

# No Longer My Son?

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

August 30, 2009

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2 Samuel 13:23-36 (NRSV)

<sup>23</sup> After two full years Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king's sons. <sup>24</sup> Absalom came to the king, and said, "Your servant has sheepshearers; will the king and his servants please go with your servant?" <sup>25</sup> But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, let us not all go, or else we will be burdensome to you." He pressed him, but he would not go but gave him his blessing. <sup>26</sup> Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us." The king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" <sup>27</sup> But Absalom pressed him until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him. Absalom made a feast like a king's feast. <sup>28</sup> Then Absalom commanded his servants, "Watch when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not be afraid; have I not myself commanded you? Be courageous and valiant." <sup>29</sup> So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons rose, and each mounted his mule and fled.

<sup>30</sup> While they were on the way, the report came to David that Absalom had killed all the king's sons, and not one of them was left. <sup>31</sup> The king rose, tore his garments, and lay on the ground; and all his servants who were standing by tore their garments. <sup>32</sup> But Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah, said, "Let not my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men the king's sons; Amnon alone is dead. This has been determined by Absalom from the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. <sup>33</sup> Now therefore, do not let my lord the king take it to heart, as if all the king's sons were dead; for Amnon alone is dead."

<sup>34</sup> But Absalom fled. When the young man who kept watch looked up, he saw many people coming from the Horonaim road by the side of the mountain. <sup>35</sup> Jonadab said to the king, "See, the king's sons have come; as your servant said, so it has come about." <sup>36</sup> As soon as he had finished speaking, the king's sons arrived, and raised their voices and wept; and the king and all his servants also wept very bitterly.

2 Samuel 14:28-33 (NRSV)

<sup>28</sup> So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. <sup>29</sup> Then Absalom sent for Joab to send him to the king; but Joab would not come to him. He sent a second time, but Joab would not come. <sup>30</sup> Then he said to his servants, "Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. <sup>31</sup> Then Joab rose and went to Absalom at his house, and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" <sup>32</sup> Absalom answered Joab, "Look, I sent word to you: Come here, that I may send you to the king with the question, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.' Now let me go into the king's presence; if there is guilt in me, let him kill me!" <sup>33</sup> Then Joab went to the king and told him; and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom.

*Families can be difficult. Dysfunction often abounds.*

*Yet we all know, or at least would like to know, the joy of a loving family. After his taking of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, David experiences the bitter consequences of his choices on his own family.*

Few aspects of life display our need for reconciliation with God and one another more than estrangement within families. I'm not talking about siblings who have different interests and go different directions. I'm not even talking about family members who struggle with addiction in many forms and its consequences. Rather, I have in mind siblings and parents who nurture past hurts, who withhold any real forgiveness or grace, who pounce on every possible slight . . . who may profess love, but don't show it. Blood may be thicker than water; but love is thicker than blood . . . much thicker. Sadly, David discovers that estrangement within his own family is the least of his problems.

## Consequences

Looking back to last week's study, you'll recall that there was no romance in the story of David and Bathsheba. She was a married woman whom David saw bathing on her rooftop. He wanted her and, being king, he ordered his guards to fetch her. He took her and then sent her away. When Bathsheba turned up pregnant, David tried to cover-up his rape, going so far as to arrange the murder of her husband, Uriah, a distinguished commander in David's army.

Though David is God's anointed, God tells him that the violence he has perpetrated in secret on Uriah's household will now come upon David's household, for all Israel to see.

### Absalom's Rebellion

For years, King David had been tormented by his son, Absalom. The lust and violence that David brought into his own household had borne evil fruit among his sons.

The self-inflicted family tragedies had led to the unimaginable. Though he had returned to Jerusalem, Absalom was never truly welcomed by his father. He then worked for four years, building support, diminishing his father, all leading to open rebellion. Absalom raised an army and seized his father's David's throne.

David's prayers (his psalms) reveal that he understood well the depth of his own sin and the consequences that would flow from it, only deepening the pain he felt at Absalom's rebellion. He knew that his own hands were dirty in all this.

