

Who Are You When Nobody Else Is Watching?

So she went down to the threshing floor and did all that her mother-in-law had instructed. When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then Ruth came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. At midnight, the man was startled and rolled over; and there, a woman was lying at his feet. He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Spread your cloak over me, for you are a redeeming kinsman." He said, "May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter. You have shown your last act of kindness to be greater than the first, because you have not pursued young men, whether poor or rich. So now, my daughter, do not worry. All that you ask me, I will do for you. All of my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. (Ruth 3:6-11)

Naomi's counsel is questionable. Knowing that Boaz had only seen Ruth dirty and sweaty at work in his fields, she counseled Ruth to get a full makeover, buy a new party dress, and put on some nice perfume. She was then instructed to attend the great party Boaz would attend and wait patiently for him to have fun celebrating his great success in business, eat well and have a glass or two of wine before getting in front of him. Ruth was further counseled to take the risk of actually approaching Boaz while he was asleep to invite him to propose marriage.

Heeding Naomi's counsel, Ruth went to the threshing floor, which would have been a packed plot of ground where the grain from the harvest was threshed by being hit with a sledge, trampled by animals (Mic. 4:13), or crushed under the wheels of a cart (Isa. 28:28). The goal was to separate the kernels from the husk, chaff and stalk. The straw would be used for

animals, the chaff for fuel and the grain for food. The entire occasion was a time of great celebration and partying (Isa. 9:3, 41:14–16), and this party would have been particularly enthusiastic because it was the first after many years of famine.

Boaz, along with the other men who had attended the harvest and accompanying party, slept on the threshing floor next to the grain to protect it from thieves. While Boaz slept, Ruth took the very daring and bold counsel of Naomi and uncovered his feet to lie at them. Startled, Boaz awoke and asked who was with him there in the dark. Boaz probably wondered if a prostitute was there to tempt him, as prostitution was common on the threshing floor where men had a few drinks, were in good spirits and had money to spend (Hos. 9:1).

Ruth revealed herself as his humble servant, but there was likely a moment of uncertainty for Boaz about her intentions. She had recently converted, but Ruth was a Moabite whose entire race began when a young woman climbed into bed with her inebriated father and seduced him (Gen. 19). Furthermore, the entire story happened in the dark days of the judges when there was great sexual immorality of every kind.

Ruth asked Boaz to answer his own prayer of 2:12 and be God's wing of covering over her. In short, she didn't propose marriage to Boaz, but rather declared her love for him and invited him to ask for her hand in marriage. The phrase "spread your wings" is also sometimes translated "spread your garment/blanket" and is elsewhere used as a symbol for engagement much like our current engagement ring (Ezek. 16:8; Deut. 23:1, 27:20; Mal. 2:16).

In the act, a man demonstrated that he would both lovingly cover the woman for the entirety of her life and invite her into his bed as his beloved wife. In 1 Corinthians 7:39, Paul says that a widow, like Ruth, is free to marry any Christian whom she chooses to love, and here, Ruth took an enormous risk

in declaring her heart to Boaz. Furthermore, while she didn't break any clear command of Scripture, Ruth did indeed trample many cultural taboos as she was younger and Boaz was older; she was a servant and he was her boss; she was a Moabite and he was an Israelite; she was poor and he was rich; and she was a woman, and he was a man.

Bible commentators vigorously debate whether Ruth's actions were godly or good. While it doesn't seem like her actions technically crossed a line, it does seem that they danced on it vigorously late at night after few glasses of wine. To say the least, it's complicated!

Today, single people often ask where the line is in dating. But Ephesians 5:3 (NIV) says, "among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality." Furthermore, in the great romantic book Song of Songs, the refrain is "do not arouse or awaken love until the time is right" (Song 2:7, NLT). Indeed, the question is not where is the line as much as when is the time. The time is marriage, but not before.

