

Abigail

2021-06-13

Last week we looked at an ideal marriage in Proverbs 31, and we saw that ideal marriages can happen today - not sinless marriages, but marriages that wholeheartedly embrace God's ideals. Today we will look at a woman who found herself in a pretty suffocating marriage. This was anything but ideal. It was marriage to a harsh man who gives every appearance of being a narcissist. And we will get to the details of what a narcissist looks like as we go through the sermon.

But let me explain why I won't be touching on everything that could be touched on. When we looked at this chapter in the Life of David series (back in 2011), I focused mainly on her intervention on behalf of her family and why it is that women sometimes need to engage in interposition. We spent three sermons interacting with that, so I won't go into detail on that today. I'll mainly focus on things we didn't look at. There is much more to Abigail than simply that intervention. She is a complicated woman and he is a complicated man.

Why did she marry Nabal? (vv. 2-3)

For example, in light of the fact that verse 3 calls her "a woman of good understanding," I think it is worth asking, "How on earth did a smart girl like that get married to such a bad husband?" And Abigail may have wondered that herself. "Why one earth did I not see through his character issues before marrying him? Why? Why? Why?" And if it was an arranged marriage, she may have wondered, "Why on earth did my parents not see the tell-tale signs that he might live up to his name?" I don't think that we can say that her parents were mean spirited or arranged this marriage purely for financial gain. The birth of this girl brought them great joy - if we can gather anything from what they named her. Abigail means, "a father's joy" She was his pride and joy. From what we can gather from the limited data that we have, it appears that both Nabal (which is the Hebrew pronunciation of Nabal) and Abigail came from good stock. In fact, it may be that both Abigail and her parents overlooked or didn't notice Nabal's character issues because he had enough other good things going on that the bad were somewhat hidden. That certainly happened to one of my aunts.

And though we aren't told why this mismatch happened, we shouldn't be surprised. This kind of thing happens over and over again. There are many Abigails who married someone that they later had regrets about. Perhaps he was charming. Many modern Nabals can be, when they need to be. Perhaps she deliberately ignored the tell-tale signs of his bad character because she wanted to be married to him because of handsomeness, charm, wealth, fine parents, or any number of other potentially good qualities. Sometimes women think that the bad characteristics they notice will work themselves out. I have known at least a few women who fell madly in love with a Nabal, and even against sound advice, married him despite nagging doubts. In their minds peripheral things trumped important things.

So what are some peripheral issues that make women or men turn down a fantastic spouse and instead to choose a Nabal? Good looks is a huge one. From my perspective, good looks should never be a central reason to marry. It shouldn't. Some of the loveliest and godliest people I know are not good looking. But they made fantastic spouses who were wonderful to live with for a lifetime. And don't ask me who I thought was not good looking.

Charm is another attribute that fools both parents and young people. Narcissists often know how to pour on the charm. The man that my aunt married could pour on the charm when he needed to. He sang in choir, attended church faithfully, served, looked the part of a good Christian, and was a Mr. Prince Charming. So when he proposed to my aunt, she said yes without knowing a whole lot about his background or his character. The week after the wedding, he quit going to church saying that he had only pretended to be a Christian to get a good wife. And he was a narcissistic Nabal his whole life. It was a miserable marriage, and my aunt handled it in a stellar way. She was an Abigail in many ways.

IQ is another thing that some people look to. I don't know why, but some men and women are wowed by brilliance. Yet some of the smartest people I know lack patience, humility, self-control, or work ethic - they are lazy. Studies come so easily that they can get high marks in school while goofing off. And it is their goofing off times that reveal a lot about them, not their grades. I view a high IQ as peripheral. I really do.

Some people will turn down a good spouse if his or her parents are hard to get along with. Or, the opposite can happen - some people will marry a spouse because the parents are gems. Verse 3 says that Nabal was from the house of Caleb - a very godly and prestigious line in Israel. But obviously he did not follow in his ancestor's footsteps. Now, granted, I have often wondered what parent in his right mind would name his son, "fool," which is what Nabal means. So some have thought that this was a nickname that was given to him by his servants and by everyone else that knew him. I'm not sure I can settle that debate.

Wealth and success in business can make some feel that the man might be a good match. It's actually one of the faulty qualifications for eldership in some churches. Verse 2 says,

Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel, and the man was very rich. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

He obviously was a successful businessman. But I consider money to be peripheral - a non-essential, so long as the person is able to support a wife.

Know what is important and what is optional when looking for a spouse. And I really encourage young gals and guys to be very prayerful and very rational in their search for a spouse. In fact, I highly recommend that you involve your parents, your elders, and your friends in a search for a spouse. Take emotion out of the decision making as much as possible. Get objective opinions from people who will be honest. Sometimes more than one set of eyes can keep you from marrying a Nabal. And by the way, there are female narcissists who are miserable to live with too. But we are going to be focusing on her husband.

What kind of marriage did she have? (vv. 2ff) - she was married to a rich narcissist

What kind of marriage did she have? If wealth is your idea of being well-married, she was well-married. She had the comforts of life. She probably lived in an upscale neighborhood, had the nicest labor saving devices, and had all the conveniences of life. Narcissists are big on image to the outside world. They want to look good, and they avoid shame at all costs - at least in front of those outsiders who are important to them. They want to make sure that their wives make a good impression. So narcissists are not opposed to spending lots of money if they can get something from that.

