

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 14 – Absalom’s Rebellion
2Samuel 15-20

Introduction

After his sin with Bathsheba, David repented toward God and was forgiven. He failed, however, to do the hard work of estimating and repairing the *relational damage* his sin had caused. Family strife came to a head when Absalom, his son, mounted a coup. David had been forewarned of this kind of uprising after his sin with Bathsheba: *Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household . . .” (12:11)*. Absalom managed to overthrow his father and assume the throne briefly. David was able to retake the throne; but in doing so, he lost another son. Psalms 3,4 and 5 (Psalms of lament) are associated with this painful period of David’s life.

Absalom maneuvers to overthrow David: 15:1-6

“It came about after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses and fifty men as runners before him” (15:1).

Absalom methodically *“stole away the hearts of Israel”* (v.6). He appealed to people’s unmet needs, persuading them that it was the failed policies of his father that had led to their problems and *he* was their only real hope for change. Beneath the surface of his actions, we can detect his great anger. He was a bitter son who wanted to make his father pay for ruining his own life and the life of his sister, Tamar. Seeking revenge was the path that Absalom chose. Sadly, this path would cost *Absalom* more than any other.

Bitterness and revenge stole away 11 years of Absalom’s life. He could have surrendered his heart to God (Romans 12:1,2), escaped the prison of bitterness and left room for the justice of God (Romans 12:14-19). Instead, he let bitterness consume him. “Forgiveness may be excruciating for a moment, but anger and bitterness are excruciating for a lifetime.” (Beth Moore, A Heart Like His, p.213). It’s a choice: bitterness or forgiveness.

Absalom proclaimed king: 15:7-12

Absalom knew the best place to initiate the overthrow of his father. **Hebron** was a safe distance away from Jerusalem. It was also the very city where David was first made king over Israel (2Sam. 5:1).

Ahithophel, one of David's key advisors, defected to Absalom's side. He may have had unspoken resentment toward David for stealing *his granddaughter*, Bathsheba, from Uriah and then having Uriah killed in battle. Perhaps he wanted to remain *the* key advisor to the new king. As will later see, his *role* was his *identity*.

“The conspiracy was strong and the people continually increased with Absalom” (15:12).

Psalm 55 describes a time in David's life when he was betrayed by the closest of friends (see 55:12-14). Many commentators believe this was written during the betrayal of Ahithophel, David's friend.

“As for me, I shall call upon God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice. He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me, for they are many who strive with me. God will hear and answer them – even the one who sits enthroned from of old . . . Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken” (55:16-19,22).

Betrayal can shake us to the core and cause us to believe many lies: ‘No one is safe.’ ‘I am not worth loving.’ ‘I deserve this.’ ‘I must never open myself up to relationship again.’ Yet, when we place our deepest trust in God (Who will never betray us) and find our attachment and security in Him, we can learn to open ourselves up to people again . . . because they no longer have the power to define us or shatter us. “HE will never allow the righteous (those who trust in HIM) to be shaken” (Psalm 55:22).

David flees Jerusalem: 15:13-18

When David heard about Absalom's coup, he went into “emergency management mode.” He moved swiftly to avert an even greater disaster. He *knew* the extent of Absalom's rage and did not want to risk the calamity of encountering his son face-to-face. Thus, he moved his people to a place of safety.

“Arise and let us flee, for otherwise none of us will escape from Absalom. Go in haste, or he will overtake us quickly and bring

down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword” (15:14).

As David fled Jerusalem with his people, he stopped at the last house and made sure that everyone was safely out of town.

“The king went out and all the people with him, and they stopped at the last house. Now all his servants passed on beside him, all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had come with him from Gath, passed on before the king” (15:17,18).

David was not just fleeing; he was *leading* an *orderly* exit and making sure that everyone was accounted for. Captains are supposed to be the last to abandon ship. David was not panicking; he was leading *through* the crisis. This gave his people confidence and hope.

