

The Good Wife?  
1 Samuel 25  
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Friends, this summer our journey through the book of 1 Samuel has taken us through some familiar and not-so-familiar terrain. The most familiar would probably be chapter 17 – the battle between David and Goliath. This is one of the most well-known stories in the entire Bible and a favorite of many. I was grateful that after preaching the sermon on that passage I heard comments like, “Pastor Dan, even though that sermon was on David and Goliath, I still learned something new today.” I just hope the new things I said were true things.

I think some of the most unfamiliar terrain may be the text we are going to explore today – 1 Samuel 25 – the story of Nabal and Abigail (page 247). Oh, I have read this story before, but I have never preached, nor heard a sermon on this passage. In some ways, that is not a surprise. There are reasons why the kids in the third grade Sunday School class are not usually taught this story.

Yet, I think Abigail is one of the more fascinating characters in the Bible, and I believe God has some important things to say to us in this portion of the Bible. Let’s pause and pray that the Lord would use his Word to both encourage and challenge us today.

**1 Samuel 25:1 – Samuel died, and all Israel assembled to mourn for him, and they buried him by his home in Ramah.**

The death of Samuel, who had been the spiritual leader of Israel for decades, was certainly significant. Yet, how does this event fit with the story in chapter 25?

Well, the death of Samuel brings some instability to the nation; and David may fear that Saul, who is rather emotionally unstable, may see it as a reason to again try to kill him. That may be why David is on the move, going to Paran, down in the northeast part of the Sinai Peninsula (verse 2).

We are then introduced to a rich man who lives in Maon and runs a business in the town of Carmel. This is about twenty miles southwest of En-gedi, where David had been staying.

**1 Samuel 25:3 – The man’s name was Nabal, and his wife’s name, Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful, but the man, a Calebite, was harsh and evil in his dealings.**

Maybe you know some couples like that. You wonder, how did such a wonderful gal end up with such a nasty husband. Of course, in ancient Israel, this was likely an arranged marriage.

Incidentally, in Hebrew, the name “Nabal” means “fool.” It is hard to imagine that any parent would give a newborn baby that name, so perhaps it was the nickname he had earned. Or perhaps there was another meaning to the name back then that is now lost. Anyway, Nabal the fool is married to Abigail, meaning the one who brings joy.

**1 Samuel 25:4 – While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep.**

Sheep-shearing was a big deal in that culture, so it is like a festival or maybe the county fair.

**1 Samuel 25:5 – ...so David sent ten young men instructing them, “Go up to Carmel, and when you come to Nabal, greet him in my name.”**

Why? To ask for help. The men are to say:

**1 Samuel 25:8b – “Please give whatever you have on hand to your servants and to your son David.”**

This is not a demand, but a request, based on the fact that David’s army of about 600 men had always treated Nabal’s shepherds well. It seems that it would have been okay for Nabal to politely refuse David’s request if there was a good reason why he could not help. Yet, when

David's men ask for help, they receive a very rude response:

**1 Samuel 25:10-11 – Nabal asked them, “Who is David? Who is Jesse’s son? Many slaves these days are running away from their masters. Am I supposed to take my bread, my water, and my meat that I butchered for my shearers and give them to these men? I don’t know where they are from.”**

This is not just an answer of “no,” but an expression of contempt for David, a contempt that was not at all justified.

The men go back and report this to David, and he becomes angry.

**1 Samuel 25:13 – He said to his men, “All of you, put on your swords!”**

And he and 400 of his men head to Carmel.

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants goes to Abigail and tells her what has happened. He notes that David's army had actually provided protection for Nabal's shepherds and flocks and certainly did not deserve the rude response Nabal had given them. He is afraid that there will be big trouble with David's army and wants Abigail to intervene because...

**1 Samuel 25:17b – “Nabal is such a worthless fool nobody can talk to him!”**

The fact a servant dares say that to his master's wife reflects that it is a pretty widely-shared opinion.

Abigail takes the servants words very seriously. She apparently fears an attack by David and his army. So...

