

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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