

Receiving Wise Counsel (*Abigail*)

1 Samuel 25
July 29, 2018

Before reading this sermon, read 1 Samuel 25:1-13. Stop reading when you come to this phrase in verse 13: “...**Each of you strap on your sword!**”¹ Oh, how the testosterone was flowing! There’s about to be a brawl. Now, some of you might say “a good old brawl” because you grew up in a setting where that’s one of the ways you settle a conflict. Others of us might say, “a terrible brawl” because we just aren’t accustomed to such behavior. Men, most of us have experienced something like this. Some wrong has been done and it’s time to fix it with our fists. You don’t have to be Irish to understand pugilism. David and the men who followed him were all battle-hardened soldiers; they were fighters! Ladies, you’ve probably all seen instances where testosterone caused the men around you to behave in ways that make no sense to your feminine sensibilities. But, sensibility is not driving David’s decision at this point. He is allowing himself to get caught up in the emotion of the moment.

Humans are rarely at their best when their anger flares. This is why verses like James 1:19-20 tell us, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

Before we weave our way through our story this morning...

Let’s meet the main characters. We begin with **David**. He’s recently mourned the death of the prophet Samuel. He’s not yet king. He’s still out in the desert with about 600 fighting men, hiding from King Saul.² This whole time he’s been practicing patience and caution. In fact, he’s shown self-control in not killing Saul a couple of different times. Unfortunately, however, in this current situation with Nabal, David didn’t 1st seek wise counsel before acting. He makes a rather rash and imprudent decision.

Our next character is **Nabal**. He is a wealthy landowner in a town named Carmel. (With a name like Carmel, I suppose we should expect a sticky situation! Sorry, I couldn’t resist.) Nabal has 4,000 animals, 1,000 are goats and 3,000 are sheep; this is a LOT of wealth. His disposition is described as surly and mean.³ He is further described by one of his own servants in 1 Samuel 25:17 as, “such a wicked man that no one can talk to.” Similar to David, Nabal did not seek out wise counsel before acting.

Abigail is the 3rd character in our story. By far, she is given the most flattering description. 1 Samuel 25:3 introduces her as, “...an intelligent and beautiful woman.”⁴ The *ESV* translates “intelligent” more specifically as “discerning,” which we will find to be a helpful distinction as our story progresses. We will find that she is not only discerning but also decisive. In today’s story, we can find three different occasions when Abigail acts QUICKLY.⁵ In contrast to these two testosterone-driven men who act impulsively, Abigail acts quickly but also wisely. She’s a woman of action who also demonstrates humility and godliness.⁶ She had the courage to act; not just seeing the problem and knowing what ought to be done, but also **DOING** what needed to be done. Ok, enough with introductions...

¹ Here are some pronunciation hints: Ramah = RAY muh, Paran = PAY run, Maon = MAY ahn, Nabal = NAY bull

² We should really probably say avoiding King Saul since David and his men may well have been able to overcome Saul’s army.

³ We also learn that Nabal is a Calebite, meaning he is a descendant of Caleb – one of the faithful spies who investigated the Promised Land and came back with a good report. See Numbers 13, especially verse 30. Despite this godly heritage, Nabal seems nothing like Caleb. This connection probably mostly explains why and how Nabal inherited his land – See Joshua 15:13.

⁴ Consider Proverbs 11:22.

⁵ See verse 18, 23, and 42. Also note David’s comment in verse 34.

⁶ See note on verse 42 from *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 535.

Let's trace through the story together. You've already read 1 Samuel 25:1-13. David and his men are hungry or perhaps more accurately "hangry!" The little cartoon to the right says it all: T-rex becomes Barney, thanks to a Snickers bar! Back to our story, here David politely asks for "whatever you can find." In verse 6, "The Hebrew word [shalom] ("peace" or "good health") appears three times in this verse. It reflects being respectful to the superlative degree."⁷ David had sent 10 young men with this very polite request, presumably expecting that they would carry back some food to David and the other men. Culturally, this doesn't make a whole lot of sense to you and me today. But, apparently, it was quite reasonable for David to ask Nabal for food; to share the wealth with neighbors who've helped keep watch over the sheep. Everyone else in the story, except Nabal, seems to understand that.



