

Abigail: No Victim of Circumstances



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Samuel 25, Isa. 28:23, 53:12, Dan. 9:15–19, Matt. 15:10, Rom. 8:34.*

Memory Text: “Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of fools is made known” (*Proverbs 14:33, NKJV*).

Have you ever felt a victim of circumstances? Have you ever wished you could be somewhere else? Or that you were someone else? Consider, then, the character for this week: Abigail.

She was an intelligent and beautiful woman but, unfortunately, married to a selfish, short-sighted, and mean man, Nabal—a descendant of Caleb, but nothing like his esteemed forefather. Nabal may have been wealthy, but his name or nickname, which means “fool” or “foolish,” accurately reflected his character.

In the time of Abigail and Nabal, marriages were prearranged, and so Abigail probably had no choice in the matter. Circumstances seemed to speak against her in such a marriage as this. Conditions were not favorable, but in the glimpse that we are given into the life of Abigail, we are encouraged not to become victims of circumstances.

Abigail did not try to escape reality. She was realistic about her situation (*1 Sam. 25:25*), but she did not let circumstances ruin her. She decided to grow where she was planted.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 30.*

Someone Who Will Listen

Most folk have no problem talking. If the truth be known, most of us talk too much. How much better it would be if we learned to be good listeners. There are seminars given on how to be better listeners. After all, a lot is going on around us. How important, then, for us to listen.

Read Isaiah 28:23, Matthew 15:10, and James 1:19. What are they telling us to do, and why?

David and his men were on the run from Saul. While living in the wilderness of Paran, they met up with the herdsmen and animals of the wealthy landowner Nabal. Instead of helping themselves to the animals, David and his men protected the herdsmen and animals. At last the sheep-shearing time arrived, and a festive spirit was in the air. This was the time for saying thank you and giving gifts. Knowing this, David sent ten of his men to ask for provisions.

Read 1 Samuel 25:1–11. Why is David so insulted by Nabal’s reply? What does David hear?

Nabal truly is making good on his name. He sneeringly calls David’s men runaway slaves and sends them packing empty-handed. Nabal makes it very clear that he thinks David is a nobody. In his mind, David is so insignificant that knowing where he comes from or what he is doing is not really worth the asking. Though David has demonstrated amazing self-restraint with murderous King Saul, he, like us, feels deeply wounded when told that he is a nobody and amounts to nothing. This is compounded by the fact that he had shown kindness and was being rewarded with insults and humiliation.

Nabal is unaware totally of whom he is dealing with. He does seem to know some of the facts. He knows who David’s father was and that David is on the run from Saul, but Nabal is so self-centered and conceited that he is unable or unwilling to listen to his servants. Nabal’s servants have lived near David’s men and know that they are a fighting force to be reckoned with. The servants recognize that their master “is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him” (*1 Sam. 25:17, NIV*). And so they turn to someone who will listen—Abigail.

When was the last time your lack of attentive listening caused you or others trouble? How can you learn from your mistakes?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Samuel 25:41*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Contrast Abigail's courteous tact with Nabal's foolish insults and David's angry impulses.

Feel: Allow the Holy Spirit's presence to nurture a sense of peace, comfort, and light in our hearts that can spill out in blessings to others.

Do: Wisely and compassionately intercede in the lives of others as God provides the opportunity and direction.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Sweetness and Light

A How does what we say and how we act reveal the Spirit at work in our hearts?

B How was Abigail not only thoughtful and courteous but brave and responsible in her responses to Nabal and David?

II. Feel: Track of Light

A What was the source of Abigail's wisdom?

B How did she bring calm and sanity back to the situation between David and Nabal?

C How did David respond to Abigail's counsel that showed he had a teachable spirit and was responsive to God's leading?

III. Do: Intercession

A The ability to counsel wisely and tactfully is a tool God can use to bless others. What do we need to do in order to be able to be used of God as Abigail was?

