

Knucklehead Nabal

By David Feddes

1 Samuel 25

Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.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.⁴ David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep.⁵ So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name.⁶ And thus you shall greet him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.'⁷ I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel.⁸ Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'"

⁹ When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited.¹⁰ And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters.¹¹ Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?"¹² So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this.¹³ And David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

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."

¹⁸ Then Abigail made haste and took 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, and laid them on donkeys.¹⁹ And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.²⁰ And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them.²¹ Now David had said, "Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has returned me evil for good.²² God do so to the enemies of David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong 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. ²⁹ If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. ³⁰ And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel, ³¹ my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.”

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.”

³⁶ And Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until the morning light. ³⁷ In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. ³⁸ And about ten days later the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.

³⁹ When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The Lord has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head.” Then David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife. ⁴⁰ When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, “David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.” ⁴¹ And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” ⁴² And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife.

We're going to think this morning about knucklehead Nabal. You may want to understand that deep, theological word, knucklehead. It's a noun, informal, and it means a stupid, bumbling, inept person according to the dictionary. Some of its synonyms are blockhead, bonehead, dolt,

dullard, dummkopf, dunce, dunderhead, fool, halfwit, idiot, ignoramus, knot head, moron, nitwit, numbskull, oaf, and simpleton. Please don't use that list to gather insults for people you're mad at!

A knucklehead is somebody who's got a problem, and it's not just the problem with being able to think fast or remember well. That sometimes is what is meant when you call somebody a dummy or whatever, that they're just not that smart. But Nabal's IQ, his intelligence, is fine, yet he's still a knucklehead. He's hardheaded, and he's what the Bible portrays in Proverbs as a fool.

In fact, his name Nabal just means fool. Now, it's kind of hard to imagine a mother and dad cuddling their little newborn and saying, "We want to name this little cutie knucklehead. Yeah, we're just going to give him the name, fool." It's hard to know how he got that name. You kind of suspect that his mom and dad didn't name him "Nabal." Nabal was a name that he earned.

In the Bible sometimes people are given one name at birth, but then they end up with another one. Simon was born Simon and later was called Peter the rock by Jesus. Joseph, a Levite, was named Joseph, but everybody called him Barnabas, son of encouragement, because he was such an encourager. You could be born with one name and end up with another one. Nabal was one of those people who ended up with a different name than he'd been born with. He ended up being called knucklehead by everybody who knew him.

Three Angles on a Knucklehead

- **Nabal:** What if you're a knucklehead?
- **Abigail:** What if your spouse or boss is a knucklehead?
- **David:** What if you're wronged by a knucklehead?

As we think about this story in 1 Samuel 25 involving a knucklehead, I want to think about it from three angles, from the angles of different characters in the story. One is simply from the angle of Nabal. What if you are a knucklehead? We really do have to ask that question. I hate to insult anybody. But it's very important when you listen to a passage like this, that you hear its warnings and take to heart the possibility, "I might be the knucklehead. When I'm looking for that knucklehead around me, maybe the mirror is the first place to check." A second angle is that of Abigail, or the servants. What if your spouse is a knucklehead? What if your boss is a knucklehead? Third, there's David's angle. What if you are the one who is insulted and directly wronged by a knucklehead? So let's think about it from those three angles.

What if you're a knucklehead?

Having everything going for you does not prove that you're smart or good.

- **Great wealth:** "The man was very rich."
- **Great wife:** "The name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful."
- **Great heritage:** "He was a Calebite."

First of all, what if you are the knucklehead? Now, one of the things you've got to notice in this story is just because you have a lot of things going for you and you seem to be successful and all things seem to be going your way does not prove that you're smart or that you're good.

If you're asked if you're a knucklehead, the answer might be, "Of course not! I've got a great life. Business is going well. I couldn't possibly be a knucklehead." Well, the Bible says of Nabal, "The man was very rich." He had great wealth. But that didn't make him a wise person.

He had a great wife. "The name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful." Abigail was wise, she could figure things out. She knew what needed to be done at the right time. And she was beautiful. So, Nabal has this brilliant babe for a wife. But he's still a bonehead. It's possible to be rich and have a great wife, and maybe even a decent family, largely due to her. But you could still be a knucklehead.

Nabal had a great heritage. "He was a Calebite." Earlier in the Bible, Caleb is this heroic person who is sent as a scout to spy out the land. Twelve spies go in, but when they come back, only Caleb and Joshua say, "It's a great land, and we can take it." All the others are talking about the problems, not the opportunities. Caleb sees the opportunity and says, "We can overcome those obstacles."

