

Preaching Series: 12 Biblical Role Models
Sermon: Abigail: A Discerning Woman

Text: 1 Samuel 25:18-31

Introduction: Question: When do you not listen to an **African wildlife expert**?
Answer: When he tells you to stand closer to a wild rhino. Not too long ago, a 24-year-old woman from South Africa was staying at the **Aloe Ridge Hotel and Nature Reserve**, about 25 miles from Johannesburg. The reserve advertises that it gives its guests "***the ideal opportunity to view game,***" with rhinos listed among the animals "***sighted at close range,***" along with hippos, Cape buffaloes and giraffes. Unfortunately, **Chantal Beyer**, one of the guests at the reserve, got a little *too* close. Game park owner **Alex Richter** had reportedly told a group of visitors it was safe to get out of the safari vehicle to take photos, and he even used food to coax the rhinos closer. A relative of Ms. Beyer told reporters, "***There were quite a few young people on the vehicle and they probably felt they could trust Richter, who was an adult.***" As the game park owner was snapping pictures, he advised Chantal to "***stand just a little bit closer***" seconds before the attack. Photos show Beyer and her husband only feet away from two rhinos. The paper said that just after the photo was snapped, the rhino attacked, and its horn penetrated Ms. Beyers' chest from behind, resulting in a collapsed lung and broken ribs. The Aloe Ridge Hotel and Nature Reserve, where the incident took place, declined to comment. Obviously, Alex Richter, the tour guide and owner of the nature reserve, lacked some discernment when it came to the safety of his guests. Had he assessed the situation correctly, **Chantal Beyer would have enjoyed her safari and all the wild animals the group saw along the way.** As it was, because of a lack of discernment on the part of the game park owner, she found herself in a hospital fighting for her life.

This morning, in the third message in our series, "**In Search of Role Models,**" I want to look at a **woman of discernment** who had enough sense to respond to a potentially dangerous situation with good judgment. Her name is **Abigail** and her story is found here in **1 Samuel 25**. Before we get there, however, allow me to take a few moments and provide you with a definition of the word.

"Discernment" has the primary meaning '***to judge properly***' in the New Testament and '***showing good sense***' in the Old Testament. ***The American***

Heritage Dictionary wraps the two together and says, “**The act or process of exhibiting keen insight and good judgment.**”

A lot of people will tell me after taking a spiritual gifts inventory that they have discernment, but **how does one really know?** Well, here are some of the characteristics of a discerning person according to the Scriptures:

- **A discerning person loves in a wise and judicious way** (Philippians 1:9 – And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment).
- **A discerning person is able to distinguish good from evil** (Hebrews 5:14 – But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil).
- **A discerning person judges others fairly** (1 Kings 3:11–12a – And God said to Solomon, “Because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold I now do according to your word).
- **A discerning person understands God’s ways** (Psalm 119:125 – I am your servant. Give me understanding that I may know your testimonies). Here and in the next two verses the Hebrew word translated as understanding can also be translated as discernment.
- **A discerning person values a rebuke** (Proverbs 17:10 – A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool).
- **A discerning person can draw out the purposes and plans of others** (Proverbs 20:5 – The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out).

So, let me summarize what these verses tell us about discernment. It helps us become more loving, distinguish the difference between right and wrong, judge others fairly, understand God’s ways, the value of a rebuke and how to draw out the purposes of another. Now that we have a better understanding of discernment, let’s look at the historical context for the story of **Abigail, Nabal and David**.

After Samuel the prophet died, David and his men retreated from **Masada** to a place called **Maon**, not too far from **Carmel**, probably to put more distance between him and **King Saul**. Since it was the time of feasting (*sheep were sheared*

twice a year and on each occasion, it was celebrated with a festival—**See 2 Samuel 13:23**), David sent his men to request some supplies from a man named **Nabal** (means “**Worthless**”). **Why would he presume that he would incur Nabal’s favor?** It may well have been because he, like Nabal, was a descendant of Judah (i.e. family). Since the two shared the same family tree and it was David’s men that had served as a wall of protection for Nabal’s shepherds and flocks during their stay in Maon, he probably thought the man would express his gratitude by gladly sharing some of his food and water. What David obviously didn’t know about Nabal, however, was that he was surly (**miserly and rude** – he was far more like **Ebenezer Scrooge** than, say, **Mother Theresa**). He was known to be mean in his dealings. When David’s men made their request in the name of their commander, Nabal responded, **“Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days.** (*Nabal made it clear who he sided with in the conflict between David and Saul.*) **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?”** When the men returned to David with Nabal’s answer, he did not take it very well (**1 Samuel 25:12-13 – So David’s young men turned away and came back and told him all this. And David said to his men, “Every man strap on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David...**). It is at this point in the story that Abigail enters the picture as one of her own servants explains what happened. As we consider her response, let’s see what we can learn about discerning people.

