

Series: Shepherd, Poet, Fugitive, King - The Life of David  
1 Samuel 25:1–44 – God’s Restraining Grace / Ryan Patty / 2.11.24

Scripture Reading: Psalm 119:33-40 (CSB)

If you have a Bible I’d like to invite you to open it to 1 Samuel 25. We will be covering the entire chapter this morning and it has much to teach us.

While turning there, let me ask you this question: Has God ever stopped you from doing something stupid? Something foolish? Can you think back on your life and maybe it was the H.S.’s conviction, maybe it was through someone else, but you wanted to do something dumb... You wanted that sin, or you wanted to go with those people, or you wanted to buy that thing, and God in His kindness stopped you? Theologically we would call that God’s restraining grace in your life. It is a part of God’s grace towards us.

**I can think of a few of those moments in my life.** God restraining me in circumstances that I wanted, even God providentially guiding me along other paths than I thought I would take. We had a big move right before my freshman year of high school. I hated it. I was angry at the world and was a jerk to my parents. Looking back, (young people, sometimes time does give us better perspective), but looking back that was God providentially restraining me from going further down certain paths. Did I still sin after that move? Of course. But he was keeping me from further sin in many ways. We can think of God keeping us from sinning in our relationships and actions, relationships we hoped would work out and didn’t (and we saw how good that was for us), we can even think of us really wanting to let someone have a piece of our mind (they gotta get what’s coming to them, right?!) and we withheld our tongue and saw how their folly came about in other ways. God graciously restrains us.

And today of all days, as there is a certain game being played this afternoon, sometimes I wonder, “why did God not restrain me in my choice of a team?” Why did God allow my dad to pass on his love for the Dallas Cowboys and here I am, receiving text messages from you all during the season with flavorful language about the cowboys and “how good of a team they are”... Why God did you not restrain THAT? And then he reminds me that when I don’t respond to your lovely messages that I’m practicing restraint myself, and life comes full circle... but I digress.

God is gracious my friends. And this morning I want us to think on a not often thought about part of his grace. And it’s his restraining grace. By grace we are saved, by grace we are trained, and the part of grace that we are looking at this morning is that by grace God at times stops us from messing things up even more. He stops us from sinning. Because maybe even now, God’s restraining grace is at work in your life and you aren’t even aware of it. And that is what we are going to see in this story of David this morning.

Our main point this morning is that

MP: God graciously and providentially restrains us from sin. This morning’s sermon is structured around the 3 main characters in the text. I’ll go ahead and provide the outline up front to you.

- A Foolish Man
- A Wise Woman
- A Protected King

At the end I hope to provide some application points from the entirety of the text.

Chapters 24-26 of 1 Samuel are a literary section. Last week as Jeff preached on chapter 24, we got to see David extend mercy to someone who doesn’t deserve it. And in chapter 26 we see that same thing once more. But here in chapter 25, David himself will be

shown mercy, or rather mercifully restrained by God. Because this week, in this story, David is tempted to take matters into his own hands, to actually take them out of God's hands. He's tempted to become a Saul-like king instead of a Deuteronomy 17 king. So let's jump into the text this morning, point number 1:

### 1. A Foolish Man

1 Samuel died, and all Israel assembled to mourn for him, and they buried him by his home in Ramah. David then went down to the Wilderness of Paran.

2 A man in Maon had a business in Carmel; he was a very rich man with three thousand sheep and one thousand goats and was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 3 The man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name, Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful, but the man, a Calebite, was harsh and evil in his dealings.

4 While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep, 5 so David sent ten young men instructing them, "Go up to Carmel, and when you come to Nabal, greet him in my name. 6 Then say this: 'Long life to you, and peace to you, peace to your family, and peace to all that is yours. 7 I hear that you are shearing. When your shepherds were with us, we did not harass them, and nothing of theirs was missing the whole time they were in Carmel. 8 Ask your young men, and they will tell you. So let my young men find favor with you, for we have come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have on hand to your servants and to your son David.'"

