

Video #5 Transcript

I used to think of myself as an optimist. I've always been one to dream up new plans to come up with great ideas and I've always looked on the bright side and if I couldn't find a bright side I would just make one.

So when I began dating a theology major in college, I started dreaming up some amazing plans for our future. In my imagination they sounded like "Hmm, what if we started speaking together? What if we started writing books together? What if we became a family of traveling evangelists?"

Well, it turns out that I'm actually not so much an *optimist* as I am an *idealist*. I have this crystal-clear vision of the future I want, and as soon as things are starting to unfold differently, I am determined to change it, to fix it, to improve it. Whatever it takes, I'm not someone who just wants to know the future. I want to actually create the future. Because that way, it'll turn out the right way. **My way.**

Well, unfortunately, idealism is a double-edged sword. You see, when I'm thinking about the way things could be, I'm using my God-given creativity, but all too easily what starts out as an ideal becomes an idol, and I move from what could be to what would be. "If the human beings in my life would cooperate with me..." and then I move to the way things *should* be, as if somehow I have a corner on the market of future truth.

What God has been teaching me over the last year is that an *idea* becomes an *idol* when I force it. And the choice to force it is a choice to hurt.

I want to share with you a cycle I've become aware of and see if you can recognize any part of this cycle in your own life. At number 1, it starts out with "I have an expectation." Well, of course I'm an idealist, so I love coming up with new ideas. And I was actually thinking these what-if thoughts about my future way back in college when we were actually invited to speak together for Week of Prayer. I was thrilled. In fact, I was so thrilled that I completely forgot how easily an idea can become an idol.

So moving to number 2: "I force it to happen." Now of course, I don't need to force anything when things are going smoothly. AKA the way I want them to. I only don't need to force it when there's an obstacle or a problem. Well, in this case, my problem was named Daniel, my future husband. Because when I suggested sweetly that we spend some time working on our Week of Prayer message, and then I told him that we needed to sit down and work on our Week of Prayer message. Now, I didn't think of myself as meddling or being controlling, I was just helping God out. I mean, after all, it was a Week of Prayer, right? Finally, getting no response, I demanded that we sit down to work together and that's when Daniel flat-out told me he had no intention of working with me. He would do his own thing and I could do mine.

Well, that led to number 3: “I experienced disappointment.” Oh my goodness, what an understatement. I was devastated. What do you mean he won’t work with me? How are we gonna write books and how are we gonna become a family of traveling evangelists? I could not believe that God had let me down so badly. And I couldn’t stop thinking about what would have happened if only Daniel had cooperated. Which quickly became what should have happened again. As if somehow, I knew the future truth.

Well, from three to four is “I feel hurt.” I felt so betrayed, both by God and by Daniel. I’m naturally wired for collaboration. I would rather work together all the time than ever work by myself. And so I kept asking “Why won’t Daniel work with me? What’s wrong with me? Wait... why won’t Daniel work with me? What’s wrong with him?” Each time I took a ride on the hurt cycle I felt more bitterness, more resentment, more despair.

And for me, what keeps this whole cycle spinning is that as an idealist, nothing makes me happier than a new idea. So the way I move on from feeling hurt is to start all over again.

And again, what God has been teaching me is that the choice to force it is a choice to hurt, to feel hurt myself, and to hurt others.

Now, for too many years, decades really, I had no idea - I didn’t recognize that I was wasting so much time and energy. I was wasting my life going round and around on this same cycle.

Maybe you are a bit of an optimist too. Maybe a bit of a dreamer. Maybe you’re someone who tends to look on the bright side, and I’m gonna tiptoe really really gently on some sacred ground here. Perhaps you’re a helper. You know, some of us just love helping people do what they should be doing. We love helping everything turn out the way we want it to. Some of us even love helping even when we weren’t invited and we aren’t even welcome.

Now, let me be clear: we are absolutely called to help.

But what I want to do today is help us become very clear about when good helping goes bad, because I think we’re all idealists at heart. We have a vision of how things could be in the future and as soon as things start to unfold differently, we want to jump in. We want to fix it. We want to make things happen, whatever it takes. We want to help create the future, but in the name of helping, sometimes we force a future that turns out our way. Now, we can throw ourselves so heavily into the hurt cycle and then come out wondering why we feel so hurt.

