

2 Samuel 14

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Turn with me in your Bible to 2 Samuel chapter 14. If you're looking in one of the pew Bibles, it's page 264.

2 Samuel chapter 14. As you're turning there, I wonder whether you've ever been in the middle of a messy family conflict.

Where people have said and done things that have hurt and offended and alienated each other.

Where relationships have broken down. Some people don't even talk to each other anymore.

Or maybe you have a friend who's been in the middle of a messy conflict. And you even just try to understand what caused the conflict in the first place.

And the story starts five years ago. And then it's a whole mess. Like a big twisted knot. And there doesn't seem to be any clear way forward.

[1 : 13] Or you're trying to figure out how do we move forward in a healthy and productive way.

Well, what we have at the beginning of this chapter is we're in the middle of a messy family conflict in King David's family.

We have a guilty child, Absalom, who has been estranged. Actually living in exile. Away from his grieving father, David, for three years now.

Now the background to the situation is chapter 13. Which we read last week. It's an ugly story. A disturbing story.

David's oldest son, Amnon, sexually violated his half-sister, Tamar. And then he didn't want anything to do with her. And so Tamar fled to her brother Absalom's house.

Absalom was furious. And two years later, Absalom conspired to murder Amnon. Absalom then fled the country.

[2 : 18] Back in Jerusalem, their father David wept. Chapter 13, verse 37 says, David mourned for his son, for Amnon who had died, day after day.

And Absalom fled and went to Geshur, that was outside in a different country. He was there for three years. Now verse 39 says, The spirit of the king longed to go out to Absalom because he was comforted about Amnon since he was dead.

Chapter 14, verse 1 says, Now Joab, the son of Zeruiah, David's friend and army commander, knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom. Now these, the last verse of chapter 13 and the first verse of chapter 14 tell us something about David's attitude toward Absalom.

But these verses are actually, for a few reasons, they're quite difficult to translate. There's actually three different ways that you could translate these verses. And one way is the way it's translated right here, which implies that David had a positive attitude toward Absalom.

Okay, basically David had mourned for his son who was killed. He had been angry that Absalom killed him. But, you know, three years had passed and David was sort of ready to move on.

[3 : 33] And now he was missing his son, who he hadn't seen for three years. And he longed to see Absalom again. There are two problems, though, with this translation.

It's a possible translation. But the two problems are, the verb that's translated, go out to, in verse 39, he longed to go out to Absalom.

That word usually means to march out against someone. It doesn't usually mean just to go visit someone. It's used for an army marching out against someone most of the time.

Second, if David was feeling strongly positive toward Absalom, what we see later in this chapter doesn't completely make sense. So there are two other ways these verses could be translated.

One is that David is sort of neutral toward Absalom. The spirit of the king, this is actually in the text, the note at the bottom of the page, the spirit of the king ceased to go out against Absalom because he was comforted about Amnon.

[4 : 37] Now, basically that means David was angry with Absalom because he killed his brother. But then he sort of got over his anger and he didn't want to go out and attack him anymore. But he started, he just started thinking about him.

And we don't really know what he was thinking, but he was thinking about him. And chapter 14, verse 1 would say the king's mind was on Absalom. The third way to translate these verses is that David is actually negative toward Absalom.

So it could be translated, the spirit of the king determined to go out against Absalom. His mind was against Absalom. Now, these are complicated verses.

You can be a Hebrew scholar. There's about five different words that could be translated one way or the other. That's why you come up with these three possible interpretations. In the bigger context, I think either the neutral or the negative interpretation makes a little bit more sense.

But however you interpret these verses, David is thinking about Absalom. There's something that he's thinking about his son who he hasn't seen for three years, who's far away in another country because he's ran away after he murdered his brother.

[5 : 49] Absalom actually called all his brothers to a family party. He went to King David and he said, I want to throw a big party and I want to invite all my brothers.

