

It is always interesting to hear the story of how married couples first met. There are childhood sweetheart stories, blind date stories, co-workers' stories, we met in a bar, at a ball game, or online. And people have even been known to meet each other in church. My daughters, over the years, have enjoyed hearing the story of how Julie and I first met.

I've heard some unique "How Mom and Dad First Met" stories in my life, but none compare to the romantic story of Isaac and Rebekah found in Genesis 24. I can picture Isaac, Abraham's son, getting asked by his twin boys, "Dad tell us again how you and mom first met? Can ya? Huh? Can ya? Please? Please?"

Some of you know and have been praying for me as over the last six weeks, thanks to the generosity of our CPC family and our elders, I was able to take a scheduled sabbatical. I'll talk a little more about it later. But part of my sabbatical was spending time with our grandsons. And then the frosting on the cake was that I was introduced for the first time to my grandson, Colton.

Some call Genesis 24 a marriage manual, or maybe a how to find the right marriage partner manual. But this is more than a great love story. It's a great faith story. This story has three heroes: Abraham, his trusted servant, and Rebekah, Isaac's future wife. Each of them will show us characteristics of faith and what trust looks like.

It's a story that I pray God would use to empower us to trust him more completely in whatever circumstance or situation we find ourselves in. And let's not forget the happy ending. Great love stories have happy endings. Well, at least on the Hallmark Channel. And great faith stories have God's blessing at the end. So let's grow our trust in God today and look forward to His blessing. The big idea in Genesis 24 is this:

God helps those who entrust themselves completely to Him.

So Sarah, Abraham's wife, Isaac's mother, has died. Isaac is 40 years old still living at home with dad. Eventually, dad realized that unless Isaac found a wife, there would be no descendants to form a great nation that God promised Abraham. His bachelor son needed to meet the right woman, get married, and start a family. So Abraham took action to arrange a marriage for his son.

Out of all the interesting "How Mom and Dad first met" stories I have heard over the years, I have yet to hear of one that was arranged by parents. The idea of parents arranging marriages for their children seems really weird to us in the 21st-century western culture.

"Abraham was now very old, and the Lord had blessed him in every way" (v. 1). He was likely 140 years or so, which falls into the very old category.

Abraham, in his long life, already had blessings in every way because he trusted God. *"He said to the senior servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, 'Put your hand under my thigh'" (v. 2).* We read this and say, "Well, that wasn't something I expected to hear this morning." Seems way weirder than arranged marriages. "Hey, could you come over here and put your hand under my thigh?" "Sorry, it's not going to happen." What is going on here?

When an oath was made in those days, there wasn't a Bible to swear on. The thigh was considered the strongest muscle, so a hand under the thigh meant that the person was swearing on all his or her strength. And a child was viewed as coming from the thigh or loins, so to find a wife to bear children would make this kind of hand under the thigh thing make more sense to us. Abraham continues,

I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac. vv. 3-4

The huge issue for Abraham was that he didn't want his son to intermarry with their neighbors, the Canaanites. He wanted his son to marry someone with the same beliefs, the same world view, the same faith. The New Testament reinforces this sameness in a marriage partner when Paul says, for your own good, *"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14).*

Notice that Isaac isn't even part of the conversation here. We don't see that he has any input at all into who his wife will be. Would you entrust your marital future to a third party? Your thinking, "I would never trust finding my marriage partner to a third party. But would you trust God to arrange the right marriage partner for you? That's what we are about to see.

So Abraham's servant is processing the different twists and turns that could happen on his mission. He asks his master a "what if" question. *"The servant asked him, 'What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?'" (v. 5).* The servant understands that this will be a long, arduous journey, probably 450 miles one way on the back of a camel and that Abraham might die before he gets back. What if this woman won't leave her home in Mesopotamia? The language tells us that the servant's question struck a nerve in Abraham. He gives him a harsh warning.

"Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. "The Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me

on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'—he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there." So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter. vv. 6-9

Abraham trusted God

Abraham may have declined physically, but spiritually he is trusting God completely. From here on, he remains faithful to the end of his life. I could see him raising his hand to bless his servant, saying, "Just go. The Lord, the God of heaven, will send his angel to lead you. Trust God! Didn't He finally give me a son after all those years? And didn't God spare my son back in chapter 23? Since God spared my son Isaac wouldn't the Lord, the God of heaven, want him to have children to make a nation to bless the world? So just go."

And Abraham's last recorded words in his life were words of faith, "*The Lord, God of heaven will send his angel before you so you will succeed.*" People who trust God plan to succeed. They believe God will provide. If the woman is unwilling, then come home, and I will trust God that he has another plan to fulfill God's promise. So trusted servant, trust me as I trust in the promises of God for my family and me.

Let's look closer at the trusted servant. Because I think he is the biggest hero of the story, and we don't even know his name for sure.

