

Father and King

By David Feddes

I want to look at events of David's reign in which three of the main characters—David, Joab, and Absalom—figure very prominently. Let's review some of the major events, and then we'll be focusing especially on 2 Samuel 18:19 through 19:8.

The whole sequence of events begins with David committing adultery with Bathsheba. He happens to spot her in the distance, bathing, and calls for her, takes her into his bed, and she becomes pregnant. David has to deal with that situation one way or another. And he sends orders to Joab to have Bathsheba's husband Uriah killed. So Joab sends Uriah on a suicide mission, and Uriah is killed in battle.

This displeased the Lord, of course, and the prophet Nathan was sent to David and told David a story which got David really angry about the injustice that was described in the story. Then Nathan said, "You are the man." He told David, "Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the light of this sun'" (2 Samuel 12:1–12). And he did tell David, "You are forgiven" when David repented (2 Samuel 12:13), but also, there were consequences that were going to unfold publicly in the life of David's family and the life of the nation because of the terrible sin that David had committed.

One of the consequences, the most immediate one, was the child that had been born to David and Bathsheba died (2 Samuel 12:18).

A little later, David's son Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar, who was Absalom's full sister. Absalom didn't say a word about it. He just told Tamar to hush (2 Samuel 13:1–22). David was furious, but did nothing about it. Two years went by. Absalom invited all of the king's sons to a big feast, and then he gave orders to his men, "When Amnon has drunk quite a bit and is in high spirits, take him out." And they did. They killed him, and Absalom fled to the land of Geshur, where he stayed for about three years (2 Samuel 13:23–38). Absalom was missed by his father.

Joab, being close to David—one of his relatives, as well as a general and a top aide—noticed that David longed for Absalom. So Joab thought, "I'll do a favor to both of them." And he arranges for a wise woman to come in and tell a story. She tells about two sons, one who killed the other, and now they want to hunt down the other son and kill him. She says, "Oh, please protect my other son. He's all I've got." David says, "I'll take care of it." Then she says, "Well, what about your own situation? You have one son who killed another. Do you want to lose the other son too?" (2 Samuel 14:1–20).

David says, "Tell me something: isn't the hand of Joab with you in all this?" David was no dummy, and he knew who the string pullers in his kingdom were. He says, "I can see Joab's fingerprints all over this one." Joab is standing right there the whole time, and Joab says, "Yes, this is my doing. Do you want to bring Absalom back?" And David did. He allowed Absalom to come back to Jerusalem, but he refused to let Absalom come into the palace, or into his own

presence. Two years went by. Absalom got sick of being excluded from the palace. He sent for Joab to come.

Absalom was a guy who was used to getting his way. He was great-looking. "In all Israel, there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him" (2 Samuel 14:25). He even had great hair! He'd have his annual haircut, and they would weigh the hair, and it weighed more than anybody else could produce in a year of hair growing (2 Samuel 14:26). He's Prince Good Hair, and he looks fabulous. And when he wants something, he gets what he wants.

He sends a message to Joab, "You got me back from exile. But what's the use? I can't go see the king. I can't get into the palace." Joab says, "Sorry, I've done all I can." Absalom says, "I don't think so." When Joab won't come, Absalom says to his servants, "See, 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 (2 Samuel 14:29–30). Now, if you know anything about Joab, you might not want to set his field on fire. But Absalom's servants did, and the immediate result was that Absalom got what he wanted.

Joab did go to David and told him that Absalom wanted to come into his presence/ David summoned Absalom. Absalom came to the king, he bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king embraced Absalom and kissed him (2 Samuel 14:31–33). They were together again. It was a heartwarming scene from David's point of view, because he did want to embrace his son. But Absalom's only reason for wanting to get back into the palace was to lay the groundwork for taking over the palace.

Absalom's rebellion

Absalom gets himself fifty soldiers to run ahead of him and make him look important. He gets his own chariot (2 Samuel 15:1). Then he greets people who are coming to see the king and says, "The king is too busy, way too busy. He's always too busy. If only I were king, I would be giving you justice and you'd be getting what you wanted." And so the Israelites say, "This guy's great. He looks like a king. He doesn't make us bow to him. He just takes us and embraces us. And he tells us he'll give us whatever we want." He's a superb politician. And Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel (2 Samuel 15:2–6).

Now, just a quick timeline: from the rape of Tamar, it was about two years till Amnon was killed on Absalom's orders. Then another three years where Absalom lived in Geshur. Then two years Absalom lived in Jerusalem without being allowed to see David. And he takes about four years to build up his campaign and make lots of friends in high places and low places and make them wish he was king as much as he wished he was king. So a total of eleven years have passed in these chapters that have unfolded.

