

Genesis 24 — Marriage

April 10, 2016

It's great to be together as a church for another Lord's Day. This morning, we continue our study in Genesis. Last week was a depressing week in our study of Genesis. We were in Genesis 23. Sarah died. We talked about funerals. I don't like them. You don't like them. They are a part of life, so we talk about them. God has a sense of humor, last Saturday night, right before I taught on funerals on Sunday, I came down with a nasty chest cold so I sounded like the undertaker the whole time I preached.

This week we definitely have an uptick. Genesis 23 was about death and funerals. Genesis 24 is about dating and marriage. I like this week much better. Last week, we learned Genesis 23 through 25 is about passing the baton. It is about the closing of Abraham and Sarah's life and the passing of the baton to the next generation and God working in their son Isaac's life. Last week the matriarch died. This week we get a new matriarch. Isaac gets married.

Before we study dating and marriage in this chapter, I want to look at the state of dating and marriage in our culture. If you are single and searching, you need to understand the way we date and mate in our culture today is a complete mess. It is seriously broken. It leads to heartache instead of happiness.

How many of you have been on a date? The word *date* was first introduced into the English language in 1896. It was lower class slang for prostitution. The way many people practice dating today tells us this word has not moved far from its original meaning.

A hundred years ago dating and marriage were very different from the way we practice it today. If you had an eligible daughter the parents made a list of potential suitors. The suitors were sent formal letters inviting them to be interviewed by the girl's parents in the parlor room of their house. Suitors washed, shaved, combed their hair and looked their best for the interview with a girl's parents. After interviewing potential suitors, parents decided if they wanted any one of the suitors to come back for another interview. Eventually, if the girl's parents liked you, you could meet and maybe marry, their daughter. That was dating and marriage a hundred years ago.

Then things began to change. In the 1920s people moved to the city. Instead of girls meeting boys in the parlor of the home under the supervision of parents, boys took girls to restaurants, theaters and concerts away from parental supervision. The 1930s saw the mass marketing of the automobile. Girls ended up with more unsupervised alone time with a guy in the car. Fast forward to the 1960s and you have the sexual revolution, venereal disease and lots of pregnancy. At that time pornography went mainstream leaving men lusting after women that were airbrushed fantasies not reality. On the heels of that came the pill. Then girls were free to engage in more premarital sex because you didn't have the problem of pregnancy. In 1973 the legalization of abortion made a way to have more sex and get rid of the child if the pill didn't work.

All the sex outside of marriage destroyed the sex and intimacy inside of marriage. In 1974 no fault divorce and the easy divorce culture were introduced.

Can you see this seismic cultural shift that happened with dating and marriage in our culture in only 70 years?

Fast forward to today. The Internet introduced another twist to the dating and marriage cultural catastrophe. Today, 40 million singles, 40 percent of those who are single, use online dating services. Now there are even more people to date but you know even less about the people you date. Introduce Craigslist and Tinder and it went a step further. Now you can find someone on the Internet for a quickie sexual hookup with no strings attached. You know almost nothing about the person except you both want to have sex.

Sex went from something reserved for marriage, to something for when you were engaged, to something you did when you were dating, to something you did with a friend. You have friends with benefits. The Internet brought us the hook-up-and-break-up culture where you don't even know the people with which you have sex.

The result is today one-third of all children are born to unmarried women. Forty percent of children go to bed without a father. Forty-one percent of women age 15 to 44 will at some time live and sleep with someone to whom they are not married. The rate of unmarried people living together increased a thousand percent since 1960.

Dating and marriage American-style has left us broken. The way we date and marry in our culture is not leading to happy enduring marriages. As we study Genesis 24, we are going to learn a little about what dating and marriage looks like God-style and see what God says about how we can fix our relationships.

There are two lessons in this chapter. The smaller lessons are how to honor God in our dating and marriage relationships. The big lesson in this chapter is on providence. Here is a definition of providence that is not exhaustive but will help us understand it for our study.

Providence means that when we live faithful to God's Word, God will guide us where he wants us to go and to the people he wants us to meet. God will even guide us to the person he wants us to marry.

A great summary of providence comes from Proverbs 3:5-6.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)

When it comes to meeting and marrying the right person, there are two parts.

1. My job is to live a God-honoring life that pursues knowing, following and loving God with all our hearts, especially in my dating relationships.
2. God's job is providence. He will order our circumstances so we end up at the right place and meet the right people. We meet and marry the right person.