And what God has been convicting me of in my life is it’s time to learn to do something other than force it. Now in 1 Corinthians 13:12, scripture says “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in

part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” Scripture is clear that the future is all not ours to know or to create. That is God’s department.

And so today, we’re going to look at a cautionary tale in Scripture. It’s the story of someone whose actions and choices and consequences teach us what not to do. We’re gonna spend time with the story of a woman who was not content in seeing her reflection. She was not satisfied knowing only in part. She did everything she possibly could, force the future the way she thought it should happen, and as a result, she failed to mature as the woman and the wife and the mother that God created her to be.

It’s the story of Rebecca, and it’s found in Genesis 24, 25, 26, and 27. I’ll be referring to all of these chapters, but I don’t have time. Now, if you have time to pause the video and go read them, by all means, go do it. Otherwise, I’m going to be summarizing most of the story and reading just a few key verses.

Now prayer played such an important part in the early part of Rebecca’s story. Abraham’s servant prayed for God’s guidance to find a wife for Isaac and Rebecca was the answer to his prayers. After Isaac and Rebecca got married and remained childless, Isaac prayed and Rebecca became pregnant with twins. And during her pregnancy, Rebecca prayed directly to God herself.

Genesis 25:22-23 tells us “The babies jostled each other within her, and she said ‘Why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her ‘Two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated. One people will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger.’”

Well, Esau was born first and then Jacob. And over time, Isaac and Rebecca picked favorites. Isaac preferred Esau, Rebecca preferred Jacob. Years passed, and the day came when Isaac, who was old and blind, decided it was time to give Esau his blessing. Genesis 27: 2-4 record his words. “Isaac said, ‘I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death. Now then, get your equipment, your quiver and bow, and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat so that I may give you my blessing before I die.’”

Well, Rebecca overhears this conversation and she conspires with Jacob to trick Isaac. She tells him to go get one of his father’s goats, which she’ll prepare exactly the way Isaac likes. Genesis 27:11-12 continues the story. “Jacob said to Rebecca his mother ‘But my brother Esau is a hairy man while I have smooth skin. What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing.’ His mother said to him ‘My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say, go and get them for me.’”

Well, Rebecca puts goat skins on Jacob’s neck and hands, and her trick works. Until it doesn’t. Jacob is able to fool his blind father and receive the blessing, but then Esau

returns. Isaac discovers he's been betrayed by one of his sons, and by his own wife, and Esau is so angry that Rebecca now has to hatch a whole other plot to save Jacob's life. She sends him away and ultimately, she never sees him again.

You see, Rebecca thought she could force a future that turned out her way, and again, every choice to force it is a choice to hurt, to be hurt myself, and to hurt others.

Now, this is what I believe - the great value of cautionary tales in Scripture we have the opportunity for vicarious learning. We get to witness from a distance the consequences of someone else's poor choices in this case. Someone who turns out to be a lot like me, and maybe like you, too.

To learn from Rebecca's story, we can ask "Which of Rebecca's choices have I made in my own way? Which of Rebecca's consequences have I experienced or am I like to experience? And what can I learn from Rebecca's consequences so I can make different choices?" And here's the big question that I want to look at.

Now, as I unpack the lessons that I learned when I spent several months really really studying Rebecca's story, as I look to the future desiring to live my one life well - how can I learn from Rebecca's story how to face it, not force it? In other words, how can I learn to face the future with God rather than try to force it on my own? Now, if you have something to write with and something to write on, go head and number a piece of paper 1 to 13 because I'm gonna share with you 13 principles I learned about how we can face it - face the future with God instead of trying to force it on our own.

And I want to invite you to rate how you're doing on each one. Put a plus if you feel like you're doing pretty well. If you feel convicted by the Holy Spirit that this is an area to work on, put a minus. And if you're not sure, put a question mark. I'll prompt you with the first one, and then you'll just do the rest on your own. So, principle number one: How can we learn to face it, not force it? Face the future with God, not force it on our own?

1. Believe that God will provide.

Rebecca feared scarcity, and it caused her to meddle, but when you believe God will provide, you face it, not force it. Now just pause, and on your paper, just give yourself a plus if you feel like you're doing pretty well, a minus if you know that no, that's an area you need to work on, a question mark if you're not sure. For number one: believe that God will provide.

2. Say yes to God.

Rebecca said yes to herself, but when you say yes to God about your future you face it with Him, rather than trying to force it on your own.

