This week I met with a surprising number of men and women who are struggling in their Christian walk. Sin hurts.

One of them said that he just wanted to be in heaven and wondered why God kept him in this fallen world.

The answer is simple – God still has a plan and purpose for him in this world.

As Christians, we have the incredible privilege of being a part of what God is doing – being used to advance the Kingdom, telling the gospel to others and building up the body.

However, we need to be aware that there are many factors that inhibit us in this God-given task. Selfishness, worldly desires, laziness, fear.

But this morning, I want to suggest that one of the greatest hindrances to us fulfilling our commission is disunity in the church.

United – we are ready to reach the world.

Divided – we are so focussed internally the world remains untouched.

One of the shortest Psalms of David is one of my favourites. Psalm 133:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! Unity among the brothers. It is indeed precious and wonderful – but unfortunately – it is all too rare.

There are so many passages in the Old Testament and the New Testament that speak directly to the need to fight for unity.
However, if you have been a Christian any length of time – you will most likely have encountered a fractured church leadership, seen church coups and perhaps been a part of church splits.

You will have seen friendships and lives destroyed.

Some even lose their faith.

And the great commission lies sidelined during this disunity.

God hates this.

In 1 Corinthians 3:17 Paul says if anyone destroys the church of God through divisions and factions – God will destroy them.

In Ephesians 4:1-3 Paul urged the church to be vigilant to maintain its unity.

Yet despite these clear warnings – the ambition of men, the pride of men, the sin of men – mean we have not seen the last division, split or disunity in a church congregation.

Our passage this morning has one clear message for each of us. If we want to fulfil our God-given purpose in this world we must:

**Strive to be a uniter not a divider of God’s people.**

Brothers and sisters, it is so easy to become divisive. It is so hard to become a force for unity.

This morning we will look at a warning concerning the danger of disunity among the people of God.

As we work our way through this passage – I want you to be aware that you can be a force for division either by being a focal point for disunity or by joining in a division without good cause or even by merely standing idle when division brews.

Let me remind you of where we are.
We are studying the book of 2 Samuel.

Here is how I want to summarise the whole book of 2 Samuel.

1-10 Sin can seem far off
11-12 Sin comes even to the best
13-20 Sin has devastating consequences
21-24 Sin need not be the end

In the first 10 chapters we saw a David who was a confident, godly King. Sin seemed far off. But although a good man, he was just a man.

In chapters 11 and 12 we saw sin burst out into his life. Sin came even to the best.

We saw his lust, adultery, cover up and murder of his close friend Uriah.

As part of the judgment for this sin – the Lord declared to David – the sword shall never depart from your house (2 Samuel 12:10).

We saw the first manifestation of this judgment in the death of the child born to David and Bathsheba after their adultery.

Then chapters 13-20 describe how the sword continues to wreak havoc on the house of David. Sin has devastating consequences.

Last week we looked at chapters 13-14 where we saw how David’s failures as a father caused great distress his family.

This morning we come to chapter 15. In the next six chapters we see how David’s sin ended up tearing apart his wider family – the nation of Israel.

Let me be clear about this. Today, the people of God are a part of the church not the nation of Israel. The church is run by elders not Kings and Priests.

However, while there are many differences between Israel and the church – there are many similarities.
And one of the areas of similarity is how an ambitious, factious man can destroy the unity of God’s people and derail their task in this world.

One of the reasons churches have been split and torn apart is that we have not been vigilant for those in our midst with a spirit of Absalom.

Let me remind you about Absalom.

Absalom was the third oldest son of King David.

As a young man he saw a great injustice in his family. His half brother, Amnon, the heir to the throne fell in lust with his sister Tamar.

Amnon raped Tamar leaving her a desolate woman.

And King David failed to act. Absalom waited two years for David to act. David did not. So Absalom plotted revenge. He would kill Amnon and avenge Tamar.

His plan went to perfection. He killed Amnon and David did not act. He spent three years in exile at his grandfather’s house.

Finally, Joab intervened. By means of a parable he got David to bring Absalom back. But David could not forgive him. He refused to see him.

This created even greater bitterness.

