

A Tale of Three Kings

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Family Mess 2 Series

2 Samuel 13-15

If you grew up as part of many Hispanic communities here in the U.S. or in Mexico, or in Central or South America, your favorite day of the year may not have been Christmas, but,

El Dia de Los Reyes

The Three Kings Day celebration that falls on January 6 which in many Christian traditions is called The Feast of the Epiphany, or the Twelfth Day of Christmas – El Dia de Los Reyes. The Three Kings Day celebration marks the adoration of the Baby Jesus by the three kings, who in the Bible are referred to as wise men, or magi, who found their way to Bethlehem by following a star. The church later named them Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar who offered to the Baby Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Today we're going to study three other kings as I continue in the Family Mess 2 Series that I started some weeks ago. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel and the books of 1 and 2 Kings read like a modern soap opera with stories of power, lust, greed, adultery, intrigue, betrayal – no one is safe and nothing is sacred, everything is up for grabs. It was a dog-eat-dog world of the Old Testament, and the puppies don't make it. There is this jumble of tangled relationships; we see brother against brother, fathers against sons, rape, murder, and incest.

And unlike the over-heated imaginations of today's television soap operas, the stories that we read in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings happen to real people, who experienced this drama in real life. All of the sex, murder, cover ups, and power struggles didn't happen in a corner of ancient Israel to a no-name, unimportant family. The drama that is played out in the chapters we're going to read happened to the royal family, who lived in the very center of power. And their conflicts became the very stuff of gossip and warfare that nearly destroyed the ancient kingdom of Israel.

There was a book written several years ago by Gene Edwards titled The Tale of Three Kings.

The Tale of Three Kings by Gene Edwards

It is a book that tells the story of King Saul, King David, and King Absalom. I like Gene Edwards' title very much; although I'm not using his book at all today in my talk, I

borrowed his title for my message for my message from 2 Samuel on Family Mess that I've titled "A Tale of Three Kings." Let's pray.

King David: the ineffective king

David was successful in so many ways. If there were newspapers in King David's day, I think of the headlines that David would have generated throughout his life. How about these:

- **Teenage Boy Kills the Giant Goliath**
- **David Leads Forces That Destroy Enemy Troops**

I can see a photo on the gossip page with a caption that reads:

Best Pals: David and Prince Jonathan

They have their arms around one another's shoulders, smiling for the camera. Or how about these:

- **David Eludes Paranoid King**
- **King David Captures Jerusalem (subtitled "Plans Being Drawn Up for David's Kingdom and Lord's Temple")**
- **King David Victorious Against All of His Enemies**

If you read over the headlines of David's life in 1 and 2 Samuel, how would anyone possibly say that King David was an ineffective king?

Let me suggest why I call him ineffective. It is because he was, first of all:

An absent father

If you read through 2 Samuel 3 through 2 Samuel 13 which is a period of about 20 years, there is absolutely no mention made of David's son Absalom for 20 years. Professionally, David was thoroughly enmeshed in the affairs of state, fighting battles, negotiating treaties with foreign powers, building the City of David, Jerusalem, and his palace. At home his time was spread way too thin because of his multiple wives, concubines, and children. He was a father who simply wasn't there for his sons at all, but especially for his son, Absalom.

We live in the days of the tell-all biographies in which many children have decided to attack famous parents in print. There has been a basic theme to many of these tell-all biographies: "My mother (or father) was wildly successful in business, or in entertainment, but was a total failure at home." Many, many people today struggle with trying to find a work-life balance. How do you succeed in your career without

cannibalizing your family? Is professional obscurity the price you have to pay for being a committed mother or father? Are you able to do it all – work at a job you love, succeed at your work, and also succeed as a mom or as a dad and as a spouse?

These issues are being wrestled over as our society is recalibrating what is expected of each gender regarding the work-family balance. There are no simple rules especially in an economy in which employers are demanding more and more from their workers and many people find themselves economically strapped and having to work more hours than they otherwise would want to. We always need to remember that children's needs go way beyond material support. We parents can't just give our best to our jobs and have nothing left over for our kids, like King David.

