



November 10, 2013 Messages from the Wilderness

Scripture: II Samuel 11:1-3

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite."

MONDAY 11.11.13 2 Samuel 11:1-27 David forfeited moral authority

David didn't choose his first wilderness time (cf. 1 Samuel 23:14-24). King Saul's paranoia forced that on him. But by the time of this story, David was king of all Israel, respected and loved. Dazzled by Bathsheba's beauty, he seized her for his own pleasure, though she was married to one of his loyal soldiers. To cover his role in her pregnancy, he first tried to manipulate, and then killed, her husband Uriah. He wounded his reign, and badly damaged his moral character and leadership.

- Once David veered off course, each step seemed to flow almost logically from the one before it. Our self-made wildernesses seldom spring full-grown from one huge mistake, but get worse and worse as we try to avoid the results of earlier errors. Have you ever felt trapped in a course of action that seemed to just keep getting worse? What does it take, for David or you, to stop the sequence and move back toward God's path?
- Was Bathsheba a naive victim, oblivious to the site of David's palace, or did she maybe hope to seduce the king? The text doesn't say. Regardless, only David was to blame for his terribly wrong action. No one else can force you to do wrong. Have you heard excuses like "I couldn't help myself" or "_____ made me do it"? What makes it vital for you to recognize that no one else can take away your power to choose to do right?

Prayer: Lord God, it must have seemed so simple to David at the start. Please root your principles deeply in my heart, so that I can sense when my life is going off-course before it all spirals to disaster. Amen.

TUESDAY 11.12.13 2 Samuel 12:1-14 David had to face up to the wrong he'd done

As we read yesterday, King David masterminded a terrible series of events. He committed adultery with a friend's wife, and got her pregnant. Then he tried to cover up his affair, and ordered Uriah placed at the front of a battle line, guaranteeing his death. David had to face up to the wrong he had done. God used one of David's closest friends and advisers, Nathan the prophet, to hold him accountable.

- At first, David only seemed interested in covering up his sin. But after Nathan helped David see what he'd done, we read David's response: "David confessed to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan replied, 'Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you ...'" (verse 13). David's deeds were horrible, with severe consequences, yet even David's sins were not beyond the reach of God's grace. What does it tell you about God that he forgave David? Is there anything in your life you feel you should own up to and confess to God?
- As King, David had the power to do whatever he wished. But Nathan had the courage to hold David accountable. Has it ever taken a nudge from someone else (or, as in David's case, a forceful shove!) to get you to see clearly some place where you have missed the mark? Do you have one or more "Nathans" who you trust, and who have earned the right to call you to accountability when you need to seek forgiveness for something?

Prayer: Lord, give me the honesty and the courage to build caring, accountable friendships. Help me listen to my "Nathans," and to be willing to be one for someone else when we've built trust. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 11.13.13 Psalm 51:1-10, 32:1-5 Repentance and divine forgiveness

David turned away from his reckless, destructive course after Nathan's challenge. Psalm 51 reflects the profound spiritual dynamic involved in setting aside excuses, and taking ownership of his errors in order to accept God's forgiveness and renewed peace. Psalm 32 addressed the inner emptiness that came from concealing what he had done, and the freedom and release that came with letting go of the cover-up mindset.

- "God will not be toyed with. Don't pretend you're seeking forgiveness if you're really not. The kind of half-hearted apologies we sometimes offer don't cut it here" (Adam Hamilton, *Forgiveness*, p. 27). What do you learn from Psalm 51 about what whole-hearted repentance sounds like? When have you been able to talk to God in that forthright, trusting, unqualified tone?
- Do you find it hard to acknowledge to yourself, others or God that certain things were wrong? Think of times when you have repented (a word that means "turn around, change direction") and felt your load lighten. What was the experience like to trust in God's grace, and find the freedom and relief the psalmist described in Psalm 32:5?

Prayer: Lord God, I realize that there have been times, after I've messed up, when I think I'm fooling you, when I'm really just fooling myself. Help me to quit hiding, to honestly seek your healing light. Amen.