Nabal is not like his ancestor Caleb. David comes Nabal's way, and Nabal sees it as a huge problem. He doesn't say, "This is an opportunity! I can return some favors and get on the good side of the future king of Israel. Wow! Things could go well for me if I am part of David's outfit!" He instead says, "Yikes. Saul is the king. I'm going down if I ally with David in any manner whatsoever, and I don't like him anyway. Besides, I'm selfish and I don't want to give anything away."

So, Nabal's got the money. He's got the wife. He's got the pedigree, the good heritage. But he is still just a hardheaded, mean, nasty kind of guy.

What others see

- **His servant** says: "He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him." (25:17)
- **A friendly stranger** (and future king) says: "He has returned me evil for good." (25:21)
- **His wife** says: "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." (25:25)
- **His God** says: "The man was harsh and badly behaved." (25:3))

What do others see in him? It's very, very hard when you're foolish and when you're stubborn to see your problem. That's why you're foolish in the first place. That's why you're stubborn. You think you're always right, and you think you're surrounded by knuckleheads. You think your boss is one, you think your wife is one, you wish the kids would shape up, and you're surrounded by all these dummies. Somehow, you're the only genius of the bunch. Consider the

other possibility: you are the dummy. I'm sure Nabal thought he was a superb manager of his affairs and an excellent husband and all other things. But how did others see him?

His servant says, "He is such a worthless man that no one can talk to him" (25:17). That's a rousing character reference, isn't it? Nobody can talk to him—by the way, "worthless man" is spoken in the book of Judges of a bunch of rapists from Gibeah. It's spoken earlier in First Samuel of those rotten, no-good sons of Eli, who were supposed to be priests and instead were sleeping with the women and defying the sacrifice. It's not a compliment. He's a worthless guy and you just can't talk to him.

A friendly stranger, David, hasn't met Nabal before, but David he's nice helpful to all of Nabal's workers. He comes with a message of peace. So when he finds out Nabal's rude response, he says, "He has returned me evil for good" (25:21).

Abigail, his wife, sees him as he is. She's a discerning woman, including being able to read her own husband. "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" (25:25). Ouch. That's what his smart wife thinks of him.

What does God say? Well, at the beginning of the story, God's Word says, "The man was harsh and badly behaved" (25:3). So, there's your profile of Nabal as others see him. He sees no problem, but others do.

An interesting essay by C.S. Lewis was titled "The Trouble with X." Lewis says, "The trouble with X is that everybody can see what the trouble with X is—except X." That's unfortunately the case with many of us. Our own worst flaws are obvious to just about anybody who knows us well, and we seem to be oblivious to them. Anyway, in Nabal's case, a lot of people see what's wrong with him.

Knucklehead dangers

- A knucklehead can turn a huge opportunity into a huge disaster.
- A knucklehead endangers people under him and around him. (Nabal and Saul)
- A knucklehead endangers himself: *A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy. (Prov 29:1)*

What are the dangers of being a knucklehead? Well, a knucklehead can turn a huge opportunity into a huge disaster. Nabal has got this opportunity to get on the good side of David and be one of his close allies. And instead, he comes within an inch of having his whole household wiped out. The Bible often warns in Proverbs of the dangers of being a fool. It's very, very important to be praying to God for a discerning heart, because otherwise you can turn opportunity into a huge disaster.

Just take one politician of recent times who's now dead. It was said of Yasser Arafat, the terrorist Palestinian, that he never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. He had multiple

opportunities to make peace with the State of Israel, to have his own territory, and he would just continue to kill, kill, kill.

A knucklehead endangers people who are under him and around him. Nabal wasn't just going down himself. His stupidity just about got all the male members of his family killed. His stupidity just about got all of his male workers killed. It is very hard to be a fool and have it affect you only.

And now let's get to the wider context of this story. This story comes in the middle of that whole section of David fleeing from Saul, having Saul in his hands and able to kill him, letting him go, having Saul in his hands again and letting him go again. Saul is a man whose heart isn't right toward the Lord. And Saul is a man who endangers the people around him. By the time you get to the end of 1 Samuel, you find that Saul has tried to kill David multiple times—his own son-in-law, who is loyal to him and his best warrior. He has tried to kill his own son and heir to the throne, Jonathan. He has got Israel in shambles by the end of the book. He goes into battle, and he and his sons are killed, and Israel is killed and defeated and scattered. That's what happens when you have a Nabal on the throne. It is a very dangerous thing to have somebody at the top of government who does not know what he's doing and, even worse, is doing things that are devastating for his people.

