

Secret Sins

Ryan Fullerton | *illbehonest.com*

I want to speak to you this morning about secret sins. And what I'm talking about is sins we hide and we hope no one will know about, or at least we hope no one who matters will know about. In a Christian, these sins - sins that we hide - painfully rub the conscience raw and they eventually sear the conscience so that it can no longer feel. Secret sins may be responsible for deflating your spiritual joy. Secret sins not only do that, but they drain our spiritual power for life and ministry. And secret sins also demolish our spiritual fellowship. It's amazing - you can always be in community, but if you're hiding something, you will always feel alone and never enjoy fellowship from God's people. Worst of all, secret sins separate us from God. In a Christian, secret sins separate us from the warmth of God's smile. Now there are Christians who stand in grace, but because of secret sins they're holding on to, they never really feel the warmth of God's love. And of course, there are many who are not Christians and who won't become Christians not because they have some religious or philosophical objection to Christianity but because they do not want to expose their secret sins to the light. As D. A. Carson put it many people don't come to Jesus not because they have some actual philosophical disagreement with Christianity, but because they're sleeping with their girlfriends. Worst of all, there are those who think they are Christians but are not. They live a double life. They're going to church. They're playing the game, but behind closed doors, their lives are dominated by secret sins in the present or the memory of some secret sin in the past.

Secret Sins are Not Uncommon Among God's People

And I want to first of all begin by showing you how secret sins are spoken of over and over in the Bible. This is something that afflicts God's people. This is not something that is a rare occurrence among God's people. This is something that God points out repeatedly in His Word because it's something that repeatedly infects His people and drains their joy, drains their fellowship, and ends their effectiveness and their praise in the world. Proverbs tells us in Proverbs 28:13 - and I'm going to go through a lot, so you may jot them down, but you won't be able to get there in time. Proverbs 28:13, "Whoever conceals his transgression will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." There's no good future for you concealing secret sin, but there's mercy ahead of you if you will forsake it. Secret sins we're told in Psalm 90:8 are known to God. It says in Psalm 90:8, "You set our iniquities before You; our secret sins in the light of God's presence." Secret sins always catch up with us. Numbers 32:23 - this verse is haunting. "The Lord said to Israel, 'Be sure your sin will find you out.'" There's no way to cover. There's nowhere in the universe that you can dig a hole deep enough that God won't know everything you've done and can't unearth it anytime He chooses. Jesus tells us in Matthew 12:36-37, "I tell you on the day of judgment people will give an account for every careless word they speak. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned." In other words, by how we speak it will be proven that we were truly children of God. Or, by our words, it will be proven that we weren't at all. You might think, well, this is the

Gospel. Under the Gospel there's no more dealing with secret sins, but actually Paul tells us in Romans 2:16 that "according to his Gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." Jesus does not ignore our secret sins. He has actually been appointed the end time Judge of all of our secret sins.

And of course, you and I don't know each other's secret sins. You and I don't know who this sermon might be meant for; who it might point out. Of course, it's meant for all of us, because even if God has allowed you to come clean of every single secret sin in your life, you are to be the bed of mercy that those whose sins are exposed get to lay down on and find grace in their time of need. But we don't know each other's secret sins and the Bible tells us that. It tells us in 1 Timothy 5:24 some people's sins are obvious, going before them to judgment. But the sins of others surface later. But they do always surface. Ananias and Sapphira's lying about how much they gave surfaced in a matter of a few hours. David's sin with Bathsheba surfaced over the course of a few months. Judas' stealing from Jesus and the Apostles didn't surface for years, but eventually it did surface. And we're told there's coming a day of judgment where every single thing that's private and hidden will become public and out in the open. So there is no secret sin in the universe that will not in due time be open and laid bare before the entire world.

