

## Sin Escalates, part 2: Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar 2 Samuel 13-19

Every year, many schools and organizations sponsor Father of the Year essay contests asking children to write on the topic: "What My Father Means to Me." Below is a sampling of essays from past contests:

1st grader - "My dad is the best dad ever. I would kiss a pig for him."

1st grader - "My dad is a Frito-Lay man. That is an important job because Frito-Lay means chips, which is food. That is so important because you could not live without food."

3rd grader - "The dad in my life isn't really my dad. He's my Grandpa. But he's been like a dad to me since before I was born. . .I hope that as I get older Grandpa will teach me all the stuff he knows about wood, and first-aid, and everything else he knows about. My Grandpa isn't my Father, but I wouldn't trade him for all the dads in the world."

4th grader - "Sometimes as a joke I'll put my stinky socks in his briefcase, so at work the next day he will think of me! He's always at the concerts and plays that I'm in, even though he lives about an hour away."

5th grader - "You know what else my dad does? He braids my hair. I'm the only girl I know whose dad braids her hair. I think that's a perfect dad. He already is the world's greatest dad to me. I just wanted everyone to know that."

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Umberto Eco wrote,

*I believe that what we become depends  
on what our fathers teach us at odd moments,  
when they aren't trying to teach us.*

*We are formed by little scraps of wisdom."*

Umberto Eco, Foucault's Pendulum

A thought which makes today's story strangely appropriate for Father's Day, in that while we have set aside this time to honor our fathers, herein is also the warning that **our best fathering – and mothering – will always be by honorable example and loving discipline.** It's hard to imagine that King David, known as a very godly man, was actually a poor father. Perhaps he could better be described as the classic "absent father." While the Bible only names 20 of David's sons and his daughter Tamar, he had over eight wives and well over ten concubines, and certainly many other children by all these marital relationships.

**That David deeply loved his children is very evident from this story; lack of love was not their problem, lack of discipline was.** But, since this particular tragedy spans over ten years of time and over six Bible chapters (13-19), today I can give you only it's highlights and conclusion, while encouraging you to personally take the time to read and contemplate the lessons we should learn from this story of Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom.

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Our story opens with David's earliest children now grown to adult age. Amnon, David's first-born son has become infatuated with Tamar his sister by another mother, whom the Bible describes as "beautiful." Since Mosaic law forbids marriage even between half-siblings, rightly thinking that there was no way he could have a relationship with her, Amnon was actually making himself sick with longing (Lev.18:9-11, Dt.27:22). Until his "very crafty" friend Jonadab – using the salutation, "son of the king," implying that shouldn't he get whatever he wants? – suggests a scheme whereby Amnon can get Tamar alone and have his way with her.

As instructed by Jonadab, Amnon pretends to be really sick, asking father David to send Tamar to personally make some food for him to eat. Dad complies. But while Tamar is preparing the food, Amnon sends everyone else out of the room and even as she begs him not to, he rapes her. Having had his way with her, Amnon's lust immediately turns to disgust and he literally throws her out of his house, bolting the door behind her.

Now a defiled virgin having no hopes of any future marriage, Tamar rips her clothes puts dust on her head and goes weeping to the home of her full-brother Absalom where she will live the rest of her life as a "desolate woman." Absalom, David's third-born son is furious, but can do very little at the moment since Mosaic law also required that charges of rape – the penalty for which is death – to be confirmed by at least two witnesses. So Absalom bides his time waiting to see what dad will do.

Now, here is the decisive event of the whole story which seals the future of both Amnon and eventually Absalom as well. 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 13:21 records

When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, **but he would not punish his son Amnon**, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn.

II Samuel 13:21

Think of all that David's response reveals about his failures as a father.

- If he loved Amnon, should he not have disciplined him some way?
- And what about his daughter Tamar? Where was his love for his daughter while showing such preferential treatment for his son

- Was remembered guilt over his own affair with Bathsheba now tying his hands?

Whatever David's reasons which froze him into inactivity, the Bible is very clear on our parental responsibility to lovingly discipline our children. Think for a moment about the implications of these two proverbs

Those who spare the rod hate their children,  
but those who love them are diligent to  
discipline them. Proverbs 13:24

Discipline your children while there is hope;  
do not set your heart on their destruction.  
Proverbs 19:18

The Bible teaches that those parents who do not discipline their children, betray their own lack of love for them while also contributing to their future failure, perhaps even their death ... which is exactly what David's refusal to discipline Amnon now sets in motion for both of his sons.

After two-years had passed without giving any indication of what he had been planning, Absalom hosts a magnificent feast for all of David's sons with the specific intention of revenge killing Amnon. At the height of the party when Amnon was happily drunk, Absalom's servants then slay Amnon in front of all his brothers. As the rest of the brothers flee back home in terror, Absalom flees to his mother's home kingdom where he lives for the next three years in exile.

After a time, having finished grieving Amnon's death, David's heart now yearned for the return of Absalom. So he brings him back home but with the stipulation that he is not to enter his father's presence. Absalom then spends another two-years under this form of out-of-the-house arrest before he demands to see the king and receive whatever penalty David would place upon him. Absalom enters David's presence, prostrating himself face to the ground before his father. David's only response was to kiss his son.

