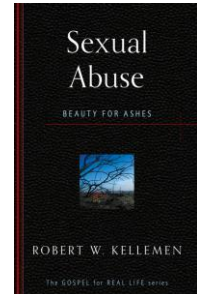


## **An Excerpt from *Sexual Abuse: Beauty for Ashes***

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**Note:** The following is a brief excerpt from the P & R Publishing/Association of Biblical Counselors booklet by Dr. Bob Kellemen—*Sexual Abuse: Beauty for Ashes*. To learn more about the booklet, visit Dr. Kellemen's [Book Page](#).



### **Understanding the Damage Done by Sexual Abuse: 2 Samuel 13**

In looking to 2 Samuel 13, I am *not* implying that this one passage has all the wisdom we need to address this complex and painful issue. Perhaps a little personal history will help to place this passage into perspective. When I teach a semester-long seminary class on sexual abuse recovery, I start by telling my students that “God drug me kicking and screaming into a focus on sexual abuse counseling.” By that, I am not implying a lack of compassion for those who have been sexually abuse. I’m stating the opposite. I feel deeply for those who have been sexually abused. So deeply, that especially at first, counseling abuse victims was overwhelming for me.

I vividly remember the first sexual abuse survivor that I worked with—Tim. Initially, I felt clueless how to help Tim. He educated me as much as I counseled him—helping me to understand the damage done by and the dynamics related to sexual abuse. In seeking to minister to Tim, I turned to another source—the Bible, examining it literally cover to cover to see what it teaches about sexual abuse and sexual abuse recovery. Through that process, I’ve come to see that God’s Word provides us with robust, relevant, relational wisdom for addressing the horrors of sexual abuse.

Tamar's narrative in 2 Samuel 13 is part of that larger biblical portrait of sexual abuse and sexual abuse recovery. It remarkably represents themes woven throughout the rest of Scripture's teaching on sexual abuse—the damage done and the path to God's healing hope.

### **Why Examine the Damage Done?**

During my three decades of ministry as a biblical counselor, I've become convinced that we need to develop a biblical "sufferology"—a biblical theology of and perspective on suffering and healing. The Bible is brimming with it. We can hardly open a single page and not see God addressing suffering.<sup>i</sup> If we are to be truly biblical counselors and one-another ministers, then we must examine the damage done to the souls of those who have suffered sexual abuse.

We also need a clear picture of the prime strategy of the Evil One. The Prince of Darkness is our most radical enemy. It is his strategy to use the horrors of sexual abuse to attempt to destroy that which enables us to be most human: faith, hope, peace, and love. To win the battle in Christ, through Christ, and by Christ, we must first name the damage that has been done to us as bearers of the image of God.

### **Our Journey In: Compass Points of the Soul**

God has not left us clueless. Throughout the Bible, including in 2 Samuel 13, God lays before us what we need to know to grasp the primary damage of sexual abuse. The Bible teaches us that sexual abuse is ultimately spiritual abuse—it attacks us body *and* soul.

In Tamar's life, we see this damage, this attempted destruction, in four primary ways. As we explore Tamar's narrative, we'll use the language of "a journey." This allows her story to show us four road map markers, four compass points, on the *journey into the*

*soul* of a person who has been sexually abused. This helps us to avoid the idea of “stages” or “phases” which might mistakenly cause us to think that there exists some common, linear, nice and neat process. There’s nothing nice or neat about sexual abuse! It is evil and complex, awful and hideous. Each situation is different and each victim of abuse is a unique image bearer. Yet, we can detect some “themes” that occur across Scripture and across the lives and souls of those who have been abused. In 2 Samuel 13, we consider four such themes.

### **Journey One: The Damage of the Loss of Trust—The Attempted Destruction of Faith (2 Samuel 13:1-12)**

Amnon is King David’s firstborn, the heir apparent to the throne. He also happens to be the step-brother of the beautiful Tamar. And he happens to be in love with her, or so he says—God labels Amnon’s feelings incestuous lust. His unbridled lusts and his unfulfilled longings are eating him alive until his shrewd friend, Jonadab, schemes up a plan to get Amnon alone with Tamar.

Pretending to be ill, Amnon tells daddy, King David, that he would like to have his sister, Tamar, bring him some food. David becomes the unwitting go-between, sending his daughter into the lion’s den with his son. Innocently, naively, and lovingly, Tamar prepares a feast fit for a king-to-be. Amnon, according to plan, refuses to eat and sends everyone out of the room.

We pick up the story at 2 Samuel 13:10-12.

Then Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand.” And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her

brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, “Come to bed with me, my sister.” “Don’t, my brother!” she said to him.

Here we witness the damage of the loss of trust. Did you catch the phrase, “my sister” and the phrase, “my brother”? In fact, the inspired narrator repeatedly emphasizes that *this is family here!* Twenty times in 13:1-22 we read of family ties: “son of, sister of, your brother, your father.” The very person who should protect and cherish Tamar, violates her instead. Amnon uses Tamar’s untainted trust as a doorway to gain access to her body and soul. She opens her heart to her father and brother only to have it betrayed and crushed.

Satan is so shrewd. He knows that God built us to trust Him. He also knows that because of the Fall, our inclination is to trust ourselves or anyone or anything but God. So, *Satan loves to feed our distrust of God by having those who ought to be trustworthy, betray us.* He wants *faith to look foolish.*

Can you picture it? God is wooing us back to Himself, drawing us home to His holy and loving heart, to Christ our faithful Savior. All the while Satan is whispering, “You can’t trust Him. You can’t trust anyone. You can’t even trust *family!* Don’t be foolish. Trust only yourself!” Evil wins the battle for our soul to the extent that we experience trust in others and in God as dangerous and foolish.

Sexual abuse, especially incestuous sexual abuse—abuse by a relative—shrinks the heart, shrivels the soul. Ashley’s description depicts this powerfully. “I responded to my abuse by erecting a wall up around my heart so that I could close the door of trust to God and others. I picture myself slamming the door shut, double-bolting it, bracing my shoulder

against it, and trying with all my might to keep God and everybody else out.” She concluded that it was unsafe to open her soul to anyone...including God.

In this, Ashley is much like Tamar. In 13:13 she speaks of her “disgrace” and in 13:20 the text describes her as “desolate” (we’ll examine both words in more detail later). Each Hebrew word speaks of *relational struggle*: alienation from God, separation from others, and dis-integration from self. Sexual abuse is *relational* abuse that seeks to severe our capacity for mutual connection.

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<sup>1</sup>For my development of a biblical “model” of “sufferology” see, Robert Kelleman, *God’s Healing for Life’s Losses: How to Find Hope for the Hurting* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2010).