

“A BAD LAD AND A SAD DAD”

“The king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (II Sam. 18:33)

Father’s Day was first observed on June 17, 1910 and was made an annual observance by President Coolidge in 1924. It is proper that we should honor our Fathers and Mothers (Exodus 20:12). But Father’s Day as we presently know and observe it may become a celebration of the past if the article in the May 22, 2000 issue of Time Magazine becomes reality. An issue called, “The Hottest Jobs of the Future,” lists Fatherhood as one of the occupations that will disappear in the next century. This is what the article says: “Between in-vitro fertilization and cloning, dads could become dinosaurs.” That’s not good news for us men, is it?

God has the final word about that as well as everything else, doesn’t He? I am honored to be a father and the father of two men of God. Of course, my wife is the mother of those two men and a godly mother at that. There are examples of good fathers in the Bible and we fathers would be well served if we followed their examples.

However, there are some examples of bad fathers in the Bible as well. It is possible to learn how to be a better father by looking at a bad father. That way we can see how not to do it! It may come as a surprise to some that the bad father that we read about in II Samuel 18 is none other than David, the shepherd boy who grew up to be king. He could tend sheep but evidently did not tend well his sons.

The story of David and his son Absalom, plus other members of David’s family, gives us a window into the parenting skill or lack thereof of David. As we look in the window, what we see is rather shocking. II Sam 18 is the window and we see a father who realized too late that he had failed. David is seen weeping over the death of Absalom and we read, “The king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” II Sam. 18:33)

These are the words of a grief-stricken, heart-broken father as he mourned the death of his son. This cry was not for an obedient and honorable son but for a rebellious son who had turned against the Heavenly Father as well as his earthly father.

This is only part of the story. Why the sad Dad? What had gone wrong? For the answer we must go back to II Samuel chapter 13. Let us look more closely at what was going on behind the scenes among David’s children and see if we can learn some good lessons about parenting. First, consider:

I. THE HOME LIFE OF ABSALOM. II SAM. 13

In order to understand what was going on between the members of David’s immediate and extended family we need to read II Samuel 13:1-14. Here we read about the rape of

Absalom's sister Tamar, by her half brother, Amnon. From that day, Absalom plotted to kill Amnon: "And Absalom spoke to his brother Amnon neither good nor bad. For Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar." (II Sam.13:22)

The plot thickens and the plot sickens! We fast forward to verses 28 and 29: "Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled."

"Every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled." A brave mob of murderers! David's son and his servants are all guilty of murder. I said "guilty" – there was an awareness of wrong-doing for they all ran including Absalom for we go on to read, "So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years. And the soul of King David longed to go forth unto Absalom..." (vs.38,39).

David wanted to go to Absalom, but he did not go! Was he too busy at the office? Was his excuse, "I'm just too busy, I have so much to do running the affairs of government?" Of course David was exercised about what had taken place in his family, who would not be? But David was not outgoing in his love toward Absalom. The best he could manage to do was become angry and we read, "But when King David heard of all these things, he was very angry." (v.21) That's all – he was just angry. As far as the biblical record is concerned, David did nothing to rebuke or discipline his son. What was David's inaction saying to his other children? To the citizens of his kingdom?

That is not the only glimpse we get into the family of David. We get another view inside the home I Kings 1:5-6 - "Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bore him after Absalom."

Here is another of David's sons and he is guilty of sedition – stirring up rebellion against the government of his father! And David did not confront him! He seemed to let Adonijah have his own way. Later Adonijah became such a menace to society that Solomon ordered him killed. So here we have a rape, a murder and sedition in the same home.

David was a great King but here we get a sad glimpse of him as a father. Discipline seemed to be totally lacking in David's home. Perhaps now we can understand better David's bitter lament, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Here is a home that apparently had little or no discipline exercised in it. Discipline is so very important and Fathers would do well to heed the scriptural teaching about discipline in raising children. What, in a nut-shell, does the Bible say about discipline?

A. Discipline Is Divine.

Heb 12:6 "whom the LORD loves He chastens...." Our only example of a Perfect Father is God, our heavenly Father. He disciplines His children, and as one of them I am glad He does!

B. Discipline Is A Directive.

Prov. 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go." The Hebrew word for "train" is "chânak" pronounced "*khaw-nak*" and means "to *initiate* or *discipline*." The Heavenly Father tells us earthly fathers to initiate and/or discipline our children in the way they should go, modern day psychologists notwithstanding.

C. Discipline Is Difficult.

Heb. 12:11a "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous..." As a parent, I never enjoyed disciplining my children.