Even though the current family drama has now been quieted, this Peyton Place of a story continues to unfold. With Amnon dead, and David's second-born son having died in childhood, Absalom is now the heir apparent to David's throne. While Tamar was beautiful, Absalom was described as exceptionally handsome, "*without blemish from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head*" (vs.25). He also had notably long hair which he only cut once a year whenever it got too heavy on his head.

Having such good looks and having gotten away with murdering his brother, Absalom must have concluded "why shouldn't I be the next king," and why wait until dad dies of natural causes. So Absalom embarks on a four-year conspiracy to steal the hearts of Israel away from his father. Once he thinks he has a sufficient following Absalom goes to Hebron – where his father was first crowned – and has himself declared king.

As Absalom's rebel troops march on the capital city, David and his loyal followers flee to spare Jerusalem from attack. Once in the city, Absalom seeks to cement his rule by setting up a tent on the roof of David's house, there to publicly sleep with ten of David's concubines who had been left behind to care for his estate. Thus his own son unknowingly fulfilled the last doom that had been pronounced for David's sin with Bathsheba.

But when his forces finally meet up with David's in combat, Absalom is thoroughly defeated. Fleeing the scene of the battle, his long hair gets caught in the branches of an oak tree while the mule that he was riding kept running on without him. There Absalom hung "*between heaven and earth*," until General Joab found and immediately killed him even though David had expressly pled for his life to be spared.

The sad conclusion of this story sees King David weeping uncontrollably, loudly crying out, '*O my son Absalom, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!*' In disgust General Joab accuses David of loving his rebellious son more than he loves his loyal troops and orders the king outside to encourage the returning soldiers. So David dries his tears and greets his victorious army, but one gets the sense that life for David has now lost most of its joy. With the death of his two sons and the rape of his concubines, perhaps David finally understood the depth of his sin in killing Uriah and stealing his wife.

The last decade of David's reign, would see him facing down another rebellion, followed by a three-year famine, and finally another war with the Philistines. By the age of seventy, with David having grown physically feeble, his fourth son Adonijah makes an attempt at claiming the throne. But having earlier promised Bathsheba that their son would be the next king, David hurriedly crowns Solomon and Adonijah peacefully submits. A few years later Adonijah will try another scheme in order to lay claim to the throne and is put to death by Solomon. But those are all stories for another day.

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So what parenting lessons can we learn from the tragic tale of unpunished rape and murder? Let's look at these two proverbs again.

Those who spare the rod hate their children,  
but those who love them are diligent to  
discipline them. Proverbs 13:24

There is no escaping that discipline is a vital part of parental love. The story is told of a single mother who had an uncontrollable son. Noting that the boy had multiple cavities his family doctor worried over who might be able to handle this defiant child, finally settling on an older dentist.

Arriving for his appointment, the old dentist told the boy to get in the chair. "*No!*" said the boy defiantly, *and if you try to make me, I'll take all my clothes off.*

*Take-em off,* said the old Dr. *and then get in that chair.* So the boy stripped down to his underwear and socks, loudly repeating again, *if you make me get in that chair, I said I would take off ALL my clothes.*

*Well get-em off,* replied the Dr. *but you will get in that chair.* Stripped down completely naked, the boy finally got in the chair and the Dentist got to work.

When his dental work was done, the boy then demanded, *give me my clothes back!*

*No,* said the old dentist, *I think we will keep them overnight. Your mother can pick them up in the morning.* And so his mother walked her naked little boy out of the office, through the public waiting area, out to their car and home.

The next day, when Mom came to pick up her son's clothes, the dentist expected to get some complaint. Instead she thanked him profusely saying, *my boy has been holding me hostage for years with that threat to take his clothes off. I don't think he will ever try that again.*

Children need love and loving discipline. Writing to the Church at Ephesus, after repeating the fifth commandment about children honoring their parents, the Apostle Paul goes on to urge the fathers ....

Fathers, do not provoke your children  
to anger, but bring them up in the  
discipline and instruction of the Lord.  
Ephesians 6:4

It is our parental responsibility to both instruct and discipline our children appropriately. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that when God disciplines us, it is because He is treating us as His children...

*For what son is there whom his father does not discipline* (Hebrews 12:7)...

*Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

Hebrews 12:11

Only with appropriate and loving discipline can we hope to raise a righteous, God and parent honoring child.

Then there is this second proverb,

Discipline your children while there is hope;  
do not set your heart on their destruction.  
Proverbs 19:18

This is a truth which the stories of Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom only too sadly illustrate. David claimed to love his children, but his lack of willingness to discipline his adult sons, which was probably a pattern that had long continued since their youth, ultimately led not only to their own untimely death but to more grief for himself than David could have imagined.

So we have come to the end of our stories from the life of King David. Personally chosen from his youth as a "man after God's own heart," though David was passionate in his love and devotion to God, a single, secret, unconfessed sin caused him a future of personal suffering: the death of an innocent child along with several of his most valiant soldiers; also eventually the death of his two oldest sons, a ruined life for his daughter Tamar, and plenty of grief for their mothers.

Unconfessed sin escalates, unpunished sin ultimately destroys.

Let's pray about this and vow to treat our own children better.