

Dear Abby (Part 1)

David the Fugitive Pt.6
1 Samuel 25:1-31 4-19-2009

Summary: David responds to the insult of Nabal the fool selfishly and foolishly. He had selfish motives for showing kindness, and when there was no gratitude David sought revenge. But Abigail teaches the proper response to a fool – don't pay him any mind.

Introduction –.....	2
Meet the Odd Couple – Mr. Fool & Mrs. Wise	2
How to respond to a Fool	3
The wrong response 3	
<i>Focus on the Fool</i>	4
<i>Give for Gratitude</i>	5
<i>Anyone can fall at any time</i>	6
The wise response to a fool 7	
Pay no attention 8	
<i>Fools mock wisdom</i>	9
<i>Endless argument</i>	9
<i>Useless</i>	10
How to rebuke an angry man	10
Humility 10	
Assume the best 10	
God's promise 11	
The Lord's Battles 11	
Conscience 12	
Conclusion	Error! Bookmark not defined.

1 Samuel 25:1-31 Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah.

2 A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. **3** His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.

4 While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. **5** So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. **6** Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!' **7** "Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. **8** Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.'" **9** When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited.

10 Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. **11** Why should I take my bread and my water, and my meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" **12** David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word.

13 David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his sword. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

14 One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. **15** 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. **16** Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. **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."

18 Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. 19 Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

20 As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them.

21 David had just said, "It's been useless--all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. 22 May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"

23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said: "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. 25 May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name--his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent. 26 "Now since the LORD has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. 27 And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. 28 Please forgive your servant's offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. 29 Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master 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. 30 When the LORD has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, 31 my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD has brought my master success, remember your servant."

Introduction – Meet the Odd Couple

We have been studying through the book of 1 Samuel and we come this morning to chapter 25, where we are introduced to the odd couple. The chapter starts with some sad news – Samuel dies.

1 Samuel 25:1 Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah.

David will be king

This verse doesn't seem to have much of anything to do with the surrounding context.

But I think there are a couple reasons why it is inserted here.

First, the writer reports the death of Samuel here because this is the time when Samuel died.

Later on, when Saul goes to the witch of Endor and asks her to call Samuel's spirit up from the grave, it would be a little odd if we didn't know that Samuel had died.

So this way we know that he has been dead already for a long time prior to that incident.

Another reason for the placement of this verse right here may be because it was Samuel whom God used to make the transition between the period of the Judges and the era of kings over Israel.

Samuel anointed Saul, then announced God's rejection of Saul, and anointed David.

But that transition from Saul to David seems questionable – until now.

The writer is showing us that at this point everyone realizes David is going to be king.

1 Samuel 23:17 "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."

1 Samuel 24:20 I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.

1 Samuel 25:30 When the LORD has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel,

So in three consecutive chapters you have it affirmed by the current king, the heir to the throne, and a random citizen.

Samuel's job is done - everybody knows David is going to be king.

Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran.¹

The writer does not give any further comment – he is going to let us figure out for ourselves why that comment is placed here in chapter 25. And we will do that next week, but for now, let's meet the odd couple.

2 A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. 3 His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail.

Nabal means “fool.” I doubt his parents named him “fool.” Probably his name is just a homonym with the word “fool”... – kind of like naming your kid Jack does not mean you think of him as being like the thing that lifts up your car. But as we will see, “fool” ends up being an accurate name for this guy.

And in contrast to that his wife has a beautiful name – Abigail. It means “delightful to the father” or “her father was delighted.” And as the chapter unfolds we find that she is also aptly named, as her great wisdom must have been a delight to God. So right off the bat we are introduced to Mrs. Wise and Mr. Fool. And in case you miss the contrast in the names, the writer just comes right out and makes the contrast explicit.

3 ...She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.

There are two key themes that run through this chapter. The most important one is the same theme we have seen for many chapters now – God's protection of David. We will get to that next week. The other theme is David's response to folly and wisdom. How you respond to wisdom and folly reveals a lot about the condition of your heart. First let's look at David's response to folly.

How to respond to a Fool

The wrong response

The writer starts by giving us the background. David had been showing great kindness to the shepherds of this rich man, and when sheep shearing time comes he requests some help.

8... be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them."

David calls himself Nabal's son. That is a gesture of respect and humility. So David sends a very warm and very respectful greeting to Nabal, and then makes a humble request. And he does not ask for anything specific – just whatever leftovers can be spared from the feast.

