

# FURY AND FAITH

*How to Trust God With the People Who Have Hurt You Most*

Text: 1 Samuel 25:1–44 (ESV)

## (Introduction)

There is a particular kind of pain that does not fade the way other pains do. It is not the pain of an accident, or a disease, or a loss that came from no one's hand but time and circumstance. It is the pain that has a face on it. The betrayal by someone who knew you well enough to know exactly where to strike. The contempt from someone whose opinion once mattered to you. The wound left by someone who used your trust like a weapon, or dismissed your worth with a single sentence, or took what was yours and walked away without a backward glance. That kind of pain has a particular weight to it — dense and specific, carrying a name and a memory and a moment that still burns when it surfaces.

You know what that feels like. Most of us in this room are carrying something in that category right now. And alongside the wound, you know the other thing — the thing that rises from somewhere deep and primal and says: do not let this stand. Make it right. Make them pay. Make sure they do not walk away from this unchanged.

That impulse is not simply weakness. It is not always sin. In many cases it is the image of God in you recognizing that something is genuinely wrong — that justice genuinely matters, that wrongs ought not to go unaddressed. The question the Bible asks is not whether you feel the impulse. The question is what you do with it.

That is exactly the question that 1 Samuel 25 is built around. It is a chapter full of unforgettable characters and high drama, but underneath all of it — driving the entire narrative — runs a single question that God is forcing David to answer. It is the same question he is placing before you today.

***Can you fully trust God to deal with those who have wronged you?***

The distance between fury and faith is not crossed in a moment. It is not crossed by willpower, by deciding to feel differently, or by being told that what was done to you was not as serious as it felt. The distance between fury and faith is a path. And David walks it inside a single chapter of Scripture — which means the text itself becomes the map.

We are going to follow that path together today. There are five steps, and each one corresponds to a moment in the story of 1 Samuel 25. Not five ideas about the path. Five actual steps David takes, in sequence, that move him from fury to faith.

## (Step One — Verses 2–13: Name the Wound)

The chapter opens with a brief and quietly devastating notice. Samuel is dead. One verse. All Israel mourned. They buried him at Ramah. For David, this must have landed like a stone dropped into still water, sending ripples in every direction. Samuel was the old prophet who had anointed him in Bethlehem when he was barely old enough to understand what it meant. He had been the visible, breathing embodiment of God's word over David's life — the one person alive who could say 'I was there when God chose you.' And now he is gone. The anchor has been cut. David rises and goes south into the wilderness.

He is still a fugitive. Still hunted by Saul. Still responsible for six hundred men who depend on him for everything. What he has is not a palace or a paycheck but a history — months of quietly functioning as an unsolicited security force for the shepherds and flocks of the region around Maon and Carmel. He and his men had formed a living wall between those shepherds and the raiders, the wild animals, and the general lawlessness that plagued the wilderness. Nobody hired them to do this. They did it because they were there, because they could, and because it was the right thing to do. Like a fire station that always shows up to the fire, but never charges the neighborhood.

One of those landowners was a man named Nabal. The text introduces him efficiently and without mercy: very rich, three thousand sheep, a thousand goats, shearing time in Carmel. Then his name. Nabal. In Hebrew it means fool — not the endearing kind of fool, not the court jester, but the Psalm 14 kind: the one who says in his heart there is no God, who is corrupt, who does abominable things. His wife Abigail is introduced in the same breath, as if the contrast itself demands immediate acknowledgment: discerning and beautiful, the text says — and the man was harsh and badly behaved. They were a study in opposites.

David hears that Nabal is shearing sheep — that the season of abundance has come to his estate — and so David sends ten young men with a message for Nabal. It is courteous to a fault. Notice how carefully he frames the request in verses 6 through 8:

***'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'***

He does not demand. He does not threaten. He appeals to the history of service, to the festive season, to the relationship between their households. He even refers to himself as 'your son David' — a gesture of deliberate deference from a man who has already been anointed by God as the future king. This is not the letter of a man who feels entitled. This is the letter of someone extending his hand, palm open, asking for acknowledgment of a genuine debt.

The young men deliver the message. They wait. And Nabal answers them. What comes back is not a feast. It is contempt. Verses 10 and 11:

***'Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?'***

Count the first-person pronouns. Eight in two verses. My bread. My water. My meat. My shearers. The word 'mine' radiates from Nabal's response. He does not merely refuse David — he dismisses him, degrades him, and wraps the refusal in the deliberate insult of calling him a runaway slave. And the cruelty is sharpened by the fact that he knows exactly who David is. Everyone in Judah knows who David is. You do not say 'son of Jesse' by accident — that phrase was already Saul's chosen term of contempt, and Nabal reaches for it like a man who has practiced the insult and is glad for the occasion to use it.

