

# From Hostility to Reconciliation

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*Rocky IV* (1985) is the fourth installment of a series of six American sports drama films following the life of Rocky Balboa of Philadelphia, a man who rises from being a poor, small-time club fighter and loan shark debt collector to becoming the heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

Set against the backdrop of the Cold War, the ideological and geopolitical tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union during the second half of the 20th century, Rocky agrees to a 15-round exhibition boxing match with champion Russian boxer Ivan Drago in Moscow.

On the night of the match, Rocky is confronted with a stadium full of hostile, jeering people. Ivan, in contrast, enters in heroic and patriotic fashion and is greeted with wild, resounding applause. Even General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and the Politburo are in attendance to watch the match.

Rocky was clearly the underdog, and it was expected by the crowd and Soviet leaders that the bigger and stronger Ivan would quickly be victorious and demonstrate the superiority of the Soviet Union over the United States. But no matter how many powerful punches Ivan inflicted on Rocky, he would not go down. As the match neared the final round, the crowd's attitude toward Rocky started to move in an unexpected direction. Impressed with his refusal to give up in the face

of their stronger champion, they started to cheer for him.

Perhaps the most memorable part of the film was when a bloodied and battered Rocky, after having defeated Ivan, winning his respect and that of the crowd, addressed the audience. Through an interpreter, he said:

“I came here tonight, and I didn’t know what to expect. I’ve seen a lot of people hating me, and I didn’t know what to feel about that, so I guess I didn’t like you much either. During this fight, I’ve seen a lot of changing – in the way you felt about me and the way I felt about you. In here, there were two guys killing each other. But I guess that’s better than 20 million. What I’m trying to say is that if I can change and you can change, everybody can change!”

The crowd was so moved by Rocky’s words that they gave him an enthusiastic standing ovation. General Secretary Gorbachev and the Politburo also rose to their feet and passionately applauded Rocky. They understood his message that the mutual hostility and disdain the American and Russian people had for each other could change to mutual respect, admiration, and peace between them.

While feats of strength and endurance can influence adversaries to develop mutual respect and admiration for each other, a special act of mercy and kindness can also lead to peace. One example of this can be seen in the history of ancient Israel.

During the reign of King Jehoram (852-841 BC), hostilities existed between Israel and the rival kingdom of Aram to the east (2 Kings 6:8-23). Ben-Hadad II (865-842 BC), king of Aram, would send marauders into Israel to plunder and weaken the country. He even set up ambushes to capture or kill the king of Israel. But the prophet Elisha’s warnings about the movements of Aram’s forces saved Jehoram several times.

Ben-Hadad, furious that his efforts were being thwarted,

gathered his servants together to find out which of them was spying for the king of Israel. They denied any disloyalty on their part and told him about the prophet Elisha, who tells the king of Israel the words he speaks in utmost privacy. So the king ordered his servants to locate the whereabouts of Elisha, and once he was found in Dothan, he sent a large force of marauders by night to surround the city and apprehend him.

But as the host of marauders approached the city at daybreak, Elisha prayed to the Lord that they be inflicted with blindness, and his request was granted. Unable to see, Elisha was able to get the multitude to follow him, not into Dothan but to nearby Samaria, the capital of Israel. Once there, their eyes were opened at Elisha's prayer.

Defenseless before the army of Israel surrounding them, the dismayed marauders expected death, especially since Jehoram was eagerly asking Elisha for approval to kill them. But Elisha told the king not to kill them but to provide food and water and send them home. He probably remembered God's word through the wisdom of King Solomon from more than a century before:

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you." (Proverbs 25:21-22)

Because Jehoram followed Elisha's word and treated his enemies with kindness and generosity instead of destroying them, the Lord rewarded Israel with peace from the Aramean marauders, who had developed a great respect for Elisha and ceased their attacks in the land.

In the apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, he encouraged them to show the same kind of mercy and grace to their enemies as a way of trusting in God and pursuing peace instead of seeking vengeance against them. He exhorted them to

“not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”  
(Romans 12:17-21)

Whether hostile children on a playground or nations pitted against each other on the world stage, it is a blessed thing when one side ceases acting out of revenge for wrongs real or imagined, animosities are set aside by all, and reconciliation and friendship take place.

In some ways, this is a microcosm of our relationship with God. He showed His great love, mercy, grace, kindness, and generosity toward us in that, while we were His enemies because of our sins against Him and deserving of His wrath, He reached out to us and sent His Son Jesus to reconcile us to Him through His perfect life, shed blood on the cross, and resurrection from the dead.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. **For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.** And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”  
(Romans 5:8-11)

Anyone who trusts in Jesus alone (not Jesus plus something or someone else) receives as a gift from God forgiveness in place of condemnation, peace in place of hostility, and reconciliation in place of separation. In Christ, you become more than a friend with God. You become His beloved child forever (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26; 1 John 3:1). Hallelujah!

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