When you look at the amount of food that Abigail was able to bring to David and his men on short notice, it shows substantial stores of wealth were behind that. Verse 2 says he was "very rich," not just "rich." He was very rich. He had 3000 sheep and 1000 goats, plenty to make cheese and other dairy products to sell to others. From verse 4 we learn that he had a business of trading wool from his 3000 sheep. From verse 18 he appears to have had orchards, vineyards, and grain fields in such surplus that he no doubt traded in wine, figs, and grain. In verse 18 we see that the food and dainties that he and his guests consumed constituted a feast like a king would have. That show of generosity is also a part of narcissism. It helps to conceal who he really is. So she definitely had the comforts of life. If she had complained about her miserable marriage some people might have responded to her, "What are you complaining about? You've got it good, lady." Obviously they have never had to live with a narcissist.

She was also married into the clan of Caleb according to verse 3. so there was prestige there as well, since Caleb was a mighty man of faith. This was an esteemed clan in Judah that was responsible for the founding of David's hometown of Bethlehem according to 1 Chronicles 2:51. Commentators say that this made Nabal one of David's kinsmen. Again, if you look at her family background and Nabal's family background, it might have appeared that she had it good. But the text actually indicates otherwise.

Verse 3 says,

The name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And she was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man was harsh and evil in his doings. He was of the house of Caleb.

Wow! Harsh and evil in his actions. That would be hard enough to live with. And by the way, charming people can be harsh once they've got their prize. But along with harsh words, and lawless actions, we discover as we read through this story that he was arrogant, insensitive, self-centered, lacking in discipline, demeaning, lacking empathy, etc. Those closest to him would know. For example, one of the servants tells Abigail in verse 17, "For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him." Literally it says, "For he is such a son of Belial that one cannot speak to him." There are differences of view on what a son of Belial is. Some say it is a worthless person, others a scoundrel, others a son of Satan or unbeliever. Whatever it means, every occurrence of that expression shows that a son of Belial is a person who is very hard to live with. He is likely not going to beat you, but you

will suffer under his manipulative, demeaning, and harsh ways. We will be seeing shortly that Nabal has a lot of the earmarks of a narcissist. And by the way, I do not agree with psychologists that narcissism is a disease or condition that can't be changed. Based on Paul's usage of the word Belial as a synonym for Satan or the demonic in 2 Corinthians 6:15, I take narcissism as sinful behavior that can be confronted, repented of, and delivered from. And it probably does take some deliverance since there is a blindness there; a demonic blindness. Narcissists are blind to their faults. But the bottom line is that there was no excuse for it in Nabal and there is no excuse for it today.

The background to this confrontation (1 Sam. 23:1-13,25-29; 25:1-9, 15-16)

Anyway, before I get into the story here, let me give some background on how David and his men had risked their lives to save the likes of Nabal in the past. In chapter 23 the Philistines had swept through the area, pillaging the produce and livestock in the region of Keilah, which would have included Carmel and Maon 18 miles to the southeast. His flocks would have been in the path and would have been totally vulnerable. The only fortified city in the area, Keilah, had asked for David's help, and at great risk to himself and his own men, David came and rescued the men of Keilah and returned the goods that the Philistines had stolen to those from whom they had been stolen. This means that Nabal owed David big time. But narcissists don't see things that way. You always owe them. It's one of their defining marks. And we'll be listing other characteristics as we go through. Anyway, in the last part of chapter 23 David was in the area of Nabal's flocks. He returns there in chapter 25 and Nabal's servants tell Abigail in verses 15-16 that those men protected all that belonged to Nabal from Philistine attack. They said,

15 But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. 16 They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep.

David's men constantly protected everything that Nabal owned. As a neighborhood watch militia, David felt it was only fair for his men to enjoy the feast along with Nabal's servants. They have been acting as servants. Verses 4-9.

1Sam. 25:4 When David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep, 5 David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. 6 And thus you shall say to him who lives in prosperity: "Peace be to you, peace to your house, and peace to all that you have! 7 Now I have heard that you have shearers. Your shepherds were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. 8 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 comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David.'" 9 So when David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and waited.

Here are four reasons why I believe that this was a perfectly legitimate request: 1) First, Nabal owed David for the return of his flocks from the Philistines, 2) Second, Nabal owed the ongoing safety of his flocks to David, 3) Third, it was a festival day when God required

the rich to bless those who were poor. And as refugees, David and his men were definitely poor. 4) And fourth, the protocol of Eastern hospitality made this request quite proper.

Knowing Nabal's character, David had probably had numerous run-ins with Nabal in the past. He was after all related and from the same area. But Nabal's insensitive, demeaning, dismissive reaction to David's messengers was the last straw and David blew up. And you can understand his blowing up - even though it was sinful and was later repented of. But Nabal's words to the messengers gives you a bit of an idea of what Abigail herself probably had to put up with day in and day out. We need to understand these things to appreciate the struggles that the Abigails of today go through. They need prayer, support, counsel, and encouragement. It's a tough position to be in.

Nabal's signs of narcissism

Let's examine his speech first, starting at verse 10:

1Sam. 25:10 Then Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse?"

This is very disingenuous because Nabal could *not* have been ignorant of David. It's impossible. David's dad was a prominent neighbor of Nabal (there probably would have been plenty of business deals going on), and when David worked for Saul, David was a hero throughout Israel; a man who had repeatedly defeated the Philistines on behalf of Israel. And within the past year David had just finished rescuing people from the Philistines in this area. Later we will see that Abigail knew of all his exploits, and even knew he had been anointed to become the next king. To say, "Who is David" is dishonest, demeaning, and dismissive. He goes on:

There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. 11 Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?"