9 David's young men went and said all these things to Nabal on David's behalf, and they waited. 10 Nabal asked them, "Who is David? Who is Jesse's son? Many slaves these days are running away from their masters. 11 Am I supposed to take my bread, my water, and my meat that I butchered for my shearers and give them to these men? I don't know where they are from."

12 David's young men retraced their steps. When they returned to him, they reported all these words. 13 He said to his men, "All of you,

put on your swords!” So each man put on his sword, and David also put on his sword. About four hundred men followed David while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

Notice first how he is introduced. We can skip over these parts but it is important to pick up on. The writer doesn't say his name right away, but says he had a business, he was rich, and then lists his possessions. The writer is signaling to us that this man's possessions precede his person. His life is determined by his property, and as we will see he both lives to defend his property, and dies enjoying his property.

And who is this man? He's nabal. A name that means fool, or as we will come to see in a moment, stupid. He doesn't just lack manners, he lacks any semblance of spiritual, moral, or societal good. And even further, through his possessions and through his parties as we will see, he thinks of himself as a king. He's a king-type figure and ultimately is a Saul-like figure. The writer of 1 Samuel wants us to see some of the similarities here. And while David won't raise his hand against the Lord's anointed, he will definitely raise it against this guy! So David comes to him with a reasonable request. David's not strong-arming him here, he and his men haven't turned into marauders or raiders, but David is simply saying, I did something for you, I helped you, would you be willing to return the favor? Some scholars see hints of David even trying to enter into a covenant here. Notice how David humbles himself in v. 8 and calls himself a son towards Nabal, and this also picks up on him doing that same thing toward Saul.. But he greets him formally, respectfully, and humbly.

And how does Nabal return the deed? He basically spits on David. Who is David? (Reminds the reader of Pharaoh saying, “And who is Yahweh?”) Who is Jesse's Son? A possible run-away slave? Isaiah 32:6 is what Nabal evidences – For a fool speaks foolishness and his mind plots iniquity. He lives in a godless way and speaks falsely

about the Lord. He leaves the hungry empty and deprives the thirsty of drink.

Have you ever known someone like this? Someone who spits on the kindness of others? Someone who has maybe even returned your good with evil? Someone who has, probably shouldn't say this, never been punched before?

You know the anger that can arise within us right? The anger to defend ourselves, to defend our honor, to bring justice down like thunder and lightning. And David wants to do just.. **But foolish nabal doesn't realize the mistake he's making. That's even in part the definition of a fool – they don't know they're fools.** That's him here. But notice once more the love he has for his possessions and how that comes out in his answer. After he calls David a possible run-away slave he says, "Am I supposed to take *my* bread, *my* water, *my* meat and give it to them? Nabal is consumed by avarice, and a fool on top of that, and so this is a deadly combination.

And so what's the right response? What would most men struggle with in this very room? It's time to teach Nabal a lesson! Notice three times in v. 13 the word sword. "All of you, put on your swords!" So each man put on his sword, and David also put on his sword. David's not playing games. He's going to kill this guy for his foolishness. Proverbs 18:6 is true for Nabal – A fool's lips lead to strife, and his mouth provokes a beating.

Before we go to our second character, and whom we will spend much time on, let me say this. Fools existed then, clearly, and fools do today. Nabal's ultimately have gone nowhere, because all those apart from the grace of God are nabals, are fools. Proverbs chapter 1 opens with the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction. Fools despise the wisdom and instruction that comes from God, and therefore they cannot be wise because they do not fear God.

And yet, we must hold Titus 3:3 and its truth in hand as well. 3 For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another.

Praise God he saves fools like us. Praise God that he sent his son Jesus Christ to be the atoning sacrifice you and I need. Praise God that through his death, burial, and resurrection, through faith in His finished work, you and I are forgiven, redeemed, and united to Christ for all eternity. That's great news that fools can both hear and embrace...

So we are to learn from the foolishness of Nabal here. And David as I said wants to take matters into his own hands. As a man of mercy last chapter, he is tempted here and starts succumbing to the temptation. Let's jump back into the story, verse 14 as we see point number 2

## 2. A Wise Woman

14 One of Nabal's young men informed Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, but he screamed at them. 15 The men treated us very well. When we were in the field, we weren't harassed and nothing of ours was missing the whole time we were living among them. 16 They were a wall around us, both day and night, the entire time we were with them herding the sheep. 17 Now consider carefully what you should do, because there is certain to be trouble for our master and his entire family. He is such a worthless fool nobody can talk to him!"

