



THE LIFE OF DAVID

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AFTER  
GOD'S  
HEART

“The Unbearable Cost of Justice”

2 Samuel 18-19

## **Jeremiah 2:2**

**I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown.**





## 2 Samuel 18:1-4

David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. David sent out his troops, a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, "I myself will surely march out with you."



## 2 Samuel 18:1-4

But the men said, "You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city."

The king answered, "I will do whatever seems best to you." So the king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands.



## 2 Samuel 18:5

The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake."

And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.



# Eugene Peterson

Deep changes were taking place in David as he descended from the heights of Jerusalem down the “Jericho Road” into the wilderness of the Jordan. ... The worst rejection of his life precipitated the most wonderful love—love for Absalom. ... But there was nothing sentimental about David’s command; it issued out of a deeply realized recovery of who he was and who God is.



# Eugene Peterson

... Only when David was truly in touch with himself and truly in touch with God was he able to be in touch with Absalom and able again to love.



## 2 Samuel 18:6-8

David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. There Israel's troops were routed by David's men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.





## 2 Samuel 18:9

Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.



## 2 Samuel 18:10-17

When one of the men saw what had happened, he told Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree."

Joab said to the man who had told him this, "What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt."



## 2 Samuel 18:10-17

But the man replied, “Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king’s son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, ‘Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.’ And if I had put my life in jeopardy – and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me.”



## 2 Samuel 18:10-17

Joab said, "I'm not going to wait like this for you."

So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. And ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.



## 2 Samuel 18:10-17

Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes.



## 2 Samuel 18:19

Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said,  
“Let me run and take the news to the  
king that the LORD has vindicated  
him by delivering him from the hand  
of his enemies.”



## 2 Samuel 18:20-21

“You are not the one to take the news today,” Joab told him. “You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king’s son is dead.” Then Joab said to a Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.



## 2 Samuel 18:22-23

Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, "Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite."

But Joab replied, "My son, why do you want to go? You don't have any news that will bring you a reward."





## 2 Samuel 18:22-23

He said, "Come what may, I want to run."

So Joab said, "Run!"

Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.



## 2 Samuel 18:24-25

While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. The watchman called out to the king and reported it. The king said, "If he is alone, he must have good news." And the runner came closer and closer.



## 2 Samuel 18:26-28

Then the watchman saw another runner, and he called down to the gatekeeper, "Look, another man running alone!"

The king said, "He must be bringing good news, too."



## 2 Samuel 18:26-28

Then the watchman saw another runner, and he called down to the gatekeeper, "Look, another man running alone!" The king said, "He must be bringing good news, too."

The watchman said, "It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok."



## 2 Samuel 18:26-28

“He’s a good man,” the king said. “He comes with good news.”

Then Ahimaaz called out to the king, “All is well!” He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, “Praise be to the LORD your God! He has delivered up those who lifted their hands against my lord the king.”



## 2 Samuel 18:29

The king asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

Ahimaaz answered, "I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king's servant and me, your servant, but I don't know what it was."



## 2 Samuel 18:30-31

The king said, "Stand aside and wait here."

So he stepped aside and stood there.

Then the Cushite arrived and said, "My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you."



## 2 Samuel 18:32

The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man."





## 2 Samuel 18:33

The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"



# Eugene Peterson

These have got to be among the saddest, most heart-rending words ever spoken—words wrenched out of David's gut when the report was brought to him that his son had been murdered in the forest of Ephraim. David was no stranger to death, no stranger to tears, no stranger to murder, no stranger to disappointment, no stranger to sin. But no event combined all of these elements with such intensity, yes, ferocity, as did the matter of Absalom.



## 2 Samuel 19:1-4

Joab was told, "The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom."

And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, "The king is grieving for his son."



## 2 Samuel 19:1-4

The men stole into the city that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle.

The king covered his face and cried aloud, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"



## 2 Samuel 19:5-7

Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men



## 2 Samuel 19:5-7

mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the LORD that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now."



## 2 Samuel 19:8

So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, "The king is sitting in the gateway," they all came before him. Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes.

Justice is needed for  
a broken world filled  
with wrongdoing  
and sin.







## 2 Samuel 17:14

Absalom and all the men of Israel said,  
“The advice of Hushai the Arkite is  
better than that of Ahithophel.”

For the LORD had determined to  
frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel  
in order to bring disaster on Absalom.



# Miroslav Volf

I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced.



# Miroslav Volf

My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandparently fashion?



# Miroslav Volf

By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love.

A world in which  
there is only justice  
without mercy leaves  
no survivors.





# John Woodhouse

Which principle would you prefer to prevail in human relationships—love or justice? I suspect that your answer to that question is, “It all depends.” There are times when we would like love to triumph over justice (particularly when we ourselves are the ones in trouble with justice). At other times it does not seem right for the claims of justice to be outweighed by compassion.



# John Woodhouse

In a world deeply affected by human sin, there is no avoiding the tension. It is an aspect of the fallenness of the world that love and justice do not meet. ... Parents with troublesome sons or daughters can agonize over this. Their love for their children is strong and true. But is it right to try to protect them from the consequences of their bad, perhaps criminal behavior? How can love and justice meet?



# John Woodhouse

... The truth is that David's love for Absalom was not able to save the rebel from Joab's justice, and Joab's sense of justice had no space for David's love for his son. The situation was impossible.





## 2 Samuel 18:33

The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! ***If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!***"



**On the cross of Jesus perfect justice met perfect love.**



Romans

5:6-11

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be



## Romans 5:6-11

saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.





# Summary

A broken world filled with wrongdoing and sin cries out for justice, but justice without mercy leaves no survivors.

Only the cross of Christ can meet this need for both justice and mercy.