

GENESIS—WEEK 19

ISAAC GETS THE GIRL



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well by Salomon de Bray (1597–1660)
On display at Musée de la Chartreuse in Douai, France*

God blesses Abraham’s servant gloriously. He finds the perfect girl for Isaac—Rebekah. Through an improbable sequence of events, Rebekah and her family approve of her traveling with the servant to Canaan to marry Isaac, sight unseen.

The servant displays absolute honesty and faith, which are in sharp contrast with secular sales technique.

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Thank you.

Genesis 24:29–61 — Isaac Gets the Girl
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1 Genesis 24:29–33 (ESV)

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."

This is the other side of how to react to the LORD's blessing—finishing. Abraham's servant is still focused like a laser on his task. He did take a moment to praise the LORD, but that was still on task.

The servant isn't just antsy to get his message out; he's avoiding a sin (one that's far too common in our culture). When God blesses us, we get excited and feel like celebrating. That can be a mistake. If you're in the middle of a task that God is blessing, don't lose focus. You need to honor God's faithfulness with some faithfulness of your own. Anything less than your best effort insults God's blessing.

The servant will have plenty of time to celebrate at the wedding.

This can get complicated. Here, the servant has a specific plan and it's working out perfectly. That's great, and the servant is reacting properly.

But more often God's blessing involves a change in plans. His blessings can look like setbacks at first.

Our plans tend to be flawed, if not downright sinful. So, God blesses us by nudging us over to the right plan. Staying on task in this context isn't as simple as just finishing. We need to "read" the situation and continue to try to discern the LORD's will. This can get tricky because some setbacks are normal hurdles meant to strengthen us, while others are signs that we're on the wrong path.

There are no step-by-step instructions for how to handle this; you just have to keep your wits about you. However, there are some basic principles.

First of all, He is Lord and we're not. Always seek to honor Him. Double-check your goals to guard against promoting your own self-interest or protecting your ego. A big change in plans can be brutally humbling, but if that's the LORD's will, failure to heed the signs will make the lesson even more humbling and more painful. Also, double check to make sure you're in conformity with scripture.

Lastly, normal hurdles are annoying and hard to get through, but usually that's it. A sign that it's something more will have the look of a sign—a strange twist that seems designed to get your attention. A supernatural clue should look supernatural—something amazing or head-scratching.

That can mean almost anything, but it always means it's time to pay attention.

2 Genesis 24:34–41 (ESV)

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.’”

Too much information! This is what negotiators are trained **not** to do. The servant describes how they can say no to him and how it will be okay if they do. His sales technique couldn’t be worse.

But what is bad from a secular point of view can be good in the kingdom of God. The servant is being completely honest—you could say too honest. As we’ll see tomorrow, he also leaves out no details in his description of his encounter with Rebekah at the well.

What’s so great about this is that he’s obviously not negotiating. He’s just telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. That’s evidence of complete trust. It might be trust in God or trust in his audience, but either way, he’s not thinking about the things a negotiator would be thinking about.

He just wants to be honest.

In modern America, this is called, “being honest to a fault.” What a wrong-headed cliché.

More than almost anything else, business dealings test our commitment to the lordship of Christ. Whether doing our taxes or selling a used car, “being honest to a fault” is what our Lord commands.

But this gets complicated. People may misinterpret your motives. Things can go haywire because being totally honest is so unexpected that it arouses suspicion. Thus, it’s often wise to be brief.

The goal is to be honest, not to bore people. We’re still commanded to be shrewd as snakes, but that’s a reference to cleverness, not deception.

Because of our deceptive culture, honesty in business takes planning. Prayer is essential. Also, you may need to think through how to avoid misunderstandings.

Lastly, and this is the big challenge, this isn’t about showing off. Don’t let pride ruin the whole thing.

Yes, in the long run we want people to recognize that we’re different. Yes, that can “prepare the soil” for someone to be receptive to the gospel.

But don’t let that distract you. Just do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do.

3 Genesis 24:42–49 (ESV)

“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.”

One of the great things about letting teenagers share their testimonies is that they blurt out all kinds of unpredictable things, often including something inappropriate (such as cuss words). The result is totally unpolished but strikingly genuine.

The servant’s presentation has that feel. He’s definitely not reading from cue cards. His presentation isn’t polished, and that’s what makes it so good. Too much polish sounds contrived. The servant’s presentation is convincing because of its amateurish simplicity.