Our true character is often exposed when no one is around and/or when we're caught off-guard. How can you pray for yourself to have integrity like Boaz? {eoa}

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What We Can Learn From Ruth About Dating and Marriage

One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, why should I not find a home that will be good for you? Now is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you have been working? Tonight he winnows barley on the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but do not let the man know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, notice the place where he is lying. Go in and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you will do." She said to her, "All that you say to me I will do." (Ruth 3:1-5)

At this point in the story, Ruth and Boaz have taken center stage. Their relationship commenced with great hope as Boaz spoke kindly to Ruth, prayed for her, protected her, and provided for her all as one would expect from a man ready to be a godly husband. Furthermore, Ruth has at this point in the story been laboring in Boaz's field for perhaps six to seven weeks until the time of harvest. Time is running out, since Boaz and Ruth won't be seeing one another anymore when the seasonal work comes to an end and they go their proverbial separate ways. The author is a wonderfully gifted storyteller who has led us to a place of crisis and urgency where, like every good television show, movie, and novel, we want the main characters who are friends to fall in love and live happily ever! But how could this happen given the culture Ruth and Boaz lived in?

As a Moabite, it would have been common for Ruth to perhaps date, and possibly even sleep with or even live with, a man as the route to marriage. Ruth needed the sort of courtship detailed in Scripture. But she lacked the kind of family to

help in that process. Today, these two paths to marriage—courtship and dating (see chart below)—remain for us.

For the first time in U.S. history, single adults reportedly outnumber married adults. This trend is also becoming increasingly common in other Western nations. Part of this is due to the fact that people are waiting longer than ever to marry. The first marriage for most men is around age 30. For women, it is in the late 20s. This is considerably higher than at any point in U.S. history. Relatedly, single people are sexually active and using birth control and abortion hoping to prevent conception. Furthermore, people are cohabiting during their single years. It is estimated that about a quarter of unmarried women between the ages of 25 and 39 are currently living with a partner and about half have lived at some time with an unmarried partner (the data are typically reported for women but not for men). Over half of all first marriages are now preceded by cohabitation, compared to virtually none earlier in the century. The most likely to cohabit are people aged 20 to 24.

Subsequently, the 3,000-year-old story of Ruth is incredibly timely. Many, if not most, Christian singles like Ruth don't come from a godly family but aspire to marry a godly person and have a godly family. In Ruth, we see that she seeks wise counsel from an older woman and in faith takes an enormous risk and “pulls a Ruth” to put herself in front of Boaz for marriage.

Looking back at your life, are there any situations where you put yourself in a potentially unsafe situation, but God was gracious to protect you from harm? {eoa}

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How Boaz Is a Type of Christ

Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the Lord who has not withdrawn His kindness to the living and to the dead." Naomi said to her, "This man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeeming relatives." Then Ruth the Moabitess said, "He even told me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.' " Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go with his young women, for in someone else's field you might be harmed." So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:20-23).

A clue to the remainder of the story is revealed when Naomi informs Ruth that Boaz was, in fact, a relative somehow connected to them through her deceased husband, Elimelech (see also Ruth 2:1). Subsequently, Boaz was qualified to become a "redeemer" for the women if he so chose and if others concurred.

In the Old Testament, the redeemer was a relative who would literally redeem people and property. If someone sold themselves into slavery/servitude to pay off a debt, the redeemer was the family member who could purchase their freedom (Lev. 25:35–55). If a widow was in need, the redeemer would care for her (Ruth 4:4–10), and if someone was murdered,

the redeemer would avenge the crime (Num. 35:9–34). If someone was going to lose land because of poverty, the redeemer was the family member who would save the land by paying off the debt (Lev. 25:23–34).

What's curious about Naomi's statement is that her words were true in the spirit, but not the letter, of the law. Boaz, in fact, had no legal obligation to Ruth because she wasn't a blood relative like Naomi. Furthermore, Boaz wasn't the closest relative to Naomi; another man was technically the legal redeemer. But because Naomi loved Ruth so dearly, she considered her as a daughter and expected her to be treated as such. Furthermore, in her conversion, it seems that Ruth was no longer to be seen as anything less than a fully respected and cared-for member of God's people. In this, we see that sometimes we feel closer to people in God's family than we do to those in our own family.

