

Swapping Battles

David the Fugitive Pt.8

1 Samuel 25:32-26:12 5-3-2009

Summary: David failed the test in the cave (lifted his hand against Saul), God exposed the extent of that character flaw in chapter 25 with Nabal, but then brought him to repentance through Abigail. Then He gave David a re-take in chapter 26 which he passed. And it was all based on trusting God with justice – swapping battles (He fights your battles and you fight His). God is just, trustworthy, and has perfect timing.

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1 Samuel 25:32 David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. **33** May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. **34** 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." **35** 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."

36 When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing until daybreak. **37** 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 stone.

38 About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died.

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 David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. **40** His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, "David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife." **41** She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, "Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master's servants." **42** Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David's messengers and became his wife.

43 David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives. **44** But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

26:1 The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeath and said, "Is not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?" **2** So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph, with his three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search there for David. **3** Saul made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah facing Jeshimon, but David stayed in the desert. When he saw that Saul had followed him there, **4** he sent out scouts and learned that Saul had definitely arrived. **5** Then David set out and went to the place where

Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down. Saul was lying inside the camp, with the army encamped around him.

6 David then asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruah, Joab's brother, "Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?" "I'll go with you," said Abishai. 7 So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

8 Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice."

9 But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? 10 As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. 11 But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go." 12 So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the LORD had put them into a deep sleep.

Introduction:

Background – summary of chapters 17-25

Have you been treated unfairly recently? At school or work or at home? Blamed for something, accused of something, or you just did not get the credit you deserved? Or someone ripped you off, failed to pay you what they owe you, or did not do the work you paid for? Is there anyone here who has experienced some injustice and you are still waiting for God to make it right? David's been waiting for probably close to 10 years now. It has been a rough 10 years for David, and it is about to get a lot rougher.

We are in the midst of a study of the book of 1 Samuel, and we left off last week at a very dramatic moment. David and 400 of his men were charging ahead into a battle, and they were stopped in their tracks and turned back. And I left that story hanging right in the middle, but before I finish it up today I need to make sure we all have a good grip on what has been going on for the past eight chapters.

David was the best military commander Saul had ever had, and he was nothing but loyal. But Saul became jealous and falsely accused David of treason, and so David had to run for his life and in the process David loses everything. He loses his wife, his family, all his possessions – he does not even have time to grab his sword when he leaves. He is reduced to begging for bread. He ends up being captured by the Philistines and loses the one thing he had left – his dignity. We find him drooling on his beard and scribbling on the city gate in utter humiliation.

David has endured a lot of unfair treatment, but finally now in chapter 24 David has a chance to do something about it. David and Saul actually meet. Saul is on his way to where David had been hiding in a place called the Crag. The narrator does not tell us that David has since moved out of there – he lets us think that David is still at the Crag, and that Saul is about to get him cornered again. But on the way to the Crag Saul has to take a pit stop. So he looks for a place of total privacy where he can go in and relieve himself. So Saul finds this cave and goes in there and does his business, thinking he is all alone. Of all the caves in the entire nation of Israel, the one cave Saul picks happens to be the one where David and his men were hiding. Obviously that is God's doing. God delivers David's enemy right into his hands. And David's men see that and they tell David, "Look – God has given Saul into your hands. This is a sign from God that you should take Saul's life."

They were right about the first part – it was God's doing. But they were wrong about the second part. God brought Saul into that cave not as a sign that David should lift his hand against him, but as a test to see if David would lift his hand against him. When God places some opportunity at your feet, and it is obvious that God has done it, do not always assume that means God wants you to seize that opportunity. It may be that it is a test to reveal what is in your heart.

The Sin: Fighting the Wrong Battle

David fails the test

So how does David do on the test? He fails. He does not get a zero – he does not kill Saul. But he does lift his hand against Saul – cutting off the corner of Saul’s robe was an act of aggression. David committed the same sin that his men were urging him to commit. He did not carry it to the extreme that they wanted. The expression they wanted was to kill Saul, and David only destroyed a little of Saul’s property. So the expression of it was more restrained, but at the heart of it the sin was the same – lifting his hand against God’s anointed in an act of aggression. What was in David’s heart when he did that was not godly, and David knew it. That is why he was immediately conscience-stricken when he did it.

The Solution: Trust the Lord with Justice

So David fails that test – but he does not get a zero. He does refrain from harming Saul. And his reason for holding back is very important. Saul is oblivious to the fact that David made an alteration to his robe, and he leaves the cave. And when he is a safe distance David yells to him and says this:

1 Samuel 24:12 May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. 13 As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

15 May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

“If anyone is going to pay you back for the things you have done to me it is going to have to be God, because it is certainly not going to be me.”

That principle is the controlling theme for chapters 24, 25, and 26. If someone hurts you unjustly, that person deserves to be punished. And whatever losses you suffered should be restored. And it should be made known to all that you were in the right in this matter. And if the person resists all that, then you have got a battle on your hands. And when you have a battle like that on your hands, you have a choice to make. Are you going to fight it or are you going to let God fight it?

“How about if we both fight it?”

