

Women's Bible Study – Fall 2009

What's in the Heart?

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A Broken Heart

2 Samuel 15-16

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A few weeks ago 2 of my girls agreed to do a friend's paper route. It was a Saturday, and I dropped them off and ran an errand, expecting them to be almost done with the route when I came back for them 45 minutes later. Instead I found one of the girls crying on the curb—not exactly doing her fair share. She was upset about a variety of things that had not gone her way while I was gone and decided to make herself generally helpless. After a long talk, she confessed her sin and asked forgiveness. But the discipline I administered was that, even though I was now back and would help finish the paper route, she could not walk along with me, but was to stay in the truck by herself and just watch her sister and me. It was a bitter pill for her, but it did her great good, and by the time we were on our way home, all was well with the world. Until it came time to distribute the money for the paper route. There was money for her sister but none for her. I explained that the consequences of *not working* are *not getting paid*. And that even though she was forgiven, she had had to undergo discipline and suffer consequences.

Last time we met we pondered one of the low points of David's life—his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah. David repented of his sin, and God forgave him. But we know that the child conceived out of wedlock died. And the ensuing chapters are a lengthy record detailing the consequences of David's sin. Sadly, they went on and on. These chapters are a fulfillment of what Nathan prophesied to David: "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun'" (12:10-12).

Commentator F. B. Meyer writes: "This is solemn reading for us; it is the inner story of God's dealing with his own. As He dealt with David, He will deal with us. He will forgive, but He may have to use the rod; He may restore to his favour, and yet permit us to drink the bitter waters which our sin has tapped. Be meek, patient, and submissive . . . and men shall learn through thy experiences the goodness and severity of God. Forgiven men may have to reap as they have sown."

First let's look at what happened. The chapter after the story of David and Bathsheba tells how Amnon, the crown prince, raped his half-sister Tamar. The punishment for rape in the Old Testament was banishment, but David did nothing, even though the text says he "was very angry" (13:21). Tamar's brother Absalom, however, "hated Amnon" (13:22). He bided his time for 2 years and then requested that David allow Amnon to come to a feast at sheep-shearing time. David was reluctant—perhaps he suspected something—but Absalom "pressed him" (13:27) and David gave in. At the feast, Absalom had Amnon killed, thus avenging Tamar's rape and moving himself that much closer to the throne. Absalom fled to Geshur, where his mother's father was king.

Fast forward 3 years. David is in a quandary. If he punishes Absalom for the death of Amnon, he jeopardizes the heir to the throne. Joab understands this dilemma, so in chapter 14 he devises a

ruse that will get Absalom back to Jerusalem. He finds a woman from Tekoa who is apparently a good actress. She tells King David a fabricated tale of her two sons, one who killed the other. Now her enemies want to kill the murderer, but she doesn't want to lose her only surviving son and end the family line. David rules as the woman and Joab want. He says, "As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground." And then the woman delivers the zinger. She turns the tables on David, saying, "Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again" (14:13). This is just what happened when Nathan the prophet told David the story of the poor man with the one lamb. Once again, David pronounces a judgment that is used to convict himself.

So Joab goes to Geshur and brings Absalom back to Jerusalem, but the family estrangement continues. Look at verse 24: "And the king said, 'Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence.'"

Fast forward another 2 years. Absalom still has not been given an audience with the king. He asks Joab to arrange a meeting but he gets no response. So Absalom knows how to get what he wants. He sets fire to Joab's fields, forcing a confrontation. Absalom's explanation goes like this: "Behold, I sent word to you, 'Come here, that I may send you to the king, to ask, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.' Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.'" I think Absalom is pretty sure David is not going to execute him. After all, David hasn't done anything about Amnon's murder for 5 years. Absalom is tired of being kept away. You see, he needs access to his father in order to betray him and usurp his throne. The chapter ends, "So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom."

This kiss is not a kiss of true reconciliation, though. For the very next verse records the first action Absalom takes in his rebellion: "After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, 'From what city are you?' And when he said, 'Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel,' Absalom would say to him, 'See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you.' Then Absalom would say, 'Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.' And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (1-6).