With wise motherly counsel, Naomi encouraged Ruth to stay close to Boaz and his workers because he was a godly and safe man. So the women settled into a routine of sorts, and Ruth continued working as the harvest was coming to an end. By that time, the relationship of Boaz and Ruth seems to have cooled, as they weren't pursuing any sort of official romantic relationship. And, because it was almost harvest time, time was running out for any sort of fairytale ending. This set the stage for the next scene of the book, where the single woman "pulls a Ruth" on the threshing floor.

In closing, we see the themes of the hero of this section of Ruth ultimately illustrated in the hero of all of Scripture, Jesus Christ. As Spurgeon said, Jesus is "our glorious Boaz" who came to His earth to look upon us with love like Ruth and care for us like Boaz though He had no obligation to do so. Jesus is our *hesed*, and the lovingly gracious kindness of God was extended to us as a gift of God for our eternal life—much like the *hesed* that was given to sustain the life of Ruth. And, like Boaz, Jesus is our great Redeemer who died, paying

our debt of sin, thereby redeeming us ... although he was in no way obligated to do so.

What observations can you make regarding Boaz and his relationships, specifically his relationship with God? His employees? The women he encountered? The marginalized? {eoa}

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Are You a Spiritual Taker, Debtor or Giver?

At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come over here, and eat some bread, and dip your piece in the vinegar." So she sat down beside the harvesters, and he passed her some roasted grain. She ate and was full and had some left over. When she got up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, "Let her glean even among the bundles, and do not harm her. Also pull out some grain for her from the bundles and leave it so that she may glean it, and do not rebuke her." So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She drew it out and gave her what she had left, after she had been satisfied (Ruth 2:14:18).

As if his lavish treatment of Ruth weren't enough, Boaz again went beyond the letter of the Old Testament law all the way to grace in his treatment of Ruth. In a masculine and noble gesture, Boaz guaranteed Ruth's safety, and he also assigned her a most advantageous place from which to glean. On top of that, he ordered that she be ensured a very generous provision.

There are three kinds of people in the world. Takers have a sense of entitlement, seeing what is yours as theirs. Debtors have a sense of owing, as they expect whatever they give to be given back. But givers have a sense of generosity and give without any hope of receiving. In this way, givers are like God, who is the most generous of all. Understanding the generous nature of God's grace, Boaz gave to Ruth generously through his words, his works and his wealth.

Also demonstrating ongoing remarkable character, Ruth continued her day of hard labor until the evening darkness fell upon her. The ephah of barley she received from Boaz's kindness and her day's labor is an amount that scholars debate, but it was perhaps four to six gallons, or some 30–50 pounds, which Ruth carried home. In our modern day, this would be the equivalent of perhaps a few weeks' wages or a few thousand dollars for one day's work!

Arriving home, Ruth gave the food left over from her lunch with Boaz and his employees to Naomi, who was likely to have been very hungry. Excited by God's provision for both their dinner and the riches Ruth obtained from her one day's work, Naomi simply had to know who had been so kind to her. Speaking for the first time in this scene of the story, Ruth reveals that the gracious provision of God had come to them through the hand of Boaz, the man of war and wealth and wherewithal.

Overjoyed, the bitter Naomi who hadn't lost all faith, prayed that God would bless Boaz for his kindness to her as well as bless the name of her family that had suffered greatly. In her

prayer, Naomi spoke of the “kindness” of God by using the word *hesed*, which is an important theme throughout the book. It summarizes all of God’s most beloved attributes, such as love, grace, mercy, kindness, compassion, patience and devotion. And *hesed* is occasionally used to describe people who reflect the character of God, such as with Ruth and Boaz. The debate among scholars on Ruth 2:20 is whether Naomi was saying that God or Boaz had acted in a way of *hesed*, and the truth is that both are true: God acted kindly through the providential kindness of Boaz.

