A Sinner Receives Forgiveness

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God is gracious to forgive the sins of His people when they repent.

MAIN PASSAGES: 2 Samuel 11:1-5,8-9,13-17; Psalm 51:4-10

We all wrestle with the following reality from time to time, and probably more often than we care to admit: We know what is right, and we desire what is right, but we fail to do what is right. Our knowledge and will aren't powerful enough to carry through to execution. The apostle Paul stated the problem this way in the Book of Romans: “For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do” (Rom. 7:19). In this sentence he captured the essence of the common human experience, even for those who have trusted in Christ.

But why? Why have we all felt this tension before? Why do we fail despite what we know and want? The Bible answers these questions with a single word—sin. We are all sinners, and because of this, we all willfully break God’s laws and disobey Him, doing what we know is not right and failing to do what we know to be right, time and time again. We can’t be good because we aren’t good (see Jer. 17:9; Mark 10:18). Only a relationship with Christ can change who we are and what we do.

How does the biblical truth that people aren’t good compare with the world’s understanding of the nature of people?
Group Time

Point 1: The King’s Captivity to Sin (2 Sam. 11:1-5)

1 In the spring when kings march out to war, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah, but David remained in Jerusalem.

2 One evening David got up from his bed and strolled around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing—a very beautiful woman. 3 So David sent someone to inquire about her, and he said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hethite?”

4 David sent messengers to get her, and when she came to him, he slept with her. Now she had just been purifying herself from her uncleanness. Afterward, she returned home. 5 The woman conceived and sent word to inform David: “I am pregnant.”

This story, when we read it with humility, should awaken us to the reality of our sinfulness and help keep us sober-minded and watchful as we seek to put sin to death through the power of the gospel. While David mastered sin on many occasions, in this instance, he was unable or unwilling to subdue its power against him, so sin became king and David its servant (see Gen. 4:7). David became comfortable and he fell before his sin like his enemies had fallen before him.

What might it look like today to be comfortable and open ourselves up to temptation and sin?

Sleeping with Bathsheba had been a momentary indiscretion for the king, a fling. His night of giving in to his passions was supposed to be forgotten—by him, by his guards, and certainly by Bathsheba—and no one else was supposed to know of it. But that plan unraveled with news of the pregnancy. Now he would have to take matters into his own hands and figure out a way to cover up his affair.

What are some ways sin keeps the sinner captive?
Point 2: The King’s Compounding of Sin  
(2 Sam. 11:8-9,13-17)

8 Then he said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king followed him. 9 But Uriah slept at the door of the palace with all his master’s servants; he did not go down to his house.

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13 Then David invited Uriah to eat and drink with him, and David got him drunk. He went out in the evening to lie down on his cot with his master’s servants, but he did not go home.

14 The next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. 15 In the letter he wrote: Put Uriah at the front of the fiercest fighting, then withdraw from him so that he is struck down and dies.

16 When Joab was besieging the city, he put Uriah in the place where he knew the best enemy soldiers were. 17 Then the men of the city came out and attacked Joab, and some of the men from David’s soldiers fell in battle; Uriah the Hethite also died.

This was David’s darkest hour as he tried to use Uriah to hide his own sin. But Uriah refused to enter the comfort of his own home to be with his wife while his fellow soldiers were at war, proving himself more faithful than David. So David’s last resort was a letter arranging for the murder of Uriah, a death sentence carried by the same faithful soldier and servant of the king. In this story, we witness the depths of human depravity. It seems there is no limit to how far the heart can go when it comes to our sin.

What are some ways sin affects those around the sinner?

Sin as Transgression: The word *transgression* means “to cross over” or “to pass by” and is often used in reference to transgressing God’s explicit _______________________ When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is ______________________, transgression has taken place. In this sense, sin is ______________________.
Point 3: The King’s Confession of Sin (Ps. 51:4-10)

4 Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you pass sentence; you are blameless when you judge. 5 Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me. 6 Surely you desire integrity in the inner self, and you teach me wisdom deep within. 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 9 Turn your face away from my sins and blot out all my guilt. 10 God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

This psalm shows us that David neither minimized nor maximized his sin. Rather, he knew that all sin is a great offense against God but also that God is willing and gracious to forgive. David’s actions hurt everyone in their wake, but no matter how far outward sin goes, it reaches even further upward (v. 4). All sin is cosmic treason against our holy and perfect God, but our good and merciful God eagerly forgives those who repent in faith.

