

## Messy Reconciliations

### 2 Samuel 19:9-18

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-9-2014

## Introduction

When there has been major conflict, it is sometimes tricky to pursue reconciliation. This is true in the family, in the church, and in the state. It is especially difficult on the state level because of the numbers of people involved, the incredibly wide range of opinions and the amount of sin that tends to complicate the efforts. So while David's attempt at reconciliation was a bit messy and ended up being sabotaged at the end of this chapter, I appreciate having it in the canon of Scripture because life in general tends to be much more messy than the picture-perfect reconciliations that you see in the text books.

### I. Not everyone wants reconciliation (v. 9a)

The first thing that we see here, and that we see in modern life, is that not everyone really wants to be reconciled. Verse 9 begins,

Now all the people were in a dispute throughout all the tribes of Israel...

They were arguing about whether they should be reconciled to David. Those who were pushing for reconciliation weren't necessarily giving the best reasons, but at least they were interested in patching up their disagreement.

But the word "dispute" makes it quite clear that not everyone was on board. Some assume from the dynamics that occur later in the chapter that it was largely a regional dispute of North versus South, while others point to fears that others had. It could have been both, but the way it is written emphasizes especially the latter. I want you to notice that this dispute was not simply regional. Verse 9 says, "Now all the people were in a dispute *throughout all the tribes of Israel.*" This makes me believe that the poison of Absalom's slander and the fears of retaliation from David were both hindrances to reconciliation. But whatever the reasons, not everyone wanted reconciliation and it would take some pretty major sacrifices on David's part to convince them that he was sincere.

And this is so true to life. Down through the years I have seen numerous reasons for resistance to reconciliation - even by godly people. Sometimes the resistance is because they are skeptical of the sincerity of the other person. Sometimes it is because bitterness has made them unwilling to trust the person again. Sometimes it is simply stubborn digging in of the

heels. And there can be other reasons. But it is good to think through those potential problems and potential solutions before you even approach reconciliation. David certainly did that, and it was a good thing. And there are good books out there, like *The Peace Maker*, by Ken Sande,<sup>1</sup> that can help you in this area of resistance to reconciliation.

## II. Not all reasons for reconciliation are equally good (vv. 9-10)

Verses 9-10 then give the reasoning of at least some of the advocates of reconciliation:

**2Sam. 19:9** Now all the people were in a dispute throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, “The king saved us from the hand of our enemies, he delivered us from the hand of the Philistines, and now he has fled from the land because of Absalom.

**2Sam. 19:10** But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, has died in battle. Now therefore, why do you say nothing about bringing back the king?”

I see five arguments being used by the proponents of reconciliation here. **First**, they say, technically he is still the king, so we should bring him back. They call David “the king.” And this may have flowed from recognition that the previous anointing of Absalom was not constitutional. **Second**, they acknowledge that David had been good to them and had done a wonderful job of protecting them from their enemies, which was the chief function of a king. **Thirdly**, at least some seem to be blaming Absalom for this alienation. And this does make sense, since we saw back in chapter 15 that he had spread a false rumor that David was dying of a sickness and that he was the heir apparent, so there is a sense in which at least some of them had been deceived. David sure doesn't seem very dead here. But in verse 10 they do take some blame, saying, “But Absalom, whom we anointed over us...” The **fourth** reason is that they don't have much choice because Absalom is dead. David apparently was not dying, but Absalom was definitely dead. And the **fifth** reason given is that somebody needs to do something. Nobody is willing to take the first step, but there does seem to be at least some advocates for reconciliation. But commentators are agreed that no progress had been made or was likely to be made. That is why the frustrated question in the last part of verse 10:

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.

### **III. Sometimes we need third parties to negotiate reconciliation and give a more objective perspective (vv. 10b-11a)**

#### ***A. The leaders don't seem able to act (v. 10c)***

“...Now therefore, why do you say nothing about bringing back the king?”

They are making no forward movement. The leaders don't seem to be able to act.

#### ***B. So David asks two priests to help (v. 11a)***

So David recognizes that it will be helpful to have third party negotiators brought in, and who better to do it than the priests, Abiathar and Zadok? They were knowledgeable in the law of God, were godly, desired a godly outcome, were respected leaders by both sides, and were more likely to be able to speak to both sides without them feeling threatened. Verse 11 says,

So King David sent to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, saying, “Speak to the elders of Judah ...

