

God Provides Isaac's Wife, Rebekah

Genesis 24

Focus Verse

"Then he prayed, 'Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.' " – Genesis 24:12

- Abraham's Mandate – Genesis 24:1-9
- The Servant's Mission – Genesis 24:10-61
- Isaac's Marriage – Genesis 24:62-67

Engage

How can you know what God wants you to do next? How do you discern God's will about where to live or work or who to marry? Is the God of heaven really involved in life on earth, specifically your life? Do you make the most logical choice and then ask God to bless it? What if you get it wrong ... are you on the wrong path the rest of your life? What if someone else's choices limit your options? A lot of mystery and hard questions surround knowing "God's will." Scripture offers many guiding life principles but often does not give all the details we desire. **Setting your life's priority on knowing and following God impacts your daily decisions.** God delights in your desire to know and follow Him.

Abraham sent his faithful servant on a mission to find a wife for Isaac. He went to a foreign land where he knew no one. He had to locate the right family and bring back the right girl. How did he do it? He received Abraham's instruction and depended on God's guidance. He prayed for specific confirmation, and God answered clearly. God is not distant or removed from the details of our lives. Though exalted above us in every way, He intentionally listens, cares and acts on our behalf. He wants to help us when we cry out for the wisdom we lack.¹ **God's sovereign plan for your life incorporates your prayers.**

Abraham's Mandate – Genesis 24:1-9

The Faithful Father's Responsibility – 24:1

Isaac represented a miraculous fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. He was the first heir of God's covenant promises, the firstborn of God's chosen nation through whom all nations would be blessed.² Abraham was growing very old (between 137 and 140), had buried his wife, Sarah, and knew his son, Isaac, needed a wife to fulfill God's promises. The prayerful and careful process by which God met this need provides a great example for us today.

The Lord had blessed Abraham. He had seen God's promises confirmed in the miraculous birth of his son and through God's faithful provision of a substitute sacrifice when his faith had been tested.³ Abraham followed some of the customs of his day, but the driving force behind his planning was a desire to honor God. **As spiritual head of his family, Abraham took the initiative to please God in this important family matter.**

The Faithful Servant's Oath – 24:2-9

Abraham summoned his senior and most trusted servant, commonly believed to be Eliezer. Abraham had once thought to make him heir.⁴ Abraham commissioned him for the task of finding Isaac a wife, under oath to the Lord. Being unnamed underscores his humility in his master's service. Whoever he was, he joyfully submitted to God's purpose for Abraham and Isaac. **This servant's faith in God and faithfulness to Abraham offers an example for all believers.**

Abraham gave his servant clear instructions. **Abraham desired a wife for Isaac from his own family.** Naturally, he also desired to see heirs to the covenant – Isaac's sons. Abraham rejected the possibility of Isaac marrying a Canaanite because danger existed regarding compromise with false religions and immorality. Abraham understood that faithfulness to God's covenant.

Abraham sent his servant to the family of his brother Nahor.⁵ Nahor and his wife, Milkah, had eight sons. Genesis 22 foreshadows the woman to be found by telling its readers that Bethuel, one of these sons, was the father of Rebekah. She is the only daughter mentioned in the record.

As the servant pondered his task, he sought clarity about what to do if the woman was unwilling to return to Canaan. Abraham commanded twice, “do not take my son back there.” It is inferred Abraham gave these orders to be followed if he should die before the servant returned.

Abraham was old in age, but strong in faith. A lifetime of walking with God made trusting Him a natural next step. He encouraged his servant as he boldly proclaimed confidence in God’s provision. Abraham knew the God who called him out of his father’s household and native land. God had spoken

unwavering promises. This same faithful God would “send His angel” before the servant. Yet the bride would also have to willingly respond to God’s call. By faith she must travel back to become united to Isaac. She must choose to identify forever with God’s covenant promises. If no willing woman was found, the servant was released from his oath. In this last recorded chapter of Abraham’s life, he did not focus on what seemed impossible, but on what was possible only through God.

The servant swore the oath to Abraham before the Lord. The cultural method of affirming an oath was to place one’s hand under the thigh of the person receiving the promise. The reason for this act is debated, but it is like placing a hand over the heart or on a Bible. An oath is a public affirmation of an internal allegiance to truthfully carry out a promise.

The Servant’s Mission — Genesis 24:10-61

The Faithful Servant’s Duty – 24:10-11

This trusted servant had personally witnessed God’s blessing on Abraham. He knew God miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah a son when they were very old. Perhaps he even accompanied Abraham and Isaac to Moriah.⁶ He knew God answered Abraham’s prayers. Surely he had heard Abraham speak of God’s faithfulness through his long life.

