

# LACK OF SELF-CONTROL

## II SAMUEL 11:1-27

*FAILING TO CONTROL OUR LUSTS, DESIRES, AND EMOTIONS WILL LEAD TO DISASTER FOR US AND THE PEOPLE AROUND US.*

### I. THE LOSS OF SELF-CONTROL (VS 1-5)

*FAILING TO BE ALERT WHILE TAKING A LACKADAISICAL APPROACH TO OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL.*

- A. OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEMPTATION (1)
- B. GIVING IN TO TEMPTATION (2-4)
- C. THE CONSEQUENCES OF GIVING INTO TEMPTATION (5)

### II. WHERE THE LOSS OF SELF-CONTROL GOES (VS 6-17)

*PEOPLE WHO LACK SELF-CONTROL WILL ALWAYS TRY TO AVOID THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS.*

- A. ATTEMPTS TO COVER UP THE CONSEQUENCES (6-8, 10, 12)
- B. THE CHARACTER OF SELF-CONTROLLED PEOPLE (9, 11, 13)
- C. THE CHARACTER OF PEOPLE WHO LACK SELF-CONTROL (14-17)

### III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SELF-INDULGENT PEOPLE (VS 18-27)

*FAILING TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL DEMONSTRATES THAT WE WORSHIP OURSELVES AND NOT GOD.*

- A. COLLATERAL DAMAGE (18-24)
- B. CAN'T STOP PRETENDING (25-27a)
- C. CAN'T FOOL GOD (27b)

# Lack of Self-Control

## II Samuel 11:1-27

Again let me remind us what we are in the process of doing here. We have two major objectives from this series of sermons. The first is to identify false beliefs that have gained a foothold in our church and replace them with biblical beliefs with the intention of building a biblical culture here. Secondly, we are taking this series from Jerry Bridge's book Respectable Sins, with the intention of examining our lives and allowing God to point out areas of our lives that are clearly sinful and not at all consistent with His nature and person.

Today we are going to look at the sin of a lack of self-control. One of the things I was taken back by is Bridge's quote:

*"We have boundaries from our Christian culture that tend to restrain us from obvious sins, but within those boundaries we pretty much live as we please. We seldom say 'no' to our desires and emotions. A lack of self-control may well be one of our more 'respectable' sins. And because we tolerate this, we become more vulnerable to other 'respectable' sins. ... What I am addressing is our lack of self-control – a tendency to indulge our desires so that they control us, instead of our controlling those desires."*

Here is what Bridges is saying. Let's say that I am extremely disciplined in every area of my life except eating. Let's "pretend" that I don't exercise much self-control when it comes to eating. He is saying that the lack of self-control that I exhibit into when it comes to eating will carry over into other spiritual areas of my life. The good news is that when we work at self-control in one area, it also carries over to other areas as well.

I don't think we pay much attention to the sin of a lack of self-control in church unless it has to do with addictions to drugs, alcohol, or sex. We don't think much about our lack of self-control when it comes to eating and drinking, our temper, or our personal finances.

Sometimes it takes an exhausting amount of work to exercise self-control. Let me give you an example. One day I was in a grocery store and observed a woman shopping with her three-year-old little girl. They went down the cookie aisle and the little girl immediately began to whine and fuss. The mother said quietly, "Now Ellen, we just have a few more aisles to go through. Don't be upset, it won't be long."

I happened to pass the mother again as they went through the candy aisle and again the little girl started to whine again. Again, the mother exercised a great deal of self-control and patiently said, "Ellen, only two more aisles to go, you can do this. We'll be checking out soon."

As they went through the checkout, the little girl started howling again. The mother patiently said, "Ellen, we'll be through the checkout in less than five minutes. Then we can go home and have a nice nap."

I followed them out to the parking lot and explained that I was a pastor and admired the self-control the mother exhibited. I said, “I couldn’t help noticing how patient you were with little Ellen.”

The mother answered, “My little girl’s name is Tanya. I’m Ellen.”

This woman managed to exercise self-control by talking to herself and calming herself down. It’s a shame that we don’t spend more time talking about exercising self-control because it is important for us to grow as believers. The main idea of today’s text is this. **FAILING TO CONTROL OUR LUSTS, DESIRES, AND EMOTIONS WILL LEAD TO DISASTER FOR US AND THE PEOPLE AROUND US.** In other words, satisfying our lusts, desires, and emotions without much thought can lead us to sin that may permanently damage us and others around us.