And David was like, I don't know about this. I know there's some bad blood between you and your brother Amnon. And Absalom said, oh, no, no, no, at least Amnon. And David said, well, all right, invite all of them. Hopefully they'll all keep each other in check.

And Absalom had him struck down in the middle of a family party. This is a mess. Now, what we see in this chapter is there are three people who have a plan, three men with a plan to do something about this mess.

To deal with David, the grieving father, and Absalom, the guilty son, who are estranged from each other. And Joab, who's the potential intermediary. So each of them have a way that they're responding to this situation.

We're going to look at each of their responses. First Joab, then David, then Absalom. And there's a proverb. Proverbs 19, 21 says, many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

[7 : 06] And so tonight, what I really want us to look at is man's plans and God's purposes in this chapter in the middle of a messy time in David's life.

So first, let's read 14, 1 through 20. This is the first plan. Joab's plan. And we'll see what's on Joab's mind. Now, Joab, the son of Zeruiah, knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom or was on, his mind was on Absalom.

And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman and said to her, pretend to be a mourner. Put on mourning garments. Don't anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead.

Go to the king and speak this way to him. So Joab put the words in her mouth. When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and paid homage and said, save me, O king.

And the king said to her, what is your trouble? She answered, alas, I am a widow. My husband is dead and your servant had two sons and they quarreled with one another in the field. There was no one to separate them and one struck the other and killed him.

[8 : 15] And now the whole clan has risen against your servant and they say, give up the man who struck his brother that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed. And so they would destroy the air also. Thus they would quench my coal that is left and leave to my husband, neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth.

Then the king said to the woman, go to your house and I will give orders concerning you. And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, on me be the guilt, my lord, the king, and on my father's house, let the king and his throne be guiltless.

The king said, if anyone says anything to you, bring him to me and he shall never touch you again. Then she said, please let the king invoke the Lord, your God, that the avenger of blood kill no more and my son be not destroyed.

He said, as the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground. Then the woman said, please let your servant speak a word to my lord, the king.

He said, speak. And the woman said, why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision, the king convicts himself in as much as the king does not bring his banished one home again.

[9 : 28] We must all die. We are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again, but God will not take away life and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast.

Now I have come to say this to my lord, the king, because the people have made me afraid and your servant thought, I will speak to the king. It may be that the king will perform the request of his servant for the king will hear and deliver his servant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the heritage of God.

And your servant thought, the word of my lord, the king will set me at rest for my lord, the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil. The Lord, your God be with you. Then the king answered the woman, do not hide from me anything I ask you.

And the woman said, let my lord, the king speak. The king said, is the hand of Joab with you in all this? The woman answered and said, as surely as you live, my lord, the king, one cannot turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord, the king has said.

It was your servant, Joab, who commanded me. It was he who put all these words in the mouth of your servant in order to change the course of things. Your servant, Joab, did this.

[10 : 36] But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth. So the first man with a plan is Joab. Joab was the commander of David's army.

He was a clever man with a clever plan and who enlisted a clever woman to be his ally. Now you might ask, what's motivating Joab?

It's not completely clear, but Joab knew that David was getting old. And Joab, most likely, Joab was thinking ahead. Joab's thinking, okay, Amnon was David's firstborn.

Amnon's dead. Absalom is now next in line. Absalom was actually number three, but we don't hear anything about son number two.

For whatever reason, son number two is also out of the picture. So Absalom is now the likely heir to the throne because he's not the firstborn, but the thirdborn, the closest.

[11 : 47] And so Joab is thinking, but wait a minute, Absalom is living in another country. David's getting old. This has been the case for three years. If David dies, the heir to the throne is in another country.

We're in for a civil war. Civil war is not a good thing. We have to do something about this. It's also possible that Joab favored Absalom over some of David's other sons.

David hadn't punished Amnon for his crime against Tamar. And so Absalom stepped up and did the dirty work. And from what we know of Joab, that kind of strong, hard-edged, rough, decisive leader might have appealed to him.

