

He liked to think of himself as a good man.

I think most people like to think of themselves in this way – good people, not perfect by any means but good, kind, honest, trustworthy. But David took a wrong turn.

From his palace overlooking the city of Jerusalem, he saw a woman bathing. A beautiful woman. He desired her.

What the king wants, the king can have or so he told himself. He inquired about the woman – found out that she was the wife of one of his commanders – Uriah – a Hittite – not an Israelite. Her husband was off fighting a war for David. ~~Maybe~~ ^{he desired her} David told himself – the Lord has arranged that Uriah should be away so I can have this pleasure. Sometimes some basically good people think like that. I won't report this little income to the IRS. Or I work hard at this job – I deserve some extras – some extra time off – a little padding of my expenses – some pens from the office. ^{David said to himself} Maybe it was the Lord who wanted me to see Uriah's wife, ~~through David~~ – and for Uriah to be gone – even that her husband should be a non- Israelite. People who are committing adultery would like to think that God approves of what they are doing.

Before you know it Uriah's wife is pregnant and her husband has not been home for a long time. So David ^{sent} sends for Uriah, ^{told} tells him to go home – enjoy some time with your wife. But Uriah said, "I can't do that – the army is in the field – I can't be taking my pleasure while they are at risk. So Uriah did not sleep with his wife.

For a time in David's younger days, he had been pursued by King Saul and an army of 3000 men. David fled from hiding place to hiding place. One day Saul came into the cave where David was hiding – came so close that David was able to cut off a corner of Saul's robe. But David did not harm Saul, for Saul was the Lord's anointed one – the king. What a good man David was.

But on this day David ordered that Uriah was to be placed in the very center of the attack and at the critical moment the soldiers around him were to be pulled back so that Uriah would be killed. Someone else would do David's killing but it would be David's killing just the same.

And so it happened. Uriah was killed – and after the appropriate time of mourning, Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, came to the palace to be wife of the king, David.

Everyone thought David was a very good man. Only a few knew the truth.

I remember a visit to the hospital. The one I will call Fay was a patient. She told me the truth in her family. Her grandfather had sexually abused her. Not once but repeatedly. Her mother did not protect her, neither did her grandmother though they both knew. Her grandfather was a respected businessman in that small town. I suppose they thought that the truth might bring poverty to them all – or shame. So a young girl was sacrificed to protect the reputation of an important man.

The way Uriah was sacrificed.

But in those days before there was the media to tell some truths that many would rather sweep under the carpet, the Lord sent prophets to Israel. Nathan, the prophet, brought the word of the Lord to David.

Now he might have marched right in to see David and point a finger saying, You committed adultery and murder. And David might have arranged for a second accident.

But Nathan told a story instead. The story of a man with one little lamb, and a rich man with great flocks. And how the rich man took the poor man's one little lamb rather than slaughter one of his own. And the good king David pronounced his verdict on this man who would do such a thing.

"You are the man," Nathan declared.

When it comes to our neighbor's sin, most of us can see pretty clearly. But when it is my own sin then clouds of excuses and rationalizations obscure my vision. But in pronouncing a word of judgement on another, David recognized the truth about himself.

Now the Lord did not kill David for what he did – but the child born of his adultery would die. And violence and chaos would continue in David's family from that day on.

I think of the family of the woman who talked with me that day in the hospital. Her life was full of broken relationships, as were her children's lives and her children's children's lives. Could it all be traced to a grandfather sinning against a granddaughter? I do not know. But I do think the hiding of shame and not telling the truth had profoundly negative effects on that family.

Maybe the woman who came to Jesus that day, anointing Jesus feet with her tears had a similar experience in her youth. Something about her made the Pharisee want nothing to do with her. A sinner he called her.

But Jesus forgave her. As God forgave David and Bathsheba. Jesus did not argue about her goodness, but he forgave.

You and I can go through life covering up. You and I can go through life in fear that others will find out about us.

Or we can come to Jesus with all the sinners, trusting that he is good enough to forgive.

And we can learn to tell the truth in our families. The way God told the truth in David's family. And there can be forgiveness and new beginnings.

I would like to think that I am basically a good man, but I am not. I would like to think that you are basically good people but at least some of you may not be much better than I. But Jesus is good. And he forgives.

What more could we want?