

“A Royal Scandal”

2 Samuel 11 and 12

Series: The Story Chapter 12 The Trials of a King

The Rev. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

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Three years ago, on the Saturday before Easter, Stuart Moffatt drove his wife and three kids to the annual Easter Egg Hunt in the British town of Holford, Somerset. About 25 children participated in the egg hunt in a field beside a busy road. As the hunt drew to an end, the parents counted the gathered eggs to see if the kids got them all. That’s when Stuart looked up and spotted a three-year-old boy who found an egg near the road. Since he didn’t recall placing an egg that close to the road, Stuart walked out to the child, who was now standing on top of the egg. Impressed that the egg did not crack, Stuart walked up and noticed the egg was oddly shaped and textured. Finally, kneeling beside the little boy, still standing on top of the egg, Stuart realized it was not an egg at all. It was a hand grenade. In fact, it was a live, fully-functional World War 2 grenade. Stuart picked the boy up off the grenade and backed away. The parents immediately called in police who brought in a bomb disposal unit which destroyed the grenade. The news reported it turned out to be a very Egg-splosive Easter.¹

When you go on a hunt it is easy to be fooled. The grenade looked like an egg, was shaped like an egg, was the size of an egg. But it was far more than it appeared, more than anyone bargained for. When we go on a hunt, when our eyes wander, when our hands wander, when our feet wander, when our hearts wander, we often find more than we bargain for. In fact, the results can be explosive.

In chapter 12 of *The Story* we read about a scandal that sounds like it comes from the British Royal Household. But King David is the one with the wandering eyes, hands and heart. And the results are explosive. Up to now, David’s rise is meteoric from shepherd boy to Shepherd of all Israel. Three years after the death of Saul, David, at the age of thirty, is crowned king. He captures a tiny hilltop citadel from some Jebusites and turns it into his capital city: Jerusalem. The surrounding nations fall like dominos before him: Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Arameans, they all drop at his feet. Such victories, such a rush of power can go straight to one’s ego. “Nothing,” David thinks, “is beyond my reach.” The king is so confident of his power that when spring comes, the time when all kings go off to war, David stays in Jerusalem and let his generals do the fighting.

That’s his first mistake: **Opportunity**. David is alone. He is isolated. There is no one to say “No.” No one to hold him accountable. No one to suggest a different path. He thinks no one is watching him. Isolation provides the opportunity for temptation. Recovering Alcoholics warn one another with an acronym: HALT – watch out if you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. These conditions create the opportunity for what happens next.

It is evening, the palace is quiet, and David is restless. Rising from his bed, he walks out on the flat roof of the palace. Archaeologists believe they have uncovered David’s palace. The homes in Jerusalem are set into a steep hillside with his royal house commanding the highest

¹ Suzan Clarke, "British Boy Finds Live Hand Grenade on Easter Egg Hunt," ABC News (4-9-12).

ground. From his perch, the king notices a woman taking her evening bath below. She is unaware of the eyes that follow her every move from on high, eyes which drink in her beauty. A hunger begins to burn within him. He should go back to bed. Yet he lingers just a bit longer and lets the urge grow. The flames of passion quickly engulf him. His head and heart tell him to turn away. But he refuses to hear their cry. Nothing else is denied him. Why this? So David, king of Israel, Emperor of nations, resolves to make another conquest. He doesn't even know her name. David wakes up a servant to find out about the woman lives in the house below. "That is the home of Uriah the Hittite," the servant replies. "It must be his wife Bathsheba."

The second mistake: **Observation**. Temptation often enters through the eyes although it can easily connect with our desires through other senses like taste and touch, sound and scent. Temptation on the outside connects with hunger on the inside. John Ortberg and his wife Nancy went fly-fishing for the first time. The guide told them "to catch a fish you have to think like a fish." The goal of a fish is maximum gratification of appetite at the minimum expenditure of energy. It's basically "see a fly, want a fly, eat a fly." They are just a stomach, a mouth, a pair of eyes and a bundle of appetites. John thought:

While we were on the water, I was struck by how dumb the fish are. Hey, swallow this. It's not the real thing; it's just a lure. You'll think it will feed you, but it won't. It'll trap you. If you were to look closely, fish, you would see the hook. You'd know once you were hooked that it's just a matter of time before the enemy reels you in.

