

# “How is Dating Supposed to Work?” Genesis 24:1–27 //

## *From the Beginning #5*

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### Introduction

#### Genesis 24...

We are in week 5 of our series *From the Beginning*. I was going to wrap this series up this week with a message on friendship... but I called an audible this week and am going to *insert* a message here on dating, or finding a spouse, before our last message on friendship. “Why?” You ask. Because...

**1. We have a church full of single people...** 73% of the adults at the Summit Church are single... and this is what many of them think about from dawn to dusk.

**2. Most people in our culture do not have a clue how to approach this subject.** I mean, not a clue.

Dating in our culture is **just goofy**... it’s more like **used car sales** than anything.

- You **hide everything** that will make a sale less likely and advertise whatever will close the deal.
- And make sure to take it for a **test drive**. You wouldn’t want to buy a car without a test drive.
- **The stats on the hookup culture are truly staggering.** One recent study reveals that 77.7 percent of college females admitted to ‘hooking up.’ For guys... the # is 84.2 percent.”<sup>1</sup>
- Now **apps**...

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<sup>1</sup> Matt Chandler, *Mingling of Souls*, 52.

I’ve heard it said that the way we date is **better preparation for divorce than for marriage**.

- You **find someone** that captures your attention and thrills you... so you give yourself to them... but then they begin to disappoint you (which, as I’ve explained, inevitably happens), and so you **walk away** and search for a new person.
- **Our whole philosophy of dating is built on the right person myth**... that happiness in life is achieved by finding the right person, and if you’re not happy now, it’s because you are with the wrong person...
- And so **we establish in dating** the relational patterns **that lead to divorce** in marriage.

**3. The local church is supposed to be a community that facilitates the romantic process from start to finish.** It is supposed to be the best community in which relationships form and flourish and finish well. And **so even if** you’re married with kids, or you are single with no aspirations of dating, there is a lot in this message for you. Because this area is **so broken** in our culture, we need to **learn how to be** that kind of community.

### Genesis 24: The Story of Isaac and Rebekah

**1** Abraham was now very old, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. (Abraham had been given a promise... old age, has Isaac... only son, now marriageable age) **2** He said to the senior servant (Eleazar) 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 now, **4** but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.”

- OK, so let's address the obvious here: Abraham basically **calls his intern** in to his office and says, "Listen, I've got a big assignment for you. But first, put your hand *here*." Honestly, if anyone on staff tried this with an intern, HR would have to get involved.
- And **lest you think I'm being unnecessarily lewd**, scholars say *the reality was actually a bit more graphic*. In saying he put his hand "under the thigh," the author is using a little bit of *euphemism*. By "put your hand under my thigh," he meant... well, exactly where you *think* he meant.
- **All Hebrew commentators** make this connection, but it is hilarious to me how they dance around it. **One commentator**, for example, said, "The thigh is a euphemism for the 'generative organ' upon which the sign of circumcision was also placed."<sup>2</sup> **Right**. That's what we called it growing up: the 'generative organ.'
- Anyway, the **point of this exceedingly awkward** charade is nothing perverted, I assure you, but to say, in essence, "The promise God made to me is about offspring. And this mission is about offspring. It's important. So, don't forget that."
- And I can assure you that after this little encounter, Eleazer did not forget.

Second observation here, a little less awkward... **Why does Abraham not want his son, Isaac, to marry from among the Canaanites?** Well, he is not being a racist. **Many great biblical heroes** married interracially, including Moses, who wrote this story down...

- It was **because the Canaanites were all idol worshippers**, and he wants his son to marry a girl in the faith. He knew of people back in his hometown, and he wants Isaac to marry a girl who will help

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<sup>2</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Genesis* (The Pulpit Commentary; London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 297. "The thigh indicates the procreative power..." K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (vol. 1B; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 326. Oh yeah. We all use the **thigh** as the symbol of procreation.

propagate the promise. **Don't let anyone ever tell you that the Bible discourages interracial dating.**

5 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?" 6 And Abraham said, "Make sure that you do not take my son back there."