18 Abigail hurried, taking two hundred loaves of bread, two clay jars of wine, five butchered sheep, a bushel of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. 19 Then she said to her male servants, "Go ahead of me. I will be right behind you." But she did not tell her

husband, Nabal.

20 As she rode the donkey down a mountain pass hidden from view, she saw David and his men coming toward her and met them. 21 David had just said, “I guarded everything that belonged to this man in the wilderness for nothing. He was not missing anything, yet he paid me back evil for good. 22 May God punish me and do so severely if I let any of his males survive until morning.”

23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off the donkey and knelt down with her face to the ground and paid homage to David. 24 She knelt at his feet and said, “The guilt is mine, my lord, but please let your servant speak to you directly. Listen to the words of your servant. 25 My lord should pay no attention to this worthless fool Nabal, for he lives up to his name: His name means ‘stupid,’ and stupidity is all he knows. I, your servant, didn’t see my lord’s young men whom you sent. 26 Now my lord, as surely as the Lord lives and as you yourself live—it is the Lord who kept you from participating in bloodshed and avenging yourself by your own hand—may your enemies and those who intend to harm my lord be like Nabal. 27 Let this gift your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. 28 Please forgive your servant’s offense, for the Lord is certain to make a lasting dynasty for my lord because he fights the Lord’s battles. Throughout your life, may evil not be found in you.

29 “Someone is pursuing you and intends to take your life. My lord’s life is tucked safely in the place where the Lord your God protects the living, but he is flinging away your enemies’ lives like stones from a sling. 30 When the Lord does for my lord all the good he promised you and appoints you ruler over Israel, 31 there will not be remorse or a troubled conscience for my lord because of needless bloodshed or my lord’s revenge. And when the Lord does good things for my lord, may you remember me your servant.”

This chapter is filled with direct speech, and here in this section we have the longest speech in the book of 1 Samuel. Although Nabal is a fool, thankfully he has a perceptive servant and a wise wife. Abigail as we are introduced to her in verse 3 is smart and beautiful. I would also call her honorable, fearless, humble, and resourceful. She is in many ways the quintessential Proverbs 31 woman. She is everything her husband is not.. We will come back to that.

And so the perceptive servant comes to her and tells her of the fool's foolishness. In many ways he is the unsung hero. We don't know his name, but he hears of the dire situation and goes to someone who can do something about it. He even says, "He is such a worthless fool no one can talk to him!" Talk about a great description in the Bible. But friends there are so many nameless people who do extraordinary things in Scripture. God uses the named and the nameless alike, and so be encouraged that although our names aren't written in Scripture and we might feel small in comparison to some of these giants of the faith, God uses the big and the small for his purposes. And nameless people like this man remind us of that.

**And so he tells Abigail about this and notice this: she takes action.** She is not a woman who sits around and waits, not a woman who will let a foolish husband drive her and the family to misery and folly, no, she takes action. She gathers the appropriate supplies to feed the troops, hops on the donkey and begins the trek on the mountain pass.

Meanwhile David is beyond angry, riding hard I'm sure with his 400 men, the narrator is building the tension for us, what is going to happen?! He's going to take justice into his hands. Probably culturally speaking this is okay (in the ANE to violate hospitality customs, to degrade someone's kindness was a severe offense), but within the text the narrator is presenting this as something David should not do.



