



THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

SERIES: KING DAVID

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2 Samuel 12:1-25

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When I watch the television program "Rescue 911," I am always amazed at the amount of resources that are expended to accomplish even one rescue. Someone falls off a cliff, an observer calls 911, and there is an immediate rush of fire engines, ambulances and police cars to the rescue. In the anguished moments before the arrival of the rescue teams, neighbors, friends and bystanders gather to help the victim. Within minutes there is the quick assessment of the paramedics, the arrival of the Coast Guard helicopter, then the flight to the hospital, where the special teams of doctors and nurses work their wondrous skills. Money is spent like water. Rescue 911 is one television program that leaves no doubt as to the value of a human life.

In our studies in the life of David we come to an incident where it seems the king of Israel has fallen off a cliff; his pulse is almost non-existent. I am referring, of course, to his taking of Bathsheba in adultery, and his subsequent arranging of the death of her husband—and his own faithful friend—Uriah. Nine months have now passed since these terrible events, and David has been living in a hell of his own silence. He absolutely refuses to call for help. But the 911 call goes out anyway, not from David, but from heaven, dispatching a prophet on earth to rescue the anointed one.

There are five movements to this story, each one of which depicts a stage on the long journey home. At the end of this tragic fall, God gets his son home; David makes a full recovery. Following a fall of these proportions it is astonishing that such a complete recovery is possible. But, at what a cost is David rescued. We will learn today, however, that no matter how bad the fall, a full, complete recovery is possible—but only if we faithfully submit to the process demanded. And the process is painful, long, and hard. There are no shortcuts. But it works. What a testimony this story is to a gracious God!

The text opens with God himself making that all-important rescue call.

I. Self Exposure (12:1-6)

Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said,

"Two men were in one city,

A rich man and a poor man.

The rich man had flocks and herds, very many.

And the poor man nothing except for one little ewe lamb which he had bought.

He raised it and it grew up together with him and

his sons.

It ate of his bread, drank from his cup, and slept in his lap,

it was as a daughter to him.

A visitor came to the rich man.

He found it a pity to take any of his flock or herd to prepare for his guest.

He took the poor man's sheep away,

And prepared it for the man who had come to him."¹

Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. And he must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion (pity)." Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! (NASB)

The scene opens with a new protagonist "who is completely unique in 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2; it is God himself who here, and here alone, participates in the continuing action...David's behavior literally provokes heaven, and God himself intervenes."² In chapter 11, David did all the sending; now it is God's turn to do so. In chapter 12, "David no longer sends, he only receives" (Brueggemann). God makes the 911 call, sending Nathan the prophet to confront David and rescue him from his sin. This event is unique in the ancient world. Then, kings were treated as gods; they were never challenged. But that was not the case in Israel. Here we learn who holds the ultimate authority. Kings, if they are to remain in power, must submit themselves to God's prophetic word.

This confrontation between prophet and king is woven with meticulous care. Fokkelman observes: "The prophet in motion is a poet in motion." Rather than confronting David directly, Nathan crafts a story outside of David's life. This is designed to draw David in, and evoke his own sense of injustice, so that a complete self-exposure will result. Thus the story, which may appear untrue on the surface, will penetrate David's soul with the truth in a much deeper way than would a direct accusation.

Nathan brings to David an incident that needs a ruling: a rich man has robbed a poor man. The two men in the story have nothing in common. One has more possessions than he knows what do with, and takes them for granted, the other man is so poor "he can permit himself a lamb only once with great difficulty, a lamb

he selects with care.”³ The poor man cares for the animal like one of his own. It eats from the man’s own bowl, drinks from his cup, and sleeps in the man’s bosom. It is like a daughter to the man (the Hebrew word *bat* evokes the memory of Bathsheba). “The twosome of pauper and sheep grows into a unity in an atmosphere of warmth and care...It emanates the mystical luster of everyday life, as we often suspect and come to know in our most open moments.” The care given to this little lamb speaks of its owner’s loyal-love, which permeates all his relationships and everything he does.

In contrast, “[t]he rich man’s ego has so strongly identified itself with his possessions that he cannot ‘take pity’ to part with even one of his own animals.”⁴ So, when a guest arrives at the front door, and with this, all the expectation of potential intimacy and togetherness that hospitality brings, the rich man becomes uncomfortable. All he can think about is having to slay one of his animals. So he takes what belongs to another, tearing the very fabric of someone else’s home in the process.

