

When I was 7 or 8 years old, my mom had major back surgery, fusing several of her discs. Today, patients are involved in physical therapy soon after surgery; regular movement is considered to be a central part of the recovery. After my mom's surgery, she was told to lie on her back as much as possible for the first six months.

We put on mom's socks in the morning, brought food to her bed or the couch; we did the laundry, vacuumed, made dinners, and the like. One day, with mom's help, I made a big batch of soup in a crock pot; it had been brewing for hours and was extremely hot. At one point, my 6 year brother tried to take a closer look but he wasn't tall enough to reach. I got there just in time to push him aside before the boiling contents spilled all over him, but in the process my arms were drenched and my arms were burned.

See if you can fill in the blanks for me:

- *If you walk through the fire, you're going to get **burned**.*
- *If you walk off of a cliff, you're going to **fall**.*
- *If your hand gets slammed in a car door it's going to **hurt**, or, **break**.*

It's **the Law of Consequences**. Smoking too much, over time, leads to lung cancer. Drinking too much alcohol, over time, leads to liver damage. Eating too much, and exercising too little, over time, leads to the breakdown of our body.

The East Coast Canadian band, *Great Big Sea*, once sang the following lyric, "*I want to be consequence-free*". He wasn't talking about freedom from the force of gravity; He longs for freedom from the constraints that binds all of us. He wants to speak his mind—even

an unkind word—without it coming back to bite him. Are we any different? As we age, we want to grow in experience and wisdom, without losing the strength, beauty, or vitality that belongs to the young. We want to take risks without the possibility of failure. We want to step into—or out of—relationships without causing, or feeling, heartache. We want to live consequence-free.

But here's what I've been thinking about all week. *Is it possible to avoid the consequences of what we pursue? Can we fashion dividers so that what we do in one area of our life has no affect upon another?*

illus: Years ago now, in my early 30's, I was pastoring at a church in Calgary. I got a knock on my office door one afternoon and I answered to find one of our congregants standing there; I'll refer to him as "Rob".

Rob had only been a Christian for a year and half; his young adult daughter had become a follower of Jesus, then his wife, and finally him. Rob followed his daughter and wife and became involved in the church. I got to know Rob through his participation on an Alpha course; Rob was really growing in his faith.

But on the day that Rob appeared at my door, it was evident that he was agitated...angry. Rob was a very gentle man, quiet, kind, I had never seen him agitated before; his eyes were like lightening bolts. He discovered that his wife was sleeping with a young man half her age and he knew where this young man lived.

"Pastor Mark, I've got a crow bar in my trunk and I'm on my way to his house; can give me one good reason why I shouldn't beat him bloody?"

I said the first thing that came to mind, “*Here’s a reason...if you act on your impulses you’re going to jail for a very, very long time.*”

When we’re angry—as the expression goes—we see red. Anger can blind us to the way things really are. Anger narrows our perspective, clouds our thinking, impedes good judgement. As it says in James 1, “*human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*” But anger is far from the only dangerous influence—the spirit of pride, envy, or comparison can set your soul on fire just as easily. So too the spirit of rejection, the spirit of shame, or fear.

It’s **the Law of Consequences**: what goes in, will come out; what we think, desire, and do, shapes who we become.

We’re five weeks into our series in 1 and 2 Samuel, focusing on the life of David, and on the descriptor that came to define his life; he was a man after God’s own heart. In the Biblical way of thinking, the heart represents the centre of a person. In one sense, a person “after God’s own heart” is like a hawk; they’ve set their gaze upon God, watching for every move, listening for every word. *Where is God going? What is He doing? What is He saying? What does He love? What does He avoid?*

To this point in 1 Samuel, Saul has been rejected as King because he continued to rebel against God; David was subsequently chosen and anointed by God—he would be the future King. Unaware of God’s choosing, Saul brought David into his service, gave him a few opportunities, and David’s star began to rise. But the more brightly he shone, the more angry and fearful Saul became. Saul orchestrated

six different attempts on David’s life; when the last one failed, David fled and went into hiding.

Last week, Pastor Brendan walked through 1 Samuel 24 and 26; David on the run, in the wilderness, harassed and hunted by Saul’s army. On two different occasions, David could have easily ended Saul’s life, but on both occasions he showed Saul mercy. These two occasions showcase David—a man after God’s heart—as one who, like God Himself, willingly offers mercy to an enemy.

