

Week 11: *David and Abigail*

Hook



Main Point: A godly person leaves vengeance to the Lord.

Emily Post was a New York society woman whose name has become synonymous with etiquette and manners. In 1922, at age 50, Emily published her book *Etiquette*, a text that served as the authority on social conduct. The author reflects on manners, saying, “Good manners reflect something from inside – an innate sense of consideration for others and respect for self.”¹

Post provided more than 600 pages of instruction in the first edition of *Etiquette*; take the quiz below and see how well you know Post’s rules of etiquette. The correct answers are in bold.

1. When a man is walking on the sidewalk with a woman, where should he be positioned?
 - a. Behind her to protect her from unforeseen threats
 - b. A half step in front to lead the way
 - c. **Next to the curb to protect her from harm that might come from the road**
2. The dinner hour in America varies. In New York, at what time should dinner be served?
 - a. **8:00 p.m.**
 - b. 7:45 p.m.
 - c. 6 p.m.

3. What is the difference between a garden party and a tea party?
 - a. A garden party is for special occasions only
 - b. Tea parties are more formal than garden parties
 - c. **A garden party is held outside**

4. What is the maximum number of courses a formal dinner may consist of?
 - a. Five
 - b. Six
 - c. **Eight (Hors d'oeuvres, soup, fish, entrée, roast, salad, dessert, coffee)²**

Q: Does etiquette still matter in a time of working from home, take-out dinner, texting, and online shopping? Why or why not?

Q: What do you communicate to others when you demonstrate good manners?

Q: In what ways might poor etiquette cause problems for someone?

Transition: Today's adventure in the life of David introduces a man whose manners were so terrible that they cost him his life.

RECAP: In this section of our study (weeks 8–17), David was on the run from Saul. It's a long period in our study and in the text because it was a long period in David's life – eight years. The text will continue to contrast Saul and David, showing David's integrity and trust in the Lord. Last week, we saw David choose not to kill Saul when he had the opportunity, out of respect for Saul as the Lord's anointed. The main point last week was "A godly person leaves judgment to the Lord." This week is very similar – A godly person leaves "vengeance to the Lord." But instead of seeing David's interaction with Saul, we see his interactions with another powerful and wicked man, Nabal, and his wife, Abigail.

It is during this time that David wrote most of the psalms that are labeled in relation to particular events in his life (Psalm 56, 34, 57, 142, 52, 63, 54). Other psalms may have been written during this time as well, but they are not specifically labeled as such. This season of David's life, particularly, taught him to lean on God as his refuge and fortress.

Week 11: *The Contrast Continues: David and Abigail*

Book

Main Point: A godly person leaves vengeance to the Lord.

1 Samuel 25:1–11 and Romans 12:13 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Godly people show hospitality and kindness to strangers.

Q: Why did David expect that Nabal would show him hospitality at shearing time?

At the end of the last chapter, Saul and David had somewhat reconciled. Saul had broken down in repentance, confessing that David was more righteous than himself. He had also confessed that he knew David would be king one day. He asked that when David became king, he would spare Saul's family and not blot out his descendants. David agreed, but he did not return to the palace with Saul, and into his service. He remained in the wilderness with his own army.

While out in the wilderness, David had to figure out how to provide for his men. Manna wasn't raining from heaven as it did for the Israelites in Exodus and Numbers. Yet David had learned to trust God as provider while he was in the wilderness, too. Many of David's psalms describe God's provision in the wilderness: "The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain" (Psalm 65:12–13). The Lord may not have rained food down supernaturally from heaven for his men, but David knew it was the Lord who provided for them. As he wrote, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).

At the very beginning of his exile, we saw David ask the high priest for the showbread and what happened as a result (1 Samuel 21–22). Here, again, David politely and respectfully asked someone for food for his men. In their day-to-day lives, David and his men fended for themselves in the wilderness, but it was sheep-shearing time, a time of feasting, like the gathering of the harvest.³ David and his men had built a relationship with some shepherds out in the wilderness and had protected their sheep from thieves and predators (25:15–16), and David was hoping the sheep owner would let them share in the feast (25:8). Since he only sent 10 men, it's unlikely he expected Nabal to provide enough for all 600 of his men.⁴ All he said was, "Please give whatever you have at hand," not an amount that would be a huge sacrifice for Nabal.