3. Take your question “Why is this happening to me?” to God.

Rebecca asked that question in a totally self-centered, self-absorbed way. When you make your “Why?” God-centered, you face the future with Him rather than trying to force it on your own.

4. Accept God’s answer and trust Him to know best.

Rebecca ignored, misused, and withheld the answer she got from God. She never even told Isaac about it. When you accept God’s answer and trust him to know best, you face it, not force it.

5. Love unconditionally.

Rebecca chose a favorite. When you learn to love unconditionally, you face the future with God, rather than trying to force it on your own.

6. Accept challenges that will help you grow and change.

Rebecca chose to stay in her comfort zone, but when you accept challenges that help you grow and change, you face the future with God rather than trying to force it on your own.

7. Take your problems to God and leave them with Him.

Rebecca, she took matters into her own hands. When you take your problems to God and leave them with Him, you face it, not force it.

8. Turn to God to fill the empty places in your heart.

Rebecca, she expected and tried to make other people fill the empty places in her heart. When you turn to God, you face the future with him rather than trying to force it on your own.

Number nine is one of the hardest ones for me:

9. Allow others to experience the natural consequences of their choices.

Rebecca promises to fix or take the blame for anything that went wrong. When you allow others to experience the natural consequences of their choices, you face the future with God rather than trying to force it on your own.

10. Protect intimate knowledge to keep people in relationships safe.

Rebecca used her intimate knowledge of her loved ones, of her husband and her sons, against them. When you protect intimate knowledge to keep people in relationships safe you face it, not force it.

11. Tell the truth.

Rebecca flat-out lied to get what she wanted. But when you tell the truth, you face the future with God rather than trying to force it on your own.

12. Learn to suffer with and for others.

This is another one I struggle with so much. Rebecca tried to avoid and prevent suffering, but when you learn to suffer with and for others, you face the future with God rather than trying to force it on your own.

13. Face the consequences of your actions and make amends.

Rebecca tried to escape the consequences of her actions, but when you accept the consequences and make amends, you face the future with God rather than trying to force it on your own. So the choice to face it is the opposite of the choice to force it.

And I want to walk briefly here through the hurt cycle and show how it transforms into the hope cycle instead.

Point number one: I have an expectation. I am full of anticipation. God is doing something wonderful. I'm learning to do this more and more in my marriage. It has only taken me 32 years. And in my parenting, only 28 years there, but here's the thing: when I switch to my expectations of other people and focus with anticipation on what God is doing, it's a completely different thought process.

Then between points one and two is when we tend to hit obstacles, maybe even a "No." and that's where we have to make a choice. This is where you get to choose: will you force it? If you do, you're off on the hurt cycle. Or will you face it? And when I learn to face it with God, when I do this - especially in my marriage with my husband - instead of focusing on my husband and his unwillingness to work with me, or wishing he would do things my way, I end up focusing on God's love and God's plan and God's Word. And it is a world of difference.

Number three, instead of disappointment, I surrender. I remember "Oh yeah, He is God, and I am NOT." I opened my hands, my heart, my mind, and instead of the clenched fists I'm-gonna-force-this-to-happen-no-matter-what, I have the open hands and the open heart of surrender.

And then at number four, instead of hurt, I have hope. And Romans 5:3-5 tell us that hope does not disappoint. When it comes down to it, face it is just another way of saying surrender, which means to return what was never mine in the first place. And control of the future has absolutely never been ours. It has always been God's department.

So force it or face it, the choice between hurt and hope.

You know, for those of us who are idealists, it is so much fun to ask the what-if questions. We love creating. We love dreaming. The big question, though, is what we're gonna do when the answer comes back "No." Well, we force it or we face it. To face it we have to ask a new what-if question. We ask "What if..." of ourselves.

So here's just a few examples. I ask myself "What if I accept that my husband and I will never work like a team the way I used to dream? What if I focus on what I do have in my relationships rather than what I don't? What if I start following God and only God?" So feel free to borrow those sentence starters. "What if I accept... What if I focus... What if I..."

You see, living your one life well starts with surrender. My favorite definition of surrender is this: surrender is handing God a blank piece of paper for Him with my name already signed at the bottom.

As you surrender your one life to God, you commit to face the future with Him, rather than trying to force it on your own.

And when you face it, not force it, you will become a powerful force for hope.