Though David has to flee Jerusalem when the rebellion is launched, he marshals his loyal forces, setting up a climactic battle. Before the battle, David gives explicit orders that Absalom is not be harmed. Nonetheless, after Absalom gets stuck in a tree, Joab, David's commander, seizes on Absalom's vulnerability and kills him. As David anxiously awaits word of the battle's outcome, runners arrive to tell him of his victory, but also of Absalom's death. They don't tell him how his son died.

David's grief is without bounds. He is inconsolable, pouring out his heart with the famous words, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Surely, David's grief was compounded by his guilt.

Through it all, God remained faithful to David and his family. They would reap the consequences of their sins, but God would not cut them loose. David, this man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14) was capable of committing terrible wrongs, but none placed him outside the power of God's grace. In David's story, we again see that God is the God of not just a second chance, but of many chances.

David would marry Bathsheba, though their first child died in infancy. Their second child, Solomon, would go on to be David's successor. But David also had other wives and other children, an assortment of half- and full-siblings. Some of them were born before David's self-indulgent violence against Bathsheba. See 2 Samuel 3:2-5 and 5:13-16 for partial lists of them. We get the names of the sons, but not the daughters.

David's oldest son was named Amnon. David had another son, Absalom, who had a full-sister by the name of Tamar. Amnon secretly lusted for his half-sister, Tamar, and schemed to get her alone. When he succeeded, he raped Tamar and sent her quickly away. But she did not go quietly and soon the entire palace knew what Amnon had done.

Absalom was, of course, outraged by Amnon's rape of Tamar and expected their father, the king, to punish him. But David did not, because "he loved him [Amnon], for he was his firstborn" (2 Sam. 13:21). But, not surprisingly, Absalom now hated Amnon.

Absalom bided his time for two years, but then wreaked his vengeance on Amnon, having him killed at a large banquet. Absalom fled and sought the protection of his maternal grandfather, the king of Geshur. He stayed there three years and we are told that "the heart of the king (David) went out, yearning for Absalom; for he was now consoled over the death of Amnon" (2 Sam. 13:39).

Try to put yourself in David's place. His life was once on an ever upward trajectory. The hero who defeated Goliath. God's anointed. The one from whose household the king of Israel would forever come.

Yet, in unthinking lust, he had taken

Bathsheba and then arranged the murder of her husband. Without considering the consequences, David had brought violence and murder into his own house. What sort of example had he set for his sons? What had he taught them about the privileges of royal power and of its abuse? Could he have been surprised that one son had also “taken” the woman for whom he lusted? Did David not realize that there would be dire consequences from ignoring Amnon’s crime? Could he not see that Absalom’s murder of Amnon was foreshadowed by David’s own murder of Uriah?

Joab, David’s trusted commander, knew that the king was still focused on Absalom and arranged for Absalom’s return to Jerusalem. He got the king to agree to the return, but David would not agree to meet his son and that is how it stayed for two years. Absalom back in Jerusalem . . . his father refusing to see him. Was he even still David’s son?

After two years had passed, Absalom persuaded Joab to approach the king on his behalf and present this question: “Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.” David relented and agreed to meet with his son. The writer of 2 Samuel depicted the reunion this way: “So he came to the king and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom.” Absalom comes in submission and the king receives him with a public welcoming kiss. This is an act of royal protocol and we search for something here of warmth and forgiveness. But the description is terse. David is referred to only as the “king.” No words are spoken. Where is the open-armed embrace of a father’s favorite son? This welcome home contrasts with the welcoming father of Jesus’ parable about a prodigal son (Luke 15), in which the father picks up the hem of his garment and runs to grab and embrace his wayward son.

When I read the account of David and Absalom, I’m left with the thought that David missed an opportunity for an outpouring of grace that might have broken this family’s cycle of violence. David would soon wish that he had found another way forward. The guilt of both father and son would live on. Absalom’s treachery will now be visited upon his own father as he tries to seize David’s throne (see the page two textbox).