Now, whatever the reason, Joab didn't like the status quo. Joab wanted things to change. That's what verse 20 says. In order to change the course of things, Joab hatched this plan. Now, notice what this woman does when she comes to David.

David, she presents herself to him and she portrays herself as being in the exact same situation as David. I'm a parent.

[13 : 00] I have two sons. One of them killed the other. And now some people want to kill the other son and that would leave me all alone with no heir.

She says that. Verse 7. They would destroy the heir also and our whole family would be wiped out. So she portrays herself in a very similar situation as David himself is in.

Now, it's interesting. At first, David says, okay, I'll think about it. I'll let you know. And she's not satisfied with that answer. She says, oh, but oh, king, please. Three times she presses the king for an answer.

She's extremely bold for a woman who David doesn't even seem to know already who comes for an audience before the king. She's very bold. And she finally gets David to swear an oath.

As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son will fall to the ground. And then she gets to her point.

Verse 13. Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God?

[14 : 05] For in giving this decision, the king convicts himself in as much as the king does not bring his banished one home again. Now, she doesn't name Absalom by name, but it's very clear who she's talking about.

Absalom's been away for three years and David is doing nothing to bring him home. And it almost seems like the prophet Nathan, right?

In chapter 12, the prophet Nathan came to David after David had sinned with Bathsheba and had Bathsheba's husband killed. And the prophet Nathan comes to David and tells him a story about a poor oppressed person that arouses David's compassion and righteous indignation, but then implicates David in the process.

Nathan says to David, you are that man. You are just like that rich man who stole the poor man's one sheep when he had plenty for himself.

So it seems like she's doing that, right? She's telling another story that draws David in and convicts him. And David's convinced.

[15:25] Verse 21. Then the king said to Joab, behold, now I grant this, go bring back the young man Absalom. So it seems like Joab's plan works, but not quite.

You see, there's a problem with the woman's story that Joab put in her mouth. In the woman's story, she says there were two sons.

They went out in the field. They got in a fight and one of them killed the other. In other words, they weren't planning to, they weren't planning to kill, no one was planning to murder his brother.

They just got into a fight and it happened. It's manslaughter, not premeditated murder. And the law in Israel, God's law in the Old Testament, distinguished clearly between manslaughter, not premeditated killing, and premeditated murder.

And premeditated murder deserves a death penalty. Manslaughter did not. And there was a way to protect the offender. But in David's situation, Absalom and Amnon were not in the field getting in a fight.

[16:43] Absalom threw a party, deceived his brother into coming and thinking that he was safe, and then ordered his servants to strike him down in the middle of the party.

It was premeditated murder. You see that there's not actually a good parallel between the story that the woman tells and what actually happened with Absalom.

Now you might say, well, Absalom was killing someone who deserved to die, right? Amnon had committed this horrible crime, rape, of his half-sister.

Now according to the law, Amnon should have been exiled, cut off from the Lord's people. David had failed. David had failed to execute justice. And so you might say, well, Absalom was taking matters into his own hands, trying to accomplish justice when the legal system failed.

But you know, remember earlier in 1 Samuel, when David was on the run from Saul, and Saul had done a lot of things.

[17:58] Saul had tried to kill David many times. David could have defended killing the king and said, it was in self-defense. Saul had broken God's law.

Saul deserved to die. But David said, no, that's not my place. That's God's responsibility to judge Saul, not mine.

So David didn't do that. David didn't take matters into his own hands. Absalom did. And Absalom went one step farther. He didn't just get Amnon thrown out of the country.

He struck him down. Premeditated murder. You see, the problem with Joab's plan is that Joab doesn't reckon with the wrong that Absalom did.

It's a complicated story. There's lots of details here, but this is the problem with Joab's story. He doesn't face the depth of the wrong that Absalom did. He wants to twist David's arm to bring Absalom back home, but he doesn't actually go to the king and say, what should the king do with his son who murdered his brother in cold blood?

