

How Absalom Stole The Hearts Of A People

by James Jennings

This sermon delves into the story of Absalom in 2 Samuel 15, highlighting how he stole the hearts of the people through manipulation, flattery, and persistent deceit over a four-year period. The preacher draws parallels between Absalom's tactics and the devil's schemes to steal believers' affections from God. Emphasis is placed on the importance of guarding one's heart, maintaining steadfast love towards others, and seeking clarity in relationships to prevent emotional adultery or trust issues.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, 1 Peter 4:8, Psalm 18:2, Psalm 139:23, Matthew 18:15, Ephesians 6:11, 1 Corinthians 13:7, Luke 4:13

Topics: "Manipulation", "Guarding the Heart"

Description

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Transcript

I had a busy week. I was praying about what to speak on. I was looking at some old notes that I'd never dealt with before, and something stood out to me.

So I'm going to speak on stealing right now. And I'm going to speak on it in a way that you don't realize at the moment what I mean by stealing. But turn in your Bible to 2 Samuel 15.

And I think there is much wisdom in this chapter that's going to be applicable for all of us as Christians. And we see something get stolen in this chapter that it should grab our attention because the exact same thing could happen to us. Let's read this 2 Samuel starting in chapter 14, verse 28.

So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem without coming into the king's presence. Then Absalom sent for Joab to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come.

Then he sent to his servants, See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire. So Absalom's servants set the field on fire.

Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, Why have your servants set my field on fire? Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent word to you, come here that I may send you to the king to ask, why have I come from Geshur?" This is where he was in exile for many years. It would be better for me to still be there. Now therefore, let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.

The king being his father, David. Verse 33, Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king, bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.

Chapter 15, After this, Absalom got himself a chariot and horses and 50 men to run before him. And Absalom used to rise early, and he'd stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, From what city are you? And when he said, Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel, Absalom would say to him, See, your claims are good and right, but there's no man designated by the king to hear you.

Then Absalom would say, Oh, that I were judge in the land. Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice. Verse five, And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him.

Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. And look at the end of verse six. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

There you have it taking place. Stealing just happened right before your eyes. You see everything leading up to this stealing.

Let's keep reading to the end a few more verses. And at the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the Lord in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow, which I, while I lived in Geshir at Arman saying, if the Lord will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the Lord.

The king said to him, go in peace. So he arose and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel saying, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say Absalom is king at Hebron.

With Absalom went 200 men from Jerusalem who were invited guests. And they went in their innocence and they knew nothing. And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gileadite, David's counselor from the city Gehoah.

And the conspiracy grew stronger and the people with Absalom kept increasing. And a messenger came to David saying, the hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom. We'll stop right there.

So this is dealing with the topic of stealing, but it's not stealing a physical object. It's stealing someone's affections. So let's pray and then we're going to consider some things.

Father, Lord, I thank You for Your Word. It is indeed profitable for reproof, correction. Lord, it indeed instructs us.

It gives us wisdom even in these Old Testament sections and these narratives. Lord, we read about what happened. And Lord, we just remember Paul's words.

These things were written down for our example. And so Lord, help us to learn from this section what we can. Lord, that we would be more equipped to fend off the attacks of the enemy in our own lives and not fall prey to his deceitful schemes.

And so Lord, I just pray, I pray You'd help me right now as I seek to deliver this message. Lord, give me strength and clarity of mind. Feed Your sheep, please.

In Jesus' name, Amen. You know, the tactics that Absalom used to steal the hearts of these people, one thing I want you to think about as we go through this is the devil uses similar tactics to steal your heart away from Christ. So remember this.

Don't just think of this as we're considering this, your relationships with others. That obviously is very applicable, but also with the Lord. And we're also going to learn about David's failures as a father and how they impacted his son severely to get to this point in chapter 15.

And there's application here for all of us parents. Us parents could have our children's hearts stolen from us. Their loyalty could shift from us as parents.

This can happen with the father. It can happen with pastors and the sheep that they shepherd. It can happen with a husband and his wife.

That woman's affections could be stolen or the husband's affections stolen from the spouse. It's always stood out to me in Proverbs 31 when it describes the excellent wife. It says the heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain.

That's something that a husband wants. A sense of emotional security with his wife. His wife's heart is devoted to him.

She's not sharing it inappropriately with other men. And so we want to be loyal, devoted in our hearts towards these different people in our lives. And just as the devil in the very beginning in the garden got Eve to be deceived through his subtleties, even we consider some of those a month ago, we see the exact same and similar tactics happening here with Absalom.

And so a lot of this could feel negative, like negative examples of what not to do. But we learn from looking at negative examples of what not to do. And so, learn from this and don't do it.

