

January 8, 2017

## THE INCONVENIENT TRUTH ABOUT SUNKEN LEGOS

2 Samuel 11

In 1812 Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Russia with an army of 680,000 men. The Russians employed tactics he could never have imagined and mostly avoided a final confrontation. The result was that eventually Bonaparte's army was decimated by starvation and massive casualties so that he eventually returned with only 27,000 effective soldiers. It was a catastrophically bad decision that would spell the end of French power under him.

When Stephen Spielberg was making the movie *E.T.* he offered the Mars candy company the opportunity to put M&M's in the movie as the alien's favorite treat. Mars declined and instead the movie featured Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. A month after the movie came out Reese's sales soared by 65%.

J. K. Rowling wrote a children's book about a young sorcerer named Harry Potter. In her attempts to get the book published she was turned down by 12 different publishing companies. I would qualify that as some pretty unfortunate decisions. The books have sold over 500 million copies becoming the best selling series of books in history.

There have been lots of bad decisions made throughout history. Some obviously have been more costly than others. Today we are going to look at a terrible decision that David made in 2 Samuel 11. Any reflective person can look back and see some decisions that he or she would like to have back. That definitely was true in David's case. Let's see if we can learn from his example so that we can avoid making catastrophic choices in the future.

### DAVID COMPROMISED BADLY

There are 2 stories from David's life that are by far the most familiar. The best known is the account of his battle with Goliath, which is our culture's parable for the underdog. Not quite as well known but famous nonetheless, is the story we consider today. This one is at the other end of the spectrum from the Goliath story. Goliath was a story of victory, this story is about a terrible, ugly defeat. That was a story of glory, this one is a story of disgrace and shame. In many ways this story is a picture of the human condition. We have the capacity for magnificent victory, but also the capacity for unfathomable disgrace, just as David did.

The writer of the story gives us a subtle hint of compromise in the very first verse. “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed in Jerusalem.” In 2 Samuel 8 says that David led military campaigns against the Philistines, the Moabites and the Edomites. In 2 Samuel 10 David led a military campaign against an Aramean mercenary army hired by the Ammonites to fight against Israel. David and his men killed more than 40,000 mercenaries.

For the most part, though not without exception, David was leading the troops. This time things were different. It was time to go finish the Ammonites. They had holed up in the fortress city of Rabbah with the army setting up a tripwire defense around it. It is time for kings, who were expected to lead the troops, to go out to war. But David didn’t go. He sent Joab, his top general, while he stayed in his palace in Jerusalem. The clear implication is that David was not doing what he should have been doing.

Why did David stay home? We don’t know. We know it wasn’t because he was a coward. He was a mighty and courageous warrior. Maybe he figured laying siege to a city would be a long and kind of boring effort and he just wasn’t that interested. He sent others to do a kind of annoying job that he didn’t think would be that tough. Or perhaps the demands of being the chief executive of an entire kingdom were pressing in on him. Maybe he was just tired. Whatever the case, the author implies he wasn’t at his post.

Verse 1 says David sent Joab to lead the troops in this battle, and with him he sent “the king’s men and the whole Israelite army.” The king’s men were a small group of David’s most loyal and fiercest fighters. There were 37 of them. They were the ancient equivalent of Navy Seal Team 6 or of the even more secretive Army 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Operational Detachment Delta, usually known as Delta Force. Except they all had a tight personal connection to David. Their names are listed in 2 Samuel 23. The last one named is Uriah the Hittite.

David’s compromises got much worse. One evening he was out walking on his rooftop patio. His palace was likely taller than the other buildings around so he was able to look down on them. He spotted a woman taking a bath on the roof of a nearby home. Why would you take a bath on a roof? In that day they likely didn’t have a bath room, so where would you bathe? The roof would be out of sight from peeping Tom eyes. But it wasn’t out of sight of Peeping David eyes. David should have respected the woman’s privacy and turned away. But he didn’t. The text says

that she was very beautiful. Not just beautiful, she was *very* beautiful. David couldn't take his eyes off her. He thought she was the hottest thing he'd ever seen. But continuing to linger and lust after her was his second compromise. First he should have been out with the army, and second he should have stopped leering at this woman.

