

SHATTERED FAMILY BONDS

2 Samuel 13:19-22, 28a, 37-39; 14:23-24; 15:1-6

Objective: To learn what we can do to foster reconciliation in broken relationships.

Dysfunctional! What a description. Unfortunately, it is a correct depiction of many families and organizations. The cause of dysfunctionality is typically people with broken relationships caused by sinful behavior, refusal to repent, refusal to seek forgiveness and refusal to grant forgiveness from the one injured. When you think about it, this is the way most the world operates and has operated since Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden of Eden. Dysfunctional!

Most of the world religions (philosophies) do not deal with broken relationships very well at all. Some even promote practices that lead to further separation (escalation of hostilities) once a relationship has been broken. Jesus came to show us a better way – the only way to bridge the gap and tear down the walls of separation. Bridging gaps and tearing down walls is part of the work He left for us to do as His representatives. We see from 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

In our study of the life of David and his family we can see sinful behavior and how such behavior is typically handled by the perpetrator, the injured, and those who are close to them. David's family did not handle sinful behavior well and we can learn from this by looking to find alternative actions that can foster reconciliation rather than make the situation worse.

The consequences of David's sin with Bathsheba were spelled out by God through the prophet Nathan when he confronted David with his sin. These consequences plagued his family and eventually affected the entire nation. The way his family dealt with problems created even more problems. The question for us to consider is "can we find a better way to deal with problems that we encounter in life?" There will be problems, there will be hurts – the outcome will depend on our attitudes and actions in response to such problems and hurts.

We are not told the details of what went on in the David's family immediately following the pronouncement of God's judgment on David's sin. We know that David went into an extended time of mourning for the child that died. However, we have no indication that David ever called the family together to tell them where things stood and that they needed to pull together and to show love for one another and to give them a stern warning to NOT do what he had done. I'm not even sure that could have happened. There were multiple wives and the children were teenagers and younger. So what could have been done to prepare his family for the judgments (problems) that were coming? We want to look at this for the purpose of discovering what we can do for our families to be prepared for life itself.

The first line of defense is PREVENTION.

The importance of the parents (and grandparents) taking responsibility cannot be over stated. This is what God said of Abraham (and is why Abraham was chosen by God to be the father of the faithful): *"For I know him, that he will*

command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment" (Gen 18:19). The advice of Moses in Deuteronomy 4:9 also applies here: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them." David's own words from Psalm 119:9-11 would be excellent advice to follow: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

If David did any of these things that could prepare his family for what was coming they were not heeded by all his children. There was a terrible incident that involved three of David's children that shows the continuing devastation that was going on in David's family. Amnon was the eldest son and was the apparent heir to his father's throne. He became infatuated with his half-sister Tamar. This infatuation (lust) led to a terribly destructive incident in which his lack of sound judgment ruined his life, ruined his sister's life, the life of his half-brother and started a sequence of events that nearly split the nation. The account given in the first part of 2 Samuel 13 shows that Amnon preplanned what he was going to do. He tricked his father and fooled his half-sister. He probably had deceived himself in that he may have thought that he loved her. His subsequent actions proved that was not the case. It would not have been totally out of the question if he had wanted to marry Tamar. Though the law of Moses had prohibitions against this, there were precedents that would have made it acceptable in the culture in which they lived. He did not even explore that possibility. In an attempt to dissuade Amnon from raping her, Tamar brought up the possibility that they could marry. That did not stop him. Raging hormones will overrule sound judgement for all except those who are very disciplined.

Amnon realized that what he did was wrong and he did not handle that guilt very well. He essentially told her "Get up and get out." He could have tried to redeem the situation by taking responsibility for his actions and following the teaching of the law with regard to relationships outside of marriage involving a virgin. What he had mistaken for love turned into contempt after the true emotion of his lust had been satisfied.

¹⁹ Tamar put ashes on her head and tore her long-sleeved garment which was on her; and she put her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went. 2 Samuel 13:19 (NASB95)

Tamar was the victim of at least two crimes. She was sexually assaulted which could be argued to a crime of passion (though I have my doubts since it was premeditated). She was also treated inhumanely and with total contempt of her as a person when he rejected her and sent her away. In verse 16, she argued that Amnon's rejection was more evil than raping her.

Tamar's life was devastated. Her reputation was ruined. Her chances for marriage had been severely damaged. She felt shame, loss of purity and abandoned. In the custom of the day, she expressed her grief by outward expressions or signs such as ashes on her head, tearing of her clothes, covering her head with her hands, and by weeping.

Question: The incidences of sexual or physical abuse in families is still prevalent today. What other acts can destroy a person's self esteem? (Verbal abuse, ridicule, shunning or excluding, lack of encouragement, etc.)