Are you a safe person for others? How can you become a safe person for others, and what does it look like for someone to be safe in our culture? {eoa}

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9 Character Traits of Spiritually Safe People

So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should acknowledge me, a foreigner?” Boaz answered and said to her, “I have been told all that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, and how you left your

father and mother and your homeland and came to a people you did not know before. May the Lord reward your deeds. May you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” Then she said, “May I find favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and have spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not like one of your servant girls” (Ruth 2:10-13).

Boaz simply wanted to give to Ruth and take nothing from her. Boaz answered Ruth’s question by publicly praising her character as a woman with faith in God and faithfulness to her mother-in-law. Boaz also prayed for her, despite having only known her briefly, and asked that God would reward and protect her. Boaz’s prayer is one of many in the book; each were prayed for someone else and all were answered by the conclusion of the book (1:8–9; 2:12, 20; 3:10; 4:1–12, 14).

Two things are most curious about Boaz’s prayer for Ruth. First, not only did he pray that Ruth would be rewarded by God for her faithfulness, he also answered his own prayer. In this, Boaz is like Jesus, who prayed that sinners would be forgiven while hanging on the cross and then died to answer His own prayer and enable forgiveness.

Second, Boaz was apparently a frequent reader of the Psalms because he included a common theme from the Psalms as part of his prayer for Ruth. Boaz essentially referred to Ruth as a lovely but vulnerable small bird that God had taken under His wing. This word picture is a heart-warming reminder that God doesn’t use His proverbial wings to fly from us, but rather cover us that we might have safety (Ps. 17:8), refuge (Ps. 36:7, 57:1, 61:4, 91:4) and joy (Ps. 63:7).

In the example of Boaz, we see nine aspects of safe people:

- Safe people understand the Father heart of God.
- Safe people care about our safety.
- Safe people introduce us to other safe people.

- Safe people enforce good boundaries.
- Safe people are generous.
- Safe people encourage our character.
- Safe people pray we would flourish.
- Safe people provide comfort and kindness.
- Safe people point us to God as our safe place.

In conclusion, we see that although Ruth was a despised Moabite who had worshipped a false god (Deut. 7:1–4, 1 Kings 11:1–2) called Chemosh (Num. 21:29, 1 Kings 11:7), God both saved her and blessed her. God did this through His invisible hand of providence that was made visible through the hand of Boaz, a masculine man of honor who walked hand-in-hand with Him. Likewise, to God we are each Moabites—outcasts, idolaters and unworthy of grace or favor. But just as Boaz came to his field to speak with and care for Ruth, so Jesus, our great Boaz, came to His earth to give us gracious favor and take us under His proverbial wing.

FOR MEN: Boaz has the Father heart of God for Ruth and Naomi. How can you receive this kind of heart and nurture in safe and life-giving relationships with the women in your life?

FOR WOMEN: Boaz presents a human picture of the Father's heart for His daughters. Is it easy or difficult to believe that God has the same love and care for you? Is it easy or difficult to believe men like Boaz exist who are safe for the women in their lives? Why? {eoa}

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Why the Book of Ruth Is More Relevant to America Today Than Ever Before

Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the harvesters, "May the Lord be with you!" And they said to him, "May the Lord bless you." Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is this?" So the servant who was in charge of his harvesters answered, "She is the young Moabitess woman who came back with Naomi from the land of Moab. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather grain among the bundles behind the harvesters.' So she came and has remained from morning until now, though she rested a little while in the house." Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field and leave this one. Stay close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field in which they reap and follow after them. I have commanded the men not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn" (Ruth 2:4-9).

The timeless book of Ruth is timelier than ever. For the first time in U.S. history, as well as in many other nations, the majority of adults are single. And anyone seeking a mate can testify that finding a safe person is perhaps more difficult than ever.

Who can you trust, especially if you're a single woman who's poor and new to a big city? That's the situation Ruth found herself in as a new Christian on the brink of starvation in Bethlehem.

For the first time, the human hero of the book of Ruth, Boaz, steps onto the stage. His name means “strength,” and he rose above the previous men in the book who had failed in so many ways. Illustratively, his name also appears on one of the pillars in Solomon’s temple (1 Sam. 9:1; 1 Kings 11:28; 2 Kings 5:1; Neh. 11:14). This is fitting because Boaz was a man with enough character and strength to hold up Ruth and Naomi so that their life wouldn’t crumble around them.

