

THE GENEROUS HEART

• A BIBLE STUDY FEAST FOR ALL •

Session 4 – Abigail and Nabal: *KNOW*

..... APPETISER

The following background notes are provided to help you in preparation for the main teaching and follow-up activities. A summary of the content is provided in the teaching video to be shown in the 'Today's Special' section of this session.

'Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.' (Psalm 100:3)

Psalm 100 places God at the centre of our giving. He is the one who created us and gave us everything we have. Without God, we wouldn't have the opportunity to serve or to share in worship. Everything we have is because of him.

Our Scripture today centres around a foolish landowner, a frustrated king and a wise woman. In 1 Samuel 25:1-42, we find David at a pivotal point in his leadership. Samuel, the one who anointed him to be king, had just died, and David was in exile. Saul continued to pursue David, consumed by jealousy and a mistaken belief that David wished him harm. Having recently had the opportunity to kill Saul, David had let him go free, keeping his anger under control, and following the will of God. In the story we will explore today, David had less control over his emotions, and it took Abigail's wise counsel to bring him back on track.

Today's story took place on the outskirts of Carmel near the wilderness of Maon. David and his soldiers were in exile with King Saul hot on their trail. They camped at Carmel alongside the home of a wealthy landowner and protected the flock while they stayed in the area. The landowner, Nabal, owned fields full of sheep and goats, but despite his success, he was *'crude and mean in all his dealings'* (1 Samuel 25:3). It was the sheep-shearing season, a time of celebration and feasting, and David hoped his men would be well-fed after protecting the flocks nearby.

'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 ill-treat 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 towards my men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.'"

(1 Samuel 25:5-8)

The future king was polite, respectful, and, along with his men, had worked hard to protect the flock. They awaited Nabal's gracious reply but were shocked by the response they received.

Nabal sneered at the young men and said, *'Who is this fellow David? Who does this son of Jesse think he is?'* (1 Samuel 25:10 NLT). Nabal knew precisely who he was dealing with and his disrespect triggered David's angry response. David offered his time and service, and Nabal refused to recognise it. There was no recognition of the way God had blessed him with an affluent lifestyle. Instead, his attitude to wealth and possession was laid bare.

'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 25:11).

Why should I give anything back? It's mine!

Nabal looked at everything he owned, the business he managed, and the land he possessed and gave himself credit for all of it. In Nabal's eyes, God played no role in his success, and any property or wealth was solely his. He sent the men on their way with no intention of fulfilling David's request.

'David's men turned round 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.' (1 Samuel 25:12-13)

To say that David saw red is an understatement. He'd spent years on the run from a king consumed with jealousy, but he continued to trust in God's promise for the future and faithfully served God throughout all these challenges. David had reached his limit, and Nabal's response tipped him over the edge. This should have been the easy bit! His men had guarded the flocks of Nabal, and now it was time to claim their reward. Nabal's response was the straw that broke the camel's back, and David mounted his revenge.

At this point, the story takes an unexpected turn!

'One of the servants told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. Yet these men were very good to us. They did not ill-treat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were

a wall around us the whole time we were herding our sheep near them. Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.'

(1 Samuel 25:14-17)

Despite obvious character flaws, Nabal had managed to marry Abigail, a beautiful, intelligent woman. For these servants to bypass the master of the house and approach his wife was significant within the culture of those days and a testament to Abigail's character. Abigail's reputation as a clear-headed, wise woman meant that her husband's servants knew precisely where to go in a time of crisis. It is here that we see not only Abigail's wisdom but also the way that her attitude to giving differed from her husband's. She could have easily gathered some bread and meat and sent the servants back to David's camp. Instead, Abigail made a different choice.

'Abigail acted quickly. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.' (1 Samuel 25:18-19)

Abigail went above and beyond her duty, gathering the food herself and personally acknowledging David's service. When she approached David, he was still angry about his mistreatment and the injustice of the situation. Abigail climbed down from her donkey, bowed low before David, and offered her generous gift of peace. She recognised who David was, God's anointed king.

She spoke wisdom into the heart of this frustrated leader and subtly reminded him of God's faithfulness during his childhood battle with Goliath.

"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 25:29-31)

David needed a reminder of why he served in the first place. A violent reaction to Nabal was not in God's plan and was driven by anger and frustration. It would only have created more chaos and discord, whereas Abigail's wisdom-filled response brought peace.

"Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought to him and said, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request." (1 Samuel 25:35)

Our story for today brings together three characters with different attitudes to giving. David and Nabal's altercation could have led to destruction if the peacemaker Abigail had not taken control of the situation with her wise words and generous heart. Abigail knew that God was at the centre of this situation and that the flocks, the raisin cakes, the land and the prosperity all belonged to God.

In his frustration at Nabal's lack of giving, David lost perspective and let anger get the better of him. From Nabal's perspective, God had nothing to do with his accumulated wealth. It was all his!

