Today we resume a sermon series titled, ▶ “Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift.” It is a study through 1 Samuel. First Samuel is an ancient historical narrative of the people of Israel about a thousand years before Christ. We are in the part that chronicles the life of a man named David.

Just before my summer break, we studied ▶ 1 Samuel 24, from which we learned something about how to deal with enemies who do us wrong for no good reason. The example was provided by David and Saul. Saul sought to kill David unjustly. But David did not seek revenge, even when he had a golden opportunity to do so, as Saul was relieving himself in a cave where David and his men happened to be hiding. Instead, David respected Saul, responding to evil with good, not revenge. Our big idea from 1 Samuel 24, which David exemplified, was: ▶ Overcome evil with good, not revenge.

The text we are studying today is ▶ 1 Samuel 25:1-44. From this text, I draw the following big idea: ▶ We must remain humble and teachable, recognizing our propensity to take back for ourselves what we once entrusted to God.

I realize this may not mean much to you now, but as we work our way through the text, I hope it grabs you as it did me.

In the previous chapter, David is a shining example of entrusting vengeance to God. He is a moral hero in refusing to repay evil for evil. He previews the Christlike virtue of overcoming evil with good.

But then, in this very next chapter, we are going to see David on the verge of taking back for himself what he once entrusted to God. We are going to see vengefulness stirring within him. We are going to see him lose it in a situation far less provoking than he had faced before. In chapter 24 he is strong; in chapter 25, he is weak.

Is this the same guy?

If we were fiction writers, creating from our imaginations a character named David to be the perfect object of religious admiration, we wouldn't write chapter 25. Because it's incriminating.

But God included chapter 25 to reveal David as a real God follower with real temptations and struggles. David's life is a messy conglomeration of strong chapters and weak chapters, breakthroughs and breakdowns.

And through it all, God still calls him "a man after my heart" (Acts 13:22). And Scripture calls him a shepherd with an "upright heart" (Psalm 78:72).

This should be an encouragement to us all because, apparently, being a person after God's heart—being a person with an upright heart—does not preclude struggling and failure, including taking back things we once entrusted to God.

Many of us have thought to ourselves at one time or another, "I should have learned this lesson by now, but I'm still struggling. I have failed again. There must be something uniquely and irredeemably wrong with me. Maybe I am beyond the reach of God's grace."

Satan loves this kind of false internal narrative because it can lead to detachment and disillusionment and despair.

And if anyone had reason to think this way, it would be David. God's gracious involvement in David's life was obvious. And yet David struggled with moral failures.

So, how can he be a shepherd with an upright heart? How does he qualify as a man after God's own heart?

A big part of having an upright heart is being humble and teachable. The truth is we're all moral failures. An upright heart humbly recognizes this reality, confesses and owns wrongdoing, and is teachably open to correction before God.

In our text for today, David embodies our big idea: We must remain humble and teachable, recognizing our propensity to take back for ourselves what we once entrusted to God.

Let's see how the story unfolds. ▶ Verse 1 says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 25:1 Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah. . . .

Samuel is one of the great men of God in history (Hebrews 11:32). He was the last judge of Israel and the first prophet. He anointed Saul and then David to be kings of Israel.

When great people of God in our lives pass away, it can be a weak moment in which we are tempted to take control of things from God because we feel alone and vulnerable. ▶ Verse 1 continues.

> ESV 1 Samuel 25:1 . . . Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:2 And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. . . .

> ▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:2 . . . The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:3 Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. . . .

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:3 . . . The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite.

Here is a ▶ map showing the geographical setting.

Samuel dies in Ramah to the north.

David and his men are to the south in the Wilderness of Paran, just beyond the border of the map.

A rich and foolish rancher named Nabal lives in Carmel in the region of Maon. He is of the esteemed family of Caleb and owns thousands of sheep and goats. And he is married to a discerning and beautiful woman named Abigail.

Why do good girls fall for bad boys? In that day and place, their marriage was probably arranged.

Previously, David and his men had run into Nabal's migrating flock and shepherding crew. Having been a shepherd himself, David had sympathetically provided protection for Nabal's shepherds and livestock. It was a valuable and welcome service because Philistines from the west had been attacking Israelite towns nearby and commandeering livestock (23:5).

It is now shearing time—a time when ranchers would take a profit from wool and celebrate with a feast. So, David sends a delegation to ask Nabal for some provisions for services provided.