The servant departed, taking 10 camels loaded with gifts. These gifts offered tangible proof of Isaac’s ability to support a wife and a guarantee of the proposed marriage. The caravan journeyed about 600 miles (more than 900 km) along the ancient King’s Highway to the town where Nahor lived. This central city of the area called Paddan Aram was the junction for international routes. Abraham left this area 65 years earlier, but his family still lived there. **Abraham’s servant arrived and sat at a well outside town to water the camels.** By God’s design, he arrived at the time of day when women would come to draw water.

He knew that the God who led him this far would show him the next right thing.

to the right people in the town. Prayer is the first step in knowing and doing God’s will.

The servant had confidence God would answer his prayer for Abraham’s sake. This reminds believers today how our Lord Jesus Christ told us to pray in His name (for His sake).⁷ Praying in Jesus’ name means much more than a finale to prayer before saying “amen.” To pray in Jesus’ name means to pray according to God’s revealed character and will. Believers pray in Jesus’ name when, in faith, they seek to honor Jesus and please Him in what they ask of God. Believers base their prayers on the finished work of Jesus that gives confidence to boldly approach God’s throne in prayer. Those who pray surrendered to God’s purpose and character look expectantly for His answer.

Examine the faith expressed in the servant’s prayer.

- **Honorable** – He recognized he brought his request before Almighty God.
- **Humble** – He, a mere servant, appealed to God’s love for Abraham, his master and God’s friend.
- **Faithful** – He sought to accomplish what his master asked of him.
- **Specific** – He requested God indicate the woman by her offer to water the camels. This was reasonable and practical.
- **Expectant** – He knew God would help him keep his promise to Abraham. He waited on God to work.

The Faithful Servant’s Prayer – 24:12-14

The servant sat at the right place at the right time, but he still needed to find the right family. Which woman was to be Isaac’s bride? The responsibility entrusted to him and the difficulty of the task exceeded mere human wisdom. **Overwhelming challenges reveal our utter dependence on God.** He knew that the God who led him this far would show him the next right thing. He prayed for wisdom about what to do, where to go and what to say. Only God could send him

God's Provision – 24:15-16

God began to answer the servant's prayer before he even finished praying. Rebekah walked up to the well with her water jar on her shoulder. God does not always answer our prayers this quickly, but delays do not indicate His idleness. The specific description of Rebekah inserted here reinforces God's foreknowledge and purpose as she appeared at the well – in immediate answer to the servant's prayer.

The Faithful Servant's Actions – 24:17-27

Request and response – 24:17-21

The servant demonstrated his faith by action. He “hurried” to meet her. Rebekah offered him a drink and to water his camels, just as he had prayed. She committed to water them “until they have had enough to drink.” Camels go many days without water and drink large amounts of water to recover. There were 10 camels. She “quickly” emptied her jar and “ran back” for more water. The servant quietly watched her as she worked. What was he thinking and praying as he observed the quality of Rebekah's character, not just her beauty? God gave the confirming sign needed to recognize His guidance.

Confirmation and worship – 24:22-27

The servant took another step to affirm God's direction. He offered Rebekah gifts, asked whose daughter she was and asked for lodging in her father's house. This offer and request reveal his personal faith in God's confirmation. **When Rebekah identified herself as Nahor's granddaughter, the servant bowed in humble, grateful worship.** His words of praise celebrated God's faithfulness and guidance.

The Family's Faithful Response – 24:28-52

Rebekah shared the servant's joy and “ran” home to declare that Abraham's servant had arrived. Her brother Laban “hurried” to extend hospitality to Abraham's servant. The servant remained true to

his duty. He would not eat until he recounted God's provisions and his mission. He honored God as he told his story. He prepared the family for this moment of decision – would Rebekah become Isaac's wife?

They all listened to the servant repeat his prayers and God's confirming guidance. Laban and Bethuel agreed, “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.” In gratitude, the servant again publicly thanked God in worship.

Rebekah's Decision – 24:53-61

The servant offered costly gifts to confirm the marriage offer to Rebekah and her family. According to custom, Rebekah could wait up to a year until the marriage. Though her family sought a delay, the servant desired to uphold his oath and immediately return to Abraham with Isaac's wife. Laban and her mother called upon Rebekah to decide, which was not a customary practice. **In answer to the servant's prayer, Rebekah agreed to go immediately.**

Rebekah echoed Abraham's first faithful response to God's call, “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.”⁸ She would travel days with strangers to marry a stranger. She would live away from her immediate family in an unfamiliar country. Her family sent her off with a blessing that reflected God's promises of numerous descendants and land. **Rebekah's commitment represented more than a choice to marry; she chose to enter into God's covenant.**

Rebekah's faith required risk but was not unreasonable. The servant's account of God's specific provision, in answer to prayer, revealed God's overruling providence. Abraham's conscientious servant revered and trusted the one true God, “the LORD.” Her family knew of Abraham and his call from God. But even with visible proof, Rebekah's faith required a personal commitment. She intentionally chose to go where God led. Her words of commitment, “I will go,” ring with truth for faithful believers.