Finally, the day comes, and Absalom says, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say Absalom is king at Hebron!" (2 Samuel 15:10). Meanwhile, he has recruited some pretty important people, including a genius of a counselor who worked for David—Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:12).

Ahithophel gives him advice. It's smart advice, in a sense, although it's not godly advice. He says, "Grab your father's wives, set up a tent on the top of the highest building, and go rape your father's wives. Then there's no going back. Everybody on your side will know that your father is not going to be making a treaty with you" (2 Samuel 16:20–22). The next thing to do, Ahithophel tells Absalom, is to send soldiers after your father now—and I mean NOW—and kill him before he can get organized (2 Samuel 17:1–4).

David has a double agent, his buddy Hushai, who didn't turn against him. David told Hushai, "Hey, you're a bureaucrat. If you go with us, you're just going to slow us down. You are no good as a soldier. You go back there, and you can do me some good. Get close to Absalom, and see if you can undo Ahithophel's advice" (2 Samuel 15:32–37).

Hushai tells Absalom, "Ahithophel is almost always right, but not this time. Your father is a very dangerous man. And the men with him are very dangerous." And this, of course, is true. They're dangerous, all right. Hushai says, "Don't just try to kill your father. Get all of Israel together so that you've got a vast army like the sand of the seashore. Then go wherever your father is, and wipe him out, wipe his army out, wipe out whatever city he's in" (2 Samuel 17:5–13).

This really appeals to Absalom's ego, and the Lord also has a hand in it. "The Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom" (2 Samuel 17:14). When Ahithophel sees that his advice isn't followed, he knows that they're doomed. He knows that if David and Joab and Abishai and all those old lions get everything organized again and get their troops together and get all their weapons in order, it doesn't matter how big a gang of young guys that Absalom can gather; they're not going to win. So Ahithophel goes home and hangs himself (2 Samuel 17:23).

Then comes the time for battle. The forces of Absalom and David are going to be facing each other. King David stands at the gate as his troops are going out, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands. And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom (2 Samuel 18:1–5).

Absalom's defeat and death

In the battle that day, more than 20,000 men fall. Absalom sees some of David's troops coming at him, so he turns his mule and flees. "Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on" (2 Samuel 18:9). There are disadvantages to being Prince Good Hair. Absalom is dangling from a tree. Somebody spots him and runs off and tells Joab.

Joab says, "Did you kill him? Did you kill him?" And the guy says, "No, I wouldn't kill him for a thousand coins! We all heard what the king said. I'd be dead if I killed him!" Joab snorts and heads off to Absalom. "He took three javelins in his hand, thrust them in the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak" (2 Samuel 18:14). Maybe Joab thought, "Still want to burn my grainfields?" Anyway, Joab knew what needed doing, and he did it. Then he had ten of his

men stab Absalom too, just to make sure that he wasn't going to be getting up. Then they buried him under a big pile of rocks. And that was the end of Absalom (2 Samuel 18:15, 17).

Then we come to the passage where David learns the news. "Then Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok the priest, said, 'Let me run and carry news to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the hand of his enemies.' And Joab said to him, 'You are not to carry news today. You may carry news another day, but today you shall carry no news because the king's son is dead.' Then Joab said to the Cushite,"—who's a non-Israelite, and maybe Joab thinks he's a little more dispensable. If David does get mad and kill the messenger, or maybe he just figured, "Well, I won't be sending David a false signal if I send one of the messengers of good news when it's not all good news." Anyway, he says—"Go tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed before Joab and ran (2 Samuel 18:19–21).

Then Ahimaaz, son of Zadok, said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?" "Come what may," he said, "I will run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite (2 Samuel 18:22–23).

Now David was sitting between the two gates, and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall. And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, he saw a man running alone. The watchman called out and told the king, and the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." Because if they saw a whole bunch of people running, that would mean they lost the battle and were all fleeing. So, if there's just one, he's a messenger coming. And he drew nearer and nearer. The watchman saw another man running, and the watchman called to the gate and said, "See, another man running alone." The king said, "He also brings news." The watchman said, "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man and comes with good news" (2 Samuel 18:24–27).

Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well!" And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king." And the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered—he knew the answer. Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was." And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still (2 Samuel 18:28–30).

And behold, the Cushite came. And the Cushite said, "Good news for my lord the king, for the Lord has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man" (2 Samuel 18:31–32).

And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "Oh, my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you—oh Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33)

It was told Joab, “Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.” So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people. For the people heard that day, “The king is grieving for his son.” And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. The king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, “Oh my son Absalom, oh Absalom, my son, my son” (2 Samuel 19:1–4).

Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, “You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you. For I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night. And this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now.” Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate, and the people were all told, “Behold, the king is sitting in the gate.” And all the people came before the king (2 Samuel 19:5–8).

