

Walking with
Old Testament
Women

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Walking with Old Testament Women

Imaginative studies for Bible
meditation

FIONA STRATTA

Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Introduction | 7 |
| Sarah (Part 1) | 10 |
| Sarah (Part 2) | 16 |
| Rebekah (Part 1) | 22 |
| Rebekah (Part 2) | 29 |
| Rachel and Leah (Part 1)..... | 38 |
| Rachel and Leah (Part 2)..... | 44 |
| Rachel and Leah (Part 3)..... | 50 |
| Tamar (Part 1) | 57 |
| Tamar (Part 2) | 64 |
| Miriam (Part 1) | 72 |
| Miriam (Part 2) | 79 |
| Rahab (Part 1) | 88 |
| Rahab (Part 2) | 96 |
| Naomi..... | 102 |
| Ruth | 109 |
| Naomi and Ruth..... | 117 |
| Hannah..... | 125 |
| Bathsheba (Part 1) | 133 |
| Bathsheba (Part 2) | 142 |
| Esther (Part 1) | 150 |
| Esther (Part 2) | 158 |
| Notes | 167 |

Introduction

The following reflective monologues and studies are based on biblical accounts of women in the Old Testament, and are intended for groups who meet together to grow in their relationships with God and each other, or for individual use. The group should first read the Bible passage about the woman to be studied, followed by the monologue, which is written as if the woman herself is speaking.

There are several types of Christian meditation; one of them is to 'enter' scripture using the imagination. Superficially we may feel very different from these women who lived so long ago, but as we hear their stories we discover that we share much in common: joy and heartache; love and jealousy; difficult choices; the need for patience, wisdom and courage. We are not so dissimilar: in our society, too, there are dysfunctional families beset by difficulties, and many women across the world have little personal choice or freedom. Of greatest importance, we see in these narratives God's wonderful grace, his undeserved favour and blessing, touching the lives of these women, and we discover that this same grace is available to us.

Imaginative reflection on the Bible is not a new concept. It was practised by St Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century. It can be a powerful way for God to speak to us, for this kind of meditation involves not only the mind but also the emotions. Jesus himself used imaginative narrative in the form of parables to engage with his listeners and thus to teach them effectively.

Although the monologues follow the biblical accounts accurately, not every detail will be true. After all, we are imagining, filling in the gaps with the possible. This need not be a problem, for it is precisely what we do when we tell Bible stories to children; we embellish the story to capture the child's imagination with the purpose of teaching spiritual truths.

Points for reflection and discussion follow the monologues, enabling issues to be explored and spiritual growth to take place. Links between the Old and New Testaments are made in each study, and we see how the Old Testament points to the coming of Jesus Christ. We experience the truth of Paul's words to Timothy, 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realise what is wrong in our lives... God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16–17). In some of the studies, verses are suggested for meditation: this involves a slow, deliberate and prayerful consideration of the verses, probing their depths. It allows scripture to work in us; we grow in our relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Finally, there is the opportunity to record what God has been saying to us and the implications for our individual spiritual journeys. After all, in coming to God's word, we want not only to learn but also to change and to grow, so that we are not just 'hearers' of the word but 'doers'. The monologues can be used without the discussion element as a means of initiating a time of silent personal reflection or led meditation for a group. They can also stand alone effectively in many other contexts: for example, individuals can use them in private meditation, or they can be read to larger groups, such as congregations.

The facilitator

If you are the group facilitator, you will need to ensure that pens and paper are available, along with a variety of translations and paraphrases of the Bible. For the longer passages, you may need to select the passages to be read and the questions for discussion.

It will be your responsibility to introduce the study and to find someone to read the reflective monologue. Try to ask someone who is able to read aloud fluently and expressively.

You will need to read the links and facilitate the discussion, allowing enough time for personal reflection at the end. It may be helpful to play quiet music during the reflection.



Sarah (Part 1)

Introduction

- Read Genesis 11:31–32; 12:1–5; 16:1–9, 15.
 - Ask God to speak to you through this episode. You could use the words from 2 Corinthians 1:2: ‘May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.’
 - Sit back, relax and close your eyes. Imagine the scene as someone reads the monologue.
-

Monologue

I had expected to feel nothing but relief as I saw Hagar and Ishmael walk away. Yes, I did feel an element of relief, but my feelings were far more complex than that. I felt guilty, for this whole situation had arisen through my wilful planning. I experienced a heaviness of heart, knowing that the man I loved was grieving profoundly as he watched his firstborn son disappear into the distance. Their absence would leave a gap in Abraham’s life that I knew I could never fill, although our child, Isaac, would be a comfort and joy to him.

