

I JUST WALKED 500 MILES, NOW LET ME WALK 500 MORE

GENESIS 24:29-67 APRIL 13, 2022

According to a 2010 Harvard study, the average person's mind is wandering 47% of the time. An article titled *You Can Get Focused* gives a variety of suggestions for how we can regain that valuable attention so we can accomplish our goals. Top of the list is "disengage from distractions."¹ The main character of our text tonight will do that very thing.

We left on a cliffhanger: Abraham's servant was on a quest to find a wife for Isaac. God providentially led him to the very right person. But then she ran away, leaving the servant behind. As we pick back up, things get back on track, but Abraham's servant will be presented with a variety of distractions. He carefully avoids them, keeping his focus on the mission.

Though this is a story centered around arranged marriage, it acts as a model to help us think about our service to the Lord. In a way, the quest we've been sent on is similar to this one. Go into the world and seek out those who are willing to join the family of faith. We find ourselves in a far land, bringing the Master's message which is an offer to be betrothed to the Son and inherit all He has.

Genesis 24:29 - ²⁹Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and Laban ran out to the man at the spring.

Many of you are familiar with what kind of person Laban was. He's a fox in the henhouse. But, if we were reading this for the first time we might wonder if he, too, was a quality man. After all, we've seen the servant running up to Rebekah. We saw Rebekah running after hearing about God's plan and providence. Now Laban is the one running to make the acquaintance of Abraham's servant. But before we get the wrong impression, we're told what motivated his hustle.

Genesis 24:30 - ³⁰As soon as he had seen the ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he had heard his sister Rebekah's words—"The man said this to me!"—he went to the man. He was standing there by the camels at the spring.

Abraham's servant ran because of his spiritual expectation. Rebekah ran home out of excitement. It reminds us of the time Peter was set free from prison and when he gets to his friends place, Rhoda, was so excited that she left him standing there at the door while she ran in to tell the good news.

Laban isn't running out of Godly expectation or spiritual excitement. He's there for the glitter. His shadiness and greed will be put on prominent display when we return to him in a few chapters. So, already we have a contrast to consider: Abraham's servant was looking for a chosen lady, Laban was looking for worldly treasure. Very different motivations.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/26/at-home/how-to-get-focused.html>

Genesis 24:31 - ³¹ Laban said, "Come, you who are blessed by the Lord. Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels."

What a relief the servant must have felt. This truly had been a Cinderella moment as the perfect woman ran off into the night, leaving not so much as a slipper behind. How long had he stood there in shock after Rebekah left, wondering what he should do?

Laban calls him "blessed by the Lord." There are hints that the servant picks up on the fact that Laban is deeply materialistic,² and, in reality, that Laban knows nothing of the Lord.

We are Bible-loving Christians who want to bring the truth with love to this lost world. In many cases, the people we come into contact with really know nothing of the Lord. They may *think* they do, they may have some assumptions or traditions, but they don't actually understand Who God is and what He has said.

In 2021, *Barna* research found that 51% of American adults say that they have a Biblical worldview. But when those people are asked questions pertaining to a Biblical worldview, it becomes very clear that they don't have one at all. For example, 49% of people who claim to have a Biblical worldview "said that reincarnation was a possibility after they die." The research showed that, in reality, just 6% of American adults have a Biblical worldview. And only 2% of millennials.³ Laban didn't know the truth about God. But, the Lord is gracious, so He sent someone to give a testimony to this pagan and his family - a testimony based on true revelation.

Genesis 24:32-33 - ³² So the man came to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and feed were given to the camels, and water was brought to wash his feet and the feet of the men with him. ³³ A meal was set before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." So Laban said, "Please speak."

The servant stayed focused and would not allow himself to be distracted. Remember: They had traveled about *500 miles* from home. Now, after many long nights sleeping on the ground and eating camp food, he's in a proper house, being waited on and given many comforts. But the servant refuses to be distracted. He says, "The appetizers are going to have to wait - I've got something to say."