It takes some of the emotion out of conversations if people who have not been directly involved in the conflict can start the talks. And by the way, mediation is almost always to be preferred to court cases. There are advantages to taking something to court, but the disadvantages are many. Let me list some of the disadvantages.

- First, it is rare that a court case settlement (whether in a civil court or a church court) will end up being a win-win situation. Where good mediation can often be a discussion of we versus the problem, a court case tends to have one party versus the other party and there is almost always a winner and a loser.
- Second, energies are primarily directed to minimizing the evidence against you and focusing only on proving the other person wrong. There is no motivation to look at things from the other person's perspective. In mediation that is quite different.
- Third, in a court case it is conflict focused rather than relationship focused. That tends to exacerbate the bad feelings rather than dealing with them.
- And fourth, the disputants lack ownership for the results. They are having a decision imposed upon them by the court. In

mediation you can help both sides to be part of the solution.  
And that is exactly what happens in these verses.

And I bring that up, not because a court situation was even possible here. It was not. But rather, I bring it up to highlight the important role of mediators in reconciliation. Too frequently that is skipped in Reformed churches and people go straight to church court. That should really be a last resort.

Now, Obviously we are missing a lot of details in what Zadok and Abiathar were able to talk through, but even what we have recorded here gives hints of a normal process for reconciliation:

## **IV. The process of reconciliation**

### ***A. Someone has to make the first move (v. 11a)***

We've already hinted at the first point – somebody needs to make the first move. It would have been easy for David to say, "They wronged me. I'm not making the first move." But for the sake of God's glory and the kingdom he made the first move by asking Zadok and Abiathar to get involved and even to give hints of what could be said and what he is willing to do.

Too many times reconciliation stops at this point. One or both parties to the conflict are utterly unwilling to be the first ones to try to reach out. Pride hinders them from doing so. They think the other person is totally at wrong, and I'm not going to budge an inch until they do such and such.

Did David have some wrong? Yes – a long time ago. God made clear that this was part of His discipline of him for the Bathsheba event. But in the current situation David had done nothing wrong. Nevertheless, with all of the slander that Absalom had sent out, it sure didn't look that way to at least some. So both sides could easily be waiting for an eternity for the other party to admit to their wrongs. Maturity will take the first step whether I am in the wrong or not. My focus should be on God's glory, the testimony of Christ, and the good of the brethren.

### ***B. There need to be efforts to get the reluctant on board (v. 11)***

#### **1. Israel (ten tribes) was already willing**

Next, there often needs to be some effort put into getting the reluctant party or parties on board. Notice again the question at the end of verse 11: "Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house, since the words of

all Israel have come to the king, to his *very house?*" Commentators say that the leaders of the northern ten tribes had by this time been convinced that they needed to go along with David, and the southern leaders have not yet done so, perhaps because of how closely associated with Absalom's rebellion that they had become. So efforts were being made to try to draw the reluctant parties into the talks.

## 2. Judah (two tribes) was dragging its feet

### *C. Unconditional acceptance does not mean total agreement; it means full forgiveness (vv. 11b-14)*

The third process issue that we see is the realization that unconditional acceptance of each other does not mean unconditional agreement. And failure to understand this has sometimes been a huge barrier to reconciliation. People may think that they can't be reconciled until they can totally agree. So let me repeat the principle. Unconditional acceptance of a person does not mean total agreement with that person. Instead, it means forgiveness and walking in grace. There might still be areas where they do not see eye to eye, but you can still be unconditionally committed to each other. If this key process is not embraced, attempts at reconciliation will keep getting scuttled. You see, the sin in the first place was not having different perspectives; it was in breaking fellowship and treating each other as enemies. David was willing to live with differences and he was hoping that these people would be willing to live with differences and still be committed to each other.

And this principle applies to marriage and to many different areas of life. If we will only be reconciled when the other party has perfectly repented or perfectly changed their mind on every last area of disagreement that we have had over the past thirty years, then the reconciliation will probably not happen. Just to illustrate, I'm sure if I randomly pointed to various people in this congregation we could probably find some pretty significant areas that you and I might have disagreements on. And you are probably aware of those disagreements. So why do we still love each other and accept each other? It's because our love and acceptance of each other does not rest on perfect agreement. Instead, we are committed to embracing all whom Christ embraces and loving them enough to continue working on our differences. But we work on the differences out of the security of being accepted, not in order to get accepted. The first flows from grace; the second from works-righteousness. We are patient with each other, knowing that God is not finished with us yet. The beauty of the body is that we can trust

the Lord with those differences (because He is the one who sanctifies, right?) and still love each other and be committed to each other in the body. That's what we are talking about. But frequently that attitude evaporates after a conflict. Where previously people overlooked these differences, now that's all they can think about. And they think that they can't be reconciled unless every one of those differences that existed before the conflict is solved. It's backwards.