In the silence brought about by their departure, I fell to musing on the years that lay behind us, back to the time when we were known as Abram and Sarai. We started our life together in the fashionable and wealthy city of Ur and then

moved with Abram's whole family to Haran. We had all the comforts of a prosperous urban life. My husband, unlike most of the men around us, had a deep faith in the God of his ancestors; he worshipped God with absolute devotion. Perhaps this was why God chose him and gave him the instructions that took us away from the stability of family and home to live as nomads, albeit prosperous nomads. Why were we willing to part with all that? Because at that stage in our lives, Abram had complete confidence in God's wonderful promises to us. It was a confidence that at times was to be severely tested.

'Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family,' God had told him, 'and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.'¹ 'I will give this land to your descendants.'²

God's promises made all the constant upheaval worthwhile, for my one deep sorrow had been our childlessness. I reasoned that there could be no descendants and no great nation without a child, an heir. As we made our way through Canaan, further and further south, my hope—no, my expectation—grew that I would soon be pregnant. In spite of our age being against us, we believed we would have a child. We waited and waited, going through times of danger and conflict, but through it all God protected us and prospered Abraham; he grew in wealth and gained the status of one who could be the father of a nation. But still no heir; doubt started to gnaw at my faith. We made mistakes through the years, but, despite them, the promises from God continued to come to Abram: 'I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession.'³

Our offspring would be like the dust on the ground, like the stars in the sky—far too many to count.

But although Abram was increasingly respected by the people around us, I saw a despondency grow within him that I could not lift. Somehow I felt responsible for his discouragement: I could not bear him the child he wanted, the child I craved. We had been in Canaan ten years and still there was no baby. It was my failure, my fault.

Slowly but surely, I lost faith and hope; I gave up. My husband was never going to have an heir through me. Yet he still hung on to the promise that he would father a great nation. What was to be done? So I thought of an answer—*my* answer—to the dilemma. The women around us gave their servants to their husbands if they were barren; the servant was the property of the wife and so the baby born from the union belonged to the wife. Quite simple. *We would* have a child, but through Hagar, my servant. Perhaps, as the Lord had prevented me from having a child, this was his intention all along. So I offered my servant to Abram, and such was the longing in his heart for an heir that he took her.

I was totally unprepared for the bitterness of the experience, for the devastation in my soul, as I saw Hagar go to him. When she became pregnant, Abram's joy further pierced my aching heart. I had planned for this; it was what I had wanted, but the baby she carried seemed like *her* child, not mine. Moreover, Hagar knew that she now held a different position within our household, and she taunted me. All respect had gone. Nothing could ever be the same again. What had I done?

In anger I approached Abram, and I confess now that I blamed him: 'This is your fault. You took my servant that I gave you; you made her pregnant and now she despises me. May God judge between us.'

Perhaps Abram felt some shame but he did not take any responsibility. He gave me the choice of what should be done, for Hagar was my servant. So I began to treat her harshly, giving her unending tasks, finding fault at her every step, showing no sympathy for her sickness or her discomfort, ignoring her fatigue. I drove her—until I drove her away. One morning she was just not there. I would have rejoiced openly had it not been for Abram’s silence and troubled look. It was for his sake that I accepted Hagar back, for there was no mistaking his relief when we saw her stumbling towards us, exhausted and dishevelled.

From that time on, Hagar was different; she did all I required of her, and I in turn was less demanding. We lived carefully around each other, without conflict but without affection. When her son Ishmael arrived, Abram’s joy was bittersweet to me. I had provided him with an heir, but at great personal cost.

Reflection and discussion

- Did any words or phrases in the monologue stand out for you?
- Ur of the Chaldeans was a sophisticated pagan society, but Abram and Sarai kept faithful to God in this culture. How can we remain faithful to God in our culture?
- Abram and Sarai spent some time in Haran before being prompted to move on to Canaan. Frequently God’s will for us unfolds in stages. Discuss possible reasons why this is so often the case. Can you give examples from your own life?
- It is likely to have been difficult for Sarai to leave her family and friends and to embrace such a different lifestyle, even though she and Abram had been promised blessings both for themselves and for others. The desire for

comfort and security can be a barrier to stepping out of our comfort-zone to follow God's plans. Have there been times when you have experienced God's blessing after making a difficult move or stepping out in faith?

