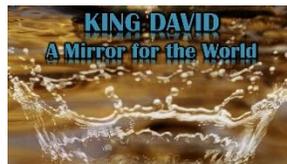




## Victim & Perpetrator



We have been spending this summer looking at the life of King David from his time as a young boy called to be the next King, through to defeating Goliath as a shepherd boy to finally becoming King and conquering

and ruling over the whole of Israel. David is known as a man after God's own heart, he listens to God's instructions and consults God as he makes decisions.

But David also made some terrible personal decisions. We have already heard about David's affair, and some would say rape, of Bathsheba. Last week we talked about how God's grace forgives us for our sins, but also that there are likely to still be consequences. Today we are going to learn about King David's parenting skills and the dysfunctional behavior that his sons learnt from him.



Remembering that polygamy was common in that era, David's oldest 4 sons from 4 different wives

were Amnon, Chileab, Absalom, and Adonijah. All half-brothers. Solomon is further down the list. We do not hear more about Chileab, so he probably died young. Today talk about Amnon & Absalom. Next week Adonijah. Absalom has a sister Tamar. But the eldest son Amnon loves and lusts after his half-sister and tricks her and forces her to lie with him.

Tamar, no longer a virgin, is distraught and goes to live with her brother Absalom. David is angry, but does nothing, despite the Jewish law indicating that Amnon should be put to death or at a minimum sent to jail. Absalom is furious at both his father King David and his brother Amnon.



Two years later, Absalom holds a banquet and invites Amnon. Absalom orders his men to kill Amnon at the party. So Amnon arrives, gets drunk and is stabbed and killed. King David is upset at the death of his son, and Absalom flees. Absalom's rage and fury at his father is still not satisfied with death of Amnon, so

Absalom plots his return and a rebellion against David. After 3 years of Absalom in exile, David's grief subsides, and he invites Absalom back to live in Jerusalem. Absalom takes advantage of being back in Jerusalem to undermine David's popular support and sways the public sentiment against David.

Four years later Absalom goes to Hebron. When he is in Hebron, he gathers an army around him and the rebellion begins. Too late, David finds out what is happening, and flees Jerusalem to go into the wilderness. *This is when David wrote Psalm 3 (that we read earlier).* David left 10 of his concubines behind in Jerusalem, who Absalom raped them to humiliate David. And then David's army and Absalom's army faced each other in battle.

*So now, let's now listen to today's scripture as we hear what happened on the battlefield. <2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33>*

*<sup>5</sup> The king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.*

*<sup>6</sup> So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup> The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. <sup>8</sup> The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword.*

*<sup>9</sup> Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.*

*<sup>15</sup> And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.*

*<sup>31</sup> Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, "Good tidings for my lord the king! For the LORD has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you." <sup>32</sup> The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man."*

*<sup>33</sup> The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"*



David had explicitly told his men to spare his son Absalom, but they defy his order and Absalom was killed. When David hears, he grieves the death of his son, and the victorious army returns from putting down the rebellion to find a grieving King. His commander Joab comes to him and says,

*<sup>5</sup> Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons*

and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now." (2 Samuel 19:5-7)

David takes his advice. He wins back the popular support and is reinstated as King and his kingdom is secure again, at least for a while.



In this story, David is both the **victim** of his son Absalom and the **perpetrator** through David's lack of ability to deal with Amnon's behavior, and then Absalom's rage. It is a complicated story of love and betrayal, forgiveness and heartbreak and unresolved grief, political duty and rivalry and power battles. It reminds us of the messiness of human relationships and emotions. It shows the enormity of the consequences that can result from our action or inaction. The results are the fruit of a long drama of sin and judgment that are passed tragically from one generation to the next and played out in individual and collective lives. It is a mirror by which we see our own complicated choices.

How can we relate to this tragic tale? THREE points.



ONE. **We reap what we sow.** David's sons are a mess. They have learned from him: how to treat women, how to use violence, how to act in passive aggressive ways, how to use or rather misuse drink.

Our children watch us. Our grandchildren too; even great grandchildren. They watch what we say and what we do. How we drive. How we respond to TV programs. What we read. What we say around the meal table. What we do at a party. How we talk about others. How we treat women or men. The words we use. Whether we admit it when we get it wrong or whether we hold grudges. If we shout or hit things or get angry. And so on ... We pass these things down from generation to generation.

The meditation quote in our bulletin today by Jennifer Lopez says "You mirror what the world mirrors to you."<sup>1</sup> *So, what are we mirroring?*

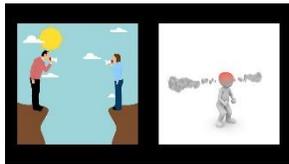


When they were younger my 3 boys knew exactly how to play my husband Adrian and I off against one another. I remember a conversation I had in the car with them as teenagers. One of them had done something wrong and cleverly chose that time while I was driving to fess up to it. For some reason, I asked him why he told me rather than his dad, or even both of us together. He and the other two boys

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/jennifer\\_lopez\\_460716](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/jennifer_lopez_460716)

laughed and then regaled me with a list. Well, if it is this, this or this, we go to you. If its that, that, or that, we go to dad! You are more lenient with this; he is more lenient with that! They had us to a “T”!