Verse 4 continues.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:4 David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:5 So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, “Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name.”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:6 “And thus you shall greet him: ‘Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.’”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:7 “‘I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel.’”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:8 “‘Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. . . .’”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:8 “‘. . . Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.’”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:9 When David’s young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited.

Culturally, this was a perfectly fair and reasonable request from David. David has hundreds of men to feed. And the ask amounted to little more than chump change for a man as rich as Nabal.

But Nabal’s name means “stupid” or “foolish,” and he responds in keeping with his name, beginning in verse 10.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:10 And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? . . ."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:10 ". . . There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:11 "Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?"

Nabal's response is insulting in a number of ways. He suggests that David is a nobody. He insinuates that it is David's own fault for being a fugitive. And he says that he doesn't know anything about David or his men, which is probably a lie.

All this is given as justification for stiffing David and his men. And this infuriates David.

Verse 12 continues.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:12 So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:13 And David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. . . .

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:13 . . . And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

David angrily mobilizes four hundred men and intends to murder Nabal and his entire family.

But word of Nabal's foolishness and David's wrath gets back to his wife, Abigail. The story continues to unfold in verse 14.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:14 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."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:15 "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."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:16 "They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:17 "Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, . . ."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:17 ". . . and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:18 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 . . .

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:18 . . . and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:19 And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:20 And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:21 Now David had said, “Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, . . .”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:21 “. . . and he has returned me evil for good.”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:22 “God do so to the enemies of David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him.”

In the original Hebrew, David’s language is colorful, reflecting his anger. The clause, “if by morning I leave so much as one male,” can be more literally translated, “if by morning I leave so much as one person pissing against a wall.”

Back in chapter 24, David extends grace to Saul, who tried to kill him. Now here in chapter 25, David seeks to annihilate Nabal and his entire family for merely snubbing him. David has taken back for himself what he once entrusted to God; namely, revenge. David intends to repay evil with evil, invoking a curse on Nabal.

Thankfully, Abigail intervenes with great wisdom. Here’s a summary of what Abigail tactfully says to David:

- Don’t stoop to the level of my foolish husband.
- A fool cannot thwart God’s good plans for you.
- Exacting revenge will cause you grief later.
- Forgive and let go of the grievance.
- Let God repay.

- Here's the food you requested.

The detailed account begins in verse 23.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:24 She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:25 "Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. . . ."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:25 ". . . But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:26 "Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, because the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, . . ."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:26 ". . . now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:27 "And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:28 "Please forgive the trespass of your servant. . . ."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:28 “. . . For the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live.”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:29 “If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the LORD your God. . . .”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:29 “. . . And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling.”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:30 “And when the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel,”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:31 “my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself. . . .”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:31 “. . . And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.”

These are wonderful words of wisdom, discernment, and tact. But several factors would have made it difficult for David to receive these words well.

First of all, he is furious.

Second, in the patriarchal culture of that day, it was common for men to be dismissive of women. Women did not have much of a voice.

And third, all David’s men are watching to see how he will respond. It could easily be construed as a sign of weakness for a leader to heed a woman, and no less the wife of a fool.

Ironically, the one woman in the story towers above all the men as the voice of reason and godliness.

David is humble enough and teachable enough to listen and take Abigail's words to heart. Verses 32 and 33 record.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:32 And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!"

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:33 "Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!"

Note the phrase "working salvation with my own hand." The same terminology is used three times in our text (vv. 26, 31, 33). It is a point of emphasis. And it relates directly to David's problem. The "salvation" in view is salvation from the injustice of Nabal. And this salvation belongs to the Lord, not David. For David to work salvation with his own hand is to take back for himself what he once entrusted to God. In this case, it is vengeance.

In verse 34, David goes on to explain.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:34 "For as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, . . ."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:34 ". . . unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male."

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:35 Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. . . .

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:35. . . And he said to her, “Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition.”

The story then ends with God bringing about justice with a romantic twist, beginning in verse 36.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:36 And Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. . . .

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:36 . . . And Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until the morning light.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:37 In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:38 And about ten days later the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, . . .

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:39 . . . “Blessed be the LORD who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. . . .”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:39 “. . . The LORD has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head.” Then David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife.”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:40 When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, “David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.”

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:41 And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.”

(That’s pretty much what Cathy said when I sent my servants to propose to her 47 years ago.)

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:42 And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife.

You may be thinking, “Wow, that ends like a Hallmark movie.”

Not exactly.