- This is about bringing this girl into the land of promise, not going backward into comfort and security.

10 Then the servant left, taking with him ten of his master's camels loaded with all kinds of good things from his master... 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. This was like the **hair salon**, where they caught up on the day's news.

12 Then he prayed, "Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 14 May it be that when I say to a young woman, '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."

15 Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milkah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. 16 The woman was very beautiful...

- You and I would read that, "She's beautiful... **but** she's your cousin." They read that as, "She's beautiful... **and** she's your cousin, too!"
- **All I can say is**, "In those days, this was not uncommon." And in my home church in WV, this required no explanation.

17 The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar." 18 "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.

19 After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink."

- Now, in case you don't know this... camels drink a **lot**. And Eleazar has **10 of them**, and they have all just **trucked across the desert**, which means they are thirsty, so **we're not talking about her going to get an extra bucket** or two; we're talking about her going back and forth to the well *dozens* of times.
- **She's All-In.**

21 Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.

22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. She put them on... which was the equivalent in their day of changing your Facebook status to "in a relationship." If you put on the nose ring but not the bracelets, it meant "it's complicated."

26 Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord, 27 saying, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master."

<sup>28</sup>The young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things. <sup>29</sup>Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring... <sup>31</sup>And he said, "Come, you who are blessed by the LORD."

Eleazar repeats the story to him, and concludes with: <sup>49</sup>Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn."

<sup>57</sup>Then they said, "Let's call the young woman and ask her about it." <sup>58</sup>So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said.

**Alright... let's be clear:** the book of Genesis is **not primarily** a romance manual; it's the **story of how God fulfills his promise** to bless Abraham and make him a blessing to the world by bringing forth the Messiah from his lineage.

But the book deals with practical matters about life along the way. Scholars tell us the Hebrew people retold stories like this one to instruct young boys about how to approach situations like marriage.<sup>3</sup> So, you see **embedded in this story several instructive things** about finding a wife. **Six** in particular I want to draw out...

But first, there are **some things from this story that clearly don't apply**... We are never encouraged to employ these kinds of special "give me a sign" kind of test.

- At **the Bible college I went to my first year of college** we tried to apply this story by going up to girls on campus and asking her to iron our shirt... and we said, "If she volunteers to iron not only our shirt but the shirts of every guy in our dorm, that means she is the one..." That's probably not a valid application.

*Those things don't apply. But here are the...*

## 6 Vitally Important Components of Healthy Dating/Courtship in Any Culture

### I. The importance of knowing what time t is

**There is a time to seek a wife**... there's a lot of intentionality here.

- I say that because there seem to be a lot of guys in the Christian world who just sit around waiting on marriage to fall in their laps. There is a time to seek marriage, intentionally. I've heard girls at our church complain about the new phenomenon of '**sneak-a-**

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, [http://www.chabad.org/library/bible\\_cdo/aid/8219#showrashi=true](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8219#showrashi=true) or Josephus, *Judaism, and Christianity*, Editors Louis H. Feldman & Gohei Hata, (163-165)

**date**, where a guy figures out how to go out with you without going through the danger of **asking you out**. Always arranging to be around you. *“Oh, look, we’re here together again.”* The **other name we give** to this is “friendationships.”

**Guys... when it’s time to seek a wife, just do it with boldness.**

(Amen?)

- Put **on a shirt with buttons**, preferably something that doesn’t have **“Star Wars”** written on it anywhere. **Bathe. Shave.** Get somebody to show you how to put some **product** in your hair.
- And when you know it’s right... **Don’t string her along.** Don’t keep a **ring on her finger** with an elusive promise of marriage way out there. Marry her.
- I’m **not talking about rushing** into things, or bringing up marriage on your first date... that’s creepy. Just **knowing when it’s time** and acting decisively.

