

A Sermon by  
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Chinese Christian Church  
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# A Love Story With a Lesson

## 2 SAMUEL 13:1-19

In order to talk about the whole experience of falling in love from a Biblical point of view, I want to read you a story. It is a love story, a love story that can teach us some very important lessons.

The love story I am going to read to you really happened. It took place in the Middle East about 1000 years before the birth of Christ. You will notice that the story centers on a young man and his half sister. The story is recorded in 2 SAMUEL 13:1-19. Please follow along with me as I read.

The focus of the first half of this story is on the young man named Amnon and the love that he felt for his half sister Tamar. 2 SAMUEL 13:1 says, "in the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David."

Amnon loved Tamar, and his feelings of love were so strong that they affected him physically. He was lovesick. Verse 2 says, "Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her." Amnon felt that he could not live without Tamar and that made him feel miserable.

This is what the world calls love. It is the kind of love that we see displayed so often in the movies and on television. Most of the popular songs we hear on the radio are about this kind of love. And most of us should be able to relate to the kind of feelings that Amnon had for Tamar. Most everyone knows what it is like to become lovesick.

I don't think that Amnon's feelings were evil in and of themselves. Many good relationships and marriages begin with the very kinds of emotions that Amnon experienced. However, I do not believe that it is possible for a person to build a relationship of true love on these kinds of emotions. I want you to see today that there is a great difference between what the world calls love and true love. What the world calls love can eventually lead to true love, but it can never become the foundation for true love.

Even though he was lovesick, it was impossible for Amnon to truly love Tamar. Let's take another careful look at this story and discover why it was impossible for Amnon to truly love Tamar.

The first reason why Amnon could not love Tamar is because he did not know her. He did not understand the kind of person she was. It was hard for him to spend time alone with her to talk to her and get to know her. It wasn't until that day that Amnon forced Tamar to lie with him that he finally began to understand the kind of woman that she was. In a very short period of time Amnon learned a few things about Tamar. He learned some things about her feelings and about her convictions. And when he began to discover who she was, he hated her. Verse 15 says, "In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her."

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But I would say that Amnon never truly loved Tamar in the first place, because he did not know her. We cannot truly love a certain person unless we know that person.

I know that in some cultures people get married who have never met one another and their marriages turn out to be very stable. But in such cases, the people who are getting married are committed to getting to know one another. Their love grows as their marriage grows, because they spend time learning about each other.

It takes time and effort to get to know another person, but it is the only way we can find true love. And the process of getting to know another person should never stop after the marriage ceremony. Experts tell us that most couples find it difficult to spend time talking to each other after they are married. So that means that after people are married, they need to even work harder at getting to know one another than before they were married. If they don't, they will lose the love that they began to experience.

It takes a lifetime to get to know another person. Even though Janiene and I have known each other for thirty-five years, we still have much to learn about each other.

Amnon could not love Tamar, because he did not know her. So what did he love? What was the source of his lovesickness?

I believe that Amnon was in love with his own dream. Even though he did not know Tamar, he knew his dream very well. He thought about it day and night. He imagined what it would be like to lie in bed with this beautiful woman and make love to her. He imagined how sweet it would be, and how much both of them would enjoy the experience. He thought about it over and over again.

Now I think that we can all understand Amnon's problem. I think that most of us have spent time imagining what it would be like to be in love with another person. It is a normal experience to have this kind of dream. In fact, these days it is very difficult not to have such dreams.

And where do our dreams come from? For most of us, they start at a very young age. Young girls have dreams, and their dreams are formed from the movies they watch and the music they hear and things that they read and pictures on their walls that they stare at when they are lying on their beds. They dream of the ideal man that they will love some day.

I grew up in a large family with five sisters, so I had a chance to observe this kind of behavior first-hand. When I was growing up, I did not realize that young girls from other cultures also have the same kind of behavior. But during the eighteen-year period of time that we made our home in Taiwan I discovered that young girls are the same everywhere. I often observed how the junior high girls would stop by the bookstores when they got out of school. Posters of movie stars and singing stars attracted them. Magazines filled with pictures of people they idolized also attracted them.

But, in reality, there is no ideal man. Every man has things about him that are not lovely. And girls who try to fit men into the dreams that they have created in their minds over the years will be disappointed. And the men they try to force into their dreams will be frustrated, because they cannot become someone that they were never meant to be.

And if men don't like to be forced to match the dream of a woman, then they should realize that most women don't like to be forced into the dream of a man. Unfortunately, many men go to the altar marrying a dream. And then, after the wedding, they try to make their new wife fit into their dream. I pity the woman who has to spend her life trying to match the dream of the man she has married.

Amnon was not in love with a person. He was in love with a dream. In our scripture reading, Amnon had a friend who helped him make his dream come true. His name was Jonadab. He is the one who came up with the plan to help Amnon make his dream come true.

Today there are many people like Jonadab who will be happy to help us make our dreams come true.

Between my junior and senior years of high school, I worked for a construction company. The people who worked with me loved to spend their Saturday evenings going to parties. Every Monday they would go into great detail telling everyone about the fun they had and the women they loved. They would try to encourage me to come along with them. Though I never did, the stories they told me were hard to forget.