You'd think fish would wise up and notice the hook or see the line. You'd think fish would look around at all their fish friends who go for a lure and fly off into space and never return. But they don't. It is ironic. We say fish swim together in a school, but they never learn.

Aren't you glad we're smarter?²

Temptation deceives us into thinking the lure will satisfy our hunger. Then it sets the hook.

And that's the third mistake: **Obsession**. David's secret dalliance with Bathsheba is rapidly played out in a single verse.

Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her...Then she went back home. (2 Samuel 11:4)

You can almost feel the racing pulse of the king in this quick line: he sends for her, he takes her, he sleeps with her and she goes back home. Bible scholar Walter Brueggeman points out, "There is no conversation, there is no hint of caring, of affection, of love - only lust. David does not call her by name, does not even speak to her." (Brueggemann, p.273). He exploits Bathsheba for his own gratification. She is not a person but the object of his lust. This is not an act of love but of power, conquest, domination, and control. The whole crime of passion races toward a tragic conclusion: she conceives and sends word to the king, "I am pregnant."

² John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*, (Zondervan, 2010), pp. 137-38.

What are our obsessions? USA Today printed a survey of 3,000 adults on the subject of temptation. It found:

Power: Men (2 percent), Women (7 percent)
Alcohol: Men (7 percent), Women (2 percent)
Money: Men (14 percent), Women (15 percent)
Food: Men (29 percent), Women (56 percent)
Sex: Men (50 percent), Women (22 percent)³

There is an addiction no one wants to discuss and it is lust. We are being conditioned and changed by a flood of graphic scenes on television, movies and the internet. The Huffington Post says that 30% of all data transferred across the internet is porn-related and that porn sites receive more regular traffic than Netflix, Amazon and Twitter combined. It is destroying relationships and marriages. And we have no idea the impact it is having on generations of children and teens. Lust for men is usually visual. For women it tends to be more relational. John Ortberg's wife Nancy writes,

I have a dear friend who is in a marriage that is hard, just plain old hard. And rather than face the pain of "the hard" she escapes for hours in the day into a fantasy world that is starring another man in her church, who doesn't know about how she feels about him. So, she feels like it's safe. But it is an amazing amount of time she daydreams and thinks about this person. Sexual idolatry could take a turn where it's not fantasy, but something like pornography, and it's got such a grip on you that you know full well it is an idol for you. And you don't know how to get it out of your life, and it competes and it obscures who God is.⁴

That is the fourth mistake: **Obscure** or cover up the evidence. David, the man of action, immediately devises a cover up. The king recalls to Jerusalem the last man you would think he wants around: her husband Uriah. David reasons that Uriah, like all soldiers on furlough, will want to sleep with his wife. Thus the pregnancy will be assigned to him. After patiently sitting through Uriah's field report, David says, "Go down to your house Uriah, wash your feet, have a good evening, you've earned it." The king gives him a knowing wink, slaps him on the back and sends him home with a gift. But Uriah doesn't go home. He sleeps in the palace. When David learns of this he questions his soldier, "Why didn't you go home?" "How I could go to my house to eat, drink and be with my wife" Uriah dutifully replies, "when your soldiers, generals and even the ark of the covenant are suffering in tents on the field of war. As surely as you live, my king, I will never do such a thing!" The answer of this foreigner rains shame down on the mighty king of Israel. This Hittite is more righteous and obedient to God than the king. While soldiers fight and die for him, David lies in the lap of luxury and he takes this man's wife.

The shame, however, does not cause David to repent. Next he gets Uriah drunk to dull his conscience. But still the soldier sleeps it off in the palace instead of going home. Finally David sends him back to the front lines carrying a sealed message to the general Joab. "Put this man in

³ Michelle Healy and Alejandro Gonzalez, "Temptation Calling," USA Today (3-9-10).