But sandwiched in between these two events is 1 Samuel 25, and for the first time we clearly see the shadow side in David. A worshipper, a warrior, a loyal subject, yes, but here we see David burning with anger. He’s going take what he deserves and destroy whoever stands in his way, consequences be damned.

If you’ve brought a Bible with you, let me invite you to turn with me to 1 Samuel 25. If you have a smartphone or tablet with you, you can open the Bible App, or you can use the blue Bible from the seat rack in front of you—our text is on page 234.

Now Samuel died, and all Israel gathered for his funeral. They buried him at his house in Ramah. Then David moved down to the wilderness of Maon. 2 There was a wealthy man from Maon who owned property near the town of Carmel. He had 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats, and it was sheep-shearing time. 3 This man’s name was Nabal, and his wife, Abigail, was [an intelligent] and beautiful woman. But Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, was crude and mean in all his dealings.¹

¹ New Living Translation.

Hebrew narrative can be subtle. Not only must we take note of *what* is being said, we also need to attend to *how* it is being said. After announcing the death of Samuel, three people are named in the first three verses: David, Nabal, and Abigail. David we know but the other two are unknown. What's interesting is that Abigail is named before she is described, Nabal, however, is described before he is named.

In doing so, the narrator wants us to know that the most important thing *about* Nabal is also the most important thing *to* Nabal, namely, his wealth. We are told that he was *very* wealthy; he was a rich landowner with enough property to sustain a flock of 1000 goats and 3000 sheep. Verse 3 describes the way other people experienced Nabal; he was mean-spirited, disrespectful, and short-tempered. To add insult to injury, we soon discover later that Nabal's name means "*fool*," or "*foolish*."

To recap, in Nabal we find a wealthy, mean-spirited, short-tempered, fool. By contrast, his wife Abigail is described as being intelligent and beautiful. Let's continue with the story.

“4 When David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, 5 he sent ten of his young men to Carmel with this message for Nabal: 6 ‘Peace and prosperity to you, your family, and everything you own! 7 I am told that it is sheep-shearing time. While your shepherds stayed among us near Carmel, we never harmed them, and nothing was ever stolen from them. 8 Ask your own men, and they will tell you this is true. So would you be kind to us, since we have come at a time of celebration? Please share any provisions you might have on hand with us and with your friend David.’ 9 David’s young men gave this message to Nabal in David’s name, and they waited for a reply.

10 ‘Who is this fellow David?’ Nabal sneered to the young men. “Who does this son of Jesse think he is? There are lots of servants these days who run away from their masters. 11 Should I take my bread and my water and my meat that I’ve slaughtered for my shearers and give it to a band of outlaws who come from who knows where?’

12 So David’s young men returned and told him what Nabal had said. 13 “Get your swords!” was David’s reply as he strapped on his own. Then 400 men started off with David, and 200 remained behind to guard their equipment.”

Some have suggested that David plays the role of the Italian mobster, coming to collect his protection money; I just don't see it. David had the firepower to take whatever he wanted, instead, he speaks a three-fold blessing over Nabal. David asks; he doesn't demand: "*Please share any provisions you might have on hand with us and with your friend David.*"

Nabal responded to David's request with an insult, and it's clear from the insult that he knew exactly who David was.

Nabal's response shouldn't surprise us; we all live with the consequences of our choices. One can't have a love affair with money *and* be generous towards others; Nabal loved his money too much to let it go. But it's one thing to say, "no" to David's request but quite another to intentionally insult Israel's premier Battle Chief. Again, nobody lives consequence-free.

David and his men strapped on their swords, bent on destruction. Vs. 21 gives us an inside look on what was going on in David's mind: "*A*

lot of good it did to help this fellow. We protected his flocks in the wilderness, and nothing he owned was lost or stolen. But he has repaid me evil for good. May God strike me and kill me if even one man of his household is still alive tomorrow morning!”

This is a side of David we haven’t seen before. When David lived in the palace, Saul tried to have him killed six different times; David refused to respond in kind—he ran, he hid, he forgave. Once, with his army chasing David in the wilderness, Saul wandered into a desert cave for a private bathroom break—David was hiding in this very cave; it was the perfect opportunity to take Saul out. David refused to take matters into his own hands.

