

## Chastised: Absalom's Revolt

2 Samuel 12-19 | Behold Our God Series #21 | February 26, 2012

David Sunday  
New Covenant Bible Church, St. Charles, IL

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“And now, O Lord, for what do I wait?  
My hope is in you.  
Deliver me from all my transgressions.  
Do not make me the scorn of the fool!  
I am mute; I do not open my mouth,  
for it is you who have done it.  
Remove your stroke from me;  
I am spent by the hostility of your hand.  
When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin,  
you consume like a moth what is dear to him;  
surely all mankind is a mere breath!” (Psalm 39:7-13).

You may recognize those words from the 39th Psalm.

But I remember them as the anguished outcry of my soul.

I wrote them when God's rod of discipline was heavy upon me. I was spent by the hostility of his hand. All that was dear to me had been consumed like a moth drawn into the fierce intensity of a candle's blaze. I felt I could bear God's rebuke not a moment longer.

My name is David. King David. The son of Jesse, chosen of the LORD to be Israel's anointed King.

You may know me as “a man after God's own heart.”

But to be honest, I have a hard time ever seeing myself that way. “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (Psalm 51:3).

Oh, please don't misunderstand: I love God with all my heart! There's nothing I desire more than him. My soul thirsts for him, my flesh yearns for him like a desert traveler gasping for water.

But often I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Grievously I have sinned against the LORD.

Many of my sins are hidden—hidden from you, and even unknown to me—but the Searcher of Hearts knows them all.

And some of them you know too. You have heard the sordid tale of my sin with Bathsheba. I hate to talk about it, it pains me whenever I think of it—but as long as I live, I'll never be able not to think of it.

I exploited her. I demeaned her. I violated her. Then I deceived her husband, and when he proved to be a better man than I, I discarded him. I set him up to be killed as he was loyally fighting my battle.

I was—I am—a moral monster.

In the weeks and months that followed, outwardly everything appeared normal—I married Bathsheba, she was expecting a baby, and the Kingdom was prospering. I went to meetings, I gave speeches, I sat on my throne giving judgments, keeping as busy as a King can be, doing my utmost to put the whole debacle out of my mind.

But day and night God's hand was heavy upon me. Inwardly, I felt like my bones were wasting away. My strength was dried up like a stream in the July desert (Psalm 32).

I'd go to the temple, but couldn't pray.

I'd open the Torah, but couldn't concentrate to read it.

And worst of all, I could not repent. I could not bring myself to acknowledge what I had done.

- I was comatose in my own wretchedness.
- I was blinded by my own hypocrisy.
- I was senseless to the bounty of God's grace towards me.
- And I was reckless in the face of sin's consequences.

Those were some of the darkest days of my life. But I could not see that the darkness was inside me. The Enemy was within the citadel of my soul.

Then one day the prophet Nathan came to me. He told me the story of two men in a certain city, one was filthy rich, and the other, dirt poor. And the rich man robbed the poor man of the only thing he had--one little ewe lamb who grew up with him and his children.

When I heard this, I was furious! I could think of nothing but finding that wicked man and sentencing him to death.

Gladly I could have killed him with my own sword, because he did such a thing and had no pity.

That's when Nathan's gaze pierced my soul. He arrested me with his eyes, and I knew I was caught before he spoke a word.

To this day, I shudder when his next words echo in my mind: "You are the man!"

At last, I was stripped of my defenses. The monster within me was unveiled. My icy heart was melting. And I found myself trembling at the Word of the LORD, as Nathan drove the two-edged sword till it penetrated my inmost being—you can read of it in 2 Sam. 12:

“ . . . Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,  
I anointed you king over Israel,  
and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul.  
And I gave you your master’s house  
and your master’s wives into your arms  
and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah.  
And if this were too little,  
I would add to you as much more.  
Why have you despised the word of the LORD,  
to do what is evil in his sight?  
You have struck down Uriah the Hittite  
with the sword of the Ammonites.  
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.’” (2 Sam. 12:7-12)

What could I say? Though my whole world was crashing down upon my head, it came almost as a sweet relief to finally be found out—and as impossible as it was for me to admit it all those months, there seemed to appear before me a fountain of cleansing; I could hardly wait to dive in and lose all my guilty stains.

Honestly, with a broken and believing heart, I confessed: “I have sinned against the LORD”—that’s all it took, and the floodgates of God’s mercy opened wide.

