

2 Samuel 3 — Seeking Peace

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Good morning CrossWinds! My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. At CrossWinds, we are about “Reaching People With Jesus.” That means we are committed to sharing the good news of Jesus with those who don’t know what Jesus has done for them.

There are many ways we reach people with Jesus. Let me share a fun example. Pastor Jordan, who is our Spencer Campus pastor, and I meet on Tuesdays to talk about preaching and leadership of the church. We also pray for one another on a personal level. This week, Pastor Jordan told me a great story about someone reaching people with Jesus. It was his son, Silas. Silas is seven. On the Spencer Campus, they had a promotional skit for their summer week of kids’ camp. Silas was so excited that he leaned over to his dad and whispered in his father’s ear, “Dad, I have a friend I want to invite to kid’s camp!” When the skit finished, they told everyone that the kids’ camp would be this summer in July. Silas leaned over and whispered in his father’s ear, “Dad, how can I invite my friend? If the camp is in July, I won’t see him in school!” Pastor Jordan said, “Don’t worry, I am sure we will find a way for you to invite him.”

Jordan and I both thought this was great. Here is a 7-year-old excited about reaching people with Jesus simply by wanting to invite his friends to church. It doesn’t matter if you are seven years old or 77 years old. Whenever we invite friends to church, that is a great way to reach people with Jesus.

As we turn our thoughts to today’s study, I want to begin by reminding us that we live in a world filled with conflict. There is a war between Russia and

Ukraine. There is an economic conflict between the United States and China to determine the world's controlling economy. The evening news is filled with conflict.

Wouldn't it be nice to have some peace? Wouldn't it be nice to be around people committed to relational wholeness and harmony?

This morning, as we continue our studies in 2 Samuel, we will see that as Christians, that is part of our mission in the world. We are to be like a breath of fresh air to people around us. We are people that work for peace in a world filled with conflict and hatred.

Background

This morning, we are in 2 Samuel 3. In 1 Samuel, Saul was king, but because of his sin, God rejected him as king. God then anointed David as king. Saul was jealous of David and he tried to kill David. Finally, at the end of 1 Samuel, Saul died in battle with the Philistines.

In 2 Samuel 1, David learned of Saul's death. Last week, in 2 Samuel 2, God directed David to return to the land of Israel, to the tribe of Judah. There the tribe of Judah recognized him as king. The problem was Saul's old military general, a man named Abner, refused to give up power and control of the northern 11 tribes. After five years of ruling the northern 11 tribes by himself, he installed Ish-Bosheth over the northern 11 tribes as a rival king to David. In truth, Ish-Bosheth was only a puppet king. Abner was still in charge. Last week, as 2 Samuel 2 finished, Abner began a bloody civil war with David and the tribe of Judah. In the initial battle, Abner killed Joab's little brother named Asahel. Joab

was the commander of David's army and this created bad blood between these military generals that lasted for years.

Before we get back to the civil war, this chapter opens with a summary of what happened to David and Saul's dynasty during the first seven years of David's reign in Hebron. The rest of the chapter is the story of one person that changed sides in the battle, and it made a world of difference. This chapter is a story of huge egos, sex, power, dirty politics, and murder. If you don't get your fill of that on the evening news, we have plenty of it this morning.

David's time in Hebron

There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker. 2 Samuel 3:1 (ESV)

The initial battle between Abner and Joab that began in the last chapter kicked off a long war between the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. It was similar to how the war between Russia and Ukraine has gone, with each side making progress like they are in a tug-o-war, but nobody achieving a decisive victory.

This was especially difficult for David because this long war came on the heels of years of running for his life from King Saul. At that time, the constant fighting was so discouraging that David hid with the enemy to find rest. Those days were barely over, and he was immediately embroiled in a seven-year civil war. I am sure that at this time, he was overwhelmed. I am sure he was discouraged. I am sure he felt these years of fighting were wasted years in his life.

David is not the only one that is discouraged when difficult times have no end in sight. Isn't that every one of us? Some of us this morning are struggling financially, and we don't seem to be able to make ends meet month after month. Others have health challenges that go on for years and wear you down. Others are having a difficult time with their children. Your heart is breaking with the choices they are making. You don't know why the dark days never seem to end. Everyone on Facebook looks happy. Why can't you catch a break and have the constant problems go away?