After four years of this Absalom requests permission to go to Hebron to supposedly pay a vow to the Lord. Hebron was Absalom's birthplace, but it was also where David was first anointed king over Judah and then over Israel (5:3). David's last words to him are, "Go in peace," which is terribly ironic, because Absalom's next action is to make war on his father.

Absalom sends messengers throughout the land, declaring himself king in Hebron. David's trusted counselor Ahithophel defects to Absalom's side, and verse 12 says, "The conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing." It's interesting to note that Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather, and his son Eliam was a comrade to Uriah (11:3; 23:34). Perhaps that made the betrayal sting even more. And maybe that uncovers Ahithophel's motive. Let's keep going: "And a

messenger came to David, saying, 'The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom.' Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, 'Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword'" (13-14). David leaves 10 concubines behind to look after the palace; otherwise many loyal followers leave the city with David, including the foreigner Ittai the Gittite. David is also met by the priests Abiathar and Zadok, carrying the ark of the covenant, but he sends them back into the city. He does the same for his friend Hushai, instructing them all to spy for him when Absalom takes over. Picture this sad scene—David, the deposed, barefoot king mournfully ascends the Mount of Olives, just as Jesus would one day, and journeys into the wilderness. Along the way he discovers Ahithophel's betrayal, hears that Mephibosheth has sided with Absalom, and is cursed by Shimei, a member of Saul's family. Can things get any lower? Yes. The next thing Absalom does is pitch a tent on the roof of the palace so he can sleep with David's concubines and everyone will know.

But ultimately, Absalom's grasping at the throne comes to nothing. When David heard about Ahithophel's betrayal, he prayed, "O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (15:31). And that is exactly what happens. Ahithophel advises Absalom to attack David right away, before he has a chance to organize his fighting force. But David's loyal friend Hushai gives Absalom the opposite advice, and Absalom falls for it. Look at the end of 17:14: "For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom." David thus gains the upper hand in the battle that ensues. And though David urges Joab to be gentle with Absalom, Joab will have none of it. He finds the usurper hanging helplessly in a tree after his army has been defeated—presumably by the long, thick hair of which he was so proud, and Joab thrusts 3 spears into his chest. David's response to the news is famous: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (33).

Now let's see why this happened. Our title today is "A Broken Heart." Sin causes broken hearts—our sin and other people's. Think of all the sadness in the world. It's all caused by specific sin or the general fallenness of our world, which came about by Adam's sin. What kinds of sin can we see highlighted in these chapters, which are to be seen as flowing from the story of David and Bathsheba? First there was *abuse of power*—by David, then by Amnon, then by Absalom. There was overreaching *ambition* in Absalom's desire to steal the throne from his father. There was *unchecked sexual desire*, again by David first, then by both of his sons. God will forgive any sin that we truly repent of, but the fruit of some sins seems to last longer, and unchecked sexual desire is one of those. *Vanity* is another sin that played a role in this drama. Remember how Absalom, like Saul before him, was described in purely physical terms? 14:25 says, "Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head . . . he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight." His focus is completely on the outside, and ironically that impressive head of hair proves instrumental in his death. The pursuit of *revenge* is another sin that causes David's broken heart. Absalom waited to avenge Tamar's rape for 2 years, and that compulsion for revenge drove him to murder. *Poor parenting* is certainly another sin that plays into this story. It is natural and appropriate, I think, to consider the question, "What went wrong with David's children?" So here's a little 3-minute lecture within a lecture—Let's consider what truths about raising children, specifically sons, does God want us to hear in this sad story? Now, don't turn me off if you don't have kids. The church is a family, a covenant community, and we are to look out for each other's interests. And there are many ways you can help to "bring

up” children in the church and community, even if you don’t have biological offspring, if you’re past the point of childrearing, or if you have only daughters!

Scripture is the definitive parenting book. But to help us in fleshing out biblical principles, Rich and I have always found it helpful to seek the advice of parents whose children are grown and are still faithfully following Christ. So I sent out a plea to a handful of such parents a couple weeks ago—parents of adult sons who are, as far as I can tell, on a God-ward trajectory, asking them to share some of their biblical wisdom. Lots of this applies to daughters, grandchildren, and really almost any child with whom you have an influential relationship. Here is a sampling of what they said.