*Mercy there was great, and grace was free  
Pardon there was multiplied to me.*

Nathan said to me, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

To this day, I cannot get over it—“My Lord, what love is this, that gave so freely? That I, the guilty one, may go free?”

- God has created in me a clean heart.
- He has restored to me the joy of his salvation.
- He has put a new song in my heart, a song of praise to my God.
- He has not dealt with me according to my sins, nor repaid me according to my iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

- Bless the LORD, O my soul! And All that is within me, bless his holy name!

How sweet it is to be forgiven! How sweet it is to know that when I stand before God, he will not see me as a sinner—he will receive me as a saint—a man after God’s own heart!

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1-2).

But there is something very serious I need to tell you this morning. In doing so, I hope to spare you enormous pain in your lifetime.

It’s been many years now since my sin with Bathsheba. I know I’m forgiven, and I believe with all my heart God won’t hold my sins against me in the Judgment.

**But it still stings.**

Years have passed, all of them riddled with pain: I’m still suffering the consequences of my sins.

I’d do anything if I could go back to the point when lust first started rising in my heart, and repent then. If only I could change my vote—if only I could deny my lusts the power of reigning in my heart.

But I can’t. I let the cancer grow. And God has been doing surgery on my soul ever since.

Know this, my friends: forgiven sins may still sting.<sup>1</sup>  
Be sure of this: pardoned sins can produce lasting pain.

We live in a Created World, ruled by a Holy God. He has revealed his will to us with utter clarity.

[7] The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
[8] the precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;  
[9] the fear of the LORD is clean,  
enduring forever;  
the rules of the LORD are true,  
and righteous altogether.  
[10] More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase was inspired by the title of a sermon preached by James Adams, found on the Gospel Coalition website: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/a/Forgiven-Sins-Still-Sting>

sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.  
[11] Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

(Psalm 19:7-11 ESV)

Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows he will reap.

You are harvesting today what you have previously planted; and you are planting today what you will one day harvest.

You are making choices today that will impact future generations with consequences that are huger and wider than you can imagine.

Today you are saying YES to things and NO to things—and all of your Yeses and all of your Nos will one day yield a harvest.<sup>2</sup>

I would do anything if I could go back and say NO to the beauty I saw bathing on that rooftop in that fateful Spring many years ago. But I cannot go back. The YES I said then to my lusts planted a toxic seed in the garden of my family, and now in the Autumn of my life I am reaping its bitter fruit.

*Forgiven sins still may sting. Pardoned sins can produce lasting pain.*

**Let me tell you my tale of tears, for I hope to spare you some.**

*It all revolves around three of my sons.*

## **1. My Infant Son (2 Samuel 12)**

First, there was my infant son . . . he who was conceived through my adultery with Bathsheba.

Oh, how I loved him—and yet I always knew I did not deserve him.

My heart was crushed when the prophet told me, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.”

When our baby became sick, I cried out to God. I fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. And then, on the seventh day of his illness, he died.

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<sup>2</sup> The last three sentences were adapted and revised from a sermon preached by Paul Tripp, “David and Absalom,” <http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/a/2-Samuel-15---David-and-Absalom>.

My servants were afraid to tell me, so great was my grief at his illness. But I knew this was the hand of the Lord, so I arose, washed and anointed myself, and changed my clothes. And I went into the house of the LORD, and worshiped.

My son is with the Lord, and I cannot get him back—but by God’s grace, I will one day join him in God’s presence.

God’s mercy sustained me through all my grief—and his mercy followed us with the birth of another son, Solomon.

The LORD loved him so much he told Nathan the prophet to give him a new name: Jedidiah, beloved of the LORD.

Beloved of the Lord—God disciplines me not because he hates me, but because he loves me. Not because he’s against me, but because he’s against the sin that would destroy me.

**So sins forgiven may sometimes still sting...** and the sting of losing my infant son was not the end of it for me.

## **2. Amnon, my Insolent Son (2 Samuel 13)**

Amnon was my oldest boy, the Crown Prince, the heir to my throne.

Like his father, he knew what he wanted and he was determined to have his way at all costs.

But I never in my worst nightmare could’ve imagined where his willful heart would lead him.

One day he called for me, saying he was sick. When I came to visit him, Amnon said to me, “Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand.”

I was being deceived by my own son, just like I had deceived my friend Uriah. I had no idea what Amnon had in mind. I never would’ve sent my daughter into that!