The text tells us that Nabal was very rich and had an abundance of flocks. David didn't storm in with his 600 men and take whatever he wanted, nor did he demand that Nabal owed him the food. He respectfully asked for a modest amount that would be returning a kindness, a typical expectation in their honor/shame culture.⁵ David even spoke with humility and deference, calling himself "your son" though he ranked more highly than Nabal (25:8).⁶

David showed hospitality to strangers in the wilderness by protecting Nabal's shepherds and sheep, but Nabal did not. In the ancient world, showing hospitality wasn't just good manners; it was a moral obligation that grew out of living a nomadic existence in a harsh desert landscape. Hospitality in their culture wasn't about throwing a great dinner party as we tend to think of it. It was about protection and provision for a traveler in need. It wasn't just a nice thing to do, it was a command of biblical law to care for the stranger and even love them as you love yourself (Leviticus 19:34).

When three visitors appeared at Abraham's tent, he immediately offered them food and drink, even going so far as to prepare a choice calf for them (Genesis 18:1–8). Later, Lot would not let them sleep in the town square, but insisted they stay in his house to protect them from the wicked men of the city (Genesis 19:1–8). This wasn't because there was something special about those visitors (though we later find out there was); it was the expectation of any righteous Israelite toward any stranger who needed provision and protection (Judges 13:15; 19:16–21; 2 Kings 4:8–11; Job 31:32, et. al.). David provided that kind of hospitality for Nabal's shepherds in the wilderness, and he expected Nabal would do the same for him and his men.

In the new covenant, hospitality is also an expectation of every believer. Some think of hospitality as a spiritual gift that only some people have because we tend to think of hospitality as having the ability to throw a good party or being an especially welcoming host. But when Paul commanded believers to "practice hospitality" in Romans 12, two things show us that ours is a misunderstanding. First, it's not listed as a spiritual gift (12:6–8), but it's listed in the very next section, which gives commands that apply to *all* believers about what it means to love others and do what is good (12:9–21). Also, the phrase just before "show hospitality" is "contribute to the needs of the saints." These two phrases are parallel lines, as in Hebrew poetry. They don't mean the same thing, but they are connected. Hospitality isn't about being an especially good host in a Martha Stewart kind of way; it's about sharing our homes and resources with those in need, both believers (v. 13) and strangers, like the Old Testament's definition of hospitality.

Q: In what ways is God calling the Church to rethink what it means to practice hospitality and what it looks like to provide for and protect the stranger?

Q: In what ways is God calling you individually to practice hospitality?

1 Samuel 25:12–31 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Wise people are humble peacemakers in difficult situations.

Q: How was Abigail's attitude and posture toward David different from Nabal's?

Q: Why did Abigail have faith that God was with David?

When Nabal refused to share his feast with David, David reacted with violence. This may seem like an overreaction to us, but it's actually very similar to Gideon's reaction when

the officials of Sukkoth and Peniel refused to give food to his army (Judges 8:7–9). This doesn't mean his reaction was righteous. We learn later that had he killed Nabal and his household, then bloodguilt would have been on him (25:26). It was certainly an emotional response but an understandable one if you understand the way honor worked in their culture. This was not how God would have His people react, but in many ancient cultures, this is exactly what a man such as David would have been expected to do to avenge his honor.⁷

David reacted so strongly, not just because Nabal refused, but because of the way he refused. Nabal surely knew who David was; everyone in Israel knew him (18:16). His asking, "Who is the son of Jesse?" was a slam against David's honor. He also challenged David's integrity by calling him a slave who had escaped his master (Saul), as if David were the one at fault. David had pleaded innocence the whole time; this, too, was a major affront to his honor.

One may try to argue that Nabal was acting out of loyalty to Saul as the current king, but he didn't say that, and both his servants and his wife attributed his response to simply being a "worthless man" (25:17, 25). Nabal's name means "fool," and the text describes him as "harsh and badly behaved" (25:3). Proverbs, which was later written by David's son, Solomon, makes strong contrasts between the wise and the fool. Fools despise wisdom, instruction and knowledge, and most of all, they do not fear God (Proverbs 1:7, 22, 29). David's psalms tell us that "the fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1); and "A foolish people reviles Your name" (Psalm 74:18). This story shows a strong contrast between Nabal and Abigail's responses to David, not only in practicing hospitality, but also showing humility and honor to God.

At the very least, Nabal should have offered David hospitality, just as a rule. Beyond that, David's men had shown him the kindness of protecting his sheep, and he would have owed David a return of kindness.⁸ But on top of all of that, had Nabal really known the Lord, he would have recognized David as God's true servant as Abigail did (25:28–31). Abigail showed David honor by bowing before him and calling herself his servant (25:23). She said she believed David was fighting the Lord's battles, even though his army was not the official army of Israel, referencing his battle with Goliath by using the metaphor of a sling (25:29). She even said she believed God would one day make him king (25:30). The contrast in the passage is clear – Nabal was a proud fool who didn't recognize a man after God's own heart, but Abigail was a humble woman who feared God and honored His true servant. It's worth noting that Nabal's servants knew this about both of them, since they went behind Nabal's back to ask Abigail to intervene (25:14–17). By her humility, fear of the Lord, and wisdom, Abigail diffused a very emotionally charged situation and was a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9).