²⁰ Then Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now keep

silent, my sister, he is your brother; do not take this matter to heart." So Tamar remained and was desolate in her brother Absalom's house. 2 Samuel 13:20 (NASB95)

In a polygamist family, there were multiple households where those children who had the same mother gathered. Loyalties were strongest in these enclaves. Tamar went to the home of her brother Absalom and he immediately figured out what had happened. I'm sure he knew that Tamar had gone to Amnon's house to cook for him while he was supposedly sick. He probably also knew that Amnon was infatuated with Tamar. Her actions following the attack left little to doubt as to what had happened. What Amnon had done was serious and had shattered the family relationships for these three. While prevention would have been the ideal option, matters had gone beyond the possibility of prevention and the possibility of reconciliation would depend on proper INTERVENTION.

Question: What actions can a believer who wants to heal broken relationships take to confront wrongdoing?

Absalom could have taken course of intervention by his own action or he could have gotten King David involved. He rejected intervention that might have lead to reconciliation in favor of retribution. His advice to Tamar to keep quiet was likely rationalized by several possible arguments. First, it could be argued that it should not be made public since it would further hurt the reputation of Tamar. Second, he could argue that this was a family matter and if it got out the punishment for Amnon might be too severe. Third, an open accusation could have become a danger for Tamar if he accused her of being a willing participant. Fourth, Absalom was likely wanting to take revenge on Amnon because what he had done to his sister and he needed some time to set up the revenge.

Question: How is it possible for believers to lay aside vengeful attitudes toward others who have wronged them?

Absalom advice to "not take this thing to heart" could mean that she should not feel any guilt for what had happened or that she should not continue to dwell on the loss but move on with her life as best as she could. Because of what happen to Tamar, her life was forever altered and there was no way that she could be compensated for all that she lost.

²¹ Now when King David heard of all these matters, he was very angry. 2 Samuel 13:21 (NASB95)

This short verse may be the key verse in understanding how the fabric of David's family became so unraveled. The only response David had was an emotional reaction. He had reason to be angry. His own son did a very wicked thing and caused David and the rest of the family to be accessory to it. What Amnon did reflected poorly on the way David had trained him, it was a scandal for the royal family, it ruined Tamar's life, it was a bad example to David's kingdom, and did immense damage to the soul of Amnon. But was it enough for David to just be angry? He should have punished his son for it, and have put him to open shame; both as a father and as a king he had power to do it. But the Septuagint adds these words: *But he saddened not the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, because he was his first-born.* David fell into Eli's error, whose sons *made themselves vile, and he frowned not on them.* Since Amnon was dear to him, punishing him would have been like punishing himself for his own uncleanness.

Question: Why are believers often reluctant to take the lead in seeking resolution of a family conflict?

It is difficult to punish wrong doing in others when we are guilty of the same or similar sins in our own lives. This is a good example of not being able to operate effectively because of having lost the "moral high ground" in our own lives. This

loss of “moral high ground” is likely to be the cause of our reluctance to share Christ with a lost and dying world. When a person gets into such a situation, the only thing left is to “get angry.” No action was taken, and anger became a substitute for justice. Solomon (Eccl. 8:11) observed that the consequences of such an alternative is more wrong doing.

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.

Is this not where we are as a society, today?

²² But Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar. 2 Samuel 13:22 (NASB95)

This is another example of how NOT to handle broken relationships. Absalom’s refusal to confront Amnon (along with David’s refusal to take action) created an environment that was perfect for hatred to grow and more evil to happen. The confrontation may not have led to anything positive. Amnon may have thought so highly of himself that he would have rejected any effort to bring about a reconciliation. There may have been some “racial” bias in that Amnon’s mother was an Israelite but the mother of Absalom and Tamar was the daughter of a heathen prince. That may have been part of what was happening when Amnon totally rejected Tamar after having raped her. He may have thought that this is all she deserved since she was not a 100 percent Israelite. Absalom may have sensed this superiority feeling and just did not bother to try to work on what he thought was a losing cause. The alternative he chose was to set himself up as judge in the matter and he decided that Amnon should die for what he did to Tamar.

It took two year for the right moment and the hatred to come to the point of expressing itself with violence. The plan Absalom put into motion was to have a banquet in a remote area and invite all the family. He urged David and all his brothers to attend. David did not go but encouraged the other to go.

²⁸ Absalom commanded his servants, saying, “See now, when Amnon’s heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, ‘Strike Amnon,’ then put him to death. Do not fear; have not I myself commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant.” 2 Samuel 13:28 (NASB95)

It was a pretty simple plan. Get Amnon drunk and then have the servants kill him. In Absalom’s role as judge, he decided that it was OK to break the commandment regarding murder to avenge the broken commandment regarding adultery.