The young men turn around in silence. They come back to David. They tell him everything. And David's response is immediate, like a switch being thrown. Verse 13:

***'And David said to his men, Every man strap on his sword! And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.'***

There is no anguish in those words, no hand-wringing, no prolonged deliberation. It is crisp, military, decisive. It is the equivalent of “I don't get mad; I get even.” Four hundred pairs of boots. Four hundred swords clattering into their sheaths. Dust rising from the hillside as the column moves north toward Carmel. In verse 21, David gives his honest assessment of what happened: **'He has returned me evil for good.'** That is not an exaggeration. That is not wounded pride inflating the offense. That is an accurate description of what Nabal did. And God's word nowhere asks David to call it something else.

### ***(The Transition to What This Teaches)***

Notice what the story does not do. It does not minimize what Nabal did. It does not rush past David's anger. It does not tell him — or us — that the right response is to get over it quickly. The narrative validates the wound before it addresses the response. And this is the first key to trusting God with those who have wronged you.

This is the trailhead. You cannot begin a journey from a place you refuse to acknowledge you are standing. David names it with full, furious clarity — evil returned for good — and that honest naming is the first step onto the path. If you are still performing a pretend peace you have not arrived at, you are still standing at the trailhead. The journey begins right here.

## **You trust God to deal with those who wronged you by honestly acknowledging the reality of what was done to you.**

### **(BIBLICAL TEACHING)**

There is a version of so-called spiritual peace that is actually just well-dressed denial — a performance of forgiveness that has never passed through honest acknowledgment of pain. You have almost certainly heard the language. 'Just let it go.' 'Don't dwell on it.' 'Move on.' And because these words often come from people who quote Scripture and mean well, they can feel like the godly path. But they are not — not when they are a shortcut around honesty rather than a road through it.

The God of Scripture does not ask his people to minimize their wounds. Read the Psalms of lament. Read Psalm 55, where David writes about a betrayal by a close friend: **'It is not an enemy who taunts me — then I could bear it. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.'** That is not the language of a man who has quickly reframed the injury. That is honest grief set before God, in God-breathed words, preserved in inspired Scripture. God did not edit that out. He put it there.

David is not being criticized in verses 2 through 13 for feeling what he feels. He is being set up for a test. You cannot take a test honestly if you have not honestly acknowledged what the test is about. The foundation of trust is not forced peace — it is honest pain brought before a God who already knows the full story.

Allow me to share something that happened in my life years ago, a situation that this story causes me to remember.

Patti and I had been married about three years. We had a daughter — Courtney — nine months old, small enough to transport in a car seat. I was finishing the last semester of my graduate degree, and we were in the middle of interviewing for a position as Youth Pastor at Patti's childhood church. Think about what that meant to us. Not just a job. Her home. The place where she had grown up. The people who had celebrated with us at our wedding three years before. The hallways she had walked as a girl. For a young couple just starting out, it felt like the kind of story you could not have written better yourself — come home, serve the people who shaped you, begin something lasting in a place already soaked in memory and meaning.

The telephone interviews had gone beautifully. Each one ended with warmth, with encouraging words, with the unmistakable sense that a door was swinging open. Every week brought something new — a call, a letter, a conversation that confirmed what we were already beginning to believe: this was the one. This was where God was pointing. Patti and I would lie awake some nights, whispering about it the way young couples do when something good is

coming and you almost do not want to say it too loud for fear of breaking the spell. The excitement was quiet and enormous at the same time.

Then came the weekend. The three of us flew out — me, Patti, and nine-month-old Courtney — to visit the church, to meet the staff and the leaders and the youth volunteers and the parents. Friday evening was everything we had hoped. Warm faces. Easy conversation. The kind of evening that leaves you feeling like you already belong somewhere. We put Courtney down to sleep, and I think we talked late into the night.

Saturday morning, the land line phone hanging on the wall rang.

I still remember the way a ringing phone sounds different when bad news is on the other end of it. You do not know it in the moment. But later, when you replay it, you hear a difference. Patti's mom answered it. It was the senior pastor of the church. His voice was careful in that particular way that voices get when a person is choosing each word because they know what the words are about to do to you. He told me that the youth volunteers had not been in favor of me becoming the youth pastor. And then he said whatever else he said, and I do not remember any of it, because the world had already gone very quiet.

I sat there with the phone in my hand for a moment after the call ended. Patti was watching me from across the room. She already knew from my face. Courtney was somewhere on the floor between us, blissfully unaware that her parents' carefully assembled future had just come apart.

We packed our bags. Patti's parents were still members of that church. They were hurt and embarrassed in the specific way that only happens when something painful occurs inside a community you love. Nobody knew what to say to anybody. We loaded our bags into a car, drove to the airport, and flew home. Patti held Courtney on her lap and did not say much.

