy Spirit every single moment of every day if he is to be able to overcome temptation and follow hard after God.

In the third request, David asks God to restore to him the joy of his salvation. It is not salvation that he has lost, but the joy of it. Because of his sin, David had no joy. His fellowship with God was broken. Anyone ever been there? It's no fun. Now that David has confessed his sin, repented of it, found cleansing, and is seeking a renewed spirit, he wants to have that joy again. Sadly, many people today think that true joy is found by sinning. Godliness is boring. David reminds us that sin brings sorrow and righteousness brings true joy. Do you believe that?

Let me just say too that yes, David was forgiven and restored, but he still had to deal with the consequences of his actions. The baby born to Bathsheba dies of an illness. David's other son Absalom is disobedient and rapes Tamar, his sister. Absalom later throws a coup to overthrow his dad. Life sure wasn't too sweet after this Psalm was written.

As I wrap this up, I agree with Chuck Swindoll who said, “When I step into this chapter of David’s life, I am forever grateful that God has finished writing Scripture. There is not a person I know who would want to have his failures and vices recorded for all generations to read and discuss and make movies about and write books on and preach sermons on down through the centuries.” Isn’t that true?

Some of you are thinking, “But you don’t know where I’ve been or what I’ve done. Why would God want to forgive someone like me?” Can I just say, you’re absolutely right. No one knows what’s between you and the Lord. But we can all see what David did. His life is held up in scripture as someone we can learn from. David was an adulterer, schemer, and murderer. It doesn’t get much worse than that. Yet, David is called “a man after God’s own heart,” not because he walked in perfect obedience with God, but because he brought himself, time and time again, before God to be cleansed and renewed.

C.S. Lewis once said, “We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.” We must learn to trust God with what he already knows. Do you trust God with **all** that you are? A lot of us have been carrying around the weight of guilt and shame and pain and hurt and we can’t let go of it. That is why we need to come to the Lord’s table. It’s a place we can let it go.

When we sin, and we all will, we must confess our sins honestly to God. And in just a moment you’ll have a chance to do some business with God. Before you eat the bread or drink the cup, confess your sins to God. One of the great promises in the Bible

is this: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). God does not want to punish us for disobeying him; he’s already punished his Son Jesus on the cross. Confession is where God sees what’s really in our hearts—are we humble and teachable and willing to learn from our mistakes, or are we proud and defensive and oblivious to our need for God’s mercy and love?

If you are a follower of Jesus then true confession of sin is what marks a person after God’s own heart. Because David owned up to his sin and accepted the consequences of his behavior, God continued to bless him in other ways, like allowing him to have more children with Bathsheba. Solomon would be born and continue the line of David as king of Israel. Fast forward to the New Testament, to the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, the Great Hall of Faith. And right there, in the list of the godliest and most faithful men and women of the Bible, is David. There is no asterisk by his name with a footnote of his sin. Eventually, Jesus too would be born from his lineage.

The Lord’s table helps us to experience the forgiving, restoring grace of God. Forgiveness is on the basis of the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ. There is no forgiveness without faith in him. God’s forgiveness restores us into a right relationship with him. If you are not a follower of Jesus, would you place your life and your trust in him today?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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