

## “Impossible Choices”

II Samuel 18:5-9,15,31-33 and John 6:51

([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+samuel+18:5-9;15;31-33](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+samuel+18:5-9;15;31-33))

([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+6:51](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+6:51))

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### Family Life is challenging.

A young boy was talking to a friend, “My grandma told me she was brought by a stork. My Mom says I was found under a cabbage plant. She also told me that she was found in a wicker basket on the front porch. Isn’t it funny. There hasn’t been a normal birth in our family for three generations.”

When it comes to families, “normal” is an oft used word about other families when we compare ours to theirs. We hope for “normal” whatever that means, and we live with the abnormal family we were born into. If we were to scratch below the surface, every one of us could share stories, some very tragic stories, of our families. There are broken relationships between parents and children, children and children, grandparents and parents, the list could go on infinitum. There are stories of children who took the wrong path and are now estranged, or if not, some parents wish they were. All manner and means of human destruction and pain come forth in our families. We know of abuse of all kinds, addictions to many substances, greed, envy, jealousy, even murder. We long for a normal family, but more often than not we live with tragedy.

### In this ‘fallen world’ tragedy happens in families.

Webster’s Dictionary defines tragedy as, “A drama in verse or prose and of serious and dignified character that typically describes the development of a conflict between the protagonist and a superior force and reaches a sorrowful or disastrous conclusion that excites pity or terror.” (Webster’s Third International Dictionary, Vol.3, p2422) Unfortunately since the time of Adam and Eve, families are breeding grounds for tragedy.

King David was caught between his royal duty to preserve the unity and future of his empire which was being threatened by his own son, Absalom, and yet King David can’t give up his fatherly love for his son. It was wrong for him to forsake his responsibilities to the people of Israel. It was wrong for him to harm his beloved son. Life invariably involves a sense of the tragic.

Almost from the start, Absalom had a number of strikes against him. For one thing, he was much too handsome for his own good, and his special pride was such a magnificent head of hair that once a year when he had it trimmed, the trimmings alone tipped the scales at three and a half pounds. For another thing, his father, King David, was always either spoiling him rotten or reading him the riot act. This did not promote stability of character. He murdered his lecherous brother Amnon for fooling around with their sister Tamar, and when the old war-horse Joab wouldn’t help him patch things up with David afterwards, he set fire to Joab’s hay field. All Israel found this kind of derring-do irresistible, of course, and when he eventually led a revolt against his father, a lot of them joined him.

On the eve of the crucial battle, David was a wreck. If he was afraid he might lose his throne, he was even more afraid he might lose Absalom. The boy was the thorn in his flesh, but he was also the apple of his eye, and before the fighting started, he told the chiefs of staff till they were sick of hearing it that if Absalom fell into their clutches, they must promise to go easy on him for his father’s sake. Remembering what had happened to his hay field, old Joab kept his fingers crossed, and when he found Absalom caught in the branches of an oak tree by his beautiful hair, he ran him through without blinking an eye. When they broke the news to David, it broke his heart, just as simple as that, and he cried out in words that have echoed down the centuries ever since, ‘O my son Absalom, my son, my son,’ he said. ‘Would I have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!’ (2 Samuel 18:33) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+samuel+18:33](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+samuel+18:33))

“He meant it, of course. If he could have done the boy’s dying for him, he would have done it. If he could have paid the price for the boy’s betrayal of him, he would have paid it. If he could have given his own life to make the boy alive again, he would have given it. But even a king can’t do things like that. As later history was to prove, it takes a God.” (Frederick Buechner, *Listening to Your Life*, Harper San Francisco, 1992)

The Poet Randall Jarrell speaks of “dark, uneasy world of family life---where the greatest can fail.” He could be talking about Adam and Eve, King David, or us. King David weeps with deep and profound grief, “O my son Absalom...” Have we not wept for our children in such a way? Or, do we not fear that we might have to weep for them? King David cries and his wail echoes down the centuries and touches every family tragedy, every parent full of regret for what might have been but is not.