THURSDAY 11.14.13 2 Samuel 15:1-16, 16:15-17:14 Rebellion—led by David's own son

David's repentance and God's forgiveness did not wipe out all the consequences of David's wrong actions with Bathsheba. David's self-inflicted wound cost him many people's respect. Absalom, one of his sons, led a major revolt, exploiting that lesser public regard for David. (Putting 2 Samuel 23:34 with 2 Samuel 11:3, many scholars think Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather. That would explain why David's advisor helped the rebels.) His initial success drove David from his beloved capital, Jerusalem, and into a new wilderness journey.

- Absalom was a clever politician, with a knack for telling everyone in his “audience” exactly what they wanted to hear. As you read the account of his “campaign” for the kingship, do you believe he would have been able to keep all of the promises he made to people? Is it possible to offer straight talk and honesty, and yet to work effectively with a variety of people? When have you done this, or seen it done?
- Pastor Ken Chafin pointed out that, in this painful crisis, David showed his renewed relationship with God: “There was a very deep trust in God’s ability to bring things to the right conclusion. This is shown most vividly in his ordering the ark back to Jerusalem. There is in his ‘If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord’ (v. 25) a willingness to surrender himself to God’s will for his life.” At what “wilderness” points in life have you been able to draw strength from your relationship with God?

Prayer: Lord God, David wasn’t perfect. But beneath all his mistakes, he loved you, and that made him a person through whom you could lead. Give me a heart that is constant in my love for you. Amen.

FRIDAY 11.15.13 2 Samuel 18:1-18, 18:31-19:8 David’s costly, painful victory

David organized his loyal soldiers to resist Absalom’s rebellion. He did plead with them not to hurt his son. His veteran fighters beat Absalom’s army, and Joab brutally ignored David’s wish. David’s self-inflicted weakness in the end brought him the shattering grief of losing Absalom, the son he loved despite his disloyalty.

- Though many of his wounds were self-inflicted, David avoided the error of letting shame paralyze him. He’d sent a “secret agent” into Absalom’s camp to thwart Ahithophel’s wise counsel. Now he drew on his years of military experience to organize his troops under experienced commanders. What made it important for David to trust God and not succumb to paralyzing shame? Think of times when it has been important for you to act rather than hiding away. Has your faith helped you at those times?
- Absalom listened to the wrong advice, chose a poor spot for his inexperienced army to fight in, and left himself helpless by his panicky riding. The man who had built himself a big stone monument (chapter 18:18) ended up dead beneath a big pile of stones. How could so poor a leader fool so many people? How can God’s principles help you make wise choices in which leaders you follow?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me, like David, be a person of action, not in my own strength but in yours. Give me your wisdom, that I may choose my battles (in whatever sphere) wisely, and for your glory. Amen.

SATURDAY 11.16.13 1 Chronicles 28:1-10, 29:1-9, 2 Samuel 23:1-5

In faith, David outlived his errors

David’s bad choices put him (and Israel) through great “wilderness” pain, even to a brief civil war. But because he made peace with God and continued to bear his kingly responsibilities, they didn’t end his service to God and his people. In his final years, he collected supplies for the Temple his son Solomon would build. According to 2 Samuel 23, his final words praised God for guiding him in his duties as king.

- In *Mandela: The Authorized Biography*, the great South African leader said, “The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but rising every time we fall.” His words characterize David well. What did it take for you to rise up after the worst falls you have taken? What choices can you make every day that will help you live with the same kind of spiritual trust and psychological resilience that David showed?

Prayer: Lord God, whenever I fall, help me to rise again. And keep building in me the character and wisdom to help me to fall less and less. Amen.

Family Activity: David was a very wise king, but even he did not always make choices that honored God. Sometimes he made choices that hurt others and sometimes they hurt him. As a family, talk about choices people make every day. Which do you pick when you have a choice between eating a candy bar or an apple? When you could do your own homework or look off someone else’s paper? When you could tell the truth or lie? How do the choices we make affect us and other people? Which choices honor God? Pray and ask God to help you make choices that honor you, others and God.