After two years of this. Absalom acted. He got Joab to force David to allow him access to the palace.

But the damage was done.

Absalom set his heart on being King and began to devote his considerable talents to becoming King.

The tale of Absalom is a classic story. Family, friends, leaders … who once were united, fall out and then wind up in outright war.

In a church setting the reasons for the fall out can be personal, doctrinal, the direction of the church – just about anything. Throughout the years, churches have split over the most minor of issues.

But with Absalom – the issue is not doctrine – or the good of the Kingdom – or some practical issue – it is personal – it is revenge and ambition. He wanted to be King.

This is Keating/Hawke – Costello/Howard – Gillard/Rudd – Rudd/Gillard.

It happens all the time.
You would hope this is not commonly found in churches. Unfortunately it is all too common.

How many times over the years have we seen the associate pastor, youth pastor, elder who feels frustrated, overlooked, aggrieved? The church is not achieving its potential, ignoring youth, irrelevant in its music. What the church really needs is better leadership --- they need me!

For a time there can be a papering over the cracks – like David and Absalom – but there is bitterness and resentment below the surface – that finally leads to outright division.

There is a lesson here for every one of us. We are human. We are sinners. We struggle in relationships – marriage, parenting, friendships, leadership. We see only one side of the issue. We feel frustrated. And this can overflow in division.

Again – let me be very clear. I am not saying there is no place for action if a church is led by poor leaders.

But there is a right and a wrong way to deal with problems in leadership.

The right way is to pray – seek the Word – make sure your grounds are valid and approach them with your concerns. Show them biblically or practically what your issue is.

If there is a problem be a part of the solution – not enhancing the problem.

Seek to be a contributor not just a critic.

If the elders clearly do not meet the biblical criteria – then the church is in trouble. You have to decide if God would have you seek to try and change the leaders. But more likely you need to leave.

If the elders are godly men and they just don’t see it your way – you either have to decide this is not that big a deal – you will live with it – or you need to leave.

The alternative is to develop a spirit of Absalom – and foster division in the church – and it is rare for that to lead to anything positive.

I trust the elders here at Grace are approachable. I trust we have listened to your concerns when you have brought them. We won’t always agree with you – but I trust we give you a good hearing.

If ever you feel the leadership of this church is failing – either in general or you personally – come to us and hopefully we can resolve it.

Don’t develop the spirit of Absalom, don’t become vulnerable to someone with the spirit of Absalom and don’t just stand idle if you see division brewing.

Our passage this morning focuses on two men Absalom and David.
Please don't get me wrong. Both men are complex.

Don’t think I am painting Absalom as the black hat baddie who is always wrong and David as the white hat hero who is always right.

Like all of us they were a mixture of good and bad.

Absalom had genuine grievances with David. But they turned into personal ambition and revenge. He was not after the good of the Kingdom but personal advancement.

Absalom looked good on the surface – but it turns out that he is not the kind of man you want as a leader.

David is mixed bag. He is like most of us. He has areas of his life where he is strong and areas of his life with weaknesses. None of us have it all together in every area of our lives.

We have seen some of David’s weaknesses – his lust and murder.

We have seen his faults as a man and as a father.

I do not want you to follow in his footsteps in these areas at all.

But as a leader – as a King – there is much about David that is commendable.

In our passage this morning – David is shown as a humble, godly man in the way he responds to this division in the kingdom. He is a man we can learn much from.

Again – a little disclaimer. I am not saying David acts perfectly in his response to this threat.

As a King – David does things that are not good practice in a church. For example, he sends men as spies – and false counsellors – into Absalom’s camp.

Church leaders don’t want to be doing that.

But, we will see that he had a humble, pastoral, devout heart that we do want to see in our leaders – that we do want to see in ourselves.

My point is this. There are things regarding the spirit of Absalom to beware of and there are things regarding the spirit of David to emulate.

So look with me first at the marks of an Absalom spirit.

The first mark is that he is proud.
Absalom is the young turk who feels he is not given his due who has convinced himself the kingdom needs a change of kings – they need him.

In chapter 14 verses 25-27 we find a few things about Absalom. He is the son of the King. He was one handsome guy and he knew it. He had good looking kids. But, his pride and joy was his magnificent head of hair.

