

David Brings Absalom Back to Jerusalem

2 Samuel 14

2 Samuel 14 - *"So Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was concerned about Absalom. ² And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman, and said to her, "Please pretend to be a mourner, and put on mourning apparel; do not anoint yourself with oil, but act like a woman who has been mourning a long time for the dead. ³ Go to the king and speak to him in this manner." So Joab put the words in her mouth.*

And when the woman of Tekoa spoke to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and prostrated herself, and said, "Help, O king!" ⁵ Then the king said to her, "What troubles you?" And she answered, "Indeed I am a widow, my husband is dead. ⁶ Now your maidservant had two sons; and the two fought with each other in the field, and there was no one to part them, but the one struck the other and killed him. ⁷ And now the whole family has risen up against your maidservant, and they said, 'Deliver him who struck his brother, that we may execute him for the life of his brother whom he killed; and we will destroy the heir also.' So they would extinguish my ember that is left, and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the earth."

⁸ Then the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you." ⁹ And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, "My lord, O king, let the iniquity be on me and on my father's house, and the king and his throne be guiltless." ¹⁰ So the king said, "Whoever says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall not touch you anymore." ¹¹ Then she said, "Please let the king remember the LORD your God, and do not permit the avenger of blood to destroy anymore, lest they destroy my son." And he said, "As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground."

¹² Therefore the woman said, "Please, let your maidservant speak another word to my lord the king." And he said, "Say on."

¹³ So the woman said: "Why then have you schemed such a thing against the people of God? For the king speaks this thing as one who is guilty, in that the king does not bring his banished one home again. ¹⁴ For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him. ¹⁵ Now therefore, I have come to speak of this thing to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. And your maidservant said, 'I will now speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his maidservant. ¹⁶ For the king will hear and deliver his maidservant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the inheritance of God.' ¹⁷ Your maidservant said, 'The word of my lord the king will now be comforting; for as the angel of God, so is my lord the king in discerning good and evil. And may the LORD your God be with you.'"

¹⁸ Then the king answered and said to the woman, "Please do not hide from me anything that I ask you." And the woman said, "Please, let my lord the king speak."

¹⁹ So the king said, “Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?” And the woman answered and said, “As you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has spoken. For your servant Joab commanded me, and he put all these words in the mouth of your maidservant. ²⁰ To bring about this change of affairs your servant Joab has done this thing; but my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of the angel of God, to know everything that is in the earth.”

²¹ And the king said to Joab, “All right, I have granted this thing. Go therefore, bring back the young man Absalom.” ²² Then Joab fell to the ground on his face and bowed himself, and thanked the king. And Joab said, “Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord, O king, in that the king has fulfilled the request of his servant.” ²³ So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. ²⁴ And the king said, “Let him return to his own house, but do not let him see my face.” So Absalom returned to his own house, but did not see the king’s face.

²⁵ Now in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. ²⁶ And when he cut the hair of his head—at the end of every year he cut it because it was heavy on him—when he cut it, he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels according to the king’s standard. ²⁷ To Absalom were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a woman of beautiful appearance.

²⁸ And Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, but did not see the king’s face. ²⁹ Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but he would not come to him. And when he sent again the second time, he would not come. ³⁰ So he said to his servants, “See, Joab’s field is near mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire.” And Absalom’s servants set the field on fire.

³¹ Then Joab arose and came to Absalom’s house, and said to him, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?” ³² And Absalom answered Joab, “Look, I sent to you, saying, ‘Come here, so that I may send you to the king, to say, “Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.”’ Now therefore, let me see the king’s face; but if there is iniquity in me, let him execute me.” ³³ So Joab went to the king and told him. And when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king. Then the king kissed Absalom.”

Background Notes

2 Samuel 13 records the rape of Tamar by Amnon, and then the murder of Amnon by Absalom. After the murder, Absalom fled the country, and he was not forced to return home to face trial for his crime. In 2 Samuel 14, Joab sensed David’s dilemma: on the one hand, as a father, David wanted his son Absalom to come home, but on the other hand, David knew that as king, he was responsible to carry out justice in the kingdom, even in reference to his own son, Absalom. So, Joab came up with a plan to solve the whole problem, at least to his way of thinking. He brought a wise woman from Tekoa, a town about ten miles south of Jerusalem, and Joab had the woman go before David with a made-up story about her predicament as a poor widow with a son who had killed his brother.

