

Genesis 24 Part 2: Love and Consolation

By:

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“Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, “Please, put your hand under my thigh, “and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; “but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”

-Genesis 24:1-4

The last paper I wrote on Genesis 24 looked at the marriage rituals that were formed by the Jewish culture that are exemplified in this chapter. The beauty of these rituals is that they are also reflective of the higher reality of God’s love and commitment for His people. This means that if we can appropriately represent these patterns, we have the opportunity of worshiping and enjoying the eternal pleasure and joy of God through participating in these earthly patterns of romance and marriage. That is the more cosmic understanding of this passage, but for this paper I wanted to focus on the more practical implications of Genesis 24. To break this down more effectively we are going to look first at the importance and comfort contained within marriage, and then we will look at what qualities we should be looking to emulate within ourselves to make a marriage work, and what qualities we should be seeking in a potential spouse.

Death and Consolation

“Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”

-Genesis 24:67

It is important to remember that the beauty of this passage is shadowed by the death of Isaac’s mother in the previous chapter. However, this truth doesn’t seem to make this passage less beautiful in the eyes of the author, but more beautiful. The reason for this is given in the way that ancient man understood love and death. Ancient man was far more attuned to their mortality than modern man. They lived in a harsh world with no hospitals, modern medicine, they were more vulnerable to the weather, and had far

more wars. This meant that most people in the ancient world were well acquainted with the concept of death when they entered adulthood.

As such, they entered their adult years with a heavy emphasis on legacy and responsibility to their tribe and family. To put it another way, almost no one in the ancient world entered their adult years unprepared for death. Because of this, they saw the great consolation of death and the great motivation for their lives to be marriage and family. This is why it was normal for the Biblical authors to say that people were comforted after death by romantic love and family. This is explicitly said numerous times in the Old Testament, like in Genesis 24, the end of the book of Job, and in second Samuel after David and Bathsheba lose their firstborn son:

“Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the LORD loved him...”

-2 Samuel 12:24

This language scandalizes modern man. We think that it trivializes the death of the loved one and insinuates that you can “make up” for the loss of one loved one with the birth of someone else. We will talk more about this modern mindset in a second, but just to focus on the previous point, it isn’t that ancient man believed that relationships are interchangeable, only that they understood the normal cycle of things and saw the continuation of life as a comfort after the termination of a different life.

“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted...”

-Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

Ancient people were well acquainted with the natural cycles of life and death and so they oriented their lives towards legacy and future generations. This is why ancient stories, (mostly preserved for us in the form of fairy tales) emphasize so strongly the pursuit of marriage and family. As a matter of fact, most fairy tales have the main characters fighting monsters, dragons, and villains in order to find their brides and be joined in marriage. The idea there is that our lives ought to be primarily oriented towards marriage and family. All of the obstacles they had to overcome and all the things they were trying to achieve was to support their families. To put it more simply, ancient man thought that the main arc of every person’s life was to overcome vast obstacles in order to find love, start a family, and then protect and provide for that family.

Modern Man

Modern man lives a life of relative ease and comfort. Death is a distant reality that most people don't really think about, and therefore, most people don't think much about the future or their legacy. So, instead of pursuing success or prosperity in order to support their future family, they see their careers as their ultimate goals, and marriage and family as far less important. Look at how we are reinterpreting these ancient fairy tales to see this more directly. In the past decade, every modern fairy tale has not had the protagonist pursuing a love interest, but instead they are pursuing power or career.

The last several Disney Princesses, Elsa, Anna, Moana, Mirabel, and Asha, only one of them actually finds romance, and their romance is seen as, at best, a secondary consequence of the main story. This trend is not simply some agenda that Hollywood is trying to make true, it is instead a direct reflection of the modern attitude towards marriage and family.

“A majority of Millennials are not currently married, marking a significant change from past generations. Only 44% of Millennials were married in 2019, compared with 53% of Gen Xers, 61% of Boomers and 81% of Silents at a comparable age.

What does marriage look like for Millennials who have tied the knot? They are getting married later in life than previous generations. The [median age at first marriage](#) has edged up gradually in recent decades. In 2019, the average man first got married at age 30, and the average woman was 28 when she first wed. This is three years later – for both men and women – than in 2003, four years later than in 1987 and seven years later than in 1968.”