Within our churches, the theme of giving can raise difficult questions, and there are many different perspectives on the subject. Some have the attitude of Nabal, believing that they have earned their wealth and shouldn't have to give any of it away. Some get frustrated when they see others not giving in the way they 'should', and there are those, like Abigail, listening to God and responding generously.

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STARTERS

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Choose one of the starters to share with your group.

TRIBUTE TO ABIGAIL

In today's Scripture we meet a wise woman who was not afraid to stand up for what was right. See if you can answer these questions about wonderful women and their work.

1. Which book written by Emily Bronte was turned into a song by Kate Bush? *Wuthering Heights*
2. What is the first name of the founder of the Women's Social and Political Union who spearheaded the 'Votes for women' campaign in the UK? *Emmeline (Emmeline Pankhurst)*
3. What is the last name of the female author who wrote the award-winning memoir *I know why the caged bird sings*? *Angelou (Maya Angelou)*
4. What is the first name of the brave woman who played her part in the American Civil Rights movement when she refused to give up her seat on a bus? *Rosa (Rosa Parks)*
5. What is the first name of the first female General of The Salvation Army? *Evangeline (Evangeline Booth)*

6. What is the first name of the first British astronaut (and woman) to visit the Mir space station in 1991? *Helen (Helen Sharman)*
7. What is the first name of India's only female Prime Minister who was sadly assassinated in 1984? *Indira (Indira Gandhi)*
8. What is the last name of the multi award-winning actress who won Oscars for her performance in *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *Sophie's Choice*? *Streep (Meryl Streep)*

In order, take the first letter from each of your answers and write them down.

- **What** does this reveal about our relationship with God? **WE ARE HIS**

FOOLISH, FRUSTRATED OR WISE

Ask the group to think about a time when they have been foolish, shown frustration or acted wisely. Give the group some thinking time or share your own example. Then, as a group, share stories of foolishness, frustration or wisdom.

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TODAY'S SPECIAL

Today we are focusing on the following verse from Psalm 100:

'Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.' (Psalm 100:3)

Watch the teaching video to discover how this verse links with our theme for today - the story of Abigail and Nabal.

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MAINS

In Psalm 100:3 we read: *'Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.'*

This verse places God at the centre of our giving.

- **What** is your response to this verse?
- **How** could our understanding of this verse impact our view on giving?

In our session today we are going to spend time reflecting on the actions of the foolish landowner, frustrated leader and wise woman. Each character in this story has much to teach us about our attitude to giving and motivation for service.

You may want to separate the group into three subgroups and have each one focus on a character, feeding back key learning points later on to the wider group.

FOOLISH LANDOWNER

Read 1 Samuel 25:1-11.

Nabal was a wealthy landowner who found it difficult to give freely to God.

- **Do you** think it is more or less difficult to be generous in our giving if we have more to give? Discuss your reasons.
- **What** was Nabal's attitude to his wealth and how did it impact his willingness to respond positively to David's request?
- **What** is your response to Nabal's questions in 1 Samuel 25:10? What are the modern-day equivalents to this kind of response?

In 1 Samuel 25:3 we discover that Nabal was a Calebite. This meant that he was a descendent of Caleb, a man of great faith who encouraged the Israelites to take possession of the Promised Land in Numbers chapters 13-14.

- **What** responsibility do we hold to pass on to future generations about the importance of placing God at the centre of our giving?
- **In what** ways was Nabal responsible for his outlook, regardless of the strong faith of his ancestors?

Despite comments to the contrary, Nabal knew that David was God's anointed choice to be king.

- **In what** ways was Nabal disrespectful to those God had placed in authority?

Summarise Nabal's understanding of Psalm 100:3.

FRUSTRATED LEADER

Read 1 Samuel 25:12-13; 21-22.

Think back to the moment David was chosen by Samuel to be God's anointed king (1 Samuel 16:1-13). David's father, Jesse, didn't even bother to bring his son from the field to be presented to Samuel. Now fast forward to the moment David's men brought back news from Nabal.

- **What** buttons do you think Nabal pushed in David when he said, *'Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse?'* (1 Samuel 25:10).
- **How** do our experiences and beliefs about ourselves impact the way we respond to others within our church in relation to giving our time, talents and finances?

Read 1 Samuel 25:21-22.

- **What** was David's motivation for guarding Nabal's property?
- **Is it OK** to give, expecting something in return? If so, why/why not?

In Samuel 24 we discover that David had the opportunity to kill Saul but refused to take it. King Saul had hunted him relentlessly and tried to kill him and yet David controlled his emotions and walked away.

- **Why** do you think David's response to Nabal was so different from his response to King Saul?
- **Read** 1 Samuel 25:1. What difficult loss had David just experienced, and how, if at all, do you think that impacted his choices?
- **As you** think about David's frustrations as a leader, working hard for the rest of the flock, in what ways do you empathise with his poor response in this situation?

WISE WOMAN

Read 1 Samuel 25:14-19; 28-31.

