David and Bathsheba

One knocked-over plant, three chances to come clean, and a forgiveness nobody earned

SPEAKER	Wes Neely
DATE	Sunday, February 6, 2022
PASSAGES	2 Samuel 11:1-17; 2 Samuel 12:1-13; 2 Samuel 12:10; Matthew 26:34; 1 Samuel 13:14; Romans 3:23; Matthew 5:47
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:10:02 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

David's sin started with being in the wrong place, and every move he made to cover it cost more than confessing would have. God forgave him anyway. If the man after God's own heart could fall this far, so can we — and the forgiveness that covered David is the same forgiveness we owe whoever has wronged us.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- David's first failure was geographic. In the spring, when kings went out to war, Israel's warrior king stayed home. The adultery came after the idleness.
- Sin does not reach a natural stopping point and quit. Adultery became deception, deception became a murder, and the murder took other men down with it.
- David was given three distinct chances to come clean and took none of them — the same three Jesus gave Peter before the rooster crowed. Our God is not a one-and-done God.
- Uriah's honour defeated David's plans twice in a row. That is God refusing to let the sin stay buried, not bad luck.
- Nathan's story let David pronounce sentence on himself. We condemn in other people what we quietly excuse in ourselves.
- Most of what keeps us from David's sins is a lack of opportunity, not a superior character. How you handle the small temptations is the only evidence you have about the large ones.

- David took Uriah's wife, his life, and the meaning of his death. And Uriah, forgiven of his own sins, has no ground to stand on if he withholds forgiveness. Neither do we.

▶ 1:12:18

No slides. Wes asked the room to do it old-fashioned — Bibles in the pew racks, open to 2 Samuel 11 — and then told a story about a kid left home alone with a list of chores and a deadline that moved up on him.

One potted plant, and then the whole house

▶ 1:14:01

Little Johnny had all day and used none of it. The call came at six: his parents would be back by seven thirty. Vacuuming in a panic, he knocked over a potted plant and scattered dirt across the floor. Running upstairs for a solution, he tripped on the computer cables and took the computer off the desk with him. Then he remembered the kitchen sink he had left running. Ten minutes on the clock. His parents arrived to find Johnny on the front lawn, surrounded by police officers and firemen, with the house fully engulfed. "Well, I knocked over a plant, and then one thing led to another."

▶ 1:15:29

That, Wes said, is 2 Samuel 11. David gets more ink than anyone in the Old Testament but Moses — forty chapters across 1 and 2 Samuel, plus dozens of psalms — and we follow him from shepherd boy to deathbed. Nobody lives a life that long and that consequential without mistakes, and this is the famous one, third on the list after Adam and Eve and Judas.

Where the snowball starts

▶ 1:17:32

> “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, ‘She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.’ Then David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him… Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, ‘I am pregnant.’”
>
> 2 SAMUEL 11:1–5 ↗ (NIV)

▶ 1:18:33

Kingship in Israel was only forty or fifty years old at this point, and the job description was still vague. But everyone knew one line of it. When the people asked Samuel for a king, they were not asking for a legislator — they wanted someone to lead them into battle like the other nations had. Israel already had the Pentateuch; it did not need a man signing papers. "The king's sitting there sharpening a sword all day, getting ready for battle," Wes said.

▶ 1:19:28

So when the writer tells us that at the season for war David sent Joab and stayed in Jerusalem, he is telling us something. Idle hands are the devil's workshop. That is the plant getting knocked over. The lust and the adultery follow, and then, in almost soap-opera fashion, the message comes back: I am pregnant. Adultery David could have hidden. A pregnancy with the husband away at the front is another matter.

Three chances to turn back

▶ 1:21:00

Wes tracked the chapter by the exits David declined. Here is the first: he could have come clean. Instead he sent for Uriah, asked politely after Joab and the war, and told him to go down to his house and wash his feet — with a present from the king following him out the door.

▶ 1:22:04

> "But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house… 'The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.'"
>
> 2 SAMUEL 11:9–11 ↗ (ESV)

▶ 1:23:04

Uriah is a stand-up guy, and Wes wanted the room to feel it. Nobody would have faulted him for a night at home; he would have taken a light ribbing from the other soldiers and that is all. He slept on the king's doorstep instead. "There's nothing worse when you're in sin and along comes a goody two-shoes," Wes said. Uriah's integrity pricks David's conscience, and it also blocks his plan. Chance two, declined.

