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## Keeping Up Appearances II Samuel 14

**Intro:** In [Chapter 13](#) we saw an abundance of scheming among those close to David and the scheming continues here in [Chapter 14](#). Joab, David's general, is going to use a witty woman from Tekoa to sway David's opinion concerning Absalom and Absalom will craft his own audacious plan using less skilled labor. But, as we'll see, all this wrangling will fail to produce any real joy this episode because in the end, it's not the [prodigal](#) son that is returning but the [murderer](#) son. The fatherly kiss David extends to Absalom is not an [invitation for celebration](#) but an [omen of worse things to come](#).

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**1- [concerned](#)**- what does the author mean by this? What were the King's true feelings towards Absalom now? Most commentators assume David was pining away after his exiled son but that sentiment may only be the result of a faulty understanding of [13:39](#). Most English translations say David longed to go to Absalom but the Hebrew verb [kalah](#) is usually much stronger than [longed](#) or [yearned](#); it literally means: [to come to an end](#), [be used up](#), [exhausted](#). The verse could then be saying: [David's enthusiasm for marching out against Absalom was spent](#). Thus, vs1 could mean that either the heart of the king was [towards](#) Absalom or [against](#) him. It seems like the latter would still be the case because it will seem like David has [little enthusiasm](#) for Absalom's return & even [less](#) for reconciling with him.

I only mention these details here as a [warning](#) because this story may not really be about what it [seems](#) to be about.

What's Joab's concern here? Is David's unrequited consternation towards his son eating him up slowly day by day? Or maybe Joab just wants to make sure that Israel had a crown prince ready & waiting in the wings if something unforeseen was to happen to David. The premature death of a monarch without a clearly designated successor could plunge the entire nation into a very costly (not to mention ghastly) civil war. Of course Joab could do nothing about this without the consent of a monarch who doesn't seem to be too keen on the idea at all. So, Joab takes a sheet from old Nathan the prophet's playbook & devises a legal scenario that will convince the king to see the light.

**2-3- wise**- This woman wasn't only sharp, she was a good actress; she played her part perfectly. Her widowhood invited sympathy; Tekoa was far enough away to prohibit fact-checking; her age lent dignity to her story & her mourning clothes heightened the effect. She also had family troubles but not so similar as to cause any suspicion.

**4-11**- Her dilemma is obvious: her husband is dead & 1 of her sons is dead by the hand of her only other son. She's all for granting mercy because if justice were served on her remaining son, she would be without support & her dead husband would be without a living descendent to carry on his name in Israel. In contrast, her relatives are all for executing justice on the manslayer but their passion for justice is really only a cover for their greed. See, if they succeed in executing her remaining son; when she dies, her husband's property would become available to the extended family. So, under the appearance of "justice" they plot a great **injustice**. Will the king take up her case?

David assures her he will but that's not good enough for her. The wheels of government turn slowly & her case is a matter of life & death. She's willing to assume the guilt of any decision David made (not that it meant anything) but David promised to protect her if anybody tried to harass her on this. But she still wasn't satisfied so she asked the king to go on oath concerning immunity for her son & David does (**11b**). Taking an oath in the Lord's name was binding & could not be ignored. The woman (& Joab) had David right where they wanted him.

**12-17- Why?** - She takes the decision David made for her & her son & applies it directly to him & his son. The king is being 2-faced. He has decreed that the woman's banished son should be restored but he has done nothing to restore his own banished son. She may be assuming Absalom is the heir to the throne & by depriving Israel of an heir, David wrongs & acts against the people of Israel. If this situation is not resolved, the nation will die off & like water poured out on the ground, will not be restored. Even **Yahweh**, holy & righteous as He is, is able to devise ways to show mercy & forgive offenders. He looks for ways to reconcile sinners to Himself, as He had done for David.

She then shifts back to her original story. Maybe she felt that she over played her hand, maybe she just wanted to distract David. Whatever the

reason, she clearly doesn't want David to think that her main point *is* the main point. But David's no slack when it comes to smarts & he could smell a hypothetical rat when he needed to.

**18-24- Joab**- there's no point in continuing the charade: the points been made; it's best to just lay it all out now! The woman assures the king that Joab acted purely out of intent to change the present situation for David & Israel. Apparently, Joab was present when the beans were spilled (awkward) but David concedes the point & gives Joab approval to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem but not total freedom; he is to be placed under house arrest.

This section is dripping with apparent wisdom: Joab's scheme succeeds thru the efforts of a wise woman from Tekoa but is their wisdom **really wisdom**? The woman's story seems plausible but her hypothetical son was merely guilty of manslaughter. Absalom, on the other hand, was guilty of premeditated murder & it cried out for justice not clemency. To appeal to God's mercy (14) in a case that requires God's justice is **not wisdom** – its **sentimentality**.

There's a lot of "wisdom" here that isn't wisdom at all. There's planning wisdom (Joab); persuasive wisdom (woman) & even perceptive wisdom (David). It all has the trappings of wisdom but without any real wisdom. Does Joab know what he's bringing about? He believes all that was lacking was Absalom's **presence** when in truth, all that was lacking was Absalom's **repentance** & that was never demanded or offered. David can detect Joab's meddling but can he deal wisely with Absalom? He could have left him in exile or he could have executed justice on him but David does neither. In fact, David doesn't act at all; he's acted upon. David doesn't rule, he reacts; he doesn't reign, he consents.

