

## **Tamar and Amnon**

(Based on 2 Samuel 13:1-22. A talk given at a one day retreat for survivors of abuse "The Healing Journey" 3/00 by Bonnie Nicholas)

Intro:

The healing journey from abuse is a lonely one. We may feel that no one else could possibly understand what we've been through and felt. I remember when I first moved here to Michigan from Maryland. I didn't know anyone. It happened to be shortly after I had first labeled and began to deal with my own sexual abuse. The abuse was all I could think about, it was consuming me. It was so hard to meet new people. I couldn't very well introduce myself and say, "Hi, I'm Bonnie and all I can think about is sexual abuse, I can't even sleep because of the nightmares." That's not a good way to make friends and influence people. It was a one day retreat, something like this one, that helped me so much and put me in touch with others. Finally, I had someone to talk to. One of the reasons for a retreat like this is so that we can see that we're not alone. Our pain is lessened when it is shared. I've found great comfort in the stories of others. It helps me to see that even though my own story is a very personal one, there are people who can understand. There are people on this same road from the past as well as the present. Abuse is not a recent development. Sexual abuse is not the result of the sexual revolution of the '60's or pornography on the Internet. As bad as it may seem, violence toward others is not a direct result of violent video games. It's been around as long as people have. It's not new, and it's not unknown to God. There are stories of abuse even in God's Word. We're going to look at one of those stories today. I read a book recently by a feminine theologian called, "Texts of Terror". Many texts of scripture were sighted in which abuse and mistreatment of women seemed to be part of God's plan. The passage we are going to look at today was in that book. The chapter was entitled, "The Rape of Wisdom". As I read and studied the passage I became more and more impressed with Tamar, the woman of wisdom in the story.

Read 2 Samuel 13:1-19 Dramatically (see below, page 5)

First a little cultural background. You may think that in our culture women are second class citizens, and you may be right. But we've come a long way from life in ancient Israel where women were bought and sold as property. Women were not valued because they were persons created with dignity, created in the very image of God. A woman's value lay in her ability to bear children, especially sons and heirs. Tamar, a virgin daughter of King David also had great value in her culture because of her social status. She was seen as a prize or possibly as part of a political bargain. Alliances between nations were sometimes formed through marriage. Tamar was very beautiful. She and her full brother Absalom were known and admired throughout Israel for their beauty.

We read that Amnon (a half brother in this family) "fell in love" with Tamar. I have my doubts about that. First Corinthians says that love is patient and kind and does not demand it's own way. Love seeks the best for the person who is loved and rejoices in what is true. According to this definition, what Amnon felt for Tamar was not love at all. Rather it was selfish lust. So strong was his desire for her that he became "frustrated to the point of illness". In our culture too, lust and love get confused as we receive so many mixed messages about what love is. Can you relate to being confused about love? Have you ever had someone say they love you, yet treat you shamefully? Confusion about love is a part of Tamar's story and may be a part of your story as well.

Now, Amnon had a good friend who was very "shrewd" or "crafty". Jonadab (a cousin in this family) helped Amnon devise a plot, a way to get what he wanted. The plot was based on deception and involved a shameful violent act against Tamar. It doesn't seem to me that either Amnon or Jonadab thought through the consequences of this plan. Their wickedness was also very short

sighted, as wickedness often is. With a little reflection and thought, Amnon could have said, “no”, to Jonadab’s plan and determined a more righteous way to pursue his desire. Instead, he followed the plan. Maybe Jonadab dared him and he couldn’t resist the challenge. Think about this, was Jonadab a good friend to Amnon? Do good friends lead you down a wrong path? Have you ever trusted someone who led you astray? The book of Proverbs is full of verses that encourage us to listen to wisdom rather than to folly. Psalm 1 says, “Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.” Amnon would have been better off following this advise, not listening to his cousin Jonadab.