This is the longest chapter in Genesis. Let's dive in.

1. Only date and marry a believer.

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." Genesis 24:1-4 (ESV)

Let's start with the part that throws everybody off. What is this hand under the thigh? Why does Abraham want his servant to put his hand where the sun doesn't shine? In this culture, when a man was making a deadly serious promise

to another guy, he would touch him in a very sensitive area when he made the promise. I am sure this was effective. Anytime you grab another man in this area and make a promise, you will never forget that moment. It was a moment you wished you could forget, but no matter how hard you try, you could not forget that moment or that promise.

Personally, I am thankful guys make promises to today by simply shaking hands. I prefer the handshake.

At this point, Abraham was an old man. He knew he would die soon. Time was running out to arrange a marriage for his son. Isaac was 40 years old. He was still single. Some of you didn't know a person could be 40, a virgin and not explode. If Isaac could do it, so can you.

Here is the problem. Where Abraham and Isaac lived, there were not a lot of great girls that loved God. The Promised Land was Canaanite territory. Leviticus tells us Canaanites were very promiscuous ungodly people. While Isaac was the rich eligible bachelor of every Canaanite girl's dreams, Isaac stayed single a long time because he refused to date or marry a girl that didn't love and worship the one true God of the universe.

This applies to us. Only date and marry a believer. It may mean you wait a long, long time to meet and marry a believer. Isaac waited until he was 40 to meet and marry the right bride. If that is how long you need to wait, be prepared to do the same.

Only dating and marrying a believer carries forward through the rest of the Bible. In Genesis 28 we find Jacob is not allowed to marry a Canaanite woman.

He had to meet and marry a believer from the extended family. 1 Corinthians 7:39 tells us Christians are only to marry “in the Lord.” That means only marry another Christian. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 tells us Christians should not be unequally yoked with a non-Christian. That means don’t date or marry a non-Christian.

Some of you think, this only applies to marriage and not to dating. Quick question of every married person in the audience. How many of you married somebody you were dating? All of you. What a surprise. Second question. How many of you found yourself thinking more with your hormones than your head the longer you dated anyone? All of you again.

Dating is not a recreational activity like watching the Super Bowl. The only reason to date someone is to check him or her out as a potential marriage partner. If her or she doesn’t love Jesus, there is no reason to take that person on a date. The more you date someone the more you start thinking with your hormones instead of your head. A friend once told me that when any couple starts a dating relationship, if they stay together, within 19 months they will be talking marriage.

If Isaac dated Canaanite girls to pass time because he was lonely, trust me, he would not have been a 40-year-old virgin bachelor.

Lastly, never, never, never, never get sexually involved with someone before your wedding night, especially if he or she is an unbeliever. Sex is reserved exclusively for marriage. 1 Timothy 5:2 tells young men to treat young women like sisters, with absolute purity. If you wouldn’t do it with your sister,

don't do it with your girlfriend. Some of you think I am out of touch with our culture. The question is not, "Am I out of touch with the culture?" The question is are you in touch with God and the Bible? God is clear in his Word that sex is reserved for marriage. Why does he say this? Is God a cosmic killjoy? Everything God says in his Word is for our good and for our best interests not because God hates us, but because he loves us.

If I saw you about ready to pound your hand with a hammer, because I love you, I would try to stop you. If you think pounding your hand with a hammer hurts, try hitting your heart with a hammer. Sexual intimacy before marriage and then breaking a relationship apart feels like hitting your heart with a hammer.

God tells us to save sex for marriage because he loves us. He doesn't want to see you hurt.

2. Men need to go where the Godly Christian women are found.

Abraham realized God was not bringing godly Christian women to the land of Canaan. Since it was a father's job to arrange a marriage for his son, Abraham needed to take initiative and go to where the godly women were found. That meant going back to his family. It was a 450-mile trip back to Ur. If you think 450 miles is tough in a car with a radio and heated bucket seats, try it on the back of a camel in the desert with no air-conditioning.

Single men: You also need to take the initiative and go where the godly Christian women are found. They are not at the bar. That is where you find an alcoholic. They are not at Boji Nights or Zippers. They are not found with a beer in their hands on the ice at the Winter Games. You find godly women at church.

Godly Christian women love God. They love his church. They love his people. They love serving in his church. Single men, look for the godly women at church.

