



**TOUCH POINT**

## From Willfulness to Willingness – TouchPoint for July 21, 2021

**2 Samuel 11:1-15** *In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.*

*It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So, David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."*

*So, David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.*

*In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.""*

**1 Peter 5** <sup>6</sup> *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.* <sup>7</sup> *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

<sup>8</sup> *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* <sup>9</sup> *Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

<sup>10</sup> *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.* <sup>11</sup> *To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

**Grace and peace from the mystery in who we live and move and have our being**

A dad and his young son were getting in their car. It was during the days when seatbelts weren't required. They both got in the car and the son was standing on the seat so he could see out of the window. The dad told his son to sit down, but the son refused. Dad repeated, "son, sit down." He still would not sit down.

Finally, he said with a stern voice, “I want you to sit down right now”. The boy saw he was going to be in serious trouble so reluctantly he sat down. After a few minutes of pouting he said, “Dad, I may be sitting on the outside, but I'm standing on the inside!”

This is a good description of what willfulness is. Willfulness isn't necessarily outward disobedience; it can also be a mask of compliance. Disobedience is an outward expression of defiance. Compliance can be simply an appeasement.

What's more important is what lay in the shadows below disobedience and compliance. It is our inward motivations. Unless we have a willingness to see our inward motivations, we will continue to live in the illusions of our willfulness. For David it was the illusion that he had been given power, to take what was not his, then erase the crime and the scene.

It is clear in what follows, he is completely unaware of his condition.

Nathan comes to him with a story about a rich man who takes a poor families' pet lamb and serves it as food for his own guests. The rich man had a herd of his own yet he took theirs. David's disgust for the man's heartless action awakens him to his own behavior. Then Nathan shines a light through the back door of David's willfulness.

That's what kind of happens with our moments of failure and desperation. Those moments can be like the voice of Nathan shining light where we had become closed off.

No one reading this story is unaware of David's terrible wrong. To judge him is easy. But to see beneath the shadows of his willfulness, we see the roots of his act. It is the ego building fruit of his military conquests, his social maneuvers and manufactured privilege. He played with power before he became a powerful player.

We like to say David was a man after god's heart. Perhaps that was his true self and the deepest desire we all have. A desire for God. But our heart can turn toward another god very quickly.

Like David we are all vulnerable to this heart condition. It's genetic! Unless exposed to the light of truth, or have truth spoken to it, it will intensify until great harm is done. That is what plays out in our politics and our institutions. Why? Because they are run by humans.

Willfulness provides shadow for our inward fear-based motivations. Both outward disobedience and compliance can provide shadow better known as blind spots. Like David, enlightenment is the only thing that can bring soulful transformation. It takes willingness to allow light in and show us our inner motivations.

The kind of willingness Jesus was consistently preaching was one that epitomized humility. Not for the sake of looking meek, mild, and accommodating. But the kind that was persistent and determined. Like a rugged adventurer willing to take on physical challenges to eventually reach a place of serenity and contentment. It's about the deepest desire.

When Jesus asked the lame man waiting on his mat to get a turn at the healing waters. Jesus asked him, “What do you want? Do you want to walk?” Another way would have been to say, “Are you open to do this thing another way?”

We go to great lengths, hours of preparation, and map reading to reach a destination where pleasure and peace can be found. Amusement parks, the Grand Canyon, European vacations, beach body workouts. We are willing to go through temporary suffering, to get to long term pleasure.

We also know about wanting to see a good image of what we will look like in public. We get up. We spend a couple hours primping and then stare in the mirror and add many quick once overs before we leave the house. We may even do checks throughout the day with smaller mirrors to make sure things look good. This is exactly how our religious adventures have gone. It's how we look on the outside. To others and even God.

We easily forget what brought us to places of intimacy with our true self. With a truer understanding of god. It usually came in moments of brokenness and desperation. Times when the scaffolds that supported our facades of image began to crumble. *If we were fortunate enough!*

Great men and women, spiritual giants of our time, did not arrive at these places by simply being able to say my father was a minister and my father's father was a minister and so I am an ordained minister. There are many famous TV evangelists, and many not so famous pastors that preach from pulpits passed down but have no experience or desire to wrestle with their false self. They build empires on their own will.

No, the true great spiritual giants, known or unknown of our time, arrived there because their own willfulness was exposed, or they possessed a deep desire to go the journey of exposing themselves to the God who loves them.

I'm not saying to stop looking at yourself in the mirror before you leave the house. Please, please keep doing that! By all means do it once or twice or even 10 times over if necessary! We're all better for it! What I'm saying is that we would never step into public without doing that first in the morning. So what if we did the same thing for our *inner* selves. A check on our willful power maneuvers and motivations.

As I said before we are haunted by three demons. The three needs tapping us on the shoulder saying they want to be paid attention to.

