

Genuine Love Takes No Revenge: Lessons from the Life of Joab - Part VII

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"Delighting in God to the glory of God"
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Over the last couple of months we have been learning what genuine or authentic love looks like in this life as a Christian. What have we seen? The overall theme is Abhor What is Evil/Cling to What is Good. Let's recap the last few weeks.

"Genuine Love: **Is Intense!**" Romans 12:11

- I. Be Tirelessly Diligent!
- II. Be Empowered by the Holy Spirit!
- III. Serve Your Master!

"Genuine Love: **Is Fixed on God!**" Romans 12:12

- I. The man who loves shouts, "Upwards and Onwards!"
- II. The man who loves stays true under pressure
- III. The man who loves sticks to his prayers

"Genuine Love: **Is Self-Sacrificing For Others!**" Romans 12:13

- I. The Man Who Authentically Loves Immerses Himself in His Brother's Needs "Contribute to the needs of the saints"
- II. The Man Who Authentically Loves Hunts for strangers to house: "and seek to show hospitality."

"Genuine Love: **Pray for Your Persecutor!**" Romans 12:14

- I. What is "persecution?" - Malicious treatment caused by our Well-Doing
- II. How does authentic love react to persecution?
 - 1) Negatively – do not curse
 - 2) Positively – bless your persecutor

"Genuine Love: **Unites with the Successful, the Sorrowful and the Insignificant**" Romans 12:15-16

- I. You love the successful
- II. You love the sorrowful
- III. You love the insignificant

"Genuine Love: **Love Your Enemies**" Romans 12:17-21

- I. Retaliate with good
 - 1) Negatively – no revenge
 - 2) Positively – think in advance how to do good
- II. Conspire for peace
 - 1) Your stance
 - 2) Your hope
- III. Conquer evil
 - 1) Negatively – never avenge yourself

2) Positively – meet his needs

Each of these, just taken at face value, provides a CATSCAN on the genuineness of our profession of faith in Jesus. What I mean is that when you take the Bible for what it says, and honestly compare your life to what it commands, you are beginning to see yourself the way God looks at you. These are His standards and expectations for every single Christian.

Somehow, North American evangelicalism has drifted into this idea that the real test of whether or not you are a Christian is some decision you made in the past. “As long as you walked an aisle, made a profession of faith, signed a card, raised a hand – as long as at some point you decided to follow Jesus – then you are a Christian.” But if you read the Bible you never see things like this offered as proof you are born again. These are modern terms, never used in Scripture or church history until 100 years ago. And they are quite unhelpful!

One of the fundamental tests to see whether you are a genuine believer or not, is to ask yourself if you are willing to do whatever Jesus commands. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” I am not suggesting that you never stumble or rebel... I am suggesting that fundamentally, at the heart of the matter, all things being considered, you are desirous of doing whatever Jesus says because you love Him so much. And that implies you want to *know* what He says, *understand* what He says and *learn* what He says. It also implies that as you *read* what He says, you will carefully examine your own life to see if you are *living* what He says.

When we come to a passage like Romans 12 then, we are given a lot of material to work with! The ESV adds the little subtitle to this section, “The Marks of the True Christian” and that is not a bad subtitle. This is how normal Christians live. It is normal conduct! So, we can take each of these characteristics of authentic love and turn it into a kind of test: “Be patient in tribulation.” Am I patient, do I endure afflictions? If not, why not? How can I improve in this? Lord, help me, renew my mind! Or, I am never patient in troubles... Lord, save me!

These marks of a Christian are not the admission price to heaven, they are the fruit of a life that has been saved by God. Are you a Christian? Have you repented? Believed?

While each of the attributes of genuine love are an excellent test of our relationship to God, perhaps none is more challenging than the last, found in 12:17-21: Take no revenge. Never avenge yourself, either in spirit, with thoughts of payback, wishing evil on someone or imagining hurting them, or in actions, such as gossip, lies, making them look bad, harming, physically striking or hurting them.

