

Touched by David: Abigail

Fourth in a series on David's Connections

Selections from 1 Samuel 25

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Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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I'm using the New Living Translation today over the course of my sermon.

² There was a wealthy man from Maon who owned property near the town of Carmel. He had 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats, and it was sheep-shearing time. ³ This man's name was Nabal, and his wife, Abigail, was a sensible and beautiful woman. But Nabal... was crude and mean in all his dealings.

Sermon, "The Connections of David: Abigail"

Have you ever met a mismatched couple?

The kind of couple where you scratched your head and said, "How did these two people ever get together?"

I've had some pre-marital counseling with couples where they seemed to be polar opposites from each another. Sometimes the differences are physical: the bride is eight inches taller than the groom. or they have completely different educational backgrounds or she's a Packer fan and he's a Bears fan. (Or she's a pig and he's a frog.)

I remember counseling a couple some years ago as they prepared for marriage. He was covered in tattoos and had all kinds of body piercings and ear spacers to go with the tattoos. She had none of those things—at least none that I could see. I just scratched my head and wondered, "What did these two ever see in each other?" (Actually, I wondered, "What does she see in him?")

We've all known of couples that seemed to be completely mismatched. We find that in 1 Samuel 25, the story of Nabal and Abigail. However, despite the mismatched nature of their marriage, we're going to find some keys to successful living.

First, we see that Nabal is uncouth and a fool—a dangerous combination. And it would prove to be dangerous for him. Nabal is also rich; his life is determined by his possessions.

He reminds us of the parable of the self-indulgent rich fool in Luke 12 (vs. 16-20) who celebrated his wealth as he planned to build bigger storehouses, not realizing that God was saying to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded of you."

Jesus said the man was rich toward himself but was not rich toward God. The same could be said of Nabal.

In contrast, Nabal's wife Abigail is beautiful, intelligent, and generous. One might scratch his head and ask himself, "How did these two ever get together?"

⁴ When David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, ⁵ he sent ten of his young men to Carmel with this message for Nabal: ⁶ “Peace and prosperity to you, your family, and everything you own! ⁷ I am told that it is sheep-shearing time. While your shepherds stayed among us near Carmel, we never harmed them, and nothing was ever stolen from them. ⁸ ...So would you be kind to us, since we have come at a time of celebration? Please share any provisions you might have on hand with us and with your friend David...”

¹⁰ “Who is this fellow David?” Nabal sneered to the young men. “Who does this son of Jesse think he is? There are lots of servants these days who run away from their masters. ¹¹ Should I take my bread and my water and my meat that I’ve slaughtered for my shearers and give it to a band of outlaws who come from who knows where?”

¹² So David’s young men returned and told him what Nabal had said. ¹³ “Get your swords!” was David’s reply as he strapped on his own. Then 400 men started off with David, and 200 remained behind to guard their equipment.

Despite the fact that the narrator is clearly on David’s side in this story, it’s not hard to figure out that David is here engaged in some Chicago-style racketeering. He hears that Nabal’s servants are shearing sheep—a time when they and their flocks are more vulnerable than usual. So he sends ten men—why do you need ten men, anyway, unless you want to intimidate someone?—he sends ten men to remind Nabal that they have lived in safety because of the presence of David and his men. Now they would like a little something in return—just enough to feed the 600 malcontents who made up David’s army. Gangsters call that “protection money.”

Nabal doesn’t want to pay protection money to David’s band of “gypsies, tramps and thieves.”

David refuses to go away quietly; he tells his men to grab their swords and prepare for battle! Clearly, neither of these two men is acting in an admirable way. Thank goodness for Abigail! One of the servants sends word to her—apparently, she was the sort of woman that you’d go to in a crisis because you knew that her cooler head would prevail.

So far, David has been successful, and he would become even more successful in life. But at this moment, his success in life depends on Abigail. We all need an Abigail in our life, don’t we? Abigail is one of the most intelligent women in the Bible.

And that brings us to our first key to success: **Look for your Abigail and heed her advice.** Now let’s pick up the story at verse 18:

¹⁸ Abigail wasted no time. She quickly gathered 200 loaves of bread, two wineskins full of wine, five sheep that had been slaughtered, nearly a bushel of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 fig cakes. She packed them on donkeys ¹⁹ and said to her servants, “Go on ahead. I will follow you shortly.” But she didn’t tell her husband Nabal what she was doing.

²⁰ As she was riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, she saw David and his men coming toward her. ²¹ David had just been saying, “A lot of good it did to help this fellow. We protected his flocks in the wilderness, and nothing he owned was lost or stolen...²² May God strike me and kill me if even one man of his household is still alive tomorrow morning!”

²³ When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed low before him. ²⁴ She fell at his feet and said, “I accept all blame in this matter, my lord. Please listen to what I have to say. ²⁵ I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don’t pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests...

The name Nabal means fool.