David's years of pain were not wasted years. They were the formative years of his life. The pain of many years of continual conflict drove David to his knees. He wrote many of the Psalms in our Bible during these times of struggle. In the dark days David learned to wait on the Lord. In the dark days, David learned to pursue peace and trust God with the outcome. If we take a panoramic view of David's life, David's dark times were some of his best times with the Lord. It was when life became cushy that David committed his greatest sins.

This morning, if you are in one of those hard seasons where your health is no good and your marriage is struggling, while these are painful times in your relationship with Jesus, they will be some of your best times as God draws you close to him. While none of us wish hard times of anyone, know God loves to use those hard times and have them become some of the most spiritually significant times in our life.

We were told David and his kingdom were growing stronger while Saul's dynasty was growing weaker. How was that taking place? David's kingdom was growing stronger because he took more wives and they bore children.

And sons were born to David at Hebron:... 2 Samuel 3:2a (ESV)

Six sons were born to David in these years to six different wives. In a worldly sense, multiple wives and many children was seen as a good thing. It meant more power and more heirs. God was clear in Genesis that his plan was for one man and one woman to be united in marriage for life. Jesus reaffirms that in the gospels. Paul also reaffirms that in his New Testament letters. The Bible is clear that polygamy is wrong. Why doesn't the author of 1 Samuel come out and say something negative about all these wives and children in David's life?

As we talked about last week, the Bible often usually doesn't explicitly condemn polygamy, but it does implicitly condemn polygamy. Every time polygamy is mentioned, the Bible shows us the heartache and pain that goes with it.

To set the record straight, in the ancient world, most relationships were not polygamous. Most of the time, it was one man and one woman in marriage. It was typically powerful people, such as kings, that engaged in polygamy. This was very common in ancient culture. The Bible is explicit that God's kings were not to be like other kings in this area. God's kings were not to be known for multiple women and for pursuing sexual lust. God's kings were to be known for their holiness and purity. Look what God said was to be the standard for kings of his people.

And he (the king) shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. Deuteronomy 17:17 (ESV)

For anyone who knew God's law, and David certainly did, this list of David's multiple wives and their sons is troubling. It shows us that even though David was a great and godly man, in the area of his sex life, he was not following God's Word. He was following the culture around him. This will lead to disaster and terrible pain for his family. To prove my point, let's keep reading.

And sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron. 2 Samuel 3:2-5 (ESV)

Let's go through these sons and see the pain that unfolded in their life, most of which came from the polygamy of their father.

Amnon was his firstborn son. Born to Ahinoam of Jezreel. This was one of two wives David acquired while on the run from King Saul. Amnon will appear later in our story when he rapes his half-sister Tamar. This was not just rape, but it was also incest because she was his half-sister. This kicked off a bloody family feud in David's home that almost destroyed the rest of his family. After raping his half-sister, Amnon was murdered by another half-brother by the name of Absalom.

Chileab of Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel, was David's second son. This son probably died in infancy because he is never mentioned after this. Later in the story, David's third and fourth sons will be the oldest still alive.

Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Thalami, king of Geshur is next. This was the brother of Tamar, who was raped by the older Amnon. Absalom killed Amon for revenge. Absalom later tried to overthrow his father and take the throne. Absalom will end up dying in the coup against his father.

So far David's oldest three sons end up dead. Two of them die because of their sinful choices.

It is important to notice that Absalom came from the marriage of David to Maacah, who was the daughter of Thalami the king of Geshur. Geshur was a kingdom to the north of Israel, David married this woman to bring political pressure on Ish-Bosheth. The problem is that she came from outside of Israel and was not part of the family of God. David was unequally yoked with this woman. Picture how this unfolds. David conceives a son with Maacah but was too busy with kingly duties and other women to spend time raising his son. This wife, who does not know God raises Absalom with a values and belief system that does not come from God's people. This explains why Absalom murders his brother and tries a coup against his father. He was raised by an absent father and a mother who didn't know God. So much of this pain could have been avoided if David followed God's plan for one man and one woman in marriage for life.

Adonijah the son of Haggith is next. As David's death drew near Adonijah was the oldest surviving son. The older three were dead. Even though David designated Solomon as the heir to the throne, Adonijah tried an insurrection to

steal the throne from Solomon. That led to more family conflict and Adonijah's death.

We know nothing about Shephatiah.

While the Bible does may not explicitly condemn polygamy in David's life, it shows us the complete disaster that comes from polygamy in David's life.

This raises a question for all of us. How are we like David? How are we loving Jesus and following God's word in many ways, but there are areas of our life where we have chosen to ignore the Bible and follow the culture of the world around us? How do we do this with our sexual ethics as David did?

