

Abigail's Choice

26 Jan 2011 Rachel Olsen

"Haughtiness goes before destruction; humility precedes honor." Proverbs 18:12 (NLT)

Marriages were often arranged in Abigail's era, and I wonder if this was true of hers. On paper her husband Nabal seemed like a "catch." He was wealthy, a good provider, and he liked to have fun and throw parties. But behind the scenes his self-control and integrity was seriously lacking, causing those closest to him to suffer.

Here is what we know about Abigail's husband Nabal from the Bible in 1 Samuel chapter 25:1-41

- * He is wealthy — that's partly due to David's protection of his land and flocks. (vs. 2,8)
- * He's crude, and mean in all his dealings. (vs. 3)
- * He sneers at guests who come in peace, and questions their character. (vs. 10-11)
- * He shouts insults. (vs.14)
- * He's stingy, not returning favors or repaying kindnesses showed him. (vs. 16, 21)
- * He is so temperamental that people dread talking to him. (vs. 17)
- * He thinks more highly of himself than he ought. (vs. 36)
- * He drinks too much. (vs. 36-37)

Basically, Nabal was a self-centered, ill-mannered guy who didn't recognize God's provision or blessings in his life. And if you read his story, you'll see he was foolish enough to insult the most powerful man around (King David) but more importantly, he was foolish enough to insult the one true God.

God let Nabal face the ultimate consequence of his character — death (vs. 38-39).

Imagine yourself paired up in marriage to such a foolish, arrogant, sharp-tongued man as this. (I hope you have to imagine, and have not lived this.) How would you react towards him? What do you think living with him might do to your personality, or your character?

Might you grow depressed? Would you become withdrawn or timid? Would you nag him to do better? Would you grow bitter, angry and become argumentative back? Or, would you perhaps just "let yourself go" and decide not to care about anything?

Let's look at Nabal's wife Abigail, from that same passage in the Bible:

- * She is smart and sensible. (vs. 3)
- * People look to her for wisdom and leadership in times of trouble. (vs. 14, 17)
- * She is decisive and wastes no time worrying, pitying her situation, or fussing at those who cause her trouble — instead she takes action to improve the situation. (vs. 18, 23)
- * She is generous, (vs. 18, 27) even willing to lay down her life for others. (vs. 22, 24)
- * She is humble (vs. 24, 41) and quick to ask forgiveness. (vs. 28)
- * She speaks eloquently and tactfully — with a knowledge of God — as she gives one of the longest speeches by a woman recorded in the Bible. (vs. 24-31)
- * She looks out for the well-being and reputation of others — even Nabal's. (vs. 25, 31)
- * She trusts God, holds her tongue, and waits patiently for the right timing. (vs. 36-38)

Abigail has always been one of my favorite women in the Bible. She has it all — wisdom, character, courage, faith, eloquence, graciousness. She possesses both inner and outer beauty. But her life with this man Nabal was no picnic, and that's really why I admire her. How many times did Nabal get drunk and say or do something demeaning to her? Yet she chose not to let her spirit die. How many times did she wish for revenge, though not seek it? How many times did he berate her, yet she wasn't paralyzed by his insults?

How many times did his foolishness cost her greatly, or those she cared about? Yet she

chose not to count the costs to herself when she put her life on the line to spare his life and the other men's.

Abigail's praiseworthy character ran deep, which tells me her reverence of God did as well. After Nabal's death, she married King David and they had a son. David would have seven other wives in his lifetime, but only Abigail earned his complete respect. Only she had a positive influence on him.

Abigail challenges me to choose differently — to be humble, wise and courageous. Her example teaches me that I can choose how I will allow my circumstances to shape my character. While Nabal's life clearly shows that haughtiness goes before destruction, Abigail's shows that choosing humility and wisdom allows God to shape my character and my circumstances. And it makes room for God to be glorified in both.

Dear Lord, today I humble myself before You. I confess my sins and ask You to help me develop and display the same wisdom and character as Abigail. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Question: Is abuse an acceptable reason for divorce?

Answer from Got Questions.org: While it seems obvious abuse should be an acceptable reason for divorce, the Bible gives only two reasons in which divorce is permitted: the first is in the case of abandonment of a Christian by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15), and the second is if one partner is involved in a lifestyle of infidelity (Matthew 5:32). Although God allows it in these circumstances, He has never been an endorser of divorce. It should be assumed that two Bible-believing Christians will not mutually agree to divorce, but should practice the forgiveness and love that God freely gives us. "'For I hate divorce!' says the Lord, the God of Israel..." (Malachi 2:16).

The Bible is silent on the issue of marital abuse as a reason for divorce, although it is obvious that God despises the mistreatment of wives by their husbands (Colossians 3:19, 1 Peter 3:7, Ephesians 5:25-33). Abuse should not be tolerated by anyone. No one should have to live in an abusive environment, whether it involves a family member, friend, employer, caregiver, or stranger. Physical abuse is against the law, and the authorities should be the first ones contacted if this occurs.

The best way to prevent ending up feeling trapped in an abusive marriage is to get to know a potential spouse before making the commitment to marry. The signs of being an abuser are manifested in one's personality. These "red flags" are always there, but are often overlooked or even ignored when attraction and infatuation take over. These signs can include: irrational jealousy, the need to be in control, a quick temper, cruelty toward animals, attempts to isolate the other person from his or her friends and family, drug or alcohol abuse, and disrespect for their partner's boundaries, privacy, personal space, or moral values.

A wife who is being abused should get herself, and any children, out of the situation immediately and find a new temporary home. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that separation (not divorce) in this instance would be wrong. Although friends and family will likely tell the woman to immediately file for divorce, God places a much higher value on marriage than the world does.

Once separated, the abuser has the responsibility to reach out for help. First and foremost, he should seek God. "For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks" (Matthew 7:8). No one has ! more power to heal individuals and relationships than God. He must be the Lord of our lives, the Master of our assets, and the Head of our households.

Both husband and wife must commit themselves to God and then develop a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. "And this is the way to have eternal life " to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth" (John 17:3). This should be accompanied by intensive Christian counseling " first individually, then as a couple, and even for the entire family if necessary.

During this time, the wife should let her husband know of her unconditional love and support, and devote herself to much prayer. Although the effort must be made on the part of her husband to make the changes, she should not give up hope if he is at first resistant. However, if he never even takes the first step, she should not consider returning to him until he does.

The abused spouse should not return home until a trained Christian counselor decides that the family will be safe in the same home as the former abuser. Together, the couple should then commit to serving and obeying God. They should spend individual time with God daily, attend a Bible-believing church, begin serving God through a ministry, and get involved in small Bible study groups that fit their needs. "What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun" (2 Corinthians 5:17)!