



I'll start us off with a trivia question this morning. What is the longest chapter in the book of Genesis? The answer is chapter 24 and the topic is marriage.

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."

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

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."

¹⁵ Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor.¹⁶ The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

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 finished drinking." ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. 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. ²³ Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?"

²⁴ She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor." ²⁵ And she added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night."

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. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives."

²⁸ The girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. ²⁹ Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. ³⁰ As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. ³¹ "Come, you who are blessed by the LORD," he said. "Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels."

³² So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. ³³ Then food was set before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say."

"Then tell us," Laban said.

³⁴ So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵ The LORD has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, and camels and donkeys. ³⁶ My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. ³⁷ And my master made me swear an oath, and said, 'You must not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live, ³⁸ but go to my father's family and to my own clan, and get a wife for my son.'

³⁹ "Then I asked my master, 'What if the woman will not come back with me?'

⁴⁰ "He replied, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father's family. ⁴¹ Then, when you go to my clan, you will be released from my oath even if they refuse to give her to you—you will be released from my oath.'

⁴² "When I came to the spring today, I said, 'O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. ⁴³ See, I am standing beside this spring; if a maiden comes out to draw water and I say to her, 'Please let me drink a little water from your jar,' ⁴⁴ and if she says to me, 'Drink, and I'll draw water for your camels too,' let her be the one the LORD has chosen for my master's son.'

⁴⁵ "Before I finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water, and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.'

⁴⁶ "She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too.' So I drank, and she watered the camels also.

⁴⁷ "I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?'

"She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.'

"Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, ⁴⁸ and I bowed down and worshiped the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the

right road to get the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. ⁴⁹ 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."

⁵⁰ Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the LORD; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. ⁵¹ Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has directed."

⁵² When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the LORD.

⁵³ Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and to her mother. ⁵⁴ Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night there.

When they got up the next morning, he said, "Send me on my way to my master."

⁵⁵ But her brother and her mother replied, "Let the girl remain with us ten days or so; then you may go."

⁵⁶ But he said to them, "Do not detain me, now that the LORD has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master."

⁵⁷ Then they said, "Let's call the girl and ask her about it." ⁵⁸ So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?"

"I will go," she said.

⁵⁹ So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

"Our sister, may you increase
to thousands upon thousands;
may your offspring possess
the gates of their enemies."

⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her maids got ready and mounted their camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

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.

This marriage is of the utmost significance in Biblical history. Other than the union of Adam and Eve, it's the first marriage in Scripture that takes more than one verse to describe. It's significant because it involves Isaac, the son of promise. The entire future of Israel depended upon the generations coming through Isaac. But the Lord took 25 years from the promise of Isaac to his birth. Now in chapter 24 we find that Isaac is about 75 years old and he is still not married. The promise of many descendants and ultimately the promise of a Redeemer and Messiah required that Isaac get married and have children. If you were reading and following the story of the patriarchs for the first time, you would no doubt feel this tension in the narrative. Like a good mother or grandmother, we should read through Genesis and think, "Is that boy ever going to get married? He needs to find a nice girl and settle down!"

When we read through the Bible we often lose our sense of timing and so we crunch everything together. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob more or less run together as a unit and fail to see the importance of the timeline. With Isaac in his seventies¹ we should ask ourselves, “Will the promise be fulfilled? When *will* Isaac get married? What kind of a woman will she be?” Therefore, we have two prominent themes in this chapter—marriage and the fulfillment of the promise. There are a number of marriage principles in this chapter and we’ll get to them in a moment, but I didn’t want this to be only a sermon on marriage. If all you do in your reading and study of Scripture is to pull out life principles, you will have missed the message of the Bible. The Bible is not merely a guide book for life—it is a story of God’s saving work in the ruined lives of human sinfulness. This description of Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage is driving toward Jesus. Jesus will be born into the tribe of Judah, one of Isaac’s grandchildren. The birth of Isaac and the marriage and birth of his own children are all part of the slow advancement toward Jesus, our Redeemer. God promised and God fulfilled.