We want to think about David, the king and father. But before looking more closely at David, and that tremendous tug of war between his role as father and his role as king, I want to take a few moments just to look again at Joab. Joab is a very major character throughout all of these chapters, and a very important man in the history of Israel.

Joab

Joab was the son of Zeruiah, David's sister. She had three sons: Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. And they were all tough. Abishai and Asahel were members of David's elite of the elite—the Thirty—and Joab was the commander of David's whole army. This was one tough bunch of brothers.

Abishai was the guy who always wanted to kill Saul. Whenever David was able to sneak up to Saul, then Abishai would say, “Now's your chance! Hey, this is your God-given opportunity. Kill him! Kill him!” (1 Samuel 26:7–8). When David was coming back with his people after the victory over Absalom, then Shimei—the man who had been pelting David with rocks and dirt and cursing him—came out and said, “Oh, my lord the king, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!” Abishai said, “Let me cut the head off this dead dog” (2 Samuel 16:5–9; 2 Samuel 19:16–22). Abishai is one of those guys who is ready to take you out if you have offended the king in any way. He was chief of special forces, the Thirty, and a general. In the middle of a battle, when David was aging and no longer quite the warrior he had been, a Philistine giant came at him, and Abishai killed the giant and saved David's life (2 Samuel 21:15–17). On another campaign, Abishai killed 300 men himself (2 Samuel 23:18). That's a tough guy! And he's still not as tough as his big brother Joab.

The other brother, Asahel, was one of the Thirty, so he was one of the special forces elite, but he was killed in battle by Saul's general, Abner (2 Samuel 2:18–23). Abner's army had lost the battle, and he was running away, with Asahel chasing him. Abner says, “Go chase somebody else! I don't want to have to kill you.” As tough as Asahel was, Abner was still tougher. He knew that if they fought, he'd have to kill him. He says, “I don't want to face your brother Joab!”

Nobody wants to face Joab. Abner knew that even if he killed Asahel fair and square in the battle, that was not going to sit well with Joab. And it didn't. Later, during peacetime, Joab lured Abner into a room and murdered him (2 Samuel 3:26–27).

Anyway, Abishai and Asahel were two of the three brothers. The oldest and deadliest of the three was Joab, who had a long history of wiping out enemies.

Joab did what was necessary in killed Absalom. It's hard to read this passage and think that David was right—that Absalom should be spared while 20,000 men were killed. “Go out there, kill, maim, destroy, wipe out that army... and deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake” (2 Samuel 18:5). “I don't think so,” Joab tells himself. He’s got personal motives for revenge because he was the one who helped Absalom get back into the country in the first place (2 Samuel 14). He was the one who helped get Absalom back into the palace. His only payment from Absalom was to have his fields burned. And then Absalom led a revolution against his father.

Joab didn't like Absalom very much personally, but he also knew that the best most politically was to kill him. Why would you fight a battle and spare the one man who started it all, so he can start trouble all over again? Three javelins to the heart will take care of that. We won't have any more rebellions from Absalom now, will we? (2 Samuel 18:14)

Joab also does the necessary intervention after the battle. When David makes a huge scene of weeping for Absalom, Joab tells him, “You love those who hate you, and you hate those who love you. You wish Absalom was alive and we were all dead. You'd better stop wailing, man up, and start acting like a king. We won a great victory today. You're making everybody feel ashamed. You want to have a kingdom by tomorrow morning? You better get out there and act like a king and quit bawling your eyes out over this rebel who ruined the kingdom” (2 Samuel 19:5–7). That was necessary advice. It's not easy to hear when you're a grieving father.

Joab the general

- **Brave and deadly:** first soldier into Jerusalem; quick to eliminate any enemy of David
- **Shrewd and political:** very diplomatic or very direct, depending on the need of the hour
- **Decisive and practical:** “Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy!” (2 Samuel 20:20) Just hand over the culprit!
- **Ruthless and selfish:** kills any who wrong him or take his position: Abner, Absalom, Amasa

Joab was one of those necessary people. He did what was necessary—whether it was a necessary execution or a necessary intervention. But when you read about Joab, you might also think, “Yeah, he's necessary—but a necessary evil.”

General Joab was brave and deadly. How did he get to be general in the first place? Well, when David men had to invade Jerusalem and conquer the Jebusites, David said, “Whoever is the first

guy in the attack gets to be commander, if he lives.” Joab was the first guy in the attack. They took the city, and Joab became general (1 Chronicles 11:6). Joab led many battles and was very quick to eliminate any enemy of David.

He was shrewd and political. You can see that a number of times in the stories we've read. He'd hire somebody to go and tell a story to help the king choose a course of action. Joab would see what the king wanted and make sure the king got what he wanted. He knew how to be very diplomatic. He also knew how to get right in your face, like he did after Absalom's death when barked at David, “Get out there and act like a king!” Joab had a sense of what needed doing as a politician.

