

When God Calls You To Be A Nathan 2 Samuel 12:1-15a

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 5-5-2013

Introduction

One of my favorite Scriptures is that love covers a multitude of sins. That's *God's* emphasis. Can you imagine the trouble we would be in if He confronted us instantly over all of our sins? It would undo us. Instead, He progressively deals with more and more of our character over the years. And I believe that God wants us to have the same patience with others.

Now it is true that the sign, "Be patient, God is not finished with me yet" has been abused by some people as an excuse to never grow and to get people off their back. But it's still a good sign, and I believe it is one reason that Peter reminds us that love covers a multitude of sins. But another reason is that even though all sins bear negative fruit of some sort, not all sins are equally serious, and therefore not all sins require a Nathan moment.

But every one of us will be faced with times when you simply cannot overlook a sin. Under Roman numeral I, I've listed some hints from the chapter of when a Nathan moment would definitely be appropriate.

I. **Though "love covers over a multitude of sins," here are some indicators that a "Nathan moment" is necessary:**

A. Was this a "high handed sin" rather than a sin of ignorance? (vv. 2ff)

The first indicator that it is appropriate is when you see a person who is arrogantly and willfully sinning. We've already seen that this was definitely the case with David, but let's look at what the law has to say about this. Numbers 15:30 says, "**the person who does anything presumptuously** (some translate it "defiantly" – it is literally "who sins with a high hand") ... **shall be cut off from among his people.**" In other words, love does not cover over that kind of sin. Hebrews 10:26-27 comments on that verse, and says, "**For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation.**" In other words, God treats willful arrogant sins much more seriously than sins that flow out of weakness (but which are repented of) or sins that flow out of ignorance.

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Those of you who watched the Godfather series may remember the famous baptism scene where Michael Corleone acts as a godfather to his namesake, Michael Rizzi, and he answers in the affirmative the baptism vows on behalf that baby. It's a powerful scene. And as the priest asks Michael, "do you renounce Satan?" the screen flashes to scenes where people are being killed at Michael's orders, and yet Michael hypocritically affirms that he will renounce Satan. The priest continues, "and all his works," and it flashes to scenes where others are being killed. And Michael affirms that he will renounce all the works of Satan. And the priest says, "Michael Rizzi, go in peace and may the Lord be with you. Amen." That is sinning with a high hand. It is referring to a person who asks God to forgive him, but fully plans to continue living in the same sin. And it doesn't matter what the sin is or how big the sin is – it's the sinning with a high hand that Hebrews 10 says will simply not be covered with a sacrifice (in other words, with God's forgiveness). Love should not cover over such deliberate sin. And remember the distinctions from last week between the security we have in justification that is eternal and the covering of sins of an already justified person.

B. Has he hurt someone irreparably? (vv. 2-15)

Here is a second question that is worth asking: "Is the sin this person is engaged in going to hurt someone else irreparably?" David's sins obviously did hurt both Uriah and Bathsheba, and hurt them irreparably. You simply cannot overlook sins that are doing severe damage to other believers.

C. Has he fallen so low that he now despises God's law? (v. 9)

Third question: "Has he fallen so low that he now despises God's law?" That can easily happen. Verse 9 says, "**Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight?**" Numbers 15:30-31 say that we may not overlook or cover over sins that involve despising God's law. It says,

Numbers 15:30 "But the person who does *anything* presumptuously, *whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people.*

Numbers 15:31 Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *shall be upon him.*' "

Well, if despising God's law is a good reason for bringing a Nathan moment, then most of the Protestant church in America needs it. The things I have heard ministers say about God's Holy Law make me cringe – absolutely cringe. In the last year I have argued with pastors who claim to love Jesus but who have said flat out, “I reject the Old Testament.” That's despising the law. How can they do that? They claim that they are New Testament Christians. But here is the problem - rejection of the law is a rejection of Jesus, who commands us in Matthew 4:4 to live by “**every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.**” If a person obviously hates God's law, he needs a Nathan moment. If we love them, we need to confront them. And we need to know how to do it properly.

