

Session 15

The Drift of Distraction

2 Samuel II:1-5

Memory Verse

David sent messengers to get her, and when she came to him, he slept with her.

– 2 SAMUEL II:4A, CSB



The Drift of Distraction

THEOLOGICAL THEME: None of us are immune to the temptation to sin, so we should be wise about the situations we put ourselves in.

CALL TO ACTION: Identify areas of idleness and consider what it would look like to honor God in those areas.

In 1857, prolific writer Charles Dickens went on a sightseeing trip with his friend and fellow author, Wilkie Collins. Following the trip, the pair wrote a humorous satire caricaturing themselves (Dickens for his maniacal energy and Collins for his idleness). The story, called “The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices” was published in Dickens’s periodical *Household Words*, and the story goes something like this:

Young apprentices Thomas Idle and Francis Goodchild escape from the responsibilities of their apprenticeships to embark on a tour of the countryside with a simple goal: Avoid all work and responsibility (and effort of any kind) and simply enjoy being idle.

They assume this life of carefree idleness will be a joy, but, as you might expect . . . it is not. They find their character weakened, and their foolishness increased. Rather than the pleasurable time they imagined, their “lazy tour” was full of humorous misadventure, and they learned an important lesson: Idleness isn’t all it is cut out to be.¹

Biblical wisdom, too, warns us of the devastating consequences of idleness, in passages like Proverbs 19:15. Scripture also illustrates this danger through real life stories. In our passage today, we’ll read a story that illustrates the dangers of isolation and idleness from the life of King David.

? How would you describe the difference between idleness and biblical rest?

? How does idleness often open the door to temptation? How are smart phones often connected to idleness in our current moment?

Session Summary

When “all Israel” went off to war to fight the Ammonites, “David remained in Jerusalem” (v. 1). There, isolated and idle, while strolling on the rooftop of his palace, David looked down and saw the “very beautiful” (v. 2) Bathsheba, and desired her.

Though David confirmed she was married (and therefore off-limits according to the law), he “sent messengers to get her,” slept with her, and impregnated her. Scripture is very clear that David’s sin was great and repugnant to his holy God. (Keep reading in 2 Samuel to watch this play out.) This story is a cautionary tale about the choices we make that lead to the doorway of sin, and the danger that could come from idleness and isolating ourselves from those who would speak wisdom when we’re contemplating foolishness.

1. The Wrong Place at the Wrong Time (2 Samuel 11:1)

? What stands out to you in this verse? What details do you notice?

? What clues do we have that David was not where he was supposed to be in this verse?

The text opens with a very important tidbit: Spring is the time when kings go to war. Spring would have been a particularly good time for this activity because crops were already planted and growing in the field and the men weren’t as needed for normal industry during this time of year.²

The Hebrew words that describe the time of year literally translates to “at the return of the year,” and may also refer to the one-year anniversary of the Ammonites marching against Israel (2 Samuel 10:6-19).³ The conflict the author describes was against the Ammonites and Rabbah was their capital city.⁴

The Israelites were possibly finishing what the Ammonites started the year before. David, as a king, should have played an active role in the defense of the nation. But David remained in Jerusalem. This was a problem. David wasn't where he ought to have been. He had a duty to uphold, but he stayed home.

Notice the emphasis on the other able-bodied men that went to war. Joab, David's military commander, was there, along with his officers, and all of Israel—except for David that is.



While others were taking responsibility to care for God's people, David stayed behind and was idle. How have you seen idleness make way for temptation?

To be fair, the text doesn't specifically tell us that it was foolish for David to remain in Jerusalem while his men went to war. Perhaps he had a valid reason or was asked to stay behind. But the author seems to imply that David was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and no matter if he had valid reasons or not, his isolation and idleness would absolutely cost him.

2. An Idle Mind (2 Samuel 11:2-3)



How would you describe David's activity here? Where might David have turned from an incidental observation to sinful pursuit?



What additional warning signs did David have to stop pursuing his sin in these verses?

The palace would have likely been on the highest ground in all of Jerusalem,⁵ so looking into any nearby areas would have been easy. It is from this vantage point that David spotted Bathsheba. It's important to note there's nothing in the text that suggests Bathsheba was doing anything untoward or provocative. Bathing outside, where it would have been cooler, wouldn't be outside the norm, and "bathing" here doesn't necessarily mean that Bathsheba was naked. She could have been simply bathing her hands or her face. While Bathsheba was bathing in a private location, David, looking down from the roof of his palace, noticed her and her beauty.

In response, David sent someone to find out who she was, and the response he received was significant. David knew these men. Eliam was one of David's elite warriors, and Uriah one of David's thirty elite soldiers.⁶ The servant gives not one but two connections (perhaps an attempt to verbally dissuade David from taking any further action). Scholars think Bathsheba may also have been the granddaughter Ahithophel, one of David's closest advisors.



How does the deception of sin often try and convince us to keep moving past warning signs that would give us pause?