¹ The most reliable manuscripts say that he went down to Paran, not Maon. Paran is WAY down south. But then he comes back up into Israel in verse 2.

That is really not much to ask because sheep shearing time was a time of celebration and festivity. There would have been lots and lots of food and the etiquette of that culture obligated Nabal to feed David and his men – especially given the fact that he was so wealthy. This situation is a little bit like being served especially well at a restaurant. You are not legally obligated to leave a tip for the server, but social etiquette requires it. And the social etiquette in this situation was a lot stronger than in a tipping situation.

9 When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited.

Nabal, at this point, has a number of options. He could send the men back with a generous tip and a word of thanks. He could send them back with a cheesy, small tip. He could send them back with a word of thanks but no tip at all. Or he could send them back with no tip and a word of insult and mockery. And he foolishly chooses that last option.

10 Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse?"

He is not asking who David is – obviously he knows he is the son of Jesse. He is making a statement about the fact that compared to him David is a nobody.

10 ...Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days.

It sounds like he knows about the situation between David and Saul – which is likely, because we find out later that his wife knows all about it. So Nabal is siding with Saul here. And that is no surprise – remember, Nabal is a Ziphite, and the Ziphites are always siding with Saul against David.

11 Why should I take my bread and my water, and my meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"

In the Hebrew in verse 11 Nabal uses the words “my” or “I” eight times in one verse. It does not take a degree in psychology to figure out what god this guy worships. He is Selfish with a capital S.

Notice the second item in the list – water. This guy is rich. He could easily afford to give David large amounts of wine. But he won't even give him water! Nabal could easily afford to give David delicacies like figs and raisins – but he does not even mention that stuff. He will not even give David bread.

“Why should I take my bread and water and give it to men (Lit. “whose origins I do not know”)?

It is not that he does not know what town they are from. It is that they do not come from a prominent line. Nabal is saying, “I'm a big shot. And these people don't have a respectable name. They aren't famous or rich. They aren't at my social level – why should I deal with them?”

12 David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word.

How is the man after God's own heart going to respond? Is he going to have a godly reaction – like Job? Job got a lot worse news than this. For Job it was not a failure of someone to be generous – it was evil people who stole all of Job's wealth. He went from being super rich to having nothing overnight. Not only that, but all his children were killed. And how did he respond?

Focus on the Fool

Job 2:10 Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

Job 1:21 The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Let's see if that's how David responds:

13 David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his sword. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

Uh... David – what happened to the whole, “I will not take vengeance with my own hand” attitude you had in the cave with Saul in the last chapter? “If anyone is going to punish you for what you did it is going to have to be God because it certainly will not be me” – what happened to that David? David is going to slaughter every last male in that whole household because of an insult.

Why doesn't he respond like Job? What is the difference between Job and David? The difference is Job saw what happened to him as coming from God, and in this particular instance David saw what happened as coming from Nabal. When you look at the human source of your trials it causes anger. When you focus on the Ultimate Source, it causes praise (if you believe that God is good). Job does not even mention the people that did those horrible things to him. He just sees it as trouble coming from the hand of God. And David is the opposite in this case - he does not mention God at all. All he can see is Nabal.

One of the healthiest things you can ever do for your marriage is to start to see the suffering as coming from the hand of God rather than focusing on your spouse as the cause all the time.

“Lord, You arranged for my husband to be late getting home from work once again, You bring loved ones home and You take them away – blessed be Your name. You allowed this person to lie to me because You knew I needed to be tested with that kind of suffering right now; I accept that from Your hand. You let my boss treat me unfairly today,

- You let my car keys get misplaced so I am late for work,
- You let my dishwasher perish,
- You decided I needed a migraine,
- You took away this person I dearly love...

You gave and You have taken away – shall I accept blessings from Your hand and not hardships? No – everything from Your hand is only good, so blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Or, if you do not want to use Job's words – how about the words of Jesus in John 18:11 – “the cup that the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?”

You can say that every time any painful or hard thing happens in your life. Everything God does is for your good (Ro.8:28). And in those times when Romans 8:28 is not enough to comfort you, go to Romans 11:36 – everything is for God's good. But David is not focused on God here – he is focused on himself. Look at his attitude down in verse 21.

21 David had just said, "It's been useless--all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good.

David has really dropped into the depths of foolishness here. That is very often the result of dealing with a fool.

Proverbs 26:4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.

And that is exactly what happens here – David becomes just like Nabal.