Right? In Ben-Gurah, you saw there right at the end in verse 11 of chapter 15, these 200 people went in their innocence. This chapter shows us there are things you and I might be doing or we could participate in that we literally have no idea what we're involved in doing. We're innocent.

And yet, we are deceived in the midst of that. And so Absalom, he stole their hearts, their affections, their loyalty. He didn't earn it.

These 200 people didn't come because he really earned it. He actually stole their affections through slander and different things. And he did this over a four-year period.

And he did this against his own father. And this is a very sad and sobering chapter. But before we look at some lessons from chapter 15, I think it's very important to think of what leads up to this point in the narrative.

And so I want to think briefly about some of the phases that led up to chapter 15. So go back in your Bibles to chapter 12. It's important to see how all of this connects leading up to chapter 15.

So 2 Samuel 12, starting in v. 9, David has committed his adultery. He's had Uriah murdered. And in this chapter, Nathan the prophet is rebuking David.

And he says in v. 9, Why have you despised the word of the Lord to do what is evil in the Lord's sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against you..." And where's the evil going to come from? Out of your own house.

It's interesting. We see that being fulfilled in the chapter we just read. Absalom is the evil personified, being raised up out of David's own house.

This mutiny and rebellion, is it Absalom's rebellion? It is, but who also is involved in allowing it to take place? God. God. And what led to all of it even happening? Whose sin? David's sin.

David's sin. So this is important to realize. And in chapter 13, without reading the whole thing, we see two things introduced into the palace through David's life.

What two things was David introducing into the palace through his own character in chapter 11, 12, and 13? What were the two things? We saw the one already, adultery and murder. So sexual immorality and murder. And in chapter 13, it's no surprise, just a chapter later after David gets exposed for his sin, and now it becomes common knowledge about what his sin was, we find in the very next chapter, his own son.

His own firstborn son, Amnon. In verse 20, and in this whole section, he takes Absalom's full sister and he rapes her. He inappropriately seizes her.

And in verse 22, it says, Absalom hated Amnon. In verse 23, we see that he nursed this hate for two full years. Why did Amnon go and commit his sin? What was the big instigator in that happening? David's bad example was a massive factor.

You're not finding all this immorality happening among his children prior to this point. It's after the father's sin. And God promised a judgment being raised up from in David's own house.

So God's actually removing a hand of mercy and even allowing these things to take place. He's not making them happen, but these things are happening and it's going to fulfill even a very judgment of God. So we're getting up to chapter 15.

This might not be progressing as you would have thought initially. And then what else is totally missing? If we read this whole chapter, if we read this whole section, you know what something is entirely missing? What does David do towards Amnon for his sin? What did he do? Nothing. There's no punishment.

He doesn't punish his son. Who else didn't receive adequate punishment for their sin just a few chapters earlier? David. So David doesn't get adequate punishment for his own sin.

He's actually hiding it and concealing it for over a year. And then his own son doesn't actually receive the due punishment for his sin. So sadly, you could say it's no surprise his son gets away with this.

And even in 2 Samuel 13.21, the ESV doesn't actually record the full way the verse is quoted, but the Septuagint, it says this, it says, he vexed not the spirit of his son. He didn't bother his son because he loved him and because his son was his firstborn. So the Septuagint, it kind of gives this thought, David showed partiality towards his son and he didn't adequately deal with his son.

And we're going to see that matters. The parent not adequately punishing the child, it actually leads to greater and more severe problems. The next phase in this, 2 Samuel 13.27, we're still right there.

Notice here, Absalom manipulates David. He pressed him until he let Amnon go. This has been two years.

Absalom has waited for this opportunity. He's been nursing this wrath for two years. Maybe he thinks enough time has gone by where David won't suspect that I want to kill my brother.

And so they go to the family farm to this sheep-shearing endeavor and what happens there? They assassinate Amnon. So David doesn't deal with his own son who raped the sister. And here, Absalom now nurses all this wrath for two years, and then he goes and he wrongly kills his brother.

He murders his brother. And if you look at v. 32, it seems like this should have been obvious this was going to happen because Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother said, let not my lord suppose they've killed all the young men. Because that was the initial report.

All the young men died. This guy realizes that's not what happened. He said, the king's son for Amnon alone is dead.

For by the command of Absalom, this has been determined from the day he violated. Amnon violated his sister, Tamar. So onlookers recognize this guy has nursing this wrath in his heart for two years.

Was that just not apparent to David at all? You just gave permission for all your sons, including Amnon, to go out with him? What happened to his discernment in the midst of this? You've got to remember, God's judgment is being fulfilled in the raising up of Absalom. You know why you and I even see certain things in our lives? The mercy of God to open our eyes to see something clearly that maybe we did not originally see in a clear way. So this is actually very humbling.