I want to be honest about what the weeks and months that followed actually felt like. I had not grown up going to church much. I was not prepared — no one had warned me — for how much injury could happen inside a community of people who said they followed Jesus. I had expected the church to be the safest place. And it had become, in one phone call, the place where I had been told I was not wanted.

The word I kept returning to was betrayal. Not just disappointment, not just the sting of a professional setback. Betrayal. The kind that is specific to situations where you have been vulnerable — where you have shown up with your family, with your hopes, with your whole young life ready to be poured into something — and had the door closed before you could step through it. I asked the question I imagine you have asked about your own wounds: Where was God in this? Why did he let us come all this way, get this close, feel this certain — only to let a handful of people put a stop to it?

The sting did not stay politely in the background while I tried to finish my studies. It was there in the library when I was supposed to be reading. It was there at the dinner table. It followed me into sleep and was waiting for me in the morning. There is a particular exhaustion that comes from carrying something you cannot put down, and I carried it every day for months.

And to this day, I do not think God was asking me to stop feeling it. He was asking me to bring it to him honestly — the full, unedited weight of it, the confusion and the anger and the unanswered questions — rather than perform a pretend peace I had not yet arrived at.

That is where trust begins. Not with the resolution. But with the honest acknowledgment of what was actually done.

## **(Step Two — Verses 14–19: Watch for God)**

The honest acknowledgment that the wound is real, that the wrong genuinely happened, and that God does not ask us to pretend otherwise. But naming the wound is only the beginning. Genuine faith must keep moving — and it must move in a specific direction. The next part of this story opens a window into something David cannot see from where he stands, something that addresses a question every wounded person eventually asks in the waiting: Where is God in this? The answer is about to arrive from a direction David would never have anticipated.

### ***(The Story)***

While David and his four hundred men move north toward Carmel, swords at their sides, the narrative pulls back to show us a scene David cannot see. Something is already in motion on the other side of the mountain.

One of Nabal's servants — unnamed, one of the very shepherds David's men had protected — has watched the whole exchange unfold. He knows what David asked for. He knows what Nabal said. And he knows, with the bleak certainty of long experience, that there is no point talking to Nabal about it. Verse 17: *He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him.*

So he goes to Abigail. He lays out everything — the long protection, the wall of security David's men had provided night and day, and Nabal's contempt in return. Disaster is coming for the entire household. *Consider what you should do.* Which is another way of saying: you are the only option left.

Abigail does not hesitate.

Verse 18: *Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys.*

She is using Nabal's own abundance to undo the damage Nabal's own contempt has caused. There is a biting irony in that. And then verse 19 adds a detail easy to overlook: But she did not tell her husband Nabal. She moves without his knowledge, against every social convention governing a married woman in that world.

Not one link in this chain was orchestrated by David. He was marching toward Carmel with an oath on his lips — and God was already moving through the household of the very man who had wronged him, funded from that man's own stores, riding toward David on a donkey.

### *(The Transition to What This Teaches)*

This part of the story is not primarily about Abigail's wisdom, as remarkable as that is. It is about the way God was already moving before David knew to look for him. And this teaches us the second key to trusting God with those who have wronged you.

This is *the first mile* of the path. You are still carrying the weight. The wound has not healed. But something has shifted — you are no longer standing still with your sword drawn and your eyes locked on the person who wronged you. You have turned your gaze outward. You are watching, open to what God may already have in motion from a direction you have not been watching. You are moving. You have not arrived. But you are no longer frozen. The key at this point of your journey is this:

**You trust God to deal with those who wronged you by staying open to his unexpected instruments of intervention.**

### **(BIBLICAL TEACHING)**

One of the ways anger and grief make us spiritually brittle is by locking us onto a predetermined script for how intervention should arrive — so tightly that we cannot recognize God working from a direction we never anticipated. We develop a mental picture of how this should end. We can see exactly how God ought to deal with the person who wronged us, and exactly when and through what means the vindication ought to come. And when it does not come through those means and on that timeline, we conclude that God has not acted.

But God moves through unexpected instruments because he is sovereign over the whole board — not just the pieces we are watching. The servant who went to Abigail was acting faithfully. Abigail who prepared the provisions was acting faithfully. God was working through both of them, from within the household of Nabal, the wrongdoer, without any input from the person wronged. The posture that trust requires is not passive — it is receptive alertness that is watching for God to work in their own life, from whatever direction he chooses.

Let me return to my own story, because this is the part I find myself most grateful for.

Several months had passed since the phone call. I was still finishing my degree. The wound had not gone away — it had simply grown familiar, the way a bruise stops surprising you even though it still hurts when pressed. Patti and I had not talked about what came next. We were in that in-between place that every wounded person knows — not fully healed, not fully broken, just moving forward because moving forward was the only available direction.