## THE LOSS OF SELF-CONTROL (VS 1-5)

As verses 1-5 in today’s text demonstrate, the loss of self-control often occurs as a result of not paying attention. Let me go back to Jerry Bridge’s definition of ungodliness because he said he felt it was the fundamental sin that opened up the door to other sins:

*“Ungodliness may be defined as living one’s everyday life with little or no thought of God, or of God’s will, or of God’s glory, or of one’s dependence of God.”*

As we have said before, most of us live our lives on autopilot. We don’t give much thought to what God wants from us moment to moment, and we don’t spend much conscious and intentional time thinking about, listening to, and talking to God. That’s a dangerous way to live. Let’s take David as an example. Up to this point, he lived close to God. Almost everything he thought and did he submitted to God. When he was running for his life, living in caves, and hunted by enemies, David remained close to God and always sought out his will.

However, now all his enemies have been defeated. He is safely enthroned as Israel’s king and he is living in the palace. While in the field as a soldier and responsible for his men’s lives, David was constantly alert. But now he feels safe and finds himself thinking less and less about God and being less and less disciplined in his walk with God.

I’m guessing that when most of us are facing a crisis in our lives; whether it be financial, physical, health or relational, we walk very close to God. We pray and cry out for Him to help us. While going through the crisis, we are very alert to listen for God. However, when the crisis passes, we put our spiritual lives back on autopilot.

Let’s look at how the author words the first sentence in this passage. The first phrase of verse one reads, “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab,” and then ends the verse with, “But David remained in Jerusalem.” David had been a warrior and an outdoorsman all his life. I’m not sure if most kings of that day led their troops into battle or not. But the author wants us to note that in this battle, David had remained in the palace. Perhaps David should have been with his men. Perhaps David is like modern day athletes who have to retire because they can no longer perform like they used to. He may long to have some of the

excitement of battle and his thoughts start to drift off to the days where he experienced the adrenaline rush and the excitement. He is clearly not thinking of God and God's will for the nation of Israel. He could have been working hand in hand with the priests and prophets, planning on how to ensure that Israel follow God's laws and make sure that social justice is being enacted and entrenched in the collective conscience of Israel. However, he is not focused on that.

When we are not consciously and intentionally focused on God, we become prime targets for Satan. The Apostle Peter said that Satan roams this earth looking for people to devour. Since we are children of God, we are prime targets. Listen to what Peter commands us:

*"<sup>8</sup>Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:8-9 / NIV).*

There is God's warning to us. We have an enemy that is at constant war with us. We must live life in a constant state of readiness. Look at how Peter starts the verse out, "Be self-controlled and alert." My guess is that's not how most of us approach our spiritual lives.

Let's see what happens to David because he has forgotten that he has a spiritual enemy. In verses 2-4 we see David giving in to temptation. Here we find David getting up after his afternoon nap. He is walking around the rooftop patio of his palace, and he happens to notice a very beautiful woman taking a bath. First of all, he shouldn't be watching her. I'm wondering how many times we are watching television and see something we know we should not be watching. I'm shocked to see how many men who claim to be Christian watch pornography on television and on the internet. And yet it seems to be as common with men who claim to be Christians as it with non-Christian men.

So David has become entertained with this naked woman taking a bath. He becomes engrossed in the event and sends for some men to inquire who this beautiful woman is. And now he feels the adrenaline start to rush again and he feels the excitement return. His men inform him that the woman is Bathsheba, the wife of one of David's best soldiers. This soldier has been faithful to David and to God for years. He has had a distinguished military career.

David doesn't even hear that. He sent for her. She came to the palace and David had sex with her. She stays the night, bathes, and at sundown of the next day, she has been purified from the sex act itself. Now remember from our study through Leviticus, even when husbands and wives have sex, they must bathe and remain ceremonially unclean until sundown. David and Bathsheba feel since they conformed to the religious ceremony of washing and waiting until sundown, they are now ceremonially clean.

I have had married men who claim to be Christian come to me and say things like, "God has brought this incredible new woman into my life. I'm sure it's His will that I divorce my wife and marry her." I always respond, "God did not bring that woman into your life and He is most definitely not telling you to divorce your wife and marry her." And yet, when we don't exercise self-control over our minds, emotions, and bodies, we start to think crazy.

Listen to how James says this happens:

*<sup>13</sup>And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. <sup>14</sup>Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. <sup>15</sup>These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death” (James 1:13-15 / NLT).*

When we get negligent about our communion with God, we don't give much thought to controlling our thoughts and desires. While we are in this thoughtless state of mind, Satan takes this opportunity to marry up our lusts with an occasion to fulfill them. Once we get caught up in sin, the consequences of sin kick in. The Bible says the wages of sin is death.