Joab was decisive and practical. 2 Samuel 20 tells about another rebel named Sheba. Joab goes after him with his army, and Sheba holes up in a city. In that city, a wise woman comes to the wall and says, “Joab, do you want to wipe everybody out?” And Joab says, “Oh, far be it from me! Far be it that I should swallow up and destroy! Perish the thought!” (2 Samuel 20:16–20). How could a nice guy like Joab ever hurt anyone? Meanwhile, he already had the siege ramp built and was ready to destroy the whole city. Joab says, “Just hand over that guy, Sheba, and then we'll go away.” So the wise woman goes back and tells the townspeople, “You’ve got a choice here. Do you want to face Joab and his whole army, or do you want to cut off Sheba’s head and toss it over the wall?” They didn't think very long about that one. Joab went away with Sheba’s head, and that was the end of Sheba's rebellion (2 Samuel 20:21–22). Practical, decisive Joab did whatever he thought necessary. If he had to wipe out a town, he would. If he could get the one guy he was after, he'd do that.

Joab was ruthless and selfish. He killed anybody who wronged him or took his position. He killed Abner and Absalom, as we've already seen.

After the victory over Absalom’s army, David decided to appoint Amasa—the commander of Absalom’s army—as commander of the whole army instead of Joab. Maybe he had two reasons. First, he was mad at Joab for killing Absalom. Second, he may have figured that this would be a way to unite the kingdom again. Bring people from the opposition into the government and have a unity government.

Joab wasn't about to let the enemy commander replace him. But he pretended to be friendly with Amasa. Joab goes out to meet Amasa. Joab said to Amasa, “Is it well with you, my brother?” And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab’s left hand. So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died” (2 Samuel 20:9–10). Joab was commander of the army again. That’s how the man operated.

Joab was a necessary man. David needed him. David could never fire him or get rid of him because Joab was too tough, and he had too many soldiers who were loyal to him. You might say, “Maybe Joab was necessary, and the Bible tells some stories about him, but I'd rather not think too much about a guy like that.”

Joab the believer

But let's consider Joab the believer. That may sound ridiculous after you've heard some of the things he's done. But with all his faults and harshness, Joab was a man who counted on God.

One day Joab and his brother Abishai are commanding two different segments of David's army. They're facing hostile troops from several nations and are outnumbered. Joab gives a speech: "Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him" (2 Samuel 10:12). And they win the victory. Joab trusts in the Lord, and he tells the people to fight for their people and for the cities and for God, and then let God decide what happens.

Later David wants to number all the troops of Israel. This is a very sinful thing, because David is doing it in pride. He's going to count on his own strength and success. Joab says, "No, no, no!" He says, "May the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" (2 Samuel 24:3; 1 Chronicles 21:3). Joab understood that it was wrong. It would be offensive to God, and he told David not to do it. David did it anyway, and brought a plague on Israel (2 Samuel 24). But Joab warned him it would offend God.

In the end, those who live by the sword die by the sword. Joab picked the losing side when it came to a contest for the throne between David's son Adonijah and another son, Solomon. Joab sided with Adonijah, but Solomon was David's choice and was very powerful. Solomon sent his hatchet man, Benaiah—another of David's mighty men—to hunt down Joab. Joab flees to the tabernacle and grabs hold of the horns of the altar of the tabernacle. Maybe he was hoping to be spared when he did that. But Benaiah said, "No, you're going to die. Get out of there." And Joab refused to let go of the altar. he says, "No, I will die here" (1 Kings 2:28–34).

When I recently read those word of Joab, all of a sudden I had tears streaming down my face. I read about Joab and think, "What a nasty individual!" But am I more worthy of salvation than Joab? When death comes for me, I'm going to do what Joab did. I'm going to grab the horns of the altar and hold on and say, "I'm dying here." If you want to approach God on the day of your death and say, "I've got a pretty good track record. I've had a clean, calm, good life," good luck with that. You're not as good as you might think. Hold on to the altar—the place of sacrifice, the place of atonement for sin, the cross of our Savior that the altar in the tabernacle was pointing to—and say, "I'm dying here. I refuse to die anywhere else."

Joab had all the heroic traits of a warrior and a very tough guy. He had the sins that sometimes go with that kind of character. But at the end, he was a believer holding on to the horns of God's altar.

Well, enough about Joab. Let's look at David in this story.

Flawed father

The story unfolds from David's sin against Bathsheba. We shouldn't use David to launch too many moralistic sermons about good child-rearing and bad child-rearing. We'll see some insights from the story that are related to fathering, but we do need to understand that first of all, David had just sinned grievously against his family, his kingdom, against God. His kingdom suffered for it. His family suffered for it. His Lord suffered for it. There's only one reason why David is with God in heaven forever—it's because his Lord suffered for it too.

