

2 Sam 18:5-9, 15, 31-33
"The Parent Trap"

Parents don't always get things right. In fact, they can sometimes get things horribly wrong. They often struggle with knowing when and how to discipline their children, keeping lines of communication open, admitting mistakes, apologizing for their errors, and letting their children become independent. This is what I refer to as the "parent trap"—the common pitfalls in parenting and the difficulties in overcoming them. King David experienced many of these struggles. Despite being a great leader and warrior, he faced significant challenges as a father. The situation between David and his son Absalom, which we will explore today, highlights the consequences of poor parenting. While Absalom was responsible for his own actions, which ultimately led to his death, David's failures as a parent played a crucial role in the tragic outcome. In examining this story, I hope to provide insights for parents, grandparents, and guardians on avoiding similar mistakes and finding a better path if they find themselves in difficult situations. So, how did King David's relationship with Absalom deteriorate to the point where Absalom ended up dead and hanging in a tree? I want share three key reasons I've uncovered:

First, King David failed to appropriately and swiftly discipline his sons Amnon and Absalom. In 2 Samuel 13, Amnon, David's oldest son, assaults his half-sister Tamar, who is Absalom's sister. When David learns of this, he is angry but takes no action to address the wrongdoing. This inaction sows deep bitterness in Absalom, directed not only at Amnon but also at his father,

David. As a result, Absalom decides to take revenge into his own hands and kills Amnon for the harm done to Tamar. Again, David is upset but does nothing to address the situation. The Bible teaches that failing to discipline a child is always harmful and can have detrimental effects. When a child sees a parent neglect to discipline a sibling, it can foster toxic rivalry and cause the child to harbor resentment towards the parent. David's refusal to follow the law, which would have required either punishing Amnon or making him marry Tamar, only exacerbated the situation. Moreover, David's lack of communication with his sons about these issues highlights a failure in parental guidance. A piece of advice for children: if you are upset with how your parents handle a situation, discuss it with them. While it might not always lead to the outcome you want, it can help prevent bitterness. And for parents, if you realize you've made a mistake, it's important to apologize.

Proverbs 23:13-14 "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. ¹⁴ If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol."

Hebrews 12:6-7 "⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

Second, King David assumed that ignoring the problem would make things better. In 2 Samuel 14, King David, influenced by poor advice from Joab, in my opinion, allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem after fleeing. This decision led to escalating problems. Absalom, angry over being denied an audience with his father for two years, burned Joab's property in protest.

Instead of addressing Absalom's actions appropriately, David forgave him without any consequences and allowed him to rejoin the royal court. This leniency led to further chaos, ultimately resulting in David fleeing Jerusalem to save his own life. How many parents have taken this approach of ignoring the child's bad behavior believing things would simply get better and then as things escalate instead of stern correction and discipline the parent seeks to appease the child for things only to get worse. This approach often results in significant heartache for both the parent and the child. We should learn from David's experience with Absalom. Ignoring problems does not resolve them; it usually makes them worse.

Proverbs 12:1 "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid."

Proverbs 12:24 "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."

Eph 6:4 "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Finally, King David failed to teach his sons that every decision produces a consequence. Allowing a child to face the full brunt of their poor decisions does not mean that parents don't love their child. In fact, it demonstrates a deep love. Parents must avoid enabling rebellious or harmful behavior. This is exactly what David did with Absalom. **V5** " 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." Despite Absalom orchestrating a coup and committing significant wrongs, David could not bring himself to hold Absalom accountable. This

leniency turned David into an enabler of Absalom's behavior. True parenting involves teaching children that every decision has consequences. Parents should not shield their children from the results of their bad choices. David should have kept Absalom in exile until he demonstrated genuine remorse for his actions. While it's uncertain whether that remorse would have come, it's clear that David's failure to act appropriately contributed to Absalom's tragic end. Shielding a child from the consequences of bad decisions will never produce good outcomes.

Luke 15:12-24 ¹²“And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your

son.’²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Parents, grandparents, guardians, all those who have responsibility for raising and caring for children and children let us not ignore the invaluable lessons we’ve learned from David’s situation with his son Absalom. The parent trap. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**