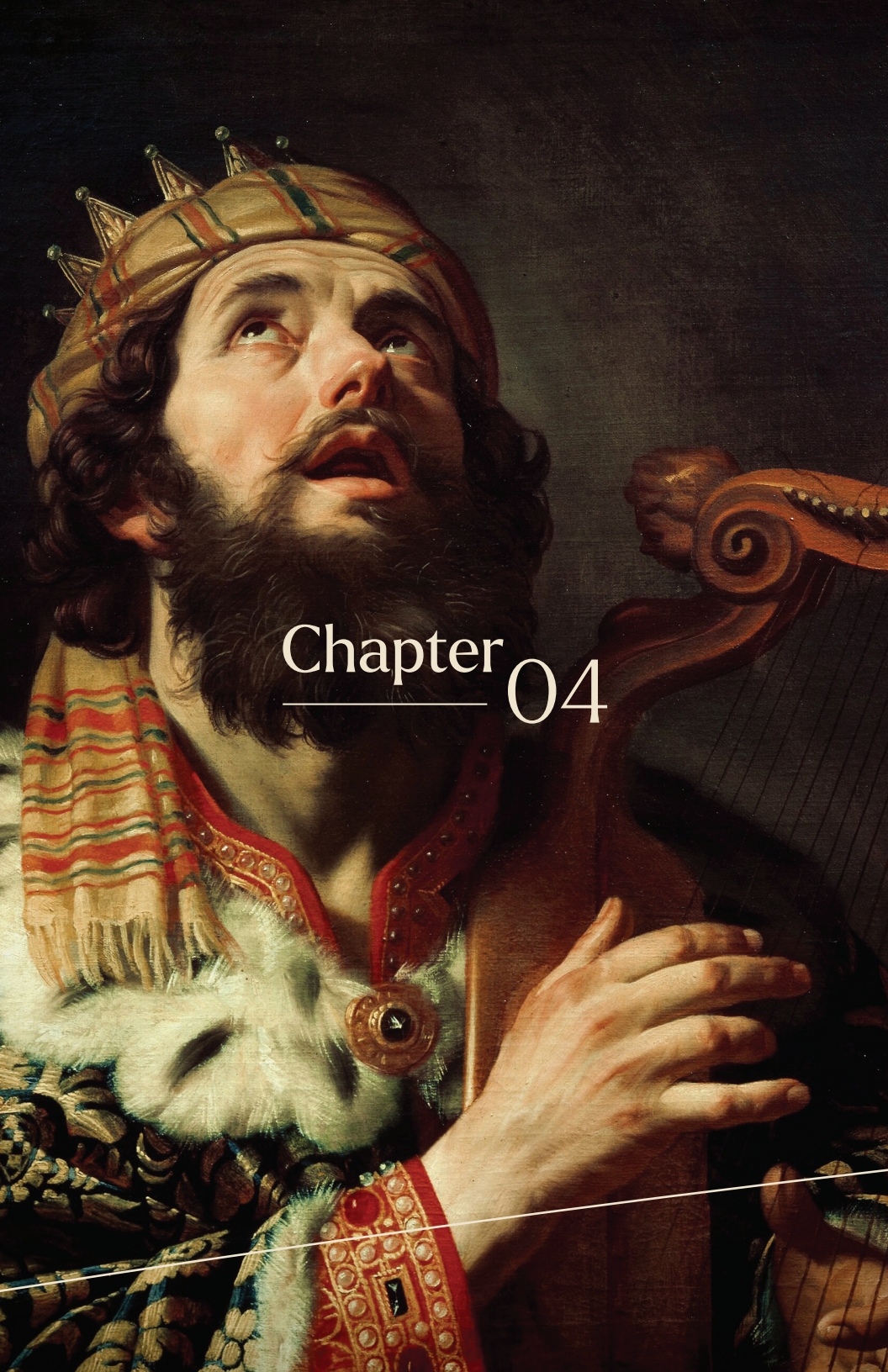




Chapter 04

David & Temperance

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UNDERSTANDING

What do I need to know about this passage?

When David defeated Goliath and the Philistines with nothing more than a sling and a stone, he could not have imagined how God would shape his future. But one victory multiplied into many, and David became a mighty warrior. Under his leadership, Israel won battle after battle and grew into a strong, respected, and powerful nation.

But amid overwhelming triumph, David faced a different kind of battle, one that would shape his life and legacy even more deeply than his military exploits. It was not an external attack from enemies, but a conflict within his own heart.