Give for Gratitude

In verse 21 David says, **"It's been useless--all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing."** Anytime you have a thought like that – that all your kindness toward someone turned out to be useless because they have not been thankful – that is a sure sign that you have the wrong motives for showing the kindness. If you think it was useless when you did not get thanks, that means you were doing it for thanks. If you were really doing it for the right motive – love – then it is not useless regardless of how the person responds. Love takes delight in showing kindness, so no matter how the person responds you still have that delight.

In this passage David discovers something that is a hard lesson for all of us. We all understand that we are to serve one another. But do not be surprised when you act like a servant and people treat you like a servant. And when people start treating you like a slave – expecting you to serve without giving you any thanks, that is when your true motives get uncovered.

What would you do if someone gave you a gift on your birthday that cost them \$1000 , and then got mad at you for not giving them an expensive gift on their birthday? You would want to say, “If I would have known that accepting your so-called ‘gift’ obligated me to repay you, I would not have accepted it. If I have to pay it back it is not a gift.” If people have to pay back your acts of kindness with gratitude then they are not really acts of kindness – they are just efforts to extort gratitude out of the person.

In the last chapter we saw that the secret behind David’s amazing ability to show kindness to his enemies was his entrusting all vengeance to God. When you trust God totally with that, it frees you up to be kind. But when you take it in your own hands kindness dies.

One of the biggest destroyers of Christian love is worrying about being loved. If you concern yourself with people’s failure to show you proper love, you can kiss Christian character goodbye. If you are worried about making sure you are treated kindly, and making sure no one takes advantage of you, and guarding your rights, and putting up boundaries all the time to protect yourself, you will become a selfish, angry, miserable person. When you have that perspective it seems like everyone is failing to love you all the time.

Anyone can fall at any time

So how can a guy with the character David showed in the last chapter suddenly be like this? That question comes up any time an especially godly man or woman has some terrible fall into sin. I have often heard people say that that can only happen as a result of a long, extended period of spiritual decline. They say that no godly person just suddenly falls into a big sin. But Scripture says the opposite. In the area of showing kindness to an enemy and overlooking insult David just showed himself to have amazing character in the previous chapter. And now he is terrible in that area. And there is no mention of a long period of spiritual decline in between. People who think there has to be a long period of decline before a godly person can fall into some terrible sin (like murder in this case) do not understand how godliness works. It does not matter how godly a person is – anyone can fall suddenly into any sin at any time because there are no reserves of strength within a spiritually strong person. Think about it – why are spiritually strong people so strong? Is it not because they trust in and rely on God? Yes! And the split second they stop doing that and separate themselves from God’s grace they are as weak as Sampson without his hair. When his hair was cut Samson cut himself off from access to the power of the Holy Spirit, and he went from invincible strength to pathetic weakness literally overnight. And the same thing will happen to you or David or anyone if you cut yourself off from the enabling, strengthening power of the Holy Spirit. There is no reservoir of strength that you can survive on for a day or two. Enablement from God is like an electric lamp – the same second you pull the plug, the light goes out.

And the thing that usually pulls the plug on enablement and strengthening from God is pride. We start to think so much of ourselves we think the strength is within us. And it is easy to see in this account that pride was at the root of David’s problem. He could take an insult from the king, but he could not take an insult from a fool.

And that is not surprising – taking insults from a fool is an especially hard thing to do.

Proverbs 27:3 Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both.

When criticism or insult comes out of the mouth of a fool it is really hard to take – for a number of reasons. For one thing they do not know what they are talking about. Nabal assumes David is a runaway slave. When a fool rebukes you it is usually based on falsehoods and wrong assumptions.

Secondly they tend to be disrespectful, as Nabal was when he said, **Who is this David?**

And third, fools are usually dominated by selfishness.

11 Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"

Why? How about ... kindness? Nabal was the type who would not show kindness to someone unless he could think of a good reason to do it. He would not do it just to be kind. So he misses out on a huge opportunity. Nabal kind of reminds you of

Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

David was not an angel, but he was a pretty special individual that it would have been a good idea to be kind to, not only because he would become king, but more importantly because he was favored by God. Show kindness to someone who is favored by God, and that is the best thing you can ever do for your own wellbeing.

The wise response to a fool

OK, now in verse 14 the scene shifts over to Abigail. How did David respond to Mr. Fool? Not very well. He failed that test for sure. Let's take a look at how Mrs. Wise deals with a fool.