#### *Being grace-givers*

John Donne famously wrote, “No man is an island.” We are bound to others whether we like it or not. David’s impulsive abuse of his royal power in his taking of Bathsheba put himself and his family on a long downward path into ever-deepening violence that took many years to unfold. In the same way, our actions, for good or ill, have long-lasting consequences for our own families. Violence begets violence. Abuse begets abuse. Lies beget lies . . . and love begets love.

So often in the biblical stories we look for some outpouring of grace and find none. Michal berates her husband, David, when he brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. David extends only an official “welcome” to the son he first refused to punish and then refuses to forgive.

We too are quick to seek forgiveness, to ask for some grace, but so stingy when it comes to being the grace-giver. If we claim to love those in our families with whom we are estranged, we need to be the first to extend some grace, knowing full well that we are in need of grace and forgiveness in these relationships. What if Michal had welcomed David with open arms? What if David had welcomed Absalom as a prodigal son? What if we set aside our pride, our need to repay hurts, our fear of being taken advantage of . . . and simply forgave and asked for forgiveness. What if we became grace-givers, not just grace-neederers? What if we became more like Jesus?

# Encounter

*a time for fellowship, worship, and learning*

Are you ready for a life with God that makes a real difference? Would you like to develop a passion for Scripture? Would you like to make new friends in a casual, Christian setting? The time has come . . . **Encounter** is coming to St. Andrew, beginning September 9 at 6:45 in Wesley Hall.

Featuring the music of Jodi Wright, the teaching of Scott Engle, and the pastoral leadership of Rev. Steve Robertson, **Encounter** will be a Wednesday evening time for connecting with God, his word, and one another. Each week, we'll worship together with fresh and engaging music. We'll encounter God's word in an innovative time of teaching and preaching, beginning with the Gospel of Mark. We'll make new friends and share our joys and concerns. Each week . . . Every week.

We'll be offering a children's program, as well as childcare for the littlest ones. We are even going to make meals available at 5:30 in Youth Common, much like last fall's popular "Soup for the Soul."

Whatever you think this is . . . well, it is probably a bit different. You'll have to come see for yourself!

## *Uniquely You*

*Your personality, your talents, and your spiritual gifts*

**A six-week series beginning Sunday, September 13, in Scott's 11:00 class**

God has created each of us to be unique humans made in his image. He has given all people widely varying personalities and talents. In addition, God's Spirit has given believers certain gifts for the good of the body of Christ. In this six-week series, we'll examine the Spirit's work in our lives and the gifts given to each of us. We'll take both a personality test and a spiritual gifts inventory, as we seek to understand the differences between them and the unique way in which God hopes we will put these gifts to work for God's kingdom.

Cost of the assessment materials: \$10  
Scott is a certified instructor in both of the assessments we'll be using

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

One of the things I've learned in life is that all families have stories that they'd prefer to keep to themselves. Some families have self-inflicted wounds that strike deep and threaten to undo the family. When David takes Bathsheba and murders his husband, he sets in motion a family tragedy that would go on for years, ending in death not reconciliation.

Imagine that David was sitting with you late in his life. What do you think would be his perspective on the stories of Bathsheba, Uriah, Amnon, and Absalom? What lessons do you think he'd want to share with you? What do you think he'd wish he'd done differently? I can't help but see this story through the eyes of a father. How do you think Bathsheba would tell this story? She was David's queen and mother of the heir to the throne. She saw it all.

## *Daily Bible Readings*

Continuing with the readings from the book of Samuel:

**Monday, 2 Samuel 13** Amnon rapes Tamar and Absalom takes his revenge.

**Tuesday, 2 Samuel 14** Absalom returns to Jerusalem. David allows him to return to the palace.

**Wednesday, 2 Samuel 15** Absalom launches his rebellion and David must flee.

**Thursday, 2 Samuel 16:1-14** David meets some adversaries on his way out of town.

**Friday, 2 Samuel 16:15 – 17:29** Intrigue among key advisors. David manages his escape.

**Saturday, 2 Samuel 18:1-18** The defeat and death of Absalom