I don’t have good hair – I have never had good hair. Maybe that is why I have never quite understood the whole pride in hair thing – but Absalom clearly was proud of his hair.

We begin in 2 Samuel 15:1:

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him.

After David allowed him back into the palace – he made sure everyone knew he was back. He travelled by chariot with fifty men running before him.

I have tried to picture this. You are standing on the street and men start streaming by. 5, 10, 20, 40 ... 50 handsome young men – running. Then a chariot with supermodel Absalom and his long locks flowing in the breeze.

This is some spectacle. This is announcing to everyone that he is back. The son of the King. The heir apparent. You need to know – the age of Absalom is coming.

I want to say – beware the man who feels he has to let everyone know how good he is. How smart, how well read, how gifted, how good looking. The one who wants you to know he is so good you need him.

Pride comes before a fall.

Let another’s lips praise you.

Let me mention a few names:

Abraham ... Moses ... Jeremiah ... Paul ... ... Jesus.

I could name twenty more – but could you ever imagine any of them getting a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before them regularly?

You just couldn't.

Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross. Even in His triumphal entry it was humbly on the back of a single donkey’s colt.

Even King David – the David of Scripture is not a man I could imagine ever contemplating such a spectacle.
Beware the proud man.

There is a second mark of an Absalom spirit – he is political.

Israel was not a democracy – it was a theocracy – to be run by the God appointed King – not the popular guy.

But Absalom is savvy. Even in a theocracy, if you get the support of the people you can have yourself a coup.

But look at verses 2-6 of chapter 15.

And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, “From what city are you?” And when he said, “Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel,” Absalom would say to him, “See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you.” Then Absalom would say, “Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.” And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him.

This screams politician. It almost seems Absalom paved the way for political campaigning. I am sure he kissed babies as well.

You can hear him:

I know full well that my father doesn’t care about your issues – but if I were King – I would deal with your issues – you would get justice from me.

If you want something done – I am your man.

Let handsome Absalom kiss your baby ma’am.

Remember – Absalom for King!

*In this way Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*

If only they knew. Absalom could care less about giving them justice and a voice. Absalom is not after a better kingdom.

Absalom is after one thing – the throne.

But to get there he needs supporters.
Winston Churchill made a famous statement to the House of Commons in 1947:

Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

Why is democracy a bad form of government?

Because politicians need 50.1% of the vote. Many of the most significant reforms in history have faced massive opposition. They were unpopular. Voters don’t like it. It helps someone else not me but I will have to help pay for it.

Many of these reforms simply failed to get through in democracies.

Voters want to know – what will you do for me? Absalom knew that.

But great leaders ask – what does the nation need – regardless of how popular it is?

Look at the incredible struggles men like Wilberforce and Lincoln faced to pass laws against slavery.

Democracy often struggles to make the right choice if it is hard.

So why are the other forms worse?

Because while democracy has some accountability – the people – Kings, dictators and generals have no accountability.

An ungodly King or dictator is a terrible situation – and all men are sinners. The best of men struggle with ambition and pride.

Kings were not meant to be elected – but Absalom knew – get enough people on your side and you can seize the throne.

Let me draw a parallel with the church.

God in His wisdom did not intend the church to be a democracy with the most popular men elected to lead.

He put the authority in the hands of elders. Elders are to be godly men who meet God-given qualifications. Elders are not meant to be political.

We are not meant to have Elders lobbying for votes. I will listen to you. I will make sure we get better coffee and supper. Vote Elder Green.

Elders often have to make decisions that are godly – but might not be popular.
However, the history of the church is filled with men who decided to take the Absalom route – they lobbied for power. Get people angry with the leaders and on your side.

Beware the man who lobbies for power in the church without good reason.

Let me be clear – ungodly elders are a disaster. They lead the church and if they are not godly the result is terrible. Ungodly elders are worse than any form of congregational leadership – so if they are not the right men – run – get out of that church!

If they clearly do not meet the qualifications – if they make ungodly decisions – if they don’t care for the flock – then they should step down – and if they don’t – you get out!