Then the phone rang again. This time it was a friend — someone I had known during my undergraduate years, from a church in the town where I had lived back then. She was not calling about anything dramatic. Her voice was easy and unhurried, the way old friends sound when they are just checking in. She had heard I was finishing up my degree. She wondered if I would be open to talking about a youth pastor position at her church.

I remember the feeling of that moment. It was not a clean, uncomplicated joy. It was more layered than that — a small warmth flickering against the backdrop of a heart that was still tender, still cautious, still carrying the memory of what the last open door had felt like right before it closed. Part of me wanted to say yes before she finished the sentence. Another part of me flinched. I had been excited before. I had felt certain before. I had packed my bags and flown across the country with a nine-month-old baby before, full of hope, and I knew now what the underside of hope looked like when it collapsed.

But here is what I did not know in that moment, and only came to understand much later: while I had been sitting with my wound, focused entirely on the door that had closed, God had already been moving. He had been working in a different town, in a different church, in the life of a friend I had not thought to call, preparing something I had not thought to look for. The call came from a direction I was not watching. It arrived in a season when I was not in any condition to have arranged it myself.

That is the thing about God's unexpected instruments. They do not announce themselves. They do not arrive on schedule. They do not come through the door you have been staring at. They tend to come through the window you forgot to leave open — quietly, almost casually, with the voice of an old friend who is just checking in.

I joined that church's staff as their youth pastor. I served there for four years. It was exactly what I needed — the right environment, the right community, the right season for a young pastor who still had things to learn about himself and about ministry and about the kind of leader God was shaping him to be. And it was the beginning of a trajectory I could not have engineered from where I was sitting. But I would have missed all of it if I had been so sealed inside my bitterness about the first church that I could not receive what was arriving from an unexpected direction.

## (PRACTICAL COUNSEL)

Stay alert to people and moments that are arriving in your situation from unexpected directions. Ask God specifically: 'What are you already doing that I do not yet have eyes to see? Who have you sent that I may have missed?' Those are not passive questions. They are the questions of someone who genuinely believes that God is sovereign and active. God rarely works through the door we are watching. Oftentimes, he comes through the window we forgot to leave open.

## (Step Three – Verses 23–31: Hear the Word)

### (The Theological Heart of the Sermon)

But staying open to God's working only matters if we are willing to actually hear what God is saying. And what Abigail is about to say to David in this ravine is the theological core of the entire chapter – not a gentle word to a reflective man, but a hard word to a furious one. The question is whether fury or faith will win.

### (The Story)

Four hundred armed men, swords at their sides, commander's oath already sworn – and a single woman dismounts her donkey and lies face-down in the dust at their feet.

Extraordinary courage wearing the clothing of submission. What follows is the longest speech by a woman in the entire Old Testament. She begins by taking the blame herself, pivots to Nabal – his name is Fool, and folly goes with him – then moves to her central argument.

Verses 26 through 31:

***'Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, because the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the LORD your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And when the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself.'***

Notice what Abigail is doing. She is not working David's emotions. She is working his convictions — calling him back to his own theology, the deepest things he already believes about God and his future. Her argument is this: God has a future for you, David, and you do not need to be the instrument of Nabal's judgment to secure it. Verse 31 shows David two futures — one carrying the weight of unnecessary bloodshed, and one arriving at the throne with nothing on his hands but what God put there. And this word of restraint comes not in a quiet moment of reflection. It comes in a ravine, with four hundred armed men and a sworn oath still on his lips.

### *(The Transition to What This Teaches)*

The weight of this scene in the narrative is not accidental. Everything about the setting — the ravine, the armed men, the fury, the oath — conspires to make the point that the word of restraint arrived at the hardest possible moment. And this teaches us the third key to trusting God with those who have wronged you.

This is *the critical fork* in the path. Every traveler reaches a moment where the terrain demands a decision — where the path forward requires something costly, and the path back toward vengeance looks easier. For David the fork arrives in a ravine, with four hundred armed men and an oath already sworn. It arrives in the form of a single woman on a donkey with one hundred and fifty-three words. He can dismiss it and continue downhill. Or he can receive it and be redirected. The rest of the journey depends entirely on what happens at this fork. Here is the key at this fork:

**You trust God to deal with those who wronged you by receiving his word of restraint even when your anger feels completely justified.**

### **(BIBLICAL TEACHING)**

The theological core of Abigail's speech in verses 26 through 31 is not a counsel of weakness. It is the most theologically sophisticated statement in the chapter. She is not arguing that Nabal's behavior was acceptable, that David's anger was disproportionate, or that justice does not matter. She is arguing that vengeance belongs to God alone — not because God is indifferent to the wound but because God is infinitely more qualified to address it than David is.

Deuteronomy 32:35 established this principle at the foundation of Israel's covenant life: 'Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip.'