Years ago I was in a grocery store walking with my son, who was about 3 years old at the time. And an older man came up to me and it was almost like he had a prophetic word for me. He looked at me and he said, "Is that your son?" I said, "Yes, he's 3 years old." This total stranger said to me, "Young man, remember this, children spell love T-I-M-E."

Again, this is hard to put into practice. As parents today we often find ourselves without the support of extended families, who live nearby. But whatever the work life balance is, David missed it.

It is easy to overlook little things when it comes to your kids. You're too tired to play ball with them when you get home from work. We over look the fact that our kids have waited all day to play with us. You're too busy with work taken home from the office to take a walk with our children. We're too enmeshed in the newspaper or in a TV show that we're watching to read a bedtime story with our kids, or to pray with them, or to get up from the sofa to help our kids with their homework. Little things neglected become big things.

You've heard the nursery rhyme that goes this way:

**For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost.
For want of a horse, the rider was lost.
For want of a rider, the message was lost.
For want of a message, the battle was lost.
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.
And, oh, for the want of a horseshoe nail.**

King David never paid attention to the little things at home. He was an absent father.

Why do I call him an ineffective king? Because he lived:

An inconsistent life

Many of you may have read Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* in high school, or college. But it is the story of Willie Loman, who was a traveling salesman and idolized by his teenage son, Biff. Although Willie was on the road a lot, Biff held him in the highest esteem. Everything the boy did in life was designed to please his father – whether it was playing football, or applying to college. One day Biff visited his father unexpectedly on the road and discovered his father having an affair with another woman. And everything changed. For the first time in his life, Biff saw the man behind the mask. He was crushed, devastated at finding his father having an affair. His relationship with his father radically changed. His hurt grew roots of bitterness and choked off his relationship with this dad.

The sudden discovery of a parent who you respect is a totally hypocrite is devastating. And that's what happened to David's son, Absalom. Not only did he experience his dad's neglect, while everyone sang his father's praise – "Oh, Absalom, you are so lucky to grow up as the son of King David. You must be so proud of your father. He is such a wonderful man. He saved us from our enemies. Look at his power. Look at his building projects. Oh, Absalom, you are so lucky to have a father like King David." Not only did he grow up with an absent father, but Absalom grew up in a home where his dad lived a life of incomprehensible inconsistencies. King David got A's on all of his exams, and got an F in life.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be one of David's children as King David's affair with Bathsheba became known and then the cover-up and David's murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, was gossiped about?

Let me ask you a personal question: Have any of you ever experienced the shock of discovering that your father or mother was having an affair? What did you feel like when you made this discovery? For many people, discovering that your parent, who before that time, was your hero is living a lie, is an utterly devastating experience. That's what it must have been like for Absalom.

At every baby dedication that we do here at the church, I say several things to parents who are dedicating their children to Christ. I say, "Parents, do you understand that you are primarily responsible to raise your children for Christ? And while the church supports you, and Christian friends and family support you, nevertheless, you are primarily responsible for raising your children for Christ. Do you accept that responsibility?" And then I say to parents, "Do you commit yourselves, by God's grace, to live before your children in such a way that they would want to grow up to know Jesus as Lord and Savior?"

See, there is nothing more persuasive in developing a child's faith than a parent, who lives a consistent life of faith before their children. There is nothing that is a stronger encouragement to long-term faith than a parent, who communicates by their life and by

their words: The only reason why my life works is because of Jesus. When a child sees their parents serving, when a child sees their parents giving, when a child sees their parents forgiving and reconciling and privately worshipping and opening their home in hospitality, all of those things sow into a child that putting your faith in Christ is worth it. Your faith in Christ will lead to a fulfilled and successful life.