So before we go any further, we really should be certain about the meaning of this chapter—is it about marriage or is it about fulfillment of the promise? Actually, it is about both. It is about the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Redeemer through marriage. Think about it—every story in the Bible takes place in the context of marriages and families, and I don’t just mean in a biological sense. Of course everyone has a biological father and mother (except Jesus!), but the Bible carefully places each character into the context of marriage and family. Here is how the two major themes of this chapter hold together—strong marriages and strong families are the core of gospel proclamation. If a child is to grow up and become a committed follower of Christ, is he or she more likely to arise out of a strong family with a strong husband and wife relationship where the children are trained in obedience to Christ and his word, or out of a family where mom and dad are divorced or if married, the marriage is weak and ineffective with little to no discipleship? God can use and situation and any person for his purpose and glory and you don’t need a perfect family to be a strong Christian, but everyone will agree that it is much more likely to happen in the soil of a strong family with the modeling of a strong marriage. But far too many people start off on the wrong foot by making poor choices in regard to their husband or wife. Therefore, this message will be about the principles behind choosing a godly husband or wife so that we can multiply strong marriages and strong families and the gospel can advance forward.

Before we pull out the good principles of a marriage, let me point out some things in the story that don’t have application to us. In other words, some of this story is bound by the culture in which it happened and much of it is not bound by culture. Therefore, we need to separate cultural descriptions from biblical truth. Such descriptions that are not applicable principles include the following:

1. Must be a close family member. Abraham married his half-sister, Sarah. Isaac married his cousin, Rebekah and Jacob married two of his nieces, Rachel and Leah. We definitely don’t have to follow this cultural custom.
2. Must be of the same race. Obviously if they married a close family member the spouse was also of the same race. This may be obvious to us, but over the centuries, these kinds of stories have been used to teach that Christians should not practice interracial marriage. When the Israelites were commanded to marry only other Israelites, it was not for the purity of their race

but for the purity of their faith. Foreign wives and foreign husbands would have foreign gods to lead them astray. Biblically speaking, we are all one race and interracial marriages actually make for a healthier population. When people only marry others who are genetically similar to them, they propagate genetic diseases.

3. Must be beautiful. In verse 16 Rachel is described as “very beautiful.” While it is true that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all had beautiful wives, this is not an absolute principle that we should follow. Sadly, in our culture and even among believers the number one question is “Hot or not”? What’s the first thing we say when we learn that a person has a new boyfriend or girlfriend? “Let me see their picture! Is he really cute? Is she good-looking?” How shallow! I am not saying it is wrong to be naturally attracted to someone’s outer beauty, but if that is near or at the top of your list, then you are headed for a lifetime of misery. The pursuit of eye candy will rot your soul.

4. Must be chosen by a “fleece.” Abraham’s servant set up a detailed set of circumstances by which he would be certain of God’s leading for the right woman. “Let her be the one” was his prayer. Two weeks ago I told you about our friend who found coins on the ground as certain evidence that she was to marry the man she was dating. God can and does direct through the circumstances of life, but if all you have is some mystical sign or handwriting in the sky, you are looking in the wrong place.

5. A dowry was necessary. The servant presented Rebekah and her family with gold, silver, jewelry, articles of clothes, costly gifts (53). Dowries have been and still are a part of some cultures, but this is not a Biblical absolute we need to follow. Although you could make a case that when a husband works hard and provides for his family that this is a type of dowry for the wife.

6. God has only one person in mind for you to marry. Marriage stories like this one could lead you to believe that out of all of the people in the world, God only has one person for you to marry and that you need to find your “one true love” at all costs. Actually, I don’t think the Bible even implies this, but when you mix in a bunch of Disney love stories and Twilight romances like Edward and Bella, you get whole host of strange ideas about love and marriage. If you follow the Biblical principles, there are many men and women that would make a good husband or wife. We need to dispel the hyper-romantic myth that there is only one perfect mate for us in the world.

Now we can move onto the principles described here that we should follow.

1. The necessity of strong parental leadership. Abraham directed his servant saying, “Go... and get a wife for my son Isaac” (4). This was not an arranged marriage as we will soon see. Rebekah retained full rights of refusal and she was in no way forced into this marriage, but Abraham had the responsibility of guiding the process. Furthermore, since Abraham was too old and weak to travel, he utilized the services of his “chief servant.” This man was probably relatively old himself and a man of unquestionable character and wisdom. Abraham trusted the future of his race and the fulfillment of God’s promise to this one man.

This pulls in a related principle of seeking counsel from other Godly people. Young people, the choice of a husband or wife is the second most important decision you will ever make. It's more important than what school you will attend. It's more important than your choice of career or where you will live. It is second only to your choosing to follow Christ. This is huge! In such a tremendously weighty decision, don't you think you should seek out Godly counsel and wisdom from as many people as possible? The first place you should look is to your parents and especially to your father.