Now I want to be used this morning by the Holy Spirit for your good. I want to be used by the Holy Spirit to uncover secret sins. And I'm not going to name anyone's names this morning. It's not my job to from the pulpit point to someone who I think is keeping a secret. Rather, I'm going to trust that the Holy Spirit will do His work. You remember what we're told His work is? John 16:8-9, "When He comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment." It's my hope that before some incident comes into your life that reveals something going on in your life, it's my hope that before the last day dawns and all is exposed, the Holy Spirit would apply a gentle and sweet and powerful upward pressure to bring anything inside out and to allow us to confess our sins, because when we confess our sins, we are told over and over in the Scriptures, we will find mercy. I promise you that no matter what sin might even be brought to your mind now as I've been speaking, bringing it out will be less painful than keeping it in. In fact, bringing it out will bring you a future you never thought could be as good as it will be because God meets with secret sins - He meets with all sins with His mercy and His grace.

The Story of King David

And I want to speak to you this morning about this from a very famous story - the story of King David, the king of Israel, and his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. And I'm going to tell you this story under five headings. First, David sins and scrambles. Second, God knows and exposes. Third, God forgives and disciplines. Fourth, David pleads and presses on. And finally, God restores.

David Sins and Scrambles

And so let's begin first with: David sins and scrambles. 1 Samuel 11:1, "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab and his servant with him and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah, but David remained at Jerusalem." Israel was a land that was promised peace and victory over her enemies. This is

going to become important actually in my last point. They were promised that they would be able to destroy their enemies around them and have peace in the land. And it was the custom that in the spring - of course when the weather was better - that that's when kings went out to war. And notice the author points out that that's when "kings" went out to war. But the king in this story - King David - we're told decided he was going to sit this one out; that he'd had enough years of war, and he would just send a general to handle the skirmishes that were happening on Israel's eastern front. And what we have here is an instance that reminds us that very often where sin enters into our lives is when we're not taking our place on the front lines of the battlefield that God has placed us in. It's very common that the place sin comes into our life is when we're avoiding the battle that God has called us into. We're told in 1 Timothy 5:13 that there was a bunch of widows who really should have gotten remarried sooner than they had, but because they refused to get remarried they became idlers going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips, busybodies, saying what they should not. It's amazing how much trouble you can get in when you slip back from the front lines of the battle God has placed you in. It's amazing how much trouble you can get yourself in browsing the Internet at work when you should be working, or gossiping on Marco Polo or iMessage when you should be washing the dishes. Neglecting what we are called to do is one of the great places sin will slip into our lives. And all of this is one more proof of the old expression: idle hands are the devil's playground.

And so there's David. Not doing what he should be doing. Idling around on the roof of his castle. And in v. 2 we read, "It happened late one afternoon when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing. And the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, 'Is this not Bathsheba? The daughter of Eliam? The wife of Uriah the Hittite?' So David sent messengers and took her and she came to him and he lay with her. Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness. Then she returned to her house." David must have been used to the power of being a king. When you're a king, you see, you decide, you speak, and things happen. And as you read the text you notice that's what goes on. He saw. He sent. She was taken. She came. He lay with her. She went home. As one commentator pointed out David is the actor. David is in control. David gets what he wants. And it's amazing what we can get from all of our control. It's probably important to notice that all David got was one brief moment of passion. Here for a moment and then gone. And I want to know if you are holding on to secret sin, are you getting anything more than a brief fleeting moment of pleasure from what you're holding on to. And if you held on to it and no one ever found out about it - in fact, if you got the whole world of pleasure, would it be anything compared to your soul?

Anyway, all would have been fine humanly speaking if that was all that happened. Bathsheba and David might have run into each other later on, exchanged furtive glances, but everything would have been hidden. But sin has an amazing way of sticking its head up and revealing itself. You notice that Bathsheba sends a note to David saying, "I am pregnant." So she was going to change into maternity clothes and announce to all of Israel that somebody got her pregnant. And of course, the folks in the palace would begin to whisper about exactly who "somebody" had been.

