



*Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.*

*3 Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do." 5 And she replied, "All that you say I will do."*

*6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her.*

*7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! 9 He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." 10 And he said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.*

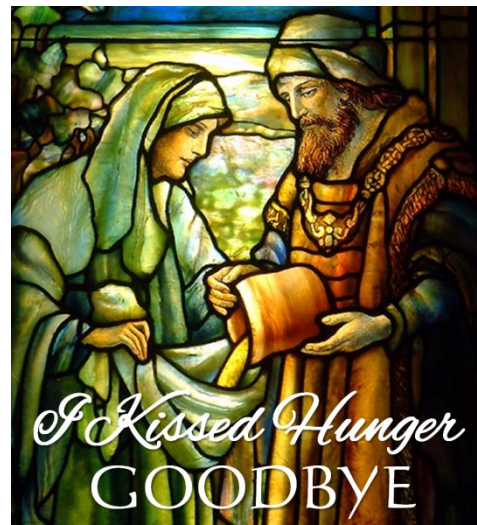
*11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. 12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. 13 Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning."*

*14 So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." 15 And he said, "Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out." So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. 16 And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did you fare, my daughter?" Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17 saying, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, 'You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.' " 18 She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today."*

You have to admit that this chapter is one of the most unique in all of Scripture. At Naomi's bidding, late at night, Ruth laid down next Boaz and then when he woke up, proposed to him. That is what she did, by the way. When she asked Boaz to *spread your wings over your servant*, that was a full-blown marriage proposal. Can you imagine if our church gave similar advice to teenagers and young people today? I'd be fired on the spot if I suggested such a thing!

Instead, we have a slew of good books on the subject of dating and I hope you are reading several of them if you have kids at home—even if your kids are very young. Of course there's the classic, "I Kissed dating Goodbye" as well as his sequel, Boy Meets Girl." I always wondered how the boy met a girl when he kissed dating goodbye! ☺ Greg Laurie has one called God's Design for Christian Dating. A few months back I mentioned the Ludy's book, When God Writes Your Love Story. There's even one called How to Ruin Your dating Life. I can only imagine that it instructs you on all of the things not to do.

There are many more Christian books on dating and courtship that I encourage you to read. I was thinking if Ruth and Boaz wrote about their story, what it might be called. I created two possible titles: Boy Meets Girl—on the threshing floor and I Kissed Hunger Goodbye. What do you think—potential bestsellers? ☺



This love story is unique, no doubt about it and not something to be directly imitated but that does not mean that there are not good principles we can apply not just to dating and courtship, but to other areas of our life as well.



In order to do that, we need to dig into the details of this story. It begins with Naomi's plan:

*"My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Naomi wants to find a husband for Ruth.* If you are familiar with Fiddler on the Roof, then you will know Yente, the village matchmaker. More than a true matchmaker, she was really the town gossip and busybody, always in

everyone else's business. When you read this chapter, please do NOT think it was anything like Yente's wily ways.

Naomi's plan to find a husband for Ruth began back in chapter one. Before they left Moab and as she was trying to persuade Ruth to remain in Moab, she said, *The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!*" (1:9) Naomi did not want Ruth to come with her as it might mean that Ruth would remain a widow for the rest of her life, watching out for old Naomi. Ruth was safe as a relative of Naomi but what would happen to her if Naomi died? First Naomi prayed that Ruth would one day find a husband and then she took matters into her own hands with this grand plan.

### **1. Marriage is a form of "rest".**

Naomi wanted Ruth to find "rest" for Ruth under the protection and care of a husband and family. You can see this idea of marriage as rest more easily in this ancient Biblical culture but marriage is a form of rest. We might call it "family values," but the point is that it is a place for companionship, security, safety, children and prosperity. And these are all good things.

Recall the original creation mandate—*it is not good for man to be alone*. God created us for fellowship and marriage is the most intimate type of human fellowship. Not to say that every marriage is always filled with continual joy, otherwise, this verse would never have been written.

It is better to live in a corner of the housetop  
than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife. (Pr. 21:9)

But even in rocky times, do not lose the vision that marriage is a form of rest, that you are almost certainly better off in the marriage than not, that there is a security for you and your children and grandchildren that lays a foundation of strength and rest.

