

# Marriage Is God's Idea

*When trying to understand God's will in choosing our life partner, biblical guidance is a lifesaver.*

BY GAVIN ANTHONY

**I** COULDN'T HELP IT, BUT I ROLLED MY EYES. I had just read that single people should study the story of Isaac and Rebekah to guide them in choosing a life partner. Now, I don't mean to be cynical, but how does a story about an arranged marriage 4,000 or so years ago relate to finding a partner today?

If trying to understand God's will in general is difficult, understanding God's will regarding whom we should marry is like crossing a mine field—we may not get a second chance if we step on one. So for those who desire to do it God's way, biblical guidance is a lifesaver. That is, of course, if we can find it.

And the finding can be hard. In Christian circles, it seems easy to find oneself bombarded with temperament profiles and new insights from the world of pop psychology. And of course there are many helpful books describing other people's experiences. While these are all interesting, where can biblical guidance be found?

You may feel reluctant to turn to the story of Isaac and Rebekah for guidance, but it contains six principles that can really help direct the Christian. Consequently, these principles take a lot of the stress and worry out of wondering if one is on the right track. Here is how Genesis 24 presents it:

1. God clears the way ahead (verses 6, 7). As Abraham's servant is about to set out, Abraham tells him, "[God] will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son" (verse 7).<sup>\*</sup> Abraham was confident not simply that the mission would be successful, but that God

would send a messenger from heaven to prepare the way to make it successful. The servant did not have to worry about blazing his own trail. He started his journey confident that God was leading.

God leads because it is a mine field out there. We have to struggle with our own hearts, which are unbelievably deceitful (Jer. 17:9). We also have to evade Satan, who, as Ellen White observes, "is busily engaged in influencing those who are wholly unsuited to each other to unite their interests."<sup>1</sup>

When we get waylaid by one of the two, it can be painful. Not that godly relationships are pain-free. But marriages are designed by God to reflect the harmony of heaven here on earth. If we find ourselves continually experiencing obstacles and hurt, it may be time to reassess who is really leading up front.

2. Entrust the choosing to God (verse 12). The servant prayed, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today." The servant acknowledged that God was the source of his success. This is hard for us, because we really want to believe we are good at choosing for ourselves. But, as we cannot see the future as God does, it is critical to pin our hopes on His wisdom. As Ellen White suggests, "a sincere Christian will not advance his plans in this direction without the knowledge that God approves his course. He will not want to choose for himself, but will feel that God must choose for him."<sup>2</sup> The wonderful truth is that God's choices always work for our very best. We do not have to worry that He will make a mistake.

3. Wait until you see the “harmonization principle” (verses 13, 14). Abraham’s servant now requests a sign to confirm he has found the right girl. Not only should the girl offer to give him, a stranger, a drink, but also to water his camels. However, the servant did not just randomly ask for this strange sign.

Ellen White makes a short observation that is perhaps the most significant in this story: “In the family of his master he was accustomed to the constant exercise of kindness and hospitality, and he now asked that an act of courtesy might indicate the maiden whom God had chosen.”<sup>3</sup> The servant requested a sign that would show if Rebekah’s character would harmonize with the character of Isaac’s family. Even more significant, she would also be harmonizing with the greater purposes that God had in mind concerning the covenant between Himself and Abraham.

This harmonization principle works in two ways. First, it looks for harmonization of character and personality. Second, and perhaps more important, it looks for harmonization of purpose. Are our values, our ambitions, our spiritual journeys, moving in the same direction? Does this person share in the same purposes for my life that God has already begun to show me? At the beginning, Eve was created as a “helper” in God’s purposes, not just a foot warmer for Adam. Before making any sort of commitment to a relationship, we need to see this *harmonization principle* working, particularly regarding God’s purpose for our lives.