Now, we have already looked at a number of characteristics of narcissists. This little speech hints at seven more.

1. The first is lack of empathy. Narcissists expect everyone to think like them and seldom give any thought to how others feel. Though they can be charming, their charm is only to win things for themselves. They have an utter lack of empathy. In fact, fear in a wife, or begging, or humility, or apologies will often be interpreted as an attack. They often misread the emotions of another person. It's hard to win with a narcissist because of their lack of ability to empathize.
2. The second common characteristic is selfishness. And I mentioned earlier why that can be totally consistent with occasional lavish generosity and charm. But narcissists tend to be selfish and self-absorbed, much like Nabal is in this speech.
3. Third, superiority and entitlement. That's obvious on the surface.

4. Fourth, narcissists often take advantage of the service and kindness of others with no sense of owing them anything. There is no social sense of reciprocity. They are willing to keep taking others' sacrificial services even if it seems socially unacceptable. I know, it is a strange characteristic, but I have seen this myself. This tends to make them users.
5. Fifth, they often behave in an arrogant or haughty manner, coming across as conceited, boastful and pretentious.
6. Sixth, if a word, action, or even facial expression does not serve their perceived needs, they often react with anger.
7. Finally, even though narcissists are highly sensitive to perceived threats and rejection, they strangely miss cues that *they* have offended others. For a Nabal to offend an army of 600 men is not a good thing, but he goes on with his party in the rest of the chapter totally oblivious to the fact that he has offended them and is in danger. He has no idea that he is in danger. Narcissists may look normal at first, but when you get close to them you see all of these strange characteristics plus more.

The danger Nabal put them all in (vv. 12-17)

And he could have read the body language of these men turning on their heels, but doesn't. One of the servants certainly did, but Nabal is clueless. Verses 12-13

1Sam. 25:12 So David's young men turned on their heels and went back; and they came and told him all these words. 13 Then David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword." So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies.

So now the whole household is in danger.

Why intervention was imperative (vv. 14-35)

And in verses 14-35 we have the intervention that we looked at in 2011. I won't go nearly as in depth on the ins and outs of intervention today as I did back then. But the first person to intervene was the servant. Verses 14-17:

1Sam. 25:14 Now one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them. 15 But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. 16 They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep. 17 Now therefore, know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household. For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him."

This intervention was not gossip (v. 14a)

First, he told on Nabal. That's not gossip. Gossip is sharing negative information about a person with those who are either not involved or not part of the solution. She was definitely part of the solution. And in my previous sermon I went into all of the difficulties that go into navigating something like this.

This intervention was not rebellion, and failure to intervene would have been the sin of enabling (vv. 14ff)

The second difficult thing that both servants and wives need to navigate is learning to become comfortable with knowing where to draw the line between legitimate submission (which is a good thing) and enabling (which is not a good thing). Our instinct should be submission. But when submission turns into enabling, we have crossed over the line and we have become guilty of the sin ourselves. This is why both Ananias *and* Sapphira were judged. She went along with his sin. Many wives are guilty of enabling their husbands entrenched and unrepented sin habits - like drunkenness, prolonged porn use, addiction to meth, etc. And in my previous sermons I went into great detail on what kinds of situations servants and wives are warranted by Scripture to engage in intervention. And it's tricky. It's not easy. But I dealt with those tricky situations adequately in those sermons.

This intervention was needed because the time was short (v. 14b)

Verse 14 indicates that action had to be taken immediately since the time was short. There was no time for alternative approaches. It says, "**Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master.**" The wilderness was not very far away, and from the body language of those soldiers, this servant could tell that they were in trouble if something was not done right away.

This intervention was needed because a gross injustice had happened (vv. 14b-16)

Next, this intervention was needed because a gross injustice had happened to David. I've already gone into that.

This intervention was needed because a permanent disaster was near (v. 17)

The fifth thing we see here is that intervention was needed because of the danger of permanent disaster. This was not a case of petty meddling. Verse 17 says,

17 Now therefore, know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household...

When we are trying to intervene in people's lives, we need to make sure that it is serious. Disaster was hanging over everyone's heads, and in this case it took more than one head to

figure things out. And in my previous sermons I dealt with the difference between needless conflict and absolutely essential intervention.

This intervention was needed because no one could reason with the abuser (v. 17b)

The last reason that intervention was needed was because no one could reason with Nabal. Verse 17 goes on to say, “For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him.”

Obviously the ideal would have been to reason with Nabal, but if they had taken the time to do that, everyone would have been dead, including Nabal. Drunks usually reject any notion that they have a problem. Meth users often convince themselves that they are using the drug responsibly and that they are no danger to anyone. In fact, every meth user that I have counseled has been a liar. I’ve had to deal with the issue of lying concurrently with drug addiction. Porn users deceive themselves and others into thinking that they don’t have a problem. So, like a drunk who didn’t want help, Nabal didn’t want help. So those were six reasons why the intervention was necessary. Intervention should be a last resort, but there are times when it is necessary for a wife to do just like Abigail did.

The nature of the intervention

It involved others (v. 19a)

But let’s move on to the nature of the intervention. First, it involved others. Verse 19: “**And she said to her servants, ‘Go before me; see, I am coming after you.’**” There were reasons for this that I won’t get into, but the main point is that she involved others in her intervention. There is a great deal of wisdom in this.