▶ 1:24:41

So David tries the only other thing he can think of:
he keeps Uriah in Jerusalem another day and gets him drunk. It is a plan. It is not a good plan. "He's willing to basically drug one of his men to try to cover up his sin." And Uriah, drunk, goes out and sleeps with the servants again. Most people would jump at a night off after a war zone. God is not interested in letting David hide this.

▶ 1:27:32

Wes was careful about what that means for us. Not that we should broadcast our sins from the rooftops — that is silly — but that David was hiding from everyone and, in a sense, from himself. He did not want the consequences he knew were coming: the law called for death, and beyond that, a king who takes a soldier's wife has no credibility left. It is a selfish act end to end.

▶ 1:28:13

Three chances, and the pattern rang a bell. When Christ told Peter he would deny him three times, that was not theatre — it was three opportunities to prove his loyalty. Peter failed all three, and we know how that story ends. David fails all three, keeps his throne, and is forgiven. "Our God is not a one-and-done God," Wes said, "where you make a mistake and then, oh, now he's no longer useful, get him out of here, let's get someone better."

The letter Uriah carried

▶ 1:29:25

> "In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.' And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died."
>
> 2 SAMUEL 11:14–17 ↗ (ESV)

▶ 1:30:33

Read that again and notice the courier. David had seen Uriah's honour up close, twice, and he banked on it — he knew the man would not break the seal and read his own death warrant. Joab opens it and simply complies; nowhere in the text does he object. And a lone casualty would have looked suspicious, so the assault is pressed close to the city walls, which any general knows is bad ground. Other servants of the Lord die to make one death look ordinary.

▶ 1:32:19

Tally it: David has failed his office, committed adultery, conspired to deceive a loyal soldier, murdered that soldier, and killed a handful of other men to cover the first murder. "I wonder how many of us would treat him with an open arm and a nice firm handshake," Wes said. And David thought he was clear. Joab was in on it, the servants would say nothing, Bathsheba had not spoken. Except God was the wiser, as he always is.

David gets a mirror

▶ 1:33:57

Then Nathan arrives with
a story about a rich man who had everything and a poor man who had one little lamb, and David burns with anger: as surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die. Nathan had left the murders out entirely. The theft alone was enough to get a death sentence out of him.

▶ 1:35:04

"David got to look in a mirror without knowing it was himself," Wes said. If we had a mirror that showed our own sin for what it actually is, we would reach David's verdict about ourselves — how could I be worthy to stand with God? But we rarely get that mirror. What we get instead is other people, and in them the same sins look unforgivable. David would not consign himself to death; a stranger doing a fifth of what he had done, he would.

> "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan replied, 'The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.'"
>
> 2 SAMUEL 12:13 ↗ (NIV)

▶ 1:37:18

Forgiven, and not spared the consequences. This happened within the first ten years of a forty-year reign, so David lived with it for thirty more. Nathan said the sword would never depart from his house, and it did not: one son rapes a daughter and another son kills him, a son raises a civil war against his father, and the child born to Bathsheba dies. Trace all of it back to a king who stayed in Jerusalem. "Sin doesn't just reach the end and stop. It only gets worse."

If David could sin like this, so can you

▶ 1:38:01

The first takeaway is the floor under everything else: there is no sin God is unwilling to forgive. If you are on the page of *my sins are too great to bring to God*, Wes doubted anyone in the room had committed adultery and then conspired with the military to kill the spouse. If God can forgive David, he can forgive you.

▶ 1:39:10

The second is the one he thought the room needed more. David was a man after God's own heart, and he did this. Anyone who assumes he is immune to sinning this drastically should take that as a reality check.

▶ 1:40:25

Most sin, Wes argued, is sin of opportunity. Polygamy was ordinary in that culture — which did not make it right, but it also means nobody today earns credit for resisting a temptation that was never on offer; even the Gentiles do that much. David, though, had power. None of us can make a phone call and have a man taken out. "If David didn't have that power, Uriah wouldn't have died."