He sent someone to find out who she was. The report came back in verse 3 that she was "Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." That description of her is significant. In the genealogies of the Old Testament people were usually described as the son or daughter of someone. What is unusual is that David was told that Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah. David's aide was warning him that she was married, and not only that but that she was married to one of his most loyal and best men. This was a clear wave off. Aides back then didn't tell kings what they could and couldn't do, but as tactfully and subtly as possible this aide is telling David to let it go.

Sadly, David didn't heed the warning. He had to have this woman. He was inflamed with lust. He could not get her out of his mind, and he was obsessed with desire to have sex with her. He convinced himself he could not be satisfied until he did. So he disregarded the clear warning and had her brought to him so he could sleep with her.

What in the world was Bathsheba thinking? Why would she do such a thing? It is possible that she was one of the desperate housewives of Jerusalem and was excited about a dalliance with the king. Maybe she had appallingly loose morals and saw no problem with sleeping around with other men. But I doubt either of those was true. My guess is that she feared she had no choice. In that day the law was whatever the king said it was. He was not subject to any higher authority. He had the right to do whatever he wanted. You couldn't say no to the king. So if David ordered a married woman to come and have sex with him, she had no choice. She either obeyed or she faced a terrible consequence.

#### DAVID COVERED UP CRUELLY

Numbers 32:23 says, "Be sure that your sin will find you out." There is an odd thing happening on the coast of Cornwall in England. In 1997 a container ship went down off the coast taking 62 containers with it. One of those containers held 4.8 million Lego blocks. The past few years those Legos have been washing up on the beaches. U. S. oceanographer Curtis Ebbesmeyer says, "The incident is a perfect example of how even when inside a steel container, sunken items don't stay

sunken.” The Bible insists that something like that is true with sin. You can try to bury it or hide it, but somehow it won’t stay buried or hidden.

David thought he could have his little fling and no one would be the wiser since Uriah was off fighting David’s battles for him. But just as items sunk in a steel container seem to manage to find their way to the surface so David’s little secret threatened to come into the light of day. Bathsheba had gotten pregnant. Since her husband was away in the front lines there was no way to explain that other than unfaithfulness.

David ordered Uriah to come back to Jerusalem from the front lines and made repeated attempts to get him to go home and sleep with his wife. Obviously David hoped that Bathsheba could convince her husband that the baby was his, conceived during his R and R leave.

Uriah refused to cooperate. He couldn’t bear the idea of getting to sleep in his own bed with his wife when his men were all away from their loved ones, putting the lives on the line and sleeping on the ground. Out of loyalty to David and his own men Uriah staunchly refused to do what David wanted, thereby foiling David’s scheme. What a stark contrast Uriah provides with David’s self indulgent compromise.

We have seen several instances in David’s life where his faith failed. Twice he couldn’t believe that God would really take care of him and concluded that it was up to him to come up with a way to protect himself. In those situations he usually lied. And most of the time when he depended on his own clever schemes, which were almost always dishonest, innocent people died. This incident follows that pattern exactly. David did not trust that what God supplies is enough, that he had all the women he needed to sleep with. And so he acted in disobedience to God. When the consequences arrived he again relied on his own dishonest schemes. And once again an innocent man died.

David gave up and sent Uriah back to the front lines. He told Joab, the commanding general, to put Uriah on point in a dangerously exposed position, then have the troops fall back, leaving him alone in the open. They did exactly what David instructed and got the outcome he was looking for. Uriah, one of the great heroes of Israel, one of the “Mighty Men,” was killed. There was undoubtedly great sadness and mourning, especially among his men. I suspect there was more than a little anger at how Uriah had been hung out to dry and sacrificed. But David had gotten precisely what he wanted. Uriah, a noble and innocent man, was dead.

At that point David took Bathsheba as his wife. David may have thought he got away with it, but he did not. Even if no one else knew, God knew, and he would bring it to light.