D. Is what he is doing “harmfully evil”? (עַוְוָה in v. 9)

Here is a fourth question: “Is what he is doing ‘harmfully evil’?” The Hebrew word for “evil” in verse 9 can just mean evil in general, but often is used to speak of wild animals or an evil that is very harmful. And I think that is the case here. And the reason I think that is that David had obviously done sins before this – He confessed that he had a multitude of sins. But this sin was particularly harmful and heinous. So, it is appropriate to make distinctions between sins.

The Bible speaks of “**the least of these commandments**” (Matt 5:19) and also knows of greater commandments (Matt 12:28-34). To treat the taking of a baby bird with its mother (which is the least of the Old Testament commandments)¹ on the same level as fornication would be ludicrous. The Bible also speaks of degrees of sin such as “sin,” “great” sins (Ps. 19:13; 25:11) “greater sin” (John 19:11) and “exceedingly great” sin (Ezek. 9:9). It distinguishes between sins of ignorance that are not done intentionally (Lev. 4:27; Ezek. 45:20) and willful sins (Heb. 10:26). I'm just saying that not all sins are worthy of a Nathan moment.

E. Is your David engaged in a crime? (v. 9b)

Here is a fifth potential diagnostic question: “Is your David engaged in a crime?” Verse 9 mentions two things that Scripture considered to be crimes. It mentions adultery and murder. If you cover over sins that are also Biblical crimes, you become guilty yourself. And that probably means that

¹ Note that Christ still upholds “the least of these commandments,” a reference to taking a mother bird with its young Deuteronomy 22:6-7. However, He is making a distinction of importance among various laws.

some of these servants were guilty of overlooking a crime. We don't know that for sure. But God certainly did not want Nathan to overlook it. Now, I am talking about a Biblical crime, not a humanistically defined crime.

F. Is this destructive to the family? (vv. 9-11)

The sixth test: is the sin destructive to the family? Obviously David's was, and there are other sins that destroy a family as well and need intervention. We looked at some of those in 1 Samuel 25. And by the way, in that chapter we looked at some other principles that help to balance what I will be preaching on in this chapter. This chapter does not say everything that needs to be said with regard to a Nathan moment. If you are under authority (like Abigail was), your Nathan moments will probably look a bit more like Abigail's than like Nathan's. But still, these principles help us to have balance.

G. Is this negatively impacting others? (v. 10)

Seventh question (from verse 10): "Is this negatively impacting others who are not involved in the sin?" This was definitely going to negatively impact far more than David and Bathsheba. It would impact David's children as well as the rest of the kingdom.

H. Has he shown that he despises the Lord's conviction? (v. 10)

Eighth question: "Has he shown that he despises the Lord or despises the Lord's conviction?" Verse 10 says, "**because you have despised Me.**" God felt despised because His Word had been despised, the conviction of the Holy Spirit had been despised (and we know that from Psalm 32), and God's kindnesses had been despised. Obviously each of these things are not the ordinary weaknesses of the Christian life. This shows a hardened heart.

I. Will this sin cause a bad testimony for the church or cause unbelievers to blaspheme God? (v. 14)

Last question: "Will this sin cause a bad testimony for the church or cause unbelievers to blaspheme God? – in other words, will it give a bad testimony to God Himself." Verse 14 says,

2Samuel 12:14 However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *who is born to you shall surely die.*

And the Scripture I read from Numbers 15 also mentions a bad testimony for the church and for Christianity in general as a reason not to overlook sin. So when God's reputation or the church's reputation is being ruined, it is time for a Nathan moment, and if there is no repentance, to move to the other stages of Matthew 18 discipline. Our Book of Church Discipline (which is basically the PCA's) says,

The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. In its proper usage discipline maintains:

- a. The glory of God,
- b. The purity of His Church,
- c. The keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners.

So you can see that we don't discipline for every little sin. Love covers over a multitude of sins. But sometimes Matthew 18 discipline has to take place, and it usually starts with a one-on-one Nathan moment between two members of the church. And if there is repentance, we elders don't even hear about it. It's the body loving on each other. Now, it *can* be an elder who confronts and brings repentance if he was the witness of the sin, but more often than not, it is a member who confronts another believer. And so in the remainder of this sermon, I want us to consider some principles that can help us to be more effective in bringing these Nathan moments to the happy conclusion of repentance.