-Pew Research - “How Millennials Approach Family Life”

Beyond getting married later and in fewer numbers, the current generations are also not having children:

“Fertility rates are declining worldwide. Yes, there are nations where there are still far more children than the replacement rate of at least 2.1 children per woman. But industrialized economies are all well below replacement level.

United States Census data [indicates](#) that the percentage of women between ages 30 and 44 who have never had children is at a record high since 1960 contributing to the nation's fertility rate of 1.8 children per woman — notably below the population replacement rate of 2.1.

The United States is a virtual day care center compared to many other nations.

[Statistics Canada](#) reports that Canada clocked in at 1.3 children per woman in 2022.

Euro News [reports](#) that Europe had its fewest number of babies since 1960 in 2022.

The United Kingdom has a modest fertility rate of 1.6, while Germany is at 1.4 and Italy

at 1.2. Of course there is the island outlier of Malta with the lowest fertility rate in Europe at about 1 child per woman.”

-Forbes - “Millennials Are Having Fewer Babies. What Does This Mean For Retirement?”

While these statistics are fairly well known, the question we should be asking is, is this a bad thing? Some might even argue that this represents a positive trend and should be embraced. Not only do I believe that this attitude is damaging, but I will even go so far as to call it unbiblical, and I will give two reasons why.

Legacy

“Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,” says the LORD. ‘And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’”
So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, *“The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good!”*
For he said, *“Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?”*

-2 Kings 20:17-19

The above passage is one of the most tragic in the whole Bible. King Hezekiah was one of the few truly faithful kings in Israel’s history, and he performed truly noble and brave acts of devotion towards God that preserved the nation through one of its most severe moments of crisis. However, towards the end of his life, he began to treat life more casually, and he lost sight of legacy and future generations. This is symbolized in how he casually boasted of all his treasures to an envoy from Babylon. After Hezekiah does this, God makes the above pronouncement on Israel. At face value this can seem overly harsh, until you see the response of Hezekiah in verse 19:

“The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good!” For he said, *“Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?”*

Hezekiah could care less about the fate of the future generations, he only cares that his own kingdom would be preserved and that he wouldn’t see calamity. When the rulers of a society adopt this mindset, the nation that they rule over is doomed. When a society adopts an attitude of callous indifference to the future of their own nation, as demonstrated through our incessant spending that continues to rack our national debt up to unimaginable numbers and the general apathy towards the lack of children necessary to replace the current generations and carry on the legacy of our nation, that society is doomed.

They don't see their lives as being a service to future generations, they don't even care about what the future children will inherit as long as their lives are "peaceful". Notice that the article I quoted earlier from Forbes was titled: *"Millennials Are Having Fewer Babies. What Does This Mean For Retirement?"* The concern of the article is not for future generations, but the retirement prospects of current generations. We are a society that has ignored the importance of death, and so we treat life casually. And any society that has no care for their future is one that is destroying their own legacy.

The Blessing of Life

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate."

-Psalm 127:3-5

As dangerous as the above attitude is, there is a far more pernicious attitude that we have to address, and that is the nihilistic attitude that we have towards life itself. The Bible's attitude towards life is pretty consistent with what most human cultures have known throughout history. Life, with all of its flaws, is still beautiful and worth celebrating and protecting. The one force throughout history that seems bent on the destruction, and denigration of all life seems to be Satan himself. Whenever a society turns more towards the demonic and cruel, it is symbolized by the killing of the innocence. We see this at the birth of Jesus when Herod has all the infants killed, we see this with Israel when they begin to "shed innocent blood", and we see this most notably when Israel is enslaved by Egypt in the book of Exodus.

When this happened, Pharaoh commanded the boys of the Israelites to be murdered so that the population of the Israelites could be controlled. This seems to have had an effect on the consciences of the Israelites, because Moses notes this as the reason for why his parents didn't kill him:

"So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months."

-Exodus 2:2

This passage doesn't mean that Moses was a particularly good looking baby so his parents preserved his life, it means that his parents showed their nobility by recognizing the innate beauty contained in Moses at birth. A society that doesn't recognize the innate beauty of life is one that turns to death and the destruction of their future. This is

also a society that is participating in the philosophy of Satan. I think that the German author Goethe put this best in his play "Faust" when he has his own Satanic figure say:

"I am the Spirit that Denies! And justly so: for all things, from the Void Called forth, deserve to be destroyed: 'Twere better, then, were naught created. Thus, all which you as Sin have rated,— Destruction,—aught with Evil blent,— That is my proper element."
-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe - "Faust, Part One"

Satan is the one who stands opposed to the beauty and the goodness of God. As such, he hates God and therefore hates man who bears the image of God. His constant agenda is to mock and destroy life and every nation that gives into his call will begin to denigrate the value and beauty of life.

