

GOD'S GRACE IN DARK DAYS

The book of Ruth

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan

Ruth 1:1-2

TO GO OR STAY

What am I to do in dark days of moral and spiritual decline? Am I responsible to accept and/or acquiesce to every decision society and the government makes as laws, and compromise the unchanging laws of God? The days in which the judges ruled the land of Israel got progressively worse with each passing generation of people and changing leadership. It seemed like a hopeless task to live for God when there were so few around that were committed to the Lord and His word. Perhaps it was in the time when the Midianites took almost everything the people of Israel had, that Elimelech took his family from the fertile country of Bethlehem-Judah in a time of famine, east of the Jordan River to Moab.

There are times when we make life-changing decisions and we hardly realize what we have done and the serious consequences that can come from them. We may try to justify leaving where we are because we can make more money there. Or, the job opportunities are better for our children and the school-system here is poor and I don't want to home-school my children. Unless we are conscious of the leading of the Lord to another location, it is best for us to endure the pressures and difficulties of hard times where we are, then to make a move to an area where the influences around will lead us away from the Lord and into the influence of idolatry.

The book of Ruth teaches us how to remain strong in character and true to God when all around us people are "doing what is right in their own eyes." A dark day had descended on God's people spiritually, and morally, society was getting rapidly worse. Disobedience to God, idolatry and violence was all around. But God was still at work in the lives of at least three people: Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. God's grace is in evidence in the midst of difficult circumstances. In times of crisis and deep despair, there are those who follow God, and through whom God works to bring blessing to others. He will use anyone who is open to Him to fulfill His purposes. The book of Ruth, therefore, is a book of encouragement to remind us God is still at work in the world and He can use you to bring others to Him.

It is quite probable that many of God's people today, like in Ruth's day, live in unbelief and disobedience and are not enjoying God's blessings. They make the mistake of walking by sight, not by faith. Faith enables us to look above, and live above the things around us that seem so obviously acceptable to the majority of people. Running away from difficulties does not necessarily mean we will escape the consequences of them. We can also make the second mistake Elimelech made by majoring on the physical and not the spiritual parts of our lives. We need also to make sure we are honoring and obeying the Lord, not the enemy. By immigrating to Moab, the result was he forsook the spiritual rest that he could have had even in difficult times, and led the others of his family into the consequences of following the ways of the world.

Whether we realize it or not, a time of famine is a time of harvest. Even though the situations in life may seem more than we are willing to accept, "Seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." It may be in the tough times we have our highest spiritual experiences. Often in the difficulties that befall people, they are inclined to turn to God. The harvest time is still on-going presently in this world in spite of the indifferent and careless attitude toward God and the Bible in privileged places. It is our responsibility to discipline ourselves in "times of famine" and keep our commitments to God, His people and the world of lost souls around us.

There is not a lot drama in the book of Ruth like obvious miracles being performed or battles being fought and won. The people the Spirit of God uses to teach us some of life's important lessons were folks like us who lived life from day to day without a whole lot of excitement. A family suffers the consequences of a bad decision by the father. This happens to people like us. Death comes in and leaves grieving widows who wonder what to now. Because we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, does not make us immune to the inevitable "last enemy." But when a young man, woman or child dies we have a tendency to think God has been unfair to us. We think this should not happen to a young person. And when a person has had a certain amount of security and now is left destitute, we have to be careful lest bitterness makes our lives worse than they already are. In this book of Ruth there are common-sense lessons taught to us that are illustrated by ordinary people who haven't had some great spiritual call to a great spiritual work.

But in the main characters of the book we learn how to respond to life as it is for most people. They went through normal day to day living and stayed faithful to God.

We will make mistakes. What should and can we do about it when they create havoc in our normal routine of daily living? When death comes into our own family in an unexpected way. How should we react to tragedy? When an older person feels abandoned and hardly knows where to turn for help. What can that person do? When a young widow is feeling especially vulnerable in the situation in life where she hasn't lived much yet and wants - and needs - the companionship and physical connection with a husband. What is appropriate behavior? When a man is successful in business and is looked up to by many as having achieved what they want, and yet is wanting a solid relationship that is not built on his success or money - how should he conduct himself and what should he do to maintain his reputation and still be consistent to his convictions? All these and more questions that arise in the lives of those who are just common people are dealt with in the book of Ruth. God is at work in our lives even though we may not always be conscious of it and nothing really big happens to us. Basically, the point is that our Lord teaches us how to be faithful in ordinary living. How to do what is right no matter what other people do. How to please God without hardly being aware of it.

There are principles and practices that we need to follow
As we make choices in the course of our lives.
Many of the attractions and temptations are hollow
Still people seek for them hoping for a better prize.

To leave what has been proven and give to us by God
Is to go outside His provision through grace.
Following the road away from the Lord millions have already trod,
Will lead to a spiritually dark and perilous place.

The danger is there to lose what we had
In exchange for some temporary gain.
Separations and death serve to make one sad,
Bringing to others and self unneeded pain.

Lessons from those in the past and the mistakes they made
If we heed them will preserve us from failing.
We will be strengthened in faith for the unknown ahead
And in difficulties will find the Lord for us prevailing.

“Father, I know there have been many times I have made mistakes and failed in the work to which I have been called. The way back to usefulness and fellowship with Thee is a wonderful experience and the lessons learned, I would like to pass on for the benefit of others. If this is the way to do this best, I pray I will be guided by the Holy Spirit to be biblical and appropriate to those in the family who will take time to read this. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Ruth 1:3-5

SHE WAS LEFT

We may not always appreciate what we have until we lose it. We can learn lessons from Elimelech who lived in Bethlehem (the house of bread), and even though there was a famine in the land, he must have forgotten that God is still the same and His promises never fail. Whenever a person, assembly or nation turns in repentance and forsaking of sin to God, he is there to hear and answer according to His sovereign will. The decision Elimelech made affected Naomi and his two sons for the rest of their lives as well as his own. We are not without influence - good or bad. That fact should make us stop to count the cost of our actions before we take action.

It may not have seemed all that wrong to go to Moab because the Moabites were not living in Canaan. But they had forbidden Israel to go through Moab on the way to the promised land. For that the edict of the Lord was that no one from Moab could "enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation." Not only had their leaders not provided for the Israelites with bread and water, but Balaam was hired to put a curse on them. The Lord turned that into a blessing even though the intent of the Moabites was to destroy Israel.

For our learning, the facts are that those who are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ do not fit well in a worldly society. Our new nature makes us uncomfortable with all that we see goes on in business, pleasure and even the religious activities of those who claim to be following the rejected Lord. The moral standards of a believer should be set higher than those of the world because God set the standard by which

we are to live. When we leave where we should be because God placed us there, no matter how weak the situation is in which we are found, then we are on our own in a social system in which we do not fit. To "sojourn" in a foreign land means that you really do not fit there among those people and in that society and culture. One stands out as a foreigner in speech, lifestyle and no matter what you do, "you are not one of us." Conversations stop or change subjects when you try to join in with the group. Questions arise as to why we are there and how long to we intend to stay. Try as we might, there is always the "them and us" attitude to separate the stranger and pilgrim from those born there.

While he was alive, Elimelech was responsible for his family and may have been able to care for them as he had wanted when he made the move. However, there are consequences to our actions that others may have to suffer when we run away from our problems in unbelief. My disobedience and unbelief have effects on my family and maybe on other people also. Elimelech apparently didn't live long after the move to Moab, but the other members of his family had to go through hard times because of his decision. His widowed wife was without the support of an extended family. His two sons married girls from the area in which they were living even though that practice had been forbidden. Thankfully there was a good relationship between the women even during those ten years, and even though they were all widowed. In that foreign land there was no family support to turn to in difficult times. What some people accept as Christianity today is not biblical Christianity. There is no biblical support to the claim that God wants all of His children to be rich and prosperous in this world's goods. Actually, the life-style and teaching of the Lord Jesus is very different from that. For all of God's children to be healthy is not a promise from God. John was concerned that Gaius' physical well-being would be prosperous "even as thy soul prospers." It is not wrong to be optimistic about life and how God is going to use us, but that doesn't mean that we are not going to suffer. "All that live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

It would be hard for a dutiful wife to oppose the leadership of her husband. But God in grace gave Naomi a special daughter-in-law who was of a kindred spirit. Both Naomi and Ruth were unique persons in their own right, but were able to blend their different backgrounds, ages and cultures into opportunities. We may be in a place where we shouldn't be for some reason, but we can learn from Naomi there are principles by which we live that should never change. Even though after the death of her immediate family and her bitterness of soul, she maintained her integrity. In doing this we will be committed to being real and genuine in spite of the circumstances in which we are found. God is concerned with our character far more than our comfort. What we are inside is more important than what we have and claim as our own. Many of God's people who are left in hard circumstances are mentioned in scripture as illustrations for our learning. Job lost all he had but remained confident in God even though he didn't understand the great losses. Paul had to live without being healed so God's grace could be revealed through his life as well as his words. Hosea had to live with an unfaithful wife in a shameful marriage relationship. We read, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers' temptations." People have persevered through trials without ever knowing the reason. They just have trusted God and remained faithful to Him under extreme pressures of life. When a child of God can truly say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord," that person of faith is a testimony to us all of God at work behind the scenes of an ordinary life.

When kindred-spirited persons meet, there is established a commitment to integrity that keeps both of them honest and upright with each other. Naomi was left without family and support, but was graciously supplied by the sovereign God with the perfect daughter-in-law who was free from the corrupting immoral lifestyle of idolatry. How good it is when the Lord brings into our lives upright people who are committed to purity and genuine in attitude toward us and God. Integrity is a necessary part of life for one who is godly. We need to guard our testimony with integrity and with all our might. Then when a person comes into our life who has the same commitment to God, we find ourselves blended and able to serve God with our heart and still give the other person the freedom to be who they are before the Lord.

Ruth was willing to leave her homeland to go to Israel and Naomi was willing for Ruth to return to Moab. When one is "left" by her husband's death is bad enough. When "left" of her two sons, that is almost more than one can accept. The disobedience of one person has long-lasting effects on others. It is so important that we take plenty of time to consider any action we think about with a mind to know what the Lord our God says. We may not only be "left" ourselves, but others may be "left" also. Ten years away from the will of God and the place of His choosing, not only leaves us personally bereft of fellowship with God and His people, but will affect our testimony and that of others we have influenced in a way from which they may never recover. We need to commit ourselves to persevere even when the trials we are called upon to endure may seem overwhelming.