That is not an option. If you fight it, God will not fight it. The only way God will fight it for you is if you entrust it completely into His hands. And if you do that God will punish the person, restore what you have lost, and make it clear that He is on your side and that you are in the right. But He will only do that if you leave it up to Him. If you try to fight it, then you are on your own.

Revenge is a constant temptation for every one of us. Your spouse is short with you or inconsiderate or disrespectful, and you make him or her pay a price. Even if it is just being grumpy for an afternoon – you make them suffer a little bit. Retaliation is built into our flesh when we have power to do it.

David has not had power to do anything – until now. David has a chance, but instead of hurting Saul David says, “I’m not going to fight this battle against you. I’m putting it totally in God’s hands. The only thing I’m going to do is show you love and respect. And I will just wait for the Lord to grant justice.”

So David understands the principle. He understands it, but still there is some vengeful pride in his heart that needs to be dealt with. His sin of lifting his hand against Saul was restrained and small and very short-lived, but it was an indication of something in his heart that needed to be dealt with. When you fall into a sin and then repent right away, do not blow it off – even if it was a small, harmless sin. The fact that you repented is great. And the fact that you restrained the extent of the sin is great. But still, you need to deal with the core sin in your character that caused you to commit that sin. And that is what God does for David in chapter 25.

In chapter 25 a fool by the name of Nabal insults and mistreats David, David flies into a rage and rallies his men for battle. You see, that sin is still in his heart, but the expression of it is not restrained now that he is dealing with a fool. God presents David with a circumstance that will uncover the extent of what seemed in the previous chapter to be a small flaw in his character. But God also sends the voice of wisdom to bring David to repentance. So David gets word of the insult, he tells 400 of his men to strap on their swords, and he leads the charge toward the house of Nabal to annihilate them. And just before he gets there he runs into Abigail, he skids to stop, has a conversation with her, then turns around and gets the attention of all these 400 armed, angry men following him into battle, and says, “Uh, never mind. The whole thing’s off. Let’s just go back to camp.”

How did Abigail accomplish that? She did it by pointing David to 1 Samuel 17. 1 Samuel had not been written yet, but that is OK because David was in 1 Samuel 17, so all she has to do is remind him of what happened. She is using Scripture before it was even written. Abigail calls to David's mind the incident with Goliath, because everyone needs to learn from what David did in that chapter – including David himself. Sometimes the most inspiring example for how to do the right thing is yourself. You just look back to a time in your life when you were walking close with God.

There are some obvious clues that Abigail is pointing David back to the incident with Goliath. For example,

25:29 the lives of your enemies God will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling.

That is not very subtle. But there are some other things she says that are a little more subtle.

Trading battles

28 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.

What did Abigail mean when she said David fights the Lord's battles? Clearly she was telling David that his fight against Nabal was not one of the Lord's battles. That was David's own battle. And Abigail is saying, "Look, you will have a clear conscience if you let God fight your battles, and you fight God's battles."

So what are the Lord's battles? There is one battle that has taken place in 1 Samuel that we know for sure was the Lord's battle. Right before David killed Goliath there was a fair amount of trash talking between the two of them. Both were saying they were going to feed the other one to the birds, etc. But then David said this:

1 Samuel 17:47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's

Those are the same two words Abigail uses. Abigail had heard the stories of what happened that day with Goliath, and she borrows the very words that came out of David's own mouth that day when David said, "The battle is the Lord's." David is about to fight his own battle against Nabal and Abigail says, "David, you don't do this sort of thing. The deal with Goliath – that's the kind of thing you do. You fight the Lord's battles, not your own."

So what is the difference? David's conflict with Nabal was David's battle. But the conflict with Goliath was the Lord's battle. Why? What was it about the thing with Goliath that made that the Lord's battle? The reason the battle with Goliath was the Lord's battle was because the Lord's name was at stake in that battle. Goliath was blaspheming and mocking the God of Israel and David wanted to shut his mouth not because of David's pride, and not because of patriotism, but because of his love for God. Goliath insults David and David does not even seem to notice. David's own brothers insult David, and he blows it off. But someone speaks against God and David cuts off his head. At that time in his life David was not interested in defending his own interests. He cared only about standing up for the honor of God. That is what it means to fight the Lord's battles and not your own. And that is what Abigail reminds him of.

What God wants us to do is swap battles with Him. He wants us to leave our battles for Him to fight, and for us to focus on fighting His battles. He fights ours and we fight His.

And you might hear that and think, I can understand why He fights our battles, but why do we fight His battles? He fights our battles because we do not have the power to fight them ourselves. When someone treats you unfairly, you do not have the power to bring about justice for yourself. You cannot cause what you lost to be restored. You cannot cause yourself to have favor in the eyes of people who now think ill of you. You do not have the power to make everything right again. And it makes sense that God would want us to trust Him to do all that so His power and goodness and faithfulness is put on display for all to see. That makes sense.

But if that is the case, why not just trust God to fight all my battles *and* all His battles? If I am so weak, it seems silly for me to jump in and try to fight the Lord's battles. It is like I am a worm, and I am being ganged up on by three really big worms, and I am powerless to help myself. Then a human being comes along and says, "I'll fight your battles if you'll fight mine," and he puts those three big worms in a sling and sends them into the next county. That part makes sense. But then the worm is supposed to turn around and help defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan? It sounds crazy.