B What areas of our lives need to be faced with courage and responsibility?

C How might God use us to intervene in the lives of others?

► **Summary:** Abigail, though the wife of a wicked man, was full of God's Spirit. She wisely and humbly intervened with tactful counsel and prevented bloodshed when David was set on revenge.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Read 1 Samuel 25. What is the essence of the story? What lessons immediately can be drawn from it? What questions remain?

After having heard the report of the servant, Abigail immediately begins preparations. Abigail does more than listen; she acts. The narrator in 1 Samuel 25:18, 19 details the list of supplies she readies: raisins, figs, sheep ready to be cooked, roasted grain, bread, and wine. These supplies were luxurious and probably more than David's ten men had expected.

The next part of the story is full of movement and action. The writer of the passage moves between different scenes, building the tension. We wait and hold our breath for the moment of contact. In the heat of the moment, without pausing to listen to God or reason, David and his men march out to take revenge because of an insult. The number of men that David takes with him reflects just how angry he is. David is pulling out two thirds of his fighting force.

When we react in anger, it is very difficult to make an appropriate response; we normally overreact. Abigail does not just send the gifts off and then wait to see what happens. She saddles up and rides to meet David. Despite the fact that she has been married to an overbearing and rash man, she has not allowed him to crush her spirit. She has not let herself be victimized. She still holds to her sense of self-worth and is ready to risk her life in order to protect her household. The odds are something like the young David facing Goliath: a woman with donkey loads of food and a few servants, going to face 400 armed and angry men.

Meanwhile Nabal, the *fool*, is also busy. While his brave wife is going out to face an angry army, he is at home having a dinner party and getting drunk.

What do the following verses teach about the significance of our actions? *Matt. 7:21, 25:31–46, James 2:14–17.*

Talk may be cheap, but our actions confirm or contradict our speech. The actions of Abigail, David, and Nabal speak volumes about what they thought, who was important to them, and which spirit motivated their actions.

If someone were to draw conclusions about you and the kind of person you are solely by your actions, what conclusions would they draw, and why? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Abigail's example of handling two difficult men illustrates how the inward beauty of a nature, imbued with the grace and atmosphere of heaven, can mediate in difficult circumstances and influence others for good.

Just for Teachers: Use this opening discussion and activity to help your students examine the dynamics of unequal marriages and how Spirit-led spouses can relate to their mates.

Abigail's marriage to Nabal probably was arranged, as some marriages still are today in many parts of the world. Though some arranged marriages do well, others simply are vehicles for socially sanctioned abuse. But even marriages that we choose for ourselves can sour miserably, and two people who are very different can find themselves yoked together.

Activity: Illustrate popular notions of romance with examples of cards, boxes of candy, and flowers. Or alternatively, ask class members to discuss such notions as they exist in their culture.

Discuss: To what extent do popular notions of romantic love and marriage illustrate the relationship between Nabal and Abigail?

Consider This: What godly principles promote happy marriages? What can marriage partners who are unequally yoked together do to improve their marriage?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: Help your students compare and contrast the effects of foolish and wise words on the ones to whom they are spoken.

I. Nabal (*Review 1 Samuel 25:1–15 with your class.*)

In Bible times, spring was usually the season when sheep were sheared. Nabal's 3,000 sheep would have produced a wealth of fleeces, most likely

CONTINUED ►

A Time to Talk

In a mountain valley or ravine, Abigail meets up with David's forces. She bows before David and treats him as though he were already king.

Read carefully Abigail's speech in 1 Samuel 25:23–31. Contrast that to Nabal's reply (*vss. 10, 11*). What does this tell us about the difference between the two of them?

Abigail addresses David as "my lord." Perhaps this in itself serves as a reminder to David that he should behave as would befit God's anointed king and not as the leader of a marauding band. Abigail is able to promote nobleness in David, because she has not lost her own sense of self-worth. This enables her to see the best in David and encourage godly behavior in him.