David’s friends: 15:19-37

Even as David was fleeing Jerusalem, God’s mercy was evident, providing him key strategic partners that chose to risk their lives to help him in this crisis. **Ittai the Gittite** (a Philistine from the city of Gath) was loyal to David. He would not be dissuaded from going into exile with his king. As a result, Ittai was later promoted to be a commander of 1/3rd of David’s army, along with Joab and Abishai. **Zadok and Abiathar** the priests came to David carrying the Ark of the Covenant. David sent them back, however, believing that IF God was for him, he would return to Jerusalem and worship in the presence of God. It was an act of faith for Zadok and Abiathar to return; for in the past priests had been slaughtered (by Saul) when they were suspected of being friends of David. **Hushai the Archite** was David’s friend and most trusted advisor (2Samuel 15:37). He was sent back to Jerusalem with the hope that he could thwart the counsel of David’s former advisor, Ahithophel, who had defected to Absalom’s side. In fact, it would be the advice of Hushai that would eventually lead to the defeat of Absalom and David’s return to the throne.

In times of crisis, it is important to have trusted friends that you can depend upon. Call those friends to your side and share your situation with them. Let them walk with you through the crisis. They can pray with and for you; but they may also help bear your burdens. Who is on your emergency management team? “Bear one another’s burdens . . . ” (Galatians 6:2).

If we wonder where David's *heart* was at in the midst of this crisis, we find clues in his own words and songs. When Zadok the priest came to David with the Ark of the Covenant, David revealed his trust in the sovereign hand of God.

“Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the Lord, then He will bring me back again and show me both it and His habitation. But if He should say thus, ‘I have no delight in you,’ behold, here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him” (15:25,26).

Psalm 3 also reveals David's *wrestling* with God during this crisis.

“O Lord, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. Many are saying of my soul, “There is no deliverance for him in God.” But You, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head” (Ps. 3:1-3).

Have you ever been in a situation like this? Many have risen up against you. Many have given up on you. Many are saying that you are finished. In such times, you **MUST** turn your eyes away from the predictions of men to the faithfulness of God. He **WILL BE** a shield around you. **HE** will lift your head up from the shame of your failure and defeat. **HE** will give you the strength and hope to move forward. Do not let the negative voices of men define and defeat you. God's plan for your life will prevail . . . if you cling to **HIM** and keep your hope fixed on **HIM** as you walk through the fire.

David walked barefoot up the Mount of Olives, weeping and praying as he went. His repentant demeanor indicates his awareness of his own sins that had led him to this sad crisis.

And David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot. Then all the people who were with him each covered his head and went up weeping as they went. Now someone told David, saying, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” And David said, “O Lord, I pray, make the counsel of Ahithophel foolishness” (15:30,31).

The Son of David, Jesus, would later walk up this same Mount of Olives with His disciples, weeping and praying on the way to His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:30).

Psalm 4 gives us more insight into David's heart during this time:

“Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the Lord . . . In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:4,5,8).

Pete Scazzerro writes about “enlarging your soul through grief and loss” (EHS, ch.7). David seems to have done this. Through weeping, praying and journaling, he wrestled with God in the course of his trials. It is unhealthy to minimize, deny or rationalize grief and loss. We must let the full weight of our losses fall upon us. Only then can we learn what God has for us and deepen our walk with Him. We learn the most about God IN our darkest hours.

An opportunist and a hater: 16:1-14

While some came to David’s side in his time of turmoil, others seized upon his downfall to pursue their own agendas. **Ziba** was the servant of Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s crippled son. He lied to David about his master, alleging that Mephibosheth wanted David to be overthrown. He was an opportunist seeking to advance his own welfare at the expense of others. David, not knowing the truth behind these allegations, granted to Ziba all the property that had formerly belonged to Mephibosheth (16:1-4).

In a crisis, our pain can cause us to make rash decisions. David did not have access to the information necessary to make a wise decision about Ziba’s issue. He made a false assumption about Mephibosheth, who had never betrayed him before. Avoid making rash decisions during a crisis. This will only make matters worse.

