

“A FATHER’S FAILURE AT HOME” 2 Samuel 13:1 - 14:33

NIV MEMORY VERSE: 2 Samuel 14:14b

But God does not take away life; instead he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.

My Sweetheart or "Honey" was born and raised in the Middle East. We met and married after he lived in the U.S. for 10 years. For the most part, our relationship is no differently than any other couple. People are people, families are families, and life at home is like any where else. However ... there are some things he does that I know are influenced by his culture. (Wink, wink)

One area we know where Honey excels is with buying cars. Now Honey is not a "car guy," in that he is not good at repairing or working on cars. He just loves to buy them. I have learned to not be surprised when every few years Honey comes home from work and announces, "Look what I bought," and there is a new car in the garage. For him it is the art of making the deal. This has earned him the family nickname of "Abdul the camel trader," and it's then I remember that he grew up bartering at the bazaar. *This* must be the cultural part of him.



→ A few decades ago it was no surprise when he came home and announced, "Look what I bought" once again. I think he was in his 'macho man' stage of life because he did not buy his usual car, a European style sports car. This time he was attracted to a Toyota 4-Runner. Imagine; a new SUV body, 5 speed, standard transmission, 4-wheel drive, 6-cylinder engine, two-door, in a

'sweet' powder blue color, and running boards on the sides. Vroom, vroom!

He was so proud of that 'macho' car. None of us could touch anything, eat or drink anything in it. Riding in that new car you had to just sit with your hands in your lap and not move. Honey carefully thought through all the details of buying that super vehicle except one. At home, Son #1 was 15 years old with a learner's permit to drive. Just let that sit in your head for a minute. ... Yep, trouble was coming.

A few weeks later Honey went out of town on a business trip and left his precious 4-Runner in the garage. I came home from work the next day and noticed that the engine on the 4-Runner was hot when I walked past it. Mmm? I asked Son #1 if he knew why, and he answered "no Mom, I haven't touched it." The next day a close neighbor called to tell me that Son #1 had visited her. She had been a babysitter for the boys and was like an adopted grandmother. Son had stopped over and shared with her how excited he was that he managed to drive the new 'macho car' down the street and back without grinding the gears. He was so proud of himself. Our neighbor thought I should know. The next question was how to tell Honey. You know the saying, "Wait until your father gets home!"

Well, Honey came home, I told him, and together we talked to Son #1. My anger and frustration had built up so much that I was ready to 'kill the boy!' Honey said, "Son, your mother tells me that you drove my car while I was gone." Son couldn't lie to his dad and admitted that he did it and apologized. To which Honey responded, "If you want to drive again before you're 18 years old, just don't do it again." That was it.

Really? That was all? "Just don't do it again?" Where was the punishment in that?? - Then Honey shared that at the same age he did the same thing with his father's car, only he crashed it. He spent most of his high school years paying for the repairs on his father's car. Honey felt that he couldn't punish our son for the same thing that he did at his age.

Answering the questions for our lesson this week reminded me of this story in our family. No doubt your family has similar stories. The fact is that bad choices we made in our past, long forgotten and considered forgiven, can arise when we least expect it. Our memories are humbling and they can prevent us from imparting the discipline that is necessary at the time.

Certainly, joyriding Dad's car is nothing compared to rape, incest, and murder. However, in considering our family's story I further remembered that a worse offense happened with this same son about 2 years later because he believed that his actions were not wrong unless he was caught and punished. We had to apply a firmer tough love later to develop the character and integrity of this beloved son.

A family in trouble is a common occurrence, but it's never a pretty picture. There are two kinds of trouble a family can experience: trouble that comes from without and

trouble that comes from within. Though both can be devastating for a family, the more difficult of the two is trouble from within.

Trouble from within comes in the form of pressure, tension, abuse, neglect, unforgiveness, bitterness, heartbreaking hatred, and all the other difficulties that accompany the carnal life when parents walk in the flesh or act foolishly . . . or when children respond in rebellion and disagreement and disharmony. When there is friction between husband and wife or between parent and child, that's a lot harder to bear than external struggles, especially when it is the consequence of someone's sin in the family.