Some scholars believe that the story of Nabal is told in part just to give kind of a miniature and a picture of Saul, when the fool returns evil for David's good. Nabal was loyal in some respects to Saul. And the danger that he brought was not just for himself, but for a lot of people around him. And of course, he does endanger himself. We've read the story. You know what happens? Proverbs 29 says, "A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy." He's got the beautiful wife. He's got the riches. He's got the pedigree, and he's deader than a stone because he had his chances. He had his chances and then all of a sudden God pulls the plug. So those are the dangers of being a knucklehead. And as we read a story like that, we always have to read the story through the ultimate lens of what the Bible is about. The Bible, in all of its parts, points to Jesus Christ and it's a revelation of Jesus Christ, and an invitation to relationship with Jesus, and a warning against rejecting Jesus.

And in the stories of David, David, in a sense, plays two parts. One is simply David himself, the man. And we can learn a lot from his example, both from what he did well, as well as what he did badly. But also, there are times in David's story where David is a type or a picture of the Son of David who is still going to come—the Lord Jesus Christ. David is the Anointed One. The word "anointed" simply is, in Hebrew, "Messiah," or in Greek, "Christ." David is an early version of Messiah or Christ. He, of course, isn't the real Christ, but he's a forerunner and a picture. What happens when you go up against him, when you reject your opportunity to have a relationship with him, and instead insult him and drive him away? Well, what happens in the case of David? God judges the one who won't have anything to do with God's anointed. A greater judgment awaits those who reject not just David, but the Son of David—Jesus Christ.

Psalms 2, speaking of God's anointed king even before Jesus came, says, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." Now, I know that nowadays it's said that love wins, and that all people are eventually

going to be with the Lord forever in joy and in bliss. This is what some megachurch pastors say nowadays, but this is not what the Bible says. “How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:29). You don't just happen not to believe in Jesus, or happen not to follow him.” If you don't want to be with the Son of God, you have spurned him. You profane the blood that he gave. You've insulted him and outraged the Holy Spirit. That's what the Scripture says happens when we don't put our trust in Jesus, and when we don't follow him. If you're a preacher, you might be able to fill up some churches temporarily with a very different message, but you're in danger of filling up hell as well if you're not willing to give the clear warnings of the ultimate danger that happens when a knucklehead rejects the Son of God—the Anointed One of God.

As we consider Nabal's role in the whole story, a big part of the warning is: don't walk Nabal's path. Don't reject the Anointed One of God when he comes close to you. Jesus comes to us now. At times, it may seem like the cause of Jesus isn't doing so well, and there are other forces in the world that seem to be prevailing. That's how it seemed to Nabal. He thought that Saul had the upper hand and David was a loser. Big mistake. Similarly, there may be those who think, “Christianity thing is losing.” *Time* magazine years ago had a cover story: “God Is Dead.” I had to read a book a few years ago for my PhD dissertation. The title was *God Is Dead*, by an atheist sociologist of religion from Britain. He was describing how fewer and fewer people are Christians. To him, that was evidence that you could write off Christianity.

Not so. Even when David is on the run, even when David's cause seems to be going downhill, even when God has not yet put him on that throne for everybody to see and for everybody to bow before—it is a very, very dangerous thing to mess around with the anointed of God.

What if your spouse or boss is a knucklehead?

- Nabal's servant faced facts about his boss and acted to stop disaster.
- Abigail saw her husband's folly and took action contrary to his wishes.
- If you work for a knucklehead or are married to a knucklehead, do what you can to prevent damage to others, even if you must go against his wishes.

Nabal's servant faced the facts about his boss, and he said, “Man, I got to do something or we're cooked!” So he hopes that maybe Abigail can get something done. Nabal's servant takes action.

What does Abigail do? She sees her husband's folly very clearly. She takes action. She does it contrary to his wishes.

Not that long ago, we preached through the book of Colossians. There the apostle Paul tells those who work for somebody to submit to those who are your masters. It tells wives to submit to their husbands. Ephesians and Peter's letters say the same thing. Some have taken that to mean that if you work for somebody else, you just say, “Yes sir!” and you do whatever he says all the time. Likewise, they say, if you're a wife, your husband is always right.

