

July 5, 2026

Genesis 24 – “Between the Familiar and the Future”

My earliest church experiences as a new Christian were filled with a lot of definitions and categories. It seems like pastors and teachers spent a lot of time emphasizing that everything had its place in God’s grand design. Last month, in Faith and Films, we watched *Remarkably Bright Creatures*. Sally Field’s character, Tova, believed there was “a right way to do things and a wrong way.” And there *is* truth to that. But as we know there’s more than one way to make a taco. There’s more than one way to brush your teeth. There’s more than one way to... I don’t know... bathe a cat, if you’re brave enough to try. People have different styles, preferences, and strategies even when pursuing the same goal.

One thing I discovered in those early years was how often pastors and teachers talked about the importance of having a “biblical marriage.” Now remember—I was one of those annoying kids who actually read my Bible. So, I’d ask things like, “So... exactly how many concubines am I allowed?”

Family systems in biblical times were complicated. As we discovered a few weeks ago when we studied Abraham and Sarah, apparently it’s acceptable to borrow your

wife's servant if you think your wife is too old to have children. To complicate matters even more, Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. I almost forgot about that one, but it's right there in Genesis 20. Later, one of Abraham's grandsons, Jacob, intended to marry Rachel. Instead, his uncle Laban—who also becomes his father-in-law—tricks him into marrying Leah first. Eventually Jacob marries Rachel too. The result? Two wives. Two sisters. One husband.

Don't even get me started on Israel's kings. David had numerous wives. His son Solomon—often called Solomon the Wise—had 700 wives and 300 concubines. I don't know about you, but that doesn't sound very wise to me. Whenever I brought these stories up in Sunday School, someone would explain, "Well, Israel was trying to fulfill God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky." Sometimes my Sunday school teachers used terms like "ethical non-monogamy" to explain practices that certainly wouldn't be legal—or advisable—in our culture today. I just wanted to get all of that out of the way before we jump into today's story. Because this is one of those passages that people point to when they talk about a "biblical marriage." But if we spend all our time trying to compare it to our modern understanding of marriage, we're going to miss what the story is actually trying to teach us.

Our story begins with Abraham wanting to find a wife for his son Isaac. He sends his trusted servant, Eliezer, back to Abraham's homeland because he does not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman. Before entering the city, Eliezer prays. He asks God for a sign. "Lord, if the woman you have chosen not only offers me water but also volunteers to water my camels, I'll know she's the one."

Then something important happens. He doesn't pray... and take a nap. He watches. He pays attention. He engages. Before long, Rebekah arrives and does exactly what he had prayed for. She offers him water and then voluntarily draws enough water for all of his camels. Realizing God has answered his prayer, Eliezer praises God, tells Rebekah's family why he has come, and asks for her hand in marriage on Isaac's behalf.

Then the story reaches its emotional center. Rebekah is asked one simple question: "Will you go?" No one forces her. Not Eliezer. Not her father. Not her brother. *She* has agency. *She* has a choice. And her answer is simple: "I will."

With those two words she leaves her parents, her routines, her neighbors, her security, and everything she has ever known to marry a man she has never met. She doesn't have all the answers. She doesn't know exactly how the

story will end. She simply trusts that God is already ahead of her.

What fascinates me about this story is that everyone is moving. Abraham sends. Eliezer goes. Rebekah serves. Rebekah leaves. Isaac receives. Nobody just sits around waiting for God to do everything. Everyone participates in what God is *already* doing. We often reduce faith to something we *believe*. Genesis reminds us that faith is something we *do*.

So here's the question I want to put on the table this morning: How many of us are trying to follow Jesus while refusing to leave anything familiar? You might be thinking, "Oof! Can't we talk about biblical marriage some more?" No. Because that isn't what this story is about. Sure, it's interesting to talk about complicated family trees and ancient marriage customs. It may even make us feel good about how much our society has changed over the centuries. But that isn't what this text asks of us. This story is about us. It's about how we respond to God.

We say, "Oh sure, I love God... as long as I don't have to change." "I trust God... as long as I know exactly how everything is going to turn out." "I'll pray... as long as God blesses the plans I've already made." But God says, "No. Come with me." That requires faith.

A couple of months ago we talked about how many people think faith means certainty. Yet here's another story that says otherwise. Nobody knows exactly how this story is going to end. Abraham doesn't. Eliezer doesn't. Rebekah doesn't. Isaac doesn't.

Faith isn't certainty. Faith is trust. Think about what's happening in our own congregation. A few months ago we launched a capital campaign. We asked one another to Imagine More. We invested in a future we cannot fully see yet. That's exactly what Rebekah is doing. She isn't preserving what is familiar. She is stepping toward the future God is preparing. Again, this story isn't really about marriage. It's about discipleship. It's about the kind of faith that doesn't simply believe God exists but trusts God enough to move.

Abraham moved. Eliezer moved. Rebekah moved. Isaac welcomed what God had prepared. Faith always has feet. When Jesus called his disciples, he never said, "Figure everything out first." He never said, "Come back when you're certain." He simply said, "Follow me." And following *always* requires movement.

So here's what I want you to take home with you today. Every one of us is somewhere between what is familiar and the future God is preparing. Maybe God is calling

you to forgive someone. Maybe God is inviting you to repair a relationship. Maybe God is nudging you to say yes to a ministry you've been resisting. Maybe God is calling you to step up to the plate in ways you never have before. Maybe it means trusting God through a difficult diagnosis. Maybe it means finally saying yes to a calling that has been quietly tugging at your heart for years.

The question Rebekah heard is the same question every disciple eventually hears. "Will you go?" Will you trust me? Will you leave what is comfortable? Will you take the next faithful step?

We don't know where that journey will lead. Rebekah didn't. Abraham didn't. Eliezer didn't. During Jesus' time, the disciples sure didn't know. But they discovered what we are invited to discover today: Faith isn't having all the answers before you begin. Faith is trusting that God is already waiting for you wherever God is calling you to go. Now ... *will* you go?