

# Nabal, David, & Abigail - 1 Samuel 25

## Background

David's men had been protecting Nabal's shepherds and property during sheep-shearing season. David sends messengers to ask for provisions. Nabal responds with contempt, provoking David to march with 400 men to wipe out Nabal's household. Abigail, Nabal's wife, intervenes and prevents bloodshed.

NVC Step	Nabal (Violent / Selfish)	David (Escalating / Retaliatory)	Abigail (Peacemaker / NVC)
<b>Observation (facts without judgment)</b>	<i>"Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days." (25:10) → Dismisses David, distorts facts.</i>	<i>"It's been useless—all my watching over this fellow's property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing; he has paid me back evil for good." (25:21) → States fact but through anger.</i>	<i>"My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say." (25:24) → She calmly names her presence and appeals for attention.</i>
<b>Feeling (naming inner state)</b>	Pride, disdain (not expressed as "I feel" but shown in contempt).	Rage, indignation: <i>"May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!" (25:22).</i>	Humility, grief for the offense: <i>"Please forgive your servant's presumption." (25:28).</i> Her posture shows sorrow and compassion.
<b>Need (the universal longing)</b>	Security and control but expressed as arrogance ("Why should I take my bread and water... and give it to men coming from who knows where?" 25:11).	Justice, respect, recognition for protecting Nabal's household.	Preservation of life, peace, righteousness: <i>"The LORD your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the LORD's battles." (25:28).</i>
<b>Request (clear, positive action)</b>	Refuses the request: "Why should I give them anything?"	Vows destruction: his "request" is effectively to satisfy honor through bloodshed.	Concrete plea: <i>"Please accept this gift I have brought to my lord... When the LORD has brought my lord success, remember your servant." (25:27, 31).</i> Requests forgiveness, restraint, and future blessing.

## Key Insights

- **Nabal** communicates through insult and contempt—blocking relationship.
- **David** communicates through offense and retaliation—escalating conflict.

- **Abigail** models NVC: she observes without blame, expresses humility and feeling, identifies needs (peace, righteousness), and makes a specific, life-giving request.

## David's Initial Reaction – Without NVC

**Observation (missing):** David doesn't start with an observation; he interprets Nabal's words as a personal insult.

**Internal Story:** "He's spitting on my kindness and disrespecting my position." (Judgment/Evaluation)

**Feelings:** Outraged, irritated, appalled

**Needs (unspoken):** Respect, acknowledgment for his service, fairness.

**Request (absent):** David skips making any request for resolution — he moves straight to violent action.

**NVC note:** David is in **amygdala hijack** — fight mode. His reaction bypasses curiosity and turns to retribution. *"Each of you strap on your sword!" (1 Sam. 25:13)*

## Nabal's Response – Without NVC

**Observation (distorted):** "David is just a runaway servant." (Assumption, disrespect)

**Internal Story:** "This man is beneath me — I owe him nothing."

**Feelings:** Pride, contempt

**Needs (ignored):** Security over his resources, maintaining status in front of others.

**Request (absent):** He makes no space for dialogue or understanding.

**NVC note:** Nabal's contempt is a classic life-alienating communication — labeling, dismissing, and provoking without recognizing the other's needs or stating his own clearly.

## Abigail's Intervention – With NVC Principles

Abigail steps into the gap and does what neither man has done:

- Makes clear **observations**
- Names the **impact**
- Identifies **feelings/needs**
- Frames her **request** in a way that preserves dignity for both sides

**Observation:** "My lord, let not your heart take seriously this worthless man, Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal [Fool] is his name, and folly is with him. But I, your servant, did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent." (vv. 25–26) She distinguishes between what happened (she didn't see the messengers) and the character flaw of her husband, without excusing him.

**Feelings:** While she doesn't directly name her emotions, her urgency and humility ("I am your servant") convey deep concern and respect.

**Needs:** She appeals to David's higher values — justice, righteousness, and his future reputation as king. (vv. 28–31) She reframes the conflict as a spiritual test rather than a personal insult.

**Request:** "Please forgive the trespass of your servant" (v. 28) — she asks for mercy, effectively requesting that David not carry out vengeance. She also gives a gift of provisions (a nonverbal request for reconciliation).

**NVC note:** Abigail shifts David’s focus from his wounded pride to his long-term identity and calling. She satisfies his deeper needs for honor and righteousness without shaming him for being angry.