Not quite. There are times when things are so critical and so much is at stake that you simply have to go contrary to the wishes of someone who's doing something deadly and devastating to your family. And that may be your husband, it may be your wife, it may be somebody else. There are times when something is so sick and so bad that you simply have to find a way to stop it or to undermine it. This doesn't mean every time you have a disagreement with your husband or with your wife, you say, "Well, the pastor said that whenever you're a knucklehead, then I have to go around you and above you." That's not what I'm saying. But there may be crucial times when a knucklehead does things so serious that those around them who would normally be honoring them and submitting to them have to counteract them and put a stop to it instead.

There are abusive parents. There are parents who become alcoholic. You do not owe it to an alcoholic person to help them to continue in that, to wreck everything around them. The best thing you can do is to try to either help them to stop or separate yourself and those in your care from their alcoholic behavior. Those are the best choices. It's tough, but that's the way it is.

It's sad that someone like Abigail ever got matched up with this knucklehead Nabal in the first place. How did that happen? The Bible never explains, but it happened. She had to bypass her husband to undo the damage and prevent disaster. If you work for a knucklehead or you're married to a knucklehead, you have to do what you can to prevent the damage to others, even if you have to go against his wishes. That's what Abigail did. She knew what needed doing.

Notice also in the Abigail story, if David in some ways is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ and of God's anointed, Abigail in some ways in this story is a type of how faith responds. Here's what she says to David: "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 when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel ... when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant." (25:28-31)

The first thing she says to David is, "Please forgive the trespass of your servant." Now, in a sense, she hadn't even done the evil. It was her husband who had done the damage, but she's still willing to shoulder the responsibility and do what she can about it. Sometimes, we're in a similar position. We face problems that, in a sense, are not entirely our fault. They were passed down from parents going all the way back to Adam and Eve. We had an old Dutch farmer near us growing up, and whenever something went wrong—the machinery would break down or somebody do something stupid that would do some harm—he'd say, "Oh, Adam, Adam." Adam, you've gotten us into this mess. Even so, there comes a time to stop blaming and just say, "Okay, here's where we are. I'm involved in this mess, even if it didn't start with me. Please forgive it."

Abigail sees what is coming. She sees what God's going to do. She believes. She's heard about promises that God has made to David, and she believes those promises are going to come true. She believes that David is fighting the Lord's battles. She believes that God is going to do all the good that he has spoken when he appointed David to be prince over Israel. So too, we believe God's Word and his promises concerning the reign of Jesus Christ and his triumph. Faith may not see all of that triumph right now, but faith believes anyway that the triumph is coming.

A final thing that faith does is it seeks a reward. Abigail not only asks forgiveness, not only believes the word about David, but she says, "When all this comes true, then remember your servant." Unlike her husband, she sees David as an opportunity. She figures he's going to win. And when he does, she wants to be remembered well by him. That's the cry of faith, "Remember your servant. Bless me." When Jesus was hanging on the cross, what did that thief next to him say? "Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

In short, when we respond in faith, we pray for forgiveness, we believe God's promises, and we ask God to remember and reward us because of our trust in him.

What happens if you're a knucklehead? Repent of that and quit it as soon as you can. What happens if your spouse or boss is a knucklehead? Deal with it as best you can, and keep trusting the Lord and the future of his Anointed One. And finally, what if you're wronged by a knucklehead?

What if you're wronged by a knucklehead?

When Nabal wronged David, what was David's initial response? "Okay guys, out with the swords. Strap them on. We're going after him, all 400 of us. That guy's dead meat." There's a problem with that. Revenge has a way of flaming out of control and causing way more hurt than the original offense deserved. Nabal insulted and wronged David, and David wanted to repay insult with death. David's furious revenge was going to destroy not only Nabal but all of Nabal's male family members and workers, all because Nabal insulted him and refused to help him. That reaction was way out proportion to the offense.

You see it already just when little kids are fighting. A kid might say something just to tease or to bug the other ones. So what is the response? A worse insult in return. Then the first one will hit the other one. Then the second one won't just hit lightly; he'll punch him in the gut. Then they'll both be bawling and blaming the other one.

Unfortunately, it doesn't quit with little kids. One spouse hurts the other one. The second one turns up the heat. The next one turns it up a little more. The next one turns it up even more. Eventually you might not even remember how the fight started. All you know now is you can't stand each other anymore, and you don't know how it got to that point.

If you let rage and revenge keep building, it's deadly. That's why it says in the New Testament, "Don't let the sun go down while you're angry. And don't give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27). The devil works very effectively where there's rage and a thirst for revenge.

When you read, "David strapped on his sword," you might say, "That's interesting, but we're reading about stuff that happened 3000 years ago. I'm not walking around with a sword strapped on and 400 men following me with swords strapped, and I'm really not planning to kill anybody."

