

background

Tamar raped by her 1/2 brother Amnon

David does nothing

Absalom avenges the death by murdering Amnon

Banished - all attempts at reconciliation spurned by David

Absalom attempts to overthrow his father

### Absalom, My Son

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 12th Sunday after Pentecost, August 11, 1991. Scripture Lessons: 2 Samuel 18:24-33; Psalm 102:1-12; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I. Bruce Baker asked a veteran minister, "What advice do you have for me, a young man just getting started in the pastorate?" Deliberately and in a tone betraying his sorrow, he replied, "Spend time with your son." His sense of failure to his son overshadowed everything else. "I was so busy seeking to succeed as a minister that I failed as a father." That's a danger that all parents face - the danger of losing our sons and daughters.

For all his accomplishments as a musician, soldier, diplomat and national leader, King David was a failure when it came to his two oldest sons. When David's oldest son, Amnon, raped his sister, Tamar, David did nothing. "When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry; but he did nothing to harm his son Amnon, for he loved him, because he was his firstborn" (2 Samuel 13:21). By doing nothing, he condoned it. He refused to face the enormity of the crime (Peterson, Growing Up With Your Teenager).

David responded in another way when his next son, Absalom, avenged the rape of his sister by murdering Amnon. This time David's response was condemnation. Absalom was banished into exile for three years. Through the intervention of a friend he was allowed to come back to Jerusalem, but still David would not speak to him or see him. He rejected him completely and cut him off from all relationship.

Both responses are similar in that neither dealt with what happened in any responsible or personal way. Eugene Peterson, of the Bel Air Presbyterian Church, writes, "At bottom there's something cowardly in the way David, alternately indulgent and harsh, dealt with his sons."

I can't help but wonder that if David had handled the crisis of Amnon and Absalom differently, maybe Absalom wouldn't have raised an armed rebellion to overthrow his father's kingdom and maybe David would've been spared the terrible grief of Absalom's death.

→ David lost Absalom in death. But David had lost Absalom long before his death. Death is not the only way we lose our children. There's a lot of evidence that Americans are losing our children spiritually and morally.

II Recently a friend recommended that I read, The Day America Told the Truth by James Patterson and Peter Kim. Patterson and Kim set out to take the moral pulse of America in the 1990s. They conducted the largest survey of private morals ever undertaken in any country to discover the personal ethics, values and beliefs of Americans. *In the light of the Biblical story of David, Absalom, Amnon & Tamar the following*  
Among the major revelations ~~were these:~~ *stood out.*

✓ Young American males are our biggest national tragedy. Males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, the age of Absalom and Amnon, are the real cause of our crime problem. ~~They're responsible for most child abuse. They are a violent, untrustworthy, and undependable group,~~ they write.

✓ One In seven Americans, like Tamar, has been sexually abused as a child. ~~One in six Americans has been physically abused as a child.~~ And twenty percent of the women surveyed reported that they've been raped by their dates.

✓ Our children are starting sex earlier- far earlier- than in any previous generations. One in five kids now lose their virginity before the age of 13. The reasons given by those who started having sex at age twelve or thirteen are really revealing. Love and pleasure rated low as motives. Overwhelmingly, the reason teenagers give for starting sex so early is the powerful force of peer pressure- peer pressure without any effective counterforce from many parents (102).

~~✓ Patterson and Kim asked people to tell them what portion of their~~  
current values they received from their parents. The result: Only 50 percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds honestly feel that they've gotten a strong moral foundation from their parents. *They learn their morals + ethics + religion from the peer group.*

There's evidence that even a smaller percentage of the children of Presbyterians are getting a strong moral foundation from their parents. This concern crops up over and over again in my reading and when I attend seminars or Presbytery. We Presbyterians are losing our teenage sons and daughters in alarming numbers. We're not losing them for the most part, to the cults or to more conservative, evangelical churches. We're losing them to secularism; to materialism; to nothingism.

The Presbyterian Church is an aging church <sup>nationally</sup> because we lose our youth. Survey after survey indicates that many of our children as well as parents are biblically illiterate. Not to long ago I heard Dr. Thomas Gillespie, President of Princeton Seminary, speak at a Princeton Alumni meeting. He expressed concerned that we aren't communicating to our youth even such basic ideas as to what is a Christian and how does one become a Christian. How is being a member of the Christian church different from being a Boy Scout or Girl Scout? How's the church different from the Kiwanis, Lions or Rotary?

Another Princeton professor, Diogenes Allen writes these scathing words in his recent book, Love, Romance and Marriage. "The tendency of some parents in our society to leave all choice of 'values,' including religious values, up to their children *is really a sign that they themselves believe in so little that they find precious that it is not worth the effort to try to pass it on* (105).

A minister, Bruce Baker, has shared in an article entitled, "My son, my son" some things he and his wife have done in their home, hoping that other parents can adapt and use them with their children with the hope that we can keep from losing our young people.

1. Pray daily with each son or daughter. I don't always do this although I know I should and I often do, although less often now than when our boys were younger. Nevertheless, I treasure those times I'm able to

tuck the boys in and lie down beside them and talk with them for awhile and to pray with them.

2. Tell your child you love her or him each day. Ask questions like these: "How do you know I love you?" "Do you ever doubt my love?" "What else can I do to express my love to you that would please you?" When I asked that question the other night they said, "Be quiet! We can't hear the television."

3. Invite your child to do things with you. Some of my warmest memories of my father are of his taking me to work with him on the railroad engine where he'd let me sit on his knee in the engine and even hold the throttle.

~~4. Be open and honest with you children. Be real. Be yourself. Many~~  
parents are being condemned for their hypocrisy. Admit failure when you fail. If you have wronged your son or daughter ask their forgiveness.

5. Encourage your children, even your grown up children. Praise promotes wholesome personality development while criticism leads to antagonism and loss of self-esteem.

6. Discipline your children in love. Be realistic in what you expect of your children. Insist upon obedience. Discipline your child in an appropriate way when they disobey.

7. Share Jesus Christ with your children. Talk with your children about their relationship with Jesus. Presbyterians need to learn how to

share their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and encourage others to take their first, halting steps of faith.

When the young son of the famous 19th German theologian, Schleiermacher, died he said to his congregation at his child's funeral, "Children are not only pledges entrusted to us from God, for whom we must give account... inexhaustible subjects of concern and duty, of love and prayer... they are also blessings... they make our hearts glad."

Children are blessings. They are inexhaustible subjects of concern, duty, love and prayer. <sup>Few griefs can be as powerful as the grief of a parent who has lost a child.</sup> Therefore, The Apostle Paul writes, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Whenever a child is baptized in the Presbyterian Church all of us who are members of the church take vows promising to fulfill a parental responsibility of raising that child in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. Will you help to fulfill your vows by encouraging the parents in our church to pledge their children to receive a Christian education when Sunday Church School begins in a few weeks? Consider also the gift of teaching that God has given you and which others have seen in you. Have others said to you, "You'd make a wonderful teacher?"

Why not at least attend the teacher training seminar being led this week by Sandy Christos?

If you are an adult, parent or not, young or old, I believe that you'll benefit if you participate in a Sunday school class. There are also opportunities to grow in the faith through participation in weekday small group activities such as the Serendipity group at Ann Bailey's, the small group Bill and Jan Townsend started last year, or the Bible Breakfast Bunch on Thursday mornings.

We don't need to lose our children. They should be among our highest priorities... to pass on the faith that God loves us, that Christ died for us, that Christ rose from the dead and is Lord of all of life. This must be *one of our* highest priorities because, as Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Almighty God, you have given your only son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.