And yet here, now, mercy, patience, and trust in God’s plan is replaced by David’s burning anger; he’s going to take what he deserves and destroy whoever stands in his way, consequences be damned. Let’s get back to the story and the intervention of Abigail.

Vs. 14 tells us that a servant overheard Nabal insulting David’s men and refusing his request; he went straight to Abigail saying, *“You need to know this and figure out what to do, for there is going to be trouble for our master and his whole family. He’s so ill-tempered that no one can even talk to him!”*

Abigail acted quickly; she gathered food for David’s men and then set out to find him. When she saw David, dressed for war, she fell at his feet and said—vs. 25—*“I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don’t pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests...Now, my lord, as surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, since the Lord has kept you from murdering*

and taking vengeance into your own hands, let all your enemies and those who try to harm you be as cursed as Nabal is.”

Vs. 28, *“The Lord will surely reward you with a lasting dynasty, for you are fighting the Lord’s battles. And you have not done wrong”*.

Vs. 30-31, *“When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, don’t let this be a blemish on your record. Then your conscience won’t have to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance.”*

Abigail kept David from making a terrible mistake; she spoke courageously, convincingly, intelligently. Abigail reminded David who he was, what God had promised to him—and David listened. She stopped his course of action before it was too late, before he shed innocent blood. Abigail was right; David’s life *was* in the Lord’s hands. David didn’t have to defend his own honour. The Lord would continue to provide for him. David trusted the Lord to raise him up—or set him aside—according to the Lord’s timing and purpose.

When Abigail went back to the house, she discovered a party was in full swing and Nabal was in a drunken stupor. The next day she told Nabal what had transpired and he had some kind of heart attack or stroke; ten days later he died.

The story concludes with David asking Abigail to become his wife. Abigail agreed, but vs. 43 and 44 sound a troubling note: *“David also married Ahinoam from Jezreel, making both of them his wives. Saul, meanwhile, had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to a man from Gallim named Palti son of Laish.”*

David sent for Abigail and she came but we're left to wonder whether this marriage was born of love, lust, or power. A landowner as wealthy as Nabal would have been well-known in the Southern part of Israel; Abigail's wisdom and beauty would have been equally well-known. In becoming David's wife, she brought all of Nabal's wealth and all of her influence. In every age, both then and now, wealth + influence = power. Years later, David was crowned as the King of Judah, not far from here, in Hebron.

David didn't kill Nabal or confiscate his wealth. In one sense, he didn't take matters into his own hands, but in another sense, David made an alliance, stockpiled wealth, and secured his future. This "normal" behaviour for most kings, but I fear his action was out of line with the King of Heaven.

Verse 43 that David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel—another marriage, another alliance. In Deuteronomy 17, God gave clear instruction to Israelite kings: don't amass wealth, or wives, in the attempt to consolidate power. And yet David is taking his first steps down a dangerous path; *he's on his way to kingship, but to what kind of kingship, and, at what cost?* What we do shapes who we become; no one can avoid the law of consequences.

Application: In the time remaining I want to offer two points of application. Here's the first:

1. All of us are on a journey of becoming. Our lives are not static. We are being shaped, changed, formed, and one of the chief agents in this process are the choices we make.

We tend to think in binary terms—*in or out, black or white, good or bad*—but life isn't that simple; the human heart isn't that simple. One moment David is merciful, the next moment he's hell-bent on vengeance. Our hearts are like a field in which weeds and wheat grow up together. Like Nabal, Abigail, and David, our character is being shaped by what we think, desire, and do; each choice is a brush stroke on the canvas of our lives.

Stop for a moment to consider the life-shaping power that is found in the choices we make. Every day we make choices that affect us at school, at work, in our neighbourhood, or families. We make choices about entertainment, about money, about time and how we will spend it. Have you stopped to consider where your choices are leading you? What are your choices producing in you?

We can choose to open ourselves to love—the love of God and others—or we can hold God and others at a distance for fear of being hurt. We all live with the consequences of our choices.