II. When we bring a "Nathan moment," here are some principles that could guide us:

A. *Make sure God wants you to go (v. 1a)*

The first thing that I would point out is that we should really make sure that *God* wants us to go. Verse 1 says, "**Then *the LORD* sent Nathan to David.**" And we saw last week it was God's love that sent Nathan. Sometimes when Christians confront each other, it is pride that sends them, not the Lord. Or it may be bitterness that sends them to rebuke. Or it may be envy, judgmentalism, insecurity, frustration, or other sins. Those are not good reasons to engage in a Nathan moment. And that's why Galatians 6 warns us to examine our own hearts carefully before we try to restore a brother overtaken in a trespass. It's so easy for our own sinful agendas to get mixed up in a Nathan moment. It is important that we have a God-centered motive. This is why Jesus called us to remove the plank from our own eye before we try to remove the speck from our brother's eye. He wants us to see

clearly and to make sure that we are bringing God’s judgment, and not our own.

B. Make sure you bring the word of God (v. 1c; Ps 51 title – “Nathan the prophet”; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 1:19) – “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him.” (Proverbs 26:4)

And that brings us to point B. The second principle seen in verse 1 is that you must make sure that you are bringing the Word of God, and not simply your own opinion. The way Jesus worded it in Matthew 7 is, “**Judge not that you be not judged.**” We are never to bring our own judgment. Never. Instead, in John 7:24 Jesus commands us to bring God’s righteous judgment by sharing God’s Word. After all, it is God’s Word that is sharper than any two-edged sword, not your own word.

Verse 1 says that the LORD sent *Nathan*, and Psalm 51 calls him *Nathan the prophet*. And so you might think, “That let’s me off the hook. I’m not a prophet.” No it doesn't let you off the hook. The reason God gave us the Bible is so that every one of us could bring the prophetic Word. 2 Peter 1 says, “**We have the prophetic Word...**” And he is referring to the Bible. You have in your hands everything you need to bring a Nathan moment because this is what Romans 16 calls “**the prophetic Scriptures.**” 1 Peter 4:11 commands ordinary believers, “**If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God....**” An oracle was the human mouthpiece of God. In other words, when you bring the Scripture to bear in a person’s life, you are acting as a mouthpiece of God – that’s what an oracle of God means. Your own words are not powerful or sharper than any two-edged sword, but when your words are bringing the righteous judgment of God through the Scriptures, suddenly your words can carry the same power that Nathan’s words did.

And one of the advantages of bringing a Nathan moment *as the oracles of God* is that the person can’t accuse you of judging them. If they do, you can respond, “I don’t judge you. God’s Word does. I’m just bringing God’s judgment, not my own. Brother, both of us stand under the authority of God’s Word, and I am simply asking you to pay attention to God’s righteous judgment of your behavior. I’m not judging you.”

Let’s say that a brother has been caught sleeping around. Don’t just tell him that it is bothering you, or tell him that his actions might get him in

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trouble with the church. That's a man-centered motive. Tell him that God has a message for Him. And *then* you won't *need* to be apologetic. That brother will have to argue with God, not with you. You might need to be apologetic if you are sharing your personal opinions or values, but if it is God's word that you are sharing, it is God Himself who is speaking through you. So to repeat 1 Peter 4:11, it says, "**If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God....**" Because you have the prophetic Scriptures, you can powerfully bring a Nathan moment.

C. Personal presence is usually best (v. 1b)

The third thing that will make a Nathan moment more likely to be effective is if you do it face-to-face rather than via email. Verse 1 says about Nathan, "**And he came to him.**" It's easy for email dialogues to take on a life of their own that you never intended and for things to actually get worse. It's easy for people to misunderstand things that were said via email or snail mail. And it's easier for the one being confronted to figure out a way to cover his tracks and not repent. But when you are face to face, it's easier to read body language. It's easier for the recipient to see that you really do care about him. Personal presence is usually best. Even when you are bringing a Nathan moment to a politician, doing so in person is usually far more powerful and impactful than a simple email. Now, there is a place for emails. We all have to use them. I'm not knocking them. I'm just saying that there is a reason that most Nathan moments in the Scripture were not via letter. Even when doing so was dangerous and extremely uncomfortable, the prophet addressed David face-face-face.

