

Unearthed Sermon 4
What Lives in the Dark—David and Nathan

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Many of you know that I grew up in Las Vegas Nevada. There were lots of interesting aspects of growing up in Sin City. Our family could go to all-you-can-eat buffets in super nice hotels for really cheap because the prices were discounted in order to entice people to spend money in their casinos. Every time out-of-town family came to see us, they always wanted to walk the strip downtown and see all the latest attractions. We lived pretty close to Hoover Dam, so we regularly got to visit one of the modern engineering wonders of the world. Another aspect of growing up in Las Vegas was constantly hearing public debate about what to do with the Yucca Mountain Repository. Yucca Mountain is about 80 miles from the city center, and the US government had planned it to be the site to house, long term, all the nuclear waste produced in our country. It was supposed to be a safe site, far enough away from a large population center, where the dangerous waste from the entire nation could be transported and stored safely. This sounded like a good idea to the other 49 states in our union, to have a place where the toxic waste could go, but as you can imagine, it didn't sound like a very good idea to people living in that state. We didn't want it in our backyard, and we didn't want it to be transported on our highways and roads in order to get there. Even though the project was planned and received initial approval in 1998, it's been over 25 years, and through constant petitioning and litigation, Nevada has kept the nuclear waste out of its state. We'll see how much longer that will last. Until they find the solution, everyone else in the US will be left wondering, "What are we supposed to do with this waste that we have built up?"

That question—what are we supposed to do with this waste—is relevant in so many ways beyond the discussion about spent nuclear fuel. The reality is that every one of us—not some of us, not most of us, but every one of us—has things in our lives that emotionally, spiritually, and relationally speaking, have toxicity and contaminating power. The issues are unique to all of us. For some it has to do with deceit, for others with selfishness, for others it's an addiction, for others it's a disordered desire, for others it's the way we treat our spouse, for others it's bitterness or unforgiveness. We all have areas in our life that aren't quite right, areas where we have messed up, done wrong, hurt someone, not lived up to the standards God set for us, not lived up even to our own expectations. When that happens, when we have toxic waste like that in our lives, we all have to decide what we are going to do about it. The basic human tendency in all of us is just to bury it. Hide it. Throw a few layers of dirt on it and hope no one notices. But even though the path of least resistance might seem right in the moment, we all know it's not a better long term solution for our transgressions than burying a container of nuclear waste in our backyard. It might not have any immediate ramifications, but sooner or later, the damage is going to spread.

Last week my kids were playing a game together and I found Hudson holding two leaves that looked like they had come from one of Keren's plants. I asked Hudson how he got them; he said he found them on the ground. That was clearly not the case—it was as obvious as could be that he pulled them off for the game he wanted to play. I asked him 25 times in a row how he got them; again and again and again he told me they were on the floor. We went to the plant together and he stuck with his lie. Then finally, after Keren entered the conversation and presented her expert testimony, he confessed and told the truth. I took him to a different room to administer his punishment. Before I did I asked him, "Hudson, you know how important it is to tell the truth. You know that trust is the foundation of our relationship. Why would you lie to me?" He had tears in his eyes. He was disappointed in himself and ashamed. He said, "I thought lying would get me out of danger." "I understand. Did it work?" "No, lying got me in more danger." What Hudson is learning at age four is a lesson we often have to learn again and again and again. When we do wrong, we are tempted to conceal it because we think it will get us out of danger. But even if it works for a while, it never works forever. Confession, which is telling the whole truth about what we did and bringing everything into the light, is the only path forward that leads us to the place we want to be.

This is a lesson that God taught King David, whose story is recorded for us in the book of 2 Samuel. I referenced a part of this story two weeks ago as we talked about the way our family of origin can impact our life today. Today, we'll dive deeper into the aftermath of that story. For review, in 2 Samuel 11 we see that David, during the time of year where kings go out to war, decided to stay home from war. He sent other people out to fight his battles. One night, unable to sleep, he went up to his rooftop and committed voyeurism, spying on an unsuspecting woman as she was bathing. He found out she was a married woman, that her husband was off to war fighting one of his battles. Even with that knowledge, he sent for her and slept with her. As I mentioned two weeks ago, with what we know today about power dynamics, her as his subject, him as the king, this was not a consensual love affair; this was sexual assault. Afterward, David sent her home. He had his lusts met and he assumed he got away with it, that it would be covered up and no one would ever know.

