

# Study in Psalm 51 - Part 1

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now, seeking the Lord's blessing, we'll turn to the first passage of Scripture we read, 2 Samuel and chapter 11.

And the very last sentence in the chapter, the end of verse 27, But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

Now, I want to look with you for two Sabbath evenings at Psalm 51, which is a very well-known psalm dealing with sin and repentance.

And as I drew attention to it when we were reading it, the title tells us when that psalm was written. It was written some time after this terrible sin which David committed.

And it deals with the blackest series of events that were ever in David's life, when he could be called legitimately an adulterer and a murderer.

[ 1 : 2 6 ] And the psalm tells us how he came to repentance and how he found the forgiveness of God. But before I look with you at the psalm, the next two Sabbath evenings that were together, I want to look first of all with you at the history behind the psalm, as we find it in 2 Samuel chapter 11.

Because this very clearly brings before us the sin into which David fell and how he fell into it. And so I think it will be more beneficial for us to look at the psalm once we've understood the background a little better.

So let's tonight look at these sins that we find recorded here in 2 Samuel 11. And of course, as the New Testament reminds us, these things are written for us, for our admonition to instruct us, to warn us.

And there is a lot in this chapter to do exactly that for us, to warn us in our spiritual lives. Now, first of all, perhaps we could just give a very brief summary of what the chapter is telling us.

The whole incident took place in the springtime, after the winter, with its heavy rains, had passed. Now, the climate there made it difficult for war to be continued over the winter period, and so winter always brought a suspension to war.

[ 2 : 5 8 ] But as soon as the winter was over, any war that was ongoing would then be continued. And there was a war here between the Israelites and the Ammonites. And as soon as springtime came, that war resumed.

And Joab, David's commander-in-chief, was in charge of the Israelite army. But David himself, for some reason, and we'll come to that in a moment, he stayed at home. He always went out with the army, but this time he remained in Jerusalem.

And late one afternoon, David got up from his own couch and he went out to walk on the roof. As you know, in Israel, then, you could walk on the roof of a house.

And as he was walking on the roof of his palace, he looked down, and a little distance away down below him, he saw in the courtyard of another house, he saw a very beautiful woman bathing.

And David's eye lingered on the woman, and immediately he sent servants to find out who she was. The servants came back and told him that she was none other than the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was actually one of the 33 most able soldiers that David had.

[ 4 : 08 ] David had men which were called the 33 mighty men. They had a leading role in his army, and Uriah the Hittite was one of those 33, and Bathsheba was his wife.

Now, his desire for this woman had so taken hold of him that he sent his servants to fetch the woman. And she came, and he lay with her, and she returned home.

But that wasn't that, because after a short while, the terrible news came to David, terrible for him anyway, that Bathsheba was pregnant, that she was expecting a child.

Now, David tries various methods to try to cover up what had happened, and we'll deal with these in a moment, but they all failed. And finally, he took the most drastic method, but as far as he was concerned, the only one possible to cover up his own sin and crime.

He sent a letter to Joab, and he sent it specially sealed by the hand of Uriah himself. And the letter was to state to Joab that he was to go very close to the walls of the city, and that he was to put Uriah the Hittite in the hottest part of the battle.

[ 5 : 29 ] And just when the battle was hot, that Joab's men were to draw back to ensure that Uriah the Hittite would be slain. And Joab carries out these instructions and sends a messenger back to David, telling David that the people had gone, that the army had gone into such and such a place.

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that David told the army to go near the city. David didn't say that, but he just asked to ensure that Uriah, that the men would fall back and leave him exposed.

Now, Joab sent a message back saying that the army went in such and such a course and went right up to the walls of the city. And Joab said to the messenger, if David becomes angry at this point, you just tell him that amongst the casualties was Uriah the Hittite.

Now, I'm sure the messenger didn't understand what the reason for all that was. But he came back and told David what had happened and that your servant, he says, Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

And David, in these terrible words, says this, Well, say to Joab, don't be displeased because the sword devours one as well as another. As though it was just an inevitable consequence of war.

