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God's Severe Mercy

2 Samuel 12

It often seems easier to cover up our sin than to confess it. When my son, Chris, was about four years old, he decided to do some pruning in our garden. My wife had carefully planted red and yellow tulips, and they were in full bloom. As we went into the garden to admire them, we couldn't believe our eyes. Every petal had been cut off, and all that was left were the tall, naked stems.

"Christopher James!" I cried out. "What did you do to the tulips?"

"Nothing, daddy," he replied.

"Are you sure?" I countered.

"Uh huh."

"Don't lie to me, Chris. I won't punish you if you tell me the truth."

There was a long pause, and then he said, "Even if I *did* it?"

GROUP DISCUSSION. Why are we tempted to cover up our sin rather than to confess it?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How do you respond when someone confronts you about something you know you've done wrong?

In the previous chapter, David sought desperately to hide what he had done. Then, when David assumes his "problem" is safely behind him,

Nathan appears with a message from God. This chapter gives us a powerful example of God's severe mercy. *Read 2 Samuel 12.*

1. Why do you think Nathan tells David a story rather than confronting him directly about his sin?

2. Why is it so difficult for us to be objective about our own sin?

3. Why is the Lord amazed that David despised both him and his word (vv.7-10)?

4. When we sin, how do we display contempt for God and his Word?

5. How are God's justice and mercy revealed in his decision about David's sin (vv. 10-14)?

6. We normally assume that God disciplines us for our benefit (see Hebrews 12:5-13). Is God's treatment of David an example of beneficial discipline, or is God demanding a penalty for David's sin? Explain.

7. How does David respond to the news that his child is ill (vv. 15-17)?

8. How would you evaluate David's method of pleading with the Lord?

9. After the child dies, how is God's grace again evident in David's life (vv. 23-25)?

10. The author of Hebrews writes: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11). In what ways has God's painful discipline had that effect in your life?

Take time to thank God for his severe mercy in your life. Ask him for grace to see his love and care in the midst of his discipline.

Now or Later

The author of Hebrews tells us we face two options when God disciplines us. Either we can accept his discipline and be healed, or we can resist his discipline and risk a permanent disability: "Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 'Make level paths for your feet,' so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed" (Hebrews 12:12-13). Think of an area in your life where you are experiencing God's discipline. How can you cooperate with him in that healing process?