The Bible tells us to save sex for marriage. It tells us we are to treat the opposite sex like a brother or sister unless we are married. Then, and only then, do we treat someone sexually as a husband and wife. You don't get sexually involved with your brother and sister. Today there is so much pressure to live together because everybody is doing it. There is pressure to become sexually involved with many people before you settle down with just one person. Are we following God's Word or the ways of the world on that one?

Today there is great pressure for everyone to consider homosexuality normal and healthy. Entire denominations have closed their eyes to what the Bible says on this subject while claiming to follow Jesus. Are we doing the same thing?

Today there is also great pressure for everyone to endorse transgender rights and values. Entire denominations tell us our gender is something we decide. That is not what the Bible tells us. The Bible tells us that God made each

one of us exactly the way he wanted us to be. He gave us the gender he wants us to have. God made you to be the way he wants you to be to accomplish the work he has given you to do. That includes our weaknesses, not just our strengths. God didn't make a mistake when he made you.

We must be careful not to do what David did, which was follow God wholeheartedly in many areas of his life but in other areas of our life where we ignore the Bible and follow the sinful ways of our culture. That pattern of behavior cost David dearly. It will cost us dearly as well. Remember that whatever God says in his Word, it is because he loves us and wants what is best for us. It is not because he hates us and wants to hurt us.

The relationship between Abner and Ish-Bosheth broke down.

While David was busy adding women to his life, Ish-Bosheth was unable to keep control of the women in his life. Abner, who installed Ish-Bosheth as king, was having second thoughts. Remember, Ish-Bosheth was his nickname. His real name was Ish-Baal, which means man of God. He was such a bad leader the people nicknamed him Ish-Bosheth, which means the man of shame. When you put a guy in power known as the man of shame, it shouldn't take you two years to figure out he is not the right leader for the country.

While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul. 2 Samuel 3:6 (ESV)

While the house of David was growing stronger and the house of Saul was growing weaker during the civil war, there was one man in the northern kingdom whose influence was growing stronger all the time. His name was Abner. To him,

Ish-Bosheth was a complete disappointment. Abner decided to take matters into his hands and work to get rid of Ish-Bosheth.

Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, “Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?” 2 Samuel 3:7 (ESV)

Like the practice of multiple wives, the practice of concubines in the Old Testament receives less attention than we would like. A number of Old Testament men had concubines. Saul had at least one. David had several. Solomon topped them all with 700 wives and 300 concubines, according to 1 Kings 11:3.

While this is an incomplete definition, the best way to think about a concubine for the moment is to consider her a mistress on the side. Mistresses are common for powerful men. Even today, if you look at the monarchy in England, many of the men have a mistress. Obviously, this was another example of following the sexual culture of the world and a king not following what was spoken about in Deuteronomy 17, where God specified sexual purity and holiness for his kings.

What was Abner doing sleeping with King Saul’s mistress? In a royal family, if someone starts sleeping with a king’s concubine, that was understood as an assault on the king’s throne, an attempt to take over the kingdom. If you know the story, fast-forward in your mind to Absalom’s attempt to overthrow his father. What was the first thing Absalom did after he drove David out of Jerusalem? He slept with his father’s concubines as a way of hating his father and taking over his father’s place.

This is why Ish-Bosheth was understandably upset when he found out Abner was sleeping with his father's mistress. When Ish-Bosheth calls him out, he doesn't deny it. Let's see what happens.

Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, "Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the LORD has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba." 2 Samuel 3:8–10 (ESV)

Proud Abner and his big ego did not like getting rebuked by Ish-Bosheth, the weakling he had come to despise. Instead of repenting for what he did, he berated the king. He says to the king, "Do you think I am a dog's head?" That was a way of saying, do you think I am a nobody? Abner claimed to be the one who was in charge of everything and keeping Ish-Bosheth's kingdom alive. He should be able to do whatever he wanted to do.

Here is a lesson for us. Ish-Bosheth was completely right. Abner was completely wrong. When people have a big ego, they will not listen when somebody calls them out on their sins, especially if they have little respect for that person. Abner was so full of himself that he could only listen to himself. This can be true for any of us, especially if we are in a powerful position at work or in society. It is easy for us to start thinking and acting like Abner. Our ego makes it hard for us to humble ourselves and listen to the criticisms of other people, even if they are right. The only way out is to ask God to give us a humble heart, especially when we see an Abner-like prideful heart surfacing in our life.

