

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

God and Romance
Genesis 24:34-51, 57-67

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

God Leads Us Along, *The Worship Hymnal*, #80; CCLI # 190919; Public Domain

He Leadeth Me! O Blessed Thought!, *The Worship Hymnal*, #81; CCLI # 62762; Public Domain

Shine on Us, *The Worship Hymnal*, #89; CCLI # 1754646

Grace Alone, *The Worship Hymnal*, #112; CCLI # 2335524

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***God and Romance*****Focal Text**

Genesis 24:34-51, 57-67

Main Idea

God provides leadership and direction in the ordinary and extraordinary matters of human life, including romance.

Questions to Explore

How can a person know whether God is leading in a romantic relationship?

Gathering together:

Sing one or more of the songs suggested in Music Sources. These songs emphasize God's leadership and direction.

First thoughts:

The main idea for our study today is that God provides leadership and direction in the ordinary and extraordinary matters of human life, including romance. Only a commitment to Christ has Saviour has a more long lasting impact on our lives than the choice of a life mate. Yet we make that choice at a very young age, based primarily on physical attraction and common likes and dislikes. Is there a better way? Today's study emphasizes that God wants to provide leadership in this area of our lives.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

God and Romance

Focal Text

Genesis 24:34-51, 57-67

Background Text

Genesis 24

Main Idea

God provides leadership and direction in the ordinary and extraordinary matters of human life, including romance.

Questions to Explore

How can a person know whether God is leading in a romantic relationship?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to describe ways of discerning God's leadership in romance.

Introduction to your personal study:

In an effort to meet possible mates, many European and North American adults have taken ocean cruises highlighting “Three minute dating.” Participation in this activity permits an individual to meet 20 to 30 people of the opposite sex in a two hour period. They do this by conversing three minutes with an individual, then moving to the next for another three minutes, and continue for the two to three hours. Then if they want to proceed with one of the people, and the other wants to continue, they will have further time to explore each other's history, family, interests, etc.

Another approach to finding a mate is the TV program that selects a large number of possible eligible people. Through a process, a group eliminates a large number of these candidates. In a continuation of this process ten men and ten women are each paired off. Then those who are matched supposedly get married. Fortunately, these

extreme methods are not the standard for western culture. The “prognosis” for a lasting and healthy marriage emerging from such matches would be very low.

Normally in western culture, the process of becoming friends, dating, and the engagement periods for a couple take a period of months, if not years. Unfortunately, and against Biblical moral standards, it is becoming more popular for a couple to choose to live together for awhile before marrying. Supposedly, this will strengthen the marriage. However, statistically, this has not proven true.

Other cultures have remarkably different ways to bring together a man and a woman as marriage partners. Most cultures think that their ways are best—for the couple and for their society. The process in which Isaac and Rebekah experienced in their discovering each other reflects one way that their culture introduced potential mates to each other.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

A Romance Story Told Twice

This romance story of Isaac and Rebekah is told twice in Genesis. Genesis 24:1-33 gives us the narrative of Abraham’s concern for a wife for Isaac and the servant’s part in finding a wife for Isaac. In Genesis 24:34-47 it is retold by Abraham’s servant in his account to Rebekah’s family about his mission for Abraham.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Recounting Abraham’s concern and the servant’s experiences. Genesis 24:34-47

He described his mission for Abraham. Abraham, now old, was concerned about his son Isaac and his future. He devised a plan to find a wife for Isaac. He made his chief servant promise to go on a mission back home to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham desired a wife for his son that was not a Canaanite. He wanted his son to have a wife from his own country and kinsmen. The servant told Laban and his family of God’s blessings on Abraham. Abraham had been given much. He had wealth of sheep, cattle, silver, gold, servants, camels and donkeys. God had given Abraham and Sarah in their old age a son. Now that Abraham was old, he had given the son Isaac everything. The servant described his mission for Abraham to find a wife for Isaac. All Abraham’s possessions had been given to Isaac. He was to go to the family of Abraham’s father to seek a wife from the family of Abraham’s family.

