

COMMUNICATE OR MANIPULATE

GENESIS 24:67

Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

The word "**honeymoon**" is a wonderful word.

Whether yours was two weeks in Hawaii, or two days in Panama City Beach it was a romantic highlight. Just the word conjures up warm feelings and pleasant memories - *you and your **honey** enjoying each other.*

I've read several definitions of the word "**honeymoon.**" Here's one: "A honeymoon is a thrill of a wife-time." Or how about: "It's the period between 'I do' and 'You'd better'." Or "It's the vacation that a man takes before starting to work for a new boss." Or maybe: "It's the morning after the knot before."

Actually, the word "**honeymoon**" was coined to describe the *first moon*, or the *first month* of a marriage. Apparently, it's the first month or **honeymoon**, that's the sweetest and the tasty time in a marriage.

But for every marriage there comes a point when the honeymoon ends. One man observed, "**The honeymoon is over when he phones that he'll be late for dinner and she's already left a note that it's in the refrigerator.**" I've heard, "**The honeymoon is over when your dog brings you your slippers and your wife barks at you.**" Or "**The honeymoon is over when he finds out he married a big spender and she finds out she didn't.**"

Every honeymoon eventually comes to an end, and then the marriage begins. Marriage is like a violin. You can make beautiful music, but when the music stops the strings are still attached. Real love is not a love that lasts for a few days, or a few months, but for a lifetime.

People talk about *love at first sight*, but what impresses me most is love at the 18,250th sight.

Did you know that if you're married for fifty years you'll wake up and look at your spouse 18,250 times.

When you're married 50 years you see the good and the bad - the sweet and the sour. Real love is not as *exciting* as it is **enduring. It's love for the long haul.**

Yet the sad truth is that marital love can grow stale. Love can get lost in the commotion of life. Love can *begin well*, but that doesn't mean it will *bloom well*.

Such was the case with Isaac and Rebekah. At first it seemed their honeymoon would never end, but it did.

Isaac and Rebekah stopped communicating and an avalanche of mistakes followed in their marriage. As a result their harmony and happiness was short-lived.

Tonight, I want us to examine the three phases of what became a distant marriage. We'll call them: **love at first sight - love at first slight - love at first spite.**

Remember Isaac - he was the **promised son** of Abraham and Sarah. He was the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abram that His descendants would be God's special

people, a divine tribe. Isaac was one of the patriarchs of Israel, God's chosen.

Isaac was also a **privileged son**. When Abraham died Isaac inherited his vast wealth and holdings.

Isaac was also a **pious son**. He was a man of faith.

When Abraham was called by God to scale the mountain called "*Moriah*" and offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice - *Isaac didn't object*. And he could have, at the time Isaac was a grown man, probably in his mid-30s.

(He was about the age of Jesus, who 2000 years later, allowed His Father to offer Him as a sacrifice on the same, Mount Moriah.) We speak a lot of Abraham's faith, but certainly Isaac's faith was equally impressive.

Isaac was a *promised son*, a *privileged son*, a *pious son*, but he was not a **perfect son**. For Isaac was also a **pampered son**. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and never made his own mark on the world.

Isaac was content to ride his daddy's coattails.

We're told in Genesis 26:18, "**Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father.**" *He didn't even dig his own wells.*

He reopened the wells of Abraham. Isaac wasn't a man who *ventured out*, he was happy to just *lay back*.

Isaac followed in his father's footsteps, both in good ways and in bad. Recall when Abraham went to Egypt he lied about his wife, Sarah. Sarah was a beauty - a real *knock-out*, but Abraham was afraid of getting *knocked-off*. He instructed

Sarah to tell the Egyptians she was his sister, so they wouldn't kill him to take his wife. To save his skin he threw his wife under the bus.

And this wasn't a one time occurrence for Abraham. Twenty years later he does it again on a trip to Gaza.

Actually, this may've been his habit. In Genesis 20 when Abraham explains his strategy to Sarah, he says, "This is a kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, 'he is my brother.'"

But parents pay close attention. When Isaac grows up and his family makes a trip to Gaza - guess what he says to Rebekah, "Honey, you're so beautiful and I fear for my life. Lie to them, tell them you're my sister."

Tragically, he follows in the footsteps of his father.

It's a scary thought, but every parent better start thinking about it, your habitual sins are contagious.