### IMPLICATIONS

That's a familiar story that is right up Hollywood's ally. But is there anything we can learn from this? There's the obvious lesson that one should not have sex with other people's spouses, but I think this story says more to us than merely that.

### WE ALL HAVE GAPS

As you know, my son, Toby, still plays hockey. He is a goalie, which has always been a strange position to me. You get the joy of standing in front of a net while opposing team players shoot a rock hard rubber puck at you at speeds up to 90 miles per hour. That sounds fun, if your idea of fun is being pummeled by hard objects. If you mess up you can't hide it because the puck is in the net behind you. Jacques Plante, one of the great goal tenders of all time once said, "How would you like a job where when you make a mistake a red light goes on and 18, 000 people boo?"

Today they do everything they can to protect goaltenders. A goalie wears a prodigious amount of protective padding. He typically wears a helmet, neck guard, chest and arm protector, enormous leg pads, protective pants, padded gloves and special protective skates. It seems like every inch of a goalie's body is padded, but all goalies know that surprisingly every now and then a puck will somehow find an unprotected spot. There are little gaps and the puck manages to find them. And it hurts, big time.

This is true of every goalie, it's one of the hazards of the job. And every human being, no matter how good they are or how vigilant they may be, also has gaps in their armor. The gaps I refer to are spiritual or moral vulnerabilities. Every single one of us has areas where the enemy can trip us up and cause us to make terrible choices.

David was a man after God's own heart. All of us are touched and helped by the Psalms. Did you know that half of them are attributed to David? You read the deep, insightful, soaring words of those Psalms and you know the author was a man who knew and loved God deeply. He was Israel's greatest king. Yet that great man had his own personal gaps. The most glaring one is on display for all to see in this incident. David had a problem when it came to women. When David finally

became king he already had 3 wives. Yet when he moved into his palace 2 Samuel 5:13 tells us he took more wives and concubines. Excuse me but, how many do you need? He took wives, plural, meaning at least 2 or more, plus concubines plural, meaning again at least 2 or more. So at that point he had a minimum of 7 women that he was sleeping with. It was quite likely considerably more than that. He basically had his pick of eligible women and could take whoever he wanted. Just in case you weren't aware may I remind you that this was not in accord with God's plan? He specifically commanded that Israel's kings not do exactly what David did. By the way, have you ever noticed that pretty close to half the human race are men and half are women? Does that suggest anything to you? The plan is one man per woman, one woman per man. Apparently David didn't get the memo.

He had a weak spot, and in this incident that gap in his armor became a serious problem. As with all of us, the flip side of one of David's strengths turned out to be a weakness. David was a man of great passion. He had a passionate love for God. But his passion also was a vulnerable spot for him, for his passion for women led to his greatest failure. The terrifying thing about this story is that it is an example of the fact that not only do we all have gaps, but also that we have difficulty recognizing them. This is true of all of us.

In Acts 10:11-15 Peter was given a vision by God. "He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice came to him, 'Get up Peter. Kill and eat.' 'Surely not, Lord,' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.' The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'" That same thing happened 3 times in the vision. How mystifying that must have been for Peter. To that very day he had been totally kosher. He was serious about never eating anything that God said was taboo, and he never had. He had been warned his entire life about not eating baby back ribs and bacon. And now in this bizarre vision God said, "Hey, I've made those foods clean, so stop saying they're impure." How could this be? Did God change his mind? Those foods used to be unclean but now they're clean. I don't know how that happened, but I'm really happy about it, because I really love bacon. God didn't go to all that trouble with Peter merely to give him a thumbs up on ham on rye sandwiches for lunch. What did this vision mean?

Peter didn't have to wait long to find out. While he was trying to understand the vision some men showed up at the door of the house where Peter was staying. They claimed they had been sent by an angel to this house to find a guy named Simon Peter. They took Peter to their boss, a Gentile, a Roman soldier named

Cornelius. Peter told him about Jesus and he immediately received the Spirit of Jesus. Peter connected the dots. Gentiles used to be unclean, unacceptable before God, but now in Jesus God said they were clean.