One of Nabal's servants comes and tells Abigail what happened.

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."

How is Abigail going to respond? Abigail is married to a fool. Life is very, very hard for women who are married to fools. To all the young girls and single women here let me urge you as strongly as I possibly can – Do not fall in love with a man who is not a wise man. One of the most severe kinds of suffering in life is a life of being married to a fool. And you wonder if the thought crossed her mind, "Maybe I should go visit Aunt Martha for the weekend." Suddenly – there is a chance for her to be free from this horrible marriage – and she would not have to lift a finger. She could even try to make it sound spiritual. "David's coming? Oh – let's pray. 'Lord, please let it be swift'." But that is not what she does. She springs into action to save her husband's life. She shows kindness to him.

18 Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. 19 Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

He is such a fool he will probably interfere with her saving his life, so she cannot tell him what she is up to.

20 As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them.

Here you have an attractive, defenseless woman, riding all by herself straight into a troop of 400 angry, armed men who are bent on violence. This is every bit as heroic as Jonathan charging into the Philistine stronghold by himself, or David going against Goliath. Jonathan had a sword and an armor bearer, David had a sling – all Abigail has is wisdom and some food. What is going to happen?

The writer leaves us in suspense and shifts back over to David, who is still mumbling and fuming and grouching about what Nabal did.

21 David had just said, "It's been useless--all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. 22 May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male² of all who belong to him!"

All this time has gone by - and David is *still* grumbling and fuming. It is almost kind of comical. Abigail got the report, then she prepared all that food, loaded it all up, traveled by donkey on this journey – all this time has passed, and when she runs into David he is still grouching and grumbling. And in verse 22 he hits bottom with regard to foolishness.

22 May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!

Some manuscripts make David's enemies the object of the curse rather than David himself. But either way, David is swearing an oath that he is going to kill them all.

So here comes Abigail down the road into a valley, and she runs head-on right into this angry mob of David and his 400 men who are on a rampage. And if David is doing all that grumbling you can imagine what the rest of those men were doing, because they did not have anywhere near the patience David had. So let's see what happens.

23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground.

Here comes the longest speech by a woman in the Old Testament. This is the voice of wisdom confronting David. When I choose the sermon title "Dear Abby" I thought I was just making a clever play on words because Abigail in this story is such a dear woman. And then I realized – "Hey, it's even more clever than I thought, because Dear Abby is a newspaper column where people write in asking for wise counsel, and the main point of this chapter is that Abigail is someone who gives David wise counsel. Then I looked up Dear Abby online and found out the woman's real name was Pauline Philips, and she took Abigail as a pen name from this very passage in Scripture. So the whole thing was not as coincidental as I thought. (And Pauline Philips was the clever one, not me.) I do not think Pauline Philips' advice reached the level of wisdom that the real Abby had, but if you are going to have an advice column, she was at least wise in picking a pen name, because one of the major purposes of this passage is to show Abigail as wise and to teach us something about how to respond to wise counsel. But first let's see what Abigail can teach us about how to respond to a fool.

Pay no attention

Abigail's wise advice about how to deal with a fool is to do the exact opposite of what David did.

25 May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name--his name is Fool, and folly goes with him.

Do not pay attention to him. It is unwise to engage with fools. It is unwise to allow fools to steer your life.

Proverbs 26:4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.

² The literal Hebrew here is a figure of speech that seemed to be common in the time of David: literally, "no one who urinates against a wall will survive." Some have pointed to that as an example of David using obscenity. At first glance we may very well wonder that, since David is acting sinfully here. But we find elsewhere that the phrase is not obscene. In fact, it is used by the narrator in 1 Kings 16:11, and God says it in 1 Kings 21:21.

The more you interact with them the more you will tend to get drawn in to their folly – just like David did.

Now, does that mean you can just walk away anytime you get exasperated with someone? Someone says or does something you do not like and you just say, “You are a fool, so I can no longer talk to you” and you walk away? No. Not everyone who irritates you is necessarily a fool. So how do you know when you are dealing with a fool? Proverbs gives us plenty of insight into that question.

Fools mock wisdom

If someone just disagrees with you that is one thing – but if they use what you say as an opportunity for mocking you are dealing with a fool.

Proverbs 23:9 Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words.

Jesus taught us not to cast our pearls before pigs or give what is holy to dogs. A person qualifies as a pig or a dog when they respond by trampling holy things under their feet and turning and attacking you. When that happens just shake the dust off your feet and move on.