Discerning people know WHAT is right (**1 Samuel 25:14-17 -- But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them. 15 Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them. 16 They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. 17 Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him"**). When this unidentified servant spoke to Abigail about her husband’s response, he somehow knew that at that moment David was on his way with four hundred of his men to exact revenge on Nabal. **Of course, David’s chosen course of action demonstrated a lack of discernment on his part.** Why, because God is the One who takes vengeance and repays those who do evil (**Deuteronomy 32:35 -- Vengeance is mine and**

recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand and their doom comes quickly). Abigail, having been informed that her husband had acted improperly according to God's Word (**Leviticus 19:18 – you shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself**), still refused to be party to bringing harm to this worthless man, in spite of his servants low assessment of his character (**He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him**). Let's stop right here for a moment and make this point: **Men and women who possess discernment do not allow themselves to be swept up in the rip tide of public opinion.** They have learned to think for themselves and evaluate every circumstance based on what is right and wrong as outlined in the Scriptures. Though David was a man to be feared, it was Abigail who opted to take the high road of obedience to God's Word and intervene in an effort to save Nabal's life because she knew it was the right thing to do.

Discerning people know WHEN to act (1 Samuel 25:18a -- Then Abigail made haste ...). Abigail made haste. In this case it was clearly the right time to act. Had she chosen to wait until the morning of the next day, everything would have played out very differently. David would have showed up with his men ("**Every man strap on his sword!**"), angry at the treatment they received from Nabal and committed multiple murders. There is no provision in the Scriptures for a person to act outside of the laws of the land and take another human being's life simply because he wants to. Only recognized government authorities are given the right to do so as a punishment for evil (**Romans 13:4 – For (rulers) are God's servant for your good, but if you do wrong, be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain**). Just as David had hastily decided in his flesh to exact revenge, so the situation necessitated that Abigail make haste and do what she deemed necessary to alter the outcome. **People who have discernment not only know what is right, but know when to act in carrying out what is right.** Sometimes, this means taking action immediately, while on other occasions, it means delaying a response. For example, later, during one of the most difficult times of David's life, as his son Absalom attempted to steal his throne, a descendant of Saul named **Shimei** cursed the King and cast stones at him for taking up the throne after Saul's death. **Yet, it appears he had learned his lesson.** David decided not to act at that time, but to leave it up to the Lord should He desire to take vengeance -- **2 Samuel 16:5-12** -- When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually. And he threw stones at David and at all the

servants of King David, and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And Shimei said as he cursed, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man! The LORD has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood." Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head." But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will look on the wrong done to me, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing today." How different was his response than on the occasion when he was insulted by Nabal! **Ecclesiastes 3:3** says there is a time to kill and a time to heal. A discerning person knows the difference.

Discerning people know HOW to respond (1 Samuel 25:19 – Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal). David's original request had been for some food and water that was most likely in abundant supply given that a festival was taking place. Though Nabal refused him, Abigail had enough discernment to fulfill his request. She quickly put together a care package for David and his men, yet told her husband nothing of her plan. ***She was, after all, the mistress of the house and it was clearly within her right to distribute the household provisions as she saw fit.*** In no way was Abigail stealing from her husband, but paying a debt that he refused to pay in loving his neighbor. How different was her response from Nabal's? He was stingy and jeopardized the lives of everyone. She was generous and preserved the lives of her husband and male servants. **Listen to me:** Because discerning people have the insight and good sense to understand what is really happening, they respond well in difficult circumstances, even when others do not. **Proverbs 28:11** says, ***"A rich man (Nabal?) may be wise in his own eyes, but a poor man (or in this case, a rich man's wife) who has discernment sees through him."*** In other words, discernment is not dependent on a person's status and it serves those well that cling to it.