The Lord's battles are huge. He is in a conflict with demons and powers and authorities and Satan himself – massive powers that are millions of times stronger than us. Why would God want us to fight His battles? Simple – because we love Him. If you love someone you stand up for that person. If you love your wife and someone comes along and slanders her or mocks her, you are going to stand up for her. The greatest commandment is to love God with all your being, and if you do that you are not going to sit idly by when someone blasphemes Him. God calls us to fight His battles not because He needs help with them, but because He knows that our greatest joy and greatest wellbeing will come when we love Him and express that love. And fighting His battles is one way to express love for Him.

So how do you fight the Lord's battles? Go on a crusade and kill all the unbelievers? No – God's battles are not against flesh and blood.

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

We do not engage in Jihad – holy war against human beings like the Muslims do, because the war is not against human beings. That is one reason why we do not engage in revolution.

John 18:36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

If God's battles were against human beings we would get some guns and weapons and fight against human beings. But His battles are against a much greater power – a power that cannot be touched by guns.

So how do we fight? And does our fighting actually accomplish anything? It does. We are not just worms trying to help win a nuclear war. God has placed in our hands devastating, powerful, lethal weapons that can absolutely demolish the enemy. One of those weapons is truth – the truth in God's Word.

2 Corinthians 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God

False doctrine, lies, untrue beliefs about God, false religion – any kind of falsehood or error that leads people astray – those are the nuclear bombs of the enemy, and we have been given divine power to demolish those with the truth of Scripture.

Another weapon that can blow the enemy to smithereens is righteousness. That is really the only way he can be overcome.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So, when someone offends us, hurts us, mistreats us, slanders us, treats us unfairly – we leave that up to God to deal with. But when someone opposes God, blasphemes God, speaks against God – we stand up and unload on that person with the double barrels of truth and righteousness.

That is a principle David understood back in chapter 17, when he overlooked insults against himself but was fearless in defending the name of God. Now he has kind of slipped from that, and so God uses Abigail to remind David of what he knew back in chapter 17. And so David says, "OK – you're right. This is my battle, which means it is not mine to fight. I will leave it totally in God's hands and let Him take care of it."

The Promise: God is Trustworthy

David's battle: David needs justice

So here we have David in need of justice. He is being slandered, mistreated, unjustly accused, and unfairly treated – by both Saul and Nabal. So David needs justice. He needs God to take up his cause. But he leaves it totally in God's hands. So let's watch and see what God does.

Judgment on Nabal

In his foolish anger David had vowed to murder every male in Nabal's household. But then God sends the voice of wisdom in Abigail, and David comes to his senses and decides not to follow through. And that was wise. Making a foolish vow is a sin – following through on it is another sin. If you ever make a vow that would require you to commit a sin, break the vow.

So David says, "May God deal with me severely if I fail to do this," then he fails to do it, and in His unbelievable mercy God ignores David's prayer for judgment and does not deal with him severely. Abigail convinced David to do with Nabal what he had already done with Saul – leave justice in the hands of God. Just trust God to bring about whatever punishment is necessary – but do not soil your own conscience by doing that yourself. So David leaves the punishment of Nabal completely up to God. And here is what happens:

36 When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk.

The report of him getting drunk is probably included because getting drunk is the greatest expression of foolishness there is. That is why in Ephesians 5, in a context where Paul is explaining his command, "Do not be foolish, but be wise" he follows it by saying, "Do not get drunk with wine."

So she told him nothing until daybreak.

What happens next has nothing to do with the alcohol. That is gone. This is a direct act of God.

37 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 stone.

It sounds like a stroke. Some people think this was because of realizing that he came so close to being killed by David. But Nabal was not one bit afraid of David. I think it was because he found out how much money his wife spent rescuing him. You gave him *how many* loaves of bread?! What's the matter with you? Do you think bread grows on trees?" Forced generosity is traumatic for a man who worships money.

The folly of loving money

Nabal is exactly like the fool in Jesus' parable in Luke 12.

Luke 12:16 The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 'Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" 20 'But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

Nabal could not give up a little bit of his wealth to be generous. He had to keep it stockpiled. So he ate and drank and made merry and got drunk – not knowing that ten days later his life would be required of him.

Abigail a picture of Christ

And by the way, there is a sense in which all of us are like Nabal. Every one of us, because of our own sin, was in a position where a mighty King was furiously angry with us, and He was ready to destroy us. And without our even knowing it, someone went on our behalf and met that King before He arrived and offered Him a gift to save our lives. And the only reason we are still breathing today is because that King accepted that gift.

But in our case our guilt was a lot more severe than Nabal's, so it required a gift a lot bigger than some food. The gift was the life of the one who was pleading our case. Jesus Christ offered His life on the cross as a gift to satisfy the wrath of God the Father over our sin.

So we are all like Nabal up to the point where Abigail gets David to relent. The question that will determine your eternal destiny is, are you going to continue to be like Nabal so that God has to destroy you anyway? Or are you going to humble yourself and repent of your sin and become one of the King's own children? We all started out like Nabal, but we do not have to end up like him. Abigail is a beautiful picture of

the Lord Jesus Christ. But she also serves as a picture of the Church. At the end of the story she becomes a picture of those of us who humble ourselves before the Lord. And in response to that He takes us to be His bride.

