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Sliding Doors **II Samuel 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33**

Thomas Aquinas once said, “True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God.”

The scene is London. A young British woman with long, reddish brown hair dons a handsome black suit, kisses her still sleeping boyfriend goodbye and leaves for work. Helen is employed in public relations and as she arrives in her first meeting of the day a sea of angry male faces greet her. She has “borrowed” four bottles of company vodka for her birthday party. Those around the table needed those bottles for entertaining a client. Needless to say, she is, as she says, “sacked.”

Helen makes her way to London’s subway system. As she descends the stairs to the Tube, a little girl is ascending them right in Helen’s path. The girl plays with her toy oblivious of Helen’s approach. Helen steps out of the way. In those few seconds that it takes to avoid the little girl, Helen just misses the sliding doors of the Tube. Those sliding doors represent an opportunity for Helen—a chance to make a choice.

Helen’s next choices fall like dominoes. She runs out of the Tube, hails a taxi, experiences an attempted mugging only to fall into a tree and cut her head. The kind taxi driver takes her to the hospital and then to her home where she just misses catching her boyfriend, Jerry, in the act of cheating on her. The following day there are no public relations jobs to be found so she starts waiting tables and selling sandwiches to local businesses in hopes of finding some way to survive financially. There is little about her life that speaks to peace. Helen clearly has not sought God’s will. “True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God.”

The scene I have been describing is taken from the movie, “Sliding Doors.” The movie’s character, Helen, is not unlike King David. Take a look at his life. David had those same significant sliding door opportunities to choose God’s will and he, too, missed them.

David starts out as a great young man of faith—with faith that could move mountains or in his case topple giants. His faithfulness leads him to be chosen as one of Israel’s greatest kings. And then it comes . . . that sliding door moment that sets his life on a trajectory of missing God’s will and causing struggle. David sees Bathsheba. He wants her. And, he takes her. Demonstrating impure motives, dishonesty, selfishness and a lack of love, he deceitfully arranges the death of her husband and then takes her for his wife. Their first child is a son—Amnon.

David must spend a lot of time indulging Amnon because Amnon’s actions demonstrate a young man who believes himself to be entitled. Amnon, like his father, sees a woman whom he wants. He takes her. He rapes her and then he refuses to marry her as the culture would require. She is his sister, Tamar. Their brother, Absalom, is so distraught over the ongoings that he exhorts and pleads with his father to enact justice.

This is another sliding door moment for David. David makes a choice to do absolutely nothing! No punishment for Amnon. No grace for Tamar. The result is that

Absalom takes justice into his own hands. He murders his brother and then the parental bones of David's body appear to wake up. He is grieved and furious. He banishes Absalom from the kingdom and grieves for years! At the behest of his military commander, David invites Absalom back into the kingdom but refuses to lay eyes on him for two solid years. Then suddenly, David reaches out to Absalom but it is too little, too late. The handsome Absalom now wants David to pay with his kingdom and with his life if that is what it takes. Absalom recruits an army from David's own kingdom. The numbers of Absalom's army far surpass the numbers of David's. David suggests to his commanders that he will go out into battle with them. That is what most kings did back in the day. They led their troops! By this point, it has been years since David did such a thing. In this interchange with his troops, it is almost as if he is asking for their permission to **not** go. Is he afraid of his own son? What is David thinking?! The men "convince" him to stay back and David concedes—though admittedly there wasn't a lot of prodding needed. This is where our Biblical story picks up: READ II SAMUEL 18:5-9.

"Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." For my sake. For my sake. The words ring over and over. Is David deeply concerned for Absalom, really? Is David more concerned with the potential for his own grief? Tom Peacock pointed out to me in the discussion of this passage that when parents bring children into the world it is a wonderful event. But, if they are honest, there is at least a part of them that sees in each child a twinge of the parents' own immortality. There is something that hopes that something of that parent will live on. Is David worried that something of his own immortality is at risk? Or is David concerned for assuaging his own guilt? The words seem to assume that David's army will win and he will maintain the kingdom. So, that being the case, if Absalom does live on without harm, and David has squared off with Absalom as his son seems to desire with David winning fair and square, at the very least, David can assuage his own guilt over not doing justice by Tamar when he had the chance. Maybe amends can be made. "True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God."

The battle begins. The terrain is tough, but David's men know how to manage it. They divide and conquer. Absalom's army is caught off guard and Absalom finds himself hanging by his hair in a tree. Absalom is not stupid. But he is vain. He has a sword. He could cut his hair and free himself but there is nothing here to suggest that he attempts anything like that. Absalom's ego is too huge and thus in the way of Absalom listening to the will of God. Absalom has set himself up. "True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God."

READ VERSE 15, VERSES 31-33. "True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God." David does not know peace. David is deeply moved. His cry is heart-wrenching! Here is a parent who has lost his beloved child and in spite of the child's rebellion he surely loved him. But, in David's heart . . . and perpetuated in the hearts of his sons . . . was a failure to seek God's way . . . a failure to strive for purity . . . a failure to strive for honesty . . . a failure to strive for **unselfishness** . . . and a failure to love. True love would have had David on the battlefield with his troops trying to protect his son. True love would have had David on the battlefield willing to risk his own life for his son's sake. O Absalom, would that I had died instead of you. The words are

easily said. But actions speak louder than words. “True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God.”

The movie, *Sliding Doors*, shows what would have happened if Helen had made it through the doors of the Tube. She would have met a new man, James, who would have consoled her. She would have kept running into James in different places. She would have cut her hair, become a blonde and at James’ encouragement launched her own small public relations business. She would have fallen in love with a man who would cherish her and essentially, she would have sought God’s will. “True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God.”

What if David had chosen to simply seek God’s will in the first place when he looked at Bathsheba? There would have been no Amnon and no conflict of hatred between brothers to ensue. By David’s daily commitment to seeking God’s will, his heart would be changing in every day and he would represent for his family and his kingdom a man of purity, honesty, unselfishness and love. These are the attributes of God and of his will.

True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God. But how do we know the will of God? To know the will of God we first must learn to listen to God. Two months ago I stood before you and said that if “you aren’t listening to God then you don’t have a relationship with him. It is that simple.” It is that simple and I stand by what I said, but in the months since that day, I have realized that I have done you a great disservice. I have not taught you how to listen to God. How can I expect you to do something if I have not taught you? The leadership of the church universal has done us all a great disservice. In 34 years of growing up in the church, not once has anyone in the church taught me how to listen to God! That is sad commentary. Today, this is my sliding door experience. Today, I am committing to you to teach you how to listen. In your bulletin today is an insert that offers you a guide for listening to God. I have put this together for you. Your sliding door experience is in what you do with that insert. You can throw it away or you can stick it in your Bible, pull it out every day and practice what is there. If you would like further explanation of what is written on the page you may meet me in the chapel after the worship service today. After today, you will not be able to say that you do not know how to listen to God. You will not be able to say that you do not know how to know the will of God and you will not be able to say that you do not know how to find true peace.

“True peace exists in not separating ourselves from the will of God.” In 1903, Henry Burt Wright became a professor of religion at Yale University. Every single day, without fail he would close his classes with one phrase. It is his phrase that I use to close our time together today. “The world has yet to see what can be accomplished by, with and through one person totally committed to doing the will of God. Will you be that person?” Will you be that person? Amen.