The Bible says that "tongues are sharp swords" (Psalm 57:4). Scripture speaks of people "with swords in their lips" (Psalm 59:7), "evildoers, who whet their tongues like swords, who

aim bitter words like arrows (Psalm 64:2-3). "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Proverbs 12:18). Speech is one powerful sword. It might not be the only one, but it is a way to kill.

Listen to Jesus: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not murder,' but I tell you that anyone who's angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Anybody who says to his brother 'Raca!' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. Anybody who says to his brother, 'You fool!' is in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:21-22).

Using insults to belittle and to destroy another person is strapping on the sword. This can be done directly by undermining somebody, by attacking their dignity, by slamming them, by always telling them how worthless and awful they are. Or it can be done not by talking to them but by talking about them, and undermining their reputation with others, trying to ruin their job by passing along things about them or whispering to others and gossiping. There are a variety of ways where we can be out to get somebody. And in our own minds that falls far short of my sword and my 400 swordsmen. But Jesus seems to equate them.

Handling hurts

- When you're provoked, slow down and cool down before taking any action.
- Listen when a wise person speaks.
- Realize who else you might hurt in getting revenge on your enemy.
- Be sure of your God-given identity and destiny, rather than reacting to insults.
- Let the Lord settle the score.

How should we handle hurts? When you're provoked, take a deep breath and step back and cool down. Slow down and cool down before taking any action. Most action that's worth taking will still be worth taking tomorrow—unless, of course, you're like Abigail, you got to head off disaster today. But any action of revenge, if it's worth doing at all in the future, you could wait a few days and sit on it.

I have a rule for myself with email. When I get a message from somebody that makes me mad, I have on numerous occasions typed out a very articulate answer, and a very nasty answer. But I've learned to put it in my drafts folder. After that thing has sat there for two days, it usually has the "not worth sending" look to it, and I delete it. There may be some of you who are quick with your mouth or are quick with your online comments. Just cool it.

When a wise person speaks, listen. Remember Nabal—nobody can talk to the guy. When David is talked to by Abigail, he says, "Whoa, you're right! I was about to kill a whole bunch of people. I would have brought blood guilt on myself. I'm glad you came along and stopped me!"

Realize who else you might hurt in getting revenge on your enemy. If you were David, you wanted to hurt Nabal, but you would've hurt a lot of families if you wiped out all his relatives and all the people who worked for him.

Here's another thing to keep in mind when you're handling hurts: Be sure of your God-given identity and destiny, rather than reacting to insults. Nabal says, "Who is the son of Jesse? David is a nobody. He comes from who-knows-where." That's Nabal's opinion. But if you're David, you have God's opinion on the matter. The great prophet Samuel has stood over you and poured oil on your head and declared you to be the next king of Israel. If you know that, can't you ignore a few of the Nabals in your life when they say something ornery?

If God has spoken to you and called you his son or his daughter and called you his beloved, and then somebody else comes along and says mean stuff, do you really have to get into such a dither about it? One of the things that helps you to cool your hurts down is to remember who you are and what God says about you.

Then let the Lord settle the score. He knows how. And he has his timing. The Bible again and again warns against taking personal vengeance and says to leave it to the Lord instead. David didn't have to punish Nabal; God took care of that.

When I checked the news this morning, I happened to see a story about a woman in Iran. When she was in college, a man proposed to her. She refused his proposal because she didn't want to marry this guy. And so, he—being such a sweet person whom she should have married—threw acid in her face. One eye is totally out. The other one is blinded. The acid messed up her face big time. The Iranian courts decided that she had the right to proportionate punishment. They had a room set up in a hospital with a person there to execute sentence, because the woman was too blind. As fitting punishment, they were going to pour acid on both eyes of this man. The woman was in the room, and she said, "I forgive him. Don't do it." And the man was spared. He deserved a face full of acid, but she decided instead not to have that sentence inflicted on him.

The Bible says, "Repay no one evil for evil... Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21).

David was willing to leave Nabal in God's hands. Jesus tells us to go even further: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). The fate of a fool in the end should be an occasion only for sorrow or compassion or pity. When God does inflict his vengeance, it is a terrible thing. So pray that God will get rid of his enemies by making them into his friends, rather than treating them as his enemies forever. The way to overcome evil with good is to leave vengeance to God. Forgive. Pray that God will yet change and transform a knucklehead into a reborn person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of the story, David recognizes God's hand in two ways. He says to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand!" (1 Samuel 25:31-32) God spares you from doing wicked or damaging things if only you're willing to pay attention and listen to the people in your life that he sends your way.

