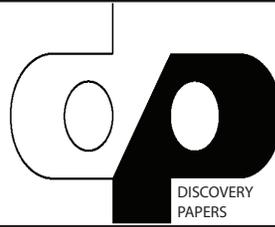


# ASSAULTED AND ABANDONED

SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:  
THE STORY OF DAVID.



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2 Samuel 13:1-22  
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Paul Taylor  
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2 Samuel 13:1-22

There's a new TV show coming out in a few weeks called *Powerless*. The plot centers around a low-level employee at what is known as the "world's worst insurance company."<sup>1</sup> She loves her job because she likes to help people. The twist is that she lives in the world of DC Comics. Her world is dominated by good guys and bad guys with superpowers.

The employee has to struggle with how to make sense of her little job when the people around her seem to have such a larger impact on major events. The show is described as being about "the reality of working life for a normal, powerless person in a world of superheroes and villains."<sup>2</sup>

The premise of the TV show is compelling because it taps into something that we all feel. We look around us and see power everywhere. Some people do amazing, selfless acts of generosity. Others roll over anyone to satisfy their selfish drive for achievement. It can seem like we are minor characters in a world of superheroes and villains.

Today we're continuing our ten month series on the life of David that we've called *A Life of Passion*. We're in the chapter of David's life that we've called *Father*. After a long time of David being identified, prepared, and finally installed as the King of Israel, the focus of the story starts to shift to his family life.

We started this two weeks ago by looking at the infamous story of David and Bathsheba. We saw the beloved king of Israel compel a young woman to have sex with him and then order the murder of her husband to cover it up. We were horrified at David's depravity.

Last week we saw something just as remarkable. David was confronted by the prophet Nathan and repented of his sin. As evil as his deeds were, he was able to receive the forgiveness of God and start to move forward.

This week we pick up the story in 2 Samuel 13 where the consequences of David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah begin to echo through his story. David's first sin

was an abuse of power played out in a sexual encounter. Today we watch his son Amnon follow the same path, but worse.

Amnon will violently rape his half-sister. Then he will reject her and send her away. Our hearts will break as we watch a powerless woman assaulted and abandoned.

And then our hearts will break again because we'll see how the other men in her life respond to this situation. We saw David respond well to his sin. But we'll be disappointed by his response to his son.

We'll be invited to ask some difficult questions. Why is sexual assault so prevalent? What really causes it? How should we respond, both to the general culture around us and particular incidents that we encounter? Finally, where does God fit into all of this? How does the love of God pierce through such darkness?

Are we really powerless in a world of heroes and villains? Or is it possible that we have the potential to be, maybe without realizing, either villains or heroes ourselves. This is a difficult but important story we are about to read. Let's see what God has for us in this heart-breaking story of sexual assault.

## The Problem

This story unfolds in a typical way. It begins with a problem. Then there is a proposed solution. That solution is implemented. There is a result. And finally an aftermath.

The perceived problem that drives our story is stated right at the beginning.

**2 Samuel 13:1-2:**

**Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar. And after a time Amnon, David's son, loved her. 2 And Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her.**

Most of the story concerns two different people: Tamar and her half-brother Amnon. But it begins by referencing Absalom and David. This story isn't just about a victim and a perpetrator. It's about all the people involved.

Absalom is the son of David's third wife, Maacah. This wife was the daughter of a neighboring king. Her marriage was a political arrangement. Absalom and his sister Tamar were not full Israelites.

We know a lot about David. Most recently, we've seen him engage in sexual sin when he sent for, took, and lay with Bathsheba. I suggested that sin was closer to sexual assault than adultery because Bathsheba would have had so little chance to consent.

Amnon was the first son of David's first wife. His mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel. We don't know much about them. But we could assume that his position would have led him to assume certain preeminence among his siblings. He probably felt entitled. Barring other factors, he would have been the heir to the throne.

Think about how all these people would have already been affected by the events of the past few chapters. The taking of Bathsheba. The murder of Uriah. The birth of Solomon. This assault against Tamar doesn't happen in a vacuum. There's a whole lot that comes before it. Many people are involved.