Now, on the **flip side**: if it’s **not time to get married**—as in, you **don’t have a job**, or your life is **too much of a mess**, you still live in your parents’ basement—well, don’t flirt with girls and lead them on.

**Know what time** it is in your life, and act decisively.

**I love this verse from Proverbs:** **“He that findeth a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”** **Proverbs 18:22 2 things:**

- A godly wife is a blessing from God, and...
- God expects you to be looking for her. “He that findeth” implies “he be looking!”

## **II. The importance of reciprocity**

There is no, “God told me to come marry you, Rebekah, so pack your bags.” They seek her consent.

- In their culture, **that would have been a temper** on arranged marriages... in our day, it means that guys, you shouldn’t ever pull the God-card. “I feel like God wants us to get married.”

- **Or girls.** When I was single and would go around and preach at youth groups or college events I got **more than one letter** telling me that God had told some girl we were supposed to get married. And I’d say...“Uhh... the Lord has not put that in my heart, yet, or ever with you, and I think I too have the Spirit of God.”

## **III. The importance of marrying in the faith**

- Abraham **didn’t want Isaac marrying a Canaanite**. Why? Because he didn’t want his descendants to lose the thread of the promise.
- One of the **most damaging things** you can do to your children and grandchildren is to marry a non-Christian.
  - We have people in our church who are dating people who don’t share their faith... they think, *“Oh, no big deal. I like him... and I can probably **convert** him.”*
  - That’s probably **not true, but here is the bigger question:** Have you thought about your **future children?** **The biggest impact** on their spiritual lives is going to be him or her... and you are intentionally going to make the biggest influence on them someone who doesn’t share your faith?
  - Are you **really that selfish?** Prioritize your desires of the moment over the souls of your future kids?
  - Do you **really care** about the faith your future kids?
  - Only marry a non-Christian if the faith of your future children is not that important to you.
- **And if you’re not a Christian, I’m not trying to pick on you or demean you...** I told you a few weeks ago that if you’re not a Christian, you shouldn’t date one **unless you plan to become one.** **Because the Christian you are dating right now really wants to convert you.**
  - LET ME PROVE IT: THEY HAVE YOU HERE TODAY. They keep looking at you to see if I’m connecting, to see if you get a tear in your eye
  - The point: They don’t accept you as you are.
  - Their mom and dad don’t like you and want you to become a Christian. Their whole family is praying for you

(they know you're here), and nobody in the family is ever going to be really happy until you become a Christian.

- I'm just being honest with you; I've observed this for many years.
- **Believers: How our enemy works...** When he cannot successfully attack your faith, but he sets you up in situations that stop the progress of the faith into the next generation.
  - **Balaam.**<sup>4</sup> I can't curse them, but you can get them to curse themselves. Send in all the hot Moabite women to seduce them and the kids will grow up in homes not sure how is God, and you'll destroy the faith of the next generation. **That's what our enemy does.** He gets you in relationships that will stop the forward progress of Christianity in your family.
  - **I tell my kids...** I want **my grandkids** to trust Jesus, and my great grandchildren... but that is **going to be in their hands**, not mine, and it is **in large part determined** by whom they marry, and whom they marry will be determined by who you choose to date.
  - **2 Cor 6:14.** Command. Period. End of sentence. If you are a Christian dating a non-Christian you are out of the will of God
  - But the command is not just a rule... it is for the good of your kids. He is thinking about them even if you don't right now.

#### IV. The importance of character

Eleazar observes her from a distance. What does he see? She's a servant-hearted person, gracious and hospitable. His test reveals her *character*.

Character is not the **only** thing that matters in a relationship; she's beautiful, too... but character is by far the **most important** thing.

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<sup>4</sup> Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14. Balaam devised a plan to get Moabite women to seduce Israelite

The Apostle Peter says: <sup>3</sup> **Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.** <sup>4</sup> **Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.** **1 Peter 3:3** And, I would add, should therefore be in yours, too. Why? Because that kind of beauty is "unfading," Peter says.

