

Family Struggles

Deuteronomy 6 & 2 Samuel 13

August 19, 2018

Please read Deuteronomy 6:1-25 before going further.

I wonder how much David took Deuteronomy 6 to heart with his own family. As one who loved God's Law, he would have certainly known this passage.¹ I wonder what it looked like when David put this into practice? Sometimes we joke about how parents unintentionally embarrass their kids in public. You ever wonder what David's kids were thinking in 2 Samuel 6:14, "Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might." His wife, Michal, wasn't too happy that day. She described him as dancing half-naked in front of everybody. This may have embarrassed his kids, ...UNLESS, it impressed upon them the importance of loving God with all of their heart/soul/mind/strength. David's children probably attended worship services with him. They may have even walked into dad's study from time to time and found him writing one of the psalms. David had lots of children.² With so many kids, we can't be sure how much time King David actually had to model and pass along his faith to each one of them. The Bible doesn't really focus in on that part of his story.

From all we know about David's love for God and his love for God's Law, we might jump to the conclusion that David's family was the perfect family. They must have been a lot like "Leave It to Beaver's."

Is this a good illustration of what David's family was like? His kids probably didn't think so. David's kids would probably relate more to one of those Awkward Family photos.



How about your family? Which of these 2 pictures resonates more with you? Sometimes, in Christian circles, we have the tendency to view other people's families from the outside and assume they lucked out with a "Leave it to Beaver" family, while we got stuck with the "Awkward Family Photo." Today, let's not make the assumption that other people in our church don't have family struggles like ours. All of us, to one degree or another, have had to wrestle through some family struggles. That's why it can be so helpful for us to consider some of the family struggles in David's life.



1. David's family had its share of struggles. Despite the fact that David was a "man after God's own heart" who loved God deeply and who loved God's law, in many ways David's own family was a train wreck. Family struggles show up in several key parts of David's life. Let's try and learn from those today. Please turn in your Bible to 2 Samuel 13. One of the most disturbing examples of family struggles in David's life is the incident between his son Amnon and his daughter Tamar; they are half siblings with different moms. Amnon is David's oldest son; thus, he is the heir apparent to become the future King of Israel. Unfortunately, he has a compulsive lust for his half-sister Tamar. Simply put, there is a terrible incident of sexual assault. Interestingly, this incident is recorded in the chapter right after David's own sin with Bathsheba. As God disciplines David for his sin, He says, "the sword will never depart from your house" (2 Samuel 12:10) and that "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you" (2 Samuel 12:11). Many of our family struggles just come from living in a fallen world, but some of them come, as the result of our own sinful choices and the repercussions that follow.

Our family struggles are greatly exacerbated when we don't get good advice about how to handle life's challenges. An example of this is a character in 2 Samuel 13 who could be easily overlooked.

¹ The Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, became a daily recitation for practicing Jews.

² One of the ways that David grows in strength as the king of Judah, is by having lots of children. In 2 Samuel 3:1-5, David has 6 sons, all with different wives. Later on, David becomes king over all Israel, and we learn in 2 Samuel 5:13, "After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him." David's family was growing quickly due to all these different women and the children they were bearing him. Setting aside the question of polygamy for now, we can only imagine that King David probably wasn't able to spend much time with all of these different kids (at least 17 at this point by my count.)

His name is Jonadab. 2 Samuel 13:3 tells us, “Now Amnon had an adviser named Jonadab...Jonadab was a very shrewd man.” Jonadab actually coached Amnon as to how to go about doing this terrible thing to Tamar. And this makes me wonder why Amnon didn’t go to his father, David, for advice. I know that his father was probably quite busy, being the king and all, but still, surely he had access to the king as his oldest son. Here’s another thing to consider, why didn’t Amnon’s father, King David, do anything after this terrible incident occurred? He was The King after all! And, this was his daughter! But all that we learn from Scripture is what we read in 2 Samuel 13:21, “When King David heard all this, he was furious.”