Nabal responds "Who is this?⁸ ...Why should I?" And, he doesn't ask around to learn more. David's men had urged him in verse 8, "ask your servants." But Nabal doesn't. If he had he could have learned what we later read in 1 Samuel 25:15-16, "Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall around us the whole time we were herding our sheep near them." David and his men really had been wronged by Nabal. Nabal's rejection is what brings us to 1 Samuel 25:13, "David said to his men, "Each of you strap on your sword!" So they did, and David strapped his on as well. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies."

David is about to make a rash, unkingly, and terrible mistake. Can you relate to this? Feeling wronged and reacting poorly? Perhaps even plotting your revenge? This makes me reflect on the challenging advice from Romans 12:18-19, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord." But David, takes the matter of revenge into his own hands. In fact, he's about to get blood on his hands.

Now, before we jump ahead to the intelligent/beautiful Abigail, let's recognize that there is actually a 4th important character in this story. This person goes unnamed, but that makes them no less important. Behind the scenes, we find an incredibly helpful unnamed servant. He/she assessed the danger AND THEN brought their concern to the right person. We read in 1 Samuel 25:14, "One of the servants told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them." The Hebrew verb here actually connotes that Nabal screamed at them!⁹ The servant then goes on to warn Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:17, "Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him." Here's a place where the servant could have just kept their mouth shut. They could have thought, "well, it's none of my business!"¹⁰ But, instead, they become an accomplice to the hero of the story. Abigail acts quickly by gathering a bunch of food and heading out to meet David, without telling her husband Nabal. Her decisive action wasn't a moment too soon. 1 Samuel 25:20 says, "As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them."

The text actually tells us what David had just been saying, "May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!" (1 Samuel 25:22) David and his men were "loaded for bear." The servant was right to warn Abigail. Swords were about to clash into a bloody confrontation! Abigail then carries out an amazing act of mediation and wise counsel. 1

⁷ NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 533.

⁸ Nabal's designation of "son of Jesse" was likely a way to belittle David since Jesse was of little import at this point. See text note on verse 10 in NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 533.

⁹ See NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 533.

¹⁰ Consider Proverbs 24:10-12.

Samuel 25:23-27 says, “When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. She fell at his feet and said: “Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my lord sent. And now, my lord, as surely as the LORD your God lives and as you live, since the LORD has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you.”

Two things happen here. First of all, Abigail gives David a different perspective on the situation. Rather than focus on avenging Nabal’s bad behavior, she urges David to pay no attention to him, but rather to pay attention to God’s perspective. She declares that God has kept David from bloodshed.¹¹ She says this even though David was on his way to shed blood. The 2nd thing she does is take David and his men the food they had rightly requested. This took a lot of courage. She walked up to the hangry t-rex and offered him some food; meaning she had to get close to the teeth.

Abigail then goes on as a skilled peacemaker in 1 Samuel 25:28-31, “Please forgive your servant’s presumption. The LORD your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the LORD’s battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. (an interesting choice of metaphors) When the LORD has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant.” Abigail calls David to act kingly! Consider how wise/knowledgeable Abigail was to give this answer. She is not just smart, she is discerning.¹² She knew who David was, she understood that he was in hiding out in the wilderness from Saul, she knew that he would understand her slingshot analogy, and she knew that he was to become Israel’s future king. In short, she understood the great magnitude of whom her husband had offended. Therefore, she courageously and humbly initiates a peaceful, diplomatic solution that saves the lives of MANY men. Praise God for Abigail! She’s both beautiful and intelligent!