Blindly, I called for Tamar and told her to go to her brother Amnon’s house and prepare food for him. And she went—my beautiful, innocent daughter went and baked some cakes in Amnon’s sight.

How terrifying it must’ve been for her when he took hold of her and wouldn’t let go. And then the unspeakable happened. To this day, I shudder in horror and get violently sick to my stomach just to imagine it. And I cannot think of Amnon’s sin without being haunted by my own.

Soon it was all over, just as violently as it started. Amnon now hated my daughter with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her (2 Sam. 13:15).

He cast her out of his presence, and Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe she was wearing. She went away, crying aloud as she went.

And that's when Absalom, her brother, met her. Instantly, intuitively, he knew; and he said to her "Has Amnon your brother been with you?" And from that moment on, Tamar lived as a desolate woman in her brother Absalom's house.

When I heard of all these things, I was outraged. But I did nothing. I said nothing.

And all the while, I studiously ignored an active volcano gathering steam in my own family.

### **3. Absalom, my Indignant Son**

Absalom wasn't saying anything either. He would not talk to his brother, Amnon. No harsh words. No kind words. No small talk. Nothing.

For Absalom hated Amnon for what he had done to his sister.

And I knew it. And I did nothing at all to address it. If ever he tried to talk to me, I ignored it. And I did not say a word to him about it.

Was I paralyzed by my own shame? Was I afraid that Amnon would scorn me for my own sins? I do not know what kept me from performing my duty as a King and as a father, but my failure to confront and punish my son's wickedness cost a severe price.

For two full years, Absalom's rage was simmering. I was too absorbed in my own anger to notice, and I foolishly gave in to him when he asked for his brother Amnon to go with him on a sheep shearing expedition.

And that's when I lost not just one more son, but two.

Amnon, still a lover of himself, got drunk with wine, and then Absalom commanded his servants to kill his brother.

My failure to execute justice provoked my son to take matters into his own hands.

By the time the news of Amnon's death reached my ears, Absalom was long gone. While I was weeping, my son was fleeing.

I wept bitterly that night. And for three years, not a day went by when I did not mourn.

My sin had cost me three sons—my infant son is dead, my eldest son is dead, and Absalom has fled.

**Forgiven sins still sting. Pardoned sins produce lasting pain. A man reaps what he sows.**

During those three years, my heart would go out to Absalom, but I never could bring myself to seek him out. I was not a longing Father going out to look for my prodigal son. I was not a good

shepherd, going out into the wilderness to search for my lost sheep. I was absorbed in my own sorrow. I had no heart to show my son the same mercy God had shown me.<sup>3</sup>

Then God sent me a wise woman from Tekoa, with searching words that started to loosen the soil of my sorrow. She said to me, “All of us must die eventually. Our lives are like water spilled out on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God does not just sweep life away; instead, he devises ways to bring us back when we have been separated from him” (2 Sam. 14:14, NLT).

It was time to bring my banished son home, no longer an outcast.

But I didn’t have it in me. Instead, I told Joab to go get him from Geshur and bring him to Jerusalem, but to keep him separated from me, dwelling in his own house.

I would not let him into my presence. My son, who had been in hiding for three years, would spend two more years living in the City of David without ever seeing my face.

My cold-heartedness only fueled his rage. A son cannot live with his back turned to his father. Alienation breeds insubordination, and so it did with my son and me.

He kept calling Joab, “Let me into the presence of the king.” But Joab would return none of his calls. Finally the boy set my General’s field on fire! That got his attention. He told Joab, I’d rather die than live like this—it’s time for the king to see me, and if he finds guilt in me, let him put me to death.

And so I summoned my son into my royal chamber.

I’ll never forget what it was like to see him. Five years is way too long for a father to banish his son. When he bowed with his face to the ground before me, I could bear it no longer. My heart melted. I stood up from my throne, opened my arms and kissed my son.

For me, that kiss opened the valve that drained my anger. My heart was filled with love again.

But for him, too much damage had already been done.

Before long, I heard that he was out running a public relations campaign, setting himself up as the perfect candidate for the Throne—only the Throne was not vacant.

My son waged a conspiracy against me, stealing the hearts of all the men of Israel.

This went on for four years before he asked me if he could go worship the LORD in Hebron. I should’ve known by then what he was up to—before long, a messenger came to me saying, “The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom.” The conspiracy was threatening to become a coup—I could remain in Jerusalem no longer.

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Dale Ralph Davis for suggesting these thoughts in *2 Samuel: Out of Adversity* (Christian Focus: 2007).



