

GRIEVED 2 Samuel 13:15-20, 30-39

Life is about relationships and relationships can work very well or they can be dysfunctional. The cause of dysfunctionality can usually be linked to sinful behavior, followed by refusal to repent, refusal to seek forgiveness and refusal to grant forgiveness from the one injured. Unfortunately, “dysfunctional” is an accurate description of many families and organizations. 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!

Some of the world religions (philosophies) do not deal with broken relationships very well at all. Some even promote practices that lead to further separation and 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. To learn what we can do to foster reconciliation in broken relationships we see a good start in 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 making 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 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 overstated. 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 showed the continuing devastation happening in David's family. Amnon was the eldest son and was the apparent heir to his father's throne. In the early part of chapter thirteen we read that Amnon loved or fell in love with Tamar. The Hebrew word used here is "ahab" (aw-habe) and was used to describe a "strong attraction" such as a nail to a magnet. In other words, 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. The Hebrew word for the kind of "love" Amnon should have had for Tamar is "hasad" which is typically translated as "loving kindness" and means "faithful love." 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 judgment for all except those who are very disciplined.

Shattered – 13:15-20

¹⁵ Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up, go away!" ¹⁶ But she said to him, "No, because this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you have done to me!" Yet he would not listen to her. ¹⁷ Then he called his young man who attended him and said, "Now throw this woman out of my presence, and lock the door behind her." ¹⁸ Now she had on a long-sleeved garment; for in this manner the virgin daughters of the king dressed themselves in robes. Then his attendant took her out and locked the door behind her. 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. 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 13:15-20 (NASB95)

The problem with love that is merely attraction (ahab) and not that which is related to human decency and real dedication (hasad) is that it can easily become the opposite of attraction and turn into repulsion.

Amnon realized that what he did was wrong and he did not handle his responsibility and the resulting 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.

Tamar was the victim of at least two crimes. She was sexually assaulted which could be argued to a crime of passion (though we would have to seriously doubt that 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.

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 individuals. 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.

Absalom could have taken a course of intervention by his own actions or he could have gotten King David involved. He rejected intervention that might have led 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 of what he had done to his sister and he needed some time to set up the revenge.

We would hope that Absalom's advice to "not take this thing to heart" meant 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 happened to Tamar, her life was forever altered and there was no way that she could be compensated for all that she lost.

Two questions come to mind when it comes to application of the events of this account to our lives. The first question is "What actions can a believer who wants to heal broken relationships take to confront wrongdoing?" The second related question is "How is it possible for believers to lay aside vengeful attitudes toward others who have wronged them?"

We would be hard pressed to come up with really wise answers to these questions; however, we can see what did not work by looking briefly at David's reaction when he heard about what happened. We see in verse twenty-one that "he was very angry." There was an emotional response, but there was no action taken even though Amnon needed to be punished and exposed to open shame. The Septuagint added these words: *But he saddened not the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, because he was his firstborn.* He essentially did not want to embarrass Amnon. This sounds like David was following the advice of modern day psychiatrists.

Was David reluctant to punish Amnon since what had happened reminded him of his own actions with Bathsheba? 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. Ecclesiastes 8:11 observes that the consequences of such an alternative are more wrongdoing. "*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?

More wrong doing is exactly what transpired by Absalom who set in motion a scheme to exact revenge on Amnon because he had violated his sister. His refusal to confront Amnon 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.

The alternative Absalom 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 years for the right moment and the hatred to come to the point of expressing itself with violence. This planning resulted in the death of Amnon at the hand of the servants of Absalom and in the panic that followed the murder of Amnon, all the children of David who had attend the feast that Absalom set up immediately fled to return to their homes. Word reached David that Absalom had killed all his sons.

Devastated – 13:30-36

³⁰ Now it was while they were on the way that the report came to David, saying, “Absalom has struck down all the king’s sons, and not one of them is left.”³¹ Then the king arose, tore his clothes and lay on the ground; and all his servants were standing by with clothes torn.³² Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David’s brother, responded, “Do not let my lord suppose they have put to death all the young men, the king’s sons, for Amnon alone is dead; because by the intent of Absalom this has been determined since the day that he violated his sister Tamar.”³³ “Now therefore, do not let my lord the king take the report to heart, namely, ‘all the king’s sons are dead,’ for only Amnon is dead.”³⁴ Now Absalom had fled. And the young man who was the watchman raised his eyes and looked, and behold, many people were coming from the road behind him by the side of the mountain.³⁵ Jonadab said to the king, “Behold, the king’s sons have come; according to your servant’s word, so it happened.”³⁶ As soon as he had finished speaking, behold, the king’s sons came and lifted their voices and wept; and also the king and all his servants wept very bitterly. 2 Samuel 13:30–36 (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. This report caused David intense grief and while he was mourning, Jonadab (who had advised Amnon in his treachery against Tamar) brought 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.

Separated – 13:37-39

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)

Vengeful attitudes not only harm the target of such anger but they harm the person nursing the vengeance. When we set ourselves up as judge without any real authority, then the time will come when we will be guilty of breaking the law and we will find that our judgments are not 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 David eventually allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem.

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 vengeance and working to foster reconciliation. This can work only when selfishness is subordinated to working for the good of others.