Endless argument

Proverbs 29:9 If a wise man goes to court with a fool, there will be ranting and raving but no resolution.

That is why in the Pastoral Epistles Paul warns Timothy against the false teachers who want to constantly argue.

1 Timothy 6:4-5 He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions⁵ and constant friction

They argue endlessly because they do not listen to wisdom. Wise words bounce off their skull like rubber balls. Throughout the book of Proverbs a wise person is always described as a person who listens to wise counsel, listens to his elders, and listens to rebuke.

Proverbs 13:1 A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.

In fact, not only will they not listen – they will respond by attacking you.

Proverbs 9:7 "Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.

You point out their sin and instead of heeding your words they just say, “Oh yeah, well what about you? You are guilty of...”

Proverbs 9:8 Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.

And so instead of it being a profitable correction it just turns into an argument.

2 Timothy 2:14 Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

Do not allow yourself to get drawn in to that. That is the mistake David was making – he allowed himself to get pulled into a fight with Nabal. He should have just blown it off and gone somewhere else.

Useless

And the reason for that is because interacting with a fool is useless – it does not bring about any good.

Proverbs 14:7 Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips.

That is what Abigail is getting at when she says **his name is Fool, and folly goes with him.**

Proverbs 14:24 the folly of fools yields folly.

Proverbs 27:22 Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him.

Nothing good comes from arguing with a fool. In fact, not only does it not bring about any good – it causes harm.

Proverbs 17:12 Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly.

Do not let fools steer your life. Do not engage them in their folly or you will be pulled right into it, which is exactly what happened to David.

How to rebuke an angry man

OK, so we have learned how to respond to a fool. Now Abigail is going to teach us another lesson – how to rebuke an angry man. David is out of control with selfish, vengeful rage. How do you approach a man like that?

Humility

She begins with humility.

24 She fell at his feet and said: "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say.

She refers to David as her “lord” and to herself as David’s servant. That is very hard to do when you are talking to a sinful, angry, irrational man who fully intends to harm you. But she understands...

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

She is in the right and David is in the wrong, and yet she still humbles herself and speaks to him with the utmost respect – just like David did with Saul in the last chapter.

So Abigail starts with humility and respect and calms David down. Then she gives him sound advice about how to respond to guys like Nabal. And in doing so she acknowledges the validity of David’s complaint. His reaction was wrong, but his complaint against Nabal was valid. Nabal was wrong to do what he did, and Abigail acknowledges that. When you are dealing with someone who is having a sinful response to an offense, it is OK to begin by acknowledging the validity of the offense.

Assume the best

But then look where Abigail goes next.

25 ...But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent. 26 "Now since the LORD has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal.

What she is saying there is, “May God punish all your enemies the way He is going to punish Nabal. God will avenge Nabal for you, and it is going to be severe – why? Because the Lord has kept you from bloodshed.” The Lord kept David from bloodshed? He is standing there with a sword and 400 men ready to go slaughter the entire household.

Some commentators wonder if this verse somehow got placed out of order because she speaks of David’s decision not to follow through on the slaughter in the past tense. But it is not out of order – the reason she speaks in the past tense is she is assuming David is going to listen to reason and do the right thing. So what she is saying is, “Look David, since you are no doubt going to do the right thing, may God reward you for that!” That is not a bad technique in counseling – show some confidence that the person will do what is right. When you do that it helps people do what is right.

So what Abigail is doing is reminding David of something that he understood just fine one chapter ago – that vengeance is God’s job, not ours. What David needs right now is to listen to the sermon he preached to his men in the cave about leaving vengeance up to God. And Abigail preaches that sermon to him. But she does it with amazing tact and gentleness and humility and respect. But still, she makes it crystal clear that what David is planning would be sin.

God’s promise

Next she points to God’s promise.

27 And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. 28 Please forgive your servant's offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD's battles.

Not only are you going to be king, but you are going to have a lasting dynasty. She points to God’s impending generosity as motivation for David’s kindness.

“You do not have to take anything by force – God is going to give you everything.”

That is why Christians can be so generous and so kind and so forgiving. We do not have to grasp after as much as we can get because in the end we get everything. We can always afford to forgive because of what God has promised.

The Lord’s Battles

And another thing she does here is subtly and tactfully reminds David to really think through whether this is a battle that he is supposed to fight.

28 the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD's battles.

