

The Weight of the Crown

Living with Fools

1 Samuel 25-26

Mark Vroegop

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. 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. 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. 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. And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. 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. 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. 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, 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." And David said 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 working salvation with my own hand! 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." 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" (1 Sam. 25:23-35).

I wonder if you are familiar with the term "providentially hindered"?

What do I mean by that? It's an attempt to name the kind of moments where the Lord hinders our actions in order to redirect our steps or rescue us from making a big mistake. It's a scenario that often involves a fair amount of emotion—like anger, frustration, anxiety, fear, disappointment, or longing. It can feel like you are on the dark side of God's will.

There's a hinderance that means that something isn't working out according to either what you want, how you planned it, or what you expected. And it's providential because the Lord is actually the one who is doing something good. However, our emotions can get the best of us.

Wisdom is the ability to recognize that hindrances or cautions can be important parts of God's providential plan. It doesn't see every opportunity as something to jump into. Foolishness, on the other hand, is quite the opposite. It's rash, reactionary, impulsive, and short-sighted.

The challenge with wisdom and foolishness is that they are not usually entirely exclusive. In other words, our lives are a mixture of wisdom and foolishness. Now, you can certainly be more characterized by one over the other. But the Christian life is a mixture of both. I'm sure you can think back on some really wise decisions that you made. And I'm equally sure that you can see some really foolish decisions.

In 1 Samuel 25-26, we have two accounts in David's life as he is on the run from Saul. One involves Nabal and Abigail. The other involves Saul and Abishai. In one case, David is being rash. In the other, he exercises wisdom and restraint. In both cases, we see the overarching providence of God. But we also see how complicated and challenging life can be.

We see in the life of David the importance of asking ourselves: **"What might God be doing here?"** Now the answer may not always be clear. But one thing is clear: a failure to ask this question often leads us into bad places. This text invites us to slow down, think carefully, listen, and seek God's heart.

Abigail: Listening to a wise woman (1 Sam. 25)

Chapter 25 begins with a brief statement about the death of Samuel, and then the narrator turns to the story about David, Nabal, and Abigail.

David is still living in the wilderness, and he moves even farther south after the death of Samuel. According to verse 2, we learn that there is a wealthy man who lived in the area of Maon and Carmel. What's more, he was shearing his sheep. This once-a-year event was similar to harvesttime for crops. The sheep were brought in from grazing, and their annual coat of wool was removed. It was a time for celebration and feasting.

We are quickly introduced to the names of the people involved and a description. First, there's Nabal (v. 3), and he is described as "harsh and badly behaved." The NLT says, "he was crude and mean in all his dealings." As we'll see later in the text (v. 25), his name literally means fool. The word is used in Psalm 14:1.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good (Ps. 14:1).

We'll learn more about him as the story progresses.

Secondly, we learn about his wife. Her name is Abigail, and she is described as "discerning and beautiful" (v. 3). It's quite a contrast from Nabal, and we'll see how it plays out.

In verses 5-8, David learns about Nabal's feasting and sends ten young men to request some kind of support from Nabal, since David's men treated Nabal's shepherds well as they lived near his encampment. Keep in mind that David is trying to provide support for his six hundred men.

Nabal's response was arrogant, condescending, and inflammatory—not a surprise. Listen to his words:

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. 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?" (1 Sam. 25:10-11).

Did you notice all the "my" statements? Nabal is a fool. And now David is angry. In verse 13, he gathers four hundred men with whom to attack Nabal. Frankly, David is offended and acting rashly.

In the meantime, a servant of Nabal appeals to Abigail about the impending crisis (vv. 14-17). His words of warning are instructive about the nature of his master:

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 (1 Sam. 25:17).

Abigail responded quickly. She gathered a feast for David's men without telling Nabal: two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five prepared sheep, five seahs of grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs. Meanwhile, David is seething. Verses 21-22 capture his words as he rides to Nabal's compound:

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. 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" (1 Sam. 25:21-22).

Gratefully, Abigail intersects David. Her appeal is heartfelt and powerful:

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. 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. 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. And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. 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. 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. 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, 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” (1 Sam. 25:24-31).

Something about Abigail’s petition reached David’s heart. And the spirit of vengeance subsided. David’s words reflect a deep change of heart.

And David said 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 working salvation with my own hand! 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.” 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” (1 Sam. 25:32-35).

