

<sup>26</sup>When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him.  
<sup>27</sup>When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, <sup>12:1</sup>and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup>The rich man had very many flocks and herds; <sup>3</sup>but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. <sup>4</sup>Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.”

<sup>5</sup>Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; <sup>6</sup>he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” <sup>7</sup>Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; <sup>8</sup>I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. <sup>9</sup>Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. <sup>10</sup>Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. <sup>11</sup>Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. <sup>12</sup>For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” <sup>13</sup>David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

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Stephen Nedoroscik: pommel horse, winning the U.S. men’s Gymnastics team a Bronze medal. Alex Sedrick: with 8 seconds to go, she broke a tackle and ran the rugby ball the whole length

of the pitch to win the U.S. women's Rugby team a Bronze medal. Swimming, rowing, even BMX Freestyle Cycling: you name it, the Olympics have given me plenty of edge-of-my-seat moments. We've not yet reached the bulk of this year's track and field competitions.

We had something like an edge-of-your-seat moment here last week. We read the first-half of the story of David and Bathsheba. Our reading ended with Bathsheba's honorable husband, Uriah, delivering a letter to his commanding officer. The letter was from King David, who was demanding that Uriah be abandoned in the thick of the worst fighting. After worship last week, a few of the conversations involved, "How can we leave David's story right there!?" I assured them that the story would continue this week. In that first half of the story, King David was seemingly in control, which was emphasized by his recurrent "sending" of others. He sent his army off to war while he stayed home. He sent someone to inquire about the beautiful woman he saw bathing. He sent messengers to retrieve this woman Bathsheba and bring her to his quarters. What David did to her resulted in a pregnancy. So David sent word to Joab to send Uriah back from the fighting. David tried three times to send Uriah home in order to sleep with Bathsheba, that way Uriah would believe he is the biological father of her child. That didn't work; Uriah was too honorable to enjoy the comforts of home while his fellow soldiers were engaged in battle. So King David sent Uriah back to his commanding officer with a letter, which demanded that Uriah be placed in the thick of the fighting. The rest of the troops should be withdrawn from him, letting Uriah die on the battlefield. An unjust death by the hands of the powerful. David has done a lot of "sending," hasn't he? It shows his power and ability to control. Therefore, the action in our lesson today – the second half of the story – begins with the phrase "The Lord sent Nathan to David." Oo... that brings us to the edge of our seats again. God is the one doing the "sending" now.

The prophet Nathan comes to the mighty king and tells him a story: two men, one rich, one poor. The story focuses on how much the poor man loved his one and only ewe. It was a member of the family. Ultimately, the rich man had an out-of-town guest, and rather than killing a sheep from his own herds for the meal, he had the poor man's sheep killed. David is enraged! He cries out, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die!" Oh, Nathan is about to let David have it.

Let's note a few things about this exchange up to this point. First, Nathan never asked David for his wisdom or his judgment on a matter. He just began to tell him a story, and David was one who urgently inserts his judgment into it. Second, the task of confronting David was likely very scary for Nathan. God is sending him to speak truth to power. If this didn't go well, David had the power to order Nathan killed, and it would have happened without delay. So Nathan had two goals: convey God's displeasure, and do that while keeping his own life.

The way Nathan pulled this off leads me to believe he innately knew what we today call human psychology. For instance, when someone has a guilty conscience, that often leads them to anxiously demand that other things be set right. David's subconscious mind was eager to right what he did wrong, and the easiest path to do this was to externalize the guilt onto the story's rich man and be angry at him. This is projection, in psychological terms. The phrase "Every accusation is a confession" is a good description of someone who is projecting. Nathan's approach to this whole conversation counted on David responding to the story in anger. Nathan could then use that emotion to point to what was happening within David's psyche. Call David out for his dirty deeds and point to God's anger at this injustice. Nathan's plan worked because David's subconscious had an urgent need for wrongs to be righted. This zeal for justice inside of David was so strong that he inserted his own judgment into the story. He was unable to consciously recognize that the story clearly points to the injustice that lies at his own feet.