Then, she awaits David’s response. David is still hangry at this point and the testosterone is still flowing! He’d just spewed a bit of venom. But, BEFORE giving the t-rex food, she FIRST gives him wise counsel. Then, I picture David kind of standing there... slowly loosening his grip on the hilt of his sword. As he listened to Abigail’s wise counsel, God softened his heart enough that he could receive her good advice. Slowly, t-rex turns into Barney. He hasn’t even accepted the food yet but he has accepted her good judgment. 1 Samuel 25:32-35 then tells us, “David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. **Otherwise**, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, **if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.**” THEN David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, “Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.” Abigail demonstrates for each of us the importance of using good judgment. Oh that God would grant that, more and more in my own life!¹³

Meanwhile, Nabal is back home partying it up. Rather than appealing to David, who was soon to be King, Nabal is feasting like a king himself and getting drunk as a skunk. He is completely wasted. So, Abigail, waits until morning. Again, she shows prudence and good judgment. You don’t try to reason with a drunk or tired person; you wait. 1 Samuel 25:37-38 tells us, “Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a

¹¹ Consider also the nobility of Abigail for taking responsibility for her husband’s bad behavior.

¹² See 1 Samuel 25:3 in the ESV.

¹³ Consider Job 12:13; Psalm 32:8; Proverbs 8:12-21, especially verse 14, and Proverbs 15:22.

stone. About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died.” Abigail’s display of godly wisdom is confirmed by the Lord’s sovereign decision to take Nabal’s life. Nabal was not struck down by David’s sword, but rather by the hand of the LORD. This is summarized in 1 Samuel 25:39, “When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Praise be to the LORD, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head.”

Then, in what seems like a very strange plot twist, David asks the now widowed Abigail to marry him and she says “yes.” That’s how the story ends! We don’t have time to jump ahead to 1 Samuel 30 and read the story of Ziklag¹⁴, when Abigail gets taken captive by roving marauders and David has to go to her rescue! Nor do we have time to delve into our questions about polygamy and David’s multiple wives. However, if you call church or check on our website, you can find some resources that will help you learn more about this. Check out <http://www.efcbemidji.org/media/studies>

For today, let’s... **Let’s apply our own personal takeaway.** Which character in this story do you most need to learn from today?

Nabal teaches us not to behave foolishly. Are you hard to reason with? 1 Samuel 25:17 describes Nabal as the kind of person that no one could talk to. He just wasn’t willing to listen to anyone. Are you prone to be mean and surly? Or, are you unwilling to share your wealth and be generous toward those in need from your plenty? If you can identify with Nabal, that’s worth praying about. Ask God to change your heart.

David teaches us to receive wise counsel; to pay attention not to the foolish people in our lives like Nabal, but rather wise people like Abigail. Who are the Abigail’s that God has put in your life? And, are you teachable and open to their advice and good judgment?¹⁵ “It’s been said that we find comfort among those who agree with us and growth among those who do not.”¹⁶ Have you surrounded yourself with only “yes men?” Or, are you open to feedback from people who envision a different way forward than you do? Before running off half-cocked, seek wise counsel! Just imagine what may have happened if David had not received Abigail’s advice? Identify what triggers anger in your own life and what causes you to use bad judgment and get rid of it. Maybe it’s being hangry or feeling like you are being treated unjustly. Maybe it’s bad friends or alcohol or something else....

Abigail teaches us not only to think wisely but to act wisely; to be discerning but also to take decisive action. Can you be an Abigail in someone’s life? Do you have a word of wisdom or wise counsel that you need to share with a certain person at a certain time or place? Perhaps you can already see a looming crisis or a need for mediation? Is God prompting you to initiate a wise course of action?¹⁷ Or, perhaps, like the **unnamed servant** in this story, you don’t personally feel like you have the wisdom that’s needed. You need to find someone wise like Abigail. Not for the purpose of gossip or slander, but for the purpose of bringing the right person into a tricky situation, in order to mediate a godly solution.

Whichever character you need to learn from, may God help you become more and more the godly woman or man He wants you to be!

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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¹⁴ Pronounced “ZIK lag”

¹⁵ Proverbs 19:11 says, “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.” (ESV)

¹⁶ Castleman, Robbie, *A Fisherman Bible Study Guide: David Vol. 1*, Harold Shaw publishers, Wheaton, IL, Rev. ed. 1993, p. 38.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:7-8 teaches us, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit.” If this is your spiritual gift, put it into action for God’s glory!