The servant explained the promise he had made to Abraham. He swore that he would go to Abraham's own country and his own relatives to find a wife for Isaac. He sealed this promise by putting his hand under Abraham's thigh. The "thigh" was thought of as the upper leg or the lower part of the body. His mission was to go to Abraham's country and relatives to find Isaac a wife.

The servant then recounted his questioning of Abraham. He wanted to know would happen if the woman was unwilling to accompany the servant back to Canaan. He asked if he should take Isaac back to Abraham's old country. Abraham said no. Abraham wanted Isaac to stay in Canaan, the land that God had promised him and his heirs. Abraham told the servant that God would guide him in the selection of a bride for Isaac. If the woman would not come back to Canaan, then the servant had fulfilled his responsibility and was released from the oath.

The servant described his experience at the well with Rebecca. When he arrived at Nahor, he stopped by the well outside the town. Here the chief servant prayed for success and for blessings on Abraham. He was specific in his prayer. He prayed for his own success in the mission and also prayed for God's blessing on Abraham. He prayed that when he asked a young lady to put down her jar and give him a drink that she would respond and say that he could have a drink and that she also would water the camels also.

Even before the servant had finished praying, Rebekah arrived at the well. Rebekah was the daughter of Abraham's brother. She was beautiful. She was a virgin. She responded as the servant had prayed. She gave the servant a drink and watered the camel. Without comment, the servant sought to learn if this girl was the one. He gave her a gold nose ring and two gold bracelets. The servant asked who she was and also requested a place to spend the night. In reply she described her family relationships. She was the granddaughter of Nahor. Her father was Bethuel and mother was Milcah. There is no further mention of Bethuel. Later, upon hearing the news and seeing the nose ring and bracelets on Rebekah, Laban, the brother, welcomed the servant. Here it is Rebekah's brother Laban who greets the servant. No mention is made here of Bethuel, her father. The only other reference to her father is in Genesis 24:50. Either Laban was a super aggressive son and Bethuel a passive father or Bethuel was not actually living at this time. She then invited the servant and his party to spend the night. The servant then expressed praise to God for his kindness and faithfulness to Abraham.

Praise to God and an Appeal for An Answer Genesis 24:48-49

The servant expressed his praise to God of Abraham for His leadership to Rebecca. Laban and Bethuel then was questioned by the servant. Were they going to show goodness to Abraham and give Rebecca to Isaac? If they were not going to do that, then what suggestions did they have for the servant? He did not want to be left in suspense.

Response of Rebecca's Family Genesis 24:50-53

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The family indicated their understanding that these happenings were of God. Since this was the case, what else could they do? They told Abraham's servant to take Rebecca. The distance away from them; Abraham's leaving the family years ago, and Abraham's lack of property did not enter into the decision. If it was of God, then it was settled. He was to take Rebecca to Isaac as God was directing.

Commitment of Rebekah Genesis 24:57-61

The servant was anxious to return to Abraham and tell of his success on the mission. He did not want to be delayed. He requested that he be sent on the way. Rebekah's family said that it was up her. When questioned about her desires, she replied, "I will go." The family was sent with the approval of the family. They wished her God speed. They wished for her many descendants that would be strong. The group set out. It was composed of Rebekah, her maids, Abraham's servant and his men. When all was ready they got on their camels and returned to Canaan with the servant and his men.

Rebekah and Isaac Meet and Marry Genesis 24:62-67

The climax of the story approaches. Abraham had a concern for the proper wife for his son Isaac. The servant, commissioned and sent, had fulfilled his assignment. Rebekah and her family had made their decision. The journey back to Canaan was almost over. Isaac had gone out in the evening. He took advantage of the evening for solitude and prayer. We do not know what he prayed for but surely one thing he prayed for was his wife who was being sought. Prayers are not always answered while we pray or as we get off our knees, but in this case they were. He looked up and saw the caravan approaching. Rebekah saw Isaac. Upon questioning the servant she discovered that it was Isaac that she saw. She then modestly covered herself.

