

- Mother Theresa, who spent a lifetime working in Calcutta India among the poor and destitute said that the worst disease was not aids or leprosy, it was loneliness.
- We were made for healthy, meaningful relationships... we suffer *without* them. Life is a long journey with many joys and difficulties.
 - I believe that for you to not only survive but thrive, you need relationships. Not just networks, classmates, fans, employees, acquaintances... but people you relate to, and relate with!
- (some of the greatest transformation in my life happened in relation)
- But how? Before us today in the story of a woman named Ruth is a powerful picture of transformative relationship, and example of people relating to one another in a way that brings change for good.
- Ruth is a Moabite who married into an Israelite family only to be widowed years later. Upon her arrival in Israel as a widow, she ended up in the field owned by a man who honored God, and who takes notice of her. They will eventually marry, but here we note that the way in which they relate to one another actually teaches us important lessons for all relationships and how it how points to the heart of Christian faith.
- And I want us to ask, what are we looking for from relationships? How do we conduct ourselves in relationships? And where do we find hope for relationships? First, in Ruth 3 we see:

1. The Need for Relationships (Ruth 3:1)

- a. When Ruth and Naomi came to Israel, their initial plan was to scrape together just enough to exist, knowing that as widows, they would have very little chance of surviving.
- b. But now, Naomi is energized by the fact that Ruth met Boaz while looking for grain in the fields. Boaz owns land, he is single, he is godly... and he showed romantic interest in Ruth! Naomi knows that this is an opportunity that can bring them *what they need*. And what is that? Well, what Naomi wants for

Ruth in a romantic relationship is really what we long for in all relationships, even if in different ways: Rest and support.

Ruth 1:1 One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home (rest) for you, where you will be well provided for."

- c. **Rest** - Marrying Boaz would mean her full integration into Israelite society. It would be the opposite of alienation. She would know where she belonged. She could settle. Her marriage would mean that she would be settled; a home, a family... a future!
- d. **Support** – Ruth's marriage to Boaz would mean practical provision and support for them both, including Naomi!
- e. **Three Views of Relationships**
 - i. **Relationships built on usefulness**- Stepping stone
 - ii. **Relationships built on amusement – Good times only**
 - 1. But the greatest quality and need are
 - iii. **Relationships built on Virtue** – One that strengthens each other. Side-by-side carrying of burdens, helping
- f. This is certainly pictured in marriage. But, also, though in a different way and to a different degree, should be the desire for all of our relationships!
- g. God created us for relationships, he built into us a natural need to depend upon one another! At best, they can be a refuge.
 - i. So, don't be too proud thinking you don't need others
 - ii. And don't be ashamed to ask for help!
- h. But, we must be thoughtful in the way we pursue relationships!

2. The Search for Relationships (Ruth 3:2-13a)

- a. How do we go about finding such relationships? And what are the marks of healthy relationships? As we know, not all relationships bring rest. Some bring ruin. How can avoid that?
- b. Well, the story of Ruth and Boaz here is a romantic one. And for that reason can provide some lessons in the search for romantic relationships.

- c. But the principles highlighted here are also broader than that and apply to all of our relationships, whether you are single or married, young or old, man or woman.
- d. Naomi sees an opportunity: At this time of the year all the farmers would be down there, it was a type of community event, a Threshing floor slumber party if you will!
- e. That night Boaz would not be alone, but he would be accessible

Ruth 3:2-6 Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. ³ Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." ⁵ "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. ⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

- f. Before there was eharmony/Mingle, there was Naomi...
- g. So, Ruth is to wait till everyone is asleep and take the opportunity that she would not have elsewhere. She is to put on perfume which was a sign that her mourning was over.
- h. Upon arrival, she would uncover his feet so as to wake him up without waking up others and hope that the visit would be interpreted as it was meant: She was asking about marriage!

Ruth 3:7-9 When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet! ⁹ "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family."

- i. Now, whether Naomi's strategy was actually wise, really depended on how Ruth and Boaz would conduct themselves!
- j. And the story creates two difficulties that are designed to leave us tense at this point:
- k. *Difficulty number 1* - The scene itself provides a context of temptation; how would they respond?

l. Difficulty number 2 – The scene presents a moral dilemma pertaining to the marriage and the law of the land.

m. So, how did they respond? And what stands out in their search

Ruth 3:10-13a ¹⁰ “The Lord bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.¹¹ And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character.¹² Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I.¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you.

n. How did they respond to the problem of a tempting situation and a moral dilemma? Please, do not miss these two qualities, two qualities should not only mark what we look for in romantic relationships, but should mark all of our relationships ***Honorable character*** and ***honest conviction!***

o. **Honorable Character** – Behaving in such a way that honors the right kind of boundaries.

i. First, Boaz notes Ruth’s godly character (v 11)

ii. If he took advantage of her it would not be right in God’s eyes, it would ruin her reputation, and it would possibly jeopardize a possible marriage.

iii. And yet it is all handled delicately! So as to avoid sexual misconduct! **And so should we!**

1. If you are married, it means being faithful!

2. If you are not married but pursuing someone, do so honoring Biblical boundaries because marital intimacy is reserved only for those who are married.