Throughout his life, David gained access to nearly every worldly pleasure and power imaginable. And like all of us, he had natural desires and passions. Would David allow those passions to rule him? Would he use his power selfishly? Or would he moderate his desires and direct them toward the good?

God wants us to enjoy the gifts He has given

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us. He created emotions like joy, sorrow, anger, contentment, and loneliness to help guide us in our relationships and draw us closer to Him. He also gave us food, wine, sex, possessions, money, and leisure as good sources of happiness and comfort. When used properly, these gifts deepen our joy and strengthen our connection to God and others.

But how do we embrace God's good gifts in our modern culture? At any moment, we can distract ourselves by scrolling on our phones. We have instant access to endless pleasures—food, pornography, online shopping, entertainment, and more. At the same time, our culture tells us that our feelings should guide us and that self-indulgence is freedom. In such a world, how should we respond?

The Church offers an answer in the virtue of temperance—the virtue that teaches self-mastery and moderation. The temperate person can enjoy created goods fully because their desires are rightly ordered toward what truly satisfies.

In David's story, we see both the beauty of moderation and the destruction that follows when our passions become divorced from

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what is truly good. By learning from David's victories and failures, we too can become people of temperance, free to receive God's gifts as they were meant to be enjoyed.

David

In this chapter, we will study two situations that required David to be temperate. In the first, we will explore how David needed to moderate his emotions and direct them toward what was ultimately best for him and honoring to God. In the second, we will see how David needed to temper his attraction to pleasures and how his choices affected him and his relationships.

David and Saul

King Saul loves David as a son. But over time, Saul begins to feel threatened by David's rising popularity. Saul's envy eventually becomes hatred, and he tries to kill David. Saul chases David into the mountains and, perhaps, feeling angry and betrayed, David must run for his life.

One night, David sneaks into Saul's camp and finds him asleep and unguarded, with his spear in the ground next to him. David has the perfect opportunity to kill Saul and seize the kingdom. Even David's attendant encourages him to slay his enemy, saying, "God has given your enemy

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into your hand this day; now therefore let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice" (1 Sam 26:8).

David seems to have justification for killing Saul. He has forced David to live in hiding, and in fear for his life. Not only this, but he even spared Saul's life once before (1 Sam 24:1-22). David's anger at Saul's continued unjust persecution is understandable. It seems almost natural for David to desire vengeance.

But David sees a greater good. He remembers that God anointed Saul the first king of Israel, and rather than grasping the kingdom on his own terms, serving his disordered desire for vengeance or allowing his anger to overcome him, David stays his hand. He spares Saul's life, saying, "Do not destroy him; for who can put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? As the Lord lives, the Lord will smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam 26:9-11).

David even goes a step further, seeking something better than vengeance: reconciliation. And for a time, he is successful. While Saul will never fully overcome his envy of David, for now, the two are reconciled and Saul wishes blessings upon David (1 Sam 26:25).

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What would have happened if David had allowed his anger to rule him? Not only would he have sinned, but he would also have experienced real-world consequences that may have complicated his rise to the throne: division, violence, and the stain on his own soul for choosing murder over what was truly best. But instead of allowing himself to be overcome by anger or the desire for revenge, David exercised self-mastery and chose what was right. Practicing temperance made David free to receive the fullness of God's blessings and fulfill His good plan for his life.

David and Bathsheba

Years later, King David has won many victories over his enemies. He is enjoying the fruits of peace—perhaps too much. When the time comes to go to war once again, instead of joining his men, David chooses to stay home. With little to do, he stays in bed, sleeping in until the afternoon. Eventually, he gets up and goes for a stroll along the roof of his palace where he sees a woman bathing.

Struck by her beauty, David investigates. He finds out that the woman is Bathsheba, and she is married to the soldier Uriah. David summons her to the palace and sleeps with her. When Bathsheba becomes pregnant, David tries to cover it up. First, he brings her husband home from battle and tries to

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get him to lie with his wife. When he refuses, David orders his commander to place him on the front line of battle, ensuring his death. The plan is successful. Uriah dies and David marries Bathsheba.

God sees all that unfolds and rebukes David, saying, “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 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? 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” (2 Sam 12:7-10).

David recognizes his sin and repents with mourning and fasting. God accepts his repentance, but the consequences of his actions remain. David and Bathsheba's child dies, and David's family devolves into chaos. His sons turn against him and against each other. These family conflicts dominate the rest of David's life.

Just as David's first act of temperance resulted in God's blessings. David's failure to be temperate led to tragedy. Giving in to laziness led to giving in to curiosity, which, in turn, led to lust and, ultimately, murder. David's choices are a chilling example of

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what can happen when we allow our passions to rule us.

