

Abigail – Brains, Beauty and Courage.

Today's scripture features three major characters. One was Nabal, a successful businessman who ran a big farming operation. Another was David, future King of Israel, who found fame even before he was out of his teenage years. The third was Nabals wife Abigail, who through her courage, wisdom and quick thinking, prevented a massacre. For those of you that are expecting a baby, I have a suggestion. If you are thinking of girls names, consider calling your girl Abigail. She is the star of this story. First a quick bit of background on David and Nabal.

David

David was what you might call an overnight success. One day he was out the back end of nowhere looking after his father's sheep, doing one of the most despised jobs of his day. Within 24 hours he was the sensation of the nation after killing a giant and inspiring the army of Israel to beat the Philistines. The army guys thought he was the bees knees. The King thought he was the bee knees. He made him a high ranking officer in the army and gave him his daughter in marriage. The Kings son became his best friend. They wrote a song about him. The women went crazy over him. Whenever he showed up, they would come running out of their houses singing and dancing. David went from zero to hero in the space of a few hours. Now can you imagine what that does to the head of a teenage boy? If David didn't have an ego before, he sure would have had one after that. On top of that, Samuel anointed him to be the future King of Israel. He led and trained 600 soldiers that would become the nucleus of the greatest army Israel had ever known. Even though he was on the run from King Saul, David was still the darling of the nation.

Nabal

The other big ego in this story is Nabal. Nabal was descended from Caleb, the family who founded Bethlehem, where David was born. Nabal was a wealthy farmer of some renown in the region. He was a legend in his own mind. He was stubborn, arrogant, selfish, hedonistic, bad tempered, foul mouthed, greedy, and mean spirited. He was married to one of the most beautiful and intelligent women around. Despite all his wealth, power and influence, Nabal was lacking in the one thing he needed most – wisdom. In fact his name means "Fool" and he seemed to be doing everything he could to live up to the name his parents had given him. So this story is about what happens when David the big ego clashes with Nabal the big ego. This is a story of two proud men doing a bit of chest thumping. Here's how 1 Samuel 25 describes it;

"Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran. A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband was surly and mean in his dealings—he was a Calebite. While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!' "Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favourable toward my men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.'" When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited. Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" (1 Samuel 25: 1- 11 NIV)

I don't know if he did it deliberately, or whether Nabal was just stupid, but when Nabal said he didn't know who David was, that was an insult that pressed all of David's buttons. To claim he didn't know David was nonsense. Nabal knew that David was the son of Jesse. David was the hero of the nation. Nabal knew exactly who he was. David and his 600 men had been hanging about on Nabals farm protecting Nabals sheep, which is one of the reasons why Nabal had become so rich. When Nabal asked "Who is this David?" he wasn't asking for information. He was extending an insult. And in that culture at that time, insults were taken very seriously. It was a stupid little incident that got under David's skin.

The scripture describes what happened. ***"David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. David said to his men, "Each of you strap on your sword!" So they did, and David strapped his on as well. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies." "David had just said, "It's been useless—all my watching over this fellow's property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!" (1 Samuel 25: 12-13 & 21-22 NIV)***

David was so incensed that he led 400 of his men to wipe out Nabal and all the males of Nabals family. One insult, and David is off to commit murder. This is the David who can handle giants who insult him, and a King who tries to kill him, but he can't handle an insult from a fool.

Abigail

Fortunately for David, and Nabal, there was a woman who had more sense than both of them put together. Abigail was Nabals wife. She was both intelligent and beautiful. When she heard about the way Nabal had insulted David, she loaded up donkeys with all the food she could find, went out to meet David and his 400 soldiers, bowed to the ground, and apologized profusely for her husband's stupidity. Abigail is one classy woman. Nabals servants obviously held her in high regard. They went to her, rather than to her husband, to tell her what was happening. She took charge, telling the servants what to do. Here is what she did:

"When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. She fell at his feet and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my lord sent. And now, my lord, as surely as the Lord your God lives and as you live, since the Lord has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you.