This powerful story is designed to evoke David’s deepest sense of justice. And so it does! David is drawn in, hook, line and sinker. His anger provoked beyond ordinary dimensions, he pronounces the immediate and severe judgment: “This man must die. He must make restitution fourfold, because he did this thing, and he had no pity.” David grasps at the truth, and pronounces a guilty verdict on his own two crimes. This truth had already been working on him, but he had expended enormous amounts of energy suppressing it.

Deep within every one of us is that subterranean region of the soul where the conscience lives, “the breeding place of...truth, authenticity, love, care...it is...that part of man which transcends the visible and everyday existence in meaning.”⁵ It tells us we can’t live in isolation.” You can silence it by day, but it will haunt you by night.

In Psalm 32, David describes what it was like to live with the guilt that came with adultery and murder:

**When I kept silent my body (bones) wasted away
Through my groaning (roaring) all day long.
For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat
of summer** (My life juices were turned into the drought of summer) (Ps 32:3-4).

Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher of the last century, described the terrible torment of a guilty conscience in these words:

Give me into the power of a roaring lion, but never let me come under the power of an awakened, guilty conscience. Shut me up in a dark dungeon, among all manner of loathsome creatures—snakes and reptiles of all kinds—but, oh, give me not over to my own thoughts when I am consciously guilty before God!

The conscience can be suppressed, but only for so

long. Finally, it will speak, and its pronouncement will be: Guilty! Thus, self-exposure, self-condemnation is first step toward healing. As we reconnect with what is true in us, integrity rises through the muck and mire. Breaking through the surface, it shouts the naked truth. It is only then that the soul that has been fragmented starts to become whole again.

So the first step on the journey home is complete and thorough self-exposure.

The next step is, listen in silence to the Judge.

II. A Silent Submission (12:7-12)

“Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your bosom, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ “Thus says the Lord ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight (lit. “before the eyes of this sun”). Indeed you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.”

Now God does all the talking and David does all the listening. God prosecutes the king with a terrifying intensity. David’s crimes are first and foremost a breach of trust against God. Notice that the word “I” is used five times. David is guilty of acts of treachery that spurned his Creator. He has returned a slap in the face to a generous God, a God who had given all, provided all, and was by no means finished with his generosity. This is why David says, in Psalm 51:4, “Against Thee, Thee only I have sinned.” We can hear the pain of God’s amazement in his question, “Why?” (v 9). We can feel the weight of his anger.

It is this scorning of God’s word that explains why the punishments imposed appear more severe than the crime. But David had brought God’s name to shame. And David was no private individual, but the Lord’s anointed; thus there was a national dimension to his sins: “The whole nation must therefore be witness to the punishment.”⁶ Jesus said, “By your measure it shall be measured unto you.” David had perverted the holy office of war to accomplish a private murder and cover-up. Now the sword would never depart from his house: he would suffer the premature death of four of his sons.

His punishment for his adultery, which he did in secret, would be that his close associate, who is unnamed, would commit the sin of adultery before David's eyes, and "before the eyes of the sun." Later, his son Absalom would have intercourse in public with David's ten concubines on the palace roof.

As David is silenced in judgment, I am reminded of Jeremiah's word to help Israel back to the road of restoration:

**Let him sit alone and be silent
Since He has laid it on him.
Let him put his mouth in the dust,
Perhaps there is hope.
Let him give his cheek to the smiter;
Let him be filled with reproach (Lam 3:28-30).**

After David has been exposed, and then silenced in a lacerating litany of judgment, he finally speaks.

III. A Naked Confession (12:13-15a)

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "With this the Lord has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, by this deed the son also that is born to you shall surely die." So Nathan went to his house.

In reply, David can speak but two words in Hebrew. But these are two weighty words that entail a full confession: "I sinned...against Yahweh." Unlike Saul, who said, "I sinned, but..." David does not offer even a word of justification. He quietly listens and painfully agrees to every charge. He is guilty. He deserves everything he has coming. This is the attitude that counselors have to look for: Do people take full responsibility for their sin, or do they try to justify their behavior.

Amazingly, miraculously, once the whole truth is faced and fully acknowledged, the Judge becomes advocate and rescinds the death sentence which David had pronounced on himself. David will not die. But because the son who would result from his union with Bathsheba was the fruit of David's adultery and his acts which incited blasphemy, Yahweh must act to protect his name; thus the son must die.

Self-exposure, silence, confession. These three things lead to the next step, and that is mourning, the most important element of the healing process.

IV. Intense Mourning (12:15b-23)

Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. And the elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them. Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And

the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do himself harm!" But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." And he said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go (lit. "I am walking") to him, but he will not return to me."

