

One of the most effective stumbling blocks to great leadership and stewardship is the leader's lack of perception of his or her faults. Here's a powerful example for us—the astounding exchange in 2 Samuel between Nathan, God's prophet, and King David. I have broken that short exchange down by themes.

First, God's parable for David through Nathan. "And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.'"

Second, David's anger that was grounded in blind hypocrisy. "Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'"

Third, Nathan's confrontation of David. "Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.'"

Fourth, God's head-spinning consequences, then David's response. "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.' Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.' David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.' Then Nathan went to his house."

Wow, isn't that a gut-wrenching history lesson, a lesson that's actually an important warning to each of us? Here's why. The Bible foundationally declares that David was a man after God's own heart—just how many people does God call out with *that* assessment in the Bible? But even further, here, through Nathan, God takes care to recount His showering extraordinary measures of His favor onto David's life—such as God's anointing David as King, His delivering of David out of harm from King Saul, His giving David the house of Israel and Judah, and, as Nathan reported, God's willingness to do even more for David.

But, then, Nathan recounted David's significant transgressions—despising the word of the Lord, doing evil in God's sight, wife-stealing of Bathsheba from a loyal subordinate, and actually orchestrating the death of the wronged husband, Uriah the Hittite.

In the end, there was clear reaping assigned to David—assigned by God as detailed consequences in Nathan's message. For example, the sword never departing from the house of David—that meant nothing but warfare for David. Then, evil against David by his own family and the giving of David's own wives to others—that would contemplate the sister-raping son of David, Amnon, and another of David's sons, Absalom, illegitimately, aggressively pursuing the throne and power of King David himself. And, who can forget the death of David's child.

Throughout this sad saga of Nathan's confrontation, did David see himself as the necessarily humble shepherd-boy owing all his elevation to God? Or had he long ago started seeing himself quite differently—a powerful, victorious king who unaccountably could do as he wished, however heinous, with regard to others, including a very loyal soldier under his command? Taking the soldier's wife and arranging his death, even in the very face of the soldier's loyalty. Spurning God's Word. Doing evil. This was spiritual blindness, of course, a deliberate lack of pursuit of God's wishes, a spurning of God's will.

But this was no shallow thing for David...by now, his compounding of multiple sins was deeply self-justifying, with little apparent regard for God. So, when Nathan was sent by God to confront David, David not only did not recognize himself in Nathan's parable, David's anger actually burned against the trespasser in the story. David simply did not see his faults as a person and as a leader, being quick to condemn others, while failing to see the direct applicability or relevance to his own life, his own failings.

This was not just spiritual blindness, this was blindness upon blindness. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the Apostle Paul references the Christian life as being captured in the phrase "glory to glory." Of course, this phase of David's decision-making was pretty much the opposite, spiritually speaking—from blindness to blindness.

Note that I just said "David's decision-making." These grave missteps by King David were distinct decisions—made one after another—and the sinful errors were compounding.

This is one of the all-too-common entangling dimensions of high leadership where the leader has been given an abundance of power in the social context and structure of the events of the day—whether that's a nation like David's Israel or a church in the Middle Ages or a family business today. As Lord Acton famously said, "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

And there always seem to be enablers or toadies or sycophants...whatever might be the appropriate label for those supporters who actively or just passively stand by and support the behaviors of the transgressing leader. Think of modern politics, or, for that matter, politics in any era. How often have the unacceptable behaviors of political adversaries suddenly been deemed acceptable when it's "our leader" who similarly transgresses—but does so in the name of supposedly much bigger political stakes.

But look how the rest of David's life was so dramatically impacted through several significant, lamentable events. Loss of an infant, family crime and betrayal, a wearying focus on the sword ...well, suffice it to say, in God's economy, compounded spiritual blindness can have significant consequences.

But. But God. But God inspired a few powerful words to come from the mouth of Nathan toward the end of Nathan's encounter with King David. And those words to David were these: "The Lord also has put away your sin." So, God's grace and mercy were clearly resident in the midst of God's judgement in the remaining mundane events of David's kingly leadership.

Remember, David did not even recognize correction in the message from Nathan. This is important for you and for me. Are we so entrenched in our leadership self-justification that we not only ignored God's best in getting there, we also don't even recognize our transgressions when they are directly pointed out?

Now's the time—now's *always* the time—to seek accountability in our prayer life, asking the Holy Spirit to convict us and convince us of crooked paths of the past, straight paths ahead, and God-given grace and mercy that accompanies repentance. Will the consequences for *our* transgressions be waived, be swept away? Perhaps. Perhaps not. But the straight path ahead is worth it. David recognized that. So should we.

So, you say you don't have the necessary awareness, the strength to address your issues? Connect with your pastor—your shepherd—for guidance. This, *this* is one of the keys for authentic, effective leadership: addressing spiritual blindness, through introspection and the necessary correction. Pursue.

A&A: Application & Action

1. What processes or accountability do you have in place to avoid or correct any spiritual blindness in your life? Be specific.

2. Do you routinely see your strengths *and* your weaknesses accurately? Share this question and your answer with someone close enough to you to know and ask if your assessment is accurate.

3. Do you believe that our spiritual blindness, acted upon, is simultaneously subject to full earthly consequences *and* the full grace of God? Always? Sometimes? Never?