D. Connect with "David's" heart by addressing his own inconsistently held presuppositions (vv. 1c-4)

The third thing that we see is that Nathan sought to connect with David's heart. And he did so in a number of ways. He used a word picture. Word pictures communicate so much more. They help to connect at an emotional level. They help to capture the imagination. This is why they say that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Second, he caught David off guard by drawing out David's sympathies for another person who was being similarly hurt. So he is connecting David with an incident and comparing the two.

But thirdly (and most importantly) he appealed to presuppositions that David already held to, in order to convict David. It is a presuppositional approach to confrontation. And if you are into presuppositional apologetics, let me quickly point out that point B is not answering a man according to his folly, lest you be like him. We have to base all of our reasoning upon the Word of God. But point D here is answering a man according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes. On David's own fiercely held principles he was guilty. It is basically tricking a person into agreeing with the very presuppositions that are needed to change him. Beginning part way through verse 1:

2Samuel 12:1 ...And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city,

Nathan is setting things up for David to make a judicial judgment on behalf of one and against another. He wants David to exercise his thinking about justice. He goes on:

...one rich and the other poor.

Biblical law over and over again established that there must not be favoritism for either the rich or the poor.

2Samuel 12:2 The rich *man* had exceedingly many flocks and herds.

2Samuel 12:3 But the poor *man* had nothing, except one little ewe lamb ...

So David is now beginning to think that this might be a property judgment that he needs to decide upon. But Nathan adds some heartstring issues as he presents his case before David makes a judgment. He says,

...except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him.

Maybe the lamb's mother had died, and they were raising it like a pet. So Nathan is making clear that this man is not asking for a handout. He has taken care of his own property. But David as a shepherd would have appreciated the story.

2Samuel 12:4 And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

So here is a clear-cut case of theft. And what makes it so egregious is that he is stealing the only property the poor man has. So Nathan lays this story out for David and asks him in effect, "I am appealing to you for a judgment." He is getting David to say what his presuppositions are. And that is point E.

E. Let David draw conclusions (vv. 5-6)

If the conclusion of guilt comes from David's own mouth, it will be harder for David to backtrack or continue his habit of covering sin. And for those of you who are engaged in apologetic debates, this is an important principle. Don't just declare the conclusion. They can deny the conclusion without giving any reasons for denying it. Instead, ask enough questions that the other person has to audibly state the principles that will prove your argument. Let them affirm the conclusion, or at least the steps toward that conclusion. And the reason this is important is the strong, strong tendency of the flesh to want to cover over sin, that we looked at two weeks ago. You need to pray ahead of time and you need to think through ahead of time what to say if excuses are made. In this case, no excuses are made. But let's continue reading verses 5-7.

2Samuel 12:5 So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, ...

And this is an odd psychological phenomenon, that guilty people can be outraged at the guilt of others. But it happens all the time. In this case, because of David's emotional declaration, it serves Nathan's purpose.

...and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die!"

I don't agree with that translation because it contradicts the next words out of David's mouth, where David's judicial judgment is not death, but fourfold restitution. But I will admit that there is huge debate on how to translate the Hebrew, and I want to explain what the implications would be on each way that it could be translated. If it should be translated as "shall surely die," it shows a totally distorted sense of justice on David's part. That rich man did not deserve to die - restitution, yes, but not death. And of course, such distortions of thinking do often happen when we justify our own sins. We begin to get clouded in our judgment and can become overly harsh on some people and overly lax on others. Rationalization of our own sin always distorts our judgment of other people's sins. So that would be the implication of the NKJV is right.

Others translate it as, "he deserves to die." Some commentators say that David isn't giving a judicial declaration until verse 6, but that verse 5 is equivalent to, "He ought to be shot" – an emotional outburst that people sometimes make when they have no intention of putting the person to death. That's possible. I still don't buy it.

The third interpretation is to just translate it literally. Literally it means he is a son of death, which some commentators believe is equivalent to saying, “He is not acting as a son of righteousness or a believer, but he is acting as a son of death, or an unbeliever.” As one commentator said, it is equivalent to saying, “What a fiend of hell.” Or “What a reprobate.” And that’s the way I take it.