And that's how life works. A drug addiction shows up in the withdrawals in the bank statement. Embezzlement shows up when fresh eyes look at the books. Abuse shows up when someone gets a bruise makeup can't hide. Anger says, "I was here," when it leaves a hole in the wall. Laziness and lack of self-discipline are exposed when the report card comes home. And of course, adultery is revealed by pregnancy. "And the woman conceived and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'" David had sinned, and Bathsheba's growing belly was going to rat him out all over town. So David scrambles. He knows he will use that kingly authority that brought Bathsheba to him to bring Bathsheba's husband back home from the front lines. And David thinks: aha, there's a plan! I'll bring a soldier back home and that soldier will do what soldiers do when they get back home to their wife for a night of furlough. He'll go home to be with Bathsheba, and then she'll be pregnant and I'll be off the hook. They'll ask who the kid looks like. They'll decide: must look like Bathsheba. And all will be clear for David. His sin will stay secret. Verse 6, "So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going..." A little small talk for Uriah like he was home as a messenger. "Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house and wash your feet.' And Uriah went out of the king's house and there followed him a present from the king." Now David, I imagine, felt one of two ways at this moment. One, he probably felt quite clever. He was sending the soldier home to be with his wife. All will be hidden. But we actually know from Psalm 32 that he felt another way. Psalm 32 is a poem that David wrote about how horrible he felt during this time of hiding his sin. Psalm 32 says, "For when I kept silent my bones wasted away, through my groaning all day. For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." So here's David, clever and cunning, and dying on the inside. I wonder if there are any others here who feel the same way.

But then David runs into a problem. Uriah is a nobler man at this point than David is. He won't go to sleep with his wife. He says, hey, while the ark of God, which was the symbol of God's presence is on the battlefield - and while my buddies from my platoon are risking their lives and sleeping in tents, I'm not going home to be with my wife. And so he sleeps on the palace floor and refuses to go home to Bathsheba. And David thinks, well, what am I going to do? So he has strategy number 2. He says, well, Uriah, stick around one more night. And David, this man after God's own heart gets Uriah drunk. Because if a soldier won't go home to his wife, well, I tell you one guy who will - a drunk soldier will go home to his wife. The passage says, "But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David Uriah did not go down to his house, David said to Uriah, 'Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?' (v. 11) Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths (that's tents), and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in open field. Shall I then go down to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.' Then David said to Uriah, 'Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next, and David invited him, and he ate in the presence and drank so that he made him drunk. In the evening, he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house." David had been thwarted. He had run up against the power that all men in sin hate - the power of a moral man. A man of conviction. A

man whose heart is gripped by the fear of the Lord. If you find that men and women of deep conviction frustrate your plans and get in your way, there's a good chance you are driven by covering up a secret sin.

Anyway, the scramble continues. And it always does. Sin never stays stagnant. You may think that you're just dabbling in something and that you control it. That is not the biblical picture of sin at all. If you are dabbling in something you have no idea how deep that sin will take you. Do you think for your life that David thought, "I'll murder this spring"? He just thought he was staying home. But once sin has got its hook in our cheek it can reel us in into the depths of depravity beyond what we ever thought possible. The Bible tells us that sin is progressive. 2 Timothy 3:13, "Evil men (evil people) and impostors go from bad to worse." Romans 6:19 - Lawlessness leads to more lawlessness. Looking at ladies in bikinis leads to harder porn. You cuss once and you blush and eventually you find yourself swearing like a sailor without noticing. You don't report your tips at tax time and pretty soon you find yourself comfortable stealing from the store. Sin hardens and advances.

Can I ask you this? If you're hiding a sin, have you ever had to sin more to hide it? And if you've hardened your heart to sin and to hide it, how do you know you'll be able to stop? What if you keep hardening yourself? Maybe you will find yourself doing things you never dreamed that you were capable of. Sin demands more and hidden sin demands more sin to cover it, and eventually, David, the man after God's own heart, arranges a murder of Uriah. You think David ever dreamed he would become a murderer? Verse 14, "In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab (that's the general) and sent it by the hand of Uriah." Uriah is holding in his hand his own death warrant. That's calloused. "In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and then draw back from him that he may be struck down and die.' And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting." And David gets the news that Uriah is dead. The scramble is over. The deed is covered. David gives Bathsheba a minute to mourn and then he marries the poor widow. Verse 26, "When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife and bore him a son." The scramble worked. We'll just tell people the baby was born a little premature. The conscience is still screaming, but at least his sin is not going to scream into the city streets when Bathsheba starts wearing maternity clothes. David can rest.

