

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: God's Life-Transforming Work

(Studies in the life of David)

The Repentance Road to Restoration

Study #6

(2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51)

Introduction: Restoring what has been broken...

Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall.

Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall.

All the king's horses and all the king's men

Couldn't put Humpty together again.

That nursery rhyme has often been applied politically. Like in the 15th century, astute observers applied it to King Richard III, after concluding that he had become too unpopular to continue as king.

But the poem has roots that can be traced back ages before Richard. Forms of the poem are found in the ancient literature of France, Germany, and Sweden, as well as England.

Originally, the rhyme was a riddle. And the answer to the riddle is - an egg!¹ The message of the riddle is that some things, once broken, can never be restored.

Eggs are like that. Once broken, irreparable. So are cars totaled on Loop 1604 and homes destroyed by fire and flood.

After suffering damage, some things might as well be trashed.

So...what about a life? What about the life that is "broken"? Can a seriously damaged life ever be put back together again?

Or are all the king's horses and all the king's men as unable to rebuild a broken life as they were unable to rebuild Humpty-Dumpty?

Broken lives come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Some of you have been dealt life-shattering blows. You have suffered storms. Some of you here have been "broken" by the cruelty of others or by seemingly haphazard accidents.

But there is another kind of brokenness. There are those times when we break our own lives, as King David did.

Last Sunday, in walking through the narrative of 2 Samuel 11, we watched as David created a mess of his own making. He sinned.

And we want to know what happened NEXT. Was he remade? Put back together again? We want to know what happened to David because if there is hope for David, there is hope for us after we sin.

David's fall into sin and a miserable year of silence...

In 2 Samuel 11, we read the ugly story of King David lusting for a married woman, calling her to his palace, and sleeping with her.

The woman, Bathsheba, sent a letter to David weeks later, letting him know that she was with child.

David put her husband to death ("death by warfare") to protect his own reputation, and then married Bathsheba, who bore him a son.

Shortly after Bathsheba was brought to the palace, though, David began to awaken to the horror of what he had done.

Throughout the first year of his marriage to Bathsheba, he was increasingly consumed with self-loathing.

¹ This according to The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes.

During that year, the people of Israel still looked to David for leadership. He still had to deal with matters of state. His subjects still knew him as “*David, the man after God’s own heart.*”

Except for a few palace servants who knew the story, no one suspected that their king lived with burning guilt and shame. The awful secret stayed bottled up inside for an entire year.

That kind of secret-keeping does damage to a soul. Pretending that all is well when all is not well eats away at the inner life.

David wrote these words during that year of hiding:
***[Psalm 32:3] When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
 Through my groaning all day long.***²

As we open our Bibles to 2 Samuel 12, David’s year of silence is ending. To this point, we don’t know how the story will end. We discover David’s “next” in what follows.

David’s good friend, Nathan (a prophet),³ entered the palace and approached David with an ugly story. I picture Nathan pulling David aside, asking permission to tell David about an unjust “situation” that requires wisdom.

David gladly agreed to give royal advice.⁴

Nathan’s Crafty Approach (12:1-12)

A Prophetic Set-Up (vv. 1-6)

Nathan: “There was this rich man...”

[1] “There were two men in a city, the one wealthy and the other poor.

² See the following Psalms we suspect David wrote during this year. We call them Penitential Psalms: 32, 39, 102, 130.

³ Nathan brought David the good news of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7.

⁴ Is Nathan nervous? Do we have to assume that just because he was a prophet, he entered every situation with bravado, Elijah-like? Remember, David still had the power of life and death over him.

[2] The wealthy man had a great many flocks and herds.

***[3] But the poor man had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb
 Which he bought and nourished;***

And it grew up together with him and his children.

***It would eat scraps from him and drink of his cup and lie in his lap,
 And was like a daughter to him.***

[4] Now a visitor came to the wealthy man,

***And he could not bring himself to take any animal from his own
 flock or his own herd,***

To prepare for the traveler who had come to him;

***So he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the man
 who had come to him.”***⁵

This story bleeds injustice. It’s a terrible tale of a “have” oppressing a “have-not.”

