

Foundations: Isaac I—Finding God's Will
Genesis 24:1-14 (8/20/17)

Last month, we spent three Sundays considering the life and work of Abraham—often referred to as “the father of our faith.” We also heard from his wife, Sarah.

Today we turn our attention to the second of our patriarchs, their son, Isaac, whom God surprised them with in their old age. This brings us now to the 24th chapter of Genesis and what I find to be a very interesting passage of Scripture. I think you'll agree.

Isaac is now a young man. We learn in this passage how Abraham went about trying to secure a wife for his son. You'll quickly notice that this is not how we do things today, but it is how they did them then—so let's see what insights we can gain.

Not that you and I are likely to start arranging marriages for our children—tempting though this may be—but this story does help us with something that should be of concern to all of us, namely, discerning the will of God. How can we find God's will?

Sometimes it's very hard to know what God wants for our lives. Many of us, no doubt, have been guilty of labeling something as “God's will”... that really wasn't. So I invite you to join me as we look for some ways to better find and follow God's will.

There's a story about a woman who spent a few weeks in the Colorado Rockies. She was captivated by the tall mountains, the clear blue skies, and the sweet smell of pine trees.

But as she visited there, she was also attracted to a man she met. He owned a cattle ranch, and he lived in a large, beautiful log cabin--all alone. These two very quickly “hit it off,” as they say.

Before she left to return home, the rancher asked for her hand in marriage. But it had all happened so quickly; so she decided to return home, all the while hoping that she would receive some kind of guidance—Divine guidance--as to what she should do.

The next day, as she was flying home, she was still agonizing over her decision. She was too nervous to stay in her seat, so she went to the rest room and splashed cold water on her face.

About that time, the plane hit some turbulence. Immediately, a sign lit up in the rest room saying: **PLEASE RETURN TO THE CABIN**... which she did--all the way back to that rancher's cabin in the Rocky Mountains. (Reader's Digest [1/81], p. 118)

The signs aren't always that clear, though. So how do we make important decisions? Do we look for signs from God? Or do we just look for any kind of sign that might tell us to go ahead and do whatever it is we want to do anyway?

Since we all have to make big decisions, this is important. Our passage today suggests some principles that can help us discern God's will for our lives. As I said earlier, though, your first reaction to this story may be "Well, that's not the way we do things around here."

Listen please, and follow along, as we read **Genesis 24:1-4**, the introduction to the story about "When Isaac met Rebekah":

1 Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. 2 He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. 3 I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, 4 but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

So, for those who are single now and all of us who can still remember being single, how would you like it if your father assigned one of his employees the task of finding you a wife or husband? You would probably tell dear old dad, "that's not how we do it—and we're not going to start now!"

We want to have our say in anything that's going to affect our lives so completely, right? But whoever decides about this or anything else, if we're people of faith, we want the decision to be okay with God.

So, here are a few guidelines that can help us discern the Lord's will when we're pressed to make important decisions:

1. WE FIND GOD'S WILL BY KNOWING GOD'S WORD. We need a thorough knowledge of Scripture to help guide our decisions. God's plan, His principles and purposes, are found in His Word, so knowledge of the Bible is an essential step in receiving God's guidance.

This is how it was for Abraham. God told Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. Abraham is simply taking steps here to see that God's plan is implemented.

His son, Isaac, must marry and have children for God's promise to be fulfilled; so Abraham doesn't just sit around and wait. He takes action. He begins looking for a wife for Isaac.

Some people seem to think that finding God's will means doing nothing. For instance, I've known people who are out of work and yet they refuse to look for a job because they are waiting for God to provide a job for them.

Until He does, they seem content to wait around and do nothing! That's not biblical. God expects us to do our part, but to do this while being guided by His Word.

This is what Abraham does! His search for Isaac's wife isn't based on his own desires. It's directed instead by his knowledge of God.

This is why he insists that Isaac's wife will be from his own people, the Hebrews, who were still back in Abraham's homeland—a place called Mesopotamia. Now, why was this so important?

Because Abraham had heard enough to know that this was God's will. God had not given specific directions concerning who Isaac was to marry. But God had revealed enough to Abraham for him to know that Isaac was to marry someone who shared his faith.

Abraham had enough information to make a reasonable decision. In other words, he was able to apply what He already knew of God's will to the situation at hand—enough to act.

Many times we're in similar circumstances. We don't have a specific commandment in the Bible related to the decision we face, but we can still apply principles from God's Word that reassure us that we are acting within God's will.

There are no specific commandments about all kinds of temptations we face today; but there's plenty of guidance in Scripture about making wise decisions, and avoiding situations that tempt us to do wrong or that fill our minds with thoughts and attitudes that do not honor God.

Abraham didn't have the Bible as we have it today, but he was able to take steps in the right direction because he sought to be faithful to everything he knew about God. The same is true for us. To find God's direction, make it a priority to know His word.

2. WE FIND GOD'S WILL BY COMMITTING TO FOLLOW IT.

It is one thing to know what God says, but it's another thing entirely to be committed to doing God's will. Abraham had already demonstrated strong commitment to God's will when he showed his readiness even to sacrifice his son if God required it.

