



## How not to be a good parent

2 Samuel 8—18

**D**AVID WAS A GREAT warrior, a mighty king, a wise judge, and a “man after God’s own heart.” But he’s a good example of what *not* to do when you’re a parent and a leader in God’s kingdom.

1. David didn’t remain faithful to his wife. Like most kings of that time, David felt it was his right to take on a few concubines. Then came Bathsheba and the sins of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11). How many churches have been wounded because a church leader was not faithful to his wife! The greatest gift a leader can give to his congregation—and his children—is a good marriage.

2. David naively gave his children too much freedom. His son Amnon fell in love with Tamar, Amnon’s half sister. Amnon pretended to be ill. He told David, “I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight” (2 Samuel 13:6). David never suspected anything! He sent Tamar, and Amnon took advantage of her. Naively, David seemed to believe his kids could do no wrong.

3. David didn’t discipline his children. After Amnon committed this horrible crime against his sister, the Bible says David “was furious” (2 Samuel 13:21), but he did nothing about it. Another of David’s sons, Solomon, saw firsthand what happens to a young man who is not disciplined. He warned, “Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party

to his death” (Proverbs 19:18).

4. David didn’t comfort his children when they were hurting. He not only failed to reprimand Amnon, he did nothing to comfort his daughter Tamar. That fueled in Tamar’s brother Absalom a bitter spirit toward his half brother and his father.

5. David didn’t spend time with his children. Absalom threw a banquet and asked David to come (2 Samuel 13:24). David refused. But David, again being too naive, sent Amnon to the banquet, where Absalom had him killed. David’s presence might have stopped another tragedy, but he was unwilling to go. Children spell love T-I-M-E. It’s possible for a leader in God’s kingdom to spend so much time shepherding the flock that he neglects the most important sheep.

6. David didn’t forgive his children. Absalom fled after killing his brother. Joab, the captain of David’s army, tried to persuade David to bring Absalom back home and forgive him. David finally agreed to let Absalom come back to the city, but he refused to have Absalom in his presence. There was no reconciliation, no forgiveness, no warm moment when the two embraced as the prodigal returned home. Instead, David acted as if Absalom didn’t exist. Absalom, all the more embittered toward his father, gathered an army and attempted to overthrow his father the king. But the battle resulted in Absalom’s death. One of the saddest passages of the Old Testament



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pictures David, after hearing the news, staggering up the steps to his room, weeping and crying out, “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18:33). He must have been racked with guilt over the way the relationship had ended. David never got another chance to reconcile with his son.

How grateful I am for good parents! My parents loved each other (and still do!) and have been faithful to one another for more than 30 years. My mother has always supported my father and his ministry. They loved my brother and me and never showed favoritism. They expected us to face normal temptations, so they gave us freedom gradually. They disciplined us. They spent time with us. (My father had a demanding schedule but rarely missed one of my high school basketball games, even though I often sat on the bench!) And they forgave us when we failed. Now that I am in ministry and have a family of my own, I have a greater appreciation for my parents’ attempts to balance ministry and family. ■