There's a great likelihood your children will repeat your same mistakes. Parents, don't underestimate the power of your example, either for good or for bad.

It was not until Sarah died that Abraham decided to search for Isaac a wife. Apparently, they had previously been one little happy family. But when Sarah *slipped away* Isaac *slipped into a funk*. He became depressed.

In an effort to jar him out of it, Abraham called on his servant Eleazar to go to Abraham's own people, his family living in Haran, and seek out a wife for Isaac.

When Eleazar reaches Haran he decides to pray. He asks the Lord to send a girl who will water his camels.

And this was no small task. Eleazar had 10 camels and *I'm sure you know* a camel can drink 25 gallons at a single sitting. That's 250 gallons of water to draw and fetch. Any woman who would attempt such a kindness would be a giving, sacrificial, unselfish, energetic, hospitable young lady - *a very fine catch for Isaac.*

Well, before Eleazar can say "Amen," up walks Rebekah. *"Hey mister, would you like for me to water your camels?"* Whoops, there it is! Later when the story is recounted to Rebekah's family they marvel, and rightly conclude, *"The thing comes from the LORD."*

I suppose these days, this is as close as a parent can get to arranging their child's marriage - *pray and work out a deal with God.* I've been praying for my children's future spouses from the time they were born.

So Abram's servant, Eleazar, proposes to Rebekah on behalf of Isaac - and the young girl accepts.

She'd never seen Isaac. She'd only heard about him from the servant, but she travels 500 miles to marry him. Talking about a *blind date - this was the ultimate.*

And I'm sure the trip from Haran to Judah was an exciting one. Rebekah asking questions about her groom. Getting to know him through his servant.

When Rebekah's caravan finally arrives she sees Isaac out in the fields. He's meditating on the Lord.

In Genesis 24:64 we have the first case of cigarette smoking in the Bible. The OKJ puts it, “**She lighted off her camel.**” *Not sure if it was filtered or unfiltered...*

Actually, she jumped down and ran into his arms.

It was **love at first sight!** We're told in 24:67, “**Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.**”

There was no question Isaac and Rebekah loved each other. Some forty years later we're told that the Philistine king saw Isaac smooching with his wife.

Genesis 26:8 says they were caressing.

These love birds had been married forty years and the fire was still burning. There was plenty of passion.

In fact, when it turns out that Rebekah was barren - she couldn't have children - rather than get mad, or bitter, or depressed, Isaac gives his wife the greatest favor a husband can give a wife. *He prays for her.*

Husband, *your* wife may be going through a period of barrenness. She might have several kids, but maybe she's barren in other ways. Perhaps she's enduring a spiritual drought, or she's at a place in her life where she's dried up emotionally, and seriously depressed.

We're told in Genesis 25:21, “**Now Isaac pleaded for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.**”

It just goes to show God likes to hear and answer a husband's prayer for his wife. Men, intercede for your, Rebekah, and God will make her fruitful in lots of ways.

But here's what I want you to notice about Isaac and Rebekah... Though they were close physically, we see them **petting** - and though they were close spiritually, we see Isaac **praying** - there was still a **problem**.

There was a bond physically and spiritually, but emotionally there was a distance. What began as *love at first sight*, soon became **love at first slight**. They slighted each other and shortchanged their marriage.

There were several problems in their relationship.

First, remember when Isaac took Rebekah to be his wife we're told he brought her into "*Sarah's tent.*"

Sarah's tent? Ladies, how would you feel if your newlywed husband wanted to spend his wedding night in your dead mother-in-law's bedroom. *That's creepy!*

Isaac had been close to his mom. Its possible, *even probable*, she had been overprotective of her only child. **Her mothering love had been a smothering love.**

Sarah sheltered Isaac from many of life's hardships. Rather than grow into a man and learn to stand on his own two feet, perhaps Isaac had found it easier to yield the tough decisions to his mother - *sort of hide behind his mom's apron strings*. A helicopter mom ran his life.

I really shutter when I read that phrase, its so laced with innuendo, "*Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent.*" In

a sense, Rebekah took the place of Sarah in Isaac's life. She was a talented and capable woman. It was easy for Isaac to capitulate leadership.

Rather than be his wife, Rebekah *mothered* Isaac.

Over time Isaac became the passive husband for whom Rebekah lost respect. And Rebekah became the manipulating wife from whom Isaac withdrew.