The traditional model happens when a young man asks permission of the girl's father to date or court his daughter and then if all goes well, eventually asks him for permission to marry his daughter. This is fine and well and I am happy to see the tradition being recovered among Christians, but we must understand that this tradition of asking dad's permission must be the very end of the process of parental leadership. The father is not merely the gatekeeper to his children's heart and future, he is the shepherd of their heart. Tell me, when does a dad start helping his kids to choose a spouse? It's not when they are 16 or 18 or 20 years old—that is far too late. It needs to start when they are still in diapers. Dad's, it's all about your relationship with your kids all through the formative years. I don't have time to list all of the necessary qualities in this relationship, but if you are not guiding them throughout their younger years, then what right do you have to say whether or not they can date or marry a certain person? Her trust in your love for her, in your wisdom, in your Godly counsel must be developed over time.

But it's not just dads that are important, but moms and whole families. If a wife does not respect her husband, then she teaches her children not to respect them. Why would they want to go to him for advice? When husbands demonstrate love to their wives, all of the children will eventually catch on to what a husband and wife relationship is supposed to look like. What I am saying is that the marriage of our children is the culmination of all of our discipleship efforts. If it is the second most important decision they will ever make, then what are we doing to guide them through the years? Strong parental leadership and discipleship is needed from diapers all the way to wedding bells.

2. Chastity and purity. Verse sixteen tells us that Rebekah was "a virgin. No man had ever lain with her." At first this may sound redundant, after all, a virgin is someone who has never lain with a man. It's unfortunate, but in our day, that qualifier is needed more than ever. There is a news story out of Florida where a woman is suing the Christian school where she used to work because they fired her for the charge of fornication. She got married and is now pregnant with her first child, but it was discovered that the child was conceived three weeks before the wedding. First of all, I am curious as to the purpose of her lawsuit. If she wins, would she really want to teach in the school that fired her for moral reasons and after a bitter lawsuit? Also, does she expect a large financial settlement from the school? What are the odds that this Christian school has millions of dollars lying around? My point is that Rebekah was a true virgin, not an "I was a virgin up until three weeks before my wedding" kind of virgin. She wasn't the kind of virgin that Bill Clinton is famous for describing. She was not the kind of virgin so common even in our churches that asks the question, "How far can I go with my boyfriend? What is acceptable? How far is too far?" If you even have to ask that question you have already gone too far. Rebekah was chaste and pure in every sense of those words. She was a true virgin.

How can we help our sons and daughters remain chaste and pure in our day? You are probably familiar with the program from Focus on the Family called *True Love Waits*. This program upholds the value of abstinence and helps teens take the following chastity pledge.

"Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to a lifetime of purity including sexual abstinence from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship."²



I commend Focus on the Family and other ministries who help teens take vows of chastity. Apparently, millions of teens have taken this step. Many have taken part in what is called Purity Balls. You can even purchase beautiful jewelry to remind you that True Love Waits. For a mere \$869 you can buy your daughter this gorgeous gold ring engraved with the True Love Waits message. For some reason, the rings for

guys are little less expensive coming in at \$441. If you are on a budget, you can opt for the sterling silver necklace for only \$25. A true cost cutter item is the leather bracelet and the penny pinchers can get a t-shirt for only \$8.50. All of these purity pledges and purity balls are wonderful except for one problem—they're not working. Look at the results of one longitudinal study which followed 10,000 teens over several years. They concluded that "It didn't matter if they took the pledge or not. 82% of those who took the pledge had broken it."³

Miley Cyrus, aka "Hannah Montana" has made a chastity pledge. But now she has been parading about in ways that tell young girls she has no intention of keeping her pledge. Britney Spears made a similar pledge. Purity pledges are a good start, but they are not helping in any significant way.

There are two important things necessary to help assure chastity and purity. The primary thing you can do to instill purity in your kids is to provide consistent love and protection, especially from dad. I will talk at length about this at length in a few minutes, but first I want to address the topic of modesty.

3. Modesty. When Rebekah saw that Isaac was approaching, "she took her veil and covered herself" (65). Here is the point—Rebekah's body was completely covered. Even her face was covered before her wedding. We know that in this culture, women wore robes which covered their entire bodies. If you recall when we studied Adam and Eve, the animal skins that God made for them constructed to cover their bodies from their neck to their ankle. God did not weave a fur bikini and a fur speedo for Eve and Adam, he made them a long robe made out of animal skins

whose blood was shed for them. It's not just the amount of skin that's the issue because if you've got skin-tight clothing, what difference does it really make if the skin is technically covered?