David is making huge concessions to Amasa and the other Judahite leaders, and they are no doubt making concessions as well. It takes looking at life from the other person's perspective and working through trust issues. And that's what the next point is about – gaining understanding. This is the fourth process issue. And there are four sub-points to that:

#### **D. Gaining understanding**

##### **1. Involves a learning spirit (“why...why” – vv. 11-12)**

Everyone has been walking on eggshells and doesn't quite know how to proceed. And the first thing that Zadok and Abiathar do is to ask questions. There are two “whys” in verses 11 and 12 that are trying to draw out the reasons for Judah's reluctance. They are trying to understand what is driving their fears. It is a very abbreviated account so we are not told what stories the leaders told Zadok and Abiathar for their reluctance, but they were at least given an opportunity to do so.

One book on mediation says that this is a real sticking point in conflict resolution – people feel like they are not being heard. It said,

One's interest in telling his or her side of the story is usually balanced by the other side's disinterest in listening. Yet, successful resolution depends on both occurring, so it is critical to emphasize the value of listening skills... I find an extremely helpful technique in mediation is to ask the listening side to summarize what the talking side has said. Typically, summarization never actually takes place, because the ‘listener’ will admit to not listening, but then will be more attentive.

...In situations of conflict, we typically expend great effort to persuade our opponents where we are “coming from,” but we fail to invest in similar understanding of their side of the argument. In short, we don't understand them, and we don't understand the problem from their perspective...<sup>2</sup>

So the first sub-point is that understanding involves having and promoting a learning spirit and a listening heart.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Randolph Lowry, J.D. and Richard W. Meyers, *Conflict Management and Counseling* (Word, Inc., 1991), pp. 70-71. While I cannot endorse this book, it does have some good concepts in it.

## 2. Understanding interests/perceptions

The second sub-point of understanding is trying to discover what interests and perceptions are driving the other side. Frequently suspicions kick in. Why is this guy suddenly so co-operative? I don't trust him. What's he got up His sleeve? Since the Judahites had gone along with the Absalom rebellion, they are very legitimately concerned about whether David will treat them like enemies. David's invitation helps to settle that.

David on his part is worried that they will continue to rebel against him once he gets into Jerusalem, and their invitation in verse 14 helps to settle that fear. He's not going to cross the Jordon till he gats that, right?

Another interest that is mutual is that neither side is thrilled with the idea of Israel being split into two nations, as it appears might happen. And so there are shared interests that could be useful to understand.

Let's take it out of the area of theory and into the area of common everyday life. Your son asks you if he can borrow the car for the afternoon, and you say "No." And he walks out of the room and that's the end of the conversation. Now, you may think that you are not an arguing family. But there could be internal conflict that you don't even recognize with the son feeling frustrated that he won't be able to pick up this last day of a sale on a Macintosh computer. (Now you know this illustration is totally fictitious because Macs are never on sale, right?) But just asking a few questions about what interest is driving each party could result in a very satisfactory solution. The dad's concern is that he might have a client call and needs to have the car available just in case, and the son's concern is that he will miss out on this \$500 savings. If either the son or the dad were to ask a couple of questions, a satisfactory solution for both might be able to found. If the dad were to ask what the son needed it for, he could perhaps volunteer to drop him off at the mall and pick him up when it is convenient, and both interests are satisfied. Now, it's a silly illustration, but the point is that conflicts often happen because we don't take the time to listen to the concerns and perspectives of the person that we are disagreeing with. David was trying to avoid that.

## 3. Understanding shared values (v. 12)

The third sub-point in understanding is reminding each other of shared values. The Judahites were suspicious of David, and he tells them in verse 12:

2Sam. 19:12 You *are* my brethren, you *are* my bone and my flesh. Why then are you the last to bring back the king?"