This is not the highlight reel of David's life. This is actually a very sad time in David's life. And then 2 Samuel 13, 37, it shows David mourned for his son day after day.

And then v. 38 records Absalom. He fled and he lived in Geshur for three years. So this is all building up to chapter 15.

Then in chapter 14, Joab basically recognizes how burdened David is by this. And maybe he realized how the Nathan the prophet thing woke up David and convict him. So they try to reinvent that.

And they hire some lady to come and be an actor basically to try to get David to fall under conviction just like happened with Nathan the prophet a few chapters. But it doesn't work. David realizes that this isn't

genuine.

Joab hired the lady. But nonetheless, at the end of all of this, he still allows his son to come back. He brings Absalom back, but he doesn't bring him back into full fellowship.

He brings him back and he doesn't see his face for a few more years. And then a last thing here in 2 Samuel 14, 29, leading up to chapter 15, Joab who was with Absalom is not really that committed to him at this point. And so what does Absalom do? He does more manipulation.

You see, he pressed his father and here he manipulates again and he burns Joab's field to get him to come. And then that lands us in chapter 15 at this point in this narrative. And it's interesting, Absalom said, let me get before my father even if he puts me to death.

He knew that that would be the punishment for what he has done and his dad had every right to kill him. What does David do at that moment? He kisses the son he was longing for all of these years. He kisses him and gives him this approval.

And then that's when we get into this chapter. After this, all of this is leading us up to chapter 15. And so you see by what comes before, this isn't just Absalom's conspiracy.

God is involved in judging David because of his sin. And his own sin has been a massive and severe influence upon his children and everything that's happened up to this point. This to me is very humbling as a parent.

And in all of this, David apparently seems totally blind to everything that's happening, which is rather surprising. It's rather shocking. You'd think all these opportunities to realize something suspicious is happening right under your nose and David doesn't see it.

I mean, and just think, parents, do you think when Absalom was 10 years old that David anticipated all of this was going to happen? This is what his 10 year old son was going to do? No. David lust after a woman. He didn't say no.

He sent for her. David's son Amnon likewise desired a woman. He didn't refrain.

Father like son. King David sent out a letter to Sinuriah to the front of the lines to be killed. It was a death setup by David.

Father like son. Absalom talked about shearing the sheep, bringing the king's sons. It was a setup too.

He killed Amnon. This is scary stuff. The influence of the parent bringing in conduct that is unacceptable and bringing it into the palace, into the kingdom.

In a way, you see David's own lust and failures reappearing in his sons. And the very tragedy he faces in chapter 15 of this mutiny, in many ways was his own doing because of his own sin. And God actually says He's going to raise up someone from His own house as a judgment upon Him, as punishment for his sin.

To me, this gives it a whole new light of the sobriety for a parent. And so, parents, fill in the blank. James Jennings did this and brought this into his home.

Ten years later, Paul Jennings goes and does this because he witnessed that example from his father. Is any of that happening in your life? What's happening in my life? When David found out Absalom had died, 2 Samuel 18.33, it records, he said, oh, my son Absalom, my son, would I had died instead of you, oh, Absalom, my son, my son. It's just a great expression of grief and of mourning.

And one interpreter, whether you agree with him or not, he rewords it to state this. I have slain my son. I have murdered my son with my own hands.

I neglected my son Absalom from a child. With my own lust, I laid his very worst temptation right in his way. It had been better Absalom had never been born.

If he rebelled, who should blame him? I, David, drove Absalom to rebellion. You might not agree with that, but I trust as you've seen this progression, I understand why he asserts that. Parents, there is a lot here for us.

David at some point lost the heart of his son. And the same son then goes and steals the hearts of the people of his kingdom. This is real painful.

This really humanizes David too. I mean, as godly as he is, this is just riddled with his failures. You know what these chapters are also riddled with? We dare not forget, it is riddled with the grace and forgiveness of Christ.

I mean, all these failures at this point, and guess where David's at right now? He's in heaven. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord does not count his iniquity. And so praise the Lord for the Messiah.

You can feel this miserably as a father. Is his own son in hell? Yes. Yet God, as Craig pointed out in the Lord's Supper, God is just to forgive David, and David is clothed in Christ's righteousness and in heaven.

So all this leads up to chapter 15. Now Absalom, he's beyond just trying to repay Amnon. Amnon's dead.

Now he's actually seeking to overthrow the entire kingdom. This is not a righteous man. This is not a righteous man we're looking at.

This is a wicked man regardless of the failures of his father. It does not justify his actions as righteous. And so I want to look at basically a negative list of how a man stole the hearts of the people.

That's what we're going to look at. How to steal the hearts of a people. And apply this in areas of your life where you're under authority.

Your relationship with Christ. As a worker to a boss. Children to a parent.