We are told that Boaz was a distant relative in some way through the family of Elimelech, Naomi’s deceased husband. Furthermore, he was spoken of as “a worthy man,” which is used throughout Scripture to refer to men of wealth (2 Kings 15:20), war (Josh. 6:2–3, Judg. 6:12, 2 Sam. 17:8), and wherewithal (1 Sam. 9:1, 1 Kings 11:28, 2 Kings 5:1, Neh. 11:14). Boaz continually displayed such impeccable character, blessing everyone in the story, that many have called him a “type” of Jesus Christ. The great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon affectionately referred to Jesus as “our glorious Boaz.” Though Boaz wasn’t a prophet, priest or pastor, he is a paragon of piety.

Ruth’s character was also impeccable. Rather than dating, relating and fornicating, this single and broke young woman worshipped, worked and waited. With the two women likely very hungry and desperately in need of food, Ruth asked her mother-in-law, Naomi, for her approval to glean in the fields. In this request, we see that the women had hit the proverbial rock bottom. Ruth took a great risk, venturing out in faith as a foreign woman to scavenge for food in a new town.

Looking at the character traits displayed in this passage, what would a man like Boaz look like today? A woman like Ruth?
{eoa}

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Why Ruth 2:1-3 Is Unprecedented in All of Scripture

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband, a man of prominence and means from the clan of Elimelek. His name was Boaz. Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go into the field and glean among the heads of grain behind anyone in whose eyes I may find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she went to glean in the field behind the harvesters. She happened to come to a part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek (Ruth 2:1-3).

The way in which this is stated is very unusual and unprecedented in all of Scripture. It essentially says that Ruth got "lucky" or by "chance" and "coincidence" found herself "fortunately" in the field of Boaz. The phraseology is so peculiar it has led to much speculation about what the author intended. Indeed, the author used an ironic tone to grab our attention and turn our focus to the invisible hand of God's providence in the daily affairs of ordinary people. Ruth arrived at the field of Boaz not because an angel led her, or because a voice spoke to her from heaven, or because of any other miraculous occurrence. Instead, we see that God's

invisible hand was working through Ruth's decision about which field to glean.

In Acts 17:26, Paul says that it is ultimately God who determines where and when we live. By peering beneath the loom of our lives, we often see what appears to be various knots of free will and choice, but by peering above the loom, as God does, we see that He was weaving nothing less than a meaningful and orderly tapestry out of the frayed ends of our lives. When life comes together, some people will give credit to happenstance, circumstance or chance rather than God's providence. But the Bible is clear: Fortune is a false God who likes to take credit for God's creativity (Isa. 65:11). This is the big point the author of Ruth is driving home: *God is involved in our lives and directing our destiny.*

Adding to the irony, we witness that not only was Ruth in the field of Boaz, but she, by providence, also happened to be there when he was making the rounds to examine his business venture. We then hear the first words of Boaz in the story, and they were a brief prayer for his employees, that God's hand of providence would be with them. Echoing the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24, his workers likewise responded with a brief prayer that God would bless their boss.

Looking back at your life, whom has God brought into your life who was really a blessing? {eoa}

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Why Naomi's Bitterness Was Actually Admirable

So [Naomi and Ruth] went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women asked, "Is this Naomi?"

But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has brought great bitterness to me. I was full when I left, but the Lord has caused me to return empty. Why should you call me Naomi when the Lord has opposed me? The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me!"

So Naomi returned from the land of Moab with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law. They came to Bethlehem at the start of the spring barley harvest (Ruth 1:19-22).

Although admittedly bitter against God after the death of her husband and sons, Naomi decided to leave Moab and return home to God's people and presence. One of her daughters-in-law, Orpah, returned to her people and religion in Moab at Naomi's urging, but Naomi's other daughter-in-law, Ruth, was determined to leave her people and religion to worship Naomi's God and live with God's people. Leaving all she had ever known for the complete unknown, Ruth is an example of incredible faith.