So as the story opens, we want to consider our own experience. How have you been affected by sexual assault, abuse, harassment, or violence? How are you affected?

Each of our answers is going to be different. Some of us are survivors of sexual assault or abuse. Some of us are loved ones of those survivors. Some of us are perpetrators. For these people, it's easy to see how you've been affected.

I want to speak for a moment to those people who think they aren't affected. Maybe you aren't a victim or a perpetrator or a relative. Maybe this issue isn't a big part of your life. I'd like to suggest that it's bigger than you think. All of us are affected.

The issue of sexual abuse, harassment, assault, and violence is one of the most prevalent issues in our world. The recent Oscars featured Lady Gaga revealing her history as a sexual assault victim. Just this week the Mountain View Police Chief was charged with sexual harassment. There are disturbing reports about sexual abuse on college campuses, within other law enforcement agencies, and in the military.

For starters, we have a responsibility as Christians to care about these kinds of issues in our culture. If this is happening in our communities, it ought to be important to us. In our worse moments, it can seem like Christians are more concerned about pre-marital sex than sexual violence.

But in addition, I'm willing to bet you are more personally affected than you realize. If you know more than ten people, the chances are excellent that you know a victim of sexual assault. If you've watched a movie or played a video game or seen a billboard, you've probably picked up attitudes that contribute to this. We live in a violence-prone world with grossly distorted views of sex. We are all affected.

Amnon was affected by the people and attitudes around him. Our text says that he loved his half-sister Tamar, who was beautiful. This desire was not a sudden thing. It grew over a period of time. But this is no normal desire. We get a glimpse at the real nature of that emotion from the phrase, "it seemed impossible ... to do anything to her."

Amnon didn't love Tamar like we think of love. He wanted something from her. That's all. This desire grew and developed and took on a life of its own. It seemed unstoppable. It made him physically ill. What could he do in the face of such desire?

## The Proposed Solution

He begins by doing what most of us do with our desires. We talk about them to our friends. We complain about them. Until finally, one of Amnon's friends has a solution for him to consider.

### 2 Samuel 13: 3-5:

**But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother. And Jonadab was a very crafty man. 4 And he said to him, "O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." 5 Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill. And when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me bread to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat it from her hand.'"**

Jonadab, whose Hebrew name ironically could be translated as "God gives generously" was probably one of his advisors. Amnon was, after all, a prince of the

royal court. He would have the ancient equivalent of an entourage that was attracted to his power and position and wanted to help him spend his money.

Jonadab's words play into all the worst parts of Amnon's heart. "O son of the king" – you're an important person. "Why are you so haggard?" – you don't deserve to suffer in any way. "Will you not tell me?" – let me help solve this problem that you shouldn't be expected to face.

Jonadab goes on to offer a solution to Amnon's problem. His plan manages to get Amnon and Tamar alone together. Now we see why it seemed impossible to do anything. There was no natural opportunity for anything to happen. But Jonadab fixes that. He has found a way for Amnon to satisfy his desire.

But he has solved the wrong problem. The real problem wasn't that Amnon couldn't satisfy his desire. The real problem was the desire itself. And in particular, what it was built upon. The real problem is that he wants sexual fulfillment apart from all the relational dynamics that are meant to be included. He wants sex apart from a relationship. He views his sister as nothing more than an object that could give him sexual pleasure.

I began by suggesting that we've all been affected by these issues. Now we have to face the possibility that not only have we all been affected, but many of us have contributed. Only a few of us have likely been actual perpetrators of sexual assault. But most of us have contributed to the attitudes that get us there.

We may not be rapists, but we are objectifiers. It's time that we recognize this about our culture and take responsibility for our own attitudes. How is this true of you? Do you objectify people?

It isn't just men who objectify women. People can become objects for a lot of different reasons. It happens anytime you value someone for the rush they can give you instead of recognizing their personhood. There are ways that we can even objectify ourselves.

But our culture is obsessed with the sexual objectification of women. This has become a national pastime. It's part of our comedy. It's a regular part of life. It's habitual. It isn't the only form of objectification. But it is the most common. It is built into the very fabric of our culture.