### **2. Faithful prayers work together with wise plans**

Now let's look more closely at the plan itself. Naomi had simple instructions: *Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak*. In other words, take a shower, put on some perfume and nice clothes. Isn't this the very same thing that all teenagers and young people do today? Do you know how you can tell how much a girl likes a certain guy? The amount of eye shadow she puts on is in direct proportion to how much she likes him. Sorry girls if I let your big secret out of the bag!

Naomi was also very specific in telling Ruth to watch where Boaz lay down for the night. Remember, it was going to be dark and the last thing Naomi wanted was for Ruth to lay down next to the wrong man! There are issues that can get in the way of our understanding and applying this passage. The first is just the strangeness of it all. We have nothing in our society to compare it to.

By the way, make certain that you do not read something illicit into this story. Commentators, especially liberal commentators, have had a heyday with this passage. They read all sorts of innuendo and illicit activity or motives into the story. All throughout the story, both Ruth and Boaz have been presented as holding the highest moral standards and acting in faith and righteousness at all times. There is nothing in the whole book of Ruth and nothing in the details

of this section that could ever lead you to believe that there was sin, or even potential sin, happening here. For all of its 'strangeness' and unfamiliarity, one thing is certain—it was all done with the purest of motives.

But you cannot escape that it was a plan. It was a very detailed plan with seemingly all contingencies worked out ahead of time. Naomi's plan was determined but careful. She wanted everything to go just right. But you have to balance this detailed plan to find a husband with her earlier prayer to the Lord asking that Ruth would find rest in a husband. That's always a fine balance, isn't it? How do you know how much to plan and seemingly take matters into your own hands and how much should you leave to God alone? How does faith-filled praying go hand in hand with determined and wise planning?

I would guess that most Christians in Western nations are imbalanced toward the planning end of the spectrum and prayer is therefore neglected or underemphasized. We can plan big plans because of the relative prosperity of our culture. If there is something we think we need, whether it be in the church or in our personal lives, we can usually achieve it without a miracle or overwhelming answer to prayer. We can depend on our own resources and the resources of others around us to get it done. After all, we live in a 'get it done' society, don't we. I am not saying that we have unlimited resources to do whatever we want whenever we want, but we are more likely to emphasize planning over praying.



This contrasts greatly with K.P. Yohannen. He was raised in poverty in India and came to saving faith as a teenager. Despite their poverty, his mother fasted and prayed every Friday for 3 ½ years asking the Lord to let her son become a missionary. Her prayer was answered and here we see him in 1971 serving on an Operation Mobilization evangelism team. He was only 16 when he started traveling and preaching with them! The teams would spread out to remote villages and share the gospel to whomever would listen. Because they were used to living on next to nothing, they lived day to

day without much planning and just trusting God to meet their daily needs. I think we would all agree that this was a ministry bathed in prayer and trust in the Lord.

However, many years later he realized that this method of evangelism alone was ineffective. Many would get saved but then be left alone to fend for themselves. He writes, "The 'staying power' and disciple-making were what my ministry in North India had lacked. I saw why I failed in the Punjab. Holding evangelistic crusades and bringing people to Christ are not enough: Someone had to stay behind and nurture the new believers into maturity."

This resulted in the birth of Gospel for Asia which is fundamentally a church planting ministry and one which our church actively supports. GFA now supports thousand of indigenous church



planters in six Asian countries. Do you think such a movement of church planting as well as their relief and humanitarian programs requires a lot of planning? It requires an enormous amount of ongoing planning. They are constantly planning and strategizing about their next move. But I doubt they pray less than they ever have but probably more.

Prayer and planning must go hand in hand and our goal should be to achieve a healthy, Biblical balance between the two. I think the old saying can be helpful which states: work as if everything depended on you and pray as if everything depended on God.

### **3. Good character trumps all else in a marriage**

Whatever we do or don't know about this strategy/custom, the most obvious thing we do know is that both Ruth and Boaz have already demonstrated a deep character and trust in the Lord; not just through their words but by their actions. Boaz was considered to be a worthy man and his integrity consistently proved it true. Ruth also showed exemplary character through all of this. Listen how Boaz complemented her in verse eleven: *for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman*. He may have been the most respected and worthy man in Bethlehem and after such a short time the whole town also put Ruth into the same category. Ruth and Boaz were not sinless. Their character was not without flaws but from what the Bible does tell us, I cannot think of a more righteous couple in all of the Bible. Their love story is amazing for many reasons but there is no doubt that they were drawn to one another by their character.

