

The Growth of a Leader

Courage to Lead Series

1 Samuel 25:1-26:25

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If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 25. I think this will work just fine because I mentioned two weeks ago these three chapters—24, 25, 26—need to be really viewed together. There's one big lesson that I think is the point of these chapters, and that's really what we need to walk away with. In order to do this, there's just no way I can read every word. I hate to do this, but there are parts of the story I'm just going to tell you, other parts that we will read together.

We've been wrestling with this question from two weeks ago: If you could get away with anything, what would you do? Does your life look different at church than it does at school, than it does at work, than it does at home? Does it look different in private than it looks in public? If so, then you have to wrestle with the fact that your life is guided much more by your environment, and basically it's what you can get away with in that environment. That is very different from having an internal moral compass, a conviction that guides you through every environment of your life.

As an ancient king, Saul was a law unto himself. He could virtually get away with anything. The result of that was that he slaughtered men, women, and children, so the question is: How will David be different from that? And the answer is: By the lessons he will learn in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*, and clearly again this text reminds us that God is the primary teacher.

Chapter 25, verse 1, we're simply told that Samuel dies. Samuel and Saul basically parted company roughly seven years previous to this—would have been chapter 15—and we're just told that Samuel dies and the nation mourns. Probably not since Moses and Joshua had the nation known a leader that had so affected the nation, so a significant moment. We pick it up in verse 2:

Now *there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel (now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite), that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep.* (*NASB, 1 Samuel 25:2-4)

So this sets up two new characters in the drama in this chapter: Abigail, who is described as being **beautiful and intelligent**, and Nabal, who is described as being **harsh and evil**. Even the name Nabal—in Hebrew the word means fool. So, for example, when the psalm says, "**The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God,'**" it's literally the Hebrew word Nabal. So he is consistent with his name.

He's rich and it's time to shear the sheep. Now in the ancient world, this was party time. Sheep shearing time was basically harvest time. The wool came in, and it was a time to party and celebrate much the same way they did when the harvest came in. However, in the ancient world life was dangerous all the time. Imagine being out basically in the wild as shepherds with your sheep. Not only did you have to worry about predators, but you constantly worried about thieves. You constantly worried about raiders. It was just dangerous. From time to time there would be groups—

typically groups of men—that would take it upon themselves to be guardians of the flock. This wasn't really contracted. It really wasn't agreed upon. It was just a custom. So David and his men really had no way to make a living, so this makes sense. They became the guardians of the flock. They kept out predators. They kept out thieves. They kept out raiders. They just basically circled the area where the shepherds and the flock were. The custom was then when it was party time, when it was sheep shearing time, that's basically when the fortune was made, that representatives would go to the owner and there would be some sort of compensation, typically food, wine, something that they could use to survive. So what David does is fairly consistent with the tradition.

One verse to bring to your attention would be verse 6. Three times in that verse, he uses the word **peace**, the Hebrew word *shalom, shalom, shalom*. The Hebrew concept of *shalom* means basically a mutual flourishing, and that's really what this is about—everybody working together in order to flourish. So you have Nabal who's rich; you have the shepherds; you have the sheep, and you have David's men. If they all work together, they can make this work, and that's an illustration of *shalom*.

So David sends his men. He basically says, "Send greetings; use my name, and tell him we'll be happy with whatever Nabal chooses to give us." So the men come, and their report is, "We have operated with integrity. We haven't taken any of the sheep. We haven't abused any of the shepherds. We've conducted ourselves with the highest degree of honor, and we'll be happy with whatever you choose to give us." But Nabal is a fool. Nabal is harsh and evil, so he responds in verse 10:

...“Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master.”

Now I don't think Nabal was saying, "I don't know who David is," but rather he's mocking; he's questioning; he's clearly siding with Saul. "David's nobody. He's from Jesse, and Jesse's nobody. As a matter of fact, this is just a bunch of sinners and misfits and losers—servants and slaves that have broken away from their masters—and there's rebels all over the land, and I don't owe you anything." So it was a very strong rebuke. David's men go back to David and report, "This is what Nabal said," and David is immediately furious. This is embarrassing. David said, "Oh, just use my name," and Nabal mocked David's name, so it's embarrassing. He's angry. We might say there's some misplaced aggression here where David is already hurt. He's frustrated; he's angry with Saul. His life has been miserable now for years, and some of his anger now from all of that is turned on Nabal, and he's furious.

