

Passiveness

A television show called “*What Would You Do?*” features hidden cameras out in public that record staged scenarios for the purpose of trying to catch the public’s reaction. Ultimately, the show is trying to expose how dangerous being passive can be. In each episode, actors will create a scene which is meant to evoke bystanders to interrupt and engage the situation. The problem is, too many bystanders sit idly by and do nothing. For example, one episode takes place in a public park. An elementary aged girl, a child-actor, is sitting on a bench waiting for her ride after school. Several unaware members of the general public are also sitting nearby. Soon, an older man, also an actor, approaches the girl and tries to convince her that he’s a friend of her mom, and that he has been sent to take her home. The girl keeps insisting that she doesn’t know him, yet the man keeps trying to coax the girl to take his hand and get into his car. While this is going on, hidden cameras are catching the reactions of the bystanders; both men and women nearby who sometimes engage and protect the girl, and other times passively watch as the girl eventually goes off with the stranger. The scenario is repeated several times with mixed results. What would you do? Would you intervene and come the rescue of the girl? Or, would you remain passive, watching and hoping that somebody else steps in and does the right thing? This essay aims to show the consequences of being passive and draws attention to the sin of omission.

There are two kinds of sins; sins of commission and sins of omission. I sin when I commit acts that I ought to have avoided. I also sin when I omit acts that I ought to have completed. James 4:17, ***“Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*** This is the sin of omission. If I choose to be passive then I’m guilty of the sin of omission because I’m neglecting to do something that God expects me to do. Jesus teaches His disciples that on the Day of Judgment, non-believers who think that they are righteous, will learn that they are not righteous at all, and for many reasons. One of these reasons will be their sins of omission. Jesus speaks to this in Matthew 25:41-45, ***“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’*** On the Day of Judgment, Jesus will remind the wicked of the many opportunities in which they neglected to engage and assist others; failing to do what was right. This is a reminder that we can’t be passive and assume, *“Someone else will do something. That’s not my concern.”*

The Bible provides other warnings about being passive, but there’s no greater example than what took place at the beginning with Adam. Never before has the passiveness of one man had such far-reaching consequences. While his wife Eve was being tempted by Satan, Adam stood by, fully aware of what was going on, and chose passive silence while Satan convinced Eve to take and eat of the forbidden fruit. Adam joined her and ate as well, and from his sin, all mankind is doomed. Genesis 3:1-6 says, ***“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You***

***shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die."* The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."**

One might say, "That was Eve's fault! If it wasn't for Eve, we'd all be playing naked volleyball right now in the garden of Eden." If that's your opinion, you'd be wrong. The responsibility of the sin of mankind falls squarely on Adam's shoulders, as Romans 5 reiterates. For example, Romans 5:12 says, ***"Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men."*** So, why does the blame fall solely on Adam? The reasons for this are as follows. Adam was the head over his marriage with Eve; something the Bible calls headship (1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:23, 1 Timothy 2:11-15). In a nutshell, headship is a responsibility that God has placed on the husband to be the final authority in the marriage union. In part, the husband's role is to provide and protect, and when it comes to decision making, he's to weigh his wife's input. Ultimately though, the burden of the final decision rests on the husband. As such, the husband will give an account to the Lord. This is demonstrated in Genesis as God instructed Adam, not Eve, regarding the guidelines for the forbidden fruit, and later God sought Adam, not Eve, to be the point person to give an account of what happened after eating the forbidden fruit. It was at this time that Adam was charged with following his wife's direction, instead of obeying the Lord, as Genesis 3:17 says, ***"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you..."***

When Eve was being tempted by Satan, Adam was supposed to stand in the gap, intervene, rescue his wife from temptation, and correct her thinking about what God had said regarding the fruit. Instead of intervening, Adam shrunk back and chose to be passive. Satan deceived Eve and she took the fruit and ate. Eve was operating by deception. Adam on the other hand wasn't deceived at all, but acted out of conscious rebellion; fully aware of the wrong-doing and passively sinning anyway. 1 Timothy 2:14, ***"it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman."*** This verse exposes the heightened nature of Adam's sin, acting in full awareness, having no alibi for why he sinned. Nonetheless, Adam still tries to pass the blame onto others, as passive people usually do. We see this in Genesis 3:12, as Adam gives his account to the Lord. Adam said, ***"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."*** Notice how Adam tries to pass the blame to Eve, and even to God, "You gave her to me!" Needless to say, Adam's excuses didn't go well with God.