When we take vengeance into our own hands, we almost always overshoot or undershoot. We overshoot because our anger inflames the response beyond what justice actually requires. We undershoot because we do not have access to the full picture — the whole story of what was done, why, and what it deserves. We wound innocent bystanders. We damage our own souls in the process. We confirm in the wrongdoer's mind that their original assessment of us was

correct. And we step into the place that belongs to God alone — the place of judge and avenger — which is a place no human being can occupy without deforming themselves.

### **(PASTORAL ENCOURAGEMENT AND PUSHBACK)**

Maybe some of you are thinking: 'My anger doesn't feel like a problem — it feels righteous. What was done to me was genuinely wrong. Why should I receive a word of restraint when the anger is completely warranted?' Let me be direct with you: you may be right that the anger is warranted. David's was. The story never challenges the legitimacy of David's fury. It only challenges what David intends to do with it.

Righteous anger is not the same as the right to act on it. The God who gave you the capacity for moral outrage — the capacity that tells you this was wrong and should not stand — is the same God who reserves the right to act on it. Your anger is appropriate. Your appointment of yourself as the instrument of consequences is not. Those are two different things, and collapsing them together is one of the most common and most costly errors that wounded people make. So be angry, but do not sin.

### **(REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL MOVEMENT: THE CROSS)**

This is the moment in the sermon where we must move from David's story to the story that gives David's story its deepest meaning. Because the path Abigail is calling David to walk — trusting God's justice rather than his own arm, receiving restraint in the moment of maximum fury — is the same path that the Son of God walked in the garden of Gethsemane. And he walked it not through a ravine with four hundred armed men, but to a cross, carrying the weight of the world's sin, facing the full outpouring of God's holy wrath.

Jesus in Gethsemane: 'Not my will, but yours.' The cup was before him — not just the suffering, but the horror of bearing the concentrated fury of divine justice against sin. He could have called twelve legions of angels. He did not. He could have spoken a word and every soldier in that garden would have been leveled. He had already demonstrated that at the moment of his arrest, when they fell back at his words. He chose not to. He entrusted himself to the Father.

The cross is not merely where Jesus was a victim of injustice — though he was that. The cross is where the full judicial wrath of God against sin was absorbed by the Son. The punishment that every wrongdoer deserves — including the one who wronged you — was not ignored or suspended or quietly set aside. The punishment was poured out. It fell on Jesus. God is not soft on sin because of the cross. The cross is the most costly, most comprehensive act of justice in the history of the universe. The Father did not spare his own Son.

First Peter 2:23 describes the path Jesus walked in language that deliberately echoes the principle Abigail argued before David: 'When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges

justly.' He who judges justly. That is the God to whom Jesus committed his cause. That is the God to whom Abigail is calling David to commit his cause. And that is the God to whom you are being called to commit yours.

The cross tells us that this God does not look away from sin. He does not shrug at injustice. He does not extend grace at the expense of justice. He absorbed the full cost of every wrong in the body of his Son so that justice could be fully satisfied and grace could be genuinely offered. That is the God who is asking you to trust him with the person who wronged you.

Because Christ bore the full weight of judgment on the cross, the God you are being asked to trust is not a God who is casual about your wound. He is a God who took it with absolute seriousness — at the highest possible cost.

## **(Step Four — Verses 32–35: Release the Claim)**

Step One was Name the Wound. Step Two was Watch for God. Step Three was hear God's word of restraint in the very moment when the heat of anger makes every impulse demand action. But receiving a word is not the same as acting on it. The story is about to show us the most dramatic single moment in the entire narrative — the moment where theology becomes decision, where the word heard in the fire either changes something concrete or proves to have been merely heard.

### ***(The Story)***

Now we find out what David is made of.

He has heard Abigail's speech. He has heard the theology, the prophecy, the appeal to his future and to God's character. But nothing external has changed. He is still a man with four hundred armed men behind him, an oath publicly sworn before his soldiers, a culture that would have fully supported what he was about to do, and a genuine grievance that Nabal has made no effort to address. No apology has come from the estate. No restitution has been offered. The only thing that has happened is that a woman has ridden out from the wrongdoer's household, fallen at his feet, and spoken a word from God into the middle of his fury.

What David does next is one of the most dramatic reversals in this entire narrative — not because it was inevitable, but precisely because it was not. Verses 32 through 35:

***And David said to Abigail, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand! For as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male.'*** Then

***David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, 'Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition.'***

He turns around. Not gradually. Not reluctantly. Not with a quietly calculated speech about generously choosing to spare Nabal this time while privately reserving the right to revisit the matter. He blesses God. He blesses Abigail's judgment. He blesses Abigail herself. He receives her gift. He sends her home in peace. He releases the claim. The warrant for Nabal's death has been cancelled — not because Nabal deserves mercy, but because God deserves trust.

