

II Samuel 11:26-12:13a

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²⁶When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord,

12and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.” ⁵Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” ⁷Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. ¹¹Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within 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 very sun. ¹²For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” ¹³David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

(Chloe)

All of us need a Nathan in our lives. A prophet, someone who tells us the truth. Maybe it's a friend, maybe it's our spouse, maybe it is just that voice of our conscience. God sent prophets to the kings of Israel to keep them in line, to tell them the truth. Each king seemed to have someone, King Saul had Samuel, King Ahab had Elijah, several of the kings had to endure the truth telling of Jeremiah and Isaiah, but David had Nathan. Remember in our story, as we talked about last week, David has done wrong by taking Bathsheba and having her husband Uriah killed. Why does he do it? The scripture doesn't tell us, but if he is like other men in positions of power, it may be that he just does it because he can. But then along comes Nathan, his prophet,

his truth teller. And this is quite an amazing conversation that Nathan has with David. He tells the story of the poor man and the ewe lamb and David, of course is irate. That's when the truth is spoken, "you are the man." A brave prophet, speaking the truth to power, letting him know of his guilt.

Guilt. Guilt is a tough thing. It's not a good thing or a bad thing, but it is tough. Guilt can be used constructively or destructively, but so often it is used badly, by ourselves and others. Guilt is the responsibility for wrongdoing. And the amazing thing to me about this conversation with Nathan is how David handles his guilt. When he is confronted by the prophet, notice what David says: "I have sinned against the Lord." When Nathan says, "you are the man," David does not say, "Wait, you've got it all wrong, you don't understand. It's not really my fault." He didn't start in with any of the scapegoating or rationalizations or romanticizing that we talked about last week. He accepted his guilt. He did wrong and he admitted it. How do we handle our guilt? What do we do when we've done wrong? What do we say when our "Nathans" point that out?

Frederich Buechner says, "the danger of our guilt, both personal and collective, is less that we won't take it to heart than that we'll take it to heart overmuch and let it fester there in ways that we ourselves often fail to recognize."¹ Too many of us have experienced guilt that is crippling, guilt that so overwhelms us that we wallow in it and fail to even seek the forgiveness that might set us free. How many of us "feel so guilty" that we don't even want to be in the presence of one that we have wronged because they are a constant reminder of what we have done wrong? It may be that we have let guilt turn into shame, that the idea that we have done something wrong has turned into the idea that we are something wrong. Guilt is there to remind us that we have done

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Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking*.

something wrong, but to also show us that we need to change. Guilt should lead to repentance and redemption, not destruction of relationships. But how many of us take the other side and use guilt as a weapon, to wield power over another, because we are not strong enough to forgive and so we constantly use guilt to try to make another feel bad, trying to get them to do what we want, never setting them free? I once heard it said that if guilt lasts more than ten minutes and doesn't lead to change, then it is pointless. That may be simplistic, but I get the idea. Too often we use guilt against ourselves or others as a weapon, not as an admission of responsibility and catalyst for change and forgiveness. Calvin said, "There's no problem so awful, that you can't add some guilt to it and make it even worse."² And that's not John Calvin, that's Calvin in the the Calvin and Hobbes comic. You take wisdom where you find it.

David will have to face the consequences of his actions and it will not be easy. The baby he and Bathsheba have together does not survive and the problems he will face among his children will bring about his greatest grief. But the covenant that he has with God does not change. His relationship with God does not change—he is still a man after God's heart, because he is ready to accept his guilt and move on. To accept our imperfections, even our wrongdoing, allow it to change us and make us wiser, and then move on. This, I think is growth as a human being.

If I think about it, I still believe that one of the more amazing passages in the New Testament is when the friends of the paralytic come to Jesus, carrying the man on his bed. We're never told what has caused his paralysis, but I like to think that guilt was part of it. Because Jesus tells him, "Your sins are forgiven. Rise." And the man stands up, picks up his bed and went home. Your sins are forgiven. Rise.

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Watterson, Bill. *The Complete Calvin and Hobbes*.