Rohan Chung and Michael Letts were double-crossed in a drug deal by Mr. Morgan Morrison. Infuriated at being ripped off, they went to Mr. Morrison’s home and brutally shot and killed his father and two adult sisters. The 8 month old son of one of the sisters was left behind and not found until 14 hours later. Thankfully, these vengeful murderers will never leave prison after being sentenced in London, England on Thursday.¹

There is absolutely no place for vengeance in the Christian’s life. Knowing how hard this is, I wanted to spend one more Sunday on the topic, but from a different angle - what you might call a biographical angle. My hope is to hold up the lives of two men who were compatriots, even relatives, and compare the life of revenge to the life of overcoming evil with good. My goal in doing this is fourfold. First, I would like to show how very difficult it can be to not take revenge. Second, I want to make revenge taste uglier to you than ever before. Thirdly, I want to make vengeance, in its many

¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/london/5260010.stm

forms, clearer to you than ever before, and lastly I want to give you a mental picture of what a life of revenge yields in the end. After all, revenge always feels like the right thing to do, the just thing to do! Part of what motivates revenge is a desire to make things right and good. But that never happens. Revenge is sin and there is simply no place for it in the Christian.

I will attempt to do all this by contrasting for you the life of Joab, to the life of David. I trust you know who David was. The 2nd King of Israel, the great champion who defeated Goliath and fought off all of Israel's enemies, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, the recipient of God's promise/covenant and the one from whom Jesus was descended – hence the title, “Jesus, Son of David.”

I. Joab, the Man

Joab was David's nephew – the son of David's sister, Zeruiah. He was also the General or Chief over David's army. The Bible has quite a bit to say about Joab and we can get a fairly accurate idea of the kind of man he was based on what he did during his life.

A) A Man of Courage

There is no question Joab was brave and courageous! Perhaps inspired by his uncle's defeat of the giant Goliath, Joab was ready and eager to fight for the king no matter who the enemy.

In fact, the way Joab became David's general is a vivid picture of this! Joab and his two brothers (Abishai, and Asahel) had joined David while he was being chased like a fugitive by Saul. After the death of Saul, when David was made King of Judah, we read of Joab leading the battle against the Northern Tribes at Gibeon. This natural leadership was officially recognized several years later, when David had become King of Israel as well.

(1 Chronicles 11:1-9) “Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron and said, “Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, even when Saul was king, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord your God said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over my people Israel.’” So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the Lord by Samuel. And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, that is Jebus, where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land. The inhabitants of Jebus said to David, “You will not come in here.” Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. David said, “Whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander.” *And Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, so he became chief.*

So Joab was a man of courage, a warrior. Besides leading the way into the fortress of Jerusalem, he also was the one to fight and conquer the nation of Moab.

(1 Kings 11:15) “...when Joab the commander of the army went up to bury the slain, he struck down every male in Edom (for Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom).”

And, of course, there is that remarkable picture of genuine courage when Joab spoke to his brother, Abishai, before their great battle against the assembled forces of Ammon and Syria.

(2 Samuel 10:6-14) “When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah with 1,000 men, and the men of Tob, 12,000 men. And

when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men. And the Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate, and the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open country.

When Joab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the best men of Israel and arrayed them against the Syrians. The rest of his men he put in the charge of Abishai his brother, and he arrayed them against the Ammonites. *And he said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him."* So Joab and the people who were with him drew near to battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. And when the Ammonites saw that the Syrians fled, they likewise fled before Abishai and entered the city. Then Joab returned from fighting against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.

So Joab was a man of courage in his own right. A great warrior and leader – a fine general.

B) A Man of Loyalty

Not only was he courageous, but, in the words of one author, he was “fiercely loyal.” Joab was so loyal he was even willing to follow into the sin of his King and Uncle. You recall how David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and in an attempted cover-up wrote to Joab these words about Uriah. Uriah was Bathsheba’s husband and himself a loyal soldier in David’s army.

(2 Samuel 11:15) “...In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.”

This was David’s way of covering up the fact that Bathsheba was pregnant with his child. It was murder and it was wrong. But you see something of the loyalty of Joab in the very next verses!

(2 Samuel 11:16-18) “And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting.”

This was loyalty to a fault, but loyalty nonetheless. It was not a one time occurrence. In the very next chapter, Joab is continuing in the war against the Ammonite city of Rabbah, in which Uriah was killed. The battle is progressing well under this courageous general, but he holds off finishing the deal until David can arrive and get the glory for the victory.

(2 Samuel 12:26-28) “Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and took the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David and said, “I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have taken the city of waters. Now then gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called by my name.”

He does this because he is loyal to David!

Much later, when David is again falling into sin (this time by taking a census of the people – thus trusting in his own army, not the hand of God), Joab again remains loyal. Joab understood that this action was wrong and an offence to the Lord. He even challenged David on the matter. In fact, both accounts of this event stress that the action was “abhorrent to Joab.” Nevertheless, he still obeyed his King.