Implied: Same will happen with Saul

So Nabal is completely incapacitated with what sounds like a stroke, and then...

38 About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died.

Note to self: Do not be mean to people who are favored by God. Oppose God's chosen man and God will destroy you.

And that has implications, obviously, for Saul. There are so many similarities in this chapter between Nabal and Saul; most commentators believe that Nabal is serving as a picture of Saul. And so chapter 25 shows us that 1) Saul is a fool, and 2) God is going to deal with Saul like He did with Nabal.

David needs justice with regard to Saul much more than he needed it with Nabal and this account acts as a kind of promise – Do not worry, you will receive justice in this conflict with Saul. And that is exactly what happens in the rest of the book. The closing chapters of 1 Samuel are the sad story of God meting out justice on Saul.

David's response

So, David left his battle with Nabal in God's hands, and God struck Nabal dead. Now look at David's reaction:

39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt.

David's delight in Nabal's demise

Wow. Is that good reaction – to celebrate when someone dies?

Proverbs 24:17 Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice.

If you have so much bitterness in your heart toward someone that you are actually happy to see them suffer or die, that is wrong. But on the other hand...

Proverbs 11:10 When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy.

When the wicked are brought down we should not gloat or take delight in their suffering. But it is not wrong to take delight in receiving justice from God. Nor is it wrong to be glad when a reign of terror is brought to an end.

Pleading your case

David is happy here, but why? Just because of bitterness? We do not have to guess why David was happy. In verse 39 he tells us three reasons.

39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has upheld my cause...

That phrase translated **upheld my cause** is exactly the same phrase from 24:15. The NIV translates it slightly differently, but in the Hebrew it is identical.

1 Samuel 24:15 May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

So in chapter 24 David says to Saul, “May God take up my side of this dispute and argue my case.” And then here in chapter 25, instead of praying that way, he flies into a rage and almost argues his own case. But Abigail persuades him not to commit that sin and to leave it in God’s hands. And when David does so, God brings judgment upon Nabal, and David says, “Hey, God took up my side in this dispute and argued my case. God just did between me and Nabal what I asked Him to do between me and Saul.”

By using this identical phrase the author is showing us that God can be counted on to do what David asked Him to do in the cave with Saul. If you entrust your battles to God, He will fight them. It happened with Nabal, and David can count on it happening with Saul. So the first reason David is so happy is because God has sided with David.

Then David goes on to tell us the second reason he is happy:

39 ...He has kept his servant from doing wrong...

David is happy because God prevented him from committing a terrible sin (the sin of fighting his own battle). David admits without equivocation that what he had planned to do was wrongdoing. Many people care only about being rescued from suffering, but the man after God’s own heart rejoices most when he is rescued from sinning.

And third, David was delighted by justice.

39 ...Blessed be the LORD, who ...has brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head.

God did not let Nabal get away with evil. If Nabal had repented that would be different. But unrepentant sin calls for punishment.

Polygamy

40 His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, "David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife." 41 She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, "Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master's servants." 42 Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David's messengers and became his wife.

It is the most romantic moment in the Bible since the book of Ruth. This strong, rugged, ruddy, good-looking hero meets up with this beautiful, intelligent, humble woman, and from the moment she appears on the scene it is obvious to everyone that they are a perfect match. Then God takes away her husband so she is a widow, and David sweeps in and proposes to her, and she is delighted to say yes. And the whole thing is just so wonderfully romantic...until the writer drops the verse 43 bomb.

43 David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives. 44 But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

So the writer just throws in the offhanded remark – Oh, and David already had a wife. That kind of throws cold water on the romance of this story to say the least.

What are we to make of this? If Abigail is so wise and so intent on protecting David from sin, why doesn’t she speak up and say, “No David – you don’t want a polygamous marriage on your conscience.” What is the deal with polygamy in Old Testament times?

I did a study of that these past few weeks and wrote up my results in an article that is included in the sermon notes. It is also the current pastor’s blog, and it is on the Articles page in the Resource Library on [TreasuringGod.com](http://treasuringgod.com).¹ We will not go over that whole study now, however I will give you my conclusion. The bottom line is God allowed polygamy in the Old Testament. In New Testament times, when the illustration of the relationship between Christ and the Church is so incredibly important, the ideal for marriage is revealed in greater detail so the importance of the two becoming one flesh is escalated in our thinking. David did not break any command by marrying more than one woman in his time. (Although in the New Testament God clearly tells us that each woman is to have her own husband and each man his own wife – not wives.)

¹ http://treasuringgod.com/resource_library/articles/

David gets a re-take

Did you ever have a teacher in school who let you re-take a test that you failed? You get a low grade, but the teacher really wants you to learn the material so she reviews the parts that you got wrong so you know them, and then she lets you retake the test so you can get your grade up. I believe that is what happens with David in chapter 26. In chapter 24 David failed the test. In chapter 25 God reviews that material with David and makes sure he understands it. And now in chapter 26 God is going to give David a re-take.² God deals with the sin in David's heart, teaches the lesson he needs to learn, and then brings him back to that same test to show how he has grown and progressed.