- **Thinking** about the culture of the time, what does it say about Abigail's character that the servants brought their concerns to her?

- **How** does David's initial request list differ from what Abigail provided?
- **Why** do you suppose that Abigail chose to give so generously?
- **What** kind of difficulties can arise within partnerships where one person has a different attitude to giving from the other? (Hopefully they are not on the same scale as Abigail and Nabal!).
- **What** solutions would you suggest for couples to work around issues like this?
- **Do you** think it was OK for Abigail to keep her abundant giving a secret from her husband? If so, why/why not?

Abigail spoke words of wisdom into a heated situation. Without getting into the specific details, share where God is prompting you to speak wisdom into a challenging situation in your church.

- **What** was David's response to Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:32-34?
- **In what** ways can we be like Abigail and remind the church that *"the Lord is God, it is he who made us, and we are his"*? (Psalm 100:3).

When it comes to giving our time, gifts, talents, and finances we can all demonstrate the characteristics of Nabal, David and Abigail:

We have moments where we see our wealth as our own and struggle to give generously.

We have moments where we are overwhelmed with frustration as others sit back and give little.

We have moments where we recognise God's blessings in our life and give abundantly to others. In those moment we see that it is God who gave us everything in the first place.

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DESSERT

- **In what** way do you relate to the foolishness of Nabal, the frustration of David or the wisdom of Abigail?
- **What** have you discovered about giving during this session?

It might be a fresh understanding of this Scripture, a verse to ponder or a life lesson to apply.

PRAYER

Father,

Forgive us for the times when we forget that you are the one who provides for us.

Forgive us for the moments when we want to keep hold of our wealth and refuse to share it with others.

Thank you for your faithfulness and wisdom. Thank you that we are yours. May we always remember that, as we live for you each day.

Amen.

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SIDES

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The *'Sides'* and *'For Sharing'* courses provide additional activities that can be used as part of the main session or at another time. Ideally these would be used after the *'Mains'* course of the main session.

KNOW MY HEART

In Psalm 139:23-24 David wrote these words:

'Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' (Psalm 139:23-24)

David recognised that our motivation for worship, giving and service can be questionable at times and asked God to search his heart.

Listen to the song **'Know my Heart'** by Sara Groves:

Reflect on the questions raised in the song and how they challenge you:

**Why do I pray – do I pray to say I prayed an hour?
Why do I love – do I want you beholden to me?
Why do I help – do I want to hear my name called out? Why do I sing?**

**Search me and know my heart, O God.
See if there is any wrong thing in me.
All I have ever really wanted are clean hands and a pure heart.**

**Why do I tithe – do I tithe so I can get a blessing?
Why do I praise – do I praise to do the right thing?
Why do I serve – do I serve so others will serve me? Why do I sing?**

**Search me and know my heart, oh God.
See if there is any wrong thing in me.
All I have ever really wanted are clean hands and a pure heart**

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

Read the following Scriptures together. Jot down the key message from each verse and discuss how they deepen your understanding of the importance of giving to God.

- 2 Corinthians 9:6-7
- Malachi 3:10
- 1 Timothy 6:17-19
- Matthew 6:1-4
- Mark 12:41-44
- Proverbs 3:27
- Hebrews 13:16
- John 3:16

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FOR SHARING
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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Read the following scenario together and discuss the modern-day equivalent for Nabal and Abigail's role within the story. The following paragraphs set the scene:

David has recently planted a new church and cares for his flock of troubled congregants. Due to difficult circumstances, David had walked away from the church of his childhood. One of the church elders, his mentor Samuel, recently passed away and David's grief is still raw. Samuel pointed out David's potential when he was a boy and told him that one day he would lead the church. These comments did not go down well with Pastor Saul who had always thought his own son Jonathan would step into his shoes. Due to mounting jealousy, and after a period of deep depression, David established a new church in a struggling community. It's hard, but he loves his work even with the challenges it brings.

Nabal is a successful local businessman. Many of Nabal's staff members struggle to make ends meet and regularly have to use the food bank at David's church. When he reads in the local paper that Nabal has had a particularly successful year financially, David sends members of his team to ask him for a donation to the food bank.

Over to you to discuss what happens next!

After creating the modern-day version of this story, group members may want to take it away and create a play script, short story or poem.

BACKGROUND MUSIC

Listed below there is a selection of music that fits with the theme of today's session.

- **'So Will I (100 Billion X)'** - Hillsong Worship
- **'Perfect Wisdom of Our God'** - Keith & Kristyn Getty

SALVATION ARMY SONGBOOK

62. 'The Lord's my shepherd'

63. 'The Lord's my shepherd'

66. 'This is my Father's world'

562. 'Yes, the Lord is my Shepherd'

565. 'All I once held dear'

691. 'When you feel weakest... Keep on believing'

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Takeaway!

A psalm. For giving grateful **PRAISE**.

SHOUT for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

WORSHIP the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

KNOW that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

ENTER his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his **LOVE** endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

(Psalm 100: 1–5)

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