But after a month went by, she realized she was pregnant. Because her husband was off to war and she had only been with the king, she knew exactly what happened. She sent a message to David, who thought, "Oh no! People are going to find out what I did. I have to find a way to hide it, to cover it up." He pulled Uriah off the battlefield under the guise of wanting an update on how the campaign was going. Uriah gave the update and then David assumed he would go home and be intimate with his wife, so everything would take care of itself. But Uriah, not wanting to enjoy the benefits of home while all his fellow comrades were still on the battlefield, slept at the entrance to the palace. David had to get creative. The next day David invited Uriah to a feast and got him drunk. But even while intoxicated, Uriah did the honorable thing, and David eventually sent him back to the field. David thought to himself, "That plan didn't work. I've got to come up with another way to cover my tracks." This is where you can begin to see how crazy and insane sin makes us, and the illogical lengths we will go to keep our sin a secret. David wrote a letter to the commander of the army and had Uriah deliver it on his way. Here's what David wrote: "Put Uriah ought in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." He not only wrote that message, but he also made that innocent, integrity-filled, loyal servant unknowingly deliver his own death sentence, all because he was unwilling to confess and had deceived himself into thinking that somehow murdering this man was better than facing the music for sleeping with his wife. Everything went according to plan; Uriah was killed. At that moment, David sent word to Bathsheba, brought her into his home, and married her. It worked—the coverup took longer than he thought, but it was complete. Now there was no evidence, no one would ever find out, and he even looked like the good guy by bringing this woman into his house and raising her son. How commendable! How compassionate!

David thought he had committed the perfect sin and got away with it. He stuffed it in the back of his head: out of sight, out of mind. That is, until God sent a man named Nathan to the king. Nathan was a prophet David knew. Nathan had spoken on behalf of God many times before, so David wasn't surprised to see him. Nathan told the king, "I have a story for you."

There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him. (2 Samuel 12:1-4)

David knew this was an analogy, that it was about some real action someone had committed, and so he "burned with anger" about the situation. David said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." At that very moment Nathan looked at him and said, "You are the man!" Unwilling to be honest

about his sin and confess, David had to be confronted. But to his credit, his heart was still sensitive, and he was still open to truth. “David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord’” (2 Samuel 12:13). Finally, he told the truth, he was honest. With his back against the wall, caught red handed, he acknowledged all he had done wrong.

Now there were still very real and very serious consequences for his actions, but after he confessed, after he came clean and told the truth, God said that he would take David’s sin away, that he would forgive him. So David become a model or a template for how we know God will respond to us. When we are honest enough and courageous enough to do a deep moral inventory and look at the darkest moments of our lives, the darkest parts of our heart, we are going to see things we deeply regret, things we are embarrassed by and ashamed of. But we can know for certain that if God met David in the wake of voyeurism, lust, sexual assault, deceit, cover up, and murder and still chose to love him and forgive him, there is nothing, nothing that we need to hide from God. There is no sin, no mistake, no error greater than his love for us!

After David confessed and received the mercy of God, he sang and celebrated about it. He wrote two of the most well-known psalms in the Bible about confession and forgiveness. Psalm 51 is the better-known of the two, but today we are going to read Psalm 32 and see what God wants to teach us about what happens when we conceal sin compared to when we confess sin.

Blessed is the one
 whose transgressions are forgiven,
 whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the one
 whose sin the Lord does not count against them
 and in whose spirit is no deceit.

When I kept silent,
 my bones wasted away
 through my groaning all day long.
For day and night
 your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped
 as in the heat of summer.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you
 and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, “I will confess
 my transgressions to the LORD.”
And you forgave
 the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let all the faithful
 pray to you while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters
 will not reach them.
You are my hiding place;
 you will protect me from trouble
 and surround me with songs of deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.
Do not be like the horse or the mule,
 which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
 or they will not come to you.
Many are the woes of the wicked,
 but the LORD's unfailing love
 surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
 sing, all you who are upright in heart!

What I hope for us to see in this incredible, beautiful psalm is that concealing sin is the pathway to misery while confessing sin is the pathway to restoration. Let's talk about each of those.

Concealing sin is the pathway to misery. There is something in every single one of us, just like Adam and Eve, who sinned and then immediately hid, where we don't want to be seen; we want to cover the mistake up and hope no one notices, that it will somehow go away and all be taken care of. Even though everything inside of us says that concealing sin is the pathway to take, it actually leads to misery. Psalm 32:4 says, "For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." David says that God's hand was heavy on him. He felt a constant pressure; he had no peace or joy in his walk with God, only a reminder that he needed to come clean. He said his strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Instead of being refreshed, he was spiritually exhausted, depleted, and dehydrated, all because he chose not to come clean. You can't hide things from God. He knows everything. He knows you better than you know you. And he will come after you until you acknowledge the truth in your life. Listen to what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit: "And when the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8 ESV). Like a lawyer who has a defendant on the witness stand and is trying to get him to tell the truth, the Holy Spirit convicts us, and prompts us, and nudges us constantly; he refuses to give us any artificial peace if we have unconfessed sin.

Psalm 32:3 says, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." It's not only the Holy Spirit convicting us when we keep silent; our own conscience convicts us. David says his bones wasted away. He felt feeble and incongruent inside. That's what happens when we live contrary to our values. We know telling the truth is the right thing. When we know that and yet we don't do it, we begin to lack integrity. Inner peace cannot coexist with secret sin. Everything that God created has integrity. Integrity means to be whole, to be sound, to be consistent, trustworthy, and honest. This is how God makes everything. If you go to the store and get a watermelon and cut it open, what do you get? Watermelon. If you go to the store and get cantaloupe and cut it open, what do you get? Cantaloupe. What you see on the outside is what you get on the inside. That's integrity. That's God's design. When we conceal things, we lack integrity. We present ourselves as one kind of person, but in reality, have hidden secrets. When you practice deceit again and again, even if no one else knows it, you know that you are a liar, someone who only tells some of the truth and gives a misrepresentation of reality. Knowing that causes your bones to waste away.

Concealing things in our life gives others a false picture of reality. This is one of the things people dislike most about social media influencers. They will post several pictures a week, and in every picture they post, their hair is perfect, their clothing is model-worthy, their kids are all smiling and in single file lines, they are eating food that is healthy and looks like it's been designed by a five-star chef. It looks great, but it's frustrating to people because it's not an accurate presentation of reality. Most people are taking fifty

pictures to get that one beautiful shot. Then it's edited, cropped, and filtered to look just right. It's only a picture of the best moments of the entire week, not normal life. It creates a sense of disconnect, distance, and distrust. We get that with social media influencers, and everyone says that's not good. But we do it in our own lives by only revealing the things in our life we want to reveal, that we think will make us look good, that present us in the light in which we want to be seen. We end up being hypocrites, not people who necessarily say one thing and do another, but people who wear masks, who put out certain images and pictures of ourselves for others to see that aren't entirely true. This makes authentic, deep, trusting relationships impossible. Concealing sin is the pathway to misery.

Confessing sin is the pathway to restoration. In Psalm 32:5, David writes, "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin." He says he acknowledged his sin. That he did not cover it up. He confessed his transgressions. Then came forgiveness. We know from the rest of the Bible that those who have placed their faith in Jesus have already had all their sins forgiven. The blood of Christ covers over all our mistakes, past, present, and future. What confession does is allow us to receive and experience the tangible benefit of having our sins forgiven. If having our sins forgiven is like having a broken bone reset, confessing our sins and having our relationships restored is like doing the physical therapy that enables us to use that part of our body to its fullest capacity again. It's not enough to "technically" be forgiven by God's grace. We need to rehab; we need restoration. That's what confession helps to bring about.

Let's look at verses 6-11 one more time.

Therefore let all the faithful
 pray to you while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters
 will not reach them.
You are my hiding place;
 you will protect me from trouble
 and surround me with songs of deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
 I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.
Do not be like the horse or the mule,
 which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
 or they will not come to you.
Many are the woes of the wicked,
 but the LORD's unfailing love
 surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
 sing, all you who are upright in heart!

If you give attention to those verses you'll see that God does seven things for those who refuse to live in the darkness but confess their sin and bring it into the light.

When we confess our sin:

- God comes near to us.
- God protects us.
- God instructs us.

- God counsels us.
- God watches over us.
- God surrounds us with love.
- God sings over us.

This is something every one of us wants, and there is only one pathway to get here: refuse to keep things in the dark, refuse to bury sin or wrongdoing. Be honest with yourself, be honest before God, be honest with each other. Don't bury that toxic barrel of waste in your heart any longer. Confess it. Get it out of there, and let restoration come.

(Watch the online sermon to see Dan's concluding story.)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).