[19:18] That's a hard question, but he completely avoids that question. But it's a necessary question for David to deal with. Now, so this is the first plan.

Now, if you're, maybe you, Lord willing, you will never be in this same kind of situation as Joab was, right?

But maybe you're in Joab's position, right? Joab is trying to reconcile a guilty son and a grieving father. He's trying to be a mediator in the midst of an ugly, messy conflict.

And maybe you haven't, maybe you, now or later in the future, maybe you will have an opportunity to help some people who are in the midst of a messy conflict. And maybe you really want to see these people be at peace with each other and be reconciled like Joab wanted.

But sometimes you might be tempted to twist their arm or just say, can you just forget the past and just come together again and go on into the future?

[20 : 31] And you know, sometimes, you know, sometimes people make a mountain out of a molehill. And you know what? They just need to leave the molehill behind and forget about it, forgive and forget and go into the future.

But sometimes there is a mountain of sin and guilt and wrongdoing that needs to be faced before a relationship can truly be reconciled and go on into the future.

So that's why Joab's plan fails. Because it doesn't address the reality and the depth of Absalom's sin. And so what we see with Joab's plan is that the reality and depth of sin needs to be dealt with in order for true reconciliation to happen.

Okay. Going on. Let's read starting at verse 22. So David says, bring Absalom back. And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king.

Joab said, today your servant knows I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, and that the king has granted the request of his servant. So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. Now here's where we see that Joab's plan doesn't actually work.

[21 : 41] Verse 24. And the king said, let him dwell apart in his own house. He is not to come into my presence. So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king's presence.

You see, this is why in verse 1 David wasn't only feeling positive toward Absalom because Absalom comes back to Jerusalem and David says, okay, he can be in Jerusalem but I don't want to see his face.

And for two whole years they live in the same city and David refuses to see his son's face. David's strategy is avoidance.

Now the problem with David's strategy is pretty obvious. You bring your son back from exile.

He's living in the same city with you. You refuse to talk to him. If Joab's concern was there might be a civil war if the heir is out of town, well, if the heir isn't talking to his father, that's not really much better.

[22 : 51] The problem with David's plan, David neither treats Absalom as a murderer who deserves to be punished nor as an innocent person whose actions were justified in the absence of rightfully executed justice by the proper authorities.

So David doesn't confront or rebuke or punish Absalom. Neither does he justify or pronounce Absalom righteous nor does he forgive him or restore him or reconcile with him.

He does none of these things. He just avoids him and says, I don't want to talk with him. I don't want to see him. I don't want to deal with this.

Okay, you've twisted my arm. I'll bring him home. I can't quite argue with your story. But his heart hasn't changed. And the reality is David needs to do one or the other.

Either Absalom is innocent and David should say Absalom was innocent. I don't think that's right.

But that's right. David needs to either say Absalom was innocent and what he did was okay and he should be restored.

[24 : 07] Or he needs to say Absalom was guilty and Absalom needs to be punished. And then figure out how to punish him. But David doesn't want to do either.

But Absalom is not neither innocent nor guilty. He's one or the other. And David as his father needs to deal with that. You know in the very beginning of the Bible there's a story about two brothers.

One who kills the other. Cain who kills Abel. And what we see in that story is we see the Lord goes to Cain. And the Lord goes to Cain very much like he went to Adam in the garden.

And the Lord goes to Cain and says where is Abel your brother? Cain says I don't know am I my brother's keeper? And God says to Cain what have you done?

And Cain doesn't repent. So Cain lives the rest of his life in exile. Cain lives the rest of his life as a fugitive and wanderer on the earth outside of God's kingdom.

[25 : 25] But you see that's how God dealt with Cain. God went to Cain the guilty party and God said what have you done? David didn't do that to Absalom.