It involved personal presence (v. 19b)

Secondly, it involved personal presence. She says, “**I am coming after you.**” She doesn’t make other people do her dirty work for her. It makes me very angry when State-interventions occur based on an anonymous tip. That is wrong. How many households have been damaged because CPS has barged in based on an anonymous tip, and the tip has ended up being false. If you are not willing to get personally involved, forget it. Don’t let somebody else do your dirty work for you. They can help, but that does not get you off the hook.

And when you get to her speech, you realize how imperative this personal presence was. She gives an amazing speech. In fact, it is so amazing, it may explain why the Jews thought of her as one of seven female prophets of the Old Testament and why the Roman Catholic Church believes she was a prophetess. I’m not sure about that assertion (and I won’t interact with that theory), but it was her personal presence that made the difference. She is not an anonymous whistleblower. She was willing to face Nabal later in the chapter and say exactly what she did. And she was certainly willing to face David. Both David and Nabal needed intervention, and she had a personal presence with both of them.

It bypassed normal protocols (v. 19c)

Third, it bypassed normal protocols. The last phrase of verse 19 says, “**But she did not tell her husband Nabal.**” If she had told him, Nabal and possibly the whole household would have died. So again it emphasizes that interventions are not standard procedures. They happen when nothing else will work.

It was dangerous (vv. 20-22)

Fourth, it was dangerous for her to do this. Verses 20-22:

1Sam. 25:20 So it was, as she rode on the donkey, that she went down under cover of the hill; and there were David and his men, coming down toward her, and she met them. 21 Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belongs to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. 22 May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light.”

David was really angry. So she was walking into something pretty dangerous, and it was going to take tact, humility, graciousness, and wisdom to diffuse the emotion in the air. Not everyone does equally well with interventions. Some people make matters worse through their attitudes. That’s why Galatians 6:1 says that with most interventions it is good to have a spiritually mature person with you. But most interventions do have an element of danger to them. It may simply be the danger of making the rift in the relationship permanent. But it could be a worse danger. I’ve had threats on my life when I’ve intervened, but I felt it was imperative that I get involved for the sake of the wife.

But I do want to point out that some interventions are sinful. David probably thinks of himself as engaging in an intervention. David was attempting an intervention on behalf of his 600 men who had been hurt, and insulted, and robbed. He no doubt thinks that he is doing a good thing. But *David’s* attempt at intervention was ungodly, prideful, destructive, flowed from anger, did not flow from love, had as its goal the destruction of *people* rather than the solving of the *problem*, and would have created more problems than it solved. It was ungodly on at least five levels. And part of the issue was that David went into the problem thinking of these people as his enemies. Your intervention will not be successful if you do that. Your bad attitudes will ooze out and destroy the effectiveness of your peacemaking

Abigail’s intervention was the exact opposite. Let’s take a look at why she was so successful. And if you want more details on this, you can look at my sermons on this chapter from 2011.

Why was she successful?

Why was she successful? Her speech, which is the longest recorded speech of a woman in the Bible, is a fantastic example of both interposition and peacemaking. She stopped a whole army of 400 men in its tracks. They were mad; they were out for blood, and she stopped them. How? There are two parts to the answer.

First, God stopped them. I'm sure she was praying like mad. Ultimately God alone can bless interpositions and attempts at peacemaking. And we should go into them with prayer and fasting. I've seen people do all the right things and they are still are not successful. We need God's aid.

But I want to look at the *characteristics* of her peacemaking. Each of these 15 points are important in giving her success.

Humble (v. 23b-24a)

First, she went into this peacemaking with no arrogance or pride showing. Beginning with verse 23:

1Sam. 25:23 Now when Abigail saw David, she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground. 24 So she fell at his feet and said...

This was a position of respect as well as pleading. Now granted, her husband's life was in danger. But when you couple this posture with the whole tone of the speech, you see that it flowed from a genuine humility.

When pride is present, it is so easy for anger to flare and destroy the whole process. When pride is present, it is so easy to see everyone else's fault and not see your own. From my perspective, she didn't personally have much fault, yet her humility enabled her to see the whole situation from David's perspective. You can't do that if you are a proud person. Humility gives you new eyes to see conflicts in a totally different way. This is why Galatians 6 wants those who intervene to consider their own weaknesses and their own vulnerabilities first. It's taking the beam out of our own eyes to see clearly.

And by the way, you can start off humble, but when you see the arrogance, mouthiness, and pride of the other person, it is very easy to cast aside humility, to start getting angry, and before you know it, things have escalated into a competition between the peacemaker and one or both of the parties. And the peacemaker is offended, and he becomes useless for the job. Humility is a critical point.

Willing to take heat so that others are saved (v. 24b)

The second thing that we see is that she was willing to take heat so that others could be saved. She didn't deserve the heat, but she was willing to take it. Look at verse 24. She says, **"On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be!"** In other words, she was willing to suffer the consequences for Nabal's iniquity. This is absolutely remarkable, and shows the degree of love that she has for her despicable husband - or at least for the servants. Some commentaries have said that this is simply a false taking of blame like the wives of many narcissists have learned to do to survive. And that may be. I initially wondered that. But let me explain why I think she is only taking the heat, and not taking the blame or overlooking her husband's bad behavior.

First, this is not blind love, because she is able to discuss his sin - and discusses it frankly. It's quite clear later in her speech that she sees *him* as being at fault. So that's the first reason I say she is taking the heat or consequences of the iniquity, not the blame. Second,

this is not an enabling love, because we have already seen that she is doing the opposite of enabling – she is intervening even without his permission. Third, this is not doormat passivity; she is anything but passive.