Abraham's servant reported to Isaac all the events of the trip. It is interesting that the report was made to Isaac and not to Abraham who had sent the servant. Verse 67 summarizes Isaac and Rebekah's, getting acquainted, their marriage, Isaac's love for Rebekah, and his fulfillment. It had been approximately three years since Sarah, Isaac's mother had died. Now with Rebekah as his wife, life in all its aspects became complete for Isaac again. A marriage made under the direction of God makes life rich and fulfilling.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Study:

Love, romance, and marriage must always be based in our firm commitment to our Lord and Saviour. Anything less is, for a Christian, courting disaster more than courting the object of our affection. Your church must understand that "being unequally yoked" has enormous reason for being taught in the New Testament. One should never look to marriage as an opportunity to change a partner. Nor ever accept the answer that the future husband or wife "will respect and not interfere with the practice of the religion of

the Christian.” It simply almost never works out that way over the years. And the damage to children living under such an arrangement is always evident in their later lives. Besides, one’s joy in Christ is severely retarded when it is not shared as a family. As leader of this study, be sensitive to present situations that are not the best or healthiest. At the same time, with love, show how these principles are really important to happiness in romance.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

God and Romance

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Genesis 24:34-51, 57-67

Background Text

Genesis 24

Main Idea

God provides leadership and direction in the ordinary and extraordinary matters of human life, including romance.

Questions to Explore

How can a person know whether God is leading in a romantic relationship?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to describe ways of discerning God's leadership in romance.

Connect with Life:

Connect with these questions:

How do men and women today meet their mates?

How did you meet your mate?

How did your parents meet? (Wait for answers. Some of the answers you may receive: met at school, he/she was a brother or sister to a friend of mine, met at work, met while playing tennis or bowling. Perhaps the marriage was arranged in a traditional way.)

How long did you/your parents know one another before marrying? (Get responses).

Do you think that these ways of couples meeting and marrying are changing in our culture today?

State: Today we study one of the most romantic stories in the Bible about how two people met and married. They are Isaac, the son of Abraham, and Rebekah

Guide the Study:

Tell the students: As we begin this story, look for different people who had a part in bringing Isaac and Rebecca together.

Request a person to read Genesis 24:34-51.

Say: On a piece of paper write down the people you find who were instrumental in this romance. (Pause for learners to do this). Ask someone to read their list.

Ask: Do you have others on your list? (Those on the list should be: Abraham's servant, Abraham, the Lord, Rebekah, Laban, and Rebekah's family).

Contribute this: Let's look at the part each of these played in the romance. The first person on the list was Abraham's servant. What did he do? (Possible answers:

He received instructions from Abraham

He went on this journey

He prayed for success in finding a wife for Isaac

He saw an answer to his prayer at the well

He questioned the girl Rebekah at the well

He gave her presents

He worshipped the Lord

He approached Laban with the request for Rebekah for Isaac to marry.

Seek an answer to this question: What was Abraham's part in this situation?

Some ideas to suggest to the group are these:

He was Isaac's father.

He was the one sent out by God from the land of the Chaldeans to a new land to make a great nation.

Sarah, his wife, had given him a son named Isaac in his old age.

He was concern about a wife for Isaac.

He promised that God would send an angel with him and make his successful.

Urge suggestions for this: What part did God have in this marriage? (Sent his angel with the servant to make him successful, heard the prayer of the servant at the spring, answered by having Rebekah fulfill the prayer, received the worship of the servant when he recognized God's leadership).

Continue: Rebekah was the female part of this romance. What were her activities? (She responded to the request of the servant for a drink. She offered watered his camels. She responded to the servant's questions. She received the nose ring and bracelets).

Say: Laban and Rebekah's family form part of the story. What part did they have? (Received the servant and his men, listened to the servant's account of his mission, recognized that the servant's task was from God, and gave permission for Rebekah to go become Isaac's bride).

Ask a participant to read Genesis 24:57-61.

Present this question: What was Rebekah's response when her family requested that she stay ten days? (She replied that she would go).

Now invite an answer to this thought: What were the actions of her family? (They send her on her way. They sent her nurse. They blessed her).

Search for an answer: What was the blessing? (She was to have many descendants and they were to be strong).

