

## Half Truths and False Restoration

2 Samuel 14

*“But God will not take away life, and He devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast” (v. 14)*

**Introduction:** Half-truths can kill fully. Recently a documentary came out on Netflix (*“The Search for Instagram’s Worst Con Artist”*) about a young woman named Belle Gibson from Australia (*where everything is trying to kill you*) came out with a heart-warming story as social media was beginning to gain steam. She claimed to have been diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor and had a few months to live. She began to gain a following on Instagram and revealed that she had decided to reject modern medicine and instead try to heal through a diet of exotic and organic food, exercise, and loving herself. Leveraging her growing following, she launched *The Whole Pantry* mobile app which included life lessons and recipe’s, claiming that this way of living actually **cured her cancer**, including ones she overcame, including blood, spleen, uterine, liver, and kidney cancers. She also announced that a high percentage of proceeds coming in would go to non-profits and cancer research, most of which never actually go there. Misleading many and even encouraging some who **should go to the doctor** but instead tried juicing, Belle finally admitted she was never had cancer, but thought she did, and though she never had a true diagnosis, she never showed sorrow or remorse for the money she took or the pain she caused.

This outright lie had enough truth to deceive many. But this is nothing new. Our enemy worked in half-truths from the beginning of time: *“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the Garden?’”* (Gen. 3:1) Was there truth in this statement? Sure, but it was intended to confuse and deceive, and it was effective. Half-truths have the ability to move someone down a path of **total pain or whole-hearted bad decisions**.

As we continue in the narrative of David in the last stage of his life, we are confronted with realities of **half-truths and false restoration**, being driven by emotion rather than conviction, making decisions based on feelings rather than truth. This chapter has the air of wisdom but possesses little, the essence of discernment but lacking in effectiveness. To set the **context**, we remember that **Absalom, David’s son**, took vengeance into his own hands and killed his half-brother **Amnon** as retribution for raping his sister. He took two years to devise a plan and allow his anger to boil over, but after it happened, he ran away to his grandparents’ house in Geshur (2 Sam. 13:37) and waited there for **three years**. In that time, nothing changed. No humility, remorse, regret, or sorrow over his sin. He was simply waiting for something to give. The family was fractured, the kingdom in limbo, and the king paralyzed with inaction. What gave was a relative and David’s general named **Joab** who decided to, for whatever reason that is left unstated, take matters into his own hands and broker “peace” between father and son. What we will see is this peace was **artificial and restoration hollow**, which only lead to more pain and a proliferation of sin.

### A Half-Truthed Plot for Half-Hearted Restoration (14:1-24)

Plots can be helpful or harmful, based on the motivation and execution of the originators. Nathan the prophet used a story to help David see his sin, and thus his seeming duplicitousness was actually helpful. Joab tried the same tactic, but we’ll see the motives and execution fell short of being helpful and actually complicated an already volatile situation.

2 Samuel 13 ends in an odd way. The English lays it out this way, *“And the spirit of the king longed to go out to Absalom, because he was comforted about Amnon, since he was dead.”* (13:39). If David longed to go to Absalom, why had he not gone for three years?!?! The **verb** used for longed here is the word *kalah*, which is stronger than “to long or yearn”, and means *“to come to an end or be used up”*. The verse is most likely saying that the ‘king’s enthusiasm for marching out against Absalom was spent’, since the expression ‘to go out to’ can be used in a hostile sense (see Deut. 28:7). So, in 2 Samuel 14:1, there is no verb “long for”, but simply says that Joab knew the heart of the king was either ‘upon Absalom’ or ‘against Absalom’, the latter being the most likely.<sup>1</sup> If David’s heart was FOR his son, he would simply need to go see him. But if his heart was against him, knowing that he *should* march against him to bring justice, it would make more sense as to why **Joab hatched this plan** and risked duplicitous tactics to get Absalom back. It also shows that David was **NOT happy with his son, but his conviction was that there was a longing for justice.**

**THE PLAN IS CONCEIVED AND HATCHED:** Joab found a woman from Tekoa, a village about 10 miles south of Jerusalem, far enough away that David would not have recognized her. He convinced her to travel to talk to David and **pretend** to be a mourner who had been in mourning for many days, and he would give her the words to say, since Joab was the puppet master behind the scenes. Here is the story the woman told to David, and it becomes abundantly clear to the reader what the point was:

*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.”<sup>5</sup> And the king said to her, “What is your trouble?” She answered, “Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead.<sup>6</sup> 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.**<sup>7</sup> 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 heir 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.”*

*<sup>8</sup> Then the king said to the woman, “**Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you.**”<sup>9</sup> 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.”<sup>10</sup> **The king said, “If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again.”**<sup>11</sup> 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.” (14:4-11)*