This week we celebrated International Women's Day. The BBC magazine ran an article about pictures that demonstrate how women are viewed. In it, they reference

the recent appearance of a so-called "plus sized model" on the cover of the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue. They observe the following, "The fact that the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit issue still exists is a potent statement about attitudes towards women in America."<sup>3</sup>

Isn't that true? A magazine full of women in bikinis is considered mainstream. It is intricately linked with our ideals of masculinity and sports. That tells us so much about our society.

Don't think because you've never physically hurt someone that you can't relate to Amnon. Don't think because you're married you don't share some of these same attitudes. Don't think that you're immune or exempt or better than this. The seeds of sexual assault lie in all of our hearts.

The kind of desire that Amnon faced threatens to consume and destroy. Most of us don't know the depths of evil that it can lead us to. But Amnon is about to find out.

## The Implementation

The story continues with the painful details of this crime. We see Amnon carefully implementing the details of Jonadab's plan to assault his sister.

### 2 Samuel 13:6-13:

**So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. And when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand."**

**7 Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Go to your brother Amnon's house and prepare food for him." 8 So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, where he was lying down. And she took dough and kneaded it and made cakes in his sight and baked the cakes. 9 And she took the pan and emptied it out before him, but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, "Send out everyone from me." So everyone went out from him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, that I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. 11 But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." 12 She answered him,**

**“No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing. 13 As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the outrageous fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you.”**

Think about Tamar being caught up in this series of events. It's possible that she knew about Amnon's interest in her. If it was bothering him for a long time, she may have heard about it. This request to make bread in his presence was a strange one. The item she was making was probably similar to some kind of boiled dumpling, probably described as heart-shaped. It's likely that there was at least some element of sexual suggestion going on here.

All of this is to say that Tamar would have thought this whole procedure a bit odd in the least and downright suspicious at most. She probably thinks something weird is going on. But we might imagine her talking herself out of any kind of anxiety.

“He's my brother. He's such a nice guy. We've known each other for so long. He would never hurt me.”

You can tell that she believes in Amnon by the way she tries to persuade him against this course of action. She wants to think that he can be talked out of it. And she has really good arguments: this won't actually get you what you want; we could actually be together; you would really hurt me and I know you don't really want to do that.

But she overestimates her brother. We find that out when it becomes clear that Amnon can't be talked out of his plan.

## **2 Samuel 13:14:**

**But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her.**

We can all learn something from this. Don't think too highly of the people in your life. Don't think that because he's a nice guy he won't hurt you. Don't think that because she loves you she would never hit you. Don't think that just because he's a Christian, or a friend, or a pastor, or a relative or anything that he would never do that.

We hardly know what we're capable of ourselves. We certainly don't know it of others. History has shown over and over that people who don't seem capable of

terrible things have a surprising capacity to hurt others in devastating ways. If something seems strange, talk about it. Don't ignore warning signs.

I've talked to several women who downplayed their concerns. Everything was fine. The guys were Christians. They felt guilty about it afterwards. They told the women it wasn't a big deal. It would never happen again.

So if you're made uncomfortable by a situation, speak up. If you think something feels weird, talk to someone. If you think someone else isn't treating a friend or a relative the right way, ask about it.

Don't worry about being charged with overreacting. Sometimes Christians can be naïve. We want to think the best of people. But the best is often not true. Take your concerns seriously. Protect yourself and others.

That's not to say that if you did have concerns and you didn't speak up and something did happen, that it is your fault. It's not your fault. It's never the victim's fault. It's never the friend's fault. Don't blame yourself for something that someone else did. The fault always lies with the perpetrator. Always. It's not your fault, even if he or she says it is.

Amnon did this. He followed his desire. He was stronger, so he could do it. He violated his sister. And he will quickly find out that nothing will ever be the same.

## **The Result**

We've seen what Amnon is capable of. We've watched him give in to his desire, deceive his family, and violate his sister. It's hard to believe, but it actually gets worse.