D. Discipline Brings Delight.

Prov. 29:17 "Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul." And again, Heb. 12:11b "nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

You may hesitate to discipline because you think that you're being unkind to your children. Actually, when we do not discipline, we are being more than unkind – we are not loving them as we should. If we love our children, then we must admonish, rebuke, and discipline them for their own good and the good of society.

I am not advocating mistreatment or child abuse. What I am saying is this: children need to be disciplined. Our children not only need correction, they want it. If we do not give it to them, we are failing them. Some parents will discipline their pets but let their progeny run wild!

It is important to understand the difference between discipline and punishment. The purpose of punishment is to inflict penalty and focuses on the past. The purpose of discipline is to promote growth by looking to the future. Dads, our children are looking to us to train them and love them that they may grow up to be a blessing and not a curse to your family and society.

General Douglas McArthur wrote a prayer for his son. It is a prayer that all parents should pray often. :

"Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; One who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory.

Build me a son whose wishes will not take the place of deeds; a son who will know thee who knows himself. Build me a son whose heart will be clear, whose goals will be high; a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men; one who will reach into the future and never forget the past.

And after all these things are his, add I pray, enough of a sense of humor so that he may not always be serious and give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom and the meekness of true strength. Then I, his father, will dare to whisper, 'I have not lived in vain.'

David was a winner over the bear, the lion and Goliath; he had ruled well over his kingdom and led his armies to victory but he lost as a father. I know that sometimes a child will forsake the training of godly parents, but for several children from the same home to become a menace to society does not speak well of the parenting and discipline in that home. Absalom's home life was missing the ingredient of discipline. Consider now:

II. THE PUBLIC LIFE OF ABSALOM.

Absalom had been in hiding for three years after he murdered his half-brother Amnon. There is no record that David tried to go to him and help him. After 3 years Absalom came back to Jerusalem. BUT notice his father's attitude toward him recorded in II Sam. 14:24, 28: "And the king said, "Let him return to his own house, but do not let him see my face." So Absalom returned to his own house, but did not see the king's face. V. 28 "And Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, but did not see the king's face."

Absalom needed the assurance that his father still loved him, even though he certainly did not love what he had done. However, David seems to totally ignore Absalom. This caused Absalom to sulk and become more bitter. So Absalom said, "I'll get Dad's attention one way or another." Notice what he did:

A. Absalom's Subtlety. SAM. 15:1-6 – Absalom wanted to break free from insignificance and tedium. He was bored with life in the palace. He wanted some action. In the city gate, where the crowds went in and out he could be somebody. Absalom stood at the city gate and became the consummate politician, courting the people's favor and v.6 says, "so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." By his actions he was saying, "I will get my Father's attention one way or another!" After winning many friends and influencing people, he made his next move.

B. Absalom's Seditious. II SAM. 15:10-12 – Absalom gained the favor of enough people to topple his Father's government for, as v.12 indicates "the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom." So he went to nearby Hebron and set up a shadow government.

David got word of Absalom's treason and abandoned the palace and left Jerusalem!

Why did this happen? Because of father failure! David failed his parental responsibility to discipline his children; he was too busy being King; he failed to discipline Amnon for rape; he failed to see Absalom's hatred for Amnon and make peace between his sons; he failed to

show love and forgiveness; he failed to pass his own faith on to his sons. As a result Absalom almost destroyed the kingdom.

David was a gifted song writer, a giant killer, a renowned and respected king. But remember, he was but a man! He had his strengths and weaknesses like all of us. God paints him warts and all. We can learn from David's shortcomings if we desire to avoid the heartache that David experienced.

I came across an article entitled "The Prodigal Father" years ago and filed it away. I do not know the author but I am indebted to whoever wrote it because it sums up what I believe was Absalom's attitude toward David. Here it is:

"A certain man had two sons and one said to him, "Dad, give me the portion of your time, attention and companionship that I need to make you proud of me." And the father bought him a TV, a car and sent him to college believing he was doing his full duty. Not many days after, the father took his journey into the far country of stocks, bonds and high finance that do not interest a boy and there wasted his precious opportunity to be a pal to his son. He joined the clubs, rose through the ranks and became club president. He ate the food of the well-to-do but no man gave him any real friendship. When he came to himself he said, many of these men have sons with whom they have comradeship and understanding while I perish with longing for my boy. I will arise and go to my boy and say to him, "Son, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your father. Just let me be your friend." But while he was afar off the son saw him and was ill at ease. The father said, "Son, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your father. Just let me be your friend." But the son said, "Not so fast. It's too late. There was a time I needed your companionship, counsel and advice but you were too busy. I got it anyway – from the wrong crowd and now I am wasted in body and wretched in my soul. It's too late for both of us!"