[ 6 : 44 ] The sword devours well one as well as another. Make your battle more strong against the city and overthrow it. And he told the servant to encourage Joab in everything that he was doing.

And after a brief period of mourning for her husband, David takes Bathsheba to be his own wife.

Hoping, of course, that people would assume then that the child would have been legitimately his own. Now, if David thought that everything was finished with that, and that somehow or another he could put his life back on track just that simply, well, he was very wrong.

Because as the last words in the chapter remind us, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. And we're told in these ominous words that the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

And it did. It displeased the Lord greatly. And from that point onwards, as many people have noticed, David's life was never the same again.

[ 7 : 54 ] The prophet came to him and told him that even though God forgave him, that the sword would devour his house. And David's life really, from that point onwards, reads like a tragedy.

And I think we should also note, and I'll come to this again when I'm dealing with Psalm 51, but one thing the prophet said to David was this. Because you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the sword shall not depart from your house.

Now, that's an important thing, because it reminds us that our sins have consequences beyond ourselves. Not only can they have consequences for the church, but they have consequences for the world.

You have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Uriah was a convert. He was a Hittite. You imagine when these things came out, the effect that the whole thing had upon what people thought of the church, what people thought of David, what people thought of God.

And because of that, God took his chastisement upon David. And I think it's right to say that the enemies of the cross still say these things about this very passage, and about anything like this that still happens.

[ 9 : 10 ] People use it as a reason to blaspheme the name of the Lord. And this passage still is, in many respects, an embarrassment.

How can we explain it? How can we understand it? I'm sure maybe you've done things, perhaps in your own life, that you've found hard to understand. Maybe you've come across things in the lives of other people that you've found difficult to understand.

But I would warrant that most of you haven't encountered something in the life of a professing Christian, such as we read of here, when you take it in all its stages.

So it's a difficult thing and a sad thing. And as I said, David, even though he was forgiven, was never quite the same again. But the important thing to notice is that God wrote this.

And the Lord himself ensured that this history would be written. Now, if I was trying to commend a religion, if I was a man giving some kind of man-made religion, the last thing I would do would be to present its heroes in this light.

[ 10 : 16 ] That's the last thing I would do. That reminds us of the honesty of God's word. God doesn't pretend to us that these people were better than they are, or that they were something that they weren't.

We have it here, as you would say, warts and all. And here we have something in David's life that we would wish were blotted out, but God saw to it that it was written.

And it was written for us. Not only so that Psalm 51 would come, which is a great psalm of repentance, and how many people have been blessed by that. And that psalm wouldn't have come but for this.

Not only for that, but also to teach us some things about the nature of sin. Well, let's look then at this particular sin and see what we can learn from it.

As I said a minute ago, I suppose the first question is, how could it happen at all? Well, you know the old proverb, one sin leads to another. And how true it is.

[ 11 : 15 ] How true it is. One sin leads to another. And whenever you come across a great sin, if you delve into it, you'll find that it had some kind of small beginning.

Or there was something there that made that sin likely, or made the sin possible. Now you say, well, there's absolutely nothing here like that.

I mean, here we have David one minute. He's on the pinnacle of success. God is blessing his army. God is blessing his kingdom. And the next moment, almost literally, in the twinkling of an eye, he's fallen.

But it's not quite as simple as that. In fact, the scriptures give us a clue that something was wrong in David's life. And it's an important thing. In verse 1, we read this, that it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel.

And they destroyed the children of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. Now, the word but there tells us that there is something unusual about this, and so there is.

[ 12 : 35 ] On every other instance, you find David accompanying the army. He's leading the army. He's taking the army out to the battle, and he's fighting the battle with the army.

He was never an absent leader in that respect, but he went with his people, and he went before them, even as God commanded him to do. But here, for some reason, he's neglecting his duty, and he stays behind in Jerusalem.

Israel is fighting, but David is not fighting. And I think that tells us that not only is he not fighting physically, but that he has stopped fighting spiritually.

It's not just the case that he hasn't taken his sword physically, but he has laid aside the armor of God spiritually. And that's an important thing.

David is not where he should be, and he's not fighting the Lord's battles. He's not engaged in the Christian warfare. He's opted out for a kind of state of retirement.

