

We've been looking at the second half of David's life. David is a very important figure in the Bible, mentioned over 1000 times. Remember, David was the second King of Israel. He was born around 1000 BC and became king when he was 30 and reigned 40 years. Jesus was called "the Son of David" because he was part of David's family tree, and the Messiah had to come from that royal lineage.

Last week, we saw how at the height of his power, David fell into the twin sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. God confronted him through the prophet Nathan, telling him as a result of his sin, *"the sword will never depart from your house"* (2 Sam. 12:10). In the chapters following, we see how this played out. It played out in the most sensitive area of David's life — his relationship with his children. We'll see how an unspeakable thing happened to one of his daughters, and how he also lost two of his sons

I can't imagine anything more agonizing than the loss of a son or daughter. I don't know of any parent who doesn't live with a degree of fear that they'll have to experience that. Whether it be a physical loss through death or an emotional loss through rejection and rebellion, few things can hurt us like that. The fear of such hurt keeps many from entering the ranks of parenthood today. Why expose oneself to the possibility of such pain? I don't agree with the reasoning, but it's a fair question to ask.

We are going to see an ancient example of a father in pain over a lost son. We'll see what might lead to such an experience; what it feels like; and how to pull our lives back together to continue on. The story is told in 2 Sam 13-18. Let me give an overview of what happened.

### **Amnon rapes Tamar; David does nothing**

First, David's son, Amnon, was smitten by his half-sister, Tamar. And much like David "took" Bathsheba, Amnon took Tamar and in fact raped her. How will David respond to this sickening act? 2 Samuel 13:21 says, *"When King David heard all this, he was furious."* Now that's a good start. He's angry. He's furious. But it ended there. What he needed to do was confront and discipline Amnon. Then he needed to console and help Tamar. He needed to make sure this didn't happen again. But he did nothing! The original Hebrew said he didn't reprimand Amnon because he loved him as his firstborn son. Add to that his own guilt over what he'd done with Bathsheba, and his loss of moral authority. David was furious but frozen.

### **Amnon is murdered by Absalom**

Meanwhile, one of David's other son's, Absalom, heard what happened to his sister, Tamar. It says, *"Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar"* (13:22). For two years Absalom seethed over what Amnon did, and finally, when the opportunity arose, he had him killed, just like David had Uriah killed.

### **Absalom is exiled by David**

Absalom knew his father would be upset, so he fled north to an area called Geshur and stayed there for three years. How would David handle that? The text says, *"The spirit of the King longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon's death"* (13:38). David longed to see him, but again he did nothing about it.

Joab, one of David's generals, knew David wanted Absalom to come back home. So, he employed a woman to convince David to allow Absalom to return. She told David, God *"devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him"* (14:14). David knew that. God had forgiven him. God had allowed him not to remain banished. So, David agreed and told Joab, *"Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom"* (14:21). Joab went and told Absalom his father wanted him to return. This had to give Absalom a lot of relief and even joy. He probably thought, *"My dad wants me home. Maybe he's finally forgiven me. maybe we can have a relationship."*

Absalom went back to Jerusalem, but David still refused to see him. David told Joab, *"He must go to his own house; he must not see my face"* (14:24). He held onto his bitterness, and Absalom didn't see his dad for two years. Jerusalem wasn't a big city. It was only a couple of square miles. They lived in the same, small city, but David avoided his son. Why? He was still angry, still bitter. He was still avoiding dealing with the issues. Absalom's thought, *"Why did I even bother coming home?"* David didn't want to make amends with Absalom because that meant facing the past. He wouldn't do that. He was frozen.

Finally, Joab convinced David to meet with Absalom. It says, *"Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom"* (14:33). David still didn't address the issues. He just tried to cover it all over with a kiss. David could have said, *"Absalom, let's come clean with each other. We've both done things we shouldn't have. I should have defended Tamar. You shouldn't have killed*

Amnon. Let's work this out." But he just kissed him. Absalom went away and became angrier, more bitter, and resentful. All he wanted was acceptance, forgiveness, and his father's love.

It's too bad David didn't hear a story told years later by one of his descendants named Jesus. Jesus told a story about a rebellious son who ran to a far country, lived a life of self-indulgence, disgraced his family, and finally returned to his father's house empty-handed. Even though his son had done terrible things, the father never quit looking for him, longing to welcome him home. When he did come home, the father ran to embrace and welcomed him with a huge banquet. What if David had been that father? The father would have again had a son, and the son a father.

### **David is exiled by Absalom**

But instead things got worse. Four years later, Absalom stole the throne right from under his father's nose. For four years he touted himself as the defender of justice. The text says, "...he stole the hearts of the people of Israel" (15:6). David was forced to flee from Jerusalem, knowing his own angry son would soon be entering the city and seeking his life. It was an emotional scene. The text says, "David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up" (15:30). He was taunted as he left the city. Many of his loyal supporters betrayed him and supported Absalom, who proceeded to enter Jerusalem and publicly violated his father's concubines. Meanwhile, David was banished and back in the wilderness where, as a young man, he often took refuge from Saul, his predecessor.