A wife to a husband. Church members to pastors. Think of how could this apply in my own life in some of those spheres? And this actually kind of connects somewhat Jonathan's message in the first hour about authority.

There's a lot of spheres in our life where we're submitting under authority and that's going to be a primary area that the enemy is going to attack us. So the first point, how to steal someone's heart. How to steal someone's heart.

Well, what was the first thing that made Absalom feel comfortable now to start his conspiracy? What was he waiting all these years to finally take place and to happen? After this, what was the this? What happened? Public recognition and approval from who? From his father. That was the first thing that had to happen. He had to have acknowledgment and favor given to him from the present leaders, which that leader was his father.

And you see in v. 33 of chapter 14, it says, "...and the king kissed Absalom." And no doubt, that word is spreading. People see he's giving approval to his son. Everything must be okay.

And so that takes away suspicion of Absalom's activity because he's got recognition from his father. We don't exactly know how the nation perceived it, but what we do see from Absalom's ongoing conduct, he's standing at the gate and people weren't questioning him as if being against his father because he's got this recognition. And you could even think of it like, you know, those photo bombers at political rallies and they see the president over there and there's a little town mayor and they're trying to get a picture with the president so they can put it up on their social media platform in order for people to realize, oh, they know the president.

Well, they might not really know the president, but it's getting some sort of recognition. And so Absalom, having the favor of his father, when he realized his father could have killed him and his father did not, he didn't face the death penalty for his sin, he now abuses his position of authority and he abuses the position of being David's son. And then it says that he got chariots and horses and 50 men to run before them.

He looks official. He's got everything outward where it's believable. He's very, very believable.

So that's the first thing. You get this outward acknowledgement. It looks believable.

You've got this following that agrees with your sentiments and your ideas. Second thing, how to steal someone's heart. Once the present leaders acknowledge you before the people, you can now put yourself around the people whose hearts you plan to steal without them suspecting anything of you.

Look at verse two. Absalom used to rise early, stand beside the way of the gate. When any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, what city you're from? There's nothing here about suspicion in the midst of this man's activities.

He gets to the way of the gate. It's the place where everyone leaving is going through or everyone coming in is going through. And clearly from the topics he's talking with people about, it's also the place where you find why people were entering the city.

And Absalom seems genuinely concerned, wondering what their concern is when they come into the city. So this is a very strategic intercept point for Absalom. He blended in now with his father's approval.

He's putting himself in the right spot. And this stealing is going to start to take place. A third thing, how to steal someone's heart or how someone might try to steal your heart.

Well, they're going to be real dedicated at it. If you look, Absalom does this for, he rises early in the morning, verse two. He rose early in the morning.

He made sure to not miss out on anyone's hearts that he could steal. Anyone who's going through the gate. And then he says in verse six, Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment.

So people are coming to the king to get his wisdom and his judgment on a matter. And this man is intercepting them and they never end up making it to the king. Incredible.

You know, Absalom appears very pastoral, but he's got an ulterior motive behind everything that he's seeking to do. And these people, remember, they follow all of this innocently. They don't recognize what's actually taking place.

And David in the midst of this is blind to everything that is happening. Another thing, how to steal someone's heart? Notice what he does with his words. He subtly, in a subtle way, slanders the other person.

And then he prevents them from ever interacting with his father. Look at verse two and four. He affirms to them their concerns, but he prevents them from going to those who will truly help them with their concerns.

He's basically making them afraid to go to King David. So they never do. They never end up going to King David.

They never make it to the king. He says in verse three, your claims are good and right, but there's no man designated by the king to hear you. Do you realize how subtle that statement is? It's like walking into the store and hey, can you help me out? Where's this in a certain aisle? And someone leaving the store says, oh, there's no worker there to help you.

Just right away, you think, oh, this store is irresponsible. Yet you don't know, there might be a worker the next aisle down, but now that one comment, the subtlety of that comment now prevents you from going further. It's incredible.

It's like you put up a fake sign out of office on his competitor's door when they really were in the office. You see, this is very, very subtle. There's no man designated by the king to hear you.

And notice, he says by the king. Absalom knows what to do. He points to the king and blames him as that's the fault.

The kings drop the ball. But do we have any evidence up to this point of David mismanaging the king? If anything, what did he mismanage? The punishment his son deserved. But he says there's no man designated.

It implies David had oversight in his leadership. He's disorganized. He doesn't have time.

And you know what? Since Absalom is his son, he has a real close proximity to his father. This could be very easy to believe. Since usually you would hope sons are what? Supportive of their father, right? Not trying to steal the kingdom from the father.

Another principle, how to steal someone's heart. Affirm to them that you're the answer. Look at v. 4. Absalom would say, oh, that I would judge in the land.

