

**GOOD  
LESSONS  
FROM  
BAD GUYS**

Mike O'Neal

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

In the not-too-distant past, I taught a Bible school class on the topic of David. A sweet Christian woman, whom I had known for years, regularly attended each week. In fact, she attended most activities anytime the church's doors were open. Through the years, she had probably listened to around 5,000 sermons and participated in another 6,000 Bible classes and devotionals. She also taught in our children's education program and during Vacation Bible School. This lady was thoroughly acquainted with the Bible and its stories. After teaching a class on David's encounter with Nabal, she quietly pulled me aside, and started shaking her head as she said, "Over all these years I do not recall hearing a sermon or lesson on this story." Somewhat surprised to hear her make such a remark, I admitted to its lesser-known status, while storing away her comment.

As I continued to study God's Word, I started to notice a number of fairly short stories, which often seemed rather obscure. Most of them involved one or more unsavory characters. Many times, these stories served as an excursion from the main narrative. I remember asking myself, *Why are these stories here? Are there important lessons that God wants us to learn from them?* These reflective inquiries served as the genesis for this book and imparted a passion within me to reveal the lessons contained in these stories.

Some of these stories may be new to you; some may not be. But no matter what the case, I believe you will be exposed to some

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

fresh material that you can use in our contemporary settings. All of the stories involve some of the Bible's bad actors, and most are a little obscure, though not all of them. God has placed them in His Word for a reason, so let's try to understand what He would like us to glean from them.

To my good friend, Gayle Griffin, I truly appreciate the many hours you spent in editing *Good Lessons from Bad Guys*. My writing style has some rough edges, and your skillful and thoughtful review helped make this book a more appealing read. Your ministry in this regard, not only aided myself, but serves others as they hopefully draw closer to God through the pages of this book. I know the time and energy that you expended took you away from your loved ones and personal interests, and I am forever grateful for your sacrifices in this regard.

I want to thank Professor Allen Black, Dean at the Harding School of Theology, for helping clarify a particular passage in Acts for me. I also want to continue to thank my many professors and the librarians at this august graduate school. You prepared me to take on such writing tasks and have thus contributed to this book in many indirect ways.

I am also grateful to my minister friends, Mike Shumate and Bob Bliss, who allowed me to share some of the approaches I was taking in the book. Thank you for providing a listening ear and thoughtful remarks. Also, the resources you provided to me were instrumental in putting a couple of the chapters together.

It's nice when people place their confidence in you, and that's what my publisher, 21st Century Christian, has done in my regard. Thank you so much for allowing me to serve God in a writing capacity. Your company has personally blessed me in many ways, and I am truly grateful that you put your faith in me to put this project together.

To my wife, thank you for walking by my side during this journey and especially for allowing me to read aloud sections of

the manuscript to you. Your patient listening made a positive impact on the books readability, and I know this often occurred when you were tired from a busy day. Also, thank you for reading the text along the way as well as discussing some of the concepts and stories I was considering to use in the book.

Lastly, to the readers, I thank you for considering to read this book. As a writer, I find it an honor, as well as humbling, for others to spend their valuable time exploring the pages of my books. I can guarantee you that this book was a work of passion, prayed over, and well researched. I truly believe you will be spiritually enriched by the book's contents. I pray that God will draw you closer to Him as you delve into this book and may it serve as a tool to help form you in the image of His Son.

To my loving God, I praise Your holy name and offer thanksgiving and all the glory to You.

