



[Play video clip](#) of the last minute of *That's How You Know* from Disney's *Enchanted*.

Is *that* how you know? How *do* you know that someone loves you? How do you know that he or she is the right one for you? If all of life were a Disney movie, then this would be a simple question, right? I have to tell you that I really do like this movie and this scene in the park is my favorite part of the movie. It's a happy, catchy tune and it makes you want to dance around the room. Sadly, however, it is the only instruction on dating and marriage that most little girls and teens will ever receive. We will talk about the place for romantic love and it does have its place, but life is not a Disney movie. You can all shake your heads and agree, "I know, of course I know this," but do we really? Parents, watch movies like this with your kids, especially with your girls and when it's over, tell them again and again that movies like this are pure fantasy.

Now don't misunderstand me. A great marriage can have fantasy-like parts to it. Your marriage can make you happy and be catchy and make you want to dance around the room, in fact, I hope your does, or will one day, but the problem with movies like this is not the happiness part, but the foundation of the relationship. The people in these movies literally *fall* into love. They just happen to bump into the right person at the right time, the person they meet is beautiful and successful, and then they fall madly in love and live happily ever after. That is *not* how you know. This is *not* how you choose the right person with whom to enter into the lifelong covenant of marriage.

OK then, how do we know? (Singing the Disney tune) How does she know that you love her? We laid out five principles on dating and marriage last Sunday and before we go any further, let me briefly review those principles. I won't read the long chapter this morning, but recall that these principles all come from Genesis 24.

1. Strong Parental Leadership
2. Chastity and Purity
3. Modesty
4. Submission from Children
5. Agreement from Children

I need to emphasize the point that to have a good understanding of dating and marriage, you need to keep all of these principles in mind, but if I had to pick out the big idea in all of this, it would be the necessity of parental leadership and submission from the children. I think the illustration

of the umbrella is helpful because parents and kids can quickly see for themselves whether this is the way they have structured their lives or not. Parents need to continually ask questions like this: “Am I building a good umbrella for my kids? Is it an umbrella of authority, protection, love and discipleship?” Children of every age need to continually ask these questions: “Am I living under my parent’s umbrella? Am I living joyfully under their umbrella or am I always looking for a way out?”

Basically, every other principle that we will cover is dependent upon the umbrella of authority and protection as a foundation. Modesty, purity, parental guidance and everything else will not work very well without a strong umbrella. When sons understand and live under a strong umbrella, they will want to build their own umbrella and you will be able to equip them for the task. When daughters live with joy and understanding under your umbrella, they will want to be under the umbrella of their future husband. Please keep this in mind as we delve in further.

I want to make one comment about modesty. The Bible only tells women to dress modestly, that’s why the emphasis tends to fall on the ladies. Certainly guys can be immodest, but that is not generally the problem. However, chastity and purity must come from both sides. I didn’t want to leave the impression that men are wolves only because of immodest women. As I did say last week, it comes from within our sinful nature and that is where it needs to be changed. Women will only alter their clothes as men will only alter their ways if the heart is changed. In that light, I have a dozen copies of a great book for you. The title is *The Purity Principle* by Randy Alcorn. You can have a copy under the following conditions—that you read it with one or more of your kids, and then when you are done, pass it on to someone else.

Now we can move on to more marriage and dating principles from this chapter.

6. Divine Guidance. Abraham said to his servant, “He will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife” (7). Abraham was convinced that his servant would receive direct guidance from the Lord. Notice that Abraham’s servant was not visited by an angel. The Lord did not whisper into his “She’s the one!” Rather he set up an elaborate set of circumstances by which he could be certain of the right woman. We usually call these fleeces because Gideon used an actual sheep’s fleece when he was seeking guidance from the Lord. Is it wrong to seek a fleece? It’s not necessarily wrong to seek guidance through a fleece, but let me explain why it should be approached with great caution.