**1 Samuel 25:18 – Abigail hurried, taking two hundred loaves of bread, two clay jars of wine, five butchered sheep, a bushel of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys.**

Then without telling her husband, she and her servants go to meet David with these supplies.

Meanwhile, verses 21-22 tell us that because Nabal “paid me back evil for good,” David vows to kill Nabal and all his men by the end of the day. But, before that happens, Abigail arrives at the camp.

**1 Samuel 25:23 – When she saw David, she quickly got off the donkey and knelt down with her face to the ground and paid homage to David.**

She says to him:

**1 Samuel 25:25 – “My lord should pay no attention to this worthless fool Nabal, for he lives up to his name: His name means ‘stupid,’ and stupidity is all he knows. I, your servant, didn’t see my lord’s young men whom you sent.”**

The implication is that she would have given a much different response. Abigail then gives a remarkable little speech. She pleads that David not attack her husband and household. The reason he should not do so, she says, is not because Nabal doesn't deserve it, nor because she is begging for mercy. Rather, her argument is this: Because you will be the new king, the Lord does not want you to be a man who takes revenge and sheds blood when not necessary.

Listen to what Abigail says to David:

**1 Samuel 25:28 – “Please forgive your servant’s offense, for the LORD is certain to make a lasting dynasty for my lord (*meaning you, David*) because he fights the LORD’s battles. Throughout your life, may evil not be found in you.”**

She notes how David has been protected, not by his own strength, but by God. And then adds:

**1 Samuel 25:30-31 – “When the LORD does for my lord (*you, David*) all the good he promised you and appoints you ruler over Israel, there will not be remorse or a troubled conscience for you because of needless bloodshed or revenge. And when the LORD does good things for my lord, may you remember me your servant.”**

When David hears these words, he says, “Off with her head!” No, he doesn’t!!!

**1 Samuel 25:32-33 – Then David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! May your wisdom be blessed, and may you be blessed. Today you kept me from participating in bloodshed and avenging myself by my own hand.”**

He adds, if you would not have come, I would have killed your husband and all his servants.

**1 Samuel 25:35 – Then David accepted what she had brought him and said, “Go home in peace. See, I have heard what you said and have granted your request.”**

This could be the end of the story, but it is not.

**1 Samuel 25:36a – Then Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was in his house, holding a feast fit for a king.**

There is irony here that Nabal the fool acts like a king, but treats the king, David, with contempt.

**1 Samuel 25:36b – Nabal’s heart was cheerful, and he was very drunk, so she didn’t say anything to him until morning light.**

Then...

**1 Samuel 25:37 – In the morning, when Nabal sobered up, his wife told him about these events. His heart died and he became a stone.**

This was probably a heart attack or stroke, and Nabal apparently goes into a coma.

**1 Samuel 25:38 – About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal dead.**

I don’t think there was any bolt of lightning here. Nabal died as a result of whatever medical trauma he had suffered, but the Lord uses that for his sovereign purposes.

**1 Samuel 25:39a – When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be the**

**LORD who championed my cause against Nabal’s insults and restrained his servant from doing evil. The LORD brought Nabal’s evil deeds back on his own head.”**

It was the Lord who took Nabal’s life, not David.

**1 Samuel 25:39b – Then David sent messengers to speak to Abigail about marrying him.**

If David had killed Nabal and then taken Abigail as his wife, it would have been less than honorable. However, because the Lord has taken Nabal’s life, marrying his widow seems appropriate.

When Abigail hears the marriage proposal, she is deeply humbled but agrees to marry the man she knows has been chosen by God to be the new king.

This passage closes by mentioning two other women that David marries, as well as noting his estrangement from his first wife Michal. Why the Lord allowed polygamy, multiple wives, throughout the Old Testament when right from the beginning (Genesis 1) he had made it clear he intended marriage to be the relationship between one man and one woman is a complicated question that we will not take time to explore this morning. I will simply say there are some answers to that question, and that the bottom line is this: The New Testament is quite clear that God does not approve of polygamy. Thus, for us today, it is a no-brainer – marriage is to be one man, one woman. No more, no less.