In this world all of us will experience hurt, misunderstanding, and rejection. Jesus, the Son of David, knew this firsthand. In the face of accusation and rejection, He entrusted his reputation to the Father. He made the choice, repeatedly, to let go of bitterness, anger, and the

desire to get even. “*Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.*”² “*Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.*”³

The choice to forgive and seek reconciliation leads us down a very different path than the choice to hold on to bitterness and anger. We all live with the consequences of our choices.

illus: I began my sermon with the story of Rob walking into my office. He felt betrayed, he was wounded, angry, seeing red. By the time he left my office he had surrendered his crow bar, but his journey forward wasn’t nice or neat.

Rob’s wife chose to walk away—from the marriage, from the family, from her faith. She wanted to be free to do whatever, whenever, and this priority didn’t square with marriage, family, or Jesus. Rob chose a very different path; he did the excruciating work of letting go—of his marriage, of the wounds of rejection, of anger, and over time, he forgave his wife (though she never came back). About 5 years after I left Calgary, Rob sent me a letter, outlining what God had done in his life, how he was doing, where he was growing; I’m so proud of him.

In the attempt to avoid pain, some seek to make their lives bullet-proof, building layers of protection, seeking every advantage, desperately trying control everyone and everything. We cannot live this way *and* avoid the consequences.

² Luke 23:34.

³ Luke 23:46.

As you think about your own life, are you fighting God or embracing God? Are you convinced that His way is right, or, are you trying to convince God that your way is right? The choices we make shape our becoming. Let me ask, *who are you becoming?*

2. The second point of application is this: **Embrace the gift of others.**

In the text we’ve read this morning, you may have noticed that God’s name is mentioned but we don’t see His direct activity or hear His voice. But here’s the thing...God wasn’t absent—He’s never absent or inactive—He was working behind the scenes to bring Abigail to David; David needed wise counsel, and God provided a wise woman.

Instead of driving straight to the young man’s house, first, Rob stopped by the church. At the height of his anger and desperation, Rob knew he needed godly perspective. David had set his mind on a course of action, and had he continued, he would have shed innocent blood. What a difference Abigail made! David listened to this wise woman, he learned something, and he chose to let go of his thirst for vengeance.

All of us must live with the consequences of our choices, and one of the consequences of this age of independence is blindness. We act alone, we trust ourselves, we don’t invite others in.

Proverbs 28:26 says, “*Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.*” More often than not, the providence of God is encountered in the company of others; they are God’s provision for the journey of our lives.

Let me ask, who have you let into the inner counsel of your mind and heart? Do you have a close group of friends, advisors, or, are you connected to a small group? Who are you sharing your thoughts, your plans, and your life with?

The Lord’s Supper: Like David, our heart is like a field in which weeds and wheat grow up together. Like Nabal, Abigail, and David, our character is being shaped by what we think, desire, and do; each choice is a brush stroke on the canvas of our lives. And the most important choice we can make is to live in connection to Jesus.

In a few moments, we’re going to gather around the Lord’s table; I’m going to invite you to come forward to eat a morsel of bread, dipped in grape juice. In one sense, this can hardly be considered a meal—it’s just a taste. What is going on when we participate in the Lord’s Supper?

Through this symbolic act, we open ourselves to the reality of Christ’s presence and power. Here at this table we confess we have need, and that Jesus is our supply. We are all on a journey of becoming, and we all need His intervention—we need His strength, His wisdom, His love, His forgiveness, His healing and transformation.

On the night before Jesus was nailed to the cross, He shared a final meal with His disciples. At one point during the meal, He took bread,

thanked God for it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, “*This is my body, given for you; do this in remembrance of me.*” In the same way, after dinner He shared a cup of wine with them saying, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*”

At the cross, Jesus’ body was broken for us, that we might experience God’s healing, that we might be made whole. At the cross, Jesus’ blood was spilled, that our sins might be washed white as snow.

If you are hungry and thirsty for God’s provision—for forgiveness, strength, wisdom, or healing—then come and receive this morning.

At this time I’d like to invite those serving the Lord’s Supper to come and take their place. We have three stations at the front and one/two in the balcony. As the worship team begins to play, please come forward, beginning with the front row; you will be invited to tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and then eat with gladness for all that Jesus has done, and is doing, for us.

Worship

Invitation to Prayer ministry

Benediction