

Psalms

Mar 2024



March 10th-16th.

2 Samuel 11-12.

Nathan confronts David about his adultery with Bathsheba.

A little warning upfront. This is quite a confronting study and a little longer than usual. I hope you can hang in there right through it. But if you can't, that's ok.

Proverbs is a book that was written as a curriculum for young men to teach them what they needed to be able to live a wise, productive life. Interestingly, adultery is given two full chapters in Proverbs. In these chapters, adultery is painted as incredibly destructive. In contrast, our society often portrays adultery as neutral or positive.

Research Gate¹ says that of all content on TV, one-third depicts infidelity of some sort. Interestingly, sexual infidelity is portrayed positively, while romantic infidelity is portrayed negatively. This reflects the myth that someone can enter an adulterous liaison or relationship and somehow separate their heart from the action. But the Bible makes it clear that we are a whole: body, mind and spirit. What we do in one aspect of who we are affects all of who we are.

Drawing on the destructiveness of adultery, God describes his people's betrayal of their relationship with him as adultery. Here are just a couple of examples.

"During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there." Jeremiah 3:8

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? 6 But he gives us more grace. James 4:4-6a.

Adultery, in all its different expressions, is all around us. But what is the motivation behind adultery? You may never have committed "adultery", and yet the bible says that when it comes to our relationship with Yahweh, we are all adulterous.

Adultery sees another person as a commodity. It tempts an individual to step into a relationship outside of the covenant of marriage to treat another person as something they can consume to satisfy them. When we do this, we buy into the lie that we can compartmentalise our life or, in the case of the Research Gate findings, that we believe some adultery is positive.

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360004381_Prime_Time_Affairs_A_Quantitative_Analysis_of_Infidelity_in_Popular_Television_Programs#:~:text=Findings%20revealed%20that%20approximately%20one,reason%20characters%20engaged%20in%20infidelity.

Read 2 Samuel 11 & 12 (to verse 24).

1. What are the different adulteries in this event where David had treated others as commodities?
2. Nathan's confrontation with David was risky and complex. What could have prevented Nathan from going to David?
3. Paul writes, *"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."* Galatians 6:1&2. Have you ever experienced going to someone "caught in sin?"
 1. How can we "go gently"?
 2. How can we "watch ourselves" as we go?

Paul says that in going to someone caught in sin we do two things:

- We carry each other's burdens.
- We fulfil the law of Christ.

We often don't go to others even when we see them caught in sin. I think there are lots of reasons why. We're afraid of how they may respond, we are intimidated by the deep prayer and reflection we need to undertake before we go, or that if we're willing to have such conversations with others, this may mean allowing others to come to us in the places where we are "caught". I'd like to suggest that this is another form of adultery. When we aren't willing to go to others when things are difficult or to receive others who are concerned for us, then the community becomes another consumer item, another adultery. Where we use others to satisfy us, but if it gets difficult or challenging, we step away.

4. Adultery, in all its forms, always has a cost. Nathan bore a cost when he went to David. Jesus bore the cost of our adulteries when he went to the cross. Someone must pay the cost. We all long for love. We all desire community. Is there a place where God is asking you, like Nathan and Jesus, to "bear the cost" of someone else's infidelity? What does it look like for you?

This is very challenging stuff. So, can I finish with what Paul wrote further on in Galatians 6?

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Galatians 6:9&10.

Some of us need others to encourage us not to grow weary in tough places. But some of us may need others to say you *"no longer have the opportunity"*. In other words, it's not wise to continue or persist with that person. The difference between the two requires discernment and wisdom. So, as you consider your "adulteries", remember Jesus has paid for your failure. But also, as you consider others, remember Jesus has paid for theirs as well. From that place, ask for Yahweh's wisdom.

March 17th-23rd

PSALM 51- Devine mercy for the heart that turns.

Part 1.

One of my favourite films is Les Misérables. If you can, stop as a group and watch the “final scene.” (Search for “Les Misérables (1998) - Final Scene”). It goes for five minutes.

