

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 14: Nabal, Abigail, and David's Restraint

1 Samuel 25:1–26:25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The aim of this lesson is to confront the class with an uncomfortable truth: the same David who showed magnificent restraint toward Saul is, only days later, ready to slaughter Nabal's entire household over an insult. Restraint is not a trophy we win once and keep forever; it is a daily battle with the heart. Help the class feel both the glory of David in the cave and the danger of David on the road to Nabal's house, and to see themselves in both.

Center the discussion on the great principle Abigail names and David later blesses God for: the Lord "hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand." Leaving vengeance to God is the thread that ties chapters 25 and 26 together and points straight forward to Romans 12:19. Draw out how God often uses a wise peacemaker, an Abigail, to keep us from sins we are blindly rushing toward, and how we ought both to welcome such voices and to be such voices.

Finally, lift up Abigail as a model of godly wisdom and courage without overstating her role, and lift up David's second sparing of Saul as proof that genuine trust in God's timing is consistent, not occasional. Keep the application personal and practical: where is each student tempted to take justice into his own hands, and how will he hand it to God instead?

Question 1

Student Question:

What does the timing of Samuel's death at the head of this account (25:1) signal about the season David is entering and his need to lean wholly on God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter opens with a single, weighty line: "And Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him." The prophet who had anointed both Saul and David, who had been the spiritual anchor of the nation, is gone. An era closes. For David, a steadying voice in his life has fallen silent.

The placement is not accidental. Scripture often sets a death and a temptation side by side. With Samuel gone, David is entering a season of greater isolation, and it is precisely in such seasons that we are most vulnerable to acting on our own rather than waiting on God. The very next scene shows David nearly doing exactly that.

There is a lesson here about the loss of the supports God gives us. Mentors die, godly parents pass, faithful friends move away, and the familiar voices that once helped steady us go quiet. In those gaps the temptation is to lean on our own strength and judgment. Yet God remains. The death of Samuel did not mean the absence of God.

David must now learn to lean directly on the Lord rather than on the human props God had provided. So must we. The removal of a support is often God's invitation to a deeper, more personal dependence on Him who never dies and never leaves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Samuel's death removes a steadying spiritual voice and opens a season of greater testing for David (25:1).
- Scripture often pairs a loss with a temptation, exposing where we will lean.
- The removal of human supports is God's call to deeper dependence on Himself.
- God remains present and faithful even when the people who anchored us are gone (Hebrews 13:5).
- Grief and transition are moments of heightened spiritual vulnerability.

Discussion Prompts

- Why might God allow the human supports we lean on to be removed?
- How does the death of Samuel set the stage for David's near-disaster with Nabal?
- When familiar voices in your life fall silent, how can you lean harder on God rather than on yourself?

Question 2

Student Question:

When the familiar voices and supports in your life fall silent, where are you tempted to lean instead of on God, and how can you lean harder on Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Enter Nabal, a very rich man of Maon whose name means "fool." His wife Abigail is wise and beautiful; he is "churlish and evil in his doings." David's men had protected Nabal's shepherds and flocks in the wilderness, a real and valuable service, and now at sheepshearing, a festive time of plenty, David sends a courteous request for whatever provision Nabal will spare.

Nabal's answer drips with contempt: "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master." He insults David's person, denies the service rendered, and sends the young men away empty. It is gratuitous, ungrateful folly.

David's reaction is immediate and chilling: "Gird ye on every man his sword." He vows to leave not one male of Nabal's household alive by morning. The man who would not touch the Lord's anointed is now prepared to slaughter a whole household over an insult. Wounded pride has overridden every restraint.

This is the sobering heart of the chapter. Godliness in one trial does not guarantee godliness in the next. The same heart capable of beautiful restraint is also capable, when its pride is stung, of monstrous overreaction. We are never so safe that we can stop watching our own hearts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Nabal's ingratitude and contempt provoke David, but provocation does not excuse David's murderous intent (25:10-13).
- Wounded pride can sweep even a godly person toward grave sin.
- Past faithfulness in one test does not guarantee faithfulness in the next (1 Corinthians 10:12).
- David's vow to kill every male reveals how quickly anger escalates beyond all proportion.
- We must keep watch over our own hearts, never assuming we are beyond temptation.
- Nabal's folly is real, yet David is on the verge of a far greater sin.

Discussion Prompts

- How can the same heart show great restraint one day and great rage the next?
- What does David's instant reach for the sword reveal about the power of wounded pride?
- Why is past faithfulness no guarantee against present temptation?