But beware the man who lobbies for power in the church without good, biblical reason.

The one who whispers. There is no one to hear you out. If I were an elder – If I were pastor – you could come to me and I would hear you out – and I would give you justice.

An elder has a divine constituency of one. We are to please God not man.

That means many of the decisions we make will be unpopular with some section of the congregation.

People of God – affirm godly men – not politicians to run God’s church – and if they are godly – do as Hebrews 13:17 says and:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

There is a third mark of an Absalom spirit – he is a hypocrite.

Look at verses 7-12.

For four years Absalom undermines David and talks himself up.

I struggled with what to term this mark – Conspirator/Liar/Deceiver.

I settled on hypocrite because Absalom makes himself look pious and godly. I made a vow to the Lord – please let me go and fulfil that vow. He sounds godly.

But that seeming pious devotion is nothing but a pretext to launch his rebellion. He sends messengers throughout Israel – when the trumpet sounds – declare – Absalom is King – Absalom is King!
He invited 200 guests who knew nothing of the conspiracy – they just got caught up in it all.

Beware the man who sounds godly but his actions are manipulative and deceptive. The homegroup meetings merely used to rally support against the elders – but the reasons sound hollow and ambitious. The meetings no one is supposed to talk about.

The little lies that are necessary to keep things under wraps.

Beware the hypocrite – who seems pious but his actions betray his heart.

Absalom looked holy – he was ambitious.

Our narrative now moves the focus from Absalom to David. And you cannot help but contrast the spirit of Absalom with the spirit of David.

Again – let me stress – David had his faults – but as a King – he was in general a good leader – and the way he handled this rebellion is something we can learn from.

Whereas Absalom was proud, political and a hypocrite – David is seen as humble, pastoral and devout.

Absalom is proud. The picture we see is him with his long locks on the back of a chariot with fifty men out the front preparing the way.

That is not David.

In verse 30 of chapter 15 we see David and it is a very different picture:

David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.

What we find in these verses is that David is humbled by the consequences of his sin. He sees this rebellion as part of the divine judgment for his sin – and it humbled him.

Similarly, while Absalom was political – David was pastoral.

What I mean by this is that while Absalom manoeuvred behind the scenes and sought out Israel and promised them great things to win their support, the contrast with David is amazing.

People keep coming to David – and at great personal cost they wish to align themselves with him.

David was kind and caring and now people refuse to abandon him – even when all logic says – don’t stick with David.
For example, in chapter 15 verses 18-23 we meet Ittai the Gittite.

Ittai was a foreigner who had only recently arrived in Jerusalem. David had shown him kindness.

Now as he fled the city, David had nothing to offer him and said – don’t come with me. Go back and may Absalom show you kindness and the Lord bless you.

In verse 21 Ittai answered the king, “As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be.”

This gives us an indication of the type of man David was. Men would follow him and risk their lives for him.

David had shown pastoral care and won this man not by political promises but by true care and compassion.

Similarly Hushai the Archite comes out to join David in chapter 15 verses 32-37. Another man who wants to align himself with David despite the situation.

Again, David sends him back. But as well, it is an opportunity to have a man he trusts on the inside. He can be David’s eyes and ears in Absalom’s camp.

Verse 37 describes him as David’s friend. David inspires loyalty. This man will go back and risk his life for his friend.

Then in chapter 16 verses 1-4 we meet Ziba – a servant of Mephibosheth the grandson of Saul.

Remember that Mephibosheth was someone David had shown kindness to. Instead of wiping out the house of Saul – he treated him like a son.

Ziba comes with support for David and tells him that Mephibosheth now sees this uproar as an opportunity to take the throne for the house of Saul. Later in chapter 19 we find that this is probably a lie and Ziba is probably using the situation for his own gain.

But the point is that David still inspires loyalty – people want to be on his side – even when things look grim.

David is a leader of men and inspired loyalty by care and concern.

And note also that while Absalom portrays himself as godly – let me go fulfil my vow – he is actually a hypocrite. In contrast, David is devout.

David does not use a veil of piousness – he truly trusts that God’s will be done.
He accepts that if this is God’s punishment for his sin – so be it. If God wants to restore him – so be it.