These ideas have, unfortunately, permeated our culture. This doesn't mean that everyone in our culture hates life, (though there are some who do), but it does mean that many in our culture have had their attitude towards life dragged down by this nihilistic attitude. There isn't much excitement about life and that is why people are having fewer kids, but it is also why the issue of abortion has become so prevalent in our modern political age. It's not that this issue hasn't always been contentious, but it is strange that it seemed to be the primary focus of the previous election cycle. The democrats focused almost all their attacks on this issue, and they talked incessantly about how important the "right" to abortion was and insinuated that the loss of this one "right" was the loss of all women's rights.

The point I am making is not about the pro-life versus pro-choice debate, (though I am ardently pro-life) it is merely to comment on how strange it is that a political candidacy would focus so much on this one particular issue. Most politicians focus on how they would try to make life better for their voters, this push seemed to be more about the "right" to take innocent life. Although nationally this push failed, locally in Arizona, it seems to have unfortunately worked.

As stated before though, this attitude is throughout our culture. It is all over our media, it is an attitude that actively discourages people from getting married and starting a family. The reasons can be global warming, overpopulation, or just a general sense that the world is too cruel and unjust to want to bring new life into it. As stated before, this hasn't had the effect of making most people dislike family or marriage, but it has made them rather apathetic to it. The problem is that the main consolation of this life, the main source of joy and hope and the highest expression of love that God has given us in this life is within the family unit.

Many Christians have pointed out that since we have all we need in Christ, family is not that important. This is broadly true, yet specifically it is naive. By saying that Christ is all we need, is not to say that there aren't things that Christians can do to make our lives better or worse in the here and now. So, if someone has cancer or is unjustly incarcerated, I can tell them honestly that Christ is such a supreme source of joy that they can experience peace and encouragement even as they face down death and injustice. However this is not to say that their lives wouldn't improve if their cancer wasn't healed or if they were freed from prison.

In the same way, a Christian can, and should, learn to be content in their singleness or in a life without children. But it doesn't logically follow that marriage and family are not incredible blessings from God that should not be earnestly sought.

*"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the LORD."
-Proverbs 18:22*

There will be some who, through no fault of their own, (like Daniel), will be prevented from marriage and family, while others, (like Paul and Jeremiah), will be called to some ministry or work that will prevent them from marriage and family. But for the vast majority of us, we will find our greatest and most important call from God in learning to love and be loved in the context of getting married and having children.

The Redemption of Life

This whole discussion reminds me of a conversation contained in John Milton's "Paradise Lost". This is a poetic account of Satan's fall from heaven and Adam and Eve's fall from Eden. After Adam and Eve eat the fruit, Eve contends with Adam that they should not have children because whatever children they bear will also bear the curse and be doomed to die. Adam seems to agree when he says:

*"All that I eate or drink, or shall beget,
Is propagated curse. O voice once heard
Delightfully, Encrease and Multiply,
Now death to heare! for what can I encrease
Or multiplie, but curses on my head?"
John Milton - "Paradise Lost"*

The lament of Adam might resonate with many today, but ultimately he doesn't stay in his despair. He later reasons with Eve that since God has promised a future offspring who will deliver them from sin and death, they should start a family in the hope that one day, that child would be born and would deliver the creation from the consequences of

sin and death. It is this hope that drives the narrative of the Old Testament. It is why the stories of Genesis are so focused on families, from Noah, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob we have God's plan of redemption carried through history through the ordinary decisions of men and women to faithfully bear children and raise them to live righteously in this present age. This promise propagates through time, until Mary receives the fulfillment of the promise and becomes great simply by choosing to rejoice in bearing the Son of God within her womb.

"For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name."

-Luke 1:48-49

All of this speaks of God's great love for mankind. He doesn't see us as curse on His creation, but as His beautiful creation that He would give His own life to redeem. So while the saints of the Old Testament had great motive to marry and bear children, we arguably have an even greater reason. While we aren't looking for the birth of the Savior, through His life, death, and resurrection, God has hallowed life itself. He has given eternal value to our finite lives and shown us that we can be filled with His Spirit and participate in God's act of redemption.