And on the other hand, there is nothing that is a bigger turn-off to kids, a greater barrier to long-term faith, than parents who put on a great show of religion at church on Sunday and live as citizens of hell Monday-Saturday - to sit around as a child as parents have a façade of Christianity and privately tear one another apart around the kitchen table, or cut corners in financial dealings, or fail to master their own rage or addictions or lust. That's the home that Absalom grew up in with a dad who had an inconsistent life.

Why do I call David an ineffective King? It is because he was:

A neglectful disciplinarian.

In 2 Samuel we read the story of rape and incest. Tamar's half-brother, Amnon, wants to sleep with her. Amnon devises a ruse to be along with her, and then when he is alone with Tamar, he rapes her. After the rape, we read in 2 Samuel 13:10-20:

2 Samuel 13:10–20 (NIV)

Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister." "No, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!" "No!" she said to him. "Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me." But he refused to listen to her. He called his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of my sight and bolt the door after her." So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing an ornate robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went. Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this

thing to heart.” And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, a desolate woman.

Now, we’ll discuss Absalom’s reaction in just a moment. But for now, our focus is on King David. Read with me 2 Samuel 13:21:

2 Samuel 13:21 (NIV)

When King David heard all this, he was furious.

We read in the passage that David was furious with Amnon, his son. But he never does anything. He has a son who was guilty of rape and incest, depending on what you call Amnon did, there were different judgments in ancient Israel. In those days you were either forced to marry the victim in order to protect the violated woman and being left without any support in the world, or you would be judged, condemned and sentenced to death. But David, while he was angry with what happened, never acted to protect his daughter and never disciplined his son. Why not? Why didn’t he discipline Amnon? Why was he so neglectful?

Perhaps King David didn’t want to threaten his dynasty. Amnon was his first-born, he was the successor in waiting. And David’s political position was already weakened by scandals – his affair with Bathsheba, the story of his cover-up. And now he is hit with another scandal. Maybe he thinks this will be too much for people to handle. And so he sweeps it all under the rug. David chooses not to do anything in public or private.

Whenever a leader opts for self-preservation and institutional reputation instead of complete disclosure, you can guarantee that one thing is being sacrificed and that is integrity. Look at what is happening in the Columbus Public Schools right now. There appears to have been at least some move towards self-preservation and protecting institutional reputations. Whenever there is a scandal and we go in that direction – whether we’re talking about Joe Paterno, or the Roman Catholic Church, or the scrubbing of data in the Columbus Public Schools, a leader who succumbs to the temptation to protect either themselves or to protect the institution they lead from the consequences of full-disclosure, there is always a compromise in integrity.

A few years ago the leadership of our church discovered that one of our senior leaders had a moral failure. And as leaders of this church, we were faced with an immediate choice to try to protect the church and the church’s reputation in the community, or to give full and complete disclosure not only to our staff and to our leaders, but to our entire church family knowing that this disclosure would likely get out to the larger Columbus community and injure the church’s reputation. And we knew immediately that if we acted for self-preservation and the protection of our church’s reputation, we would absolutely sacrifice our integrity. So we opted for full disclosure.

But this is always a struggle, friends.

Years ago I heard the story of a church in which the senior pastor had misallocated church funds in order to purchase a large home. Word got out about the senior pastor's misallocation of funds and the church leaders had a choice – full disclosure and discipline off the pastor, or damage control and institutional self-preservation. In this case, the leadership of the church went into damage control mode. At a church meeting the associate pastor was asked whether the senior pastor had misallocated fund. The associate pastor said, “No, never. This was a pension payment that we owed to the senior pastor for many years. There was no dishonesty there.” After the meeting, the church accountant confronted the associate pastor and said, “How could you say that? You know that’s a lie. You know the senior pastor took money that wasn’t owed to him as a pension payment.” The associate pastor responded and said, “I needed to lie. I didn’t want to destroy the church.” From the moment he told the lie, he began the destruction of the church.

Maybe David didn’t discipline Amnon because he wanted to protect himself and he wanted to protect his dynasty. But from the moment he chose to cover-up, he began the process of destroying what he wanted to preserve.