Think of your life as being like the life of a farmer. As you walk along, you are planting daily, one kind of seed or another. If you choose to sow the seeds of carnality, you may enjoy a measure of pleasure. Anyone who denies that is a fool. Even Scripture declares that sin has its pleasure. That's one of the things that draws us into it. It is exciting. It is adventurous. It brings stimulation. It satisfies the body; it stimulates the desires of the flesh. What we don't like to face, of course, is that the pain that comes in the harvesting of those sinful seeds eclipses the short-lived pleasure. Today we have the propensity for using grace as a tool to justify sin or to take away the pain of the consequences.

→ But Grace does not take away the consequences of sin.

Galatians 6:7-8

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

When David sowed to the flesh, he reaped what the flesh produced. Moreover, he reaped the consequences of his actions even though he had confessed his sin and been forgiven for it. Underline it, star it, mark it deeply upon your conscious mind: Confession and forgiveness in no way stops the harvest of sin. He had sown; he was to reap. Forgiven he was, but the consequences continued. This is exactly the emphasis Paul gives the Galatians even in this age of grace. We are not to be deceived, for God will not be mocked. What we sow we will reap, and there are no exceptions. We sin because we want to. We have the power in the person of the Holy Spirit to say no to it at every turn in our life. If we choose to say yes against the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we may be certain we will live in the backwash of the consequences. Unfortunately, so will innocent people who are closely related to us. It is those domestic consequences that create what has come to be known as ***dysfunctional families***.

Let us pray

Tamar's Story

Why is this even in the Bible? It's a horrible story. Amnon's rape of his half sister Tamar (II Samuel 13:1–22) is part of King David's family story. I don't like this episode. Yet I'm grateful to God that we have this account of a rape and family violence.



Although originating in an ancient patriarchal context and compromised by ruthless competition within a royal dynasty, this story exposes dynamics of sexualized violence and abuse that affect lives in our families and our church today.

It is a tough story. Consider King David and his wives. Ahinoam was King David's first wife and mother of Amnon—David's firstborn son—the crown prince of Israel. Maacah, another wife, was mother of Absalom (David's favorite son) and Tamar. There was also Michal, daughter of King Saul; Abigail, widow of Nabal; three more wives from Jerusalem; a crowd of concubines; and the wife David took through lust, deception, and lethal force: Bathsheba. The story of King David and Bathsheba immediately precedes the story of Amnon raping his half sister, Tamar. In broad strokes, the Biblical message here is: like father, like son.

In the episode with Amnon and Tamar, the request for a meal becomes a pretext for taking sexual advantage. Tamar's dutiful care for her sick brother is manipulated and used against her. The ethics of serving a meal and caring for the sick are eroded. The pleasures of eating and touching are distorted. Spurred on by Jonadab, Amnon's consuming, frustrating lust and entitlement becomes a toxic, violent weapon. He uses his own body against his sister, and then his lust turns to loathing and he drives Tamar out.

Do we turn away from this episode? Can we walk away from topics like sexualized violence and child abuse? Shall we run away from families or institutions that have failed to redress this kind of injustice? Sometimes turning away, walking away, or running away is how we survive. Still, God gives us this story so that when we're ready, when it's safe to do so, we can read it in light of Jesus and safely open our eyes.

God had empowered David to defeat Israel's enemies and establish and expand the kingdom. Then David committed the sins of adultery, murder, and deception, and the rest of 2 Samuel describes David wrestling with problems caused by his own children. His days are dark and disappointing, but he still depends on the Lord, and the Lord enables him to overcome and prepare the nations for the reign of his son Solomon. What life does to us depends on what life finds in us, and in David was a muscular faith in the living God.

→ God had warned David that the sword would not depart from his own household, and Absalom was the first to take up that sword. David's judgment against the rich man in Nathan's story was, "He shall restore the lamb fourfold" (12:6), and that judgment fell upon David's own head.

- Bathsheba's baby died;
- Absalom killed Amnon for raping Tamar;
- Joab killed Absalom during the battle of Mount Ephraim; and
- Adonijah was slain for trying to usurp the throne from Solomon.

→ The events unfold like a tragic symphony in 5 movements:

- From love to lust,
- From lust to hatred,
- From hatred to murder,
- From murder to exile, and
- From exile to reconciliation.

From love to lust - Amnon was the oldest of David's sons and the apparent heir to the throne, so perhaps he felt he had privileges that the other sons didn't have. Amnon ended up becoming a rapist, committing incest, and getting killed.