1. Make sure your son is trained to be fiscally responsible.
2. Listen carefully and ask for forgiveness when you’re wrong.
3. Provide lots of manual labor!
4. Focus on the heart. Kids can tell if you care more about their outward conformity than you do about a heart that’s responsive to God.

But there were three directives that were mentioned by multiple parents and resonate most, I think, with this particular passage. 1) *Discipline your son (or daughter)*. Prov. says, “Do not withhold discipline from a child . . . (23:13) The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame . . . Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart (29:15, 17). Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (13:24). Sometimes our children’s little misbehaviors seem cute when they’re small. But left unchecked, your cute 2-year-old will turn into an uncontrollable adolescent. David failed to discipline his sons and had a nightmare on his hands when they became adults. First David tried to ignore Amnon’s sin of rape. He got angry, but did nothing. The Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls add this sentence to 13:21: “He would not hurt Amnon because he was his eldest son and he loved him.” Withholding needed discipline is never an expression of love; the Bible says it is an expression of hatred. David’s weakness in handling his sons shows up again with Absalom. It was the king’s duty to administer justice and fairly enforce the laws of God. But David tried to sweep Absalom’s sin under the rug. In over 15 years of observing teenagers up close because of my husband’s job, we’ve seen that really permissive parenting does not arouse love and gratitude in children, but rather utter contempt for the parents.

2) *Spend time with your son or daughter. And boys need to spend lots of time with their dads*. The emphasis is on quantity, not just quality time. You can’t influence your child if you’re never there. Read through Proverbs sometime and listen to all the verses that start out, “My son . . .” There is a stream of communication in godliness going on there. One parent said, “Rules without relationship breeds rebellion,” especially with teens. Well, it takes time to build those relationships. Deut. 6 calls us to diligently teach our children to love God when we sit in our house, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise. We can’t do that if we or they are never home. This piece of counsel may require some tough decisions and a paring down of our schedule, perhaps even reducing our standard of living. It also requires staying faithfully married to your son’s father. I get the idea that David was a rather absent father to Amnon and Absalom. Even if he weren’t constantly out fighting in wars (and he was), his many wives and children didn’t all live in one house. He couldn’t possibly have had the day-to-day ordinary interactions with his boys that mark strong father-son relationships. If you are a single mom, you already know you have a hard job, and you need encouragement. There are men who can stand in as father figures for your boys—youth pastors, godly uncles or friends. God has promised to supply all our needs, so ask him to supply this one for your family.

At the marriage retreat last winter the speaker urged us to ask our spouses, "How do you know that I love you?" The answers to this question helped us gauge how well we were communicating love in our marriages. I'd encourage you to try this with your children. Will they answer, "I know you love me because you discipline me, and you spend time with me"?

3) *Be the person you desire your son or daughter to be.* This one has the most "ouch" potential! How often have I urged my children to do something that I myself have not done. How easy it is to reprimand my children for doing something wrong that I also do; I've just learned to hide it better! But children, especially teens, are quick to spot a hypocrite. It seems likely that David, because of his sexual sins, felt he lacked the moral authority to punish Amnon's sexual sin. And because of his murder of Uriah, it's likely he felt he lacked the moral authority to punish Absalom's murder of Amnon. Our children learn more by watching us than by listening to us. They won't see perfection, of course, but an honest admission of our faults goes a long way. I've never had one of my children withhold forgiveness from me when I asked for it.

Ultimately, the successful parents I polled almost universally acknowledged that it is God's work in our children's hearts that produces the fruit of obedience rather than rebellion. While we are responsible to do our best to faithfully obey God's Word in our parenting, we can't take sole credit for the outcome when it is good (or sole blame when it is bad) because God is sovereign over our children's lives and their response to Him. So whether you have children or not, pray for the children in your life, the children in the church. Seeking God's face for the soul of a little one is an invaluable gift that all of us can give.