Question 3

Student Question:

How does the contrast between Nabal's folly and David's near-revenge expose the way even a godly person can be swept toward sin by wounded pride (25:10-13, 21-22)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Word reaches Abigail through a servant, who pleads with her because Nabal is so ill-tempered that no one can reason with him. Abigail acts at once. She gathers a generous provision, bread, wine, sheep, grain, raisins, and figs, and rides out to meet David, without telling her foolish husband.

When she sees David, she falls at his feet and takes the blame on herself, asking that the iniquity be upon her. She does not defend Nabal; she acknowledges his folly. But then she lifts David's eyes higher than his anger, reminding him of who he is and who his God is. Her courage is breathtaking: one woman riding into four hundred armed and angry men.

Here is wisdom in action. Abigail is the embodiment of the soft answer that turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1). She does not match David's heat with heat. She brings provision, humility, and truth, and she trusts God to use them. She is a peacemaker stepping into danger rather than staying safely at home.

Notice too that God's deliverance here comes through an ordinary person doing a courageous, wise thing. The Lord could have sent an angel or a vision. Instead He sent a thoughtful woman with bread and good sense. He still works that way, sending people into our angry moments to call us back to ourselves and to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Abigail acts wisely and courageously to prevent bloodshed (25:18–20).
- A soft answer and humble approach turn away wrath (Proverbs 15:1).
- God often delivers through ordinary people willing to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).
- Abigail neither excuses Nabal's folly nor matches David's rage; she brings truth and provision.
- Peacemaking sometimes requires stepping courageously into danger rather than avoiding it.

Discussion Prompts

- What made Abigail's approach wise rather than merely flattering or cowardly?
- How does God use ordinary people as peacemakers in tense moments?
- Where might God be asking you to step courageously into a conflict to make peace?

Question 4

Student Question:

When your pride is wounded by someone's ingratitude or insult, what does your first reaction reveal, and what would a Christlike response require of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The heart of Abigail's appeal is one of the most important verses in the whole study: the Lord "hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand." She tells David that God Himself is holding him back from a sin that would stain his future reign with needless blood.

She lifts David's vision above the immediate insult. She speaks of the Lord making him a "sure house," of his life being "bound in the bundle of life with the LORD," and warns that he will not want this innocent blood as "a grief unto thee" when God has done him good and made him ruler. She helps him see his life from God's perspective and from the perspective of the future.

This is the great principle the chapter teaches: avenging yourself with your own hand is not God's way. The Lord is the one who repays. To take vengeance into our own hands is to seize

what belongs to God alone. Abigail's words are an Old Testament preview of Romans 12:19, "Avenge not yourselves... Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

And it is profoundly merciful that God "withholds" us. Sometimes His grace comes not as a feeling of peace but as a person who blocks our path, an Abigail who stops us before we do the thing we cannot undo. We should thank God for the restraints He places in our way as much as for the doors He opens.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Avenging oneself with one's own hand is not God's way; vengeance belongs to Him (25:26, 31; Romans 12:19).
- Abigail lifts David's eyes to God's purposes and his own future, not just the present insult.
- God's grace sometimes comes as a restraint that blocks us from sin we cannot undo.
- Shedding innocent blood would have been "a grief" to David, a stain he would later regret.
- We should be grateful for the people God uses to hold us back from sin.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the Lord "withholds" us from sin, and how have you experienced that?
- How does taking vengeance into our own hands intrude on what belongs to God?
- Why is it a mercy when God blocks our path before we do something irreversible?

Question 5

Student Question:

What does Abigail's intervention teach us about God's use of wise peacemakers, and how does her appeal that David not "shed blood" or avenge himself reflect God's heart (25:26, 31)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David's response is the model. He does not bristle at being corrected by a woman, nor cling to his vow of vengeance. He immediately blesses God: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand."

Notice what David recognizes. He sees God's hand behind Abigail's words. He does not say merely, "You make a good point." He says God sent her. A teachable heart sees God working through the people who confront and correct us, and receives the rebuke as a gift rather than an insult.

He also sees how close he came: "except thou hadst hastened and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall." David is

honest about the disaster he was minutes from committing. Humble self-awareness is part of repentance.

Then God Himself settles the account. About ten days later, the Lord “smote Nabal, that he died.” David did not have to lift a finger. When David hears it, he blesses God again for keeping him from avenging himself and for repaying Nabal’s wickedness upon his own head. The lesson is unmistakable: leave room for God, and He will do justice in His own way and time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David blesses God for being restrained from vengeance, treating the restraint as a gift (25:32–33).
- A teachable heart receives correction and discerns God’s hand behind the messenger.
- Honest self-awareness about how close we came to sin is part of true repentance.
- God Himself repaid Nabal in His own time, vindicating David’s restraint (25:38–39).
- Leaving room for God’s justice frees us from the burden of avenging ourselves.

