

## “A Portrait of Pursuit”

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Scriptural Foundation: 2 Samuel 11 – 12:14, NASB

### 2 Samuel 11

#### Bathsheba, David's Great Sin

<sup>1</sup>Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. <sup>3</sup>So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" <sup>4</sup>David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. <sup>5</sup>The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."

<sup>6</sup>Then David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent Uriah to David. <sup>7</sup>When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war. <sup>8</sup>Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and a present from the king was sent out after him. <sup>9</sup>But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. <sup>10</sup>Now when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" <sup>11</sup>Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing." <sup>12</sup>Then David said to Uriah, "Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will let you go." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. <sup>13</sup>Now David called him, and he ate and drank before him, and he made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his bed with his lord's servants, but he did not go down to his house.

<sup>14</sup>Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. <sup>15</sup>He had written in the letter, saying, "Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die." <sup>16</sup>So it was as Joab kept watch on the city, that he put Uriah at the place where he knew there were valiant men. <sup>17</sup>The men of the city went out and fought against Joab, and some of the people among David's servants fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died. <sup>18</sup>Then Joab sent and reported to David all the events of the war. <sup>19</sup>He charged the messenger, saying, "When you have finished telling all the events of the war to the king, <sup>20</sup>and if it happens that the king's wrath rises and he says to you, 'Why did you go so near to the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall?' <sup>21</sup>Who struck down Abimelech the son of Jerub-Besheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?'--then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.'"

<sup>22</sup>So the messenger departed and came and reported to David all that Joab had sent him to tell. <sup>23</sup>The messenger said to David, "The men prevailed against us and came out against us in the field, but we pressed them as far as the entrance of the gate. <sup>24</sup>Moreover, the archers shot at your servants from the wall; so some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead." <sup>25</sup>Then David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab, 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another; make your battle against the city stronger and overthrow it'; and so encourage him."

<sup>26</sup>Now when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. <sup>27</sup>When the time of mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife; then she bore him a son But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.

### 2 Samuel 12

#### Nathan Rebukes David

<sup>1</sup>Then the LORD sent Nathan to David and he came to him and said, "There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup>The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. <sup>3</sup>But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and

drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him.<sup>4</sup> Now a traveler came to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."<sup>5</sup> Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die.<sup>6</sup> He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion."

<sup>7</sup>Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul.'<sup>8</sup> I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!<sup>9</sup> Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.<sup>10</sup> Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'<sup>11</sup> Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight.<sup>12</sup> Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" <sup>13</sup>Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD " and Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.<sup>14</sup>" However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."

We live in a cultural climate that seldom sleeps and operates at speeds which often leave us dazed and exhausted. It is a world of instant breakfasts, drive-thru dinners, one-stop shopping, and information at the touch of a hand-held screen. As one fast-food restaurant slogan says, "We like life my way right away!"

As we consider relationships, my hope is that we can consider the way that our culture has influenced us in the way that we treat one another. For some in our society, the primary source of interaction is through Facebook or text messaging. Notice that I did not say "relationships" there, but still communicating with old and new friends no longer requires a telephone call or a personal letter. Through these technologies we can reach out to multiple friends in a matter of minutes. We can post our thoughts and reflections for the blogging world to see. The possibilities for social networking and broadening our circle of friends are virtually limitless. In many ways it has never been easier to communicate.

To be sure, these advances can be helpful in building deep, God-honoring relationships. However, my concern for the church in America, and particularly our body at Bethany Baptist Church, is that we might begin to embrace a drive-by mentality to relationships. More pointedly, when do you interact with people here at Bethany? Do you see Sunday mornings as your convenience one-stop shop for encouraging, equipping, and exhorting one another? Loved ones, drive-thru relationships on Sunday mornings are not able to satisfy the spiritual struggles, the loneliness, and the heartache that many in the community and in our church wrestle with the other six days of the week. Satan would love nothing more than to convince us that Sunday morning is the place where instant worship, warmth, love, and concern for people ought to exist and that it is the cozy confines of our meeting together where we show our care for people.

Then, when Monday rolls around and we step back onto the merry-go-round of life, whirling from work to family to that tyranny of the urgent, Sunday morning quickly fades in the rearview mirror and all of a sudden the strangle hold of sin emerges and its deadly influence in our lives makes us vulnerable and weak. At the same time this manner of life permeates our relationship with God, with our family, with our co-workers, and with our neighbors, leaving us defeated and empty. As a result our worship is relegated to Sunday mornings and our witness is lifeless.