It may not seem far at first
When we make the journey away.

Because of something for which we thirst,
We forget there's always a price to pay
For every ambitious plan we have,
And every desire we seek to fulfill.
Then too late we realize that that path
Has hidden in it a very bitter pill.

We find there is very little
That brings satisfaction that lasts
When disobedience's bill we settle,
What we wanted is already done and passed.
There is no recovery for lost years
That the "locusts and cancer" has eaten
Now engraved on our heart there are scars
That can't by a physician be treated.

She was "left" in a far distant place.
She was "left" with not a thing of her own.
She was "left," but God has great grace.
She was "left" with one better than a son.
She was "left" and through her one saw God.
She was "left" with one who wanted to know more.
She was "left" with nothing on which to hold.
She was "left" not knowing what was in store.

"Father, there are those of Thy people who have made some bad decisions and are now going through the consequences they brought on themselves. If it would be for Thy glory and their good, please bring to pass in their lives persons or events that will bring them back to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ruth 1:6-18

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

People being people are made in the way God intended, and it was not His intention that we all be like robots or all have the same physical, personality and character traits. Character is built to a certain extent by the genes that have been passed on to us, but a child's character is developed by the training received at home. As life progresses there are character traits being built into us, by everything we allow entrance through our senses into our mind. Ruth lived in an idolatrous nation and her people were ancient enemies of the people of God. Yet she was conscious of God and He was faithful to her. God will use anyone who is open to Him to achieve His purposes. We do not have to do what everyone else does, nor accept what everyone else chooses to accept. Believers have higher standards to live by that should over-ride all the pressures that any society will place upon us. People who live by faith will be called by God to venture out into unknown paths and take risks that may seem foolish to other people. The "What ifs" that plague us can cripple us if we are not careful. Fear of failure has the power to haunt us like a dark cloud hiding the light of faithfulness to God even though we do not like the outcome of a matter.

Remaining strong in character and true to God when all around us people are doing that which is right in their own eyes, can be quite difficult, especially if one is a young beautiful widow. It is in times like this that one proves their loyalty to their Lord and His word, will and way. We are first introduced to Ruth as a destitute, young widow. She and her mother-in-law shared deep sorrow, great affection for each other and an overriding commitment to God. Neither pressured the other. Naomi was willing for Ruth to go back to her home. Ruth was willing to leave her homeland forever and go to Israel. The key was her willingness to make a spiritual choice. Risks are involved wherever we go and in whatever we do. Faithful Christians will be willing to do what is right in spite of risks that are inherent in almost every choice we make. God was at the center of their communication. The older woman allowed the younger to see, hear and feel the joy and anguish of her relationship with God. Do you feel your thoughts and questions about God should be left out of your close relationships? How often do I share my unedited thoughts about God with my spouse or friends? Sharing openly about your relationship with God can bring depth and intimacy to your relationships with others.

There are times we make life-changing decisions and we hardly realize what we have done. Other times we know the decisions we make will have far-reaching consequences. Ruth made a choice for spirituality. Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi, her mother-in-law, is an example of love and loyalty. Her life was guided by faithfulness toward God and showed itself in faithfulness and loyalty towards others. Naomi and Boaz also were faithful to God and His laws. God Himself is certainly faithful to those in this book of Ruth and He is

faithful to us. To experience loyalty and love in our relationships with others, we must imitate God's faithfulness to them. The tensions between the Moabites and Israelites had historically been there but through a genuine life of holy character, Ruth was able to get beyond those tensions. Being a Moabitess didn't stop Ruth from worshiping the true God, and it did not stop God from accepting her worship and blessing her [Acts 10:35]. No one is disqualified from serving God because of their sex, race or background. The life of a widow was not easy. Naomi acted in a selfless manner and that in turn encouraged Ruth to follow her example. The same is true today. Selflessness in a person leads others to walk in the same way.

Three women on the road leading away from Moab made individual choices when they stopped to say their good-byes. Orpah and Ruth had to decide whether to return to their home and family so they could resume what would have been to them a normal life in the hopes of making a fresh start under family protection. On the other hand, they could choose to be an immigrant in a strange country, with strange people and cultural differences. Naomi had heard the famine was over. God had intervened and there was bread again in Bethlehem. "Should I swallow my pride and go back where I came from or should I stay hidden in this foreign land?" God had brought the famine to an end and there was hope that the downward spiral of departure might end. God does look after His people because He cares for them. He motivates us by placing His love in us and upon us.

Naomi had left Bethlehem with a husband and security. She returned a widow and in poverty. She changed her name to express her bitterness and the pain she felt. She lost sight of all the resources of God and the great value of her relationship with Ruth. We must never overlook all the resources God provides for us because He loves us and the strength He gives to live in our present circumstances. Never allow bitterness and disappointment to blind us to opportunities. On the other hand, a relationship where the greatest bond is God, will be a relationship of strong mutual commitment in which each person tries to do what is best for the other. A choice for spirituality will involve risking everything by putting our faith in Christ. God saves us, forgives us, rebuilds our lives and gives us blessings that will last through eternity.

Now on the road after deciding to go back to Bethlehem, Naomi commended the two young widows to God's care. By doing so she was actually terminating a relationship with them so they could form another close relationship with men apart from her family. They were released from caring for her to start new lives without her influence. At the same time, she asked that God would deal kindly with them in the same way they had with her. She probably wanted them in a place of safety and security which she could not guarantee. When we take risks, we are required to do what God wants and is considered normal to Him, but not normal to the worldly people among whom we live. Faith ventures out into the unknown with confidence only in God, not in ourselves. Naomi's challenge to them to return because she believed God had turned against her in spite of the value of her previous testimony before them. In essence she was saying, "God is against me, so you better not go where I go. The risks are too great." When we venture and are willing to take risks, there are consequences. For Naomi, she might have meant criticism implied or spoken because of the path her family took ten years before. For Orpah and Ruth it would mean forfeiting home and family security for either the acceptance or rejection that is shown toward immigrants. Orpah chose to go back to normal security and Ruth chose to take the risk of following Naomi and her God, to join with her people for the rest of her life.

Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi as daughter-in-law and friend is a great example of love and loyalty. Naomi, Ruth and Boaz were all faithful to God and His laws. God's faithfulness to His people is seen throughout the story. Ruth's life was guided by faithfulness to God. It showed in loyalty to other people she knew. For us to be a true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, means we will be willing to take criticism and misunderstanding. Our morality will label us as different. We will be committed to justice being done for the benefit of others in spite of how the laws that are passed by those with no unchanging standard of values may affect us. To be loyal and loving in relationships, we must imitate God's faithfulness in our relationships to others. Ruth showed kindness to Naomi. Boaz showed kindness to Ruth. God showed His kindness to them all by bringing them together for His purposes. Christ showed His kindness by dying for us to give us eternal life. His kindness should motivate us to love and honor Him. Ruth showed her high moral character by being loyal to Naomi, by breaking from her former land and customs and customs, and by hard work in the fields. Boaz showed integrity in his moral standards, honesty, and following through on his commitments. When we experience God's faithfulness and kindness, we should respond by showing our integrity. God protected Naomi and Ruth. He controls the circumstances and will bring us through them, He guides our minds and activities to fulfill His purposes. No matter how bad our present situation, our hope is in God. He can do what we can't. Trust in His protection. To be faithful we will have to be different than ways that are normally accepted by the world's standards. To be faithful will involve taking risks that please God. The greatest blessing that came to Ruth because of her spiritual choices was not the prosperity, the marriage to Boaz, the child that came, but the quality of love and respect between these three people. Don't think of money and

success as the main blessings of life. Rather, the high quality of relationships that you make because of spiritual choices.

Word had come, the famine was over -
God grace had failed her never.
The angel of the Lord around her did hover -
Even though she felt she was abandoned forever.

On the road three walked together -
Each had lost the one she loved.
The bonds of marriage, death did sever -
Faithfulness to husbands they had proved.

Now change had come, what was next?
Where is the right place to go from here?
To one the world her soul did vex -
To the other two, glimpses of faith appear.

One turned back to country, gods and kindred -
One was returning to the "house of bread."
The third one with faith like a little fire burning
Committed to follow God by the famous words she said.

Decision time came although she did not know
The results of the choices she made.
Families, religion, country - the world as a whole
Have been blessed by the price she paid.

We should not underestimate the value of faith
Faithfulness is a choice we all can make.
From that one decision, God by His grace,
Gave blessing to her - and me - as to the way I take.

"O God of all grace, my heavenly Father: in the decision times of my life I am increasingly aware of the tendency to make decisions based on past experiences and their outcome. I know even as I am getting older, I am needing to act in faith in spite of what may be an adverse outcome as far common sense is concerned. I ask of Thee today to give me more wisdom to discern what is Thy will versus what is my natural desire. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ruth 1:16-17. *And Ruth said, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."*

FAMOUS WORDS.

Not spoken to be quoted at weddings yet to come;
Heart-felt words that come from a woman leaving home.
Three tear-filled women on a road saying last good-byes -
One looking back - two ahead with faith-filled hopeful eyes.

There comes a time in every life when important choices are made.
Not little ones made every day to provide for our daily bread -
But a once-in-a-lifetime choice that changes my history -
We often look for others to make, but this one must be made by me.

Who am I going to follow - the majority or one alone?
She is not a perfect woman, but she knows what the Lord has done.
I've seen evidence enough to know she is one who truly believes -
God is her God, and she knows where she is going when this place she leaves.

Where am I going to live? I have nothing with which to buy -
A home or pay someone to build a shelter where I may stay.
But I will live with her who really and truly knows her God -
And the God she has learned to trust, I will trust to be my Lord.

The past is over and gone - I am not going back there to stay.
When I left the land of darkness, I chose to go to the light of day.
I know it will not be easy to start life all over again -

But if she who I am following can do it, then I too on the Lord depend.

A person who is willing to trust God, knows He will not let you down -
The faith that seemed so small at first, finally now is really my own.
I have learned God is easy to be trusted, He has plan that is laid out for me.
When I walk each day by faith in Him, His will I will be able to see.