- In the monologue, Sarai's confidence in God's promises is gradually eroded by her life experiences. In what ways have you experienced something similar? What helps us to hold on to our faith in difficult times?
- By giving Hagar to Abram, Sarai tried to solve her problems without consulting God. Waiting for God's timing can be a challenge, and the temptation to take matters into our own hands is very real. Share occasions when you have been tempted to do this or have done it. When have you had to wait a long time for God's intervention? In hindsight, were there some benefits in waiting?
- It is reassuring to note that God renewed his promises to Abram in spite of the mistakes that he and Sarai made. Describe times when God has shown his faithfulness and kindness to you, even when you have not been walking in his ways.
- In the monologue, we see Sarai lose faith in God's promises. Is there an element of choice as to whether we hold on to our faith when disillusioned? Think through together how we can hold on to the little hope that remains when we are in very challenging situations.
- Sarai took on the local custom in offering Hagar to Abram, and the consequences were costly for them all. In what ways do we take on the lifestyle patterns that surround us? How can this be harmful? Just because something is socially acceptable, it does not mean that it is wise or the right course of action.

- Sarai, in her anguish, blamed Abram for the outcome of her plan and Hagar's treatment of her. It is perhaps an instinctive human reaction to blame others when the consequences of our choices are tough, rather than admitting the error of our ways, taking responsibility and asking for forgiveness. Sarai's reaction was to attack Abram verbally and Abram's response was to withdraw, leaving Sarai to take the initiative. Neither response was helpful in the situation. 'Attack' and 'withdrawal' are typical responses to conflict. Learning to take personal responsibility and to avoid blaming others may not be easy, but it is important as we grow in Christ. Share your experiences of this process of maturing.
- 'In your anger do not sin' (Ephesians 4:26, NIV). In her frustration and anger, Sarai treated Hagar badly. Discuss ways in which unchecked anger harms both parties. If you are able, share times when you have had anger directed against you or have directed it against others.
- Sarah forfeited her peace by focusing on her doubts and fears rather than on God's promises. Refer back to the prayer at the start of this study. Pray for each other, that you will know God's grace and peace.

Conclusion

Take time to pray through your findings. What might God be saying to you? Is anything particularly relevant to your life at the moment? Write down what you have learnt and refer back to it regularly in the days ahead so that it becomes part of your thinking, reacting and general outlook.



Sarah (Part 2)

Introduction

- Read Genesis 17:15–19; 18:1–15; 21:1–14. You may like to read some of the verses before the monologue and the rest of the verses after it.
 - Ask God to speak to you through this episode. You could use the words from Ephesians 3:20–21: ‘Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.’
 - Sit back, relax and close your eyes. Imagine the scene as someone reads the monologue.
-

Monologue

Thirteen years went by; the boy, Ishmael, was practically a man and well established in his father’s affection. Those were quiet years, settled times, but they were not to last. One day, on God’s instruction, Abram altered his name to Abraham, meaning ‘father of many’. How he still clung to the promises of God—countless descendants, father of nations, father of kings, the entire land of Canaan! Next, Abraham insisted that he should circumcise himself, Ishmael and all the males

within our household. This, God had told him, was a mark of the everlasting covenant between God and those who would descend from Abraham.⁴ Abraham changed my name to Sarah, again on God's instruction—Sarah, meaning 'princess'. Princesses give birth to kings, to nations, but I had never given birth. The very name seemed to mock me. Abraham looked as if he was about to tell me more—perhaps, exactly what it was that God had said to him—but, looking troubled, he stopped.

Not long after this, three strangers appeared at our tents. Immediately my husband offered them hospitality: the shade of trees, water and food. At his request, I set about baking bread, and a calf was chosen and prepared. Eventually the men sat under the trees eating and speaking together. I stood just inside the tent entrance, listening.

'Where is Sarah, your wife?' one asked.

'She's in the tent,' I heard Abraham reply.

Another spoke: 'I will return to you next year at this time and she will have a son.'

I laughed inwardly—me, well past the age of producing children; worn out me, to know the pleasure of holding my own child? Abraham was past it too! It was a dream that I had long ago abandoned.

'Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she question whether a woman of her age could have a child?' asked one of the strangers. 'Is anything too hard for the Lord? Next year, I will return and she *will* have a child.'

Who was this who knew my thoughts and reactions? Fear of having doubted the Lord God and of dishonouring my guests flooded through me. I slid further into the tent. 'I didn't laugh,' I lied instinctively.