Abner's pride boiled over, and just to spite the king and show his power, he told Ish-Bosheth he would transfer the entire northern kingdom into the hands of David in the south. Abner even admitted that David should have been king in the first place.

What I find amazing is Abner with his big ego thought he was in control of the future and determining the future. Here is the funny part. Abner was not in charge. God was in charge. God was using Abner's pride to be the way God would unite the kingdom under David, and Abner didn't know it. One of my favorite verses talks about this.

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)

The king thinks he is in charge. In this case, Abner thought he was in charge. Really God was in charge of turning Abner's heart to make him do exactly what God wanted. Abner didn't realize he was a pawn in God's hand on the chessboard of life.

This is important for us to remember today in our culture. Today it seems like things are spinning out of control in society. Powerful people with sinister motives think they are in charge. That is not the truth. God is still in charge. He is even using their evil plans to bring about the spread and growth of God's kingdom, and they don't even know it. That is the encouragement I need to remember every day I read the news.

And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him. 2 Samuel 3:11 (ESV)

I told you Ish-Bosheth was just a puppet. Abner was in charge and this proves it. After Abner yells at him, Ish-bosheth cowers in the corner. He didn't do anything.

And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, "To whom does the land belong? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you." 2 Samuel 3:12 (ESV)

Can you hear Abner's arrogance in his words? To whom does the land belong? David, I am the one in charge. Let's make an agreement and I will bring everybody over to you. It doesn't say it explicitly, but in exchange for bringing the northern kingdom of Israel to David, Abner was expecting to be given a powerful position in David's kingdom. You give me power, and I will give you people. Abner was switching sides because he knew his side was losing, and he wanted to leverage his strengths to get into a powerful position on the winning team.

And he said, "Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you; that is, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." 2 Samuel 3:13–14 (ESV)

This response by David was shocking. David agreed to a peace agreement with Abner. Most people wouldn't trust Abner or work with Abner. Abner was all about himself. Abner has a terrible history. David was willing to work with him because pursuing peace was better than civil war. David would work for peace, even if it meant working with a person he didn't like and didn't trust. Tuck that away in your brain for a moment. That will come back in a few minutes.

David had one requirement if he and Abner were to broker a peace deal. Abner had to bring back Michal, David's first wife. That seems weird. Why would David require this? Let me explain why.

First, David understood the political value of marriages, especially to multiple wives. If King Saul's daughter was restored as David's wife, that would help unite the northern and southern kingdoms.

Second, David was still married to her. She was still married to David. She loved David. When David was forced to go on the run, Saul took Michal and gave her to another man to spite and irritate David. David and Michal were never divorced. He had paid the bride price for her, and she was still his. When Saul married her to another man, we know that was against David's will, and it is safe to say it was also against her will since she loved David. Her current husband married her when King Saul forced her to marry him. This was an adulterous relationship, and her current husband knew it. I don't feel sorry for this guy when he loses his wife. He should have never married her in the first place.

And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he returned. 2 Samuel 3:15–16 (ESV)

This is a pathetic scene, but don't feel sorry for Paltiel. By treating David's wife as his wife, it is only logical that this day would come.

This reminds me of a principle. *When a relationship begins with sin, it rarely ends in satisfaction.* Every relationship we pursue with the opposite sex in a sinful way will usually end in pain, not pleasure. That is what happened to Paltiel. It can happen to each one of us too.

And Abner conferred with the elders of Israel, saying, “For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. Now then bring it about, for the LORD has promised David, saying, ‘By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies.’” Abner also spoke to Benjamin. And then Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do. 2 Samuel 3:17–19a (ESV)

It probably took Abner months to meet with the elders of the different tribes and broker this deal. Imagine trying to put this together without cell phones and Zoom meetings. It was a logistical nightmare.

Abner said to the elders that for some time past, they had been seeking David as king over them. This is revealing. Apparently, the northern tribes had wanted David to be king for a long time. The only reason that hadn’t taken place was that Abner put a stop to it and kicked off a pointless civil war!

I want us to notice that in all of this, we don’t see Abner ever admitting he was wrong for singlehandedly splitting a nation and starting a war. We don’t see Abner confessing anything he has done as a sin. Abner’s switching of sides was all about Abner wanting to be on the winning team. Even though Abner was doing things for the wrong reasons, David was willing to work with him to end the civil war.