On my way out of the City of David, all the land wept aloud as all my servants and I passed by.

I crossed the brook Kidron and went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as I went, barefoot, and with my head covered. And all the people who were with me covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.

One thousand years later, a future Son of mine will follow this same road, only going in the opposite direction--and he too will weep, only not for his own sins, but for the sins of all his people.

As I wandered in the wilderness, Absalom was sleeping on the rooftop of my palace, where they pitched a tent for him to go in to my concubines in the sight of all Israel. Just as the prophet Nathan had said. Every word of God proves true.

But though God was disciplining me, he also was befriending me. He met me in those days, and my heart was filled with praise. And as I prayed, I said:

[3:1] O LORD, how many are my foes!  
Many are rising against me;  
[2] many are saying of my soul,  
there is no salvation for him in God. Selah  
[3] But you, O LORD, are a shield about me,  
my glory, and the lifter of my head.  
[4] I cried aloud to the LORD,  
and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah  
[5] I lay down and slept;  
I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.  
[6] I will not be afraid of many thousands of people  
who have set themselves against me all around.  
[7] Arise, O LORD!  
Save me, O my God!  
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;  
you break the teeth of the wicked.  
[8] Salvation belongs to the LORD;  
your blessing be on your people! Selah  
(Psalm 3 ESV)

God was faithful. He shielded me. And he delivered me.

When I sent my troops into the forest of Ephraim to do battle with the rebels, the last word I spoke to them was about my son: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom."

As I waited for news from the battlefields, all I could think about was my boy. Though he had become my enemy, I loved him so dearly.

How can I describe the choking anguish that flooded my soul when they told me he was dead? Years of hard-hearted rejection gave way to heartbreaking lament. I was beside myself in grief, and I can barely contain even now.

*O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!  
Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!*

As King, I should've rejoiced. A wicked rebel who had set himself up against God's Kingdom has been destroyed. The demands of justice have been meted out. And God's Kingdom has triumphed.

In that sense, Joab was absolutely right when he rebuked me for mourning when the men of Israel risked their lives to save my kingdom. Today was a day of victory. Today was a great triumph.

And yet. And yet. For me, my greatest triumph was also my most tragic loss. Though it is good news for a King when a rebel is destroyed, can it ever be good news for a father when his son dies?

What a terrible price! In order for my enemies to be destroyed, my son had to die. "The demands of justice could only be satisfied through the shattered longings of a Father's love."<sup>4</sup>

I've lost three sons now. An infant. A first-born. And a rebel.

And it all can be traced back to a moment in time when I said YES to my lusts when I should've said NO.

**I'm forgiven, and I'm in fellowship with my God--but forgiven sins still sting.**

**You may wonder if I'm bitter, but I assure I am not. I'm broken, but not bitter. And in this life, brokenness is a blessing.**

I do not despise the discipline of my God. No, I desire it. I embrace it. I need it.

*His rod and his staff, they comfort me.*

"The consequences are not a contradiction of his love. No, they are an expression of his love" (Paul Tripp). They are there to make me hate the sins that would've destroyed me.

You've heard my story. Now what about you?

- How are you being reckless in the face of sin's consequences?
- Where are you planting seeds right now that will reap a bitter harvest?
- Are you falling asleep in sin's wretchedness? Are you tempted to say, "It's no big deal; God will forgive me"?

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<sup>4</sup> The thoughts in the last four paragraphs were inspired by Christopher Ash's article, "The Death of Absalom: Drama & Theology," at <http://beginningwithmoses.org/bt-briefings/164/the-death-of-absalom-drama-theology>

Remember, forgiven sins can still sting. Pardoned sins can cause lasting pain.

*Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. And do not be weary when you are reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*

*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 (Heb. 12:5b-6, 11).*

Sin is never your friend. Sin is always your enemy.<sup>5</sup> Never take it lightly. And confess to him right now if there is any area of your life where you are trivializing something God takes with deadly seriousness.

Repent. Run into the arms of a merciful God. **A God who gave His only Son to die so that both the demands of justice, and the longings of his love could at last be fulfilled.**

Someone has wisely said, “The story of Absalom’s death ends at the Cross of Jesus Christ. *There is a Savior, who because he has dealt with sin can deal gently with sinners.* A Savior whose Father longs to be Father to you and to me” (Christopher Ash). Come to Jesus and live!

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Paul Tripp.