There's twice in this text where David uses terminology that I would consider to be vulgar. It's footnoted in your Bibles, but even the footnote tends to be very mild. Because this is a family environment, I'm not going to tell you what the vulgar terminology is, but the intent of the text is to tell you he is furious with this, so rather than *shalom, shalom, shalom*, the repetition in verse 13 is **sword, sword, sword**. He is now going to do some serious damage to Nabal and his family and his shepherds and everyone who is there.

Starting in verse 14, one of Nabal's men goes to Abigail and says, "This is what happened. David's men conducted themselves with honor and integrity, but your husband is a fool and now he has made David angry, and we are all in serious trouble." As a matter of fact, he ends that discussion in verse 17 by saying, talking about Nabal:

"...he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him."

In other words, they can't talk to Nabal. He won't listen, so the only chance they have is they're going to his wife, hoping that Abigail can do something, or they're all dead. So Abigail immediately puts together wine; she puts together food. She puts together basically what was owed to David and his men, packs it up, heads out to meet David, trying to cut him off before there's a great slaughter.

Now, I know over the years there have been people that say that Abigail is codependent with her husband. They say things like, you know, "She should have been submissive," and all of this. It has nothing to do with that. As a matter of fact, Abigail is presented in this text as a very heroic figure. Her husband is a fool, and innocent people are about to be slaughtered. She actually functions as a prophet of God to speak truth to David before David does something he will regret for the rest of his life. So she goes out; she meets David coming in. David's very clear that he plans to slaughter everyone involved and throws out one of his vulgar terms in verse 22. Starting then in verse 23:

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, since the LORD has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. Now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil will not be found in you all your days. Should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel, this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the LORD deals well with my lord, then remember your maidservant." (Vs. 25:23-31)

So this is the classic speech by Abigail. What she says is highly significant, and she speaks to David basically as a prophet. So she's laying out this speech, and there are several parts of this I want to highlight. In verse 26, she refers to **...since the LORD has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself**. There's no question what she's referring to is the incident in the cave with Saul in the previous chapter. I think David planned to kill Saul. His men said, "This is our moment." I think David agreed with that. I think David was this close to doing that. God convicted his heart that he could not take matters into his own hands to kill the Lord's anointed, to avenge himself, and he says he was convicted. That was the wrong thing to do, and he chose not to. That was the beginning of the lesson that David needed to learn, so Abigail is reminding David, "That's the lesson you learned. Don't do this."

She goes on then to identify in verse 28 that evil will not be what defines David's leadership. David is about to make a huge mistake. He is about to be Saul. He is about to slaughter innocent people because he's really angry, and she is prophetic in saying that evil will not be what defines David's leadership, but he's got to stop before he makes a huge mistake.

Verse 29 is interesting because it's talking about when David's enemies come upon him that God will protect him in this *pouch*, and He will put the enemies in a sling and fling them away. The pouch is the word used to describe the little pouch where David put his stones and the sling in the encounter with Goliath. So again Abigail is bringing up the past. "You have to trust God that when your enemies come upon you God will deliver you just like he delivered you against the giant Goliath." So there's all this review of the past and what God has done and what David has learned.

Starting then in verse 31, what she's saying is, "Once God makes you king, this will be a significant blot on your record—that the people will not see any difference between you and Saul if you go through with this and slaughter these innocent people." Right now David is being very Saul-like, and God in His sovereignty has intervened, and He's speaking truth, telling David not to do this. It's very interesting to think about how David's life might have been different if he would have killed Saul in the cave, if he would have slaughtered Nabal and his people. Would David have been king? What would that have looked like? How would that have affected his reign? There's no way to answer those questions, but this is a very significant moment in time. David is about to make a huge mistake, so Abigail urges and pleads with him to rethink this.

Starting then in verse 32, David listens. He hears from Abigail the voice of God, the voice of Yahweh who is telling him to stop, to not avenge himself, to not take matters into his own hands but to trust God. David has to learn just because he can get away with it doesn't make it right. As king he will be able to get away with anything. He has to be guided by something deeper, by a deep moral conviction of what's right and wrong, so to his credit he clearly identifies that Abigail is right, that this is from God. He identifies that he did plan to slaughter all of Nabal's men and chooses not to. He has listened. Verse 36:

Then 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 did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. But in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone. About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died. (Vs. 25:36-38)

So Abigail comes home. Nabal's drunk. She waits till he sobers up. She tells him what almost happened. He has some sort of what most think is like a stroke, and ten days later he dies. This isn't a coincidence. The text is very clear the Lord struck him dead. So David trusts God to avenge him, and God deals with Nabal. This is a very significant moment in David's life.