**Physical beauty**, you see (which is what we usually most care about in dating) **fades in 2 ways...**

- **First, the beauty itself fades:** Things **sag** and **wrinkle** and **gray** and **droop**. And if that is the entirety of someone's beauty, then they become really ugly in old age.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> way it fades... it's power on you fades. Even if someone manages to hang on to their physical beauty through makeup or botox or liposuction... it's impact on you fades.** Eighteen months is what it takes for the intoxicating effects of beauty to wear off.

**So if you are wise, in the dating process you will prioritize the evaluation of character, because that kind of beauty that is unfading.**

**And how do you tell their character?** By watching how they relate to others.

**Character is rarely revealed** in how they relate to you in the dating stage... they are in the **used car salesman mode** then... hiding all the defects. "What's that rattle in the engine?" "Let's turn up the stereo. AC works great!"

Character is revealed in **how they treat "the camels"** in their lives, metaphorically speaking...

- **Successful CEO** who told me that he watches how people treat the waitress/hired more than one waiter or waitress based on how they treated him... this is what Eleazar did.

**English word “character”** comes from the word *cherax*, which refers to the engraving done by a metal tool. That tool **makes the same imprint** no matter what you dip it in. No matter what **relationship...**

So ask questions like...

- **“What is their reputation?”** Abraham Lincoln once said, ‘Reputation is the shadow cast by the tree of character.’
- **How they treat their parents?** Mom/Dad
- Do they have a **servant spirit**, like Rebekah?
- Is he or she **faithful in their commitments**? If they can’t hold a job, or they don’t keep their word to others, they won’t to you, either.
- **Can they keep your hands off of you?** If they can’t control themselves around you now, when they know it is wrong, how will you know that he will control himself late at night with the internet... that he will control himself with another person after you’re married?

**To really see character, you need two things:**

**A. Time.** You have to be able to observe them in **regular life contexts**. **People come in after 2 weeks** and say, “We’re ready to get married.” I’m not saying you can **never be right...** just that’s there is no way you can know. **And don’t think “my heart knows,”** because it is all hopped up on the drug of infatuation.

Here’s what happens: You are so excited about being in love, so you take that parts of them you don’t know yet and fill them in with what you want them to be. But **that doesn’t mean that’s what they are!**

You need time to see them in different contexts.

- I heard about a **Christian couple**, no joke, that got engaged after a week and a half, and only had talked through email and pictures. Never met. Some other guy challenged him, and the guy said, “Sure, we’ve never met, but she’s **perfect...** We both want to have the **same number of kids.**” (In his case, it was 8) “**She dresses** how

I’ve always wanted a girl to dress. And she wears her hair the way I’ve always wanted a girl to wear it.” You **probably need more** to go on.

**Only time and proximity reveals who they really are.** You need to **understand how their past** shapes them; how the **wounds** of their past effect their relationships; what they are **like under pressure**; how they handle **responsibility**; what their idea of **family and success** are.

Secondly, to really see character...

**B. You need to keep the physical out of it.**

**Physical contact (sexual stimulation) intoxicates you** and hinders your ability to evaluate. It works **like a drug**. When you are sick, and your body is in pain, you pop a codeine pill and you feel awesome. Your body is not awesome, but the drug deceives you into how you really feel.

- Which is fine when you’re sick, but when you do that in a relationship it leads you to disaster. When the codeine wears off, your body is still sick, and when the physical excitement of sex fades, all you are left with is a sick relationship.

So, I would encourage you to keep the physical minimal FOR YOUR OWN SAKE.