Except that David had forgotten - or should I say suppressed and swept under the rug of his mind the fact that God knows and God exposes. Listen to this haunting last verse. In verse 27, last part of the verse, "And she became his wife and bore him a son (everything's covered), but the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." There is nothing more foolish in the world than hiding sin. You are hiding sin from the One for whom there is no darkness. Psalm 139 - even the darkness is as light to Him. There's no place you can hide before God. He knit you together in your mother's womb and He knows the day of your death. Before a word is on your mouth, He knows it completely. There's no hiding from God. Isaiah 29:15, "Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord who do their work in darkness and think, 'Who sees us? Who will know?'" Proverbs 5:21, "Your ways are in full view of the Lord,

and He examines all your paths." Hebrews 4:13, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account." If you fear your wife's anger so much that you could never tell her what you've done, then you have a super shallow view of God. If you legitimize not telling your wife about your infidelity because you love her so much, you have a terribly shallow view of God. If you're more worried about displeasing your parents than your God, then you have a very small and unbiblical view of God. If you think your boss's anger or losing your job is worse than God's discipline or God's wrath then you need a greater vision of God. David had forgotten God. God had seen and God was displeased. That is all that matters. Immanuel, if we are not a people who deal before the face of God, then we are not God's people. If we are not a people who understand that all we do and have done and will do happens before the face of God, and the most important thing in our lives is to deal with that God in integrity and truth and openness, then we are not the people of God. We are simply one more dead church on the corner.

Now what God does to David is amazing. He does not strike him dead. Both adultery and murder were worthy of capital punishment, of the death penalty in Old Testament Israel. But instead of striking David dead, God begins to pursue him with mercy. He sends his most powerful weapon to slice open David's heart and to surgically expose and remove the secret sin. God sends His Word. He sent it through a man - a prophet named Nathan. He sent Nathan to tell a story - a story that would draw out David's heart and in the process expose David's sin. 2 Samuel 12:1, "And the Lord sent Nathan to David." David did not choose to expose his own sin. God came to get him out of mercy. "He came to him and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city. The one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb which he had bought. And he brought it up and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel, drink from his cup, and lie in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.'" Now, I'm not usually a fan of giving your pets your last name, but it does look like that's what happened here. This was like a daughter to this man. His one little ewe lamb. "Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." You know, you've got to keep your resources secure. You can't be draining away your assets. I know, I'll just abscond this man's one poor little lamb. And he turns this daughter of a lamb into lamb chops and cooks it for his rich friend. "Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. And he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold because he did this thing and because he has had no pity.'" Nathan's story has worked like a Trojan horse. He has snuck in to convict David. If he had come into the room of a man who is now an adulterer, a liar, and a murderer, and he had just said, "You're a liar, a murderer, and an adulterer," his words would probably have bounced off of David's heart and conscience. But he came with a story that ignited all of David's old righteous passions. David knew that a rich man who takes a poor man's only treasure is an evil man. So now Nathan on behalf of God pulls the line in to set the hook. He says in v. 7, "Nathan said to David, 'You are the man.' Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul and I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add

to you as much more. Why have you despised the Word of the Lord to do what is evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites."

Now I realize as I read that you might be troubled by the idea of God giving David a harem. And I can't get into that in this sermon, but I'll just refer you to the sermons on Deuteronomy which reminds us how much God overlooked the hardness of heart in Israel even as He was getting to the main point of His salvation. But what you see here is that God mounts up the accusation against David. I had given you everything. I had treated you like gold. And now you have hated My Word and you have despised Me. He doesn't say that David had a hard moment and He understands the pressures of being king. Sin is the despising of God's Word. Sin is when we ignore God and rebel against Him.