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## **Nabal**

### **Provoked by a Fool**

**Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
Or you will also be like him.**

(Proverbs 26:4)

**H**uman space flight is inherently a dangerous business. A launch vehicle's high-energy systems present many hazardous concerns because of their explosive and often toxic nature. During launch and ascent, the vehicle must operate safely under some extreme conditions if it is to deliver its precious cargo intact. One of the more complicated issues facing early rocket designers (who used liquid rocket engines) was a phenomenon referred to as pogo. Pogo is a thrust-axis vibration of the vehicle that can occur due to surges in thrust and propellant feedline pressures. For the crew, severe oscillations may result in crippling pain, which could impair their ability to perform required tasks. For the vehicle, damage may occur to its systems if the vibrations become too violent and then possibly even trigger a catastrophic event. By the way, the space lingo term *pogo* comes from the similar linear bouncing effect you get from a pogo stick.<sup>1</sup>

To address the pogo effect, you basically need a shock absorber to dampen out the oscillations in the propellant lines. The designers of the Space Shuttle Main Engines dealt with this troublesome problem by installing an accumulator in the liquid oxygen feedlines that contains baffles and is charged with gaseous

oxygen to diminish any pressure surges thus preventing the pogo vibrations.

By now you may be asking, *Why in the world has he introduced this nerdy technical information?* Actually, it's for a good reason. We all tend to need a pogo suppression system at times. I am sure you can remember a circumstance in your life when your emotions and actions escalated an already unpleasant situation. When someone says or does something hurtful to us, an unhealthy "vibration" internally starts. And if left unchecked, what comes next usually isn't pretty. In such times, we need a "pogo suppressor" to come alongside us before we lash out and inflict unnecessary pain, resulting in irreparable damage to a valued relationship. Someone who knows us can calm us, and reason with us before the fireworks start. Even the "sweet psalmist of Israel" needed a "pogo suppressor" to enter his life and cool his surging fury on one occasion.

### **When Goodness Turns to Rage**

When David was fleeing for his life from crazed King Saul, he took those in his charge to a wilderness at the southern border of Judah. To create good will with his new neighbors and future subjects, David's men voluntarily guarded over a local rich man's flocks of sheep and goats. Such a service should have been held in high regard due to the potential presence of marauding bands of thieves and Judah's enemies, but the story turns ugly when David seeks a charitable reward for their services. As we turn to 1 Samuel 25, let's explore the three main players in this story, as several important lessons wait for us there.

### **The Fool**

Have you ever introduced someone by their possessions before giving their name? It isn't likely, unless you want that individual to be identified by their material assets and wealth. Yet, that

was how the narrator chose to introduce Nabal to his readers. His possessions and wealth defined him, and that fact sheds a revealing light on his character.

We learn of his name only after the author interrupted the flow of the story to provide us with a side remark that also describes his demeanor. Nabal was not only “filthy” rich, he was “harsh and evil in his dealings” (v. 3). In other words, he treated others cruelly and dealt dishonestly with those whom he conducted business, taking advantage of them for his personal gain.

Nabal means “fool.” Obviously, no one’s parents would give their child such a name, so it was probably a nickname used behind his back by those he had victimized by his foolhardy behavior. But don’t be misled, Nabal was no simpleton or unintelligent. His reasoning and resultant conduct came from a perverted set of values. Solomon and David aptly described a “fool’s” character and twisted ways in the following proverbs and psalm, providing us with some insight on what to expect out of Nabal the fool.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).

Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, and so is wisdom to a man of understanding (Proverbs 10:23).

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel (Proverbs 12:15).

Desire realized is sweet to the soul, but it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil (Proverbs 13:19).

The wisdom of the sensible is to understand his way, but the foolishness of fools is deceit (Proverbs 14:8).

A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless (Proverbs 14:16).

A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind (Proverbs 18:2).



## N A B A L

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God".. (Psalms 14:1).

The above fairly well depicts the attitudes and practices exhibited by Nabal in our story. As you shall see, his self-righteousness, self-centeredness, and materialistic nature guided his way in life. He had no regard for God's wisdom. Nabal's god was Nabal. He had no room for God's ways because it did not serve his purposes. Maligning and mistreating people did not affect his conscience at all. He regarded people as objects to help him achieve his own corrupt aims. So let's take a closer look at how the narrator continued to portray Nabal.

As the story unfolded, the festive time of sheep-shearing was at hand, and on such an occasion it was customary to be generous to any neighbors in need.<sup>2</sup> In David's case, they were not only in need but actually performed a protective service for Nabal, perhaps even increasing his profits. Therefore, David sent 10 young men to appeal to Nabal's good nature (not knowing that he did not have one) to provide them with some provisions as charitable payment for performing their flock-guarding services. Conceivably, the size of the party David sent signaled just how much of a gratuity he expected.<sup>3</sup> After their arrival, the men delivered the following gracious message to Nabal from David.