While the “have not” had only had one little lamb, the “have” stole it, slaughtered it, and then fed his guest with it, even though he could have easily used one of his own sheep.

Nathan didn’t even have to ask, “*So, my king, what do you think should be done in this case?*” David jumped in as judge and jury.

David: “He must pay!”

***[5] Then David’s anger burned greatly against the man, and
 he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this
 certainly deserves to die. [6] He must make restitution for the lamb
 four times over, since he did this thing and had no compassion.”***⁶

And with that, as David passed judgment on this [fictitious] heartless rich man, Nathan stepped out of character and moved from fiction to non-fiction and from novella to the History Channel.

A Prophetic Sting (vv. 7-12)

⁵ Interestingly, Nathan’s story appears as poetry, not prose. Was this standard fare for speaking to the king, or does Nathan speak poetically to get David’s attention?

⁶ Does David’s immediate, harsh judgment suggests that he was over-sensitive to injustice and to lack of compassion?

A real-time mirror to see self now (v. 7a)

[7a] Nathan then said to David, “You yourself are the man!”

The prophet sucker-punched the king. David never saw it coming. But as soon as David heard the words, he knew exactly what Nathan was talking about.

“You yourself are the man!” means that David was the rich man who robbed the poor man. He was the greedy man who defrauded his neighbor. He was the cruel man who violated a defenseless lamb.

The combination of the story and **“You yourself are the man!”** was Nathan holding up a mirror for David to see his sin clearly.

And Nathan was far from finished. Listen as he walks the king down Memory Lane to remind him of all that God had done for him.

A rear-view mirror to remember God’s goodness (vv. 7b-8)

[7b]...“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says, ‘It is I who anointed you as king over Israel, and it is I who rescued you from the hand of Saul. [8] I also gave you your master’s house and put your master’s wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!’

Nathan didn’t even mention David being chosen over his seven older brothers, his victory over Goliath, or his great friendship with Jonathan. He didn’t mention the covenant that God made with him, promising that his descendants will sit on the throne of Israel forever.

What he did mention was enough to remind David how God has blessed him.

Nathan showed David the present and the past. Then, he pulled back the curtain and gave David a peek at his future.

Consequences (vv. 10-12)

[10] ‘Now then, the sword shall never leave your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ [11] “This is what the LORD says, ‘Behold, I am going to raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. [12] ‘Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and in open daylight.’”

David had effectively murdered Uriah on the battlefield after having sinned against Bathsheba. As a result, both violence⁷ and sexual sin⁸ will plague David’s house for generations.

(Sometime soon, take time to read the remainder of 2 Samuel and then through the books of 1 and 2 Kings. You’ll see how frighteningly literal the fulfillment of this prophecy was.)

Nathan used three sharp weapons to bring David to the end of himself, to the point of repentance before God.⁹

He has forced King David to look at:

- God’s goodness to him (“*I have been blessed*”).
- his own sin (“*I have sinned miserably*”); and
- the consequences of his sin (“*I will pay for my misbehavior*”).

The confluence of these three streams drove David to repentance.

⁷ In David’s immediate family we find these atrocities: Absalom, David’s son, killed his half-brother Amnon for having raped his own sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13); Joab killed Absalom (2 Samuel 18:14); Solomon killed Adonijah, another of David’s sons (1 Kings 2:24, 25).

⁸ God will raise up evil against David from his own household and it happened just as Nathan predicted. Absalom led a successful revolt against his father, David, and violated his father’s wives and concubines in broad daylight. (2 Samuel 16:22)

⁹ Paul tells us (Romans 2:4) that it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance. It was His kindness to use Nathan to prompt David’s repentance here.

With Nathan's rebuke, the season of cover-ups and silence had passed. David comes clean and admits his guilt.¹⁰ He gives no rationalizations. No justifications. No excuses. No denials.