So I side with those who say that this is a God-given love that cares about others so much, that she is willing to suffer and take risks on their behalf - much like Paul in Romans 9 was willing to be accursed if it meant he could save his brethren. That's almost identical. She might suffer David's wrath and would surely suffer Nabal's wrath when she returned. Peacemaking often is uncomfortable. And family members often don't appreciate enough that Abigails often take the heat so that the children don't have to. But there is only so much that an Abigail can do without making matters worse. So be sympathetic if Abigails don't always get it perfectly.

Uses appeal rather than demands (v. 24c)

The third thing that I see in Abigail is that she *appeals* to David rather than making demands of David. Granted, she is not in a very good position to make demands, even if she was a prophetess. But her approach is the approach that is most likely to gain a hearing. Abigail wisely says, **“And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant.”** And she has this language of appeal all the way through her speech. “Please let your maidservant.”

If a guy is already so mad that he doesn't listen to you, then saying, “Please, listen to what a friend has to say,” is much more likely to break through the anger than saying, “What is the matter with you? Stop this nonsense!” There is a place for both approaches, but let me assure you that there are good reasons why a soft appeal is the usual way for successful peacemakers. A soft answer turns away wrath, right? A peacemaker is not only concerned about speaking the truth (she does do that), but she is also concerned about the *way* the truth is spoken, and the *context*, and the *motive*. After all, these guys have swords - not exactly the context for getting too blunt.

Does not cover for Nabal or minimize his sin (v. 25a), but neither does she cover for David or minimize his sin (v. 26c,31)

Now, it is not as if she is covering for Nabal's sin. Not at all. Verse 25 says, **“Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him!”** She is saying, “Look. I agree with you that Nabal is in the wrong here. Everyone knows that Nabal's character is not good. I'm not going to cover for him. But this is not the way to deal with it.” That's in effect what she is saying.

And you might think that she is now taking sides with David. But the reality is that she points out the sin in both men. Take a look for example at the third clause in verse 26. She describes what David is attempting to do as *****“coming to bloodshed**”** and **“avenging yourself with your own hand,”** and in verse 31 she makes it clear that it would be shedding blood without cause – in other words, it would have been murder. There would have been no justification for this slaughter. So she does not ignore the sin of either one.

And this is a very important part of peacemaking. If you minimize the sin of one party, the other party is not going to take any of your recommendations seriously. They are going to feel that you are being prejudiced and unfair.

Gives new information that was unknown (v. 25b)

The fifth thing that I see here is in the second clause of verse 25: “**But I, your maidservant, did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.**” She is giving new information to David, and encouraging David to look at all angles of this problem. There is more than just Nabal involved here. She is in effect saying, “Have you considered my involvement? Have you considered the fact that I didn’t know?”

When there is a clash of personalities, both parties tend to have tunnel vision, and they have a hard time seeing other possible explanations, solutions, or even possible collateral damage. And so one of the jobs of a peacemaker is to inject new information into the discussion that the two parties have not seen.

Assurances of her impartiality (v. 26a)

In verse 26 we see that Abigail is seeking to be impartial. “**Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives.**” She is taking an oath of truthfulness here. Her goal is not to manipulate an outcome. Her goal is not to say anything needed to stop a confrontation. That’s what some people do. That’s the problem I have with the movie, *The Negotiator*. You can say anything, so long as the outcome is OK. No, that’s not the Biblical way. What she is going to say is going to be fair and impartial, and it is going to be the truth no matter what the outcome.

Assume that the one you are talking to wants the best outcome (v. 26b)

In verse 26 she goes on to say, “**Since the LORD has held you back from coming to bloodshed...**” is this naive optimism? Most commentators say that she is assuming that David will do the right thing once he understands the situation. She is assuming the best about him. Now it may be (as some others have assumed) that this was a prophetic utterance, but either way, it still highlights that when we assume the best about others, we often get the best, and when we assume the worst in others, we often get the worst. It almost becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. But when you have two believers who are indwelt by the Spirit of God, how much more should we have a 1 Corinthians 13 love that “**believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things**”?

But don’t skip over the seriousness of his sins either (v. 26c)

But believing all things is not naivete. The same chapter says that love rejoices in the truth. It does not tell a lie. It assumes the best where possible, but it does not tell a lie. And so Abigail tells the truth as she sees it with David, even if it might be offensive to David. She has already couched her language in such tactfulness, humility, and grace that it makes it

easier for David to swallow. But her peacemaking efforts did not overlook the seriousness of David's sins.

It is appropriate to take sides, even when both sides have sin (v. 26d)

And it is in having pointed out the sins of both David and Nabal, that she could be taken seriously when she sided with David on the overall scheme of things. That's the next point. In other words she is not engaged in boot licking. She is interested in glorifying God in this process. So it is appropriate to take sides, so long as in the process it is God that you are seeking to please. And if people argue about whose side you are taking, you can say, "I'm trying to be for both of you, but ultimately it is God and His Scriptures that we must all side with. It's an issue of siding with God, not with one of you." If you are trying to side with God, then when you disagree with either person (or both), it will not be perceived as a personal rejection quite as easily. Of course, some people (like Nabal) are so self-centered, that if you don't blindly side with them, they won't like it no matter what. But ultimately that doesn't matter. It is God that you are pleasing.