..'Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. Now I have heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days 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 have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David (vv. 6-8).

Dumbfounded could only begin to describe how David's men must have felt when Nabal responded to their request with a vile and insulting rant. I have personally witnessed such outbursts

before and felt like curling up in a ball in the corner of a room during the tirade. Here's Nabal's response:

But Nabal answered David's servants and said, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know" (vv. 10-11)?

Nabal obviously knew who David was. One could infer from the text that his shepherds understood whose band of men was protecting them and their flocks. Nabal's wife, Abigail, knew who David was by attesting that he was to become "ruler over Israel" (v. 30). In the not too distant past, David and his men had rescued the nearby city of Keilah from the Philistines (1 Samuel 23:1-5). David killed Goliath, was a legend, and was loved throughout Israel. With David and his band of 600 men now on the run from Saul, Nabal had to know who David was, and that he was there in his area. So as Nabal uttered, "Who is David? And who is the Son of Jesse?" you could hear the sound of disgust bitterly ringing out in his voice. It was a horrible insult to refuse to acknowledge someone as well-known and important as David. Then Nabal compounded the affront by lumping David and his men together as just a bunch of runaway slaves. Most certainly, it was not a wise thing to say to the anointed one of God. To the affluent and arrogant Nabal, David was a nothing and deserved nothing.

Note how Nabal's self-centeredness came oozing out of his statement in verse 11; "Shall I...take my...and my...and my... that I...for my...whose origin I..." Reminds me of the sea gulls in the Disney movie *Finding Nemo* that incessantly squawk, "Mine, mine, mine." Nabal had an "I" disease that resided in his heart. No gratitude, no love for his neighbor, just a perverted love of self. I wonder what Nabal thought of the commandment to "love

your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18)? I guess his version left out the middle three words. Remember, we must not only know God’s commands but embrace and infuse them into our very being.

Unknown to Nabal, David reacted quite decisively after hearing the wealthy man’s offensive response. The wilderness leader said to his men, “Each of you gird on his sword” (v. 13). Four hundred of David’s forces now made their way to kill Nabal and all the males on his estate (v. 22).

To further demonstrate Nabal’s character, let’s look at how others in the story viewed Nabal. Fearing for the lives of everyone involved with Nabal, one of his shepherd’s reported to Abigail the unfortunate events in an effort to spur her into action to mitigate the impending calamity. He said,

Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him (v. 17).

The poor shepherd had probably felt the scorn of Nabal’s lips on more than one occasion. Trying to talk sense into a fool was a fruitless endeavor and only ridicule and shame had been the poor shepherd’s reward. So, how do those associated with Nabal view him? Worthless. You might think that this shepherd would fear retaliation by referring to his master as “worthless” to his wife. Fortunately, she, more than anyone else, understood and consented to the frantic shepherd’s appraisal. After all she was also acquainted with Nabal’s brutish tactics. She even verbally validated the shepherd’s evaluation of him, when she met up with David, referring to her husband as a “worthless man” as well (v. 25). It’s a pretty sad state when you walk around thinking you are “the greatest thing since sliced bread,” but everyone else believes you are a heel.

Abigail also knew not to try to reason with her belligerent

husband. When she devised a strategy to save the household and put it into motion, she intentionally “did not tell her husband” (v. 19). No need, since he would have only made a bad situation worse. That’s what fools do. When she eventually met up with David, she emphatically told David what a fool Nabal truly was. She said,

Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him...(v. 25).

Yes, Nabal was a fool, and folly followed him wherever he went.

