

2 Samuel 13:7–22, 30-34 (NIV)

[David had many sons and daughters by many wives. Two are Absalom and Tamar, both having the same mother. One is their half-brother, Amnon, who has fallen in love with Tamar. Now, Amnon feigns illness and attacks his half-sister.]

¹²“No, my brother!” she said to him. “Don’t force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don’t do this wicked thing. ¹³What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you.” ¹⁴But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.

¹⁵Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, “Get up and get out!”

¹⁶“No!” she said to him. “Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me.”

But he refused to listen to her. ¹⁷He called his personal servant and said, “Get this woman out of my sight and bolt the door after her.” ¹⁸So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing an ornate robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. ¹⁹Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

²⁰Her brother Absalom said to her, “Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don’t take this thing to heart.” And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, a desolate woman.

²¹When King David heard all this, he was furious. ²²And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.

[Absalom stayed quiet but later has Amnon killed at a banquet. Absalom flees and lives away for three years. David allows him to return but refuses to speak with or even see Absalom, who begins to court allies and support. Though David does eventually receive Absalom in the royal court, the son still rebels against the father. See the page three text box.]

2 Samuel 14:28–33 (NIV)

²⁸Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king’s face. ²⁹Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come. ³⁰Then 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.

³¹Then Joab did go to Absalom’s house, and he said to him, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?”

³²Absalom said to Joab, “Look, I sent word to you and said, ‘Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, “Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!”’ Now then, I want to see the king’s face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death.”

³³So Joab went to the king and told him this. 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.

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 upon his own family of his terrible choices.

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 crime, 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.

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 textbox below).

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. Sin begets sin. . . . 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 (2 Samuel 6)? 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-needers? What if we became more like Jesus?

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 to 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.

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

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Monday, 2 Samuel 13 The rape of Tamar and killing of Amnon.	Tuesday, 2 Samuel 14 Absalom returns to Jerusalem
Wednesday, 2 Samuel 15 Absalom's conspiracy is launched and David flees.	Thursday, 2 Samuel 17:24 – 19:8 Absalom is killed and David mourns inconsolably.
Friday, 2 Samuel 19:9-43 David returns to Jerusalem.	Weekly Prayer Concerns

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class – now studying 2 Samuel

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Hebrews

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our next series, starting September 7:

Ten Things You Don't Have to Believe to be a Jesus-loving, Bible-totin' Christian

Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at www.standrewumc.org. Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with each week's recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at www.scottengle.org