As we read this story, we need to understand that the basic truth about it is that these things came upon David as a judgment upon him, and not just because he had a little glitch here and there in his child-rearing practices that could have turned everything around. Still, it is true that David had thrown himself into building his kingdom and didn't do a whole lot to build his family.

David did not give his children any direction or discipline. The Bible tells about David's son Adonijah, and I suspect the same was true of the king's other sons. He had no direction from his father, no discipline from his father. "His father had never at any time displeased Adonijah by asking, 'Why have you done thus and so?' Adonijah was a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom" (1 Kings 1:6). So it probably was a pattern—David had these fabulous-looking, talented sons that he allowed to do whatever they wanted. He was a flawed father, and he was distant.

He was distant by not being involved through discipline, and he was also distant in not letting them know his feelings and his affection. He bottled up his feelings for his sons until it was too late. When Absalom was in another country, the Bible says David yearned for Absalom to be with him (2 Samuel 13:39). He yearned for him but left him there at a distance. After Absalom returned to Jerusalem, David shunned him for two years and wouldn't embrace him. He wouldn't punish him, but he wouldn't fully forgive him and be reconciled to him either (2 Samuel 14:24, 28). As a father, David let his sons run wild and didn't show his affection for them.

As a king, David didn't apply justice to his sons. When one commits rape (Amnon), David doesn't do anything about it. When one commits murder (Absalom), David doesn't do anything about it. When he sees things happening that aren't quite right, he does nothing about it. He did not apply justice to his sons or protect his kingdom from them when they became loose cannons. Even after Absalom has gotten 20,000 people killed, David wants Joab and the army to "deal gently with the young man Absalom" (2 Samuel 18:5).

A father's heart

And yet, despite his flawed fathering, David had a great heart of love for his son Absalom. There are a lot of fathers with some really serious problems in their life and in their fathering, and you may say, "They don't really care." But in spite of their faults, they have a tremendous heart of love. When Absalom was in another country, "the spirit of the king longed to go out to Absalom" (2 Sam 13:38-39). When Absalom came back to the palace, "the king kissed Absalom" (2 Sam 14:33). And when Absalom died, it broke David's heart. He cried, "My son, my son, my son! I wish I had died instead of you" (2 Samuel 18:33).

We don't want to moralize too much from the details of the passage, but we can gather at least this much: let your son see your heart for him and your heart for God before it's too late. David had a great heart of love for God and his sons, but it seems his sons didn't know it.

Some of the fault was with David, but let's not pretend that the sons were pure as the driven snow and that their rebellion was all their father's fault. Could that just say, "I had a rotten dad. What do you expect?" Well, maybe David's rebel sons didn't know their father's love for them, but they sure didn't show love for him. David wept at Absalom's death even after Absalom had been seeking David's death. If David had been killed by Absalom's forces, would Absalom have been crying, "Oh, my father David! David, oh, my father! I wish I had died instead of you"? I don't think so. Whatever David's faults were, Absalom did not have that heart at all.

Absalom and later, Adonijah—that other son who rebelled and tried to replace Solomon—they inherited David's looks and his charm and some of his political skills and his ambition. But they seem not to have had his heart, and that was the true greatness of David. Whatever his faults were, he had a great heart for God. And, despite all of his errors, he had a heart for his own children.

The father is flawed, but the sons are still responsible when they rebel and miss out on the godly, loving heart of a flawed father. I've seen it, not just in the Bible. I've seen tears rolling down a father's face, knowing a lot of the problems are his fault. And I've talked with sons—very dry-eyed and very angry at dad. There's kind of an asymmetry where the father is brokenhearted, and he knows a lot of it is his fault. The sons agree that a lot of it is his fault—and they are very angry and very cold. Read this story again. And if you're one of those sons, maybe it's time to talk to your dad. Maybe it's time to get in touch with his real heart.

King and Father

It's very hard to be both king and father at the same time. Building a kingdom instead of his family had a very negative impact on David's family, and that came back to bite him. David's violation of marriage and his neglect of family nearly destroyed his kingship. You can throw yourself so much into one part of your calling such as your work, and if you neglect your family, you might say, "Well, at least I was good at this," or "I did well at that." However, when your family collapses, it can sometimes take everything down with it, including your life's work.

With his family in jeopardy and his kingdom in jeopardy, David's favoritism and his grief over one family member almost destroyed everything. He couldn't keep his balance between king and father. Often his role as king hurt his role as father, but after Absalom's death, his role as father almost wrecked his position as king. David collapsed under the load of it all. He melted down, went to pieces, and Joab stepped in and told him to act like a king and offer some positive words to the army that had just saved his life and his kingship.