Years ago at NASA, I encountered a “Nabal” in the workforce. This “Nabal” also had power and authority, and he enjoyed making people grovel at his feet. Unfortunately, most people acquiesced to his intimidation as a matter of survival. He enjoyed berating others and embarrassing them in official gatherings. His ways were not always NASA’s ways, because he thought he was wiser than everyone else. I actually left one of my positions at NASA because I could not work with this “Nabal.” A superior finally understood his foolhardy ways, and he was virtually forced out of the Agency. Most fools’ folly eventually catches up with them.

After Nabal sobered up from a drunken stupor, Abigail revealed to her oblivious husband the catastrophe that she had averted with David and his men because of his careless conduct. It is interesting what the storyteller reported next:

...and his heart died within him so that he became *as a stone*. About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died (vv. 37-38).

Spiritually, Nabal’s heart became hard as a stone many years prior to his physically malady. And as he struck out at God’s anointed, Nabal’s death came not by the hands of David or from a health-related issue, but by divine judgment administered by God Himself.<sup>4</sup>

Don't ever expect to change the heart of a "Nabal" overnight. Keep in mind the advice of Proverbs: Such people will not listen to your guidance or instruction nor will they follow godly wisdom. Their hearts are aligned with what it takes to achieve their earthly pursuits. Nevertheless, provide them with godly examples, and over time, they may come to realize that your ways produce wonderful fruit, which leads to a more fulfilling and joyful life. And pray for them, because the "Remover of stones" has a history of dealing with the hard-hearted, and in Him there is hope.

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Ezekiel 36:26).

God will not force this upon anyone, but through Christ Jesus remarkable things can happen, even for a Nabal.

### **The Shepherd of Shepherds**

Several scholars believe that David's pursuit of some kind of compensation for their protection services was objectionable. Basically, the labels of extortionist, terrorist, and shakedown artist have been applied to the future king's activity. As we will discuss in a moment, David did react to Nabal's insulting response in an ungodly manner, but in no way do I believe the text presents David in the light of the above characterizations. David believed that what he had done was "good," and Nabal responded with "evil" (v. 21).

When David sent the ten young men to Nabal, no threats, no show of force, nor the brandishing of weapons is mentioned in the text. In fact, quite the contrary as David sent a gracious blessing to Nabal wishing him and his household "peace...peace...peace" (v. 6). Within David's message, he said that their services were carried out with respect to Nabal's property and shepherds

(v. 7). A point that one of Nabal's own shepherd's confirmed by making the following comment to Abigail.

Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep (1 Samuel 25:15-16).

While on the run from Saul, David protected his fellow countrymen in Keilah from an attack by the Philistines, so why, out of good will, would he not perform these protective services for someone in Maon of Judah? Robert D. Bergen provided an interesting thought on the whole matter. Nabal was introduced in verse three as a Calebite. Bergen points out that not only was the Calebite clan "an esteemed family in Judah," they were "apparently responsible for the founding of David's hometown of Bethlehem (cf. 1 Chronicles 2:51); he [Nabal] was certainly one of David's kinsmen." This viewpoint would explain why David referred to himself as Nabal's "son" at the end of his message (v. 8). David assumed an amicable relationship existed between each other as kinsmen, and therefore provided his services and requested aid in good conscience. Even if you do not hold to this theory, you must admit that David showed humility and respect to Nabal by referring to his men as "servants" to Nabal and to himself as a "son."<sup>5</sup> Obviously, this was not threatening language.

Sheep-shearing season in the Israelite culture was a time of celebration and feasting. Profits from all the hard work were realized, so they celebrated. Since it was also a time of gratitude and benevolence, David acted, per the custom of the day, by sending his men to ask for a handout during this joyous period. In our own culture in the United States, Christmas is a time of giving. Many organizations, like the Salvation Army, petition us for donations. As David looked into the eyes of his hungry men, he sought a donation for his version of a "salvation army."

No doubt if David's troops had been just a bunch of thugs and shakedown artists, they would have taken what they wanted, but David chose to be a good neighbor by performing a vital service for Nabal's shepherds and then asking for what they needed in the proper way.

