

The Wise Leader: Remembering the King

By Carrie Cavanaugh

One of my favorite leadership stories is that of the CEO who called in an employee who had made a mistake that cost the company a great deal of money. The employee was expecting to be fired, but instead the CEO told him to learn from the mistake and that the CEO trusted him with the future of the company. The CEO's wisdom paid off as the employee became one of the most loyal and productive employees at the company.

If this is an example of wisdom, we think of the opposite, foolishness, as something like the CEO who fails to plan for the future leadership of the company and when he can no longer lead, the company fails.

But the Bible teaches that there is more to it than this. The fool is someone who acts without regard to God. Psalm 14:1 reads, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" And verse after verse describes the logical consequence of this outlook: "It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel," Proverbs 20:3; "the complacency of fools will destroy them," Proverbs 1:32a; and "Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning," Ecclesiastes 4:13.

Christian leaders are certainly responsible for learning all they can about the most effective ways to run an organization, but of even greater importance is to be ever mindful of

our creator. This means coming to decisions humbly; recognizing that your organization cannot succeed without God's blessing. Additionally, when temptation arises to fudge the accounts to get around an unjust law, remembering the one who will call you to account on the last day. Finally, when acclaim comes, acknowledging to whom you owe your success.

The story of Nabal, whose name literally means "fool", is a personification of the blind selfishness of the fool. David was not yet king, but many young men were already faithfully following him in anticipation of the day God would fulfill his promise to this young man whom He described as "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22). David and his men had protected Nabal's sheep and when it came time for them to be sheared, David sent some of his men to ask for any supplies that he could spare. Although David's men asked with great courtesy, Nabal's response was anything but. David aptly described the situation when he said, "He has paid me back evil for good" (1 Samuel 25:21).

Nabal's wife serves as his foil in the account. While Nabal is described as "surly and mean in his dealings" (1 Samuel 25:3), his wife, Abigail, is described as "a beautiful and intelligent woman" (1 Samuel 25:3). When she becomes aware of the situation, she immediately sends

a generous amount of supplies and humbly goes to David herself to ask for his mercy. She makes no excuses for her husband.

While David was prepared to kill all the men at Nabal's dwelling, Abigail's humble and wise response was able to deter disaster and restore peace. Yet God has promised destruction for the fool and in the end Nabal dies of a heart attack when he learns what has happened. Abigail won David's favor to such an extent that he makes her his wife.

This account in 1 Samuel 25 shows us how ego, selfishness, and greedy business practices lead to destruction. As the economy struggles, Christian organizations have had to cut back. Indeed, we are called to be wise stewards, but not parsimonious ones. And so we need to remember to fear the One who alone is to be feared.

Nabal was also foolish in that he was short-sighted. A favor now to the man God was going to make king would surely have been returned by future blessing. This must have spawned from a lack of faith in God's promises. It's too easy for us also to forget God's promises in the midst of the myriad of relationships and demands placed upon us in our jobs. Although God tells us to "become all things to all people" so that they may be saved (1 Corinthians 9:22), ultimately, there is only One we need to please – God

The Wise Leader: Remembering the King

By Carrie Cavanaugh

(Galatians 1:10).

I suspect that for most of us this issue isn't as obvious as it was with Nabal and Abigail, but is rather about subtleties of the heart. We are so good at justifying our actions when really our heart motivations are wrong. God sees our hearts though. That's why it's so important to step back and look at what or who we really fear.