Look at verses 5 and 6. They show Abraham's commitment: **"The servant asked him, 'What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?' 'Make sure that you do not take my son back there,' Abraham said."**

"What if following God's Word doesn't work?"—that's what Abraham's servant wanted to know. He's asking if Abraham will change his mind about this if it appears things aren't working out. But Abraham tells his servant that Isaac is not to leave the Promised Land, no matter what!

So, Abraham is totally committed to following God's will-- whatever happens—which raises a question for us: are there any places in our lives where we respond with this same kind of uncompromising commitment to finding and following God's will? God's guidance is easier to recognize and embrace when we're more committed to God's will than our own.

There are many Scriptures that attest to this. One of the best known is in **Proverbs 3:5-6**: **"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."**

The New Living Translation expresses this in a slightly different way: "Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths."

You've heard the principle: "seek and you shall find." Seek God's will for your life, commit yourself to it, and you can find it. We may have trouble with this, though, because when it comes right down to it, we're not really committed to God's plan anyway.

We can pray, quote the Bible, and talk about God's will, while in reality we're only seeking God's approval of our own plan for our lives—no matter how self-centered it is!

Let me summarize what I'm saying with this: to discover God's will, we must be committed to following His will even before we know what it is! Which brings us to Principle Number Three:

3. WE FIND GOD'S WILL BY TRUSTING IN GOD'S WAYS.

Trust is absolutely essential if we're to discover and then do the will of God. This is what Abraham did. He trusted God to provide a wife for his son. Look now at vss. 7-9:

7 "The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'--he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. 8 If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there." 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

Abraham remembers God's promise—one that included the land of Canaan along with many descendants who would fill the land. He took God at His word, he trusted God completely to keep His promises, including... providing a wife for Isaac. He's confident in the promises of God, and God honors those who trust Him!

Honestly—there were plenty of reasons not to trust God's plan. What are the chances that Abraham's servant could travel 500 miles, meet the right woman for Isaac, and convince her and her family to let her travel with him back to a distant land and marry a man that neither she nor her family had ever met?

"No chance"—right? This would never happen in the real world. Well, friends, this WAS the real world for Abraham and Isaac, and for that poor servant who was given this tough assignment. He

had every reason to see it as a no-win situation—picking out a wife for the boss’s son—how could that possibly go wrong?!?

But Abraham clearly expected God to guide his servant and provide his son with a wife—the right wife! He’s certainly not trusting in his own understanding or insight. Humanly speaking, nothing about this makes any sense.

Abraham is trusting instead in the ways of God—which the Bible clearly says “are not our ways.” We can’t even begin to understand God’s thinking, it says.

And yet this trust is essential if we’re ever to know God’s will. “Trust in the Lord and He will direct your paths—don’t try to rely on your own understanding.” Dare I say it: this stuff (the ways of God and His will)--this is “way above our pay grade!” God is in control--not us!

Abraham even acknowledged that it may not happen as he expected. This was not a lack of trust--just the realization that God may provide in a different way than what Abraham expected. One way or another, though, God would make a way for His will to be done.

So we’ve seen three principles so far: 1) knowing God’s Word; 2) committing to God’s will; and 3) trusting in God’s ways: which brings us to this:

4. WE FIND GOD’S WILL BY PRAYING FOR WISDOM. Did you notice Abraham’s servant didn’t just assume that he would automatically recognize the woman God had for Isaac. He also prays for guidance and wisdom. We find this in **verses 10-14:**

10 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. 11 He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. 12 Then he prayed, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 13 See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. 14 May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your

camels too'-let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

And, remarkably—Rebekah does exactly that! After a 500-mile journey, Abraham's servant arrives at the perfect place to meet a young, unmarried woman—and at the very time she would be coming to the well to draw water. Just luck, or something more?

Isn't the point here that God has arranged the circumstances so that His will can be done. God is working all along to keep His promises to Abraham, and old Abe is knowledgeable, committed, and trusting enough for God to carry out His will as planned.

Friends, God is telling us something through this ancient story. It's in God's Book for a reason.

I believe God is telling us that He will direct our circumstances so that His will is done in our lives... if... we do our part by knowing His Word, committing to His will, trusting His ways, and praying for His wisdom.

When we truly seek God's will, there's a peace that comes to our hearts as we find it and follow it. We don't always understand God's will at first, but eventually we do--and many of us could bear witness to this truth. In the meantime, until we see His will more clearly, we trust God and seek to follow Him faithfully.

We won't know God's will perfectly, nor will we follow it perfectly when we do. But these four principles will at least point us in the right direction. If we sincerely seek, we will surely find enough of God's will for life to be meaningful and good.

The Psalmist said: **"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105)**. That's a start; and then God sent His only begotten Son to be the Living Word...and to shine before us as the Light of the World.

God's will for each of our lives is that we find our way to this Word and this Light—and then as we follow Christ faithfully, the other aspects of God's will for us will become clear.

The first step in knowing God's will is to know Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord. Trust Him and follow Him and He'll always guide your life to the right places.

Seeking God's Will.....James 1:5-7; Proverbs 3:5-6

Leader: If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

People: But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.

Leader: Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

People: In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.