Discussion Prompts

- What does David’s eager gratitude for correction teach us about a teachable heart?
- Why does David credit God, not just Abigail, for stopping him?
- How does God’s dealing with Nabal demonstrate the wisdom of leaving vengeance to Him?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where might God be calling you to be a peacemaker who steps into a tense situation with humility and wisdom rather than staying safely out of it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 26 returns to the larger drama. The Ziphites again betray David’s location, and Saul once more goes down with three thousand chosen men to hunt him. David, scouting Saul’s camp, sees the king asleep within the trench, his spear stuck in the ground at his head, with Abner and the army around him.

David takes Abishai with him and steals into the very center of the sleeping camp. The Lord had put them all into a “deep sleep.” There lies Saul, utterly defenseless. Abishai whispers the same temptation David’s men offered in the cave: “God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day; now therefore let me smite him.” One thrust, and it is over.

Once again David refuses, and his words are firm: “Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless?” He adds that the Lord Himself will deal with Saul, whether by a natural death, or in battle, or by God’s own hand. He will not touch the anointed of the Lord.

This is the same conviction we saw in the cave, now tested a second time and proven consistent. David's restraint is not a one-time flash of nobility; it is a settled principle. He genuinely believes God will deal with Saul, so he refuses to do God's job for Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David spares Saul a second time, proving his restraint is a settled principle, not a single noble moment (26:9–11).
- Abishai voices the same temptation David faced in the cave; the test recurs.
- David trusts God to deal with Saul in God's own way and time (26:10).
- "Who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?" shows reverence for God's ordering.
- Consistent restraint flows from genuine confidence in God's justice.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that David spares Saul a second time, not just once?
- How does David's refusal show real trust that God will handle the matter?
- What makes restraint a settled principle rather than an occasional impulse?

Question 7

Student Question:

Why does David bless God that He kept him from avenging himself, and what does it mean that "the LORD hath withholden thee" (25:32–34, 39) for how we view restraint?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Instead of Saul's life, David takes the spear and the cruse of water from beside Saul's head and withdraws to a hilltop a safe distance away. Then he calls out, rebuking Abner for failing to guard the king and holding up the spear and water jar as proof: David had been close enough to kill, and chose not to.

David's words to Saul are again full of appeal to God's justice: "The LORD render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the LORD delivered thee into my hand to day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed." He asks why Saul pursues him, and pleads that his blood not fall to the earth far from the presence of the Lord.

What David takes is telling. He takes evidence, not vengeance. He wants Saul to know the truth, that David is no rebel and no threat, but he refuses to make himself the instrument of justice. He leaves the verdict, and the rendering, to the Lord who judges rightly.

Here again is the New Testament shape of love your enemies and overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). David repays Saul's murderous pursuit not with a thrust of the spear but with mercy and an honest appeal. He breaks the cycle of evil by refusing to add to it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David takes evidence of his restraint, not Saul's life, leaving justice to God (26:12, 23).
- He appeals to the Lord to render to every man according to his righteousness.
- David repays evil pursuit with mercy and honest appeal, overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:21).
- Refusing to be the instrument of vengeance breaks the cycle of evil rather than feeding it.
- David's plea shows a longing to remain near the presence and inheritance of the Lord.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the significance of David taking the spear and water jar instead of Saul's life?
- How does David overcome evil with good in this scene?
- Why does breaking the cycle of revenge require someone to absorb the wrong rather than return it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Whom do you need to deliberately stop avenging yourself against, and how will you actively "give place unto wrath," leaving the matter to God (Romans 12:19)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Saul's reply echoes the cave at En-gedi: "I have sinned... I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." He blesses David and again acknowledges, "thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail." The words sound like genuine repentance, and perhaps in the moment Saul means them.

But as in chapter 24, the confession changes nothing lasting. Saul returns to his place, and the deeper trajectory of his life continues its tragic downward slide. We have now watched Saul confess his sin twice to David, weep, bless him, and acknowledge David's coming kingship, and still he does not truly turn. His repentance is a mood, not a redirection.

This is a sober pattern worth naming. There is a kind of sorrow that flares up under conviction and then fades, leaving the life unchanged. Paul calls it the sorrow of the world, which works death, as opposed to godly sorrow, which works repentance unto salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10). Saul has the former; he never gains the latter.