In addition, our fast-food approach to relationships seldom reaches out to people who are different from us or who are difficult to interact with. After all, we want people "my way right away!" You might find yourself rationalizing, "It is far too messy and time consuming to get involved with people 'like that'." Besides, I tried to reach out to those people and they were not interested. They rejected my attempts or didn't seem to connect with me. At the end of the day I am willing to give relationships the good old college try and if it doesn't bring instant success then I need to move on to the next endeavor."

You see, there are people who are facing tremendous obstacles in their lives and in their faith. There are some who are in bondage to sin and need the love of a brother or sister to turn them from that sin to worship and to follow God. Some may be the next pastor or missionary that God desires to raise up and send out to labor in the field of fulltime ministry. However, if you settle for "instant breakfast" relationships you will likely miss out on the overflowing joy and excitement God would bring through His work in your life and in theirs.

One of the primary barriers to developing these deep, rewarding, Romans 16-type relationships is our unwillingness to invest the time. We are just too busy. So, what is the key ingredient for developing deep, God-honoring relationships? To answer this question we need to look no further than the character of God and the way that He relates to us. In one word it is “pursuit”.

Webster’s Dictionary defines “pursuit” this way: to seek; to find or employ a means to accomplish”. Listen to how God defines pursuit in Romans 5 and 2 Corinthians 5,

<sup>8</sup> ...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God’s definition of pursuit is that while we were pursuing our own agendas, while we were pursuing sin, and while we were avoiding God’s will and God’s ways He loved us so much that He would send and sacrifice His only Son so that He could restore and renew our relationship with Him. That is the kind of pursuing love that God has for us. God’s pursuing love is of such a character and of such a nature that He seeks to rescue mankind from the destruction of sin and restore him to a place of harmonious relationship by faith in Jesus Christ.

Such depths of love are not without significance for how we interact with other people. Jesus reminds us on several occasions that our love for God is directly related to the manner and nature of our love for others. Our understanding of the character of God’s great love for us determines the framework for how we are called to love another.

May I submit to you that degree to which you understand God’s pursuing love for you will determine the depths and the lengths to which you will go to pursue others with that same love. Therefore, our central idea is this: God’s pursuing love sets the standard for how we are to treat others. As a result we are going to focus upon a portrait of God’s pursuit of broken, rebellious sinners as the model that will help us overcome the fast-food approach that our world presents.

This picture is painted between the pages of Genesis and Revelation. It begins with Adam and Eve and continues to the time of Jesus’ triumphant return when sin and death will be forever vanquished and forever conquered and God will, once for all, establish His Kingdom here on earth.

Let’s begin scratching the surface of what Scripture conveys about the pursuing nature of God. We are going to examine the story of David and Bathsheba, focusing upon three facets of God’s pursuing love and how these can be a guide for relating to other people. The first facet of God’s pursuing love is this: God pursuit endures rejection; it is relentless.

Before we look at David’s story I want you to take a journey with me through the pages of Scripture. Travel in your mind’s eye with me back to the Garden of Eden and back to that time in the history of mankind where sin first entered the world and first captured the human heart. In Genesis 3 what do we find? We find that Adam and Eve are on the heels of taking from the fruit and violating God’s instructions and they are hiding in the bushes. Can I point out that it should not surprise us that when people are struggling with sin they want to hide from God, but they also want to hide from God’s instruments? We see that in Adam and Eve, but notice how God responds to Adam and Eve. God walks the Garden and what does He say, “Where are you Adam and Eve?”<sup>1</sup> He seeks them and then He desires to restore them, even promising them that one day the offspring of Eve would crush the serpent’s head which would be a foretaste of the redemption that awaits in Christ.