Then every man with a dispute or a cause might come to me and I would give him justice. You can just see what Absalom's doing. He's making it appear I got the answers.

If I was in leadership, things would be done differently and it'd be exactly like you're wanting it to be. He's just putting that in. He's doing this to steal their hearts.

You know, he makes himself to be the hero in their eyes. I have the solutions. My father does not.

If I was the judge in the land, notice he even says in v. 4, I would give that person justice. What's that? That's a slander implying his father is not giving what? Justice. The truth is if his father's giving justice, he would be dead.

That didn't happen. So you see, he's deteriorating others' confidence in the leaders, in his father. He's stripping their confidence away at this position at the gate.

He's creating in their hearts a prejudice towards the king who is his father. He's slowly doing this to these individuals. Yet, what does the pastor see? They just see someone up early who's willing to listen to their concerns.

He always seems to have the right answer. He's always very agreeable. And that's just pulling them in.

Pulling them in. Another thing, how people will try to steal your heart, how the enemy will try to steal your heart from Christ, is he will use a big amount of flattery. Look at v. 5. Whenever a man came near to pay homage to Him, he would put out his hand and take hold of Him and kiss Him.

Kiss Him. When people come forward, you go out of your way to show them honor. You really sell yourselves as being very, very caring.

You make it appear like you're a genuine buyer before you snag the diamond out of their pocket. Trying to get close enough to rob them of something that does not belong to you. And then another thing, one of the last things here, how to steal someone's heart, you have to be persistent over a long period of time.

Look at v. 7. At the end of four years, I realize that KJV says 40, but not to get into textual arguments, it seems like it's a four-year period, not 40. Now, 40 would really be being persistent. Did he really do this for 40 years? I have a hard time believing that's how long this went on for.

But at the end of four years. So this guy, did this happen overnight? I mean, a lot can happen in four years of time. Four years go on.

Absalom didn't rush this. He made sure it had its effect. And it seems like he labored at this task without any interruption.

It sounds like for four years straight, this man got up and was at the gate every day influencing all of Israel. And what's shocking to me is did King David ever hear in those four years? Did he ever have someone come and say, hey, you know, your son's at the gate saying like you're not going to do a judgment on this thing or you're not going to hear people or anything and then David would have gone and corrected his son? You'd think that would have happened. For four years.

Apparently, David never caught wind. Remember why he didn't catch wind. This is a judgment of God.

God is raising up Absalom as a judgment towards David for his sin. So at this point, it's been 11 years since Amnon did what he did to Tamar. This has been 11 years in the making.

So all of the above led to the act. He stole their hearts. He stole his father's kingdom.

But how long did he get to keep his father's kingdom and the people's hearts? How long did that last? A brief moment. Because he didn't win their hearts. He stole their hearts, right? It was through a lie.

And so the lie will not last forever. Eventually, people begin to see and recognize the lie behind what Absalom was saying. But this statement should speak loudly to us.

He stole their hearts. He didn't gain them through true character, which is what we're seeking to do with our children. We're seeking to do with everyone in the Christian.

We're trying to win people's hearts through true character. But Absalom sowed seeds of discontentment in the people's mind in order to alienate their love from David and bring them towards himself. Now what happens next? Verse 8, he lies to his father saying he's got to go make an offering to the Lord.

And this is when the rebellion really starts to begin. The 200 guests come and we saw in verse 11, they go in their innocence. They did not recognize what was going to happen.

And so all these people, these 200 people, think of this, 200 people, maybe one of them, he ran into Absalom at the gate four years ago. For four years of his life, he has a distorted perspective about King David. For four years, in all his innocence, he totally believes what he heard from Absalom is true.

But now it's getting up to the point where what's going to happen? Those 200 people are going to face the reality that what was said by Absalom was a slanderous lie. And they're going to face the true truth about King David. The whole thing is going to unravel at this point, once the rebellion starts.

Absalom, as you know, he initially had some force, some power, but eventually the whole thing crumbled. But think of that, brethren. Four years, someone had a wrong perspective on the king.

We should apply that in our own lives. I could go on for four years having a totally incorrect perspective about one of you in the church. And it could be based on something I've heard from other individuals that really doesn't have any weight or truth to it.

Chapter 15, Absalom is overthrown and killed, and David returns. We see that happening. But the list that I gave, it described similar tactics that Satan uses in the garden.

He was right at the gate too, right? He's right at the tree where they're told not to eat. Really strategic, right? He wasn't at the trees that you could eat from. He got right to the place where they were forbidden.

He stood at the gate, and then he convinced Eve that God was holding back on her and felling as a leader. Was the Lord felling Adam and Eve as a leader? No, He wasn't. Did she ever go to the Lord and get clear perspective? Hey, the serpent came to me and said this about you, that you're holding back, and I wanted to get a clarity on if that's true or not.