Peter got the picture. Gentiles would be allowed in the kingdom of God on equal footing with Jews by putting their faith in Jesus. No need for circumcision, keeping the Sabbath or a diet free of pork. Just faith in Jesus. Fast forward to a time when Gentiles were coming into the kingdom by the bushel. In the region of Galatia Gentiles were streaming into the church, so Peter and Barnabus went there to see what was happening. In Galatians 2:12 Paul said of Peter, “before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.” He started treating Gentiles like they were unclean again. How could he do that after that vision God had given him? God specifically gave him an unforgettable vision with a message that he was somehow forgetting. Peter had a gap, a blind spot, and it had to do with fear. He was afraid of what his fellow Jews would think of him. Somehow he couldn’t see how wrong his actions were until Paul confronted him. We all have those gaps, every single human being.

We all have our own gaps and blind spots. We are flawed and vulnerable. Our vulnerability may have to do with insecurity, pride, fear, lust or just over all self-centeredness, but we all have gaps, and we need to grasp that they are as dangerous to us and others as David’s were.

## OUR GAPS ARE MADE WORSE BY TWO INFLUENCES

The first influence is the world around us. Part of the reason that David didn’t notice how horribly off base he was stemmed from the fact that he wasn’t doing anything different from other leaders around him. Everyone took multiple wives and mistresses. It’s just what powerful guys did. We are kidding ourselves if we don’t think our environment, our culture is not heavily impacting us. It is blinding all of us to some flaws that were we in another culture would be obvious to us.

Skye Jethani, author and pastor, relates something that happened with his daughter who is in kindergarten. She had a homework assignment. It was to identify the logos of a number of brands. Without hesitation she identified Pizza Hut, Target, Lego, Disney, Jello and Goldfish crackers. Jethani says no one sat down and taught her those things. They did not have flash cards they went through to memorize them. That little 5 year old just absorbed them by living in our world. The average 10 year old can identify between 300 and 400 logos. That’s because they live in a

brand saturated culture. We need to be aware that our money driven, image-obsessed, relativistic, materialistic, hyper sexualized culture is impacting us in ways we probably don't even notice.

The second influence though, is our own desires. James 1:14-15 says, "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin." I think there is an unfortunate translation there. The Greek text literally says each one is tempted when they are dragged away by their own desire." By inserting evil before desires they make it sound like it is always some terrible impulse that causes problems. The desires are not always evil, they are just strong desires. David was a passionate guy. That's how God made him. His desire for a woman was not wrong, but it got out of place in his life and created terrible havoc.

Ephesians 4:22 says, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires." They aren't deceitful desires because we try to deceive other people, the desires are deceitful because they deceive us. They tell us if we can just fulfill them then we will have the life that we long to have. In so doing they deceive us.

Those desires could be almost anything, but at their core they are usually desires for more pleasure, more power, more money, more acceptance, more fame. Our desires for those things deceived us. Sometimes they can be desires for good things, but they get out of place in our lives and instead of fulfilling us they ruin us.

## APPLICATION

### HUMBLE YOURSELF

Years ago I knew a guy who had a considerable history of blown up relationships and failed endeavors. In a rare moment of candor he came to the realization that maybe he needed some help. This was unusual for him because he had one prime directive that was the bedrock of everything he did. That principle was that nothing was his fault. If something went wrong, someone else was to blame or it was because of something someone had done to him. He could be a victim, but never the cause of problems.

This guy asked me for help. So I gave him a book to read and suggested we get together and discuss it and pray together. He agreed. We met, and in our first meeting a couple of significant issues came up. I helped him see some issues in his life and we talked about ways to begin working on those things. We prayed together, and he went away with a positive attitude about the growth he was



already beginning to see in himself. It was the last time we met. I tried to get together with him again, but he was no longer interested. He had realized that the premise of the things we talked about violated his prime directive. He was drawn back to his fundamental belief like a moth to a flame. He could not bear the idea that the solution to issues in his life was to admit his problems and begin facing them. Unsurprisingly, his life has not gone on a positive tack since then.