Another way David recognizes God's hand comes after the death of Nabal. David then realizes that he didn't need to take revenge; that was God's job. "Blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The Lord has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head" (1 Samuel 25:39). God knows how to deal with enemies. Of God has in mind to change enemies into friends. But even when he doesn't, vengeance is not yours, and the time is not now. It is his timing, and his decision, and his justice that will prevail.

Here's what we've learned from the story of knucklehead Nabal. First, if you are a knucklehead, repent and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, if your spouse or boss is a knucklehead, trust in the Lord, and then do what you have to do in order to make the situation better. Third, when you're wronged by a knucklehead, remember that you are chosen and anointed by God to be his special child. You don't need to respond to every insult that comes your way. Bless those who persecute you. Overcome evil with good.

Prayer

Father, thank you for your work throughout history and your continuing work today. Thank you for David and for the greater Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, that your kingdom may prevail, that the forces of evil may be silenced and thwarted and turned back and destroyed. We pray also, Lord, that while it is still the time of your favor and of your mercy, and not yet the time of your full venting of wrath against sin, that you'll have mercy on many, that you'll turn us from sin and turn us to you.

Lord, forgive us when we've been fools. Transform our lives and make us believers in the death and resurrection of Jesus, indwelt by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Give us grace in difficult circumstances, where we have people close to us who may be very hard to get along with. Give us your wisdom.

Help those of us who are struggling with wounds that we've suffered from others, who have been insulted or hurt in other ways. Help us to release them to your judgment and to your mercy, and to be able to move on with our lives, confident of who you are and who we are in you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Knucklehead Nabal (1 Samuel 25)

By David Feddes

Slide Contents

knuck·le·head [nuhk-uhl-hed]—noun *Informal.* a stupid, bumbling, inept person.

Synonyms: blockhead, bonehead, dolt, dullard, dummkopf, dunce, dunderhead, fool, halfwit, idiot, ignoramus, knothed, moron, nitwit, numskull, oaf, simpleton

Three Angles on a Knucklehead

- **Nabal:** What if you're a knucklehead?
- **Abigail:** What if your spouse or boss is a knucklehead?
- **David:** What if you're wronged by a knucklehead?

What if you're a knucklehead?

Having everything going for you does not prove that you're smart or good.

- **Great wealth:** "The man was very rich."
- **Great wife:** "The name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful."
- **Great heritage:** "He was a Calebite."

What others see

- **His servant** says: "He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him." (25:17)
- **A friendly stranger** (and future king) says: "He has returned me evil for good." (25:21)
- **His wife** says: "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." (25:25)
- **His God** says: "The man was harsh and badly behaved." (25:3))

Knucklehead dangers

- A knucklehead can turn a huge opportunity into a huge disaster.
- A knucklehead endangers people under him and around him. (Nabal and Saul)
- A knucklehead endangers himself: *A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy. (Prov 29:1)*

Ultimate danger

- Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:12)
- How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? (Heb 10:29)

What if your spouse or boss is a knucklehead?

- Nabal's servant faced facts about his boss and acted to stop disaster.
- Abigail saw her husband's folly and took action contrary to his wishes.
- If you work for a knucklehead or are married to a knucklehead, do what you can to prevent damage to others, even if you must go against his wishes.

Faith's foresight

"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 when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel ... when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant." (25:28-31)

What if you're wronged by a knucklehead?

- Reject rage and revenge.
- Revenge flames out of control and causes more hurt than the original offense.

Nabal insulted and wronged David, and David wanted to repay insult with death.

David's furious revenge was going to destroy not only Nabal but all of Nabal's male family members and workers.

What's your sword?

David also strapped on his sword. (25:13)

- ... **tongues** are sharp swords (Psalm 57:4)

- ... with swords in their **lips** (Psalm 59:7)
- ... evildoers, who whet their **tongues** like swords, who aim **bitter words** like arrows (Psalm 64:2-3)
- There is one whose **rash words** are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Proverbs 12:18)

Handling hurts

- When you're provoked, slow down and cool down before taking any action.
- Listen when a wise person speaks.
- Realize who else you might hurt in getting revenge on your enemy.
- Be sure of your God-given identity and destiny, rather than reacting to insults.
- Let the Lord settle the score.

Overcome evil with good

Repay no one evil for evil... Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

Recognizing God's hand

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand!" (25:31-32)

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