When you find that God keeps sending you the same trial over and over and over in your life, one possibility to consider is this – maybe He keeps sending the same test because He is giving you re-takes because you are failing the test. Perhaps if you had the right response to the test, you would not have to keep taking it. That is not always the reason why a trial comes up again and again in your life, but it is one possibility to consider. When you respond in an ungodly way to some suffering, you are inviting that same suffering to come back again in the future so you will have another chance to pass the test.

26:1 The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Is not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?" 2 So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph, with his three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search there for David. 3 Saul made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah facing Jeshimon, but David stayed in the desert. When he saw that Saul had followed him there, 4 he sent out scouts and learned that Saul had definitely arrived. 5 Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down. Saul was lying inside the camp, with the army encamped around him. 6 David then asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, "Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?" "I'll go with you," said Abishai.

7 So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

OK, now here comes the re-take. This is the exact same test David faced in the cave.

8 Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice."

9 But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?"

Now here comes the material David learned in the incident with Nabal:

10 As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.

“Believe me Abishai, I don't have to lift a finger to fight my own battles. God will take care of it.”

David did take his spear and water so he could prove to Saul once again that he is not out to harm him. But taking the spear is different than destroying Saul's robe. When David cut Saul's robe it was an act of hostility and aggression. David could feel what was in his heart when he did that, and it was not godly – that is why his conscience bothered him. But this time he does something that is not an act of aggression. He does not destroy anything – he just gathers some evidence to prove his loyalty to Saul.

God's timing

So in chapter 24 we see a hint of a sin problem in David's heart. In chapter 25 God sends an incident designed to expose the magnitude of that sin problem. But He also sends the voice of wisdom to prevent David

² Because of the similarities between chapters 24 and 26 the liberals think it must just be two corrupted records of the same event. But there are too many differences for that to be plausible. Assuming they must be the same event because of the similarities is like assuming there could have only been one Battle of Bull Run in the Civil war. Similar events happen all the time. But the differences between the events in chapters 24 and 26 are significant. In fact, they alert us to the point being made. God sends a similar event David's way to give him a chance to pass the test that he failed previously.

from continuing on that path. God brings David to repentance, and then in chapter 26 sends that first test again to show that the problem is now taken care of in David's heart. And the way God did it was by teaching David to trust in God's timing.

Sometimes when you read a chapter like 1 Samuel 25 you think, "Why doesn't it ever happen that way for me? David gets instant justice. I pray for justice for years and years and nothing happens." You know what David learned from the Nabal thing in chapter 25? That it does not matter how long God waits – the only thing that matters is that He will bring justice. Look at verse 10 again.

10 As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.

The NIV translation makes it sound like two options, but I think it is more likely three. Either the Lord will strike him (like Nabal) and he will die prematurely, or his time will come and he will just die of old age, or he will die in battle.

Most people, if they have to wait until the person dies of old age, would say, "God never gave me justice." But one thing David learned in this whole thing is to trust God's justice, but also His timing.

If it is right away, like with Nabal – fine. If it is not until Saul dies of old age – fine. If it comes in some way that makes it obvious that God was punishing him – fine. If Saul dies a natural death or in battle – fine. David is perfectly content to leave both the means and the timing completely in God's hands. He does not make demands on God as to when or how God must fulfill His promises. God has a lot of ways He could bring and end to Saul's reign, and David does not care which He uses.

The rest of this book is the story of the demise of Saul, and it is not a pretty sight. It turns out Saul dies in battle, and he actually lives to be a fairly old man. But that is not to say God took it easy on him. Just the opposite – Saul would have been a lot better off if he went quick and easy like Nabal. Things are about to get really rough for Saul.

Conclusion

Let's close by turning our attention to the glory of God. In chapter 24 David had a character flaw. By chapter 26 that flaw is gone. And the reason it was gone was because in chapter 25 God opened David's eyes to a glimpse of His glory. If there is anything in your character you want changed, the way to do it is for your eyes to be opened wider to the glory of God in whatever area you are struggling.

In this case David was susceptible to the sin of revenge. And so God opened David's eyes to several of His attributes: His justice, His faithfulness and reliability and trustworthiness, the fact that He cares about David's cause, and the perfection of God's timing. And once those attributes of God came into focus in David's eyes, David was able to trust God completely with justice. And when your trust increases – when your faith increases, that is when sin is defeated in your life.

God made the Christian life work that way so when we have victory the glory goes to Him rather than us. If we defeated sin in our lives by just trying to become more disciplined and ginning up more willpower, the credit for our victory would go to us. But if you defeat sin by seeing the glory of God and trusting Him, the credit for your victory is due to His gloriousness and goodness, and so He receives the credit.

Have you been treated unfairly lately? If not, brace yourself because it is only a matter of time. When it happens, use the opportunity to do three things:

1) Use injustice to learn to love justice.

Use the feelings of distress, frustration, exasperation, anger, sorrow – all the painful things you feel – use those to teach your soul what a wonderful thing God's justice is. Tell your soul, "Hey, if injustice bothers you this much, that just goes to show you how wonderful justice is. Remember that the next time you meditate on the beauty of God's justice."