Temperance

“Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable” (CCC 1809).

Before the Fall, our intellects, wills, and passions worked in harmony. We knew what was true and good. Our wills aligned with our intellects, and our reason and will guided our appetites. We felt hunger but were never inclined to eat more than we needed. We experienced sexual desire but never in a way that used others as an object for our pleasure. Our desires aligned with what we knew to be good.

After the Fall, our inner harmony is now fractured. We struggle to know what is right and have trouble choosing it even when we know it. Our appetites are often in tension with our intellect and will, pulling us to indulge in created goods in ways that aren’t good for us.

The virtue of temperance enables us to bring our disordered passions back into alignment with right reason so that we can enjoy God’s created gifts as we were meant to. But how do

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we practice temperance so that we can enjoy God’s gifts in ways that lead to our flourishing?

Often, temperance is misunderstood as a virtue that tells us what we cannot do: Don’t drink too much, don’t eat too much, don’t watch too much television, don’t indulge in lustful thoughts or behaviors. And while temperance does require moderating our desires for certain goods, considering it only in this way misses the beauty of this virtue. Temperance, rightly understood, is not a virtue that limits our freedom, but rather it is a virtue that enhances our freedom to choose the highest, most fulfilling goods.

It is the temperate man who enjoys alcohol without surrendering his freedom in drunkenness. He delights in his meals, savoring their goodness and receiving them as gifts, rather than surrendering to his disordered desire to eat too much, too hurriedly, more than his share, or in a way that distracts himself from the relationships with the people he is with. He expresses anger at injustices in the world and allows it to motivate him to fight for the good in a healthy way, without committing injustices himself. He avoids judging others rashly, tempering his desire to assign blame when he doesn’t fully understand someone else’s situation. He rejoices in what is good, fully appreciating moments of happiness, without the need to chase

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after the next thrill. He is satisfied with having what he needs for himself and his family, without being overcome by a desire to gather more stuff—cars, houses, clothes, or the latest technology.

Most of us have had the experience of succumbing to our disordered desires. We've eaten too much, drank too much, lashed out in rage, or spent hours scrolling on our phones for no other reason than occupying our minds or numbing our boredom. These experiences teach us that rather than giving us what we truly want, failing to moderate our desires leads to dissatisfaction. As the Catechism states, "The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy" (CCC 2339). Temperance is the virtue that allows us to discover the true peace we long for, to find what truly satisfies. It gives us the freedom to enjoy God's gifts without become slaves to them.

We see many of these dynamics in David's own story. When David ordered his passions toward the good and allowed his reason to direct his behavior, it led to good decisions that blessed his life. Conversely, when he allowed his passions to govern him, it led to a slow slide in chaos, unhappiness, discontentment, and suffering. The virtue of temperance, rather than stifling of our

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desires, allows us to experience God's blessings in their fullness and prevents us allowing our passions to lead us into error, emptiness, and heartbreak.

We want to make choices that allow us to receive the good things of life that truly satisfy, and the virtue of temperance can help us unlock the good life we desire. David's story invites us to consider the importance of this virtue, not just in the big moments of our lives but also in our small, daily choices. Where do we need to practice temperance? And how might it give us more freedom to receive God's blessings and experience the fruits of a well-lived life?

Application: Chastity

Contemporary thinking often misunderstands chastity as the repression of sexual urges and impulses. But the Church teaches that chastity is "the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being" (CCC 2337). Chastity directs our sexual desires toward the good, enabling us to enjoy sex in a way that corresponds with the deepest desires of our hearts. Far from an oppressive "No," it is a resounding "Yes" to the love that we yearn for, the love for which we are made.

Chastity is all about true love, because it enables us to love others for their own sake, not merely

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because of what we get from them or how they make us feel. That is why Saint Pope John Paul II boldly states, “only the chaste man and the chaste woman are capable of true love.”¹ It is only when we are able to exercise self-control with regard our sexual desires and direct them toward the good of the other person that we can experience the full goodness of sexual love.

Tragically, the opposite is also true: without chastity, we cannot love well. Dr. Edward Sri explains,

Men and women without chastity are in a very sad situation: They are not free to love. They may have good intentions and a sincere desire to care for the beloved, but without chastity, love will never flourish for it will not be pure. It will be mixed with a tendency to view the beloved primarily in terms of sexual values. John Paul II explains that without chastity, men and women cannot selflessly love the beloved as a person because the heart is so preoccupied with emotional and sensual pleasure.²

¹ Wojtyla, Karol. *Love and Responsibility*, p. 171.