Now, that’s the proper initial reaction. He was right to be furious! This incident was terrible; he should be absolutely outraged! On top of all this, King David had been tricked into unintentionally helping Amnon with his plot to set up this assault. Without knowing what Amnon was up to, 2 Samuel 13:7 says, “David sent word to Tamar at the palace: ‘Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him.’” This was likely part of what made David so angry. He may have felt like he should have seen this coming or should have helped to prevent it. Sadly, the only thing David does though, is get angry. His response seems to stop there. There is no evidence to suggest that he goes and talks to his son about the terrible thing he’s done. He doesn’t discipline him or hold him accountable in any way. This is his oldest son, the likely heir to the throne. And David does... NOTHING.

Now, before we are too hard on David, let’s ask ourselves how many times, in our own family struggles, do we feel immobilized? We’re like a deer in the headlights. We just don’t know what to do. So, yes, we feel angry and upset and overwhelmed by our situation, but we often fail to take the action necessary. Sometimes, our own feelings of hypocrisy hinder us from making things right. David’s own personal sin with Bathsheba, may have made him feel disqualified from correcting and disciplining his own children when they sinned. It is important to take the log out of our own eye first. But, rather than allowing the humility of our own failure to hinder us, we should let it lead us to greater spiritual maturity for the future. Just imagine how good it would have been if this story had gone differently. If David could have warned his son Amnon about the dangers of lust BEFORE this sexual assault? He could have talked with him and advised him with godly counsel BEFORE Jonadab filled his mind with this evil plan.

David had found complete forgiveness from God in his sin with Bathsheba. But, one wonders if he may have never been able to fully forgive himself, or at least to overcome his own feelings of failure. This reality may very well have handcuffed him from being the husband/father he needed to be into the future.³ It may have kept him from taking the action God would have him take. And, this, is unfortunate. Unfortunate, because every parent/spouse in this room, including myself, is imperfect. And, if we allow our past failures to hinder us from future success, we aren’t doing God or anyone else, any favors. A major blunder in our past, doesn’t have to keep causing collateral damage for years to come. Walking with Jesus daily, can enable us to put an end to the cycle of sin, and its destruction in our lives and in our families. God’s gracious design, is for sin to be fully dealt with, and then for us to learn from our mistakes. For us to be restored and for us to mature in our faith, so that our failures are transformed into faith lessons for the future.

Some of the best peer support for brokenness and sin are those who have been there, those who understand the struggle. And those who’ve also found hope in real restoration, healing, and victory. An insert in our church bulletin says: “Evangelical Free Church, A Church of Hope and Healing.” That’s the kind of church that we want to become more and more! Small groups can be a safe place for full disclosure, a place to confess our sins and struggles with just a few other people who can help us navigate a way forward.⁴ As Pastor Eric begins his ministry here, he is working toward enhancing our small groups even further, so that each person in our church has the opportunity to mature in his or her own faith. We are trying to offer groups for singles as well as for married people. For people

³ The hypocrisy of “Do what I say, not what I do” is a self-defeating approach to parenting. Unless, we make it clear to our kids that what we really mean is “Do what is right, don’t repeat what I did wrong.” See Matthew 7:1-5.

⁴ James 5:16.

who have children and those who do not. For people who have been following Christ for a long time and for those who are just now looking into becoming a Christ-follower.

Perhaps reading David's life story will prevent us from repeating some of the same mistakes. But, equally important, let's allow it to teach us that our past failures shouldn't prevent us from helping others with their current struggles. Unfortunately, it seems easier to avoid further confrontation, than to get good advice, and then do what needs to be done, to address the complicated mess in our families. And, the sad reality is, ignoring the problem doesn't help it go away and it doesn't help it get better. In fact, the problem often just gets worse. Sadly, David's failure to properly deal with the situation between Amnon and Tamar leaves things festering. This terrible incident, then leads to more and more collateral damage throughout David's family.