Leaving Moab, Ruth and Naomi made the roughly 50-mile journey to Bethlehem, a place pregnant with meaning, as it was where Jesus would later be born, as promised (Mic. 5:2). There, Ruth spent her time at the equivalent of a food bank trying to get enough to eat to keep Naomi and herself alive. To make matters worse, as a Moabite, she likely faced intense racism, and as a

non-virgin, she was likely mistreated and abused by men. Nonetheless, Ruth shines forth as one of the godliest and most loyal, humble and exemplary women in all of human history.

In this scene, the heart of Naomi is revealed as her view of God and her emotions spill out. Despite the fact that her deceased husband's poor leadership and foolish decisions were responsible for much of the devastation in her life, she rightly confesses that even the darkest days of her life were not lived apart from God's providence. Indeed, everything either passes from or through God's hand of providence, which is a great mystery we all struggle with at times. In this, we can identify with the pain of Naomi, who doesn't have her questions answered by God, but continues to seek His presence and people as an act of faith amidst her pain.

Upon their arrival, the women in town who hadn't seen Naomi for many years were abuzz and curious to know how she had fared. Naomi informed them that though her name meant *pleasant* or *sweet*, God's providential hand had made her life hard and her disposition Mara, or *bitter*. Many have criticized Naomi's bitterness and stood at a distance to criticize her emotional state. But, if we're honest, we must confess that at varying seasons of our life, we can sympathize with the emotional state of Naomi. She married a fool who led her to Moab where she had no family, friends or fellowship. She hadn't been to a worship service with God's people or gotten much, if any, Bible teaching in a decade. Her husband died, her sons married godless women, and then her sons died as well, leaving her without a single grandchild. Naomi had descended from a position of affluence to life as a devastated, broke, bitter old woman with no chance of remarriage, children or job skills to even put food on her table—a picture of desperation and loss rivaling Job. Nonetheless, Naomi is to be admired for her brutal honesty.

Unlike so many religious types whose religiosity doesn't allow them to accept reality, Naomi spoke frankly and truthfully

about her heart. Furthermore, she did so publicly in hopes of being helped and healed by the *hesed* of God's people and presence. In Naomi, we see that although we each will likely arrive at a place of bitterness because of our brokenness, God invites us to be honest with Him and others if there is to be any hope of our lives being healed. This way, our future has the hope of not repeating our past.

Naomi was bitter against God when Elimelech was largely responsible for her situation. Are you at all bitter against God for something that someone else did? In your past or present? How might you heal up from that hurt as Naomi did?
{eoa}

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How Ruth Models a Godly Response to Hardship and Tragedy

Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Return with her!"

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back

from following you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do thus to me, and worse, if anything but death separates you and me!" When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her (Ruth 1:15-18).

Devastated at the loss of her husband and only sons, Naomi remained determined to run to God's people and presence in her hometown, hoping God might also pour out His blessing upon her. Along their journey, Naomi paused to have the first of many dialogues in the book. Roughly two-thirds of the verses in Ruth contain dialogue. As a result, this is a personal book about relationships amidst tough times and a case study in how to respond to hardship and tragedy.

In their dialogue, Naomi encouraged her daughters-in-law to not venture with her, but rather return to their families, as she had no future to offer them. At least the prospect of remarriage and a new life remained possible for them in Moab.

Because the women had bonded in love through tragedy—to such a degree that Naomi now viewed them as “my daughters”—Naomi offered the first of many prayers that appear throughout the book, asking God to give Ruth and Orpah husbands (1:8-9; 2:12, :20; 3:10; 4:11-12, 14). By the closing of the short book, every single prayer is answered by God. Curiously, not one of the prayers is uttered for someone's own wellbeing, but rather only for the blessings of God to be bestowed upon others. Theologically, prayer is simply the fruit of faith in God's providence, as the one who prays does so trusting that He does hear and can answer.