Notice the shift in David’s perspective: “Blessed be the Lord who sent you this day . . .” (v. 32). Abigail’s appeal prevented David from making a huge and deeply regrettable error. David saw the intervention of Abigail as directly connected to God’s protection in his life. Dale Ralph Davis reflects on this moment by writing: “What loving hands construct the roadblocks to our foolishness!”¹

When Abigail returned home and after the festivities ended, she told Nabal about the situation with David and what she did. The text tells us that “his heart died within him, and he became as a stone . . . about ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal, and he died” (v. 38). We’ll come back to David’s response to this news.

Then David invited Abigail to be his wife. Actually, a better way to say this would be “invited her to be one of his wives.” If you are wondering about this, I would direct you to the forum that we hosted in the first part of the year called “[The Polygamy Problem](#).”

David’s response to the death of Nabal is summarized by this section:

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 Sam. 25:39).

He saw the Lord’s hand in protecting him from a reactionary decision. He recognized that his life was being directed by a divine providence that guided him away from a regrettable decision. Let me ask you and me some questions:

- Are you aware that sometimes God prevents us from actions that will be harmful?
- Are you marked by a wise open-handedness or a foolish reactivity?

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, [1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 260.

- Are you characterized by listening to those around you—to those whom the Lord might be using?

Dale Davis puts it this way: “What mercy sends frustration to our purposes! What kindness builds hindrances in our path.”²

Abishai: Not listening to a rash soldier (1 Sam. 26)

The second story is remarkably similar to the scenario that we looked at last week with the sparing of Saul’s life in the cave. David has another opportunity to take the life of Saul, but in this instance all he would need to do is allow Abishai to act. We’ll spend less time in this story because of how close it is to the previous one with a few differences.

According to 26:1, the Ziphites once again betrayed David to Saul. The same thing happened in chapter 23. When Saul pursues him again, David learns of the location of Saul’s camp. Verse 5 tells us that Saul is positioned in the middle of his troops with Abner, the commander of his army, nearby.

David and Abishai secretly infiltrate Saul’s camp, and they find him sleeping with his spear and Abner nearby. What happens next is really the key to this entire chapter. Abishai sees an opportunity to bring their life on the run to an end by killing Saul. Here’s what he says:

Then Abishai said to David, “God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice” (1 Sam. 26:8).

It’s not hard to hear the passion of Abishai, and I’m sure he could have done exactly what he suggested. Consider what David could have thought in this moment:

- He’s right. The Lord has delivered him into my hands.
- I’ll just let Abishai handle this and keep myself out of it.
- I’m the anointed, and Saul is hindering God’s work in the nation.

I wonder how tempting it must have been to go along with Abishai’s rash suggestion. And yet David holds his ground:

But David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless?” And David said, “As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD’s anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go” (1 Sam. 26:9-11).

² Dale Ralph Davis, [*1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 260.

David and Abishai take Saul's spear and water jug as they position themselves away from the camp in order to call out to Saul. In verses 13-16, David calls out to Abner, Saul's commander. Perhaps he recognizes that Saul is getting advice from the people around him, and he's trying to shake Saul's confidence in him. We get a sense of this in David's words to Saul:

And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods'" (1 Sam. 26:18-19).

Once again, Saul appears sorrowful (or is he being manipulative?).

Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake" (1 Sam. 26:21).

Our text concludes with David reaffirming his trust in God's providential leading:

The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation (1 Sam. 26:23-24).

And Saul blesses David:

Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them." So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place (1 Sam. 26:25).

Applications

We started our study this morning by asking a question: **"What might God be doing here?"** This text reminds us about the connection between God's work and our world. Let me invite you to consider three things:

1. Awareness: Remember that God is always working.

It's easier to remember that God is working when things are going well, but it's really important to remember this when life is hard or when you are frustrated or offended. God is orchestrating all the events of our lives, and we would do well to remember that he's working—right now.

2. Sober-mindedness: Remember to be cautious with your reactions.

This text is a caution, showing how easy it is to "lose our minds" because we are reacting to the circumstances in our lives. Our emotions are good, necessary, and helpful. But they are not always

immediately trustworthy. Allow some time for careful consideration. Slow down. Cool down. Allow the Lord to balance your reaction with sober-mindedness.

3. Wisdom: Remember to listen so you can learn.

Sometimes our frustrations, fear, or exhaustion causes us to become close-hearted to the wisdom of people around us. God uses and speaks through godly friends and leaders to protect us and change us. Be sure that you don't miss the opportunity to receive their wisdom.

Providential hindrances can be confusing and aggravating. But they're also a way that the Lord shapes us and guides us.

"What loving hands construct the roadblocks to our foolishness! What mercy sends frustration to our purposes! What kindness builds hindrances in our path!"³

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³ Dale Ralph Davis, [*1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 260.