OK, so what is the Lord saying to us through this “unique” passage?

There are some folks who suggest this text simply reports to us what happened and doesn’t really tell us whether any particular actions were good or bad.

I don’t think that is the case. I believe the authors, both the human historian and the Lord, clearly portray Abigail as the hero or heroine of this story. And there are some important lessons for us as we reflect on what she does in this story.

## **#1 Abigail is a model of a godly wife.**

“Wait a second, Pastor Dan, Abigail seems to have little respect for her husband. She refers to him as ‘a stupid, worthless fool.’ How would you like it if Nancy treated you that way?”

Well, I would not. I am grateful Nancy never does. Yet, by the grace of God, I am not Nabal.

A few weeks ago, we talked about how all human authorities, including husbands, derive their authority from God. When they do not lead in a godly way, they forfeit that authority.

I suspect there were a number of times when Abigail did not submit to Nabal because to do so would have been to dishonor God.

“But Pastor Dan, she certainly should not have referred to her husband as a ‘stupid, worthless fool.’”

Well, I think our text is pretty clear that this is exactly who Nabal is. Abigail is not so much insulting her husband as just telling the truth about who he is. And the reason she describes Nabal to David this way is to save his life.

Back in chapter 21, David feigns insanity, pretending to be a fool in order to escape from Achish, the king of Gath. The king realized there was no honor for him to fight, defeat and kill a mentally incompetent man.

Likewise, Abigail convinces David there would be no honor in taking revenge and killing Nabal, because he is nothing but a fool.

Abigail’s decision to bring all sorts of gifts to David without her husband’s knowledge is also intended to protect him. If Abigail would have told Nabal what she was going to do, he would have, no doubt, forbid her from doing so. He had already refused to share anything with David and his men.

Yet, if Abigail had not gone to David with those gifts, Nabal and all the males in that household would be dead. David and his men would have killed every single one. By sneaking off on her diplomatic mission, Abigail saves her husband’s life and the lives of others as well.

It is difficult to characterize Abigail as a bad wife when her words and actions are what keep her husband from being killed. And Abigail is not at all responsible for Nabal’s heart attack the next day or his death ten days later.

We should also note that Abigail was risking her own life when she met with David. Though he intended to kill only the males in Nabal’s household, David could have easily been angered by Abigail’s intervention and killed her.

Despite appearing not to be, I would suggest Abigail was probably a pretty good wife, probably better than Nabal deserved.

OK, so is the lesson for us today that it is ok for a wife to call her husband a “stupid, worthless fool” and give away a lot of things behind his back? No, not really.

I would put the lesson this way: A godly woman married to a not-so-godly husband needs to seek God’s wisdom as to how she can best honor the Lord. A godly man married to a not-so-godly woman needs a lot of wisdom as well.

At wedding ceremonies (we had a very special one in our family a few weeks ago), I often talk about what a magnificent gift marriage is and how it can and should be a wonderful experience as a husband and wife share love for each other and for the Lord.

That is the goal. However, in the fallen world in which we live, where sinners say, “I do,” marriage doesn’t always turn out that way. And friend, if you are in one of those marriages, a marriage which, instead of filling you with joy, is sucking the joy out of you, you need God’s wisdom. You need to carefully examine what the Lord has said to us in the Bible. You need to pray for his direction, and you may need to call the church office and come in and chat with Pastor Mark or myself.

## **#2 Abigail is not only a model of a good wife, but also a model of a very good friend.**

Though there is no indication that she had ever met David before that day, she is clearly

concerned about his welfare. Her motivation obviously includes protecting herself and her family, but she also seems to genuinely want David to do the right thing. At least David saw it that way. Remember in 25:33b, he says to Abigail:

**1 Samuel 25:33b – “Today you kept me from participating in bloodshed and avenging myself by my own hand.”**

And in verse 39, he praises God for using Abigail to prevent him from doing evil.

