

2 Samuel 14
February 25, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Have you ever been in a position where you knew you needed to discipline someone, but didn't follow through on it because you had emotions get in the way? If yes, what did you learn from not following through with what you knew needed to happen? [Let people engage]

Transition: There are some relationships in family systems that are healthy, and then you have some relationships within family systems that are unhealthy or dysfunctional.

In today's text, Joab, David's chief general, develops an elaborate plan to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. Why? As a refresher, Absalom, David's son, murdered his half-brother Amnon for raping his sister, Tamar. As king, David was required to apply God's law, which required him to punish Absalom by putting him to death. But that didn't happen. Absalom fled into exile at Geshur and has been there two years. This whole situation is a mess. Let's read the text and see if we can tease this out and get some good nuggets of truth out of it. Let's begin.

BOOK:

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

14 Joab son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom. ² So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there. He said to her, "Pretend you are in mourning. Dress in mourning clothes, and don't use any cosmetic lotions. Act like a woman who has spent many days grieving for the dead. ³ Then go to the king and speak these words to him." And Joab put the words in her mouth.

⁴ When the woman from Tekoa went (spoke) to the king, she fell with her face to the ground to pay him honor, and she said, "Help me, O king!"

⁵ The king asked her, "What is troubling you?"

She said, "I am indeed a widow; my husband is dead. ⁶ I your servant had two sons. They got into a fight with each other in the field, and no one was there to separate them. One struck the other and killed him. ⁷ Now the whole clan has risen up against your servant; they say, 'Hand over the one who struck his brother down, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed; then we will get rid of the heir as well.' They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth."

⁸ The king said to the woman, "Go home, and I will issue an order in your behalf."

⁹ But the woman from Tekoa said to him, "My lord the king, let the blame rest on me and on my father's family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt."

¹⁰ The king replied, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he will not bother you again."

¹¹ She said, "Then let the king invoke the LORD his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed."

“As surely as the LORD lives,” he said, “not one hair of your son’s head will fall to the ground.”

¹² Then the woman said, “Let your servant speak a word to my lord the king.”

“Speak,” he replied.

¹³ The woman said, “Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son? ¹⁴ Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.

¹⁵ “And now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. Your servant thought, ‘I will speak to the king; perhaps he will do what his servant asks. ¹⁶ Perhaps the king will agree to deliver his servant from the hand of the man who is trying to cut off both me and my son from the inheritance God gave us.’

¹⁷ “And now your servant says, ‘May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the LORD your God be with you.’”

¹⁸ Then the king said to the woman, “Do not keep from me the answer to what I am going to ask you.”

“Let my lord the king speak,” the woman said.

¹⁹ The king asked, “Isn’t the hand of Joab with you in all this?”

The woman answered, “As surely as you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right or to the left from anything my lord the king says. Yes, it was your servant Joab who instructed me to do this and who put all these words into the mouth of your servant. ²⁰ Your servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land.”

²¹ The king said to Joab, “Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom.”

²² Joab fell with his face to the ground to pay him honor, and he blessed the king. Joab said, “Today your servant knows that he has found favor in your eyes, my lord the king, because the king has granted his servant’s request.”

²³ Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. ²⁴ But the king said, “He must go to his own house; he must not see my face.” So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king.

²⁵ In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. ²⁶ Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair from time to time when it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels (5 lbs) by the royal standard.

²⁷ Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom. The daughter’s name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman.

²⁸ Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king’s face. ²⁹ Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come. ³⁰ Then he said to his servants, “Look, Joab’s field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire.” So Absalom’s servants set the field on fire.

³¹ Then Joab did go to Absalom’s house and he said to him, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?”

³² Absalom said to Joab, “Look, I sent word to you and said, ‘Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, “Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!’” Now then, I want to see the king’s face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death.”