So sin—whether it was vanity or sexual sin or poor parenting--caused David's broken heart. And we should see that sin, when left unchecked, becomes more intensive and more extensive. That's the nature of the beast. David's personal problem (his lust for Bathsheba) became a familial problem (Amnon's lust for Tamar) and then a national problem (Absalom's rebellion) that led to the deaths of thousands in the ensuing battle. David took Bathsheba, Amnon took Tamar, and Absalom took the kingdom. It's so tempting to think our "little slips" aren't going to affect anyone else. But they do. That's the nature of sin.

What was David's response to what happened? He seems remarkably at peace and reconciled to what is happening. In short, he *submits* to God's discipline. He knows it is not the punishment of a judge, but the discipline of a Father. When David meets Zadok on his way out of Jerusalem, he tells him, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. But if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,' behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him" (15:25-26). When Shimei curses David and throws stones and flings dust at him, David restrains his men, who are ready to take Shimei's head off. David reasons, "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today" (16:11-12). David also shows consideration for those who have served him. Ittai was a foreigner who surely never intended to get mixed up in a civil war when he signed on with David. David urges him: "Go back . . . You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you" (20). Only when Absalom dies does David lose control,

and Joab has to remind him that his excessive mourning dishonors all the soldiers who gave their lives for their king.

But not only did David submit, *he worshipped*. David wrote Psalm 63 when he was in the wilderness after fleeing Jerusalem. Listen: "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips . . ." Clearly this is a man who loves God, not just the good things God gives. Have you thought about that difference? God gives us all the good things we enjoy in life—family, flowers, music, sex, sports, chocolate . . . But what happens when those things are taken away? That's where David was. And he is obviously entranced with God Himself. So he can worship even in the wilderness. Last week I experienced a little taste of wilderness. My mom was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm. She is stable for now and awaiting further tests, but I find myself asking, "Do I really love God, or do I just love what he gives me? Can I honestly say, "Your steadfast love is *better* than life"? Could I worship him if he took my mom?"

Finally, since the main character of every Bible story is God, what do we learn about Him here? *First*, God can and does work through human sin. He never tempts anyone to sin, and he can't be blamed for sin, but he sometimes uses sin to accomplish his purposes. Even though Absalom's acts were wicked, God was working out his providential designs for history in these chapters. *Second*, God heals broken hearts. Isaiah says that God anointed prophets like him to "bind up the brokenhearted" (1); David writes that "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (34:18) and "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (147:3). Last week we saw in David's confession in Psalm 51 that "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit"—and that God does not despise a "broken and contrite heart" (17). *Third*, God's discipline is loving and fruitful, not purposeless, and negative consequences are always tempered with blessing. Hebrews 12:11 affirms this: "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." David's response to Absalom's rebellion shows that he already was bearing fruit because of the discipline he had had to undergo. And the negative consequences David suffered in today's passage were tempered with blessing. Yes, Ahithophel turned against David, but Ittai, Zadok, and Abiathar stood by him. Yes, Shimei cursed David, but Hushai helped him. Yes, Absalom rebelled, but there were many who defended the true king, and God ultimately gave David the victory.

Romans 11 speaks of both the kindness and the severity of God. Exodus 34 reminds us that God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." Now, the NIVs use the word "punishes" in verse 7 is unfortunate, because God does not punish children and grandchildren for the sins of their parents and grandparents. Multigenerational consequences, yes, but punishment for the innocent, no. And even those consequences are limited by God—he says "to the third and fourth generation." But notice that while he punishes the guilty, and he brings consequences to 3 and 4 generations, his LOVE is limitless—"keeping steadfast love for thousands."

Are you feeling brokenhearted today? Maybe you, like David, have a rebellious child. Maybe your health is failing, you've lost your job or been passed over for a promotion, someone you love has

died, or a friend has failed you. Maybe, like David, you're undergoing God's discipline, and it's painful. Know that God is near to the brokenhearted. He's with you in this. And he heals the brokenhearted. Hear these words from Isaiah about Jesus: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (53:4-5). Look to Christ; know that he is on your side—he is FOR you, and he has purchased your healing.

This notice should be at the end of the lecture – final page:

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