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The Bible contains so many wonderful stories about people who have done amazing things for God, but it also contains stories of those who really messed up their lives. We might consider this week's story about King David as R-rated, one that many find disturbing to read. Many of us have probably heard the story, but it's a hard story to encounter. I reflected on the story all week, and as I started to write about it at home Friday morning, I looked at a blank computer screen for much of the morning. I found other things to do: take the dogs outside, feed the swans in the pond, search for missing items in the house, get a snack, check my email, pay bills. Anything else but putting words together for this morning.

In the midst of trying to avoid the devastating sin of King David, I thought about how the prophet Nathan approached the issue. He told King David about a rich man who had many sheep and how he had stolen a poor man's one lamb to slaughter to feed a guest. David replied, "That's terrible! How could he think of doing such a thing? He had plenty

of his own sheep. Why did he take the only one from the poor man? The man who stole the sheep should die."

Nathan replied, "You are the man," and suddenly David realized he had been caught in his own despicable act of taking a person who did not belong to him. The king had taken a series of steps that led him down the wrong path. David's first tiny step occurred as he caught a glimpse of a lovely woman taking a ritual purity bath. He found her very beautiful, so he took another step in the wrong direction by sending someone to find out who she was. Upon learning that she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, David took another wrong step by inviting her up to the king's palace, for he knew her husband was gone in the middle of a battle.

These acts by themselves may seem like tiny steps, but after spending the night with Bathsheba, she later informed the king she was pregnant. The story now shifts from the tiny steps that David took to the trauma of Bathsheba, a woman caught in a sexual scandal with a powerful political leader. But

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sadly, we never hear of Bathsheba's experience. The story goes on without telling us how she felt, without describing the violation she experienced. Today's #MeToo movement occurring in our own country echoes the same trauma—those in power who have taken advantage of women who are expected to remain silent. When the spotlight begins to focus on the abuse of those in political or entertainment circles, we see the stories of terror that have been hidden for years. In addition to the exposed stories, countless voices remain suppressed and ignored, just like Bathsheba's voice, for the only words she spoke in the story is "I'm pregnant." We never hear how she feels, about the pain or grief of the abuse she experienced.

The story instead focuses on David as he took steps to cover up the scandal by inviting Uriah to come home from battle to spend the night with his wife, but since Uriah worried about his comrades still in battle, he slept alone outside that night.

David then took another huge step by sending Uriah back to the battle carrying a note for the

commander: "Put Uriah on the front line where the fighting is the worst. Then pull the troops back from him, so that he will be wounded and die."¹ When news arrived that Uriah had died in battle, David brought Bathsheba to the palace to become his wife. Her perspective continues to get ignored in the rest of the story, only being named two more times: once when her son dies and again when David tries to have another child with her.

The cover-up seemed to have worked until Nathan confronted the king by telling a parable about the two men with the sheep. The prophet turned the tables on the king by accusing him of the same action—taking steps toward sin that result in walking down the wrong path.

I imagine we have each taken what feel like tiny steps. They don't seem like much at the time, but eventually we find ourselves walking along a gloomy pathway and wondering how we got there. For example, how many of us use plastic drinking straws? They seem harmless enough, right? Even though we can drink from a cup at home without a

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straw, we've become used to drinking with a straw at a restaurant. Unfortunately, when we dispose of those plastic tubes, we join with others in throwing away more than 500 million plastic straws every day here in the U.S.² Many of those straws, as well as our plastic shopping bags, end up loose in the environment and oceans. Wildlife may ingest them, clogging up their digestive systems. Or as one famous online video showed several years ago, a plastic straw became embedded in a sea turtle's eye.³ Even if we try to recycle the straws, they are too lightweight for the sorting machine, so they often fall through the sorting screen and blow away.

An estimated 71% of seabirds and 30% of turtles have been found with plastics in their stomachs. When they ingest plastic, marine life has a 50% mortality rate.⁴

Taking a sip from a straw seems like such a harmless thing to do, but this tiny step harms many animals who cannot speak for themselves. Next time you need a drink, just say no to straws. Your tiny step may help a sea creature live longer.

During the last few weeks I've been hearing how we humans have taken tiny steps that may have huge consequences for those living twenty years from now. A scientific report from the United Nations panel on climate change has painted a gloomy picture of what our world could be like by 2040 if we don't make some changes. "If greenhouse gas emissions continue at the current rate, the atmosphere will warm up by as much as 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit...above preindustrial levels by 2040,"⁵ resulting in worsening food shortages, wildfires, death of coral reefs, drought, and floods.⁶

Two or three degrees seem like such a small change and may leave us wondering how such a tiny step can lead to such devastation. Those who study the environment have already shown some changes in the melting of polar ice caps, which affects sea levels and weather patterns. Our tiny steps can have huge impacts, even if some leaders choose to ignore the information. In twenty years, some of us may no longer be alive, but many of us will face the voices of our children, grandchildren,

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or great-grandchildren. They may say to our generation, “We told you so. It’s real. The climate has changed. Your actions have affected the world in which we now have to live.”

From the beginning of Genesis when God told the first humans to care for the Earth, to the Psalms that talk about the wonders of God’s creation, the biblical writers respect the creation that God has made and invite us to be caretakers of this wonderful world.

What tiny steps might you be able to make? Think about one tiny step of sin that you have taken and write it on one of the footsteps in the bulletin insert. The recent report on the environment may help you think about the way you treat creation. Or the story of Bathsheba may nudge you to think about how you treat people or how we ignore voices

that need to be heard. Or maybe you have discerned how you need to take better care of yourself.

On the other footprint, write one tiny step in how you can make a difference, in how you can change your life that can impact the world. I invite you to take a few tiny steps by bringing those footprints forward and placing them in the bucket. In doing so, we invite God to journey with us as we take tiny steps toward healing our world and our lives.

Just as God offered forgiveness to David, God offers us a chance to begin again each day. Let’s take tiny steps in accepting God’s forgiveness and healing the world.

¹ 2 Samuel 11:15

² www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/pft/2017/1/3/the-problem-of-plastic-straws-and-how-each-of-us-can-make-a-difference?rq=jackie%20nunez

³ www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/pft/2015/10/27/the-turtle-that-became-the-anti-plastic-straw-poster-child

⁴ <https://www.strawlessocean.org/faq/>

⁵ www.nytimes.com/2018/10/07/climate/ipcc-climate-report-2040.html

⁶ www.cnn.com/2018/10/07/world/climate-change-new-ipcc-report-wxc/index.html