The one who was the Lord spoke: 'You did laugh.' It was not so much an accusation as a statement of fact.

Later, Abraham told me all that he had held back from me on the day of the circumcisions: how he, too, had laughed when God had told him that I, Sarah, would give him a son and would mother a nation; how he had pleaded with God that his son Ishmael should have the special blessing; how God had reiterated that the covenant was to be fulfilled through *my* son.⁵ At that moment, I believed once again that God would keep his promise, and I knew the deep peace born of faith.⁶

So it was that a son was born to us and we named him according to God's instruction—Isaac, meaning 'laughter'. My laughter of incredulity had turned into joyful laughter. God had kept his promise and in our old age I had given my beloved husband a son. After all those years, I knew the wonder of nursing my own flesh and blood, my husband's heir.

My joy was so great that, to start with, I did not take much notice of Ishmael's reaction. Of course, for him, everything had changed. He was no longer to inherit his father's wealth; Isaac would, for he was my son, the son of Abraham's first wife. I suppose Abraham thought that we would all muddle through and that Hagar and Ishmael would come to a point of acceptance.

The day came for Isaac to be weaned and my husband planned a feast to mark this occasion in our son's life. We were in the throes of celebrating, although, as always, I had one eye on my son. He was trying to build up a pile of stones but it kept falling down. I saw Ishmael approach and expected him to help, but he mocked Isaac's attempts. There was no denying the malice in his eyes. Then Ishmael pushed the whole pile over; I had the feeling that it was not the first time such a thing had happened. Shocked, I was about to intervene when I saw Isaac get up and wander off to play

elsewhere. I caught and held Ishmael's eyes for a moment and I knew that we were now enemies.

I became lost in my own thoughts—thoughts of fear and panic. If Ishmael would tease Isaac in a public place, what would he do to him in private? Perhaps he had not given up hope of an inheritance alongside Isaac? But it was through *my* son that God's promises would be fulfilled; it was my son who would father the great nation, my son whose descendants would be as numerous as the grains of sand—my son, *my* son. Abraham touched my arm, noticing my silence and distraction.

I turned to him. 'That slave woman and her son have to go.' I was not even able to name them. 'I will not have that boy sharing Isaac's life and taking any part of his inheritance whatsoever.'

The party was over. I have never seen my husband look so distressed. 'But Ishmael is my son. How can I send him from here?' he said softly.

Abraham walked away and I knew that he had gone to pray. Much later, he returned and told me that he would do as I had requested, for God's promises were for Isaac's descendants. God had assured him that he would take care of Ishmael.

I heard him rise early the next morning and prepare food and drink; heard him speak quietly yet urgently to Hagar and Ishmael; heard Ishmael's remonstrations. But not a word came from Hagar's lips. I watched from the tent entrance as Abraham walked with them to the edge of our encampment, the food and drink now bundled on to Hagar's sagging shoulders. Abraham stood there, staring at them until they were dots on the horizon; then he turned and walked wearily back towards me.

Reflection and discussion

- Did any words or phrases in the monologue stand out for you?
- Thirteen years pass in this story without comment. They were presumably settled times, although, for Sarai, as she was still called, they may also have been years of heart-ache. Then her life changed completely within the course of a year. Share times when you have experienced sudden change. Have there been times when you, like Sarah, believed that you were ‘stuck’ in a situation and yet God intervened in ways you would not have imagined possible? How can we live with purpose during periods in which our lives seem to be standing still? In Romans 4:16–22 we read of the importance of faith and hope during such times. Take comfort from the fact that, although Sarah had abandoned her dreams and allowed cynicism to creep in (hence her laughter), God had not abandoned her.
- In the monologue Sarah discovers that the Lord knows her thoughts and attitudes; she lies to save face. In your own time, meditate on the wonderful words of Psalm 139:1–18. David perceives that God watches over us in love, not condemnation. Like Sarah, we are flawed. How does it comfort us to understand that God knows the worst about us and loves us even so? Read Romans 8:31–39 and find time to let these words sink deeply into your being.
- In Genesis 18:14 the Lord says to Abraham, ‘Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.’ What do we believe is too hard for the Lord today, this week or this year? Share your thoughts and pray, remembering Jesus’ words in Mark

10:27, 'Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.'