C) A Man of Religion

Not only did he have the sensitivity to know that taking the census would not be approved by the Lord, but we read of Joab devoting some of his war spoils to the temple in 1 Chronicles 26:28. We have already seen him giving over his own life into the hands of God in the battle against Ammon and Syria.

Joab was a courageous and loyal General and Nephew, and a man of some devotion to the Lord.

Now, when David comes to the end of his life, he includes in the Bible a list of his mighty men – the men of valour! You will find this list in I Samuel 23. It is made up of the 3, then the 30. And it is quite an amazing list of these courageous men and some of their exploits. You read there of *Abishai*, the brother of Saul, who was the one to accompany David when he snuck down to fetch the spear and jug from beside a sleeping Saul. You read also of *Asahel*, Joab's other brother who was killed in battle against the Israelites. You read of *Beeroth*, the armor-bearer of Joab, who would have fought at his side through thick and thin. You even read of *Uriah*, of whom Joab orchestrated the murder!

But one name you do not find on that list is Joab. The courageous, loyal general who led Israel into so many victories, was no Mighty Man in the eyes of David... or God.

Why?

II. Joab the Vengeful

Joab was a man of vengeance. On three horrible occasions, revenge got the better of Joab and he spilled innocent blood.

We have already seen that when David first became King, the northern 10 tribes would not come under his rule. So there was war between David and these tribes for many years. At one of these battles, Joab sat across the pool of Gibeon from his counterpart on the Israelite side, Abner. They decided to have a competition between soldiers and 12 for each side fought before them – and all 24 died. Battle between the armies followed and we pick up the story:

(2 Samuel 2:18-23) “And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him and said, “Is it you, Asahel?” And he answered, “It is I.” Abner said to him, “Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and seize one of the young men and take his spoil.” But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. And Abner said again to Asahel, “Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?” But he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the butt of his spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died where he was.”

Joab and Abishai chased after Abner to kill him, but in the end the battle was given up. But the warrior Joab would nurse a terrible grudge. Months would go by and eventually peace was made between Israel and David, but not between Joab and Abner. Although Abner was granted amnesty from David, and sent away in peace, Joab took things into his own hands.

(2 Samuel 3:26-30) “When Joab... sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know about it. And when Abner returned to

Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the stomach, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, “I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner the son of Ner. May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father’s house, and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous or who holds a spindle or who falls by the sword or who lacks bread!” So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon.”

Joab avenged his brother Asahel’s death by murdering Abner.

Later, Joab was instrumental in getting another murderer pardoned and brought back into Jerusalem – his cousin Absalom. You recall how Absalom murdered his half-brother to avenge his sister’s rape. After a cooling off period, Joab worked some angles to get Absalom back into King David’s presence – and it worked.

Absalom was not content, though. For although he was back in Jerusalem, King David would not speak with him. He kept badgering Joab to do something about this, but Joab was not returning his calls. Finally, Absalom set Joab’s farm on fire to get his attention! It was not too long after this that Absalom orchestrated a coup attempt against his father.

Joab had seen enough. Was it because his crops had been ruined? Was it because Absalom had gone behind his back against David? The text does not say. But once the battle begins between the forces loyal to David and those loyal to Absalom, Joab’s vengeance takes over again.

King David had commanded all his men to be gentle with Absalom. But when Joab finds Absalom dangling from a tree with his head wedged in the branches, he ignores the King’s command and thrusts 3 javelins through his cousin Absalom’s heart. He commands his men to finish the job then throws up a heap of stones over Absalom’s body. (2 Samuel 18, 19).

As a result of this act of vengeance, David removes Joab from leading the army and replaces him with Amasa – Joab’s second cousin and the man Absalom had put in charge of the army during the coup attempt.

That leads to the third and final example of Joab’s vengeance. For it was only days later that Joab murdered Amasa! Having followed him into battle against the rebelling Sheba, Joab caught up to Amasa in Gibeon....

(2 Samuel 20:8-10) “When they were at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier’s garment, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened on his thigh, and as he went forward it fell out. And Joab said to Amasa, “Is it well with you, my brother?” And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab’s [left] hand. So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died.”

Joab (remarkably!) was returned to the position of general for David’s army – although he remained greatly despised by David himself.

III The Death of Joab

Finally, when David's reign was drawing to a close, he uttered these last words from his death bed to Solomon:

(1 Kings 2:5-6) "Moreover, you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed, avenging in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist and on the sandals on his feet. Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace."

Joab was killed for his acts of vengeance.