Bathsheba's status as a married woman should have made her off-limits to any other man according to Mosaic law (Leviticus 20:10), and certainly to a God-fearing king who should be morally upright. David made a series of choices:

- He made a choice to remain home instead of going to battle with his men.
- He made a choice to send a servant to find out who the beautiful woman he observed was.
- Having learned about her (the men in her life are prominent, known to him, and she was married), he had another choice. What would he do next?

As James reminds us, sin is less often a momentary response, but a series of events that leads away from God (James 1:15).

3. The Doorway to Sin (2 Samuel 11:4-5)

? What further evidence do we have of Bathsheba's righteousness in these verses?

? What further evidence do we have of David's sinfulness?

In our last passage, David walked right up to the doorway to sin. In this passage, he walked right through it. Any hope that David would avoid moving forward into sin was now lost.

As we discussed in the last section, Scripture doesn't suggest Bathsheba was acting immorally in any way. In fact, the detail that she had been purifying herself from uncleanness gives further evidence she was seeking righteousness through following the law as commanded.

Think about the roadblocks that were thrown up to David here before he physically sinned. He learned he knew the male figures in Bathsheba's life. He learned she was married. He had to go through the effort to send someone to fetch her. He kept moving, though, no matter the roadblock. How often do we do the same? We, too, can ignore signs, and hurdle roadblocks to cater to the desires of our flesh. This is still how human nature works, millennia later, and our closeness to God does not render us immune to this temptation.

? How might we prepare now in an effort to better respond to warning signs of sin in the future?

Note David's specific actions: He sent for Bathsheba. To be clear, Bathsheba had little choice in the matter because you couldn't say no to a king. The specific verb used is more like "take."⁷ The language here is reminiscent of Eve taking the fruit from the tree. Indeed, David was continuing the pattern of sin begun in the garden.

Verse 4 gives us a succinct summary of David’s sin, and an ominous note: Bathsheba had been purifying herself after having her period (another clue that leads scholars to believe the bath David witnessed might not have featured an unclothed Bathsheba—this type of purification would not have required it). The timing of these events also led to Bathsheba becoming pregnant following this encounter with David.

Conclusion

Our passage in 2 Samuel opened with David in a place he should not have been. Instead of accompanying his men (“all Israel”) to war, “David remained in Jerusalem” (v. 1). This decision, however it came about, isolated David and opened a dangerous door.

While isolated and idle, at home in Jerusalem, David took a stroll on the roof of the palace and looked down and spotted the “very beautiful” (v. 2) Bathsheba, bathing at her home. This in and of itself may have been an invasion of privacy, but David took it a step further, sending someone to investigate who she was.

In response, David learned she was the daughter and granddaughter of prominent soldiers in Israel, soldiers who had fought for David, and he learned, most importantly that Bathsheba was married, and therefore off-limits to any other man according to Mosaic law.

Then David had a choice. What had happened thus far may have been in poor taste, unwise, and Jesus would later define this kind of admiration as sin of the heart (Matthew 5:27-28). But no physical sin had taken place yet. But in this moment, David would make possibly the worst decision of his entire reign, choosing the clearly sinful path.

Despite all opportunities to turn back, our passage ends with David making a choice to deliberately sin. Scripture doesn’t seem to indicate that Bathsheba was acting intentionally immoral in any way. David sent for Bathsheba, who was unable to say no to the king’s summons, she was brought to him, and he slept with her. Perhaps David hoped his sin would remain hidden since it was conducted at a time when many who might hold him accountable for it were away from Jerusalem. But it didn’t—Bathsheba became pregnant.

There is much more to this story (keep going in 2 Samuel to find out what happened!), but it acts as a cautionary tale as we consider the responsibility of our choices and the danger of isolating ourselves, away from God's plan for us, and away from community meant to uplift us and hold us accountable. It also teaches us something about idleness. Idleness is not the same as godly rest (remember, God Himself mandated rest in the law, and we see Jesus rest often in the Gospels). Rather, idleness is a choice to be inactive, avoiding responsibility in some way, and while this is clearly an age-old temptation, God calls us to a higher purpose (Psalm 119:37, ESV).

? Have you ever been faced with temptation after not being in the place you knew you should? How does godly wisdom call us to act in these moments?

? How does idleness and isolation cause problems for us today? How is this connected to the rise of smart phones? How are you most tempted in this way?

? How can we encourage one another away from idleness and isolation and toward community and godly responsibility and rest?

Memorize

David sent messengers to get her, and when she came to him, he slept with her.

- 2 Samuel 11:4a, CSB

References

- ¹Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, serialized in *Household Words* (London), October 31–November 28, 1857.
- ²Bryan E. Beyer, “2 Samuel,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 474.
- ³Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 258.
- ⁴Bryan E. Beyer, “2 Samuel,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 474.
- ⁵*Ibid.*
- ⁶*Ibid.*
- ⁷Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 258.