I won’t settle the translation issue for you, but it is clear that Nathan has succeeded in getting David to see the horrible injustice of the story, and that the rich man is acting like an unbeliever, not like a believer. In effect David is saying, “That is so wrong! That is Satanic!” Verse 6:

2Samuel 12:6 And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.”

And of course, that is the exact justice required in Exodus 22:1 for the theft of a sheep. Now I will be the first to admit that David deserved to die, but because there were no eyewitnesses who were willing to bring charges against David, David could not be put to death in a court of law. Nathan wasn't an eye witness. But in any case, providence does bring a fourfold restitution against David by having four of David’s lambs (or David’s children) killed. You have this first child of Bathsheba in this chapter, Amnon in chapter 13, Absalom in chapter 18, and Adonijah in 1 Kings 2:25. I’m not sure if God intended that parallel or not. Perhaps not, since David actually deserved death. But I do find the parallel of four of David’s lambs interesting in any case.

But even though I can’t settle those two issues dogmatically, it is clear that Nathan let David come up with his own declaration of justice and guilt. And I have found it fascinating that when you do a similar thing with your children, and ask them during particularly troublesome disciplines what they believe God’s justice should be, they often come up with something more severe than you might have.

But the main point is that Nathan is trying to get David to agree to what Biblical justice should be. It is harder to evade the truth once they have proclaimed the truth with their own lips.

F. Be bold to apply God's Word (vv. 7-12)

1. He called sin "sin" (v. 7a and following)

Point F then deals with the importance of being bold in applying God's word during the Nathan moment. It is easy for us to go much softer than we should, but Nathan calls sin, "sin." **"Then Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'"** "The heinousness of this sin that I have just described is exactly what you have done. And actually, since it is a human you have killed, it is worse."

2. He reminded David that he was accountable to God (v. 7)

But Nathan kept this from being a personal vendetta by making sure that David understood that it is God he would have to deal with. "Don't argue with me. Argue with God." So verse 7 says, **"Thus says the LORD God of Israel."** "You may think you are exempt as a king, but there is a King who is above you David, and to whom you are accountable." That is in effect what David was saying.

And I wish that there were more pastors who were willing to bring Nathan moments to politicians and even to bring politicians under church discipline. We would be a different country if people would bring the Word of God to bear in a politician's lives *as the oracles of God*. We need Nathan moments in every sphere of life.

3. That David should be grateful to God (vv. 7b-8)

Anyway, moving on, in verses 7-8 Nathan then points out how ungrateful David had been to God.

2Samuel 12:7 ... Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.

2Samuel 12:8 I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if *that had been* too little, I also would have given you much more!

And that phrase, **"I also would have given you much more"** shows the incredible generosity of God. He loves to give to us above and beyond what we need. Now, some people have stumbled over the fact that God gave Saul's house and Saul's wives to David. What's with that? But commentaries point out that David did not marry Saul's wives and he did not in fact own Saul's property. In fact, chapter 21 makes it clear that Saul's concubine, Rizpah did not even live near the palace, and that there is no

evidence that David ever married Saul's wife. So there is really no need to stumble over that phrase. We have already clearly demonstrated in past sermons that God does not believe in polygamy. He regulated the sin, but He did not endorse it.

Let me explain what it really means. Notice that the text does not say that God gave those women to David as wives, but gave them **“into your keeping,”** and it is parallel with **“gave you your master's house.”** Saul's house was also in David's keeping. He didn't possess it. Instead, David protected these women from abuse once he was king since there was no one else to look out for them, and he took care of Saul's property until he could give it to Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth. He acted as a father to the wives and over the property. It shows that David had no danger from the house of Saul. He was an authority over all, and no one would dare to claim the kingdom by claiming Saul's wives. But the point is that God's protection, exaltation, and provision were rich. Yet David was ungrateful.

4. He called a spade a spade (v. 9)

In verse 9 Nathan calls a spade a “spade.” He does not mince words or blame Ammon for the death of Uriah. He blames David.

2Samuel 12:9 Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.