iv. The application can of course become broader! In our friendships, and within our community here in the church, we do not take advantage of one another! But rather we show honorable character in the way we relate to other men and women, recognizing healthy boundaries. **But how do we know what those are?**

- p. **Honest Conviction** - We behave in line with what we believe.
- i. Boaz is a man who is governed by something bigger than himself. Verse 12. Boaz is part of the clan and a potential redeemer! What does that mean?
 - ii. A Guardian Redeemer was a relative who had the opportunity to purchase back land that was mortgaged so that it would not leave the family
 - iii. They could also buy back those family members who had gone into slavery because of debt
 - iv. In short, a kinsman redeemer could rescue a relative out of poverty and give them a brand-new start!
 - v. But that leads to this second problem: There is a closer relative who he must talk with first according to law and custom. Boaz knows that he must not cut corners... (v 13a)
 - vi. Instead, he makes it a matter of priority to deal *rightly* with the matter of the other redeemer. **No shortcuts!**
 - vii. This is key! If the matter was not dealt with rightly then the marriage would be called into question!
 - viii. He is honest about his convictions, what is right and what is wrong, and this governs his relationships!
 - ix. Boaz is not a lawbreaker, but a law-keeper!
- q. For Boaz “The Word of God is not cold moralistic institution but loving fatherly instruction!” That is what we have in Scripture!
- i. Whether it is friend or family, husband or wife, bf or gf, brother or sister, our ideas and beliefs about right boundaries and behavior must come from God’s Word.
- r. Listen the Bible’s teaching on all relationships is not meant to hinder relationships but help them! We should look for and develop honorable character and honest convictions.
- s. But, even the best of relationships, by themselves, are not enough. Even the best human relationships are a signpost, not the source of deep rest. And that leads to the third point:

3. The Hope for Relationships (Ruth 3:13b-18)

- a. Boaz and Ruth aren't married yet, but notice this: In the next statement they build their relationship upon a truth that is deeper than their affections: the Reality of God. That is what shapes and directs their relationship, and it should direct ours. And when it does, we find our hope.

Ruth 3:13b-17 But if he is not willing, **as surely as the Lord lives**, I will do it. Lie here until morning." ¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor." He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town. When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?" Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her ¹⁷ and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"

- a. As surely as the Lord lives! How I relate with others is determined by how I relate with God! My Hope and power!
- b. Does God exist? Then I should live like it!
- c. The stage is set. Boaz makes a promise, and as a symbol of his promise, loads her up with food for her and her mother-in-law.

Ruth 3:18 Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

- d. Her conclusion? Ruth should rest... her life could not be in better hands! Its beautiful because Ruth is not only the record of how a foreigner was brought into Israel, but a picture of how we are brought into *relationship with God!*
- e. This leads us to the heart of Christian faith. The reason we are often so desperate, or frustrated, or disappointed in our search for relationship the Bible says, is because we are alienated from God! This is what sin has done! We have not looked to Him to find what we need. This is why our relationships become sinful and toxic. And so, friends, remember this:

Finding rest in relationships with others requires first finding rest in a relationship with God.

- f. And the good news is that we can have this relationship. Beyond the promise of Boaz, there was a promise of God. But a promise that would come through Boaz and Ruth's line... the true and better redeemer ... Jesus! The ultimate man of his word! Who would bring us rest through a relationship with himself, a relationship mirrored in the actions of Boaz.
- g. Boaz is a foreshadow of Jesus who provides love and protection for all who come to him!
- h. Jesus accepts us**
 - i. Boaz could have turned her away, but he does not! And our God does not turn any of us away!
 - ii. And he speaks his word of assurance "fear not!"
- i. Jesus protects us**
 - iii. You see! Anyone that wanted to mock Ruth because she was a Moabite would be silenced by Boaz who did not cut corners but did it right! And so it is with Christ.
 - iv. God did not overlook our sin when he accepted us. He paid for it. This means that God is **not** unjust in accepting us, which protects us from accusation.
 - v. Christ fulfilled the law for us!!! And paid the price for our failure to fulfill the law, taking the penalty!
 - vi. To "You don't belong here!" I can simply say "I know, but my redeemer took care of it! And he did it right!"
 - vii. With Jesus there are no loose ends... cut no corners... and not rest until the matter of our lives was settled.
- j. Jesus redeems us (he turns our life around!)**
 - viii. Like Boaz, Jesus stood in between us and our poverty!
 - ix. Not only did Boaz calm her fears, but he also made a promise about her future. All based on his work.
- k. Your life could not be in better hands than Jesus!
- l. You can rest... because you have a redeemer who won't rest until your redemption is complete! Will you trust him?*

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

m. So, how do we view our relationships with others? Boaz is an example: Because the Lord lives... What would our relationships look like if we really believed the Lord Lives...?
n. If *he* lives, then how should *I* live?"

- Putting God at the centre of your relationships means
 - Because the Lord lives, you find **guidance** (what Boaz found)
 - Because the Lord lives, you find **grace** (for your failing Naomi)
 - Because the Lord lives you find **rest** (from striving Ruth found)
 - i. WE should make the effort, but not try to control!
- *You can rest... because you have a redeemer who refuses to rest until your redemption is complete! Will you trust Him? Your life could not be in better hands! That's the relationship that changes all others.*
- **Augustine "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."**