

HOW TO GET INTO AND OUT OF SIN

2 SAMUEL 11:1-7, 11:26 – 12:14

Evangelist Billy Graham first came to national attention when he led a series of city wide meetings in Los Angeles in 1949. Shortly before or after that momentous event that launched one of the most God-honoring ministries of the last century, Billy spent considerable time with God in prayer. He was very much aware way back right then at the beginning of his ministry that he could do something that would dishonor God and bring his ministry into disrepute. He recognized that when Christian leaders fall it's usually because they give into at least one of three temptations: money, power or sex. In that time of prayer he called and cried out to God to preserve him from falling into sin by misusing money, power or sex in any way. Billy Graham hasn't been perfect. He's said and done things he regrets. He's a sinner saved by grace, too. But I think you have to agree that God honored his prayer some 60 years ago. He and his ministry are highly respected and God has been honored by his life.

If only David had been as wise as Billy Graham when he became king of Israel. David seemed to dodge the money and power arrows of temptation, but the misuse of sex was the temptation that impaled David right through the heart. Let's read the story in God's Word. (2 Sam 11:1-7, 11:26-12:14) Why did God allow this terrible, sordid, messy story to get put into His holy Word? To warn you and me. God has wired us in such a way that we learn by both positive and negative examples. The Bible is full of both. God also knows that we often learn better through a story than we do through just hearing a bunch of true principles or statements. In this awful story you see very clearly the power of sin and what sin can do to you and others around you. To be more specific, you see in this story what terrible results sin can produce in the life of someone who loves God.

Like David, we've tasted God's grace and love. Like David, we have the Holy Spirit living in us. Like David, we can knowingly choose to sin and disobey God. Why? Why do we at times deliberately go against God? Why do we blow it? Why does it happen? Can we also, like David, experience God's forgiveness and cleansing? Of course, and that's wonderful, gracious and important news to know about as well. Here's the mistake you must avoid today. Don't conclude that just because you haven't committed adultery or murder that, therefore, this story has no relevance to you. That's the attitude – underestimating the power of temptation and failing to know your personal weaknesses – that led to David's fall. This awful story about David is a lesson, first of all, in...

HOW TO GET INTO SIN.

David didn't wake up one day and say to himself, "I've just got a new and very interesting idea. Today I'm going to destroy my whole life by committing adultery." No, the first step of getting or giving into sin is to indulge your defects. David either didn't know his weaknesses or, if he was aware of them, did nothing to protect himself from them. David had an eye for the ladies. He apparently had

a strong sexual appetite. Now, a healthy sexual appetite is completely normal and God-given. Apparently, though, David concluded at some point in his life that he was incapable of being a one woman man. The Bible says, “And David realized that the LORD had confirmed him as king over Israel and had blessed his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel. After moving from Hebron to Jerusalem, David married more concubines and wives, and they had more sons and daughters.” (2 Sam 5:12-13 NLT) I know that kings back then married women to form political alliances. I know that strict monogamy wasn’t practiced in ancient Israel. But I also know what God had said a few hundred years earlier about kings in general and which David conveniently ignored, “The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the LORD....” (Dt. 17:17 NLT) I get the sense that David added wives and concubines in order to keep his sexual appetite satisfied. But lust is like drinking salt water from the ocean. The more you drink the more dehydrated you become.

Every single one of us here today has areas of spiritual weakness or defect. David’s defect was lust, but there is an almost endless variety out there to choose from. Your weakness might be lying, stealing, dishonesty in business dealings, greed for money or things, a vicious temper, a poisonous tongue, a desire to manipulate or control people for your own selfish needs, addiction to drugs or alcohol, homosexual behavior, laziness, gluttony, pornography, misuse of money, arrogance or hatred of people from other racial or ethnic groups. There’s the whole area of what some people call “stinkin’ thinkin’” – just sinful patterns of thought that keep people in bondage to poverty, in bondage to poor self-esteem and in bondage to dysfunctional relationships. You probably already know your areas of spiritual or moral weakness. You might well be ashamed of and embarrassed about these defects. These are often the areas of our lives that we wall off from one another and guard as secret because we’re afraid of what others would think of us if they knew about these defects.

Over in the New Testament, these weaknesses are often called your “sinful nature” or “the flesh.” The reference isn’t to your actual skin and bones, but instead to sinful character flaws or defects. They don’t instantly disappear when you accept Jesus as your Savior and the Holy Spirit comes to live within you. In fact, every follower of Jesus has them. The Bible encourages you to think of these defects almost as living things that have to be put to death spiritually. We’re commanded to crucify them or put them to death in a spiritual sense. Some of these spiritual weaknesses die off fairly easily. Others are just tenacious, stubborn and may well require a life long battle to defeat. If you ever reach a place where you think you are completely free from every spiritual weakness or every moral defect, you are - just like David - a sitting duck for a fall.

