

Chapter 6

Intervention

The Words of Abigail

1 Samuel 25:2–42

Introduction

“Don’t make waves!” “Don’t rock the boat!” “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” So much of our cultural wisdom warns us to avoid conflict and advises us to stay out of the middle of any disagreements. While this is undoubtedly good advice in many situations, there may be times when it is important to step into a conflict and try to bring resolution.

Abigail found herself in just such a circumstance, and her careful intervention brought good results for her and her household. In this study we will look at how Abigail handled a very dangerous conflict and what we can learn from her example.

The episode we will study in this lesson is set during the time that David is running from King Saul. David has been anointed as king by Samuel (1 Sm 16) and has fled for his life from the jealous Saul. Word of David’s military victories and maybe his anointing has spread throughout the countryside. His reputation, as well as his army, has increased.

— *Debbie*

Observation

1. Read 1 Samuel 25:2–13. HOW are Nabal and his wife described?
2. WHAT does David ask of Nabal?

FYI: On the surface, David’s request could appear to be a protection racket. However, it was not unusual in that culture for an army to make such a request. Shearing time was a feast time and there would be an abundance of food. David’s request is not presented as a demand or a threat. David’s men do not ask for a specific amount of provision but leave the size of the gift up to Nabal. They also give Nabal a way to test the truth of their story by asking his own servants.

3. HOW does Nabal’s response confirm his reputation as a “surly and mean” person?

4. Read 1 Samuel 25:14–35. WHO are the innocent parties in this conflict? HOW do they respond?

5. WHAT does Abigail do and say to bring peace? WHAT are the risks? WHAT is the result?

FYI: Abigail's expression, "bound securely in the bundle of the living" (v. 29), is probably a reference to the practice of rolling valuable jewelry or money in a piece of cloth and tying the cloth so the valuables could be carried safely. Her reference to hurling his enemies from a sling could be a way of indicating to David that she is aware of his reputation and his defeat of Goliath.

6. Read 1 Samuel 25:36–42. HOW does David interpret what happens to Nabal? HOW does the story resolve for David and Abigail?

Interpretation & Application

7. How does Nabal's response to David's request cause the situation to escalate? Why do you think David becomes so angry at Nabal's reply?

FYI: Scholar Alice Mathews writes that Nabal insults David in two ways. First, he refuses to repay David for the help his men have provided Nabal's workers. Second, contrary to the cultural custom of politeness, Nabal slurs David's character in front of David's own men. (*A Woman God Can Lead*, p. 103)

8. Why do the servants turn to Abigail? What are some of the qualities she shows as she deals with this crisis?

FYI: As a woman, Abigail can approach David's army without posing a threat. Her intuition tells her that David would not kill an innocent woman. Approaching him and taking responsibility for Nabal's folly disarms David. (v. 24)

Abigail deals honestly with David by acknowledging her husband's mistake and reminding David of his own desire to be faithful to God. She is also honest with her husband and tells him what she has done, though she carefully chooses the best time to tell him.

Although Abigail had acted against her husband's wishes, David commends her action as being prompted by God. Alice Mathews points out that Abigail acts "in the best interests of her household, and of her husband." Mathews also asserts "a woman is not a failure as a wife and she is not disobedient to God if she takes active steps to preserve life in an abusive situation." (*A Woman God Can Lead*, p. 106)

9. How do Abigail's words help David regain perspective? What can we learn about David by how quickly he is willing to put aside his anger and his desire for revenge?

10. What lessons might David have learned from this encounter with Abigail and her household?

FYI: This episode is sandwiched between two occasions when David has the opportunity to kill Saul and does not do it. He does not want to take matters into his own hands but trusts God with his future.

11. Nabal's servants are powerless to confront Nabal, so they take their problem to Abigail, their mistress. She is reputed to be wise and has more authority in the household than they do. Share with your group a time when you took a concern to another person and they gave you wise counsel? Are there people in your life you can turn to for help in a crisis? Are there times when people come to you?

12. List several wise ways Abigail dealt with conflict. What can you learn from Abigail's example that could be helpful to you in times of conflict?

God's Word on the Subject

Handling conflict

Both Jesus and Paul have much to say about how God's people should handle conflict. Jesus teaches his followers that they should treat one another with respect. (Mt 5:21–22) He tells them they should take initiative quickly to bring peace when they are involved in a conflict. (Mt 5:23–26) Jesus gives detailed instructions about confronting someone who has wronged another person. His instructions protect both the dignity of the person confronted and the safety and reputation of the one who confronts. (Mt 18:15–17)

Paul encourages the Corinthian church to deal decisively with a member who is sinning in order to try to bring the man to repentance. (1 Cor 5:1–5) Paul also exhorts them to help one another resolve conflicts rather than taking their problems to the secular courts. (1 Cor 6:1–8) Paul again and again reminds God's people that they should help one another grow in godly character by treating each other with gentleness, humility and love. (Gal 6:1–5; Eph 4:1–6, 5:21; Phil 4:2–7; Col 3:12–17)

Summary

- There are times and situations in which God may call us to intervene in a conflict.
- Honesty, humility and timing are all tools used by God to bring peace in volatile situations.
- In dealing with another believer, it is helpful to remind them of God's call to holiness and affirm their desire to be obedient. When we ourselves are confronted, we should be open to hearing God speak through our sister or brother.

Bibliography

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