Did she do that? She didn't. Did she have minor consequences for not going to the Lord? No, it was major consequences. We're still suffering those consequences right now.

Same thing with Paul in 2 Corinthians, the false apostles convinced the Corinthians that Paul was taking advantage of them. The ironic thing was, who was taking advantage of them? Was it Paul? No, it was the false apostles. So the very ones taking advantage of them were accusing Paul of the very thing they were doing.

How often that is the case. And so, I think there's wisdom here to apply to ourselves things that we should all be aware of. Because like Paul says to those at Corinth, do not be ignorant of the schemes of the devil.

Brethren, if these people went in innocence and were unaware of the schemes of the enemy right here, the very same thing could happen to you and I in our lives. And so we want to be gaining wisdom and applying it in our lives. And so what are some ways to apply it? Number one, I would ask you this, what would you have done if you were one of the men of Israel at the gate and you faced Absalom? What would have happened to you? Which side of history would you have ended up on? Would you have been one of the 200 going to the coronation of him? Or would you have seen through it? It's the king's son.

He's got a nice horse and chariot and 50 men. Looks really like he's got everything together. If they went in their innocence, if they were naive and unaware of what was happening, then think of this.

You know what really leads to this? If you already have some dissatisfaction in your heart towards David, is it now easier to believe what Absalom has to say? Yeah, it's much easier. It makes the ploys all the more work. If you and I have any little dissatisfaction with Jesus Christ today, if we in any way believe like Eve that God has done us wrong and is holding back something from us, then when the devil comes with his lie, it's that much easier to believe the lie because there's some dissatisfaction and discontentment with the Lord.

That's terrifying how easily that can happen. I mean, in one day, Eve hears what she hears. Some point at Corinth, they heard what they heard.

You see, knowledge is coming forth to these people at the gate. How do they handle the knowledge that Absalom is saying? It could steal their heart. The second thing, how to apply this wisdom? We see again and again the loud tactics of the enemy to get people to not talk to those over them, but to rather view those leaders as fearful to go to or not having time designated by which to talk, right? That's exactly what Absalom does here.

He says in verse three, you got good claims, but there's no man designated by the king to hear you. He has no one available. So you can't go to him.

And then what happens? They never go to the king. And children, I would say to you, the devil wants you kids to view your parents in the same way. He will bring excuses to you about why you can't open up to your parents about things going on in your life, but your parents want you to come to them.

As intimidating as it might be, even if there is punishment that you will suffer if you come to them and say whatever it is that you're going to say. Even today, I noticed again, people keep vandalizing the bathrooms back there. Have we got more graffiti again on another wall? I mean, if that's one of you kids and you've done that, that should bother your conscience.

It should be smiting your conscience and you should want to come clean and you should, it's easy to say, well, yeah, my parents don't want me to talk about that. Well, that's just an excuse. Absalom got them to think it's easier to talk to him and he's concerned for us, but not David.

You see? That's what Absalom, he got that in their mind. That can happen to us too as well. This is honestly, to me, is a scary chapter as I see how blind David is to everything that is happening and as I see the 200 people going in their innocence.

And if my response to this is that would never happen to me, then I'm the very one most likely who it will happen to. Right? The one man who said I'll never deny Christ is the very one denying Christ. That arrogant pride is terrifying.

And so, the enemy doesn't want you to talk to those who you're getting a skewed perspective about. My plea to you all is, you do want to talk to them. Right? Even I know, not too long ago, my sermon on what part of go from Matthew 18 about going to your brother if he sins against you.

I really emphasize that. And it's interesting to me in two recent meetings where people did go to us about issues in the church. And we're so thankful those people came to us and we got to sit and talk through things.

We're so grateful for that. But the same people indicated there's others here who they've told again and again to come to us and those people have yet to come to us. And you're kind of, okay, why aren't they coming to us? Is there some idea that we don't have designated time for them? Is there some idea that there's some fear there that we're not going to hear them? That we're not willing to listen to whatever it is they have to say? Whether we agree or not, we want to listen and hear.

And as a shepherd, you feel bad if someone, to use an illustration someone else has used, if you have glass in your foot and you're not stopping to get it out. It's hard to walk. It's hard to fight.

As a soldier, if you've got something stuck in your side, you've got to get it removed. And so on that note, I want to make a brief attempt even here for a moment to win your heart if someone's heart here might be getting stolen because of even something that I have done. And just briefly speaking for myself, in the recent situation that happened within the church, there were decisions and counsel that I gave that looking back on, I was naive.

I lacked discernment to see ahead enough on how it would affect the church. And I'm sorry about that. I made blunders as a leader towards the body.

