

Making the Most of a Difficult Marriage

✖ *The biblical Abigail had a tense relationship with her husband, but she practiced grace and wisdom, and transformed her situation.*

As a mentor, counselor and minister's wife, I often hear desperately hurting women say: "You just don't understand. Things are not like they were back in your day." "You don't know the things we have to go through—single parenting, abusive relationships, substance-abusing partners, men who won't or can't take financial, emotional or spiritual leadership and responsibility for their families."

"Does the Bible even speak to our pain in any realistic terms?" They ask.

"What if I have made disastrous decisions?"

My sisters, keep reading. Although the Bible is an ancient book, it is as up to date as today's headlines. Its principles apply today, and its storylines are as compelling as an episode from an afternoon soap opera.

God is a God of compassion. Each one of us is unique and especially important to Him. And He has provided everything we need in

His Word.

It is always a joy to find portraits of biblical women who are so like the women of our modern age. So imagine my excitement, when I began uncovering yet another role model in Scripture—Abigail.

She is a woman with whom we can all relate, for she did not have a perfect life, but she still emerged a winner. We've often heard the saying, "When life hands you lemons, make lemonade." In Abigail's life story, we find a recipe for success that will show you how to squeeze the blessings out of the bitter circumstances of life.

You can learn how to take the negatives and transform them into a life-affirming, life-giving testimony that will refresh someone else along your journey. Our heroine did just that, and there are some key lessons from her life that you can apply in yours.

GUARD YOUR HEART

In ancient Palestine, women were chattels—slaves—with no rights except those extended by their husbands, fathers or nearest male relatives. Even in this restrictive society, Abigail is given a glowing description in Scripture. The Bible says she was "a woman of good understanding,

and of a beautiful countenance” (1 Sam. 25:3, KJV).

Abigail was not only beautiful in terms of her facial features and figure. The word, “countenance” has a broader meaning that refers to expression, demeanor, attitude, mannerism and personality.

Abigail was gifted with intelligence. She was well-informed and an astute manager and homemaker. Her husband’s great wealth and extensive holdings meant that she would have had to provide for and entertain hundreds of people at a time.

She would have had hiring and firing responsibilities for an army of workers and servants. Her responsibilities, managing the holdings of a wealthy man with extensive lands, herds, vineyards and fields, would qualify her to be an executive of a midsize corporation in today’s world.

Because of the times in which she lived, Abigail would most likely have been the product of an arranged marriage as a very young teenager. It is not important how she acquired her husband.

We will not attempt to judge her any more than we would judge our sisters in similar circumstances. Suffice it to say that beautiful, talented and wise Abigail landed in the same boat as so many women today:

She was
unequally yoked with her husband.

The Bible records her husband's
name as Nabal, which means "churl" or "brutish," and says, "As
his name
was, so was he." Abigail refers to him as a "man of Belial,"
which
means "worthless," "wicked" and "ungodly" (see 1 Sam. 25:25).
The
Scripture says Nabal acted out his name. He was his name (see
1 Sam.
25:25). His name defined his behavior and attitude. He was
verbally
abusive.

Today, he likely would be considered an alcoholic—a
substance abuser (see v. 36). We all know someone who deals
with the
pain of living with a name-calling, ill-tempered man who also
abuses
drugs or alcohol. We can imagine how difficult it must have
been for
Abigail to endure his criticism and negativity.

Women intuitively
understand what a struggle it is to stay positive in an
atmosphere that
is virtually always poisoned with demeaning words. What a
challenge it
is to be proactive and not reactive in the face of such
harshness.

But
Abigail refused to become an enabler of Nabal's addiction or
his
negativity. She did not take his criticism into her spirit.
Nor did she

allow him to define her. She knew her worth. Abigail held onto her self-esteem because she did not see herself through Nabal's limited vision; she saw herself through the eyes of God! How did she accomplish this? How would you accomplish this?

ENCOURAGE YOURSELF

Abigail had a personal relationship with God. Because she knew Him for herself, eventually, she would become a good complement for David, who became her husband after Nabal's death.

Scripture tells us in 1 Samuel 30:6 that when David was overcome with grief over losing his wives and the city of Ziklag, "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Evidently, Abigail had learned to do the same. And so can you. Spend more time in God's Word, and remember who you are. You are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14) in His image and after His likeness (see Gen. 1:26). You are special to Him.

If Abigail is the heroine of this story, the hero has to be David—the warrior poet, the Lord's beloved, the gifted hymnist and worship leader of Scripture. David was the greatest king in the history of Israel. He was a flawed man, but "a man after [God's] own heart" (Acts 13:22).