They are the markers of willfulness: the need to be right, the need to be enough, and the need to be in power. I think all our social structures that are in chaos right now can be traced back to this willful pride of the need to be right, need to be enough, and the need to be in control.

As i go through the book *Breathing Under Water* with the book club, which will have its second gathering on July 22nd by the way. I'm reminded that step 3 says,

*"We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of god as we understood god."*

Turn our will over could be described as a completely giving of my will but i don't think we can totally give our will. Then we would remove the will to turn our will over. I look at it is as a flipping of the will. It's moving from a willfulness into a willingness and giving God something to work with. Like with the disciples, it was the fish and the loaves handed to Jesus. Only five loaves and two fish! But plenty enough in God's hands when it's given over. We just need to turn it over.

Whether it is having the humility to illumine the blind spots in my life or it is giving to God the mess we've made, when surrendered it's something for God to work with. In my hands, in David's hands the story is a mess. David simply compounded that mess by trying in his willfulness to change the condition that his condition was in. Hoping he could evade exposure, he eventually needed a visit from Nathan and hear his

prophetic voice. You see it's about him, not about the circumstances he created. Morality says it's about our deeds. Spirituality and love say it's about the motivation that caused us to do the deeds. Unless our willfulness flips into a willingness, we will never have intimacy with anyone or with our God.

Willfulness protects us from our insecurities and our inadequacy's. Protects us from exposing our inadequacies and insecurities. It protects us from what caused our insecurities and inadequacy's whether it was childhood trauma or simply bad beliefs about ourselves. Willingness brags about failures and insecurities and draws us into being more wonderfully human and connected. Willfulness is sponsored by fear. Willingness is sponsored by courage. Willfulness shrinks life and love. Willingness expands our capacity for love and for life. Willfulness causes long term suffering. Willingness causes temporary suffering.

Why does it take so long to come to a place of willingness why does it seem to take so long to come to the end of our own efforts?

Lutheran minister and hymn writer Albert Ebert says,

*“Self-knowledge is tied with inner work, which is both demanding and painful. Change occurs amid birth pangs. It takes courage to walk such a path. Many avoid the path of self-knowledge because they are afraid of being swallowed up in their own abysses. But Christians have confidence that Christ has lived through all the abysses of human life and that he goes with us when we dare to engage in such confrontation with ourselves.”*

We must allow compassion to be our companion as we begin to understand not only our condition, but the human condition. It is the downside to being created in god's image that we have such great capacity for making change in ourselves and in the world. But initially we don't want to look at our blind spots. We would rather think that we are god. As someone so perfectly said, “God created us in his image and then we returned the favor.”

Willingness allows us to be co-laborers with a power that is greater than ourselves. It is the, *God causing* of all things to work together in Romans 8:28! In Greek it's called *synergeo*. My willingness combined with God's power.

Why wouldn't we want to participate in such a great partnership! It is this understanding, this awakening, that helps us understand the great paradoxes of spiritual life. Because it is that power which is greater than me which is enabling me in a partnership to do that which I was unable to do.

That's why the contemplative life is so essential. It is allowing spirit to hold a mirror so i can see those places of willfulness that are motivated by fear. Then i become emotionally receptive to that which i cannot force to have happen on my own. Some have given themselves in self -sacrifice in hopes that they will achieve the thing they longed for perhaps unconditional love or to be liked, loved, noticed, applauded. We all long to feel connected and to belong. We think if we practice religious devotion in the church, we might please god and earn favor.

To surrender my willfulness and allow it to flip into a willingness is an ongoing experience. Just like checking myself out in the mirror in the morning and throughout the day. Like an addict or alcoholic in recovery, we allow peers to be our prophets, our Nathan, a light for our blind spots. The devil is prowling around like a roaring lion trying to devour us, but we need not take it literally. It is simply many annoying voices, with no real power. But none louder than the voice inside of us that says, “You got this! You don't

need to worry anymore you're sober. You've got Jesus you don't need humility, you're good to go. Now change everyone else!"

It's the voice inside of us that says that we need to take control once again. That we need to do things better and to be enough. *That* is the one that prowls. The ego that always wants to take cuts in front of our honesty and humility.

I will close with this scripture as our ultimate blessing and charge to open the adventure of willingness.

*I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of god.*

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.*

**Amen.**

# **Spirit in the Desert**

## **Opening Songs**

### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

### **You Lord Are In This Place**

(Keith Duke)

You Lord are in 1)...this place.  
2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.  
Your presence fills it.  
Your presence is peace.

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Inpoured Spirit**

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd.)

Inpoured Spirit, deep and still.  
Love eternal, the world to fill.

## **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

(Taize Reflections)

## **Benediction**

### **Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace**

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.  
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.  
Deep peace of Christ to you.