Some infertile couples believe if they can just have a baby it'll answer all their problems, but for Isaac and Rebekah their children *revealed* their problems.

Rebekah's pregnancy was difficult and she couldn't understand why. She prayed and ask the Lord.

And God spoke to her, Genesis 25:23, “Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.” Of course, this prophecy was fulfilled with her twins, Esau and Jacob.

But what's provocative about the story, is Genesis never records Rebekah sharing the promise with Isaac.

The only other time Rebekah is mentioned outside the book of Genesis, *Romans 9:12*, the Scripture makes a point of affirming that this promise was spoken exclusively to Rebekah. Paul writes, “It was said to her, ‘the older shall serve the younger.’”

My point is, Isaac and Rebekah had apparently stopped talking. They ceased communicating, even about the important stuff. They had grown distant.

Amazingly, an issue of this magnitude, *a direct promise of God*, was never discussed between them.

Isaac could talk to God about Rebekah, but Isaac and Rebekah couldn't talk to each other about God.

Did you hear about the hard-of-hearing couple, coming home from their 70th wedding anniversary.

The old man said to his wife, "Honey, after seventy wonderful years together I've found you tried and true."

His wife got angry and shouted back, "And after seventy years I'm tired of you too!" Proving that a lack of communication can be a real problem in a marriage.

There was once a couple who raised and pickled cucumbers. The husband liked to watch things grow so he took care of the planting. The wife liked to work in the kitchen so she did the pickling. When the man died the kids came over to plough the garden. Their mom said, "No thanks guys, but I never liked cucumbers. I only pickled because your dad wanted to grow them."

The youngest son heard her and was upset. He said that just a few days before his father died, he had confessed that the only reason he planted the garden was to give their mom something to do in the kitchen.

On the one hand, it was commendable that they put each other first and sacrificed for one another. But they could've saved themselves a lot of grief and wasted effort if they'd simply talked and shared their feelings.

Husbands, when you come home from work you say you're too tired to talk to your wife - or too busy - or you just don't care enough any more - or perhaps you don't always really know how to express your feelings...

The answer is not to *withdraw* as Isaac did.

If you're too tired *save some energy...* If you're too busy *make some time*. If you just don't care, *repent of your sin and love your wife as Christ loves the church*.

And if you just don't know how to talk, you can at least listen. Be a good listener and you'll open up important lines of communication with your wife.

Famed British author, Thomas Carlyle, never got over the regret he felt for neglecting his wife. In his diary there appears a line that has been called the saddest sentence in English literature. Carlyle wrote of his wife, "Oh, that I had you yet for five minutes by my side that I might tell you all." There's a lot we'd tell our wife if we knew we'd never have the opportunity again.

One study revealed that 70% of all marital problems involve **a silent husband...** *The more the man withdraws the less secure the woman feels, and the more she tries to manipulate him to gain control. The more she tries to gain control, the more he withdraws and does his own thing... A vicious cycle gets created.*

You can call it, **love at first slight**.

The bitterness and disappointment start to snowball. Walls go up. Communication becomes impossible. One day you wake up, and **the wedlock is a deadlock**.

As men we need to work hard to communicate with our wives. *For where there's a silent husband, it produces a scheming wife.* How can your wife trust you, if you never let her into your thought process?

How can she be submissive, unless she knows your plans? *If I were to ask your wife to describe your five year plan would she be able to answer accurately?*

When women aren't privy to their husbands thoughts, they don't trust him - and if they don't trust their husband, they'll try to take control of the family.

A wife who's kept at a distance resorts to manipulation, and in subtle ways tries to force her husband into doing what she wants him to do.

Like the fellow who said, *"I wouldn't say that my wife always gets her way, but she does write her diary a week ahead of time."* Always remember, *"where communication breaks down manipulation starts up."*

Of course, why it happens doesn't make it right...

Moodiness, pouting, sulking, withholding, sexual bargaining... are all forms of marital manipulation.

For some wives it's become such a habit they don't realize they're doing it. They've seen mom do it, and friends do it - *they no longer see that they're doing it.*

Ladies, if you've become a manipulator it's time you stopped, and trusted God to guide your husband. You don't have to be in control, when God holds the reins.

The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah included *love at first sight, love at first slight*, and **love at first spite**.

