

The Importance of Relationships
2 Samuel 18:1 – 20:2
Lesson 21 by Dellena Ludwig

The following is a “one-liner” taken from a little blog I subscribe to called: CyberSalt. It is written by Pastor Tim Davis of Westside Bible Church in Victoria, BC.

The relationship between Husband and Wife
is very psychological;

One is Psycho and the other is Logical -

and whatever you do, don't try to figure Who is Who.

I like this man's blog because no matter what is going on in my life, I can go to Pastor Tim's jokes, have a good laugh and feel lighter.

Sometimes relationships can bring us such joy that just seeing the other person makes us feel better. But sometimes, just the thought of the person with which we have a bad relationship brings us to tears or causes us to relive the stress of our broken situation. Sometimes even the pleasant one cannot erase the pain from that broken relationship. However, as we examine David's relationships today, we will turn to the best advise ever given for relations - The Bible.

The first relationship to examine in our lesson today is: The relationship with a wayward son. In the last three lessons, we studied how David's relationship with Absalom, his second-oldest son, was weakened. David failed to discipline Amnon when he raped Absalom's sister, Tamar. David failed to discipline Absalom when he murdered the king's oldest son, and heir to the throne at the feast. David failed to contact Absalom in exile or when he was back in Jerusalem. David failed to chastise Absalom when he plotted to take over the kingdom. And David failed to take Absalom seriously as he gathered a counsel to himself. It was only when Absalom was anointed king and began a march toward Jerusalem, that David realized how far wrong things had gotten.

Was it that David didn't really care about Absalom? Was David so absorbed in his work that he didn't notice how the people were turning to Absalom instead of himself for justice? In 2 Samuel 14:1 we read, “Joab son of Zeruah knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom.” Yes, David did care about Absalom. David was always busy working. He planned battles and sent his armies to settle border disputes. He was planning the building of the temple with Solomon. But for some reason, David did not react to the sins of his sons Amnon and Absalom until it was too late to heal the broken relationships.

David was very concerned about his son, Absalom. However, his own guilt over his sin with Bathsheba and the death of Uriah, her husband, caused him to consider each of these sins to be personal, not national. Remember, Nathan the prophet had warned David that the consequences of David's sins would result in long reaching trouble in his own household. God had judged, “Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.” [2 Sam. 12:11,12] So with each circumstance of his sons' disobedience, David took it as his own punishment. David was so introspective, that he didn't see how this situation affected others.

Proverbs, written largely by David's son, Solomon, gives some of the best relationship advice that has ever been written. Proverbs 22:4-6 pertain to this dilemma David faced: “Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life. In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares, but he who guards his soul stays far from them. Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” David was walking the path of regret, rather than walking in the fear of the

Lord. He had abdicated his position as Father to the wives and mothers of his adult children. He had admitted his sin and begged God to forgive him. But each time something terrible happened to his family, he fell right back into blaming himself.

We also easily fall right back into blaming ourselves, even though it is others in our lives who are committing the sins. Our spouse falls back into addiction. We discover our children are living promiscuously. We discover a family member is stealing company funds. But do we confront them? Or do we enable them? After all, if we had not committed similar sins, maybe they would never have gotten themselves into this trouble. However, Scripture is clear: Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." [Luke 17:3,4] The word brother here refers to believers in God. We have a responsibility to help fellow believers who walk in sin.

But perhaps the best response to sin is found in 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." First we need to confess our own sins, as David did. God is faithful to forgive us our sins, because He sent Jesus to pay for them. Believers, brothers, are forgiven as they confess their own sins. It is our job to challenge fellow believers to confess and for us to forgive them. God not only forgives us the sins we confess, but also forgives us and, "purifies us from all unrighteousness;" even the sins we do not realize.