So David thinks, “That was a rush. That was like the good old days out on the battlefield.” He thinks that everything is fine. That is until the consequences of his giving into temptation are revealed in verse 5. Oops, it turns out that Bathsheba has gotten pregnant. She sends word to the king that she is pregnant. That can't be good. When we fail to exercise self-control over our thoughts, desires, and emotions, things will turn out badly.

Let's look at some of the things we fail to exercise self-control over. The Apostle John wrote this:

*<sup>15</sup>Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you. <sup>16</sup>For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world. <sup>17</sup>And this world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever” (1 John 2:15-17 / NLT).*

We need to exercise self-control when it comes to these things. Obviously we live in the world. The trick is to master the things of this world and not to be mastered by them. You may say, “I'm not having an extramarital affair, or I'm not having sex outside of marriage,” and that may be true. However, here is what happens to us. Sometimes we live vicariously through books, or television programs, movies, or news media. We have developed a taste for good food and expensive drinks, and as long as we have the money to buy them, we don't usually exercise self-control. We are used to getting what we want when we want. We get selfish with our possessions. Here is what we need to remember. Although it is not a sin to eat what we want, we often get lax in practicing self-restraint in our culture. If we get lax at practicing self-control and self-restraint in seemingly neutral areas, when presented with more serious temptations, we often give in to them because we are not used to denying ourselves and practicing self-denial, self-control, and self-restraint.

We may not be looking at pornography, but many of us don't practice self-control when it comes to spending a lot of time in front of the computer, in front of a television, in front of a video game, playing sports, etc. We see things on television and we desire them. We are always buying things we don't need oftentimes just to impress others. If that's the case, that we don't exercise self-control in these areas, then why should we expect young people to be sexually pure when they are pressured by their peers?

In our culture, we never seem to practice self-control or self-restraint when it comes to pride. We are not good at practicing humility and placing ourselves in positions where we must submit and take a lower role. William Barclay sums up the lifestyle we have set up for ourselves like this in his commentary on First John:

*“As John sees him, the man of the world is the man who judges everything by his appetites, the man who is the slave of lavish ostentation, the boastful braggart who tries to make himself out a far bigger man than he is. Then comes John’s second warning. The man who attaches himself to the world’s aims and the world’s ways is giving his life to things which literally have no future. All these things are passing away and none has any permanency. But the man who has taken God as the center of his life has given himself to the things which last for ever. The man of the world is doomed to disappointment; the man of God is certain of lasting joy.”*

I’m quite sure that when King David woke up that morning and did his daily devotions and morning prayers, he never planned to commit adultery. And when he had sex with Bathsheba, he never dreamed he would get her pregnant. And yet, that afternoon, he committed adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal soldiers.

There is no telling what kind of temptations we could end up giving into. We must stay alert and be self-controlled. We are all potential adulterers, liars, thieves, and murders. We are only one moment of not exercising self-control away. **FAILING TO BE ALERT WHILE TAKING A LACKADAISICAL APPROACH TO OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL.**

## **WHERE THE LOSS OF SELF-CONTROL GOES (VS 6-17)**

Once we go down that road of self-indulgence, it gets worse. Verses 6-17 illustrate where the loss of self-control goes. **PEOPLE WHO LACK SELF-CONTROL WILL ALWAYS TRY TO AVOID THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS.**

King David is in a real bind now. In verses 6-8, 10, and 12, he attempts to cover up the consequences of his sin. I think we don’t really believe this but I have seen it over and over again. David comes up with this great plan. He’ll send for Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband. David will give him a 72-hour-pass. Surely when Uriah gets home from the field, the first thing he’ll want to do is go home and sex with his wife. When he does, no one will question Bathsheba’s pregnancy. But the trick is he will have to get Uriah back to Jerusalem alive and then to have sex with his wife. If he doesn’t then everyone will know something is wrong because Bathsheba’s pregnancy had to be from another man. And King David’s staff know he had sex with her.

Sure enough Uriah gets to Jerusalem with a bogus mission to go report to King David. Since Uriah is a good soldier, he reports to the King. David goes through the motions of receiving the report, gives Uriah a nice gift, and then tells him to go be with his wife.

The next ploy David uses is to get him drunk and send him home. David can’t understand why a soldier who has been away from his wife for an extended period of time won’t go home and have

sex with his wife. What David didn't count on was the righteousness and self-control of a good soldier and godly man.

I can't tell you of how many times I have witnessed people trying to shift the blame for their ungodly behavior on to others. I have seen the desire to take down anyone they could with them in order to dilute the blame and consequences. And when it doesn't work the way they want it to work out, they become as confused and as desperate as King David.