## **2 Samuel 13:15-19:**

**Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, “Get up! Go!” 16 But she said to him, “No, my brother, for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me.” But he would not listen to her. 17 He called the young man who served him and said, “Put this woman out of my presence and bolt the door after her.” 18 Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves, for thus were the virgin daughters of the king dressed. So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. 19 And Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe**

**that she wore. And she laid her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went.**

When we lust after something, getting it doesn't fulfill any kind of desire. The thing wasn't what we wanted in the first place. So when we get it, we're filled with disappointment and bitterness and hatred. What we once thought was necessary for our happiness suddenly becomes a reminder of our emptiness. And so we hate it.

This is why Amnon's supposed love turns so quickly into hatred. What he once could not live without, he now can't stand to be in the same room with. "Come and lie" has been replaced by "get up and go."

The Jewish Law in Deuteronomy 22 was very clear. If a man lies with an unmarried woman, he was obligated to marry her. It's hard in a culture like ours to understand how that could possibly be a good ending. But in ancient Israel, it was the best way to restore that woman to full status and ensure her future. That's why Tamar says that this second action is worse than the rape itself.

First she is treated as an object. Then she is cast aside as a worthless object. Amnon's lust has turned into hatred. He rejects her. He abandons her. He throws her out.

This same thing happens today. After being abused and treated as an object, victims of sexual assault are often then subject to being despised, hated, and abandoned. This is why so many victims are afraid to talk about what has happened to them.

Many victims are told they are overreacting. It's not really that big of a deal. You misunderstood the situation. It didn't really happen the way you said it did. You brought it on yourself by the way you were acting. If it was so bad, why didn't you do something to stop it?

Treating victims like this can often be almost as hurtful as the event itself. Insult is added to injury. To be assaulted and then doubted or even blamed is devastating.

Tamar has been assaulted and abandoned. By tearing her robe, wearing ashes, and crying aloud, she was treating herself as a widow. In the course of a few hours, Tamar has gone from a young virgin princess to a wailing desolate widow. Her brother has taken her and then spit her out.

## The Aftermath

In the aftermath of this incident, we return to all of our characters to see how they are affected.

### 2 Samuel 13:20-22:

**And her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this to heart." So Tamar lived, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. 21 When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry. 22 But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad, for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister Tamar.**

First is Tamar. Her brother Absalom finds out what has happened to her. He lets her live in his house because her life has been destroyed. She will have no husband, no family, no future. She lives out her days as a widow in her brother's house. We never hear from her again.

That isn't to say that all sexual assault ends this way. Two weeks ago we observed that Bathsheba had a remarkable recovery from a similar situation. We know a lot of women today who have found healing and hope even after terrible things have happened to them. If you have been the victim of sexual assault or something similar, your story doesn't have to end. There is hope. There can be healing.

After hearing about Tamar, we return to her father. David was angry. At first, we are glad to hear it. We want him to be angry. He ought to be angry. He needs to be angry.

But then we realize that we want more than his anger. He is the king. This happened between his son and his daughter. This is his family. He can't stop at being angry. He needs to do something. He needs to take action.

But he doesn't. He doesn't seem to know what to do. He's paralyzed. Perhaps he thinks he can't because of the example he set. Perhaps he feels trapped by his sense of justice and compassion for his children. Perhaps he just doesn't know how to set things right. So without realizing it, he does just what Amnon has done. He abandons Tamar. Oh sure, he's angry. But he does nothing.

Finally, we hear about Amnon and Absalom. They stopped talking to each other. Absalom hates Amnon. We'll find out in a few weeks that his hatred will drive him to take vengeance through murder. Again, on one level, we appreciate that Absalom hates Amnon. We don't like him much either. We're glad he wants to set things right. But vengeance doesn't lead to healing. It doesn't actually help the victim

In fact, once again, these two men are driven by violence, anger, and hatred. In their feud between each other, they both forget about Tamar. The story moves on to them and their fight. She is the victim. But it is their story. Once again, Tamar is forgotten and abandoned.

What do we make of all this? David. Absalom. Amnon. The protector. The brother. And the perpetrator. Only one of them raped her. But they all failed her. The three most important men in Tamar's life.

This story ends with a scathing critique of the role of men in their response to sexual assault. Amnon perpetrated it. But David and Absalom both, in their own way, contributed to the Tamar's desolation.