Rectifying the situation (v. 27)

In verse 27 she says,

27 And now this present which your maidservant has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men who follow my lord.

She is providing the thing that her husband refused to provide. Peacemaking is not simply about getting two sides to bury their hatchet. It is about making sure that injustices are rectified. Not everybody can achieve this, but since she could, she did.

She sought forgiveness for even perceived (but mistaken) wrong (v. 28a)

In verse 28 she asked forgiveness for even her unintentional oversight - or possibly for intruding upon him in this uninvited way. You could take it either way. She had already insisted that she didn't know that the messengers had come and had asked for consideration. And you can see that she is tiptoeing very carefully through some land mines here. In my previous sermons I talked about those potential land mines and this needed to be very delicately worded. Peacemaking requires tact. And it is so easy for one misspoken word to hijack things and for emotions to flare again. This is why we need to bathe these things in prayer.

She affirms what is good in David

The twelfth thing that I see is that she affirms what is good in David. And by doing this it will actually add power to her point that all of that could be lost on others if he insists on acting rashly. "You've got such a good reputation, and it is all going to be blown up in this one act."

A. God's promises for him (v. 28b)

So here are three things that she says that she appreciates about David. First of all she affirms that she believes God's promises that he will indeed be king. She is in agreement with those God-given promises. Verse 28 goes on to say, **"For the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house..."** He will be king, but as she will shortly point out, that carries with it the responsibilities to act consistently with that fact.

B. David's sacrificial service for God (v. 28c)

Second, she appreciates the fact that David has been very sacrificial for God. She says, **"...because my lord fights the battles of the LORD..."** Now again, that is a subtle reminder that he needs to continue to be thinking about serving the *Lord* in this situation instead of serving his pride. But she is saying it positively. Up until this time you have certainly been serving the Lord, and I appreciate that about you.

C. The good reputation he has had (v. 28d)

The third thing that she appreciates is that David has had an impeccable reputation. She says, **"...and evil is not found in you throughout your days."** And the implication will shortly be made that he might lose that good reputation if he follows through on his plans. So think about your good reputation. So even the good in David that she mentions is going to be leveraged to make her point.

She expresses legitimate sympathy for David's plight (v. 29a)

But the next two points give two more ways that she seeks to be positive about David before she launches into her final reason that what he was doing was wrong. She shows sympathy for the difficult straights that David found himself in. He was in a tough position. He was totally dependent upon the goodwill of others. She says, **"Yet a man has risen to pursue you and seek your life..."** That is referring to Saul. So she shows sympathy and understanding for his tough status. Sympathy can be a critical component of peacemaking. Even people who are in the wrong are sometimes driven to that wrong because of tough situations. And we can appreciate that and sympathize with them before showing them a better way of handling things.

And encourages David to look to God in faith during this situation (v. 29b-30)

But (next point) even given his tough situation, there is no excuse. Instead, she encourages David to look to God in faith during this trying situation. David too has had to deal with a narcissist - King Saul. This is the second part of verse 29 through verse 30. She says, **"...but the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, as from the pocket of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when the LORD has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel."** Though it doesn't look as if God's promises will be fulfilled, she has faith that they will be. And

again, all of these remarkable statements may be prophetic statements. But either way, the point is that she encourages David to have faith that they will be fulfilled. And we spent a lot of time on those beautiful images in 2011. She affirms that God will protect David like a treasure and sling his enemies out and that he will eventually be king.

Now, here is an important thing to consider: of all the previous fourteen points, at least twelve of them don't deal directly with David's sin. Isn't that interesting? David's sin is the crisis that needs to be dealt with, yet it is the smallest portion of what she speaks about. There is a sense in which all of these other points are preliminary to pointing out the stupidity of what David is about to do. It's giving perspective. Once he has perspective, it would be easier to convince him.

She encourages David to repent by appealing to the consequences of his actions (v. 31)

She tries to get him to see how he might react to this in the future (v. 31a)

But now comes the bitter medicine in verse 31. Let's look at it phrase by phrase. Even this is worded carefully. She says that she has interposed herself because she does not want David to later have to regret this action. So she is still *for* him, even though she disagrees with what he is doing. She says, "**that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord...**" "This is not something you are going to be proud of. In fact, you are going to grieve over this and find it offensive." "Grief" is the result of his sin, and "offense" is the character of his sin. But interestingly, she is trying to have him look at it from *his own future perspective*.

And peacemakers have to give perspective. Peacemakers try to get the parties to look at the problem from the other person's perspective, from the perspective of onlookers, from God's perspective, and also from the perspective of what he himself will think in the future - "What's the trajectory of your action?" She tries to convince him that he will grieve over it and it will become something offensive to his heart.

She tries to get him to see the seriousness of the sin in its own right (v. 31a) because:

Next she tries to get him to see the seriousness of the sin in its own right. Here's what he is going to regret: "**either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself.**"

1. He will have shed innocent blood (v. 31b) and will thus be no different than Saul.

The first serious charge was that he was about to shed blood without cause. That is a euphemistic way of speaking of murder. Killing someone in self-defense is with cause and so it is not murder. But unless the Bible specifically authorizes the spilling of blood, you are engaged in murder. And as David himself had pointed out previously, the civil magistrate alone can spill blood for vengeance purposes. Self-defense, yes, but vengeance, no. In the previous chapter David had written the imprecatory Psalm, Psalm 35, against all those who

spill blood without cause. He pronounced curses on those murderers. So that means that in the time period of chapter 24 he hated the very thing that now he wants to do. He himself would be under the curse of Psalm 35. In Psalm 7, he would later pronounce a curse upon himself if he had spilled blood without cause. So this is a serious sin, and she is seeking to point out the seriousness of that sin.