- **Postpone physical commitment ALAP.** *Sexual stimulation sabotages the spouse search*
- **Lynn’s laws**
  - Nothing in the dark
  - Nothing should last longer than 5 seconds
  - Nothing below the chin
  - Never lie down. If you can lie down with a girl and not be sexually aroused... we have other things to talk about: **Chandler:** Nothing good and godly ever happens between dating couples when they lie on a

couch together late at night to watch a movie. It has never in the history of humankind led to discussions about cinematography or the symbolic resonance of the **director's body** of work or whatever."<sup>5</sup> (Not his body)

*Promise me, O women of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and wild deer, not to awaken love until the time is right. Song of Solomon 2:7*

(Gazelles and does represent youthful, sexual vigor.) Keep 'em hibernating until it's time for them to run. Then let 'em out the cage and let 'em go wild.

- **And, by all means, don't live together:** someone who has lived with 2–3 people has right at a 0% chance of staying married. (Even if you don't believe in God... good counsel)

**I know this is difficult, but this time where you are dating is a test for you,** for God to build character, to see if you trust him enough to wait; to see if you love him enough to bring your sexual desires under his Lordship. When a young man or woman brings this area underneath the Lordship of Christ, he uses it to release long term trust between them and dynamite spiritual power into their lives.

Let me be clear on standard... wait until married

**So, prioritize character in the dating process,** and while you are waiting, focus on **its development in you**. Here's the way we said it, *"Are you the person you are looking for is looking for?"* Are you becoming more godly, self-controlled, and servantlike?

## V. The importance of godly counsel

**In this story,** we are immediately struck with **how involved the families** were. Moreso than we are used to, and I'm not trying to push us back to an arranged marriage culture... (a lot of problems w/ that)

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<sup>5</sup> Matt Chandler, *Mingling of Souls*, 61.

But **in our culture we have gone** to the opposite extreme. In what is **arguably the most important** decision of our lives, **we isolate ourselves and tell ourselves that our heart knows best**. Your heart is an emotional idiot, easily deceived.

**Or we only consult** with our best friends, who are no older or wiser than we are. Ever read *Lord of the Flies*?

You need **godly and wise counsel** particularly at this stage. **If there were no other practical reason to be involved in the church as a single, this would be it.**

- **Attraction and dating** are so **exhilarating and confusing**... You need people who are **wise** and can look in, **from the outside**, soberly, without the deluding adrenaline of attraction and help you navigate the relationship...
- **Sometimes people see** the obvious problem that you can't see because you are so hopped up on pheromones. **Or, on the flipside**, they can see you might be writing someone off because of some silly preference or fear that really makes no long terms difference.
- **Matt Chandler:** *"One sure way to walk in foolishness in a romantic relationship is to date someone who troubles the godly counselors in your life."*<sup>6</sup>

**Let me give a practical application of this to both married and single people:**

- **Married people: open your life to single people in our church.** Include them in your families; your small groups. Get to know them.
  - A friend of mind one time told the **story of being at a restaurant with his wife** where his oldest daughter worked as a waitress. At another table a man about 15 years older than her began to flirt with his daughter. She ignored it, but he kept

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<sup>6</sup> Chandler, 56.

on, making suggestive comments, asking for her number.

Eventually she pointed to her dad across the restaurant and said, “**That is my dad. We have the same phone number.** If you want my phone number, you can go ask him.”

- My friend says, “It is God’s plan that every woman should have a man around that she can point to and say, ‘You’re interested in me? Ask him.’”
- **And they need a community that can help** these relationships form healthily!
- **Single people: get integrated in the church!** Don’t hang out in singles-only cliques.
  - We have **young professional ministries** and **older single ministries**... go to those. But ask your leader, say, “Help me get involved in the lives of some families, too.”
  - **That can be in a small group**... one of the best ways is serving on a **ministry team** here. Get to know someone and tell them to invite you over for dinner. **Don’t feel bad about not inviting them to dinner**... We know what single people’s houses are like. **PILE SYSTEM.** We weren’t inviting anyone over for dinner.