“Gracious Father, I praise Thee for leaving these few words of this woman for us all to read and see how simple faith works. She must’ve really appreciated Naomi. I appreciate those who have been in my life that I can watch and learn from. May I in turn be someone others can see the reality of faith in. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Ruth 1:19-22

GETTING BACK

Ruth had just made one of the great confessions of faith in all of the scripture. This young Gentile woman was committed to do the will of God. It makes no difference to God where a person is from, or what their creed or culture is. The fact is made plain in the word of God that "He that feareth Him (God) and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him." God was with Ruth, the stranger, when she was gleaning in the fields, and with Esther, a young Jewish woman, in the city. He guides the gleaner and overrules the king on the throne. Wherever you are, God is at work on behalf of His people. Faith is obeying God in spite of the consequences; not in spite of evidence. Ruth points the way to an exciting, dynamic faith. Her faith wasn't the kind that puts feet in the water and expects the river to stop flowing, or to throw a tree into bad water to make it fit to drink. Her faith was demonstrated in her commitment to serve God by serving Naomi and being with her until death and burial. It is not common in our day to see such genuine devotion as Ruth declared in plain words to Naomi. Instead of commitment to others, the normal now is to "self-awareness, self-esteem, self-fulfillment, self-confidence and pleasing myself." It doesn't cross the mind of very many people except in an emergency that it is normal Christian living for us to pay a cost that other people may benefit at our expense. Integration doesn't happen when we put our own good and self-interests before that which can bless others.

We all are prone to making mistakes when we think a particular action will be to our advantage. As a result of unbelief in the promises of God in times of problems, the inclination is to run away from them rather than face them and deal with them the best way we can. In faith we know that God is "able to do above all that which we ask or think." Many of God's people now, like in Ruth's day, live in unbelief and disobedience and are not enjoying God's blessings. We are living in a harvest time even though there seems so little fruit being gathered from the great harvest field. Famine is a time of discipline in which our faith is both tested and strengthened. Part of the problem is that we think we deserve all we can get because "we earned it." Self-sacrifice is what God wants from His people and in order for this to be real we will commit ourselves to serving others with genuine commitment. Unbelief moved Elimelech to walk by sight, not by faith, and so he left the house of bread at harvest time. In making that decision he was majoring on the physical, not the spiritual, and consequently did not honor the Lord. We can't really run away from our problems because the basic cause of our problems is our lack of faith in God and our disobedience to Him. The consequences may be last a long time and may even be fatal.

Another common mistake is deception in which we try to hide our mistakes. We ask God for some blessing on our labor, family and those things for which we think we have a right, but I have to ask myself, "Am I a blessable person?" Can God trust me? I ask for souls to be saved but am I a shepherd who can be trusted with the "lambs?" When He gives me more finances than I really need, am I one who He knows will use this kind of blessing for the proper things in a right way? Naomi was trying to cover up and finally faced the fact that her only hope was to get back to where God wanted her to be. Orpah had given up, so she returned to the place she was before God had brought her to a person who could be a potential blessing to her. Ruth was prepared to stand up against the pressures brought against her, and frankly and openly confessed her faith. Deception has a way of undermining even our own concept of ourselves and seeks to give us excuses for our mistakes.

We can't control all the circumstances of life, but we can control how we respond to them. Nine tenths of our unhappiness is a result of selfishness. It is a mistake to blame God for the trials and difficulties that comes to us in life and when the mistake of allowing bitterness to take root in our lives, we not only make serious damage to our own selves, but that "root of bitterness defiles many." Naomi came to the place in her life where she knew it was right to return to Bethlehem. The path she chose to walk led her to go back to Bethlehem. She knew it was time to turn her back on Moab even though it took time to clarify her plan. Her decision in turn had an influence on Ruth and her decision to go with her mother-in-law. If we ever leave the

place, we know was right because of problems, for a place that is more conducive to our lifestyle or ambitions, we need to remember we will affect others who may live and die there. On the other hand, when we choose to return to the place we left, there are others who will wonder why we make this choice and they may return with us. The place in which Naomi and her husband chose to lodge, was not the place where the Lord was with His people. They had left a prosperous place in which there was a temporary problem and found the consequence of that choice was that she lost her family. We learn from Ruth the value of personal integrity in her commitment to Naomi, and we learn from Naomi the value of our personal testimony even though we may feel ourselves to be a failure.

However, God in His grace brought to pass a remarkable turn of events that brought a remarkable young woman to express her faith in a remarkable statement of faith. This in turn led Ruth who loved her mother-in-law, Naomi, to a different country and to different people she chose to love. All she knew about the people of God was in one person, Naomi. Because of walking by faith, she met the reapers (young men); gleaners (poor people); Boaz, a wealthy kinsman, and furthermore the whole village came out to meet Naomi and Ruth. These people were the people of the Lord and they accepted her in spite of the differences of nationality and background. This then was the plan she chose to live by: faith - going to a place she had never been; to live with people she did not know; to trust God to direct her life; take the little steps and the big steps when they came. The principles of living by faith do not change and when we practice them ourselves, we will find our gracious Father is there to guide, strengthen and have fellowship with us as we walk in the light with Him.

The commitment of Ruth to Naomi contrasts Orpah fading away into the distance with Ruth's stated commitment to Naomi. Orpah was not condemned for going away. She just did what was normal and acceptable to the society in which she lived. Ruth did that which was extraordinary by resisting the pressure to do what everyone else expected similar to the way peer pressure is exerted today. Her stand and statement are an example to us to not allow ourselves to be pressured to go for the second or third best no matter who applies that pressure. In spite of Naomi's urging, Ruth stayed firm and her stated commitment left no grounds for misunderstanding what she meant. We should never let the appeal to the pressure of society to change our minds from our commitment to God. Social pressure and pressure from Naomi that was almost in the form of a command did not dissuade Ruth from her devotion both to Naomi and to God. Real devotion has a way of saying what we really mean in a way that is not misunderstood nor vague.

Ruth's firm stand took place when she made a firm statement. Clarification wasn't necessary for Naomi to know what she meant. She told Naomi of her own plans and was not about to acquiesce to Naomi's normal plans for her. Openness has great value when communicating with others when it is tempered with thoughtfulness and spoken with gracious words. Christians can't be everything to everybody in every situation. Compromise to please others is not acceptable if it is based on human opinion. Our work, our family ties and our ambition are not wrong if it does not take away our devotion to the Lord and commitment to Him and His people. The expense of energy is legitimate when it is expended in fellowship with God and His revealed will. Ruth burned all her bridges in one statement that not only committed her to Naomi until she started a new life, but even to death and burial. She made that commitment and carried it out. Her plain stated words stopped all weeping and wailing. The silence that came over them confirmed the power of her commitment. Total commitment stops all objections, arguments and underhanded innuendos when it is true and genuine. When that is the case, then it is free of dispute and the challenges that may be thrown against the commitment are useless. Whether we like it or not, we leave heart-prints when our words are precise, meaningful and appropriate to a situation. Just like we leave fingerprints behind us wherever we go, so one who has committed themselves to another and to being faithful leave an indelible impression that cannot be negated. To have our commitment to God printed on our hearts is of far greater value than have ink printed on our skin.

Ruth 1:20. *“And she said unto them, ‘Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.’”*

NAOMI.

Often in life there are times when we grieve over what went wrong.
We feel guilty about what has happened and we have really lost our song.
The mistakes have left consequences we are not even able to change -
And we wonder if ever the sun will shine, or if this is going to remain the same.

The years pass by so slowly - there doesn't seem to be an end in sight.
We've tried many things to correct it, but nothing seems to set it right.
Finally, we stop and consider, “Why not go all the way back to the beginning,
And see if the Lord will teach us, or if in some way we still are sinning.”

So, we leave where we've been for years, and start on the road back home -
And to our surprise there are others who have decided to come along.
One for sentimental reasons - the other one with deep conviction;
She has learned by watching you in trouble, there is more than soul's salvation.

Her simple words of faith have a meaning that comes from deep in her heart;
And you sense that in her long journey, this first stage is only a start.
Her words are filled with faith, she has learned to trust God completely
And the remarkable thing to ponder, she has learned this from your testimony.

Not all of life's lessons are easy; we really learn more in times that are hard.
It is in these times of our testing; others see if we are really trusting the Lord.
Even when we have to go through deep valleys, and the lessons to learn are bitter;
Others looking on are deciding if a life lived by faith in the Lord is better.

We will never really like the testing, the losses, the pain and the hurt;
But our loving Father knows well that light seems brighter in the dark -
He guides us along step by step and gradually brings back the way we came -
And looking beside and around us, we find a lot of others doing the same.

“O Loving Father, thanks so much for recovering me when there have been the times of wandering and wasted efforts. I praise Thee for not leaving me to drown in self-pity or guilt but assuring me that when any recovery or restitution need is finished, then it is time to get on with our service for Thee in life. Amen.”

OPENNESS

There is a resistance on the part of most people to letting our feelings show in times that really count. People can ventilate loudly and for a long time at a sporting event when everyone else is doing the same thing, but when it comes to real openness and frankness, the natural tendency is to put our guard up high enough that we think others won't know what eating at us inside. When unexpected things happen or things and events work out differently than what we wanted, we wonder why or what we did that was wrong. Often at such times the outward person is very different from what we are inwardly. The tendency is to camouflage what we are really like and how we really feel about the matter. We become like a door to shut people and events out, rather than like a window allowing light to shine in and illuminate our understanding. It is not our normal choice to let our sincere and genuine emotions out in the view of others but to keep them hidden. When Naomi came back from Moab, she may have looked older, worn and grey with new wrinkles on her face, but she didn't put on a stone face like some do and pretend everything was alright when she was really angry inside.

Like a blank face without expression can hide bitterness and anger, a happy face can cover up a crying heart inside. "Everything is just fine and dandy" isn't always a very honest statement but is a way of deflecting the truth from what is actually happening to us. There is also the "Christian" face that we see when God's people come together that is supposed to advertise our contentment and delight in the things of God. "Praise the Lord, Hallelujah" and other words may be used to hide doubts and confusion within that we think should never been thought about in a Christian's life. It is hard to live and maintain a false front with bluff and bluster for very long. One who is constantly trying to cover up some problem in life may find that the emotional stress one is under affects their physical health and well-being. The body, soul and spirit all are affected by our emotions. Naomi was wise enough to "let it all hang out," doubts, anger, bitterness - all of it was right out in the open because this woman was transparent enough to say what she really meant.