This sort of mission focus is important as we serve God. Without it we end up missing opportunities or making spiritual mistakes. I remember a few years ago the Lord gave me a fun opportunity. Our friend Dennis Agajanian asked if I would play with him at a few churches over a four day period. I was honored and it was a treat. There are *many* other people who he could've asked. It was a ton of fun. But then on the very last song of the very last night at the very last church, I was sitting in the audience during the sermon and I just stopped paying attention. I had allowed myself to be distracted and kind of think, "We're done." But we *weren't* done. There was one last song to play.

² See *Alter, Walthke*

³ <https://www.christianpost.com/amp/only-6-of-americans-have-a-biblical-worldview-survey.html>

So, in that state of negligence I look up and realize that Dennis and the team are up on stage about to start the song and there I am in the pew. I tried to get myself in position with as little disruption as possible, but I missed the first quarter of the song. I still feel bad about it to this day because it was altogether my own fault. I drifted into distraction and needlessly dropped the ball.

Abraham's servant could've said, "Hey this is all sewn up. We got here, we found the girl. We just have to cross a few T's and dot a few I's," *but he didn't*. He kept that flame of urgency alive. Because the job wasn't done until they were back at home. In the same way, our job is not done till we're at home with the Lord in glory.

Now, in verses 34 through 49, the servant recounts what we studied last week. Rather than parse the providence like we did last time, this time it shows us a good example of how to share a testimony with folks we come into contact with, something we're all called to do.

Genesis 24:34-49 - ³⁴ "I am Abraham's servant," he said. ³⁵ "The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys. ³⁶ Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. ³⁷ My master put me under this oath: 'You will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I live ³⁸ but will go to my father's family and to my clan to take a wife for my son.' ³⁹ But I said to my master, 'Suppose the woman will not come back with me?' ⁴⁰ He said to me, 'The Lord before whom I have walked will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, and you will take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father's family. ⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath if you go to my family and they do not give her to you—you will be free from my oath.' ⁴² "Today when I came to the spring, I prayed: Lord, God of my master Abraham, if only you will make my journey successful! ⁴³ I am standing here at a spring. Let the young woman who comes out to draw water, and I say to her, 'Please let me drink a little water from your jug,' ⁴⁴ and who responds to me, 'Drink, and I'll draw water for your camels also'—let her be the woman the Lord has appointed for my master's son. ⁴⁵ "Before I had finished praying silently, there was Rebekah coming with her jug on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. So I said to her, 'Please let me have a drink.' ⁴⁶ She quickly lowered her jug from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels also.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She responded, 'The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her wrists. ⁴⁸ Then I knelt low, worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who guided me on the right way to take the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. ⁴⁹ Now, if you are going to show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; if not, tell me, and I will go elsewhere."

There are some wonderful elements in this speech. First of all, what he's sharing *is* a testimony. He's not making things up, he's not ranting or raving, he talks about what God has done in his midst.

God wants to build testimonies in your life. Now, your experience isn't the end all, be all of God's work. Your testimony isn't the ultimate message. But it is a vehicle God wants to use to deliver His Gospel truth and reveal His work.

Psalm 66:16 - ¹⁶Come and listen, all who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.

Our testimony is not meant to make *us* seem great, but to display God's faithful love - a love that can only be understood in the context of revelation.

As the servant begins, he speaks to Laban's family on their level. He knows that Laban is all about wealth, so he says, "You know, my master is a wealthy man. But he's not wealthy because he stole or cheated or clawed his way up from the streets. No, his life has been completely affected by the Living God." So, he uses this touch point and starts off by speaking Laban's language.

One commentator points out that he also uses tact and wisdom by pointing out that this Isaac he wants to bring Rebekah to isn't some weird old man.⁴ Laban and Bethuel, would've known the math. "Abraham is 140 years old...just how old is this guy they want our daughter to marry?"