- We read in Hebrews 11:11, 'By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised' (ESV). It is God's faithfulness that we depend on, not our own. How does this take the pressure off us as we 'try' to have faith? Sarah was commended for her faith; she became the matriarch of the Hebrew people. Read the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1: 'Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.' You may be facing situations that require patient faith. If you are able to do so, share them.
- 'For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him' (Genesis 18:18). Sarah and Abraham became the channel through whom God's plan of redemption for the whole world would be fulfilled: through their line, the Messiah would be born (Matthew 1). Read Isaiah 51:1–2 and Romans 4:23–25. Reflect on the enormity of God's plan fulfilled through frail people. How can we take confidence from this, both at a personal level and at a global level?

Conclusion

Take time to pray through your findings. What might God be saying to you? Is anything particularly relevant to your life at the moment? Write down what you have learnt and refer back to it regularly in the days ahead so that it becomes part of your thinking, reacting and general outlook.



Rebekah (Part 1)

Introduction

- Read Genesis 24:1–41 before the monologue and Genesis 24:42–67 after the monologue.
 - Ask God to speak to you through this episode. You could use the words from 3 John 2: ‘I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as you are progressing spiritually’ (NIV).
 - Sit back, relax and close your eyes. Imagine the scene as someone reads the monologue.
-

Monologue

We can sometimes look back and recall the one moment that shaped the rest of our lives—one encounter, one decision. And what a small decision mine had been, to offer to bring water for a stranger’s camels.

My life-changing moment took place many years ago. I was brought up in north Mesopotamia, over 500 miles from here. We were nearing the end of a routine day and I had gone with my friends to collect water. As we arrived, we were aware of a stranger standing near the well, watching us. I had just filled my jug and placed it on my head to return home when the foreigner came up to me and asked for a drink. Of course, I lifted my jar down and gave him some water. I observed his

camels, counting ten in all. They were well laden and looked as if they had been travelling for some time.

'I'll bring up some water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink,' I offered.

Such a look came over the man's face: pleasure, joy and relief. His gratitude encouraged me on my way as I stepped up and down to the well, drawing water with my heavy jug and carrying it to the watering trough. It was a lengthy job and, by the time I had finished, my friends had long since left. Tired, I returned to the well to fill my jug with water for my family's use. They would be wondering what had kept me. As I climbed up the steps for the final time, the stranger was still there watching me. He approached me once more, but this time he had something in his hands for me: two costly bracelets and a beautiful nose ring.

'Please tell me who you are and whether there is room for me to stay with your family this night,' he asked.

'I am the daughter of Bethuel; my grandparents are Nahor and Milcah. We have room for you and your men, as well as straw and fodder for your camels,' I replied.

Then, to my amazement, the man fell to the ground and started to worship the Lord, the one we, too, served and loved.

'Praise to the God, the God of my master Abraham, for he has shown us yet again his love and faithfulness. He has led me right to the doors of Abraham's brother, Nahor.'

How incredible! I ran home and told my family what had happened, showing them the bracelets on my wrists and the ring. My brother, Laban, immediately gave directions to our servants to prepare the house for the guests and to make space for the camels. He ran to collect Abraham's servant and brought him home, ensuring that the animals and men were well provided for.

Then, most surprisingly, the man refused to eat. First he had to tell Laban his story—how his master had sent him to find a wife for his son, Isaac, from his own family; how an angel would guide and direct him, and how he had arrived at the well after several weeks of travelling and had prayed to God for guidance. He would ask a girl for water and, if she offered also to draw water for his camels, this would be a sign from the Lord that she was to be the wife of his master's son.

Was this not exactly what had happened? Without knowing it, I was the answer to this man's prayer. I stood in total amazement, listening as Abraham's servant explained to my brother and father that the promise he had made to his master was binding, unless my family refused to agree to my returning with him. With bated breath I waited while my brother and father left to discuss the matter. Their answer echoed my heart's desire and response: 'This is so obviously from God, so what can we say? It is not for us to decide "yes" or "no" when God has so clearly shown his will. Take Rebekah with you and may she be the wife of your master's son.'

At their words, once more the man bowed low and worshipped God. Then he gave orders to his companions to bring in precious gifts for my family. I was given silver, gold and beautiful clothes. I had never seen anything as exquisite as those presents.

The feasting and celebration continued late into the night. However, next morning, I was called early by my brother and my mother. They had been discussing arrangements with the servant: apparently he wished to leave straight away. My brother and mother preferred me to remain for a few more days to adjust to the change, to prepare and for us to say our goodbyes. I was to have the final say.