He gives a play-by-play recitation of what happened at the well and then surprises everyone by suddenly popping the question. This clumsy style meshes perfectly with his claim that this is all the LORD’s doing. He’s obviously excited—so excited that he makes a mistake. He gets to the point too quickly and doesn’t give his hosts time to assimilate his story. Giving away your daughter in marriage isn’t something one does in haste.

Pressing for a quick decision is bad form.

Consider this when presenting the gospel. Instead of explaining the plan of salvation, sometimes it’s better to just tell people about your own experiences. That kind of personal testimony is easy on the ears. We rarely know exactly where someone is in their path to Christ, but a personal testimony can be enlightening at any stage. Talk normally, instead of like some kind of pitchman, and you’ll connect.

Remember, the goal is to glorify God, not to get someone to sign on the dotted line. Sure, they need to sign on the dotted line someday, but the timing is up to God.

It’s not about you. Don’t keep score.

4 Genesis 24:50–55 (ESV)

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.”

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.”

Rebekah’s brother and father are convinced—and for the right reason. They specifically say that since this is from the LORD, “*we cannot speak to you bad or good.*” They are humble enough to know that what they think isn’t even worth mentioning.

This is more than a charming turn of a phrase. Would you send away your beautiful daughter or sister with a stranger so easily? She’s going to be over 500 miles away. That’s a humongous camel ride. Laban may never see her again. For Bethuel, this is surely a final good-bye.

And so, not surprisingly, they’d like to spend a few final days with Rebekah before she goes. They may also have some lingering doubts about this transaction. Ten days would give them time to think it over.

But notice that they say, “*at least ten days.*” They’re not promising when “*a while*” will end. Last night they said, “*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.*” Now they’re saying, “*Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.*”

But notice something else. Last night, it was Laban and Bethuel who said Rebekah could go. Today, it’s Laban and momma who want more time.

The action is taking an interesting turn—the women are taking over.

While Rebekah will still end up leaving soon, this momentum stopper is an example of an important principle. When everything is going right, it’s easy to get caught up in the moment and overvalue your sense of God’s will. When someone comes along and says, “Time out!” (like momma does here), that’s a signal to pay attention.

The book of Proverbs defines wisdom as heeding the council of others. When someone wise chooses to weigh in, ignoring them is foolishness (another definition from Proverbs).

No matter how sure you feel, snap decisions are reckless. Take your time and seek expert council.

5 Genesis 24:55-61 (ESV)

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.

In one final, glorious twist, the last piece of the plan falls into place. Remember the servant's words, *“Perhaps the woman will not follow me,”* in his recitation of how this all came to pass? It seems that Rebekah's family is now keying off those words. Maybe they're just hoping she'll say no and the whole thing will be called off. More likely, they acknowledge the LORD's hand is this and are willing to let their own will be subservient to His.

If so, they're violating the patriarchal nature of their culture. They're letting Rebekah choose. They really meant it when they said, *“The thing has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good.”* They're now going to let this play out exactly as the servant envisioned it.

In any case, they cede control of the situation. That's the essence of faith. When people use the word “Lord,” what do they mean by that? These folks really mean, “Lord.”

All too often, people call Jesus “Lord,” but they insist on maintaining control of their lives. They want Jesus to do them favors, but they don't want Him to tell them what to do.

But the words “Lord” and “servant” can't be synonyms.

Almost all our prayers ask God to “do” something. But if God is our Lord (instead of our servant), we should often be asking him to “say,” or “teach,” or even “command” something. We should be looking to Him for guidance and illumination more than assistance.

We readily admit our ignorance. We know we need His advice and direction, but we almost never ask for it. This isn't some great act of rebellion; it's simply a matter of habit. It's how we were taught to pray.

Let's break the habit; put something bold before the Lord.

What are the things that challenge your faith? Is there a Bible verse that you just don't get? How about something that happened that you struggle to understand or even accept? Pray about those kinds of things.

Just lay it before the Lord and ask Him to clear your mind. He honors humble prayers like these.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Ever seen something that you thought was a sign from God? In retrospect, was it one?
2. Has there been a time you've known total honesty to cause problems?
3. What's the craziest, from the heart, testimony you've heard?
4. Ever seen a group of people change their mind because of a single person's comment?
5. Ever resolved a long-standing mental struggle you had with a troubling event or Bible passage?