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## God Devises Ways for Life (2 Samuel 14:14)

### Introduction

Do you devise ways for those outside Christ to find life with God or to remain separated from Him? Be careful, there is no neutral. We all devise ways to either pull people toward God or to push them away from Him. The determining factor is how we respond to the life-giving inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Bible records that when it comes to the banished, God devises ways for life: “Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him” (2 Samuel 14:14). *Nephesh* is the Hebrew word for *life*, also translated *soul*, or *breath*. God pulls toward those who are separated from Him by breathing life into their souls so that they may turn to Him and experience reconciled relationships. Contrastingly, left to our flawed nature, we push people away from God. In fact, the Hebrew word for *estranged* means literally “to push away.” Now here’s the question that each of us must ask: “If the Spirit of God dwells in me, do I devise ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from God?” In order to do so, we must: (1) inhale the breath of life from God and (2) exhale the breath of life to others.

First, let’s examine the background of this potent verse.



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*Amnon devises a way to push*

King David's son, Amnon, fell in love with his half-sister, Tamar. Literally lovesick because it seemed impossible for him to be with her, Amnon was approached by his friend and cousin, Jonadab, who inquired about his gloomy appearance. The two devised a way for Amnon to be alone with Tamar. Amnon pretended to be ill, garnering the presence of his father, the king, to whom he requested none other than Tamar to come to his house and prepare food for him. An unsuspecting David obliged. What followed cut deeply into David's family legacy, scarring it for generations.

A scheming Amnon gazed at Tamar with shameless intent while she kneaded the dough, formed it into bread, and then placed it in the brick oven. As the aroma of freshly baked bread filled Amnon's house, lust filled his heart. When Tamar served him the warm bread, he refused to eat, ordering their servants to leave. Still devising a way to violate his sister without any witnesses, Amnon requested Tamar to feed him as he lie in his bed. When a vulnerable Tamar approached her deceitful brother, he grabbed her, whispered his dishonorable intentions, defied her warning, and stole her innocence.

*Absalom devises a way to push*

When news hit the king, he was furious, but he ignored the law requiring Amnon's banishment. Consequently, Tamar's full brother Absalom calmed his sister while he secretly devised a way to seek revenge. Two years later, after receiving David's permission allowing the king's sons to join him out of town with his sheepshearers,



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Absalom ordered his men to murder a wine-filled Amnon as repayment for his sin with Tamar. The princes raced to David's palace where they mourned the untimely loss of their brother. Realizing that he faced banishment or even death for his heinous act, Absalom fled for asylum in Geshur, land of his mother, where his grandfather was king.

*David devises a way to push*

All the while, David's heart longed for his son Absalom. However, the king allowed his son to remain banished without contact for three years until David's military leader Joab (meaning Jehovah-fathered), devised a way to persuade the king to reconcile with Absalom (2 Samuel 14:1).

*God devises a way to pull*

Motivated by a desire to pull David toward reconciled relationships, to see the king's heart mended by renewing his relationship with his son (2 Samuel 14:1), to honor God (2 Samuel 14:13, 16, 17), to maintain Israel's military strength (2 Samuel 14:16), and to improve his own relationship with David (2 Samuel 14:22), Joab sent his messenger about ten miles south of Jerusalem to Tekoa where he solicited the help of a wise woman. Disguised as a grieving widow, the undercover agent traveled to Jerusalem and fell before the king as she presented him with her parable masterminded by Joab. While in the fields, her sons argued. With no one to separate them, one son stole the breath of life from his brother. Now the entire clan was coming to kill her sole remaining heir who also represented her only means of survival. She begged for David's protection



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from the avenger of blood. Empathizing with the woman's plight, the king promptly ordered for her son's safety.

With the confirmation of the king's ruling, the wise woman of Tekoa unveiled her true motive. David listened intently only to learn that he had been the antagonist in yet another parable. "The wise woman inquired, 'Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son'" (2 Samuel 14:13).

With David's blood boiling, the woman seized the moment to craft one of the most insightful word pictures ever expressed to the shepherd turned king: "Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him" (2 Samuel 14:14). The wise woman of Tekoa had just painted a portrait of God on the inner canvas of the king. If God devises ways for life, would the man after God's own heart do the same?