He didn't say Absalom what have you done? He just ignores him out of his own indecision and cowardice.

Now again maybe maybe you might find yourself in David's situation someday.

Lord willing it will never be the same circumstances. Maybe you're a grieving parent distressed over some wrong that your child has committed. And you know you either need to say to your child what

you did was right even though other people are saying it was wrong or you need to say what you did was wrong and this is the consequence.

But avoiding just refusing to do any of those refusing to take a stand or just giving a child the cold shoulder and refusing to talk with them won't make any progress.

[26 : 49] The same thing if you're a Christian and if you've been offended by a brother or sister in Christ. Say there's somebody else in the church somebody else who's a Christian and they've done something wrong to you.

You have two choices. You either need to overlook the wrong and forgive and continue to relate to that person as a brother or sister in Christ.

And Proverbs says often that's a wise course of action. Proverbs 19 11 says good sense makes one slow to anger and it is a person's glory to overlook an offense.

So that's one option is overlook and forgive and continue in fellowship with that person. The second option is maybe the offense is serious enough that you shouldn't just overlook it.

And in that case you should find a way to confront the other person. And there's Bible verses that talk about how to do that. That you first attempt to do it privately and if you need help you bring one or two others along.

[28 : 03] It's a good opportunity to seek out some wisdom from a pastor or a mature Christian. Right? if you need someone to come with you. Right? Sometimes offenses are serious enough that they should not be overlooked and in that case we need to lovingly confront and rebuke and then be willing to extend forgiveness when someone recognizes they're wrong.

But sometimes what we do as believers is we do neither. We don't really overlook and forgive and we don't confront.

We just avoid the other person. And say I don't want to talk to them. I don't want to deal with them. I don't want to confront them because that's too messy. But I can't overlook it and I'm going to hold a grudge in my heart.

And we stay in this middle place like David. That's a bad place to be. And the Bible says go one way or the other.

Overlook and forgive or confront and gently lovingly rebuke and then listen and be willing to extend forgiveness by the grace of God.

[29 : 19] God. All right. So that's the second plan. David's plan that also fails. Let's read the rest of the chapter. We'll see Absalom's plan.

We've seen Joab's plan, David's plan. Now we see Absalom's plan. Verse 25. Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom.

From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head, for at the end of every year he used to cut it, when it was heavy on him he cut it, he weighed the hair of his head, 200 shekels by the king's weight.

There were born to Absalom three sons and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a beautiful woman. So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem without coming into the king's presence. Then Absalom sent for Joab to send him to the king but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time but Joab would not come. Then he said to his servants see Joab's field is next to mine, he's got barley there, go and set it on fire. So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him why have your servants set my field on fire?

[30 : 30] Absalom answered Joab behold I sent word to you come here that I may send you to the king and ask why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still. Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king and if there is guilt in me let him put me to death.

Then Joab went to the king and told him and he summoned Absalom so he came to the king and bowed himself Well verse 25-27 it's a little interlude it basically shows us that Absalom was big on outward image and little on inner substance it talks about he was extremely handsome he had amazing hair a long haired dude he had a growing family that's all it says it says nothing about his moral or spiritual character and the implication is there's not much good to say about that now verse 29-33 we see Absalom's plan Absalom's plan is force the issue understandably Absalom's fed up with how David's treating him you know you called me back from exile and then you don't even want to talk to me what's going on so he calls

Joab Joab doesn't answer his phone calls so he lights Joab's field on fire and then Joab hooks up the phone right away Absalom says let's do this one way or the other let me go into the presence of the king and either I'm guilty or I'm not but then we see the result in verse 33 Absalom comes into the king and he bows down like a servant in the king's household and the king kisses Absalom and that's it nothing else happens if you read the next chapter read the next chapter what Absalom does is he goes out and conspires to become king himself I mean isn't it odd when Absalom and David first see each other after five years there's no weeping after pressuring David to allow him to organize his family party and then killing his brother in the middle of it there's no sorrow no repentance on Absalom's part no confession of sin after not speaking to his son for five years David has no words of wisdom no words of correction after five years of non-communication there's no talking about what the future of their relationship might look like no words of blessing no words of hope no words of pain no words of rebuke you see what this was was a fake reconciliation reconciliation that doesn't last it doesn't even last into the next paragraph now contrast this scene with two examples in the Bible of real reconciliation between people who had really hurt and offended each other so first think of

