

## KH April 18-24

April 18 Su (optional) — James 4:1-10 — Resist and Draw Near

Think about David's lustful son Amnon as you read today's instruction from James. How many of these things was Amnon doing wrong? What does James suggest Amnon had been doing instead?

<sup>1</sup> *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* <sup>2</sup> *You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.* <sup>3</sup> *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* <sup>4</sup> *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* <sup>5</sup> *Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?* <sup>6</sup> *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* <sup>7</sup> *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* <sup>8</sup> *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* <sup>9</sup> *Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.* <sup>10</sup> *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

What we try to get from people might be given to us by God if we humbly ask Him. The attractions of "the world" (v. 4) are opposed to God so we should not let them deceive us. Notice the strong contrast in this statement pair: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (vv. 7-8).

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April 19 M Reading 77 — 2 Samuel 13:23-39 — Absalom murders Amnon

<sup>23</sup> *After two full years Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king's sons.* <sup>24</sup> *And Absalom came to the king and said, "Behold, your servant has sheepshearers. Please let the king and his servants go with your servant."* <sup>25</sup> *But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, let us not all go, lest we be burdensome to you." He pressed him, but he would not go but gave him his blessing.* <sup>26</sup> *Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us." And the king said to him, "Why should he go with you?"* <sup>27</sup> *But Absalom pressed him until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.* <sup>28</sup> *Then Absalom commanded his servants, "Mark when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not fear; have I not commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant."* <sup>29</sup> *So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and each mounted his mule and fled.*

<sup>30</sup> *While they were on the way, news came to David, "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons, and not one of them is left."* <sup>31</sup> *Then the king arose and tore his garments*

and lay on the earth. And all his servants who were standing by tore their garments.

<sup>32</sup> But Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "Let not my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men, the king's sons, for Amnon alone is dead. For by the command of Absalom this has been determined from the day he violated his sister Tamar. <sup>33</sup> Now therefore let not my lord the king so take it to heart as to suppose that all the king's sons are dead, for Amnon alone is dead."

<sup>34</sup> But Absalom fled. And the young man who kept the watch lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, many people were coming from the road behind him<sup>[fn]</sup> by the side of the mountain. <sup>35</sup> And Jonadab said to the king, "Behold, the king's sons have come; as your servant said, so it has come about." <sup>36</sup> And as soon as he had finished speaking, behold, the king's sons came and lifted up their voice and wept. And the king also and all his servants wept very bitterly.

<sup>37</sup> But Absalom fled and went to Talmai the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son day after day. <sup>38</sup> So Absalom fled and went to Geshur, and was there three years. <sup>39</sup> And the spirit of the king<sup>[fn]</sup> longed to go out<sup>[fn]</sup> to Absalom, because he was comforted about Amnon, since he was dead.

#### ESV Footnotes

(13:34) Septuagint *the Horonaim Road*

(13:39) Dead Sea Scroll, Septuagint; Hebrew *David*

(13:39) Compare Vulgate *ceased to go out*

**Festering Hatred** — The last thing we read about Absalom earlier was that "*Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister Tamar*" (13:22). That hatred festered for two years (v. 23) and developed into a plan for murder. The connection between hatred and murder reminds me of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, '*You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.*' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22). As we continue to read about Absalom, we will discover that he did many wicked things. Did it all start with this hatred? Sin does beget sin. The evil example of Absalom gives us a good reason to check our own attitudes. Are we harboring resentment against someone? Are you refusing to talk to someone because of a previous offense? If so, it is destroying you, not necessarily the person you are angry with, and it leads to further sins. Rather, we should be "*kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you*" (Eph. 4:32).

**Meditation:** When you read this story, did you wonder how the false news (that all of his sons had been killed by Absalom) had arrived before his sons returned to Jerusalem? (v. 30). After all, the sons were running scared. They had just seen Absalom's servants kill their oldest brother, Amnon, and they all mounted their mules and fled for home in Jerusalem. Who could have arrived from the scene and delivered this news before the tower guard even saw the sons coming along the road in the distance? Could it be that there was no messenger who beat the sons back but that the false news was generated by Jonadab, one of David's nephews (v. 32)? Do you remember earlier in this chapter that it was Jonadab who suggested to Amnon how he

could get alone with Tamar in order to rape her? There we learned that “Jonadab was a very crafty man” (v. 3). It was Jonadab who corrected the false news that came to David, saying that only Amnon was killed (v. 32). How did he know that? It is tempting to think that Jonadab was also Absalom’s advisor about how to get revenge against Amnon. Crafty, indeed!

