

SESSION 4

ABIGAIL: INTERVENING FAITH

▶ **The Point**

Honor Christ by stepping in to help resolve conflict.

▶ **The Passage**

1 Samuel 25:2-3,14-17,23-28,32-35

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

It's always good to have someone in your corner. Emma has Molly. Emma is the family dog. She's a small Yorkiepoo who's naïve, carefree, and often unaware of her surroundings. Molly is the other dog in our family. She's the "nanny" for our family because she makes sure everyone is where they need to be—even making stops at night to ensure everyone is in their beds. Molly is a comforter, but she is also a protector.

When we moved to a house with a large unfenced lot, both dogs began exploring their new territory. One of our neighbor's sixty-pound dogs ran over to meet five-pound Emma, and Molly sprang into action, positioning herself directly between the smaller Emma and the imposing bigger dog. Molly is not a big dog herself, but she willingly put herself in harm's way in order to protect Emma.

Some might think it's none of our business if we choose to be like Molly and try to prevent a conflict from escalating. One woman in the Old Testament, though, showed us that we can make a positive difference when we do.

▶ **The Setting**

As Israel was moving from a tribal confederation to a strong nation, Samuel anointed two kings of Israel, Saul first, later David. Samuel died (1 Sam. 25:1). David and his six hundred men (v. 13) camped in the wilderness area of Paran near Maon about seven to eight miles south of Hebron. Nabal, a very rich man, and his wife, Abigail, had thousands of sheep and goats being sheared in Carmel.

What does the Bible say?

1 Samuel 25:2-3,14-17,23-28,32-35

² And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

³ Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite.

¹⁴ But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them. ¹⁵ Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them. ¹⁶ They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. ¹⁷ Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him."

²³ When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. ²⁴ She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. ²⁵ Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. ²⁶ Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, because the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. ²⁷ And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. ²⁸ Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live.

³² And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! ³³ Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand! ³⁴ For as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male." ³⁵ Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition."

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 2**, the “Living by Faith Map,” to give context for some of the places that were important in the story of Abigail.

DISCUSS: **Question #1** on page 37 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“Who’s someone you want in your corner when trouble is brewing?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

Notes



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, enlist two members to role-play two people who are experiencing conflict at work. After two or three minutes of role playing, invite other members to take on the role of peacemakers. Ask them what principles they would use to help resolve the conflict. Repeat the activity by role-playing a conflict at school, in the community, or even at church. If needed, allow a few minutes for group members to develop a skit.

GUIDE: Direct group members to **“The Bible Meets Life”** on page 38 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of intervening faith by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to **“The Point”** on page 38 of the PSG: **“Honor Christ by stepping in to help resolve conflict.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to help us identify ways that we can be peacemakers and help resolve conflict in our church and community.

Dotted lines for taking notes.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

1 Samuel 25:2-3,14-17

2 And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 3 Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite.

14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them.

15 Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them.

16 They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. 17 Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 25:2-3,14-17 on page 39 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 39 of the PSG: **"What impresses you about Abigail in these verses?"**

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to share background about the key people mentioned in this passage.

RECAP: For all the good things we know of David, in this moment, his reaction was not good. His goal became retaliation—revenge on Nabal and his entire family. His kindness to Nabal's men was not being repaid in kind, so in a move that may seem out of character for David, he led about four hundred of his men back toward Carmel to pay back evil with harm.

TRANSITION: We should be people whom others can trust when help is needed. In the next verses we also see that we should humbly encourage others to do the right thing.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What makes some people so approachable when you have a problem?

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1 Samuel 25:2-3,14-17 Commentary

[Verses 2-3] First Samuel 25 focuses on the story of David, Nabal, and Abigail. Nabal was a very rich man who had three thousand sheep and one thousand goats. Nabal's name meant foolish, likely both in the intellectual and ethical senses. In stark contrast stood his wife, Abigail, whose name means "my father rejoices" or "my father is joy." Nabal and Abigail lived in Maon, a central city in the tribal area of Judah settled by Caleb. Nabal's servants were shearing sheep in Carmel, about a mile north of Maon. Sheep-shearing festivals were usually times of feasting and good-will toward all who had helped protect the sheep—as David and his men had. The biblical writer listed two characteristics of Abigail in verse 3; she was **discerning and beautiful**. The word translated discerning also means "sensible," "prudent," and "discretion." This sets the stage for quite a few other character traits we will discover. In contrast to his ancestor Caleb, Nabal was **harsh** and badly behaved in his dealings—both qualities absent from God and His servants. Verses 4-13 set the stage for the confrontation between Nabal and David by explaining how Nabal rejected David's good greeting and request to join in the sheep-shearing celebration. Although David's men had protected Nabal's sheep and servants, Nabal, true to his name, acted evilly in dealing with David's servants. When David heard Nabal's response, he left two hundred of his men to guard their supplies and took four hundred swordsmen to kill Nabal and his men (25:22).

