

A Special Word for Women: Ruth's Journey from Shame to Significance

If you think your past has disqualified you, take courage from the life of this Gentile widow.

It is truly profound that Ruth's name appears in the royal genealogy of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Matthew tells us: "Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king" (Matt.1:5-6, NASB).

In Old Testament times women's names rarely appeared in genealogical records. Women were invisible. They were not valued for their gifts or talents; they simply faded into the background—even though they worked hard, served their husbands and raised children. Women had no voice.

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For that reason alone it is amazing that Ruth's name appears in this biblical list. Yet it is more shocking that a destitute Gentile widow from the land of Moab ended up in the lineage of Christ. If normal cultural rules had been observed, Ruth would have been disqualified. She had too many strikes against her.

First she was a Moabite. These people traced their lineage to the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters (see Gen. 19:30-38). Ruth was carrying a huge load

of family baggage, as well as the shame that is attached to sexual impurity.

Second Moabites had been cut off from the assembly of the Lord because of the way they had treated the nation of Israel during their wilderness journey. Deuteronomy 23:3 says the idolatrous Moabites were alienated from the Lord's presence to the 10th generation. Ruth must have felt a deep sense of rejection.

Third Ruth was not only a widow but was probably considered barren. She had been married to her husband, Mahlon, for several years yet she never had a child. In Old Testament times women were expected to produce heirs immediately after they married, but Ruth remained childless until her husband's untimely death. Widowhood and barrenness placed a doubly depressing stigma on her.

Yet against this sad backdrop the book of Ruth presents a beautiful picture of Christ's redemptive power. When Ruth pledges her loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, she takes a courageous step of faith and chooses to serve the God of Israel. In response to both of these women's faith, God not only provides for them in a miraculous way but also enables them to find a place in His salvation plan. By the end of the story, Ruth marries into a Jewish family and she gives birth to an heir; meanwhile Naomi's tragic emptiness is turned to joy.

What does their story mean to you today? No matter how many strikes are against you, God wants to use you in His awesome plan. If He can do it for Ruth, He can do it for you!

If you want your life to count for God, all you have to do is participate with His grace and follow the same steps Ruth took:

1. **Leave your shame behind.** Walk away from your past by trusting fully in the blood of Jesus to forgive and cleanse

you. Even if you have experienced abortion, rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence or addiction, you can leave your Moab and move to Bethlehem, the “house of Bread.” God has made it possible for you to transfer from darkness to light.

2. Turn away from your idols. Ruth had to leave Moab even though her sister-in-law, Orpah, chose to stay in that land of idols. Sometimes we have to make hard choices when following God. But you must make a clean break. Don’t give in to the temptation to compromise.

3. Get out of your comfort zone. It was not easy for Ruth to go with Naomi to Bethlehem. It was a foreign land and she had no guarantee of provision. Yet when she took the risk she discovered the amazing goodness of God. Many Christian women today have been living in the same spiritual ruts. You must get out of the pew and take a risk. God has a spiritual adventure for you, but you won’t find it if you just sit there. Like Ruth, you will find your destiny in the harvest field.

4. Find a mentor. God never intended for us to walk through life alone. He provides us with spiritual mothers and fathers as well as friends to encourage and counsel us. Ruth chose to serve the Lord because she saw God’s kindness reflected in Naomi. And it was Naomi’s counsel that prodded Ruth to go to the threshing floor of Boaz where she found God’s ultimate purpose.

As I travel I find so many women full of spiritual potential who feel trapped by depression, disappointment, grief, shame and physical pain. Yet when they look to the church for help they often find that the patriarchal attitudes of the Old Testament are alive and well.

The church has failed when it comes to helping women discover and implement their spiritual gifts. Women’s ministry has focused on trivial things like fashion shows and recipes when

God desires to train His daughters to win souls, disciple new believers, start and run businesses, fund kingdom enterprises and transform communities. We have ignored the message of the book of Ruth—and as a result many women have remained spiritually barren when it was God's intention that they become dangerous weapons that make the devil tremble.

Women please hear me. Jesus has included you in His plan! Allow Him to reveal to you how much He loves you and how He desires to use you. He wants you to leave a spiritual legacy, just as Ruth did. May you be filled with the same courage, faith and determination that marked her life.

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