2. He will have acted as a revolutionary (v. 31c) and will thus reap the same in his kingdom.

The second thing she is accusing him of is acting as a revolutionary: “**or that my lord has avenged himself.**” When the New Testament commands us to not take vengeance into our own hands, but to love our enemies, it’s quoting the Old Testament. It is quoting from Deuteronomy 32, and from other passages. And I think this would have stuck to David like glue, because he had spent so much time in the previous chapters convincing his men of this very thing - that it was wrong for private citizens to take vengeance. He refused to raise the sword against Saul. He refused to take out Doeg, even though he suspected that Doeg would tell Saul of his whereabouts. He had been a model of the Reformed principle of self-control under tyranny, and was about to let all that go out the window in one act of revolutionary vengeance. If he had killed Nabal and his men he would have been no better than Saul, and it would have been hypocritical of him to write those Psalms against Saul. My new booklet, the Divine aright of Resistance goes into when it is legitimate and when it is not legitimate to resist the civil government.

She tries to get him to see that there will be other collateral damage from this action (v. 31e)

The last thing that she mentions is that there are innocent people who can be hurt when people take vengeance into their own hands. There is collateral damage. And peacemakers try to give perspective on collateral damage. In this case, she would be one of the ones who would have suffered at David’s hands. So she says, “**But when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.**” Of course, she had been so gracious, and so humble in her entreaty, that it made it easier for David to respond humbly.

David’s marvelous response (vv. 32-35)

And because I went in depth on David’s response in 2011, I will just barely mention ten aspects of a good response to your sin being exposed. What’s a godly response to rebuke?

1. First, David listens and responds in verse 32. Proverbs calls us to avoid abusing the peacemaker, slamming the door on the peacemaker, or ignoring him.
2. Second, he rejoiced at the rebuke. He says, “...Blessed be the LORD God of Israel who sent you this day to meet me!” Exclamation marks are interpretations in translation, but this is one exclamation mark in this passage that I think belongs there. It shows his rejoicing.

3. Third, he thanked her for the rebuke. That's hard for pride to do. He says in verse 33, "And blessed is your advice and blessed are you..."
4. Fourth, he clearly named his sin and repented of it in front of all of his men in verse 33. "...because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand." He repeats back the precise language that she reproved him with, and repented of that sin. And since he had sinned in front of all of his men, he repents in front of all of his men. This is a habit that we tried to instill in our children when they were young. We wanted them to tell us precisely what it was that they were repenting of. And we have sought to model that ourselves.
5. Fifth, he was God-centered in his repentance. He says in verse 34. "For indeed, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back..." Some confessions of sin are only enough to get people off their backs - they are just horizontal. But the moment God is brought into the equation, your mind thinks differently - often more accurately. I don't know how many times I have seen people defensive with one another and not recognizing their sin, but as soon as they go to prayer they are suddenly conscious of their sin.
6. Sixth, he affirmed the seriousness of his sin. "For indeed, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!" He is admitting that he would have been guilty not only of taking vengeance on Nabal, but also of genocide, and of hurting her. No wonder he had this threefold blessing in verses 32-33. This is not a simple, "I'm sorry if I offended you." It is owning sin, naming it, describing the seriousness of it, and repenting.
7. Seventh, he didn't downplay the overtures of peace that she had given. Verse 35 says, "So David received from her hand what she had brought him..." She had extended an olive branch, so to speak, and David is receiving it. Failure to do so can short-circuit true reconciliation. If he had refused the gift and said, "Ah, don't worry about it," there still would have been tension.
8. Eighth, he affirmed full restoration. Verse 35 goes on to say, "Go in peace to your house..." The Hebrew word for "peace" is shalom, and it is not only inward emotional peace but it also conveys the idea of full restoration. In the book, *The Peacemaker*, by Ken Sande, he shows that learning to be civil with each other is not enough. God's grace should restore fellowship and ideally even make the relationship better than before - if possible.
9. Ninth, he committed himself in verse 35 to following through on his repentance. There is going to be action. Verse 35 goes on to say, "See, I have heeded your voice..." The ESV translates it, "I have obeyed your voice." However you translate it, David was committing himself to follow through with action.

10. And tenth, he affirmed the fact that he respected Abigail. “I have heeded your voice *and respected your person.*” Some believe this was an acknowledgment that she was a prophetess. Others believe it was simply an affirmation that he respected her very much for what she had done. Either way, it still affirms the same point. It is good after a tense confrontation, to affirm respect for the person who has confronted you. It is a tough job to bring a rebuke. To say, “Thank you for bringing this to my attention; I respect you very much for having the courage to do that,” goes a long ways toward normalizing relationships.

Still more confrontation - this time with Nabal (vv. 36-38)

In verses 36 to 38 we have one more confrontation that needs to happen. She needs to let Nabal know what she has done and that she saved his skin. She acted behind his back, but that’s not her persona. In verse 36 she discovers that he is drunk and totally oblivious to the danger he had been in, so she waits till he is sober. That’s always wise.

1Sam. 25:36 Now Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was, holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; therefore she told him nothing, little or much, until morning light. 37 So it was, in the morning, when the wine had gone from Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became like a stone. 38 Then it happened, after about ten days, that the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.