David was known for his wisdom and keen insight, but after the "Bathsheba affair," he seems to have lost ground. By ordering Tamar to obey her half brother's wishes, he sent her into pain and humiliation, and when 2 years later David allowed Amnon to attend Absalom's feast, he sent his firstborn to his death. David the deceiver was himself deceived!

From lust to hatred - Amnon thought he loved Tamar. First he was distressed over her, and then he became ill longing for her even to the point of looking haggard. But after he committed the shameful act, he hated Tamar vehemently and wanted to get rid of her! True love would never violate another person's body just to satisfy selfish appetites, nor would true love try to persuade someone to disobey the law of God. In his sensual cravings, Amnon confused lust with love and didn't realize that there is a fine line between selfish love and hatred. Before he sinned, he wanted Tamar all to himself, but after he sinned, he couldn't get rid of her fast enough.

Sexual sins usually produce that kind of emotional damage. When you treat other people like things to be used, you end up throwing them aside like broken toys or old clothes.

Rape was strictly forbidden by God. So why was sending Tamar away an even greater crime? By throwing her out, Amnon made it look as if Tamar had made a shameful proposition to him, and there were no witnesses on her behalf because he had gotten

rid of the servants. His crime destroyed her chances of marriage - because she was no longer a virgin, she could not be given in marriage – especially as a princess.



Tamar went to the apartment of her brother Absalom, because in a polygamous society, it was the responsibility of a full brother to protect the honor of a full sister. When Absalom saw her tears, her torn garment, and the ashes on her head, he realized that she was in great pain and humiliation, and he deduced that Amnon had violated her.

Tamar may have said that she was going to the king to tell him what happened, but her brother suggested that she wait. Why? Because Absalom's cunning brain was already at work on a scheme that would accomplish 3 purposes:

- Avenge Tamar,
- Get rid of Amnon, and
- Put himself next in line for the throne!

His statement "He is your brother" means, "If it were any other man, I would avenge you immediately; but since it's your brother, I'll have to be patient and wait for an opportunity." Absalom was trying to avoid a public scandal that would grieve the family and hurt his own plans to seize the throne.

King David did hear about the tragedy and became very angry, but what could he say? The memory of his own sins shut his mouth, and how could he punish his firstborn son and the heir to his throne? According to the law, if a man raped a virgin not engaged to be married, he had to pay her father a fine and marry her, and he could never divorce her. However, the law also prohibited the marriage of half brothers and half sisters, so marriage between Amnon and Tamar was out of the question. David had committed two capital crimes - adultery and murder - and God had not applied the law to him.

So, neither David nor Absalom said anything to Amnon about his wicked deed.

→ From hatred to murder - For two years Absalom waited to avenge the rape of his sister, but when the time came, he was ready to act. Thanks to the generosity of their father, the princes not only held government offices but they also owned lands, flocks, and herds. Absalom had his land and flocks at Baal Hazor, about 14 miles north of Jerusalem. It was customary in Israel to arrange great feasts at sheep-shearing time and invite members of the family as well as friends to share the festive occasion.

Absalom asked his father to come to the feast and bring his officials with him, but David declined. David knew that the crown prince often took his place at public functions that demanded a royal presence, so David allowed Amnon to represent the throne at Absalom's feast. After all, two years had passed since Amnon violated Tamar and Absalom hadn't done anything against him. To guarantee some kind of safety for

Amnon, David went the extra mile and permitted all the adult king's sons to attend the feast, assuming that Absalom wouldn't dare attack Amnon with so many of his family members present.



However, during those two years, Absalom had perfected his plan and made arrangements for escape. His father David had arranged for the murder of Uriah the Hittite and had survived, so why shouldn't his son Absalom survive? Like his father, Absalom used other hands to do the deed, and at the time when the victim least expected it. David had made Uriah drunk but failed to achieve his purpose, while Absalom made his brother drunk and accomplished what he had set out to do. Absalom followed his father's evil example and committed premeditated murder.

When Absalom gave the command and his servants killed Amnon, the princes at the feast fled for their lives, no doubt convinced that Absalom was planning to wipe out the royal family and take the throne. The young men mounted their mules, which were considered a "royal animal," and they hastened back to Jerusalem as fast as donkeys could move. But Absalom also fled and probably his servants with him.