First of all, the example of Gideon and Abraham’s servant were very exceptional. If you remember, Gideon first asked the Lord to make the fleece wet and the ground dry. The next morning Gideon awoke and found it just the way he has asked for. The next morning he prayed that the fleece would be dry and the ground would be wet and it was so. Neither of these were naturally occurring phenomenon, therefore in this example God granted two separate miracles as assurance of guidance. The example of Abraham’s servant doesn’t include a miracle per se, but it does have a very specific set of circumstances. The servant prayed, *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.* Sorry to bring up an old illustration again, but what is the difference between this “fleece” and the one used by our friend who found coins on the ground?

People find coins on the ground all of the time, and the harder you look for them, the more you will find. I remember when I was about eight years old I was walking through this store in the mall and I found a dime on the floor. I went into this store on purpose to look for money on the floor. I told this story to my mom and she said, “Why did look for coins in that store? And I replied, “Because it seemed like the kind of store where I could find money on the floor.” Do you see, even as an eight year old, I knew how to find loose change on the ground.

If you want to use coins on the ground as a fleece, then pray something like this. “Lord, when I go to Walmart today, please let me find a 1906 silver dollar in mint condition over by the soup aisle and then I will know I am supposed to marry this man.” What we call fleeces are little more than naturally occurring circumstances, or like an Rorschach ink blot test, we see whatever it is we want to see in the circumstances. Many years ago a young couple came to my office and wanted me to perform their wedding ceremony. They told me they had chosen a wedding date of August 16 because they had opened their Bible one day to Luke, chapter eight, verse sixteen—8/16. I should have asked them what they would have done if the Bible had fallen open to Psalm chapter 119, verse 176! We Christians are strange folk, aren’t we? The real concern is that this is dangerously close to divination. This is what the New Age practitioners in our town are doing every day. They turn over a Tarot card and tell you your future. It’s like throwing a handful of chicken bones on the ground and discerning whom you should marry. Our so-called fleeces are very often on the edge of divination.

The other problem with fleeces is that they tend to distract us from the real ways that God is already, or should I say, trying to direct us. As we have already said, the Lord guides us through good parental leadership. Why would you look to a fleece or something else when you have Godly parents in your own house? He guides us through his word.

We must not forget the circumstances surrounding Gideon’s fleece. The Lord had already revealed himself to Gideon in miraculous ways. First, the Lord spoke directly to Gideon and said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.” The Lord specifically called Gideon to serve him and to free his people from oppression by the Midianites. Moreover, the wool’s fleece was not his first “fleece”. While talking with the Lord, Gideon asked, “Give me a sign that it is really you talking to me” (Jud. 6:17). Gideon brought an offering of a goat, unleavened bread and broth. The Lord touched the offering with his staff and fire flew out and consumed the offering. It wasn’t until after the Lord revealed himself by his word and by a miraculous sign that Gideon asked for the additional sign of the two fleeces.

Likewise, Abraham’s servant had a direct word from the Lord through Abraham. The servant received these instructions in verse seven. *Abraham said. “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.* For Abraham, the choice of a wife for Isaac was all part of God’s sovereign promise of a great land and a great nation and a great blessing through his descendants. God’s revealed will was abundantly clear to Abraham—Isaac’s wife must be from your own people. Abraham’s servant was not merely following the will of Abraham, he was following the will of God. He was following God’s word.

By the time we are done with this short series, you will have a nice list of ways that the Lord wants to guide you to finding a good husband or wife. If you choose to ignore these guiding principles, I can guarantee you that the Lord will not guide you by the use of a fleece, no matter how hard you try. But that is what often what happens. A young person will look at the list of Biblical qualities that he or she should seek in a husband or wife and think, “Well, that list is just too long. If I wait for someone who fulfills all of these things, I’ll never get married.” So they proceed to ignore God’s revealed will and start looking for mystical signs in the heavens and coins on the ground. Too many young people search for a husband or wife this way. You ask them, “Do you know what you are looking for in a spouse?” and they reply, “I don’t know, but I’ll know it when I see it.” As the old saying goes—if you don’t know what you are aiming at, you’ll be sure to hit it. I don’t think God only has one possible husband or wife planned for us, but I do believe he cares greatly about our choice of mate and will guide us to an excellent choice. If we are willing to follow his revealed will. When you think of it this way, there might be many people that you could cross paths in a lifetime that would be a good choice in a lifelong mate. God has more than one person that you could marry, but once you are married, that is God’s person for you.