David then goes on to marry Abigail. She would have been very vulnerable as a rich widow. She asks that David remember her. David does, takes her as a wife. The text tells us David takes a second wife. The text doesn't say it's right; the text doesn't say it's wrong. It's just simply recording a fact. Therefore, we'll leave it at that and deal with it at a later time...maybe a much later time. *(laughter)* We're also told that Saul, who had given his daughter Michal to David, now basically gives her to someone else, so she's no longer David's wife. Maybe he thought because David is no longer his son-in-law, he has no right to the throne. Anyway, that wife is out; two new wives in.

Chapter 26: The Ziphites for the second time give David up. Again, it's not because the Ziphites have a high loyalty to Saul and they believe in him and they believe in his leadership. It's not that at all. They are absolutely terrified of Saul because Saul is so unpredictable. They're well aware of what happened in Nob, and they're fearful that if Saul figures out David is among the Ziphites he'll

slaughter all of them. So they send word. "Hey, by the way, David's in our backyard. Why don't you come and get him?"

So Saul once again pulls together three thousand troops. We wrestled with, in chapter 24, whether Saul was repentant or whether Saul was just sorry. Now we get our answer. He was just sorry. He kind of felt bad with the cave incident, but now he's back at it. He wants to kill David but David has spies, and the spies know exactly where Saul is. In some ways the hunter now becomes the hunted, and David's spies figure out where they're spending the night. So with that we pick it up in verse 6.

Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." So David and Abishai came to the people by night, and behold, Saul lay sleeping inside the circle of the camp with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the people were lying around him. Then Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time." But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be without guilt?" David also said, "As the LORD lives, surely the LORD will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go." So David took the spear and the jug of water from *beside* Saul's head, and they went away, but no one saw or knew *it*, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a sound sleep from the LORD had fallen on them. (1 Samuel 26:6-12)

So David knows where Saul is. In typical fashion the army sleeps in a circle. The king sleeps in the middle. It sounds like Abner and some of the army were in maybe a smaller circle. Saul's in the middle so David goes down with Abishai, and there is Saul's spear stuck by his head. Remember this spear has come up again and again in the Saul narrative. For example, there were two times that Saul hurled this spear at David to kill him, so there's kind of a play here because Abishai certainly knew that Saul had flung his spear twice at David, so what he's saying is, "I know that twice Saul flung this spear at you, David, but let me get one shot." Basically what he says is, "I won't need two shots. One shot will do it." So he's kind of powering up. He's the tough guy; he's going to take Saul out.

But David doesn't consider that option for a moment. When you look at chapter 24, the cave story, and then you look at 26, this story, there are a lot of similarities, but there are also significant differences. There's a lot of language that causes the reader to compare what is alike and what is different about the two stories, and the thing that is most different is there is no moment where David is thinking, "I will kill Saul." Abishai says the same thing that David's men said in chapter 24, but he doesn't even consider it. There's no conviction. There's no sense of that. David knows that it's not his place to avenge himself on Saul. He doesn't even consider it. All he wants to do is take the spear and a jug of water in order to demonstrate again to Saul, "I could have killed you. That's not what I'm doing. Why are you chasing me and trying to kill me?"

It is interesting in verse 12. Even though David told Abishai to take the sword and the water jug, verse 12 says that David did it. You almost get this sense that he didn't quite trust what Abishai would do if he got that close to Saul's head, so David changed his mind. He did it himself, and they

take off. The end of that paragraph tells us that everyone was put in a sleep by God. As a matter of fact, it's the same word that's used of Adam being put to sleep in Genesis 2 when God removed a rib.

So David gets far enough away to be safe, gets up on the side of the mountain, and calls out to Saul and his army. The first bit is David rebuking Abner and the army. He's mocking them; he's calling them out. "Your job is to protect the king, and you did a lousy job. I got all the way to Saul's head, and I could have killed him," and he demonstrates that by having the spear and the jug of water. As a matter of fact, he says, "You did such a lousy job. If I was the king, I'd put you to death."