Do you know your defects? Do you know how your sinful nature uniquely manifests itself? If you do, do you tolerate it, excuse and rationalize it? What are you doing to put it to death spiritually? The devil knows your weaknesses better than you do and he rarely if ever attacks you where you’re strong. The devil

loves for you to get complacent. You must know your weaknesses. Then, you must learn how to refuse to indulge your defects. You learn how to soak up the Bible and prayer. You learn how to avoid the people, the situations and the circumstances that entice you to give in to those defects. You surround yourself with godly people. You might even have a Christian friend hold you accountable in areas where a defect has a grip on your life and you want to break its power.

I'm challenged by the fact that David was around 50 years of age when he committed these sins. There's no security in getting older. I believe David allowed his personal relationship with God to get dull and routine before he ever yielded to temptation. There's a lesson. No relationship with God in the past is going to safeguard you when you become careless and complacent in the present. David became spiritually lazy, complacent and overconfident. How important it is for you to make up your mind every day that until you pass through the gates of Heaven you will never be completely free from the power of sin; therefore, you are always and forever on guard. It's true, you can't defeat your defects without the power of the Holy Spirit in you. But He will not defeat those defects without your cooperation, without your prayer, without your involvement.

Indulging your defects is the first step in how to get into sin. The second step is believing the devil's deception. Sin is all about deception and this story is full of examples. David sees Bathsheba taking a bath and the devil whispers, "Look how gorgeous she is. Can you imagine what it would be like to have sex with her?" But the devil didn't tell David about the consequences of his actions; he never does. The devil always wants you to overlook the long term consequences of your sinful actions in order to satisfy your short term desire.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German Christian theologian, makes a great observation about temptation. He says, "At this moment God is quite unreal to us.... Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God." David didn't consciously hate God when he committed adultery and murder; He just forgot God. Do you see the deception? And the deception continues as the devil encourages you to cover up your sin by committing even more sin. He whispered in David's ear, "Oh, no, now Bathsheba's pregnant. Damage control! Better cover it up. Get Uriah back here quick. Get him drunk and send him home. Oops... that didn't work, did it? Better see it to that Uriah gets killed. No one will know." By the time Nathan confronts David a year later, David had become utterly blind to the injustice and greed of his own actions. Oh, he could spot it in someone else and get all righteously indignant, but he was blind to his own sin. The devil will deceive you into believing that God will just overlook your sin and let you get away with it.

How do you and I get into sin? Indulge your defects. Believe the devil's deception. And, then, experience the inevitable disaster. Some people look at this story of David and Bathsheba and actually see in it a rationalization for sin. They say or think something like this. "You see there, God can forgive any sin.

Just look at David and Bathsheba!” Well, of course, God can forgive any sin. But is that really the point of the story? Did God put this awful story in His Word so that you and I can justify our sin? Or, did He put it in His Word so that we could see the incredible disaster that sin causes in people’s lives and be warned against it? If this story teaches anything, it underlines the fact that God allows even His own favored children to experience the terrible consequences of their own sin. It’s as if God is saying, “Child of God, look at David, a man after My own heart! This is the kind of thing that happens when you indulge your defeats and believe the devil’s deception. Disaster!”

Before you rush in and dump God’s grace all over David, observe well and ponder long what David lost. David lost his reputation. You can spend a lifetime building a reputation and lose it all by one foolish, sinful indulgence. David lost his influence. Yes, he remained king of Israel, but his reign was tarnished for the rest of his life. But that wasn’t the greatest loss. When Nathan told his story about this greedy, unjust man, David got all incensed and said the man should be put to death and he should pay back the man he wronged four times over. Interesting.... Four of David’s son’s died prematurely, he and Bathsheba’s first child, Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah. David’s own family disintegrated. Brother raped sister. Brother killed brother. Son tried to overthrow father. Destruction. Death. Disaster. Yes, God did indeed forgive David’s sin. Praise the Lord! But for the rest of his earthly life, David lived with the knowledge of the disaster he brought upon himself and his family. The point of this story is not, “Go out and sin and God will forgive you.” The point of the story is, “Do not invite disaster upon yourself by despising God. You reap what you sow. You harvest what you plant. Obey God. Live for God. Choose life and not death. Choose blessing and not cursing. Choose joy not destruction.” But, fortunately, this story isn’t just a lesson in how to get into sin. God didn’t just leave David in sin and abandon him. He won’t leave you in your sin either. He loves you too much! This story is also a lesson in ...

HOW TO GET OUT OF SIN.

It starts when you respond to the Holy Spirit’s conviction. There’s no creature more miserable in all of the universe than a follower of Jesus – a child of God – who has sinned and hasn’t confessed that sin to God yet. You might know that Psalm 51 was written by David as part of his confession to God. He points to the power of the Holy Spirit’s conviction. “For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.” (Ps 51:3 NLT) When David went to bed at night, he thought about what he had done. His first thought when he woke up in the morning was about his sin. All throughout the day, that sin would invade his conscious mind. No one can make you miserable like God can. God will allow unconfessed sin to dominate your mind and heart. David says, “Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.... Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.” (Ps. 51:7, 10 NLT) Unconfessed sin leaves you feeling dirty inside. You long for purity. You long to be spiritually

clean again. David says, “Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me— now let me rejoice.” (Ps. 51:11 NLT) Unconfessed sin removes any sense of God’s presence. You no longer have any assurance of His love, His grace or His peace in your life. The Holy Spirit convicted David for one solid year, gradually chipping away at his stony heart with a hammer of misery. Thank God when the Holy Spirit convicts you! It’s His way of breaking down your stubborn resistance and making you long again for His grace and forgiveness.