Q: How does humility help us to be peacemakers in difficult situations?

Q: In what ways is God calling you to be a wise, humble peacemaker like Abigail? How can you intervene in difficult situations with wisdom and discretion as she did?

1 Samuel 25:32–44 and Romans 12:17–21 again [Read]

Talking Point 3: Godly people do not repay evil for evil but leave vengeance to the Lord.

Q: How did Abigail not only save herself and her household but also save David?

Q: How did the Lord avenge David's honor for him?

Abigail not only saved her household by her actions, she also saved David from bringing guilt upon himself by taking matters into his own hands and avenging his honor with Nabal. She stopped David before he got to the house to attack Nabal, but when she met him, she credited the Lord with restraining David from bloodguilt (25:26). Even though she was the one who convinced David not to attack, the Lord was the One who put it in Nabal's servant's heart to approach Abigail and who put it in Abigail's heart to do something about it. He's the One who made the timing all work out. As a true servant of God, she gave glory to God, even for her own good deeds (Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 2:10).

David blessed Abigail for her discretion, her wisdom and discernment – the opposite of her husband, the fool. He also thanked her for saving him from bringing guilt on himself. Then the Lord avenged David's honor by striking Nabal dead (v. 38). This kind of direct vengeance from the Lord doesn't always happen in this life, yet God calls us to leave vengeance to Him. He promises He will repay what needs to be repaid (Romans 12:19). Revenge is not good for our hearts. People say holding on to anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. It consumes and destroys us from within. And revenge doesn't fix our hurt; it only brings more hurt. By telling us to leave vengeance to Him, God is protecting us from that kind of anger. He's protecting us from ourselves. This wisdom would make it into David's son, Solomon's, book of Proverbs (20:22), the Psalms (94:1) and Paul's writings, using language similar to David's in this story, repaying good with evil and vice versa (v. 21).

In the last chapter, David chose not to take revenge on Saul, and it seemed he had already learned this lesson about leaving vengeance to the Lord. Yet here, in the very next chapter, he almost took vengeance into his own hands with Nabal, showing us that we are all susceptible to these kinds of feelings. Even if we are people after God's own heart. Even if we have the Holy Spirit within us. Even if we have made the right choice at other times in other situations. We must continually make a conscious effort to fight these feelings and put our trust in the Lord. It also shows us the importance of having believing friends who can hold us accountable the way Abigail did for David.

Q: How have you seen even more brokenness coming out of situations when people sought revenge or vindication instead of leaving it to the Lord?

Q: Describe how God honored your choices to give up the need for vengeance or vindication in the past.

Q: How has giving up the need for vengeance been freeing for you?

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Took

Main Point: A godly person leaves vengeance to the Lord.

Choose a neighbor or coworker to show hospitality to this week. Make a plan right now and be specific; name the person, the act, and the need you will be meeting. Whether it be someone you need to make peace with or a new person who needs community, there are opportunities in your life to live out the Gospel. Prayerfully follow through on your plan this week, and ask that God would use this opportunity to point back to Him and impact the kingdom.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Why is it so easy to get angry and want revenge? Think through practical ways to diffuse anger in an emotionally charged situation. How can you calm yourself when you are angry? How can you intervene when others are angry and calm them in a way that is safe and wise?

PRAY for God to help you be a peacemaker. Ask Him for His heart toward people who have wronged you so you can let go of your anger and need for vengeance and see them as He sees them. Ask Him for His wisdom and strength to be a peacemaker in the middle of other people's conflicts.

ACT: Make peace. Look around you at situations in which you see conflict between other people, whether it's family, friends, or coworkers. Pray for the Lord to reveal to you how you can be a peacemaker, not in a way that feels as though you're butting into their business, but in a way that is helpful and wise, and diffuses tension. Then act on God's leading.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we'll see Saul go back on his word to pursue David again, but David keeps his word and spares Saul's life again.

¹ <https://emilypost.com/about/emily-post>

² <https://www.zoo.com/quiz/is-your-etiquette-as-good-as-emily-posts>

³ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

⁴ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁵ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁶ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

⁷ E. Randolph Richards and Richard James, *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

⁸ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).