Notice the explicitness of the release: **'I have obeyed your voice. I have granted your petition.'** He is not hedging. He is not leaving a back door. He is stating, in the hearing of four hundred men who watched him strap on his sword an hour ago, that the march is over. The sword that came out goes back in. The four hundred men who went up after him now turn around and go back the way they came.

This was a conscious, deliberate, against-the-grain act of the will. It cost him something in front of his men. It cost him the satisfaction of the outcome his oath had promised. And he did it anyway — because he had decided that God was more qualified to handle Nabal than he was.

### ***(The Transition to What This Teaches)***

The story has been building to this moment since verse 13. And here, in the explicit, irreversible, costly decision David makes in these four verses, we find the fourth key to trusting God with those who have wronged you.

This is *the watershed*. In geography, a watershed is the ridge line where water on one side flows one direction and water on the other flows the opposite direction. What David does in verses 32 through 35 is cross the watershed. He turns his men around. He sends Abigail home in peace. The march toward vengeance becomes a march home. It is a small physical act — David turns around — but it is the hinge of the whole path. Everything that comes next is only possible because of the decision made here. And this is the key at the watershed:

**You trust God to deal with those who wronged you by making the deliberate choice to release your claim to vengeance.**

The release of vengeance to God is not a feeling. It is not the thing that happens automatically when the anger finally fades. If you are waiting for the anger to subside before making the decision, you will wait a very long time, and you will fill the waiting time with what the New Testament calls bitterness — a root, as Hebrews 12:15 says, that 'causes trouble and by it many become defiled.' The release is not a feeling that descends on you. It is a decision you make.

David made a decision to forgive his enemy. His decision was made in response to Abigail's prophetic word. And this underlines the fact that this is not the natural way for a powerful man to behave. And it is not the natural way for any wounded person to behave. It requires something that comes from outside ourselves — a word, a conviction, a settled decision about the character of God that overrides the natural insistence of the wounded self. The release David makes in verses 32 through 35 is possible precisely because he has heard a word about God that he has chosen to believe more than he believes the claim of his own fury.

Proverbs 20:22 states the principle simply: **'Do not say, I will repay evil; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.'** And in Romans 12:19, Paul makes it a direct command grounded in God's own word about himself: **'Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'** The release is not a passive resignation to injustice. It is an active, confident, God-directed decision to place the claim in the hands of the One who is infinitely more capable of pursuing it than you are.

#### (PASTORAL ENCOURAGEMENT AND PUSHBACK)

Let's consider for a moment the most common and the most serious pushback that may be in our hearts: 'If God forgives my wrongdoer, does that mean they escape judgment? How can I trust his justice if forgiveness cancels punishment? What good is releasing this to God if God just forgives it and they face no consequences for what they did to me?'

This question misunderstands what forgiveness costs. God's forgiveness is never offered at the expense of justice — it is offered through the satisfaction of justice. Every wrong that is ever truly forgiven by God is forgiven because Jesus absorbed its full judgment on the cross. If your wrongdoer genuinely repents and receives the grace of God, then what happened to them is not that their sin was excused or overlooked. What happened is that the full weight of divine judgment against what they did fell on the Son of God in their place. The cross paid the debt. It did not pretend it did not exist.

And if they do not repent — if they never turn to God and receive that grace — then they will face the full unmitigated weight of divine judgment at the end. Romans 2:5 describes it as a day of **'wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.'** Nothing will be overlooked. Nothing will be quietly set aside. Nothing that was done to you will go finally unaddressed. God's forgiveness is not a bypass around justice. It is the most costly act of justice in the history of the universe.

So, therefore, release your claim to vengeance, not because God is soft on what was done to you, but because the God who judges with perfect knowledge, perfect justice, and perfect timing is more capable of handling it than you are — whether the outcome is the grace of repentance or the certainty of final judgment.

This is the moment where trusting God to deal with those who wronged you stops being an idea and becomes a decision. David made that decision in verses 32 through 35. The question the text is now placing before you is whether you will make it too.

## **(Step Five — Verses 36–39: Rest in His Justice)**

But once that decision is made, a new question rises. What comes next? What does life look like on the other side of that release? What does it feel like to have turned your men around, sent the woman home in peace, and now you are living in the interval before you know what God is going to do with what you gave him? The final section of this story answers that question — and it does so in the most direct, unambiguous way the narrative allows.

### ***(The Story)***

Abigail rides back home. And when she arrives at Nabal's house in Carmel that evening, she finds him in the middle of a feast. The text says it was like the feast of a king — lavish, abundant, the celebration of a man who has made his fortune and sees no reason not to enjoy it to the last drop. He is very drunk. His heart is merry, the text says. He is thoroughly pleased with himself, presiding over the table like a man without an enemy in the world. The bitter irony is breathtaking: the man who would not give David a loaf of bread is now feasting like royalty, oblivious to the fact that his wife spent the afternoon saving his life with his own provisions, and that the reason he is still alive to eat his feast is not his own power but the mercy of the man he insulted.