First a messenger arrived at the palace announcing that all the king's sons had been slain! David tore his garments and fell to the ground in grief. David's nephew Jonadab, who knew more than he admitted, gave the true account that only Amnon had been killed, but even this was a terrible blow to David, for Amnon was his firstborn and heir to the throne. The fleeing princes arrived safely and everyone joined in expressing grief because Amnon was dead and Absalom was the murderer.

The problem with revenge is that it doesn't really solve any problems and eventually turns around and hurts the perpetrator. The old slogan "Don't get mad - get even" may satisfy some people, but it can never be pleasing to the Lord. The Christian way is the way of forgiveness and faith, trusting the Lord to work everything out for our good and His glory (1 Peter 4:12-19).

God chooses to end the story of Tamar with homage from her brother. Absalom lovingly names his daughter after Tamar "and she became a beautiful woman (2 Sam.14:27)." "From aunt to niece have passed name and beauty so that the rape and desolation have not the final word in the story of Tamar." God redeemed her this much on earth, how much more will He in heaven?

If you've had an injustice done to you, God will deal with it. God will be a warrior on your behalf (Ex. 14:14;15:1-7)! He only asks for you to keep following Him, be patient, and continue on in love and good deeds until the day you are joined with Him in

heaven so He can fully heal and comfort you in His arms. Be strong and courageous until that day!

→ From murder to exile - Twice we're told that Absalom fled, and he probably escaped during the confusion that ensued when the king's sons fled. Only Absalom and his guilty servants knew what was going to happen at the feast, so everybody else was caught unawares. They were all witnesses of the murder and could easily testify that Absalom was guilty.

Absalom fled 80 miles northeast to the home of his maternal grandparents in Geshur, where his grandfather was king. No doubt this safehaven had been arranged beforehand, and it's likely that Talmai, the king of Geshur, would have enjoyed seeing his grandson crowned king of Israel. Back in Jerusalem, David mourned over his firstborn Amnon, but in Geshur, the exiled son was no doubt plotting how he could take the kingdom away from his father. Normal grief heals in its time, and after 3 years, David was comforted concerning the death of the crown prince.

From exile to reconciliation - Joab knew his king and cousin very well and recognized the signs of David's yearning for his exiled son. As head of the army, Joab was concerned that Israel have a crown prince ready to reign just in case something happened to David, who was now close to 60 years old. But Absalom couldn't come home unless David gave permission and the king wouldn't give permission until he was convinced it was the right thing to do. It was the king's duty to uphold the law, and Absalom was guilty of plotting the murder of his half brother Amnon.

David loved his son and undoubtedly was convicted about the way he had pampered him, but how could he get out of this dilemma? Joab provided the solution to the problem.

Just as Nathan had confronted David the sinner by telling him a story, so Joab confronted David the father and king by putting a fabricated account of a family problem into the mouth of a woman who was both wise and a very good actress. Clearly, you know this story from your study questions this week. Eventually the widow asked the king to take an oath to assure her that her surviving son would not be slain, and David agreed. Taking an oath in the Lord's name was binding and could not be ignored.

The woman now had David in a corner. If he agreed to protect a guilty son whom he did not know, how much more was he obligated to protect his own son whom he love! She had come to him with a matter involving the future of one small family, but the matter concerning Absalom concerned the future of an entire nation. The king didn't want to see her only son and heir destroyed, but he was willing for the crown prince Absalom to be left in exile. He forgave the murderer of her son, so could he not forgive the man who plotted the murder of Amnon? How much longer will the king wait before

he sends for his son? After all, life is brief, and when life ends, it's like water spilled onto the earth and cannot be recovered. Slaying the murderer can't bring back the victim, so why not give him another chance?

→ **2 Samuel 14:14b**

But God does not take away life; instead he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.

God is no respecter of persons, and His law is true, but even God devises ways to show mercy and forgive offenders. He punishes sin, to be sure, but He also seeks for ways to reconcile sinners with Himself. Had He not forgiven David's sins? The woman confessed that she was afraid that her family would slay her one remaining son and rob her of the inheritance God had given them.

It was a stirring speech by the widow and David took it to heart. But being a wise man, he realized that the full import of the woman's plea went far beyond the boundaries of her family and property. David had insight enough to know that she was speaking about him, Absalom, and the future of the nation of Israel, God's inheritance. At this point he also must have understood that the entire story was pure fiction and that somebody else was behind all that the so-called widow had spoken. Then the truth came out that indeed it was Joab who had plotted the whole thing, but his motive was a noble one.

