

INTRODUCTION

The 29th Olympic Games were launched on Friday evening with the explosion of 29 giant footstep-shaped fireworks in sequence from Tiananmen Square to the Olympic Stadium. As we continue our Go for the Gold series, I have some multiple choice Olympic Trivia questions for you.

1. How many Olympians are competing in Beijing?

- A. 3,726
- B. 7,400
- C. 10,500

You can vote, just input your answer on the keypad in the pew back in front of you (ha! What do you think this is, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire???). The answer is C. 10,500—this is the largest number of competitors in any Olympic game.

2. How many women competed in the second Olympiad in 1900?

- A. 19
- B. 36
- C. 57

The answer is A. 19—no women competed in the first ancient Olympics or in the first modern games in 1896.

3. Which event was NEVER an Olympic sport?

- A. Chess
- B. Powerboating
- C. Tug-of-War

The answer is A. Chess has never been an Olympic competition, but early on, both powerboating and tug-of-war were sanctioned events.

4. What was the first Olympic event in which a woman participated?

- A. Tennis
- B. Croquet
- C. Equestrian

The answer is B. Croquet was an early event in the Paris Olympics of 1900 and a French woman competed against men, by the way. The French won all the medals because they were the only team competing—the croquet match had one spectator and was dropped after the Paris games—over the protest of the French!

5. In what sport were all three medals won by U.S. Women in 1900?

- A. Swimming
- B. Tennis
- C. Golf

The answer is C. Golf was an Olympic Sport in 1900 and 1904 but hasn't been since that time. So how did you do? If you have some Olympic trivia questions feel free to email them to me.

During this month of the Olympics I’m talking about “How To Be a Champion For God.” I’m glad I can introduce you to some of the lesser-known champions of the Bible—both male and female. Last week we learned about a lion chaser named Benaiah, and in this lesson we’re going to learn that a Champion Takes Risks, as we meet a risk-taker named Abigail. I call her the original supermodel, because she is a supermodel of faith. As I tell her story, let’s start by meeting the three key characters in our story.

1 Samuel 25:2-3 says, “Then David moved down into the desert of Maon.” This is the same David who killed Goliath—he isn’t King David yet, because Saul is still on the throne and David is living on the move, hiding from Saul in the desert wilderness. He has gathered a band of 600 soldiers who support him—Benaiah was part of this group.

And the scripture continues, “A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. His name was Nabal...” Nabal is our second character—his name literally means “empty bag” or “fool.” He’s rich and influential—and we all know that even today some fools end up rich. Now let’s meet our champion, “and his wife’s name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.”

In those days, there were many bandits in the wilderness who would descend on a flock of sheep and kill the shepherd and steal the sheep. David and his men played the role of protectors for some of the wealthy sheep-herders. They didn’t charge any money for this service, but it was customary for the protected party to provide food and other provisions for these protectors. Think of it this way: We aren’t required to tip a server in a restaurant, but it’s an insult if you don’t leave a gratuity for someone who has given you good service. David and his band of soldiers had been protecting Nabal’s herds for many months, so David sent a delegation to politely ask Nabal for some food and drink for his soldiers. Even today in Middle Eastern Culture, hospitality in the desert is practiced—even to your enemies. David’s delegation was extremely kind. They said, “Shalom to you and shalom to your family—we’ve protected your flocks, now would you be so kind as to share some of your food with us?” But Nabal was such a mean, wicked fool that he insulted David’s kindness. He said, “Who does this David think he is anyway? What right does he have to ask me for *anything*? I’m not going to share a single crumb of bread or a drop of wine with that imposter!”

When David’s soldiers went back to David and told him what Nabal said, David blew a fuse. He gathered 400 of his warriors and said, “Strap on your swords, boys! We’re going to go teach that fool Nabal a thing or two. We’re going to slaughter all of them—they’re dead meat! May God punish me if a single one of them is left standing in the morning!” They rode off in a cloud of dust to massacre Nabal and his men.

