

Consumed Part 3

Suffering Under a Difficult Husband

Physically and emotionally exhausted, Abigail arrived home to find her husband carousing like a boy and feasting like a king. It was clear he had not noticed she wasn't among the guests he entertained, but then, she didn't expect him to. Years of marriage to a man whose very name meant "fool" had caused Abigail to expect little other than selfish, reckless, and thoughtless behavior.

Abigail suffered under the hand of a difficult spouse. Descriptions of his character and conduct leave us with little room to doubt that her marriage was wearisome, lonely, and filled with heartbreak.

Perhaps the most difficult feat of the servant-wife is to patiently endure perpetual offenses, to remain steadfast when hope dwindles, and to continue trusting in God's plan and purpose to develop her into a wife of noble character. Like Michal, we can choose to be consumed by the difficulties that occur in our marriages. Or, like Abigail, we can choose to honor God no matter what marriage brings. Our steadfast trust in God is what enables us to rise above our pains and sorrows.

Proverbs 11:16-20 says, *"A gracious woman retains honor, but ruthless men retain riches. The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh. The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward. As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death. Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the Lord, but the blameless in their ways are His delight"* (NKJV).

Nabal

It was shearing time, as it was every spring. It was a time to rejoice in God's provision and a time to share all that came into one's hand. Although his flocks remained untouched by ravaging thieves, Nabal, a wealthy man, chose to withhold his abundance from those in need.

Read 1 Samuel 25:2-3. We begin our story with a detailed description of Nabal and his wife, Abigail. While his wife is a picture of physical beauty, prudence, wisdom, and discretion, Nabal was quite the opposite. He is described as *"harsh and evil."*

The word *"harsh"* describes a man who is hard, cruel, severe, obstinate, difficult, fierce, intense, vehement, and stubborn.¹ It *"pertain[s] to that which is very difficult and causes great hardship."*²

The Hebrew word for *"evil"* in this passage is *"rab"* which means *"bad, disagreeable, unpleasant (giving pain, unhappiness, or misery)"*³, *"wicked; pertaining to that which is not morally pure or good according to a proper standard, implying this evil hinders or severs a relationship to a person or principle which is proper."*⁴

Continue reading in 1 Samuel 25, verses 4-17.

What good deed did David and his men perform for Nabal? _____

With what attitude did David's young men approach Nabal? _____

What did they request? _____

How did Nabal respond to their kindness? _____

How did the young men *and* David react (vv.12-13)? _____

Overhearing the matter, Nabal's servant quickly sought Abigail. Based on his remarks in verses 14-17, we can assume that Nabal's temperament was little different at home.

When your good deeds go unnoticed, or are met with insults, how do you react?

In verses 17 and 25 of 1 Samuel 25, Nabal's servant and wife identify him as a "*son of Belial*" (KJV). The same description is contained in the following passages, further illustrating Nabal's wicked character. List any descriptive words you find.

Deuteronomy 13:13 _____

Deuteronomy 15:9 _____

Proverbs 6:12-15 _____

Proverbs 19:28 _____

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 _____

Abigail suffered her husband's selfishness, arrogance, disrespect, stubbornness, anger, harsh words, and rebellion towards God every day of her marriage, and yet refused to allow his conduct to consume her. But this time, his foolishness, arrogance, and selfish greed affected far more than she.

Read Proverbs 5:21-23.

Abigail

Abigail was noted for her external beauty, but it was her inner beauty that caught the attention of David and his men. Read 1 Samuel 25:18-35.

What qualities have you seen displayed in Abigail's life thus far? _____

Abigail met *David's* harsh words with an act of humble submission. Lying face down in the dust, she grasped his feet and began to impart words of great wisdom. Through the pleadings of a woman who suffered great pain and sorrow in her marriage, we will hear the pleadings of the Holy Spirit when we are faced with similar difficulties.

Abigail began by suggesting that David pick his battles wisely. She would advise us not to waste our time, energy, and attention on unnecessary conflicts as well. Fight the Lord's battles!