When I was in college, my best friend took a course that was supposed to prepare him for marriage. But the teacher encouraged the students that the best way to prepare for marriage was to first experiment by living with another person. By doing this, you could see if the other person would be a suitable match. In other words, you could discover whether or not the other person fit into your dream of an ideal man or woman. My friend took his teacher's advice, and it did him more harm than good.

Maybe some will say that this kind of thing mostly happens in America and among Caucasians like myself. But while I was living in Taiwan, I discovered that things in China were not that much different. While I was there students from the National Taiwan University were surveyed to see what their attitude toward love and marriage was. Over ninety percent of the male students surveyed indicated that they felt it was OK to have sex with a partner before marriage as long as you had feelings of love for the person. If that survey was true, then it is easy to imagine the kind of peer pressure that would exist for a student to make his dream come true. There would be plenty of people who, like Jonadab, would even help a fellow student come up with a workable plan to make his dream come true.

But regardless of what our peers tell us, we must understand that it is impossible to truly love a person unless we first know the person. We must first understand a person's personality and how they think and what they believe before we can truly love them.

Let's take Tamar as an example. What can we learn about her from our story?

First of all, we can learn that she had some moral convictions. She believed that sex outside of marriage was not right. In verse 2 she pleaded with Amnon saying, "Don't do this wicked thing." This showed that she had respect for the laws of God.

Second, she was a person who faced up to reality. She knew well what the consequences of such action would be. In verse 13 she said, "What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the fools in Israel."

Third, Tamar was a girl who respected the authority of her father. She said to Amnon, "Please speak to the king. He will not keep me from being married to you."

And finally, fourth, she was a beautiful woman. But this was the only thing that Amnon noticed about her. His strong feelings were based on this one thing only. But his feelings could not represent true love, because he did not know her well enough.

The second reason why I believe Amnon could not love Tamar was because he placed too much emphasis on sex. True love is much more than just having sex with a person. It makes up only one part of a relationship, but Amnon saw it as the only thing.

I believe that sex is overemphasized in our society. Advertisements and celebrities make people think that sex and true love are the same thing. But this is simply not true. You don't enter into a love relationship with another person by having sex with that person.

Regardless of how sweet the experience may seem, sex can never become the foundation for a strong marriage relationship. The Bible tells us that sex outside of marriage is wrong. And God does not give us guidelines without a reason for doing so. He knows that sex cannot become the foundation of true love. In fact, if done outside of marriage, it can destroy true love. When sex is an expression of the marriage covenant it is beautiful. When there is no marriage covenant, sex loses its meaning. When a man and

a woman have not promised true love to one another by working together to reflect God's image for the rest of their lives, there is no meaningful foundation for marriage. Under such conditions, God forbids sex. Amnon could not truly love Tamar, because he placed too much emphasis on sex.

The third reason why Amnon could not love Tamar was because he was selfish. He really wasn't thinking about Tamar. He was only thinking about himself. When Tamar said, "Please speak to the king. He will not keep me from being married to you," Amnon was not willing to listen. He couldn't wait, because he wanted to fulfill his own selfish desires. And so he raped Tamar.

According to the survey that was taken at the Taiwan National University, over ninety percent of the male students surveyed said that they thought it was OK to have sex as long as you have feelings of love for another person. But, in the same survey, over ninety percent of the male students also said that they wanted to marry a virgin. Obviously, such thinking represents a double standard. But most of all, it represents a very selfish attitude.

True love is not like this. A person who truly loves another person is willing to sacrifice himself in order to help another person receive the best. And helping a person experience eternal life is always the best. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life." That is true love.

True love will take time to get to know a person. It will not overemphasize sex. And it will sacrifice itself to help the other person receive the best. Because Amnon lacked all these things, it was impossible for him to truly love Tamar.

But we must be careful not to condemn his feelings, especially since most of us (if not all of us) have experienced the same kind of feelings. Amnon's mistake was not that he had these feelings; rather, it was that he failed to take his feelings to God. He failed to allow God to give him the strength to control his feelings.

God gives every person the ability to be able to tell the difference between true love and the feelings of selfish love that we all experience from time to time. If we do not take our feelings to God and use His Word to discover whether or not they are true, then we will become confused. We will become lovesick, and we will be driven to do things that will end up hurting other people and ourselves.

Let us make true love our standard. Let's work to understand what it means, and let us settle for nothing less.

Don't feel guilty if you are tempted with feelings that are below this high standard. We cannot stop temptation from coming our way. We cannot stop ourselves from having dreams.

But we can and we must stop ourselves from dwelling on the temptations and allowing the dreams to dominate our thoughts. We can and we should take all our feelings of love to God. And, if we discover those feelings do not meet His standards, then we should make sure we do not allow the feelings to determine our actions. And we should ask God to give us the strength to replace the selfish thoughts with godly thoughts.

This is what Amnon failed to do. We must learn from his failure. God has allowed this love story to be recorded in the Bible so that we can learn from it. It is a love story with a lesson. May God help us learn the lesson well.