

Build Better Marriages Series

Love Is Your Choice

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Marriages in our society often fail. The statistics are bad. Many couples are choosing to live together hoping to avoid the pain of divorce. Yet, that solution does not avoid the pain of separation and the failure of the relationship. In a day of all of the modern advancements, we still do not know how to live together in a committed relationship. In the Bible, we have the teaching that love is a commitment to a person. That commitment is a choice we make at the beginning in the wedding vow; and we continue to make that commitment every day of the rest of our lives. Love is in fact a choice we make more than a sentiment we feel. Today, I want to take a story from the Bible and see what it can tell us about marriage and the love commitment. We are going to look at the story of Isaac and Rebekah.

Genesis 24:62-67 NIVO

⁶² Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. ⁶³ He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. ⁶⁴ Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel ⁶⁵ and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?"

"He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. ⁶⁷ Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

(Gen. 24:62-67 NIVO)

1. Isaac and Rebekah chose to love each other, before having emotional sentiment of love.

A. Rebekah was a close relative of Isaac, as was common in those days.

The practice is known as endogamy. Wealth is kept within the family. Rebekah is Isaac's 1st cousin-once-removed (She is the granddaughter of

Abraham's brother.) When they married, they became **kissing cousins**. (Joke)

B. Isaac and Rebekah did not know each other before marriage.

Abraham had sent his servant to get a bride for Isaac from his family. The servant went up to the region of Haran (Northern Syria) where the family lived. In this sense, **Rebekah was the first mail ordered bride. (Joke)**

Rebekah agreed to travel to Canaan, a land she had never been to and marry a man she had never met. She agreed to marry sight unseen. She did not know if he was handsome, if he was a nice man. She knew he had wealth because the servant gave gifts of wealth and that Isaac was the heir to this branch of the family. Did he have a long nose? Was he ugly? None of this would be known when she said, "I Do."

C. Isaac was significantly older than Rebekah.

Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah. We do not know Rebekah's age, yet she is likely much younger than he. (Gen. 25:20). Because girls were often married young (age 13 or so) Isaac is likely 24 to 27 years older than Rebekah. Rebekah is a responsible person at a young age, as a young teenager. She watered the camels and provided water for the servant to drink, showing her willingness to respect others and handle tasks. When she leaves to go to meet Isaac, she takes her nurse and maids as part of the group. Later, when Jacob and Esau are young men, Isaac is old and near death, but Rebekah is still in her active years.

D. Isaac chose to marry Rebekah before seeing her.

Rebekah was beautiful (26:7). However, Isaac could not know that until he took her into the tent. Before he took her into the tent, he had committed to marry her.

Let's get the picture correct. When Rebekah gets off the camel she covers her face with a veil. Her body is covered in robes. She is covered from Isaac's sight. The only thing he can see is her eyes, and they didn't wear

make-up back then. She had been traveling for days to reach the Negev, where Isaac was living. She hadn't had a bath. They didn't have Bath and Body Works. When he sees Rebekah, she is wrapped up like a package.

The Bible tells us that Isaac takes her into his mother's tent (Sarah was deceased by then), and he married her. He marries her sight unseen. So Isaac took her into his mother's tent and began to take off her veil. He is unwrapping the package. When he does, he says to himself, "Yes! Yes! Yes! I got a good one!" It could have gone a different way.

What does it mean he married her? In the biblical world view, sex is the act of marriage. It is the union that makes two people one. Sex is not meant for pleasure outside of marriage. He married her meant the two of them joined together in sexual union. From that moment on they would be committed to each other to love each other as husband and wife, and that without knowing anything personal about one another.

E. Isaac loved Rebekah by choice. Emotional love would come later.

Isaac loved Rebekah. His love is not determined by emotions, desire, beauty or gratification. He loves her because he chooses to love her as his wife. She takes the position of being his wife as her committed choice.

In the old world, often people committed to love before they felt the emotions of love. They would have to learn to love each other as they lived out marriage. This does not mean that couples always worked marriage out well. Society set much of the expectations of marriage, and people learned to get along because it was enforced by society about them. They lived in expected social rules.

This does not mean that Isaac and Rebekah did not share romance. In chapter 26 they get caught embracing in the public after he had told Abimelech that she was his sister. (Hebrew word means more than hugging or kissing. The word means a jesting, sexual touching a man would do with his wife and not with his sister, as he had claimed to Abimelech. The Greek LXX has a word that means to play as a child.) They were sharing a moment between them that was not meant for other eyes.

What this tells us is that Isaac and Rebekah learned to have emotional feelings for one another later, after they made their choice to love each other in the marriage commitment.

2. Build a better marriage by realizing love is your choice.

Our world has lost the customs and norms that keep marriage together by social expectations. We are in a society that wants no rules. Our society has rejected God and as a result, rejects morals and mores.

Keeping your marriage out of divorce is not the same as building a good marriage. Some have kept their marriage together, but they have endured abuse – sometimes physical, verbal and mental.

Even in couples who seem to have good homes there is often much conflict. The relationship is a battleground of words, with love choking on the words, if not worse.