When David and Abigail met, he was a renowned warrior and soldier of fortune with a band of 600 crack fighting men. He was considered an outlaw and a traitor to King Saul.

Although the prophet Samuel had anointed him as the next king, David had been betrayed by Saul, then forced to flee into the wilderness and run for his life for almost 20 years before he claims his kingdom.

When David and his men came upon Nabal's extensive land and herds, they discovered thousands of sheep and cattle grazing for the winter, spread out across hundreds of acres. But David and his men are not the only bands of men in the mountains. Nomads, bandits and caravans were all passing through Carmel.

David appointed himself protector of the defenseless shepherds and herdsmen spread out in the pastures. He does this throughout the entire fall and winter seasons, but in the springtime, when the fattened herds are brought down for calving and shearing David asked for food and provisions for his men before they moved on.

He sent his emissary to Nabal, informing him that he had been the defacto protector of all that Nabal had on the range, and that his men had not taken anything—nor had they allowed anyone else to do so for months and months (see 1 Sam. 25:4-8).

Nabal's answer was typical of his nature and his name. His answer was brash, ill thought out, inconsiderate and selfish, endangering his whole household. David's response to this rebuff was to arm 400 of his men and swear to destroy all of Nabal's possessions and kill every man and boy on his land before sunup (see vv. 9-13).

But one of Nabal's men had the foresight to tell Abigail what was about to happen. What can a wise woman do to preserve her family despite the shortcomings of her husband? Abigail went into action. She did not waste time berating Nabal for his failure. She did not hope he would catch the vision and make the prudent decision. She knew her man. She knew his limitations, and she did what she had probably been doing all along: She got the job done.

Abigail took huge loads of bread, fruits, wine and meat and sent them ahead to David. Then she courageously mounted her own donkey and raced out to intercept him and plead for her family. This powerful role of intercession is one women have had to fulfill since time immemorial (see 1 Sam. 25:18-19).

INTERCEDE FOR OTHERS

Just as Abigail

prostrated herself before David to plead for a change in her husband's fate, women everywhere should follow her example and fall prostrate before the Lord on behalf of the deliverance of the "Nabals" in their lives.

Like Abigail, we can plead our case before the King for our husbands, children, communities and those we love who are threatened by negative circumstances. David is moved by Abigail's passion, beauty and the wisdom of her plea. She speaks prophetically over his life, and tells him that God will bless him to be a great king, therefore, he should not have the blood of vengeful murder on his anointed hands (see 1 Sam. 25:28-32).

Abigail models for us a woman who is spiritually wise and discerning. She is a passionate intercessor, able to give others godly counsel. But her recipe for wringing the best out of a negative life situation also calls for women to invest themselves in becoming all they can be with God's help. She demonstrates the value of cultivating practical and intellectual skills, maintaining a great attitude and positive self-esteem, based on your worth in God.

This portion of Abigail's story ends with her becoming David's wife and queen after the death of Nabal. Most of us will not experience

such a
dramatic turnaround in our circumstances. However, God has
made great
promises to us for every stage and season of our lives (see
Jer. 29:11).

Abigail represents every woman who must persevere through a
strained marriage and other destructive life issues. But she
stays
spiritually connected to her God because she knows this is
vital for
living with joy, courage and dignity.

Don't be discouraged today.
Our God is not a respecter of person. Abigail's story is here
for our
edification. What she was able to do, by the grace of a
generous and
caring God, we can do also.

REJOICE IN GOD

Find your joy in the
Lord, and in who He has made you to be. You should not look to
anyone
else to make you happy. He will perfect those things
concerning you (see
Ps. 138:8).

Allow the presence of the Lord Jesus to envelope
you. It is His presence that will enable you to do all things
and be an
overcomer in every circumstance. Cherish the opportunities you
have for
your life to be a beautiful testimony of the transforming
power of
Christ. Thank God for the gift of life's circumstances and His
assurance

of victory.

May God help you become a woman of wisdom. And may you come to appreciate the fact that your beauty is defined most importantly by your attitude and spirit. I pray that the Father will enable you to see the real power in the roles you fulfill as a woman, a wife and a homemaker, but above all as a vessel of honor created by Him for an eternal destiny and purpose.

Even in a troubled marriage relationship, your life can be a source of inspiration and strength to others. Ask God to allow you to see yourself, as Abigail did, through His eyes.

When you know your sufficiency is in Him, it is possible for you to maintain a quiet and serene spirit on the inside that will radiate peace and a certainty of victory on the outside.

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