"Then the servant left, taking with him ten of his master's camels loaded with all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor" (v. 10). So the good things were a dowry. A dowry was a payment to the daughter's family. A marriage meant that a daughter who was a good worker would no longer be there to contribute work, putting a financial strain on her family. A dowry could replace the income she could earn working for her family. The journey likely took at least a month to make, a hard journey, carrying valuables through unsafe areas to get back to Abraham's native homeland.

"He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women went out to draw water" (v. 11). Notice that. The women were out in the evening drawing water. Again, another strange cultural thing. As one commentator put it, the women did the manual labor, while the men sat in their tents and drank coffee and did what they thought was the important work of discussing and making deals."

Then he prayed, "Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this

I will know that you have shown kindness to my master." vv. 12-14

As I studied this passage this week, the faith of the unnamed servant caught my attention the most. Notice that he prayed. I think he prayed for 450 miles. A person who trusts God completely to take on a challenging mission from God prays to God. He is entrusting the future of Abram's family completely to God. This servant didn't sit by passively; he took action. He stepped out, took a risk, and put himself in the middle of things. Prayer isn't an excuse to be passive. Trusting God isn't an excuse to be passive. The servant did the work that he knew his master wanted him to do. This tells us what trust looks like. It's, "Lord, I trust that you have already made your choice for Isaac. I'm not making the choice here. Lord, you just show me who that woman is, and I will take action."

The servant's prayer is one of the most unusual prayers in the Bible. And what makes this such a unique prayer is that the prayer is answered before he is done praying. Wouldn't it be great if every prayer we prayed was answered before we said amen? Before you can say amen, it's answered!

"Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milkah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor" (v. 15). So her father was Bethuel, her Grandmother was Milkah, and her grandfather, Nahor, was Abraham's brother. Best I can figure Isaac would be her cousin once removed. And Abraham was her great uncle. *"The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again" (v. 16).* Did you notice he didn't pray for her to be beautiful? I'm sure he was watching and hoping for Isaac's sake.

"The servant hurried to meet her and said, 'Please give me a little water from your jar.' 'Drink, my lord,' she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink" (vv. 17-18). So the servant asks for a sip, and Rebekah lowered her water jar from her shoulder and gave him a good long drink. Look at what happened next in verses 19-21.

After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink." So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful. vv. 19-21

It was happening just as he had prayed. A typical jug would hold three gallons of water. If they were running on empty, each camel could consume 20 gallons each to be filled up. So filling up the camels is not a little cup she would hold out and say. "Here, camels, have a sip of water." Now, their internal water tanks are larger than the gas tank on my car. Best I can tell for her to fill up ten camels with water, she had to make 67 trips, at least two hours of hard labor from the well to the trough carrying three gallons in her jug.

And what did the servant do? He just watched. You know what he was doing on the inside. "Yes! Yes! This is the one! Thank you, God!" He

witnessed her hospitality, her work ethic, her generosity, and he said, "Yes! Yes! Perfect for Isaac. Thank you, God!" And he saw more than a first impression; he watched her overtime to see that her character was deep. And he saw her maintaining a good attitude under the stress of hard work. "Yes! Yes! Perfect for Isaac. Thank you, God." He saw how beautiful she was, and he said, "Yes! Yes! Perfect for Isaac."

When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milkah bore to Nahor." And she added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night." Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord, saying, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives." vv. 22-27

The Servant Trusted God

How about this servant? He learned to trust God from his master Abraham. He learned to live by faith from his master Abraham. And he just saw God do something that may be in his heart he didn't expect. He is blown away seeing God work. Remember when we opened this series, God told Abraham to leave his home and go. And he didn't know where or how long the journey would take, he just made the first step, and God directed him. The servant learned to do the same thing. He began the journey, and the Lord guided his steps to that well outside of Nahor.

He prayed. He took action. He observed all that was going on around him. He watched her. He took in all the details, and he saw God in the details. He obeyed his master and entrusted himself to God completely, and God answered his prayer. This is a miracle. It's not an earth-standing still kind of miracle. Earth standing still miracles are rare. This is a miracle where God works through everyday life events, which is how most miracles happen. The servant's faith story tells us that this is the way God works day in and day out in our lives. Things don't happen by chance or randomly.

The young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things. Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. "Come, you who are blessed by the Lord," he said. "Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. Then food was

set before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say." "Then tell us," Laban said. vv. 28-33

So the servant repeats all that had happened in verses 34-49. Laban and Bethuel hear the story, and we pick it up in verse 50.

Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has directed." When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the Lord. Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother. Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night there. When they got up the next morning, he said, "Send me on my way to my master." But her brother and her mother replied, "Let the young woman remain with us ten days or so; then you may go." But he said to them, "Do not detain me, now that the Lord has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master." Then they said, "Let's call the young woman and ask her about it." So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said. vv. 50-57

Rebekah Trusted God

Rebekah's "I will go" is the most decisive statement in the chapter. She makes it clear to her family that she is willing to put her trust in the God of Abraham and Isaac alone. She willingly left her father's house, recognizing the call of the same God who called Abraham. Rebekah's faith reminds us of Abraham's wife Sarah's faith as she uprooted to follow God's call. "*So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men*" (v. 59).