In chapter 15 verses 24-29 – Zadok the high priest wants to bring the ark and leave with David.

David says – I sinned so perhaps these events are the will of God. Take the ark back. If God wants me as King – He will restore me.

There is a humble reliance on God.

Or look over to chapter 16. Shimei – a man from the house of Saul comes out to curse David as he flees. In verse 6 he throws stones at David. Abishai one of the leaders of David’s mighty men – who once took up his spear against 300 enemies and killed them – said:

Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.

David says, “My own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today.”

David has his 300 mighty men around him. I suspect they all wanted to run this dog through. David lets him curse, throw stones and fling dust.

Again David seems to say – this may well be the punishment I deserve for my sin.

That is humble trust in the Lord.

You could not possibly imagine that kind of reaction from Absalom.

For all his faults – David has responded to this rebellion with humility, pastoral care and devout trust in the sovereign hand of God.

He was a good King.

Now the focus moves back to Absalom.

In the next section, Absalom is depicted as unstable and indecisive – not sure which advice to follow or what to do – and this leads to his downfall.

In chapter 16 verse 15 through to 17 verse 23 we find that a final mark of an Absalom spirit is that he listens to unwise counsel.

A voice here or there seems to sway him.

In chapter 16 verses15-19 Absalom makes a triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
There he meets Hushai – David’s friend and a counsellor.

Hushai greets Absalom with the rather ambiguous – Long live the King!

Yes but which king – David or Absalom?

Absalom questions his loyalty.

Hushai gives another vague response – I serve him whom God and Israel have chosen.

Then when he is pushed – he says – I will serve the son as I served the father.

We then meet the other rival source of counsel – Ahithophel. He was one of David’s counsellors. He is a wise man.

In 2 Samuel 16:23 we are told:

Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.

His advice is assert your authority as King by going in to your father’s concubines.

In the Middle East – to take a King’s concubines is to assert your right over his throne.

Absalom does so. It is good advice and he sets himself up as King. This fulfils the words of Nathan’s judgment to David in 2 Samuel 12:11–12:

Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’ ”

This scenario then sets up the two counsellors and the question becomes who will Absalom listen to next time?

Chapter 17 opens with Ahithophel advising Absalom to strike while the iron is hot.

Let me take 12,000 men.

David is disorganised, on the run, tired and without supplies.

Strike now – those with him will flee – you can kill him and Israel will be yours. Israel will come to you like a bride to her husband.
Verse 4:

And the advice seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

Actually this is pretty good advice. He is known for wise counsel. He has just given Absalom wise counsel.

But, that is not enough for Absalom. He wants confirmation from others. What does Hushai think?

In verses 7–13 Hushai says – no. David is too smart to be caught like that.

He is already holed up and you won't catch him.

Wait. Gather your forces. Prepare well – then strike. And make sure you are leading the battle in person.

Basically, Hushai is giving unwise counsel in a bid to save David.

Which counsel will Absalom heed – Ahithophel or Hushai?

Verse 14:

And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.”

Why? Why did they reject the counsel of one who was normally said to speak as if one consulted God Himself – who had given wise counsel before – and accepted the counsel of someone who is a friend of David?

For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom.

This civil war was a consequence of David’s sin. It is in a sense divine punishment. However, it is not meant to lead to the overthrow of David and the line which will lead to Messiah.

The Lord ordained to make Absalom listen to the unwise counsel of Hushai and not the wise counsel of Ahithophel.

As soon as he knew Absalom had taken his advice, Hushai sent word to David and he escaped to Mahanaim where he could organise his forces.

Ahithophel was so crushed that his counsel was rejected that he hanged himself.
In contrast – David listens to wise counsel.

Chapter 18 opens with David dividing his forces into three.

He plans to go with them into battle – but wise counsel comes.

This is not Israel against the nations – you don’t have to lead the battle.

If you die – that is the end – all is lost. You should direct the battle from the city.

Remember, Ahithophel’s plan had been to strike just David. A surgical strike – kill David – then the battle is won.

By listening to Hushai – Absalom missed his chance. Now David would not be on the battlefield. No quick surgical strike was possible.