It is hard to do justice both to your family duties and to the duties of God's calling beyond your family. And you cannot just take one or the other. Your family is not your whole life or your whole calling. David couldn't say, "Well, family first! Family matters. I don't need to worry about this kingship thing." When you're appointed king, you've got to be king. And you have to

pay a lot of attention to your kingly duties. But you can't neglect your family duties entirely. And it is hard to do justice to both. But you need to keep seeking to do justice to both every single day, where you don't neglect one and you don't neglect the other, and you pray to God to forgive the failings in both areas and to help you to do better in all the different aspects of your life.

Stopping a ruinous rebel

Absalom did have to be stopped. We've seen that. He endangered everyone in David's family and his kingdom. David could not afford to be soft with him because the rebel could ruin everything. Before the battle, David ordered the commanders to deal gently with Absalom, but God had decided what was going to happen with Absalom. "The Lord had determined to bring disaster on Absalom" (2 Samuel 17:14). There's a sense in which Joab was the sword of the Lord—or the javelin of the Lord—because Absalom did have to be stopped.

There's a similar story from earlier in Israel's history: the story of Eli the high priest and his sons. "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD... the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt... they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting" (1 Samuel 2:12, 17,22). "His sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them" (1 Samuel 3:13).

I've heard sermons that say, "Now you've got to be a good disciplinarian, and make sure you discipline your kids when they're little, or they'll turn out like Eli's rotten sons!" Maybe that's true, but the emphasis here is not on how to discipline your little children. The emphasis here is that Eli, as high priest of God, had two sons who needed to be fired in a hurry—and he didn't fire them. He didn't remove them from their position when they proved to be men who did not know the Lord. His main fault was in letting his fatherly affection overcome his duties as high priest, who had to fire bad priests.

"Eli's sons would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death" (1 Samuel 2:25). Eli did try to talk them out of what they were doing. But he wouldn't just fire them and remove them from the priesthood. And they wouldn't listen to him because they had passed the point of no return. "It was the will of the Lord to put them to death."

The Bible says in Proverbs, "A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1). You can play your game and play your game, and maybe your daddy is high priest and he plays along with you. Maybe your daddy is king and he plays along with you. And you figure, "As long as my dad is king, I can burn Joab's fields. I can replace Dad as king and do a better job than him." And then suddenly comes that day when you're hanging in the tree and there's somebody standing in front of you with three javelins—and that's it. There was a point at which the Lord determined, "The sons of Eli are going down. They've had their warnings. They're gone." And they perished in battle. There was a point at which God decided, "Absalom's going down. He's had his warnings. He's gone." We need to understand that God will deal with us in that manner if we ignore his warnings.

A king or a high priest had a duty to put a rebel son out of commission, regardless of how tender his feelings were toward his son. David couldn't bring himself to destroy Absalom. So Joab did what had to be done, and he killed Absalom to prevent further trouble. Then Joab pushed David to do what had to be done: stop acting like a grieving father and start acting like a victorious king. So David congratulated his army and his people and acted like he had won a great victory, even though his heart was broken. And there are times when you do what you've got to do, even when your feelings are entirely the contrary. It is very, very hard to be a king and a father.

David's great successor

The Son of David was also a king. "And when Jesus drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! ... your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.'" (Luke 19:41-44) The great heart of Jesus encompasses all the roles of a loving Father, and mighty King, and a terrible Judge. He knows the Jerusalem has refused him, has rejected him, is about to crucify him. And he weeps over what he knows is going to happen to them.

God says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked. I would rather they would turn to me and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). But if they don't turn to God in repentance, don't think that God's tears and compassion will prevent his justice and his wisdom from doing what they deserve and what is necessary for the advancement of his kingdom. On that last day when Jesus comes again, he will judge and he will welcome. Jesus can perfectly combine the roles of King and Father.

David cried, "Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son" (2 Samuel 18:33). But David couldn't die for his rebel son. However, Jesus did die for the rebels against him. And he did something else David couldn't do: he rose again from the dead. After dying at the hands of his rebel children, he rose again in victory. Jesus has gone beyond what David or anybody else could ever do—in dying for his enemies and then giving his enemies yet another opportunity, having paid for the sins they've committed.

Another thing to notice in this passage: David's roles of king and father were in conflict sometimes, and his feelings were in terrible conflict. He just couldn't manage all of that. When we understand who God is and what God's attributes are, and what God's various activities are, we need to understand that God doesn't actually have a whole bunch of different, conflicting attributes. We talk about it that way, but he is simply God, who unites all of those things that we may call anger, and justice, and wisdom, and love. Sometimes theologians use the term "the simplicity of God" to mean that God is not made of different parts or attributes. When we think about God, we use those descriptions of his attributes, but we must realize that these are all one perfect unity in the being of God. The divine attributes are never out of balance, and they never destroy one another in the being of God. His attributes are in harmony, even perfect union.