When we choose to marry, we are choosing to marry another image bearer of God, one who has the infinite and eternal love of God upon them, and we have the opportunity to bear life in our image and to raise our children in a way that prepares them to have a relationship with that same God. That our love will pass beyond this world and continue forever in the presence of our eternal Father who bought us through His sacrifice and desires our lives to participate with Him for all eternity. I love how C.S. Lewis put this in his essay "The Weight of Glory".

"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours."

-C. S. Lewis - "Weight of Glory"

It is in light of this fantastic truth that we correctly value marriage and family. It is in this that we can see why our ancestors would craft legends and myths that put family at the center of human existence and marriage as the prime treasure that we should be pursuing above all else.

Godly Character

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold.”

-Proverbs 22:1

All that being said, if one of the chief physical goals of this life should be for marriage and family, I thought it would be good to wrap up this paper by talking about the practical wisdom contained in this passage for how to properly do that. One of the struggles that we can have in reading this passage as modern people is the brevity in which everything is described. When it comes to romantic stories, we are used to full length movies, novels, or even shows that develop characters and show the audience why they are a good match.

Ancient stories were told in a much shorter fashion and so they relied on symbols to express in a few lines what takes modern storytellers pages to express the exact same thing. And what this chapter is predominantly about is the great character of both Isaac and Rebekah.

“Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink’—let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.”

-Genesis 24:14

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming.”

-Genesis 24:63

As hard as it might be for us to understand, these two verses are full, symbolic depictions of the character of both Isaac and Rebekah. They seem so short to us, but the author is letting us know that both of these people had strong moral character before meeting and this is what made them a good match for one another. As I said before, although this kind of storytelling is foreign to us today, it was very normal for the majority of human history.

Take fairy tales for an example. These stories represent some of the most well-known and oldest stories that we are aware of, (some of these classic stories date back more than 1500 years). In these stories you have symbolic representations of character used to tell the story, which is why most modern people have attacked these stories as being

backwards and negative for kids. Most stories use looks as a shorthand account for character, but one, “The Little Mermaid”, uses a very unique literary device for her character, her voice. Because modern people don’t understand symbolism anymore, they thought that these stories were teaching a very shallow message to kids. They thought that these stories were teaching kids to fall in love at first sight with the most attractive person they meet at a dance.

This fear was so prevalent that Disney has subsequently changed their classic versions of these stories in their dull live-action remakes. On top of that, they have even used their newer films to openly mock this fairytale formula. In “Frozen” princess Anna falls in love with a handsome stranger named Hans, and they spend the night dancing together at the ball until he proposes to her. This is seen as romantic, until later in the movie Hans reveals that he is actually a terrible narcissist who was out to kill both Anna and Elsa and take their throne. The message wasn’t subtle. Disney was “repenting” of what they saw as the shallow and damaging messages of their past movies.

Little did they know though, this attack was aimed at a false target. The reason why these stories have been around for so long is because they are teaching timeless lessons. They aren’t preaching shallowness, it’s actually the opposite. They are using looks, singing, and dancing as “shorthand” to symbolize the character of the protagonists. In many of these stories the symbolism is less obscure than people make it out to be.

In Snow White, the wicked queen is driven to jealousy over the beauty of Snow White, and transforms herself into an old hag in order to trick and murder her own step-daughter. In the new “Tangled” (which was the last true fairytale that Disney has made) Mother Gothel is obsessed with beauty and uses Rapunzel’s hair in order to stay young and vibrant. When Rapunzel’s hair is cut though, she reverts into an ugly old woman and falls to her death. So yes, beauty can be a mask, but they are also clearly using physical beauty as shorthand for inner character.

I can go over more of these, but I hope you see the point. These stories were never shallow, our understanding has just become shallow in recent years. And this shallowness can make us miss the beauty of God’s word in what He is trying to communicate to us. Modern people today can read this story and think that the Bible is supporting an old “patriarchal” system in which Rebekah is “sold” by her family to a wealthy landowner whom she has never met. And that this story is presented as “happy” simply because Rebekah is pretty and Isaac is rich.