The servant doesn't try to *hide* the Lord in his speech. He's right out in front about God and prayer and providence and the Lord's sovereignty over his life. He's completely God-oriented in his message. Here's what God has done. Here's how trustworthy He is. Here's how He hears prayer. Here's how He's worthy of worship. Here's how He wants to guide our lives. Here's how He's faithful.

Our testimonies will, obviously, *include* us, but they're not *about* us. They're supposed to be about Jesus.

And then we note that the servant brings his audience to a moment of decision. "Tell me if you're going to accept this or not." Christians like to argue about things like altar calls. I don't get the point of that argument. We all can agree that, in the Bible, the messengers of God consistently call people to a moment of decision. As we testify, as we preach, we want to do the same.

There are a few other wonderful principles we can take to heart from his speech. First, we see the power of prayer - even *silent* prayer. God hears and He responds. Second, we see that the servant's motivation was completing the mission. His goal was God's will. And third, there at the end we see that he thought that the *best* thing Laban and the family could do for him was to *accept* the message and decide positively. *That* would be true kindness in the servant's mind. Undoubtedly he was happy for the warm bed and the sumptuous feast, but the *best* thing they could do for him was not wine and dine him, but conform to the Lord's will.

Genesis 24:50-51 - ⁵⁰Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the Lord; we have no choice in the matter." ⁵¹Rebekah is here in front of you. Take her and go, and let her be a wife for your master's son, just as the Lord has spoken."

⁴ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

We don't see a real surrendering to the Lord here. They give their daughter, but not their own hearts. What they said was, "we are not able to speak to you bad or good."⁵ They couldn't deny the obvious providence of God, but we note that none of them said, "Hey, can we come and join in this incredible arrangement?" When God speaks, we may think that indecision isn't a choice, but it is.

Genesis 24:52 - ⁵²When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed to the ground before the Lord.

The servant is God-oriented in each scene of this story. He's at a well, but he's in prayer. He's at a dinner, but he's thanking God. He's never afraid to honor God in public and he's quick to worship.

Genesis 24:53 - ⁵³Then he brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious gifts to her brother and her mother.

This was, perhaps, the bride price that would need to be paid in that culture.⁶ Abraham had provided what was necessary. Where God guides, God provides.

Genesis 24:54 - ⁵⁴Then he and the men with him ate and drank and spent the night. When they got up in the morning, he said, "Send me to my master."

They had one night of rest, now the servant is ready to walk 500 more miles to get back home. Earlier he had not wanted to be distracted by creature comforts, now he's not wanting to be *delayed* in getting home.

It would've been easy to hang around for awhile. He could've justified, saying, "it would be rude to eat and run..." And I'm sure it was nice *to be served for once*, instead of doing the serving. But this guy is all about the call, he's all about faithfulness and being a part of God's work.

Genesis 24:55 - ⁵⁵But her brother and mother said, "Let the girl stay with us for about ten days. Then she can go."

This seems pretty reasonable to us, but linguists point out that it wasn't just a week and a half. They used a saying, "Let Rebekah stay here days or ten," and scholars believe they we're probably referring to a time period more like 10 months or even a few years!⁷ Jacob will get caught up in a long wait-awhile in Laban's house, and it doesn't turn out well.

Genesis 24:56 - ⁵⁶But he responded to them, "Do not delay me, since the Lord has made my journey a success. Send me away so that I may go to my master."

⁵ NET Study Bible Notes

⁶ CSB Study Bible Notes

⁷ See Walke, *Alter*

In that article about regaining focus, a second strategy given is “stick to a schedule.” The servant didn’t have a “be-back-by” date - this was a fluid situation. But once this thing was going, he wanted to be as timely as possible. It reminds me of the fact that Peter said we can be a part of “hastening” the coming of the Lord through the way we conduct ourselves as servants.⁸

He says, “Listen, I’m not a free agent. I’m a servant to a master and I’m on the clock. It’s time to go.”

