

Prayer

Lord Jesus, in those difficult times when life feels numb and love seems far away, come gently, we pray. Bring a word, a touch, a sense of Your presence; and place within us the seeds of hope and renewal. Then, with every day that passes, may we increasingly know the transforming power of Your love deep within, and rejoice in Your graciousness and care. Thank You Lord Jesus; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Christmas

We will pray this week that the message of Christmas will become clearer to the world as it is celebrated in millions of homes and churches. Pray for Christ to bring peace to our world.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for all who work across the world for the health of nations*
- *Pray for the country of Israel and all people who live there*
- *Give thanks to God for the life of each member of your family*

Meditation

Rescue us, Lord Jesus Christ,
by Your Holy Spirit, rescue us.

Restore our bodies through rest,
and strengthen them with exercise;

Replenish our minds by the Word,
and fill our hearts with Your truth;

Re-ignite Your fire of love in us,
so that we may shine for You;

Recover our zeal to live the Faith,
by challenging us to do Your will;

Replace the tiredness in our hearts,
with the vigour of Your enthusiasm;

Recharge our souls through worship,
so we may enjoy Your presence;

Renew us, Lord Jesus Christ,
by Your Holy Spirit, renew us.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 14:18-24

¹⁸ Then the king said to the woman, 'Do not conceal anything from me when I ask you.' The woman said, 'Let my lord the king speak.'¹⁹ The king said, 'Is Joab involved with you in all this?' The woman answered, 'As you live, my lord the king, what you say can only be true, not false. It was your servant Joab who instructed me; it was he who told me what to say.'²⁰ He did this in order to change what was happening; but my lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God and knows everything that is going on!

²¹ Then the king said to Joab, 'Very well, I will do this. Go and bring the young man Absalom back.' ²² Joab bowed down low in obeisance, and blessed the king, and then said, 'I know that I have received your goodwill today, my lord the king, because You have granted the request of your servant.'

²³ Then Joab set off to go to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. ²⁴ The king said, 'He must go to his own house; he is not to come into my presence.' So Absalom went to his own house, and did not appear before the king.

Review

What was David to do? If you have followed recent studies you will know that David was faced with a complex quandary concerning his son. Absalom, a son who he clearly loved, had placed himself in line to the throne after his father by murdering his elder brother Amnon (2 Sam 13). Absalom had gone into voluntary exile, but David would not accept him back in court as a punishment for his sins. It sounds a reasonable response. However, the situation was not good for Israel because with the heir to the throne exiled, others might try to destabilise David's court in order to seek advantage, and Joab, David's right hand man perceived the problem. He sent a woman to David who told a tale to him which pointed out the salient details of the situation. Despite the personal pain involved, unless reconciliation could be effected between the wayward son and the court, Israel's future would become unstable.

No hiding! After the woman had told her tale and began to explain to David the reason for her concern, David asked the woman without hesitation 'is Joab involved in all this?' (14:19), and she could not hide the truth in front of the King. Her words in verses 19 and 20 appear to reflect both due respect for the king, and also a certain amount of fear at what he might do now her mission was exposed. There is, in truth, a paradox in what she says, for the words 'but my lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God and knows everything that is going on!' (14:20), are likely to make us respond with a dry smile. David was having difficulties and fell far short of the qualities she ascribed to him, and the David of old would have been mortified to have been likened to Almighty God like this, and least of all to be accredited with omniscience (knowing everything)!

David's response Nevertheless, the woman from Tekoa was highly vulnerable standing before the king in open court. Would David accept her approach together with the strong implication of rebuke for the king? Would David accept the clear implication that he should make peace with his eldest son and not abandon him in exile? How would David respond to the fact that Joab was involved in the woman's approach and was obviously trying to influence him? If we imagine the scene, we must remember that as the army commander, Joab would have stood near to the king when he received public petitions. He was, after all, responsible for public order; but it was he who had arranged for the woman to come to the king and challenge him. Joab's sole purpose had been to persuade the king to stop prevaricating and allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem, and thus bring to an end all the uncertainty about Israel's royal succession. This, in his view, would strengthen the monarchy and also his own position as army commander. After a moment's thought (perhaps), David turned to one side and addressed Joab, giving permission for the return of Absalom. Joab therefore set out immediately for Geshur to do what he had probably wanted to do for some time, and bring Absalom back.

David and Absalom Despite David's love for Absalom, he still decided to keep his son at a distance. Perhaps David remained uncertain about the suitability of Absalom as an heir (he proved to be right, of course). He permitted Absalom to live in Jerusalem with his immediate family circle (wife, family and children), but not attend court or come into the King's presence. David did not want to be associated with what Absalom had done, so

Absalom had to live away from the centre of power and the heart of government. It was a situation he would exploit to great effect (2 Sam 15).

As we read this story, there can be no doubt that the writer of scripture is asking us to consider whether David is really in full control of events. Joab, the army commander, had covered for him in the matter of the murder of Uriah the Hittite, and sometimes had to 'pull strings' to get things done for Israel, and whilst he was doing this, David seemed to be preoccupied with his own feelings about his family. We can learn from this that it is quite unrealistic to expect every man or woman of God to be perfect. Like David, there will be times when their ministry or leadership is compromised, and the stories of David are there for us to learn from. In this story, David showed that there are times when a leader needs to heed what others say and accept the advice of loyal servants. Each leader needs to know who these loyal servants are, and when to use them.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss whether it is possible that in verses 19 and 20, the woman from Tekoa is mocking David for his frailties rather than praising him.
2. Much of this story is about who will rule Israel after David. How important is it for God's people to know who will lead them next?
3. Why do some leaders appear to refuse to listen to others, and discuss good and bad examples of this.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Here is another text from scripture which advises Christian leaders to surround themselves with people who are godly, truthful and prepared to speak out when things go wrong. God's people can be severely affected when not led properly, or when they feel that their leader is not on top of the job, and undercurrents of dissatisfaction will quickly surface. As disciples of our Lord, what do we feel our responsibilities are towards our leaders? This applies to all levels of leadership in the church, of course, not just the appointed minister, priest or elders.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If you feel strongly about an issue, would you feel able to bring this to the leadership of your church and do you feel they would listen? Pray about this, because the empowerment of God's people in the life of the church is an important issue.*
- *Are there anyone within your church who you believe to lack a voice and who is not heard by the leadership? Talk with them to check whether your feelings are correct, and pray about what you should do to be a help to those involved.*

Final Prayer

Give me, Lord God, a heart that is open to Your guidance and Your will. May I be prepared to go wherever you may call, and have the courage to stand against all evil, according to Your grace; and help me to serve others under all circumstances, so that You may be glorified in everything I do. Thank You, Lord God. AMEN