## Outcome

David recognizes the wisdom in Abigail’s approach: “Blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed...” (v. 33)

- **David’s feelings:** Relieved, grateful, respected.
- **Needs met:** Preservation of honor without resorting to vengeance; affirmation of his righteousness.
- **Result:** Conflict is defused, bloodshed prevented, and Abigail is remembered as a model of peacemaking.

## Key Takeaways

1. **When insulted, slow down before acting.**  
Ask: *What am I feeling? What need is unmet? What might the other person’s needs be?*
2. **Separate the person from the offense.**  
Abigail acknowledges Nabal’s foolishness but also removes David’s need to “win” by shifting the focus to God’s justice.
3. **Appeal to values and identity.**  
Rather than arguing facts, she reminds David who he is and what story he wants to live.
4. **Meet a need physically and relationally.**  
Abigail not only brings words of peace but also practical gifts, showing tangible care.

Abigail’s gift came in the form of nonviolent language. Her sweet words of compassion changed everything in David’s heart, and she saved countless lives. Imagine how different our world would be if we all practiced this kind of speech.

## The Ten Spies – Numbers 13-14

NVC Step	Ten Spies (Fear-Based / “Jackal Talk”)	Caleb & Joshua (Faith-Based / “Giraffe Talk”)
<b>Observation(facts without judgment)</b>	<i>“We went into the land to which you sent us. It does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.”</i> (13:27) → They start with observable fact.	<i>“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good.”</i> (14:7) → They also start with clear observation.
<b>Feeling(naming emotion)</b>	Fear expressed as <b>exaggeration &amp; projection</b> : <i>“We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”</i> (13:33)	Confidence expressed with <b>faith &amp; reassurance</b> : <i>“Do not be afraid of the people of the land...”</i> (14:9)
<b>Need (the universal longing)</b>	Underneath: <b>safety, security, predictability</b> . But instead of naming	Underneath: <b>trust in God’s covenant, courage,</b>

	it, they collapse into despair: <i>“If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness!”</i> (14:2)	<b>protection.</b> They name it clearly: <i>“If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land...”</i> (14:8)
<b>Request (clear, positive action)</b>	Reactive & regressive: <i>“We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”</i> (14:4)	Life-giving & actionable: <i>“Do not rebel against the LORD... Do not be afraid... Let’s go up and take possession of the land.”</i> (13:30; 14:9)

### Key Takeaways

- The **ten spies** distort reality through fear; their communication escalates despair and disconnection.
- **Caleb and Joshua** ground their words in reality, name the deeper need (trust in God), and make a hopeful, actionable request.
- Both groups saw the same land, but their communication shaped radically different outcomes.

## Joseph & His Brothers – Genesis 45

NVC Step	Joseph’s Communication	Notes / Impact
<b>Observation (facts without judgment)</b>	<i>“I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!”</i> (45:4)	Joseph states the plain fact—he names their past action without shaming or insulting them.
<b>Feeling (naming emotion)</b>	<i>“And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.”</i> (45:2)	His tears reveal deep grief, longing, and relief. Vulnerability shows his heart more than accusations would.
<b>Need (the universal longing)</b>	<i>“And now, do not be distressed or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.”</i> (Genesis 45:5)	Joseph identifies the deeper need: reconciliation, family survival, and God’s redemptive purpose. He reframes the betrayal in light of God’s larger plan.
<b>Request (clear, positive action)</b>	<i>“Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have.’”</i> (45:9–10)	Joseph makes a specific, actionable request: bring the whole family to Egypt to dwell near him. This turns reconciliation into concrete restoration.

### Key Takeaways

- Joseph demonstrates **nonviolent communication**: he names the truth, shows vulnerability, identifies the deeper need (life, reconciliation, God’s plan), and makes a clear, actionable request.
- Instead of using blame (“you ruined my life”), Joseph communicates life-giving truth that heals the relationship.
- His NVC opens the way for forgiveness and covenant restoration.

## Hannah & Her Rival – 1 Samuel 1

NVC is not only horizontal (human-to-human) but also vertical (human-to-God)

NVC Step	Hannah’s Example	Notes / Impact
<b>Observation (facts without judgment)</b>	<i>“And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb.”</i> (1 Samuel 1:6)	Hannah’s reality is clear: she is barren, and Peninnah provokes her. She names the facts of her situation through narrative.
<b>Feeling (inner emotion)</b>	<i>“She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly.”</i> (1 Samuel 1:10)	She openly expresses sorrow and grief. Instead of hiding her pain, she brings it into prayer.
<b>Need (the universal longing)</b>	<i>“And she vowed a vow and said, ‘O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant...’”</i> (1 Samuel 1:11)	Hannah identifies her need for remembrance, dignity, and fruitfulness, but even deeper, for recognition, worth, respect, and contribution in God’s covenant.
<b>Request (specific, positive action)</b>	<i>“...but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”</i> (1 Samuel 1:11)	She makes a concrete request (a son), framed with covenantal devotion (dedicating him back to God).