Meanwhile a wise servant ran to our champion, Abigail, and reported what had happened. In a flash, Abigail comes up with a risky plan and executes it. She instructs her servants to load up a vast amount of food on donkeys and intercepts David before he reaches Nabal. Let’s pick up the story and read it ourselves beginning in 1 Samuel 25:23-28.

“When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. She fell at his feet and said: ‘My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent. Now since the LORD has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. Please forgive your servant’s offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD’s battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live.’”

She goes on to brag on how she believes that David will soon be the King and to consider her peace offering. We find David’s response in 1 Samuel 25:32-38. “David said to Abigail, ‘Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.’ Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, ‘Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.’”

I call Abigail the first supermodel, because she was a woman who not only was beautiful, she was smart, and she was brave. Her quick thinking and her risky plan to intercept David and intercede on Nabal’s behalf prevented a disaster of, well, biblical proportions! She is a supermodel of faith, because she teaches us three important lessons about taking risks.

1. RECKLESS BEHAVIOR ISN’T THE SAME AS A CALCULATED RISK

Throughout the pages of God’s Word we discover champions who weren’t afraid to tackle a risky challenge with the power of God. It was foolhardy for Joshua to simply march around Jericho, the most heavily fortified city in the ancient world—but the walls fell down. It was risky for a little shepherd boy named David to go against Goliath with only a slingshot in his hand—but the giant fell before him. In our story today, Abigail was taking a risk, because it was socially forbidden for a woman to approach or talk to a man who wasn’t her husband—she was risking her reputation. She didn’t tell her husband about her plan, and technically she didn’t even own the goods she offered to David—Nabal owned it all. Her audacious behavior would have been grounds for instant banishment and shame. And don’t forget, David was as mad as a wet hornet. He was angry enough to kill anyone associated with Nabal—she was risking her very life, but she threw caution to the wind. She was a champion risk-taker.

Are you a risk-taker? Dr. Bob Cox, longtime educator in our church, once said that most organizations or movements go through three stages. First, they are risk-takers, then they become caretakers, and then they become undertakers. In other words, most great movements are born when someone is willing to take a risk to do attempt something impossible. But once that stage has been reached too many people and too many groups (including churches) become caretakers

and eventually undertakers—as the organization dies and people just refuse to bury it. The key to success as a champion for God is to have a willingness to take risks for God.

But being a risk-taker doesn't mean you just close your eyes and barge in where angels fear to tread. There is an important difference between reckless behavior and calculated risk. In our story we observe the hot-headed reckless behavior of two stubborn men—Nabal and David. It was dangerous and rash for Nabal to refuse to pay David's men, and then to insult David. Like Jim Croce used to sing, “You don't pull on Superman's cape; you don't spit into the wind; you don't pull the mask off the old Lone Ranger; and you don't mess around with the king-to-be!”

David was a man after God's own heart, but this reaction was obviously a result of a hot temper. He had been insulted and his only reaction was to strap on his sword and ride in and lop off a few heads without asking any questions. I think this was probably a carryover from his frustration from the way King Saul had insulted and threatened him. Due to his respect for the King, David kept his anger in check. But this Nabal didn't wear a crown, so it was an easy outlet for his rage. Psychologists today call it transference, and we still transfer our anger and rage toward the nearest target.

Are you a rage-aholic, or do you live with a rage-aholic? Some people react like David in a knee-jerk reflex of anger to any threat. Some people live by the philosophy, “Ready, FIRE, aim...”

Fortunately in our story, there is a champion who takes a calculated risk. She is a supermodel of kindness, a supermodel of grace, and a supermodel of faith. Abigail considered her options, calculated her resources, and developed a risky plan. Her calculation for success wasn't based upon the character of David, or the character of Nabal—it was based upon the character of God. In her brief speech Abigail mentions the Lord seven times. She appealed to David's higher spiritual nature by reminding him who he was and *whose* he was. It was a calculated risk, because she had simply factored in the power of the Almighty God into the equation. And whenever you calculate a risk with God's power added, it's not a risk anymore!