In that statement he is appealing to both shared values and a common relationship. When conflict occurs, these things can be completely forgotten because the focus is only on the problem. Frequently in divorces people don't consider shared values, such as the loss of finances, house, children, lifestyle, reputation, emotional damage, and the synergy of their efforts together as opposed to apart, and many other things. When the mediators focus on what both sides value jointly, many times it can help to give perspective and help both parties to realize that divorce is not such a great idea after all.

#### 4. Appealing to relationship (v. 12)

#### E. *Taking a risk in reaching out sacrificially (v. 13)*

The fifth process item in conflict resolution is a willingness to take risks in reaching out to the other person. In avoiding a divorce sometimes it takes the risk of being hurt again. After church discipline it takes the risk of people thinking poorly of you. And even though it rarely happens, that still goes through people's minds. And there is always some risk of blowback when you are the first to reach out in reconciliation. Well, David took a huge risk in verse 13 in order to show his good will. David instructed Zadok and Abiathar:

2Sam. 19:13 And say to Amasa, “*Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if you are not commander of the army before me continually in place of Joab.’*”

Now, he was killing several birds with one stone in doing this, but it was an action that convinced the Judahite leaders that David had no intention of going back on his word. It convinced them that he was in this all the way. **First** of all, he was burning his bridges. **Second**, with one of their own leading David's army, it ensured against David becoming vindictive. **Third**, it put David in a vulnerable place in two ways. It put him in a vulnerable place to take a stand against Joab, who was a pretty powerful man, and it put him in a vulnerable place in that their most prominent general would now be working hand in hand with David. That's a risk. **Fourth**, it showed that David held no grudges. In fact, it would give credence to the idea that Absalom's propaganda was full of lies. **Fifth**, David was showing what he had in common with Amasa. He was after all, Amasa's relative. **Sixth**, it built a bridge to the leaders by valuing their top leader. **Seventh**, it showed unconditional acceptance. David didn't have to agree with what they did to him. In fact, after having fought against them it wouldn't be very credible to claim that he agreed with them. But despite

disagreements, he showed unconditional acceptance. And **lastly**, it was a powerful statement that David did not approve of Joab's killing of Absalom.

But taking this step was very risky. Reconciliation always involves some risk. And if you are only willing to be reconciled if there is no risk in it for you, it is not Biblical reconciliation.

**F. Reconciliation is a heart issue and not simply an administrative issue (v. 14)**

Then verse 14 shows that reconciliation is not simply an administrative issue; it is a heart issue. Until David won the heart of these leaders, there would not be lasting reconciliation. So verse 14 says,

**2Sam. 19:14** So he swayed the hearts of all the men of Judah, just as *the heart of* one man, so that they sent *this word* to the king: "Return, you and all your servants!"

David may have been able to fight his way back into kingship. But he wouldn't have had their hearts, would he? He may have been able to bully his way back to the throne. But would they ever trust him? You see, without the hearts of the leaders, it would not be true reconciliation. And to show how powerfully this worked, even though commentators point out that the ten tribes were the first to agree to take on David, they were the first to leave in chapter 20. For them it was an easy and convenient administrative reconciliation and it was just as easy to break it off. On the other hand, even though the Judahites were the slowest and the most reluctant to take back David, because David had gone through a fuller process of winning their hearts, they stuck with David even when civil war broke out once again.

I know of a company that Randolph Lowry claims had treated an employee very badly, and there was a lawsuit. Lowry was assisting the attorneys of the company to try to settle the lawsuit. And one day the owner confided in private that he felt very badly about the way the employee had been treated. He admitted that he had not been treated fairly. And Lowry was extremely surprised that they were fighting this in court. Lowry asked if he had ever told the employee this, and the answer was, no – that he had been advised that this would be disastrous for the lawsuit to admit any such thing. Well, Lowry encouraged him to do the right thing, and when he apologized to the man, almost immediately the man was willing to settle out of court for much less than what he was suing for. Prior to the apology this guy's heart was out to punish, but with the apology, all he wanted was fair treatment. The owner had won his heart just as David had won these Judahite hearts. It really is an important principle.

### **G. Mutual actions that reinforce the reconciliation (vv. 15-18)**

The seventh process item was that action needed to follow agreement. When a person asks for forgiveness but doesn't try to follow through on specific actions to change his bad behavior, he won't be taken too seriously. And these people were aggressive in showing these actions of reconciliation. There were five steps taken:

#### **1. Mutual agreement to reconciliation (v. 14b)**

Verse 14 shows their verbal response to David's words was a very enthusiastic response.