But our responsibility before non-believers may be even more important. 1 John 2:1,2 goes on to say, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

David and his children knew God had established a system through which to look forward to Messiah's final work of being our atoning sacrifice. David offered his sacrifice for his sins after the death of his first son with Bathsheba. [2 Sam. 12:13,20] But he knew his sin had influenced his other sons and the world that would show "utter contempt" for the Lord. He had reconciled and kissed Absalom showing he forgave him [2 Sam. 14:32,33], but Absalom never confessed his vengeful murder of his brothers. Now David faces that contempt as his son Absalom tears the allegiance of Israel away from him.

From the citadel of Ma-ha-na-im, David prepared his faithful army for a civil war against Absalom and their relatives in Israel. David now had no choice but to confront Absalom in this war. But David's men wisely declined to let him go out against his own son in person. In 2 Samuel 18:4,5 we read, "...So the king stood beside the gate while all the men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands. The king commanded generals Joab, Abishai and Ittai, 'Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.' And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders." David had one last hope. Perhaps his men could defeat Absalom's army and yet arrest Absalom so that he might yet repair the breach between them. However, such a restoration was not to be in this relationship.

The next relationship we read about in this lesson was one between a hero and a fan. Joab had been David's comrade-in-arms since the days of Saul. He knew the king and his children well. Remember, it was Joab who tried to repair the relationship between David and Absalom by getting the king to bring Absalom back out of exile. [2 Sam. 14:1] However, he had ambushed and killed Abner, Saul's general after David had made a treaty with him. [2 Sam. 3:27] He had also been the one to give David's order that killed Uriah. [2 Sam. 11:16,17] Joab knew that David suffered because of his eldest son's choices. But as he led out the army, David stood at the gate telling Joab's men, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." [2 Sam. 18:5] Joab decided this was one order he would not obey.

The royal army was tried and true. Absalom's army was not, although some of David's men had defected to him. Led by Amasa, a cousin of Joab, they marched from Jerusalem after waiting to gather more men from across Israel's tribes, thanks to the counsel of Hushai. So, Joab's men were already organized and caught Amasa's army too spread out along the eastern plain of the Jordan River valley. As the royal army attacked along three sections of the enemy's lines, Absalom's army fled toward the forest of Ephraim and many died because of the dangers of fighting in such rough terrain. As we studied, Absalom himself was a victim of the forest. Riding on a mule, he fled into the forest and accidentally was dislodged from his mount by hitting a branch that caught him by the neck. His mule rode on in the heat of the chase and Absalom hung there, able to hold on enough to keep from breaking his neck, but not able to dislodge himself safely down to the ground.

Once Joab was informed that the "enemy king" was vulnerable, Joab made his decision. In the commentary by Jamieson-Fausset-Brown his possible thought process was suggested as follows: "But Joab's stern sense of public duty, which satisfied him that there could be neither safety to the king nor peace to the kingdom, nor security to him and other loyal subjects, so long as that turbulent prince lived, overcame his sensibilities, and looking upon the charge given to the generals as more befitting a parent than a prince, he ventured to disobey it." Joab decided that he knew better what was best for the king and the country than did his sovereign. Therefore, unlike the simple soldier who found Absalom on his predicament, Joab took his ten armor-bearers and struck Absalom with javelins until he died.

This relationship is one between a hero and his fan. While fighting for their lives to survive King Saul's vengeance, Joab saw David as his commander and a noble leader. He was proud to follow David into battle as his King to pursue the many enemies of his nation. But, when his hero failed in character, Joab's relationship went from disappointment to disillusionment. And he began to believe that his own judgment was wiser than that of his king.

The men and women we idolize will often fall off of the pedestal we have placed them upon. What should we do about such a relationship? This could be the relationship between you and your boss, or mentor, or political leader, or respected friend or even your parent. First remember that no person is beyond committing a sin. But when we lose our respect for another believer, we may be in danger of our own sin of pride, thinking we are better than they. Luke 14:11 gave us instructions concerning this issue: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Philippians 2:3,4 breaks down for us how this works to heal relationships: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

We must be careful that our respected friends or family do not become our idols. Do not hold anyone above your one true God. But in honor of Christ, be aware of and consider the needs of others, giving them understanding and the benefit of the doubt concerning their actions. Joab hurt his relationship with David because he did not give understanding and honor to David's request.