No doubt her return to Bethlehem after being away ten years was a cause of excitement in the little town. They knew her as Naomi, which means "pleasant, lovely," but now she was apparently a bitter woman because of all she lost. It seems like she was disappointed in God as well as in the way her life had turned out. All she had expected and hoped for, plenty in times of famine, a loving husband to care for her, sons who would bring grandchildren to her for her guidance - all that people want today, and what she wanted evaded her completely. The reality was such a disappointment compared to her expectations. She may have thought God would end the famine quickly so they could come home sooner instead of later. Her hopes for a happy family life were gone leaving her nothing at all for the present or the future. She was not only disappointed with God but may not have realized the choice jewel she had in her life - Ruth. Very few people would ever criticize God, even though inwardly we may blame Him for the circumstances in life in which we are found. It is not uncommon for us to sanctimoniously blame ourselves when we are talking to others even though we really don't mean that sincerely. It just plays good to the people we want to impress with our apparent honesty.

By Naomi openly admitting her disappointment, she expressed her desire to have an open, honest relationship with God. That is a high compliment to God who knows our hearts anyway. She was no credit to God and His goodness and even seemed to cast blame on Him for what was taken away from her. That kind of open frankness startles us and must have scared the people of Bethlehem who were so glad to have her back. It is an interesting thing to note that bluntness is not uncommon in the scripture accounts of God's people and their dealings with God. God is quite blunt Himself when He speaks to us. That does not give us the right to irreverence and disrespect toward God but openness and transparency with God is appropriate. God does not overlook our faults and failures and tells us plainly how He feels about that openly and bluntly. The scriptures encourage frankness and specificity so that we can express our feelings, thoughts and intentions that are already known by God.

Openness reveals the fact that we do trust God and His grace in spite of all our failures. It may be one way of complimenting God in whom we trust implicitly in spite of everything that happens to us. Openness in marriage, in friendships and family strengthens our relationships in all of these cases. God our Father knows all these things anyway, so by removing any mask we might try to put on, we let Him know we trust Him in the bad as well as the good times. Naomi told of the bad things that happened and it didn't turn the people off. By telling others of our experiences helps us to unload those things that bear us down helps us as well as them to understand our Lord's dealings for our ultimate blessing. Openness with God is an act of faithfulness towards Him and expresses our faith in His goodness and grace.

We don't often express what we mean when it comes to the affairs of the heart
We want people to think that what is seen is not as bad as it seemed at the start
So, we get used to saying what we think is best rather than that which is true
And before long we suffer from deep unrest as the tensions in life accrue.

Our Gracious God has patience with us so bluntly tells us what's wrong
His objective is that we put full trust in Him who for us is so strong
The purpose of God is not always clear at the moment when we feel the loss
But the faithful one knows our Father is near even though we have to pay sin's cost.

A person is wise to be open and frank regarding our questions in life
To try to hide behind some facade brings bitterness, disappointments and strife
When nothing is hidden behind a false front then all that is left is the truth
We are able to not bluff and rather be blunt with that which is of vital worth.

Failures will come and mistakes too that we wish had not happened to us
But with open confession stating what is true we testify that in God only we trust
He is open and frank with us and doubtless expects us to be with Him
With honest transparency this is a plus and so healing and recovery begin.

O Gracious God my Father, I thank Thee today for telling it like it is to us, and for not getting upset or impatient with me when I fail and complain to Thee. I hope I will never get over, or cease to appreciate, the blessing of Thy unfailing grace and love - and willingness to make it abundantly clear what is right and wrong. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ruth 2

DON'T BE AFRAID OF WORK

Ruth, is an excellent example of an Industrious woman who wasn't going to wait for everything to be handed to her on a platter. In chapter two we learn that not only was she a woman of noble character and compassion, but she had initiative. Ruth did not wait for some good fortune to come to her and Naomi. She went to work. She was not afraid to admit her need, or of working hard to supply the need. When you have a need, consider that God may be waiting for you to take the first step to demonstrate just how important your need is. What do you do when you are asked to do a job that you think is not up to your potential? The task before you may be the one God wants you to do for now and maybe permanently. It may be a test of your character that can open up other doors of opportunity. Ruth was willing to listen to Naomi and act on her guidance and wisdom relating to the culture and how best to apply her efforts. It is a wise person who will listen to others instead of acting on the spur of the moment or carelessly. A faithful person will give diligence to provide what is needed to meet his or her own need and be able to give to others. It is not uncommon nor wrong to wait for God's provision even though we already have His promise in the written word that assures us what we need He will give "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

We may not realize at the time when we are about our daily tasks and the vocation to which we have been called that we are building a reputation that we will have to live with. Often the way you work displays the

kind of qualities you have inside. Hard work, a loving attitude, kindness, faithfulness and courage are character traits that show up best in the work place – and often best, under adverse circumstances. Consistently living out what you believe establishes your reputation. Ruth showed this in her willingness to glean in the field diligently. Boaz showed this when out of his abundance, he provided for the needy people around. We are often known by how we treat those who are less fortunate than we are. Do we do the minimum or the maximum or somewhere in between? Even though she was bitter, Naomi still recognized God at work and praised God for Boaz's kindness. In leaving one place and going to another, in release from some bondage or in assurance of victory, in times of despair and grief - we may have to wait for relief for a long time. Maybe it will not come until this life is over.

In life we will all make mistakes. This is an inevitable fact. But after facing our mistakes and dealing with them appropriately, we must trust God for a new beginning and stop looking back with regrets or frustrations over things we can do nothing about. God's storehouse of resources is far greater than your burdens. Stop staring at the wall and waiting for something great to happen. By faith, get up and open the door to a brand-new tomorrow. Sometimes we will question God's dependability when looking at things through natural eyes and make the mistake of trying to bring a quick solution in our own way. Faithfulness in the lives of ordinary people may not bring dramatic answers to our problems but simple quiet solutions to the everyday issues we face.

There are conditions to meet when we are making spiritual choices; when God wants to accomplish His purposes through us. We must commit ourselves to live by faith in the Lord [2:1-3]. To live by faith means we take God at His Word and act upon it. Ruth believed God would provide for her, so she went to work. In the same way the Lord worked for her, God works with us [Mk.16:10]; God works in us [Phil.2:12-13]; God works for us [Rom.8:28]. We must learn to live by the grace of God [Ru.2:4-16]. Grace is favor bestowed on the undeserving. When we do this, God makes the first move to solve the matter on our behalf. Boaz took the initiative when the issue arose with the property and future of Ruth and Naomi. Also, God does not desire to leave us in the dark about a matter but He speaks to us through His word, like Boaz opened the conversation with Ruth about the future. He knew what needed to be done and did it. God also freely gives. We don't have to try and initiate a "I will do this if you will do that" sort of an agreement. Boaz promised to provide for and protect Ruth in the same way God has given promises to us. God wants us to trust Him. Boaz encouraged Ruth and she went away contented that all was going to work out in the right way. God has never let us down and He never will. God satisfies those who trust Him and admit that what He does and gives is right and best. Boaz made sure Ruth was satisfied.

Naomi and Ruth got to Bethlehem too late to plant barley or wheat in the field of Elimelech. The barley harvest had already started and the wheat harvest followed after. How could they get food to live on without stealing? There was prosperity all around among those who had stayed in Bethlehem but they were poor and poverty stricken needing the basic essentials of life to survive. They had to face the fact that they would not have a barley or wheat harvest of their own. When things happen over which we have no control, then we should follow the example of Ruth by taking the initiative of getting what we can get even though it may not be much. She took advantage of the Jewish law that allowed gleaning in the fields after the harvesters had passed through and collected the stalks of grain that had not been bound up into sheaves. Gleaning is what we call today basic subsistence living, like collecting bottles and cans from a ditch. It was hard demeaning work to get a little return for the labor expended but it was provision from God. Immigrants like Ruth were strangers in the land to which they went, and were strangers in the land they left. Ruth was a poor foreigner but was committed to Naomi and was determined to fulfill that commitment she made. She acted on what she said in the only way she knew how. She was faithful in seeking to provide for Naomi as long as she lived. It is expected of us to do what we say in words and sing in our Christian hymns and songs. Ordinary people are those who meet the needs of others while remaining faithful to God.

Separate fields belonged to different people and "by chance" Ruth came to the field of Boaz and asked permission to glean there. "By chance" Boaz came by to see the work going on in the harvest. It seems a simple but unusual happenstance, but it happened. Behind it all God was working "to will and to do of His good pleasure." In grace He was making things happen according to His sovereign will although there was nothing dramatic in the way He was working. We should never overlook or take for granted the blessing of the little things that happen in our lives. God is at work in the way most suited to the situation. Boaz must have been a friend to Naomi and was certainly a relative of Elimelech. He was a man of power and authority in the community and had influence in Bethlehem that seemed to be used in a positive way. Ruth needed a favor and Boaz gave it without her asking for it. God is working behind the scenes in the lives of His ordinary people.

Ruth's politeness and diligence added greatly to her natural attractiveness. As a result, she received far more than she expected. Boaz not only was faithful in making provision for this poor widow woman, but he gave her permission, protection and the provision of food and water to maintain her strength for laboring in the field gleaning. It is interesting to notice that Boaz served her food himself. He granted her the favor she needed out of the fullness of his provision as a faithful man. He obeyed what the law meant, the spirit of the law, as well as what the law said. He wasn't just meeting the basic requirements of the law. God had been generous to him and now he was generous to the poor. Whether out of a sense of duty, conscience and reputation or as a response to the law, Boaz did what was right by showing kindness to the poor woman. Ruth wondered why he noticed her because she thought she was unnoticed. We are not unnoticed in life even though we may think we are insignificant in the overall scheme of things in our society. But Boaz knew about her already and how she cared for Naomi. As far as Boaz was concerned Ruth earned what she got. God likes to do things for His children and rewards faithfulness by His provision for our real needs.

There will be times in our lives when we are unsure of ourselves and what will happen to us. Uncertainty can seriously stumble a person who hasn't really learned to live and walk by faith. From Ruth chapter two we learn that we must live in hope [Ru.2:17-23]. Despondency not only negatively affects us, but it also can affect others around us. When we live in hope we will labor in hope. When we labor in hope, we will be willing to trust God in hope. Then when these practices are followed in a way similar to Ruth and Naomi, we will truly be living in hope.