David then give this plea in verse 5:

And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.” And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.

Why? Why spare this one who has fermented a rebellion and wants you dead?

I think David is feeling guilt. His personal failures and failures as a father contributed to Absalom’s rebellion.

Deal gently with him.

The battle is fierce. 20,000 men are lost. 20,000 men – the consequences of David’s sin are immense.

While David listened to wise counsel and did not go on the field of battle – Absalom listened to unwise counsel and is on the battlefield.

And what was his pride and joy – that great head of hair – is now his downfall.

How often have we seen this – the area of pride becomes the area of weakness.
He is fleeing on his mule – his hair gets caught in a tree and he is left hanging between heaven and earth.

No one dares kill him for David had ordered them to deal gently with him.

Joab wants no chance of a further rebellion – he took three javelins and ran Absalom through.

The rebellion was over.

Absalom had already set up a pillar for himself in the King’s Valley – a little presumptuous to say the least – and so he was buried there.

Ahimaaz the son of Zadok wants to take the news of this victory to David.

Joab knowing David will find no joy because Absalom is dead says – there is no reward in that. The King won’t be happy. He sends a Cushite with the news.

Ahimaaz still wants to take the news anyone and persuades Joab to let him go.

He outruns the Cushite and arrives first. He tells David the battle is won – but does not tell him about Absalom.

The Cushite arrives and tells David – Absalom is dead.

David is shattered. Verse 33:

And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

There is guilt, regret, loss – no joy in this victory for David.

Absalom sinned – there is no doubt, but David’s sin led to a sword dividing his home and the nation.

There are no winners here.

David’s lust set the ball in motion.

Absalom’s pride fermented the revolt.

Together their sin led to great pain, loss and despair in Israel.

What a waste of a life. Absalom was a young man with so much potential – but it was thrown away.

What are the lessons for us?
First, beware the spirit of Absalom.

David would not take the Kingdom that was rightfully his from Saul.

Absalom tried to take the Kingdom that was not rightfully his from his father David.

Again, there are times when elders are unwise and need to be challenged.

But at times it is simply that men and women with some ambition want to stir up trouble in the church.

Often their motives seem good to them and to others. But in the end there is some Absalom spirit there. Some pride, politicking and a dose of hypocrisy.

Beware the divisive man or woman – who divides without just cause.

Check your heart – check your motives. If you are in a church long enough you will question many decisions.

Healthy feedback is good. Spurious division is dangerous.

If you have to speak up do it the right way – with a right heart – not in a factious way.

Remember, God hates disunity among his people and warns the church to watch out for the divisive man or woman.

In Acts 20:29 Paul warned the Ephesian elders:

> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3 Paul gives us very vivid pictures of the type of man the church must be every vigilant against. The divisive, factious man.

In Titus – Paul told the church how to deal with those who are divisive and factious. Titus 3:10–11:

> As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Again, elders are not perfect. If we are wrong – come and talk to us.

But be careful to set in train divisions and factions among the people of God.

Search your heart to know your motives. Is it about you or the kingdom? Is it really that crucial? Is the damage greater than the remedy?
A second lesson, look for the spirit of David.

Look for this spirit in yourself. Make sure your heart is seeking first God’s kingdom – not your kingdom.

David handled this rebellion pretty well. He trusted God and acted humbly.

And look for this spirit in your leaders.

The men you affirm as leaders need to be humble and pastoral and devout – who heed good advice.

There are no perfect leaders. But in this world – the elders are the ones given by God to guide the church and preserve unity.

Godly elders strive for unity. Ephesians 4:11–12:

> And he gave … the shepherds and teachers … for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith.

I thank God very regularly for the leaders we have in this church. For the godly spirit they exhibit and the tremendous spiritual leadership they provide.

I met regularly with them – I know they are godly men. They have a spirit like David. Humble, pastoral, devout men – who listen to wise counsel.

You want the godliest men making godly decisions.

Please pray for your elders, deacons, homegroup shepherds, interns. Pray for godly leaders who will unite the flock under Christ.

A third lesson, united we stand and divided we fall.

It is so easy to criticise and tear down in a church.

