

CHAPTER 12, THE TRIALS OF A KING

TIMELESS TRUTH: SIN HAS ITS CONSEQUENCES, BUT REDEMPTION IS ALWAYS NEAR.

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

David was voted least likely among his brothers to be anointed king. He was the last person on the battlefield you'd pick to play the hero's part, but David was the underdog who overcame. He confronted lions, giants and kings with bare hands and bold faith. At last, the man after God's own heart became the man on Israel's throne.

But kings who stay home from battle are seldom at rest. David's eyes wandered and so did his heart. He summoned the very lovely and very married Bathsheba to his palace and then into his bed. When Bathsheba sent word she was pregnant, David turned his strategy tactics toward her husband, Uriah.

He called Uriah home from the battlefield to visit his wife, expecting a night together would position Uriah as the father-to-be. The plan failed, so David concocted a surefire Plan B. He sent Uriah back to the frontlines carrying his own death warrant: an order for General Joab to engineer a battlefield "accident" and guarantee Uriah's death. The plan worked. David married Bathsheba and went back to the business of the kingdom.

Then Nathan, the prophet, came to the palace. Guilty kings never fare well when prophets arrive for a visit. Nathan told a parable and pointed the finger of blame squarely in David's face. He asserted, "*You are the man!*" and David knew he'd met his match. The man after God's own heart had become the man with blood on his hands. David and Bathsheba's marriage feasting turned quickly into mourning the death of their son. David repented of his sin and God forgave him. They had a second son named Solomon, which means *peace*.

Sadly, David was a better king than father. David's sin was forgiven, but its aftermath was calamitous. His son, Absalom, attempted to usurp the throne and his rise to power resulted in a rebellion. David instructed his troops to be gentle with his proud son, perhaps because he connected the dots between Absalom's behavior and his own failures as a father. But the clash between David's army and Absalom's rebels was brutal. When Absalom was found hanging from a tree limb, Joab seized the moment and killed the conspirator. King David mourned in anguish when he heard the news.

David's closing chapter turns the page from battles to building. He knew that his son, Solomon, would build a house for God, so he did all he could to prepare the way. From the overflow of David's heart came the emptying of his bank account. Others followed the king's example and gave willingly to build God's temple. King David's story draws to a close with poetic psalms of praise, reminders of faithfulness to Solomon, and his sights set on living "*in the house of the LORD forever.*"

David's Lower Story places the spotlight on one man's sin and its tragic consequences. Yet it also beams with the offer of forgiveness and redemption. God's grand Upper Story reminds us that no one is righteous on their own. God's promise to David (p.159) pointed across a millennium to a sinless King of Kings; no end of righteousness, no end of peace, and the redemption of all things.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: Share a time when you made a wrong turn on a road trip and the results created a real hardship.

1. What were the steps in David's sin and cover-up? Compare David's steps leading to sin with Eve's (p. 5). How can your group help hold each other accountable to guard against the same pathway?
2. Which Ten Commandments did David break in his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah?
3. Why did God take the life of the child when it was his father who sinned? How do you feel about God's decision?
4. Does God's punishment of David (and all his family) fit the crime if God truly forgave him?
5. Psalm 32 describes what David felt before and after his confession (p. 165-166). If all our sins were forgiven by Christ dying on the cross, then what value does confession have today? Why is it so important?
6. Who did David sin against—Bathsheba, Uriah or God? Find examples in the text that prove your point. What does this teach us about sin?
7. Compare David's reaction when hearing the news that his baby had died (p. 165) to his reaction when his son Absalom had died (p. 169). Discuss with your group some explanations that could account for the differences.
8. Following his sin, David's family unraveled. He was betrayed by his son Absalom and deeply mourned his death. How have you responded to betrayal?
9. How did the people feel about giving to the work of the temple that Solomon would build? Why were they so willing?
10. Look back at Psalm 23 (p. 173). Why do you think this passage continues to be so meaningful to people?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER

CHAPTER 13, THE KING WHO HAD IT ALL

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

DAY 1

1. At the beginning of the chapter, Solomon is humble, and looks to God for help. By the end of the chapter, he is using political power and slave labor to maintain his reign. What led to this change?
2. Solomon was only 20 when he became king. One of his first acts as king was to ask God to give him wisdom. Where you have influence, when did you last ask for wisdom?
3. If the LORD offered you anything you wanted, what would you ask for?

DAY 2

1. What does the prayer of Solomon teach us about God and how we approach him?
2. Despite Solomon's wisdom, he also made some poor decisions. Which would you say was the core bad decision and how will you avoid this in your life?

DAY 3

1. The Queen of Sheba traveled a long distance to experience the wisdom of Solomon. Who do you go to for wise advice? How can you take better advantage of those relationships?
2. As Solomon grew older, he was a rich and established ruler. He did not apply the wisdom that defined his early career. How can you continue to seek wisdom, even after you have experienced success?