A few pages later, in the Book of Genesis, we come to another man by the name of Abram, also called Abraham. In the Book of Joshua, Abraham, we learned, was born and living in a family that worshipped other gods. They were completely overrun by idolatry and more than likely, Abraham and his entire family had never worshipped the True God. Low and behold, God, in His pursuit, reaches down and He takes Abraham and He leads him from that land to the Promised Land, and because of His pursuit of just one man He builds and sets apart an entire nation for Himself.<sup>2</sup>

We flip forward a few more pages and we come to a man, Moses, and here we find that Moses is a fugitive. He has had a little run-in with the authorities in Egypt and he has fled to Midian and he is now a nomad in the wilderness.<sup>3</sup> Despite his fleeing and despite his running he cannot run from God, so with the burning bush and with the plagues in Egypt,

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:8

<sup>2</sup> Joshua 24:2-3

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 2:11-15

later in the wilderness we see over and over again God's pursuit of Moses and the people of Israel to set them apart and draw all nations unto Himself through their lives. It is a story of God's pursuit.

Now we flip a bit further in the Old Testament and we learn from the prophets. We see in the prophets, and perhaps in the poster child, the quintessential story of God's pursuit, is Jonah. Here is a man that God calls and commissions to go to Nineveh and preach the message of forgiveness to a very wicked people. What does Jonah do on the heels of this commission? He turns and he runs and he gets on a ship and he says, "I am headed in the opposite direction as fast and as far as I can get." We see that God uses an enormous fish and sends Jonah back to Nineveh to preach this message of repentance.<sup>4</sup>

Notice two things. First, Jonah is rejecting God and he is rejecting God's mission for him. Secondly, there is a group of people who have been rejecting God for a very, very long time. So, God, through the waywardness of this prophet, and despite the waywardness of this prophet, is still going to pursue that fallen and broken people in Nineveh. This is a powerful story of God's pursuit and the repentance and reconciliation that follows.

It is not unique to Jonah. This same story can be seen powerfully in Hosea where the wicked people who are the Nation of Israel themselves are likened to a harlot who has many lovers and pursues them with wanton abandon. For Israel that meant that they were pursuing every god that they could lay their hands on. They had long since abandoned faithfulness and a monogamous relationship with YEHWEH to pursue any god that would cross their path. In fact, the prophet describes this people as "ones who would pursue these lovers but never overtake them."<sup>5</sup> They would pursue and pursue them but they could never capture what they were looking for, and yet at the end of the Book of Hosea God calls out to this people and says, "I will not abandon you. I will not destroy you. I will restore and renew you." This is a powerful picture again of God's pursuing love.

This message is the central theme of all of the prophets. The prophets time and time again call to the people of Israel, "Repent and return. Turn from sin and turn from pursuing your own desires and your own gods to worship and to follow the living God."

In case you are thinking that this is an Old Testament idea and an Old Testament concept, think with me for a few moments about the New Testament. You may recall Jesus, in Luke 6, as He stands on a flat plain with a large crowd gathered around Him, defines the nature of our love. He tells us that loving our neighbors and loving those who love us is the kind of a relationship that anyone can have. Even those who reject God will love those who love them in return, but a sacrificial, a radical love that defines those who are following Christ is defined by loving one's enemies. He says, "Pray for them. Pray for your enemies." In addition, He says that we are to treat them with kindness and to shower and to show them the love of God through the way that we treat them.<sup>6</sup> That is a convicting message and a convicting portrait of God's pursuing love.

Lastly, I think of two of the key figures in all of the New Testament: Peter and Paul. Peter was this one whom God would use to lead the Jews and to preach the message of the Gospel for the very first time in the Book of Acts<sup>7</sup>, and yet this same Peter would deny Christ three times to a little, servant girl.<sup>8</sup> God pursued him and He used him in a mighty way.

It is the same thing with Paul. This one that God would use to reach the entire Gentile world, Paul was steeped in the pursuit of murdering and killing everyone who would claim allegiance to Jesus Christ. And yet, in the midst of that pursuit, God reaches down and saves Paul and transforms him into a messenger of the Gospel.<sup>9</sup>

Do you see the magnitude and the enormity of God's redeeming love?

Let's return to our story in 2 Samuel. I have to qualify upfront that this will not be a detailed analysis of this story, but what I want to draw your attention to in this story is the nature of God's pursuing love because it shines brightly in the story of David and Bathsheba.