We can see right away her appeal. She was dealing with **family relationships and the murder of one brother by another**. There was a cry out for **justice** for the one who killed, and this would leave the woman desolate, to which David gave the affirming response she was looking for, as David gave his word that the murderous brother would be protected by his authority. However, we all NOTE pretty quickly that this was NOT a 1-for-1 story. This was a **fallacious story of half-truth**. Absalom killed his brother in calculated fashion, waiting for anger to boil over for **2 years**. The woman was presenting a story of brothers wrestling in the field and things got out of hand (as they do with brothers!) and one **accidentally** killed the other! This is how half-truths work, appealing to our **emotion or feelings rather than what is true**. In fact, notice this profound reality about the story **Nathan told David about a man and his sheep and what the woman told David about two brothers:**

<sup>1</sup> Dale Davis, “2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity”, p. 175-76

*“Nathan’s parable was designed to arouse the king’s conscience as against his feelings; the woman of Tekoa’s, as prompted by Joab, was to rouse his **feelings** as against his **conscience**.”<sup>2</sup>*

In other words, the woman was not appealing to **justice, righteousness, or right and wrong, but on David’s affections for his son**, knowing it is hard for parents to be truly objective with their kids. (If you think you are, you are already deceived!).

Once David was on the hook, she turned the conversation to David specifically, switching the story from her sons to David’s situation with Absalom. **FIRST**, she appealed to David’s obligations to the **nation in verse 13**: *“Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again.”* She was trying to connect the fact that by keeping Absalom out of the city and out of the kingly line, injuring the nation and falling short of his role as king, even though David had many sons and God had already designated Solomon as king. This kind of half-truth is called **manipulation and laying on a guilt-trip**, seeking to sway David’s decision.

**SECOND**, she used **sentimental manipulation**: *“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.”* (v. 14) In other words, nothing can bring back your dead son, so why would you sacrifice another son just to uphold some legal niceties and outdated measures? This is clearly where the **half-truth** found its zenith, as she appealed to the fact that God is a God of life and wants those who are rebellious and outcast to be brought back. **Is that true?** Yes, and no. Again, what was missing with Absalom was **JUSTICE**, and without justice there could not be true forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation. Time alone does not take care of this, and God NEVER waves a magic wand to forgive people, but ALWAYS demands justice and payment for sin. This is equivalent to someone saying, *“Doesn’t God love everyone? How could He send anyone to hell or pour out His wrath on anyone?”* God loves, yes, but He also pours out His wrath on sin. **Joab and this woman were appealing for restoration without dealing with sin, and that both never works nor is what God intended.**

David was manipulated, but he was not fooled. He discerned that this story and maneuvering smelled too much like Joab, and so finally got her to admit it was Joab, and then confronted Joab directly. But David also buzzed through his own conviction and said this to Joab in verses 21-24:

*“Then the king said to Joab, “Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.” 22 And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king. And Joab said, “Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted 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 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.”*

Notice that David gave in and brought Absalom back, but at the cost of **half-hearted forgiveness and restoration**. In other words, David’s emotions had cooled and his conviction moved in and he no longer wanted to see Absalom, even though he was back in the city. This would turn out to be an egregious move, since (*spoiler alert!*), he would leverage his situation to manipulate the hearts of the men of Israel against David. Emotional decisions in regards to issues of forgiveness and restoration are not **true nor**

<sup>2</sup> Davis, p. 179, taken from WK Blaike’s commentary of 2 Samuel

are they effective, but simply satisfy our feelings for a short time. Conviction, justice, and true reconciliation take us willing to push past our emotions to stand on the truth.

### A Half-Hearted Son with Half-Hearted Reconciliation (14:25-33)

Admittedly, this whole thing put Absalom in a type of “No-mans-land”, a type of neutral ground where he was back but not restored, returning to his house but not really home. But this time gives us a glimpse into the **character** of Absalom. We’ve already seen he was one who let anger stew, was willing to play the long-game to get what he wanted, and easily manipulated his father. Here is how he is described in the rest of the chapter:

**Full circle with a Saul-like description** (25-27) – David was a man after Gods’ own heart, which differentiated him as king and leader, while Saul was known by his external traits. Here, Absalom was characterized by his looks rather than his love for God. He was **handsome without blemish**, and had a mane of hair that was the envy of every man and the desire of every woman (ok, I added the last part). If lots of hair was deemed a desirable quality, Absalom was able to grow close to **5 pounds of hair** each year (that would be quite a man-bun!) before shaving it off. Now, none of these things is bad in and of themselves (thank goodness), but when this is what you are known for, it presents a glaring picture, and in this case, a negative one.

**He was impetuous and petty** (28-31) – After spending two full years in Jerusalem without seeing his dad, Absalom had enough, so he called for and was ignored by Joab, not once, but twice! So he did what any wise, respectful, and shrewd man does: *he had Joab’s fields burned!* That’d be like slashing the tires or throwing rocks through the windows of someone that did not return a text! He DID get Joab’s attention, but at a destructive cost.