Discerning people know what to say (See 1 Samuel 25:20-35). When Abigail met David along the way to her home, she demonstrated supreme tact (*i.e. acute sensitivity to what is proper in dealing with others especially in our speech*) in her dealings with him. This godly woman bowed before David and acknowledged his position as king. In fact, she used the word “**lord**” fourteen times in her conversation with him. Certainly, Nabal would not have approved of her choice of words. She was, however, a woman of faith who believed David was God’s anointed king. She apologized for the decision of her husband, a worthless character, and asked for his forgiveness. Remarkably, she even had the courage to remind David that what he was about to do was against the Law of God and that He, God, could take care of the situation Himself (**1 Samuel 25:30-31 – And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good he has spoken concerning you and has appointed your prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause, or for my lord or for my lord taking vengeance himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant**).

Discerning people understand the power of the tongue and control theirs to avoid inflaming potentially damaging situations (**James 3:5 -- So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things**). As you probably already know, discernment is often revealed in our words. Consider the story of a dad, who after a hard day at work was very patiently listening to his seven-year-old scratch away on his violin while the dog seemingly sang along howling dismally. The father was trying to be loving and understanding, but the screeching of the violin and howling of the dog were beginning to wear thin on his already frazzled nerves. Finally, when he could take it no longer, he said as lovingly as he could to his seven-year-old, “**Son, would you mind playing a song the dog doesn’t know.**” How does one acquire discernment?

- **We must get on our knees and pray for discernment** (1 Kings 3:9 – Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil; See also 1 John 5:14-15).
- **We must open up the Word and allow it to teach us** (Hebrews 4:12 -- For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart). Suggestion: Read and Reread Proverbs.

- ***We must hang out with wise people and observe their discernment* (Proverbs 13:20 – Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm).**

Conclusion: Which do you think would be easier to discern—two objects that differ in weight by $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce or two object that differ by $\frac{1}{4}$ pound? According to medical doctor and author Richard Swenson, ***We can tell the difference between a letter weighting 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ ounces and one weighing 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces, but not between [a bowling ball weighing] 10 pounds and [one weighing] 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds—the difference needs to be at least 2 %.*** **APPARENTLY EXERCISING DISCERNMENT IN SOME THINGS, AT LEAST, ISN'T THAT EASY.** In life, the ten pound bowling balls (*life's weightier issues*) can be more difficult to figure out than the $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce issues that we deal with every day. That's because discernment, the kind modeled for us by Abigail, is a spiritual faculty, one which requires the honing of our spiritual senses. The Bible says, ***The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned*** (1 Corinthians 2:14). Keen spiritual insight and good judgment are not intuitive to men and women. If you want to **know what is right, when to act, how to respond and what to say**, you must seek discernment by praying for it on our knees, searching for it in the Word and observing it in others.

Preparation: As the facilitator, you should read through the message thoughtfully and prayerfully. Ask the Lord to give you understanding of His Word so that you can lead a fruitful discussion.

Open the Group in Prayer

Read 1 Samuel 25:1-31 -- Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon. 2 A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. 3 His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings. 4 While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. 5 So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. 6 Say to him: 'Long life to you!

Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours! 7 "Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. 8 Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them." 9 When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited. 10 Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. 11 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?" 12 David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. 13 David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies. 14 One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. 15 Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. 16 Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. 17 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." 18 Abigail lost no time. 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. 19 Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. 20 As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. 21 David had just said, "It's been useless — all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. 22 May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!" 23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said: "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. 25 May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name — his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent. 26 "Now since

the Lord has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. 27 And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. 28 Please forgive your servant's offense, for the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the Lord's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. 29 Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master 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. 30 When the Lord has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, 31 my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord has brought my master success, remember your servant."

Discussion Questions:

- How do you define discernment? How is it different from wisdom?
- Can you think of a time when you or someone close to you demonstrated discernment in dealing with a difficult situation?
- **Hebrews 5:14** says, **"But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."** How did Abigail show discernment in judging between good and evil?
- Abigail knew that the situation with David and his men required that she act with haste. What do you think would have happened had she waited to respond? David also reacted with haste. What was the main difference between how Abigail and David responded? Later in his life, while fleeing from Absalom, David encountered a descendant of Saul named Shimei. How did David show discernment in his dealings with him?
- Though Nabal did not want to provide food and water for David and his men, Abigail did! Was she wrong to go against the wishes of her husband? Sometimes exercising discernment means going against the desires of others. How do you know when this is the right thing to do?
- Abigail pleaded with David not to do something that he might regret later. How did this action demonstrate discernment?
- What advice would you give to someone who desires to be more discerning?

Close in Prayer