When you are engaged in a Nathan moment you have to clearly describe what the sin is. David was already used to rationalizing his sin, and therefore Nathan had to be crystal clear about what *God* thought of David's actions. They were nothing less than murder and adultery.

5. He pointed out that you always reap what you sow (v. 10-12)

But Nathan also boldly spoke about the fact that sin doesn't pay, and that you always reap what you sow. Why is that important in a Nathan moment? Because you are trying to tear down the idea that confession is worse than non-confession. And so Nathan is giving every reason he can why it is good to confess his sins and to no longer cover them. Verses 10-12:

2Samuel 12:10 Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'

2Samuel 12:11 Thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give *them* to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.

2Samuel 12:12 For you did *it* secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.’ ”

Here’s yet another thing that people stumble over. It looks like God was going to give David’s wives to his son Absalom, and concerning that sin of rape, in verse 12 God says, “**I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.**” What’s going on? Doesn’t Scripture say that God is not the author of sin? Yes it does.

And so let me explain how God can be sovereign over every sin (for example, the New Testament says that He was sovereign over every detail of the crucifixion of Christ) and yet be sovereign over sin without being the author of sin. Another way of asking this question is, "How can God later blame Absalom for the sin when the sin was predestined?" People have been troubled with that thought. The simple answer is that Absalom wanted to do the sin. He wasn’t forced to do it. He was blameworthy. He wanted to do it. Well, if that is the case, and if Absalom did the sin of his own free will (which I believe he did), how can this passage say that God will do it? God says, “***I will do this thing before all Israel.***” How can both concepts be true? And some of you have heard this illustration before, but I will share it again. A. W. Pink illustrates God’s sovereignty over sin and all things and man’s human responsibility this way:

Pink asks what keeps a book that’s in your hand from falling to the ground? And the answer of course is that it is the restraining power of my hand. And Pink points out that if the restraining power of my hand is removed from holding up the book, the book will drop to the ground by its own nature because of gravity. It doesn’t need to be thrown to the ground in order to fall to the ground. I don’t have to force the book to the ground. All I have to do is let go of it.

And in the same way all men are attracted to sin by their sin nature just as gravity pulls on this book. And God in His mercy and restraining goodness restrains men from plummeting into worse and worse sins. That is a wonderful gift. They don’t deserve such restraining providences. In fact, they despise God’s restraint and fight against God’s restraint. And when they continue to suppress the truth in unrighteousness and to resist God,

what does Romans 1:24 say will happen to them? It says, “**Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.**” He gave them up. That is withdrawing His restraint. Verse 26 says, “**For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.**” What happens when God gives them up and removes the restraints? He guarantees that they will fall into sin. Without His restraint that is the only direction their sin nature will go. This explains why in one generation America has gone from treating homosexuality as a crime punishable at law to celebrating homosexuality – one generation. God has given our nation up to vile passions.

So when God pulls His hand away and gives Absalom up to a depraved mind, He is not withholding from Absalom anything that he deserves. Absalom didn't deserve God's restraint in the first place. And God is not forcing Absalom to do anything. But though God does not force Absalom to sin, by the very act of giving him up to a depraved mind, God guarantees what Absalom will do. And thus God is sovereign and Absalom is still responsible.

And according to Scripture, apart from God's restraining work, any of us would fall to the same extent in sin and rebellion. That's why it scares me to death to trifle with His grace. I cling to Christ. So God can control what areas men will be given up to simply by determining when He will remove the restraint of any given area of life. You could say that He allows sins, but they are predetermined just as surely, even though He is not the author of sin. And David gets the point. He doesn't blame God. He knows that he is the sinner, not God.

6. Point out that hidden sin gets exposed by God (v. 12)

In verse 12 Nathan points out that hidden sin gets exposed by God.

2Samuel 12:12 For you did *it* secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.’ ”

God exposed David's sins. So in those six ways Nathan boldly (even at risk of David's anger) showed David the seriousness of his sins and the consequences of those sins. He used several reasons to convince David that it simply wasn't worth it to continue to cover and rationalize his sin. That's the goal of a Nathan moment.