³³ So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

2 Samuel 14 illuminates the complexities of family relationships, the dire consequences of unresolved guilt, and the power of forgiveness. Even in positions of leadership and power, David shows his human vulnerability and desire for familial love. However, his actions also demonstrate the cost of avoidance in dealing with personal guilt and responsibility. This chapter encourages us to seek reconciliation, admit our wrongdoings, and address our issues directly.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Henry, M., & Scott, T. (1997). *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary (2 Sam 14)*. Victor Books. Logos Research Systems.

Verses 1–20

We may notice here, how this widow pleads God's mercy, and his clemency toward poor guilty sinners. The state of sinners is a state of banishment from God. God pardons none to the dishonor of his law and justice, nor any who are impenitent; nor to the encouragement of crimes, or the hurt of others.

Verses 21–24

David was inclined to favor Absalom, yet, for the honor of his justice, he could not do it but upon application made for him, which may show the methods of Divine grace. It is true that God has thoughts of compassion toward poor sinners, not willing that any should perish; yet he is only reconciled to them through a Mediator, who pleads on their behalf. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and Christ came to this land of our banishment, to bring us to God.

Verses 25–27

Nothing is said of Absalom's wisdom and piety. All here said of him is, that he was very handsome. A poor commendation for a man that had nothing else in him valuable. Many a polluted, deformed soul dwells in a fair and comely body. And we read that he had a very fine head of hair. It was a burden to him, but he would not cut it as long as he could bear the weight. That which feeds and gratifies pride, is not complained of, though uneasy. May the Lord grant us the beauty of holiness, and the adorning of a meek and quiet spirit! Only those who fear God are truly happy.

Verses 28–33

By his insolent carriage toward Joab, Absalom brought Joab to plead for him. By his insolent message to the king, he gained his wishes. When parents and rulers countenance such characters, they will soon suffer the most fatal effects. But did the compassion of a father prevail to reconcile him to an impenitent son, and shall penitent sinners question the compassion of Him who is the Father of mercies?

Merrill, E. H. (1985). *2 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 469-470) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

Absalom's estrangement from David (chap. 14)

14:1–3. It was evident to all that David sorely missed his exiled son, but no one knew how to achieve Absalom's return and a reconciliation. Finally **Joab**, always a tactician, convinced or commanded a clever **woman** from **Tekoa** (later the home of the Prophet Amos [Amos 1:1]; seven miles south of Bethlehem) to disguise herself as a mourner and **go to the king** with a story which he himself concocted and put **in her mouth**.

14:4–7. Having gained access **to the king**, the **woman** related to him that she had **had two sons**, one of whom had murdered **the other**. This meant that the surviving son was liable to blood vengeance at the hands of relatives. Since she was **a widow**, this would mean the

elimination of her own source of support (expressed by the figure of speech, **They would put out the only burning coal I have left**). Perhaps even more important, she would have no **heir** to carry on the name and memory of her dead **husband**.

14:8–11. Obviously touched by her story, David told **the woman** to return **home** in peace. He would **issue an order** to resolve the matter. She was not convinced that she had fully made her point, however, and pressed her case even further. In the event of any miscarriage of justice, she said, she and her family would bear the responsibility. That is, if the circumstances really did require vengeance (Num. 35:9–21), she wanted **the king** to know that he would not be legally or morally culpable if he did not stop it from being carried out. Patiently David heard her out and again assured her that if anyone tried to prosecute the case he would have to answer to **the king**. Relentlessly she continued, however, till she elicited from David a formal oath that her accused **son** would suffer not even the slightest harm: **As surely as the LORD lives** (cf. comments on 1 Kings 1:29) **not one hair of your son’s head will fall to the ground**.

14:12–14. Satisfied at last, **the woman** boldly accosted **the king** with the meaning of her parable. In granting amnesty to an unknown murderer, it was now incumbent on him that he do the same for his own **son** Absalom. There are circumstances, she said, under which the death penalty need not be applied, particularly where premeditation was not involved (Num. 35:15). Though that was not relevant here, as Absalom had plotted Amnon’s death long in advance, there was still the principle of mercy: **God does not take away life; instead, He devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him**.