And this isn't a time for me to share specifics. But in hindsight, I look back and I realize this could have been done differently. This could have been done differently.

And so I realized that. In myself as a leader, there's the ability, like with David, to make decisions that could negatively impact his children. And same thing as a shepherd, decisions could be made that could negatively impact the body.

The third thing, we see one can perceive someone as something, please get this point, without ever actually witnessing them do whatever it is. The people never saw, it's not recorded, they never saw David not have concern for them. And yet, what did they think? They had the perception David didn't care.

They didn't give him any opportunity. They didn't. So, I mean, where's the evidence? I'm looking.

Where's the evidence that David didn't care? The people never saw David not have a concern for them. And yet, because of absolute slander and misrepresentation, that's exactly what their perspective became. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that amazing? I realize David should have dealt strongly with Absalom and a lot of this is his own fault.

I recognize that. A fourth thing, we see here in this passage, the power that we ourselves can have to steal someone's heart. You know, often you don't want to put yourself in the place of Judas, Absalom, and these characters who do incredibly negative acts, but rather than all of us have the potential like Absalom to make comments like he does here that are so subtle that you don't even recognize what you're actually doing is slandering and undermining someone by those comments.

We've got that power. And Absalom had a very relational character. And not just that, what did they say about his looks? Why would they even put that verse in here? Which verse is it? Forget where it's at.

I mean, why even add in there that no one was more handsome in the nation than him? Why would they even put that in? I think it had a factor. It had a factor. I think that's why they included that detail.

Think of this, Absalom knew what he was doing, but did the 200 people following him know what they were doing? No, they went in innocence, right? So someone might be very intentional like Absalom, others might be totally innocent. And they might be like that for four years until everything gets uncovered and you see the true truth. Well, another application to young people.

William Blakely, he wrote about Absalom. He said this, young persons, let us say emphatically, young women, and perhaps Christian young women are apt to be captivated by superficial qualities, qualities like those of Absalom. And in some cases are not only ready, but eager to marry those who possess those superficial qualities.

In their blindness, they're willing to commit not only their own interest, but the interest of their children, if they already have children, if they should have any, to men who are not Christians, perhaps barely moral, and who are therefore not worthy of their trust. Again, you see how this man's personality, his supposed pastoral care, his outward appearance, you see how it pulled people in. Brethren, the same thing can happen to us.

Children, you should be thankful for parents who love you enough to cross you and deal with your sin. If you think you'd be better off getting away with your sin like Absalom did, you're absolutely wrong. You don't want to end up like him.

A sixth thing, the exact same tactics Absalom used to make the people not trust David, the devil uses to get you, believer, to not trust in the Lord. I'm telling you, and I've already kind of mentioned this, but let's think about this here in closing. If your soul is not satisfied in Jesus Christ, if there's any discontentment towards Him, that is a very good opportunity for the enemy to try to steal your heart, to try to pull you away.

It's going to give that attack so much more power. If someone comes to the gate and they already know David's character, they already know that he's concerned about a certain issue, and they get to the gate and Absalom says what he says, since they know the true character of David, are they going to believe what Absalom is saying? No. So the more you and I study the Bible, have good doctrine, know who God is, know His character, know His promises, it's going to make attacks from the enemy not be able to penetrate the mind and steal our thoughts from the Lord.

And the devil, in the same way like Absalom, he gets up early. I mean, many of you, we get up to read the Bible. Guess who's awake already trying to harass and tempt us and distract us as we're trying to read? The devil.

When was the last time I've had an easy two-hour study time in the morning? I can't ever remember. There's all manner of distractions and attacks. The devil, he seems to show concern, just like Absalom, right? Jesus' temptation, the devil said, it will all be yours.

Right? He's got something to offer you. It's death. Don't take it.

The devil also prevents you from making it to the Lord. He says, believer, the Lord doesn't love you. He has no angel designated to help you with this trial.

Forget Psalm 34 about the angel of the Lord encamping around those who fear Him. That text doesn't apply for you. I'll go ask the Lord in His Word if that's true.

No, don't go there. I know it's true. Believe me.

See, that's Satan. And the lies begin to have power. But if you quickly go in prayer to the Lord, you go to His Word, and you're reminded of the truth, the slander diminishes.

Sadly, like Absalom, the devil's got many supporters. And they're not innocent. They know exactly what they're doing.

And they're trying to tell you and I that God is not trustworthy. Another thing, a comparison between the devil and Absalom. Absalom did this for four years and he never stopped.

The devil, he's going to do it to you not just four years, but the entirety of your life and he is not going to stop. It says even of Jesus Christ in Luke 4 that Satan ended the temptations of Christ and he sat around waiting for a more opportune time. He's looking for a time to strike.