And this comes through in Abigail's speech. Did you notice how many times I said the word Lord? Some in reference to God and many in reference to David. She is showing deference and appealing to his honor. She is also recognizing his anointed king status. Let me just highlight some of the wisdom throughout the speech:

- V. 24 - She knelt at his feet and said, "the guilt is mine, my lord... You know who else said that before? David. When he hears of Saul slaughtering the priests in chap. 22. Ahimilech's son escapes and tells David and David says I myself am responsible.
- V. 25 - My lord should pay no attention to this worthless fool Nabal, for he lives up to his name: His name means 'stupid,' and stupidity is all he knows. I don't take Abigail to be sinning in how she is speaking about her husband here. She is living in reality. The man is a fool and she is trying to fix his mistakes. As her honor shines forth here I'm sure she attempted to honor Nabal as his wife any way she could, but the man's folly is his own undoing. Abigail is simply speaking the truth and not sugar-coating the situation.
  - Side note, friends, when you open up to one another about struggles. Don't sugarcoat it, don't make it sound better than it is (eh I'm just kind of struggling with this vague sin that I don't want to describe that much and I want you to fill in the details...) Speak the truth. Call your sin for what it is, sin. And the one listening will point you to the grace of God, but let us not be a people who beat around the bush when speaking the truth. Grace and truth held together.
- V. 26 - It is the Lord who kept you from participating in bloodshed and avenging yourself by your own hand... Before David has made a decision, she boldly appeals to the Lord and His restraining grace, saying "He has done this for you!"
- V. 28 - For the Lord is certain to make a lasting dynasty for my

lord because he fights the Lord's battles. That lasting dynasty is translated also as a "sure house." It's covenantal language and pointing to what is to come in 2 Samuel 7 and the Davidic covenant where God himself will build a house for David. How wise and foreshadowing are Abigail's words here!

- V. 29 - Someone is pursuing you and intends to take your life. . . . But he [God] is flinging away your enemies' lives like stones from a sling. What's she doing here? She is so wise in appealing to David's history! David, don't do this. God has been protecting you, God has been with you, even in how you killed that Philistine giant with stones and a sling. And now God is doing that same thing to your enemies! She is putting God's miraculous and awesome acts back in front of David. Don't forget these David!
- V. 30 - When the Lord does for my lord all the good he promised you and appoints you ruler over Israel, there will not be remorse or a troubled conscience for my lord because of needless bloodshed or my lord's revenge. She's telling David, everyone knows you will be king. Don't do this act and possibly incur blood guilt or possibly trouble your conscience down the road because you weren't resting in God.

And David recognizes the wisdom in Abigail's speech and he recognizes God's restraining grace coming through in her speech. Divine intervention accomplished through human initiative. As one writer says, *the chosen king wanted his gore, yet Yahweh sent him a savior in skirts* (DRD). (Many husbands here could say amen to their Godly wives saying just the thing they needed to hear at the right time). And Abigail is just that. This woman is awesome. And so her mission is successful. David hears the wisdom and has the conviction to acknowledge what he was about to do is wrong. And this brings us to our third scene:

### 3. A Protected King

Read with me through the end of the chapter, starting in verse 32.

32 Then David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! 33 May your discernment be blessed, and may you be blessed. Today you kept me from participating in bloodshed and avenging myself by my own hand. 34 Otherwise, as surely as the Lord God of Israel lives, who prevented me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, Nabal wouldn’t have had any males left by morning light.” 35 Then David accepted what she had brought him and said, “Go home in peace. See, I have heard what you said and have granted your request.” 36 Then Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was in his house, holding a feast fit for a king. Nabal’s heart was cheerful, and he was very drunk, so she didn’t say anything to him until morning light. 37 In the morning when Nabal sobered up, his wife told him about these events. His heart died and he became a stone. 38 About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal dead.

39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be the Lord who championed my cause against Nabal’s insults and restrained his servant from doing evil. The Lord brought Nabal’s evil deeds back on his own head.” Then David sent messengers to speak to Abigail about marrying him. 40 When David’s servants came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, “David sent us to bring you to him as a wife.”

41 She stood up, paid homage with her face to the ground, and said, “Here I am, your servant, a slave to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.” 42 Then Abigail got up quickly, and with her five female servants accompanying her, rode on the donkey following David’s messengers. And so she became his wife.

43 David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and the two of them became his wives. 44 But Saul gave his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Palti son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

As I said, David sees the wisdom and sees God's providence at work. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel *who sent you to meet me today!*" David, as the Lord's anointed, will be king. This is a major theme of 1 Samuel. And further, he is protected. We have seen this point before. He's protected by God from so many different enemies that want to turn him over to Saul, and even from Saul himself. But here the protected King, is once again protected by God, but mainly from himself.

