

Genesis 24:1-9 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ² 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, ³ 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, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." ⁵ 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?" ⁶ Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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." ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

Announcements:

1. App Calendar

Genesis 24:1-9 | Faithful Servant

Proverbs 3:5-6 says,

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

Throughout so much of Genesis we see glaring negative examples in the lives of our main characters. Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah right after the flood, Abraham in Egypt, Lot dragging his feet to leave Sodom, Lot's wife not leaving Sodom. But in today's long story of how Rebekah came to marry Isaac we see a wonderful embodiment of the verse above in the actions of an unnamed man referred to by himself and others simply as a servant. Let's follow his story, which begins with Abraham's faith.

1. Promise = Direction and Boundary

Even into his old age and into Isaac's adulthood, Abraham never stopped living in faith for the fulfillment of God's promise to him and his offspring. And we see that his faith is not a passive resignation, but rather a mode of living that is guided by the promise of God. The promise is that God will give his offspring the land of Canaan. This provides both direction and a boundary. The direction is in the form of a generational hope for his family. This means that part of the promise is for Isaac to have offspring, and you can't do that alone. So Isaac needs a wife.

Negative examples
A
Servant

Abraham's Faith
= mode of being.

- Promise =
direction and
boundary.

direction
Needs a wife

boundary
 - Can't leave Canaan
 - Can't marry Canaanite.

- Not Assimilation

↓
 trusted
 intercessor

But the promise also provides this double boundary. Isaac cannot marry a Canaanite, because the promise is not to occupy the land of Canaan by becoming Canaanites, but as a distinct lineage. The occupation of Canaan will not be an assimilation. But Isaac ought not leave the land of Canaan, because it is here in the land of Canaan that the promise is realized. So the boundary is that Isaac cannot marry a Canaanite, but he also can't leave Canaan. Either would be a step towards abandoning the promise. Isaac needs a trusted intercessor, who might seek for him a spouse. Abraham calls upon his oldest servant.

Angel will go before you
 Providence.

Genesis 24:6-7 Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ 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.

Caravan
 outside city wall
 by the well.

↓
 Prays

This faithful servant vows his obedience to Abraham, and leads a caravan of camels and men back to Abraham's homeland to find a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac. The servant positions himself outside the city wall, by the well where the women come out to draw water in the evening. And then the servant prays. I'd like to share his whole prayer.

Genesis 24:12-14 And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ 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."

3 qualities
 of his Prayer:

Grounded in the
 Promise.

He prays from
 where he is.
 Embodied prayer.
 in the place of being.

Risks the
 outcome.
 He leans in his
 prayer.

Here we see the servant pray precisely as we saw in the proverb, as he commits his ways to the Lord. There are three wonderful qualities of this prayer that we ought to notice.

1. Grounded in the promise: The servant is not praying to a vague God towards general outcomes. But instead he is praying in faith to the God who has extended the very promise and character he is counting on. He trusts in the steadfast love of the Lord and the very promise of God to Abraham. We likewise pray specifically, we pray in Jesus name, grounded in an ultimate promise.
2. He participates in his prayer: What I mean is that he positions himself and his life toward the outcome of faith. He desires to find Isaac a wife, so he puts himself where the women are. And in the Bible, they are at a well (which is no accident).
3. He risks the outcome on the Lord: By praying specifically for a confirmation he puts God in the drivers seat of the outcome. To use the language of proverbs he leans on the Lord, that means to shift your weight onto the Lord. And he does this in the very thing that he prays for, it is both an external sign to witness, but also an internal revelation of the character of the woman he is seeking. Generosity, kindness, care for a stranger.

Risky because
= Narrows his odds.
Counting on God to
provide. It moves
quickly.

Don't you see the risk of prayer like this? The fate of the promise rests in his finding a wife for Isaac and by his prayer he has narrowed his odds. But he isn't playing odds, he is depending upon the Lord. And because of this type of specificity he is also able to move quickly when he sees God's faithfulness beginning to materialize, which happens before he is even done praying. Rebekah, the granddaughter of Abraham's brother, approaches the well. The text describes her as attractive in appearance, unknown by any other man, and she dipped her jar in the well. Attractive, available, approachable. Don't walk.

Can

Genesis 24:17 Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar."