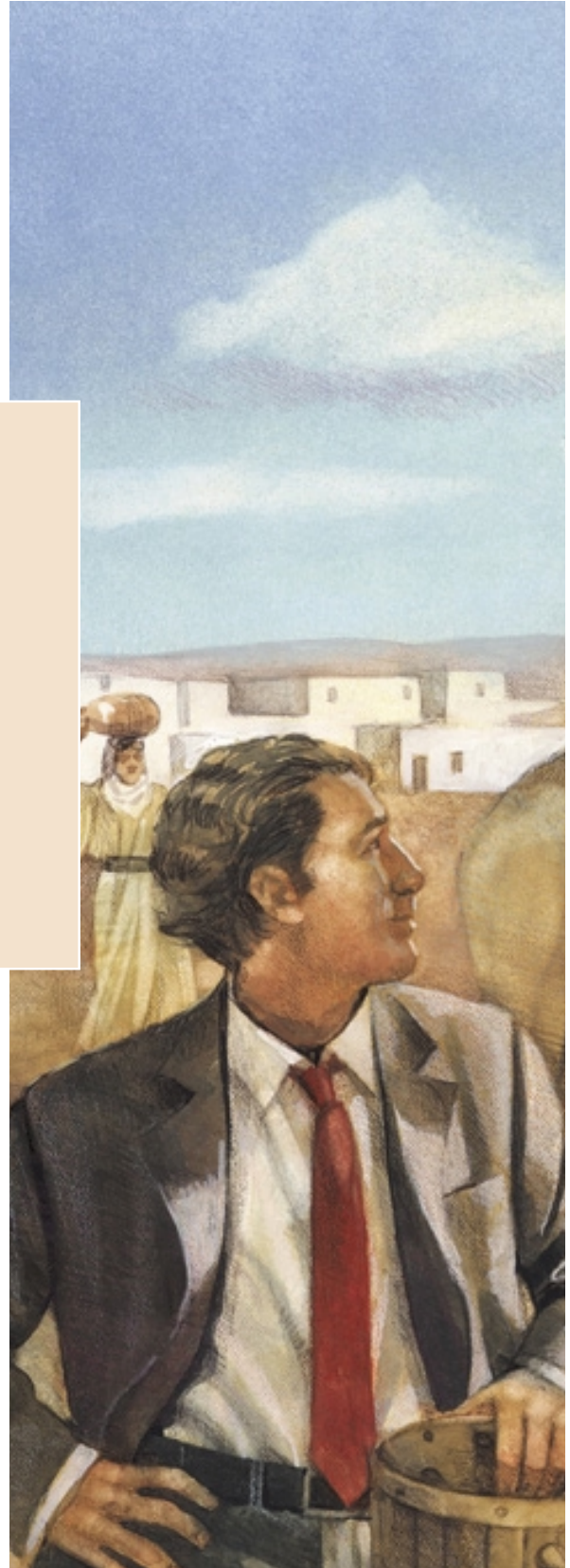
4. You will recognize that God has chosen (verses 26, 27). Before Rebekah rushes home to share her story, the servant “bowed down and

worshiped the Lord” (verse 26). While he had not yet met Rebekah’s family, he was already confident that God had chosen. But it was not just the servant who was convinced. Mrs. White notes that “[Rebekah] believed, from what had taken place, that God had selected her to be Isaac’s wife.”<sup>4</sup> Both could see God at work.

5. Handle signs carefully—

*Because we cannot see the future, it’s critical to pin our hopes on His wisdom.*

watch for God’s guidance to be confirmed (verses 33-49). While the servant had asked for the fulfillment of a specific sign, he did not automatically assume the family would see it his way. Before eating, he insisted on describing to the whole family what had happened, and then asked for permission to take Rebekah home. This was quite unlike what happened at my college. A friend was approached by someone who was convinced that “God has told me we should be together.” But God had not let anyone else know. However God’s direction comes, it must be





continually confirmed.

6. Others will confirm that God has chosen (verses 28-31, 50, 51). After Rebekah's brother Laban hears her story, he goes out to meet the servant, declaring, "Come, you who are blessed by the Lord" (verse 31). But how did Laban know that the servant wasn't planning an elaborate con? Somehow Laban discerned that God was at work. A short time later Rebekah's father, Bethuel, was told the story. Again, when the servant asked for their opinion, both Bethuel and Laban replied, "This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other" (verse 50). God was obviously working in a way that was evident to those around. When God is at work, godly people who are close to you will be able to discern it.

### Conclusion

Marriage is God's idea. To be committed to His direction is of great delight to Him. He will not play hard to get. He will not deliberately lower His voice so that it seems garbled by life's noise to confuse you. So relax. He desperately wants you to know Him and His will for your life. That is why we have Scripture and the Spirit to guide us. If you long to know His will in marriage, be assured that He will guide clearly. Because He loves you—intensely.

\* Bible texts are from the New International Version.

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Adventist Home*, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

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