Voices from the Church

“Beloved, don’t go staring too long in the mirror examining your imperfections before lifting your eyes to the One who desires to meet you with compassion, relentless love and help.”

—Yana Conner

How do you tend to respond when confronted with your sin?

Minimize Sin  A Biblical Balance  Maximize Sin

How can we strive for a biblical balance regarding sin?

David’s sin had severe consequences, but God still forgave him and took away his sin (2 Sam. 12:7-19). Yet we know the mercy and grace of God in ways David did not because of David’s greater Son, Jesus. He died in the place of sinners and rose victorious over sin and death for those who confess their sin and repent in faith.

Repentance: A response to God’s gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine ___________ for one’s sin, a turning away from one’s sin toward Christ, and a life that reflects lasting ___________ and ________________. 
My Mission

Because we are a forgiven people, we live with appropriate transparency before others so that they too might repent and find forgiveness of their sin in Jesus Christ.

- How will you respond to the balanced biblical perspective of your sin as a great offense against our holy God of love?
- What are some steps your group can take to be intentional about loving one another and always trying to turn one another back to the truth of God’s forgiveness in Christ (Jas. 5:19-20)?
- How will you be appropriately transparent about your sin to show others God’s goodness to forgive through Christ Jesus?

Voices from Church History

“It is not falling into the water, but lying in the water, that drowns. It is not falling into sin, but lying in sin, that damns. If sin and thy heart be two, Christ and thy heart are one.”

–Thomas Brooks (c. 1608-1680)
Daily Study

Day 1: Read 2 Samuel 11:1-5

Up to this point in the narrative, David has been presented as mostly heroic. The young shepherd defeated a giant, bringing victory for God’s people. Then he was chased by a jealous king whose life he spared more than once. When David became king, he led God’s people to victories over their enemies. And most recently, David showed kindness to Mephibosheth.

But in this chapter, we see David not just stumble but make a series of choices to sin against God, and in doing so, he not only brought dishonor to God but also harmed himself and others. It all began with David taking a seemingly harmless stroll in the evening. Commentators debate whether verse 1 implies that David should have been off to war with his troops or not. He had not been to other battles before this (2 Sam. 10:7), and perhaps he was waiting for the preliminary part of the battle to be concluded before joining his men. Either way, his walk on the rooftop appeared to have been innocent—at first. While on the roof, he noticed a woman, Bathsheba, bathing. In this moment, he made the first of a series of choices that led him deeper and deeper into sin.

David’s initial mistake was that he didn’t turn away from temptation but entertained it instead (v. 3). Then he made it possible to act on his temptation by calling for Bathsheba to be brought to him (v. 4). Finally, at least in this initial part of David’s sin, he gave in to temptation and slept with her (v. 4). In this account, we see the truth of what James would later write in James 1:14-15. David was enticed by his evil desire, allowed it to conceive, and it gave birth to sin and, as we will see later, death.

Many of us see David as a hero of Goliath proportions, which is why this account is so important. We need to remember that every person in Scripture—save Jesus—was a sinner in need of salvation. Even David, the giant slayer. And thanks to God’s kindness, mercy, and grace, that salvation has been provided for people in Christ Jesus.

The best place to break the chain of temptation is early on. What steps can you take to stifle it in its infancy?
Day 2: Read 2 Samuel 11:6-27

It didn’t take long for things to go from bad to worse. Any hope David had of keeping his sin with Bathsheba concealed evaporated when she sent word to him that she was pregnant. Once again, David had a choice to make: He could come clean or he could seek a way to cover up his sin. Sadly, David chose the latter. His first attempt to cover his sin was to recall Uriah from the battlefield and encourage him to sleep with his wife. But that didn’t work because of Uriah’s loyalty to his fellow troops.

Seeing that cover-up attempt fail twice, David then took a more drastic approach. He ordered Joab, his general, to send Uriah ahead into the battle and then withdraw from him, leaving him to die; then David would be free to take Bathsheba as his wife. We need to be clear about this: David’s order led directly to Uriah’s death. David was a murderer. What had begun as perhaps a lingering look had ended in murder. In this we see that there is truly no such thing as a “harmless, little sin.”

How have you experienced your attempts to cover up instead of confessing sin lead to further sin and harm to yourself and others? What sins might you need to confess to God and fellow believers today?