She asks

He puts his plan into action. Rebekah gives him the water with her jar, and the text draws us out to see whether or not she will offer to water his camels also. And She does.

Genesis 24:19-20 When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking."
20 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.

1st Girl?
→ not a best
offer yet.
not looking for
certainty.
because he is humble.
Counter
Example

The servant witnesses his prayer being answered in front of him in the kindness and generosity of Rebekah. He does not hesitate. He does not continue to wait at the well. You know another woman might show up! But part of his trust in the Lord is demonstrated in his willingness to receive something that looks like serendipity, rather than a demand for something like certainty. Edwin Friedman says this:

The great lesson here for all imaginatively gridlocked systems is that the acceptance and even cherishing of uncertainty is critical to keeping the human mind from voyaging into the illusion of omniscience. The willingness to encounter serendipity is the best antidote we have for the arrogance of thinking we know.¹

You see, the lack of overthinking on the part of the servant is not naïveté. It is a refusal to lean on his own understanding. His faith is as risky as his prayer. Faith often looks like risk. A desire for certainty is a quick route to fearfulness and inaction.

Stay at
Rebekah's

The man asks Rebekah who she is, and asks if he could stay in her father's home. He gives her a ring and bracelets as a token of gratitude. She invites him to stay, continuing her display of hospitality. The servant then prays once more in gratitude to the Lord for his answered prayer.

Prayer of
Gratitude

Genesis 24:27 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."

¹ Friedman, Edwin. 1999. A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix. Church Publishing. New York, NY. 52.

the servant
is living in the
Lord's story.
= risk of taking
hands off.

Success puffs up the weak, but those of strong faith are humbled by their success. Because of the form of his servant's life, this amazing happenstance of discovering Rebekah rises up in praise to his Lord. He celebrates the Lord, then his master Abraham, and then he himself celebrates the way in which the Lord has led him. The faithful servant sees his project through.

Skip all
details.

I'll need to skip over a lot of details for time. But the servant is invited into the home by Rebekah's brother Laban, who spots Rebekah's new jewelry. They lay out a meal for the servant, but before eating he lays out his intentions.

How he
recounts
the story

It is a long recounting of the whole story we have seen. But the important thing to notice in the servant's relaying of the story is his absolute straightforwardness about God's guiding direction, as well as his openhandedness towards Rebekah and her family. He is never coercive. He ends leaving the decision absolutely in their hands:

Straightforward.
Openhanded.
Leaves interpretation

Genesis 24:49 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."

they agree.

- recent
- Rebekah decides

I tend towards coercion in my own heart, oh how hard it is to simply lay out your hope into the hands of others. But this servant never leaves the posture of a servant and therefore places himself in the hands of another in faith. And he finally sees the story through. The family at first agrees for Rebekah to marry Isaac, but then Laban and Rebekah's mother try and prevent Rebekah from leaving with the servant. But the servant presses on. He sees the goodness the Lord is working and will not delay its movement. Ultimately the decision to leave appropriately falls to Rebekah, and we see the character of her faith moves in the same way as the servant.

Marriage.

at another
well.

the promise
which leads to
Christ.

The story ends, like all good stories do, with a marriage. Isaac out meditating in a field, he looks up and sees Rebekah, she looks out and sees him. It's all very cinematic. And just behind the veil of this unfolding love story, is the servant who faithfully sought the Lord. The story ends just outside of another well, Beer-Lahi-Roi. It's where we get our word beer from (just kidding). This is where Hagar sat alone, without a husband with her child invisible to the whole world, but seen by the Lord. So she named this place, The well of the living one who sees me. It's an appropriate place for a first look.

Jesus the
true servant

You know you can't think about the story of this servant without thinking about the story of another servant who met a woman at a well. But this woman was very much unlike Rebekah. She had been with many men before, she currently lived with one who wasn't her husband, and instead of being from just the right family like Rebekah she was from just the wrong family, a Samaritan. She was the mixture Abraham was trying to avoid. But there was a servant who went to her, and asked her for water. A servant sent to find a bride. He was a servant both from the line of Isaac and Rebekah, and God himself. The living one who sees. This is the servant that Abraham's servant trusted in.

the well of the
living one who
sees me.

Mark 10:45