Let's take this opportunity to examine the character of self-controlled people as we look at how Uriah comports himself in verses 9, 11, and 13.

Uriah never went home. Instead he slept outside, at the entrance of King David's palace together with King David's servants. Even when David got him drunk and tried to get him to go home, even drunk, Uriah slept outside the palace with David's servants. That is incredible self-control. What is it that motivates Uriah to such self-control? Let's look at his response to King David when David asks him to go home and sleep with his wife:

*"Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing'" (II Samuel 11:11 / NIV).*

First of all, Uriah is firmly committed to following God. He loves God. He says that as long as the Ark of the Covenant is in the battlefield, he will not allow himself to be at rest. God is at war on the battlefield and Uriah feels he should be where God is. His heart is where God's heart is. If we are focused on God's desires and His will for our lives, it becomes easier to exercise self-control. Our needs, wants, and desires, don't seem so important when following God. When the disciples went for food and came back to eat with Jesus, they were surprised at His response, even though He hadn't eaten. Jesus said:

*"My food ... is to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to finish His work" (John 4:34 / NIV).*

If we were that focused on doing God's will, exercising self-control in all areas becomes relatively easy.

Secondly Uriah was an extremely empathic person. He related to his fellow soldiers. He identified with them. He said that as long as his platoon was in the field, he would not partake of any benefits of being home. I can remember when I was in the army and we were on field assignment. It was dirty, hot, humid, muggy, and we were in thick mud. A truck came by with women soldiers in the truck. The truck stopped and told the women in our platoon to get in the truck. They were going to take them back to the garrison to shower and change clothes. One of the women in our platoon asked, "Are the men going back to shower?" to which the commander said, "No, just the women." This woman refused to get on the truck. She said, "I'll stay here with my platoon." I can't even begin to tell you the respect that woman got in our platoon. She was a fellow soldier. That's the attitude Uriah had and the dedication he had to his fellow soldiers.

Finally his loyalty to his commanding officer and his commander in chief motivated his self-control. We know that Uriah was a loyal soldier all throughout his career. While his commanding officer was in the field, Uriah felt that he should be in the field as well. And Uriah was fiercely loyal to King David. For Uriah, if King David's army was in the field, he should be in the field. He says to King David, "As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

Are we that empathic, godly, and loyal as Uriah was? If King David was as godly and loyal to his men as they were to him, this would never have happened. Let's look at verses 14-27 to see what the character of people who lack self-control is like. Uriah never went home. He slept out in public. Everyone knows that he hasn't had sex with his wife in months. What's David going to do now? Let me just repeat how Uriah expressed his love and loyalty for King David. He said, "As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" David repays Uriah with treachery. David writes this note to Joab the field commander. His plan was to have Uriah and a group of men assault a heavily armed wall. When the fighting got fierce, all the men were to withdraw without Uriah knowing it. Uriah would be left out there alone and all the enemy soldiers would shoot at Uriah.

Here is the horrible thing about this whole matter. David has Uriah hand-carry this message himself and deliver it to Joab. He is carrying his own death-sentence. Secondly, even though the soldiers don't know this, they are going to be part of the plan to kill their fellow soldier who had been faithful to their friendship. Furthermore, Uriah had been fiercely loyal to both Joab and David. They are now going to execute him. And finally, they are killing a man that has faithfully been serving God. He is dying for David's sin.

I'm sorry to say that people who sin because of a lack of self-control are usually people who really only love themselves. David has just killed one of his best and most loyal soldiers. He killed him to cover up his own sin of adultery. This is a clear truth. **PEOPLE WHO LACK SELF-CONTROL WILL ALWAYS TRY TO AVOID THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS.**

## **THE CONSEQUENCES OF SELF-INDULGENT PEOPLE (VS 18-27)**

There seems to always be a moment in which self-indulgent people think they have gotten away with it and have dodged a bullet. However, as we read through verses 18-27 let's track the consequences of self-indulgent people. There is no doubt about this fact. **FAILING TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL DEMONSTRATES THAT WE WORSHIP OURSELVES AND NOT GOD.** When we fail to control our needs, desires, and wants and submit them to the glory of God, we are in reality worshiping ourselves and not God. In verses 18-24 we find out that self-indulgent behavior often causes collateral damage. Not only did David kill Uriah, other soldiers died in that sortie. David's attempt to cover up his adultery led to the death of several good soldiers for absolutely no good military objective. Again, we must remember that when we fail to exercise control over our needs, desires, and emotions, we will leave a great deal of damage around us. When people fail to exercise control over their sexual desires, they often leave a broken family behind. When people fail to exercise control over their temper, they break the spirits of people around them. When people fail to exercise control over their spending, they can hurt their entire family by putting them in debt. Forget this American concept that my actions affect only me and I will take the personal consequences of my actions. The Bible is

clear when we fail to exercise self-control over our desires, people suffer and die. A man named Achan took a robe that God told him not to and he caused the death of 36 Hebrew soldiers and caused the army to lose the battle. Later on in David's life, he again commits a sin of failure to control his pride and God punishes Israel by taking the life of 70,000 Hebrews. Think about the damage we each have done in our lives because of a lack of self-control and who we have hurt. Young people have sex outside of marriage and solve the pregnancy problem by killing the unborn baby. We know that unscrupulous business people have bilked people out of their life-savings in order to cover their own mistakes.