## VI. The importance of trusting God

- Eleazer and Abraham and Isaac bathe this whole process in trust.

### Two ways Eleazar demonstrates his trust in God:

#### A. He prayed... at every turn.

- **He really believed God heard his prayers and would provide in this area.** Do you believe that?
  - **Ryah: talks to me when the blender is on full-blast.** She really believes I can hear! Do you believe God hears you and cares about this above all the noise in the world?
  - **Matthew 6**... Jesus says that not one hair falls from your head without the heavenly Father knowing... that there is not one bird in the sky that God doesn’t have his eye upon. *He certainly knows how important this is to you and he is watching over you and ready to help if you ask.*

#### B. He would not compromise.

- If Rebekah wasn’t her, he wouldn’t “settle.”
- **The proof of trust** is that you won’t compromise even when things get difficult. Not good intentions, but small decisions
- Fullness of time
  - **Will you compromise when things don’t happen as fast as you would want them?** It means you don’t really trust God.
  - I love how **Jim Elliot, missionary to Ecuador**, talked about his pursuit of a wife: Adam “fell asleep in the will of God.” God provides.
  - **(And listen: Don’t date someone you wouldn’t marry.** Dating is a road that leads to a destination... if you **have no intention of going to the destination** with someone, stay off the road with them. It gets **harder every mile** you travel with them to take the exit ramp.)

**(MUSIC) TRUST GOD**... there’s **one other element** to this, and it fits into the **bigger picture** of Genesis... **All of Genesis is about a promise** that God gave to Abraham... to bless him and make him a blessing... **IMPORTANT: that blessing did not consist of romance and a good family**, but in a **Messiah who would come** to restore what had been broken in our hearts (what was broken was not romantic, but spiritual): our relationship with God.

**The** blessing in life is not getting married; **the** blessing is being RE-united with God. **Jesus PLUS nothing EQUALS everything.**

- *Now, it is true... you were created for community and it is not good that you live alone.*
  - But as I’ve shown you in this series, marriage and biological family is not the only way, not even the ultimate way, that God fills our lives with community. The **church, and deep friendships within the church, and ministry relationships**, are God’s ultimate community.
- *(More on that in our last week in this series, coming up.)*

**The blessing you are looking for... the promise of Abraham**... it is **JESUS**. And that’s where this **STORY** takes a really sweet turn.



**You see the greater story in Genesis, about Jesus, in many ways turns this one on its head.** Jesus is like Eleazar: he **crosses great distances**—not just a desert, but the gap between deity and humanity, between holiness and sin; **but he didn't find in us a worthy**, virtuous bride, like Rebekah... he found someone who had sold themselves out to prostitution. It **was not our generosity** that impressed him; it was his generosity that took compassion on us.

He didn't give us gold bracelets or a nose ring; he shed his blood to make us his bride.

**And here's why that's good news for some of you:** some of you have really **messed up your dating story**. In fact, you've messed up your whole life. **The good news of the gospel** is not "follow these rules correctly and everything will turn out fine..." NOT GOOD ADVICE BUT GOOD NEWS. but God came for you in spite of that... to redeem you: his blood can wash you from your past mistakes and make all things new.

The **whole Bible is about God redeeming us as his wayward bride**. We weren't worthy, like Rebekah. He **set his affection on us** while we were still sinners... he **pursued us when** we were running the other way; he **purchased us** with his blood when we had sold ourselves into spiritual prostitution.

That love he **offers to us as a gift**... like Rebekah, you have to choose to receive it. Won't force it!

And here's the **great thing**: **WHEN you choose to receive** his love and forgiveness, as a gift, it **actually heals** your damaged soul and **gives you the ability** to become the right kind of marriage partner.

**Over and over... vertical relationship with God** makes you an excellent marriage partner. You become better in your horizontal relationships by strengthening your vertical relationship.

**Do you have that relationship with Jesus?** Do you want it? Surrender to him now as Lord and trust him as Savior.