▶ 1:43:04

Which turns the question around on us. Gossip gets treated as a minor thing precisely because it is one of the few temptations that actually reaches us. So: how do you manage the small sins? If lust is already a struggle and you are offered the promotion that keeps you in other cities away from your spouse for months, have you given yourself or God any reason to think the bigger version will go better? The scale of David's consequences came from the scale of his power, not from his sin being a different species than ours. We all fall short, so who are we to judge each other.

What David took from Uriah

▶ 1:43:43

Then Wes slowed down and said this part hits him in the gut. What did Uriah think as he was dying? Nothing ill of David. He had no idea. A soldier dying at the wall can at least take solace in dying for the Lord, for his king, for Israel — there is nobility in that. David took even that away. Uriah's death was not for a greater cause; it was an errand to dispose of him.

▶ 1:44:22

"Not only did David take Uriah's life, he took his honour in death as well." And the other men who fell beside him thought they were dying for the Lord when in fact they were dying to hide one man's sin.

Forgiveness already waiting

▶ 1:45:36

So picture the next time these two men meet. It is hard to imagine Uriah in the kingdom still nursing a grudge — there are no grudges there. But Wes did not want to leave it at "heaven is magic." Uriah forgives David because Uriah has seen himself in the mirror. His sins may not have been catastrophic, but they warranted separation from God too, and God was merciful. Having been forgiven, he has no legs to stand on.

▶ 1:48:28

His illustration: nobody faults you for declining to hand a friend your savings — you earned it and you have a mortgage. But imagine you find a credit card on the sidewalk that reads *US Federal Reserve*, no limit, no legal consequences, and your buddy who is behind on payments asks for help. Refuse that and you are simply a bad person. "God didn't look down and say, wow, Wes is a really great guy, I'm going to give him unlimited forgiveness. It's the other way around." If the forgiveness we hold is free and limitless and unearned, there is no version of withholding it that is not hypocrisy.

▶ 1:50:49

Wes was honest that for us it will often take time, because our grasp of how much we have been forgiven is weak. The fix is upstream: think harder about what God has forgiven in you, and the forgiving gets easier. "What a better church we will be if we can freely give out forgiveness."

Full hog

▶ 1:52:01

One last contrast, and it is the difference between David and Saul. Confronted with his sin, Saul hedged — well, maybe not exactly what God wanted, but I was trying, it is not that bad. Confronted with his, David fell on his face: *I have sinned against the Lord.* No half measures. "Let us be like David," Wes prayed. "When we sin, we fall on our face and we ask for forgiveness, knowing that Christ will forgive us."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 2 Samuel 11:1–5 (NIV)
- 2 Samuel 11:6–8
- 2 Samuel 11:9–11 (ESV)
- 2 Samuel 11:12–13
- Matthew 26:34
- 2 Samuel 11:14–17 (ESV)
- 2 Samuel 12:1–6
- 2 Samuel 12:13 (NIV)
- 2 Samuel 12:10
- 2 Samuel 13
- 2 Samuel 12:15–18
- 1 Samuel 13:14
- Matthew 5:47
- Romans 3:23

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. David's trouble began with being somewhere he was not supposed to be. Where is the equivalent in your life right now — the place your idleness or your absence is making room for something worse?
2. Wes counted three moments where David could have come clean. Think of something you have covered up: where were your three moments, and what kept you moving forward instead?
3. Nathan's story got David to pronounce death on a man who had done a fifth of what he had done. What do you judge harshly in other people that you quietly excuse in yourself?
4. If most sin is sin of opportunity, which small habit of yours would get out of hand if your circumstances suddenly handed you the power and the privacy to indulge it?
5. Who are you still holding something against, and what would it take this week to hand them the forgiveness you were given for free?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Wes Neely is Hope Chapel's associate pastor and youth pastor, and works with the church's middle schoolers and high schoolers. Much of his teaching with them urges them to talk with their friends about Christ, on the logic that you talk about what matters most to you. He preaches from the Hope pulpit from time to time; earlier messages include Malachi (August 2025) and On the Incarnation (November 2025).

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_C6znL_3ecg&t=4202s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.