What is the first thing Abigail says to David? What do her words remind you of? What is she attempting to do? *Exod. 32:32, Esther 7:2–4, Isa. 53:12, Dan. 9:15–19, Rom. 8:34.*

Intercession is marked by one common denominator: the person interceding must closely identify with the person he or she is interceding for, whether or not the interceding person stands to gain anything from the transaction. The person must be willing to put aside his or her own selfish interests and ask for what would be best for someone else. Abigail could have seen this threat on Nabal's life as a way of getting rid of her husband and regaining her freedom; instead, she chooses to identify herself with him and pleads for his undeserving life.

Perhaps the very best form of intercession is intercessory prayer. We pray for people who are unable or unwilling to pray for themselves. We have to put our own wants, needs, and wishes aside and talk to God for these people. Our prayers give God the excuse to move deep into Satan's territory. It is in praying for others that we realize the immense compassion that God has for us. We can learn how to bless those who curse us and pray for those who mistreat us (*Luke 6:28*).

Have you ever had someone intercede for you in a situation in which you couldn't take care of yourself? How did that situation help you to understand better what it means that we have Jesus interceding in our behalf?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

the largest source of his income. Such a time of financial success brought on festivities, and Nabal should have been in a good mood. However, in response to David's courteous message of congratulations and request for a gift of food in recognition of his part in protecting Nabal's flock over the winter, Nabal insolently suggested that David was just a ne'er-do-well who didn't deserve kindness, much less a reward.

A servant, reporting to Abigail on her husband's message to David, ended with the prediction that David would be furious, the camp would be in immediate danger, and that Nabal was "such a wicked man that no one can talk to him" (*1 Sam. 25:17, NIV*).

Good speech, it would seem, begins with being a good listener. And it is clear in Nabal's case that he is doing all the talking and that none of it is good.

David's son, Solomon, wrote a good deal about the effects of wicked words. He noted in Ecclesiastes 10:12, 13 that a fool's words may at first just be nonsense, but they end up as "wicked madness" (*vs. 13, NIV*). Proverbs 12:18 declares, "Reckless words pierce like a sword" (*NIV*). We may excuse our careless words as "just talk," but thoughtless speech quickly can spiral into rude, insulting, and abusive language.

The New Testament is just as strong as the Old in condemning reckless speech. Some of the most harrowing language in the Bible on the damage that words can do is found in the book of James. *The Message Bible* paraphrases James 3:6 this way: "By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell." Unless we are deeply conscious of how our words may affect those listening to us and carefully guard our speech, our words may set off wildfires far beyond our control. Just look at the one Nabal's words ignited.

Consider This: Do you know anyone who is so insolent and disagreeable that no one can talk to him or her? How do we respond to persons who often are unreasonable and bad-tempered?

II. Abigail and David (*Review 1 Samuel 25:16–31 with your class.*)

Abigail immediately packed a feast for David and his men and went to meet what she must have known would be an angry, vengeful warrior and his band.

When she met David, she bowed before him and addressed him as if he were already king. "With nothing of ostentation or pride, but full of the

CONTINUED 

What Abigail Won't Do

People often are afraid of an abusive person. They are ready to cover for the abuser and will lie and pretend in order to appease the abuser.

Read 1 Samuel 25:25, 26. What does it say about Abigail that she was so open about her husband's faults? How does this make her intercession in his behalf that much more remarkable? If someone were interceding for you right now (which there is), what might be said about you?

Although Abigail is ready to risk her life to save her household, she also has personal integrity. She does not lie for Nabal. She knows that he is the one with the problem, and she is not afraid to say so, even in public.