G. Don't make your "David" stay in the "dog house," but resolve the issue of forgiveness quickly (v. 13)

And by God's grace, David repents in verse 13 and says, "**I have sinned against the LORD.**" His repentance shows that he truly was a man of God. It shows that he truly was regenerate. And you can read Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 to see that this was a thoroughgoing repentance. It was a deep repentance.

And here is the point that I want to make on this verse: despite the seriousness of David's sin, Nathan immediately gave forgiveness and assured David of God's forgiveness. You may not be able to say exactly what Nathan does, but you can forgive just as Nathan did. "**And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.'**" We can't promise a criminal that he will not have any consequences. In a Biblical society, if there were two witnesses willing to testify, David would have been put to death. But David could not be condemned to death in a court unless there were two eyewitnesses who were not involved in the same crime. Nathan was not an eyewitness. David couldn't be given capital punishment, and God here has decided not to kill David providentially because of the confession and forgiveness. There will still be horrible consequences that I will mention in point H, but Nathan did not make David stay in the "dog house" (so to speak) to suffer his stares and his glares. Once the goal has been achieved – repentance, we should move quickly to forgiveness and reconciliation.

And people say, "That just can't be. I can't forgive that knucklehead simply because he repents and asks for forgiveness. He's hurt me too bad. I want *him* to feel some pain. If he proves himself for six months, then I will forgive him." Well, Matthew 18 says that if you do that, God won't forgive you of your sins. And in Luke 17, Jesus doesn't let you make the knucklehead wait for six months before you grant forgiveness. In Luke 17 He said,

Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him [There's the Nathan moment]; and if he repents, forgive him.

Luke 17:4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him."

You cannot make them suffer in the doghouse. That is not forgiving as God forgave us. And people respond, but what he did is so serious. Well, what David did was so serious too, but notice the immediate forgiveness.

H. But in granting forgiveness, don't trivialize the seriousness of what was done and what might result (v. 14)

But in Luke 17 you see the balance of both points G and H. Point G says, "Don't make your 'David' stay in the doghouse, but resolve the issue of forgiveness quickly." Point H says, "But in granting forgiveness, don't trivialize the seriousness of what was done and what might result." When Jesus called upon His disciples to forgive seven times in a day – in other words, speedily, He was not downplaying the seriousness of sin. Let me read the verses in context. Luke 17:1-4 say this:

Luke 17:1 Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!"

Notice that He is not downplaying the seriousness of sin simply because the sin has been forgiven. He says,

"...but woe to him through whom they do come!"

Luke 17:2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

Can you see that He is taking the sin seriously? But then comes the words that I read under point G.

Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

Luke 17:4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him."

Yes, forgive him of even as serious of a sin as the previous verse talked about – serious enough to have a millstone hung around his neck and to be cast into the depths of sea. So points G and H need to be held together. Grant forgiveness right away and don't punish the David by making him stay in the doghouse. But, in granting forgiveness, don't trivialize the seriousness of what has been done and what might result. After assuring David of forgiveness, verse 14 says,

2Samuel 12:14 However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *who is born to you shall surely die.*"

We might look at the laws of harvest next week, Lord willing. But it is clear from this verse that even with forgiveness, the sin was still treated very seriously. A glue sniffer may be forgiven for his abuse of the body, but his brain may still be fried for the rest of his life. A murderer may be forgiven for his murder, but he might yet have to face the death penalty if there were witnesses. An adulterer might well be forgiven and even restored, as Hosea's wife was, but she would likely need counseling, might have VD, and might have other issues that would not go away. And certainly Hosea had the right to divorce her. Galatians 6:7 warns true believers who were members of the church, **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”**

And there are so many ways that the seriousness of sin can be downplayed in the church. We looked at some of those ways last week. But another way is by responding to an apology, “Oh, that’s all right. It was no big deal.” We’ll, why did you bring it up in the first place if it was no big deal? Forgiveness does not mean it was a small deal. That is to trivialize the fact that our forgiveness is a reflection of God’s forgiveness, purchased at the cost of Christ’s life. God never trivializes our sins, and Ephesians says that we are to forgive in exactly the same way that God forgave us. He certainly did not trivialize our sin.