Maybe David didn’t discipline Amnon because of his own sin. Often, for parents, our own guilt about sin in our own lives makes it difficult, if not impossible, for us to deal with the sin in others, especially the sin in our children’s lives. After all, David committed adultery. He might have thought: Who am I to challenge the sexual sins of my sons?

Parents, listen to me. The standard by which you and I are to exercise discipline with our kids is not our own lives or our own pasts or our own feelings in the moment. The standard by which we discipline our children is the Word of God. It is important, of course, to confess your sins and to repent. It is important that you communicate to our kids the destruction your sin brought into your life. But if you want to have major problems on your hands, when your children violate God’s Word – when they lie, when they steal something, when they show you utter disrespect, when they deliberately hurt someone else, if you want to have long-term problems with your child, discover them committing a sin, get angry, and do nothing.

I read a list some years ago about how to raise a delinquent. Here is what the author said:

Begin in infancy to give your child whatever she wants. Then she will believe the world owes her a living.

When she picks up vulgar words, laugh at her. This will make her think she is cute.

Never give her spiritual training. Wait until she is 21, then let her decide for herself.

Avoid the use of the words “wrong” or “sin,” they may cause her to develop a guilt complex. This will condition her to believe later when she is arrested that society is against her and she is being persecuted.

Defend her against neighbors, teachers, police officers, or any authority and bail her out of any problem she gets into with the law. They’re all against her, you know.

Why do I call David an ineffective king? Because he was an absent father; he led an inconsistent life; he was a neglectful disciplinarian, and, finally, he engaged in:

An incomplete reconciliation

When David fails to act to discipline his son, Amnon, David’s other son, Absalom, takes matters into his own hands. Absalom first plots against then kills his brother, Amnon, and flees to his grandfather’s home. Here is what we read in 2 Samuel 13:28-39:

2 Samuel 13:23–39 (NIV)

Absalom ordered his men, “Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, ‘Strike Amnon down,’ then kill him. Don’t be afraid. Haven’t I given you this order? Be strong and brave.” So Absalom’s men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king’s sons got up, mounted their mules and fled. While they were on their way, the report came to David: “Absalom has struck down all the king’s sons; not one of them is left.” The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his attendants stood by with their clothes torn. But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David’s brother, said, “My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom’s express intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king’s sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead.” Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. Now the man standing watch looked up and saw many people on the road west of him, coming down the side of the hill. The watchman went and told the king, “I see men in the direction of Horonaim, on the side of the hill.” Jonadab said to the king, “See, the king’s sons have come; it has happened just as your servant said.” As he finished speaking, the king’s sons came in, wailing loudly. The king, too, and all his attendants wept very bitterly. Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. But King David mourned many days for his son. After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years. And King David longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon’s death.

David longed to see his son, Absalom, but he never goes to him. Leaders, those of you who are in charge of leading other people, you're the employer, you're a supervisor, you're a coach, you're a teacher, you're a pastor, you're a parent, you're a small group leader – those of us who lead in some area of life, we are responsible for initiating reconciliation. We don't wait for the person who is under us, who we are supervising, to repair the relationship. We are responsible to initiate reconciliation. Let me ask you a personal question: Do you always initiate the process of reconciliation for those you are leading, or do you wait for them to fix things?

David had the responsibility to initiate reconciliation. He allowed years to pass. It might be that if David approached Absalom, he would be rejected, just as if you approached your child or an employee, or someone in your small group, someone you are trying to lead, you might be rejected. But you still have the responsibility to try. David never initiates. He continues to be passive. How long, David, will you wait for your son to come to you? How long will you, leader, parent, coach, wait for this other person to come to you?

Well, David is convicted by the story told by a wise woman in 2 Samuel 14. And so he brings his son, Absalom, back to Jerusalem. He says, "OK, you can return to Jerusalem. You don't have to stay at your grandfather's home." But David doesn't sit down and talk with him. His son is physically near, but emotionally distant. Here is what we read in 2 Samuel 14:28-32:

2 Samuel 14:28–32 (NIV)

Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face. Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come. Then he said to his servants, "Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab did go to Absalom's house, and he said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" Absalom said to Joab, "Look, I sent word to you and said, 'Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!"' Now then, I want to see the king's face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death."