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<sup>4</sup> Jonah

<sup>5</sup> Hosea 2:7

<sup>6</sup> Luke 6:27-35

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:14-40

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 26:69-75

<sup>9</sup> Acts 9

David was a man after God's own heart, but David was still a man who desperately needed God's pursuing love in his life. The key term that I want to draw your attention to, and one that I believe frames this notion of God's pursuing love, is the term "sent". As we come to 2 Samuel 11:1, we see a very critical setting for this story of David and Bathsheba. It says that it was "springtime", a time when kings would go out to battle. At this point in Israel's history, David has reached a place of great power and prestige that is unparalleled in the world. He has conquered many of his enemies. His public opinion polls are off the charts, and so, for David, he is complacent and he is content with the state of his kingdom. When spring and the dry season rolls around, a time when all of the other kings would have been seeking to expand their territories, David stays home and he sends Joab and the army to do his work.

There is nothing here that is sinful with David sending his army to do battle, but here is what I want you to recognize – there is a great saying that "power...corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely".<sup>10</sup> Notice how David's contentment, David's authority, and David's power is yielded in the way that he sends. Each time that David sends he is executing his authority doing exactly what he wants. He is pursuing life "my way right away". Look at Verse 3. David has gotten up in the middle of the night, and perhaps he was sleeping on the roof of his own home, and he notices this beautiful woman across the way, so in Verse 3, "David sent..." David sends and he inquires about this woman, Bathsheba.

This initial sending brings back a report that she is indeed married to one of his most valiant warriors and one of his mighty men, Uriah. Does that deter David? Verse 4 says absolutely not!

<sup>4</sup> So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.

David sees her. David wants her. He sends for her and he gets her. As we look at Verse 6 the woman conceived and the first warning signs should have come up, "We have a problem. She is pregnant. How are we going to deal with this?" For a man of absolute power and authority, this is no problem. David sent to Joab and he said, "Send to me Uriah the Hittite." David has a plan: "If I can call for Uriah and bring him back, surely he will have missed his wife, having been separated for months, in the heat of battle, and the first thing he will want to do is be reunited and be with his wife. Then any question or ambiguity can be brushed over and Uriah will appear to be the father of this child."

Verses 7 through 11, and following, show that this is a futile plan. At this point Uriah has more integrity than David does. Uriah is so deeply concerned and so deeply troubled over the people of Israel, and particularly his fellow soldiers on the battle field, he refuses to leave David's palace.

In Verse 12, David gets on the move again and he says to Uriah,

<sup>12</sup> "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back."

David's plan to bring Uriah home and have him mask this sin doesn't work, so David even tries to get him drunk. It is one last effort to make this thing happen neat and clean, but that fails because Uriah stays and he won't leave David's door. So, we read in Verse 14,

<sup>14</sup> In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

David's power is at work again. He is sending, now, an execution order by the hand of the very man who will lose his life. This time we read in the verses that follow just how that plan unfolds. This time David is successful and Uriah is murdered on the battlefield.

So, in Verse 26, when the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. For the eighth time, in Verse 27, in this short story we see David's response,

<sup>27</sup> And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son.

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<sup>10</sup> Lord Acton, *Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 1887*

David tried to get Uriah to do this the easy way, but when Uriah would not comply now David has to murder Uriah so that he can do it the hard way. Once Uriah is out of the picture David can marry Bathsheba and in the timeframe still appear to be kosher as far as this child being born.

Do you see the pursuing nature of David and how he is pursuing everything that is against God? Perhaps you are wondering, the narrator doesn't interject and comment upon these actions. He presents them in rapid succession leaving us to wonder, "Does God see this? Is God aware of what is happening here?" Notice the end of Verse 27,

<sup>27</sup> ...But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.

God's eye was on David the entire time. David was relentlessly rebelling and rejecting God, but here is the most beautiful part of the story, Chapter 12 and Verse 1,

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD sent...

Whose power and authority is at work here? It is God's. As great as David's power was and as much as David thought that he could send and get whatever he wanted, God has a different agenda and God has a different plan. God "sends" and He sends Nathan the Prophet to David to bring restoration, reconciliation and healing. This is a marvelous story of God's pursuing love. He is pursuing David in the height of his sin to bring restoration, repentance, and healing. This ought to challenge and encourage us, church. The applications here are clear: God desires to use us. He wants us to be able to forgo rejection.

A couple of applications are in order. First, when you reach out to somebody, and perhaps you share the Gospel with a neighbor, a co-worker, or a friend and they reject the Gospel, how do you respond? Do you give upon the relationship? Do you set it aside and say, "Well, they weren't interested so I am going to move on." Or, do you pursue that relationship and continue to build and nurture it, hoping and praying that one day God might turn their hearts so that they will receive His message of hope and forgiveness.