(2 Kings 2:28-34) "When the news [of Solomon's coronation and David's death] came to Joab—for Joab had supported Adonijah although he had not supported Absalom—Joab fled to the tent of the Lord and caught hold of the horns of the altar. And when it was told King Solomon, "Joab has fled to the tent of the Lord, and behold, he is beside the altar," Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, "Go, strike him down." So Benaiah came to the tent of the Lord and said to him, "The king commands, 'Come out.'" But he said, "No, I will die here." Then Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, "Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me." The king replied to him, "Do as he has said, strike him down and bury him, and thus take away from me and from my father's house the guilt for the blood that Joab shed without cause. The Lord will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself, Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. So shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever. But for David and for his descendants and for his house and for his throne there shall be peace from the Lord forevermore." Then Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and struck him down and put him to death. And he was buried in his own house in the wilderness."

Joab lived a life of vengeance and went down to his grave in shame.

IV. Joab Compared to David

Compare that to the life of his uncle David. If ever a man had cause to take revenge, wasn't it David? He was hated by Saul because God gave him many victories. He eventually became the subject of unjust murder plots, spear-throwings and false-accusations for the same reason. He was betrayed by the citizens of Keilah (that he had just delivered!) to Saul; he was also betrayed by the residents of Ziph to Saul. Saul took David's wife and gave her to another man, he was spoken evil of by his enemies and was rebelled against by his own son.

Over and over again, David was the victim of false-accusations, attempted murders, was chased around the wilderness and constantly harassed – *all because he was doing good!* David is the classic example of true, Biblical persecution. It seems that if anyone, ever, had a right to take revenge, it was David.

And it was not as though the opportunity did not present itself! Think of Saul and his men sound asleep as David stood over his head. Or think of Saul crawling into the cave of Adullam to relieve himself – talk about a defenseless position! – and David and his men just happening to be in that very cave! What do you see? A man who will not take revenge!

(1 Samuel 24:4-12) “Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed.” So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way. Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. And David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of men who say, ‘Behold, David seeks your harm’? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, ‘I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.’ See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.”

Wait a minute. Sounds a little like Romans 12:19-21 doesn't it?

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Beloved, we must be *Davids* – not *Joabs* – when it comes to taking revenge. You may do much for the kingdom, as Joab did much for Israel – but it will count for nothing if your love is inauthentic and you are a vengeful man or woman. Whether that vengeance is as fierce as murder or as quiet as a few acid-laced thoughts or words.

How quick we are to avenge! Just driving this week I saw the fires of vengeance instantly kindled in my heart again and again! *Our only hope is to look at David's greater son – the Lord Jesus Christ.* We need Jesus to suffer the penalty for the times we have taken vengeance on others. It is sin and it must be punished. Like all sin, the only thing we can hope for is that Jesus will suffer its just penalty on our behalf. Once we can grasp this, we leave room for the vengeance of God!

We need to follow the model of Jesus' life - something only true Christians can hope to do by the enabling power of His Spirit.

(1 Peter 2:21-23) “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

We need to beg Jesus to send Abigail's across our path when we *are* seeking revenge. Do you recall Abigail? The wife of Nabal (the fool!) Nabal had refused to share his feast with David while David wandered in the wilderness, even though David had protected Nabal's shepherds and flocks in the wilderness. David is enraged at this injustice and when he hears of this rejection shouts, “Every man strap on his sword!” Vengeance will be his!

But wise Abigail, the wife of Nabal, heard of her husband's foolishness and rode out to meet David with food and supplies. She said to David:

(1 Samuel 25: 26) "Now then, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, because the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal."

David listened to this gentle admonition and replied to her:

(1 Samuel 25: 32-34) "And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand! For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male."

God in His mercy sent Abigail and spared David from taking revenge. How we need Abigails and how we need to be Abigails to one another!

Beloved, do not avenge yourself! This is your only recourse, the singular option! When persecuted, you must entrust yourself to God who judges justly. And as you do this, you must love your enemies and bless those who persecute you, even going so far as to willingly give them food and drink – do them well. For by so doing, beloved, you will overcome. You will conquer evil, with good.

Will you commit to a life of no revenge? How could you not? Let me urge you to remember Joab and to remember that great exploits for the kingdom of God amount to nothing if you are a man of vengeance. Then remember our Lord Jesus, and commit today to do all that he says which includes this command, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves..."

May God give us grace to live it, to His glory.

By Pastor Paul W. Martin © Grace Fellowship Church

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