How do you get out of sin? First, respond to the Holy Spirit’s conviction. Secondly, listen to a godly friend’s confrontation. This is what Nathan did for his friend, David. What Nathan did reminds me of what the Bible says, “Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.” (Prov 27:6 NLT) One of the most important and yet one of the most difficult things the Lord may ever ask you to do is to confront a fellow follower of Jesus about sin in his or her life. The Bible says, “Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.” (Gal 6:1-2 NLT) And one of the most important ways to get out of sin is to listen to and receive humbly the rebuke of a godly friend God sends to you. Confrontation and rebuke – even when it’s done in a godly way – stings. It will hurt, but it’s a good hurt. Later on, you will be grateful to your friend for having the courage to confront you and prevent even greater disaster in your life. May God grant you and me the grace to hear God’s voice in a godly rebuke and see it as a step out of sin and back into a restored relationship with God!

The story of David and Nathan is a crash course in how to confront someone in a godly way. Notice what Nathan did. First, he thought about and chose the appropriate timing for his confrontation. God didn’t send Nathan to David immediately. Be very sensitive as to when you confront someone. Allow the Holy Spirit to prepare your heart and the heart of the person to whom you need to speak. Ask the Lord to show you the proper time to confront. Second, only confront someone regarding the truth. The Bible doesn’t tell you to confront someone on the basis of gossip or hearsay. You can only ever confront someone on the basis of what you know to be a fact. And then, make very sure that the issue you confront someone about is, in fact, a sin and not just a matter of your opinion or prejudice. Finally, use tact. Nathan’s approach to David was exceptionally wise and Spirit-led. Instead of coming right at David with guns blazing, he chose to tell a story that appealed to David’s own damaged sense of right and wrong. Timing, truth and tact – there’s a lesson in how to confront. There’s always risk in confrontation. David, as the king, could have had Nathan killed right then and there. No doubt about it, confrontation takes courage. Confronting someone might not be well received. It may end a relationship. That doesn’t make your confrontation wrong. That’s just part of the risk involved.

How do you get out of sin? First, respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction. Second, listen to a godly friend's confrontation. Third, confess your sin fully before God. Call your sin what God calls it. Stop making excuses for it. Stop rationalizing it away. Stop minimizing it. Simply stand before the Lord, as David did, and say, "... 'I have sinned against the LORD.'" (2 Sam 12:13 NLT) It used to bother me that in David's confession here and also in Psalm 51, he makes no mention of Uriah or even Bathsheba. It seemed to me like he was minimizing the terrible effect of his sinful actions against them. But I've come to recognize that every sin is, first and foremost, a rebellion against God. All sin and every sin is what Nathan calls it here – "... because you have shown utter contempt for the LORD by doing this..." (2 Sam 12:14 NLT) You can seek out and receive the forgiveness of people you have injured, but until you seek out and receive God's forgiveness, it's still unforgiven. By the same token, people will sometimes withhold forgiveness from you for however you wronged them, but if God forgives your sin, your sin is forgiven. It is always and forever God with whom we must do business. That's why David confesses to God.

And the good news is that God did forgive David. That's a powerful lesson each of us need to hear and live out. God will forgive your sin, my sin, anyone's sin. Moreover, there is no sin God cannot or will not forgive except one: unconfessed sin. God can't forgive sin which you refuse to confess, which you refuse to own up to or which you refuse to reject. But any sin and all sin - no matter how terrible, no matter how heinous – is no match for the grace of God. In another of his psalms, David underlines this incredible truth with a fascinating image: "He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west." (Ps 103:12 NLT) How far is that? I don't know, but it's a really long way!

Donna Rice's sins were exposed in a highly publicized sexual scandal with former U.S. Senator from Colorado, Gary Hart. In the aftermath, Hart's bid for the 1988 Democratic nomination was trashed and so was Rice's reputation. Rice disappeared from the public eye for quite some time. But she committed her life to Jesus Christ. She's now passionately committed to God and to "Enough is Enough," a Christian organization fighting to keep pornography out of the hands of minors. She's worked there for a long time now and since 2002 has been serving as the President and CEO of that ministry. Donna is thankful for the support of her family, friends, and her Christian husband, Jack Hughes. But she's most thankful for God's work in her life: "God loves us, but he doesn't grant us immunity from the consequences of our choices. However, when we mess up, if we ask his forgiveness, he'll redeem those choices, using our mistakes as a 'door of hope' for other people. I have great empathy for victims of sexual abuse and pornography. God has brought purpose to my pain."

God is all about doing that in Donna Rice's life, in David's life, in your life and my life. No sin you've ever committed is bigger than God's grace. David's story shows you how to get into sin. Heed the warning. But by God's grace, David also shows you how to get out of sin. Follow his example.