Jesus spoke about the importance of taking a calculated risk when He said, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?” If you stop there you may think Jesus is advising you to play it safe, but if you keep reading you'll find that He says, “... In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:28, 33) Jesus was saying that it's not enough for us to give Him our best—He wants our ALL. As someone once said, “It doesn't take much of a person to be a Christian, but it does take ALL of him or her.”

God may be leading some of you to embark on some risky challenge right now. A coward always says, “Better safe than sorry.” A champion says, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained!” I heard Zig Ziglar say once that it's risky for an airplane to take off and fly, but it's actually riskier for it to sit on the ground and rust, because airplanes are designed to fly, not to sit on the ground. You may think it's risky for you to step out of your comfort zone and attempt something impossible for God, but that's what He designed you to do.

2. A RISK-TAKER CHOOSES TO WAGER IT ALL ON GOD

Abigail put together enough food to feed an army, because that’s what she was doing. She didn’t think about how much to leave behind, she was thinking about how much she could give. In the same way a risk-taker is willing to wager it all on God—with nothing held back. The Bible says, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.” (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

You’ve probably heard that before without knowing what it means. The word “bread” means “food” generically. Basically it means in order to receive, you must give. This proverb probably comes from a time when the Nile River would overflow its banks. A wise man would take all the seed he could buy or gather and cast it on the water, and when the water receded the seeds would be planted in the fertile soil and in a few months, there would be an amazing return on the investment. But to cast all your food on the waters is a huge risk, because crops sometime fail. Are you willing to wager it all on God and His work?

It’s the same principle Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 9:6, “If you plant generously you’ll reap generously, but if you plant sparingly, you’ll reap sparingly.” William Jennings Bryan once ate a piece of watermelon that was so good he put some seeds in his napkin and took them home and planted them. This made him think about the power of a seed, and he weighed a watermelon seed and compared it to a 40-pound watermelon. He determined that in a period of six months, a single watermelon seed would multiply itself 250,000 times in weight. Think about it, if you weigh 150 pounds and you multiplied like a watermelon seed you’d weigh 19,000 tons by February! That’s the power of a seed. The more you plant, the more you reap.

And Jesus said if you have faith the size of a mustard seed you can say to a mountain, “Get up, mountain, and take a flying leap into the ocean” and that mountain would do a full triple flip gainer right into the sea. But the key thing about a seed is that you must plant it. You must invest it in the soil. You must spend it.

Are you doing that with the resources God has given you? Are you wagering all your time, your talents, and your treasure in the work of God? When you do, life will never be boring and you’ll experience more excitement than you can stand.

There’s an old saying from the race track that says, “No one ever bet too much on a winning horse.” I can’t verify that, but I can verify that when you come to the end of your life, I believe your greatest regret will be that you didn’t sell out completely for God—or that you didn’t sell out completely for God sooner! The last lesson we learn from our supermodel of faith is:

3. WHENEVER YOU TRUST GOD THE REWARD OUTWEIGHS THE RISK!

Anyone who deals in financial investments understands the risk/reward grid. Basically, the greater the risk, the greater the reward, the lower the risk, the less the reward. So financial advisors always seek to determine your level of risk tolerance. With such a volatile market these days, investing can literally be risky business.

But the greatest reward you’ll ever receive is when you’re willing to take a risk for God. We should never serve God with a selfish desire for reward, but the Bible says that God “rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6) God has different ways of rewarding those who take risks in His name. Sometimes the reward comes in this life and sometimes it comes in the next life, but the when you trust God for the outcome; the reward always outweighs the risk.

Let’s go back to our story. With the bloody disaster averted, David returned with his army and the provisions Abigail had given them. Abigail returns home hoping Nabal had heard of her heroic action and would hug her and say, “Thank you, dear, for saving my life.” But instead, when Abigail returned she found Nabal so drunk she couldn’t talk to him. So she goes to bed that night sad that there would be no thanks or reward for what she had done. So now our story is over. Nabal lives to insult again, he keeps his wealth and Abigail remains the miserable wife of a fool—but actually that’s NOT the end of the story.