First Step on the Road to a Royal Repentance (v. 13a)

[13a] "I have sinned against the LORD."

By saying this, he ceases pretending. He admits to his guilt for terribly wrongdoing - by adultery and murder - two innocent people.

But David understood that life was fundamentally about God. And it was God's Law that he had disobeyed. It was God's holiness he had violated.

This - ***"I have sinned against the LORD"*** is all we have of David's repentance in 2 Samuel. It's the short version.

Fortunately, we have the fuller text in a psalm that we believe David penned right after his repentance.

It is a psalm that expands his one-liner into a full picture of what repentance looks like.

We listen as David addresses the themes of conviction and confession, forgiveness and restoration.

David's Repentance (Psalm 51)¹¹

CONVICTION (vv. 1-4)

¹⁰ David will suffer severe consequences. The rest of chapter 12 details the death of Bathsheba's child and the grief that this death brought to David. But, the death of that child, unfair as it is because of David's sin, is of a piece with the other injustices associated with David's sin. Innocent bystanders always suffer because of the sin of the guilty. That is part of the hideousness of sin.

¹¹ The opening line of Psalm 51 reads, ***"For the choir director, a Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba."*** We take from this that David intended this Psalm to be used in public worship - a gutsy move on his part. This is not to say that all confessions are to be as public as David's. But we don't want to miss that David's was extremely public.

Cleansing needed (vv. 1-2, 7)

Over the years, I've spent a lot of time getting dirty.

- I plant and tend a spring and fall garden and get dirty there.
- I exercise and get hot and sweaty and dirty in the garage.
- In years past, when cars were more work-able-on-able than they are today, I got dirty and greasy under the hood.
- I enjoy backpacking trips and I get dirty doing that, too.

After these dirtinesses, I pay pretty close attention to washing up. If I don't, nobody wants to get close to me. I've conducted experiments in this. It's true. So, I've gotten good at cleaning up.

David imagines sin as a dirty, smelly, greasy stain. It fouled him. When he finally woke up to the reality and the horror of his sin, he begged for a soap only God could provide.

[1] Be gracious to me, God, according to Your faithfulness; According to the greatness of Your compassion, wipe out my wrongdoings.

[2] "Wash me thoroughly from my guilt And cleanse me from my sin..."

[7] "Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; Cleanse me, and I will be whiter than snow."

Last Sunday after church, I met my most recent grandchild, Felicity, courtesy of my daughter, Erin, and her husband, Kody. Felicity doesn't wash herself. She needs someone else to wash her.

Here, David presents himself as a helpless child and asks God to "de-sin" him. He needs God to do what only God can do. Only God can remove the sin stain from his soul.

Next, David gives us a glimpse into his inner life in the months following his sin.

Constant awareness (v. 3)

If we had seen David during the year of his silence, we might have thought everything was fine with him.

He carried out the duties of king, as required. He conducted matters of state. He even led in worship when that was expected.

But he was not fine. All was not well with his soul.

***[3] For I know my wrongdoings,
And my sin is constantly before me.***

During the year between his adultery and murder spree and Nathan's rebuke, David felt the burn of God's conviction for his sin.

He never had real rest. He was always conscious of the evil he had done. He was convicted of his sin.

That conviction led him to confession.

CONFESSION (v. 4)

***[4] Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.***

Of course, David sexually violated Bathsheba. Yes, he murdered Uriah. He caused untold damage to extended families and friends by his sin. David harmed innocent people and he wouldn't have denied that.

But he wasn't wrong when he said, ***"Against You, You only, I have sinned."***

He sinned against a holy God. His sin offended God. So, he confessed. He agreed with God that what he did was awful.

David didn't make dumb moves. He didn't make a mistake. No, David's sins fell under the category of "high-handed" sins. He knew that he was doing wrong when he did it - and he did it, anyway.