'I'm ready to go now,' I said.

Why was I so sure? I never had a shadow of doubt, never a second thought. Perhaps it was the evidence that God was at work, the excitement and romance of it all, or the impulsiveness of youth. How quick we are to seize an adventure and challenge at that age, to look to the future full of confidence, with barely a glance at the past! I failed to grasp how that parting must have grieved my family.

My mother instructed that my childhood nurse and my maids should accompany me. I would be glad of their familiarity and company as we travelled further and further away from all I had known and loved. As we gathered to leave, my family's blessings and prayers strengthened me. I have always remembered Laban's parting words: 'Our beautiful sister, live in a full and bountiful way. May you have many descendants and may your offspring overcome their enemies.'

The days turned into weeks. As we travelled, there was plenty of time for my excitement to recede, although I remained in a state of nervous anticipation, thinking about the man whom I was to marry. I asked many questions of the servant who had journeyed so far to find me—questions about my new family, their home, their land, and especially questions about Isaac. I came to understand that God had special plans for Isaac and his descendants. The nearer we got and the more the servant told me, the more I grew to love this man who was to be my husband.

At last, the servant informed me that we were nearing his master's home and that the fields surrounding us belonged to Abraham. The afternoon was drawing to a close. Looking up, I saw a man walking towards us across the field ahead. Asking to dismount, I enquired who the man was.

'It is Isaac, my master,' came the reply.

Immediately, my heart beating fast, I pulled my veil over

my face. Isaac approached and spoke at some length with his servant. Then, smiling, he led me into their home. So it was that I was welcomed into their family and became the wife of this man who had inherited great wealth and great promises from God. I cherished the love and tenderness that Isaac showed me as we started our life together. In return, I was able to comfort him as he grieved the loss of his mother; and so we shared our joys and sorrows.

Reflection and discussion

- Did any words or phrases in the monologue stand out for you?
- Rebekah's act of kindness was her life-changing moment. Can you look back and see moments or decisions that completely changed the direction of your life? Share some of them. If you can pinpoint a specific date for your coming to faith, this was surely a life-changing moment. Share your testimony and reflect on the difference it has made to your life.
- Through her act of kindness, Rebekah shaped not only her own future but also the future of a nation. A kind-hearted deed may have a great long-term impact. A biblical picture of this might be the tiny mustard seed, which grows into a tree that can provide for many birds (Luke 13:18–19). How does this picture encourage us in our daily lives?
- We see in this event that both the giver, Rebekah, and the receiver, the servant, received blessing. In Luke 6:38 Jesus says, 'Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' (NIV). Share how an act of kindness

shown to you has made a difference, or how you have been blessed as a 'giver' in a certain situation.

- However, Rebekah did not give in order to receive, but from a genuine desire to meet a need. Neither did she do the bare minimum expected of her in response to the servant's request. Read Matthew 20:26–28. How can we follow Christ's example in having a 'servant-heart'?
- Abraham's servant experienced God's guiding hand in an amazing way. In what ways has God guided you? Guidance takes many forms and may not always be as straightforward as in this episode. You may wish to share areas of your life in which you are seeking guidance and pray for one another.
- The servant received an amazing answer to prayer, and his response was to praise and worship God. Gratitude delights God and benefits us. Read Luke 17:11–19 and Ephesians 5:20. It seems to be a human trait to take things for granted and forget to show gratitude. How can we guard against this?
- In the monologue, Rebekah is seen as decisive and wholehearted in her willingness to follow God's leading, and several possible reasons are given: 'Perhaps it was the evidence that God was at work, the excitement and romance of it all, or the impulsiveness of youth.' Why can our desire to be wholehearted in following God diminish as we get older?
- Rebekah is blessed by Laban: 'Our beautiful sister, live in a full and bountiful way, may you have many descendants and may your offspring overcome their enemies.' Have you ever spoken words of blessing over someone or been blessed through words spoken over you? One biblical blessing is the prayer at the start of this study; others are

Numbers 6:24–26 (the Aaronic blessing) and 2 Corinthians 13:14 (the Grace).

- Rebekah, by means of her energy and vibrancy, brought comfort and healing to Isaac’s grieving heart. We can often help others just by being who we are. Share your experience of this.

Conclusion

Take time to pray through your findings. What might God be saying to you? Is anything particularly relevant to your life at the moment? Write down what you have learnt and refer back to it regularly in the days ahead so that it becomes part of your thinking, reacting and general outlook.