This means that Jesus reveals to us the loving heart of the Father, but also his justice as King and Judge. God is tender and loving—more tender and loving than David. God is tough and deadly—

more tough and deadly than Joab. And you had better take these and many other truths about God to heart.

In one of Jesus' parables, he told about somebody like Absalom who wanted his inheritance even before his father was dead. When the younger son in the story of the prodigal son says, "I want my inheritance," he's saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead, because I want your property now" (Luke 15:12). And yet, after the son has taken it, squandered it, ruined everything, and hung out with the pigs, and then comes crawling back, his father is like David on the walls of Jerusalem looking, "Is that him? Is that him? Is that runner maybe bringing some good news?" The father in Jesus' story is watching. And when he sees that it's his son, when he's still a long way off, the father rushes out and feels compassion for him and embraces him and kisses him (Luke 15:20). What a beautiful picture of the heart of the Father and of his great love and eagerness and willingness to welcome back any who will return to him and turn away from the far country and turn away from their sins.

But that's not the only parable Jesus told. He told the parable of a king who went to another country, and left talents with a few of his servants. There were many in that country who would not have him as their king at all. But he turned out to be king anyway, and he came back to reign even though they didn't want him to be king. He came back in all his power. After dealing with the servants who had been given various amounts of responsibility, he said, "But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me" (Luke 19:27). That is not the warmest and fuzziest statement in Jesus' parables. But it is there just as much as the father who ran out to embrace his son and kiss him.

The Bible tells us if you want to turn to God, you should never fear that his arms are not wide open to welcome you. You can come to him, and you can seek him and enjoy his love and know that Jesus has fully paid the price by dying in your place. But if you will not have that price that he paid, and if you will not have Jesus rule over you, then you can only hear the voice: "Bring them here and slaughter them before me" (Luke 19:27). "Away from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). You find yourself like Absalom dangling in the tree with the javelins aimed at your heart.

And so today, I say two things. Take with utmost seriousness the tremendous love of the Father. Take with equal seriousness the deadly justice of the King.

Prayer

We ask, Lord, that you will apply to our hearts what we need from you today. Some of us, Lord, have a tender and trembling and fearful heart. We need to know the greatness of your love and the warmth of your embrace and the kindness of a Father whom we've never really known—one that we've feared perhaps all too often, and yet never known that great heart of tenderness that you have for us. If that's our situation, Father, please pour that love upon seeking hearts today, and draw them into the peace and assurance that Jesus is their Savior and that you are indeed their Father.

Almighty King, if there are some of us who have been playing games with you, who have not taken seriously your warnings, who did not realize the justice and the fierce vengeance of the King of kings, help us today to have our hearts shattered by the reality of your power, of your vengeance against your enemies and against those who refuse to be ruled by you.

Father, you know the medicine that each heart needs. And so I ask that by your Holy Spirit you will apply that to our needs, and bring us into a living relationship with you.

We pray too, Lord, for those of us who are fathers, who have to balance the obligations to our family with other obligations of our calling. We pray for those who are mothers. We pray for each of the children and young people who are seeking their place and seeking how they can be good family members and at the same time flourish as individuals and in the callings that you put upon their lives.

We ask, Father, that each of us, by the direction and wisdom of your Holy Spirit living within us, will be able to walk with Christ and find in him our sufficiency. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Father and King (2 Samuel 11-20)
By David Feddes
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11:4 David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her...Then she returned to her house. 5 And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

David ordered Joab to send Uriah on a mission that would get him killed.

11:7 You are the man! ... 11:11Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun."

...because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die. (2 Sam 12:14)

David's son Amnon raped Tamar, his half-sister and Absalom's sister.

Two years later, Absalom had Amnon killed. Absalom fled to Geshur for three years.

Joab got David to let Absalom return to Jerusalem. However, for two more years, David refused to see Absalom.

14:25 Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. 26And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight.

14:29 Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come. 30Then he said to his servants, "See, 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 went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.

15:6 Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

15:10 "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron!'"

17:14 The LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.

Timeline of events

- Amnon rapes Tamar.
- Two years later, Absalom has Amnon killed.
- For three years, Absalom lives in Geshur.
- For two years, Absalom lives in Jerusalem without being allowed to see David.
- For four years, Absalom uses his foothold in the palace to build support for making himself king instead of his father David.
- A total of eleven years passes from the rape of Tamar to Absalom's rebellion.

18⁴ The king stood at the side of the gate, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands. ⁵And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.

18:9 Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.

18:14 Joab took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak. "Good news for my lord the king!" "Is it well with the young man Absalom?"

"May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man."

18:33 And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

19¹It was told Joab, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." ²So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, "The king is grieving for his son." ³And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. ⁴The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

⁵Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, ⁶because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and

servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased.”