And he knew - and we should all know - that under the Mosaic system, there were no sacrifices that would atone for the sins that David committed. Adultery and murder were capital crimes.

By offending a holy God David had every reason to expect the full brunt of God's wrath. And he still cried out to God for grace.

FORGIVENESS (vv. 5-6, 8-9)

***[5] "Behold, I was brought forth in guilt,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
[6] Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in secret You will make wisdom known to me.
[8] Let me hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones You have broken rejoice.
[9] Hide Your face from my sins
And wipe out all my guilty deeds.***

David is not saying that there was anything sinful about his parents coming together. He is simply saying (v. 5) that sin has been all over him from the very beginning.

Corrupt parents - which we all have - can only produce corrupt children - which we all are.

And he is asking that he might not receive what he so richly deserved - condemnation, and that he might receive what he could never earn - mercy.

Sin has put David in God's debt. Hence the request, ***"Wipe out all my guilty deeds."***

David knows he needs cleansing and asks for it. He knows he needs a debt forgiven, and he asks for that.

And there is something else he needs that only God can provide. He needs restoration, spiritual vitality. So, he asks for that, too.

RESTORATION (vv. 10-19)

Please re-create me! (vv. 10-12)

**[10] “Create in me a clean heart, God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
[11] Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
[12] Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.**

For a solid year, there has been no joy in David’s life. Worship? Just going through the motions. What obedience there has been has been more rote than heart-felt.

Maybe you’ve been there. Maybe you’re there right now. Joy in Jesus is a distant memory. Passion to follow and to serve is gone.

OK. Could spiritual vitality be missing because you’re stuck in sin are in need of God’s cleansing, forgiveness, and restoration?

If so, listen to David and learn.

David asked God to rekindle a spirit of joy. He asked God to give him a *“willing spirit.”*¹²

God loves to say, “Yes!” to that prayer.

- Thumb through the psalms and you’ll find this prayer a lot.
- Page through the writings of the prophets and you’ll hear this cry that God would do a work of heart re-creation in His people.
- Read Paul’s letters and you’ll find him asking God to give us who believe in Jesus *“willing hearts”* (the *“want-to”*) to serve and to worship.

That is precisely the work God delights to perform when we follow David’s lead and ask Him to.

¹² Consider Zaccheus, the tax-collector (Luke 19) who led a small, selfish life until he met Jesus. When Jesus passed by and invited Himself over for lunch, Zaccheus was launched on a new life and was given a *“willing spirit.”* He repaid those he had defrauded four times what he had taken from them, exactly what David planned to require of the rich man who stole the lamb.

Here are David’s three requests of God:
Cleanse my soul of the filth of my sin.
Wipe out the debt I owe You, Lord.
Change my heart so that I want to worship and serve You.

And what will happen when all of THAT happens?

David will be traveling light. When God cleanses and forgives and renews, the ton of guilt he’s been carrying will be gone.¹³

Sure, David is going to suffer a lifetime of earthly consequences. But God has set him free, internally, so that passion to serve God flows. It always flows through people who are being strengthened by grace.

Use me to serve You, Lord! (vv. 13-19)

**[13] Then I will teach wrongdoers Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.
[14] Save me from the guilt of bloodshed, God, the God of my
salvation;
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.
[15] LORD, open my lips,
So that my mouth may declare Your praise.
[16] For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You do not take pleasure in burnt offering.
[17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, God, You will not despise.
[18] By Your favor do good to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
[19] Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.**

For a solid year, honest-to-God praise and worship was missing from David’s life.

But now that God has given him what his heart longed for (cleansing, forgiveness, renewal!) he will serve and worship His God!

Might it be that our hearts to serve and worship God are sometimes small and our love for others in Jesus' Name is sometimes weak because we haven't recently drunk deep at the well of God's cleansing, forgiving, renewing grace?

And could it be that we have not recently experienced that cleansing forgiveness fresh and new because we haven't recently gone to the Lord in humility, admitting that we have sinned?