“May God reward you David, because you are the type who fights the Lord’s battles – not your own. You fight battles like the one against Goliath, or rescuing Keilah from the Philistines, or fighting to protect our shepherds out in the desert. You are not the type who fights your own battles – but God’s battles.

28 ...Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. 29 Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master 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.

“David, you do not have to fight for your honor or fight for your rights or fight for your anything. God will protect you. He will guard your life and wrap it up securely in the bundle of the living. And He will take care of your enemies. God will launch them into oblivion as from the pocket of a sling.”

Is that wisdom or what? She calls to mind what happened with Goliath – reminds David of what he was like when he was walking in obedience. And uses that image as a graphic description of what God would do to his enemies. “Anyone who opposed you, David – just leave it up to God and He will put them in a sling, give it a whirl, and send them flying.”

Conscience

Next she appeals to his conscience.

30 When the LORD has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, 31 my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD has brought my master success, remember your servant."

She reminds David of the value of a clear conscience. Committing this sin might feel good for a moment but it will result in the staggering burden of a guilty conscience and the horrible consequences of that sin. Your future is so bright – do not weigh it down with this sin.

Abigail gives David a perspective of the past, present and future. Think of what it was like when you were walking in obedience to God. Trust in God right now to take care of this. Set your hope on what God has promised and do not do anything to forfeit that. Those are the words of wisdom.

Conclusion

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

There is no greater example of how to do that than Abigail. When someone in your sphere of influence falls into sin...

1. Get rid of selfish motives.

Make sure you are not rebuking the person just because he is making your life hard. Make sure your real motive and concern is his wellbeing, not your own. If you find that the only time you ever rebuke anyone is when they are making your life hard, chances are your motives are selfish. If you really care about the spiritual wellbeing of the other person you will not just rebuke him when his sins affect you.

2. Approach him with humility and respect.

Do not look down your nose at the person like a superior correcting an inferior. Let your gentleness and meekness evident to all (Php.4:5). If you do not have a reputation of gentleness, humility, and meekness, make that area of growth priority #1.

3. Show confidence that the person will do the right thing.

There have been times when people have sent me an email that started out with something like, “I know you will probably have a selfish or sinful response to this, but...” and then they go on to admonish me for something. It is almost like they are hoping I have a sinful response so they will be proved right. When you say that all you do is provoke the person all the more and make it more likely that they will respond the wrong way. Do not provoke the person. Do

all you can to encourage the person – “I can’t wait to see how God blesses you when you do the right thing here...”

4. Point the person to the great and precious promises of God.
According to 2 Peter 1:4 the way a person escapes the corruption of the world caused by evil desires is through God’s promises. Remind them of all the grace that is promised to those who obey, so the person is reminded of what all he is about to forfeit if he continues in the sin.
5. Remind him to fight the Lord’s battles.
Remind the person that if someone has offended him, that is not his battle to fight. His job is to fight the Lord’s battles – battles for the Kingdom. If he is a Christian then he has a calling, and there is no meaning in life outside of that calling. You are never accomplishing anything worthwhile at all unless you are carrying out God’s calling, and so you do not have time to waste taking a timeout from God’s work to engage in some personal battle.
6. Remind the person of the priceless value of a clean conscience.
There are a hundred different angles to approach that from. Be creative and put some thought into it like Abigail did. Make a clean conscience sound so appealing and so valuable and so wonderful that by the time you are done talking the person wants that more than anything.
7. Point them back to when they were walking with the Lord.
Remind them about how wonderful it was to be close to Him. Let them be inspired by their own life in the past when they walked in obedience.

And if you do all that and they refuse to listen – you are probably dealing with a fool. If they respond with hostility or they refuse to listen or they just argue endlessly, once it becomes evident that talking with them does more harm than good, shake the dust off your feet and move on to someone else. And pray for them, and then periodically check back with them to see if they are willing to listen. But even when you need to disengage from them because of their foolishness, do not stop loving them. Nurture compassion in your heart toward the person, show kindness and warmth, and do not let hostility build up in your heart, so when they do come around you have not hardened your heart to the point where now you are the fool.

Benediction: Col.3:15-16 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Devotionals

Day 1

In 1 Samuel 25 David is insulted by Nabal the fool. And how does David respond? Does he respond like Job?

13 David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his sword. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

What happened to the "If anyone is going to punish you for what you did it is going to have to be God because it certainly will not be me" attitude David had in chapter 24? David is going to slaughter every last male in that whole household because of an insult. Why doesn't he respond like Job?