Dads, and I have said this a few other times, what your daughter wears is fundamentally your responsibility. You can send your daughter shopping with her mom, but you have the final say. So, fathers, let me ask you a question. If you were a young boy the age of your daughter, what would you be looking at? Come on men, are you telling me you have never thought of this before? How many times have you watched your daughters leave the house in something that you really don't approve of, but you let her go anyway? I was talking about this topic with a friend a couple of weeks ago and he made the comment that men are like wolves. That's a difficult thing to admit, but there is truth in it. And why are men wolves? Fundamentally, it comes from within our sinful nature, but men are wolves, in part, because they are fed fresh meat or because fresh meat is dangled before them everywhere they look.

Dads, let me put your responsibility in the clearest of terms. Your responsibility is to help your daughter dress in such a way that they will not attract wolves. Karen and I often hear a pack of coyotes on the move at night. If a pack of wolves or coyotes passed by your house, would you throw your housecat into the middle of the pack? Then why would you send your daughter off to the wolves smelling like fresh meat? Help your daughter dress in such a way that they will not attract wolves. Let's go one more than that. Help your daughter dress in such a way that she will not only not attract wolves, but she will attract guys who value things other than outer beauty (or outer "lust"). Some men and young men want to be wolves, but many want help in abating their wolfish tendencies, and they cannot do it without your help. You cannot promote purity and chastity without also continually promoting modesty. These are inseparable values.

4. Submission from the children. Laban, Rebekah's brother said to the servant, "Here is Rebekah, take her and go" (51). If you read this out of context it might appear that Laban is treating his sister as a piece of property over which he had final authority to keep or to give away. This is not what was happening at all. The involvement of the family demonstrates the principles of submission and authority that were part of the very fabric of their culture. Rebekah was still living at home because their culture knew nothing of a single woman living out on her own.

And why did she live with her family? The answer to this question gets at the heart of submission and authority. She lived with her family for protection. Many people think that the main reason would have been economics because a woman, let alone a single woman had no way to support herself. She didn't have any economic options available to her simply because she was a woman. While it is certainly true that women had limited options, the so-called Proverbs 31 woman was commended in part for her economic prosperity and diligence. This woman manufactured and sold textiles. She bought and sold land. She created income for her family. We make the mistake in thinking that all ancient cultures were like the Taliban—oppressive and abusive to women in every way. Many ancient cultures had women serving in important government positions. Women served as Pharaoh of Egypt. Women had strong influence in ancient societies.

The primary reason that Rebekah lived at home was not for economic reasons, but for protection. A woman out on her own was totally vulnerable to all manner of crimes, abuse, slavery and murder. Like I said, it would have been inconceivable.⁴ But some will object to this by saying that society was so different back then. It was an agricultural society with children living at home and everyone working together. Yes, society was set up differently, but that's my point! There was a natural form of protection embedded into the fabric of society. Therefore, instead of saying that this is old-fashioned and out of date, we need to recapture that sense of protection and submission. The entire family structure is built upon authority and submission and families that are healthy understand and practice this.

Submission from the children goes hand in hand with the next principle...

5. Agreement from children. Laban asked his sister Rebekah, "Will you go with this man?" (58) This was NOT an arranged marriage. Rebekah was under the protection of Laban's household and he was asking her permission to be given as a wife for Isaac. This illustrates the double sided coin of authority and submission, that is, submission must be voluntary. In fact, by its very definition, submission is voluntary, otherwise it would be coercion.

Some of you are probably thinking, "Are you saying that it is voluntary for children to obey their parents—that they can choose to submit or rebel against their authority?" No, that's not what I am saying. The Bible is clear that children are required to obey their parents, but when they get into the late teen years, if they are not voluntarily submitting to your parental authority, you will not be able to force them to obey. Especially when your children reach the age to be married, their submission to your desires and wisdom must be voluntary, otherwise we would be promoting an arranged marriage.

Let me give you an illustration using this umbrella. This large umbrella represents my authority as a parent and as a father. And what is the primary purpose of authority? The primary purpose is protection. Just as Rebekah as an adult submitted to her parents and brother's authority for her protection, your family comes under your umbrella of authority for their protection. When kids are younger I would be more comfortable using the illustration of a fence, because obedience is required, but for older children, and for your wife, an umbrella is better since it represents the voluntary nature of submission.

