

MAR 2, 2025

# *Marion* weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### *BIBLE STUDY 2 Samuel 12*

Chapter 12 give us the hard response to David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. What David thought was concealed, God sees clearly. Nathan the prophet is sent to deliver accountability.

It's interesting how he approaches the king. Keep in mind this is a king who has just murdered a man for the great "crime" of being honorable and having integrity. Anyone might be a little dodgy about approaching such a person, even when commissioned by God.

This isn't so different today. Leaders known for their temper, their ruthlessness, or just their inability to accept criticism have no issue with at best dismissing someone who cuts against their grain. At worst livelihoods are ruined and in more despotic situations lives literally taken (like Uriah's). The fear of retribution is very real in the higher ups of political power.

As a result Nathan tells David a story that somewhat mirrors his own circumstance. The egregious nature of the action incenses David. "He ought to be killed!" David is blind that he is the one described in the parable. Willful ignorance keeps David from having the "aha" moment intended.

Once again we see this is not an old condition alone, it persists even today. How often do we look at someone harshly critical of another and we shake our heads because they do the very thing they are criticizing. How often do we see the splinter being pointed out in another's eye when the plank in the accuser's goes unnoticed? How often do we do this ourselves?

Many times when people see fault in themselves and don't want to admit it, or are ashamed, battling that very fault in others becomes almost missional. Tragically whatever shame they feel in themselves gets compounded if inevitably they are found to be participants in the very actions they so vehemently condemn. Consequences can be dire. This is what David is about to find out.

Once David is triggered in outrage Nathan reveals that the wicked man in the parable is David himself. He reminds David of all of the goodness God has given to him. David's response is to ignore God's expectations and do as he pleased in the most heinous of ways. David's sins are enumerated and not to be misunderstood David is named the murderer of Uriah, not the Ammonites. The Ammonites are merely the "sword" David used. Then comes the consequences.

David's family will be in turmoil. His household will be at odds with itself. His throne will be threatened and taken by one close to him. Is this prophecy or consequence? The way it pans out as scripture unfolds isn't word for word what Nathan reveals. It is, however, hauntingly close. At the very least Nathan has a God inspired insight into what David's misdeeds, faults, and guilt are going to bring about in his home and office as Israel's leader. The backdrop of this incident will linger for a long time over David's reign.

David's response is simple. "I have sinned against God." Unlike Saul who made excuse on excuse David owns his mistake and confesses. Sure, it's after he's been caught, but there is no weaseling here. It is an example of what is necessary to make right with God and move forward. We admit and own our faults authentically. Then there is the forgiveness we seek, which is precisely what happens between God and David. "The Lord has put away your sin. You shall not die."

Yet even in forgiveness consequence stands. If David will live, the child conceived will die. This puts us in some dicey water as the story unfolds.

The child is born and God strikes the child ill resulting in the child's death. Let's be clear about this, the child is killed because of David's sin. God is the one who does the killing. The child has done nothing wrong. The child is simply the object of accountability or David's actions.

We should have a hard time reconciling this, particularly in our day and age. In a time where children were property perhaps this wasn't such a difficult story to swallow. Today where we fight tooth and nail for the lives of unborn children and just born children the idea of someone killing a newborn to punish a parent is unthinkable. It is barbarous.

Yet often there are excuses and verbal and mental runarounds that try to make this story jive with our modern sensibilities. “There must have been some other reason”. No, scripture is clear, it was a punishment on David. “Maybe it wasn’t God”. No, scripture says God is the one who struck the child ill with the intention of the child’s death.

I offer no easy answers here. What I offer is this. While there are mitigating explanations offered to justify this passage, there is often none when it comes to a woman who is pregnant through no ungodly means, and the doctor shares the tragic news that if she carries the child to term she will certainly die and the child is in danger as well. The options are death or to have the doctor end the pregnancy early on. If she chooses to end the pregnancy many will demonize her refusing to consider how to find grace for her in her circumstance.

Neither am I suggesting we demonize God, discard scripture, nor applaud abortion here. I am suggesting that what is essential to an honest faith is to wrestle with these kinds of realities. In the wrestling and asking why we struggle with how we manage God taking a baby, we also need to struggle with our own sense of real people in our real time who are faced with real and impossible choices that have no easy answer. The end of it all must be a heaping yield of grace for one another, recognizing that in the midst of confusing, difficult, and uncertain moments perhaps the best we can do is be there for each other with compassion and grace, ensuring no one is alone in such literal life and death struggles. Ultimately, David and Bathsheba’s child dies. There is some confusing behavior by David that teaches us a lesson in resiliency.

While the child lives David mourns and when the child dies David ceases mourning and gets back to living. This is odd even to us today and most certainly to those looking on back then. It was culturally and religiously expected that a period of honest ritual mourning be observed in the face of a death. To not do it violates social and spiritual norms and rules. Why would David do this?

In his repentant grief David despairs. His hope is that seeing his earnest sorrow God will relent on the judgment. He is demonstrating his heart to God with a desired outcome. That the child is destined for death is known. Perhaps this destiny can be thwarted. While this makes sense to David to us it may seem strange as I can see most wanting to soak up every moment with their newborn infant when death is imminent. Not so here.

Then when the judgment comes David dusts off and resumes a healthy routine. It flips the whole script. In doing so we see a new perspective in David that we might also do well to emulate. When a consequence falls or life hands us a hard moment whatever is lost so long as we are still here there is another day. There is hope. There is more to be done.

We have a mission and a purpose. While mistakes, accountability, and loss might cause a hiccup it doesn’t derail all of who we are and what we are to be about. So get up and keep living. Don’t waste time leaving things undone for another day. That itself would be folly.

David understands this and so regardless of what others expect from him, he will do what he believes to be correct. He has owned his mistake, accepted judgment and consequence, and dwelling on it does no good. Get back to life.

We don’t know how long he consoled Bathsheba or what that looked like. There’s no sense he came clean with her about his sin against Uriah. All we know is that they came together and had a son. Solomon’s name means wholeness. The mess around David’s misdeeds has been resolved between David and God.

Nathan gives the name Jedidiah which we almost never hear Solomon called. It means “beloved of God”, a name of hope.

While David the King is on solid royal ground and David the man of God has been reconciled, even in the hope of a new child we’ll soon see that David the man has created a hornet’s nest.

The end blip about defeating the Ammonites seems almost abrupt and odd. All we are receiving here is tying up loose ends before diving into the next chapter and phase of David’s life and “soap opera” with his family. The war has been the backdrop against which this last drama has been set. It’s now over.

Joab displays shrewd, favor winning wisdom. When victory over the Ammonites is clear rather than taking the glory for himself he invites David to take the city and the win. It would seem this would be a good ego boost to a king who's suffered a harsh loss. It is smart to let the king get the praise as it serves a longer term purpose of cultivating grace and favor down the road.

David enslaves the Ammonites essentially. This is a place where it's helpful to remember that there is no moral judgment for or against this enslavement. It is matter of fact and was how things were done in that day and time. Much as we might disagree with the morality of it, and see wrong as wrong no matter the time in history, we acknowledge that imposing hard judgment against a past people for whom this was simply life as they new it isn't necessarily fair. We can extend grace to them and at the same time hold ourselves to a higher standard here and now.

The chapter ends with a victorious David and a new prince named Solomon in the family. Next we'll see that as rosy as this might seem, harmony will not be the order of the day for David's children.