What was the real motivation behind Amnon’s planned action? I wonder if it was an ego thing for him to try to get away with deceiving both the king and his half-sister. Possibly he was jealous of Absalom, Tamar’s full brother. King David always did like him best. Disgracing Tamar would be a good way to get back at him. I’ve heard people say that rapists should be castrated. I have my doubts about whether that would solve anything. Have you ever heard the “two heads” theory? I first heard of it a few years ago from my husband who had just had a talk with my young teenage son. I was all ready to tell you the story of what precipitated this father-son talk. Then I happened to mention it to my son. I said, “remember the time...” and told him that I was going to use that incident as an illustration in this talk. He said, “you can’t do that!”. Even when I told him that no one he knew well would probably be here, he still was insistent that I not use him as an example. So, in respecting his wishes, I can’t tell you the story of what precipitated this father-son talk. But I can still tell you about the “two heads theory”. Being the curious mother that I am, after “the talk” I wanted a blow by blow account. What did he say? Then what did you say? And so on. That’s when my husband said, “I gave him the two heads theory”. I said, “what?”. He said, “you know, the two heads theory, guys have two heads, but only one of them has a brain.” He acted surprised that I had never heard that before, as if the “two heads theory” was common knowledge. So our son was told among other things to use the head with the brain. And I think it worked. As far as I can tell, my son is doing that pretty well. Although he does have his moments, most of the time he makes me very proud, and we haven’t had any new incidents like the one that precipitated “the talk”. The point I want to make is that the motivation for abuse is complicated. Even sexual abuse, is not really about sex. More often it’s about power, control or manipulation. The abuser wants to dominate and sex may be one of the tools used in the process. So, to stop an abuser, it’s the head with the brain that would need to be cut off, not the other one. Because that’s where the problem is. In case you were wondering, I’m not advocating beheading as a solution. I just want to point out that in this story, Amnon’s problem was in the head with the brain and his reasons for following this plan were probably very complicated as well as twisted.

So, Tamar went unsuspecting to the bedside of Amnon. She couldn’t refuse. The orders to go to him had come directly from her father, who happened to be the KING! One of the greatest of kings of all time, King David! She was not in a position to say no. Besides, this was her half-brother, I’m sure she was happy to care for him in his illness. But when she took the bread to him, he grabbed her. And we read that, “since he was stronger than she, he raped her.” It’s important to note here that Tamar was in no way responsible for his actions. She did everything exactly right. She even tried to reason with Amnon, which is amazing considering her circumstances. Listen to her wisdom and clarity of thought, “Don’t force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel!” She was concerned, as a daughter of the king should be, about her country. She was unselfishly encouraging Amnon to think about the reputation of Israel. It’s too bad that Amnon, who was in line to be the future King, never thought about that. Tamar thought ahead to the consequences for both herself and for Amnon. “Where could I get rid of my disgrace?” and “you would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel.” She even had the presence of mind to suggest an alternate, more righteous way. “Speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you”. (We may not be used to marriages with half-siblings or with arranged marriages, but this was common at the time). She was saying there is a

right way and a wrong way to go about this. Tamar was concerned with honor, not ONLY for herself, but for Israel and even for Amnon himself. What wise, intelligent words, coming from Tamar. It's hard to even imagine her being able to think so clearly and express herself so well as she was being grabbed to be raped. Are you as amazed as I am? Are you as impressed with her strength and character, even in this, her weakest moment?

Unfortunately, her words of wisdom went unheeded. Hence the chapter title in the book that I read, "the rape of wisdom". I don't know what kind of responses you had in the face of your abuse. It probably doesn't matter. It certainly doesn't help us to be second guessing ourselves after the fact. If only I could have come up with wise words like Tamar... If only I could have been stronger... If only I wouldn't have gone there... It probably would have made little difference. Think back to your own situation. Were you unsuspecting, like Tamar was? Did you walk into a situation in which you had every reason to believe that you would be safe? Were you in a weaker position, with all the strength, prestige or power working against you? One sad thing about abuse is that it's often the victim who takes on the weight of responsibility and guilt. Don't do it. Look at your situation rationally, from an adult perspective. Where does the real responsibility lie? Even if you didn't come up with wise words like Tamar, which probably wouldn't have made a difference anyway (they didn't in her case); realize that what happened is not your fault! Tamar did absolutely everything right. Even more than that, she was noble in seeking honor and righteousness. Yet she could not prevent the abuse. Whatever you did, or didn't do, chances are, like Tamar, you would not have been able to prevent it.

We read in verse 15, "Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred". This is where Tamar's wise words and noble character may have worked against her. I think that Amnon recognized the wisdom in Tamar and her inner strength and integrity. So that when he looked at her, he saw his own wickedness in contrast, like a dark reflection. No one likes to be shown the darkness in their soul. It's a very unpleasant experience. Tamar reminded Amnon of his own failure and of the evil he had done, and for that, he hated her. He told her to get up and get out. I would have expected Tamar to run out of there as soon as she could. But no. Again I'm amazed and impressed with Tamar. Instead, she stayed right there. She said, "No! Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me." Here is Tamar, unselfishly offering Amnon the opportunity to pursue honor for both of them and for Israel. Yet again, wise words from Tamar went unheeded and the servant came in to throw Tamar out and bolt the door behind her.

