

David and Absalom
Spiritual Foundations of Leadership
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Just because an individual trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation does not mean that their lives will be trouble free. This is as true today as it was for the early Jewish people, like David and Absalom, the subjects of one of the most tragic stories ever told in the Bible. This paper will provide some of the reasons for David's trouble in the home, especially with Amnon and Absalom, God's relationship with David at the time of Absalom's rebellion, and this writer's view of David as a spiritual leader.

The reasons for David's trouble in the home, and with Absalom in particular, are many. While David was said to be a man after God's own heart, he fell short when it came to providing leadership to his sons, especially in matters of justice and reconciliation. Amnon, the first born, and Absalom, his younger brother, did a lot of growing up without David around. They were born during the time of David's warring with what was left of Saul's followers. These brothers shared a number of attributes brought on by a lack of strong leadership including growing up spoiled, full of pride and vanity, impatience, and ambition. But David's troubles in the home began with himself.

The Bible says that David was a man after God's own heart, and that he was a courageous hunter and warrior. Unfortunately, David lacked self-control where women were concerned, which is exemplified by his affair with Bathsheba. While walking on his rooftop one evening, during a time he was supposed to be at war, he sees a woman bathing nearby and became consumed with lust for her. At that moment, David did not think about his relationship with God, the effect an affair could have on his position as king, or how this could effect his family. He thought of nothing but satisfying his lust for Bathsheba. David sent for her, she consented, and the affair was consummated. Afterwards, everything was fine until she notified him that she was pregnant with his child. To make a long story short, David attempts to cover up his sin by sending an order that Bathsheba's husband be sent to an area of the war that gets him

killed. One night of pleasure has led to murder. Again, everything seems fine, until God sends Nathan to confront David about not only the sin of adultery, but the murder of Bathsheba's husband as well! David confesses to God and Nathan, which is good, but the Bible gives no indication that he used this experience to teach his boys about his sins, how to avoid them, or reconcile them with God.

The spiral of trouble for David's family accelerates with Amnon, who is the first of the brothers who could have learned from his father's mistakes. One day, Amnon, consumed with lust, desires to lie with Tamar, Absalom's sister. A friend, so to speak, counsels him on how he might be able to seduce her. He goes through with the plan but she is not willing to be seduced, so Amnon rapes her. When Absalom hears of this, fearing how this public scandal may tarnish the family's (his) reputation, he urges her not to tell of what has happened. This act created hatred in Absalom's heart and planted the seed of murder towards Amnon. But, on the other hand, when David hears of this, he gets angry, as any father should, but then he does nothing. He fails to address the crime, or the rift that has now been created between his two sons.

David had failed to exercise discipline in his own life, and now has failed to give direction to his sons when it comes to the dangers of sin, or how to address sin once it has happened. Two years later, Absalom is still consumed with hatred for his brother and develops a plan to kill him. His plan works, and just as before, David gets angry about what has happened. Again, that is where it stops as David fails to act. But even if David wanted to reconcile with Absalom, he cannot, because Absalom has fled in rebellion from his family. Over time, Absalom, consumed with rebellion, returns only to attempt to take the throne from David, but is eventually killed by David's army. Even after all that, David mourned over his son that he loved very much. But in reality, he lost him long before he died.

Was God still with David through these troubles and how was he as a spiritual leader?

Yes, God was still with David. Nathan told David that he had grace from God after Bathsheba, but that he would have a life of consequences because of his sin. After every major setback in David's life, he prayed, whether it was for repentance, guidance, or praise. David truly was a man after God's own heart. During the war between David's men and Absalom's men, David gave instruction that Absalom not be harmed. After all that had happened, David still loved his son and cared for his well being, just as any parent cares for their children no matter what they have done. God cared for David in this same fashion. Unfortunately for David's family, David was not an effective spiritual leader and did not pass his experience learned wisdom onto his sons. They fell into many of the same traps, particularly of lust and murder, that David had fallen into.

David was a hunter, a war hero, loyal to God's anointed, a king, and a man after God's own heart. Unfortunately, he was lacking in areas of spiritual leadership, particularly at home, which led to his oldest sons being spoiled, full of pride and vanity, impatient, and ambitious. Amnon, like his father became consumed with lust, committing the act of rape against his sister and sewing the seeds of hatred in his brother Absalom. Absalom, seeing the lack of leadership in his father, committed the murder of Amnon out of the hatred in his heart and then rebelled against his father in order to take the throne rather than wait for it. David still loved his sons, despite their actions just as God still loved David after all he had done. While David may not be the ideal spiritual leader, his story teaches everyone who reads it today, that even a sinful man can be remembered as one being after God's own heart.

References