The truly disturbing aspect of this story was David's reaction to Nabal's demeaning rejection. We are accustomed to the antics of the "Nabals" in this world, so his foolish tirade should come as no surprise. But virtuous heroes like David are expected to act with grace and stay blameless. Yet we see an unimaginable dark side burst forth from him. In the previous chapter, David just mercifully spared Saul's life. The temptation to strike him down must have been overwhelming, as the demented king entered a cave alone, not knowing that David and his men lurked in its dark recesses. David assuredly considered the thought: *I am so tired of running and hiding from this murderous madman, perhaps the time is right for me to end this with one quick thrust of my sword and take the throne that was promised to me.* With his men urging him to strike, David quietly pulled out his sword and could only bring himself to cut off a piece of the king's robe. David's godly trained conscience saved Saul's life and maybe even his own (1 Samuel 24:1-7). In our story, David was instantaneously incited by the words of a fool, and with 400 of his men at his side, he then advanced on Nabal's home, intent on murdering the abusive fool and all of the males in his household (v. 22). What happened to his godly conscience? Was mass murder the answer? Of course with respect to Saul, David highly esteemed God's anointed king, and until God removed him from the throne, David chose to revere him. Was David turning into a Saul? David's rage controlled him, while a veil of bitterness and hate shrouded God from him. The words of Solomon aptly address David's state.

A stone is heavy and the sand weighty,  
But the provocation of  
a fool is heavier than both of them (Proverbs 27:3).

Under the circumstances that faced David, Nabal's words were too weighty for this leader to bear. David's frustrations vehemently poured out as he growled, "Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness...he has returned me evil for good." Please take a moment and walk in David's shoes. You are running for your life from the king whom you loyally served, removed from your position in the royal family, can no longer experience the comfort of your wife, separated from your friend whose soul was knitted to your own, and your spiritual mentor recently passed away. If that's not enough, you are responsible to seeing for the needs of 600 men and their families while fleeing and hiding out in isolated places. So when the insulting words of a fool are hurled your way, and possibly even bring your choices as a leader into question, the overall weight of this burdensome load causes you to buckle at the knees, and you lose all your composure. Perhaps you can relate. David lost it...really lost it!

Have you ever lost control due to a fool's provocation? In my teen years, I remember our neighborhood "Nabal" getting on my nerves after my team had just lost a game of baseball that we played in a cul-de-sac. Such things were mighty important back in those days. Although I was probably tired and not feeling all that great about losing, "Nabal" bored into me with one of his usual, thoughtless diatribes. Consequently, I momentarily lost my composure. Before I knew it I had thrown two or three punches at him, and he sprawled on the ground. He fell over, not because I hit him, as I was no fighter, he just lost his balance. I then removed myself from his presence so that I could calm down. That response was way out of character for me. I had never thrown a punch at anyone before and haven't since. But is that not a typical reaction when a fool's provocation gets to us? Our circumstances draw us into a weakened state, while rage sits crouching at the door, and when provoked, we lose touch with God and react in sinful ways. That is what I believe David



experienced in the extreme. In the next section, we will see how the shepherd of shepherds recovered his composure.

### **The Wise and Eloquent Maiden**

With David on the warpath, the story's hope for a good ending rested with Abigail. The author introduced her in verse three, noting her physical beauty and intelligence. Her beauty, though, was not limited to her appearance. It went to the depths of who she was as a person. Abigail cared about others and had the remarkable ability to project a vision where God takes center-stage in life, while shrewdly addressing one's areas of brokenness. Abigail was a wise and perceptive woman.

Nabal's shepherd convinced Abigail that David meant business...bad business. He anxiously stated, "...for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household" (v. 17). Fortunately, unlike Nabal, Abigail was approachable and fully understood the dire nature of the situation. She immediately formulated a plan to send an extravagant amount of food to David and his men, which more than satisfied the initial request. Abigail and her servants, along with a small train of donkeys packed to the hilt with provisions, made their way to David in an effort to avert the predicament caused by her careless and insensitive husband.