The sorrow of David over the death of his son leads us to the relationship of a leader to his men. Joab knew David would be upset that Absalom had been killed. That is why he didn't want the priest Zadok's son, Ahimaaz, to be the bearer of such bad tidings. The war was over. King David's army had won. However, David was more involved as a parent than a monarch. Ahimaaz may have understood the difficulty in reporting the "success" of their battle when it would mean informing David that his son was dead. But Joab preferred to send an underling instead of a high ranking officer to give this difficult announcement to the king. Cushai was chosen. This word suggested that this man may have been a foreign slave in the army. So he was sent with this mixed message. However Ahimaaz felt it would be important to be there when his leader received this message. So he begged to leave also.

How do you deliver bad news to those you respect? News that is particularly personal carries with it almost an automatic rejection. In Proverbs 27:6 we read: “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” True friends cannot let us continue in ignorance. They may wound us with bad news or correction, but to continue in the false news of enemies will ultimately hurt us worse than hearing the hard truth. Ahimaaz was such a fast runner, even though he left after Cushite, and took the longer route, he arrived back at Mahanaim first. But notice that he gave the “good tidings” first. “All is well!” He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, ‘Praise be to the Lord your God! He has delivered up the men who lifted their hands against the lord the king.’” [2 Samuel 18:28] Matthew Henry commented on this passage: “By directing David to give God thanks for his victory, Ahimaaz prepared him for the news of his son's death. The more our hearts are fixed and enlarged in thanksgiving to God for our mercies, the better disposed we shall be to bear with patience, the afflictions mixed with them.”

He did well. He did not see the death of Absalom and so could truthfully say he saw only “great confusion” [2 Sam. 18:29] and so carefully prepared the king for the complete message just arriving with the Cushite. This man also worded his message carefully, saying concerning Absalom, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.” [2 Sam. 18:32]

However, with this message David fully realized that his son was dead. “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!’” [2 Sam. 18:33] In this passionate outbreak, we had confirmation that David was truly taking his son's sins personally. Notice he sobbed, “If only I had died instead of you!”

I do not believe that any parent has not felt the pain of their child as they met consequences of their sin. No matter how severely our children disobey, it is very difficult to watch them go through the fire of God's discipline. But we know as Proverbs 3:11,12 says, “My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”

I recall small incidents of discipline where I had to remind my son, “I love you too much to let you behave this way.” I also remember very clearly when our son had reached a rebellious stage in his early twenties which necessitated a severe discipline. It broke my heart to have to tell him he must move out on his own. He had become disrespectful of his father and I and refused to mow the lawns, his only chore in our home, as he began his life as a young adult. He paid rent and somehow felt he could pick and choose when he must interrupt his video games to keep his end of our arrangement. Finally, we had to send him out on his own. It broke my heart to see him prepare to move out, with a low paying job and anger painted all over his face. Again I told him, “I don't want you to move out. But you need to grow up and meet your responsibilities. If you stay here, you will always be a teenager. Because I love you, you have to go.” God was gracious. After five years on his own, our son returned, at our request, to live with us as an adult, doing his own wash, meals and paying his own bills saving up to buy his own home. However he still does not mow the lawn! I believe he will find a house with very little lawn and pave that over! But his heart attitude is now one of respect and friendship to us his parents.

But David grieved this ultimate discipline of his son. His grief confused his men as they returned. They fought this war for him. But he did not stand at the gate and congratulate or thank them for this battle against Israel. Joab felt he had to reprimand his king for dishonoring his men. “You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and

all of us were dead.” [2 Sam. 19:6] This was a bold move by Joab on behalf of his men. Their king was stunned out of his grief to tend to his duties. But we will see that David did not forget Joab's part in Absalom's death nor his change from honor before David, to disillusionment with his leadership. The civil war changed a lot of relationships. Now, at its end, we noticed several relationships between friends and enemies that were dealt with.