Friends, that's so true of us. We like to think a lot of our problems are outside of us, the problems are just other people, they are the circumstances we find ourselves in from our home life, to work, to whatever else, and there can be problems in those, sure. But what the Scriptures repeatedly beat us over the head with, lovingly, is that we have a problem within ourselves. **And the Bible calls this sin. It's the sinful flesh that this side of eternity we are to be at war with.** And so, as I said earlier, praise God for the Son of God who came and did something about that problem. And the Christian here knows that freedom, that forgiveness that only can be found in Jesus. But David here had to be reminded that he can't succumb to that sinful flesh, he can't be a Saul-like king and take matters into his own hands, he must rely on the Lord above all else. And as the anointed king he must look to Yahweh as his defender.

So Abigail goes home. She waits until Nabal is no longer drunk. Notice that he is holding a feast for a king. He thinks of himself as a king as I mentioned. So after the wine had gone out from him, he sobered up, Abigail tells the fool what happened. **And we have this interesting verse in verse 37** - 37 In the morning when Nabal sobered up, his wife told him about these events. His heart died and he became a stone. It's hard to know exactly what happened here. Maybe he became like a dead man? Maybe he had a stroke? Maybe he was quiet and in solitude. But Nabal is confronted with his foolishness and then the Lord takes his life. Abigail's words to David

come true. He is the protected King, and all is well. Now ideally we would love to end the story there, but we can't because that's not how Scripture ends it.

Because in verses 39-43 there are some things that need to be explained. **David takes multiple wives doesn't he? He does that which the king of Deuteronomy 17 should NOT do.** Now, some think Saul had already given Michal to someone else and that is why he sends for Abigail to be his wife. Others think Saul did that after these events. We aren't sure, but David does get Michal back, he wants her back as his wife, in 2 Samuel. Whatever the case, I think the writer is presenting David's actions towards Abigail in a positive light. In the ANE, caring for a widowed woman was an honorable thing to do, and here he has seen her beauty, her intelligence, her wisdom, and wants her to be his wife. And Abigail is all too happy to go.

And then, despite Deuteronomy 17 and the King should not be taking multiple wives, David marries another one in Ahinoam. So what do we do? This is clearly not something good. I think it could even possibly be foreshadowing what's to come with Bathsheeba. And so I just want to say something briefly about polygamy in the Bible.

Polygamy was never God's intended plan or framework. It was to be one man and one woman. Yet, because of our sin we push against that. From the worst cases of adultery, to the lust of the eyes, we push against that in our sin, and this is what we observe of sinful people, that God still uses, in the OT as well. And so I think Alex Motyer (mateer's) comment on this is most helpful: Polygamy in the Bible was tolerated by God at times so that mankind may look on those circumstances and realize that in every instance you find it in the Scriptures, it always involves jealousy, conflict, and chaos. In other words it's recorded to show us what a mess we make of things when we step beyond the boundaries of God's plan.

- So tolerated, not condoned. And ultimately we are to learn from the folly of it.

So David is protected. The anointed King will be king. And God in his kindness exercises a gracious restraint of David. So after walking us through the text, I now have 5 application points from chapter 25 as a whole and what is happening in this part of redemptive history.

- Proverbs 26:4 - “Don’t answer a fool according to his foolishness or you’ll be like him yourself.”
  - Our first application is Scripture. We are to learn from the negative here in this story. In this life, you will have fools say foolish things to you, even ridicule you, throw you under the bus, and infuriate you. While defending oneself is not always bad, in many ways fools left to their own devices receive their own judgment. Let us be Christians who embrace a Proverbs 26:4 life.
- Look to God, not possessions
  - This application is a little more subtle, but this side of eternity, and living in the West in particular, it can be hard to be content with our lot in life. It can be very easy to have those thoughts of, “if I just had more of fill in the blank, then everything would be better..” But notice from this story and nabal, that possessions in no way imply happiness, and in fact, in light of Jesus’ warnings in the NT, possessions *can* possibly serve as a hindrance to following God. Listen, we all have problems and desires and besetting sins. But Nabal is a case study of how to learn from this foolish man who in one sense had everything material one could want, and was still miserable. He was still a fool. May that not be true of us.
- Learn from Abigail