Folks, we need friends who will encourage us to do the right thing. Those folks seem to be in kind of short supply these days. Many people fail to tell their friends, “Do the right thing. Do what God, through the Bible, has told us we should do.”

Instead they tell their friends, “Follow your heart,” or “Do what is best for you.” If Abigail would have given David that advice, he would have killed her husband and been guilty of taking revenge and shedding blood that didn’t need to be shed.

So, are you someone who encourages your friends to do the right thing?

Yes, as a pastor, I need to tell people to do the right thing. That is my job. However, I think often a friend who is willing to confront and encourage someone to do the right thing is often more persuasive.

The Lord uses friends in our lives, friends who have the courage to speak the truth and who have the love to do so in a gracious way. Are you willing to do that?

Think of Jane, for example. The rest of us don’t know her, but she is your friend. Last week, she posted her status on Facebook as “in a relationship” with Joe. She got 227 “likes” and 73 comments expressing “congratulations.”

The problem is 80% of those Facebook friends don’t have a clue who Joe is. They don’t know if this relationship is going to be good for Jane,

and they certainly don’t know if it is honoring to the Lord.

Because our culture kind of worships romance, people tend to get excited about anything that seems “romantic.”

Jane needs a friend to private message her, or even better, go out for lunch with her, actually talk to her, and ask the hard questions:

- Is Joe a believer in Jesus Christ?
- Is he active in his church?
- What is his family background?
- What kind of job does he have?
- Does he abuse alcohol or drugs?
- How does he react and treat you when you have a disagreement?
- Is he willing to be chaste until you get married or are you already sleeping together?

Friends, are you willing to ask Jane those tough questions in a gracious way?

Oh, it is not easy, but Jane is in love. She is not necessarily seeing things real clearly. She needs a friend who does.

Jane responds, “Well, I don’t know. I think Joe is a Christian. At least he says he believes in God. No, he has not gone to church since he was a kid.”

What do you say then?

Jane could use a friend who says, “I know you think you and Joe have something special, but I don’t believe this is the relationship the Lord wants for you. The Bible is very clear (2 Corinthians 6:14) ‘Do not be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever.’ You are a Christian, Jane. There is really no evidence Joe is. You are, of course, free to marry him if you choose. That is your right. But don’t pretend that will be pleasing to the Lord.”

Folks, it would be really hard to say something like that to Jane. Most people believe Jane should follow whatever path she thinks will head to her happiness, and no one should criticize her for doing so.

Yet, Jane can really use a friend or two who will remind her that rather than doing what she feels is right or what anyone else thinks is right, she needs to seek to do what the Lord says is right.

Or maybe you happen to be Joe's friend. If so, that's not an accident. The Lord has him in your life for a reason. Are you willing to sit down with him and say:

"Joe, not for Jane's sake, but for your own, you need to consider, carefully consider, the claims of Jesus Christ. Joe, being a Christian is not about just believing in God, going to church, or being a good person. A Christian is someone who believes that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who died on the cross for sinners, and rose from the dead to guarantee the salvation of all who, by God's grace, trust in him. Trusting in Jesus starts with believing those facts about Jesus, but doesn't stop there. It involves relying, not on your own goodness or accomplishments, but on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Are you willing to do that, Joe?"

Folks, it is not easy to be the friend who has those types of conversations with Jane or Joe. It is a lot easier to just watch and smile as they head down a path that could do great harm to each of their souls.

"Oh Pastor Dan, I will just pray that the Lord will give Jane opportunities to witness to Joe, and maybe he will become a Christian."

Great! It is nice that Jane and Joe have friends that will pray for them, but what they really could use are some friends who have the courage to tell them the truth and care enough about them to encourage that path, the path where not you, but the Lord wants them to go.

Abigail was willing to have that type of conversation with a man she had never met. Are we willing to have those types of conversations with the people closest to us – family members and friends?

By God's grace, may some of those conversations happen – even this week!