## Hannah in Conversation with Eli

NVC Step	Hannah’s Words	Notes / Impact
<b>Observation</b>	Eli <i>“thought she was drunk”</i> because her lips moved but no sound came. (1:13). This is a moralistic judgment, not a true observation. <i>“How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you.”</i> (1:14)	When misunderstood by Eli, she clarifies without defensiveness, showing vulnerability instead of accusation. <i>“No, my lord, I am a woman sharply pained in spirit, and I have not drunk wine and strong drink, and I pour out my soul before Adonai.”</i> (1:15)
<b>Feeling</b>	<i>Don't think of your servant as a worthless woman; because I have been speaking from the depth of my distress and anger.”</i> (1:16)	She names her feelings of anguish/sadness, and anger.

<b>Need</b>	<i>I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.” (1:15)</i>	She needs God’s attentive ear, not human misjudgment.
<b>Request</b>	Implicit: “Do not regard me as a wicked woman.” (1:16) Request for empathy and dignity.	Eli responds with blessing: “ <i>Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.</i> ”(1:17).

### 1. Observations (Facts without judgment)

- Hannah had no children.
- Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife, had children.
- Peninnah regularly provoked Hannah, causing her distress.
- Hannah wept and did not eat.
- Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion of meat.
- Hannah prayed intensely at the tabernacle.
- Eli the priest mistakenly thought Hannah was drunk.
- Hannah explained her distress to Eli.
- Eli blessed Hannah.
- Hannah conceived and bore a son, Samuel.
- Hannah kept her vow and presented Samuel to the Lord at Shiloh.

### 2. Feelings (Emotions in response to observations)

- **Hannah:** Despair, bitterness, sadness, shame (related to barrenness), longing, hope, relief.
- **Peninnah:** Possibly jealousy (of Elkanah's love for Hannah), perhaps even satisfaction in Hannah's distress (though not explicitly stated, her provoking suggests a lack of compassion).
- **Elkanah:** Love for Hannah, concern, confusion about her distress.
- **Eli:** Misjudgment, perhaps concern initially, then understanding and compassion.

### 3. Needs (Universal human needs underlying the feelings)

- **Hannah:** To be seen and understood, to have her pain acknowledged, to experience belonging and connection, to have her desire for a child fulfilled, to be valued, to be free from shame.
- **Peninnah:** Perhaps a need for recognition, significance, or security within the family structure.
- **Elkanah:** To show love and care, to understand and address Hannah's sadness, to maintain peace within his household.
- **Eli:** To understand the situation before reacting, Bay Area Nonviolent Communication suggests perhaps to maintain order in the tabernacle, to offer support where needed.

### 4. Requests (Specific, actionable steps to meet needs)

- **Hannah (implicit):** To be heard by God, to be granted a child, to be comforted by Elkanah, to be free from Peninnah's provocations.

- **Peninnah (implicit):** To be recognized and valued.
- **Elkanah (his questions to Hannah):** To understand the source of her distress, so he can address it.
- **Eli (after realizing his mistake):** To bless Hannah and offer encouragement.

### NVC analysis of the narrative

- **Hannah's cry to God:** This is an honest expression of deep feelings and unmet needs.
- **Peninnah's provocations:** These actions likely reflect her unmet needs and potential hurt, though expressed in a way that creates disconnection and further distress for Hannah.
- **Elkanah's attempts to comfort:** While his intentions are loving, his words ("Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?") may unintentionally minimize Hannah's pain and fail to fully address her deeper need for a child.
- **Eli's initial misjudgment:** This highlights the importance of observation and seeking clarity before making assumptions, a key tenet of NVC.
- **Hannah's explanation to Eli:** This demonstrates the power of vulnerable and authentic self-expression.
- **Eli's blessing:** This is an act of empathetic support and acknowledgment of Hannah's need.
- **Hannah's vow and dedication of Samuel:** This reveals her commitment to meeting her need for connection with God and expressing gratitude.

By examining 1 Samuel 1 through an NVC lens, a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations, the impact of their actions on one another, and how empathy and honest communication could have potentially fostered greater connection and compassion throughout the story is gained.