No doubt it was Joab who brought the woman to have this audience with the king, and he probably remained in the room and heard all that the woman and the king said to each other. David had sworn to protect the woman and her fictitious son, so the king could do nothing but allow Absalom to come home, and he ordered Joab to go to Geshur and bring the exile back to Jerusalem. Joab's words in verse 22 suggest strongly that he had discussed the subject with David on more than one occasion, and he was overjoyed that the matter was now settled. Geshur was about 80 miles from Jerusalem, and Joab wasted no time in making the journey, so Absalom could have been back home a week or 10 days later.

However, there were restrictions placed on crown prince Absalom. He had to remain on his own land, which almost amounted to house arrest, and he wasn't allowed to go to the palace and see his father. Perhaps David was testing his son to see if he could be trusted, or David may have thought that these restrictions would assure the people that the king wasn't pampering his difficult son. However, these limitations didn't hinder the expansion of Absalom's popularity, for the people loved and praised him. The fact that he had plotted the murder of his half brother and had proved his guilt by running away meant very little to the people, for people must have their idols, and what better idol than a young handsome prince? Lack of character was unimportant; what really mattered was status, wealth, and good looks. In contemporary language, Absalom was

a "he-man", someone with "machismo," and the people envied and admired him. Times have not changed.

Absalom put up with this arrangement for two years, trusting that Joab would bring about reconciliation between himself and his father, but Joab did nothing. Absalom knew that being banished from the king's presence meant he wasn't expected to be heir to the throne, and more than anything else, Absalom wanted to be king of Israel. A shrewd man like Joab must have realized that Absalom had designs on the throne and that the prince's growing popularity could provide him the support he needed to take over the kingdom. Knowing how volatile the situation was, the discerning general stayed away from Absalom lest he give the impression he was being controlled by the egotistical prince.

After two years of waiting, during which he had summoned Joab twice and been ignored, Absalom decided that drastic action was necessary. He commanded his servants to set fire to his neighbor's barley crop, and his neighbor happened to be Joab. This got the general's attention, for the law required that an arsonist repay the owner of a field whose crop he destroyed. People knew about the fire, allowing Joab to visit Absalom without fear of being misunderstood.

→ Absalom presented Joab with two alternatives: either take him to the king and let him receive his son and forgive him, or take him to court and prove that he was guilty of a capital crime and deserved to die. Absalom would rather be slain than go on living in shameful house arrest. Joab was on the horns of a dilemma, for it was he who masterminded Absalom's return to Jerusalem. Joab knew that the people would never permit their favorite royal personage to be tried and convicted of a crime, but how could Joab guarantee that the king would be reconciled to his son? Joab gave Absalom's message to David and David invited his son to come and see him, and the king received him with a kiss of reconciliation. Father and son were together after five years of separation.

There is no record that Absalom was repentant and sought his father's forgiveness, or that he visited the temple and offered the required sacrifices. Father and son were together again, but it was a fragile truce and not a real peace. Absalom still had his hidden agenda and was determined to seize David's throne. Now that the prince was free, he could be visible in the city and enjoy the adulation of the crowds, while at the same time quietly organizing his sympathizers for the coming rebellion. David was about to lose his throne and crown, his concubines, his trusted advisor, and ultimately his son Absalom. It would be the darkest time of David's life.

"I know ..."

When I prepare for these lectures, I study the questions as you do and I study commentaries and other resources. I usually spend several days in a mental bubble,

thinking and meditating on what to share and present. A few nights ago I awoke in the middle of the night (and not because Honey was snoring). I've learned in such times to just get out of bed, make a cup of tea, and sit on the sofa with my Bible on my lap. A thought or answer usually comes to me eventually, and it did this time as well.

My prayer had been for the Lord's direction in what words of hope and take-away points I should share with you in this lesson. This is such a hard and difficult lesson, and there are so many layers to this story. I felt the need to close with words of hope for you. Two words came to me ... "I know."

→ "I know."... God knows. Your Heavenly Father knows.

He knows if you are suffering as an innocent victim of someone else's choices. Of course, it was not fair, but God knows. ... He knows if you are struggling with consequences resulting from your past choices. He knows...

Allow me to conclude with words of comfort from Paul in his letter to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 4:8-18

⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹²So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

¹³It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken."^[a] Since we have that same spirit of^[b] faith, we also believe and therefore speak,¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Amen ...