...so that they sent *this word* to the king: "Return, you and all your servants!"

Reconciliation was now something mutually agreed to. But the first action was verbal action. The kind of words that we are willing to speak either short-circuit or reinforce reconciliation.

#### **2. Physically meeting (v. 15)**

Next, there was a physical reunion in verse 15:

2Sam. 19:15 Then the king returned and came to the Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to escort the king across the Jordan.

If people say they forgive and are reconciled, but they refuse to be around each other, then both the meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation is misused. Reconciliation involves physical presence. It involves reunion. You are willing to be around each other. So both sides went to meet each other.

#### **3. Repentance where necessary (v. 16a with 18-23)**

Third, they gave repentance where necessary. Verse 16:

2Sam. 19:16 And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, who *was* from Bahurim, hurried and came down with the men of Judah to meet King David.

Verses 18-23 amplify on the story, showing him crossing the river, and with wet clothes falling on the ground before David asking his forgiveness. He was a humbled man. And in verses 19-20 you see that it was a risky and thoroughgoing repentance. But he illustrates the importance of repentance in the process of reconciliation. Is this just one example of many who asked for forgiveness? We aren't told, but repentance is part of the process.

#### 4. Make the reconciliation publically clear (v. 17a)

And the repentance needs to be such that it is obvious to all. Verse 17 shows that Shimei was not ashamed to bring everyone he knew to witness his repentance. It says,

*There were* a thousand men of Benjamin with him...

Shame keeps some people from making their repentance and their reconciliation a publicly known matter. And it is really too bad when people are ashamed to make their repentance public. It does not model repentance to others, it does not show humility, and it gives no accountability should the person once again break the peace. It's really much better when people are open about it like Shimei was. Hard as it is, it's a wonderful step.

#### 5. Serve one another (v. 17-18)

And then in verses 17-18 they serve one another.

2Sam. 19:17 *There were* a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over the Jordan before the king.

So they are not just waiting on the West side of the river. They eagerly cross over the river in order to help the king and his family and his men to cross.

Verse 18:

2Sam. 19:18 Then a ferryboat went across to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. Now Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king when he had crossed the Jordan.

And we will deal with Shimei next week. But here I just want you to notice the enthusiasm with which they welcome David back, make him and his family comfortable, and seek to serve. And the point is that *action* is louder than words. And many times, loving actions like these can cement a good reconciliation in place. We have to work harder than normal at showing the actions of love to each other.

#### H. Not all issues will necessarily be satisfactorily resolved (v. 17 Ziba with vv. 24-30)

But there is one last process issue hinted at in this passage, and we will not get to the passage until another week. But I will briefly mention that reconciliation can happen even though not all sin issues are satisfactorily acknowledged, repented of, or resolved. This is why I call it a messy reconciliation. The ideal would be for every issue to be cleared up. But the mention of Ziba makes it clear that this reconciliation was not perfect. And in real life, it rarely is.

Ziba most likely had slandered Mephibosheth in chapter 15, and David most likely had cheated Mephibosheth out of half of his property in that same chapter. Most commentators believe that when David met both parties in this chapter, he simply could not figure out who was lying and who was telling the truth. Obviously one of them was lying. And because of that fact, one of the two was going to be getting a bad deal. And nobody could figure it out. And when we get to Mephibosheth's story in verses 24-30, it is heart breaking to see sinners like Ziba acting so boldly and unashamedly in their sins against another person. Personally I think that Ziba slandered Mephibosheth and that the property should not have gone to Ziba. It's an astonishingly bold sin, but he gets away with it. Thankfully, Mephibosheth has a very humble, forgiving, God-centered, and gracious attitude, and peace is preserved despite ongoing sin.

But I mention Ziba here because in real life you cannot expect every issue to be resolved before reconciliation is achieved. Sometimes we just need to do the right thing to the best of our ability and trust God with the fact that the other person has taken advantage of us. I have personally had a number of times when I have had to overlook a major injury against me because the other person simply would not acknowledge it. But being reconciled was more important to me than being right. So those are the kinds of issues that should be thought through during an attempted reconciliation. There are a couple more process issues than the eight I listed under point IV, but I was surprised at how many had been addressed in this short passage.