Inspector Javert, who has hunted the convict Valjean all his life, has a final confrontation. Javert, whose life was saved by Valjean, cannot accept the mercy he received from Valjean. So, when he is able to capture Valjean, he is in turmoil about what to do. He says to Valjean, “It’s a pity the rules don’t allow me to be merciful...I have tried to live my entire life without breaking a single rule.” He then sets Valjean free and takes his own life. The foundation on which Javert had stood was his own self-righteousness. In showing mercy to Valjean, his foundation of self-righteousness crumbled, and the only way he could see to reconcile this was to take his own life.

In committing adultery, David’s world crumbled. The foundation of his success as king crumbled, and in his adulterous actions, he brought destruction to so many people.

In this Psalm of penitence, David sees his absolute need for mercy. In his journey of repentance, David discovers a number of things.

1. That he had sinned first against God. In discovering and living from the mercy and grace of God, why is it vital for us to realise that we have first sinned against God?
2. David says that he realises he is “sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” Vs 5. David was not saying that the beautiful process of conception and birth is sinful, but rather that all people have been born into sin. This contradicts the belief in our world that people are basically good and just have a few bad habits or traits that can be fixed. This is “original sin” that Paul writes about in Romans 5:12-21. David came to recognise that this original sin was in him before he gave into his sinful passions which overcame and overthrew him. We might be tempted to compare ourselves to David and think, “I am not that bad.” But when we recognise that we have been born into sin, it opens us up for something wonderful- mercy.

Read verses 1-9. What are the expressions of mercy that David experiences?

David prays to be delivered from bloodguilt (v 14). This is an unusual term. One we don't use. John Stott says, Perhaps he means that, although he has indeed been guilty of the blood of Uriah, he is determined that God shall not require at his hand the blood of sinners whom he has failed to warn and teach (compare Ezekiel 3:16–27 and 33:1–20).²

It's easy to see the sins we've done (or others have done) that we need God's mercy for. But what about the things we haven't done that we should have done? James says, “Remember, it is a sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.” James 4:7. Is there anything in your life this applies to?

Whether it is things we have done that are sinful, or should have done but we have failed to do, all of them we can receive mercy and forgiveness for; we just need to ask (1 John 1:9).

² John Stott, *Favourite Psalms: Growing Closer to God* (Mill Hill, London; Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2003), 57.

Part 2.

The second part of the Psalm (vs 13–19) is devoted to the results which follow an experience of the cleansing and recreating mercy of God. David resolves that his attitude both to other people and to God will be different.

David first accepts his responsibility to his fellow humans. He has sinned against them; now, he will serve them in a new way. When his own transgressions have been forgiven, he will teach transgressors God's way so that they return to him.

You see this happen time and again when people encounter the mercy and grace of God. Consider:

- John 4, the woman at the well who goes back to her hometown and those who had rejected her to tell them about Jesus.
- Luke 19 and the tax collector Zacchaeus, who gives half of his money away and submits the rest of his resources to God's use in response to the mercy he receives from Jesus.

Is there an action God is calling you to, in response to his love and mercy?

What encouragement do you need from your group to follow through?

March 24th-29th.

1 Samuel 24, Psalm 57 and The Feast of Purim.

“For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” Psalm 100:5

On Sunday, it was both Palm Sunday and the feast of Purim. Palm Sunday, we remember Jesus being welcomed into Jerusalem as the Messiah.

Entering the rapturous welcome of those who saw him as their saviour on the Sunday, he was a few days later giving his life as God’s “lamb” to take away our sin.

This momentous event would not have happened if, 450 years earlier, God hadn’t saved the Jewish people, including Jesus’ ancestors, from extermination at the hands of the Persian King Xerxes. The Feast of Purim celebrates God’s deliverance of his people 450 years before Jesus.

While we may not be aware of it, the coinciding of Palm Sunday and the Feast of Purim reminds us that often what we see as a momentous event is often determined by events that occurred earlier than we may overlook.

We can often be drawn to the big moments when God does something amazing, but we miss seeing all the steady-handed events that God worked through, which that momentous moment was dependent on.

You have had some momentous moments with God in your life. But what were the smaller, more easily overlooked people or events in your past without which you would not know Jesus today?

Take some time as a group to praise God for both the momentous moments and those who steadily and faithfully sowed into you.

Someone listened.