You have the capacity now to be more delighted by God's justice than the rest of us, because you cannot really appreciate what is so great about it until you experience injustice. So this unfair treatment is putting you in a position of spiritual advantage.

2) Trust God.

Fix your attention on God's faithfulness and the perfection of God's timing, so that you gain full confidence that He will take care of the situation in the best way and at the best time. And it is so absolutely certain that you could stake your life on it.

3) Swap battles with God.

If the whole incident has you riled up to fight, then fight the Lord's battles, not yours. Trust God completely with yours, and you use your energy to fight His. Take advantage of the divine power that is at your disposal and blast away at evil with good, and demolish strongholds of error with truth.

Benediction: Isaiah 64:4 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

Devotionals

Day 1

Have you been treated unfairly recently? At school or work or at home? Blamed for something, accused of something, or you just did not get the credit you deserved? Or someone ripped you off, failed to pay you what they owe you, or did not do the work you paid for? Is there anyone here who has experienced some injustice and you are still waiting for God to make it right? David has been waiting for probably close to 10 years now. It has been a rough 10 years for David, and it is about to get a lot rougher.

We are in the midst of a study of the book of 1 Samuel, and we left off last week at a very dramatic moment. David and 400 of his men were charging ahead into a battle, and they were stopped in their tracks and turned back. And I left that story hanging right in the middle, but before I finish it up today I need to make sure we all have a good grip on what has been going on for the past eight chapters.

David was the best military commander Saul had ever had, and he was nothing but loyal. But Saul became jealous and falsely accused David of treason so David had to run for his life, and in the process David loses everything. He loses his wife, his family, all his possessions – he does not even have time to grab his sword when he leaves. He is reduced to begging for bread. He ends up being captured by the Philistines and loses the one thing he had left – his dignity. We find him drooling on his beard and scribbling on the city gate in utter humiliation.

David has endured a lot of unfair treatment, but finally now in chapter 24 David has a chance to do something about it. David and Saul actually meet. Saul is on his way to where David had been hiding in a place called the Crag. The narrator does not tell us that David has since moved out of there – he lets us think that David is still at the Crag, and that Saul is about to get him cornered again. But on the way to the Crag Saul has to take a pit stop. So he looks for a place of total privacy where he can go in and relieve himself. So Saul finds this cave and goes in there and does his business, thinking he is all alone. Of all the caves in the entire nation of Israel, the one cave Saul picks happens to be the one where David and his men were hiding. Obviously that is God's doing. God delivers David's enemy right into his hands. And David's men see that and they tell David, "Look – God has given Saul into your hands. This is a sign from God that you should take Saul's life."

They were right about the first part – it was God's doing. But they were wrong about the second part. God brought Saul into that cave not as a sign that David should lift his hand against him, but as a test to see if David would lift his hand against him. When God places some opportunity at your feet, and it is obvious that God has done it, do not always assume that means God wants you to seize that opportunity. It may be that it is a test to reveal what is in your heart.

Thank you, dear Lord, for testing Your servant. Thank You for the trials and suffering and temptations and difficulties that expose what is really in my heart. I grieve, dear Lord, at how often I fail the tests – especially those tests that would be easy to pass if I was alert to the fact that it was a test. Teach me to be alert and awake, and be aware when I am being tested that I might pass the test for Your glory.

Day 2

So how does David do on the test in the cave in chapter 24? He fails. He does not get a zero – he does not kill Saul. But he does lift his hand against Saul. Cutting off the corner of Saul’s robe was an act of aggression. David committed the same sin that his men were urging him to commit. He did not carry it to the extreme that they wanted. The expression they wanted was to kill Saul, and David only destroyed a little of Saul’s property. So the expression of it was more restrained, but at the heart of it the sin was the same – lifting his hand against God’s anointed in an act of aggression. What was in David’s heart when he did that was not godly, and David knew it. That is why he was immediately conscience stricken when he did it.

So David fails that test – but he does not get a zero. He does refrain from harming Saul. And his reason for holding back is very important. Saul is oblivious to the fact that David made an alteration to his robe, and he leaves the cave. And when he is a safe distance David yells to him and says this:

1 Samuel 24:12 May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. 13 As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

15 May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

“If anyone is going to pay you back for the things you have done to me it is going to have to be God, because it is certainly not going to be me.”

That principle is the controlling theme for chapters 24, 25, and 26. If someone hurts you unjustly, that person deserves to be punished. And whatever losses you suffered should be restored. And it should be made known to all that you were in the right in this matter. And if the person resists all that, then you have got a battle on your hands. And when you have a battle like that on your hands, you have a choice to make. Are you going to fight it or are you going to let God fight it?

“How about if we both fight it?”

That is not an option. If you fight it, God will not fight it. The only way God will fight it for you is if you entrust it completely into His hands. And if you do that God will punish the person, restore what you have lost, and make it clear that He is on your side and that you are in the right. But He will only do that if you leave it up to Him. If you try to fight it, then you are on your own.

Revenge is a constant temptation for every one of us. Your spouse is short with you or inconsiderate or disrespectful, and you make him or her pay a price. Even if it is just being grumpy for an afternoon – you make them suffer a little bit. Retaliation is built into our flesh when we have power to do it.