This was an important time for David. It was a time of surrender not so much to Absalom but to God. As he walked out of the city, he said, "If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him" (15:25-26). Do you see the surrender? Then, when David was told his most trusted adviser, Ahithophel, betrayed him, David prayed, "Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness" (15:31). Again, he depended on God. In fact, Psalm 3 was written during this time.

**Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. vv. 1-4**

You see, God's discipline was doing its work in David's life. David put his life in God's hands.

### **David hears of Absalom's death**

But David's troubles were not over. In 2 Samuel 17-18, a civil war took place between David's troops and Absalom's troops. In this

encounter, Absalom was killed by Joab, despite the fact David gave explicit orders to bring his son back alive. This is the third of David's son to die. First, it was the baby boy born to Bathsheba, then Amnon, and now Absalom.

With Absalom dead and his troops defeated, someone had to report the news to David--not an easy job. I can see David pacing back and forth, waiting as fathers and mothers do with a son in combat, fearing what that news might be. As David waited, two men come to tell him what had happened. They must have been torn. On the one hand, they wanted to say, "We won! The enemy is defeated! The throne is back in your hands! You can return to Jerusalem!" But on the other hand, they had to deliver the news that his son was dead.

What was uppermost in David's mind wasn't the outcome of the battle, but the condition of his son. David asked one of the messengers what happened to his son, "*Is the young man Absalom safe?*" (18:32) The man replied, "*May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man*" (18:32). These were cold, hard words. No name was given. Nothing was said about this being David's son. He was just another of the king's enemies. There are certain moments in our lives when time freezes; words are spoken we never forget. This was that moment for David.

### **David's grieves over Absalom**

In the original Hebrew Bible, the chapter ended with verse 32. This gave the reader a chance to pause and consider how David would respond. David might have been torn between two roles here, as we sometimes are. He was both king and father. As king, he had the realities of his job and nation to think about, but as a father, he had his son to think about. As far as his job was concerned, things looked good. He retained the throne. But, as a father, things couldn't have been worse. Who was David? Was he more king than father or more father than King?

All we have to do is read the next verse to answer that question,

**"The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!" (18:33).**

David was heartbroken. He shuffled to his private chamber where an aching, wailing cry of anguish echoed for all to hear. Five times he said, "my son!" Three times he cried, "Absalom," as if to bring him back from the dead.

What was going on in David's mind right now? What kinds of thoughts and feelings were in that anguished cry? If we are ever confronted with the same reality, a son or daughter who dies or even strays, what can we expect to feel? Implicit in David's cry were three things.

First of all, there was the remorse. Part of what David felt was the remorse for his own failings as a father. As godly a man as David was, he'd made some serious blunders. He was a great saint, but also a great sinner. As parents, we know how critical modeling is, we know how much our kids pick up in between the lines of our lectures. David knew it too, and he felt remorse because he was a poor model.

He was also a passive disciplinarian. He failed to confront and deal with the rebellion in his sons. After Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar, David got angry but never confronted or disciplined his son. Like all passive fathers, David was a conflict avoider, and that's at least part of where his remorse came from.

David also felt remorse because as a father, he failed to communicate his feelings. He'd allowed long stretches of time to pass where he refused to reach out to his son. He longed to see his son, but he never expressed that to him. And then he brought him back but shut him out. He regretted that now. He was an inconsistent model, a passive disciplinarian, and a poor communicator. And at this moment in time, when he heard of Absalom's fate, all his failure as a parent hit him.

Another thing wrapped up in this cry of grief was disappointment. All the hopes he had for Absalom were dead. He was a young man full of potential. Although he was the fourth son, he was the logical choice to be the next king. He was known for his long hair, which was a symbol of strength and virility in those days. He had an impressive family: three sons and a beautiful daughter. He had everything going for him. He was David's pride and joy. I have a feeling David, like many dads, got far too caught up in his son's outward success. So, when David heard the news of his death, his dream for Absalom died, and the disappointment he felt was overwhelming. Every parent has dreams for their kids. Part of the fun of watching kids grow older is seeing some of those dreams fulfilled. It's disappointing to watch those dreams die.

There was one more thing in this cry — perplexity. This was a cry to God of perplexed faith. He's perplexed over the seeming unfairness of it all. Notice he said, "O Absalom! If only I had died instead of you." He was thinking, "It should have been me, Lord. Why have you been so merciful to me and yet so hard on Absalom?" We wonder, why does the Lord allow our kids to make choices that end in pain? Why does he allow people to come into their lives who influence them the wrong way? Why does He allow events that result in tragedy? Why them and not me? When we see our kids suffer, it's normal to be perplexed.

### **David Moves Forward**

The amazing thing is David was able to move forward. He was a father first, but he was also able to resume his duties as king. In chapter 19, Joab came to David and said in essence, "Life must go on David. You have a whole army who've risked their necks for

you. They need your affirmation. You owe it to them to go and take your rightful place as king."