Ladies, what is your job in this process? Your job is not to hunt down the men. The guys should be looking for you. Ladies, your job as a single woman that wants to meet a godly Christian man is to serve Christ faithfully where you are planted. Your job is to be actively involved in your church. Help in AWANA. Serve at the coffee bar. Be a greeter. Make meals for others in need. Don't hide in the corner. Be an energetic, outgoing, positive, enthusiastic servant of Christ that is walking close to God.

Don't just attend church. Get actively involved in serving God by serving others in church. If you want to meet the right guy, that is essential. When a godly Christian guy comes to church looking for a godly Christian girl, he will notice you right away because he will see the energetic, kind, loving, selfless, enthusiastic character of your heart as you love, serve and help others. A godly guy can't help but notice your heart and life when a you live this way. Single ladies, if you want to get noticed, that is how you get noticed.

Ladies, if you have to chase a guy down because he is not chasing you, he isn't the right guy for you. You don't want him. You want a guy who takes the initiative. You want a guy who notices you and pursues you. If he is not pursuing you when you are dating, there is no way he will be pursue you when you are married. A marriage with a husband that doesn't pursue a wife is not an exciting marriage.

3. A woman leaves her life to join her husband, not the other way around.

The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter. Genesis 24:5–9 (ESV)

Notice how things work. When the servant found the woman he thought would be the right woman for Isaac, she needed to be willing to let her life go and join his life, not the other way around. In Genesis 3, we learned a wife was given to Adam to be his helpmate. A husband is responsible for his family before God. This means a woman must be willing to leave her parents, her life and her job to join her husband in his life. Can a wife still work? Yes. Of course. But if she is not willing to leave her life to become the helpmate for her husband in his life, she should not be get married.

Abraham and Isaac had a calling from God to stay in the Promised Land. Abraham tried leaving the Promised Land in Genesis 12. It did not go well. He learned his lesson. Isaac needed to stick to the God-given calling and mission of staying in the Promised Land. Abraham told his servant, “If you think you have the right woman for Isaac and she is not willing to join Isaac in the Promised Land, keep looking. You don’t have the right woman.”

I would say the same. Guys, if you think you have the right girl but she is not willing to leave her family, her life and to take your name and become one with your life, keep looking. You haven’t found the right girl.

4. Pray for your future spouse.

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master." Genesis 24:10–14 (ESV)

The first thing I want us to notice is where the servant went. He went back to Abraham's country and he positioned himself outside of town at the well in the evening. This was the time when the young ladies came to draw water and bring it back to the family. Why evening? It wasn't hot. Why did the young women do this? It was hard work. Their jugs of water were typically three or more gallons. They were clay jugs. Try carrying three gallons of milk a mile or two. That is heavy. Remember you are carrying plastic jugs; they carried a clay jug. This is why the young women did this work.

The servant positioned himself to see all these young women. The city well in the evening was like a Wal-Mart for eligible women. He would see all the options. The next question was, "How would he find the right one?"

He prayed. He asked God to show his faithfulness to Abraham and Isaac and bring the right person to the well. Here is another practical pointer. How will you meet and marry the right person? Pray for them. Pray about them. Pray God will help you recognize them. I prayed for my wife long before I met her. I have prayed for Cindy almost every day since I met her. I am currently praying

every day for my children's future spouses. If you are single, be praying for your future spouse now. God answers prayer. He usually answers this prayer in such a way that when he brings the right person into your life you recognize him or her as the answer to your prayer.

Notice what the servant was praying for when it came to a wife for Isaac. How would he know she was the right one? He was not praying for the best-looking girl in the group. He was not going to have try-outs and stick all the women in the same house as Isaac so he could give a few of them a rose each week until he came down to the final one. He prayed for one woman he would recognize because she would be a woman of extraordinary character, servanthood, humility and initiative. He didn't say, "God, let me know she is the one by putting a glowing halo over her head." He didn't say, "Let me know she is the one because she is wearing a red sweater." He didn't say, "Let me know she is the one because she is drop dead gorgeous." He said, "God let me know she is the one because she has amazing character. I will know you led her to me because she will voluntarily water my camels."

That doesn't sound impressive until you think about it. Putting a three-gallon jug on a rope and then letting it down into a well, then drawing it up from the well is hard work. Offering to give somebody a drink from your well water showed extraordinary kindness because it meant you had to draw more water.

Offering to water someone's camels was off the charts! A camel drinks 30 to 50 gallons of water. The servant had ten. That is 300 to 500 gallons of water all pulled from the well by a young girl with a three-gallon bucket. Nobody would

volunteer to do that for a complete stranger in her right mind unless she was incredibly humble, incredibly kind, incredibly generous, and incredibly loving. If anyone finds a girl like that you better snatch her fast because women like that are extremely rare.