David has not had power to do anything – until now. David has a chance, but instead of hurting Saul David says, “I am not going to fight this battle against you. I am putting it totally in God’s hands. The only thing I am going to do is show you love and respect. And I will just wait for the Lord to grant justice.”

So David understands the principle. He understands it, but still there is some vengeful pride in his heart that needs to be dealt with. His sin of lifting his hand against Saul was restrained and small and very short-lived, but it was an indication of something in his heart that needed to be dealt with. When you fall into a sin and then repent right away, do not blow it off, even if it was a small, harmless sin. The fact that you repented is great and the fact that you restrained the extent of the sin is great. But still, you need to deal with the core sin in your character that caused you to commit that sin. And that is what God does for David in chapter 25.

In chapter 25 a fool by the name of Nabal insults and mistreats David, David flies into a rage and rallies his men for battle. You see, that sin is still in his heart, but the expression of it is not restrained now that he is dealing with a fool. God presents David with a circumstance that will uncover the extent of what seemed in the previous chapter to be a small flaw in his character. But God also sends the voice of wisdom to bring David to repentance.

Right now I give my battles to You. That person who has hurt me – take it, dear Lord, that battle is in Your hands. I don’t want any part of it. I trust You with it. You are reliable and just and faithful and good, and I have no cause for concern if this battle is left in Your great hands. Take it from me. Wrest it from my grip. Pry open my stubborn fingers that I might relinquish all to You. I trust You, Lord.

Day 3

1 Samuel 25:28 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.

What did Abigail mean when she said David fights the Lord's battles? Clearly she was telling David that his fight against Nabal was not one of the Lord's battles. That was David's own battle. And Abigail is saying, "Look, you will have a clear conscience if you let God fight your battles, and you fight God's battles."

So what are the Lord's battles? There is one battle that has taken place in 1 Samuel that we know for sure was the Lord's battle. Right before David killed Goliath there was a fair amount of trash talking between the two of them. Both were saying they were going to feed the other one to the birds, etc. But then David said this:

1 Samuel 17:47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's

Those are the same two words Abigail uses. Abigail had heard the stories of what happened that day with Goliath, and she borrows the very words that came out of David's own mouth that day when David said, "The battle is the Lord's." David is about to fight his own battle against Nabal and Abigail says, "David, you don't do this sort of thing. The deal with Goliath – that's the kind of thing you do. You fight the Lord's battles, not your own."

So what is the difference? David's conflict with Nabal was David's battle. But the conflict with Goliath was the Lord's battle. Why? What was it about the thing with Goliath that made that the Lord's battle? The reason the battle with Goliath was the Lord's battle was because the Lord's name was at stake in that battle. Goliath was blaspheming and mocking the God of Israel, and David wanted to shut his mouth not because of David's pride, and not because of patriotism, but because of his love for God. Goliath insults David and David does not even seem to notice. David's own brothers insult David, and he blows it off. But someone speaks against God and David cuts off his head. At that time in his life David was not interested in defending his own interests. He cared only about standing up for the honor of God. That is what it means to fight the Lord's battles and not your own, and that is what Abigail reminds him of.

What God wants us to do is swap battles with Him. He wants us to leave our battles for Him to fight, and for us to focus on fighting His battles. He fights ours and we fight His.

And you might hear that and think, I can understand why He fights our battles, but why do we fight His battles? He fights our battles because we do not have the power to fight them ourselves. When someone treats you unfairly, you do not have the power to bring about justice for yourself. You cannot cause what you lost to be restored. You cannot cause yourself to have favor in the eyes of people who now think ill of you. You do not have the power to make everything right again. And it makes sense that God would want us to trust Him to do all that so His power and goodness and faithfulness is put on display for all to see. That makes sense.

But if that is the case, why not just trust God to fight all my battles *and* all His battles? If I am so weak, it seems silly for me to jump in and try to fight the Lord's battles. It is like I am a worm, and I am being ganged up on by three really big worms, and I am powerless to help myself. Then a human being comes along and says, "I'll fight your battles if you'll fight mine," and he puts those three big worms in a sling and sends them into the next county. That part makes sense. But then the worm is supposed to turn around and help defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan? It sounds crazy.

The Lord's battles are huge. He is in a conflict with demons and powers and authorities and Satan himself – massive powers that are millions of times stronger than us. Why would God want us to fight His battles? Simple – because we love Him. If you love someone you stand up for that person. If you love your wife and someone comes along and slanders her or mocks her, you are going to stand up for her. The greatest commandment is to love God with all your being, and if you do that you are not going to sit idly by when someone blasphemes Him. God calls us to fight His battles not because He needs help with them, but because He knows that our greatest joy and greatest wellbeing will come when we love Him and express that love. And fighting His battles is one way to express love for Him.

And so how do you fight the Lord's battles? Go on a crusade and kill all the unbelievers? No – God's battles are not against flesh and blood.

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

We do not engage in Jihad – holy war against human beings like the Muslims do, because the war is not against human beings. That is one reason why we do not engage in revolution.