This paragraph shows some of Nabal’s other character issues. He was a poor steward of his money. He was a drunk. He was lavish to impress others while ignoring his wife - did he even notice that his wife was gone? Anyone who has had an addict for a relative knows the constant stress that this places on a wife.

Some people point out that the Achilles heel that a narcissist has is his shame. And when Nabal realizes the extent to which he has already been exposed, it produced such stress in Nabal that he stroked out and went into a coma, dying ten days later. This is not saying that wives should try to stroke out their husbands. But it is perfectly appropriate for Abigail to tell him what happened even if it meant that he might blow up at her. It takes courage to be the wife of a Nabal.

Despite his grouchiness, she continued to serve and manage the household throughout the marriage. Despite his refusal to live by grace, she continued to live by grace. Despite his emotional abuse, she returned love. And who took care of him during the ten days that he was comatose? She probably did or had her servants do it. Otherwise he would not have survived for ten days. It’s not that he deserved it. He didn’t. But Romans 12 calls us not to become sinful in our responses to the sins of others.

So even this brief account gives two indications of her faithfulness to her husband. The first one is that she did not try to hide the fact that she had intervened on his behalf. He might have gotten angry, but we saw previously that she had not done it out of rebellion. She had done the intervention to save his neck.

And then secondly, when she had a chance to let him die, she didn’t. Even jerks need to be treated with dignity. She obviously cared for him in his dying days. If that does not

exemplify the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, I don't know what does. My aunt's husband was a drunk who was mean when he was drunk. But even when God struck him with almost total paralysis, she loved him by God's grace, and ministered to him. And my parents loved him and ministered to him. And he came to Christ before he died. The only thing he could do was to slightly squeeze the hand to indicate a "yes."

Verse 38 doesn't ascribe the death to the stroke alone. It says, "**Then it happened, after about ten days, that the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.**" Notice that she isn't wishing for his death. *God* sovereignly struck him. And I should point out that not all miserable marriages are allowed by God to end like this one did. But Paul does guarantee believers in 1 Corinthians 10:13, that no matter how miserable our circumstances, God always makes a way of escape from sin that we might be able to bear up under the miserable circumstances. Now, we are obviously not talking about physical abuse or danger to life and limb - then you need escape from the home, not escape from sin. That's different. But most Abigails don't have that choice.

In any case, in Abigail we see that she needed grace, she had sufficient grace, and she sought to minister grace to her husband. It does not appear that her husband ever did repent, but you know what? God has won husbands through the grace that they saw in their wives. That's exactly what 1 Peter 3 promises. And my aunt is testimony to the power of God's grace to triumph over an evil husband.

Her marriage to David and subsequent trials (vv. 40ff)

Since I dealt with her marriage to David adequately in 2011, I won't dig into it today. This was not a polygamous marriage since we saw that Michal, the daughter of Saul had divorced David and married Palti. God Himself said that Palti was her husband. This means it would be unlawful for her to come back to David according to Deuteronomy 24. This also means that David was free to marry Abigail.

Because she was a Proverbs 31 woman, this was a marriage that enriched David in many ways. He was obviously enriched in the vast properties he inherited from Nabal, but the brief statement in verses 40-42 shows that he was enriched in a good relationship with her.

40 When the servants of David had come to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her saying, "David sent us to you, to ask you to become his wife." 41 Then she arose, bowed her face to the earth, and said, "Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." 42 So Abigail rose in haste and rode on a donkey, attended by five of her maidens; and she followed the messengers of David, and became his wife. David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and so both of them were his wives.

We aren't told when David married Ahinoam or why. But this would be a difficult burden for Abigail to bear. There is not a single polygamous marriage in the Bible that turned out well. It's sad that hear that her story doesn't turn out perfectly - like a fairy tale would. But God includes stories like this because they are true to life, and they show that God knows and cares. But I'm sure that David sought to care for her. She definitely had it much better than under Nabal.

She went with five maidens not only as a sign of her vast wealth (in other words, it is a statement that she doesn't need David financially), but also that she was willingly getting married. It shows that she has no insecurity or need whatsoever. She is making a statement. She is entering this marriage of her own free will. Again it shows strength of character on her part. She is a strong woman.

We have only three other facts that we know about Abigail. First, she had a son by David whom they named Chileab (2 Sam. 3:3). And according to 1 Chronicles 3:1 they gave him a second name, Daniel. Or it is possible that the first son died and the second son was Daniel. We just don't know much about that. But most take the same son as having two names.

Second, chapter 30:5 shows that David's two wives are now listed with Ahinoam being first. She is probably listed first simple because she was the first to bear David a child.

Third, Ahinoam and Abigail, were taken captive by the Philistines. David strengthened himself in the Lord and with his men chased down the Philistines, inflicted a slaughter, and rescued the wives and children of everyone. So David was a protector. We aren't told how she handled that kidnapping or how she handled the second wife. We can only guess. And it illustrates that life is not always peaches and cream. But Abigail is the type of person who could hold her head high anyway. I think she probably was able to thrive.

But let me conclude with two more admonitions from the life of Abigail.

First, be careful what you wish for. There are many people who would love to be as wealthy as so-and-so. Frequently this is because you don't know the pain that goes along with that apparently successful life. Behind many a happy, beautiful, and rich face lies untold pain. Focus on what God wants *you* to do with *your* own situation and seek to glorify God where *you* have been planted. Don't envy.

Second, pray for the Abigails you know. They need it. And may God be pleased with our responses to this wonderful woman of faith. Amen.