Isaac's Marriage – Genesis 24:62-67

Isaac's Response – 24:62-67

Isaac's faith also required risk. Isaac could have married a woman from the Canaanites, but instead he waited on God's timing and provision. **Isaac trusted God with his personal happiness and future.**

Isaac expressed his expectant faith by waiting at Beer Lahai Roi to meet his bride. This is where Hagar had named God “the One who sees me.”⁹ While

meditating in a field one evening, he looked up to see approaching camels, an answer to his prayers. Rebekah saw him and verified that the man was Isaac.

As Rebekah covered herself with a veil in preparation to meet Isaac, she followed a custom many today recognize when a veiled bride walks down the aisle. **This faithful bride accepted Isaac as a gift from God.** The servant further confirmed the union by his account of all God had done for Abraham's

sake. The marriage began without delay. Isaac, still mourning the death of his mother, Sarah, found comfort in his new wife. The next chapters record how God's purposes for their marriage unfold.

Abraham took responsibility to establish a home for his son founded upon faith in God. The story of Abraham's search for Isaac's wife illustrates putting faith into practice – asking for and receiving guidance from God in daily matters. God created us. He maintains sovereign control over all He has created.

He will accomplish everything He plans and promises. But along the way He gives us the privilege of seeking Him in prayer. He listens, responds and allows us to experience His faithfulness so our faith will grow.

God's sovereign plan for your life incorporates your prayers. The truth of Proverbs 3:5-6 applies to Genesis 24: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

The Doctrine of Prayer

We often talk about prayer. We pray before meals and offer to pray for one another. Yet familiarity with the concept of prayer can blind us to its profound wonder. We can talk to the God of heaven and He listens! Our quiet thoughts, spoken words, anguished cries and joyful praises enter the throne room of Almighty God. God is exalted above us in every possible way, yet accessible to us. When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us (James 4:8). **We cannot overestimate the amazing privilege and responsibility of prayer.**

Prayer is equally simple and complex. Most simply, prayer is talking to God. Believers pray to the Father (Ephesians 1:17; 3:14), through the Son (John 14:13; 15:16; Romans 1:8; 5:1-2; Colossians 3:17) and in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 1:20). Christ broke the barrier between God and sinful people and made access to Holy God available to those who believe in Him. The Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings too deep for human words (Romans 8:26). All parts of the Godhead are actively engaged when you pray.

Prayer reflects a relationship with God. Your love for God and desire for Him draws you to prayer. God speaks in many ways – through His Word, creation, our circumstances, other people, through the Holy Spirit. In prayer, we speak to Him. Do you want to spend time with God, to listen and to speak to the One who knows the secrets of your heart? Prayer is more about surrendering to God than communicating our agenda. Through prayer, God molds our hearts to His higher and better ways. By praying, you acknowledge you need what you do not have in your own strength. When you pray, you look beyond yourself to God who knows more and can do more than you could ever imagine (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Prayer expresses dependence on God. The depth and regularity of your prayers indicate how much you depend on God and how much you depend on yourself. When you pray, you acknowledge God's attentive, active interest and involvement in your life. You recognize His compassion for your needs and power to act on your behalf (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15). Your needs are never too insignificant for God to care about or too big for Him to handle. Even when answers to prayer seem slow in coming, God is at work. The way you pray indicates what you believe about God. Your faith is not in prayer itself, but in the God who hears and answers prayer.

Prayer connects people on earth with God, their Creator. **People do not pray because they do not think rightly about God.** Some reject God, and some ignore Him. They do not think God cares, listens to them or will do anything for them. To fail to pray either ignores the reality that God exists or relegates Him as a distant being removed from daily life and real people. People often treat prayer as a last resort when all else fails. To fail to pray is to ignore a lifeline from God and to choose to live with only the limited resources of this world. What keeps you from praying? What does your prayer life reveal you believe about God?

Prayer can be as natural as breathing for a believer. A child of God needs neither fanfare nor formula to gain immediate access to the Sovereign of eternity. How do you feel when you receive a telephone call from someone you love? **God loves it when you call out to Him.** He wants to spend time with you. He wants you to tell Him what He already knows. Nothing you pray about ever surprises God or turns Him away from you. He is not offended when you ask Him honest questions, pour out your heart and confess your sins. Those who love God deeply speak to Him often. When you believe your prayers reach and move the heart of God, you know you are never alone, hopeless or powerless. The act of prayer acknowledges the care and power of God. Answered prayer glorifies God. Will you cry out to God in the middle of your day or your challenge? Will you express your gratitude to Him with actual words when you experience joy or pleasure? How does thinking about the privilege of prayer offer fresh wonder and worship of the God who loves you, hears you and acts on your behalf?