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April 20 Tu Reading 78 — 2 Samuel 14:1-24 — Absalom returns to Jerusalem

<sup>1</sup> Now Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the king’s heart went out to Absalom. <sup>2</sup> And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman and said to her, “Pretend to be a mourner and put on mourning garments. Do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead. <sup>3</sup> Go to the king and speak thus to him.” So Joab put the words in her mouth.

<sup>4</sup> When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and paid homage and said, “Save me, O king.” <sup>5</sup> And the king said to her, “What is your trouble?” She answered, “Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. <sup>6</sup> And your servant had two sons, and they quarreled with one another in the field. There was no one to separate them, and one struck the other and killed him. <sup>7</sup> And now the whole clan has risen against your servant, and they say, ‘Give up the man who struck his brother, that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed.’ And so they would destroy the heir also. Thus they would quench my coal that is left and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth.”

<sup>8</sup> Then the king said to the woman, “Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you.” <sup>9</sup> And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, “On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father’s house; let the king and his throne be guiltless.” <sup>10</sup> The king said, “If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again.”

<sup>11</sup> Then she said, “Please let the king invoke the LORD your God, that the avenger of blood kill no more, and my son be not destroyed.” He said, “As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground.”

<sup>12</sup> Then the woman said, “Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king.” He said, “Speak.” <sup>13</sup> And the woman said, “Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again. <sup>14</sup> We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast. <sup>15</sup> Now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid, and your servant thought, ‘I will speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his servant. <sup>16</sup> For the king will hear and deliver his servant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the heritage of God.’ <sup>17</sup> And your servant thought, ‘The word of my lord the king will set me at rest,’ for my lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil. The LORD your God be with you!”

<sup>18</sup> Then the king answered the woman, “Do not hide from me anything I ask you.” And the woman said, “Let my lord the king speak.” <sup>19</sup> The king said, “Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?” The woman answered and said, “As surely as you live, my lord the king, one cannot turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has said. It was your servant Joab who commanded me; it was he who put all these words in the mouth of your servant. <sup>20</sup> In order to change the course of things your servant Joab did this. But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth.”

<sup>21</sup> Then the king said to Joab, “Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.” <sup>22</sup> And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king. And Joab said, “Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant.” <sup>23</sup> So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. <sup>24</sup> And the king said, “Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence.” So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king’s presence.

**Can’t Punish, Can’t Forgive** — David loved Absalom but he had committed murder. According to the Law given to Moses, he should have been punished with death. Three years had passed since Absalom had fled to his maternal grandfather, the foreign king of Geshur (13:37-38). Everyone seemed to know where he was (14:23) but David did not pursue him. He could not bring himself to punish his son with death, maybe also because he remembered his own sin in murdering Uriah. Joab was a cousin of Absalom and he wanted to bring about reconciliation in the family. If David couldn’t bring himself to punish his son, perhaps they could at least be reconciled, so Joab devised a plan to send a Tekoa actor to David to accomplish his design. It worked up to a point. Although the woman said that David was “*like the angel of God to discern good and evil*” (v. 17) and that he was able “*to know all things*” (v. 20), when the king agreed to bring Absalom back, he said that he did not want him “*to come into my presence*” (v. 24). It was only halfway forgiveness. As we will see in our next reading, it will take Absalom to force the issue. Do you identify more with the indecisive, also-guilty David or the confident “*angel of God*” David? Somewhere in between? Many times, we are torn between what God says we ought to do, what people think we ought to do, and what we feel we want to do. Some decisions in life are complicated by a great struggle.

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April 21 W Reading 79 — 2 Samuel 14:25-33 — David reconciled with Absalom

<sup>25</sup> Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. <sup>26</sup> And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels<sup>[fn]</sup> by the king’s weight. <sup>27</sup> There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a beautiful woman.

<sup>28</sup> So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Then he said to his servants, "See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire."<sup>[fn]</sup> So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. <sup>31</sup> Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" <sup>32</sup> 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? It would be better for me to be there still." Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.'"<sup>33</sup> Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.