There is no place for abuse of any kind in marriage. Abuse is not love. It is not the character of God.

I have shared this story to help us see that we are often misled by our view of love. We assume that love is the feeling we have for our mate or which we get from our mate. This is not the biblical view of love. We can build a better marriage only if we follow God's guidelines.

A. You will only sustain love for your partner if you daily choose to Love.

Love is your choice. Wherever you are at in your marriage, you can choose to make your marriage better by choosing to love your partner. Remember love is essentially a choice.

The feelings of love will always rise and fall. Sometimes they will move down into a valley of dullness. They can even fall down into despair if there is a great deal of friction happening. It is when you are here that you can choose to make a difference in the relationship. If you choose to keep

loving, by acting in love toward your mate, eventually you will see the emotions of love start to rise again.

- **Love even in the lack of love.**

Even if you fell in love, eventually the falling will stop. You will hit a bottom somewhere and things will get difficult. Early love is often filled with much idealism. New lovers often refuse to see the faults in their lover while dating. If they see problems, they think love will cure it. They do not realize that people have set ways that will only change with much patience and time if at all. At some time you must choose to love a person who does things you don't really like. You end up choosing to love the person when there are emotional things about them you cannot stand.

When Isaac pulled off Rebekah's veil he might have seen she is beautiful. ("Yes!!! I got a good one!!!!). What if she was ugly? Later on, Jacob gets tricked into marrying Leah when he loved Rachel. On the wedding night, Laban arranged the wedding to be at night so he could hide Leah behind the veil when Jacob took her to his tent. He wakes the next day to find out, "Yikes! You're not Rachel!!!! You're the ... put my hand over my mouth!") Yet, Jacob eventually gets to marry Rachel too, but he chooses to love Leah too.

Such love does not come from feel-good emotions, but from act of will.

In our day, we are taught just the opposite. We see it among many in our society. On the newsstands at the grocery store are the continued headlines of who is falling in or out of love by social elites. The phrase I hear is "I just don't love him or her anymore." I want to ask, When did you stop. Love is a choice. So when did you stop choosing to love? Love is work. It is not easy.

- **Love as God loves.**

Our example of love as choice is God's love for us. John 3:16. Paul uses Christ's death for the church in Ephesians 5 to talk about how husbands are to love their wives. He sacrificed himself to make the church holy and

beautiful. Yet, there are a lot of husbands who won't lift a finger to help their wives and who are often bitter with their tongues.

Every day you have to wake up and say, "I will love you." You said, "I do" at the altar on the day of marriage. It was your covenant promise to him or her and to God. You have to keep saying it.

B. You must choose to love even in emotional pain.

It is your choice to continue to love even if you have been disappointed or emotionally hurt by your mate. Conflicts are inevitable in relationships. Where there are two different people, there are two different emotions, minds, wills, thoughts, plans, ideals, etc. When the differences clash it can lead to emotional pain.

To choose love is to look beyond the pain of the present and the past. You choose to love as obedience to God who chose to love you when you were a sinner. As God gave you grace, you must give grace to your mate.

(This is not to endorse any abuse. Neither verbal assaults nor physical assaults are actions of love. *A critical mouth is like a knife to the soul. It bleeds the life of the mate, even if no marks are made on the outside.*)

There are always differences between people. So, conflicts will be there. They may be simple or complex. You have different styles. Different natures. Different expectations. OCD versus SLOB.

C. Love is not love if it is manipulative or coercive.

There are often times when couples will make mutual compromises that meet needs both parties might get some benefit from it. However, if you will only show love to your spouse when you can get something you want, eventually the other person will begin to see you are not acting in love. Love is by nature a gift we give. It is a commitment to act on what is best for the other person. It is not selfish. Read 1 Cor. 13. You must show up with a willingness to be a giver because it is your gift to give. No one gets too

moved by cadaver love. Your body is there, but your spirit is somewhere else.

D. When you choose to love, you are choosing to change yourself.

Every marriage requires both partners to change things about themselves. You cannot become one in marriage without both persons changing. You may have many similarities when you first start your marriage. However, there will be differences. Two people do not become one without both persons moving some distance from where they both started.

You start by leaving your families. (“A man must leave his family...”). Marriages have a way of making two people different than what they were before they married. That means they both have to change some things.

Change in language.

Change in likes.

Change in behaviors.

Change in expectations.

Change in rolls and responsibilities.

Let’s say you are both western and love to ride horses. That is what got you together and you rode off into the sunset of love bliss on marriage. But now you have settled down into your regular activities there is a problem. She wants to go horse riding every day, and you are fine if you ride the horse once a month. She is off riding without you and wants you to spend time with her; but you want to spend time working up the ranch. You both love to ride. You both love horses. You both want more time together. Eventually you are going to have to accept riding more often than you want and leave the ranch upkeep longer than you want, and she is going to have to allow that horse riding is not such a frequent thing for the two of you. Oneness comes when both of you move to become more like each other.

Love is work. It is a choice we make to keep loving our mate.

If you want to build a better marriage, realize it is really your choice first and foremost to choose to act in love rather than depend on the emotions that come from love.