David realized that despite his grief, there were still people counting on him. Sometimes we need a good word from a Joab to turn us in the direction of those who aren't lost. So, David pulled out of his emotional nose dive and took his place as king. Once again, the throne was securely in his hands, but he was a different man: humbled, broken, and dependent.

I believe all of this constituted a very painful reroute in David's life, as a man, but especially as a father. In a strange way, David was both being disciplined by God and delivered by God. I want to take a few minutes and reflect on what we might learn from this as it relates to our own lives as parents and as followers of Jesus.

### **What we can learn from David's loss**

#### **First of all, as a parent, continue to fight the good fight.**

Fight to be a consistent model. You will blow it, and when you do, admit it and move on. Don't let your own failings render you powerless. You'll make some mistakes, but you're still in charge.

Fight passivity also. Deal with rebellion when it happens. It's interesting, one of David's surviving sons was Solomon, who wrote the book of Proverbs, which talks a lot about the need to discipline our children. I wonder if that was because Solomon watched how his dad's passivity impacted their family. Solomon wrote, "*He who spares the rod hates his children, but the one who loves his children is careful to discipline them*" (Prov. 13:24). The motive behind discipline is love. It says the one who doesn't discipline his child hates him. God's word has a different view of discipline than we often do. Many say the reason they don't discipline their children is they love them too much to hurt them, but this says the parent who won't hurt his child harms him.

Fight also to keep the lines of communication open. Keep short accounts. Don't allow past wrongs suffered to lie as open, untreated wounds. Time does not heal all wounds. Be willing to have hard conversations. Communicate your disappointment, but also your love. This is especially important during adolescence when communication can break down.

#### **Second, when you forgive, forgive completely. For three years,**

David longed to reach out to his son but didn't. Then when Absalom finally came home, he still wouldn't see him for two more years. He let his son come back but built an emotional wall. Why couldn't David let it go? His son was dying for love! The answer was pride. Pride kept him from letting the past go and embracing Absalom. This is a powerful reminder to get over our pride and reach out to our sons and daughters who might have done some very hurtful things to us. I'm not saying you sweep it all under the rug. You deal with it but then refuse to allow your

hurt feelings and wounded pride to simmer. When forgiveness is sought, give it freely and fully. Don't allow past wrongs to lie long as open, untreated wounds. They don't just go away in time.

### **Third, understand there are forces at work in your children's lives you can't control.**

Yes, David made a lot of mistakes, but what happened to Absalom wasn't all David's fault. There were decisions made by Absalom, which David couldn't control. Wouldn't it be nice if we could follow a nice script and be guaranteed to have successful, church-going, God-loving kids? But we have no such thing. Instead, we have the risky business of parenting in a sinful world where bad things happen, and God doesn't always cooperate with our agenda. When we choose to be a parent, we make a decision for both joy and sorrow. Usually, the joy outweighs the sorrow, but not always. And like David, when we experience sorrow as a parent, it can eclipse every other area of our lives that may be going well.

Finally, it's possible to move forward after the devastation of a lost child. Your life will never be the same, you never get over it, but you can move forward. To do that you'll need two things: forgiveness and friendship. To move on from your remorse, you'll have to forgive yourself for your own failings. To move on from your disappointment, you'll have to forgive that son or daughter who made such poor choices. And to move on from your perplexity, you may even have to forgive God who didn't stop it from all happening when he could have. Not only will you need forgiveness, you'll also need friendship. A friend to help you when you need it.

The truth is, God uses all of this to shape and mold us into the people he wants us to be. Without the crucible of painful parenting, David would have never written a Psalm 3. I wish it was easier. I wish we didn't have to go through the pain. But we need to remember in all of this our Father in heaven is training and disciplining us, not for evil but for good. Under his hand, we become softer, more humble, and gracious people than before.

John White, who wrote a fine book called *Parents in Pain*, said this after years of parenting a son who went astray:

**"If we had our lives to live over again, we'd not have it different. For in months and years of darkness, we learned lessons we could never have learned in the light. Our souls have been stretched, so they now have a capacity for both joy and suffering they never had before. The pain that could have**

**shriveled and embittered us has made us stronger, more alive."**

But let's look beyond parenting for a moment. In a strange way, we see in this whole story both the Lord's discipline and the Lord's deliverance. God disciplined David while he delivered him. David was being chastised, but at the same time, God was delivering him from his enemies, restoring him to the throne, and most of all, restoring him to himself. God may be doing that in your life right now. Maybe you're experiencing the Lord's discipline, and that's hard; that's painful. But know that God's discipline is for your deliverance. Hebrews says, *"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).

Somehow, in all of this, I can't help but think of Jesus. Like David, Jesus walked up the Mt. of Olives, weeping as he went, knowing the cross meant both painful discipline and joyous deliverance. The discipline was for our sin as the weight of the world's guilt was placed on his back. The deliverance was for our freedom as we receive forgiveness and the joy of reconciliation with the Father. Isaiah put it this way,

**"But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed." Isaiah 53:5**

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No. 1436-5FC

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This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, July 7, 2019 at Central Peninsula Church.

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