The next morning Abigail enters the room of her hung-over husband to explain what transpired the day before. The Bible says Nabal is so shocked by the news he has a heart attack. He lingers for ten days and then dies. Now, we don’t wish evil on anyone, but if this was a movie, the audience would be cheering at this point.

Abigail took a risk to do what was right and God rewarded her. After the Lord brought justice upon the man named Fool, His plan started coming into focus. God had something better planned for Abigail. Here’s The Rest Of The Story. When David heard what happened to Nabal, he remembered her intelligence and faith. Let’s pick up the story in 1 Samuel 25:39-42, “Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, ‘David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife.’ She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, ‘Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master’s servants.’ Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David’s messengers and became his wife.” If you love fairy-tale endings you’ve got to love this story. Abigail didn’t waste any time, she grabbed the first donkey out of Carmel and made her way to her new husband. Some might question this timing. Nabal’s funeral is barely over—but remember—this was 3,000 years ago, not the 21st century. David saw a widow in need. Ancient societies weren’t kind to widows, even wealthy ones. Abigail saw a man after God’s own heart who would be her protector—it was indeed a match made in heaven!

David left justice in the hand of God and Abigail did what was right as a wife. There are so many things I admire about Abigail. She was married to a fool, yet she was willing to defend him. Just imagine, when she had heard that David was on his way to kill Nabal, she could have said, “God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform! Good riddance!” But instead, she chose to defend her foolish husband. She didn’t defend Nabal because he was good and deserved it, she did it because SHE was good and it was the right thing to do.

If you will trust God and obey God—even at a risk—He will always reward you. Simon Peter was talking to Jesus once about how much he and his friends had given up to follow Jesus. They had left their families and their business to follow Him. They had truly wagered it all on the idea that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus said, “No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as

much as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life." (Mark 10:29-30)

CONCLUSION

Abigail teaches us that champions are willing to take risks for God. What the world calls risky behavior, the Bible simply calls a step of faith. God loves you so much that He wants to work through you to accomplish things for His kingdom that are humanly impossible. In order to appropriate His power, you must be willing to risk it all.

I'm learning a lot more about children now that I'm a grandfather. I agree with all those other obnoxious grandparents who told me, "If I knew having grandchildren would be this much fun, I would have had them first!"

Lizzie loves to play with her DeeDee and I love playing with her. We have one game where I set her up on a table or a shelf and I hold out my hands and she jumps to me. When we first started she was very reluctant and would make me stand very close with my hands only a few inches from her. Now, she constantly says, "Jump! DeeDee! Jump!" And she makes me stand farther away and she grins and leaps off with her arms extended as if she's going to fly. And do you know what? I'm not going to miss her. I love her so much that I'm going to catch her every time.

I can't help but think about the times in my life when my Father is standing there saying to me, "Jump, David, jump!" He's calling me to do something courageous. He's leading me to attempt something risky, something impossible. I can't see Him, but I know one thing for certain—He's not going to let me fall. And even if I think I've missed His arms and I'm falling, then I'll just fall into His arms, because His arms are bigger than any fall, and stronger than any mistake.

God is calling you to be a champion today. The theme verse for our series is 1 Corinthians 9:24 which says, "run in such a way as to get the prize." In the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City John Stephen Akhwari was running the marathon for his home country, Tanzania. Early on in the race he had fallen and badly injured his leg. But rather than dropping out, he pushed on. He entered the stadium in last place. The track was empty, because the other 56 runners had finished much earlier. His leg was bandaged and bleeding—yet Akhwari crossed the finish line with anguish on his face and tears in his eyes. After he hobbled across the finish line he was asked why he endured such pain when he had no chance of winning. He simply said, "My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race. They sent me to finish the race."

In the race called the Christian life, it's not how or when you start the race, it's how you finish the race that matters to God. In God's race, there isn't just a prize for the one who finishes first, second or third. There is a prize for everyone who finishes by faith. So, go ahead, take a risk, and **GO FOR THE GOLD!**

OUTLINE

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes