

- *Pray for all who struggle with the consequences of other people's sin played out in their own lives. Pray that the church of God will always help those who suffer the social consequences of the sins of evil people.*

Final Prayer

You, O Lord God, know the secrets of the Universe; its origins, its workings and its future. Show me my place within Your eternal purposes and give me inner peace. So, may I live my life with confidence in You as my maker and my Redeemer, to the praise and glory of Your Name. AMEN

Prayer

Glorious Lord, You have shown Yourself to millions of people throughout the world and throughout history; reveal Yourself to us today. Give us eyes to see where You are, ears to listen to Your Word, mouths to speak to You, and hearts to accept Your presence and the consequences of Your will. Glorious Lord, change and transform our lives daily through the power of Your love: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Faithfulness

Pray that God's people will remain faithful to the task of mission they have been given by God, and seek to go to where they are needed most in our turbulent world today.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for India and the terrorist outrages in Mumbai (Bombay)*
- *Give thanks to God for the joys of Christian fellowship*
- *Pray for the people of Afghanistan and the war still raging there*

Meditation

(a carol)

The rider in the heavens, has raised his mighty voice,
Listen now to hear the news and in God's name rejoice.
See the glorious majesty of the coming of our Lord
He comes in power amongst us now according to His word.

*Glory to the Lord in the highest heaven
Glory to the King above all kings
Glory to the Father for the gift of His son
Glory to the Lord, glory to the Lord, glory to the Lord for evermore.*

Immanuel has come to earth as ancient prophets said
Turn to see the place he lay where sheep and cattle fed
Join with kings and shepherds in true homage to the King
And make this celebration now a chance for all to sing
The babe was born in Bethlehem according to God's plan
For He made our great Redeemer before the world began
He's come to break the power of sin for all the human race
And those who have received Him know the amazing gift of grace

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 12:15-23

¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house. The Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill. ¹⁶ David pleaded with God for the child; he fasted, went to his house and lay all night upon the ground. ¹⁷ The elders of his house stood around him, to get him up off the ground, but he refused, and would not eat food with them.

¹⁸ On the seventh day the child died. David's servants, however, feared to tell him that the child was dead. They said, 'While the child was still alive, we

spoke to him but he would not listen to us; how then can we tell him the child is dead? He may do himself harm.’ ¹⁹ *David saw that his servants were whispering together, and realised that the child was dead; so he said to his servants, ‘Is the child dead?’ They said, ‘Yes, he is.’*

²⁰ *Then David got up from the ground and washed, and prepared himself, and changed his clothes; then he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. He then went to his own house, and when he asked for food, they set it before him, and he ate.* ²¹ *His servants then said to him, ‘Why did you behave like this? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you got up and ate food!’* ²² *He said, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I thought, “Who knows, perhaps the Lord will be gracious to me, and the child may live?”* ²³ *But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not come back to me.’*

Review

As we read this strange story about David's behaviour during the sickness and death of his child, we should remember that he had just heard Nathan's harsh word of judgement for his appalling sins of adultery and murder. David repented, by Nathan said that the consequence of his actions would be the death of the child (12:14). This sounds to us like a harsh judgement. However, if a son of David was to bear the Messianic promise, it would not have been good for David's son and heir to be a child of adultery; how would it be possible for David's line to claim any moral or spiritual authority? No, God had decided to take the child into His own hands, and work another way to give David the son and heir that he now desperately needed for the fulfilment of the Covenant promise.

The death of the child In the mean time, the consequences of David's sin and Nathan's prophecy played out in the world of real people with real feelings and real lives to lead. Today's passage tells us briefly that the son of David and Bathsheba took ill and died (12:15-18; David prayed for the child in earnest, but to no avail. The story tells us nothing about Bathsheba and very little about the child, it is all about David and how he responded to what happened. This reminds us of scripture's unswerving focus on God's agenda, not on the human agenda of recording the drama of individual lives. How we would love to know what Bathsheba thought or how the rest of Israel, especially the army, responded to the unfolding drama; but we are not given to know this; only David's response is described, and what he did was not what was expected of him, and is also surprising to us.

While the child was alive (12:15-17), David mourned and fasted. From what David said later (12:22), this was a personal act of devotion by David, seeking the Lord's mercy for the life of the child. Nathan had said that the child would die (12:14), but how could David turn his back on the child? As a repentant man, he prayed for the child in earnest. Nathan's prophecy of the death of the child was a personal rebuke to David, but it was not fulfilled until he died, so whilst he lived, David prayed and sought the Lord for mercy and for the child's life, despite the prophecy. Which of us could simply accept that a child might die without seeking mercy from the Lord?

David's change of heart Whilst David fasted and wept, his servants attempted to look after their master (12:17). When the child died, however, scripture tells us a touching tale of how the courtiers were afraid to tell the king, but David knew what was happening because of their manner towards him (12:18,19), and he immediately turned from private prayer and mourning to public worship of the Lord. Everyone was utterly confused by this, for the expectation was that parents went into mourning when a child died, and David appeared to stop his mourning! He explained himself clearly (12:22), and what he said

reminds us of Jesus, who had to explain to the Pharisees why his disciples did not fast when everyone else was fasting (Matt 9:14,15). What God expects of us is not always what the world and its culture expects!

When David ignored social convention by breaking his fast, and preparing himself for normal life (12:20), this demonstrated something important. It showed that David had accepted God's will because the death fulfilled the first part of Nathan's prophecy; this proved the veracity of the prophecy. Deuteronomy (18:22) laid down the condition that a prophet was not to be taken at his word unless what he said would come true, so upon the death of the child, David knew that the other things prophesied by Nathan would come true. He would have to accept on-going violence in his own court and family, and the future sexual humiliation of both himself and his wives (12:11f.). The Lord had not taken the Covenant away from David, so repentant, and with a wiser heart, David was prepared to face a future he knew would be tough, but it was still the Lord's path for the salvation and blessing of His people.

Getting on with life It is likely that David's actions were seen by the courtiers and people at large as an admission by David of his own guilt, and a message from him that although he was indeed responsible for the whole sad affair. From David's point of view, he was prepared to place the future in God's hands, and 'get on with life' as we might say today.

Sometime the immediate path ahead of us is very hard because our own sinfulness and struggles with faith have laid a tough path before us. This is the consequence of our own sin, and as with David, these have their unavoidable consequences. However, instead of mourning or complaining because of the difficulties that we have to endure, the true disciple of the Lord will face the consequences of all that has happened in life and get on with it, in the full knowledge that the Lord has promised the blessing of His presence to all those who trust Him. In God's strength, sin does not overcome us if we do not allow it to dominate either our past or our present, and we get on with life to do what our Lord requires of us.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Does this story show sufficient repentance in David? What might we have expected of him in these circumstances?
2. Do you feel comfortable with how God uses the life of a child in this story? Why should God take the life of a child in this way?
3. Does God always expect us to endure the consequences of sin? To what extent are they taken away by the death of Christ?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Consider for a moment how you respond to the consequences of sin. What sin has the Lord had to deal with in your life? What have been the consequences of this sin? Can you live with this? Have you moved on in the Lord's strength, or tried to forget what happened? Does past sin have a control over you now or has the Lord removed its power? All these are important but difficult questions. I suggest that if any of them raise problems for you, then consider, in the light of David's story, how you might best deal with such problems.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Take the challenge offered by my comments above, and follow them through over a period of time. Start with my challenge, but the Lord lead you so that you will know His power to save.*