How is your relationship negatively affected by picking battles over trivial issues? Is maintaining your position worth the cost? _____

Abigail seemed to understand that when her husband came against her, she would be held securely in the hands of the Lord. Regardless of what the Lord allowed in her life, she was safe in His care. Read Isaiah 43:2 and Hebrews 13:6.

While reminding David of his past victories, Abigail reminds us that the Lord is capable of defeating the "giants" in our marriages with a single stone. He fights our battles in His time and in His way. Read Exodus 14:13-14.

Finally, Abigail begged that David refrain from taking on "*the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself*" (v.31, NIV). "Keep your character unstained!" she would tell us. "*Let no wrong doing be found in you as long as you live*" (v.28, NIV). Review Romans 12:19-21.

According to verses 32-35 of 1 Samuel 25, what did David recognize in Abigail? _____

A Servant's Heart

Without a doubt, David caught a glimpse of his Lord in Abigail's speech and conduct. Though she had suffered greatly under the hand of her husband, she begged that his sin be upon her. "*On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be!*" (1 Samuel 25:24, NKJV). Continue reading in 1 Samuel 25:36-42.

In what condition did Abigail find her husband? _____

What was her reaction? _____

Coupled with the fact that Abigail had just returned from redeeming her husband's life, she found him drunk with wine. But rather than taking matters into her own hands, she "*left [her] case in the hands of God who always judges fairly*" (1 Peter 2:23, NLT).

Review 1 Peter 2:18-23. What similarities do you see in Abigail and Christ? _____

How did God repay Nabal for his wickedness? _____

Abigail's choice to honor God above herself didn't end with Nabal's death. In 1 Samuel 25:41 we see the heart of the servant-wife in full display. Record her words. _____

Years of living with a harsh and evil man hadn't caused Abigail to give-up and grow bitter, but to develop qualities that honored God. With each offense, she submitted first to the hand of the Lord and then to her husband. In the end, her commitment to revere God and to continue on the right path—no matter how difficult it became—led to her nobility among men.

In closing, read Colossians 3:18, 22-25.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Many women live with men who share one or more qualities with Nabal. When these qualities present themselves, do you respond like Abigail or like David? (It may be helpful to review Nabal's character description and then note your response to each quality in the margin.)
2. When you are wronged, do you tend to focus on the pain of the offense or on the sanctifying work of God in your life?
3. Abigail was noted for her external beauty, wisdom, and unwavering dedication, yet these qualities seemed to have no bearing on her husband's love for her. In what ways have you allowed yourself to believe that these things would change your husband's love for you?
4. Abigail superseded her husband's decision by providing David and his young men with food. Ephesians 5:22-23 clearly establishes that the husband is to be the head of the household, making him the final authority in all decisions. Abigail made her decision to overstep Nabal's authority based on the fact that his life was in danger.

When you are tempted to overrule your husband's decisions, ask yourself what your motives are. Are they like that of Abigail? If not, in what ways will your defiance sow contention and discord?

5. *"Rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die"* (Romans 5:7, NIV), but Abigail willingly laid her life down for a man who treated her harshly. Could you do the same? Why or why not?
6. Perhaps the most difficult challenge of Abigail's marriage was to remain silent after returning home. Read 1 Peter 3:1-5. How did *"the holy women who trusted in God"* (NKJV) adorn themselves?
7. If Abigail had taken matters into her own hands out of a desire for revenge, how would her character have been stained?
8. How can Matthew 5:43-48 be applied to your marriage when dealing with a difficult spouse?

9. Abigail understood and practiced the principles listed in Matthew 5:38-42. What do these mean to you in your marriage?

10. Read Psalm 37:1-40. Do you believe the promises made to the righteous in Psalm 37? If so, how will you align your actions with your beliefs?

11. The meaning of Abigail's name reveals the source from which she drew her strength to patiently endure perpetual offenses and remain steadfast when hope dwindled. It means, "My Father is joy." From what source do you draw your joy?

What danger is there in allowing your joy to come from external circumstances and relationships? Read Psalm 16:1-11.

¹ Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. H7186

² Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament).* electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. DBLH 7997, #1

³ Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. H7451

⁴ Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament).* electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. DBLH 8273, #1