⁷“Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the LORD, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now.” ⁸Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, “Behold, the king is sitting in the gate.” And all the people came before the king.

Joab the son of Zeruiah

- David’s sister Zeruiah had three sons: Abishai, Joab, and Asahel.
- **Abishai** wanted to kill Saul and later Shimei. He was chief of the elite Thirty and a general. In the middle of a battle, he saved an aging David from an attacking Phillistine giant.
- **Asahel**, one of the elite Thirty, was killed in battle by Saul’s general Abner, who was later named chief of David’s army. Joab then murdered Abner, getting revenge and regaining his position.

Necessary Execution

Joab took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak.

Necessary Intervention

Joab said, “You love those who hate you and hate those who love you.
... Go out and speak kindly to your servants... if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night.”

Joab the general

- **Brave and deadly:** first soldier into Jerusalem; quick to eliminate any enemy of David
- **Shrewd and political:** very diplomatic or very direct, depending on the need of the hour
- **Decisive and practical:** “Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy!” (2 Samuel 20:20) Just hand over the culprit!
- **Ruthless and selfish:** kills any who wrong him or take his position: Abner, Absalom, Amasa

Joab said to Amasa, “Is it well with you, my brother?” And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab’s hand. So Joab

struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died. (2 Sam 20:9-10)

Joab the believer

- “Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the LORD do what seems good to him.” (2 Samuel 10:12)
- Joab said to the king, “May the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see it, but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?” (2 Samuel 24:3)
- Joab fled to the tent of the LORD and caught hold of the horns of the altar... He said, “I will die here.” (1 Kings 2:28-30)

Am I more worthy of salvation than Joab? When death comes for me, my only hope is to hold tight to the altar of sacrifice and refuse to let go.

Flawed father

- David sinned grievously against his family, his kingdom, and his Lord—and his kingdom, his family, and his Lord suffered for it.
- David had thrown himself into building his kingdom but did little to build his family.
- No direction or discipline: “His father had never at any time displeased Adonijah by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?” He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom.” (1 Kings 1:6)

Distant dad

- David bottled up his feelings for his sons—until it was too late. When Absalom was in another country, David yearned for Absalom to be with him, but kept him at a distance.
- After Absalom returned to Jerusalem, David shunned him and was slow to embrace him.
- As father David let his sons run loose.
- As king David did not apply justice to his sons or protect his kingdom from them when they became loose cannons.

A father's heart

Despite his flawed fathering, Dave still had a great heart of love for his son Absalom.

- The spirit of the king longed to go out to Absalom. (2 Sam 13:38-39)
- The king kissed Absalom. (2 Sam 14:33)
- "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam 18:33)
- *Let your son see your heart for him and for God before it is too late.*

Sons blind to father's heart

- David's rebel sons did not know their father's love for them, and did not show love for him.
- David wept at Absalom's death, even after Absalom sought David's death.
- Absalom, and later Adonijah, inherited their father's looks, charm, and ambition, but not his heart—the true greatness of David.
- *Father is flawed, but sons are responsible for rebelling and missing his godly, loving heart.*

King and Father

- Building kingdom instead of family had a negative impact on David's family.
- David's violation of marriage and neglect of family nearly destroyed his kingship.
- With family and kingdom both in jeopardy, David's favoritism and grief over one family member almost destroyed everything.
- *It is hard to do justice both to family duties and to duties of God's calling beyond family.*

Stopping a ruinous rebel

- Absalom endangered everyone in David's family and kingdom. David could not afford to be soft with him. The rebel could ruin all.
- Before a battle in which 20,000 men would be killed because of Absalom, David ordered, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." (2 Sam 18:5)
- God would do what David would not: "The LORD had determined ... to bring disaster on Absalom." (2 Sam 17:14)

Stopping ruinous rebels

- Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD... the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt... they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. (1 Sam 2:12, 17,22)
- His sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. (1 Sam 3:13)
- Eli's sons would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death. (1 Sam 2:25)

King and Father

- A king (or high priest) had a duty to put a rebel son out of commission, regardless of how tender his feelings toward his son.
- David could not bring himself to destroy Absalom, so Joab did what had to be done: he killed Absalom to prevent further trouble.
- David fell apart when he heard of Absalom's death, so Joab pushed David to do what had to be done: stop acting like a grieving father and start acting like a victorious king.

Weeping but punishing

And when Jesus drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! ... your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44)

David's great successor

- "Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (1 Samuel 18:33)
- Our Lord did endure the death we deserved.
- After dying at the hands of his rebel children, Jesus rose again in victory.
- Although David's roles and feelings were in conflict, God's attributes are in harmony.
- Jesus reveals to us the Father's loving heart, but also his justice as King and Judge.

King and Father

- **The Father's love:** But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)
- **The King's judgment:** But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me. (Luke 19:27)