Someone in an abusive relationship often begins to feel responsible for the abuser's actions and feels guilty. Abigail does not do this. She has a strong sense of self-worth. This sense of worth is grounded in her sense of mission. She does not give herself credit for intercepting David and bringing the gift but sees herself simply as God's instrument in changing David's mind. Because Abigail knows who she is, she is able to encourage David to be all he can be. She reminds him that he is to fight the Lord's battles and not waste his time and energy in seeking revenge for personal insults. Abigail's observation that "evil [has] not been found" in David (*1 Sam. 25:28, NKJV*) is both a statement and a warning that David has not (yet) disqualified himself from the great office that he has been anointed for—to be king.

Abigail also reminds David that with his life firmly bound up in God, he has no need to "save face" or defend his honor. God would do it for him.

Remember, too, that in Abigail's world divorce and even separation were not options for a woman. From an earthly point of view, she would "belong" to her husband until the day of her death. However, Abigail does not see her life as useless or as a permanent prison. She believes that God will deal with her husband in His own good time.

Abigail's speech shows that wisdom can be found in any life situation in which we surrender ourselves to God. Wisdom is not a theory but a practical way of living and reacting to the people around us.

What does it mean to surrender ourselves completely to God? How does one do it? If someone were to say to you, "I want to give myself completely to the Lord, but I don't know how," how would you respond?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

wisdom and love of God, Abigail revealed the strength of her devotion to her household; and she made it plain to David that the unkind course of her husband was in no wise premeditated against him as a personal affront, but was simply the outburst of an unhappy and selfish nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 666.

Abigail’s humility is evident in a number of ways. As the wife of a wealthy man, she could have let the gift of food speak for itself or sent a message to David by one of her servants, as David had done to Nabal. Instead, she herself accompanied the gift. Abigail didn’t take credit for any of her wise counsel but acknowledged that it was God who kept David from avenging himself. She graciously accepted the blame for David’s resentment and tactfully implied that David should be fighting God’s battles instead of seeking revenge for himself.

David accepted the reproof with praise to God for Abigail’s wise counsel. Rather than being impatient and holding a grudge, he allowed Abigail’s calm, respectful words to work on his heart.

Pleasant words, words offered with restraint at the right time, are “sweet to the soul, and healing to the bones” (*Prov. 16:24, NIV*). They are reliable and bring instruction. They are like a fountain, bubbling with fresh water (*Prov. 18:4, NIV*), “like apples of gold in settings of silver” (*Prov. 25:11*). And wise words can turn away anger, quenching the wildfires of wrath that wicked words have started. How important it is to allow God’s Spirit to mediate our speech, giving us courage to respond to evil and imbuing our words with His gracious wisdom, fresh beauty, and sweet healing.

Consider This: While Abigail did not excuse her husband’s foolishness, how did she take responsibility for the situation? How did her tact allow David to save face?

■ *David could have continued to hold a grudge. Instead, he allowed God to teach him a lesson through a woman’s gentle courtesy. How did this teachable spirit enable David to respond to other lessons he needed to learn throughout his career as leader?*

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Help the class to look at their own cultural assumptions as they contemplate scriptural models for relationships.

CONTINUED ►

In and Out

Unlike many of us, David could take constructive criticism, and he observes in Abigail's words the workings of God. In a moment he sees the consequences of his proposed actions in perspective, and he is thankful that God has intervened to prevent a bloodbath. Abigail arrives home to discover that her husband is once again in no condition to listen, and so she wisely waits until the next morning to inform him of what has happened.

Nabal is terror-stricken. He most likely suffers a stroke and dies ten days later. David has not forgotten Abigail and sends men to make a marriage proposal for him.

Consider Abigail's last recorded words in the context of this week's study (*1 Sam. 25:41*). What do they tell us about Abigail? What other biblical examples can you find of the same principle in action?

Abigail was a woman of influence. She had five maids, and yet, she was willing to serve. Much later Jesus would say, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (*Matt. 20:28, NKJV*).