David's reaction to the sickness of his son is very different from his reaction to the news of the death of Uriah. Then, David showed no mourning, no emotion, no care. He came up with just a glib piece of theology, which he tossed to Joab like stale piece of beef jerky. But now, when his son is sick, his entire being is engaged. He is on his face, in tears, entreating God with as much as a man can give to God—prayers, accompanied by fasting. Instead of lying with a woman he is lying on the ground, grasping the earth, trying to take hold of heaven.

The true David is back, with remarkable pathos and freedom. This is the David we know from the Psalms, praying to God, beseeching God, wrestling with God, worshipping God. This is the David who won't be swayed either by ease or by majority opinion; the David who has penetrating insight into the heart of all matters; the David who is humbled by his own mortality.

The death of this son is absolutely essential to David's restoration. This death becomes the trigger for the recognition of things for which David had never mourned: a dead friend, a violated woman, an illegitimate birth, a compromised nation. In the act of mourning his soul is reconstructed bit by bit, and he becomes the man of tenacious face that he was in his youth. In the end, it is the heart of God that he reacquires, the God who wept as his own pleas were refused when he beseeched David to spare Uriah in subtle but powerful ways. Now David weeps as he beseeches God for a life he loves. David could not be healed without deep personal mourning, and neither can we.

These then are the steps to recovery: exposure, conviction, confession, and weeping.

When we have wept in full, then we are surprisingly

able to offer comfort to others.

V. Comforting Others (12:24-25)

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the Lord loved him and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the Lord's sake.

David settles accounts with any illusions he might have had for healing. Weeping is of no further use, so he turns to comfort his wife. This is the final step to healing—being able to give to someone else. “She is called Bathsheba instead of the painful ‘wife of Uriah.’ ...For the first time she is no longer being used but is treated by David as a person...The intercourse which he henceforth has with her is legitimate.”⁷ God personally names the baby, “the beloved of Yahweh.” And the baby is not only a legitimate child, but one who is loved. This child is Solomon (“Peace”) the one who will carry the David story into Kings, the son of the Messianic seed.

What an incredible turn of events! David's past is restored, his present invaded by love, and his future would surpass his dreams. Only God could do such a thing to reverse David's “this thing.” Brueggemann comments that God has an “amazing capacity to work more life at the border of death, to act in promise-keeping ways just when the promise seems exhausted.”⁸

Notice that the restoration of David took place publicly, in the midst community. A 911 went out, then the healing began in the community of the prophet, of God, of the elders, and all Israel. Afterwards, David wrote these Psalms which we have all come to love. The hardest part of healing is being exposed to shame. We don't want that. But when we're dangling from the edge of a cliff, staring death in the face, being exposed to a little shame is the least of our problems. We welcome any and all intervention to rescue us.

That is what the church is supposed to be, of course—a hospital of healing for cliff fallers. Last week, our pastoral staff attended a conference in Canada with Dr. Larry Crabb. Larry, who is a brilliant psychologist, has now come to the conclusion that the real work of healing belongs not in the therapist's office, but in the community of the church, with ordinary people caring for each other.

Are you dangling over the edge of a cliff? Is your pulse almost gone? Have you spent enormous amounts of energy suppressing the voice of your conscience shouting to you to come clean? Do you stay awake at night in fear of being found out? Perhaps you think you've been gone too long and you have wandered too

far. The good news is, there is a way back. God is willing to expend amazing amounts of resources to save just you. A full recovery is possible. The bad news is, there is no other way. And there are no shortcuts. Every step is essential. If you skip one, there will be no recovery.

- 1) Full public exposure.
- 2) Sacred silence. Submit to the accusations of God and of others; take in the pain.
- 3) Naked confession. Take full responsibility for your actions.
- 4) Tears. Pour out your grief with tears.
- 5) Comfort. God gives a hope.

As we conclude our study this morning, David himself will exhort us with these verses from Psalm 32, which he wrote following the incident with Bathsheba:

**Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,
Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,
Otherwise they will not come near you. (Ps 32:9)**

**Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found,
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.
You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;
You surround me with songs of deliverance. (32:6-7)**

1. Translation taken from J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. I, King David* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 72. I have heavily depended on the excellent insights of Fokkelman, 71-93.

2. Fokkelman, *King David*, 71.

3. Fokkelman, *King David*, 73.

4. Fokkelman, *King David*, 75.

5. Fokkelman, *King David*, 83.

6. Fokkelman, *King David*, 86.

7. Fokkelman, *King David*, 91-92.

8. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990).