David knew he must repair the breach between Israel and their king before he could return to be monarch of the nation. The people of Israel and Judah were not sure what they should do because they had anointed Absalom as their king over David. Israel was debating how they should ask David back. So David reached out to Judah first. Through the high priests Zadok and Abiathar, he sent this message: “Ask the elders of Judah, 'Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace, since what is being said throughout Israel has reached the king at his quarters? You are my brothers, my own flesh and blood. So why should you be the last to bring back the king?' And say to Amasa, 'Are you not my own flesh and blood? May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if from now on you are not the commander of my army in place of Joab?’” [2 Sam. 19:11-13] With these words David erased any lingering fear those who had sided with Absalom might have had and began the healing process.

Next he reached out to individuals who came to him as he staged his crossing back across the Jordan River, to reenter Israel. First he gave an audience with Shimei who had cursed and pummeled David's entourage as they left Jerusalem. Shimei brought one thousand men from the tribe of Benjamin and Ziba, the steward of Saul's household with him to help get David's household safely across the Jordan. But Shimei had to repair his own relationship with David.

Now, the secret service in our own country would have stopped Shimei way before he had gotten to David's presence. But David reacted with mercy toward him. As Shimei laid prostrate before David, Abishai, Joab's brother, said what everyone, who had felt the dirt and stones thrown by Shimei during their retreat from Jerusalem, thought in their hearts. “Shouldn't Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the Lord's anointed.” But David extended mercy, in 2 Samuel 19:22,23: “What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruah? This day you have become my adversaries! Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Do I not know that today I am king over Israel?” So the king said to Shimei, 'You shall not die.' And the king promised him with an oath.” Therefore, with this one decision, David promised mercy to an old enemy and promised distance to two old friends. We will learn more about how the disloyalty of these men grew and brought on their own demise in future lessons.

David was willing to rebuild broken relationships in order to establish his reorganized nation on forgiveness rather than retribution. As Paul later instructed believers how to relate to each other, he said, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” [Colossians 3:13] It is not easy to forgive others. But the scriptures repeat the only attitude that can help us to accomplish this: “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” If it is hard to forgive those who have betrayed us, we must rehearse how we have betrayed God even before we met Him. If it is difficult to forgive others who have said evil things about us, remember when we have denied in word or deed the Savior of our souls. Since God has forgiven me of all my sins and flippant attitude toward him and his Word, I must forgive others. In fact, Jesus said himself: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” [Matt. 6:14, 15] So, the final persuasion that we must forgive others, is that “your Father will not forgive your sins,” if your attitude before him is constantly unforgiving.

Part of Absalom's plot to divide the loyalties of Israel from allegiance to David included lies

about an uncaring attitude for their problems. Remember last week we heard in 2 Samuel 15:3 that he convinced the people, "...there is no representative of the king to hear you." But as David prepared to cross the river, he met with the crippled grandson of Saul. Mephibosheth looked as though he had not groomed his beard or feet or clothes since David had fled the castle. Remember the tale Ziba shared of Mephibosheth's decision to align himself with Absalom's side in chapter sixteen? Now David was to hear the other side of this tale. Mephibosheth had wanted to go with David, but being crippled, he had asked Ziba to prepare a mule for him to ride, with provisions for the journey. But Ziba had taken the mules and provisions and fled with David, leaving Mephibosheth alone without help!

David, being unable to decide on which person was telling the truth, restored the agreement he had made originally. Saul's farmland would belong to Mephibosheth and Ziba equally. This may have felt unfair from our perspective. But David's relationship with Mephibosheth was restored as the young man spoke again, saying, "Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has arrived home safely." [2 Sam. 19:30] Mephibosheth showed humility while Ziba showed his own ambitions.