At the core of his problem was an unwillingness to accept that he had gaps, and in his case they were huge ones. The problem is if you don't admit to the gaps you will never see any improvement. I read a story last summer about a Padres pitcher who had some surprising success early this year. In the article he talked about how during his career that had been mostly disappointing up to 2016 coaches had tried to teach him to do some things differently than he was used to. Early in 2016 he seemed to be having a breakthrough year and he attributed his success to the fact that he had finally decided to stop listening to them and do things the way he was used to. As I read the article I thought that the coaches were giving him sound advice. I felt he could not have long term success in the Major Leagues doing what he insisted on doing. I concluded maybe I was wrong. I wasn't. The second half of the season this guy began having big problems and it was specifically because he insisted on doing it his way. He refused to humble himself, and the results were predictable.

Frank Sinatra sang proudly, "I did it my way." Great, unless your way is stupid and self-destructive. How is that something to be proud of? The way of the follower of Christ is not, "I did it my way," but "I did it Christ's way." That means we need to start with the premise that we have nothing to prove or defend. We are not loved by God because we have it together more than other people. Jesus died on the cross for us because we are fatally flawed, and we should start with that premise. We should keep our focus on the idea that those flaws are dangerous for us, but for other people as well. David's flaw led to the death of a great man who was noble and innocent.

This humility will make us open to admitting our wrongs and our flaws. The problem with a blind spot is you are blind to it, but others can see it. Some cars have a blind spot warning that goes off when there is a car in your blind spot that you don't see. Unfortunately we don't have that as original equipment, so our only defense is to be humble and willing to listen and admit that we have a flaw.

In his seminars on marriage Christian counselor and speaker Paul Tripp tells couples there is one thing that is crucial for them to address any issues in their

marriage and improve it. He said they need to accept one crucial truth. They need to say to themselves, “I am the biggest problem in my marriage.” I have found that the majority of people reject that idea. They are certain the biggest problem is their spouse. If their spouse would just change then everything would be great. And that belief dooms their chances of improving.

## IDENTIFY THE INFLUENCES

One of the things that can help us is to recognize that our desires can be the source of a lot of problems. This is so true that some eastern religions teach that the key to real peace is extinguishing our desires so that we desire nothing. The Bible never suggests such a thing. Our desires are a crucial component of being human and being alive. But our desires can fool us and create great grief for us, just as David’s desires did for him. So we need to pay attention to what seems to matter most to us. This incident intersects with our lives at the point where there is something that we want. What is it that you desire?

Usually a good key to understanding what our own desires are and where we might be vulnerable to bad decisions is our emotions. When we get depressed or frustrated because we don’t have something that is a clear sign that we desire it a lot. Thursday Laurie and I were scheduled to fly to Seattle in order to attend the funeral for her mom on Friday. Laurie was taking care of Ella for most of the day, so we had to drop her off with her mom and dad, then make it down to the airport in time to catch our 6 PM flight. It rained all day Thursday so the traffic was terrible at the end of the day. We hustled out of the house, drove to Encinitas to drop off Ella, and then drive to the airport. Only as we were getting into the car after dropping off Ella I made a terrible discovery. I had forgotten my wallet. It was still at our home in La Costa. I know, you’re thinking, “Wait, I’ve seen this movie before and didn’t like it the first time.” Yeah, I didn’t like it either. When I informed Laurie of the unwelcome news that we were going to have to drive home first to get my wallet, thus making our already narrow window impossibly tight and likely meaning we were going to miss the flight, she was understandably less than thrilled. At that point our desires came into play. Laurie desired to not be married to me. I desired to be someone else who is not as much of an airhead idiot as I am.

Actually Laurie at that point had a legitimate desire. She desired to be able to not miss our flight so we could get up to Seattle in time to attend her mother’s funeral. I also had some legitimate desires. I was already feeling terrible and stupid, so I desired to be given unconditional love and grace despite my stupidity, to be treated

with patience, kindness and affirmation even though I didn't deserve it. Sadly at that moment her desires and mine were mutually exclusive.