Now, let me mention just a few things here before we move on in this story. First, it is a great act of love when God exposes sin. It almost never feels like that when it's happening. Not to me. Not to you. But it is a great act of love when God exposes sin. He could have let David go in his sin. That is what God did with King Saul. When King Saul sinned against God, God said, "I'm done with you. That was it." But He told David in 2 Samuel 7, "My steadfast love will not depart from you as it did to Saul." And now when David sins, God doesn't reject him and throw him away. He comes after him to expose his sin. Judas betrayed Jesus and Jesus let Judas go. But Peter betrayed Jesus as well, and Jesus wouldn't let Peter go. He came along and exposed Peter's sins. That's what He does with all of His people. That's what He does with His covenant children, His chosen ones, His elect - is even if they fall and they sin against His grace, He comes and gets them in grace to bring them back to Himself even in the midst of their hidden sin. He wants to expose you so He can restore you. He wants to lead you to repentance, yes, but to faith too. He wants to show you that you have displeased Him, yes, but so He can please you with His grace. Let that truth overwhelm any desire to go on in hidden sin. All of the promises you may make yourself that hiding your sin will be better for you are lies and they are utterly, utterly foolish compared to God's promises to do you good if you come clean.

God Knows and Exposes

Secondly, notice that God can literally move mountains to expose our sins. David had covered this thing up. It was done. He had done it. He'd fixed it. The only people who knew were the servants of the royal throne room and they could be easily disposed of if need be. But God had other resources. He still does. In the New Testament church when Ananias and Sapphira were lying about how generous they were to the church God gave a prophetic word to Peter so he knew they were lying and He exposed them. We're told in 1 Corinthians that sometimes unbelievers would come into the church gatherings and God would give prophetic words that would expose even the sins of those unbelievers. We're told an unbeliever, outsider, enters. Then he is convicted by all. He is called to account by all. All the secrets of his heart are disclosed and so falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. God has everything at His disposal.

I heard of a pastor once who was in an affair and while hugging his lover, he pocket-dialed his wife and she heard him talking to his lover. God moved circumstances to expose him. I know a pastor who was stealing sermons, but one week when he was preaching

them, a man who had been there when those original sermons were originally preached, that man was there watching the pastor steal sermons and he showed up and he knew and he said something. What are the chances? How many men were cheating on their wives thinking no one would ever know when the Ashley Madison website got hacked and all of those names were printed publicly? Don't think you can hide from God. And don't think He can't expose you. Even if it's true that no one knows your sin, God can give a prophetic word to someone to expose that sin. There is no possible way in the universe to hide. But even if you did hide until the day of your death, God has planned a day where He will bring all things to light. And there will be no hiding then. And why get caught then? When it's too late? When the judgment day has been sealed? When your destiny in hell is sealed? When you could come clean now? And receive mercy and grace in this life and for eternity? If you look like a fool and a wicked sinner for the rest of your life, wouldn't it be worth it if you were counted righteous in eternity?

In fact, why not model your response to God's exposure after David's? Look at chapter 12:13, "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" Verse 13 of chapter 12. "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" No if's. No and's. No but's. No excuses. Just a simple confession: Yes, I agree with what I have been accused of. I have sinned against the Lord. It is a miracle when anyone says those words. It is an absolute miracle of the Holy Spirit when anyone says those words. And the only words more miraculous than those words are then the following words: "And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin. You shall not die.'" Christian, that is what is over your whole life. The Lord has put away your sin. You shall not die. But if you hold on to your sin and hide it how do you even know you're a Christian? The mark of a Christian is that they come clean. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Oh, in Psalm 32, David doesn't just say that his bones are drying up when he hides his sins. He also says, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me. My strength dried up as in the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You. I did not cover my iniquity. I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." That's what God does primarily through His Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross out in the open to pay for all sins - even hidden sins that we will bring into the light of His presence. God disciplines and forgives.

God Forgives and Disciplines

Now we would be remiss if we did not notice something. God disciplines David. He forgives him, yes, a thousand times yes. But there are terrible consequences. Verse 10 of chapter 12, "Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house because you have despised Me and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." If you've ever read the Old Testament, man, this royal lineage is always fighting. They're always fighting because of the consequences of David's sin. The sword never departed from David's house. "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of

the sun." In other words, the wives that David has had, now they will be ravished in public all bringing shame down on David's head. "For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun." David's house will know war. David will be shamed as his wives are ravished and as other men do David's wives as David did to Uriah's. It's going to be grim. And in fact, it gets worse. We're told, "Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die." Severe, severe discipline. The New Testament describes the discipline of the Lord as a scourging. It describes it as the hacking off of a limb when a tree is clipped of its most precious limbs.