...And then Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do. When Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron, David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. And Abner said to David, “I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires.”... 2 Samuel 3:19b–21a (ESV)

Remember that Abner was not David’s best friend. When Abner was King Saul’s general, he chased David and tried to kill David for years. More recently Abner was the reason for a divided kingdom and bloody civil war. If I was David, I

would want nothing to do with Abner. I love how David humbles himself. He lets the pain of the past be in the past if he can work to bring peace in a world filled with conflict. In all this, David will not compromise his integrity or make a bad deal for his kingdom. He just humbles himself and works really hard for peace.

This reminds me of what Paul tells us Christians are to be like in the book of Romans.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:18 (ESV)

Some people love conflict. We have them in the church. We have them in the world. That is not good. As Christians, while we cannot compromise on core issues, we can be flexible on many other issues, even if it is not our style.

Notice how David received Abner. He held a feast for him. Do you know why he did that? When you have tension with somebody, but you have a meal with them to honor them and eat with them, it helps create forgiveness and unity between people.

Something else we learn about peace in a place of conflict is that it doesn't just happen. We need to work for it. We need to go out of our way to help it happen. David went out of his way to work for peace with Abner. It is too easy to assume peace happens when we don't see war. When there is conflict and tension, the best thing to do is to go out of our way to build a relationship with the person who is cross-wise with us. David humbled himself and worked hard for peace with Abner.

...bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:2-3 (ESV)

Paul reminds us that unity is something we need to work hard to maintain.

Joab's consuming desire for revenge led to sin.

Joab was the general of David's army. He is the opposite of Abner. He started in the right direction, then headed in the wrong direction.

Joab, like Abner, was a man of action who was inclined to take matters into his own hands. David sent him out of town while Abner was in town so he could broker a peace deal and give Abner and his men a special meal.

Remember what happened last week. In the initial battle between the northern and southern kingdoms, Abner killed Asahel, Joab's little brother. Abner did not want to kill him, but he was put in a corner and needed to defend himself. Joab and his brother Abishai still want blood for Abner killing their little brother.

Just then the servants of David arrived with Joab from a raid, bringing much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David at Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has let him go, and he has gone in peace." 2 Samuel 3:22–23 (ESV)

Joab is the kind of person who is always a barrier to peace. He never assumed good motives for Abner. He completely hated him in his heart. To be honest, I think Joab was worried that if David and Abner made peace, part of that peace deal would be Abner replacing Joab as the commander of the army. It isn't stated here, but that is what Abner would want. Joab feared getting demoted or removed and of course, he hated Abner for killing his brother.

Then Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone? You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing." 2 Samuel 3:24–25 (ESV)

Notice how Joab spoke to David. Did he respect his king? Absolutely not. He berated David for seeking peace. Here we find Joab was starting to think he

was in charge, not David. Joab could not believe David was seeking peace and treating Abner kindly, respectfully, and as a friend after all the things Abner had done. Joab wanted blood. The problem is that somebody needs to break the cycle of revenge. Somebody needs to humble themselves and seek peace, or there will never be peace. David was willing to do that. Joab wasn't.

In every conflict, it could be in your marriage, it could be at work, it could be with your in-laws, there are two kinds of people. People like Joab, who never forgive and always want to get even, or people like David, who will swallow their pride and hurt so they can work for peace. Which one are you?

When Joab came out from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know about it. 2 Samuel 3:26 (ESV)

David did not know about this. This tells us about Joab's relationship with David. Joab was just as willing to be disloyal to David as Abner was to Ish-Bosheth. Both of them were willing to defy their kings.

And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately,... 2 Samuel 3:27a (ESV)

We know what will happen next.

...there he struck him in the stomach, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. 2 Samuel 3:27b (ESV)

Remember Asahel died a bloody, painful, slow death from a gut wound. Joab gave Abner the exact same wound Abner gave his brother so he would be experiencing the same kind of slow, agonizing pain. This was all about revenge, not forgiveness and working for peace.

Abner's death was particularly bad on many levels. First, Hebron, where this took place, was a city of refuge. There was no revenge of blood allowed in

this city. Joab didn't care. Second, Joab disobeyed his king. He tricked Abner with a lie. Third, Asahel's death happened in a time of war. This was a time of peace. It was cold-blooded murder. Fourth, Joab's revenge was about to destroy all the peace negotiations David was working on with Abner to end a civil war and reunite the country.

There is a lesson for all of us in this. If we don't forgive, if we don't choose to work for peace in broken relationships, and if we let ourselves constantly think about hatred and revenge, we will become a dark person who only cares about themselves, just like Joab only cared about himself. He didn't care about the peace in a nation he almost destroyed. He would never allow Abner to repent or give him a second chance. Joab only cared about himself, and because of that, he became a dark, selfish person.

