

Anger Unbridled, A Son Unchecked

2 Samuel 13:22-39

*Never take your own **revenge**, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written,
“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord
Romans 12:19*

Introduction: In the classic story of betrayal, injustice, revenge, and the hope of forgiveness, written between 1844-46 by Alexander Dumas, the book has been continually translated, read, and turned into movie form since then, capturing the minds of the reader and hitting on themes that are universal in the human heart. If you are unfamiliar with the gist of the story, it is about the character Edmund Dantes who was a trusted, guileless, and fast rising officer in a shipping company, but who elicited jealousy from his supposed friends, who conspired against him and condemned him to life in prison in the infamous *Chateau D’if*. On the brink of suicide, he gains a chance relationship with another prisoner who gives him a broad education, deducing who the culprits were, and gives Edmund a way out of prison. He also gave him knowledge of a vast treasure, one that would secure a good life and ability to take **vengeance and revenge on those that betrayed him**. The rest of the novel tells of how he drove some to bankruptcy, shattered the reputation, and helped cause others to commit suicide. By the end, Dantes was able to carve out a pathway of forgiveness and hope, realizing that vengeance could go too far and finding love from a woman who had been his slave. The final words of the novel express this message: *all human wisdom is contained in these two words: 'Wait and Hope'*.

Why is the story so captivating to so many? In our hearts and minds there is a desire for justice and a recoil against injustice, which is God-given. However, in the tainted nature of our inner self, we have a mixed up or inconsistent expression of these things. It’s why in my heart, I WANT Dantes to not only be alive and thrive, but for his betrayers to PAY, to HURT, or to FEEL the PAIN that their supposed friend felt, and more. We cheer on the one getting revenge, hoping that it somehow helps reclaim what was lost. But though JUSTICE is needed and real, our thirst for vengeance is not.

This morning we want to explore our hearts in terms of **anger, bitterness, and the seeking of vengeance**, especially when we have been wronged (like Tamar) or someone we love has been wronged (like Absalom).

Nature of Anger: Slow Burn

*But Absalom spoke to Amnon **neither good nor bad**, for Absalom **hated** Amnon, because he had violated his sister Tamar.*

²³ After two full years Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king’s sons. ²⁴ And Absalom came to the king and said, “Behold, your servant has sheepshearers. Please let the king and his servants go with your servant.” ²⁵ But the king said to Absalom, “No, my son, let us not all go, lest we be burdensome to you.” He **pressed him**, but he would not go but gave him his blessing. ²⁶ Then Absalom said, “If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us.” And the king said to him, “Why should he go with you?” ²⁷ But Absalom **pressed him** until he let Amnon and all the king’s sons go with him. ²⁸ Then Absalom commanded his servants, “Mark when Amnon’s heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, ‘**Strike Amnon**,’ then kill him. **Do not fear; have I not commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant.**” ²⁹ So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king’s sons arose, and each mounted his mule and fled.

Anger and hatred are cousins, closely knit together in an insidious racket to infect our heart. The problem with these sins are they function in the **subterranean** and are by nature **volcanic**. They can bide their time, slowly boiling and stewing, masked by a smile or calm speech. They are by definition **deceptive**, since they desire to deceive others and can easily deceive ourselves. They hold onto **grudges**, have long memories, and plot in order to exact whatever kind of revenge seems necessary to assuage the dark feelings.

Notice that **Absalom** was angry and **hated** Amnon for what he did to Tamar, and we might conclude at some level he was justified in these feelings. But instead of dealing with these in a righteous way, he allowed the lava flow to gain steam and temperature. The truly concerning part of anger is the fact that Absalom could **mask it for two years**, not speaking or doing anything negative toward Amnon, but staying in a holding pattern externally all the while bitterness was taking root and beginning to flower. For these years, he waited for the right time to exact revenge, believing that was the only way to have **justice**, so he went forward more self-justified with each passing day.

The story is intriguing, and once again involves deception, an unscrupulous friend in **Jonadab**, a murder, and schism in the family. This shows the character of **Absalom**, who will be the focal point for the next five chapters, and how he **manipulated** circumstances to put Amnon in the ground. Here are the key observations of how Absalom operated out of hatred and anger:

- **He pestered his dad to get his own way** – The context of killing Amnon was the annual feast that followed the shearing of the sheep. In a show of seeming respect, Absalom invited David and all of his servants to come, to which David said “no” to, since it would have been overkill and burdensome, most likely costing an exorbitant sum to feed everyone. To this response, it says that **Absalom PRESSED him** (v. 25), a word that means urge, force, or impel. Another way to say it is **pestering** or **nagging** until you get your way. It seems like he knew David would say no, and his ultimate goal was NOT to have David come, but to have Amnon. So he used the old “ask for a huge thing so that the small thing you want doesn’t seem like much”, and it’s clear he read “The Art of the Deal” at some point in life. David initially said “no” to the request of Amnon, but Absalom **PRESSED him** (v. 27) until he relented. The table was now set, the opportunity was created, and the time was right for the hatred to find its vengeance.
- **He used SCRIPTURE as a means of manipulation and authority** – When he had commanded his servants to carry out the murder (just as his dad had Joab carry out the murder of Uriah), he knew they could have some questions or trepidations, so he told them “**Do not fear; have I not commanded you? Be courageous and valiant**”. If this sounds oddly familiar, it’s because it was almost a verbatim rip off of **Joshua 1:9**, as God commanded Joshua to not fear but to be strong and courageous. Here, Absalom showed that he both was convinced in his mind this was righteous but also that he was willing to twist Scripture to get his own way. Many have stooped to the same levels, using the Bible to serve their desires and wants instead of yielding to what God says.
- **He had his old friend and politician to help him** – If you remember the story of Tamar’s defilement, it was Jonadab that led Amnon down a path of abusing his sister. Now Jonadab saw the political winds blowing and saw an opportunity to help Absalom (BTW – Amnon was first in line of succession to the throne, and this bumped Absalom one more rung higher). News came to David that Absalom killed **ALL THE SONS OF DAVID** (v. 30), to which David to react with abject sorrow. But in came the smooth tongued Jonadab, who gave much “better” news: It was not

ALL the sons, but “ONLY” Amnon, who you remember violated Tamar...you remember that, right, David?!” It’s like telling a parent that your child died on the way home from school...but nope, only got caught stealing a car! Isn’t that much better?!”

All of this lead to Absalom fleeing Jerusalem to his grandpa’s city called Geshur for three years, creating angst with his father and division in the family. Amnon was dead and a form of vigilante justice was meted out, but this did NOT help the situation or Tamar, since now she was alone again. Unleashing vengeance ONLY led to more complications, to more pain, and did not resolve any family issues but merely created more.

Nature of Absentee Parenting: *Slack Discipline*

Now, we already pointed out that chapter 13 becomes a hinge for the rest of the book, and will detail both the friction between he and Absalom, but also the diminishing nature of his home and leadership. It’s good to note that we should not **stand in judgment toward other parents or leaders**, since we are not privy to all the information or nuances of a situation, and thus we do not want to come down to heavy on David. Yet, David was the best of the best of Israel, and he got caught into the same trap as many before and after him. He had a great **public** reputation and success, but his home life left something to be desired. It is true that the schism in his home was based in large part to the consequence of his sin, but it was also to some degree the result of absenteeism, and his inability to lead his home. Here are a few principles we glean from David here:

- 1) **David’s inability to call out Amnon or lead to restoration left room for vengeance** – If any of us were faced with a situation similar to David’s, where one daughter was violated by a son, there would be no simple or easy fix! However, David’s silence in all of this was deafening. At the very least, Amnon would need to be called to **repentance**, and in the absence of repentance there would have to be some form of **discipline given**. In calling for repentance, it would have created a pathway for potential **restoration and reconciliation**. Not easy, pain staking, tear filled work for sure, but possible. But it seems David opted for what most parents/grandparents choose: *can we just all get along! Can we just all come over for the holidays and for one day act normal!* True peace can only be experienced when there is restoration, which means hard issues have to be addressed. And when those issues still are not resolved, at least there is clarity where everyone stands. Without this process, it opened the door for Absalom to take justice and matters into his own hands.
- 2) **David could be manipulated by his kids** – Kids of any age are not dumb, and there is something innate in our fallen nature that has the ability to find and exploit weakness in people, including our parents. This was seen with David and his children. David was known for his courage, wisdom, and decisiveness, but that was with the kingdom and war. At home, he was easily swayed. Amnon took advantage of him by having Tamar come and help him when he feigned sickness, even though that was out of the norm. Here, we see that he was willing to give into **Absalom’s pressing and nagging**, and though he said “no” to start, gave in to his requests, which lead to the opportunity for murder. Parents must be clear on what they are willing to say “no” to, and willing to be the ‘bad guy’ in the relationship for the best of the child. Giving in **feels loving, but it actually reinforces the wrong things in life**. Saying and standing by your “no’s” reminds our kids that life is not about them, and that they are NOT the most important person in life, and that there are guidelines by which we all live. We will also see that David will have a

hard time **confronting** Absalom in the future, and it was framed to be out of love, but it was truly out of insecurity.

- 3) **We are reminded of David's nature, which is more reflective of all of us** – The book of Chronicles covers the same time period as 2 Samuel, but there are not any of the sinful and personal situations revealed like in 2 Samuel. The reason for this is that Chronicles was written to encourage the exiles of the greatness of the kingdom and hope of restoration, and 2 Samuel was written to point to a greater King than David. The point is not to cast stones at David's sin, leadership, or parenting shortfalls, but to remember that we are all **weak, inconsistent, self-loving, insecure, and able to be manipulated at times**. We are NOT the saviors of our kids or others, but there is One who is greater than all who fulfilled all righteousness. We see ourselves in David's downfall, so that we can look to Christ who is the perfect Leader in our home, church, and life.