Another Biblical example of passiveness is King David's handling of the rape of his daughter, Tamar. You can read the full account of this in 2 Samuel, beginning in chapter 13. Interestingly enough, the two preceding chapters, 2 Samuel 11-12, deal with David's notorious sins, namely his sexually immoral choices with Bathsheba, and then having Bathsheba's husband killed so that David could bring her into his cluster of wives. On a side note, the gravity of David's sin goes to show the depth and breadth of God's patient mercy and love for David. In all that David did wrong, the Lord didn't cast David aside. Instead, the Lord brought David out of seasons of sin and into new seasons of righteousness. What a testimony of God's loving goodness! When God says that David was a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), this doesn't mean that whatever David did was pleasing to the Lord, but it implies that despite David's downfalls, David was a man who would humbly

repent, turn in faith back to the Lord, and worship the Lord with sincerity. With that being said, this essay focuses on some of David's decisions to be passive.

As we explore the events of 2 Samuel 13, it starts off a little while after David and Bathsheba had a son named Solomon. By the time Solomon was born, David had already had many kids with his other wives. Where this story picks up, those other kids are grown into young adults. The events we're examining focus on 3 of David's kids; Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar. Amnon was David's firstborn; whose mother was Ahinoam. Absalom was David's third son; whose mother was Maacah. Tamar was David's daughter; whose mother was also Maacah. Another quick side note, if you're wondering if God ever condoned polygamy, the answer is absolutely not. For example, the Bible says that David was sinful for having multiple wives (Deuteronomy 17:17), but you can read more on that subject by reading my essay called, "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage."

Absalom, Amnon, and Tamar were older kids who would have been well aware of David's choices surrounding Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. This is a reminder that our kids are watching us and that our children are prone to lean toward immoral choices when we as parents make immoral choices. Sadly, that's exactly what unfolds here. The account begins in 2 Samuel 13:1-2, ***"Now it was after this that Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar, and Amnon the son of David loved her. Amnon was so frustrated because of his sister Tamar that he made himself ill, for she was a virgin, and it seemed hard to Amnon to do anything to her."*** Let's unpack these verses.

"Now it was after this," that is, after the events of David's notable relationship with Bathsheba and other events that followed. Verse 1 continues by introducing those kids of David who are central to the story; the siblings Absalom and Tamar, and their half-brother Amnon. ***"Amnon the son of David loved her,"*** the ***"her"*** spoken of is his half-sister, Tamar. This wasn't love, in the way you might think. This was a lustful passion, reduced to nothing more than an emotional reaction to her beauty. Daily, Amnon burned with lust for Tamar. Obviously, pursuing his sister sexually was forbidden, for reasons such as incest and fornication. Maybe Amnon thought to himself, *"My dad wanted a woman he couldn't have, and yet he took her. Why can't I have a woman I'm forbidden from taking?"*

"Amnon was so frustrated because of his sister Tamar that he made himself ill." This type of illness refers to the turmoil that he brought upon himself, spurred on by constant fantasy. Daily he'd torture himself over his lusts which produced mental distress, sexual frustration, and knots in the stomach. What heightened his anguish was that he couldn't think of any way to bring these fantasies to reality, ***"and it seemed hard to Amnon to do anything to her."*** A significant part of Amnon's turmoil is that he had no access to Tamar. He wrestled with ideas of how he might seduce her, but there was no opportunity to get her alone. This reason for this is due to the fact that, ***"she was a virgin."*** This critical fact explains her limited accessibility. You might think, *"How difficult would it be to get alone with your own sister? After all, I grew up with a sister, and I often couldn't get away from her!"* We have to understand that this wasn't any ordinary household, nor an ordinary family. David was the King of Israel, and as such he lived in a palace. His wives had their own homes in which they raised children they had with David. These separate homes may have been private additions on the palace. These homes would have been secured by staff, and the virgin daughter of the king was especially under a watchful eye and would have been kept from the company of men. When David wanted to see his

family, they were either summoned to come to him, or he would make a particular point to go visit them. In short, this was not like having your sister's bedroom across the hallway, nor would you pass your dad in the living room throughout the day. These realities brought Amnon to his wits end.

One day, Amnon is speaking with his cousin and close friend, Jonadab. After Amnon shares his desire for Tamar, Jonadab convinced Amnon of a plot to seduce her. In summary, Amnon would fake a type of illness, so that he'd need to stay in bed. Then he'd try to convince his dad, King David, to summon Tamar to come and attend to him. Here's how it went down as recorded in verses 6-8, ***"So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, 'Please let my sister Tamar come and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand.'" Then David sent to the house for Tamar, saying, 'Go now to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him.' So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house."***

Upon hearing that Amnon is ill, King David pays a special visit to Amnon at Ahinoam's house. Once Amnon sees that his father is concerned for him, he takes advantage of his dad's care and makes a bold request, ***"let my sister Tamar come and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand."*** I'm guessing that this awkward and creepy request troubled David, despite the fact that he agreed to it. Afterall, the king would have had the best chefs in the kingdom at his command, and a bounty of servants, not to mention the best doctors. Any expert could have been summoned at once. Certainly David thought it a little disturbing that Amnon wanted to watch his sister make food and then eat it out of her hand. As a dad myself, of both a son and a daughter, I would have had questions. However, David passively obliges. David summons Tamar from her house to come attend to Amnon, therefore, ***"Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house."*** When the king calls, you go. In the same way David had men go to Bathsheba's house and take Bathsheba back to the king's chambers.

