

Introduction: People are born being foolishly rebellious in their rejection of God (Psalm 14:1-6; 53:1-5); but, the rod (of God's) discipline can drive out folly (Proverbs 22:15) and produce righteousness and peace (Hebrews 12:5-11). *** Questioning human authority and wisdom is good (James 3:14-15). Most people do this in the time of transition from childhood to adulthood. But, maturity comes from the humility to see our lack of a full understanding of the purpose for which we have been created is part of our brokenness. So, we all need to humbly seek God's wisdom so that we may act as peacemakers between God and our neighbors so together we may receive His righteousness (James 3:13, 17-18). *** The story of David's life, and the people associated with him, is a true tragedy. They all had moments of humble obedient faith, some more than others. But in the exilic account of his life, which we are considering this year, we see bloodshed is prevalent because of the foolishness of the untamed human nature. *** Asahel is a tragic example of the folly of youth, especially in warfare. His big brother Joab is a less sympathetic example because of his stubborn and impulsive pride. *** In a psalm written by a mature David, he desires to be taught in the mercy and love of his Savior-God. This desire came because of the humility he learned in his afflictions. After seeking pardon for his youthful transgressions, he petitions God to be obedient to His instruction. *** We are now ready to dig in to God's Word for us today.

I. Joab's younger brother foolishly pursues Abner and is struck down; as Joab seeks revenge, Abner is the voice of reason, and Joab retreats after many die. (2 Samuel 2:18-32)

- A. The youngest son of David's sister foolishly pursues the general of Saul's army and is struck dead. (*Verses 18-23*)
1. There were three sons of Zeruiah: Joab, Abishai and Asahel (made of God); Asahel was as swift as a deer of the field. (*Verse 18*)
Zeruiah: The name of David's sister (1 Chronicles 2:13-17) means balsam, a tree known for its resin which was considered a luxury and was used for perfume and healing wounds. Her youngest son was known for speed that matched a sleek wild deer.
 2. Then Asahel pursued after Abner, and he did not turn to go to the right or left from following after Abner; then, Abner turned to look behind him, and said: Is this you, Asahel? Then he answered: (It is) me. (*Verses 19-20*)
Pursued Abner: With youthful energy, Asahel pursued Abner, a tough and experienced military leader who had been Saul's captain of the army (1 Samuel 14:47-50).
 3. Then Abner said to him: You must turn aside to the right or left, and you must seize one of the young men and you must take his spoil; and, Asahel would not turn away from following him. (*Verse 21*)
Asahel un-wise: Abner is giving Asahel a very reasonable request, but Asahel is responding foolishly.
 4. Then Abner added to say to Asahel again: You must turn aside from following me! Why will I smite you to the ground? How could I lift up my face to your brother Joab? (*Verse 22*)
Repeated request: Abner repeats his request more emphatically. He knows Joab has a violent and resentful spirit. Asahel is showing the folly of youth.

Warfare brings out folly, especially in the young

5. He refused to turn aside, then Abner smote him in the stomach with the back of the spear; then it came out behind (Asahel) so he fell there and died; then all who came to where he fell stood still. (*Verse 23*)
Third time: For the third time, Asahel does not turn aside. Abner now strikes him with the blunt end of his spear thrust backward. Because of Abner's super strength, it goes through Asahel as if it was the business end of the spear. Asahel dies in his folly!

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Application: We must realize it is essential to heed the hard advice of those who have had more experience with life and death than we have had.

- B. Asahel's brothers pursue Abner for revenge; but when Abner calls out to Joab, he repents and calls off the battle after many die. (*Verses 24-32*)

1. Then Joab and Abishai pursued after Abner, and as the sun is going down, they came to the hill of Ammah, which is before Giah, on the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. (*Verse 24*)
Pursued again: Abner is now pursued by both big brothers of the youth who foolishly pursued him. Gibeon is where the battle commenced.
2. Then the men of Benjamin gathered together and they were one group, and they stood at the top of a hill. (*Verse 25*)
Benjamin united: Saul's tribe unites as one and stands with the man Saul appointed their commander.
3. Then Abner called to Joab: Will the sword devour forever? Have you not known in the end it will be bitter? How long you will not speak to the people to turn from following their brothers? (*Verse 26*)
Bitterness: With three rhetorical questions, Abner warns of the bitterness that will result from a civil war with brother killing brother! He uses the word with which Naomi re-named herself after returning to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19-21). In essence, he says: When will we stop warring like fools?

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4. Then Joab said: As God lives, that you spoke not, then in the morning each man gone up following his brother; then Joab blew the ram's horn and all the men stood still, and they no more pursued Israel and they did not fight. (*Verses 27-28*)
Joab's heart: The proud, stubborn, impulsive son of Zeruiah has a change of heart. For this battle, he signals his men to leave off pursuing their fellow Israelites to death.
5. Abner and his men went through (the plain of) Arabah; all that night they went over the Jordan and walked the cleft (of land), then they came to Mahanaim. (*Verse 29*)
Returns home: They return to the place where Abner made Saul's son Ishboseth king (verses 8-9).
6. And Joab returned from following Abner, then he gathered all the people, then were missing of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel; and the servants of David had slain of Benjamin and Abner's men: three-hundred-sixty men had died. (*Verses 30-31*)
Body bags: Almost four hundred men had died in a day! Twenty men of Judah and David died, but three-hundred-sixty men of Benjamin and Abner perished! The cost of warfare between tribes of Israel was not worth it!