In order to be used by God to advance His kingdom, David would have to: (1) inhale the breath of life from God and (2) exhale the breath of life to others. The same holds true for us today.

### **(1) Inhale the Breath of Life from God**

First, David would have to remember his own sin and God's justice, mercy, and grace. We must remember that we were once banished, and God devised a way that we



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could turn and not remain estranged from Him. In order to restore our fellowship with Him, the Father did not condone our sin, nor condemn us beyond His reach; rather, He paid the price for our transgressions and devised a pathway home. Justice, mercy, and grace flow from the heart of the Father Who devises ways for life.

### **Justice**

“Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die” (2 Samuel 14:14). Amnon was dead and could not be brought back to life. According to the law, Amnon should not have had sex, let alone forced, with his sister (Leviticus 18:9). The penalty was to be banished, or cut off, from the people (Leviticus 18:20; 20:17). David exchanged justice for license with Amnon, fostering an opportunity for Absalom to execute revenge. We have one opportunity at life on this side where we fall short of God’s perfection, and then we die to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Christ is the justice of God. He paid the price for our sin (Hebrews 10:10).

### **Mercy**

“But God does not take away life” (2 Samuel 14:14). The Latin Vulgate states, “Nor does God will the destruction of the soul” (2 Samuel 14:14). God exhales mercy. God provided Amnon, David, and Absalom mercy so that they would return to Him. In the Garden of Eden, God breathed life into the clay (Genesis 2:7). In the original Hebrew, that breath of life suggests a continual inhaling and exhaling. Consequently, God did not merely breathe into man one time, and walk away. Rather, He continues to inhale and



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exhale through His creation. In Christ, we find that breath of life only by His mercy (Romans 9:15-16). God does not give us what we deserve, eternal banishment from Him. Instead, He offers us mercy: less than we deserve.

### **Grace**

“Instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him” (2 Samuel 14:14). *Chashab* is the Hebrew word for *devise* that is contrasted with David’s devising Absalom’s banishment referenced in the previous verse (2 Samuel 14:13). If God devises ways to forgive and reconcile, will David? Will we? Contrast this with the fact that God hates a heart that devises wicked schemes (Proverbs 6:18). Both Amnon and Absalom had devised wicked schemes. According to the law, two or more witnesses to a premeditated murder allowed for the death penalty (Number 35:30). This stipulation would have weighed heavily in Absalom’s decision to flee Jerusalem.

“*Banished*,” spoken by the wise woman of Tekoa, is a repeated Old Testament reference to God’s people who were the benefactors of the Divine Who devised ways so that they would not remain estranged from Him. This was true from the beginning. After the first sin in the Garden, justice was issued and death occurred. An animal was killed for its skin to cover Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). Then mercy was unveiled as God instituted physical death for man so that he would not live in the dilapidated state of sin forever (Genesis 3:22). So, God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23). However, God did not banish them from His presence. He offered grace through the prophesied Christ (Genesis 3:15).



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The story of God's grace to reconcile banished people continued throughout the Old Testament. Just prior to the Israelites entering the Promised Land, God spoke to His people through Moses, "Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back" (Deuteronomy 30:4-5). Hundreds of years later, though King David's successors had sinned, God still issued grace: "But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence" (2 Kings 13:23). God devised ways for life. Our sin against God requires death. Through His justice, mercy and grace, God devised a way that we would not remain estranged from Him. Christ is the way (John 14:6).

### **David Inhaled the Breath of Life (Psalm 103; Psalm 23:3)**

We have to ask, "How did David respond to these words about God?" We know that David allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem, though their relationship was strained for the balance of Absalom's life (2 Samuel 14:23-24, 32-33). However, a snapshot inside David's heart appears in his words of Psalm 103 where David painted a picture of inhaling God daily. First, David inhaled the breath of life in his soul (*nephesh*) from God in *worship* of Him (Psalm 103:1-17). David penned, "Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my innermost being, praise his holy name" (Psalm 103:1). He remembered that he was once banished from God, and he had received forgiveness, God's justice and mercy offered by grace, in order to not be estranged from Him (Psalm 103:3-17). Second, David



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inhaled the *Word* of God (Psalm 103:18-20). David wrote, “Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word” (Psalm 103:20). Third, David inhaled the *works* of God: “Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul” (Psalm 103:21-22). In his familiar psalm, David expressed that only God can renew the breath of life in us when he composed, “he restores my soul” (Psalm 23:3).