I. Don’t nag about the sin – move on (v. 15a)

The last principle that I see in this passage is that we should not nag the sinner about his sin once the Nathan moment has been finished. In verse 15, Nathan moves on once the Nathan moment has achieved its desired result – repentance. He does give a little bit more information, but no rebuke. It says, **“Then Nathan departed to his house.”** I have seen parents preach and preach and preach at a child even after repentance and confession has been achieved. That is counteractive. The goal is repentance, and the rest we leave in God’s hands.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a story told by Billy Graham. He related a time when he was going to be interviewed by a television show in their home. When Graham’s wife heard about it, she worked her tail off to make sure the home was tidy and nice. She vacuumed and dusted and rechecked everything with a fine-toothed comb, so to speak. On the day of the interview everyone was in their assigned seating. And Graham said,

...when suddenly the television lights were turned on and we saw cobwebs and dust where we had never seen them before. In the words of my wife, “I mean, that room was festooned with dust and cobwebs which simply did not show up under ordinary light.”

That’s what happened with David. When Nathan brought God’s Word to bear in his life, it was as if God Himself was in the room. It was as if the Television Lights were turned on, and not only did David see the two sins he was confronted on, the Psalms he wrote immediately after this event (Psalms 6,32, 38, 51, 103) show that he saw a multitude of sins and cobwebs everywhere.

It is precisely because of the problem of spiritual blindness that we looked at two weeks ago that Nathan moments are sometimes needed in the church. There are times when Davids don’t see the cobwebs and the dirt. If God calls you to bring a Nathan moment, ask God for the courage, faith, and love to do it well.

And though we primarily looked at Nathan this morning, we are going to respond to the sermon by singing *Have Thine Own Way, Lord!* – a hymn that is committing us to respond to Nathan moments with the humility and grace that David did. And may this church be the stronger because we have looked at this passage. Amen.

I charge you to be willing to be used by God as a Nathan and to be willing to receive a rebuke from a Nathan with graciousness and humility.

TOC \n \p " " \t "Heading 1,4,Heading 2,5,Heading 3,6,Heading 4,7,Heading 5,8,Heading 6,9,Title,1,Author/Date,2,Introduction/Conclusion,3" When God Calls You To Be A Nathan
2 Samuel 12:1-15a

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 5-5-2013

Introduction

- I. Though “love covers over a multitude of sins,” here are some indicators that a “Nathan moment” is necessary:
- A. Was this a “high handed sin” rather than a sin of ignorance? (vv. 2ff)
 - B. Has he hurt someone irreparably? (vv. 2-15)
 - C. Has he fallen so low that he now despises God’s law? (v. 9)
 - D. Is what he is doing “harmfully evil”? (עָרַךְ in v. 9)
 - E. Is your David engaged in a crime? (v. 9b)
 - F. Is this destructive to the family? (vv. 9-11)
 - G. Is this negatively impacting others? (v. 10)
 - H. Has he shown that he despises the Lord’s conviction? (v. 10)
 - I. Will this sin cause a bad testimony for the church or cause unbelievers to blaspheme God? (v. 14)
- II. When we bring a “Nathan moment,” here are some principles that could guide us:
- A. Make sure God wants you to go (v. 1a)
 - B. Make sure you bring the word of God (v. 1c; Ps 51 title – “Nathan the prophet”; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 1:19) – “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.” (Proverbs 26:4)
 - C. Personal presence is usually best (v. 1b)
 - D. Connect with “David’s” heart by addressing his own inconsistently held presuppositions (vv. 1c-4)
 - E. Let David draw conclusions (vv. 5-6)
 - F. Be bold to apply God’s Word (vv. 7-12)
 - 1. He called sin “sin” (v. 7a and following)
 - 2. He reminded David that he was accountable to God (v. 7)
 - 3. That David should be grateful to God (vv. 7b-8)
 - 4. He called a spade a spade (v. 9)
 - 5. He pointed out that you always reap what you sow (v. 10-12)
 - 6. Point out that hidden sin gets exposed by God (v. 12)
 - G. Don’t make your “David” stay in the “dog house,” but resolve the issue of forgiveness quickly (v. 13)
 - H. But in granting forgiveness, don’t trivialize the seriousness of what was done and what might result (v. 14)
 - I. Don’t nag about the sin – move on (v. 15a)

Conclusion

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