The Blessing of Trusting God

Our story could end there, but it doesn't. God lets us in on something beautiful. There is a blessing that comes when we trust God. A blessing that could be delivered powerfully in your life immediately, or it could be a blessing that won't be fully delivered until you get to heaven.

What that blessing from God looks like, and when that blessing is delivered, is entirely up to God. But know that as hard as your situation and circumstance may be, God promises a blessing to those who trust in him. Rebekah's family had seen enough. God had revealed his perfect plan to them, and they pronounced a blessing on their faithful daughter.

"And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the cities of their enemies" (v. 60). They understood that a great nation would be born through their sister Rebekah, which will bless the world. "Then Rebekah and her attendants got ready and mounted the camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left" (v. 61).

Now imagine a month on the back of a camel. Think about the questions she must have had about Isaac? Remember, she had never seen him. I can imagine her asking the servant all the way to Canaan, "Tell me again what my husband looks like? Tell me more about his miraculous birth. Tell me about his rivalry with his brother and about how he was almost sacrificed on Mt. Moriah. Tell me everything! Don't leave anything out! All we have is time."

Enter Isaac:

"Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching" (vv. 62-63). The word translated as "meditate" doesn't make it totally clear to us what Isaac was doing in the field. Rabbis take it to mean that Isaac was praying. The word can mean to "rove about; to go back and forth" I imagine after his workday, Isaac spent his evenings pacing, thinking and praying and wondering if the servant would return with his wife.

Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?" "He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself. vv. 64-65

The idea is that they both looked up, and their eyes met simultaneously. And if you had never thought about it, God did create romance. God's hand on the situation and His timing is undeniable. According to custom, brides wore a veil. By pulling the veil over her face, she was signaling that she was his bride.

"Then the servant told Isaac all he had done" (v. 66). It is quite likely the couple took a little time to get to know each other while Abraham and his staff prepared a big lavish wedding feast. On the day of the feast, everyone would enjoy the celebration until evening.

"Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (v. 67). The tent flap closes, the scene fades to a romantic happy ending. The End. A great love story and a great faith story.

This story and all of Scripture teach us that our lives are not ruled by chance or fate but by God. God is always faithful to his children—always. Our challenge is to be faithful to Him. Scripture tells us that God helps those who entrust themselves completely to him, as did Abraham, his servant, and Rebekah. Here are two application points.

Build Your Own Great Faith Story

We have seen some great lessons on what trusting God looks like. Abraham taught us to trust in God's promises. We were taught by the servant to be about serving the master, praying like crazy, and going, that is, actively stepping out, asking, and expecting God to guide our

steps to success. We were taught to watch what is going on around us, think deeply about what is going on, and then find out where God is working and get on board. And we were taught by Rebekah that trusting God means to obey God and say, "I'll go." And then go!

Trust in the Providential Care of God

God's Providence: The belief that God directs our affairs with wise benevolence, care, and guidance. I felt very strongly that God wanted me to take my CPC seven-year sabbatical. I wasn't called to take a class or visit a historical site, but what he was laying on my heart was soul care. I shared with the elders that I had felt that of late, God's word was going into my head through my ears and eyes but not going into my heart. My theme for my sabbatical was "A Closer Walk with Thee." I wanted a place or a setting just to be. A week away. No church work, just me, my Bible, and God.

All the other items I wanted to do on my sabbatical were coming together. My time with family and sightseeing, but my time for soul care was not. Cabins were full for the summer, and places were too expensive. I needed solitude and simplicity. I was googling monasteries. Nothing was working out. But then, out of the blue, a man from CPC, who had no idea that I was planning a sabbatical, invited me to accept a trip to Alaska to a place called The Respite. He believed in this ministry, and he wanted me to see it. It was designed specifically for pastors in crises, but they had an opening the week I could go. Not only that, but he paid for everything. And it was remote.

I flew into Anchorage, then on a little plane to Homer, and then a seven-mile boat ride to a remote island where only 27 people lived all year long. The providential care of God made this happen. All I could do was respond to trust, obey, and rejoice. God met me there in his Word, prayer, hikes, viewing moose, bald eagles, and glaciers, and in my delightful hosts who made me delicious home-cooked food. Only God could put that together.

It reminded me of a story about a woodpecker. Sure, let's end with a woodpecker story. Why not? There was a woodpecker who was pecking on a tree. Just as he flew away, lightning hit the tree and split it right down the middle. The woodpecker heard the noise, turned back, and said, "Look what I did!" A lot of us are like spiritual woodpeckers. We walk around consciously and subconsciously saying, "Look at the house I've bought. Look at this car I drive. Look at the school I went to. Look at the job I have. Look at what I have done." But the only reason why we have anything is because God let lightning strike.

God's job is to let lightning strike, usually through very natural means. Our job is to follow the great examples and entrust ourselves completely to Him, obey and rejoice.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1457-10FC