[ 13 : 40 ] Maybe he means it to be temporary. We don't know. Maybe he means it to be permanent, in the sense that he's going to give up now, going at the head of the armies. There's enough people in Israel to fight.

There are plenty people to do the job. As for him, he's had a hard enough time all his life since he was young. He's had his day of it, and now he can stay in Jerusalem.

Now, let me tell you, friends, that according to the Bible, there is no place for Christian retirement. Yes, a Christian can retire from his work, but he can't retire from his Christianity.

And the minute you try to opt out of the Christian warfare, and the minute you try to absent yourself from duties that God is laying upon you, you're putting yourself in a position where spiritual sloth can take a hold of you very, very easily, and the devil can then come in and have his day with you.

The last thing the devil likes is a Christian with his armor on, a Christian who can wield the sword of the word of God, a Christian who knows how to pray, and who holds up the shield of faith, a Christian who goes out to fight.

[ 14 : 55 ] But the devil is quite happy with a Christian who stays at home and tosses his armor to the side, and thinks he can call it a day in terms of fighting spiritual battles. You can't do that.

You know very often sometimes what happens in physical recovery, and that soon leads to ailments of one kind or another. Not too long before that, the man was a picture of health.

But the minute he seized up, suddenly ill health begins to take a hold of the person. Well, the same thing can happen spiritually. What you have to do spiritually is keep going.

You have to keep active, keep working for the Lord, and keep fighting for the Lord, and never shirk the Lord's battles. And that's the way to keep healthy in the Lord's cause.

And David did not do that. And if you cease to fight for some reason, and you become a Christian in slippers, then the devil finds it very easy to make you a prey.

[ 15 : 55 ] Now the Lord says, quite often, he says to watch and pray. And these two words, of course, always go together.

Watching means to be vigilant, to be alert, looking for what's around you, understanding the situation you're in, understanding where temptations usually come from, being awake as to things that are going to ensnare you.

And prayer means that you're praying for God to help you in all these situations. They always go together. You pray watchfully, and you watch prayerfully. Again, that's another maxim that you can take with you.

You can pray watchfully, and watch prayerfully. And it's important to remember that that applies to the middle-aged Christian, and to the old Christian, just as much as to the young Christian.

I suppose you would think that once a Christian reached a certain age, well, the hard part was over. Well, tell Noah that, after he had endured 120 years, and had seen the flood, and then became drunk in his old age.

[17:00] Tell Abraham that, when God came to him, with the severest trial of his life, when he was an old man. Tell David that, who fell into this sin, not when he was 25, or 30, or 18, but when he was 50.

You tell many of God's saints that, who have suddenly found themselves overwhelmed, when many of their victories were past, and when they would have thought that now was the time of rest.

It's never finished. The life of the Christian is never finished, in this world, until it really is all over. You just never know, when a trial is going to come.

And the Bible tells us to keep our hearts, with all diligence, because out of the heart, are the issues of life. Now, if we neglect, the armor that God gives us, there will be trouble.

That's as certain as day follows night. There's no point pretending that that's not the case. Some people can go on and think, well, prayer maybe isn't all that important, or reading the Bible isn't all that important.

[18:03] My devotional life, not all that important. I don't have to give it time in the morning, or time in the evening. I can skip it by, and I can go on. For a time, yes. But you'll come a cropper, spiritually, because you've left your armor, and Satan's watching.

And that's exactly what happened here to David. He was not where he should be, not fighting the Christian battle, and Satan got his opportunity. Now, that means really that if you neglect prayer, and reading the word, and so on, and Christian fellowship, you'll be open to things that you wouldn't otherwise be open to.

And notice what David's open to. First of all, he's open to more indiscipline in his life. Not only is he staying in Jerusalem when he should be fighting, but we're told in verse 2 that it came to pass in an evening tide that David arose from off his bed and walked upon the roof of the king's house.

Now, all people who are able to comment on this, and who know the original language, and so on, will say that what happened here is not that David got up through the night, but that evening tide here should be understood in the Jewish way of that period sometime between after lunch and six o'clock in the evening.