As we continue to read the story, Tamar's brother, Absalom, takes matters into his own hands. We learn in 2 Samuel 13:23, "Two years later, when Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons to come there." Verse 26 then clarifies that "all the king's sons" includes Absalom's half-brother, Amnon. Absalom's plot for revenge then comes to fruition in 2 Samuel 13:28-29, "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." Can you picture the mass chaos and distrust as everyone ran for their lives? The collateral damage of this mess from 2 years earlier, is now spiraling throughout David's family tree. The unresolved sexual assault has now led to retaliatory murder. And, once again, we can imagine how the story could have gone differently. What if rather than plotting revenge for 2 years, Absalom had handled the situation more wisely? When Absalom first learned of his sister, Tamar's assault, 2 Samuel 13:20 tells us, "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." While it was a noble thing for Absalom to take his sister into his own home and care for her, it's unfortunate that he didn't do more at the time. Rather than addressing this injustice and finding a course of action that would hold Amnon accountable, sadly, Absalom tells his sister to keep quiet.

It's also unfortunate what we learn in 2 Samuel 13:22, "And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar." While it was certainly wise to take some time to cool off first and collect his thoughts, it was incredibly unwise for Absalom to let his hate sit there and fester. Regardless of Amnon's special position as King David's oldest son, there had to have been some way that his younger brother Absalom could have undertaken his sister's cause and brought justice to this situation. But, just like his father, Absalom is very angry but doesn't handle that anger in a godly or mature way. I wish I could tell you that eventually this whole story comes around and nicely resolves itself, and they all live happily ever after. But, frankly, it just doesn't. In fact, it spirals down even further.

David struggles to fully forgive Absalom and refuses to see him for years. Absalom doesn't care for the way his father is leading, so he then ends up launching a whole other conspiracy against his father. Then, David, the King of Israel, ends up fleeing from Jerusalem.⁵ Ultimately, this leads to war between David's army and Absalom's army and Absalom is killed.⁶ Family struggles can be messy sometimes, but they get so much messier when we don't address the obvious issues in a timely way with wisdom, courage, and godly maturity.

Even though David's family had its share of struggles, there is a lot that we can learn from them. As we read further into David's life, we can also learn a key theological truth:

2. David's family points to God's redemptive plan for mankind. Mankind needs redemption, not just because of our family struggles, but even more so, because sin in general, is a struggle. There has never been an earthly king, in all of human history, who has been able to rescue us from our sin

⁵ Read Psalm 3.

⁶ This is a pretty interesting way to die. Consider 2 Samuel 14:25-26, then read 2 Samuel 18:6-15.

problem. No matter how hard David tried to be godly, even as a man after God's own heart, he didn't even come close to meeting this need. God tells King David that He has special plans for his family. 2 Samuel 7:11-13 says, "...The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." David's son Solomon became the next King of Israel and he did indeed build an incredible temple for God. But Someone way beyond Solomon was also being alluded to here. When God says FOREVER, He means just that. Eventually David's family line would lead to the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who would be born in Bethlehem, which is also known as the town... of DAVID.⁷ There is an interesting prophecy in the Old Testament about John the Baptist coming to prepare the way for Jesus' earthly ministry. We find an intriguing verse about restoration in Malachi 4:6, "He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents..."⁸ That word "turn" refers to repentance from sin but it also refers to reconciliation, a restoration of our hearts toward one another. In other words, "Turning toward God in repentance results in intergenerational reconciliation."⁹

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus to come and do a mighty work of restoration at every level. There is hope for restoration within the Kingdom of God, which is established through David's heir to the throne, Jesus Christ. You see, David's family points to nothing less than God's redemptive plan for mankind. 1,000 years before Jesus even came to earth, God already had a plan to rescue us from sin.¹⁰

That plan was restoration: bringing hope to our broken world, hope to the hurts in our individual lives, and hope to our struggling families.



This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji on August 19, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

⁷ See Matthew 2:6, Luke 2:4, and John 7:42.

⁸ This is echoed in Luke 1:17.

⁹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1891.

¹⁰ See Colossians 1:13-14.