

Every year the motion picture industry gives out some awards called “Oscars.”

There are Oscars for Best Picture. Best Director. Best Actor and Actress.
And so on.

One that interests me especially is for “Best Supporting Actor.”

A “supporting actor” has a lesser role, but he’s still important, because he can highlight the main character and even improve his performance.

A Bible story that has inspired at least one movie is the story of King David.

It features a complex plot-line,
lots of action,
and memorable characters.

If Oscars were to be given out to the characters in this story,
David himself would be the “Best Actor.”

But there’s another character whose role fascinates me,
about whom I’d like to preach to you today...

a man who, though he appears seldom in the story, plays a crucial role.

He helped David make a mid-course correction, and possibly saved
him eternally.

For “Best supporting actor,” I nominate Nathan, the prophet.

Nathan makes three appearances in David’s story.

The **FIRST** is when David is contemplating building the **TEMPLE**.

“NO!” said Nathan. “You are not the one to build it.”
He then goes on to reveal God’s astonishing promise that
David’s dynasty will last forever.

The **THIRD** is when David is dying, and a successor must be chosen from
among his many sons.

Nathan helps persuade David to select **SOLOMON** – and David heeds
the prophet’s advice.

But the SECOND appearance is the most memorable of the three.
It is the most urgent, and the most dangerous for Nathan, for he
literally took his life in his hands that day.

The story unfolds in 2 Samuel.

David has stumbled into horrible wickedness.

He has seen a beautiful woman bathing on a rooftop.
She is Bathsheba, the wife of one of his army captains.
He has seduced her, gotten her pregnant,
and then murdered her husband to cover it up.

He appears to be a kindly benefactor who has take this grieving widow under
his wing to care for her in her time of distress!

Whereupon God dispatches Nathan to confront the King and rebuke him.

READ THE TEXT

What an assignment for Nathan!

Go unbidden to stand before the king.
Tell him his sins. Call him an adulterer and a murderer who has despised God.
Then announce the punishment – including the death of the child!

Can you imagine how Nathan must have felt?

Maybe like the GIs headed for the deadly beaches of Normandy, and all the waiting
German guns...

or like the trembling Christians dispatched to meet hungry lions in the
Coliseum!

But Nathan did not balk.

He went. He took his life in his hands.
He stood before the King, that lion of a man, pointed a trembling finger,
and spoke the judgment of God:

“YOU ARE THE MAN!”

I nominate Nathan, first, because of his COURAGE!

But he had another quality too – one that enabled David to listen to his terrible words, take them to heart, and finally CONFESS HIS SIN.

Nathan had WISDOM.

He chose his words carefully. Framed them in such a way that the TRUTH could be inserted into David's heart before David realized it.

My dentist in Vancouver used a similar tactic with me.

I had told him that I had a low threshold for pain – that I feared the needle.

So he adopted a sneaky tactic.

He had me close my eyes, whereupon he grasped my lip and gave it a shake. I did not notice until afterward that he had deftly inserted the needle into my gum while I was distracted!

Nathan did that to David. He grabbed hold of his attention with a pathetic story about a RICH MAN who took and butchered a POOR MAN'S LAMB.

David's attention was focused on that heartless man. His anger rose. He pronounced JUDGMENT!

Only when the story was finished and the sentence pronounced did David realize that Nathan had inserted the needle into his own heart....

“YOU ARE THE MAN!”

God's Word and Nathan's wisdom led to an astonishing result.

The king bowed his head and quietly confessed:

“I have sinned against the Lord.”

David is broken. His spirit humbled.

And now Nathan speaks his most important line:

“The Lord has put away your sin.”

In that moment the AGENT OF JUDGMENT becomes the SPOKESMAN OF GOD'S GRACE.

I didn't tell you earlier, but the name “Nathan” means “Gift.”

Nathan is God's GIFT to David,

bringing the two words a sinner needs most to hear:

The Word of LAW to bring him to repentance
and
The Word of GRACE – to comfort and forgive.

Every sinner needs a NATHAN!

You do! So do I! For we are no better than David.

If our sins are not as spectacular, they are no less deadly.

Like David, we COVER THEM UP
so that no one would guess by looking what has gone wrong in our lives.

But God knows, so He sends a “Nathan” to us.

WHO IS THE NATHAN IN YOUR LIFE?

Is it the pastor...
who preaches a sermon that, as some say, “hit me between the eyes”
or calls us on the phone at an eerily coincidental moment?

Perhaps the Nathan is someone even closer:
a co-worker who corners us in the parking lot and asks, “What’s up with you
these days?”
or a spouse who finally erupts in anger or tears, pleading for you to change
your ways...
or a child who looks at us with wide eyes, begging for our attention.

And if we will not listen to any of those people, God may send a “printed Nathan” -
a passage of Scripture that arrests us
or a reading from a book or pamphlet that gives us a lump in the throat and
needles us about our sin.

How do you react to the Nathans who come to you?

Do you resent the pastor’s inquiry, saying “Why do you keep pestering me?
I don’t like to be pushed!”

Do you brush aside your spouse? “Quit your nagging!” Ignore your child?
Change the subject with your co-worker?

Or will you do as David did. Bow your head, leave the excuses behind, and
make a simple confession:

“I have sinned against the Lord”?

“Nathan” means “GIFT.”

Shall we not rather accept the NATHANS God sends as gifts of mercy
to bring us to our senses before it is too late...

so that we can open our hearts to hear the pardoning word
“The Lord has put away your sin!”

For He HAS!

Jesus paid your debt. Bled and died for you.
Lifted that heavy burden you’ve tried to carry by yourself.
Entered your death, your grave, and came out again alive!

In the book Pilgrim’s Progress is a scene in which Pilgrim,
struggling along with a heavy bundle of sins on his back, comes
to the mouth of Christ’s empty tomb.

The bundle suddenly slides from his shoulders and rolls into the tomb,
never to be seen again!

“Come unto me,” says Jesus, “all you who labor and are heavy-laden,
and I will give you REST!”

Thank God for the Nathans who tell us that comforting word, who show us
Jesus, the crucified and Risen One, the Burden-lifter!

Now let me turn it completely around:
WOULD GOD HAVE YOU BE A NATHAN?

Every sinner needs one.

That includes your spouse, your child,
your teammates
your boss
and yes, your PASTOR too!

Each one of these people sins,
and each finally needs some word from God to bring him to repentance
so that he may find peace.

If not you, WHO? If not now, WHEN?

It happened to me one evening. I phoned a woman who had been missing from church for a long time. I was thinking of myself as her “Nathan.”

In the midst of our talk, she plucked up courage and said to me,
“Pastor, I have a hard time coming back because you intimidate me by your confrontive manner.”

Though it was fearful for her, she dared to be a “Nathan” to me,
and through her God taught me that I needed to be gentler,
more compassionate.

It’s hard to be a Nathan!

It requires courage. And a generous helping of WISDOM.

It means that we must speak honestly about uncomfortable things.
But in the end, it allows us to speak helpfully of Jesus Christ
and His grace to one another.

That’s the best supporting action you can give. King David would tell you that.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