Five years after Absalom kills his brother, Amnon, we read about the first meeting between King David and his son, Absalom in 2 Samuel 14:33:

2 Samuel 14:33 (NIV)

So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom.

There is no record of a discussion about the past. There is nothing in this story about a full confession by Absalom, or full forgiveness or full pardon by King David. There is nothing that we read about a painful pulling off of the scab, a cleaning out of the wound, and all the infection and poison of the past. There's nothing about a searching, days-long conversation about their relationship. Instead we read of a kiss:

2 Samuel 14:33 (NIV)

So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom.

Let's just kiss and make up. Like the adulterous spouse who says, "I don't want to talk about the past. I don't want to go through all of this counseling. Let's just move on. Let's not pull off the scab and really clean out the infection. Let's just move on without ever really dealing with our problems."

That's what King David did – superficial reconciliation.

Edwin Friedman was a Rabbi, who also was a family systems therapist. He did a lot of his best work with churches healing church disputes. But Edwin Friedman said that what you find almost always in a dysfunctional family is impatience. They have a quick-fix mentality. They think that problems can be solved simply and reduced to an easy solution. Here's what Friedman says:

What regressed families all have in common is a very low threshold for pain. As mentioned previously, there is no way out of a chronic condition without being willing to go through temporarily a more acute phase.[Sadly] chronically anxious families will seek out those professionals who promise the most comfort, not those who offer the most opportunities for maturation. They will seek out those professionals who help them avoid or reduce their pain as quickly as possible, not those who would encourage them to endure their pain in order to move steadfastly towards higher goals. Focused always on symptom relief rather than fundamental changes, they will pressure the experts whether medical, educational, therapeutic, legal, or political for magical, quick-fix solutions.

Friends, do you find this to be true in your own lives? That even regarding long-term chronic problems in your family, or in yourself, that what you often opt for is an easy, quick-fix solution because you don't want to go through the pain of deep healing?

Let's look at Absalom:

King Absalom: the bitter king

Who is Absalom? His name means “Father of peace.” This is the man that brought so much conflict and destruction to the nation of Israel, in complete contradiction to his name. Absalom means “Father of peace.” He was great looking. We read in 2 Samuel 14:25-26:

2 Samuel 14:25–26 (NIV)

In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair once a year because it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard.

He was outwardly beautiful and politically savvy. He was a great manipulator of men and women. He knew how to pull all the great levers of power and to draw people to himself. Inwardly, Absalom was a seething cauldron of bitterness. The thing that is so notable about Absalom is his bitterness, especially towards his father, David. Absalom waits five years for David to work justice on behalf of Absalom’s sister, Tamar. David does nothing.

Contrary to popular belief, time does not heal all wounds. If problems aren’t addressed, they often fester and grow. Time does not heal wounds. The only thing that heals is complete forgiveness. But Absalom doesn’t forgive his brother and he doesn’t forgive his father. Instead, he nurses his bitterness towards his father, King David.

Let me give you an illustration by what I mean about nursing your bitterness. I once read a story about a guy in Alaska who had two husky dogs – a dark one and a white one. He took the dogs to different towns and would have them fight each other. People would bet on the dogs. Sometimes the owner of the dog would bet on the dark dog and sometimes he would bet on the white dog. Whatever dog the owner bet on, that dog would win the fight.

One fellow asked the owner, “How do you know which dog to bet on each time? How come the dog you always bet on always wins? How is it that you’re always right?”

The owner said, “That’s easy. Whichever dog I’ve been feeding for the past week is the one that’s going to win.”

The same thing is true in our own lives, friends. Whatever you feed emotionally, that’s the dog that’s going to win inside of you. If you nurse and feed anger, then anger is going to rule in your life. If you nurse and feed lust, then lust will win in your life. If you nurse and feed bitterness, then bitterness will win. If we nurse and feed kindness, then kindness will win. Whatever we regularly sow into our hearts, we will reap.