Now we noted that God forgives. Forgives so fully that David escapes death and brings joy to his soul. But there are consequences. I cannot tell you that if you come clean of your sin, your wife won't leave you. I cannot tell you that your kids won't hate you. That your boss won't fire you. The government won't arrest you. I cannot make you that promise. God often allows dark consequences to follow our sins. I know a man who pressed on for many years in pornography and saw his wife die. He felt her death was God's discipline for his sin. God may discipline you terribly for your sin, but it's still worth it to come clean. You may lose everything, but you'll have God. (incomplete thought)

David Pleads and Presses On

Second to finally, David pleads and presses on. Now what David does next is shocking. He fasts and prays that God would not inflict the fullness of His discipline on him. He fasts and prays for the life of his child. Chapter 12, verse 15, "And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. And the elders of his house stood beside him to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day, the child died, but the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, 'Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to us. How can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm.'" They thought David was suicidal. "But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, 'Is the child dead?' They said, 'He is dead.' Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his servants who said to him, 'What is this thing you have done? You fasted and wept for the child when he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.' He said, 'While the child was alive, I fasted and wept. For I said who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live. But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.'" David's servants were confused by David, and maybe you're confused by David too. What's going on here? They thought he was praying and fasting out of grief. But he was not primarily fasting and praying out of grief. He was fasting and praying for mercy. He was hoping God would remove some of the consequences. Did you know you can do that? If you come clean over your sin and God disciplines you, you can ask God to suspend the discipline. In fact, I've seen God grant mercy to so many disciplined saints over the years.

I remember a young woman who had lied to her school. If I remember correctly, she had cheated on a test affecting her entrance requirements. And as she came to know more of God's holiness and grace, she came clean, but she knew she might be kicked out of her school. We prayed and prayed and God had mercy on her. And when she told the school administration, they had mercy on her. I remember a man who was fired for lying at work. We prayed for God to be merciful to him as he came clean. And he was given another job by a different company that day. Sometimes - many times - He does that. He releases us from the discipline. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. I knew a man who by the time he came to Christ had such a damaged marriage that it did not look like the marriage could be saved. Yet, he prayed and prayed, and he would not take his wedding ring off. He prayed and prayed, but in the end, he had to take off the wedding ring because God did not restore the marriage. But God still forgave his sins. He was not treated as his sins deserved.

Can I say this to you this morning? I have not been treated as my sins deserve. And you have not been treated, believer, as your sins deserve. Perhaps you have confessed some secret sin sometime in the past and the discipline has stayed. God was being merciful to you. How you should praise God with shouts of hallelujah this morning that God didn't reject you and send you to hell, but He kept you as His child. And maybe you're here this morning and you're like I did get myself in a pickle. I should have lost my marriage. I should have lost my job. But instead, God sustained even those. We should have shouts of hallelujah to the rooftops for how God has preserved us even in the midst of our sin.

God Restores

Finally, God restores. The last two paragraphs of this chapter are fairly scandalous. David is treated with real, practical grace. These paragraphs include two instances of God being super-gracious to David. Treating him the way we kind of get mad when we see sinners treated. Treating him well and lavishly. It says that God gives David Bathsheba. And then personally sends a note where He decides what Bathsheba's son will be named. You talk about divine intervention in your life. It says in v. 24 of chapter 12, "Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba and went in to her and lay with her and she bore a son and he called his name Solomon, and the Lord loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet so he called his name Jedidiah because of the Lord." You can imagine how much David would have doubted the love of God after all of God's discipline upon him. And there he is standing with his new son and Nathan comes - the same one who had convicted him - and slips him a note. God has decided the name of this new child. What an assurance of God's involvement in David's life; God's love for David.