This applies to all of us. All of us have people who have done hurtful things to us. I am not saying the pain doesn't matter or that the wound wasn't real. We need to be careful not to let that wound define us and control us. If we let that happen, that hurt will destroy us, just like it did Joab.

Jesus did not let our sin become the defining quality of how he sees us. He died for us. He forgave us. He worked really hard on the cross to bring us peace. Jesus took the initiative between God and ourselves to bring peace. He didn't just wait for it to happen. If that is what Jesus did for us, we must do the same for others. As Jesus forgave us and made peace between for us with God, we must forgive others and work for peace between us.

I am not saying that a person who deeply hurt us has to become our best friend. I am saying that the wounds that scar us, because of Jesus, should not be the wounds that define us. As Jesus forgave us and worked hard for peace with us, we need to forgive others and work hard to be at peace with them, humbling ourselves to make those relationships work, just like David did with Abner and Jesus did with us.

Now that the murder of Abner happened, we see David working hard to get the peace deal in the nation back on track.

Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner the son of Ner. 2 Samuel 3:28 (ESV)

Joab had done what David avoided doing to Saul and Abner for years, that was taking revenge. David left revenge in God's hands. Joab hadn't.

David publicly denounced Joab's sin and cursed him and his family.

May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house, and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous or who holds a spindle or who falls by the sword or who lacks bread!" 2 Samuel 3:29 (ESV)

David took a very public role in Abner's funeral honoring him. David made Joab and his men mourn for what they had done and walk in front of the casket. David should have done more than this. He should have removed Joab from his position. Joab deserved the death penalty. Here we see one of David's character flaws. When it comes to people who were close to David, he had a hard time disciplining them. This was true for his children, and it was true for Joab, who was one of his sisters children. This is not the last time Joab will rebel against David. Later he will participate in an attempt to overthrow the king.

So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon. 2 Samuel 3:30 (ESV)

Here we find both brothers were involved in Abner's murder.

Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner." And King David followed the bier. 2 Samuel 3:31 (ESV)

The peace deal that would bring a nation together was almost lost. David went out of his way to distance himself from Abner's murder and to mourn his death. Abner was given a state funeral. Joab and his men were forced to tear their clothes and march in front of the casket. That was humiliating. David followed the casket.

They buried Abner at Hebron. And the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. 2 Samuel 3:32 (ESV)

Hebron was a special place. It was where the patriarchs were buried. David wept for Abner, and he buried him in a place of honor. David worked hard to honor Abner in his death and keep the peace process going.

And the king lamented for Abner, saying, "Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound; your feet were not fettered; as one falls before the wicked you have fallen." And all the people wept again over him. Then all the people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was yet day. But David swore, saying, "God do so to me and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!" 2 Samuel 3:33–35 (ESV)

David wrote a song about the grief David felt for Abner. Was David going overboard as he was working for peace? Maybe. That was better than Joab, who didn't care about peace but always wanted revenge.

And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased all the people. So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner the son of Ner. 2 Samuel 3:36–37 (ESV)

The way David honored Abner brought healing to the nation. It reminds me of what Jesus said.

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,…” Luke 6:27 (ESV)

David was not getting revenge on his enemy. He was working for peace and doing good to his enemies, even in their death.

And the king said to his servants, “Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? And I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are more severe than I. The Lord repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!” 2 Samuel 3:38–39 (ESV)

In this chapter, we get a glimpse at how hard David worked to bring peace to a nation that was at war. It involved swallowing his pride. Letting the wounds of the past be the past. Going out of his way to love his enemy and do good for those who hurt him. In all that, David never compromised. He worked for peace and united a nation, unlike Joab, who could only think about revenge and didn't care about how his hatred ruined the lives of others.

As Christians, who are members of the kingdom of Jesus, we are to be the same way. We are to work really, really hard for unity in the church and with people around us. Jesus worked really hard to bring us peace with God. We want to work really hard to bring peace in our relationship with others. When the people of the church are a people of peace in a world of conflict, that is like a breath of fresh air in the world that draws people to Jesus.

God's Word says this about our responsibility to pursue peace.

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Romans 14:19 (ESV)

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 (ESV)

For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. 1 Peter 3:10–11 (ESV)

My friends, may we be people in this world who humble ourselves and work for peace like David, not people who don’t forgive and are eager for revenge like Joab. Let us forgive and work for peace with others like Jesus on the cross worked for the forgiveness that would give us the peace with God we desperately need.



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