In other words, what we would call late afternoon. Late afternoon, while it was still obviously light, when the day was cooling a little bit. Now, that becomes important again because what's David doing coming off his bed at that particular time?

[19:47] It implies that he took a longer time than usual in resting at lunch and that he stayed around what you would call perhaps lounging around or that he was indisciplined or slothful at this particular point and he gets up lazily from off his bed when the coolness of near evening comes and he goes out then to walk on top of the roof.

There you have somebody who should be somewhere. He's not where he should be and so other troubles come in. He becomes generally indisciplined in his life. Now, again, let me emphasize that.

You can't neglect the word and the prayer and the fellowship of God's people without becoming indisciplined in every single area of your life.

It will gradually affect it and it affected David's life here too. And so that comes in, a general indiscipline.

And then you'll find that he has a wandering eye. At the end of verse 2 we're told that from the roof he saw a woman washing herself and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

[ 21 : 05 ] Now, the word for beautiful is a word that's only used of very few in the Bible such as Rebecca and Vashti and Esther. So she was particularly beautiful.

But David isn't strong enough to resist what he's seeing. Now, the woman is obviously very careless. It was very indiscreet for a woman to be bathing outside at this time of day in a courtyard where other people could see her.

And I think that's a reminder too that Bathsheba is not guiltless in this whole affair. Far from it. She has her own guilt and it comes in at many points.

She appears to be quite willing all along the line and she is also here guilty of being seen in such a way. And that reminds us that we have to be careful even if we think that perhaps we're safe enough doing a certain thing while perhaps someone else is seeing us.

And we should always be careful that we're not inciting or encouraging other people to fall into sin. And that can come through in different ways including what you wear and where you're seen with what you wear.

[ 22 : 19 ] All these things are important and they come into our Christian lives. But let's not take the focus of David. He wasn't strong enough to withstand this.

And that of course is what a lack of disciplined prayer and communion with God does in your life. It weakens you. And the devil knows it weakens you. So you're not able to deal with temptations that come your way in the way that you should deal with them.

Joseph wasn't like that. He was close to the Lord and he was strong in the Lord. And when Potiphar's wife tried to entice him in exactly the same way he fled, left his coat behind him and was able to resist it.

But David didn't have the spiritual energy and strength to resist it. And I wonder how true that is in the Christian church today. That the spiritual energy and strength to resist evil and to resist sin is just not there in the way that it should be.

And all these things are constantly telling us about the importance of being close to God and having a personal walk with God. That's the root of our strength and the root of all our power.

[ 23 : 28 ] And so his eye rests upon her and lingers on her beauty. And the lust of the flesh easily empowers him in this kind of spiritual weakness.

Now you know that David in another place was it David? Perhaps it wasn't David. It's Psalm 119 which says turn away my sight and eyes from viewing vanity.

That's the right attitude. We should always pray for strength from God to be watchful and to turn ourselves away from situations that are tempting or anything of that kind.

Turn away my sight and eyes but his eye lingered there. And of course when the eye lingered it didn't take too long until the heart was captured. When lust is conceived it brings forth sin and sin when it's finished brings forth death.

You'll notice how the heart is captured here because not only was she beautiful to look upon but David sent and inquired after the woman. Now what does that tell you? It tells you that an idea has formed and the idea has come into a purpose and he's now set to go in a particular direction.

[ 24 : 42 ] So much so that he sends servants to inquire who this woman is. And before long the deed is done. We read that she came in unto him and that he lay with her and then she returned to her house.

Now not only is this evil in itself but there are some things that aggravate it. First of all God I'm not sure how to put it it sounds almost irreverent to say that God tried to stop him but what I should say is that God sent him a warning to stop him.

God sent him a warning to stop him. Because when he inquired who she was somebody told him immediately that it was Bathsheba the wife of Huriiah the Hittite.

In other words first of all she was a married woman. And let me say that adultery in the Bible is a great evil. And it's a great and rampant evil in our society.

And the Lord doesn't wink at it. And adultery is something that the Lord's people should pray against in our society. And everyone should pray against in our society.