The friction in this marriage soon became evident in the family. Aloof from each other, Isaac and Rebekah sought emotional attachment through their kids.

Each parent clung to a different child and played the two against each other. It made a mess of their family.

Esau was a hunter. He was a rugged, meat and potatoes kind of guy. Isaac saw in his older son, Esau, the strong independence that he had lacked. He lived out his own failed ambitions through his son, Esau...

Whereas Jacob was Rebekah's favorite. She coddled him and kept him around the house. Jacob loved to cross-stitch and work on floral arrangements.

An expert on family matters writes this, "**While a child may be getting pampered and overindulged by one parent, he is getting criticized and rejected by the other. Neither one does him any good... He grows to disrespect the parent who indulges him and despises the parent who rejects him.**" Favoritism can be fatal in a family. Isaac and Rebekah were stone cold guilty.

Once a couple were on their way home from Aunt Emma's funeral. Emma had been a handful. She was an obstinate old bitty who tortured the family for years.

Finally, she died. On the way home the husband turned to his wife and said, "**Honey, I hate to say it, but I'm actually glad your Aunt Emma kicked the bucket.**"

Suddenly a look of horror swept over his wife's face. She said, "**My Aunt Emma, I thought she was your Aunt Emma!**" This couple had made a horrible, insufferable mistake, because they had failed to communicate.

Communication breakdowns will effect a family.

It's interesting when the moment came for Isaac to bestow the blessing of the firstborn - it would've been an opportune time for Rebekah to tell her husband of the prophecy she had received while the boys were in her womb - *but that ship had sailed*. **The result of slight, after slight, after slight... is a show of spite!**

Neglect hurts. When you're *left out* over and over, you want to *take it out* on the person you blame.

You know the story... Isaac goes to bless Esau, but Rebekah the manipulator has clothed Jacob in a furry disguise. She's made him feel hairy like Esau. She's also taking advantage of Isaac's diminished eye-sight. She passes off Jacob for Esau and tricks her husband.

Rebekah knew God intended to bless the younger over the older - *I'm sure she assumed she was helping God out*. But when it comes to God's will the ends never justifies the means. God's purposes are fulfilled through *love and truth*, not *manipulation and deception*.

Because of Rebekah, Esau ends up enraged. He seeks to kill his younger brother. Jacob runs for his life. Sadly, Rebekah never sees her favorite son again.

The problems in Isaac and Rebekah's marriage spill over, and destroy what could've been a happy family.

There're so many lessons to be learned from this story, but it's a textbook case of why couples need to work hard to keep open vital lines of communication.

Trust is crucial to every marriage, and trust is based on frequent, and honest, and humble communication.

As one Bible commentator writes, "Trust is essential to any loving relationship, and trust cannot flourish in a home where there is dishonesty and deceit. Husbands and wives who purposely keep things from each other, who sneak around to hide the truth about finances, the activities they're involved in, the things the children have done, or anything else, can never enjoy the fullness of God's love in their relationship."

Paul said in Ephesians 4:15, "But speaking the truth in love." This is great advice for husbands and wives.

Truth doesn't ignore love, and love doesn't ignore truth. Nothing is gained by concealing our feelings, but those feelings should be expressed in a caring way.

Communication involves more than just an emotional rant from time to time. Venting or dumping isn't exactly healthy communication. Effective communication puts ourselves in the other person's shoes. We speak the truth, but we do it in a gentle, considerate, loving way.

The lesson husbands learn from Isaac is get off your duff, and reenter the marriage - re-engage your wife.

Your wife needs to know your inner thoughts, and to feel the emotional support that comes from caring communication. No

excuse justifies a husband barricading his emotions or bailing out on his wife.

A loving leader has to learn to communicate.

And to the wives, Rebekah's example teaches that a woman only hurts herself, and her children, when she seeks to manipulate her husband. Trust God with your husband, or you'll end up messing up your family.

Manipulation mars a marriage. It creates problems that surface in the future - problems you live to regret.

People with good marriages, are those who connect not just physically and spiritual, but also emotionally.

The willingness to communicate is the key to a good marriage. And when you make the effort God is certain to bless. But if you don't: *love at first sight, turns into love at first slight, which turns into love at first spite.*

May the love in your marriage never deteriorate that far... I pray your honeymoon lasts a lifetime as you learn to trust God, and communicate with your spouse.