



FEED MY SHEEP

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How to Handle Fools

After David had surprised King Saul in the cave and spared his life, David fled further south in his ancestral territory of Judah. This issue of FMS will focus on an incident that occurred there which provides lessons for us as prospective overcomers in how to deal with the fools we encounter. This is a lesson which David himself nearly flunked! (Read the entire story in 1 Samuel 25. We quote from it sparingly in order to get it all in one issue. This is a highly-edited version of our tape message: *David, Abigail and Stone-cold Nabal*, tape #399. \$5 ppd.)

1 Samuel 25:2 And *there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great [wealthy], and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.*

Shearing time was accompanied by great merriment and feasting. It was also payday for the employees. It was a time when the business/ranch owner was generous to all who had helped him prosper in the past year.

3 Now the name of the man *was Nabal and the name of his wife Abigail and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb.*

Nabal was a mean, nasty, and obstinate individual. His name actually means "fool." His ranch in the southern plains of Judah was wide open to the Arabian desert. Some of the Bedouins who roamed there were bandits which were a constant threat to the lives and

livelihood of a businessman like Nabal. During the grazing season David and his followers had provided a security perimeter, a wall of defense against the marauding Bedouin bandits.

When the sheep-shearing time arrived, by the custom of the day David had every right to expect to be remunerated for protecting Nabal's possessions those many months. So David sends some of his men as a delegation to Nabal (vv. 4-8).

But the odious and nefarious Nabal was not about to be kind, just or fair (vv. 9-11). He refused to offer anything, saying David was an outlaw. Upon hearing of Nabal's rude refusal, David "blew his stack" (v. 13). He took 400 men with him to pay a visit to Nabal. Here is a case of David giving way to some of the character marks of Saul: impetuosity and rash judgment made in the heat of passion. Even worse, David had his heart set on murder. In this case and at this point, David is no better than Saul. As Saul intended to murder David, so David intended to murder Nabal and his men.

Although it was the custom for the owner to give a handsome reward for the security services, David had no right to react in this manner. He was clearly in error. But since God had foreordained David to be a righteous king, God caused this pending disaster to be averted by the actions of the gentle and wise Abigail, wife of Nabal.

David would have flunked this overcomer quiz, had it not been for the Providential actions of Abigail. Would it have been justifiable homicide? Not by any

stretch of the law. So David was on his way with 400 men to a tragic failure when he was saved from it by the comely Abigail.

One of Nabal's ranch hands had reported the danger to Abigail (vv. 14-17). Abigail did not doubt the employee's word. She knew exactly what kind of arrogant, brash and shoot-from-the-hip kind of man her husband was. So she wasted no time swinging into action.

18 Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid *them* on asses.

She did not tell her husband what she was doing as she went to meet David with this peace offering (vv. 19, 20). Meanwhile, David has lost self-control, stewing in his anger.

21 Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept [guarded] all that this *fellow* hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that *pertained* unto him: and he hath required me evil for good.

So what's new, David? He had had many experiences with Saul of being rewarded evil for good. Naturally, it is easy for us to sit here as armchair quarterbacks and recognize what David should or should not do. But these stories are written for our admonition and our learning, so that when we confront the Sauls, the Ziphites (the smelters), and now the Nabals (fools), in our life, that we can react in the manner befitting an overcomer-in-training. But David let his carnal nature get the best of him for a time as he tells his men his intent.

22 So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that *pertain* to him by the morning light any that *pisseth* against the wall. [euphemism for "males."]

23 And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground,

24 And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid.

Abigail's speech is a masterpiece of wisdom and so artfully done! By a play-on-words with her husband's name, she uses a mix of clever playfulness and seriousness to turn away David's wrath. First, she comes to David in an attitude of complete humility, prostrating herself before him. When she begins to speak, the first thing she asks is for David to impute Nabal's sin to *herself* and then punish *her* as he sees fit. She does not try to justify her husband's sin, but confronts it head on, saying that her husband's name is "Fool," and that's exactly what he is. As she goes on, she refers to David as her lord, out of respect.

25 Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard [or pay serious attention to] this man of Belial, *even Nabal*: for as his name *is*, so *is* he; Nabal *is* his name, and folly *is* with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send.

Do you see her wisdom in the way she presents this? First, she says punish me instead of him. But then she adds that she did not see the incident happen, letting David know she is actually innocent. Even so, she is also making the point that Nabal's treatment of David's men did not arise from some vicious malice toward them, but it was merely the result of the fact that the man is a rude and brutish boor who simply does not understand how to treat people nicely. He has bad manners. He is just not a gentleman. In effect, this implies the question: So should he be killed because he's a low-class slob? She continues her plea.

26 Now therefore, my lord, *as* YHWH liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, seeing YHWH hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal.

As with every page of Scripture, the sovereignty of God is woven throughout this story. Notice Abigail is only in the midst of her plea, but yet she speaks as though it is a *fait accompli* that David will not go through with his plot to murder Nabal. Her faith is that strong. Notice also that Abigail gives God all the credit for preventing David from carrying out his plot. She gives Him all the credit even though she knows full well that she was God's instrument to stop David. She is humble and claims no credit for herself. She continues:

27 And now this blessing [gift] which thine

handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord.

Again, what wisdom! She does not even hint that she is buying him off with her gift as though it were for David personally. Rather, she suggests the food be given to his men. Now notice how Abigail indeed assumes the sin of her husband when she says...

28 I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for YHWH will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of YHWH, and evil hath not been found in thee *all thy days*.