Request a different person to read Genesis 24:62-67 aloud to the group.

Ask. What was Isaac doing just before the caravan bringing Rebekah arrived? (He was out in the field meditating).

Add this question: What did Rebekah do? (She got off the camel, asked who Isaac was, and covered herself when she heard it was Isaac.)

Say. Notice that modesty was an element of the actual meeting of Isaac and Rebekah. Compare this to current behaviour in many places. Bodily features are displayed to attract people and cause them to focus on the physical aspect of oneself. God made us sexual beings. He designed us for sexual relationships but a marriage relationship built only or primarily on physical attraction is not the strongest. Emotional, intellectual, cultural and friendship ties should come before the sexual ties.

Now ask: What did the servant do? (He reported all he had done to Isaac?)

Say: Now look at the climax of the story. Isaac and Rebekah married. What was the result of their marriage.? The scripture says Isaac loved Rebekah and that Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Share: Listen to some of the factors in the romance of Rebekah and Isaac: concern of the father, faithful friend (servant), prayer asking for God's guidance, seeking God's guidance, thanking God for leadership, sympathetic family, recognition of what is from God, God's blessing, blessing of family, and openness of both man and woman to God's provision. Now, let's think about romance and marriage today.

Encourage several responses to this: How can a person know whether God is leading in a romantic relationship?

Ask: How can married couples improve their relationship with one another

Look for suggestions for this: Can some of you contrast the way God provided Rebekah for Isaac with the illustration of the contemporary happening at the beginning of the lesson commentary?

Lead in a prayer asking God to bless those married couples present and to guide and direct those seeking a mate.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

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A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

A Really Good Question

What is the best possible way for two young people to begin a relationship in our day and in our culture? Why? (Oh, oh. Two questions!)

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***God and Romance***
Genesis 24:34-51, 57-67**Beginning the Service:**

Choose songs from those listed in the Music Sources for the day.

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

Recently, several generations of a family in a Mexican village have met together to listen to Bible stories. Children and adults crowd in a small room and listen to Bible stories that they have never heard before in the Mixtec language. After listening, the group retells the story. Pray that this whole family will continue gathering to hear Bible stories and for each of them to be saved.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

God and Romance
Genesis 24:34-51, 57-67

Many people like a romance story. Even action movies will often have a romance involved. The story of Isaac and Rebekah's marriage is a true romance story. It does, however, reflect a culture very different from modern day western culture. However, other cultures around the world continue to practice some of the elements seen in this

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Biblical story. And there are truths which exist today even as they did for Isaac and Rebekah.

1. God has a plan for our romance.

Many people have taken as “life verses” the words in Jeremiah 29:11-13. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’”

These verses are set in the context of Jeremiah’s long pleading with Israelites to be faithful to God. Finally, the Lord allows the Babylonians to carry into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon those who had forsaken their beliefs. He promises however, to bring the exiles back to Jerusalem at the end of a seventy year captivity. The plans to prosper and not harm the people come after these difficult years of captivity and the return of the people to the worship of the true God.

How then, can we apply these verses “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord; plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” to romance in the present day.

First, God always wanted to bless and prosper the people. It was their own rebellion against God that led them to make choices which eventually led to their captivity.

There are some realities about today’s dating and mate seeking environment which make it difficult for God’s blessing to reach its full potential.

One of these is a disregard for moral purity. We live in a world where sexual stimulation abounds. Few television programs or movies portray sex as anything but a pleasurable act between two consenting people. It is difficult for young people to have a sense of the commitment to one another which is inherent in the act of lovemaking. When youth have pledged themselves to wait for sex until marriage, they are often ridiculed even by adults and certainly by their peers.

2. Secondly, we have little sense of romance and marriage having a purpose larger than ourselves.

Isaac knew the covenant promise which God had made to his father, Abraham. He understood that he was a part of keeping that promise alive. Abraham sent his servant back to his own family to search for a bride for Isaac so that he would not marry one of the women from the area where they lived - a woman who had no knowledge of the one true God. Isaac was apparently comfortable with this idea. He was forty years old when he married; he hadn’t hurried the search.