[Verses 14-16] One of Nabal's men told Abigail about the confrontation between Nabal and David's messengers. True to his harsh and evil nature, Nabal railed **at** David's servants. The man explained that David's men had treated them very well and protected them as well as Nabal's sheep: (1) they were not harassed, (2) nothing of theirs was missing, and (3) David's men formed a wall around them. Likely this wall protected them from wild animals as well as robbers and thieves. The young man also reported the consistency and comprehensive nature of David's men by using phrases such as **"when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them"** and **"both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep."**

[Verse 17] The tone shifts. Rather than describing what had happened, this young man addressed Abigail directly, **"Now therefore know this and consider what you should do."** Abigail was a person others could trust when help was needed. The man provided the rationale for his request: **"for harm is determined against our master and against all his house."** From other verses we know that the word harm may be an understatement. Verse 22 indicates this harm was that David was planning to kill Nabal and his men. This Hebrew word is also translated "evil" and "disaster." In contrast to Abigail, this young man said Nabal was **"such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him."** Nabal deserved this reputation based on his previous words and actions. Likely this man not only feared for his life, but for the lives of all those around him.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Samuel 25:23-28

23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. 25 Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. 26 Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, because the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. 27 And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. 28 Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 25:23-28 on page 40 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 40 of the PSG: **"How can we know whether it is best to intervene in a conflict or to stay out?"**

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points on page 42 of the PSG. As she spoke, Abigail did four notable things: She interceded on behalf of her husband. She asked for forgiveness. She prophetically revealed David's destiny. She sought to prevent David from bringing judgment on himself.

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, "Peacemaking" on page 41 of the PSG to help them.

Use the acrostic [PEACE] to list attributes you see in Abigail that helped her be a peacemaker. Then answer the question.

TRANSITION: In the next verses we see how we are to keep a Christ-centered perspective in resolving conflict.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What lessons can we learn from Abigail's approach to conflict resolution?



1 Samuel 25:23-28 Commentary

[Verse 23] Verses 18-20 detail Abigail's plans to meet David. From verse 18, we can surmise that Abigail was also generous, conciliatory, and decisive. Abigail traveled to meet David and brought gifts of food and wine. Abigail stepped in to help resolve the conflict between Nabal and David. She humbly encouraged David to do the right thing. As soon as Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey she had been riding and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground, the traditional position of an inferior before a superior. That her face was to the ground intensified the kneeling action. Together, Abigail's actions revealed great respect for David. This verse reveals additional character traits of Abigail: humble, respectful, brave, and bold. In Israelite society, for a wife to kneel before anyone but her husband was an unusual act of bravery and boldness.

[Verse 24] Old Testament scholar Robert Bergan summarized Abigail's speech: "Abigail did three remarkable things: (1) she successfully interceded in behalf of her husband, (2) she prophetically revealed David's destiny as the founder of a dynasty and vanquisher of enemies, and (3) she prevented David from bringing judgment down on himself." Abigail's speech revealed another character trait: she was eloquent. Abigail's first words, "**on me alone . . . be the guilt,**" assumed blame for her husband's words. As a sign of respect, eight times in verses 23-28 Abigail referred to David **as my lord**, a term frequently used by wives to their husbands. Abigail continued this respect by asking "**please let your servant speak in your ears.**" Abigail then became more firm in requesting that David **hear** her words.

[Verses 25-26] Getting directly to the point, Abigail placed blame where it belonged: on Nabal, whom she described as a **worthless** fellow. Further, Abigail acknowledged her husband lived up to his name (more literally, "for as his name is, so he is"): "**Nabal is his name, and folly is with him.**" Seven times in the remainder of Abigail's speech, she used the covenant name for God, Lord. This reveals another character trait; Abigail was pious. She used words similar to an oath before getting to her main thought: "**the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand.**" Then Abigail voiced a wish, or perhaps prayed, that David's enemies be as stupid or foolish as her husband by failing to succeed with their evil plans.

[Verses 27-28] Referring to her generous present of food (v. 18), she encouraged David to give it to his men. She asked that David **forgive** her trespass—though it is difficult to find an offense she committed except being brutally honest about her husband. By Abigail's saying "**the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house,**" we recognize her prophetic insight. She gave the reason for her prophecy: because David was fighting the battles of the Lord. She concluded with a prayer about David's righteousness: "**Evil shall not be found in you so long as you live.**" This would be another helpful quality for a king of Israel. Abigail's actions reveal additional character traits. She was selfless, prophetic, hopeful, and encouraging.