#### ESV Footnotes

(14:26) A *shekel* was about 2/5 ounce or 11 grams

(14:30) Septuagint, Dead Sea Scroll add *So Joab's servants came to him with their clothes torn, and they said to him, "The servants of Absalom have set your field on fire."*

**Bold Manipulation** — Although David later referred to Absalom as a young man (18:5), he already had children, servants, and productive land. What he didn't have was freedom, at least in his own mind. He wanted to be reconciled with his father David but from what we will read later, it seems that his motive was more about expanding his influence throughout Israel. He had a lot of positive things in his favor. He could have been crowned "Mr. Israel" in a beauty contest (v. 25). He had a head of thick hair that grew so fast that he cut off 4.8 pounds (2.2 kg) of it every year (v. 26). He also had boldness—suicidal boldness—to burn the barley field of the army's general because he wouldn't do what he asked! As we will read next time, he wanted the freedom to become king. We sometimes try to manipulate people as well. We want something that we cannot get, so we manipulate others to get our own way. What if it is not God's way? Are we unwilling to ask for His will and to wait for His timing? Absalom's selfishness led to his ruin and so will ours.

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April 22 Th Reading 80 — 2 Samuel 15:1-37 — Absalom's rebellion

<sup>1</sup> After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him.

<sup>2</sup> And Absalom used to rise early and 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," <sup>3</sup> Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you."<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

<sup>7</sup> And at the end of four<sup>[fn]</sup> years Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. <sup>8</sup> For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to<sup>[fn]</sup> the LORD.'" <sup>9</sup> The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. <sup>10</sup> 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!'" <sup>11</sup> With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. <sup>12</sup> And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for<sup>[fn]</sup> Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.

<sup>13</sup> And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." <sup>14</sup> Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword." <sup>15</sup> And the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides." <sup>16</sup> So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. <sup>17</sup> And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house.

<sup>18</sup> And all his servants passed by him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king. <sup>19</sup> Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. <sup>20</sup> You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the LORD show<sup>[fn]</sup> steadfast love and faithfulness to you." <sup>21</sup> But Ittai answered the king, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be." <sup>22</sup> And David said to Ittai, "Go then, pass on." So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. <sup>23</sup> And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness.

<sup>24</sup> And Abiathar came up, and behold, Zadok came also with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God until the people had all passed out of the city. <sup>25</sup> Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. <sup>26</sup> But if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,' behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him." <sup>27</sup> The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Go back<sup>[fn]</sup> to the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. <sup>28</sup> See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." <sup>29</sup> So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.

<sup>30</sup> But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went. <sup>31</sup> And it was told David, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” And David said, “O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.”

<sup>32</sup> While David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and dirt on his head. <sup>33</sup> David said to him, “If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. <sup>34</sup> But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father’s servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,’ then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel. <sup>35</sup> Are not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? So whatever you hear from the king’s house, tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. <sup>36</sup> Behold, their two sons are with them there, Ahimaaz, Zadok’s son, and Jonathan, Abiathar’s son, and by them you shall send to me everything you hear.” <sup>37</sup> So Hushai, David’s friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

#### ESV Footnotes

(15:7) Septuagint, Syriac; Hebrew *forty*

(15:8) Or *will serve*

(15:12) Or *sent*

(15:20) Septuagint; Hebrew lacks *may the LORD show*

(15:27) Septuagint *The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Look, go back*

**Submitting to God’s Will** — Why did David flee Jerusalem? He had Joab on his side with Israel’s army. Why didn’t he go after Absalom and put down the uprising? Yes, he loved Absalom but perhaps he was also hearing in the back of his mind the word of God spoken through Nathan after David’s sins involving Bathsheba and Uriah: “...*the sword shall never depart from your house ... I will raise up evil against you out of your own house...*” (12:10-11). This looked like a fulfillment of God’s prophecy and David was willing to humbly submit to it. He concluded, “...*let him do to me what seems good to him*” (15:26). That response was strikingly similar to the virgin Mary’s response to Gabriel’s announcement that she was to bear the Son of God: “...*let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38). Those are words of submission: “...*let him do ... let it be.*” David was submitting to God’s punishment and Mary was submitting to God’s blessing. We never have any trouble submitting to God’s blessing but submitting to His rebuking discipline is usually a struggle. David wasn’t even entirely sure this was God’s punishment. He prefaced his statement of submission with one of uncertainty: “*But if he says, ‘I have no pleasure in you,’ behold, here I am, let him do to me ...*” (v. 26). When we go through hardships, we may wonder if we are being disciplined by God. Maybe so, maybe not. But we should at least examine ourselves honestly and humbly and pray like David did: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*” (Ps. 139:23-24).

**Meditation:** Notice the contrast between Absalom’s pride and David’s humility. Absalom strove to exalt himself by riding with fanfare in a chariot (v. 1) and charming

people at the city gate (v. 6). It was all about him: “*Oh that I were judge...!*” (v. 4) and “...*say, ‘Absalom is king...!’*” (v. 10). On the other hand, why did David flee? He had the people’s interest at heart: “...*let us flee ... lest he overtake us ... and strike the city with the edge of the sword*” (v. 14). Pride is self-centered and humility is other-centered.