What about that person that you work with; that difficult co-worker, the one that really irks you? Are you willing to invest the time to come along side that person and to love them when they are very unlovable and to pray for them that God would turn their heart from following and pursuing sin to follow Him? That is the kind of pursuing love that God has shown us and, brothers and sisters, that is the kind of pursuing love that God desires us to show people who are in our church, but also to people who are in our community. When you hear of someone in your Sunday school class, when you hear and meet someone out in the halls and in the foyer and they share with you an upcoming test, a problem, or a personal struggle with sin do you call the next week to see how that appointment went? Do you call because you have been praying for them and the Lord has burdened you for the struggle that they are facing to say, "Brother, how are you doing today? Sister, can I pray with you today? I want to see you walk in the power and in the strength of Christ."

That is what a pursuing love does and that is how God pursues us and that is how God desires for us to pursue others.

That is the first facet of God's pursuing love. It is relentless. It overcomes rejection.

The second facet we want to look at, and we have seen it in our story so far, is that God's pursuing love brings restoration and it brings reconciliation. We see this in 2 Samuel 12. Through this story we see that Nathan brings to David a response of reconciliation and restoration in Verse 13. David recognizes and acknowledges, "I have sinned against the Lord and my sin is first and foremost against Him." This has implications for others as well, but notice the Lord's response through Nathan,

"The LORD has also taken away your sin so that you shall not die."

This is a powerful picture of healing and restoration. David turns from his sin and he turns to God and God offers forgiveness, healing, and cleansing.

It is interesting that this pursuit of reconciliation is rooted in God's faithfulness. Notice how God reaches out to David in Verse 7, when He says,

<sup>7</sup> "It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. <sup>8</sup> I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care..."

God had been so faithful to David and yet how did David view and perceive God's faithfulness. We read in Verse 9,

<sup>9</sup> "Why have you despised the word of the LORD... <sup>10</sup> you have despised Me..."

David had despised God! That is strong language. It is the language that Esau used when he sold his birthright for a pot of red stuff. The Scripture says that despised his birthright so he was willing to sell it for a bowl of red stuff.<sup>11</sup>

This is the story of God's faithfulness to David, that in the same way He protected him from Saul. He is willing to go the extra mile to protect him from sin and to protect him from the wickedness of his own heart and bring reconciliation and restoration.

I encourage you to read Psalm 51 which is David's personal diary on these events and it is a wonderful cry to God's faithfulness and God's reconciliation, that He would give David a new heart. It is a powerful reminder that God's pursuing love brings reconciliation and restoration on the basis of His faithfulness.

There is another thing here that we cannot miss: reconciliation is costly. Think for a moment of the cost of our redemption, that indeed God would send and not be unwilling to spare His only Son for us. That is the kind of cost. Can you picture it and see the cost that our redemption has?

Peter put it this way, in 1 Peter 1,

<sup>18</sup> ...you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold...

No, we were bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. That is what it cost God to pursue us with His love. It cost us His very Son.

In his first epistle, John connects this to the way that we love one another. In 1 John 4:20, he says,

<sup>20</sup> If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

What a statement and what a challenge that is to us about the way that we understand and appreciate God's love for us and the way that we love one another. We cannot say out of one side of our mouth that we love God, and yet be indifferent, uncaring, and disinterested in the heart needs of our brothers and sisters. The two are not compatible. That is what it means to hate. It is in opposition to love. God's pursuing love will do what is necessary to bring reconciliation. It is costly. For us it means that reconciliation and being God's agent in the lives of others will come with a price.

My question for you is what might it cost you? Perhaps it will cost you a nice afternoon on Saturday watching your favorite college football team. Perhaps it will cost you a few hours of sleep in the morning so that you can get up and meet someone for breakfast. It may cost you the convenience of an evening where you are going to welcome and invite people into your home to share what God is doing in your life and in theirs and to pray for them.

Do you start to see the cost? We are not talking about dollar signs. We are talking about a cost that runs to the very core of our being and that shares and bears the burdens of one another. Reconciliation is costly, but this is what God calls us to do.