Ruth 2:12. *"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."*

YOUR LABOR.

Not everyone does the same things - some things are great and others are small;
But when our labor is for God, He is willing to add His blessing to all.
He knows the motive behind each and every task and the work we will do,
And adds His full reward -payment and more - when through that work we show
Our efforts are not just for self-interest, but to further His work by God's grace -
So, He recompenses the labor you've done in your home or in some distant place.

One is working as a farmer in the field - physical labor there can be quite intense.
From preparing the ground to bringing in the yield - much labor in that field is spent.
It would be foolish for one to sit at home, praying and hoping for results without work.
God cannot water plants with rain, when the farmer has placed no seed in the earth.
The sun can shine in all its strength for days, but there is no life or to seed to germinate,
If the one who is supposed to do his work, either sits around or spends his time at play.

A builder who does not build really can't be called a builder nor even is a builder at all.
It is he who is diligent at his work who will be the one on whom others will call
To do for them what they cannot do, for they know he is a man who knows his trade;
They can travel around and see evidence of his skill at work by all the things he made.
The Lord can add His blessing to efforts that earnest and honest builders put forth;
As they teach and shape the lives of people, their work gives evidence of their worth.

A fisher goes fishing early each day, even the day after he fished and caught nothing;
Because he knows there are fish in the sea to be caught, if only he can find them.
He may pull up his nets and move them to another more distant place for awhile,
Or he may have to change the bait he uses, but it won't be long till he can smile
At the bounty the Master of fishers has sent to that place for him to catch -
He wouldn't have caught a single one if he just sat on the beach to watch.

"In all labor there is profit" - and each one of us needs to be off to the work.
No harvest of grain will come in, or no building done - no fish caught if we shirk
From the calling wherewith we've been called to labor for the Lord today -
He can recompense our work and rewards what we do - not just what we say.
Do our part with enthusiasm and vigor, knowing we are called to do what we must,
And the Lord will make happen what He wants when in Him alone we put our trust.

"I find great enjoyment, Father God, in the privilege of laboring in Thy field. I am thankful that I learned to enjoy any kind of work when I was young. Now, I find a lot of pleasure and meaning in a work that Thou art able to bless. By Thy grace I would like to be found doing a meaningful work when the Lord comes or when I die. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ruth 2:19. *"Where hast thou gleaned today? And where wroughtest thou?"*

THE FIELD.

The work we do from day to day, may at times seem insignificant and a waste of valuable time. The question that influences the work we do is, "Where did you work?" It is possible to expend great amounts of energy on things that are wrong or in the wrong place. There are places of work for the one who has followed God's leading and know that it is God's will we be in this place. And yet, all it seems that we do is glean. We spend time picking up bits and pieces. What we are doing seems such slow work and the results normally are small in our eyes. Picking up what someone else drops, doesn't impress other people around who are energetically engaged in "the beginning of barley harvest." Others seem to be getting souls all around us; there are thriving works that are filling pews; others have people coming from everywhere to be with them.

What's wrong with me? What's wrong with what I am doing? It doesn't measure up to what all the other reapers are producing. I get tired working hard and getting what seems so little out of it. "Where wroughtest thou?" "Where did I work?" In this field; the one that seemed to be the right one. Should I go to another field and try to get more barley there? If I do, how can I be sure the Lord led me out of this one into the other one? I have met the Owner of this field but I am not sure who owns the other ones around. The One who owns this field is kind, thoughtful and giving. He doesn't mind speaking to me and encouraging me to keep at it when I am hot and thirsty. He even shared His own food with me by letting me dip my bread in the same thing He dips His food in. And He also lets me drink water so that I haven't had to go to the well to draw.

No! I'll stick with this field and see what I can get by gleaning and let others harvest or glean in the other fields. This bag full of gleanings seems to be getting heavy. Maybe that's because it's getting close to the end of the day, and I am hot, tired, dusty, itchy and I am getting older too. In fact, I've got all that I can handle. I don't think I can deal with any more. My O my! I must be getting weak! I think I'll give this up. But I've got to beat out what I've got first; and that is going to take some time and work.

What in the world!? I have a whole lot more here than I dreamed of. How could I have gotten so much and not realized it. Those reapers, they sure left a lot now that I think about it. Probably if they were working for me, I would've fired them for leaving so much behind. I wonder what their Boss thought? Wait a minute! He was there! He was talking to me and He was talking to them so He knew all the time what was happening. He wanted me to get this bag full! It was His doing all the time and yet He wanted me to work for it rather than just dump it in my lap. It was His field I was in; it was His grain I was able to get; He could've just given it to me if He had wanted to, but He didn't. He knew if I gathered it, if I put it in my bag, if I worked for it I would appreciate it more. It would mean more to me than any other way. He gave it but I did it! Yes! That's the way it should always be. It was from His seed; it was in His field; it belonged to Him; but He let me get it for myself.

This bread sure tastes good! It is fresh from the field; fresh from the oven; fresh from my hand – no, fresh from His hand!

We are able to learn from Ruth's responsibility to care for the needs of her mother-in-law and her own needs, that we should not expect from others some kind of interest in our welfare if we are not acting aggressively to help ourselves. We also learn from Boaz's generosity that kindness has its own rewards and one is never wrong when they seek to meet the genuine needs of others.

"I want to thank Thee, O God of the field, Supplier of those who need what Thou alone can supply. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, will You accept my sincere and grateful thanks for the full and plenty I receive every day from Thee? I don't deserve this spiritual food and sustenance I have here but I really do appreciate it. Amen."

Ruth 2:20. *"And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead.' And Naomi said unto her, 'The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.'"*

KINSMAN-REDEEMER.

Amidst great departure in the nation - a man of honor
A mighty man it is true, a man of wealth, a man of integrity.
Not too high to see the needs of others around him;
Not too low to lose the respect of those who know him -

The KINSMAN-REDEEMER.

In his field there was much activity - the time of harvest was here
In his field there was unity - laborers and gleaners worked together
In his field there was purity - the women who worked there were safe

In his field there was plenty - for him, his servants and the poor -
The KINSMAN-REDEEMER.

In his field there was counsel - between the master, the servants and the widow
In his field there was care - the master saw, knew and met the need of the poor
In his field there was comfort - food and water for hungry and thirsty, shelter from heat
In his field there was compensation - for laborers, and "Handfuls of purpose" for Ruth
The KINSMAN-REDEEMER.

There was no evil-speaking in the field - the master was there
There was no jealousy in the field - fairness was there
There was no fear in the field - all knew the master's will there
There was no sloth in the field - the harvest was passing there -
The KINSMAN-REDEEMER.

He knew his responsibility - there were rights to be maintained
He knew his ability - he could meet the need of the widows
He knew his heart - he didn't ignore what he wanted
He knew how to deal with the needs - he had a role to fill as...
The KINSMAN-REDEEMER.

"There is no question, O God, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the great Kinsman-Redeemer for his bride today. Everything I see in Boaz can be clearly seen in the Lord Jesus and His relationship to His bride. May all who are part of this body of believers realize our privilege to be known by Him and chosen by Him. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

GIVE THANKS

The value of giving thanks for all the blessings we received should never be underestimated. When Ruth came home after gleaning all day in the field of Boaz she had "about an ephah of barley." That would be close to thirty pounds of grain, which would normally be an unheard-of amount for a gleaner to gather. It was obvious to Naomi that something special had happened in their lives and behind it, God was working on their behalf. When we receive unexpected gifts or more than we had expected, we have a tendency to be suspicious of the reason behind the gift. It seems like we suspect the giver has some expectations of us that are beyond what is normal. So instead of being grateful we wonder if there is some obligation tied to the gift. We have gotten used to greed that comes more easily than gratitude. It is easier to ask for help than to accept the fact that someone wanted to give the gift without strings attached and without being asked. We are slow to give thanks without restraint to another person because we think in terms of giving to others to get favors back.

Furthermore, we may be embarrassed by the generosity of others when we realize we have been taking and expecting to receive, rather than looking for ways to give with joy. "God loveth the cheerful giver." We may honestly feel unworthy of blessings bestowed on us by others and their generosity convicts us of our lack of giving simply because we are grateful to God for what He has allowed us to have. Some people see generous gifts almost as a form of money and payment that has as its motivation the measure of worth. The costly gifts are worthy gifts and the cheap gifts are not of value. When that happens, we are looking at the gift rather than the giver.

Pride shows its ugly head when we feel worthy of receiving generosity and ingratitude for what has cost someone who may have just wanted to show appreciation. The big pile of grain Ruth brought home after the day's work was proof of the generosity of Boaz, and both she and Naomi were grateful for this provision he provided for them. No doubt Naomi was surprised and thankful for the amount of grain but also for the cooked food Ruth had left over from her lunch. She had worked all afternoon and was probably hungry but was conscious of the need of her mother-in-law and brought the food to her. No one else knew she had kept the leftovers to share with Naomi. There is something about being thankful that has a lasting appeal to those who know what we have done for them but do not advertise so others will know and think well of us. We have the weak, the aged, the handicapped and lonely who need our assistance and will be thankful for the little things as well as the big things. These people need our time, empathy, encouragements, talents and financial aid. We need to show our gratitude to God by practical living by faith unselfishly. Naomi was immediate in her expression of gratitude to the Lord and her benefactor.

The details of what and how generosity was motivated may not be known as far as the details, but like Naomi expressed herself, we should "in everything give thanks." Joyful gratitude has a significant impact on the giver and there is something that is not forgotten when an act of kindness is truly appreciated. Naomi

believed Boaz's act of kindness deserved a reward from God and did not hesitate to say so with a grateful heart. Ordinary people of faith see God's hand at work in the ordinary things of life. Prayer is a way of expressing gratitude for someone else when we bring that person's name before the Lord for His attention and commendation. A prayer commendation is one way to show gratitude both to God and the person whose name we mention to Him.

Boaz was known to Naomi as a close kinsman-redeemer who knew his duty was to keep a family and property together. Ruth probably didn't know all of those things of which Naomi was aware such as the fact that Ruth's husband, Mahlon, who had died was the legal heir to the field of Elemelech, and that a dead man's wife was part of that inheritance. Ruth was no longer an outsider and was considered one who was guaranteed grain until the end of both the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. The lack of food was no longer a problem because Ruth was being protected by Boaz from harm, verbal abuse, ridicule and innuendo from the young men because she was a stranger. Now that was past. It should be normal for us as those who the Lord has blessed through the efforts of others to express our gratitude for the privilege of steady work, gifts that express friendship, kindness that has been shown. We give words of gratitude to God through whom "all blessings flow." We "count our blessings" and praise God for His goodness to us. It is only right for us to pray the prayers of thanksgiving for those who have benefited us that we might enjoy what we have and in turn demonstrate our gratitude by being faithful.