Job 2:10 Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

Job 1:21 The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

What is the difference between Job and David? The difference is Job saw what happened to him as coming from God, and in this particular instance David saw what happened as coming from Nabal. When you look at the human source of your trials it causes anger. When you focus on the Ultimate Source, it causes praise (if you believe that God is good). Job does not even mention the people that did those horrible things to him. He just sees it as trouble coming from the hand of God. And David is the opposite in this case - he does not mention God at all. All he can see is Nabal.

One of the healthiest things you can ever do for your marriage is to start to see the suffering as coming from the hand of God rather than focusing on your spouse as the cause all the time.

"Lord, You arranged for my husband to be late getting home from work once again, You bring loved ones home and You take them away – blessed be Your name. You allowed this person to lie to me because You knew I needed to be tested with that kind of suffering right now; I accept that from Your hand. You let my boss treat me unfairly today,

- You let my car keys get misplaced so I am late for work,
- You let my dishwasher perish,
- You decided I needed a migraine,
- You took away this person I dearly love...

You gave and You have taken away – shall I accept blessings from Your hand and not hardships? No – everything from Your hand is only good, so blessed be the name of the Lord."

Or, if you do not want to use Job's words – how about the words of Jesus in John.18:11 – "the cup that the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?"

You can say that every time any painful or hard thing happens in your life.

Everything God does is for your good (Ro.8:28). And in those times when Romans 8:28 is not enough to comfort you, go to Romans 11:36 – everything is for God's good.

Day 2

1 Samuel 25:21 David had just said, "It's been useless--all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good.

David has really dropped into the depths of foolishness here. That is very often the result of dealing with a fool.

Proverbs 26:4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.

And that is exactly what happens here – David becomes just like Nabal.

In verse 21 David says, **"It's been useless--all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing."** Anytime you have a thought like that – that all your kindness toward someone turned out to be useless because they have not been thankful – that is a sure sign that you have the wrong motives for showing the kindness. If you think it was useless when you did not get thanks, that means you were doing it for thanks. If you were really doing it for the right motive – love – then it is not useless regardless of how the person responds. Love takes delight in showing kindness, and so no matter how the person responds you still have that delight.

In this passage David discovers something that is a hard lesson for all of us. We all understand that we are to serve one another. But do not be surprised when you act like a servant and people treat you like a servant. And when people start treating you like a slave – expecting you to serve without giving you any thanks, that is when your true motives get uncovered.

What would you do if someone gave you a gift on your birthday that cost them \$1000 , and then got mad at you for not giving them an expensive gift on their birthday? You would want to say, “If I would have known that accepting your so-called ‘gift’ obligated me to repay you, I wouldn’t have accepted it. If I have to pay it back it’s not a gift.” If people have to pay back your acts of kindness with gratitude then they are not really acts of kindness – they are just efforts to extort gratitude out of the person.

In the last chapter we saw that the secret behind David’s amazing ability to show kindness to his enemies was his entrusting all vengeance to God. When you trust God totally with that, it frees you up to be kind. But when you take it in your own hands kindness dies.

One of the biggest destroyers of Christian love is worrying about being loved. If you concern yourself with people’s failure to show you proper love, you can kiss Christian character goodbye. If you are worried about making sure you are treated kindly, and making sure no one takes advantage of you, and guarding your rights, and putting up boundaries all the time to protect yourself, you will become a selfish, angry, miserable person. When you have that perspective it seems like everyone is failing to love you all the time.

Day 3

How can a man with the character David showed in the last chapter suddenly be like this? That question comes up any time an especially godly man or woman has some terrible fall into sin. I have often heard people say that that can only happen as a result of a long, extended period of spiritual decline. They say that no godly person just suddenly falls into a big sin. But Scripture says the opposite. In the area of showing kindness to an enemy and overlooking insult David just showed himself to have amazing character in the previous chapter. And now he is terrible in that area. And there is no mention of a long period of spiritual decline in between. People who think there has to be a long period of decline before a godly person can fall into some terrible sin (like murder in this case) do not understand how godliness works. It does not matter how godly a person is – anyone can fall suddenly into any sin at any time because there are no reserves of strength within a spiritually strong person. Think about it – why are spiritually strong people so strong? Isn't it because they trust in and rely on God? Yes! And so the split second they stop doing that and separate themselves from God's grace they are as weak as Sampson without his hair. When his hair was cut Samson cut himself off from access to the power of the Holy Spirit, and he went from invincible strength to pathetic weakness literally overnight. And the same thing will happen to you or David or anyone if you cut yourself off from the enabling, strengthening power of the Holy Spirit. There is no reservoir of strength that you can survive on for a day or two. Enablement from God is like an electric lamp – the same second you pull the plug, the light goes out.