God's Call to Good Character

The opposite is the truth. The Bible is using the same subtle "shorthand" of fairy tales to teach us something very important. Since this is the first full romance that we witness in the Scriptures, the message is actually very important and instructive for young people. Just as Jewish culture has modeled their wedding ceremonies off of this story, so they have modeled their expectations and goals off this same short story. What this passage has taught young Jewish men and women is that first, one of the highest callings God has placed upon us is to marry and start a family, and second, that a prerequisite for that calling is to develop character.

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope."

-Romans 5:3-4

Once again, going back to the fairytale analogy, the reason why the young prince has to slay the dragon or why the young princess has to withstand the wiles of some wicked witch before they can be joined together, is that this too is symbolic of the trials necessary to build character. As beautiful and wondrous as marriage is, it requires the highest character imaginable to make it successful. Anyone can be kind and generous to strangers, but to learn to be good to those in your own home is one that takes true character.

For someone to have to negotiate and compromise with the differences between them and their spouse, to learn to sacrifice for your children who will be thankless and exhausting, and to not give in to bitterness or self-pity, but to truly see that sacrifice is the path towards fulfillment is a divine quality and one that is not simple. And this shouldn't surprise us because the Scriptures themselves are not subtle on this point.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her..."

-Ephesians 5:25

I love what C.S. Lewis said about this passage in his book "The Four Loves":

"This headship, then, is most fully embodied not in the husband we should all wish to be but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion; whose wife receives most and gives least, is most unworthy of him, is—in her own mere nature—least lovable. For the Church has no beauty but what the Bridegroom gives her; he does not find, but makes her lovely. The chrism of this terrible coronation is to be seen not in the joys of any man's marriage but in its sorrows, in the sickness and sufferings of a good wife or the

faults of a bad one, in his unwearying (never paraded) care or his inexhaustible forgiveness: forgiveness, not acquiescence. As Christ sees in the flawed, proud, fanatical, or lukewarm Church on earth that Bride who will one day be without spot or wrinkle, and labors to produce the latter, so the husband whose headship is Christ-like (and he is allowed no other sort) never despairs.”

-C.S. Lewis - “The Four Love”

Modern people are being taught that their prime direction in life is to be entirely selfish. That they should live their 20's for “themselves” building their careers and their success. They should play the field so that they develop sexual competence and “have fun”, and then when they are near 30, they will, all of a sudden, meet the right person who will willingly submit to their vision of their future without any question and live happily ever after. This is painfully naive. Practice makes perfect, and if you spend your 20's living only for yourself, what makes you think you will willingly “take up your cross” to serve another person when you turn 30?

Marriage is beautiful, but what Christ taught us is that the ultimate beauty in the universe is not in self-service, but in ultimate self-sacrifice. When we willingly sacrifice for the needs of another, when we teach ourselves day in day out what it means to put someone else's needs above our own, we will be confronted with the true selfishness of our own soul and be shown our need for daily repentance and reliance upon God. Yes marriage is a crucifixion, a painful death to ourselves, but in the Christian economy, sacrifice is the path to gain, service the path to love, and the humiliation of the cross is the pathway to glory.

This doesn't mean that we should willingly enter into abusive relationships in order to fulfill this image (more on this point in a second), only that, even in the best marriages, extreme self-sacrifice is the only way that these relationships become successful and reflective of the ultimate beauty in God. The reason why the story of Isaac and Rebekah comes in Genesis 24 is because Isaac had to willingly submit himself to death in the previous chapter. Isaac is seen “meditating” in his field because he had learned through trial what it means to offer everything up to God. Although he is wealthy, he is in the habit of offering up every day to God in his time of prayer before he sets out to work, this is the Godly character that was formed in the shadow of self-sacrifice.

With Rachel it's the same thing. We get little snippets of her and her family in this chapter, but we are exposed to more of her family dysfunction in future chapters. We know that her brother Laban is a greedy, selfish, and manipulative narcissist who was only drawn to Abraham's servant by the wealth that was displayed in the gifts. Rebekah

grew up around this selfishness and managed to shape her character into something truly special.

She willingly offers up help to a stranger, with no conceivable benefit for herself, she goes against the will of her family to honor her pledge, and she veils herself when she meets Isaac for the first time. This is not an act of shyness, but true modesty. We are told that Rebekah was very beautiful, she could have increased her chances at being accepted by Isaac by displaying her beauty, but she modestly covers her face. She wanted her actions to speak for her character, before she revealed her beauty to her future husband.