As if the author wanted to dispel that notion, he includes a couple of embarrassing marital complications to round out the chapter in verses 43 and 44.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:43 David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives.

▶ ESV 1 Samuel 25:44 Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim.

Life is messy. David is not a poster boy for monogamy. Although polygamy was socially acceptable in that day, it is not the biblical ideal. Scripture does not hide or minimize the foibles of God’s people.

Nevertheless, David exemplifies our big idea: ▶ We must remain humble and teachable, recognizing our propensity to take back for ourselves what we once entrusted to God.

Do you find yourself taking back for yourself what you once entrusted to God? Let me provide some modern examples that may help you apply this.

It is prudent to have a financial plan and to be disciplined with money to avoid needless trouble. But in the process, we can we take back from God what is rightfully his. We can start to think it's our money when it's not. As Christ followers we are merely managers of God's money. And sometimes God calls us to do things with his money—through generosity or sacrifice—that are way outside our comfort zone and well beyond cultural norms.

I am a fan of good therapy. My son is a therapist. I have been to a therapist. But sometimes we can take on sole responsibility for fixing ourselves to the exclusion of crying out to God for his help, entrusting our souls to him. When personal empowerment eclipses spiritual surrender, we take back what belongs to God.

Exercising self-control is godly and wise. But excessive desire for control can lead to overthinking or perfectionism or avoidance that seeks to quell our fears and mitigate our vulnerability instead of trusting God to be our refuge.

It is good to take the initiative and to work hard to get things done. But in the process, we can become impatient with God's timing, forcing outcomes, bypassing waiting, taking shortcuts, believing our way is more efficient than God's way, taking back what belongs to him.

It is smart to explore and pursue medical solutions to health problems. I thank God for modern medicine. But sometimes we obsessively assume the burden of finding within the healthcare maze the elusive key that will unlock some medical mystery, all the while forsaking dependence on the Great Physician for our well-being.

It is good to want justice. I think longing for justice is a part of being made in the image of God. But our zeal for justice and fairness can morph into vengeance. Vengeance is God's job, not ours. When we take revenge for ourselves, we forsake the grace and forgiveness of Christ and fail to bring life to our world.

I have drawn all these scenarios from personal experience. At one time or another, I have taken back for myself what I once entrusted to God. And often, it has taken the discernment of an Abigail to help me see it.

It's usually an Abigail named Cathy.

Recently, it was an Abigail named LEGO®.

You see, during my break, I spent some time putting together a working LEGO® typewriter. It has 2,079 pieces and it's complicated.

You may know that LEGO® pieces are reliably crafted; the pieces fit together as designed. Also, the instructions are clear and dependable. If you follow the instructions, you won't go wrong.

About halfway through the build, a section I had just finished was not fitting as it should. It was the second of two symmetrical sides of the typewriter. I had already built and fitted the first, and the second was just a mirror image of the first. So, I figured I didn't need to pay as much attention to the instructions for the second side.

But it wasn't fitting. I examined the second side, and it looked the same as the first. I looked at the place where the pegs were supposed to fit, checking for any imperfections that might explain the difficulty. Nothing.

So, I used a little more force to try to make it fit, which created more problems. Some other parts popped loose under the pressure.

I finally discovered that about 30 steps earlier, I had left out a tiny piece that made the second side about 1/16" smaller than it should be—enough to prevent it from fitting.

I had started the project by surrendering myself fully to the instructions, which are clear and dependable. About halfway through, I took back control, trusting myself to reproduce the second side of the typewriter, pridefully assuming that I knew what the designer had in mind and that I already knew what the instructions would say.

I made a mistake that cost me. And instead of being immediately teachable, I forced it, creating more problems.

The reality is I could never build the typewriter without following the instructions. It's way too complicated. I could never figure it out on my own. So, I repented, returning to the designer and the instructions for the way forward.

It's a metaphor of my life.

God is the designer of my life; he has a plan for me. God has given me the instructions in Scripture. My part is to fully entrust myself to God and the instructions he has given because he and his word are reliable. And it is impossible for me to build a godly life without them. I must humbly recognize my propensity to take control for myself. And be teachable enough to own my waywardness and get right with God when I stray.

Which brings us back to the big idea: We must remain humble and teachable, recognizing our propensity to take back for ourselves what we once entrusted to God.

Let's pray. Lord, forgive us for taking back what is rightfully yours in an effort to "work salvation with our own hand." Help us to entrust ourselves to you afresh. Amen.