Ruth 3

TAKING A RISK

It is not uncommon for Christians to think only God can solve our problems and God answers our prayers without human help. We know we live by faith so we may think we are relieved of responsibility and do not need to do anything more because after all, God is in control. We pray about a matter and then sit back and wait for God to do something about our need. The thinking behind that attitude is all we need to do is to pray and trust God. But God isn't sitting by the door waiting for us to call. He is busy working out His own plans and is moving people and events according to His purpose. Actually, we are the ones sitting by the phone waiting for Him to call us. We receive our orders from Him to instruct us and move us to service for Him. It is our responsibility to wait for His movements and then apply our gifts and talents to the tasks He gives us. Both Naomi and Ruth are good examples of Integrity. Naomi felt responsible to see Ruth had hope in the future. A widow in that day had to rely on her family for support and protection. Naomi knew Boaz as a man of character and as he was a kinsman, she no doubt felt she would be supplied with the necessities of life. But a foreigner who was widowed like Ruth, really had no one on which to turn. Her caring character led her to encourage Ruth to act according to the culture of the Israelites. There will be those who come into our lives from time to time who have legitimate needs which we can meet. Wants and needs are two different things.

As stewards of that which God has given us, it is our responsibility to use this stewardship with wisdom and grace. We will have to make decisions when people come and ask for our assistance as to whether the request is honest and whether we are able to do anything to help them. That is a risk we have to take. Naomi saw God's hand behind that which was happening with Boaz and Ruth and used her common sense, maturity and ingenuity in faith to seize the opportunity that arose. No longer was she a bitter old woman. No longer is she passive like a person whose spirit is broken. Now with excitement and authority she steps up to the occasion and takes advantage of what she knew was a God-given opportunity. She had food and a relative who cared what happened to the two widows. She had hope in the future because she knew Boaz had stature in the community and was taking the kinsman-redeemer part.

Ruth felt responsible to Naomi to provide for her needs and give her assurance that she wouldn't go hungry even though she had no family to care for her. Integrity moves us to not wait for others to do what we are responsible to do for ourselves. When the time comes we are at the end of our resources, and want to turn to someone else for help, the first thing to be done is to take the matter to the Lord in specific terms and wait for His will to be revealed to us. It may seem to us that we are called upon to take unnecessary risks simply because older people have told us to. However, when we have older friends and family in whom we trust, even though an action may seem risky to our reputation or our opinion, their experience and knowledge can be of great value when we are taking actions that involve risks. God has a pattern and plan for the well-being of His people and we do well to follow that. Others can help us in the carrying out of those plans. Ruth could legitimately approach Boaz as a family member to whom he had an obligation.

The kinsman-redeemer was a guardian for his family and was responsible to meet the needs of family ties by either marrying the widow or fulfilling the laws for caring for that widow. In that day integrity was demonstrated when one met the requirements of a kinsman-redeemer and was publicly identified as the responsible person. Boaz was such a person. His integrity was demonstrated toward those who worked for

him. There was a good relationship between him as the employer and his employees. There was also a respect for Naomi and Ruth in his dealings with them. Even though it seemed like he kept his distance so there would be no compromising of reputation on the part of any of those involved, he knew what was happening and was willing to take the risk of going public with his intentions for the care of Naomi and Ruth. Our Kinsman-Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, who though He was God, came to earth to redeem us from sin and purchase us to be His possession. This in turn guarantees our eternal inheritance.

There is no reason to believe Naomi was suggesting that Ruth behave seductively by going to the threshing floor outside of the town where Boaz was sleeping to prevent the theft of grain and to wait for his turn to thresh his barley. In a secluded place under the cover of darkness the opportunity was there to do what was needed to secure the future. Using faithful ingenuity, she acted on the opportunity without knowing whether she would be accepted or rejected. We do not always know what God is going to do, but we know He can do what we cannot do. She was simply telling Ruth to act according to the custom and the law of Israel. It was common for a servant to sleep at the feet of his master. Ruth was probably unfamiliar with that particular practice of the Jews but she took the risk of acting in faith on what she was told by her mother in law. Ruth took the place of a lowly servant by taking that position which was acceptable in those days. This was a family business in which she was letting Boaz know he could be her kinsman-redeemer by finding someone else for her or marrying her himself. There was nothing romantic about this, although there was later. It is inappropriate on the part of a believer to give appearance of evil in our relational contacts with others. Purity is a choice we make and that is not to be compromised. That often is a person's most attractive characteristic that leads to a permanent relationship. It is a wise person who guards as fine treasure that purity which endears them to God and to godly people. Sensible preparation was needed and Naomi knew Ruth needed to "wash...perfume herself...and then dress up" out of respect both for Ruth herself, and for Boaz.

Ruth followed Naomi's advice because she knew her to be kind, trustworthy and a person of moral integrity. It is wise for us to take the advice of those who are older and wiser. The experience and knowledge of such a person can be invaluable to us. It doesn't pay to ignore the words of one who has already been over the road of life and maintained their integrity. Respectability comes at the price of saying "No" to what we know is wrong and "Yes" to that which is right. There is a certain dignity to be maintained that is not always understood by those who want to be everyone's friend. To laugh at unclean jokes, to accommodate to the wishes of those who live carelessly and laugh at sexual innuendo is to lose your respectability. One who lives by faith, will realize there are times when maintaining dignity and respectability have costs, we must be willing to pay. Good impressions are often created by simply preparing to please another person. Ruth put her "best foot forward," as a testimony to whom she was in character and looks.

Boaz's answer to Ruth indicates that he had already been considering marrying her but there were marital rules to follow. He had a reputation for keeping his word and not quitting until a task was completed. This kind of reliable person stands out in any culture or any age. We will be called upon to take risks in our decision-making times when we are wise to ask ourselves some questions. Am I regarded as one who does what he says he will do? Do I keep my word and follow through a task or assignment to the end? Am I high on anyone's list as a person of integrity? It doesn't happen overnight but takes time and consistency. We can learn for ourselves practical lessons from Ruth's commitment to purity and Boaz's commitment to maintain his dignity. It is not always wise to push things but we should be willing to wait for an opportune time. When one is at ease and contented, make sure you do the right thing, with the right person, at the right time. Privacy protects from embarrassment when the outcome is not known because we do not know how each one is going to react. Creativity, opportunity, preparation, persistence, common sense and compassion go well together to bring the right outcome of a matter. Ruth was willing to do what the older, wiser woman said even though she was likely uncomfortable doing it. Two people being alone in a field is one thing. Two people alone in the dark at night is another. The reputation of both Boaz and Ruth was at stake. Ruth was quiet, resolute and faithful.

Ruth 3:4. "And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in,

MARK THE PLACE.

Lying in a manger at Bethlehem-Judah in an outside place at the start
Of His life on earth as a man-child sent by God, His grace to us to impart -
There was no great ado made when He came here to live and dwell on earth among men,
But instead of men the angel and heavenly hosts came to testify to Him from heaven.

His humanity was evident to fearful fishermen as He lay sleeping in the aft of the boat.

The storm was raging around them, but with Him aboard that ship would surely float,
Because there was more to do, when he said to them, "Go to the other side,"
Others might fear but His work was not done, until upon Calvary's cross He died.

Lying on the ground in the garden, He prayed aloud - "Not My will but Thine."
His strong crying and tears were not for Himself, but for all the sins of mine.
A prayer like His was such because no one else could bear sin's great load -
His strength was there but He lay in prayer as blood on His countenance showed.

When the cross was past and light came back on at last, sin's price was fully paid.
Two men came bearing all that was needed and then His body in the tomb was laid.
But the One who had been seen lying in various places, now is seen standing on His feet;
No longer lying down under an earthly weight; He is the Victor for sin He did defeat.

We mark where He lay in a long past day but now, we uncover His feet -
And see His feet shod in brass as our Lord walks where with saints He meets -
There to show forth to us who by Him have been blessed with every benefit by grace -
Knowing we soon shall see Him who gave all for me, seated in the highest place.

"O Lord God of heaven: to have seen the Lord Jesus lying as a lowly human among men must have moved all the heavenly hosts to wonder at Thy grace to fallen man. The One who upholds all things by the word of His power lying in a manger in some field, or in a boat on a stormy sea, or in a garden at night - and especially, to see His body in a tomb - is sight never to be forgotten. I mark the place where He shall lie and wonder and worship, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

HONORING OTHERS

There is no question that every person is different in many ways but basically there are two classes. Those who have the "me-first" and "here-I- am" attitude, and those who have a "there-you-are" attitude. Some of the last group have the "God first, others second and me last" attitude. To give honor to others involves self-sacrifice which is not too popular among most people. Those who honor others will introduce shy people and call attention to those who are often overlooked. They may even brag about a reticent person's achievements and will listen with appreciation and interest to what others have to say. Often, they are the ones in a group who will draw out the thoughts of others and give credence to what those people say. Usually they are steady at their work and take the comments people make seriously. They find it easy to give praise to others without trying to claim some part of that person's success. God gives honor to the self-sacrificing person, not the "I did it my way" person. The Lord Jesus was the model of self-sacrifice. He gave Himself for others - for us - for me. Ruth was like that. Boaz also was a man who was sensitive to others even though he was well known and a person of good standing in Bethlehem. He was committed to helping Naomi and Ruth, and did it without grudging. He did what was right and he did it right away.

Ordinary people make choices in the course of an ordinary day without a lot of fanfare because it is normal to do that. Yet that simple act may have eternal consequences that we may never realize in this lifetime. Ruth had made a commitment to her mother-in-law on the road in Moab and she was committed to carrying that out. When Naomi made a plan to secure her future, Ruth carried that out consistent to her statement of commitment to Naomi. A person who thinks of others may not understand why another person wants a certain thing to be done, but gives them the credit of having a justifiable reason for that which that person desires. In quietness Ruth did what Naomi said and unobtrusively made her way to the threshing-floor and waited unnoticed until Boaz had finished eating and drinking. Naomi had told her to "mark the place that he shall lie" which was probably so she wouldn't go to the wrong person. We need to do that when it comes to our submission to the Lord so we do not get sidetracked by the opinions of other people.