7. Prayer Did Abraham pray for a wife for his son Isaac? There is no explicit mention of his praying in this chapter, but it is certainly implicit. The future of the nation was riding on the marriage of his son. All of God’s wonderful promises hinged upon the successful marriage of Isaac, so we can be certain that Abraham prayed about this decision. He had promised his servant that the Lord would guide him so we know that prayer was foundational to his assurance.

Abraham prayed. His servant also prayed, and his prayer is recorded in verses 12-14. *Then he prayed, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.* Why do you think the servant addressed God the way that he did? He called him, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham.” As far as we can tell, most or all of Abraham’s servants came either from the Egyptians as a gift from Pharaoh or from the Philistines as a gift from Abimelech. This means that when they first became his servants, they would have been polytheistic and worshipped the many gods of their ancestors. Therefore, Abraham had passed on the knowledge of the Lord’s faithfulness to this former pagan. Furthermore, whenever you see the word “LORD” all in capital letters, it represents the Hebrew word Yahweh. So the servant literally prayed, “O Yahweh, God of my master Abraham.” What this means is that Abraham passed on his faith in the Lord to his servant.

Do you recall the three major promises given to Abraham? One, Abraham would bear a son which would lead to a multitude of descendants. How was that promise coming together? This chapter comes at a crucial point in its fulfillment. This chapter is all about Isaac’s future descendants. Remember that while we draw marriage principles from this chapter, it is not about marriage per se. It is about the marriage of Isaac leading to many descendants and the promised Messiah. Therefore, the first promise was well under way. The second was a promise to possess the land. Had that promise been fulfilled at this point? In chapter 23, Abraham purchased a small piece of land as a burial place for his wife Sarah. It wasn’t much, but it was a foothold to possessing the land. The third promise was that Abraham would be blessed so that he would become a blessing to all nations, tribes, people and languages. This promise was also well underway in Abraham’s servant. This Egyptian or Philistine servant, wherever he was from, had

already abandoned his pagan gods and was now worshiping Yahweh, the God of Abraham. Eventually the blessing of a Savior would get to every tribe, nation, people and language and it began in Abraham's own household, and it's still being fulfilled today.

The journey to Abraham's home took anywhere from one to two months. We can imagine that the servant was praying all during the journey. But it's important to realize that when the servant prayed, he had no guarantee of success, only of guidance. Furthermore, through his prayers, the Lord's will was revealed to him in several steps.

Step one comes in verse 26. *As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives.* This is what the servant said when he realized the identity of Rebekah. This knowledge alone caused a spontaneous celebration of worship in the servant. The angels had guided him, just as Abraham had said. The Lord had led him to the exact right place and the exact right time and specifically answered his prayer for a woman who would offer him a drink and also offer to water his camels. But that wasn't the end of the story. He had met the family but he had not yet secured a bride. He had been given guidance but not success.

Step two occurred in verse 49 when the servant said the following to Rebekah's brother, Laban. *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.* This was the turning point for the servant—either Rebekah and her family agreed to the marriage with Isaac or they did not. The servant was prepared for either answer from them.

Finally, step three comes in verse 59. *So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men.* Prayer led to guidance which eventually led to success. The servant was anxious to begin the journey home and did not want any delays. It's important to remember that prayers for guidance in regard to a future spouse, whether prayed by the one seeking a husband or wife, or by the parents, will probably be answered in smaller steps and not all at once. But like most things in life, we get impatient and want answers to our prayers now!