For us to have our momentous moments, someone else before us listened to God and obeyed him so that we could meet Jesus.

Think of all the people whom we can overlook who listened and obeyed God so that eventually Jesus could be our saviour...

- Miriam listened to God and pointed Pharaohs daughter to Moses lying in a floating bassinet.
- Samuel, as a boy, listened in the temple, eventually becoming God’s prophet who would eventually guide nations and anoint kings.
- Ruth listened to her mother-in-law Ruth. Eventually, Boaz, their kinsman, rescued them, married Ruth, and as a couple, they became the grandparents of King David and the great-grandparents x20 of Jesus.
- Esther was prepared to advocate for the Jews before the King as they faced the threat of genocide.

Can you remember any other events that are pivotal in God’s redemptive plan but which we tend to overlook?

Listening and you

There may be events in our lives right now that seem small and insignificant, and we are tempted to overlook their importance. But we really don't know the impact of these small events and their importance in God's redemptive plan.

In the Parable of the Sower- the parable Jesus said was "*the*" parable by which we understand all other parables (Mark 4:13), Jesus uses the word "hear" seven times in 8 verses. He concludes his instruction to his disciples of this parable with this powerful principle of listening.

"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them." Luke 8:18.

Q. How do we listen carefully?

Q. What shows you when someone is listening to God?

Passage. Read 1 Samuel 24. David would seem justified in striking Saul down for his unjust treatment of him, in fact, it looked to many that God had "delivered Saul into David's hand for this reason. But instead of killing Saul, we read that when David cuts the corner of his coat, he was "conscious stricken" (Vs 5).

Our conscious isn't the voice of God, but I heard one person describe our conscious as "The canvas on which God can paint."

Q. Have there been times when you have felt justified in striking someone down?

This event in David's may be one that we could easily miss the significance of, but how did David have to trust God in this moment? And how did it set him up for the future when he eventually became the king?

Listening.

- How is your listening?
- What helps you to listen to God?
- How is the canvas of your conscious? Is it blank, ready to receive the Spirit's brush strokes?
- Is there something God is asking you to do now which seems small, but which may have a much bigger impact in the future?

Talk and pray together for your listening, your faithfulness in small things and to lay aside your "rights" and entrust God to deal with difficult situations you are tempted to take into your hands.

March 30th- April 7th.

Psalm 61. Lead me to the higher Rock.

We don't know the events surrounding this Psalm of lament that David writes. But he does express something that we've all done, wished we were somewhere else, or that something else had happened.

I remember listening to Michael Guillen describe an experience where he thought he was going to die when the mini-submarine he was in got caught up in the giant propellor of the Titanic.

Michael, at the time, wasn't a Christian. Still, as he contemplated dying at the bottom of the ocean, he remembered a verse from the bible: "... if I make my bed in the depths, you are there..." (Psalm 139:8). Remembering this verse took him to pray as he realised that even in that place he could cry out to Yahweh. He describes an "unbelievable peace" coming over as he did, so that despite his "heart growing faint", he knew that he was God's.

Q. Have you ever had a time that you wished things were different, or perhaps you called out to God from "the ends of the earth"?

Vs 2. David asks God to "lead me..." To be led requires humility, a willingness to surrender the way we think we need to work through a problem.

In my experience, I have tended to have temporary humility but then revert back to my way.

Q. What would you say that keeps you not just listening out to the Spirit of God but willing to have Him lead you?

Q. What does being "led" by God look like? As a group, come up with three practical ways (have a look at verses 3-5. You might find some key words).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In the second half of this Psalm, David switches to speaking about his kingship. Asking God to "increase the days of the king's life." He is speaking about influence that affects "many generations."

David, like all of us, made vows or promises (vs 5&8), but like us, he also struggled with keeping them. He recognised in verses 7&8 that the authority of his role and ability to follow through with the promises attendant to his role came from seeing what he was doing in light of God's eternal presence.

Q. What are you struggling to follow through with in your role as a parent, worker, employer, son, daughter or friend? Share this with your small group and spend time praying for each other that we will live with an increased sense of our everlasting relationship with Yahweh, whose purposes for us do not fail even at "the ends of the earth."