5. Remember beauty is appreciated but it is not what is most important.

Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not. Genesis 24:15–21 (ESV)

I love the way God answered the servant's prayer even before he finished praying. This shows us God's providence. God ordered Rebekah to come to the well at just the right time. God prompted the servant to pray for a woman of amazing character at just the right time. Do you see how God was leading Isaac and Rebekah together in the normal circumstances of life as they both walked faithfully with God?

Even though the servant was looking for amazing inner qualities, there was a bonus. She was also a Hebrew hottie. She was drop dead gorgeous. Even better, she was a virgin. Even though a lot of men would have loved to be with her, she saved herself for her husband on her wedding night.

Today, men usually look for one thing in a woman, physical beauty. Guys, look for a woman with amazing character that is actively serving the Lord. This

passage reminds us that beauty is not unimportant but it is not what is most important. Men, what you look for in a woman is godly servanthood character first. Should she be attractive to you? Yes. Beauty is not the No. 1 quality. Character trumps beauty every time. In 50 years a beauty won't be beautiful, but a woman of godly character will have transformed her home, her children and her family into something of incredible beauty through her character.

Ladies, it is not wrong to work hard to be physically beautiful. It is not wrong to go to the gym to stay in shape. It is not wrong to try your best to look your best. Your husband will appreciate it. Physical beauty is appreciated but it is not what is most important. The most important thing for a woman to refine is her inner beauty before her outward looks.

Notice how Rebekah does things. She quickly let down the jar to give the servant and didn't whine or complain. She ran enthusiastically the whole time. This lady was like the energizer bunny. Watering the camels took approximately two hours of back-breaking, hand-callousing work. Maybe this offends some of you, if so, be offended to your hearts content.

I picture Rebekah like one of those women on the cover of a Muscle and Fitness magazine at the check out line. She was a beauty plus she was buff. She was all muscle. Two hours of hauling water, running the whole time she did it. Three hundred to 500 gallons of water. I think she did Cross Fit at her local YMCA. No, I think she led the Cross Fit class at the YMCA. She was incredibly strong and hard working and not a whiner. No wonder the servant stares at her for two hours. Canaanite women didn't work like this. A Canaanite woman would

complain at the callouses. She would cry if she broke a nail. She would pout and whine when the sweat ruined her hairstyle. Not Rebekah. She worked hard and was full of energy.

6. The faith question is always one of the first questions.

When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, and said, "Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." She added, "We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night." The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord and said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen." Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.
Genesis 24:22–28 (ESV)

Notice the first question he asked, "Whose daughter are you?" Rebekah passed the character test but was she a godly woman? If she brought 10 camels 500 gallons of water she would have no trouble bringing one husband a cup of coffee. Even if she had incredible character, if she was not part of Abraham's family — if she was a pagan — she was off limits. One of the first questions the servant asked was the faith question.

Guys, when you ask a girl the faith question, some of you think all a girl needs to be able to do say the name of Jesus. If a girl says Jesus, that does not mean she is the girl for you. A roofer says Jesus when he hits his finger with a hammer. That doesn't mean you should marry him. Demons says the name of Jesus. They are off limits. You want someone a little higher up the spiritual food chain than just somebody who says the name of Jesus. You need to have somebody who loves Jesus and is passionate for Jesus.

Guys, remember your wife will be the primary spiritual input for your children. If all a lady can do is say the name of Jesus, she cannot do a great job teaching her children to love Jesus. You can't teach your kids to love a Jesus you barely know.

You want to look for a woman not just with great qualities of servanthood, humility and kindness that is a hard worker and not a whiner. You also need to look for a woman that burns hot enough for Jesus so she can train her kids to be little zealots for Jesus.

We are going to see in a few minutes that Rebekah was a woman of great faith and love for God. Her brother, Laban, was creepy but her faith is amazing.

7. Providence is guidance.

Before Abraham's servant even sat down for dinner, he retold everything that just happened. Here is his one point. God ordered everything to make it obvious that Rebekah was the girl for Isaac. God guides us through his providential ordering of our lives.

Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. He said, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on." So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys. And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has. My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell, but you shall go to my father's house and to my clan and take

a wife for my son.' I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' But he said to me, 'The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father's house. Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.' "I came today to the spring and said, 'O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.' "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left." Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken." Genesis 24:29–51 (ESV)

Years ago I wrote in the front of my Bible, "Providence is guidance." How do you know where you should go, what you should do and who you should marry? Simply walk faithfully with God serving him in church and life. He will order circumstances in your lives to bring you to the right places and the right people so you meet and marry the right person. Pray about who you should marry. Ask God to reveal that person through the normal circumstances of everyday life by allowing you to see his or her attractive Godly character.

Eight years ago Cindy and I candidated at CrossWinds. At the time, I was also interviewing with other churches. We were praying every day for God to bring us to the right church and to make it clear which one we were to serve at.

After candidating at CrossWinds, the church offered me the job as pastor. Pastor Jorgenson, who was the associate pastor at the time, asked if I wanted to pray about this decision for a few days before I answered the church. I was so unspiritual. I told them I didn't need to pray.

I had been praying about this decision every day for the last nine months. At the time, God had us in a situation where we needed to move out of our house. There was only one church that wanted to hire me in the right window of time when we needed to move. There were no other options. Providence is guidance. God guides us where he wants us to go by ordering the circumstances of our lives so we will be where he wants us to be at just the right time. God ordered our lives to guide our lives. He does this not just with marriage and jobs but he does this all the time in many other ways of our everyday life. God's providence is his guidance.

8. When you know where God wants you to go, don't delay in getting there.

When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord. And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master." Her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master." They said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her." And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go." So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!" Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way. Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. And

Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel and said to the servant, "Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Genesis 24:52–67 (ESV)

Before they even had dinner, because of God's providence, everyone realized Rebekah was the bride for Isaac. Not wasting any time, the servant brought out gold, silver and costly garments for Rebekah, her brother and her mother. The servant paid the bridal price for Rebekah. The 10 camels were 10 Hebrew U-Hauls full of stuff to buy her with. On the spot she was bought and purchased.

They had dinner. It was a great meal. The next morning, the servant hopped out of bed and wanted to pack and head for home. At that point Rebekah's mother and brother threw on the brakes. "Wait a minute. Not so fast. Let her stay around for at least 10 days." To me, that sounded reasonable. It would take most women at least 10 days to pack for the trip. Rebekah had a lot of stuff. We are talking shoes, dresses, lotions, hair products. She would pack those camels. Here is something I never knew until this week.

The phrase "at least 10 days" is a Hebrew colloquialism for an indefinite period of time lasting a few days to a few years. Later in Genesis we will see Laban, Rebekah's brother, was not a man of great character. He was greedy. He was a cheat. He was a swindler and a shyster. He wanted to slow things down indefinitely to cheat Abraham's servant out of more money.

Abraham's servant said, "I don't mean to be rude but I bought her last night. She is paid for. I work for Abraham. Isaac isn't getting any younger. I need to get home." Finally they asked Rebekah, "Do you want to leave right away?" This is what I love about her. She said, "Yes." She was like Abraham. She was willing to follow God's leading to go to a land she didn't know to be with a people she barely knew to marry a man she hadn't met, because she trusted God and his providential control over history and her life. I told you she was a woman of great faith!

When you know where God wants you to go and what he wants you to do, especially in a relationship, don't delay in getting there. Don't second guess God.

If you are in a dating relationship and you realize the person you are not dating is not the right one, don't keep hanging onto the relationship because you are afraid of being lonely. If you know the person is not right, let him or her go because God made it clear.

If you are in a dating relationship that isn't going anywhere because it is stuck, break up and move on. The purpose of a dating relationship is to determine if someone is the one you should marry. If he or she isn't somebody God has confirmed for you to marry, break it off. Don't be afraid to be alone.

On the other hand, if he or she is the right person, and God confirmed it in answer to your prayer, make a straight line to the altar. It better to marry than to fornicate your way to the wedding night.

When Rebekah knew God was leading her to her wedding day, she didn't delay in getting there.

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 1 Corinthians 7:8–9 (ESV)

Make a straight line to the altar if that is where God wants your relationship to go.

Conclusion

The American dating and marriage scene is messed up. It leads to more divorce and heartache than it does to happiness and blessing. The story of Isaac and Rebekah gave us many practical pointers on how to meet and marry the right person when you date and marry God-style.

The biggest lesson in this story is about God's providence. God promises to guide us to the places he wants us to go and to the people he wants us to meet when we actively walk with and serve him. That is the way he will lead you to the person he wants you to marry.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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