Joseph and his brothers Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery they almost killed him at the last moment they thought better of that but they left him for dead they sold him into slavery and sent him into exile sent him to a foreign country where they hoped to never see him again that's a pretty I mean you know this wasn't just somebody called me a bad name on the playground Joseph had been sold into slavery right his brothers come before him what does their reconciliation look like what does their meeting look like well first his brothers expressed regret over their past actions and resolve to chart a different course going forward they express repentance and Joseph showers them with assurance of his love with generous hospitality throws a big party and has a big meal with them and he speaks words of confidence in God's providential purposes as you meant this for evil but God meant it for good and so and they embraced they spoke they wept the brothers repented and

[35 : 22] Joseph forgave and then they celebrated together that's real reconciliation or Jacob and Esau Jacob had stolen Esau's blessing deceived his father to steal from his brother and they hadn't seen each other in years and finally they're coming to meet each other and Jacob sees Esau coming and he sends gifts and messengers ahead to Esau to express his good will and he bows to the ground seven times and then Esau runs to him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept and Jacob said I've seen your face it's like seeing the face of God because you have accepted me you see that's what real reconciliation real repentance real forgiveness and real joy looks like between people who've really hurt each other in the past that doesn't happen here the plans of these three men all fell short but you see the

Lord has a purpose there's a very interesting verse in the middle of the woman's speech in verse 14 and she says we must all die we are like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again but God will not but God does not wish to take away life he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast you see the Bible is a story of God devising means so that the banished one may not remain an outcast the Bible is a story of God finding a way to resolve the mother of all conflicts in the beginning of the Bible we were banished from the garden of Eden from the place of God's presence and his provision because we put ourselves in the center of the universe instead of God we disobeyed him and we were sent out of the garden banished and there was a flaming sword at the gate flashing back and forth guarding the way to the tree of life we are all guilty children and God is rightly grieved and justly indignant because of our sin and all the plans of man will never succeed to bring a true reconciliation between humanity and God but the message of the Bible is God has made a way

God has devised a means that we might be truly reconciled to him not just sending a prophet or a wise person but coming to earth himself pursuing us with his undeserved kindness in order to bring us to repentance taking the guilt of our sin upon himself so that we might receive forgiveness and justification you see God's answer is the cross you see in the cross we see the reality and depth of our sin what Joab and Absalom didn't face we see how terrible our sin is that the son of God had to die as a sacrifice in our place to take our punishment and bear our guilt but we also see that that price has been paid and the book of

Hebrews says there's a new and living way open for us to enter freely into the presence of God and be welcomed and be delighted in and be received and reconciled forever we're going to celebrate

the Lord's supper tonight and that's what this is a picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ did to reconcile us to God that when we take the bread and drink the cup we remember Jesus Christ's body was broken and his blood was spilled in his death on the cross so that our sins might be paid for so if we repent and believe in Jesus turn to him we can be washed clean and we can be welcomed into his presence as his beloved children with no reserve so let's pray as we prepare to come to the

Lord's table Lord we thank you that where all the plans of men and women have failed that you sent your son into this world to reconcile us to yourself to pay the price for our sin the price that we could never pay and to make a way for us to come into your presence forgiven and free your beloved sons and daughters Lord as we prepare to eat this bread and drink this cup to remember you may you feed us by your holy spirit and strengthen us to be agents of your reconciliation and messengers of that reconciliation in this world in Christ's name we pray amen merciful ■ to be one faithful