

Diffusing a Crisis

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on 1 Samuel

As David's power grows, he comes into conflict with a rich landowner named Nabal. As it happens, David's band of rebels had been encamped in Nabal's area for some time. David's men have treated Nabal's shepherds kindly, and David figures this means Nabal owes him something. He sends a delegation to ask Nabal to donate some lambs for a feast for David's army.

Nabal will have nothing of it. Not only does he refuse to give David anything for the feast, he insults David publicly, denies knowing David, and impugns David's integrity as a rebel against Saul. Nabal's own servants describe their master as "so ill-natured that no one can speak to him." David immediately sets out with 400 armed men to slay Nabal and kill every male in his household.

Suddenly David is about to commit mass murder, while Nabal cares more about his pride than about his workers and family. These two arrogant men are unable to resolve an argument about sheep without spilling the blood of hundreds of innocent people. Thank God, Nabal's wise-hearted wife Abigail steps into the fray. She quickly prepares a feast for David and his men, then rides out to meet David with an apology that sets a new standard for courtesy in the Old Testament. Yet wrapped in the courteous words are some hard truths David needs to hear. He is on the verge of shedding blood without cause, bringing on himself a guilt he could never escape.

David is moved by her words and abandons his plan to kill Nabal and all his men and boys. He even thanks Abigail for diverting him from his reckless plan.

The incident shows that you don't have to have authority status to be called to exercise influence. It also demonstrates that showing respect, even while making a pointed criticism, provides a model for challenging authority.

Nabal turned a petty argument into a life threatening situation by wrapping a minor dispute in a personal insult. Abigail resolves a life-threatening crisis by dressing a major rebuke in a respectful dialogue.

In what ways may God be calling you to exercise influence to hold people in positions of higher authority accountable? How can you cultivate a godly attitude of respect along with an unwavering commitment to telling the truth?