The story provides an interesting detail at this point. Both groups were descending down a mountain on a collision course yet blind to each other's progression. When they suddenly met up, Abigail took advantage of the spontaneity offered by the situation and before David could act, "...she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground" (v. 23). Before a word passed her lips, Abigail humbled herself in an expression of great respect toward Israel's future king. And at his feet in a posture of one pleading for mercy, this remarkable woman delivered one of the most eloquent and wisely crafted speeches we have in God's Word.<sup>6</sup> Note that her

words not only sought forgiveness but to calm the infuriated David as well. They also contained a bold, yet subtle, chiding of the young leader.

“...On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, since the Lord has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. Now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil will not be found in you all your days. Should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And when the Lord does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel, this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the Lord deals well with my lord, then remember your maidservant” (vv. 24-31).

Abigail’s humble posture was also portrayed in her words throughout the entire speech. She referred to herself as “maidservant” six times and David as “my lord” 14 times. After imploring David to hear her out and dismissing Nabal as worthless, her words turn into an articulate argument of why he should let go of any vengeance and ill-will toward her household. Let’s take a look at a few of the seminal features of her speech.

Right out of the chute, she took the blame. You may be internally thinking, *Sweet Abigail should not take the blame. She did nothing wrong. It was that inconsiderate, stingy Nabal who deserves all the blame!* You're right; he does. However, there is no quicker way to defuse a dicey situation than to take the blame and seek forgiveness, even if you believe you are innocent in the matter. Then, calmer heads will usually prevail, which will promote a civil conversation.

Before Abigail gets into the heart of her argument, she stated that God had already "restrained" him from committing any heinous acts. David could have laid waste to all of them, but his posture and inaction demonstrated that God was at work through this diplomatic woman's words and within David's heart.

Abigail utilized her strategic prowess in selection of some of the words she chose to use. For example, she appealed to David to accept the "gift" of food for his men. The term translated as "gift" means "blessing," and to David's Hebrew ears that had religious overtones. It likely brought the sense that this generous "gift" of food was from God, as He was working through this gracious woman. In other words, this was not a payoff to leave Nabal's family alone, it was a "blessing" from God.<sup>7</sup>

Also, Abigail shrewdly wove into her plea a metaphor of God's using a sling to "sling out" David's enemies. Such a reference assuredly took the giant-killer's mind back to a time when he relied upon God for victory, as he had emphatically claimed to Saul;

Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God." And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you" (1 Samuel 17:36-37).

Along with this reference, David's faith in God became a subtle target for wise Abigail. She tactfully pointed out that it was God who restrained Him, God who would give him an enduring house, God who would destroy his enemies, God who promised him the kingship, and God who would appoint him ruler over Israel in due time. Abigail challenged his current intentions in an extraordinary way (my interpretation/words follow), "David, you are trying to chase down a fool, when you are to be 'fighting the battles of the Lord,' so reject evil and let not the guilt of murder be upon you. Too much is at stake for you and Israel, let the role of vengeance remain with the Lord. If you are the anointed one of God...be of God."

One of the most amazing things about this tension-filled scene was that David stopped, listened, and changed his heart. David was fuming mad! Foaming at the mouth mad! Murder vow-making mad and ready to drag 400 men into his folly. How approachable are you in such moments (hopefully not murderous ones, though)? Don't ever think God did not know what He was getting into with David. He knew his vices. But He also was keenly aware that David had a teachable spirit and a heart that sought after His will, even when the fireworks of his humanity temporarily blinded him. Abigail knew how to douse those fireworks and bring this distressed man back in touch with his God. Perhaps David was thinking of Abigail when he poetically developed this comment.

Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me;  
It is oil upon the head;  
Do not let my head refuse it...  
(Psalms 141:5).

As Abigail liberated David from the blinding turmoil of his rage and opened his eyes to God again, he rallied the courage to discard his anger-fueled vow. Daniel got thrown in the lion's den because of a regrettable vow made by Darius. John the Baptist

was beheaded because Herod was too ashamed to go back on the oath he made before his dinner guests. Once David allowed God back into the picture, David had the spiritual means to “eat a little crow” that day and valiantly dismiss his ill-conceived vow. Doing right often takes moral courage when we are surrounded by others who entice us to make wrong choices. Yes, we, too, need an Abigail, at times, to guide us back into God’s light.<sup>8</sup>

With his rage and foolish vow behind him, David recovered a thankful heart and made a three-fold blessing, while assuredly looking into the beautiful and relieved eyes of Abigail.