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April 23 F Reading 81 — 2 Samuel 16:1-14 — Ziba's deception and Shimei's curses

<sup>1</sup> *When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine.* <sup>2</sup> *And the king said to Ziba, “Why have you brought these?” Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who faint in the wilderness to drink.”* <sup>3</sup> *And the king said, “And where is your master’s son?” Ziba said to the king, “Behold, he remains in Jerusalem, for he said, ‘Today the house of Israel will give me back the kingdom of my father.’”*

<sup>4</sup> *Then the king said to Ziba, “Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours.” And Ziba said, “I pay homage; let me ever find favor in your sight, my lord the king.”*

<sup>5</sup> *When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually.*

<sup>6</sup> *And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David, and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.* <sup>7</sup> *And Shimei said as he cursed, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man!”* <sup>8</sup> *The LORD has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood.”*

<sup>9</sup> *Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.”* <sup>10</sup> *But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’”* <sup>11</sup> *And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to.* <sup>12</sup> *It may be that the LORD will look on the wrong done to me,<sup>[fn]</sup> and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing today.”* <sup>13</sup> *So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust.* <sup>14</sup> *And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan.<sup>[fn]</sup> And there he refreshed himself.*

#### ESV Footnotes

(16:12) Septuagint, Vulgate *will look upon my affliction*

(16:14) Septuagint; Hebrew lacks *at the Jordan*

**Suffering Abuse** — David had accepted Absalom’s rebellion as part of God’s predicted punishment for his sins. Now comes a second installment—or was it? Shimei (pronounced in Hebrew *shim-EE*) was outrageously bold in heaping abuse on David as



he headed for the Jordan River. Army captain Abishai had the natural response, to “...take off his head” (v. 9) but David was still considering all of this in the light of God’s prophesied punishment for his past sins involving Bathsheba and Uriah. David’s first response showed that he considered it to be a *possible* punishment (“*If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, ‘Curse David’...*”—v. 10) but his second response showed *confidence* that this was God’s will (“...let him curse, for the LORD has told him to”—v. 11). What is your response to abuse that comes your way? Is it “take off his head” or maybe, “the LORD has told him to”? Is it revengeful retaliation or humble submission? We may not know that it is God’s discipline but we should at least consider it. For sure, we should not retaliate, as the NT reminds us often: “*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them ... Repay no one evil for evil ... Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God ...*” (Rom. 12:14, 17, 19).

**Meditation:** The same day that I wrote the above paragraph, I “just happened” to read the following very appropriate comment from Marilynne Robinson’s 2005 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, “Gilead,” when a pastor instructed his young son:

“If you confront insult or antagonism, your first impulse will be to respond in kind. But if you think, as it were, This is an emissary sent from the Lord, and some benefit is intended for me, first of all the occasion to demonstrate my faithfulness, the chance to show that I do in some small degree participate in the grace that saved me, you are free to act otherwise than as circumstances would seem to dictate ... You are freed at the same time of the impulse to hate or resent that person. He would probably laugh at the thought that the Lord sent him to you for your benefit (and his), but that is the perfection of the disguise, his own ignorance of it.”

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**April 24 Sa (optional)** — Esther 3:1-6; 7:1-10 — Pride Before a Fall

Absalom was fiercely proud and proactive in striving to be king but his life would end while he was hanging from a tree. Let’s read today about another similarly proud man who showed up hundreds of years later in another country and suffered a similar end.

### Esther 3

<sup>1</sup> After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. <sup>2</sup> And all the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. <sup>3</sup> Then the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate said to Mordecai, “Why do you transgress the king’s command?” <sup>4</sup> And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai’s words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. <sup>5</sup> And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. <sup>6</sup> But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had

*made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.*

#### Esther 7

*<sup>1</sup> So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. <sup>2</sup> And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." <sup>3</sup> Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. <sup>4</sup> For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king." <sup>5</sup> Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" <sup>6</sup> And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.*

*<sup>7</sup> And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king. <sup>8</sup> And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?" As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. <sup>9</sup> Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." <sup>10</sup> So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.*

- Haman was not satisfied with his elevated position; he wanted to push people down. Here was Paul's attitude: "*I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content*" (Phil. 4:11). Are you stepping on someone in order to get to where you want to go?
- Haman was not satisfied to punish only Mordecai; he wanted to kill all the Jews. Sin has a tendency to escalate into something worse. If we say "No!" to the first one, we won't have to deal with the consequences of worse ones.