⁴ Nancy Ortberg, "Modern Golden Calves," Preaching Today #203.

the front lines and then withdraw your forces so he may be killed." And so David sends Uriah back to war carrying his own death warrant. When news of his death reaches the home front, the king graciously consoles the grieving widow and then, after a respectable length of time, marries her. The cover up is complete. No one suspects. No eyes have seen...except the Lord. "And the thing David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Sam. 11:27).

The next day, Nathan the prophet, David's closest advisor, visits the king and tells him a strange little story about a rich man who owns a very large number of sheep and cattle and a poor man who has just one little lamb for a family pet. Yet when a friend visits, the rich man does not take one of his many sheep to prepare a meal for the traveler. Instead he seizes the little lamb from the poor man and sacrifices it. David, a former shepherd, is outraged. "The man who did this deserves death. He must pay for the lamb four times over for his heartless crime. Who is this evil man?" Then Nathan looks the king squarely in the eye and says, "You are the man." David knows he was caught. "I have sinned against the Lord," he confesses.

And the final outcome of all this is **Obliteration**. David breaks God's law against coveting, adultery and murder. And the consequences and cost of his passion are beyond calculation. Like a hand grenade, David's sin explodes in his household. The fallout from this affair devastates the royal family. David's sons follow their father's pattern and commit even more shocking sexual sins. Eventually David is driven from Jerusalem by his son Absalom in an act of defiance and rebellion. What starts off as a hunt for pleasure unleashes a chain reaction that leads to family dysfunction and death.

Our culture tells us many lies about sex: "It doesn't matter who you are with so long as no one gets hurt." David's story shows people always get hurt. "It is all about taking and self-satisfaction." God created sex so we can give love not take lust. "It is too powerful to tame. You must obey your sex drive." This lie makes sex your god. Our culture calls these attitudes liberation. In fact they are manipulation because the culture knows that sex sells. Just think how sex in movies and TV has changed over the years. They are pushing a drug to sell their product. For a time, sex covers the pain, the fear, the hurt. It makes us feel powerful and in control. But its pleasure is brief. And like any drug, we need ever stronger doses to get high. Once temptation sets the hook we are trapped.

It is time to recover God's original blueprint for sexuality. Sex is God's creation. It is His good gift to us. It is the source of children. It is intended to give pleasure and joy. But like all his gifts, we must use it responsibly within God's guidelines. Misuse or abuse leads to hurt, danger, even death. People who get behind the wheel of a car and blatantly disregard the rules of the road soon pay the cost for their negligence - and so do the people around them. It is the same with sexuality. It is like fire. When fire is kept in the furnace, the fireplace, or the oven, it accomplishes wonderful things. Houses are warmed and food is cooked. Fire makes life possible. But if we let it out of the fireplace, the furnace, or the oven, it burns the house to the ground. God intends for the fire of passion to remain safely within the context of marriage. There it gives warmth, joy, and nourishment to the relationship. When sex is the crowning act of a complete commitment, a marriage bond that intimately unites two lives, it has a deep and profound meaning. But if it gets out of the fireplace, it burns and even destroys relationships and lives.

Teenagers, adults, if you are involved in pornography, in premarital sex, in an extramarital affair, the Lord says to you, "Please, don't play with fire."

God provides a way out. The Lord invites you to rediscover his original plan for passion and pleasure. No matter what has happened in the past, you can always start afresh with a clean slate. The misuse of sex is not the worst sin, nor is it an unforgiveable sin. Let the Spirit of God make you pure, clean, and whole. If you turn to him, he will always forgive you and transform you. This part of the Story presents a very predictable pattern of lust: Opportunity leads to Observation, Obsession, Obscuring the truth and finally Obliteration. Think of it like a train. When it starts it's still going slow and you can get off. The longer you stay on the train, the faster it picks up speed and the harder it is to escape. How do you get off the runaway train of lust? Avoid the Opportunity altogether. Don't scan the TV late at night. Don't surf the internet. Keep clear of relationships that are becoming inappropriate. Find an accountability partner with whom you can be honest and confidential. Pray and seek God's power to recover. If you feel out of control, contact one of the pastors or a trusted Christian friend for help. There are counselors, support groups and books we can recommend to help you be free.

The price is too high to pay. Don't let this grenade go off in your life.