Shimei, from the family of Saul, came out cursing David as he fled from Jerusalem (16:5-14). He was filled with hatred toward David for overthrowing the dynasty of Saul.

“Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! The Lord has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom” (16:7,8).

David’s general, Abishai, wanted to kill Shimei on the spot. David would not let him. David preferred to look for the movement of God in his own life.

“Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him. Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day” (16:11,12).

It is tempting to want to lash back against those who hurt you. David chose a different path. He chose to search for the movement of God even in his worst experiences. Larry Crabb writes much about this idea of seeking to discern God's movement in our lives, particularly as we journey through trials and pain. The Soul Talk questions are: What is God saying to me through this situation? What is God up to in my life? How is God coming to me?

Absalom takes Jerusalem: 16:15-23

Now that his father was in exile, Absalom took over the city of Jerusalem and quickly asserted his authority. At the advice of his counselor Ahithophel, his first move was to have sexual relations with his father's concubines. This was the ancient way of saying that you had completely triumphed over a vanquished king.

“So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel” (16:22).

Recall that David's sin with Bathsheba had started on that very same rooftop (see 11:2). Now, the words of Nathan the prophet, spoken to David after his sin, were coming to pass:

“I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun” (12:11,12).

Absalom had inflicted the ultimate humiliation upon his father.

Hushai's advice helps David escape: 17:1-29

Ahithophel advised Absalom to quickly rally 12,000 troops to pursue David while he was weary. Hushai (the counselor that David had sent back to Jerusalem to thwart Absalom's rebellion) contradicted Ahithophel's advice, arguing that David would easily defeat such a small force. Instead, he advised Absalom to wait and rally a massive army from all of Israel and mount a full-scale attack. In reality, Hushai was just buying time for David to escape.

Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.” For the Lord had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring calamity on Absalom (17:14).

When his advice was rejected, Ahithophel was so devastated that he went home, put his house in order, and killed himself.

Ahithophel's significance was defined by his role as the king's most trusted advisor. Once that role was taken away from him, he had nothing left to live for. In his book, *Scary Close*, Donald Miller talks about the difference between the roles we occupy in life, and the real person that we are. If we try to live in our roles, we end up presenting a false self to the world. On the other hand, when we acknowledge who we really are, apart from ANY roles, we open up our authentic self to relationship with others. We cannot hide behind our roles. We must step out of those roles in order to allow our true selves to get 'scary close' to others. A must-read book!

Absalom killed by Joab: 18:1-33

As the opposing armies prepared to meet, David gave specific instructions to his generals as to how treat Absalom when they encountered him.

The king charged Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king charged all the commanders concerning Absalom (18:5).

David asked *for his sake* that Absalom be shown mercy. David knew that God, *for HIS sake*, had to exercise this same kind of mercy toward him: "*For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great*" (Psalm 25:11).

It is clear that, in spite of Absalom's treachery and rebellion, David had forgiven his son. He also saw his own sins that had contributed to his son's angry rebellion.

In his book, Forgive the Unforgivable, David Stoop contrasts the path of bitterness with the path of forgiveness. Deep forgiveness, in the face of a great offense, is neither quick nor easy. We must grieve the pain and loss at the deepest level, allowing forgiveness to gradually and repeatedly wash over the offense(s). Quick forgiveness minimizes the pain caused by another's sin. Bitterness poisons your own soul for a lifetime. Deep forgiveness, on the other hand, can heal your hurt while allowing the offender to move forward free from the burden of their sins.

Tragically, Joab again proved to be a self-willed general who was not afraid to usurp David's authority. When Joab encountered Absalom, with his head caught between tree branches, he killed him. David was shattered at the news of Absalom's death.

The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the

gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (18:33).

David felt that it was *he* who should have died instead of Absalom. He *knew* that his own sins had, in part, set his son up for failure.