Now you might get all judgy about David and Bathsheba getting to have a happy marriage after all the mess they were in, but some of you started your relationship with a bunch of fornication before you were married and lo and behold, God still gave you to each other and after you came clean of your sin, He actually gave you a stable marriage. Some of you He even gave kids. Pretty amazing really. And I know of people who should not have gotten divorced. The Bible after all seldom allows divorce. And they should not have gotten remarried. After all, the Bible really speaks negatively of remarriage after an unlawful divorce. I know of people who have done that, but lo and behold, God gave them grace and sometimes even children. We

should not take stories like this as an excuse to sin. But if you've been blessed after you came clean from sin, then you have one more reason to bless the Lord this morning, and one more reason to come clean if you've hidden sin in your life. How can you hide sin against the God who has been so gracious to you?

Now we won't skip over this last paragraph. You might look at it and say this is just military details. The chapter ends with military details. Like what on earth is the Bible doing? Ending the story of David and Bathsheba with military details? I think I'm out of time to read them, but I'll tell you what they say. They say that David went to that war that he should have been at in the first place and he won it decisively. And we shouldn't just see a won war here. We should see that God is restoring his king to the rightful place of victory. God had promised Israel peace. He had promised Israel victory. And when the king clears the sin out of his life, the victory returns to Israel. And the same is true for God's church. When we tolerate sin in our midst, we lose our spiritual power. We lose our spiritual effectiveness. We lose God's blessing on the work we do. But when we confess our sins, we become useful to God again. Paul told Timothy, "If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work." Beloved, we should clear out sin in our midst because it not only affects our effectiveness and our ministry to our friends, our roommates, our co-workers, our children, and our families, but it also destroys the work of God among us.

There's a story of D.L. Moody, the evangelist. And Moody tells the story like this: Moody was used to seeing about one person saved a day, and often many people saved through his evangelistic ministries. And he says, "I remember one town that Mr. Sankey (that was his worship leader) - I remember one town that Mr. Sankey and I visited. For a week, it seemed as if we were beating the air. There was no power in the meetings. At last, one day, I said that perhaps there was someone cultivating the unforgiving spirit. The chairman of our committee was sitting next to me, got up and left the meeting right in view of the audience. The arrow had hit the mark. He had had trouble with someone for about six months. He at once hunted up this man and asked him to forgive him. He came to me with tears in his eyes and said, 'I thank God you ever came here.'" That night the inquiry room where people came to be saved was thronged. Wouldn't it be a glorious thing if every single member of Immanuel that may be holding on to secret sin came clean? We don't always have to tell the whole congregation. The Bible shows us that sin can be limited in its confession to the people who are affected. But if you've sinned against someone - and lust includes sinning against your wife - if you've sinned against someone, then not only does God need to know and be confessed to, but that someone needs to know and be confessed to as well. And if you confess your sins, you will know a refreshing and a restoration from God's power. You will know a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit. We as a people will know a fresh outpouring of evangelistic zeal and power even in our own midst.

I'll leave you with one verse from Psalm 32. In Psalm 32, not only did God dry up David's bones when he sinned and kept it hidden; and not only did God forgive David and restore him to joy when he came clean; but David also says in Psalm 32, "I acknowledged my sin to you. I did not cover my iniquity. I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord. You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to You at a time that You may be

found. Surely in the rush of great waters they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me. You preserve me from troubles. You surround me with shouts of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with My eye upon you." David says that when he was forgiven, it actually resulted in him praising God and calling other people to call on God. That is what God will do in our midst when secret sin is uprooted. When it stays lodged, we're bound for dryness at best, and deadness at worst. But when it comes out, we are promised fresh, fresh springs of new life.

Let's pray. Father, You have been good to me to expose sin when I've held on to it too long. I have watched You over the years be good to Your saints, to expose their sin sometimes even in very surprising ways. Lord God, I want to pray that You would be good to every member of Immanuel and every visitor who's here, to help them by the Holy Spirit to expose their own sins to the light and to feel your grace and mercy. And then Lord God, I also pray that You would make us who hear sins forgiven to be a gracious and merciful people knowing we have had our sins forgiven as well. We pray this in Jesus' name.