Hold Fast

Abraham's most trusted servant learned much by working and walking with Abraham over many years. **Abraham's faith in God deeply influenced his servant.** He recognized God's blessing on Abraham and the power of Abraham's God. When tasked with the huge responsibility of finding a wife for Abraham's beloved son, he followed Abraham's example of faith. He not only knew about Abraham's God, he trusted and worshiped the same Lord as Abraham. **God is equally accessible to all people, in all walks of life.** God responds the same way to the humble servant, the needy child, man or woman, the poorest or the wealthiest. The servant's faith and worship grew as he personally experienced God's bountiful care. He spoke boldly and publicly of all that God had done for him. He had witnessed that God was faithful to Abraham but now experienced God's faithfulness himself.

The servant demonstrated faith in God by seeking Him through prayer. He prayed specifically and expectantly. Prayer kept his focus on God and kept him alert to God's provision.

The timely and specific answers to his prayers drew Abraham's relatives closer to one another and increased their faith in God. God's wisdom is needed to live well in this world. The privilege and responsibility of prayer cannot be overestimated.

Both the servant and Rebekah needed God's guidance to make critical decisions. Are you waiting on God for direction and guidance? How do you know, without a doubt, how God is leading? The servant knew God's revealed standards for Isaac's wife. He clearly communicated his need to the Lord. He prayed for God to reveal His will in specific ways. The Lord gave guidance by ordering the circumstances to reveal His direction. But outward circumstances were not enough. He sought God's overruling peace as confirmation of His desired path forward. In the same way, God gives boundaries for our choices in His Word. We pray and see Him answer in specific ways. But how easy it can be to allow personal desires to cloud our judgment! **It is possible to know God's peace, even when the next step of obedience requires bold faith.**

Apply It

Almost every worthwhile cause overwhelms us. Marriage, parenting, jobs, careers, retirement, relationships, even daily survival can strip us of answers and human wisdom. Abraham's servant faced a responsibility that left him needy. Shaky knees and a trembling heart offer a gracious invitation to humbly bow before God. **God orchestrates our lives to uncover our gaps, so our best option is to seek Him.** Coming to the end of ourselves and falling on God's greater power and wisdom is the path to growth. Spiritual muscle develops through this oft-repeated cycle. We find ourselves needy, cry out to God, find Him faithful, then praise and worship Him. Then we find ourselves needy again and start the process over. God knows what He is doing. How comfortable are you with admitting personal neediness?

Do you quickly embrace the privilege an overwhelming need offers and cry out to God? How is God calling you to seek Him today?

Prayer is equally mysterious and wonderful. People living bound by time and with limited understanding cry out to Almighty God, who lives beyond time and understands everything perfectly. God balances the needs and interests of all praying people and weaves together the best plan for all involved. God is sovereign, in absolute control of everything, yet responds to us. We will never truly understand how prayer works. But we can know the God who hears and answers our prayers. **Prayer is not wonderful because we pray wonderfully; prayer is wonderful because God is wonderful.** God stoops to hear us. He listens and responds to a confused servant trying to

accomplish a big task. He does what we cannot understand in ways that cause us to marvel. How is God leading you to just simply pray? Can you give up pretense and fine words to call out to the God who knows you better than you know yourself? Where are you choosing to worry when you should choose to pray? Cry out to God. He is listening!

God is committed to developing your faith. The situations in life that lead us to pray for God's help build trust in Him. **God often reveals only the next right thing to do.** Many times, He will lead you forward through a series of small steps rather than through full disclosure of the entire journey and outcome. The servant took the first step, traveling to the town where Abraham's family lived. He got there, sat by a well and prayed. He followed God's

leading, step-by-step. Each step required faith and obedience. In what matter are you seeking God's guidance? How is God developing your faith as you wait on Him? Do you hesitate to obey until you can guarantee

the outcome? What is the next directionally correct step of obedience God has revealed? God wants you to know His will. God does not find strange delight in hiding His will from you. He loves for you to seek His help.

God prefers to develop deep faith more than provide quick solutions. God will reveal His will for you in a way that grows your faith and draws you to Himself.

Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- 1: **Seeking wisdom from God:** Psalms 5:2; 102:17; Ephesians 6:18; Philipians 4:6; James 1:5
- 2: **God's promises to Abraham:** Genesis 12:3; 17:8; 22:18
- 3: **Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac:** Genesis 22:1-18
- 4: **Abraham and Eliezer:** Genesis 15:2
- 5: **Abraham's family:** Genesis 11:29; 22:20-24
- 6: **Mt. Moriah:** Genesis 22:2-5
- 7: **Prayer in Jesus' name:** John 14:13; 15:16
- 8: **God's call to Abraham:** Genesis 12:1
- 9: **God met Hagar:** Genesis 16:13-14