In a circumstance like that even though the desires of both of us were quite reasonable they also opened a door for some bad choices to be made. For Laurie her desire to go to that funeral was potentially blocked by the idiocy of her dolt of a husband making it tempting for her to pour out her frustration on the blockhead, letting him know that what he had done was inexcusable and was causing her great pain and stress. In other words her legitimate desire could cause her to choose not to love and extend God's grace and kindness to her own husband, a man clearly deserving of our sympathy since he is placed in the battle of this world clearly unarmed with the mental faculties necessary for survival. My desire for forgiveness and undeserved kindness was also totally understandable, but it opened the door to taking offense and being resentful of my wife if said grace was not immediately forthcoming.

Fortunately we are still married, and we actually did make it onto our flight because it was delayed, which is itself a story for another time. What we can see, though, in that situation is that any desire we have lays us open to being fooled into thinking that we absolutely must have what we desire in order for life to be even bearable. When we go to that place there is no end of possible compromises we can make to get what we have deemed essential to have. Pay attention to what you desire. Your desire may be fine, but it is an opportunity if it is blocked for your vulnerabilities to come into play and for you to make some decisions the way David did.

Desire is not a bad thing. It is what motivates us. But any desire we have can deceive us by convincing us we can never be happy or whole without the thing we desire. When that happens we are on the precipice of some really dangerous territory.

We should also be suspicious of our culture. We live in a culture that wants God completely eradicated, that is totally human centered, is money driven, is obsessed with appearances and status, that is morally bankrupt and completely relativistic, and is hyper-sexual. These things are influencing us in ways we mostly are not conscious of. But we should look for them.

## REMEMBER THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES

Numbers 32:23 says when we sin, "you may be sure your sin will find you out." Galatians 6:8 says, "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap

destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Every choice we make has a consequence, either a good one or a bad one.

As we go on in David’s life we will learn that he experienced some terrible consequences for his choices. One of the most important lessons we can ever keep in the front of our minds is that our choices will always have consequences. When we choose to disobey God, even a little, every tiny compromise, it comes at a price. We will do injury to ourselves.

If we compromise, if we disobey God even a little, God is not harmed. But we need to grasp that we are doing damage to ourselves. We need to remember that when we are tempted by our own desires or by what the world tells us that there are always consequences for choosing to live our way and not God’s way. We will get burned, and it will hurt. When we believe that with all our heart it will help us avoid the kind of terrible choices that David made.

#### ASK GOD TO DELIVER YOU

Remember that in Matthew 6:13 Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The late Dallas Willard in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, said this prayer is “a vote of no confidence in our abilities.” The good news is, as Ray Stedman wrote in his book, *And When You Pray*, “God delights to help those who have nowhere else to go but to the Lord.”

If it is up to us to deliver ourselves from evil we have a problem. A number of years ago before our kids got married Laurie and I went on a vacation with them to Disney World in Orlando. One of the rides we went on was Expedition Everest. It’s a roller coaster that our kids loved. They thought we would love it too. I loved some of it. There was something unusual about that ride that they didn’t tell us because they wanted us to be surprised. And I was surprised. Unpleasantly. It was doing the usual fast roller coaster thing and I was enjoying it, but at one point it goes up to a peak, stops, and begins going backward. It really scrambled my senses and I immediately started feeling queasy. I gritted my teeth and commanded myself not to feel sick and dizzy. Have you ever tried to steel yourself from feeling motion sickness? It doesn’t work. At least not for me. I got off that ride feeling horrible. I just don’t have the power to order myself not to feel motion sickness.

Neither do I have the power to not give in to my weaknesses. That is why Jesus taught us we should ask God to deliver us from evil. The very act of praying that reminds us of what we really want in life, it reminds us of his presence with us, and it invites him to strengthen our souls so that we can stand. So let’s do that.