Let's consider the last facet of God's pursuing love. At this point it should be obvious. In each of the stories we have seen it. God's pursuing love involves human relationships. In our story of David and Bathsheba, God desires to use Nathan. Let me tell you, I do not want to be Nathan for anything. Imagine having to go before the most powerful ruler in all the world and confront his sin. In that day and age it would have not been uncommon for Nathan to walk out with his head on a platter. I would not want to be in Nathan's shoes, and yet he was willing to count the cost and to pay the price to be God's agent of reconciliation for David.

God wants to use you and me in the lives of others. I would be doing you a great disservice if I did not share the greatest example of how God uses human agents: it is His Son Jesus Christ. John tells us, at the beginning of his Gospel, that the

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<sup>11</sup> Genesis 25:34

Son of God, full of glory, came and dwelled and tabernacled among us so that we could see His glory. What all the Gospel writers affirm is that what glory looks like is a path of suffering, of persecution, of hardship, and heartache. Why? It is to redeem and restore you and me to a right relationship with God. That is why Jesus came. He came to pay a penalty that we could never pay. He had to be one-hundred percent man so that He could be our substitute and so that He could stand in our place. At the very same time He had to be one-hundred percent God to pay the infinite penalty that our sin deserves and demands. He was the just dying for the unjust. That is what God was willing to do for you and for me. He loved us so much that He would send His own Son in human flesh to be the One who would redeem us and to show us and to communicate to us so clearly what His love looks like.

Lastly, there are two great examples. I think of Peter, Paul, James, and this Book. God has communicated to us so clearly in the pages of His Word, and yet how has He done it. He has done it through men who wrote these words. By the power of His Holy Spirit He inspired them to write and to record His message of reconciliation for you and for me. God loves to use human agents.

That leaves us with two questions and two implications. First, there may be some who God has been pursuing. He has been seeking you and He has been calling you to abandon and set aside the pursuit of these pleasures that never satisfy and that always leave you longing for something more and for trying to earn or merit a right standing with God. He tells us to set that aside because He has provided One for us, His Son Jesus Christ, so that by faith we might have the full, infinite righteousness credited to our account and that we might forever be reconciled to Him.

With the Apostle Paul I plea with you, if you find yourself in that condition, be reconciled to God, but for the rest of you, as those who claim to have received this gift, I challenge you and I urge you to be Godly ambassadors and be the instruments of His redeeming love for others. Are you willing to count the cost? Are you willing to seek out and search out the people in your neighborhood and in your workplace who are hurting and who are struggling and to invest the time and the energy to pursue them with God's love in a way that He has pursued you?

Almost nine years ago a young man walked into the doors of Bethany Baptist Church and he sat in the very back row, as close to the windows as he could get. He listened, captivated, as Pastor Ritch preached from the Gospel of John. For the first time in years he had heard God's Words faithfully taught and communicated and he was enthralled. For this young man, his college years had seen a drift, a slow but steady decline and movement away from God and away from the Christian upbringing that he parents had given him. So, through various events and circumstances, God had brought him to that seat in the back of the church.

A few months later he got married and he and his wife joined an Adult Bible Community and they began to get connected and they began to grow. During the course of that time, numerous families and individuals came along side of them, encouraged them, and welcomed them into their homes.

One day another man approached this young man and said, "Would you consider being a part of the college ministry here?" This young man, because of the shame of his past and the shame of how he lived with God during his college years said, "No, I am not ready and I am not interested."

Months went on and this man and his wife continued to grow and God slowly but surely pursued them. Much to this young man's surprise, six to eight months later, that same man appeared again and said, "Would you consider helping and serving in the college ministry?" This time the Lord had prepared the heart of that young man and he said, "Yes, I will." For the next two years he devoted every moment of his free time to teaching God's Word and to caring for and ministering to the hearts and lives of college students.

Eventually, his passion for the work of the ministry and for serving Christ in this way, and needing to become more equipped, led him to leave his job and go to seminary. Last spring he graduated from seminary and this morning he stands before you, humbled for the opportunity and privilege to share with you this morning.

You see, I was that man. I was the one who walked into that back row one day almost nine years ago and I praise God for the people who pursued me, even in the face of rejection, because they have allowed me to experience the greatest joy of my life: finding the purpose and design that God had for me, that He set apart for me, before the foundation of the world.

Oh, that we would be a church, that this would be a place, where people can find relationships like that; that people can be set free to fulfill what God has designed for them from before all time.