My own story about meeting Karen demonstrates how such things happen a little at a time and involve a large web of relationships working together. In high school I had a group of friends that involved several guys and girls. Eventually I started dating one of the girls. During that time she decided to spend her upcoming summer working as a counselor at a Lutheran camp. I wasn't Lutheran, but I didn't have any job lined up for the summer, so I decided to apply. This girl broke up with me and only worked at the camp for one summer. I worked there for four summers and who do you think joined the staff my third year? Karen Evans, my future wife. One friend led to other friends and new places which led to meeting Karen. Such things happen in steps and involve a complex web of relationships.

Abraham prayed for a wife for Isaac. The servant prayed for guidance to be led to the right woman and Isaac prayed as well. *Isaac... went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching.* What do you imagine that Isaac was doing while he was "meditating" in the field as the days approached for the return of the servant? This is another one

of those places where the text is silent but we can assume that Isaac was praying for his future bride. I mean, how perfect is that? Just as he returned from praying for his bride, she arrives on the back of a camel. In most romances, it is usually the man who arrives in shining armor on a white steed, but a dusty woman riding on a camel is almost as romantic, don't you think? The point is that the timing of the whole scene is rather amazing. The prayer of everyone involved was answered that day.

This brings us to thinking about what your prayers should look like. Our prayers must not be lazy prayers but rather intelligent prayers. Let me show you what a lazy prayer sounds like. "Lord, help them find the right one." Or this one: "Lord, please help my son find a nice Christian girl to marry." How lame is that?! Do you see how lazy these prayers are? Instead of these lazy prayers, intelligent prayers from dad might be, "Lord, help me to build a better umbrella. Help my son understand purity. Give me a good way to teach him the principle of purity. How can I prepare him for a good career that will provide for his family? Lord, help me to love my daughter in such a way that she feels accepted and loved for who she is, not only as my daughter, but as a daughter of King Jesus." Why do women look for "love in all the wrong places?" Generally, they search somewhere else because it was not provided in adequate measure at home. Intelligent prayers for a son looking for a wife might be: "Lord, help me to build my umbrella so I will be ready when my future wife comes along. Help me respect my parents and live joyfully under their umbrella. Please let me live in purity. Help me to love your Word so much that I only look to it to determine the qualities of a good wife." Daughters seeking a husband can pray: "Lord, do not allow me to look for love in all the wrong places. Help me to appreciate qualities other than outer beauty and male charm. Father, keep me pure at all costs."

Do you see why these are intelligent prayers? Because they strive to apply the Word of God into the specifics of daily life right now. Or how about this for a final prayer: "God, you know who I will marry. Please lead me to this person according to your revealed will and according to your perfect timing." That's a prayer God would delight to answer.



I want to close this message with a story about a wonderful marriage and a life well lived. John Rappl made mention of John Wooden last week during sharing. John Wooden was the coach of the UCLA basketball team for 28 years. His last twelve years as a coach he won ten national championships—a feat that has never been matched by any other coach. Wooden died two weeks ago on June 4, four months shy of his 100th birthday. His story sums up many of our principles because he was raised in a good family, he made a good decision about his life partner and he lived his life well, on and off the court. [This video](#) was produced a few months before he died.

In his most recent book, Wooden wrote: "I have always tried to make it clear that basketball is not the ultimate. It is of small importance in comparison to the total life we live. There is only one kind of life that truly wins, and that is the one that places faith in the hands of the Savior."¹ (Wooden is also quoted as saying, "If I were ever prosecuted for my religion, I truly hope there

would be enough evidence to convict me."²) Strong families produce strong marriages where the gospel can be spread to the ends of the earth. And that's a good model to emulate on Father's Day.

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¹ John Wooden (2003). *They Call Me Coach*. McGraw-Hill.

² John Wooden; Steve Jamison (1997). *Wooden: A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections on and Off the Court*. McGraw-Hill.