Nature of Vengeance: *Self Deification*

Now let's come back to the issue that can reign in our heart, and that of **anger, hatred, vengeance, and bitterness**. Before you quickly say this is not something you struggle with, we want to look at **why a believer** does not exercise these heart issues, how we address them, and how we put them away. Think of this: If you do not struggle with these, how would you counsel someone like Tamar after being violated, or Absalom when it seemed like justice was not happening, or David in how to deal with Absalom now. We want to look at a few passages of Scripture in the New Testament to see what God expects from us in terms of this issue.

1. **Anger, hatred, bitterness, and revenge is something a believer can PUT AWAY through repentance in our hearts and minds, and replaced –**

Ephesians 4:30-32 *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all **bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.** 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**"*

Colossians 3:8-10 *"But now you must **put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.** 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 **and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.**"*

The context of both of these passages is the ability that a **believer** has that an unbeliever does not. When we LEARN CHRIST (Eph. 4:20), we have a new opportunity to deal with the besetting sins that plague all people. Notice that believers **struggle** with these sins, so being a believer does NOT mean you will not be tempted by or wrestle with sin in our heart or minds, but we have a revolutionary and new way to deal with them. The context of both is that we are able **to put off the old self**, which is categorized by our flesh and that which is not yielded to the Spirit, and **put on the NEW self**, along with its new attributes, through the **renewing of our mind**. This is the *immaterial* parts of our life, dealing with mind, heart, and soul. *What does repentance of someone who steals look like?* They not only stop stealing, but now use their hands to give to others. *What does it look like for a liar?* He not only stops telling lies, but starts telling the truth. So it goes with things like **bitterness, anger, and hatred**.

When we have these feelings toward others, *we can repent of them*, seeing them for what they are, and put them away. Things like **bitterness** are poison pills we swallow to try to hurt someone else, but it simply brings negative reactions to us (see Hebrews 12:15). So we **PUT AWAY hatred** because it truly begins to kill us, and those around us. But putting off is only part of the equation. The other part is **renewing our mind so we can replace those feelings with new, redeemed, gospel created ones.**

Through the mind of Christ and work of the Spirit, we can begin to be **kind to those who have wronged us**, compassionate to those who have sinned against us, and ultimately **forgive those who repent.** Now, a quick word that may frustrate you and that you may not agree with initially. Notice here that we are to **forgive as “God in Christ forgave us”.** This means that God does not forgive EVERYONE, though He has the capacity to forgive all those who ask for it. We freely forgive those who repent, since a lack of forgiveness toward others means God will not forgive us (Matt. 6:14-15). Forgiveness means we no longer hold the sin against another, but recognize it has been paid in full by Christ on the cross. Forgiveness is the **gateway toward restoration and a rebuilding of trust in a relationship.** But someone who sins against us and does not repent or ask for forgiveness is not forgiven, but we still do not hold bitterness or anger against them, but we are freed up from being bound by their sin against us anymore.

2. We do not take revenge because that is God’s lane, not ours:

Romans 12:14-21 *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”*

So many profound truths contained here. This passage **assumes** there will be persecution, evil, and wrong done to us. But it is how we **view the evil doer, ourselves, and God that makes all the difference.** In other words, when we trust that the LORD is in charge of all things, and that no one will get away with anything, but that God WILL repay others according to their actions, we can trust in His work, meaning we do not have to take matters into our own hands. We often do not like **His timing, or do not want to wait, or it seems like evil is winning** (see the beginning of Psalm 73!). But there WILL BE A TIME that God will deal justly with all sin, and will have His wrath satisfied, so I do not have to work in the lane that only God possesses. On the contrary, we are to repay evil with good, and in so doing, we will heap burning coals on their head, which was a way that a shame driven or guilty person would show their shame in public, but putting burning coals on their noggin. Because a believer KNOWS where vengeance will come from, we can operate differently than all the world around.

3. God’s wrath is satisfied by Jesus Christ on the cross

Isaiah 53:5-6 *“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*

Isaiah 53:10-11 *“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief;*

*when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*

11 *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see **and be satisfied**; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, **make many to be accounted righteous**, and he shall **bear their iniquities**.*

Ultimately, how do we put off revenge, bitterness, and anger/hatred? We understand that every sin that has been committed will be accounted for, either in judgement or in the **satisfaction or propitiation of the cross**. Jesus came, lived, died, and rose again so that every sin of those who believe and repent would be cast on Him, and He paid the debt in full, with God treating Jesus as if He'd actually committed them. This not only is how we view ourselves and our own sin, and can delight in the joy of eternal life, but what we hope others taste, including those who have wronged us. God did not withhold His wrath from His own son, but rung it out completely, which was His will and pleasure, so that He could welcome back angry, wrathful, bitter, hating, guilty, shameful, wounded, hurt, abused, and broken people like me and you.

What a Savior! What a God! This is how He turns our mourning into dancing, our tears to joy, and our mourning to hope.