Joab reproves David for lamenting: 19:1-7

Joab often appears as if *he* is the one really *in charge* of David. Here, he reproves David for lamenting the death of Absalom and warns him that an even worse coup will soon result if he does not immediately change his demeanor.

“Now arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go out, surely not a man will pass the night with you, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now” (19:7).

The surprising thing is that David did as Joab commanded him; even though Joab had *not* done as David had commanded him (he killed Absalom against David’s orders).

We have no right to try to control or manage another person’s emotions. Each person must be given the right to process their own pain on their own timetable. OPC’s Listening Well course teaches us how to listen with empathy, rather than trying to ‘fix’ another person’s emotions and/or thought process. Joab was a rude intruder into David’s emotional life. He demanded that David stop being a ‘person,’ and quickly return to his role as a ‘king.’ Those kinds of friends are “sorry comforters” (Job 16:2).

David reunites the country: 19:8-15

After Absalom’s death, Israel was greatly divided. The northern tribes had followed Absalom, while the southern tribe of Judah had remained loyal to David. David began the process of calling key leaders together to reunite the nation.

Thus he turned the hearts of all the men of Judah as one man, so that they sent word to the king, saying, “Return, you and all your servants” (19:14).

A divided entity (a family, a business, a church, a school, etc.) cannot move forward if disunity is allowed to remain within the ranks. We must work to restore unity by appealing to the hearts of all involved. “Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

David settles some scores: 19:16-39

David forgave **Shimei**, the man who had violently cursed him as he fled from Jerusalem (see 16:5-14). He came to David confessing his sin and begging for mercy and David gave him his request (19:16-23). **Ziba**, the servant of **Mephibosheth**, had falsely accused his master of siding with Absalom (16:1-4). After David heard the truth of the matter from Mephibosheth himself, he decided to split evenly the land that he had previously granted to Ziba (19:24-30). **Barzilla** was an 80-year old man who had given critical provisions to David and his men when they were forced into exile (17:27,28). Now, David rewarded Barzilla by allowing his “servant” Chimham (probably his son) to live in Jerusalem with David (19:31-39).

It's ALL about PEOPLE. When you strip down the story of David and Absalom, there is more involved than simply a struggle for a throne. The greater struggle is the struggle to LOVE WELL. It is important to remember that ultimately, we are not human doings, we are human beings. What matters most is how we love God and people along the way, no matter what kind of road God calls us to walk. The greatest commandments were NOT: Defeat your opponents and win at all costs. Instead, they WERE: Love God will all of your heart, soul, mind and strength . . . and love your neighbor as yourself. In the end, life is not a game of thrones. It is an opportunity to LOVE WELL.

Sheba's Revolt: 19:40 – 20:26

Absalom's rebellion had divided Israel. While David tried to restore unity, there were some who bitterly resisted. **Sheba** was from the tribe of Benjamin (Saul's tribe). All the tribes followed him in a backlash revolt, except for David's own tribe of Judah.

“So all the men of Israel withdrew from following David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah remained steadfast to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem” (20:2).

David had appointed **Amasa** (Absalom's former general) to be over the men of war and to put down Sheba's revolt. Amasa was slow to follow orders, however, so David put **Abishai** (Joab's elder brother – see 1Chronicles 2:16) in charge in order to move quickly to put down the rebellion. **Joab**, true to form quickly usurped the chain of command and took charge of the mission to find and

destroy Sheba. Joab first murdered Amasa, and then he did away with Sheba. Joab seems to be the one man that David feared and could not exercise his authority over. In any case, Sheba's revolt was shut down, and David was restored to full kingship over Israel.

God had made a firm *promise* to David, that his royal dynasty would *last forever* (2Samuel 7:16). If David (or his sons) disobeyed God, then divine discipline would ensue; but God would remain faithful to His promise to keep David and his descendants on the throne of Israel *forever*. Thus, David lost the throne for a time; but the promise of God brought him back. God IS faithful, even when we ARE faithless (2Timothy 2:13)!