John 18:36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

If God's battles were against human beings we would get some guns and weapons and fight against human beings. But His battles are against a much greater power – a power that cannot be touched by guns.

So how do we fight? And does our fighting actually accomplish anything? It does. We are not just worms trying to help win a nuclear war. God has placed in our hands devastating, powerful, lethal weapons that can absolutely demolish the enemy. One of those weapons is truth – the truth in God's Word.

2 Corinthians 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God

False doctrine, lies, untrue beliefs about God, false religion – any kind of falsehood or error that leads people astray – those are the nuclear bombs of the enemy. And we have been given divine power to demolish those with the truth of Scripture.

Another weapon that can blow the enemy to smithereens is righteousness. That is really the only way he can be overcome.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So, when someone offends us, hurts us, mistreats us, slanders us, treats us unfairly – we leave that up to God to deal with. But when someone opposes God, blasphemes God, speaks against God – we stand up and unload on that person with the double barrels of truth and righteousness.

That is a principle David understood back in chapter 17, when he overlooked insults against himself but was fearless in defending the name of God. Now he has kind of slipped from that, and so God uses Abigail to remind David of what he knew back in chapter 17. And so David says, "OK – you're right. This is my battle, which means it's not mine to fight. I'll leave it totally in God's hands and let Him take care of it."

What an astonishing thing it is that a worm could fight in any meaningful way against the awesome unseen forces in the heavenlies! Forgive me, Lord, for messing around fighting battles I don't have the power or the authority to fight, and ignoring the cosmic war that I've been granted both the power and the authority to fight. Teach Your servant to appreciate the privilege of fighting Your battles, and may I do so with courage and valor and full trust in You.

Day 4

So here we have David in need of justice. He is being slandered, mistreated, unjustly accused, and unfairly treated – by both Saul and Nabal. So David needs justice. He needs God to take up his cause. But he leaves it totally in God’s hands. So let’s watch and see what God does.

In his foolish anger David had vowed to murder every male in Nabal’s household. But then God sends the voice of wisdom in Abigail, and David comes to his senses and decides not to follow through. And that was wise. Making a foolish vow is a sin – following through on it is another sin. If you ever make a vow that would require you to commit a sin, break the vow.

So David says, “May God deal with me severely if I fail to do this,” then he fails to do it, and in His unbelievable mercy God ignores David’s prayer for judgment and does not deal with him severely. Abigail convinced David to do with Nabal what he had already done with Saul – leave justice in the hands of God. Just trust God to bring about whatever punishment is necessary – but do not soil your own conscience by doing that yourself. So David leaves the punishment of Nabal completely up to God. And here is what happens:

36 When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk.

The report of him getting drunk is probably included because getting drunk is the greatest expression of foolishness there is. That is why in Ephesians 5, in a context where Paul is explaining his command, “Do not be foolish, but be wise” he follows it by saying, “Do not get drunk with wine.”

So she told him nothing until daybreak.

What happens next has nothing to do with the alcohol. That is gone. This is a direct act of God.

37 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 stone.

It sounds like a stroke. Some people think this was because of realizing that he came so close to being killed by David. But Nabal was not one bit afraid of David. I think it was because he found out how much money his wife spent rescuing him. You gave him *how many* loaves of bread?! What’s the matter with you? Do you think bread grows on trees? Forced generosity is traumatic for a man who worships money.

So Nabal is completely incapacitated with what sounds like a stroke, and then...

38 About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died.

Note to self: Do not be mean to people who are favored by God. Oppose God’s chosen man and God will destroy you.

And that has implications, obviously, for Saul. There are so many similarities in this chapter between Nabal and Saul; most commentators believe that Nabal is serving as a picture of Saul. And so chapter 25 shows us that 1) Saul is a fool, and 2) God is going to deal with Saul like He did with Nabal.

David needs justice with regard to Saul much more than he needed it with Nabal, and this account acts as a kind of promise – Don’t worry, you will receive justice in this conflict with Saul. And that is exactly what happens in the rest of the book. The closing chapters of 1 Samuel are the sad story of God meting out justice on Saul.

What folly it is, Father, when I question Your timing. You have every detail of every event over the entire course of time from the creation to throughout eternity planned with perfect precision. Not one second ticks off the clock outside of Your perfect plan. To You a day is a period of time that seems like 1000 years, which means each second it like more than 100 hours to You. You pay infinite attention to detail, and Your timing is impeccable. And along comes a finite, ignorant, foolish human being and questions the wisdom of Your timing! What folly is in my heart, dear God. Take it away. Let it be replaced with full trust in You.

Day 5

In chapter 24 David had a character flaw. By chapter 26 that flaw is gone. And the reason it was gone was because in chapter 25 God opened David's eyes to a glimpse of His glory. If there is anything in your character you want changed, the way to do it is for your eyes to be opened wider to the glory of God in whatever area you are struggling.

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Thank You, dear Lord, for being so reliable, so trustworthy, so just, so good, and having such perfect timing. That collection of attributes, if my eyes were opened to see the wonders of them, would transform my character. So open my eyes, dear Lord. Use all the injustices of this life to open my eyes to the glory of that combination of Your attributes that I might delight in them, trust in them, and love You more.