In order to understand the full impact of this woman's story, we need to be aware that there were a number of different behind-the-scenes factors and factions and even agendas. Certainly, there was Joab's selfish agenda to stay on the good side of David - and also of Absalom, who had a claim to the throne. But there would have been a good portion of the people whose sense of justice would demand that Absalom be properly brought to trial because he was guilty of murder. And then there would be a good number of people in the kingdom who would favor Absalom, because they would not see him as a murderer, but as a good brother who defended and avenged the rape of his sister. Those people would have been in favor of showing Absalom mercy, especially since he was such a talented and good-looking young man, who would make an attractive king.

Joab knew that David was leaning towards the position of forgiveness, and showing mercy was emphasized in the woman's story. Then the woman revealed the parallel (v13), and David was made to feel guilty for not bringing Absalom back. This was most of the people wanted, according to the woman. And furthermore, said the woman from Tekoa, we all die like water spilled on the ground. We can't bring Amnon back by killing another one of the king's sons. Why not show mercy, as God does? Then the woman praised David for his wisdom (v17, 20).

The plan worked, and even though David suspected that Joab had engineered the whole scenario, Absalom was brought back into Jerusalem.

Doctrinal Points

1. Proper discipline must involve more than righteous anger or sorrow.

The right course of action for David, of course, was for Absalom to be brought to trial, regardless of the fact that he was the king's son. Absalom was not above the law, and justice should have been carried out. In view of his sister's Tamar's rape by Amnon, perhaps mercy could have been shown to Absalom at the trial, but Absalom had committed murder and should have been brought to justice.

David was certainly angry about at the sins of rape and murder (2 Samuel 13:21), and David was certainly very sorrowful about these matters as well (2 Samuel 13:36). But David should have done more than just become angry and weep with sorrow over the sins of his sons Amnon and Absalom. Both men should have been made to face the law and been properly disciplined for their crimes.

This is still true today. Proper discipline must involve more than righteous anger and sorrow - whether it is in the home, or in the church, or in civil government. Wrongdoing should not be swept under the rug, nor should it be left to fade away and dissipate with time. It must be disciplined. Proper discipline must involve more than righteous anger and sorrow.

2. Proper discipline may involve permanent scars and separation.

All the way through the account, there is no evidence that Absalom ever repented of his murder of Amnon. Absalom should have been brought to trial, but instead David kissed him and restored him to full privileges at the royal court. Rather than being grateful to his father, Absalom used his restored position and good looks to lay the groundwork for usurping his father's throne! All of this occurred because Absalom had not been properly disciplined. But you might say, "If David had brought Absalom to trial, he might never have seen his son Absalom again!" That's exactly right. Proper discipline may involve permanent scars and separation.

The same is true today. Even when there is confession and repentance with proper discipline, there may be permanent scars and separation. You can't sin in a vacuum. Other people get hurt and scars can remain for life. For example, proper discipline in the church may involve excommunication, and if there's no repentance, but rather defiance, then that separation must remain. Proper discipline may involve permanent scars and separation.

Practical Application

Don't neglect to discipline your good-looking and talented children!

"Now in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks"(v25). And Absalom had a nice family of three sons and a beautiful daughter whom he named Tamar, after his sister (v27). With a family like that, no wonder it was hard for David to properly discipline his son Absalom.

Do you see the spiritual lesson? It is always harder to discipline good-looking and talented children. As proud parents, we're often more interested in gloating over their appearance and promoting their achievements. We tend to overlook or make excuses for their wrongdoing. This distorted "parenting" habit will certainly lead to future problems for the children and for their parents - and for others, too.

Learn this important lesson and practical application from the relationship between David and his son, Absalom: Don't neglect to discipline your good-looking and talented children!