Conclusion:

Last Sunday, David put on a clinic on sin. Today, he has put on a clinic in how to deal with sin. It is a really important clinic because there is a 100% chance that we will each sin.

When we sin, we can follow David's lead, who points the way out of sin's grasp into freedom.

First, we must wake up to sinful practices and attitudes and patterns in our lives.

That wakeup comes as we learn to pray -
***[Psalm 139:23] Search me, God, and know my heart;
 Put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts;
 [24] And see if there is any hurtful way in me,
 And lead me in the everlasting way.***

God will reveal areas of sin in our lives if we ask Him to.

He'll open our eyes to see how we really don't love all that well, behaviors that aren't becoming for a son or a daughter of God, words we spoke - just yesterday - that wounded someone.

And He'll use others to help us wake up, just like He used Nathan in David's life.

Our brothers and sisters in Jesus will play a vital role in our dealing with sin, if we are open to the input they can give us.

We read in the book of Hebrews: ***[Hebrews 12:15] See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.***

It turns out that we are our brother's and our sister's keeper!

Our fellow Jesus-followers' incisive insights into our lives can expose bitterness and wrong ways of thinking and insensitivities. That's the kind of shepherding love we can provide for each other.

And if pursuing this awakening to our sin sounds morbid, it isn't. It's necessary and life-giving.

It is *necessary* because the potential for self-deceit is real. The Apostle John tells us that if we say that we have no sin, we're just deceiving ourselves. (1 John 1:8 and 10)

It is *life-giving* because, as John tells us, our every discovery of sin drives us to a fresh experience of God's cleansing. (1 John 1:9)

Second, we must focus on sin in the first person (me, myself, I), not the second (you, y'all) or third person (him, her, them).

If any of us have come to this point in getting to know David's story and are only able to more accurately accuse him and point out how badly he sinned, we have missed the point.

God's Word is not speaking to King David today. The Spirit is speaking to me. He is speaking to you.

It is so easy to deflect. Nathan, David's personal prophet, told a story about someone else who sinned.

David got all worked up over this other person's sin. He pointed fingers. With every detail Nathan threw in, David became angrier. He felt pity for the poor man who lost his pet lamb. He was enraged at the rich man who stole the lamb. He never "got" that he was the rich man.

When we stand in judgment of well-known oppressors, we may feel vastly superior. But the gift of seeing problems in others is a cheap gift. And judgment doesn't make us one bit more loving or more holy.

Growth happens when we move from third or second person observation to first person conviction.

To read David's story right requires that we see Nathan saying to us: YOU yourself are the man. YOU yourself are the woman.

Third, as important as it is that we acknowledge our sin, it is more important that we dwell on grace.

We dare not minimize David's sin. It was horrific. But his sin was microscopic compared to God's grace.

Once we are aware of our sin, have admitted it was wrong, have confessed, it's time to accept God's cleansing.

By the strength God supplies, walk away from that sin. Change your behavior and your thinking. Where you can, make restitution.

And then, focus on the wonder of God's work. His work is always the main event, not ours.

We see this emphasis in the way David writes Psalm 51.

In the psalm, there are only four Hebrew words used to name David's bad acts. (1). Transgression (v. 1); (2). Iniquity (v. 2); (3). Sin (v. 3); (4). Blood guiltiness (v. 14). These words are sufficient to identify how wrong his actions were.

Then, David used over a dozen different verbs that describe God's gracious work.

The point? There are only a few ways to sin. God's grace is unfathomably multi-faceted.

Sin is dehumanizing, diminishing, and soon dull and boring. Our sins aren't that interesting. Sin is a rerun.

God's grace is creativity itself. It's God's work that's interesting, innovative, and fresh.

So, after it's been recognized and confessed, the less said about sin, the better. It's best to give our energy to worshipping the God who forgives and loving others the way Jesus loves them.

Humpty-Dumpty's story proves that some things, once broken, can never be put back together again.

David's story shows that other things, like our lives, once broken, can indeed be put back together.