He's always looking for a time to strike. And Satan wants to steal your heart from Christ. He wants you to lure that heart and your affections from appreciating the Lord to despising the Lord, to thinking God has done you wrong, to get you discontent with the Lord.

And so there we've heard about it. A man who stole hearts. Did you even know such a thing could be stolen? Your affections can be stolen.

Taken. Robbed. So where is your heart this morning towards those you have a relationship with? Is anything happening where your affections are being taken? Stolen? Maybe you're going in innocence and you're unaware of what is happening.

And yes, our own decisions like David's can cause someone to lose affection for us. Just as Absalom did for his father. Part of you can't blame Absalom for David not doing anything severe in regards to what happened to his sister Tamar.

But none of that justifies Absalom's conduct. You know what's amazing though? As I already said, the Lord's love for David in all of this was steadfast. Just remarkable.

That is the kind of love that who's supposed to imitate? You and I. Even when people give us valid reasons to lose affection for them, if we're imitating the steadfast love of Christ, what should our response be? You do something and it is a valid reason for my heart to feel kind of cold towards you. Is my response to then nurse that coldness? No, my response is to be like Jesus Christ. To love you with a steadfast love despite what you have done towards me.

And I think that's a point many of us, we miss that. 1 Peter 4, 8, above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. So you might have your heart stolen from loving someone based on something valid they did.

My plea to you is your call to love them as Christ loves you. And Christ does not abandon His love for you when you legitimately do something that offends Him. Christ all the more manifests His love for you to win you back and keep that relationship happening.

So even if there is a valid reason for your affections to diminish towards someone, Christ's unconditional love for you should cause your affections to increase for them. Don't be robbed from showing the heart of Christ to your brother and sister, to your parent, to your child, to your boss. What did Christ do for Peter in the midst of his failures? Did Christ's love cease? Did it diminish? If you're Christ and this guy said he'll never deny you and he has denied you three times, it's pretty easy just to want to be done with him.

That wasn't how Christ responded. Christ loved him with a steadfast love and we're called to imitate, to have the same. So brethren, it says in Proverbs, guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

Well, here you see a passage where you could have your heart stolen. Don't you feel it in your marriage? One of the greatest things to watch out for for every married couple is emotional adultery. Where you start to have your heart getting pulled towards someone else.

There's nothing physical even happening. But your heart gets pulled towards someone. It can happen in that sphere.

It can happen with children and parents. The Tripp brother was right to write a book called *Shepherding Your Child's Heart*. Because parents want to win our kids' hearts.

Even two weeks ago, in my nine years of being a parent, I felt like I had the most sobering thing happen in nine years as a parent where I was struck with the fear that something that happened could diminish one of my children's loyalty towards me as a father and strip their trust away in me. And when stuff like that happens, we should wake up. Same thing in the church, right? We're all trying to keep our hearts one with one another as we battle in the midst of this battle of the ages.

And brethren, it takes showing the steadfast love of Christ towards one another. It takes not believing the lies of the enemy. And yes, I know I'm beating a dead drum, but it takes going to one another.

Right? Going to one another. And getting clarity. So I just want to affirm again, we are designated to hear whatever your concerns are.

But I appreciate you, brethren. Let's pray. Father, Lord, I thank You for Your Word.

I thank You for this church. And Lord, we're even just grateful to know that even when there are schemes of the devil and lies like we see happening right here in this chapter, Lord, the enemy's ploys, they eventually get seen for what they are. And we see that, Lord, Absalom's whole thing.

Lord, even having Ahithophel involved in it. And the whole thing failed. And Lord, yes, Father, I'm terrified at that reality that David was so blind while all this is happening for four years.

Lord, we thank You that You are God who has forgiven us of all of our sin. But Father, we also learn from this very chapter, You are God who disciplines those You love. And Lord, it is sobering to see Your discipline on David's life because of his sin.

And Lord, we don't want to be crying out one day, my son Absalom, my son Absalom, oh, that I would have died instead of You. Lord, we don't want to be crying that out. We don't want to be standing at the burial of our child knowing they didn't have You and that they hated You.

And to look and see hypocrisy in our own life as part of what brought that about. Lord, I pray You would save us from ever having that happen. Please, Lord, save me from ever having that happen.

And Lord, we know the only way that won't happen is if our hearts stay steadfast towards You. And Lord, we're grateful today that You are a God whose love is steadfast towards us. And that's why we can remain steadfast towards You.

Lord, because You're searching through all the earth to find a person whose way is blameless towards You to give strong support to them. Lord, we're grateful that You're our support. You're our everlasting rock.

Lord, please, deliver us from any schemes of the enemy. Deliver us from any lies of the devil. Lord, help us please.

We need Your help. We need Your strength. And so, Lord, I thank You.

We commit all of this to You in Christ's name, Amen.

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