Abigail's life was no fairy tale, even after her marriage to David. As was the custom in those days, David had many wives, and his family life was far from God's ideal. Abigail was David's second wife, and he had to be constantly on the run from King Saul. At Ziklag she, along with the other men's families, was captured by the Amalekites and later rescued. Here Abigail finally disappears from the biblical narrative. We would all expect to see this wise and beautiful woman at King David's side, playing an important role as David's story develops further, but there's only silence. All we know about her further is that she had a son named Daniel (*1 Chron. 3:1*) or Chileab (*2 Sam. 3:3*), who was second in line to the throne by birth order. However, both Abigail and her son disappear from the picture. Some scholars believe that both she and her son died violently. Given the later rapes, murders, revolts, and rebellions that David's oldest sons were involved in, an early death was perhaps not the worst that could happen.

As followers of Jesus, our lives are not necessarily fairy tales, either. God knows the end from the beginning, and so all the turns of our lives do not need to make sense to us. We need, instead, to trust in the goodness of God.

Submission to others, even when appropriate, is not usually easy, for it requires a sense of humility and dependency. How well do you fare in that area? How can you learn to submit when necessary? How can we learn from Christ's incredible examples of submission?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Thought Questions:**

1 What examples have you encountered wherein women have faced unfair circumstances in the workplace, in domestic abuse, or when applying for justice or protection? There are still many opportunities to help women improve their status in every country of the world. What can be done in your own home and community?

2 Often cultural traditions may dictate many of the injustices we have grown accustomed to seeing. How can we bring the sanctifying lens of Christ's example to bear on our own assumptions of proper relationships between men and women?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Suggest the following ideas to help your students put the class discussion into practice during the following weeks or months.

1 Examine the media, books, magazines, and other means by which we transmit cultural expectations to both boys and girls in regard to proper relationships between men and women. How can we militate against the unhealthy effects of these messages in our homes, schools, and workplaces?

2 How can you model a balance of submission, leadership, and tender care in your marriage?

3 Outline the principles of mediation illustrated by Abigail's intercession with David. How can these principles help you respond to a difficult situation that is challenging your life?

4 The description of Abigail's influence in *Patriarchs and Prophets* compares her piety to "the fragrance of a flower, breathed out all unconsciously in face and word and action" (p. 667). How might you surround yourself and others with the uplifting inspiration that comes from flowers?

Further Study: “[Abigail’s] words could have come only from the lips of one who had partaken of the wisdom from above. The piety of Abigail, like the fragrance of a flower, breathed out all unconsciously in face and word and action. The Spirit of the Son of God was abiding in her soul. Her speech, seasoned with grace, and full of kindness and peace, shed a heavenly influence. Better impulses came to David, and he trembled as he thought what might have been the consequences of his rash purpose. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.’ Matthew 5:9. Would that there were many more like this woman of Israel, who would soothe the irritated feelings, prevent rash impulses, and quell great evils by words of calm and well-directed wisdom.

“A consecrated Christian life is ever shedding light and comfort and peace. It is characterized by purity, tact, simplicity, and usefulness. It is controlled by that unselfish love that sanctifies the influence. It is full of Christ, and leaves a track of light wherever its possessor may go. Abigail was a wise reprover and counselor. David’s passion died away under the power of her influence and reasoning. He was convinced that he had taken an unwise course and had lost control of his own spirit.

“With a humble heart he received the rebuke, in harmony with his own words, ‘Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil.’ Psalm 141:5. He gave thanks and blessings because she advised him righteously. There are many who, when they are reprovved, think it praiseworthy if they receive the rebuke without becoming impatient; but how few take reproof with gratitude of heart and bless those who seek to save them from pursuing an evil course.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 667.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Spouse abuse is a big problem. As a church we have a responsibility to help. That’s why every year, on the Seventh-day Adventist calendar, the fourth Sabbath of August is “Abuse Prevention Day,” which gives us a special opportunity to educate fellow members and create awareness about this problem. What can we do to help those who are suffering from this terrible scourge?

❷ “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (*Matt. 5:9*). Drawing on this week’s lesson, what are the characteristics of peacemakers? How can we make peace without compromising our principles?