STUDY THE BIBLE

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What do we learn about David from this passage?

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STEPS TO RECONCILIATION

IF YOU ARE THE OFFENDER:

If you're seeking reconciliation or a peaceful resolution to conflict you've caused, consider these steps:

- Address those you've offended as soon as possible. Don't make excuses or use the words "I, but, or maybe."
- Express sorrow for the way you've affected someone.
- Ask for forgiveness.
- Accept the consequences.
- Commit to changing harmful habits and alter your behavior.

IF YOU ARE THE ONE OFFENDED:

If you're seeking reconciliation or a peaceful resolution to conflict someone else has caused, consider these steps:

- Pray for wisdom and discernment.
- Pray for truth to become evident.
- Pray for spiritual eyes to see the real enemy.
- Pray for everyone involved.
- Pray that your family would not be harmed in the process of reconciliation.
- Pray for God to be glorified.

1 Samuel 25:32-35

32 And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!³³ Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!³⁴ For as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male."³⁵ Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 25:32-35 on page 43 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 43 of the PSG: "How does engaging in peacemaking honor Christ?"

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 43 of the PSG. Encouraged by Abigail's words, David responded with a threefold blessing.

1. David blessed the Lord for working in Abigail's heart and sending her to him.
2. David blessed Abigail's discernment. He praised her for her perceptiveness and good judgment.
3. David blessed Abigail for stepping in and preventing him from taking bloodshed and avenging himself.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 43 of the PSG: "How can God use our group to intervene on behalf of others?"

LEADER PACK: Make copies and distribute **Pack Item 4**, the "Steps to Reconciliation" handout, to help group members understand how to reconcile with those who have offended us and those whom we have offended.

GUIDE: Refer back to "The Point" for this session: "Honor Christ by stepping in to help resolve conflict."

1 Samuel 25:32-35 Commentary

[Verses 32-33] In verses 29-31, Abigail described God's intervention in David's life, protecting him, guiding him, and preparing him to be king of Israel. She asked David to remember her as the Lord did good things for him. David began speaking to Abigail with a three-fold blessing. **Blessed** comes from a Hebrew term meaning "bend the knee" or "kneel." David's first blessing recognized God's part in directing David's encounter with Abigail. David said, "**Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel.**" By using God's covenant name, **LORD**, His generic name, **God**, and His special beloved nation, **Israel**, David focused on the grand scope of the actions rather than the minor details of what had transpired. David's second blessing recognized Abigail's **discretion**. This word refers to the ability to weigh different options and choose the correct one. Discernment is a part of wisdom. In addition to the character traits of Abigail mentioned previously, we can add three more: discerning, wise, and protective. David's third blessing was on Abigail herself. Both the second and third blessings are couched in the language of prayer, a request David made to God on Abigail's behalf. The second half of verse 33 provides the reason for this requested blessing, "**[You] have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand.**" Here David was referring to his plan to avenge himself by killing Nabal and all his males.

[Verse 34] David framed his words in a similar way that others used for taking an oath. The words, "**as surely as . . . lives,**" convey the idea of certainty based on an authority, in this case, **the LORD, the God of Israel**. The words, "**who has restrained me from harming you,**" again point to God's actions in protecting not only David but also Abigail and the men in her house. The remaining part of this verse reveals David had planned to execute judgment that very night.

[Verse 35] David accepted what Abigail had brought him and his men: two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs (v. 18, five seahs is about one bushel). David urged Abigail "**Go up . . . to your house,**" not realizing what would happen the next day. Upon hearing what Abigail had done, Nabal's "heart died" and "he became as a stone" (v. 37). "About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal, and he died" (v. 38). David directed Abigail to return home "**in peace.**" *Shalom*, translated "peace," meant much more than the absence of conflict. Peace referred to a sense of well-being, a sense of rightness within a person, as well as right relationships with God and people. To ask a person about peace was to ask something like: "Is it well with you?" Finally, David told Abigail he had understood her message and had granted her request. Hebrew is a concrete language, frequently substituting physical objects for abstract nouns. For example, "smelling" a sacrifice meant "accepting it." Literally David's words here are translated as "I have lifted [up] your face," indicating he granted Abigail's request. May we, too, follow Abigail's actions in keeping a God-centered perspective in resolving conflicts.

1. Robert D. Bergen, 1,2 Samuel, vol. 7, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 249.