Once again, this is the opposite today. Young men are told to accrue as much wealth and success as they possibly can and then parade it around in a gaudy self-indulgent way to attract women. Women are then taught to uncover as much of their bodies as they can to attract men to them. This is a system that is guaranteed to ignore true character development and to disable young people from being able to even discern true compatibility.

For young men, this doesn't mean that they should avoid pursuing a career and look only for romance, but the opposite. A young man should be shouldering as much responsibility as he possibly can. But this isn't to "impress" a young lady, but to shape his own character through the fires of self-discipline. And a young woman should desire to partner with someone by dressing and acting provocatively. True character should lead the way in a relationship, and this is shown more through modesty than anything else.

From the Right Family

"The LORD God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. "And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there."

-Genesis 24:7-8

That being said, should young people then be undiscerning in who they date? Absolutely not. The purpose of this passage is not only to give us examples for our own character, but also to show that a truly developed character can recognize compatibility. To put it another way, if I have shaped my character correctly, I should be attracted to correct qualities.

For years of my life I was attracted to the wrong kind of woman. I was almost exclusively driven by looks and didn't know that the character qualities that I was looking for really signified selfishness and arrogance. I thought I was looking for a "tough" and "independent" woman, but I hadn't really shaped those corners of my own life yet, and so I was actually looking for someone who would be just as self-centered and contentious as I was.

On top of having tremendous character, my wife is also incredibly beautiful. But initially when I met her, I didn't see the goodness of her character. This isn't because her character wasn't good, but because I was looking for the wrong kind of woman. It took a long time before I was attracted to correct qualities and then finally saw in her what was always there. This is one of the reasons why working on your character is so important. It takes good character to recognize good character.

But how can you determine good character in another person? In modern dating, there is no shortage of weird "tests" that people are being told to perform on the person they are dating to see if they are "good enough". To give one example for each gender, young men are being told that they should randomly "forget" to text the girl they are dating for a while. By doing this, they are told, a girl will have to pursue them and reveal her genuine care and concern. If she doesn't pursue them though, they are told to dump her because she isn't worth it.

One for girls is that they watch their boyfriend and see when he is busy with a task. When he is absorbed in something, she is supposed to point out an innocuous occurrence, like a bird that she sees outside, and see how he reacts. If he doesn't immediately drop what he is doing in order to talk to her, then the girl is told that he "failed" the test and is actually not interested in her.

There are many of these "tests" floating around the internet right now, but I hope you get the point. At face value, these seem like the same kind of "test" that Abraham's servant has for Rebekah, but they actually are entirely different. First, because this story is clearly using "shorthand" for what is actually a longer occurrence, but secondly, because Genesis 24 is all about family.

The passage begins with Abraham sending his servant specifically to his own family since he trusted their culture and way of doing things. And Rebekah accepts the proposal because Isaac comes from her family as well. To put this point more simply, the fastest way to determine character is to be acquainted with the family and friends of

the person you are dating. The reason why all these “tests” are showing up all of the sudden is because people are no longer dating within known social circles.

They are finding potential dates online in a venue totally disconnected from any contact with friends and family. I’m not saying that this type of dating can’t work, but it is at a severe disadvantage. When someone has strong social structures, a loving family that they invest in, close friends who are themselves of noble character, a career where they are known for their hard work, or a church community, this acts as a fairly stable reason to believe that this person has good character.

Someone with a negative character usually can’t maintain deep and healthy relationships with positive influences. Plus, as the Bible teaches us, the company that we keep tends to have a pretty massive influence on our character.

*“Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.”
-1 Corinthians 15:33*

There is much more to say about this, but to wrap up this paper, discerning someone’s character does not guarantee a flawless relationship, because those don’t exist. But it does help us discern the person who will best function in the role that God has intended for a spouse.

*“And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”
-Genesis 2:18*

The question is, what are spouses supposed to help us with? The answer is very simple, man is made in the image of God, which means, among other things, that our highest purpose is to reflect the character and love of God. Marriage is designed to help us embody and develop God’s character and love within our lives. In order to most effectively do this, it is important to find a person who desires this for their life as well. There is much more nuance to go into this, but I would say that the love and intimacy of God are not shown more clearly than in a positive marriage. This makes marriage a beautiful calling that is most worthy of our time and attention.