14:15–20. Then, to make David think that her remarks about Absalom were only incidental to her real purpose, **the woman** reminded **the king** of the fear that prompted her to come in the first place. She coupled this reminder with effusive flattery of the king’s wisdom (**My lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil**, v. 17; cf. v. 20). But David discerned that “the woman doth protest too much” and asked if **Joab** had something to do with **all this**. Found out in her treachery she had to admit it was true. David’s recognition of **Joab** as the instigator lies no doubt not only in the general’s recognized craftiness but in the fact that David was surely aware of Joab’s interest in Absalom’s return.

14:21–24. David had no alternative but to act on the sentiment he had expressed to the woman concerning forgiveness, even though he had been conned into doing so. He sent **Joab** to bring his alienated son **back**. But when **Absalom** returned David refused to meet him personally or to let him visit the palace. Perhaps David felt that too ready a reconciliation would lead the people to believe that he did not view Absalom’s crime with sufficient seriousness.

14:25–27. In order to emphasize Absalom’s attributes, features that should have made him attractive to David and which later proved irresistible to the people, the historian described **Absalom** as **handsome** in every way. The reference to his long **hair** (weighing **200 shekels**, i.e., about five pounds, when **he** infrequently **cut** it) is especially made to prepare for Absalom’s peculiar undoing—later he was caught by his head (perhaps his hair) in the branches of an oak tree (18:9). His profound love for his violated sister **Tamar** also testifies to his attractiveness; he named his own **daughter** after her.

14:28–33. After **two** more **years** of estrangement from his father, **Absalom** twice sought Joab’s aid in bringing about a final resolution of their differences. Rebuffed each time, **Absalom** resorted to dramatic action—he set **Joab’s** barley **field on fire**, which did get the general’s attention. **Joab** then intervened with **the king** and at last made it possible for **Absalom** to be reunited with his father. The meeting was at least superficially cordial, but as subsequent events

demonstrated, David's long-delayed acceptance of his son came too late. **Absalom** was embittered and resolved to do whatever was necessary to make David pay for his intransigence.

Tatum, S. L. (1972). 2 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (p. 187). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Absalom's Return from Exile (2 Sam. 14:1–33)

The passage —Joab, realizing David's longing for Absalom, and at the same time his kingly pride, conceived of a plan to bring David face to face with his own conscience. He got a woman from Tekoa to pretend to be a mourner and to carry out the act that would bring David to admit the need for Absalom's return to Jerusalem.

The woman said she was a widow and had had two sons. They had quarreled with each other and one of them was killed. She said the family had risen up to claim the life of the remaining son because he had killed his brother. She said this would leave her in destitution and her late husband without any heir.

David gave orders that the remaining son should be granted immunity from the death penalty because the circumstances justified his pardon for his mother's sake and to carry on the name of his father.

The woman then made the analogy. She said David was keeping the heir to the throne of Israel away from his people. She admitted that Joab had enlisted her to assist in bringing Absalom home. She said Joab had the wisdom of God upon him.

Joab brought Absalom back to Jerusalem, but David did not allow him to come to the palace. He lived in his own house apart.

Special points —The ambitious selfishness of Absalom begins to show in this chapter and will unfold in the succeeding chapters. Bit by bit he set the stage to overthrow his father's throne and take it for himself. This was a part of the struggle for succession in the house of David. Ultimately, of course, Solomon came to the throne.

Why was Joab so interested in Absalom's return to Jerusalem? Perhaps there were three reasons. He knew David's love for his son was deeper than his pride would allow him to admit. He wanted to do what was best for the nation. He wanted to make sure a qualified heir was ready in case of David's death. He also probably thought Absalom showed the greatest promise and admired him for his ability and appearance.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (2 Samuel 14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.