It is incredibly hard to unite and build up in a church.

However, when a church has a kingdom vision and a gospel purpose – it will naturally unite under the great purpose of Christ.

The church has a great purpose in this world. To declare Christ. To see the gospel and the Kingdom advance. To see rebels repent.

I can tell you now – a divided church spends every moment looking inward, fighting, arguing – and there is no energy for the Great Commission.

But, a united church assails the gates of hell and the gates cannot stop us and we take the gospel to the world.
Don’t look for the men who are personally ambitious and tear down.

Look for those who give a great and godly purpose.

I guess I would sum up these three points like this. If we want to fulfil your God-given purpose in this world, we must:

**Strive to be a uniter not a divider of God’s people.**

We can waste our lives or we can be part of the Great Commission and the plan of God. And to do this we must be united in the great gospel purposes.

**But there is a fourth lesson we can learn from these chapters – what unites us is Christ.**

David loved his sinful son – but could do nothing to save him.

> O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you.

No human father can do that. David could not save Absalom. He could not die in the place of his sinful son Absalom.

But God – our Father – can save sinful sons and He did something about it. He became a man. He wept over a sinful world and He died in our place to save us.

When we burn this truth into our hearts – we won’t divide over petty practices or personalities or ambition.

We will unite to declare the glory of the God who saves undeserving sinners.
Beware the spirit of Absalom  
(2 Samuel 15-18   March 9, 2014)

Main Point:

*Strive to be a uniter not a divider of God’s people.*

(More important questions/applications in bold)

*Main Themes You Should Have Considered By The End Of The Study*

- Why is unity in the church important?
- What can disrupt our unity?
- What can suck us towards being a disruptive force?
- How has God ordained for us to preserve our unity in the church?
- What is the role of elders in preserving unity?

Consider Absalom and David:

- What are the main themes in this narrative? Do you agree that the themes of disunity and how to handle disunity are prominent in this section of Scripture?
- What areas of David’s life should we emulate and what areas should we learn what not to do?
- Do you agree that most people are a mixed bag – good areas and struggle areas? What can we learn about ourselves and our leaders from this?
- What events in Absalom’s life sowed the seeds of his rebellion?
- Did he have some justification for his grievances?
- How could he have approached David over these issues?

Application: If you have a difficulty with the decisions, policies, direction of the church – how do you decide if you should say something or not? If you should say something how should you go about it?

How can you be a contributor (part of the solution) rather than a critic (part of the problem) in the church?

- What verses might indicate Absalom had a problem with pride?
- What is the role of pride and personal ambition in church disunity?

Application: How can we spot pride in ourselves or others that might lead to disunity?
● What verses might indicate Absalom was **political**?

● Why is this a problem?

● Do you agree that elders are to be affirmed if they meet biblical standards rather than by a popularity style election?

● Are there difficulties with congregational rule? If so what? Are there problems with elder rule? If so what?

**Application:** If you have ungodly elders in a church – what should you do?

If the elders propose a measure that is not that popular in the church – how should you evaluate why they do this? How should you respond to their proposal?

How can you support the leaders – if you agree with them – and if you disagree with them?

● What verses might indicate Absalom was **hypocritical**?

**Application:** What might show a leader or potential leader is hypocritical? How should you deal with this?

● What verses might indicate David was **humble, pastoral and devout**?

● How did David learn to respond in these ways?

● How did David trust the sovereign hand of God in this situation?

**Application:** How can you foster these traits in yourself? How can you learn to trust God in situations like this?

● How can you discern if the counsel you are getting is wise or unwise?

● **Are there issues churches should divide over? If so what?**

● In more minor issues – how should you deal with them if you disagree with the leadership?

● Do you agree that churches and individuals with a gospel purpose find their unity in Christ and this purpose?

**Application:** In the past, when you have questioned decisions, directions, policies in a church – have you dealt with this? How would you deal differently today?

If you feel aggrieved with the leadership – what should you do?
If someone encourages division in the church – how should you respond?

How can you be a force for unity? How can you be a part of a gospel mission and Christlike vision? How can you be a voice for building up and encouraging a uniting purpose?