² Sri, Edward. *Men, Women, and the Mystery of Love*, p. 94.

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We long for love, for closeness, for deep communion with others—these are good desires. Things like pornography, masturbation, sex outside of marriage, sexting, and other immoral sexual behaviors aren’t merely bad because “God said so,” but rather because they steal from the true love that we desire. They offer us a counterfeit version of love that can never satisfy the desires of our hearts. They offer us some sense of pleasure and connection, but one that ultimately falls short of the love, closeness, and union with another that we truly want. Therefore, if we are going to love well, we can’t give into a disordered vision of sexuality. We can’t settle for counterfeit love. Instead, let’s cultivate the virtue of chastity and experience the true love for which we are made.

Unfortunately, we are all too familiar with modern versions of David’s story. Many of us can think of how failures in chastity have affected our own lives and the lives of others. But what if David had chosen to embrace the virtue of chastity instead of giving in to his desires? What if you, or someone in your life, had done the same? How might certain situations have ended differently and for the better? How might inner emptiness, broken hearts, and failed relationships have been prevented?

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Finally, David had a contrite heart and God met him with mercy. He does the same for us. There is no sin we can commit that God cannot redeem. He wants to heal us and invites us to learn from our past sins and mistakes. Even if we have failed in chastity in very serious ways, we are not beyond God's grace. If we turn back to Him, He can "make all things new" in our lives (Rev 21:5). And by growing in the virtue of chastity, we can avoid the heartache that inevitably comes when we misuse our sexuality. But more importantly, we can become free to receive the fullness of sexual love as God intended for us.

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DISCUSSION

1 Sam 26:1-12
 2 Sam 11:1-5
 2 Sam 11:6-17
 2 Sam 12:7-10
 Psalm 51

Discussion guide for your Bible study

01. **Launching Question:** Have you ever done something that felt great in the moment, but wasn't worth the long-term consequences?

Please read aloud:

Most of us have had the experience of succumbing to a disordered desire that leaves us with regret. We eat too much, drink too much, lash out in anger, or spend hours pointlessly scrolling. We have all too often verified what the Catechism teaches us: "Either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy" (CCC 2339).

So how can we avoid being unhappy? One of the key virtues we'll need is the virtue of temperance.

Give a brief introduction to the virtue of temperance (the moral virtue that moderates attractions to pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods). Refer to CCC 1809.

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In the story of David, King of Israel, we see both the beauty of moderation and the destruction that follows when our passions become divorced from what is truly good.

In this chapter, we will study two episodes that require David to be temperate. In the first, David moderates his emotions and directs them toward what was ultimately best for him and honoring to God. In the second, we will see how David fails to moderate his desire for pleasure and how his choices affect him and his relationships.

The first episode dates before David becomes king, when he is in the service of King Saul. At first, King Saul loved David like a son. But over time, Saul begins to feel threatened by David's rising popularity—so much so that he tries to kill David, who is forced to run for his life.

Read 1 Sam 26:1-12

02. **Why might David have been tempted to kill Saul? What reason does David give for not doing so?**

Answer: Though David had been a faithful servant of Saul, winning him battles and expanding his kingdom, Saul came out into the wilderness to hunt and kill him out of envy. David likely had some

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desire to take revenge and preserve his own life. Despite this, David respects Saul's authority as established by God.

Please read aloud:

While Saul never fully overcomes his envy of David, after he realizes that his life was spared, the two are reconciled and Saul wishes blessings upon David (1 Sam 26:9–11). This sets the stage for David to become the king of Israel through legitimate means and with God's timing. The practice of temperance makes David free to receive the fullness of God's blessing and plan for his life.

Often, temperance is misunderstood as a virtue that tells us what we cannot do: Don't drink too much, don't eat too much, don't watch too much television, don't indulge in lustful thoughts or behaviors. And while temperance does require moderating our desires for certain goods, considering it only in this way misses the beauty of this virtue.

03. How does David's story show us that temperance, rightly understood, is not a virtue that limits our freedom, but rather enhances it, allowing us to attain the higher and most fulfilling goods?

Allow the group to discuss.

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Answer: David's story is a great example of a time where temperance allows someone to attain a higher good, namely obedience to God's command and a clean conscience. Because of this, David would not carry the burden of having murdered God's anointed king and eventually come into the throne by legitimate means.