Absalom sowed bitterness.

Years ago I read an article titled something like “The Five R’s of Unforgiveness.” The first thing we see where bitterness is nursed is:

The sign of resentment

2 Samuel 13:21–22 (NIV)

When King David heard all this, he was furious. And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.

Absalom never said a word. There is a silence of self-restraint and there is a silence of resentment. Absalom hated his brother, Amnon. You know when you are harboring bitterness towards a person because it will always show up with resentment. You can’t think of the other person positively. You’re not necessarily exploding in anger. You may hold your tongue. You may be silent. But you have a settled state of anger that colors your view of the other person so that you can’t think of them warmly. You don’t even like hearing about them referred to positively. Resentment means you’ve nursed your bitterness.

Here’s the second R of unforgiveness and bitterness:

The sign of revenge

Absalom plots against and then kills his brother, Amnon. And then he plots against and tries to kill his father.

Revenge. There is a desire inside of you to get even because of what they’ve done to you. They owe you and so you get even by gossiping about them, by tearing them down to others, by dropping little hints to everyone that they’ve hurt you in some way; that they’re poor husbands, or terrible wives, or awful colleagues, or bad church leaders. You can exact revenge in a million ways. If you are a spouse, you can withhold sex. With your roommate you can pout. With a coworker you can be icy cold. Concerning someone in the church, you can share confidentially with a few dozen of your closest friends about your burden for so-and-so and your desire that the other person pray for them. Some people will go out and have an affair because they want to get even with their spouse, who has cheated on them.

The third sign of nursing bitterness and unforgiveness is:

The sign of reminders

Absalom never forgets what happened to his sister, Tamar. In fact, when Absalom has a daughter, he names her Tamar. Look at 2 Samuel 14:27:

2 Samuel 14:27 (NIV)

Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom. His daughter's name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman.

When you are nursing bitterness, there will be a reminder of the violation everywhere. You know that you haven't forgiven when you encounter another person who has similar characteristics and you get angry. If every time you encounter authority, you get angry, if every time you encounter another pastor or school principal, a teacher, a coach, or a boss, there is a rise of hurt in you, every time you get in a situation where someone says "no" to you, or rejects you, that spurs a response of anger, I will bet you that you've had a problem in the past with authority – maybe with your dad, or a former teacher, or church leader. I've watched this in people for years. Folks who have unresolved anger towards their parents almost always have trouble with authority in the future. They struggle with authority in the church. They struggle with authority on the job.

And the fourth sign of nursing bitterness and unforgiveness:

The sign of reaction

Whenever someone overreacts to a small provocation, they know they've been nursing anger. When you see a small spark creating a huge explosion, something is going off there, friend. There is gas below the surface that is exploding. If there was no gas, there would be no explosion. Look at Absalom's reaction in 2 Samuel 14:28-30:

2 Samuel 14:28–32 (NIV)

Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face. Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come. Then he said to his servants, "Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire.

You're angry with your dad, so you set your cousin's field on fire. That makes sense. You're mad at your boss, so you scream at your spouse or your kids. That makes sense. You are mildly irritated, so you put your fist through a cabinet door, or smash a plate on the floor, or eat a half gallon of ice cream, but nothing is really bothering you.

And finally, there is the sign of rebellion:

The sign of rebellion

In chapters 15-18 Absalom kicks away from his father and declares war on his dad. Absalom is not content to work revenge against the man who raped his sister. He is not content to rage and lash out towards those who worked for his father. Ultimately,

Absalom wants to destroy the person who is the source of so much hurt and disappointment in his life – his father. He wants to destroy the man he judged to be the ultimate hypocrite, the fraud, the adulterer, the liar, the man who kept him living in limbo for years and didn't restore the relationship. Absalom's rebellion against David is a picture of every human being's rebellion against God. Because sin is not just an honest mistake, or an inconvenient lapse of judgment. When you and I deliberately sin, we're actively rebelling against God. Sin is described as "getting rid of the Lord God in order to put ourselves in his place." Absalom wants to get rid of David in order to be in his place.