In life, there are many people who are quick to lash out and who demand that things outside of themselves be put right. Often the root of that behavior is because they feel wrong on the inside. There is guilt of some sort in there, or something else, and – like David – the anger over it is often directed at something or someone external to themselves. In circumstances like that, the healing and wholeness that God intends for them needs to be approached with time, intentionality, and care. A confrontational approach out of the starting block will quickly bring up their defenses. If Nathan had chosen to first approach David in a confrontational manner, the outcome of today's story would have been very different. Instead, Nathan had a breakthrough with David by using a story, which allowed David to enter into the conversation to reach the truth of the matter.

On the individual level, this healing can take place through conversation with others, and licensed counselors are able to do this better than anyone. Yet, this help can also be needed on a collective level when populations of people operate with unhelpful thinking patterns. I noticed an example of it last week, and I hope you'll bear with me here. This is my Nathan moment. After the opening ceremonies of the Olympics, many American Christians were in an uproar. They viewed a portion of the opening ceremony as openly mocking the artwork called "The Last Supper" by Leonardo da Vinci. I'm not going to get into how people should perceive art, nor am I weighing in on whether the opening ceremonies had intended any connection to that specific piece of art. I'm just pointing out that Christians, specifically in America, lashed out about this. That happened. What also happened last week was the release of body camera footage of the killing of Sonya Massey. She was a woman in her thirties, living in Illinois. Sonya had noticed someone lurking outside her home, so she called the police. Two sheriff deputies arrived and searched around the house, finding no one. They then asked to enter Ms. Massey's home; she welcomed the deputies in and she spoke congenially with them for several minutes. All was good. Sonya had a pot of water on the stove, and when it began to boil, she went to remove it from the burner. One of the deputies, standing several feet away, suddenly viewed the pot of water in her hand as a threat. He drew his firearm. Within a few seconds, Sonya Massey was shot in the face and she died soon after. That deputy has been fired from the police force and he is charged with murder.

An extreme injustice occurred when Sonya was killed by an officer whom she had called for help. He was sworn to protect her. An unjust death by the hands of the powerful. Just like Uriah. I bring up this story because Christians should be more upset by the injustice of an innocent woman's death than the supposed injustice of an art performance. Just imagine how much better this world could be if American Christians focused their energy on fixing actual injustices rather than spending it publicly complaining whenever their feelings get hurt. If the population outside the Church sees Christians only crying out whenever our toes are stepped on, I don't blame them for not wanting anything to do with us. The people outside the Church want Christians to have the passion of Jesus, who is willing to forego himself in order to uplift other people. They want us to be compassionate

like Jesus, to reach out to people who've been cast aside and marginalized, to show grace and forgiveness when no one else will extend it, and they want us to call out true injustices like Jesus.

Okay, I'm done playing Nathan for now. That may have stung, and it stings me, too. Nathan calls out David for his actions, telling him in no uncertain terms how God views them. Nathan ends with a warning that within David's own house a sword will be raised against him. That played out with his son Absalom, who was killed while leading a revolt to overthrow his father. Yet those actions by Absalom didn't stop David from mourning the death of his son. It was a pain that no parent should ever have to bear. This story of Nathan and David may leave us thinking that God is vengeful, because that was the view of whoever wrote it long ago. As time passed, the people of God came to see God foremost as merciful, forgiving, and filled with steadfast love. Yet, still concerned with justice on this earth. We Christians see those characteristics in God most clearly when the Son took upon himself the weight of the cross. The Son submitted to an unjust death by the hands of the powerful. The Father bore the pain that no parent should ever have to bear. And all of that – the injustice, the pain – was redeemed early that Sunday morning. The worst injustice would not have the final word. Our hope as Christians is that all of the pain found in this world and all of the injustice that occurs will one day be fully redeemed by our merciful God. Until then, the grace of God equips the saints for the work of ministry, to be messengers who embody in word and deed God's desire for healing and justice in this world. Amen.