

Faithfulness
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Allen Power

Ruth 1:11-18; 2:5-12

Opening: Let's talk about romantic relationships. We talk about finding "Mr. or Miss Right." Think about the qualities we look for in that "right" potential spouse. What words come to mind? Now, think about love and care for family. What words come to mind when we think about someone who puts a family member's needs ahead of theirs?

Welcome to our two-week study of the little Old Testament book of Ruth. In this book we will see tragedy and despair mixed with hope, loyalty, and faithfulness. This book contains multiple human love stories woven together. The love shown by the players in this drama is a Hebrew concept called *hesed*¹—a kind of love that goes beyond what's required, that prioritizes another person's welfare above your own. It is a story of both family devotion and romantic love that ultimately points us to the greatest love story of all—God's love for the world through Christ.

The Point: This morning's text teaches us about trusting God and faithfully taking the next step. Even in our darkest moments, we can trust that God is at work. Faith means following Him into the unknown, faithfully doing what is in front of us especially for the benefit of others, and leaving the outcome in His hands.

Here is some context before the text:

Ruth takes place during the dark days of the Judges. A famine caused a man named Elimelech to leave Bethlehem with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons and move to Moab. While there, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi a widow. Her sons married two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah, but about ten years later both sons also died. Naomi was left without her husband or her sons. Then she heard that the Lord had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them, so she decided to return to Bethlehem. Ruth and Orpah started the journey with her, but Naomi urged them to return to their own families and rebuild their lives in Moab.

(NLT) — 11 But Naomi replied, "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? **12** No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? **13** Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me." **14** And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. **15** "Look," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same." **16** But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. **17** Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me

severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" **18** When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

- Here we see three women trying to move on after painful and tragic loss.
- Naomi's urging was practical. Security for her daughters-in-law would be remarriage and children. Highly unlikely for two Moabite women in Bethlehem.
- Naomi gets mixed reviews from scholars. Some criticize her for sending these women back to their pagan gods and see her faith as weak because she saw God as against her. Others point to her concern for the girls and her acknowledgment of God's sovereignty.
- My take: Naomi was a woman in deep despair whose suffering had clouded her perspective. She wasn't a model of strong faith at this point, but she still acknowledged God's sovereignty and genuinely cared for these women. I think we should give her some grace.
- What an unusual and special "in-law" relationship between Naomi and Ruth!
- Ruth's words in verses 16–17 are more than affection; they express a solemn, lifelong commitment. Her words were so "covenant-like" that years ago they were quoted in wedding ceremonies, reflecting the commitment of two spouses.
- Our Lifeway writers said, "Ruth's unselfish loyalty...stands out like a rare jewel."ⁱⁱ
- When Ruth said, "your God will be my God," she wasn't merely choosing Naomi. She was choosing Naomi's God. That also meant surrendering her future to God.
- Following God means trusting Him without knowing how the story will turn out.
- Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.
- Naomi, overwhelmed by her grief, told the women of the town to call her Mara, meaning "bitter," because she believed the Lord had made her life bitter.
- Look at 2:2-3: Ruth...said to Naomi, "Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it." Naomi replied, "All right, my daughter, go ahead."
- Ruth was going out to "glean" in the fields. Anyone know the Jewish laws on this practice of gleaning? What was this? How did it work?
- God's law required landowners not to harvest every corner of their fields or pick up what was dropped. It was to be left for the poor, widows, foreigners, and others in need. (Leviticus 19:9–10; Deuteronomy 24:19–22)
- God was providing for Ruth through a command He gave generations earlier.
- When they got to Bethlehem, Ruth got busy. Not looking for Boaz but for work.
- The principle: God's provision often comes while we are faithfully doing the next, right thing in front of us. In an uncertain future, do the next right thing.
- **3** So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech.
- The writer said, "as it happened," Ruth wound up at the right place to glean.
- The world would call that a coincidence. What do God's people call it?
- Ruth was doing the next right thing, unaware that God was already at work behind the scenes.

2:5–12 (NLT) — **5** Then Boaz asked his foreman, “Who is that young woman over there? Who does she belong to?” **6** And the foreman replied, “She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. **7** She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been hard at work ever since, except for a few minutes’ rest in the shelter.” **8** Boaz went over and said to Ruth, “Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don’t go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field. **9** See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow them. I have warned the young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well.” **10** Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. “What have I done to deserve such kindness?” she asked. “I am only a foreigner.” **11** “Yes, I know,” Boaz replied. “But I also know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers. **12** May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done.”

- Verse ten: Ruth said, “What have I done to deserve such kindness?”
- Verse six: What did the foreman’s report say about Ruth?
- Verse eleven: What did the talk around town say about Ruth?
- Character is noticed—even when we don’t know people are watching. That is why it is so important for God’s people to display consistent godly character.
- Verse twelve: Boaz was clearly a man of faith. He prayed that Ruth would find refuge under God’s wings and be rewarded for her faithfulness.
- Boaz did more than pray. He became the means God used to answer that prayer.
- Sometimes we are the one in need (Ruth). Sometimes we can be used by God to provide for the one in need (Boaz).
- As we reflect on Ruth’s actions we see:
 - Loyalty, love, and commitment toward her mother-in-law.
 - Though she was a Gentile, she chose to trust God for her future.
 - She had a great work ethic. Ruth was not passive or lazy.
 - Her character stood out for even strangers to see.
- If you were looking for “Miss Right”, I’d say Ruth would fit the bill.
- One more thing. Verse five says Boaz “...asked his foreman, ‘*Who is that young woman over there?*’” Now, the text doesn’t tell us *why* Ruth caught Boaz’s attention, so I won’t turn this into a Hallmark movie just yet. But he noticed her—and that sets us up for next week.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Even in our darkest moments, we can trust that God is at work.
- When we can’t see what comes next, we should faithfully do the next right thing.
- We can trust God is at work for our good even when we can’t see what He is doing behind the scenes.
- Ruth put her faith in God into action demonstrating for us that Hebrew concept of giving hesed—costly, self-giving love—to those who need it most.
- Like Boaz, we should be alert to how God may use us to provide for others.

I think we've met "Miss Right." Come back next week to see if we meet "Mr. Right."

ⁱ Hesed connotes covenantal loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, goodness, mercy, love, and compassion.¹ While it contains an emotive quality, hesed is fundamentally an action that recognizes and acts to relieve an urgent essential need.¹ It springs from relationship, usually a prior covenant, and expresses deep and abiding loyalty and commitment between parties. K. Lawson Younger Jr., Judges and Ruth, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 393–

ⁱⁱ Explore the Bible Leader's Guide - Lifeway