Maybe it is too late now, and we have passed many of our bad habits on. But the one thing that it is never too late for, is for us all to be concerned about **injustice**. David was wrong to ignore Amnon’s assault on Tamar. We can always change our minds about how we think on any particular issue. It is never too late. As the prophet Micah says, “*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)*”



**TWO. How we react to conflict is our choice.** So how do you deal with conflict? Any time we are in a relationship with another person whether in our families, churches, organizations, work and so on, at some point, we are going to disagree. The **way we deal with that conflict** is going to depend upon the skills we learned growing up:

Do you shout or fight or throw things which can lead to people getting hurt? That’s never a good solution! Do you run away and avoid it which can lead to pent-up anger? Do you back off and be flexible, and never challenge poor behavior? Do you keep talking and cooperate which can be exhausting? Do you bargain and compromise, so no one is ever happy? Do you assert control and dictate, which over time can create chronic tension? Or do you use a healthy mixture of those techniques?

We all weave tangled webs of alienation with those most close to us. How do we keep from responding to conflict with anger and violence of our own -- as individuals, families, and a nation?

God sent Jesus to bring us healing and wholeness and to proclaim a message of grace – grace that there is no sin too large to forgive. Jesus’ message is about the Way of Forgiveness. **The chains of dysfunction and violence are broken through forgiveness and NOT through revenge.**

*Please hear what I am saying and what I am NOT saying. If someone is being abused, that is NEVER ok. They need to escape that situation. Forgiving the person that has hurt you does not necessarily mean putting yourself back into that situation. Forgiving someone is that you can move on and so that the offender doesn’t rent space in your head. It means letting go of your anger and your need for revenge.*

Amnon was wrong to rape his half-sister Tamar, and he had to live with his conscience and seek his own forgiveness from God. King David was wrong to totally ignore a crime he knew about. Even if David forgave Amnon, there are still should have been some consequences for his wrongdoing. Absalom though, let his anger really fester. He was unable to forgive his step-brother and two years later took it upon himself to take

revenge. And it wasn't even enough for him to murder Amnon, then seven years after that, he took his rage out on David by overthrowing him as monarch.

We need to urge each other to let go of the things that are eating us up. What if someone had sat down with Absalom and talked to him about his rage? Perhaps Absalom and Amnon could have had a conversation, maybe one that was facilitated by a third person. Perhaps Amnon could have apologized to Absalom and then done some type of penance or restitution.

As a faith community, we have a conflict resolution process, and we have used it in the past. It calls us to seek help from God and from our sisters and brothers in Christ whenever we encounter conflicted situations. In Matthew 18, Jesus tells us, <sup>15</sup> *"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup> But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. (Matthew 18:15-16)*

Sitting down together and working through things is messy and challenging, but it is always better than letting our anger eat us up. And forgiveness is the key.



**THREE. We cannot fix others; we are not the Savior.** People will always let us down and disappoint us. When our children, or anyone else, does something that upsets us, we want to change the outcome; we want to change them.

David cries out when he hears that Absalom is dead, *"Would that I have died instead of you."* We cannot fix everything. We cannot make it different. That is David's dilemma at the end. Despite Absalom's wrongdoing, David still loved him dearly. David's heart was broken, and there was nothing he could do. Each of us has been given freewill to make our own choices. We can try to influence others, but their choices are theirs.

God has to watch each one of us make many mistakes. Through Jesus' death on the cross, God shares our suffering, as His own Son died.

God's grace and love is there for us regardless of our continued sinfulness. The Bible is made up of so many stories of imperfect people who continually sin, and God's story of love, acceptance and redemption. David could not change things and restore Absalom. None of us is the Savior. There are some things that only God can do. The only person we have control over is ourselves and our reactions. We can learn forgiveness and compassion and work for justice. It is God as creator of all, that has the power to restore life when the world does everything in its power to take it away. With God, grief and pain are not the final answer. God can bring new life to us and heal those wounds.



So, let us look in the mirror and learn from David, about the things he perpetrated and the things he fell victim to. Let's remember to stand against injustice, to practice the art of forgiveness, and trust God with what we cannot fix ourselves.

Thanks be to God,  
Amen.

*Let us pray...*

*Loving God, we know that we are not perfect, and we lament the bad behaviors that we have passed on to others. Forgive us for the damage that we have done. Take away our rage. Fill us with hearts of compassion and teach us the way of forgiveness. Heal our wounds, free us from fear and fill us with hope. Meet us with your grace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Resources

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