²⁶ “Now, my lord, as surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, since the LORD has kept you from murdering and taking vengeance into your own hands, let all your enemies and those who try to harm you be as cursed as Nabal is. ²⁷ And here is a present that I, your servant, have brought to you and your young men. ²⁸ Please forgive me if I have offended you in any way. The LORD will surely reward you with a lasting dynasty, for you are fighting the LORD’s battles. And you have not done wrong throughout your entire life.

²⁹ “Even when you are chased by those who seek to kill you, your life is safe in the care of the LORD your God, secure in his treasure pouch! But the lives of your enemies will disappear like stones shot from a sling!

Oh, that’s smart: Abigail subtly reminds David of his victory over Goliath. I told you Abigail is smart!

³⁰ When the LORD has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, ³¹ don’t let this be a blemish on your record. Then your conscience won’t have to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance. And when the LORD has done these great things for you, please remember me, your servant!”

David’s response was filled with relief:

³² David replied to Abigail, “Praise the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today! ³³ Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands. ³⁴ For I swear by the LORD, the God of Israel, who has kept me from hurting you, that if you had not hurried out to meet me, not one of Nabal’s men would still be alive tomorrow morning.”

Abigail is the only honorable person in this story! Any honor which might be found in David is only there because he listened to Abigail—and in that day and age, that was an unusual course of action because men weren’t supposed to heed the advice of women!

Notice how Abigail springs into action: she is decisive, brave and wise. She demonstrates what it means to live in the beatitudes.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9). That’s exactly what Abigail accomplishes.

Abigail is able to prevent violent action and in so doing, she is able to protect the reputation of David. Abigail also perceives that David would soon be king over all Israel and as king, David would have the responsibility of administering justice over the land. Abigail knew that if he murdered Nabal and his servants, that act of injustice would completely undermine his credibility as a just king. In a sense, Abigail redeemed David.

In return, Abigail said, “When you take your royal position, remember me.” Those were words of faith. And they were words which would later be echoed by a thief who was crucified beside our Lord: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

Ultimately, Abigail convinces David to leave fools to the hand of God. That’s good advice for us in 2021, isn’t it?

And it’s our second key to success: **Leave fools to the hand of God.**

I once heard a leader in the church complain about his neighbor. He could’ve described him as someone a lot like Nabal: “My neighbor is nothing but an obnoxious fool. He’s uncouth and foul-mouthed. He’s greedy and self-indulgent. Nobody can stand him. And I’m going to get even with him.

God doesn’t want us to get even with the fools around us—they’ll only drag us down to their level. Rather, God wants us to rise above their folly with the tact, the wisdom and the courage of the Holy Spirit. That’s what Abigail did for David. And that what the Abigails in our lives can do for us.

We pick up the story in verse 35:

³⁵ Then David accepted her present and told her, “Return home in peace. I have heard what you said. We will not kill your husband.”

³⁶ When Abigail arrived home, she found that Nabal was throwing a big party and was celebrating like a king. He was very drunk, so she didn’t tell him anything about her meeting with David until dawn the next day. ³⁷ In the morning when Nabal was sober, his wife told him what had happened. As a result, he had a stroke, and he lay paralyzed on his bed like a stone. ³⁸ About ten days later, the LORD struck him, and he died.

³⁹ When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Praise the LORD, who has avenged the insult I received from Nabal and has kept me from doing it myself...” Then David sent messengers to Abigail to ask her to become his wife.

⁴⁰ When the messengers arrived at Carmel, they told Abigail, “David has sent us to take you back to marry him.”

⁴¹ She bowed low to the ground and responded, “I, your servant, would be happy to marry David. I would even be willing to become a slave, washing the feet of his servants!” ⁴² ...And so she became his wife.

[Slide: Receive the unexpected]

God had a plan for David as well as Abigail, and that leads us to our third and final key to success we glean from this story: **Receive the unexpected fulfillment of God's plan for your life.** Remember that God has plan for our lives and it's always better than our plan for our lives.

David was going to be king of Israel. God did not want David to become the kind of king who abused his power by capriciously killing every subject who ticked him off. Thankfully, God had another plan and this one involved Abigail. In the end, God protects David by sending Abigail to him. And for her part, God cares for Abigail through David after Nabal is struck dead. That's because David takes Abigail as his wife. True are the words of scripture in Jeremiah 29:

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

God wants to prosper us and give us a future. However, once God intervenes in our lives, we have to stay faithful to him. If only David had done that, for despite the fact that Abigail was wise and beautiful, David didn't always listen to her. One wonders how different the history of Israel would've been if, down the road when he began stalking Bathsheba, David had found refuge in the wisdom and beauty of Abigail instead. But that's a story for another sermon.

In this story, we find that God used Abigail to deliver David from his own worst tendencies. And God also used David to deliver Abigail from the threat of poverty after the death of her foolish husband.

God always has a plan for us. He wants to use us for his good purposes. That's what God did for Abigail and that's what God wants to do for each and every one of us.