7. Then they took up Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father in Bethlehem; then Joab and his men walked all night when day broke on them in Hebron. (*Verse 32*)

Another long night: They took a detour on their way back to where David ruled as king to go to Bethlehem to bury their foolish brother who aggressively pursued an experienced warrior.

Homiletical Idea: *Warfare brings out folly, especially in the young.* (#4)

Application: As Christ followers, we must understand the devastation of needless deaths brought about by civil wars so we will pray, seeking God's wisdom to always act directed by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

II. David asks his Savior-God to teach him in mercy, overlooking his foolish youth; he now realizes

that his afflictions humbled him to seek forgiveness so he fearfully seeks instruction. (*Psalms 25:4-12*)

- A. David seeks to be taught by his Savior-God and to be mercifully remembered in spite of his youthful rebellion. (*Verses 4-7*)

1. Your ways, Yahweh, You must make me know / Your paths, You must teach me // You must lead me in Your truth and teach me ... (*Verses 4-5a*)

Petition: With three petitions, David implores Yahweh to teach him His ways so he knows them; and, he wants to be led in God's truth. He has a teachable heart.

2. ... because You (are) the God of my salvation / I have (eagerly and patiently) waited for You all day. (*Verses 15b-c*)

Reason: David is bold enough to request teaching because he is sure God has saved him, and he is willing to patiently wait as long as it takes for God to teach him. We must be true disciples of Jesus who desire to be taught to obey all Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:18-20)!

3. You must remember Your mercy Yahweh and Your steadfast love / because these (have been) from eternity (past). (*Verse 6*)

Remember: Yahweh has eternally had merciful compassion and strong life-changing love. How much are we aware of God's amazing character every moment of every day? David asked God to remember who he is. How often do we remember who God is?!

4. The sins of my youth and my transgressions, You will not remember (please) / according to Your steadfast love You must remember me on account of Your goodness, Yahweh. (*Verse 7*)

Rebellion and redemption: Young adults are often too full of themselves (as was Asahel), which causes them to be estranged from the covenant God. But those who surrender in the faith of His good strong love, shown in Jesus Christ, can be cleansed and redeemed from sin and transgression!

- B. David is teachable because his afflictions humbled him and he desires obedience after being forgiven which has increased his reverence. (*Verses 8-10*)

1. Good and upright is Yahweh / therefore He instructs sinners in the way. (*Verse 8*)

Instruction: David is again teachable. Jesus is the good and upright Son of Man who lived a perfect human life. He is also the Way (and Truth and Life) for all who are willing to learn of Him by the Holy Spirit who inspired the Word of God – the Bible.

2. He will lead the humble (afflicted) in justice (what is right) / and He will teach the humble (afflicted) His way. (*Verse 9*)

Affliction: God often allows suffering and affliction so we may be humbled to the point of submitting to His leading and teaching (Psalm 119:65-72).

Testimony: Mark was my right-hand man from 1991-1993. He graduated from MIT with a 4.0 in Mathematics. He was always in control of every situation in a good way. We stayed in touch through seminary and my early years here. One year, early in January, I received a long email from him about a deadly virus he caught before Christmas. He wrote that for the first time in his life he knew he was dependent on others (doctors, nurses, medicines and machines) for his life. He said it taught him humility. I had received a page long email from Dayspring Cards at Christmas with the Good News of Jesus in it was ideal for what he had experienced. I forwarded it to him. I have since found out he is now a professing Christian.

3. All the paths of Yahweh (are) strong life-changing love and faithfulness (truth) / to those keeping His covenant and testimonies. (*Verse 10*)

Condition: Notice the conditions for people to experience the love and truth of God.

They must keep God's covenant and testimonies through obedience to the Word of truth (John 1:14; 14:1-6).

4. On account of Your Name, Yahweh / You have pardoned my iniquity, for it is great. (*Verse 11*)

Pardon: Because David is petitioning to be pardoned of great iniquity, we know he wrote this after he had greatly abused one of his loyal chief 'thirty men' – Uriah (2 Samuel 23:13, 39).

5. Who is this man fearing Yahweh? / He (Yahweh) will instruct him (the man) in the way he will choose. (*Verse 12*)

God-fearing: So, in addition to suffering affliction to become humble, those who have a healthy reverential fear of God will be instructed by God in His love to choose His right way!

Humble and God-fearing people will be instructed in love

Application: So, we must all be humbled before the covenant God of Israel in order to have dependent child-like faith in Christ, who is the fulfillment of all God's promises and prophecies, in order to receive Him as our Lord and Savior, by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:1-10).

Conclusion: Joab's younger brother foolishly pursues Abner and is struck down. As Joab seeks revenge, Abner is the voice of reason, and Joab retreats after many die. David asks his Savior-God to teach him in mercy, overlooking his foolish youth. He now realizes that his afflictions humbled him to seek forgiveness so he fearfully seeks instruction

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But mature, humble and God-fearing people will be instructed in love