[ 25 : 51 ] That the bond of marriage in that way would be more greatly respected than it is. So immediately God fired this warning shot across David's bows. First of all she is a married woman.

And that is a sin punishable by death. And then again not only was she a married woman which aggravated the situation but she was actually the wife of his own friend Uriah the Hittite.

A man who would fight any corner for David. One of his own 33 special hand-picked men who was even a Hittite convert. Not only an Israelite but a Hittite convert who came into the Israelite camp.

And what a fearful thing that was. Not only would the thing be known amongst Israel but it would be known amongst Hittites and known amongst others what had happened to this man at the hands of David.

So God there is firing a warning shot across his bows. Now I'm sure you know what that is too. Whether you're converted here or not you'll know what I mean by that. Sometimes you've embarked on a course of action and you know it's a sin.

[ 26 : 58 ] You know it's a sin and then perhaps God puts something in your way that makes it an even greater sin to your realization than you thought it was. And God puts something in your past that should make you stop.

As though God is saying and he is saying stop it. Stop it right now before you go any further stop it. And you know God is speaking to you in that and your conscience is speaking to you clearly.

But sometimes you determine just to go on with it. Another thing that aggravated his sin was this who he was the king of Israel. Now the greater the position you hold the greater your responsibility.

That's a fact. Moses just lost his temper once we're told with the people of God. He lost his temper and insulted them and he was kept back from the promised land because those who lead should have a greater burden of responsibility.

and how true that was of David the king of Israel. The one man that people identified with the cause. Now it should be no surprise that Satan would try to get him down but how much more David himself should have been concerned that he wouldn't be brought down.

[ 28 : 12 ] And yet that didn't stop him either. And there was one more thing that aggravated the sin and that's this that God had given him everything in life. More than he could ever have asked for.

He was a young shepherd boy. He was despised at home. He was the youngest of the family. But God took him from the fold of the shepherds and God raised him to be king over Israel.

God gave him a kingdom. He gave him an empire. And God had actually provided him with more than one wife or God in his permission had given one wife or allowed David to take more than one wife.

And remember that was so clear in the parable that Nathan gave David. You remember that parable and we'll look at it later another time. How God said to him, you know you had everything.

Just like this person who had one ewe lamb and here's a rich man and he had lots of lambs but when a visitor came to him instead of taking his own he went and took this one ewe lamb that this poor man had.

[ 29 : 11 ] And David was so angry, where is this man? He should be put to death. But Nathan said it's you. You're the man. God gave you everything and still you did this. And how true that can be of you too.

What you do is in spite of what God has given you. It's not because God has been meager in what he's given you. He's given you much but still perhaps you've done it and all that aggravated is sin.

No, God isn't mocked. The Bible tells us be sure your sins will find you out. No, that is as sure as anything. Our sins will find us out.

And the Lord's people will be chastised in this life for what they do in this life. And one way God chastises them or he begins chastisement is by allowing the sin to grow and envelop and to enmesh them.

Now that may sound strange to us but there's a text in Jeremiah, I think it's chapter 2 that tells us your own wickedness shall reprove you. Your own backslidings shall reprove you.

[ 30 : 21 ] And that can be so. David found himself in a pit and he kept on digging and making the matter worse for himself. If David thought the thing was over, it wasn't.

A few weeks later he heard that she was pregnant, that she was with child. And then David's world seems to collapse around him.

Look at the problems. First of all, Uriah was away at battle. Everyone knows that he is not the father. Some of his servants knew that Bathsheba had been sent for and that David had met with her.

And then again David fears the scandal on his own name. Now I'm sure he could rationalize that and pretend that what he was really concerned about was the Lord's cause.

But you know very often people can say that it's the Lord's cause that they're concerned with when it's really themselves and their own pride and their own reputation that they're concerned with and not the Lord's cause at all.

[ 31 : 25 ] And I'm quite sure David was like that here. The Lord's cause will survive your faults. The Lord's cause will go on even if you have to confess something that's terrible.

Don't worry, it will go on. But of course it's a big question whether you will go on and how you will go on. And that's what was concerning David. What would people now think of the sweet psalmist of Israel?