#### *Pause and Let Wisdom Work*

Inhale the breath of life from God. Read Psalm 103. Remember that you were once banished, and God devised a way for you not to remain estranged from Him. Christ is the way, and His Spirit devised a unique way for you to find life in Him. Therefore, commit to three spiritual pursuits in order to inhale God each morning: (1) worship, (2) Word, and (3) workout. First, worship God by listening to a style of worship music that speaks to your heart. Music affects the central nervous system, but worship music breathes life into the soul. As you listen, pray to God, praising Him for Who He is and thanking Him for forgiving you. Second, read the Word. Begin your morning by reading the Bible. Start with at least one verse. Breathe in and live the day through the oxygen that the Word provides. Third, start your day with a workout. Whether it be walking one hundred steps amidst God’s creation or training for a marathon, release the epinephrine and endorphins in your body that offer a relaxed energy throughout your day (1 Timothy



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4:8). You might even do all three at the same time by listening to worship music while reading your Bible and climbing on the elliptical machine.

## **(2) Exhale the Breath of Life to Others**

Second, David would have to yield to God's ways. We must yield to God's devising ways in us to help the banished not remain estranged from Him. When we were banished, God reconciled us in Christ in order to use us to reconcile others to Him (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). Not only must we inhale the breath of life from God, but also, we must exhale the breath of life to others by yielding to the Spirit of Christ in us.

When we yield to God's devising ways in us to help restore the banished, we exhale the breath of life to others through the same methods in which we inhaled the breath of life: worship, Word, and workout. Jesus' disciple Peter said, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Worship sets apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. The Word prepares us to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for our hope. Workout is how we exhale life to the banished with gentleness and respect.

First, we *worship* God by communicating His character to others. The Hebrew word *yadah* is often translated as *confess*, meaning "to exhale" to God. Our first step to reconciling the banished is not toward them, but toward God. Exhaling is how we remove waste both physically and spiritually. As a result, we must be willing to confess our sins to God and appropriately to others, demonstrating our yielding to God's justice, mercy,



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and grace. When we worship God, we exhale the breath of life to others who will be drawn to Him (1 Corinthians 14:24).

Second, we communicate the *Word* of God to others. The more we get into God's Word, the more His Word gets into us. Consequently, His Word appears in our words. When we humbly and wisely share His Word with others, they draw nearer to Him (1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Colossians 4:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12).

Third, we *workout* God's redemptive and restorative breath of life in us by living out our salvation. Paul wrote, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12-13). God devises ways in us for others to find life when we inhale and exhale the breath of life by serving them in our daily encounters. The New Testament church was even called, the Way (Acts 9:2).

### **David Exhaled the Breath of Life to Others (Psalm 145)**

David yielded to God's devising ways in Him to help the banished not remain estranged from the Lord. In his crown jewel psalm, David exhaled the breath of life to others. First, David worshiped God in the presence of others (Psalm 145:1-3). Second, David exhaled God's Word to others by writing the inspired Word. Third, David exhaled to others God's just, merciful, and gracious work in him by working out, or living out, his redemption and restoration (Psalm 145:4-21). God's breath of life in David catapulted him from shepherding sheep to shepherding His people as their king (Psalm 78:70-72).



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*Pause and Let Wisdom Work*

Exhale the breath of life to others. Yield to God's devising ways in you to help the banished not remain estranged from Him. Worship God by confessing your sin and communicating His identity to those you encounter. Humbly and wisely exhale the Word of God that you inhale in the morning. Workout God's work in you by living out your redemption and restoration as you serve others through your career, family, and friendships.

**Conclusion**

When we inhale the breath of life from God and exhale the breath of life to others through our worship, the Word, and our working out, those we serve will begin to inhale and exhale that Divine breath as God devises ways for life. We must remember that we were once banished, and God devised a just, merciful, and gracious way for us to turn and not remain estranged from Him. Then we must yield to God devising ways in us to draw the disenfranchised to Him. People will be pulled toward God, rather than pushed away from Him, when we surrender to God breathing His Spirit through us.