Abigail is wise enough to know this is not the moment. She says nothing. She waits until morning — until the wine has cleared and the feast has become last night's memory and Nabal is sitting in the daylight with a clear head and whatever remains of his judgment.

In the morning, she tells him everything. What David's men had asked for. What Nabal had said in reply. The oath David had sworn. The four hundred armed men who had been riding toward him through that ravine. What she had done. What she had said. What she had given away from his stores. Every word of it.

Verse 37:

***His heart died within him, and he became as a stone.***

Like a building whose foundation gives way all at once — not gradually, not with warning, but in a single catastrophic moment. The same heart that had been merry with wine and swollen with self-satisfaction twelve hours earlier goes cold and still. Ten days pass. And verse 38:

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

The story will not allow us to read this as mere coincidence, as the natural result of a bad lifestyle catching up with a man who had it coming. The text insists on something specific and theological: the LORD struck Nabal. God was the active agent. Not the shock of Abigail's news. Not the wine. Not the bad judgment of years finally extracting its price. The Lord. The same Lord who had watched the entire exchange from verse 2 through verse 35 — who had heard the contempt, seen the oath, sent the instrument, and received the release — now brought his own justice to bear.

When David hears the news, listen to how he responds. Verse 39:

***'Blessed be the LORD who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The LORD has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head.'***

Notice what David does not say and does not do. He does not say 'I knew this was coming.' He does not describe ten days of anxious watching or quiet monitoring of news from Carmel. He made his decision in verses 32 through 35. He sent Abigail home in peace. He turned his men around. And then he lived. The news came to him. He did not go looking for it. That is the difference between a man who has genuinely released the matter to God and a man who has released it with one hand while the other still holds the thread.

### ***(The Transition to What This Teaches)***

The interval between David's release in verse 35 and the news in verse 39 is the space this final point lives in. The peace David carries in that interval — not manufactured, not performed, but genuinely resting in what God can be trusted to do — this is the fifth and final key to trusting God with those who have wronged you.

This is *the resting place* at the end of a long day's travel. Not a triumphant summit. Not the moment every question is answered or every wound is healed. Simply the place where a person who has walked this path — honest about the wound, open to God's instruments, received the restraining word, released the claim — can finally put down what they have been carrying and be still. The posture here is not celebration. It is rest. David hears the news of Nabal's death and he does not exult. He simply blesses God, the only one who ever had the authority to deal with it. Here's the key to rest:

**You trust God to deal with those who wronged you by anchoring your peace in the certainty of his final justice rather than in the visibility of present vindication.**

Genuine release produces a peace that is located not in the visible circumstances of the wrongdoer but in the certain character of God. But wait, if we're transparently honest at this point, we have to acknowledge that the narrative of 1 Samuel 25 presents an unusually

immediate and visible vindication — Nabal was dead within ten days of David's release. This is not the normative experience of God's people across Scripture or history. The martyrs of Revelation 6 are under the altar in heaven, having been killed for their faith, and they are crying out: 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' The answer they receive is not 'it is already done' but 'a little longer.' They are waiting. Still.

Many believers across history have released genuine grievances to God, carried that release faithfully through their entire lives, and died without any visible vindication this side of eternity. The person who wronged them prospered. Nothing visibly bad happened. And yet they maintained their release anyway. How is this possible or fair?

### **(THE RESURRECTION: WHERE FINAL JUSTICE IS GUARANTEED)**

It is possible because of one thing: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Jesus was the most wronged person in the history of the world. He was betrayed by a close friend. He was falsely accused before courts that knew the charges were false. He was mocked, stripped, beaten, and executed. He entrusted himself to the Father who judges justly — all the way to the end — and the Father raised him from the dead on the third day.

The resurrection is not merely the happy ending to the story of Jesus. It is the irreversible, public, cosmic declaration by the God of the universe that the one who entrusted himself to the just Judge was right to do so. The resurrection of the Son is the Father's vindication of him. This is the binding guarantee — signed in the most certain currency the universe contains — a guarantee that no wrong done to any of his people will ultimately go unaddressed. The one who bore sin in his body on a cross was raised to life, vindicating every person who has ever chosen to trust God's justice rather than their own arm.

Every believer who anchors their peace in His resurrection is anchoring it in the most certain ground in the universe. Not in the speed of God's visible action. Not in the observable consequences befalling their wrongdoer. In the character of the God who raised Jesus from the dead and will raise everything else that belongs to him in its own time.

You may not see God deal with the person who wronged you before you die. You may carry this release to the grave without any visible confirmation that God acted. But the empty tomb is his pledge — the most publicly confirmed event in human history — that his justice is certain, his timing is purposeful, and no one who entrusts their cause to him will be ultimately ashamed in the end.