How did Tamar respond? Again I'm amazed. My response to my abuse was to hide what happened, lie about it, destroy any possible evidence, not tell, bury it deep within my soul. Instead Tamar goes public with it immediately, tearing her royal robe, putting ashes on her head and wailing loudly. I can picture her walking down the palace hallway wailing while head are peeking out guessing at what had happened. All these things, the loud wailing, the torn garment, the ashes, are signs of grief and of mourning. Grief and mourning are perfectly logical responses to abuse. Again Tamar did it right. Something valuable had been lost she needed to grieve. Not everyone understood that. Her brother Absalom said, "Be quiet now, my sister... Don't take this thing to heart." The word "now" may have been a key word in Absalom's mind. He began plotting his own revenge and two years later Absalom killed his half brother Amnon, because of what he had done to Tamar. Tamar's father, King David, although he was furious, made no attempt at punishment or restitution. He didn't show that he understood the value of what was lost. Can you relate to that? Maybe you can relate to having your own abuse minimized by others. Have you ever been encouraged by well meaning friends to: "Get over it", "Hurry up and get on with your life", "Quit living in the past." "Don't you know that Jesus wants you to have victory, just pray this prayer of faith and be instantly healed." I'd encourage you not to listen to that kind of advise. Grieving is a process that can't be hurried. The fastest way out is through. There are no short cuts, no easy way out. Grieving over abuse is harder

than other kinds of grieving. I remember when my dad died. There was an announcement about it in the church bulletin. People sent cards, gave me money so our family could fly to the funeral, gave me hugs, said they were praying for me, looked at me with understanding and compassion as I sometimes left church services early with tears streaming down my face. I was given permission and space to grieve. That's not the case when there is grieving over abuse. It's not usually so public and socially accepted. It can be very lonely and overwhelming at times. Another reason for a spiritual retreat day like this one is that we need to find a community that gives us the space and the freedom to grieve the things that abuse has taken from us. We need to be supported and upheld as we do the exhausting work of grieving our losses.

Grieving does funny things to people. It may take only hearing a word, seeing a color, or even smelling a smell, almost anything can throw you into a place of intense feelings. I remember shortly after I first labeled and began dealing with my abuse. I was driving down the road on my way to work and an old song came on the radio. It was old then so maybe no one here has ever heard it, it's by REM and is called "Everybody Hurts". The words say, "When you think you've had too much of this life, hold on, 'cause everybody hurts, sometimes, everybody cries..." The chorus was big and loud and I heard it again, "everybody hurts"... Suddenly, I had trouble breathing, the song was right, everybody hurts and I was hurting, and I was crying and I'd had too much of this life, and I didn't think I could hold on any longer. I had to pull the car off the road, cry for awhile, take some deep breaths, calm down, go home, call work and tell them I wasn't feeling well and wouldn't be in today. That's what grieving is like. You can't predict it or plan for it. There aren't four easy steps then you're done. After awhile, you do gain a little more control, otherwise I wouldn't be able to be up here talking about this. One thing that I've discovered during this painful journey is that God is working. He's been there through it all and he's redeeming my pain, using it to encourage others, using it to strengthen my relationship with him, which is more real and alive because of it.

I really like the title of this retreat, "The Healing Journey". It is a journey. Each one of us takes a slightly different path, but we can take comfort in the fact that we're not alone. Many of God's people have been on this same healing journey. Our Great High Priest, Jesus himself is familiar with abuse. Take another look at his crucifixion. See how he was stripped naked, taunted, spit on, beaten, abandoned by his friends. He knows our pain intimately. And he has the resources that we need for our own journey. He has given us his Word, in which I've found great hope and truth and life. He's given us himself, the Living Word. He's promised never to leave us or forsake us. So, we can continue our journey in hope knowing that God is with us and God is working. He's promised, and nothing in the heights or the depths can possibly prevent it; He will bring to completion the work that he's begun in us. One day we will stand before him, together with all of his children, perfect and holy and just as he designed us to be. So we can press on in our own journey with confidence, because we know the end of the story.

## 2 Samuel 13:1-19

#1 - In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her.

#2 - Now Amnon had a friend named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?"

#1 - Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

#2 - "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'"

#1 - So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand."

#2 - David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat.

#1 - "Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister."

#2 - "Don't, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you."

#1 - But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!"

#2 - "No!" she said to him. "Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me."

#1 - But he refused to listen to her. He called his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her." So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her.

#2 - She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.