04. What might have happened if David had allowed his anger to rule him, killing Saul when he had the opportunity?

Answer: Not only would David have committed the sin of murder—a weight he would have to carry for the rest of his life, but he would have greatly complicated his own rise to the throne. Division, violence, and generational feuds between the various tribes would have been likely. Despite the strong urge to do so that must have been present, killing Saul would have ultimately been a limiting decision for David.

05. Write an application question on temperance and its fruits. Consider exploring the importance of moderating one's emotions in difficult moments.

Allow the group to discuss.

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Please read aloud:

Years later, David is king of all Israel and has won many victories over his enemies. We find him enjoying the fruits of peace—perhaps too much so.

Read 2 Sam 11:1-5

06. What does David do in this reading?

Answer: David commits adultery with a married woman, Bathsheba, impregnating her.

07. Was committing adultery with Bathsheba David's first mistake, or were there others that led up to it? What might we learn from David's negative example?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Long before his sin with Bathsheba, David remains home when he ought to be out fighting with his armies. Having neglected his duty, David is idle. He naps until late in the day and allows his eyes to wander. For us, it is a powerful reminder that failures to temper our desires in small things—idleness, scrolling, not fulfilling our duties—can lead us toward more serious faults.

Please read aloud:

We'll now see how David's lack of

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temperance leads to a downward spiral, leading him to do things he would have likely considered unimaginable beforehand.

Read 2 Sam 11:6-17

08. How far does David go to cover up his sin?

Answer: To hide his adulterous actions, David first brings Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, home from battle and tries to get him to lie with his wife. Despite multiple attempts, this plan fails, so David orders Uriah's commander to place him on the front line, ensuring his death.

09. Many people portray temperance as abstaining from certain behaviors or desires merely because "God said so." What does David's story reveal about how temperance corresponds not only with God's law but also with what is truly best for us?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: While it's true that we are bound by God's moral law and ought to obey it, situations like this reveal God's fatherly heart in giving us commands. God gives commands for our good. It would have been better for David to abstain from his desire to sleep with Bathsheba

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and avoid becoming a murderer. And it would have been better for Bathsheba to remain faithful to her husband. Intemperance is a sin not only because it offends God, but also because it hurts us, other people and, as we will see, fractures relationships.

Please read aloud:

Let's read about how God responds to David's sin.

Read 2 Sam 12:7-10

10. What are the consequences of David's failure to moderate his passions? In what ways does the punishment "fit the crime?"

Answer: David is told that violence will afflict his own house. This seems appropriate, with God treating David in the same way that David treated Uriah, only with more mercy, for he spares his life (2 Sam 12:14).

Please read aloud:

One specific sub-virtue of temperance that David fails in is called chastity. Chastity is often misunderstood as the repression of sexual urges. But the Church teaches that chastity is "the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being" (CCC 2337).

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Chastity directs our sexual desires toward the good, enabling us to enjoy sex in a way that corresponds with the deepest desires of our hearts.

11. David's attraction to Bathsheba is real. He longs for her and takes great risks to be with her—it might even be tempting to call it romantic. Yet, keeping in mind that love is not passion but "willing the good of another," can David be said to have loved Bathsheba? Why or why not?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: In committing adultery with her, impregnating her, and ultimately murdering her legitimate husband, David cannot be said to have truly loved Bathsheba, despite his sexual attraction to her.

Please read aloud:

David's story emphasizes an important point. Chastity is about true love. It enables us to love others for their own sake, not merely because of what we get from them or how they make us feel. That is why Saint Pope John Paul II boldly states, "only the chaste man and the chaste woman are capable of true love."¹ Because of his lack of chastity, David not only creates a terrible situation for himself, but he also finds himself unable to love well.

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12. What about you? How might the practice of chastity allow you to love more freely? How might it prevent inner emptiness, broken hearts, and failed relationships in your own life?

Optional Alternative:
How do you need to grow in chastity?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

David’s story would go on to end with his repentance and God’s Mercy. When talking about chastity, it is important to remember that God does the same for us. There is no sin we can commit that God cannot redeem. He wants to heal us and invite us to learn from our past sins and mistakes. One of the most beautiful expressions of repentance in the Bible is Psalm 51, written by King David in response to his own sexual sin.

Even if we have failed in chastity in very serious ways, we are not beyond God’s grace. If we turn back to Him, He can “make all things new” in our lives (Rev 21:5). And by growing in the virtue of chastity, we can avoid the heartache that inevitably comes when we misuse our sexuality. But more importantly, we can become free to receive the fullness of sexual love as God intended for us.

Closing Prayer: Read Psalm 51 (as a group)

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