- This wise woman of God is amazing. And we can all learn from her willingness to take action, to not let wrong things remain wrong, to fix them when we learn of them, to ultimately point another to the truth of God's promises and to rest in his sovereign plan. But I would like to make some further applications to one particular group of women.
  - To those who are married to an unbelieving spouse, Abigail in many ways is the old testament equivalent to the 1 Peter 3 woman. In her intelligence and beauty, I'm sure she honored her foolish husband as hard as that was to do. But notice this: she did not follow him into his folly or into his sin. Her loyalty was to God above all else. She was a woman who was wise and resourceful and honestly too good for Nabal. But she knew the God of Israel and she trusted in him no matter the circumstances... And the hope of 1 Peter 3 is your prayer – through your honoring and submission to an unbelieving husband you would, through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, be an instrument God uses to win him to Christ. I know that's your prayer, and so there is encouragement here for you from Abigail this morning.
    - And men, side note, maybe this should have been its own application point, aspire to be someone your wife wants to submit to. From my perspective on the church at large, we have more godly women who desire husbands who lead than what is actually happening.
- Learn from David
  - When confronted with his folly, he doesn't make excuses,

doesn't continue on with taking matters into his own hands, but he acknowledges the wisdom of another and stops his course of action. Wisdom demands that in the Christian life. There will be people who see you on a path toward sin, who see you flirting with something that you shouldn't be, who see something in your life that you are blind to. *Listen to that conviction* when it's brought about by another. Learn from David here. Be willing to change course. Friends, with living life in a fallen world, how multifaceted Christian wisdom must be! We need it every single day of our lives. Don't keep plowing on into the sin, but like David turn from the course of action and acknowledge God's providence in your life. Which brings me to my last application point,

- Thank God for His restraining grace in your life
  - God graciously and providentially restrained David from sin, and he graciously and providentially does the same to us. Thank him for that. Thank him preemptively, and thank him after you are aware of it. Because in his grace, he not only saves us from past sins, he protects us from future ones. This is a mercy of God towards us, that he frustrates our purposes, like David here, and puts hindrances in our paths to even greater sin! **The temptation for many of us is a form of self-righteousness, to think that in and of ourselves we are pretty good, that we are okay. But that line of thinking only robs God of his grace all the more.** All that we owe to God is based on his grace, no matter our past, no matter what could have been, God's grace in Christ, past, present, and future is what covers us!
    - So specifically to young people, teenagers and college age, it's very easy to take for granted growing up in the church. That you have Godly



examples who love you, who want to keep you from sin, who desire you to grow in holiness and mature in the Christian life. Don't ever take that for granted. Don't just think that mom and dad are trying to stifle you, but learn to see that as the grace of God at work in your life. Further, God brings relationships into our lives, he brings this covenant community into our lives as a means of restraint. That's the grace of God at work towards us.

- And even more so, his restraining grace is at work in all of our lives differently, isn't it? Every testimony of God's grace is an amazing thing. It's a miraculous thing that he brought us from death to life. Let's make sure we always view God's restraining grace in each of our lives properly...

Some who grow up in the church can wish, "man I wish I had that stark change. I hear the testimonies of those who were doing everything under the son and I wish I had that big of change in my life.

Nonsense. Talk to those who walked through those things and they will tell you they wish they had your testimony! There is no comparison in the kingdom of God. All testimonies are amazing. Whether you grew up in the church and have known his ways from an early age, or whether you were hell-bent on tearing your life a part and God saved you in the midst of doing just that: *neither testimony makes you any closer to God.* We all come in the same way, and that's by the blood of the lamb. The blood of Jesus Christ. His restraining grace is a wonderful thing in our lives and we should praise him all the more for it.

David saw the restraining hand of God in his life, and may you and I

as well.

Let us praise God in prayer for his restraining grace this morning.