We need to take this seriously. Without suggesting that sexual assault is always perpetrated by men against women, that is the overwhelming majority of cases. And the sad truth is that men often fail in the same ways that David and Absalom have failed. What about you? How can you respond to sexual assault?

Let me address men in particular and say that we need to respond better to sexual assault.

First, we need to acknowledge it. The worst thing you can do is to do nothing or remain silent. Don't run from the situation like all the men in our story because you're afraid of making a mistake. Don't doubt or blame victims. Don't run away from sexual assault like David did. Perhaps you're afraid because of your past mistakes. Or maybe you just know what's in your heart. But don't let your issues get in the way of responding to someone else.

Secondly, engage with the situation. You can't fix it, but you can help. Don't let worrying about doing the wrong thing prevent you from doing something. Start by believing her story. Tell her you believe her story. Withhold judgment. Listen carefully. Help her get access to other resources that she needs.

Do something. Don't just walk away.

Finally, brothers, recognize the role that we play in the problem. How do you treat women? How do you participate in the culture of objectification? Teach your sons and your daughters about the full value of all people. Teach them that women are equal to men and that worth doesn't come from beauty or sexual performance.

You need to know that it's not enough to refuse to objectify women. It's not enough to just be nice. We need to work against the constant barrage of objectification in our culture. Teach the truth. Refute the lies.

If someone is soaking wet and freezing from hypothermia, you can't just feel good about not pouring more water on them. You need to dry them off, warm them up and help restore them to health. Don't just avoid being a problem. Be a solution.

Amnon's rape of Tamar was devastating. But the aftermath was the worst part. She finished her days a desolate woman in her brother's home. Maybe you're not the perpetrator of sexual assault, but you can respond to it. You can be part of the healing process.

## Conclusion

We are not powerless insurance adjusters in a world of superheroes and supervillains. Some people do terrible things, but all of us participate in the lies of our culture. Some people do incredible things, but all of us have the opportunity to roll up our sleeves and get involved in meaningful ways. We can act where so many in this story failed to act.

We've encountered this story not in isolation, but as part of David's story. And once again, we find ourselves deeply disappointed by the man after God's own heart. With Bathsheba, he sinned actively. His actions were devastating and destructive. But now we start to see the beginning of a new pattern for David. Now he fails to act.

We want more from David. His daughter was raped by his son and all he could do was to be angry about it. His inaction is almost as bad as his action. David stands by and does nothing as Tamar is assaulted and abandoned.

One thousand years later, the son of David is arrested at night. The powerful people of his day have their way with him. They beat him. They mock him. They falsely accuse him. And they hang him on a tree to die.

Jesus is assaulted. And he watches all the men in his life walk away. Some are afraid. Some are embarrassed. Some are confused. But all of them flee. And with some of the last air in his lungs, he cries out to his God, “Why have you abandoned me?”

Jesus, the creator of the world, with all the power of God within him allowed himself to be assaulted and abandoned. Jesus became a victim.

But it did not destroy him. In fact, the injustice that Jesus suffered was the beginning of the end for injustice everywhere. His resurrection was a proclamation of victory. Sin was made powerless. Death was defeated. Hope remained.

If you're a victim of sexual assault, you are not alone. If you've been affected by sexual assault in some way, you are not alone. If you've stood by and done nothing, then you are not alone. Even if you have hurt someone else, you are not alone.

The son of David comes for all of us. He identifies with victims. He redeems the bystanders. He challenges and forgives and comforts and transforms all of us. If we are truly a community of Christ, then we are not powerless. We have the power of God to transform us. We have the forgiveness of Jesus to free us. And we have the presence of the Spirit to guide us.

So come and be healed. Victim, perpetrator, and bystander alike. Come to Jesus and find life.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “DC Comics Workplace Comedy Lands At NBC With Pilot Production Commitment.” *Nellie Andreeva*. Deadline.com. Web. 14 August 2015. <<http://deadline.com/2015/08/dc-comics-powerless-comedy-series-nbc-1201499139/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “International Women’s Day: Five Pictures That Reveal How Women Are Treated.” BBC.com. Web. 8 March 2016. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35660047>>