Here's what follows after Tamar arrives at Amnon's house. ***"And she took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. She took the pan and dished them out before him, but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, 'Have everyone go out from me.' So everyone went out from him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, 'Bring the food into the bedroom, that I may eat from your hand.' So Tamar took the cakes which she had made and brought them into the bedroom to her brother Amnon,"*** 2 Samuel 13:8-10.

Tamar prepares her brother's food, ***"in his sight."*** Apparently, the doorway to Amnon's bedroom was open and he was able to watch her in the adjacent room making the food. We know this because after she prepares the food, he later asks her to come into his bedroom to serve it to him, ***"Bring the food into the bedroom."*** Before she joins him in the bedroom, Amnon calls for the attending servants to leave. At least some of these would have been attendees of Tamar, as she would not be allowed to go anywhere alone. They were likely eunuchs, which are men who have been castrated. Historically, making a male servant a eunuch was done to men who were assigned to the service of the king's household. Castration helped ensure they wouldn't be susceptible to sexual temptation around the king's family. I believe this is likely the case here because the word ***"everyone,"*** where Amnon says, ***"Have everyone go out from me,"*** is a masculine noun in original Hebrew, implying male servants.

What happens next is tragic. Here's an overview of the events that unfold. Now alone in the bedroom, Amnon first tries to seduce Tamar, but when she refuses, he rapes her. Afterwards, Tamar goes back home and tells her brother Absalom about the rape. Absalom is enraged, but he cautions her to keep this news to herself, because in his anger he secretly plots to get revenge on Amnon. Meanwhile, King David hears of the rape and is angry. However, David passively does nothing; no punishment for Amnon, not even a confrontation. Fast forward two years and Absalom finally avenges his sister by murdering Amnon. Word reaches King David that Absalom murdered Amnon, but again, David passively does nothing to Absalom.

Consider how David's sons act in the same manner as their father; sexual immorality followed by murder. In both cases David does nothing. I believe David chose passiveness because of his own sin. He failed to discipline Amnon, because he was guilty of his own sexual immorality with Bathsheba. David failed to discipline Absalom, because David himself was guilty of murdering Bathsheba's husband. Even if that was the case, that's no excuse for being passive.

How could things have been different? After David had repented of his sins concerning Bathsheba, David ought to have disciplined his kids; speaking often to them about sin, consequences, and repentance. Maybe doing so would have moved Amnon's heart in a different direction, from lust to repentance. Maybe if David had severely punished Amnon for raping Tamar, perhaps Absalom wouldn't have felt the compulsion to seek his own form of justice.

We all sin, and our kids know it. As a dad, I'm responsible for modeling repentance and forgiveness, and for teaching my kids the value of correction and rebuke. I'm also tasked, as the man, to ensure that my kids are disciplined. This doesn't mean that my wife can't discipline too, but no household should have a passive dad where the wife is expected to handle the disciplining.

My Own Testimony

I'm reminded of a terrible season in my own life, when my daughter was molested by my father. Upon learning this news, my wife and I immediately sought care and counsel for our daughter, who was 9 years old at the time. Not long after, my father went to prison as a result of his choices. All of these events caused a great deal of trauma; for my daughter as well as our whole family. My wife and I had many conversations with other families who had also experienced this type of abuse. Most of these were families in the local church, friends of ours. It was great to have the church family minister to us. However, we learned some sad news through all of this. Many of the parents we'd talked to whose kids had been sexually abused, chose passiveness and did nothing to respond to the circumstances. Many parents spoke of the guilt they've felt for years, realizing they chose to keep quiet about everything. Instead of getting the help that their kids needed, they were more concerned about protecting the perpetrator, which was usually another family member. Additionally, their passiveness was brought on by the fear of public shame if the news got out. Ultimately, fear and peer-pressure caused them to sweep the whole ordeal under the rug.

For these parents, the consequences of their passiveness have been severe. Many of them spoke about the short-term and long-term trauma their kids experienced. Some parents shared about the resentment that their kids feel toward them for doing nothing. In some cases, their kids who are now adults, will barely speak

to them because the parents did nothing to help them years ago. Other parents who chose passiveness shared how their abused kids eventually turned to drugs and alcohol to cope with their trauma. Sadly, families who cover up sin will discover that sin permeates into far greater areas than they ever imagined. You can read more about my family's story in an essay I wrote titled, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation."

In conclusion, as a Christian I don't want to be passive about things that I ought to have a decisive attitude toward. Life's circumstances demand an appropriate response, a godly response, not a passive response.