To "uncover his feet" would have caused Ruth to be concerned lest she wake him or be considered a woman of the wrong kind. A prominent leader and a beautiful stranger from Moab would be food for scandal in a community like Bethlehem. Ruth put her reputation and self-respect on the line to fulfill her promise to Naomi. When we are serving the Lord, our promises are more important than our popularity. Daniel "chose not to defile himself with the king's meat." Our Lord Jesus chose to show compassion for the needy rather than contempt over the failures of publicans and sinners. Self-sacrifice will mean we will risk our reputation in order to do what God wants in spite of what other people may think - or even what we think is sensible.

Those two people, Boaz and Ruth were resting there in the night, the one sleeping soundly and the other likely tense, scared and uncertain as to the outcome of that meeting. While she waited, she probably had a lot of concern about the whole matter, but she trusted the wisdom of Naomi and "thy God shall be my God," would have become real to her as she waited in the darkness for something to happen. Fear is a legitimate

emotion which we cannot avoid. But when we believe God has led us to a time and place, then we have to leave the outcome of things to His sovereign will. Something startled Boaz to wake him up and what a shock he must have had to find Ruth lying at his feet probably full of fear. Boaz knew a woman was there but apparently couldn't see her features in the darkness. For the first time in the whole narrative of the book of Ruth, she identifies herself by name, "I am Ruth thy handmaid." She declared herself as his servant, not a daughter-in-law, not a gleaner in the field but a person in her own right. She was not "the Moabitess" but a "maidservant" who was now part of Israel - a household servant who was worthy of marriage. It is no small thing to be a child of God. We may think ourselves to be not worth much in the kingdom of God because we are just ordinary people, but it is important that we remember who we are and what it means to be a son or daughter of the living God.

Ruth went a step further by using the custom of "spreading thy skirt over thy handmaid" as a proposal of marriage to Boaz. This was not an aggressive act of self-will but an understanding of her role, and his, as a kinsman-redeemer. That meant he was to marry the widow of a dead relative to produce a child who would carry on the family lineage. Such a firstborn child would be Naomi's legal heir to all that was hers to keep the family name from dying out. In this case Ruth was the substitute for Naomi who was past child-bearing age. Faith knows no limits when we conduct ourselves according to the word of God. We do not know all the things God has prepared for those who love Him. Ruth made her proposal using the same form Boaz had prayed - "Under whose wings thou hast come to trust." Ruth was asking Boaz to answer his own prayer. That is not an uncommon thing for those who love the Lord and want to please Him. Often the answer to our prayer is in our own hands. "It is God who worketh in you..." Likely Ruth had fear and trepidation as she waited for a response from Boaz.

What a relief it would have been when he praised her action. He had praised her before for being loyal to Naomi. He had praised her for leaving Moab and coming to Bethlehem. He must have considered this to be another act of kindness toward Naomi for her to lay her reputation on the line for Naomi's sake. Ruth did not come to him for money or for her own sake only, but to benefit Naomi and meet her need of an heir. Self-sacrifice means we pay a price to meet the needs of another even though we may not get what we want necessarily for ourselves. It is a principle in the kingdom of God that greatness lies in being a servant. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest example of this when He became our Kinsman-Redeemer. Like our Lord, Boaz first removed Ruth's fears in a compassionate way with his words of kindness. He also accepted her proposal, and in a special way praised her as a virtuous woman of noble character. Her strength of character, devotion, industry and generosity were noteworthy and this man of high standing gave her honor. Both of these people were people of high character, honor, respect and dignity. Such characteristics need to be cultivated in each child of God and be lived out publicly. Self-sacrifice in honoring others will bring glory to God and blessing to His people. Boaz answered his own prayer. Ruth's devotion to Naomi was rewarded. Self-sacrifice in honoring others gave authenticity to both of them in their lives of faith. These were ordinary people who were simply concerned about others and the Lord rewarded them for the sacrifices they made.

Ruth 3:18. "Then said she, 'Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he has finished the thing this day.'"

SIT STILL.

Time passes slowly when one is not sure what happens next.
"Is it going to be okay, or is the next kinsman kind of vexed?"
But through the trials of life we learn to rest assured -
That in every circumstance, everything is known by the Lord.

There are things to do and protocol to follow -
Even pressures and challenges that are hard to swallow.
However, that is to be expected in the walk of faith -
Trusting God for the outcome is the only way that's safe.

People have their rights and we can't ignore them.
Often the way an event ends, depends on how we begin.
Let the other person speak and be polite to listen
To any argument he has before you go and dismiss them.

Your time will come when you're able to make your case.
He will listen then to you and will carefully watch your face
To see if you are sincere or if there is a hidden reason
You sought him out knowing it wasn't just to please him.

When a matter needs attending, do not wait too long -
There is a time that's right, that's when the issue is strong

In the mind of each one who is involved in the matter
And in dealing with such things - "the sooner is the better."

"Don't jump the gun," but don't procrastinate either -
When the decisions are being made, be sure you will be there
To bring the scriptures of truth to bear on this event
And speak plainly God's mind so all will know what He meant.

When the conclusion of the issue is made - then each one
Will know the best decision has been come to, and all can move on
To fulfilling the reason and plan God has for each individual life -
And a peaceful resolution has been made avoiding unnecessary strife.

"Surely the patient waiting for the conclusion of events is best Father, even when my nature is to push for quick action. I am asking for patience and perseverance in all of my dealing with other people. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

THE ABILITY TO WAIT

When important things are happening in our lives it is very difficult to patiently wait for results over which we have no control. To be able to keep our hands off the process is not easy. The problem is that really impatience comes from our sense of self-importance and pride, and lack of faith. Pride convinces us that we are important, and self-importance produces false self-confidence. Self-confidence in turn produces impatience. The night scene in which Boaz accepted Ruth proposal was very dramatic, but there was a glitch in the matter. Another kinsman-redeemer with a closer connection to Naomi had a closer claim to the field of Elimelech that should have passed on to Mahlon, Ruth's husband. He had to wait until morning to settle the matter legally and righteously. Would she marry Boaz or who she be another man's wife? Sometimes the issues of life seem so complicated that we worry and complain even when we can do nothing about the matter. At such times it is very hard to just wait.

Ruth left early when it was still dark before she would be easily recognized. The darkness could hopefully keep her night time visit a secret. Boaz also shared her concern for secrecy lest a scandal trap them. He wisely had a plan which would alleviate the problem. Using her shawl as a container, the load of grain she carried would indicate to anyone who happened to see her that this woman was either working very late or very early. An industrious woman who was working long hours to provide for her mother-in-law was a person of virtue. That was not a deceptive act but a sensible way to deal with a potential problem. Common sense in dealing with touchy matters is important for us to apply in any situation. We can be patient when we know what is happening is God's concern as well as ours. He does not fail us. He cares what happens to us. "All things work together for good to them who love God."

A patient believer knows God wants our best and waits for divine intervention to settle things that are beyond our control. Naomi would be waiting for the outcome of her plan. Ruth had told her all that had happened and all the details. In the gift of grain, Boaz gave assurance to Naomi that he knew her desire and wanted to assure her of his genuine concern. She would not be "empty" again. One way or another she would have an heir. Patience relies on God's commitment as well as His concern. God's actions are total and final. He doesn't have to recommit Himself to bring something to an end. Our waiting time is the length of time God ordains and not a minute longer. It may actually be after we are gone that His plan that we had waited for will be accomplished. Ruth also had to be patient. She had insisted on coming to Bethlehem. She took the initiative in going out to glean grain for food. She had carried out Naomi's plan - and now she had to sit and wait. She could do nothing more about this particular matter, so she had to sit tight until Boaz did his part. We can't do everything in spite of what speechmakers tell graduates. We all have our limitations whether we like to admit it or not. There are some things for which we just have to patiently wait.

Naomi knew what Boaz was like better than Ruth did. She assured Ruth that "the man will not rest until this matter is settled." It was in the character of Boaz to take care of business and do what he promised. He was not distracted from his objective. People who are true to their word, follow through to the conclusion of a matter. God has concern and is committed to His people and it is in God's character to do what He says. Our Kinsman-Redeemer can be trusted implicitly, but that doesn't mean we won't have to wait. Patience depends on the assurance that God is true to His word. God does what He says He will do on His own timetable. Sometimes the light is green and we can go ahead. Sometimes it is yellow warning us to prepare to stop. When it is red - just wait. It may be God's will that we wait in patience for the rest of our lives. That does not mean He has forgotten us but that His work is going on a timetable that is different than ours.

We didn't expect it would take this long
But we know our Blessed Lord knows best.

So, whatever He plans we will not go wrong
If in patience and consolation we rest.
Because if we had our way and acted in haste
The outcome might be a mistake.
All that we have done would have been a waste
Because God couldn't bless the way that we take.

In patience and quietness possess ye your soul
Just wait until God chooses to act
According as His plans and purposes unfold
And we will be able to go forward not back
To claim the promises and blessings He gives
That exceeds far more than we ask or think
Because the sovereign plans are not ours but His
And binds us to Him with an unbreakable link.

Others deserve our interest and assistance
That they may get some recognition they deserve
The arrogant and proud will give serious resistance
Because they would rather be well-known than serve
Those who know self-sacrifice will not resent
Some praise and thanks for those who are shy
With respect and dignity, they will represent
That which is important to God, not man's eye.

"Father, may Thy servant have the wisdom to give credit where credit is due. May I never be guilty of claiming something that is praiseworthy that really belongs to others. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ruth 4

RESULTS OF GOD'S GRACE

What we believe, our attitude, how we act and what we do establishes our reputation over a period of time. People make allowances for mistakes and understand the fact that failures occur in the best of people. What this really means is it takes time and careful consideration of all that we do and say each day, for a good reputation to be in place. Along with the willingness to take risks, and the purity and integrity that has formed our character, there is a dignity that is expected from the child of God that people do not expect from others. Ruth is an example of that dignity in that she was willing and able to wait with patience. Boaz in a more public way is an example of one who maintained his dignity even in the pursuit of a solution to a matter that had the potential of being a public scandal if not dealt with in a righteous and dignified way.