What would people now think of all his campaigns and his victories and his spiritual life and spiritual teaching? It seems as though the whole thing was going to collapse around him.

Oh the cause, yes, the cause could go on but could he face a confession? Could he face a confession? And in that way Bathsheba's pregnancy was a rebuke and a test.

What would he now do? Well what does he do? Do we read that he prayed? No. Do we read that he sought the Lord? No. Do we read that he asked God for courage just to confess and to acknowledge that he had done wrong?

[ 32 : 33 ] No. We don't read any of that. What he tries to do is he tries to cover it. He tries to get out of it. And how does he do it? Well first of all he sends for Uriah the Hittite.

And Joab the commander sends him back. And David first of all speaks to him and says how's the battle going and how's the war prospering? And then after these things are over David says to him now go down to your own house and stay there, wash your feet, make yourself comfortable in other words.

And as soon as Uriah had left the house, David arranged for a bountiful supply of dressed meat, of food, to be sent down from the king. And of course the arrangement is obvious.

David wants Uriah to spend the evening with his own wife, so that when the child is born, people would say, well, that indeed is when the child was conceived. But you know, when people have a heart set on sin, it's strange how God's providence seems to trip them up every single twist and turn that it takes, it seems to trip them up.

And here it trips him up. Because Uriah doesn't go down to his own house, he stays at the door of the king's house with the servants of the Lord. And in the morning the servants go into David and they say, well, Uriah didn't go down to his house.

[ 33 : 54 ] And David's exasperated and he says to Uriah, why, he says, did you not go down to your own house? And listen, here's another warning shot across his bows. What Uriah says is this, and I think it's a noble thing, and I think it says a lot for Uriah himself, his own character.

Uriah says, my people are out, he says, fighting the battles of the Lord. They're out in the fields and they're out in the tents. They're out fighting, and why should I go down to lie with my wife or to be at home when my people are in that situation?

No, he says, as thy soul lives, I will not do this thing. Now you would have thought that that would have come like a bolt from the Lord into the heart of David, rebuking him for being in Jerusalem, rebuking him for having laid down his armor when the people were fighting.

And not only were they fighting, Uriah wouldn't take any of this world's comforts as long as his own people were suffering. He was identifying with them while David was up to his neck in it because of his own sloth.

And I'm sure it probably did come home to David, but it didn't work in the way that it ought to. What does David do? Well, one sin becomes another.

[ 35 : 05 ] How black it is to read, but God voted, and it's for your benefit and for mine. David then says, stay another day, tomorrow you can't go back.

And that evening he entertains him and he makes him drunk, we're told, insisting that he have one glass of wine after another. And again, the idea is to get him definitely to go down and to go to his own home.

But again, remarkably, Uriah stays at the door along with the other servants and wouldn't go down to the house. And by this point, David's exasperated. Does he pray? No.

Does he seek courage? No. Does he try to confront what he is in himself? No. What does he do? Well, he does something terrible. The famous Uriah's letter, there's only one thing.

He writes the letter, put him in the hottest part of the battle and withdraw. And he seals the letter with the king's seal and he gives it to Uriah. Take this to the commander-in-chief.

[ 36 : 08 ] And Uriah goes to Joab, little knowing that it's his own death warrant that he's got in his hand. And that's David's last expedient to hide from the world what he did himself.

That's his last expedient to hide from the world what he's actually done. And he gets the message back, Uriah's dead. Is everything finished?

No. The thing that David had done displeased the Lord. Now, I suppose before we could look at anything in Psalm 51, I think we could ask this, why do you think God allows something like this to happen?

why does he allow it to happen? Well, it would be a brave man who would try to give an exhaustive answer to that.

God's ways are mysterious, but I think that there are four things very quickly that we should say about why God allows such a thing to happen. First of all, there's this, to show us what we're capable of.

[ 37 : 21 ] Now, you can say to that, well, I don't need to know that. I know what I'm capable of. Well, do you and do I? Especially when you become a Christian, perhaps you might be tempted to think, well, I can never fall into what I could have fallen into before.