So, when the impulse rises in you to search for news about the person who wronged you, to ask mutual friends what is happening in their life, to quietly monitor their circumstances for evidence of divine justice — recognize that impulse for what it is. It is not true concern. It is not genuine interest. It is the signal that the peace you are carrying is still being generated by

monitoring rather than by trust. When that impulse comes, redirect it. Go back to the character of God. Go back to the cross. Go back to the empty tomb. Say it again, out loud if you need to: God is sufficient. His justice is certain. His timing is his own. I do not need to watch. He has this.

## **(Conclusion)**

Before I close, let me tell you how my story ended. Or rather — how it is still unfolding, because I am not sure stories like this ever fully end.

After four years at that second church, the Lord moved Patti and me to Marietta, Georgia. That was twenty-eight years ago next month. Twenty-eight years. Twenty-eight years of Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, of weddings and funerals, of counseling rooms and hospital hallways, of watching people come to faith and struggle in faith and sometimes lose their faith and find their way back. Twenty-eight years of ministry in one place — the kind of rooted, long-term ministry that shapes a pastor more than it shapes a congregation.

None of it would have happened the way it happened if I had responded differently to a phone call on a Saturday morning, decades ago.

When I look back on that weekend now, I can still feel the specific texture of it. The warmth of Friday evening, followed by the silence of Saturday morning. Patti's face across the living room. The weight of Courtney on my lap. The months of haunted study, the quiet that was not really quiet because the wound kept speaking. I remember the injustice I felt — What happened to us was genuinely hard. I am not telling you it was not.

But I also remember the fork in the road. Because there was one. It was not dramatic or sudden — it did not present itself as a single clear moment of decision. It came in pieces, over weeks, in the daily choosing of what to do with the thing I was carrying. I could have kept that bitterness. I could have nursed it carefully, told the story often enough that it hardened into something permanent, let it quietly poison my relationship with the church and with ministry and perhaps with the God who had seemed to let it happen. Many people make that choice. I understand why. The bitterness at least has the familiar feel of control — at least you are holding something, even if what you are holding is eating you alive.

Or I could release it. Not because I understood it. Not because it had stopped hurting. But because I believed — imperfectly, with all the wavering that belief involves for people like me — I believed that God was more capable of being the judge of that situation than I was. That what looked like a closed door was not the end of the sentence. That the God who had been present in the anointing of David in Bethlehem and the ravine of 1 Samuel 25 was present in a living room in a city I had flown to with my wife and our nine-month-old baby and my whole young life in a carry-on bag.

I made that decision imperfectly. I probably made it more than once. There were days when the wound re-opened and I had to make it again. But I made it. And twenty-eight years later, I am standing in this pulpit, in this church, in this city, telling you about it — which is itself a testimony of the faithfulness of the God to whom I released it.

I am standing here today not in spite of what happened in that living room. I am standing here today because of what I chose to do with it.

Let me come back to where we started. The wound with a face on it. The name you know. The exchange that still burns when it surfaces. The person who wronged you — whose behavior you are still carrying, whose face still appears in the quiet moments, whose consequences you are still managing long after the original event.

God is not asking you to pretend it did not happen. He is not asking you to protect the wrongdoer from consequences, or to convince yourself that what was done was not really that serious, or to perform a pretend peace you have not yet arrived at. He is not asking you to do any of those things. He is asking you to trust him. To entrust yourself and your situation to Him.

He saw what was done to you. He is not behind on the details. He is not uncertain about whether it deserved a response. He is not indifferent to your wound or vague about his capacity to address it. He is the God who struck Nabal dead in ten days when David released the claim to him. He is the God who absorbed the full weight of divine judgment at the cross so that no sin against any of his people could go ultimately unaddressed. He is the God who raised his Son from the dead as the binding guarantee that his justice is certain and his faithfulness is sure.

***You can fully trust God to deal with those who have wronged you.***

We have just walked the path that David walked. *The trailhead*: honest acknowledgment of a real wound. *The first mile*: open eyes, watching for what God was already moving before you knew to look. *The critical fork*: a word of restraint received in the worst possible moment, in a ravine, with four hundred men at your back. *The watershed*: a deliberate, against-the-grain decision to release the claim and turn around. And *the resting place*: peace anchored not in what you can see happening to the person who wronged you, but in the character and faithfulness of the God who saw everything and has never once lost track of a wrong done to one of his people.

David made those moves in the wilderness of Judah, in a ravine, on an afternoon when four hundred swords were already drawn. And the God who met him there is the same God who meets you here — in this room, in this season, with whatever you are carrying.

He is sufficient. He is faithful. And he has never once lost track of a wrong done to one of his people.