Day 3: Read 2 Samuel 12:1-13

As 2 Samuel 11 concludes, it seems that David’s sins had paid off for him. David took Bathsheba to be his wife and she gave birth to a son. But the last verse of the chapter reminds us that God was watching and He was not fooled. Thus, He sent Nathan to confront the wayward king.

By the time Nathan confronted David for his sins, the baby had been born, so it was at least nine months later. Nathan began not by directly confronting David with his sin but by helping him see the gravity of what he had done through a story of a wealthy man who had taken a lamb from a poor man. Having lured David in, Nathan sprung the trap by boldly declaring David was the cruel man in the story. Finally, after months of compounding and covering up sin, David confessed and repented. The desired outcome of Nathan’s confrontation had worked. In the same way, we should seek a balance of wisdom and courage in how we confront others, all the while praying and hoping for confession, repentance, and reconciliation.

Whom might God be calling on you to confront in love?
Day 4: Read 2 Samuel 12:14-25

Nathan told David that the son born through his sin with Bathsheba would die (v. 14). But that did not stop David from pleading with God for the child’s life. When David’s son became ill, David fasted and prayed to God for days. But when the child died, David got up, washed, anointed himself, changed clothes, and worshiped God. After, David returned home and ate.

When his servants saw this, they asked David about his behavior; they expected David to fast after the child had died, not before it. David did not complain to God that His actions were unfair. Neither did David attempt to barter with God for the life of his son. Instead, David threw himself on the mercy of God, recognizing that the Lord might be gracious to him. In this we see an example of the proper posture for our pleading with God—for ourselves or others. We don’t plead with God as some form of manipulation; we plead in humility, trusting in the character of God and ready to worship Him no matter the outcome.

What are you pleading with God for today? What is your posture?

Day 5: Read Psalm 51:1-19

Sin and forgiveness form a direct relationship. The higher one goes, the higher the other must go. The lower one goes, the lower the other must go. If we fail to see the weight of our sin, we will never see the beauty of God’s forgiveness. Conversely, the more we understand the gravity of our sin, the more we will grasp the greatness of God’s forgiveness to us in Christ (see Matt. 18:21-35).

David penned Psalm 51 after Nathan’s confrontation of his sin. We see in the psalm that while David may have believed he had gotten away with his sins, they had plagued him and destroyed his joy (vv. 8,12,14). Even through all of the anguish of sin and its consequences, God reminded his servant David of the delight of grace.

For those of us who have trusted in Christ, we too can experience the same. While we continue to sin and often face its consequences, we can always rest in the grace of God made known to us in Christ. As we grow in our understanding of the depth of our sin, we also grow in our understanding of the marvelous beauty of God’s grace.

How have you experienced the depth of God’s forgiveness and grace recently?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- The King’s Captivity to Sin (2 Sam. 11:1-5)
- The King’s Compounding of Sin (2 Sam. 11:8-9,13-17)
- The King’s Confession of Sin (Ps. 51:4-10)

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

What steps can you take to promote a culture of transparency regarding personal sin? Why is it not enough merely to acknowledge your general sinfulness? Why is repentance of specific sins important?

Is there anyone whom you need to forgive or to whom you need to confess sin and seek reconciliation? What can your group do to help you set things right?

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UNIT 10

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

UNIT 11

SESSION 1

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SESSION 5

SESSION 6

UNIT 12

SESSION 1

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SESSION 3

SESSION 4
3. Martin Luther, Luther’s Large Catechism, trans. John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis, MN: The Luther Press, 1908), 44.
What followed was a series of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon, each ruling for about forty years. In some ways, these kings provide us with examples to follow: the fierce determination of David not to stand for anyone impugning God’s character; the mercy and kindness David showed to a foe and his family; the wisdom of Solomon. But we also discover that each of these three men fell woefully short of being the king God’s people wanted and needed, each one proving God’s warnings true. Bookending God’s people crying out as one for a king at the start of this volume, by the time we finish, we encounter God’s people being divided into two kingdoms.

Our takeaway is clear: The hope of humanity does not rest in any human king or leader but is fixed solely and securely in the King of kings, Jesus Christ. But at the same time, we see that God delights in using His people despite their failings. God would fulfill His covenant with David, even though he committed adultery and murder. This reaffirmed the promises God had made to Abraham generations before. And though Solomon would succumb to polygamy and idolatry, God used him to build the temple, a place for God’s people to worship and be in relationship with God.

So consider as you study: What might God do through us?