Naomi's prayer for God to “deal kindly” in 1:8 also introduces an important word that is spoken of as a characteristic of both God (2:20) and Ruth (3:10). That Hebrew word *hesed* is a

little word that summarizes the totality of God's positive attributes such as love, grace, mercy, kindness, patience and faithfulness. *Hesed* rightly reveals the nature of God in Ruth and the correlating life of Ruth who imitates Him.

But Ruth chose the extraordinary course of faith in what was likely her conversion moment. In her first recorded words in the book, Ruth responded with a faith perhaps even greater than Abraham's. Like Abraham, she in faith left her family and homeland for an uncertain future. But, unlike Abraham, God never spoke to her, and she trusted in the providence of God as a brand-new believer who had never been with God's people or in God's presence in Bethlehem.

Ruth professed her loyalty to God as one of only three non-Hebrews who do so in the entire Old Testament (the other two are Rahab the converted prostitute in Joshua 2:11, and Naaman the healed leper in 2 Kings 5:15–17). Furthermore, she vowed herself to Naomi even in death, thereby pledging a life in which her geography, theology, and genealogy would be fully entrusted to the providential hand of God. All of this occurred despite the fact that she was a Moabite who was likely to face racism in Israel and constant danger with only the help of an old, broke, lonely and bitter woman. In Ruth's decision, we see that in the new birth of conversion we are given a second family among God's people that, despite their faults and flaws, is sometimes more precious and helpful than our family of birth.

Naomi and Ruth went to great effort to be with God's people. What sacrifices and changes need to be made in your life so you can be with God's people? {eoa}

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God Causes Necessary Endings So He Can Bring About New Beginnings

“So she [Naomi] set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her” (Ruth 1:7-14).

This scene in Ruth takes place in Moab. Moab was considered a godless place because its citizens descended from Moab, who was the son of incest between the wicked Lot and his own

daughter (Genesis 19:30–38). The Hebrews had ongoing hostility with the Moabites throughout their history, in large part because they worshipped a false God named Chemosh rather than Yahweh (Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7). Tragically, in the example of Elimelech, we see how a man, as the head of his home, can impact his entire family and generations to come by the decisions, good and bad, that he makes.

While in Moab, Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, saw their sons marry Moabite women, which wasn't technically forbidden in Scripture (Deuteronomy 7:1–4), but was frowned upon because followers of Chemosh were forbidden from joining God's people in worship (Deuteronomy 23:3). Furthermore, there was a long history of God's men chasing after Moabite women because they were beautiful and immodest. Nonetheless, as perhaps the only family in Moab that worshipped Yahweh, the sons had few options. So Mahlon (meaning "sickness") married the Moabite Ruth, and his brother, Chilion (meaning "failing" or "dying"), married the Moabite Orpah; the marriages lasted about 10 years before both husbands died. Tragically, the father and his two sons died in godless Moab—ironic, as the very thing they moved to Moab in an effort to escape was death.

Like much of life, the questions that arise from this story of why no children were born in 10 years and why further tragedy came is never answered. Perhaps God was withholding his blessing because of the men's sinning? Nonetheless, the scene simply shifts to the widowed Naomi who was left standing alone amidst her devastated life with her two unbelieving and likewise widowed daughters-in-law. If you can picture three widows wearing black and sobbing in a circle as they face the reality of abject poverty and absolute misery, then the opening scene of Ruth is coming into focus.

In his book *Necessary Endings*, Dr. Henry Cloud explains how there are times in life where we need to have a clear ending with a person or place so that we can heal up and move into a new season of life. This is what happens after the funerals in

Moab.

For starters, the family should never have moved to Moab in the first place, and tragedy and misery were their only experiences there. So Naomi had a necessary ending with Moab. She determined that while they turned their back on God when they set their face toward Moab, it was time for her to repent and return to the Lord by now turning her back to Moab. In this, we learn that for the good to begin, the bad must end.

Think about your children (or future children) starting their own families. Does your leadership in the home lead your family toward flourishing, both practically and spiritually? What changes should you make now to get your family on the right path? {eoa}

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