Like before I was converted, there were certain things maybe I could have done, but now that I'm a Christian, I know that I can't do these things. Well, this passage is written in the Bible to tell you that you're wrong in thinking that, and that every seed of sin is in your heart, and given certain circumstances and your own certain spiritual condition, you can fall into that too.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately wicked. And if you think anything's impossible like that, well, think again. And that's important in your Christian life because half the battle is knowing that you are capable of things like that.

At least once you know what can be, you've partly prepared. And that's why sometimes I was speaking in the morning about weak and strong Christians, and I wouldn't like anybody to misunderstand what I'm saying.

I wouldn't want you to conclude that a person who was very careful about what he did in his life, that that person was a weak person. You've got to be very careful there. The spiritually mature person begins to understand that he's not as strong as he thought he was.

[ 38 : 59 ] And he begins to identify areas in his life which are almost inevitably associated with trouble. And he learns to walk carefully with respect to these things. And the more a Christian recognizes his own potential to evil, the more careful he will be.

And I hope we all take that to heart. Let him that standeth take heed lest he falleth. And no one's as likely to fall as the person who's deluded about what he actually is like himself.

So then it shows us what we're capable of even as the Lord's people. And then again God allows this because it shows us the need to be vigilant and to be ready.

At one level we could see that David was ready for this in the sense that he had put himself into a careless spiritual condition. But that reminds us that we are always to be vigilant and always to be ready.

You just don't know when something like this could occur. And if you're not ready for it, it could overwhelm you and it could ruin your life.

[ 40 : 10 ] Quite simply, it could ruin your life. It could ruin your family's life. It could ruin a congregational life. Many things it can ruin.

All because you weren't watching. You think about that time, about that next time you're in too much of a hurry to say your prayers before you go to work. Think about that next time that you're thinking about whether you should take the time to read your Bible before you go to school.

Think about that next time you're too tired for the prayer meeting. Think about that next time you're too tired to go to church on Sunday morning. One of these days you could be so weak, friend, that you're overwhelmed in a moment and the consequences can be catastrophic.

And that's the third thing. This reminds us of the fearful consequences of open sin. The fearful consequences of open sin.

David's family rebelled against him. They killed each other. There was even violation on the part of one son on another half-sister.

[ 41 : 21 ] I could hardly begin to catalog for you the amount of disasters. Read them for yourself. Read 2 Samuel after chapter 11. And read the disgraceful life of Absalom about Amnon and so on.

One chastisement after another because of this sin. And that's important because it's one thing to be forgiven. It's another thing to say that there's no consequences.

And I've met many people, and I'm sure you have too, who know that God's forgiven them for certain things. But boy, have they had to live with the consequences of it.

And not just for a day, for a month, for a year, but for the rest of their lives. you can deal with guilt, but the fallout of your actions are not always as easy to deal with as sad.

And it is no light thing to bring God's chastisement down upon us. It is a fearful thing. Even if it isn't his judgment or his punishment, his chastisement is a fearful thing.

[ 42 : 27 ] And I think the fourth thing, last of all, very quickly, that this incident reminds us of is this, the grace of God. The grace of God.

After all, God did forgive David. He did. And that reminds us of what Paul said, that where sin abounds, grace did much more abound.

I wonder if you were a citizen, of Zion at this time. And if you had been in David's company and all this came out, I wonder if you thought, you would have thought, well, he can never have been a real believer at all.

And even if he appears to be sorry, I don't think I can never accept this man as a Christian again. I wonder if you would say that, or if I would say it. Well, we must never, ever, minimize the grace of God like that.

He found repentance. And that just shows us the incredible grace of God, how deep it is, how merciful he is. It shows us the greatness of his love and of his compassion, that he brought David back.

[ 43 : 42 ] Manasseh was saved, Paul was saved, and we ourselves have been brought back from many things like that. But I hope this reminds us of the fearful evil of sin.

I think we live in a day when sin is really taken quite lightly. And some people almost act as though there is no such thing as sin anymore at all.

But there is sin, and it is real, and we're to be guarded against it. And I hope that prepares the way for looking together at Psalm 51. on number one.