...“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand (1 Samuel 25:32-33).

After Nabal died, David married Abigail. That seems like a “wise” thing for the future king to do. One must truly wonder whether Abigail’s remarkable discernment provided inspiration for some of his future decisions and the sweet psalmist of Israel’s poetry.

### **Parting Thoughts**

Don’t expect the “Nabals” of this world to go away anytime soon. You will likely encounter one again; perhaps even today. They may rail on you, make fun of you, lie to you, or take advantage of you. That’s what “Nabals” do. Remember, don’t turn into a “Nabal” when pounced on by one. Neither is it our calling as Christ’s own to despise or mistreat them. In fact, if you detect such attitudes in your heart, you have discovered a spiritual place of brokenness.

When Paul discussed with the church in Rome that they should “never pay back evil for evil to anyone,” this included the “Nabals” of the world (Romans 12:17-21). The wise apostle instead instructed them to “overcome evil with good.” This involved responding to acts of evil with acts of goodness thus

overcoming the evil in others. At the heart of Paul's concern, he was assuredly worried about the spiritual development of the Christians in Rome. Plotting vengeance produces bitter, hateful, and angry hearts; capable of carrying out all sorts of vile deeds. Paul wants us to contemplate on how to respond with goodness, allowing us to develop caring and loving hearts.<sup>9</sup>

If you think God expects a lot, He does! If you don't think pursuing peace, blessing not cursing, refraining from hurtful jabs, and forgiving others is hard enough, please understand what the pinnacle of mature Christianity looks like. You view that hurtful, vile fool with caring eyes. Sin has scarred them deeply, but great potential lies within them in Christ Jesus. So what does God ask of us? He asks us to give them a bottle of water, i.e. assess their needs and respond appropriately with a good deed. Wow, that is hard! They may slap the bottle of water out of our hands, but we need to kindly offer it. Loving your enemies and walking the extra mile with them is tough stuff. And you thought you were spiritually mature! Perhaps you are, but most of us still have a lot of transformative work for God's Spirit to perform in us.

Vengeance is the Lord's! He is not biased, understands all sides, and has an eternal perspective. God's heart is one of pure love, holiness, and goodness and will not be tainted with hate and bitterness. He can handle this heavy load. Leave the vengeance to Him, and get off your throne. Don't expect to always understand His timing. His purposes drive His timing and may have eternal ramifications for others. Let God be God.

David escaped the clutches of vengeance by the gracious speech and actions of Abigail. We all need an "Abigail" in our lives. Seek them out and befriend them, or like David, you may be so fortunate as to marry one. We need their calming influence, sage advice, and for them to come alongside us when hurt and when sorrow intrudes on our world. Restorative power lies within their words. They bring God with them and can help us re-engage

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with Him. As the world tries to wall off God from us, we need an “Abigail” to help us tear down those walls and open our eyes to His goodness. Let them fill you with a vision of hope, where our God takes center stage in our hearts. And perhaps, you too may become an “Abigail” for someone in need in the future. Yes, even you.

### Questions

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1. How is Nabal characterized in 1 Samuel 25? Do you know anyone with such a demeanor? How should you act toward them if they mistreat you?
2. Do you believe the story characterizes David as a “shakedown artist?” Explain.
3. David let Nabal’s crude response provoke him in a severe way. Were there other factors that might have contributed to David’s rage? Have you ever been worked into a frenzy by a “Nabal?” What do you think also contributed to your emotions/anger? How else might you have dealt with the situation?
4. How does the story characterize Abigail? What did Abigail do to calm down David? What did you think were her two most effective tactics and/or parts of her speech?
5. Do you know any “Abigails?” Why is it important for us to all have an “Abigail” in our lives?
6. Why does God want vengeance left to Him?