But then it moves into this conversation to Saul. Verse 17, Saul recognizes the voice, calls out to David. David responds back. It's very similar to the dialogue in chapter 24. "Why are you doing this? Why are you trying to kill me? I mean you no harm," David says, "If I've sinned, if God's revealed a sin then let me know what it is. I'll offer a sin offering. Otherwise, stop listening to these people telling you that I'm trying to kill you." David talks about being removed from the inheritance which means out of the land, which will make more sense next week, and away from worship. He can't get near the tabernacle. He can't get near the priests. He can't get near the nation's worship, and he asks why Saul is doing that to him. Verse 21:

Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error." David replied, "Behold the spear of the king! Now let one of the young men come over and take it. The LORD will repay each man *for* his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD delivered you into *my* hand today, but I refused to stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed. Now behold, as your life was highly valued in my sight this day, so may my life be highly valued in the sight of the LORD, and may He deliver me from all distress." Then Saul said to David, "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail." So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place. (Vs:21-25)

Very similar to the discussion in chapter 24. Saul acknowledges he's wrong; David's right. He's evil; David is righteous, and David again responds that the lesson he's learned is that his life is in God's hands, that God will take care of him, that God will avenge his enemies and, at the end of the day, God will reward the righteous, and God will deal with the wicked. Saul invites David to come on home. "I won't do it again." But we're still left with the question: Is Saul sorry or is Saul genuinely repentant? David is not convinced he's repentant, so David's not going home. Saul goes home; David flees. Next week we find him among the Philistines and another rather strange story.

If you take chapters 24, 25, and 26 together, which I think is the intent, what you see is the growth of a leader. What is it that David will learn in the *Wilderness School of Leadership* that will cause him to be different from Saul? When Saul had power and position and could do anything he wanted, he slaughtered men, women, and children. David will be king with the same ability to do whatever he wants. How will it be different? This is the lesson David has to learn. So in chapter 24 I think he had every intent to kill Saul. His men thought it was a good idea. I think he thought it was a good idea, but God convicted his heart that that is not David's role. Just because you can get away with it doesn't make it right—that you can't kill God's anointed. You have to trust God, and God will be the judge.

I think that was a significant moment for David, but it wasn't 'lesson learned', so you get to chapter 25, and Nabal really makes him angry, and immediately he goes into action, and he fully intends to slaughter innocent people because he is angry and because he can get away with it. So God raises up Abigail to intercede and speaks through her to say, "David, don't do this. Remember the Saul lesson. Remember Goliath. Remember that God is faithful. God wants you to be a different king. If you do this, you will have this evil stain on your record the entire time you're king." So God speaks through Abigail, and David realizes he was about to make a huge mistake, that he has to trust God, and God will avenge his enemies, and sure enough, in ten days Nabal is dead.

So then you get to chapter 26. Once again, David has Saul in a position where he can kill him, but I don't think there's even a hint that David intended to kill Saul. He's very clear. "That's not my role. I could do it. I could get away with it, but it's not the right thing to do." This is the progression and growth of a leader. This is what is necessary for David to learn to become the greatest king in Israel, and typically these lessons are only learned in the *Wilderness School of Leadership* with God as the primary teacher.

It is an awesome thing to want to be used by God, to be serious as a Christ-follower, to want to influence others for Christ, to make a difference in this world. That's a beautiful thing, but if you're serious about that, there are some fundamental basics that have to be there for God to give you more influence. This is not kind of abstract in theory. This is as practical as it gets. Are you regulated by your environment? In other words, are you one way at church, another way at work, another way at home? Are you one way in public, another way in private? If so, your behavior is regulated by your environment. You're willing to do whatever you can do and get away with it in any particular environment. That is very different from someone who has a deep sense of moral conviction, someone who is guided not by what I can get away with but what's right and wrong. It doesn't matter if I'm at church or at work. It doesn't matter if I'm at church or at school. It doesn't matter if I'm in public or private. It doesn't matter if I'm at home or out with my friends. There is a deep sense of moral conviction of what's right and what's wrong, and that's what guides my life in every environment. Until there is a clear and consistent pattern that your life is regulated by a deep sense of moral conviction, you're simply not ready for more influence, and typically those difficult lessons of leadership, like it or not, will be learned in God's *Wilderness School of Leadership*.

Our Father, this morning we are sobered again at this story, God, this long difficult journey of David in the wilderness where You are growing a leader, a leader that will become the greatest king in the history of this earth. God, there are many of my brothers and sisters here this morning that in all sincerity deeply long to be used by You, but, God, for that to be possible, our lives need to be regulated by a deep sense of moral conviction in every environment of our lives. God, teach us what that means, that we might influence others for Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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