Is this wisdom? This should be a warning to Christians everywhere: it's possible to have all the signs of wisdom – detailed plans, effective strategies, great accomplishments - & yet still be utterly devoid of wisdom.

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**25-27**- these verses aren't necessary to the story so why mention Absalom's good looks, hair care & family here? Note: this is Mr. Israel, darling of the media, most photographed hair of all the royal family with his lovely children. If you've studied thru I Sam, this description should make you uncomfortable because it dredges up parallels to other leaders, or potential

leaders, of Israel who were **long** on **image** but **short** on **substance**. Recall Saul's description: how he was head & shoulders above everyone else or Eliab, David's eldest brother, whose appearance so impressed Samuel, he almost anointed a second Saul! The principle to learn here is: **physical presence before men without internal submission to God makes for a leadership disaster**. These verses tell us there's another Saul waiting in the wings to take over the throne. Unlike Saul, Absalom is primed & ready to go!

Absalom's resume is pretty thin: he's handsome, got a fine head of hair & has some kids. Nothing at all is mentioned about wisdom or piety. Is this **leadership**? Well, it's what we've come to expect in the political world: style over substance, cosmetics over content, manner over matter. Like Israel, the people must have their idols. Lack of character is insignificant as long as they have status, wealth & good looks. Gratefully that's not how it is in the church or is it? Someone has described the Fortune 500 pastors that most contemporary congregations desire today: **winsome, charismatic, executives who exude warmth & success; known more for their humor than their spirituality; pastors that lift the spirit, promote optimism & make people feel good about themselves**. This is in stark contrast to the standards for elders that Paul lists in **1 Tim 3:2-4**. Woe to the church that falls into the Absalom trap.

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**28-33-** In **Chapter 13**, it looked like Absalom's vengeance had ruined his chances of ruling Israel. Now Joab had acted to bring him back from exile but he was still under house arrest. Absalom knew that being banished from the king's presence meant he wasn't expected to be heir to the throne & more than anything else, he wanted to be king! For 2 yrs, he waited, expecting Joab to hash things out with his father but apparently, Joab has washed his hands of the whole affair; he wouldn't even return Absalom's calls! Well, Absalom knew how to get Joab's attention. When Joab confronts him, he give Joab an ultimatum: either take me to the king & let him receive me & forgive me **or** take me to court & prove me guilty of a capital crime & execute me! Absalom was taking a risk here because he was clearly guilty but it was a calculated risk because if David was bent on justice, he wouldn't have allowed Absalom's safe return to begin with & Joab knew that the people would never allow their favorite crown prince to be tried & convicted of a capital crime. As it turns out, Absalom was right – all it took was a little groveling & he is back in the king's good graces!

Let's view this from Absalom's perspective: just 5 yrs before it looked like his royal life was over but now it looks like nothing can stop him from ascending to the throne. What he had seemingly lost forever was now amazingly restored to him as if **all things worked together for good** for him. It all seems like a wonderful work of **providence** but is it?

The text doesn't say this was Absalom's thought but it's not unheard of for wicked men to appeal to divine providence to justify their actions. When Adolph Hitler narrowly escaped death when a bomb exploded near him, he later told Mussolini that it was not just the pronouncement of Divine Providence – it was actually God's intervention! His theology is as suspect as his sanity. But what about our text; is this divine providence at work? I would have to say, **Yes!** It **is** the hand of God working but not for the benefit of Absalom but for David's judgment (**as well as Absalom's**).

Here's a man driven by hatred, guilty of murder, which gets off scot-free simply because he has friends in high places & the nerve to push the issue. How can this be? Often times it appears like the wicked don't just "get away with it" but are actually blessed with success – free from justice. It seems that as bad as they are, nothing bad ever happens to them. Everything seems to go their way. Is that providence? Is God smiling down on them? See **Ps 73:16-17**.

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Was David right to reach out to Absalom or wrong? Is there a place for forgiveness & reconciliation where a crime has been committed? These are difficult questions, especially since David is not just Absalom's king, he's also his father. Where do the royal office stop & the familial office begin? Can one be separated from the other?

There was a place for forgiveness & reconciliation in Israel – it was on the lid of the Ark, beneath the wings of the covering cherubims: the mercy seat! Absalom's forgiveness & reconciliation would need to be realized the same way all other sin was dealt with – thru confession & repentance. Failure to achieve this means David's acceptance will not be met with reciprocal love & loyalty. Absalom will use his new found freedom to generate hard feelings & rebellion towards his father in Israel in order to force his father off the throne & assume it for himself.

The woman from Tekoa had it right: God does devise ways to bring back His

banished ones – but not at the expense of justice. God reconciles us by satisfying justice not by ignoring it. The way God provides for His banished ones to return to Him is thru the person & work of Jesus Christ. As He hung on the cross, He stood in the place of guilty sinners & received the punishment that we deserved. In kissing Absalom, David excused his crime of murder. This was an act they would all soon regret. David's forgiveness is given without any repentance or resolution of the crime.

It may seem like a wonderful gesture but the resulting calamity would beg to differ. Imagine the nightmare if God were just to wink at sin! God does offer forgiveness but it is from a place of selfless love & justice. God selflessly gave His only begotten Son to pay the just penalty for sin but now each person must also recognize their need for a Savior, see their sin for what it is (confess) & repent of it (turn away) & accept Christ's free offer of salvation. 😊