David parts from Saul and goes his way, and significantly, he does not trust Saul's words. He has learned that a confession without a changed life cannot be relied upon. Mercy toward an enemy does not require naivety about him. David forgives, but he keeps his distance from a man whose heart has not truly turned.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul again confesses and blesses David, yet his life does not truly change (26:21, 25).
- Repeated confession without repentance reveals a heart that feels conviction but never turns.
- Worldly sorrow flares and fades; godly sorrow redirects the life (2 Corinthians 7:10).
- David forgives without naively trusting; mercy and discernment can coexist.
- Saul's pattern warns us against mistaking emotional sorrow for genuine repentance.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Saul's repeated confession ring hollow despite its right words?
- How can we tell the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow in ourselves?
- How did David show both forgiveness and wise discernment toward Saul?

Question 9

Student Question:

In sparing Saul a second time at Hachilah (26:9–11, 23), David declares he will not “stretch forth mine hand against the LORD’s anointed”; what does his repeated restraint reveal about trusting God’s justice and timing rather than seizing them ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now gather the weight of both chapters into one truth: leaving vengeance to God. David nearly avenged himself on Nabal and was stopped by grace through Abigail. David could twice have avenged himself on Saul and chose not to. The thread running through it all is the refusal to take into his own hand the justice that belongs to God.

This is precisely the command God would later write through Paul: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). To give place unto wrath is to step aside and make room for God to act, trusting that He sees, He judges, and He will repay rightly. It is not passivity; it is faith.

Why is this so hard? Because vengeance feels like justice, and waiting on God feels like letting the wrong go unanswered. But the chapters show us that God does act. Nabal dies by God’s hand. Saul will fall in his own time. The God who said “vengeance is mine” keeps His word. Our task is to keep our hands clean and leave the verdict to Him.

And there is a freedom in this. The person consumed with avenging himself is chained to the one who wronged him, endlessly rehearsing the offense. The person who hands it to God is set free to live, to love, even to bless his enemy. David walks away from both Nabal and Saul unburdened by their blood. That is the freedom God offers us when we trust Him with our justice.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Both chapters teach the one principle: leave vengeance to God, who repays rightly (Romans 12:19).
- “Give place unto wrath” means stepping aside to make room for God to act, an act of faith.
- God does in fact repay: Nabal dies by His hand, and Saul will fall in His time.
- Avenging ourselves chains us to the offender; entrusting it to God sets us free.
- Restraint is not passive weakness but active trust in God’s justice.
- Keeping our hands clean leaves the verdict where it belongs, with the righteous Judge.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean practically to “give place unto wrath” when you have been wronged?
- How do these chapters prove that God truly does repay in His own time?
- How does entrusting our justice to God set us free from the people who have hurt us?

Question 10

Student Question:

Name one specific way Jesus, who left vengeance to His Father and prayed for those who killed Him, is forming that same restraint and peacemaking heart in you through this passage.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Lift your eyes finally to Jesus, the Son of David who perfected everything David only pointed toward. When His enemies came for Him, He did not call down vengeance. When Peter drew a sword, Jesus said put it away. On the cross, surrounded by mockers, He prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He left His cause entirely in the Father’s hands.

Peter, who had once drawn that sword, later wrote that when Christ was reviled He reviled not again, but “committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). That is Abigail’s principle and David’s restraint brought to perfection. Jesus would not avenge Himself with His own hand; He trusted the Father’s justice utterly, even unto death.

And He calls us to walk the same road. “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you” (Matthew 5:44). This is not weakness. It is the strongest thing in the world, the strength to absorb a wrong and not pass it on, to leave room for God.

So bring it home. Where has someone wronged you, and you are quietly nursing a plan, a word, a withdrawal, a way to make them pay? That is the place Jesus is reaching for. Let Him form Abigail’s wisdom and David’s restraint and His own forgiving heart in you. Name the one relationship this week where you will lay down the sword and leave the justice to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus refused to avenge Himself and committed His cause to the Father who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23).
- On the cross He prayed for His enemies' forgiveness, perfecting David's restraint (Luke 23:34).
- Christ calls His people to love, bless, and pray for their enemies (Matthew 5:44).
- Absorbing a wrong without passing it on is strength, not weakness.
- Jesus forms in us the wisdom of Abigail, the restraint of David, and His own forgiving heart.

Discussion Prompts

- How did Jesus embody the very principle Abigail named and David practiced?
- Why is loving and blessing an enemy an act of strength rather than weakness?
- Name one specific way Jesus is forming a restraining, peacemaking heart in you through this passage.