**He still manipulated his father** (32) – Absalom showed no marks of **repentance**: *no humility, no acknowledgment of wrong done or sin, no taking of any responsibility*. But boy, did he know how to get his dad to dance to the fiddle he played. He complained to Joab: *“Why did I even come here? It would have been better to stay in Geshur. Either let me see the king or put me to death.”* This sounds good, but is yet another **half-hearted, half-truthed** way Absalom manipulated. He did NOT believe he deserved death or he would have accepted justice for his actions. No, he manipulated David through Joab, and **it worked**. The chapter ends with Absalom bowing before David and David kissing his son, which seems appropriate, except that it was wrapped in so much refuse. Again, Absalom would go on to hamstring and run out his father in the next chapter, and a kiss did not always refer to forgiveness in the Bible, as Jesus found out from Judas. This is an example of **sorta forgiveness, kinda restoration, and almost reconciliation, but leaves a huge void and lacked any kid of joy**. It’s the kind of process far too many go through when they allow emotions to rule rather than truth or feelings to trump justice.

*“How much bitter fruit would result from this false forgiveness, empty repentance, and half-restoration! Far from being reconciliation, it was the final seal of David’s defeat in the case of Gods’ law versus Absalom over the death of Amnon.”<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Richard D. Phillips, “2 Samuel: Reformed Expository Commentary”, p. 279.

## A Whole Truth for Those in Full Hearted Rebellion

*So where does that leave us? What is the whole truth about restoration? How could Absalom get back to a full relationship with his family and father? The answer: a full understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, where God does 'devise means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast' (14:14). What the woman and Joab presented as a half-truth the Bible displays as a glorious and full reality.*

Here is the truth: **God has devised a means of restoring outcast sinners, but not by subjugating the demands of justice with the demands of love.** As Roger Ellsworth correctly stated, *"When God forgives, it is NOT at the expense of justice, and it is never apart from our own repentance."* Forgiveness DEMANDS justice, and without it, there can be no true forgiveness or restoration. When we skip this truth, we **de-value the glory of God, His demands of holiness, the work of Christ, and the need for His blood shed.** Again, God never waves a magic wand and makes our sin go away. No, He ALWAYS demands satisfaction for every sin committed in order to welcome us back into fellowship with Him.

The Bible describes **three important aspects of full restoration, each one interconnected through the work of Jesus on the cross.**<sup>4</sup>

- **JUSTIFICATION** – This deals with our *legal acceptance* under God's law. Every sinner must stand before the righteous Judge, the God of the universe, and give an account of our sin. As we plead our case, the judgment comes down swiftly and completely: *guilty on all counts, with the sentence of eternal death.* This is what Jesus satisfied on the cross. God treated Jesus like He should have treated us, pouring out His wrath stored up against us on Him, *cancelling out the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands...nailing it to the cross.* (see Colossians 2:14) By putting our faith in Jesus and repenting of our sin, God treats us through the lens of the righteousness of Christ, not only as if we never sinned but also as if we always obeyed. Jesus had to be both **just and justifier** (Rom. 3:26), simultaneously being perfect and the One who took on sin in our place, so that God COULD actually forgive us by receiving full payment and justice for sin.
- **REDEMPTION** – This simply means that we are **set free from the bondage of sin**, no longer owing a debt to God's offended law. **Ephesians 1:7** says it this way: *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace"* The power of sin is broken in our lives, meaning we no longer HAVE to sin, redeemed from lawlessness to become zealous for good works (see Titus 2:14). But please notice: *there is no redemption APART from the blood of Christ!* In other words, we cannot be redeemed and freed from sin by sentimentalism or emotional desire. **It is only the blood of Jesus that atones for our sin, and only through faith and repentance can His blood be applied to us!** The gift is according to the lavished riches of His grace alone, but only for those that He gives the gift of faith.
- **RECONCILIATION** – This is then the result of a sinner being justified and forgiven through the atoning blood of Jesus, and morally transformed to repent of sins committed. Reconciliation allows forgiven sinners to be truly restored to a holy God, bringing us near to Him, which then opens the door for us to be restored to each other.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Phillips helps lay out these three in his helpful commentary on 2 Samuel, p. 275.

*“Through Jesus Christ, sinners gain a complete salvation that satisfies both the justice and mercy of God and restores the bonds once broken by sin. We are justified so that as to be legally accepted by the holy God; we are redeemed, no longer living as slaves to sin; and we are reconciled, living no longer in enmity but in righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom. 14:17)” (Philips, p. 276)*

God was NOT half-hearted or kind of committed to redeeming His people from their sin. He was willing to sacrifice His own Son on the cross, satisfying His wrath by treating Jesus as a curse, so that He could have full payment and justice for sin. No half-hearted response, then, will do. It means that we come to Him empty handed out of rebellion and crying out for His mercy to save us. Forgiveness demands the shed blood of Jesus alone, which is the only price that would be accepted, and when we are truly forgiven, we can be restored. This is the gospel. Not cheap grace. Not manipulation. Not artificial or a distorted view of love. But the loving God’s gracious gift of salvation by upholding his justice and welcoming back sinful people like me and you.

Is this what you know today? Have you come to Christ fully, yielding yourself completely to Him, or have you always been half-hearted? Today is the day to ask for forgiveness by faith, to turn from our sin, and follow Jesus. No tricks. No gimmicks. Only Jesus.