David and Joab tried to go on pretending that everything was now okay. Verses 25-27a demonstrate that once committed to these solutions, it's hard to stop pretending. Let's just read this:

*<sup>25</sup>David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab."*

<sup>26</sup>When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. <sup>27</sup>After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son" (II Samuel 11:25-27a / NIV).

And everyone lived happily ever after. David comforts Joab. Bathsheba ends up in the palace, has the baby, and now everyone is happy.

That is, everyone is happy except for God. The second half of verse 27 proves that we can't fool God. At the end of this entire chapter that records this event, there is this short but powerful statement, "But the thing David had done displeased the LORD" (II Samuel 11:27b / NIV). Chapter 12 starts out, "The Lord sent Nathan to David."

Whenever I have had to confront people with the consequences of their actions, they almost all have said to me, "Well David committed adultery and murder ... and God forgave him." I think I'm going to scream the next time I hear that. Listen to what God told David through the prophet Nathan:

*<sup>7</sup>... I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. <sup>8</sup>I gave you his house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. <sup>9</sup>Why, then, have you despised the word of the LORD and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah and stolen his wife. <sup>10</sup>From this time on, the sword will be a constant threat to your family, because you have despised me by taking Uriah's wife to be your own.*

*<sup>11</sup>"Because of what you have done, I, the LORD, will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man, and he will go to bed with them in public view. <sup>12</sup>You did it secretly, but I will do this to you openly in the sight of all Israel" (II Samuel 12:7-12 / NLT).*

How does that sound to you? David's life was a mess after this. There was never peace in his house. One of his sons raped his half-sister. One of David's sons went to war against him and had sex with David's concubines. Listen to that event:

*“<sup>22</sup>So they set up a tent on the palace roof where everyone could see it, and Absalom went into the tent to sleep with his father's concubine” (II Samuel 16:22 / NLT).*

David's son Absalom went on the palace roof in broad daylight and had sex with his father's concubines, one after another. Absalom tried to take the kingdom away from David and succeeded for a while. Many soldiers lost their lives in these father son battles. And actually David and Joab's relationship is broken over this. I have already mentioned that 70,000 people died as a result of David's failure to restrain his pride. David never recovered from this act of self-indulgence and Israel suffered as a result. And by the way, the son born to David and Bathsheba died as a judgment from God.

We may indulge ourselves by failing to exercise self-control and think we may have gotten away with something or dodged a bullet. But the point is God sees and God will ultimately judge. In the end, **FAILING TO EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL DEMONSTRATES THAT WE WORSHIP OURSELVES AND NOT GOD.**

We are quickly approaching the Lenten season. Lent is a time in which we Christians practice self-control and self-denial as exercises that prepare us to live in submission to Jesus and to prepare ourselves to be alert and ready to fight temptation by developing the habit and discipline of self-control. This is serious business. **FAILING TO CONTROL OUR LUSTS, DESIRES, AND EMOTIONS WILL LEAD TO DISASTER FOR US AND THE PEOPLE AROUND US.** We must develop new ways of thinking about life and dedicating ourselves to this transformation through the renewing of our minds. In his book [The Discipline of Grace](#), Jerry Bridges quotes the Nineteenth century commentator John Brown:

*“The mind is renewed when, under the influence of the Spirit, the truth is understood and believed, so as to displace the ignorance and error that previously prevailed. It is the truth, understood and believed, that purifies the heart from the love of the world; and, just in proportion as that truth is understood and believed, are men transformed. It is by men's being formed to a right way of thinking, that they are formed to a right way of feeling and acting with regard to this world and the next – to God, and our brethren of mankind.”*

It would be extremely helpful for us to practice the spiritual disciple self-denial. I also want to remind us that we are not in this alone. In the list of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Self-Control is listed as a fruit. Therefore, if we are Christians, we have the Holy Spirit and since we have the Holy Spirit, if we submit to Him, He will manifest the fruit of Self-Control in our lives.