Genesis 24:57-58 - ⁵⁷ So they said, “Let’s call the girl and ask her opinion.” ⁵⁸ They called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She replied, “I will go.”

Rebekah has no idea what tomorrow will be like, but she is ready to step into the providence of God. It meant walking by faith, but she would do it, even if her family wanted to slow things down.

Genesis 24:59-61 - ⁵⁹ So they sent away their sister Rebekah with the one who had nursed and raised her, and Abraham’s servant and his men. ⁶⁰ They blessed Rebekah, saying to her: Our sister, may you become thousands upon ten thousands. May your offspring possess the city gates of their enemies. ⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her female servants got up, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

Earlier she had identified herself as “the daughter of Bethuel.” Here’s she’s called the “sister.” But, now she is starting a new life, with a new identity. She is becoming the *wife*, a member of the unique family of faith. She’s going to be transformed. No longer will she be remembered as Rebekah the Aramean, she’s becoming Rebekah the Hebrew. And her choice impacts the lives of these other ladies who go with her. It speaks to us of how our lives will touch the lives of others. As we live unto God, He does a good work of blessing those around us by our transformation.

In their parting poem, Rebekah’s family hopes for lots of great things for her. But what is it based on? It’s just *empty* hope - hope on the human level. “I *hope* things go well.” Whereas we, as Christians, have a hope that does not disappoint - one secured in the loyal faithfulness of God Himself. They are hoping for victory and lots of offspring and all that, but when build upon the world’s sand, all of that can be wiped out in a moment. When we build our lives upon the Lord, *that’s* when we’ve built something that will last, something that is secure.

Genesis 24:62-63 - ⁶² Now Isaac was returning from Beer-lahai-roi, for he was living in the Negev region. ⁶³ In the early evening Isaac went out to walk in the field, and looking up he saw camels coming.

There’s Isaac, coming out to stroll in this land the Lord had promised. Your version may have “meditating”.⁹ Coming from Beer-lahai-roi we’re reminded of God’s watchful eye, looking out over your life. The name of that place means the well of the Living One Who sees me.¹⁰ The Lord sees

⁸ 2 Peter 3:12

⁹ See *Alter, NKJV, ESV*

¹⁰ *NET Study Bible Notes*

your life and wants to fill it with His goodness as you stroll through the time and place He has established you.

Genesis 24:64-65 - ⁶⁴ **Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she got down from her camel ⁶⁵ and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?" The servant answered, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself.**

We have a lovely scene here of boy meets girl. They each look up and we're given this impression of what we might call love at first sight. God has loved you from the beginning and when we *really* look at Who He is, how could we help but love Him in return?

For her part, Rebekah immediately presents herself as the bride. Bruce Waltke points out that this veiling she does acts as an identifier to Isaac, saying, "I'm the bride, not these other ladies." And so we see this readiness about her choice, a great, personal deliberateness to walk into this new life.

Genesis 24:66 - ⁶⁶ **Then the servant told Isaac everything he had done.**

You and I will give an account to our Master one day when the journey is done. We want to be found faithful and profitable in our service. But that requires focus and application in the here and now, the way the servant had stayed focused along the way.

Genesis 24:67 - ⁶⁷ **And Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah and took Rebekah to be his wife. Isaac loved her, and he was comforted after his mother's death.**

Arranged marriage is a foreign concept to us. But Moses points out here that this was not just a transaction. There was real love in this relationship.

Meanwhile, what an amazing development for Rebekah. A few verses ago she was a random, pagan outsider, being bossed around by some Laban who cared more about himself than anyone else. And now? Now she's been given the role of the matriarch in this incredible family. She's been brought right into the master's tent and given a place of power.

This is what God does for us. We are saved out of sin and brought into His heavenly household, as co-inheritors with the Son Himself from Whom we receive an undying love.

What a good God we get to serve! Let's stay focused as we do it.