A famous theologian said:

Sin is defiant arrogance, the assertion of human independence against God.

You know the day you receive Christ, you give up the right to be bitter. If you see any of these R's in your own life towards any person on earth, anyone, you see in your life resentment, a desire for revenge, reminders, reactions and rebellion, the way to get free from that bitterness is don't start by thinking of the other person, start by thinking about Christ. He is the third King.

I've talked about King David and King Absalom. And now let's for a moment reflect on King Jesus:

King Jesus: the forgiving king

Unlike David, Jesus is not passive in effecting reconciliation with us. He doesn't sit around and wait for us to make our way to God. Here is what we read in 2 Samuel 14:14:

2 Samuel 14:14 (NIV)

Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But that is not what God desires; rather, he devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him.

God is infinitely creative. He is always thinking and planning a way to heal the separation that exists between us and God. Have you seen this in your life, God using dozens of creative ways to draw you back to himself – pain, your need, dreams, a letter from a friend, a sermon, a book, or something at work? Unlike Absalom, Jesus was not beautiful especially when he hung on a cross. Here is what we read in Isaiah 52:13-14:

Isaiah 52:13–14 (NIV)

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance

was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—

Not only wasn't he beautiful, unlike Absalom Jesus was not self-seeking, he was self-sacrificing.

Let me close with a couple of thoughts. You know, if you read, as I have, about the history of religion, you see that most religions are concerned about how human beings can pay for their sins. Ancient and modern religions are all about human beings awareness of their guilt before God. And so religions have provided a way for human beings to offer some sort of sacrificial gift to the gods, or to God to pay for their sins. A human being comes before God with a payment, a sacrifice and that takes care of the guilt.

Now, the New Testament runs completely in the opposite direction from every other religion in all of human history because in the New Testament it is not human beings who come to God with some kind of gift, it is rather God who comes to people in self-giving in order to overcome the alienation between God and people. God does not wait passively for us to present him with a sacrifice. Instead, God comes to us in the person of Jesus and sacrifices himself in order to reconcile us to God.

It is not you or me who offers the gift. It is God who offers the gift. It is not your sacrifice or my sacrifice that makes the difference. Christ makes the sacrifice. He is the forgiving king.

Let me close with this. In the late 7th, early 8th century there was a man named John, who was a Bishop in Damascus – John of Damascus. He was a great saint in both the Eastern and Western church. He wrote about what happened on the cross. Here is the results of Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross:

**death has been brought low,
the sin of our first parent destroyed,
hell plundered,
resurrection bestowed,
the power given us to despise the things of this world and even death itself,
the road back to the former blessedness made smooth,
the gates of paradise opened,
our nature seated at the right hand of God,
and we made children and heirs of God.
By the cross all things have been set aright...
It is a raising up for those who lie fallen,
a support for those who stand,
a staff for the infirm,
a crook for the shepherded,**

**a guide for the wandering,
a perfecting of the advanced,
salvation for soul and body,
an averter of all evils,
a cause of all good things,
a destruction of sin,
a plant of resurrection,
and a tree of eternal life.**

A Tale of Three Kings - King David, the ineffective king; King Absalom, the bitter king; but we get to come to King Jesus, the forgiving King. Let's pray.

A Tale of Three Kings

Rich Nathan

May 25-26, 2013

Family Mess 2 Series

2 Samuel 13-15

- I. **King David: the ineffective king**
 - A. An absent father
 - B. An inconsistent life
 - C. A neglectful disciplinarian
 - D. An incomplete reconciliation

- II. **King Absalom: the bitter king**
 - A. The sign of resentment
 - B. The sign of revenge
 - C. The sign of reminders
 - D. The sign of reaction
 - E. The sign of rebellion

- III. **King Jesus: the forgiving king**