## V. The initial stages of reconciliation can be fragile and easily sabotaged (19:18b-20:22 – future sermon)

But the last point is simply anticipating the future. Just because God's grace was at work today does not mean that it won't have to be at work tomorrow and the next day and the next day. The initial stages of reconciliation are so fragile that they can be easily sabotaged. And even though I won't be preaching on the passage today, let me go ahead and read what happens in chapter 19:40 through chapter 20:2.

**2Sam. 19:40** Now the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. And all the people of Judah escorted the king, and also half the people of Israel.

**2Sam. 19:41** Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, "Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David's men with him across the Jordan?"

**2Sam. 19:42** So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king is a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king's *expense*? Or has he given us any gift?"

**2Sam. 19:43** And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, “We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more *right* to David than you. Why then do you despise us—were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?” Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

**2Sam. 20:1** And there happened to be there a rebel, whose name *was* Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. And he blew a trumpet, and said: “We have no share in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!”

**2Sam. 20:2** So every man of Israel deserted David, *and* followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah, from the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, remained loyal to their king.

So the reconciliation of ten tribes to David was busted apart by a few angry words. It's so sad. But emotional words frequently destroy the work of grace in God's people. As a church we should pray against that and work against such tendencies, but not get too disheartened when they happen. It's a part of life. It's our prayer that such things would not happen frequently in this church, but human nature being what it is, rebellion can easily surface in a way that nobody can deal with.

## Conclusion

But rather than ending on that sour note, I want to focus on the wonderful sacrificial actions of love that the Judahites exhibited toward David. Sometimes we will never know the degree to which an action of love will break down old walls. It would be easy for David to hold resentment for things that had happened, but he seemed to be able to cut them out of his past and not focus on them. It didn't mean that he forgot them; he just refused to bring them to remembrance.

You understand the difference don't you? Nowhere in Scripture does it say that God forgets our sins. He doesn't; He can't. He is omniscient and since He knows all things, he cannot forget our sins. But the Scripture says that God refuses to bring our sins to remembrance (Is. 43:24; Jer. 31:34). Forgetting something is a passive loss; it's a defect in our memory. There is nothing remarkable about that. I've had people confess sins to me that I had totally forgotten had occurred. But there is nothing remarkable about that. I've just got a bad memory. Forgetting is a passive thing. Both remembering and refusing to remember are active. Refusing to bring to remembrance is an active refusal to brood over someone's sins or to hold those sins against them. In fact, in the Scripture, remembering our sins against us (3 John 10; Ps. 25:7; Ps. 79:8) means to punish us for our sins and to hold us

accountable for our sins. So God doesn't forget our sins, but He refuses to remember them against us.

And when David refused to hold their bad behavior against them, David was not in any way saying that their behavior had been OK, or that he would never have a painful memory again. He was going to refuse to brood on their sins against him and he was going to refuse to hold their sins against them by taking revenge. That's what forgiveness is. It is not a passive defect of memory. It is an active discipline of our mind, emotions, and actions.

And it is sacrificial love that helps us to get past that and to grow deeper in our relationship. These men were engaging in sacrificial love for David and David in the upcoming chapters was going to engage in sacrificial love toward them. Let me end by reading the testimony of how Randolph Lowry was conquered by the sacrificial actions of another man. He said,

The power of sacrifice in establishing relationships under the most difficult of circumstances was made clear to me several years ago. My wife was enduring a very difficult pregnancy with our first child – one that left her hospitalized on numerous occasions and confined to bed for many weeks. That in itself was one act of loving sacrifice, as she took steps to protect the health of the unborn child. Meanwhile, at the church where we worshipped was a man with whom I disagreed about almost everything. We were from different church backgrounds. We were from different parts of the county. We had vastly different life and religious experiences, all of which led us to polite tolerance, but certainly not close friendship.

One day, late in the afternoon, there was a knock on our door. It was Larry, with a full dinner he had spent the afternoon cooking especially for us. The awkwardness of accepting the gift was only exceeded by the generosity of his spirit. His act of love caused me to change, forever, my view of him and establish what will always be, from my perspective, a Christian bond. Such a bond came not from our agreement on religious issues or common experiences in life, but rather from his sacrifice – that kind of sacrifice that leads to relationship.<sup>3</sup>

God so loved an alienated people that He did what? He gave His only begotten Son; He gave sacrificially. May we too give sacrificially by pursuing these steps of reconciliation with those from whom we are alienated. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Lowry, *Conflict Management*, pp. 81-82.