As I said earlier, scratch under the surface of any family and you will find tragic stories. Even the rich and famous, perhaps especially the rich and famous, are not immune from this tragedy. For a moment think Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, The Kennedy’s, even the Queen of England. A study of the British public’s reaction to all that has gone on within the Queen’s family yielded surprising results. “The sight of the Queen having the same troubles in her family that all of us have in ours endeared her to us.” It is helpful to know that money, prestige, royalty, success, or fame does not keep us from experiencing the tragedy of family pain. We sometimes view life with a Disney mentality. We think everything will come out all right in the end. If Hollywood were shooting the King David and Absalom story, it would not have come out the way it did in the Bible. The last scene would not be the King weeping for his dead son. But, the story of King David ends with deep regret. A father, not unlike many of us, weeps into the night over the sad state of his family.

### **The Bible tells us the truth about ourselves and God.**

I am glad this story is in the Bible. We learn a lot about life, ourselves, and God from this story. It does not end with a simple and easy ending. The right solution does not miraculously appear exactly in time. Unlike the Hollywood adventure movie that ends perfectly after 110 minutes. King David’s story leaves us with no hero, no moral lesson, no one to emulate. We are left with the tragedy. Holy Scripture tells us the truth. There are times in this life when we are faced with impossible choices! God does not insulate us. God does not promise we will not suffer. Indeed, Scripture demonstrates in this story and others that pain, suffering, and tragedy are a part of the human condition. We humans have the capability of creating great tragedy, particularly in our families. There is regret. Things do not turn out as we planned. We can’t get everything together. We can’t make it all work out right. Some of us carry wounds from our families that are still open and festering. We are often in a mess just as King David was.

### **God gives us the strength to see clearly.**

Until we can break through the haze of denial and know life as it truly is, we cannot understand or appreciate the gift God gives us in Jesus Christ. When we join Job on the dung heap of tragedy, then we can also cry out with Job in affirmation and hope,” I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end He will stand upon the earth.” (**Job 19:25**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=job+19:25](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=job+19:25)) The Scriptures do not sugar coat the pill. They do not create a fable to make it come out all right in the end. The Scripture tells it like it is in the hope that you will let go of your childish attachment to fantasy and accept the reality that in this ‘fallen world’ life is difficult.

George McLeod, one of the founders of the Iona Community of Scotland wrote these words concerning the truth of the Scripture’s message, “*I simply argue that the Cross should be raised at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles; but on a cross between two thieves; on the town’s garbage heap; at a crossroad, so cosmopolitan they had to write his title in Hebrew and Latin and Greek...at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died. And that is what He died about. That is where church-men ought to be and what church-men ought to be about.*” (Lift High The Cross, quoted in George Hunter, Church for the Unchurched, p.98)

When we can see the cross for what it is, God's entrance into the very heart of the tragedy of this world. Then, we can see what God did in the resurrection. God took the worst of the human condition and overcame it. God took the worst of evil and defeated it. God took the worst any family could ever experience, and God created a new family.

### **I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.**

Our hope for a way out of the tragedy of our lives and our families is to accept the Risen Christ who can and will give to us the greater opportunity of being in God's family. Hear again Jesus' message to those who would disparage his family connections. "*Stop grumbling among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day.*" (**John 6:43-44**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+6:43-44](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+6:43-44))

- Jesus will raise you up to be a member of God's eternal family.
- Jesus will raise you up when you are knocked down.
- Jesus will raise you up when your heart is downcast.
- Jesus will raise you up when you think the last moment has come and you can go no further.
- Jesus will raise you up when your son or daughter has brought tragedy into your house.

When you find yourself in the midst of tragedy; when you are sitting on the dung hill of grief and loss; when you are suffering and in pain; then do not yield to the temptation to grumble and complain. Do not yield to the temptation to blame God. Do not yield to the temptation to withdraw from God's family with anger and discouragement.

Rather, focus your attention upon Jesus Christ. Take time to look up to Christ who went through the tragedy of the cross and says to you to get up and live again! I do not have a quick 6 point psychological list that will tell you how to get out of a season of tragedy. God will surprise you no matter what you think. A relationship with Jesus Christ and with God's family will be enough to carry you through the tragedy, so that you will later look back and almost miss the close personal presence of the Lord.

Jesus said, "*I am the Bread of the World.*" Jesus meant that sentence for you. Jesus meant to tell you that you are not alone. Nourishment is available. Victory can happen. God will raise you up!