

2 Samuel 18:5-9,15,31-33

Reaping the whirlwind

David commands his military generals to deal gently with his warring son, Absalom. When Absalom's forces are defeated, David's favourite child, riding on a mule, gets his famously abundant hair caught up in a tree. Found hanging there helplessly, the generals go against David's request and take their opportunity to wreak vengeance by killing him. They expect David to be delighted by his victory in battle; instead, David is devastated by the death of his still-beloved son.



Bible notes



Many dramatic events have taken place in David's family when we pick up the story again in 2 Samuel 18. Nathan's pronouncements come sooner than anticipated (2 Samuel 12:11-13). In summary, David was reaping the whirlwind. One of David's sons, Absalom, enraged by Amnon's treatment of his sister Tamar, seeks justice by killing Amnon. He was then exiled to Geshur, his mother's homeland, ruled by his maternal grandfather, for three years (2 Samuel 13:23-39). On his return, Absalom does not see his father for two years. However, his desire for justice and to overthrow his father is not diminished (2 Samuel 15).

David would have to fight Absalom and his followers to regain his kingdom. David's unconditional love for Absalom demands preserving his life, despite the humiliation, treason and dishonour (v.5). The ensuing bloody battles spread nationwide, with thousands of lives lost (vv.6-8).

The text is bookended by David's strict instructions not to harm Absalom and his lament when the news of Absalom's death reached him (vv.5, 33). Absalom's choice of a mule (v.9) is rather strange. Unlike horses, mules are not known for their intelligence, speed or stamina but are symbols of peace. Absalom's hair, which brought great admiration and national fame and symbolised his strength (2 Samuel 14:25-6), contributed to his downfall. He was unprepared for battle.

'And all the troops heard the king...' is an undisputable order (v.5). David's trusted nephew Joab's persuasion and bribery failed to solicit Absalom's murder (vv.11-13). Verse 15 implies that Joab's armour bearers killed Absalom. However, Joab first thrust three javelins into Absalom's heart (v.14). Joab disobeys the king's instructions out of his own self-interest.



This week's passage explores the idea that actions have consequences, and sometimes we're responsible for creating our own paths with predictable outcomes – good or bad. Experiment with making different paths on a marble run or train track – how can you dictate certain outcomes (e.g. a marble getting stuck)? Think about how your actions might lead to different outcomes in daily life.

Write

Make a note of your own emotions through the week and how they influence what you think, say and do.

WATCH



Find out about the fable of the Scorpion and the Frog, which explores the idea of repaying good actions with bad, and whether we are responsible for our actions. Discuss together: What would you do in the position of the frog, or the scorpion? Can the scorpion be blamed for his actions? Linking to the Bible reading, can Absalom be blamed for his actions?

First impressions

- What decisions taken by others influence your life today, positively or negatively?
- Where are the deep-seated conflicts in your community or the wider world? Can you pray for healing for these situations this week?
- Do you or someone you know have a big decision to make in the coming weeks?



A prayer for all ages together

Loving God, we are sorry for those things that break our connections and cut us off from other people: our mistakes, our assumptions, our pride. Forgive us, and help us to be peacemakers and bridge-builders, bringing people back into relationship with us and with you. Amen.



If age appropriate, read through the back story of this saga (2 Samuel 13-18). Consider who made mistakes along the way and how they could have responded differently.