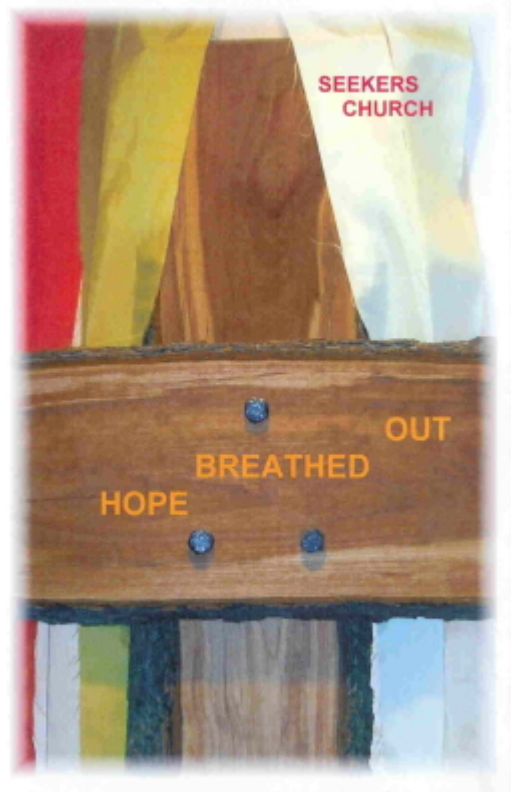


# "A message from King David" by June Gable

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As I was sitting here during a worship service three summers ago, I heard the first words of the Old Testament reading for the day. After the first three words, I smiled, recognizing the story of David and Bathsheba. I'd taught a lesson on the story several months before. A strange thing happened as I listened. It was if all of the studying and reflection that had gone into preparing that lesson came to me in a flash. I saw even more depth of meaning, relevance for the here and now, and a warning for us. I remember feeling stunned and abstractly thinking, "Sometime I need to share this with Seekers."

I used to teach prevention of sexual harassment for the Navy. We taught that sexual harassment is not about sex, it is about power. I believe the story of David and Bathsheba is, also.

“In the spring, when kings go to war, David didn’t” Why??? Was he afraid? No, not David. Then why? David was a great king. God led David to form a great army and gave them victory after victory and they completed possession of the land. David always thanked God for the victories, in private, and in public. He was God’s servant and his hymns of praise are full of declaration that God was responsible for the successes. I believe that “that spring” David had begun to realize his own importance. Unger’s Handbook tells us that the preceding verses set the stage for this story of David’s sin. David suffered a personal and professional insult and reacted, going to war against the perpetrators. He did not consult God about the battle, and he did not credit God with the victory. He must have been very pleased with himself. We know that, in that part of the world, people went up on the flat roofs to catch cool breezes after the sun when down. His neighbor’s wife knew all the men were away, so she did not hesitate to bathe on the roof. The Bible tells us that Bathsheba was beautiful, but it does not go on about it. I think there was something else that made her irresistible to David. David had a lot of foreign wives, also a large harem. He could have any woman in the land, except a married woman. Bathsheba was married to one of his military officers. I believe that David was blinded by love of his own power that spring. A woman he could not have was a woman he was determined to have.

The woman became pregnant and sent word to David. He now will pile sin upon sin. He has Uriah brought to him, gives him a big meal, plenty of wine, tells him to go home to his wife. This is the really embarrassing part, Uriah is, at this time, a better military commander than David. He speaks about his men, sleeping in the open at the front, and refuses to go

home. Are David's eyes opened to what he is doing? No, he now commits murder by sending Uriah to the front line of the war. Uriah is killed and Bathsheba comes to live with him. Will David ever be aware of what he is doing? The prophet Nathan is sent by God. He tells a thinly disguised story and David recognizes his own actions and is deeply sorry. "What will happen to me, will I die?" He asks. Nathan tells him that the violence he has brought to Bathsheba's family will be played out among David's children. And, one other punishment, the child that Bathsheba has born him will die. David must have come to really love her, because that distresses him. He goes home and lies prostrate in prayer, not eating or bathing. The child is sickly, and dies. The servants tell David about the child's death. They're surprised by his actions; he gets up, bathes, puts on clean clothes, worships, eats a meal, and goes to work. When they ask him about it, he replies, "as long as the child lived, there was a chance God would change his mind, but now he is dead and I understand that that was my punishment. God still needs me to do his work". Read about what David himself says to God at this time in Psalm 51, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, put a new and right spirit within me."

That is not the end of the story. David and Bathsheba had another child. The Bible tells us, "and God loved him". We know that is so, his name was Solomon.

It's easy for us to see why King David was tempted to love his own power; he was a very powerful king. But what about us? Do we experience the perils of falling into the trap of enjoying power plays? Have you ever been driving down the road and seen someone weaving in and out of traffic, trying to cut a few seconds off of travel time? And you hear yourself yelling at them and maybe speeding up or slowing down to prevent them from coming into your lane? When I am driving, I forget that I am God's humble servant; some of you share my problem. We can think of lots of examples in our lives when

we, like David, can easily be seduced by love of our own power.

If David could speak to us today, I believe he would warn us that when we are busy defending or increasing our own power, we cannot hear the Holy Spirit. We don't want to know what God has for us to do at that moment. I think David would warn us that that quickly becomes our mode of operation and we become totally blind to the sins against the Spirit that we are committing. I think he would also tell us, that when we fall into this behavior and God sends a "prophet" to wake us up, we need to apologize to God, to ask forgiveness and to forgive ourselves. Then we can go back to work for the one, creator God.

The next time you hear the story of David and Bathsheba, use it to check your spiritual life. Ask yourself how you can be more faithful in your attempts to be God's humble servant.