That story pretty well sums up the relationship that David and Absalom had – a bad lad and a sad Dad. But now to the closing chapter in Absalom's life. It is,

III. THE END OF LIFE FOR ABSALOM.

Absalom lived a rebel's life and led a rebel army. His army confronted David's army and "there was a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men." (II Sam. 18:7) David told his captains, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." (II Sa. 18:5) There is no way to deal gently with sin. You don't kill a snake by striking it with a feather!

A. Absalom's Demise.

Absalom saw his army defeated then riding on his mule he tried to escape. In the process his mule ran under the low-hanging branches of an oak tree and Absalom's hair became entangled on the branch, the mule running from under him. There he hung, suspended by his pride – his massive head of hair. He had his hair cut once per year and it weighed over two pounds! (II Sam.14:26) Two pounds of hair, now that is one hairy dude to be sure. The quickest way to put an end to rebellion is to eliminate the rebels. This Joab did by dispatching

Absalom with three javelins thrust into his heart. (II Sa. 18:14) This was a tragic end to an undisciplined life.

B. David's Distress.

David received the news of the tragic death of Absalom and it was as though an arrow had pierced his own heart. See him, now, as he ascends the stairway to his bed chamber and as he goes he sobs "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (II Sam. 18:33) David was now realizing the result of being soft with his son.

In many ways it is more difficult to grieve the loss of a bad son than a good one. The memory is tattooed with what could have been. How does one make peace with the fact that what could have been will never be? There is the matter of guilt to deal with. Gone forever is the hope that someday, somehow everything will be made right.

A pastor friend of mine told the following story in the church of which I was then pastor: "Before the Lord stepped in and got my attention I was too busy working to go to church. My son went with his mom and he begged me to go with him to church. I kept promising but did not go. Then Father's Day came around and my boy begged me to go with him to church on Father's Day because they were going to honor the fathers. I promised him I would go. He was so happy!

But when Sunday came, I had a chance to work and did not go with him to church. My son was really disappointed. I felt guilty about it and I took the money I had made from working that Sunday and went out and bought him a bicycle to make up for not going to church with him.

He helped me take it out of the carton and put it together and then he got on it and I watched him ride off down the sidewalk. He came to the street corner and since he was new at bike riding he failed to stop and a car hit him and killed him. God had to take my son to heaven to get my attention. I surrendered to the Lord and then He called me to preach. I've been trying to get Mothers & Dads to be better parents ever since."

CONCLUSION

Fathers, before you beat yourself up for your parenting failures, let me remind you of 3 things:

- One, there are no perfect fathers, except our Heavenly Father;
- Two, we can all be better fathers if we will work at it;
- three, we do not parent alone. The Heavenly parent wants to help us be better earthly parents.

Chuck Swindoll, in his book, "The Strong Family," says this: "C'mon dads...Let's start saying no to more and more of the things that pull us farther and farther away from the ones who need us the most...You're not perfect? So, what else is new? You don't know exactly how to pull it off? Welcome to the club...your family doesn't expect profound perfection, command performances, or a superhuman plan. Just you warts and all...Let's get started."

A father made a checklist of 7 things that he would do differently if his children were small again. They are certainly worthy of consideration:

1. I would love the mother of my children more. That is, I would be more free to let my children see that I love her.
2. I would listen more. Most fathers find it hard to listen because they are often preoccupied and a child's talk seems so trivial. It is estimated that the average child asks 500,000 questions by age of 15.
3. I would seek more opportunities to give my child a feeling of belonging which is essential for a child's security and feeling of self-worth.
4. I would express words of appreciation and praise more. Many children hear criticism but not commendation.
5. I would spend more time together. Several years ago a survey indicated that the average time Dad and son spent together was 7 1/2 minutes per day!
6. I would laugh more with my family. Fun times are not forgotten!
7. I would spend more time in Bible reading and prayer with my family. The family a-l-t-a-r will a-l-t-e-r the family!
8. I will add an 8th item: If you want to be the Dad God wants you to be you must, through a personal, saving faith in Jesus Christ, be born again. Only a saved father can be the right kind of father.

Will you promise God today to stand by your children and continue to love them no matter what? Will you first give yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that through Him you can be the parent God wants you to be?

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