And the thing that usually pulls the plug on enablement and strengthening from God is pride. We start to think so much of ourselves we think the strength is within us. And it is easy to see in this account that pride was at the root of David's problem. He could take an insult from the king, but he could not take an insult from a fool.

Be on your guard. Be vigilant. The enemy is watching constantly for your unguarded hours.

Day 4

When Abigail hears about what happened she springs into action to save her husband's life. She shows kindness to him.

1 Samuel 25:23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground.

Here comes the longest speech by a woman in the Old Testament. This is the voice of wisdom confronting David. When I choose the sermon title "Dear Abby" I thought I was just making a clever play on words because Abigail in this story is such a dear woman. And then I realized – "Hey, it's even more clever than I thought, because Dear Abby is a newspaper column where people write in asking for wise counsel, and the main point of this chapter is that Abigail is someone who gives David wise counsel. Then I looked up Dear Abby online and found out the woman's real name was Pauline Philips, and she took Abigail as a pen name from this very passage in Scripture. So the whole thing is not as coincidental as I thought. (And Pauline Philips was the clever one, not me.) I do not think Pauline Philips' advice reached the level of wisdom that the real Abby had, but if you are going to have an advice column, she was at least wise in picking a pen name, because one of the major purposes of this passage is to show Abigail as wise and to teach us something about how to respond to wise counsel. But first let's see what Abigail can teach us about how to respond to a fool.

Abigail's wise advice about how to deal with a fool is to do the exact opposite of what David did.

25 May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name--his name is Fool, and folly goes with him.

Do not pay attention to him. It is unwise to engage with fools. It is unwise to allow fools to steer your life.

Proverbs 26:4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.

The more you interact with them the more you will tend to get drawn in to their folly – just like David did.

Now, does that mean you can just walk away anytime you get exasperated with someone? Someone says or does something you don't like and you just say, "You're a fool, so I can no longer talk to you" and you walk away? No. Not everyone who irritates you is necessarily a fool. So how do you know when you are dealing with a fool? Proverbs gives us plenty of insight into that question.

Fools mock wisdom

If someone just disagrees with you that is one thing – but if they use what you say as an opportunity for mocking you are dealing with a fool.

Proverbs 23:9 Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words.

Jesus taught us not to cast our pearls before pigs or give what is holy to dogs. A person qualifies as a pig or a dog when they respond by trampling holy things under their feet and turning and attacking you. When that happens just shake the dust off your feet and move on.

Endless argument

Proverbs 29:9 If a wise man goes to court with a fool, there will be ranting and raving but no resolution.

That is why in the Pastoral Epistles Paul warns Timothy against the false teachers who want to constantly argue.

1 Timothy 6:4-5 He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵ and constant friction

They argue endlessly because they do not listen to wisdom. Wise words bounce off their skull like rubber balls. Throughout the book of Proverbs a wise person is always described as a person who listens to wise counsel, listens to his elders, and listens to rebuke.

Proverbs 13:1 A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.

In fact, not only will they not listen – they will respond by attacking you.

Proverbs 9:7 "Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.

You point out their sin and instead of heading your words they just say, “Oh yeah, well what about you? You are guilty of...”

Proverbs 9:8 Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.

And so instead of it being a profitable correction it just turns into an argument.

2 Timothy 2:14 Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

Do not allow yourself to get drawn in to that. That is the mistake David was making – he allowed himself to get pulled into a fight with Nabal. He should have just blown it off and gone somewhere else.

Useless

And the reason for that is because interacting with a fool is useless – it does not bring about any good.

Proverbs 14:7 Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips.

That is what Abby is getting at when she says **his name is Fool, and folly goes with him.**

Proverbs 14:24 the folly of fools yields folly.

Proverbs 27:22 Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him.

Nothing good comes from arguing with a fool. In fact, not only does it not bring about any good – it causes harm.

Proverbs 17:12 Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly.

Do not let fools steer your life. Do not engage them in their folly or you will be pulled right into it, which is exactly what happened to David.

Day 5

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