In fulfillment of the prophecy of Nathan the sword had come to David’s family. With the apparent heir to the throne being dead, the other children of David probably thought that Absalom was making a move to eliminate all the competition for who would be the next king. In the panic that followed the murder of Amnon, all the children immediately fled to return to their homes. Word reached David that Absalom had killed all his sons. This report caused him intense grief and while he was mourning, Jonadab (who had advised Amnon in his treachery against Tamar) bought news that only Amnon had been killed. He also knew the reason was related to revenge for what Amnon had done to Tamar. The good news that not all the sons were dead did little to appease the grief that one son had died at the hand of another son. David’s grief was likely worsened by the realization that he did nothing in the past two years to stop this matter from getting out of hand.

³⁷ Now Absalom fled and went to Talmai the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day. ³⁸ So Absalom had fled and gone to Geshur, and was there three years. ³⁹ The

heart of King David longed to go out to Absalom; for he was comforted concerning Amnon, since he was dead. 2 Samuel 13:37-39 (NASB95)

Question: How do vengeful attitudes harm the target of such anger? How do they harm the person nursing the vengeance?

When you set yourself up as judge without any real authority, then the time will come when you will be guilty of breaking the law and you will find that your judgments are worth very much. This is where Absalom found himself. He knew he was guilty of murder and he fled for his life. Where did he go? He went to live with his maternal grandfather in Geshur. Since David did not demand that Talmai send Absalom back to answer for his crimes, nothing was done.

In time David had resigned himself to the loss of Amnon. We would say that he had gotten over it. Unfortunately, he had also gotten over the fact that Absalom had murdered Amnon. Some commentators have noted that the word "longed" used in verse 39 is feminine and is perhaps an indication that Absalom's mother and perhaps Tamar had some influence on David with regard to allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem.

People around David realized that he wanted to reach out to Absalom but was apparently torn by all the conflicting things surrounding the situation. Joab (David's military leader) took the initiative and had a woman bring a case involving something that had supposedly happened in her family to King David. The story claimed that the woman had a husband and two sons. The husband died and one son killed his brother. Others in her extended family demanded that the murderer die for his crime. She was asking the king to not let that happen since she would have no man in her life who could be an advocate for her and her dead husband would have no heir. David granted her wish and then she told him that this story was actually about David's family situation. David then decided to allow Absalom return to Jerusalem.

²¹ Then the king said to Joab, "Behold now, I will surely do this thing; go therefore, bring back the young man Absalom." ²² Joab fell on his face to the ground, prostrated himself and blessed the king; then Joab said, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, O my lord, the king, in that the king has performed the request of his servant." ²³ So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. ²⁴ However the king said, "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face." So Absalom turned to his own house and did not see the king's face. 2 Samuel 14:21-24 (NASB95)

Obviously, David was still conflicted by what had happened. His parental concern for his son was at cross purposes with what was prescribed by law. This conflict resulted in less than full reconciliation because there was no restitution. There is nothing in the story to indicate that Absalom was truly penitent for what he had done.

Question: Is reconciliation without atonement a viable option? (Consider what God did for us in Christ. He made a way for reconciliation by the atoning death of Christ on the Cross. While this is universal in its availability, it is applicable only to those who repent and believe.)

The strained relationship went on for another two years before David agreed to allow Absalom see him. The meeting was apparently nothing more than a mere formality. Absalom apparently held David in some degree of contempt for his failure to take action in Amnon's case and in his case. This contempt expressed itself in open rebellion.

¹ Now it came about after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses and fifty men as runners before him. ² Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way to the gate; and when any man had a suit to come to the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city

are you?" And he would say, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel." ³ Then Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king." ⁴ Moreover, Absalom would say, "Oh that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit or cause could come to me and I would give him justice." ⁵ And when a man came near to prostrate himself before him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶ In this manner Absalom dealt with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel. 2 Samuel 15: 1-6 (NASB95)

Absalom set out to turn everyone in Israel against David. Absalom would have made a good modern day politician. He acted friendly to everyone and told everyone what they wanted to hear. He carried out this campaign for about four years. He was so charming he stole the hearts of the people. He did not earn their admiration since all his words and what he did was just a sham. He really did not care for the people, he simply wanted to use them for his own purposes and that was to overthrow David and become king in his stead.

Eventually, Absalom led an open rebellion against David. In the ensuing battles, David was forced to leave Jerusalem. Absalom showed the extent of his contempt for his father by having sexual relations with David's concubines. When it was all over, David's forces overcame the forces of Absalom but 20,000 soldiers died and Absalom himself was killed.

The consequences of unhealed family relationships spill over into the lives of friends, neighbors and other who are acquainted with any of the people directly affected. When relationships are broken, stability can be restored by properly confronting the one who did wrong, by resisting vengefulness and working to foster reconciliation. This can work only when selfishness is subordinated