Boaz was a man of integrity who followed the due process of the law to settle Naomi and Ruth's legal claim. He recognized his accountability to the law. To break ethical rules whenever one pleases will not escape divine judgment in the future. Those who model integrity, are those who recognize they are accountable to God and His law no matter what others may do or say. God arranged that shortly after dawn when Boaz was at the city gate where legal matters were dealt with, the other kinsman-redeemer came by. Public matters have to be dealt with publicly today the same as in those ancient days. The ten elders formed the government when it came to the law and judicial process. The matter Boaz brought to those men and the other kinsman had nothing to do with guilt or innocence but an administrative procedure involving the exchange of land. This was like a public hearing on a matter as to who is responsible to exercise the rights and responsibilities of a kinsman-redeemer. Boaz was open and honest as a man of integrity should be. He followed the law without deception. Such living before the people of a community honors God. He brought up the land Naomi wanted to sell and the relatives had to decide who would get that land so it would remain in the ancestral family.

The other kinsman wanted the land and had first rights to it, until he learned that in order to redeem the land he had to take Ruth to be his wife in order to raise up an heir for the dead relative. The newborn heir would ultimately keep the ancestral land. For some reason the other kinsman drew back from that responsibility. Perhaps it was too expensive for him to take three other people into his home. Perhaps it would jeopardize his family life or his own property rights. There are consequences to every action we take. It is a wise person who takes time to consider all that is involved in each decision we make. Because of one man's choice, Boaz was free legally to take his place, buy the land and take Ruth to be his wife. He took the responsibility to pay the cost of redemption. The sacrifice to pay that cost brought him the blessing of a bride and later an heir for Naomi. Integrity costs, and integrity pays the bill that is owing. That is what our Lord Jesus Christ did when He paid the cost of redemption with His own life and purchased a bride for Himself.

As far as patience: Ruth was willing to wait and rest contentedly knowing that the God she had testified about, and in whom she trusted, would bring the right result of the matter. She had done what she was advised to do by one older and more experienced in life, and she had maintained her own sense of worth, responsibility and dignity. Now she was able to rest in quiet confidence in God knowing she had done what she should have done. Boaz in a respectful, honorable and dignified way, followed through the matter regarding the buying and selling of land and the passing on of an inheritance, carefully, wisely and cleverly to bring about the right conclusion. If a relative wanted the land of a dead person, he also had to take the possessions of that person and be responsible for them – including the widow. Not everything will be settled at once when important issues arise in our lives. We have a tendency to take our time in making our mind up about a matter, and then expect the response to be an immediate answer on the part of others toward what we have decided. One who can wait quietly and patiently is impressive to most people because many make decisions based on the affect it has on us and others in the immediate future rather than looking ahead to the conclusion of a matter.

Dignity and honor go together. Boaz publicly announced his intention in an honorable way. Even though he knew what he wanted the outcome to be, he didn't short-circuit the legal practice of the law of his day. He stayed within the bounds of the law and, in faith, he stated only what was necessary to say so the other kinsman was put in the position of clearly stating what he could and could not do. Nothing was compromised. No one could accuse Boaz or Ruth of inappropriate behavior. Boaz's proclamation was clearly fulfilling the laws of the Jews and Ruth was able to live in dignity and respectability before them all. The children borne to them were legitimately heirs of all the possessions of Ruth and Boaz. Naomi was not abandoned either because her daughter-in-law and husband took full responsibility for her. The women of the town of Bethlehem stated that Ruth was better to Naomi than seven sons.

It is a wise person who recognizes that all we have lived for and stood for, can be lost in a moment if we choose to make a decision based on the desire for material gain alone. When we wait upon God, we will find His grace is sufficient for our every need, and His plans are often carried out in a gracious way without the threat of pressure or violent opposition. When the shoe exchange took place, Boaz had the legal right to the land he could set foot on. That bill of sale settled the contract. Witnesses verified the claim. The property was defined, everything owned by Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon now belong to Boaz - and Ruth was his wife. The family line would be preserved. Ruth would have full status as an Israelite and the whole community was witness to this legal agreement.

The people of Bethlehem blessed Boaz with a desire for his prosperity, fame and a family line that would continue. That blessing asked for an heir, gave praise to Boaz and the reward of integrity established his leadership. Leaders are not intended to be caterers to the whims of people. Celebrations make life enjoyable, give recognition to special people and give opportunity for us to join together in praising God. Boaz and Ruth married, and the Lord enable her to conceive and have a son as an heir for Naomi. The Lord gave the conception so that child was a gift from God as His reward to faithful ordinary people. Naomi and her grandson were featured in the praise of the people. No longer was she empty but full as the heir, Obed, (servant) would serve the Lord and provide for Naomi. The bitter woman now had joy.

The faithfulness of those ordinary people, have blessed others down through the generations to David, then the Lord Jesus and now to us. Millions have become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ who was of the seed of David. Another result of God's manifested grace to be seen in this book involves rewards. God had done all this not just to let us have an interesting story to read to our children. We learn for ourselves how to conduct life in a manner that is honorable to God and before men in our day and age. In the midst of the terrible days of the judges, God was preparing the way for the Lord Jesus Christ to come. He was teaching those through the ages yet to come how His purposes will be fulfilled in spite of the kind of day and society in which we live.

It is not necessary for us to know the reasons behind everything that happens. It is enough that we trust God by faith to do what is best and during those times of uncertainty, maintain a dignity appropriate to one who is in the family of God. Ruth would not have known the full outcome of her story and the purpose God had for her life. We will not know all the reasons for the things that happen to us until we look back from the perspective of eternity and see what God had in mind. Our biggest responsibility now is to make our choices with God's eternal values in mind. Never take shortcuts to get ahead but give God a chance to work in your life. Live in faithfulness to God and the rewards will far outweigh any sacrifices or losses that may have occurred. The life of Ruth was full of significance and her legacy is still bringing blessing because of a choice she made along side of a road when she was a young woman.

Ruth 4:15. *“And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him.”*

BETTER THAN SEVEN SONS.

There are claims to be met - protocol to follow
Judges to hear the case - witnesses to call
Land to be exchanged - money to be spent
A redemption price to pay - for a full inheritance.

Two witnesses are involved - there are also two kinsmen
Land can be purchased by one - there are two women to attend
One is linked to the land - the other her dead son's wife
One needs to be cared for - the other one needs a life.

To maintain honor then, something must be done
To get the land or wife - the redeemer of both the same one
Ruth became the wife - redeemed and loved
Ruth, the daughter in law - her honor proved.

A mother she became - she was greatly blessed
From her line Christ came - God knew what was best
Her kinsman-redeemer's choice - changed history
Through his decision one day - blessing came to me.

I may not realize - the importance of one event
A choice that is acted on - reaches to a great extent
Way beyond what I had thought - but knew what must be
God alone really knows - the results I can't see.

May I always be available to respond to the Lord
May I never avoid acting on what I learn from His Word
May God be always able to find me ready and willing
May I be in such a condition of soul for divine infilling.

“Such profound results came from one day's activity, O God, that I am wanting to be sure I am in the right place doing the right thing today. I know I can only take one step at a time and one day at a time, but the consequences of choices on that one day was so lasting and impacting we are experiencing its benefits today. I am praying to be kept from taking decisions lightly or for granted, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

There are many ways biblical truths can be taught from the book of Ruth because the whole book is an example of God dealing with us in grace in days of departure and failure. From the immigration of Elimelech and his family to Moab, we are taught that what we may think is an advantage to us may be a terrible mistake when we leave the rest God has provided for His people in the middle of apostate-like times. We also learn there is a way back to God, when one is willing to return to Him in repentance. That person will find mercy and the rest they once had can be restored. As those who want God's will to be done in our lives and seek that heartily, that rest can be found when we are in close fellowship with the Lord. That rest remains and is secure when we walk with our Lord and His people in the light of His word.

We also learn lessons relating to the actions we take in life. There are high costs to pay by being in the wrong place and with the wrong people. We may not realize it at first, but before long the actions and attitudes of those who serve the pleasures of the world, or the siren call of materialism are soon compromised in testimony. Even our own heart is grieved to where we surrender to what we inwardly know is not God's will. To return to that which we left is very hard. The pride inherent in every one of us has to be humbled. Criticism by those with whom we have been associating, hurts us because we have learned to care for people who do not know what we know, nor have they experienced the joy of fellowship with God to the same degree we once did.

When we finally find ourselves back where we once were and among people who knew us and remember our former fellowship with them; we find it is very hard to establish a credible reputation again. But by a consciousness of God and through His word and prayer we persevere, we will be able again to "restore the years which the locusts have eaten." We will also find God's people for the most part, are very forgiving and willing to reestablish meaningful fellowship with those who are again experiencing the guidance of the Lord through the hard times of restoration. There usually are some who will go out of their way to include and

accept one who displays a real desire for God and are committed to His word. That kind of return is typical of those who forgive "even as Christ forgave us." The conclusion of such a move is blessing from God to us and the blessing of God to others through us.

A character study of Ruth takes us through pretty well every aspect of the life of a believer from the first act of faith to the final blessing to others. When our faith urges us to plead for God's mercies, and He by His grace, brings us back to the path and place of His choosing, we will find His people there with an interest that is godly and sustaining. The power of God will strengthen us to follow His plans with unrestrained self-will that is submitted to His will and the prospect ahead will be greater than we could have imagined. Back in Bethlehem the poor were able to be fed. There was no evil speaking in the field of Boaz but rather an appreciation by all strata of society for each other and their work. There could be wise counsel passed on, care provided, comfort given and just compensation for the efforts of labor put forth. When there is spiritual activity, there is unity and purity that accompanies it. The book of Ruth gives wise counsel to individuals, families and the assemblies of God's people. The illustrations the Spirit of God gives can be easily applied to those issues that face us in all of these areas of life.

Whoever the Holy Spirit used to write this book must have been impressed with the fact that David was an important person when he wrote the genealogy and ended it with David. David either was or had been king. There is left for our learning the fact that we may never know the reasons for unexplainable things that have happened in our lives, but it is enough to know that God does know, and everything is under His control. There are no commands from God nor statements made by the Lord to the leading characters in the narrative. There is just the understanding clearly given when reading through the book, that these people were people of faith who lived faithful, unassuming lives. The sovereign God uses them to bring about His purpose of having our Redeemer to bring salvation to us.