David's stay in Mahanaim was bearable because an unexpected friend brought the supplies needed for his troops in exile. Barzillai, along with a few others, had brought food, dishes and bedding to help David and show his loyalty. [2 Sam. 17:27-29] Now he would cross the Jordan with David and send him on his way. David so appreciated this friend in deed that he desired to bring him to stay at the palace. But Barzillai responded that he was too old to enjoy such a favor! His desire at 80 years old, was to go finish his life in his own home.

Proverbs 17:17 describes such a friend. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Throughout our years we may have many types of friends. Some are "fair weather" friends, who blow away as trouble comes or difficulties interfere with our friendship. They may fade from our circles because they do not know how to handle those difficulties, or fear the trouble may affect them. However, God sends some friends who roll up their sleeves and roll out the provisions to help in times of adversity. This is a friend indeed. I have been both the receiver of such provisions and offered them myself, when friends had need.

Barzillai did not need recompense, but David took one of his sons, Kimham in his stead. Jeremiah 41:17 mentions a city, Geruth Kimham, near Bethlehem in the narrative. Apparently, David gave some of his personal land to Kimham to honor his father. By doing this, he sealed this friendship for generations. As David began his return to Jerusalem he was surrounded with men who were loyal to him. But as in our own civil war, North versus the South, animosity was not easily forgotten at the end of the war and boiled up again over the argument of who was more loyal to King David.

In verses 19:40 – 20:2 a divisive discussion began between the men of Israel and the men of Judah. An old comedy team, the Smothers Brothers, used sibling rivalry as the topic of many of their jokes, saying "Mom always liked you best." Here begins a division that is not so funny. Verse 40 and 41 began by comparing numbers from Judah and Israel: "When the king crossed over to Gilgal, Kimham crossed with him. All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel had taken the king over. Soon all the men of Israel were coming to the king and saying to him, 'Why did our brothers, the men of Judah, steal the king away and bring him and his household across the Jordan together with all his men?'" [2 Sam. 19:40.41] The commentary of Jamison-Faucet and Brown explained the contention: "Whether by impatience to move on or from some other cause, David did not wait till all the tribes had arrived to...return to the capital. The procession began as soon as Amasa had brought the Judahite escort and the preference given to this tribe produced a bitter jealousy, which nearly kindl[ed] a civil war fiercer than that which had just ended."

The argument went as follows: Israel: (verse 40) Why didn't you wait for us? Judah: (v. 42) Because we are more closely related to the king. What's your problem? After all we aren't getting

anything for walking with him! Israel: (v. 43) You should have waited for our delegates. We represent a much bigger portion of the nation, being ten of the 12 tribes so we have a greater stake in David as Israel's king. Besides, we were the ones who first talked about bringing him back to Jerusalem as our king after the war.

The relationship of a King or president to his people is one we may never personally relate to. However, we do experience this in microcosm as we live as believers together in a family or the church. Jealousy between siblings in a family or between factions in the church are against God's plan for either. In fact, Jesus reminded his followers: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." [John 13:34,35] And again in 1 John 4:20: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

Perhaps this is the most telling relationship of all. As a church, we may not all agree as to preference in worship: Types or volume of music; Size of the congregation; Style of preaching etc.. However, our unity in loving each other is most telling to the world of unsaved people. David ignored this squabble, even when the trouble maker, Sheba, rallied all the men of Israel to go off in a huff. But the consequences of his attitude were a split kingdom after his son Solomon reigned.

The consequences of our attitude in the family of the church is even more dire. Demanding believers have split and destroyed local churches. Failure to set aside our preferences have hindered unbelievers who do not see love as the defining relationship in us. 1 John 4:1 reminds us, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God." Let's define every relationship we have with God's love, notifying others that "We love, because He first loved us." [1Jn. 4:19]