My job as a husband and father is to offer an umbrella of authority and protection over my family. Our subject this morning is dating and marriage, but a father's umbrella is about so much more than just this. A father's umbrella means that he takes responsibility for his family's entire welfare. All spiritual training takes place under the umbrella. All education takes place under here, whether your kids are in public school, a private school or homeschooled. In a word, this umbrella is discipleship. I need to be doing all that I can to disciple my wife and kids and prepare my kids for adulthood. This includes, but it is not limited to preparing them for courtship and marriage. But if choosing a mate for a lifetime is the second most important decision your kids will ever make, then my umbrella must also include preparation for courtship and marriage.

As a father, you have two different ways of preparing your children—one for your sons and one for your daughters. Your first job is to help your sons build their own umbrellas so that you can send them out when they are ready. My sons need to be ready to provide for, protect and disciple

their own wives and families. For your daughters, the dad's job is to prepare them to transition from being under your umbrella to being under the umbrella of her future husband. With this as a backdrop, we can begin to see what dating and courtship should look like. Courtship is the process of a young man coming under the umbrella of the girl's family for a while to see if everyone is ready for him to have his own umbrella.

Let me paint a scenario for you. A young man approaches you and asks for your permission to date your daughter. Your daughter is under your umbrella, so what are you going to do? The first question you ask him is what he means by "dating" your daughter. If he means that he wants to take her on a date, your answer should be a resounding NO. If I say yes, I am allowing my daughter to go out without an umbrella. But if this young man says that he wants to develop a relationship with your daughter for the purpose of pursuing marriage, then what will your answer be? It should be a resounding MAYBE. If your daughter is in favor of this request, and the young man seems to fulfill the requirements of a potential spouse (which we will cover next Sunday), then what you proceed to do is to bring this young man and his umbrella under your family umbrella, do you see? You spend time with him as a family and, if possible, get to know his family. The point is that this young man is under *your* umbrella. All of this is taking place under your protection and guidance.

This whole notion of going out on casual dates or jumping in and out of dating relationships is a relatively recent phenomenon. Dating, as we know it, was non-existent for the vast majority of human history. Like most of you probably experienced, as a teenager I was totally caught up in the dating game. My best friend and I would get together and scope out the next girl we were going to pursue. I gave my heart, or at least pieces, of my heart to many girls and the only thing that prevented me from getting more messed up was that God, in his grace, kept me abstinent. I take absolutely no credit for that. There are a great many ways that each family can work out these dating principles, and as I said, next week we will look at several additional principles, but the point is that you need to bring your children under your umbrella of protection and authority. And this process starts when they are in diapers, not when they turn eighteen.

I witnessed a beautiful example of this umbrella principle last week at Aaron and Whitney's wedding. I was talking to Jim after the ceremony and he mentioned the great significance of something that many people may have missed. At one point, Whitney began to get teary eyed and right away Aaron pulled a tissue from his front pocket and handed it to Whitney. Jim said, "When I saw that, I knew then that Aaron would take good care of her." To use the language we are using, Jim let Whitney leave from under his umbrella and placed her under Aaron's. He actually did this at the start of the ceremony when he said he was giving away Whitney in marriage, but emotionally he did it when he saw Aaron handing Whitney a tissue.

Guys, it doesn't get any more important than this. I am guessing that some of you are feeling a bit overwhelmed trying to take all of this in. But please don't let yourself fall into a mentality that says, "Man, this is too much. Do I really *have to* do this?" Men, we don't *have* to do this, we *get* to do this. In other words, it is a responsibility but it is also an immense privilege. May God grant the grace and the courage to take the next step, even if it is the first step.

Rich Maurer

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¹ Some commentators think that Abraham died during the several month journey to find a wife for Isaac because when the servant returns he calls Isaac his “master” when this title had previously been reserved for Abraham alone. This would make Isaac 75 years old at his marriage. Whether or not Abraham was alive, he was very old and weak and probably a few years from death, thereby placing Isaac in his early seventies.

² <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/>

³ <http://www.emaxhealth.com/1002/22/28061/teen-chastity-vows-don-039-t-work.html>

⁴ But today’s education and economics not only allows for women to be out on their own, it almost requires it. If you want to get a job in your area of training or experience, often times you need to move out of the city or even out of the state.