"Please forgive your servant's presumption. The Lord your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the Lord's battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. When the Lord has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant." (1 Samuel 25: 23-31NIV)

And what was David's response to what she said and did? Verses 32 and 33. ***"David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself***

with my own hands.” (1 Samuel 25: 12- 13 & 21-22 NIV) David was smart enough to realise that it was God who had sent Abigail into his life at that point, to save him from doing something stupid.

Sometimes we need an Abigail.

God does that for us too. At times when we are ready to strap on our swords and charge off into battle, the Lord will often send someone to us who will speak his word to us to stop us doing something stupid. Sometimes it's a parent. Sometimes it's a friend, or a Christian brother or sister, or a Pastor. Sometimes it's a word from the Lord in a sermon, or a scripture that we read that is more than just words on a page, but his immediate word to us right then. Sometimes it's the person we are married to. If you are a hothead who flares up easily, the chances are that God has given you an Abigail, who has a whole lot more wisdom than you do. You need that person. When your pride has been hurt and your dignity offended, before you march off into battle, listen to your Abigail. This is the person God sends to give you wise counsel and advice. God has put them there because he loves you and wants to protect you from doing something you might later regret.

Sometimes we need to be like Abigail.

Perhaps you are like Abigail, and you are married to a fool. Perhaps your boss at work is a Nabal, and you have to put up with this sort of foolish behaviour every day at work. Maybe you come from a whole family of Nabals and you struggle to know how to cope with them. What can we learn from this Godly woman who features in this story? If you are in an Abigail situation there are some things you need to do.

1. Take some decisive action.

When you are the meat in the sandwich between a fired up David on the warpath and a fool like Nabal, you have to show some leadership. The situation won't get fixed by wringing your hands and hoping it will go away, or by moaning about it to your friends. Abigail made some decisions and took action. She didn't consult her foolish husband. She loaded up a whole lot of food that was probably prepared for Nabals party, and took it out to meet David and his men. When you know that an awful lot is at stake, to be an Abigail requires courage, and action. I suspect this wasn't the first time she had needed to pour oil on troubled waters, for when you are married to a fool, these things don't just happen once. If you want to be an Abigail, you need to lead, and leadership takes courage.

2. Stay humble and keep your perspective.

When she met David and his men, she bowed low and took the blame for her husband's insult, even though it wasn't her fault. This fight wasn't about her. She was clear that her role was to mediate between two stupid men. It's so easy to get emotionally involved, or to take sides when you are standing in the middle, but what is most often needed is a cool head and a humble heart. Abigail's soft words turned away wrath. Abigail was a diplomat and a peacemaker. She had a God given sense that she could avert a disaster, and her wisdom, intelligence, humility, and let's not discount her beauty, transformed a tense situation into one of reason. If you find yourself standing between two warring parties, stay humble and keep your perspective.

3. Point people to the bigger realities.

Most of what she said to David was about his position, his character, and his destiny. She spoke to his heart, and God used what she said and did, to change David's heart. Be like Abigail and remind people of their destiny. It's as if she says to David "Look David, you are God's anointed to be King. Your reputation is intact, but it won't be if you wipe out a fool like Nabal just because he insulted you. You have shown great courage in killing Goliath. You have shown great restraint in not killing King Saul when you could easily have done it. Don't ruin your reputation over a fool like Nabal. He's not worth it. God has called you to something a lot bigger than this. In the destiny God has for your life, this is chicken feed. Think about the bigger picture David. What does God think of what you are about to do?"

Parents, when you have a wayward teenager who is acting like a fool, speak to their heart. Point them to the bigger realities of life, not in a condemning way, but in a way that calls them to something higher and better. When you have a wife or a husband or a father or mother who is acting like Nabal, call them to something higher. Remind them of the way life can be when they live Gods way. It takes courage to do that. It requires humility and sacrifice, but sometimes those courageous acts can bring a person back from the brink of disaster.

There is an interesting tailpiece to this story. God dealt with Nabal in his own way. After Abigail told Nabal what had happened with David, he suffered heart failure, and about 10 days later, he died. And to add to the fairy tale ending, David was so impressed with this wise woman who had brains, beauty and courage, he took her to be his wife. Your situation may not work out with a fairy tale ending the way it did for Abigail, but if you are willing to take decisive action, stay humble and keep your perspective, and to point people to Gods purposes for their lives, you too can be a mighty woman or man of faith.