She is not flattering David. She knows his reputation when she says in effect "You're a good man; evil has not been found in you all your days." She knows how it was *God* who caused him to be triumphant over all the enemies of Israel. Also, it appears that she is prophesying when she says that Yahweh will make David a *sure house* (an *enduring dynasty*). That is exactly what God promised David years later through Nathan the prophet. Abigail goes on...and she must be referring to Saul here when she says...

29 Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with YHWH thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling.

Her mention of the sling is another very clever and subtle part of her plea because the mention of a sling will resonate fondly with David as it *triggers* his memory of the great victory over Goliath.

30 And it shall come to pass, when YHWH shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel;

Either Abigail had been in the loop and heard about David's future from one of the prophets—perhaps Gad—or she was divinely informed and is again prophesying David's glorious future. In either case, as she speaks she is probably witnessing David's countenance change before her eyes: from wrath and intent on revenge to the overcomer-David's face, full of kindness and mercy. She now concludes her plea by asking David to visualize himself years from now, when he is sitting in the palace and reflecting back

upon this time.

31 That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when YHWH shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid.

Amazing! How can he refuse a woman's plea for mercy when it comes wrapped in such transparent sincerity and humility and spoken with such eloquence and grace? David's anger and ardor for revenge has melted away. He recognizes the wisdom of Abigail's advice and thanks God (vv. 32-35) for sending her to prevent him from doing something incredibly rash and stupid...an act that would have been even more foolish than what Nabal did to David.

There is an enormous amount of material in the Bible concerning fools. Here is a pair of verses we would be wise to digest and understand thoroughly. By so doing, God's wisdom will always be foremost in our minds when situations arise concerning fools. After we have discerned that the person we are dealing with is a fool, then we have two options.

Proverbs 26:4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Or... **5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.**

Of course, we need wisdom to know which of these diametrically opposite courses of action we should use. In David's case with Nabal, he was so enraged that he that he was planning to answer by violence before giving it any calm and serious thought. But after Abigail had spoken to him, he realized that by killing Nabal, he would be a much greater fool than Nabal, so he opted for the advice in verse 4. Many of us run into fools on a daily basis. When we do, *calmly* consider these two options and pray for God's guidance on which is the proper course.

We should note here that the Bible use of the word "fool" is set in opposition to one who is wise. Webster's 1828 dictionary gives "3. In *Scripture*, *fool* is often used for a wicked or depraved person; one who acts contrary to sound wisdom in his moral deportment; one who follows his own inclinations, who prefers trifling and temporary pleasures to the service of God and eternal happiness."

Verse 4 advises us to ignore the fool. For if we respond, we become like him. On the other hand, a fool can sometimes be taught a lesson. In other words, he is teachable. In that case, verse 5 advises us to respond “according to his folly.” That means we should tread very softly as we kindly and humbly demonstrate to him the error of his way.

In this story of David, Nabal and Abigail, there is more than one lesson for us to take to heart. We can look at it from the standpoint of when we find ourselves in *David’s* position as one who has been wronged, or at least that is our perception. When that happens, how do we handle it? To review:

A. Determine if we are dealing with a fool and then seek the Father’s wisdom in choosing which course of action to pursue.

B. Remember that it is Father’s prerogative to avenge the wrongs against His saints. Paul in Romans 12:19 is quoting Deuteronomy when he says to believers:

Romans 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Admittedly, this is very difficult when we have been wronged or hurt so painfully. Our carnal nature screams out for vengeance and what we perceive as “justice.” But we would do well to remember this verse when we are pondering some vengeful action upon our Nabal or Saul.

C. As Abigail brought it to David’s consciousness, so should we also seek to see the hand of Father orchestrating *every* event in our life. When we do, it gives us pause to ponder whether our *first* inclination to react is righteous or not.

We can also see lessons for us when we find ourselves in *Abigail’s* position. This would be where we seek to ameliorate the anger of someone who has been offended by someone (not ourselves) who is in our household or circle of acquaintances. Here, I would suggest each of us needs to spend more time in personal study of Abigail’s methods so that we can utilize the same basic principles and adapt them to our situations. It goes without saying that the first thing we need to ascertain is whether or not *we have any*

business getting involved between the two parties. If so, then proceed. To summarize some of the main points:

A. Approach the offended party with sincere, not feigned, humility.

B. In addition to humility, use a very soft, kind and gentle approach in whatever we say.

C. Very importantly, plan in advance very carefully the precise words you wish to say. Don’t just “wing it.” Avoid *negative* trigger words, but use any *positive* trigger words, if appropriate—such as “sling” was, in David’s case.

D. If the person is a Christian who would be receptive to Scripture, by all means point out how God sovereignly ordains these trials for our learning and our ultimate perfection.

Now to conclude the story: Since David was prevented from seeking his own vengeance, God moved and caused Nabal to (probably) suffer a stroke and enter a coma. After a few days, he died (vv. 36-38). David recognized the hand of God in his life. Can we? David then got better acquainted with Abigail and took her as his wife (vv. 39-42).

What had initially been an uncomfortable and troubling situation for David was turned into an occasion of immense blessing and prosperity. This, because he *chose*—and he was *predestinated* to choose this way, of course—but David chose to heed the wise advice of Nabal’s wife not to take vengeance into his own hands but to wait on the Lord. In so doing, he obtained an incredible blessing of a wife. Additionally, he inherited the wealth which formerly had belonged to the fool Nabal. So now David is no longer a penniless vagabond who has to scrounge for every scrap of sustenance. He now has a most precious wife, plus property in land and livestock (which are sheep, did you notice?...not cattle as pertains to a Saul). Let us deal wisely with the fools Father places in our path, knowing that it is for our training and for our good.

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