North Americans have so embraced the concept of romantic love that any involvement by the parents in the process of choosing a mate is seen as ridiculous. Immigrants to North America whose cultural patterns have involved a high degree of parental involvement often clash with their children who have been influenced by North American values.

It is doubtful that North American young adults are going to encourage their parents to choose a mate for them. But there surely is some importance in understanding and honouring the purpose and values of the family of which one has been a part.

Balswick and Balswick in the book *The Family* discuss various models of courtship. One of those allows influence from the couple, the family and the church. That is, when the couple says, "We are meant for each other"; the family says "They are meant for each other" and the church family which has known the young people from childhood says "They are meant for each other", there is a greater chance of the marriage having success. The marriage includes the transmission of values which the young person has chosen for him or herself and have been modeled by the family and by the church.

3. Love grows over time.

We cannot know Rebekah's reasons for agreeing to leave her home and go with the servant back to Isaac. Laban, her brother, was apparently impressed with the gold bracelets and nose ring which the servant had brought. Rebekah, herself, may have been impressed as well. In the culture of the day, it would not have been appropriate for her to argue against the decision made by her brother to marry her to a stranger. However, her attitude seems to be one of agreement – not a forced agreement, but a willing one.

Isaac was most likely a contemplative man. He was out in the fields, meditating, when the caravan approached. We can imagine Rebekah's excitement when she asked, "Who is that man?" and the servant answered, "He is my master". She appropriately put on her veil. After Isaac heard the story of the servant's journey, he may have understood the whole process as being directed by God. At any rate, he married Rebekah and he loved her.

Marriages in ancient times did not necessarily involve love. They involved joining families in order to be stronger or more prosperous. Many marriages were not monogamous. Women who were unmarried had few options for caring for themselves; they needed to be under the protection of a man as a part of his household. Jewish law provided that the brother of a deceased man would marry his widow and care for her.

However, Isaac and Rebekah were an exception to common practice of the day. Isaac never married anyone else. The Biblical account indicates that he truly cared for Rebekah.

4. Love does not mean that all problems are solved.

Rebekah was barren for the first twenty years of their marriage. This, of course, was a personal tragedy for Rebekah since a woman's worth in her time and place depended upon her bearing sons. Genesis 25:21 says that "Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren." The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

No doubt, Isaac prayed for Rebekah to become pregnant because of the covenant promise that Abraham's descendants would be many. But there is also the sense that his love for her was so great that he wished her to have this desire of her heart.

Sadly, though, it was the birth of the twins, Esau and Jacob, that was to place Isaac and Rebekah on different paths. Isaac preferred Esau who was manly and grew to be a hunter. Rebekah preferred Jacob who used his intelligence to get what he wanted. Allowing their preference for one child over another was not fair to their children and it led to ongoing problems. It also caused disharmony between Isaac and Rebekah.

Call to Commitment:

The Biblical story of romance seen in the life of Isaac and Rebekah speaks to us today because it reminds us that God has a plan for our relationships. Parents and grandparents may faithfully pray that God will direct young people in choosing a life partner. Although Abraham and Sarah had various ups and downs in their relationship, nonetheless it was a home where Isaac saw the commitment Abraham made to God and to Sarah. The best investment parents make in their children's future marriage is to model a loving relationship for them.

We need to emphasize to young people that love can grow over time. The model of love which modern day media demonstrates is strong on sexual attraction and weak on commitment. The marriage vows of the past which promised "till death do us part" are seen more as a ritual than a true commitment. It takes a lot of work for love to weather the storms of financial difficulties, different personalities, stresses of child rearing and illness. But love can grow and continue growing if commitment exists.

Concluding the Service:

The main idea for today's study has been that God provides leadership and direction in the ordinary and extraordinary matters of human life, including romance. That is an amazing thought but one that should give us great comfort. Choosing a life partner is one of the most significant decisions we will ever make. We often make it at a fairly young age. How good to know that God wants to direct us as we make that decision. How good to know that we can pray His direction for our own children and grandchildren and other young adults for whom we are concerned.

Close the service with a song regarding God's perfect will and/or a prayer.