Young people, as you may start to think about dating and courtship—and even little boys and girls think about this occasionally—it can't be said often enough or loud enough: good character trumps everything else in a marriage. But the fact of the matter is that we are not drawn to good character in any sphere of life. Most people want good looks, talent and charisma, whether they are choosing the next president or their lifelong marriage partner. Young women especially tend to be swept away by words and promise—and worst of all, guys instinctively know this. They know it by instinct and then when it works in the real world, they know it by experience.

I don't care if you call it dating, courtship or even 'threshing'—before you start a relationship, do you have solid evidence of the strong character of the other person? And I don't just mean are they nice to you, are they well-mannered, that sort of thing. I am talking about Biblically-based character that has been observable over time. Churches are known for preaching on the necessity of only dating other believers. That is right and necessary of course but we often stop there. I have heard some of the craziest definitions of what it means to be a Christian. Try it some time. When you see a guy or girl in a new relationship, ask them if the other person is a Christian and see what they say.

- Sure he is—his parents are members at \_\_\_\_\_ church.
- I think so because she says that she believes in God.
- He's not very religious but he's nicer than most Christian guys I know.
- Of course! She told me that she prayed a salvation prayer when she was six years old.

These are similar answers to what I have heard over the years. These girlfriends and boyfriends may not even be genuine believers let alone possess observable Christian character. But young people, like all people, get concerned about being alone. They don't want to be alone—and again—this is part of the creation mandate—"it is not good to be alone." It is a God-given desire

to want a relationship but we have to balance this desire with also making wise choices. You can't move into relationships without first counting the cost. You can save yourself a lifetime of heartache if you hold fast to the principle that good character trumps all else in a marriage.

#### **4. Marriage should be a move from one protector to another**

I would like to have met Ruth. As we have seen, she was bold and courageous as a lion but as humble and committed as a golden retriever. It's almost scandalous to think that Ruth went to Boaz in the cover of night, laid at his feet and then proposed to him when he woke up. *I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant.* This seems to be incredibly progressive for a story from the Old Testament that is over three thousand years old. She didn't just ask Boaz out on a date, she asked him to marry her! How likely is this to happen in our churches today?!

But here's what I don't want you to miss. Even though she was an adult herself and previously married, Ruth had voluntarily submitted herself to Naomi's leadership through all of this. Even though Ruth was officially the breadwinner, she had committed herself to Naomi even before they left Moab. She was in a very real sense, under Naomi's protection, especially since she was a foreigner. This is probably why Naomi devised the plan in the first place. First, Naomi prayed that Ruth would find a husband. Then Ruth submitted and committed herself to Naomi's care and then Naomi set to work on this master plan. The final result was that when Ruth asked to come under the protection and "rest" of Boaz she was moving from one protector to the other.

Ultimately, this is the role of a father for both of his children but especially for his daughters. What is the question the pastor usually asks just after the father walks the bride up the aisle? "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" It may seem old-fashioned to you but it is wholly Biblical. At that moment, both symbolically and in reality, the father of the bride transfers his responsibility to protect and care for his daughter to her new husband. The bride transfers herself from being under one protector to another.

Karen and Kellyn have been watching this BBC series called *Lark Rise to Candleford*. I have probably caught about half of the episodes and the episode from this clip was by far the best we have seen. In it, the father is struggling because he lost his job. [Watch and see](#) how this plays out in regard to protecting his daughter.

#### **5. A husband represents God in a marriage**

If you recall from last Sunday that I said the most important verse in chapter two was probably verse twelve. *The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!*" By throwing herself on the mercy of Boaz she had actually thrown herself on the mercy of the Lord. She had taken refuge under the wings of the God of Israel.

Do you see the greater significance of her question to Boaz? When she asked Boaz to spread his wings over her it meant that as her husband, he would be representing God for Ruth. And we see him jump into the role of protector immediately. First, he thanked her for her kindness toward him. Obviously for Ruth to be married to a worthy and respectful man like Boaz would be a boost for her. She would be safe, secure and respected by all of Bethlehem but at the same time,

Boaz appears at least as blessed as Ruth. As one commentator put it, “Ruth acted neither from passion nor greed”<sup>1</sup>

He also protected her reputation by telling her to wait until morning but then asked her to leave before anyone else saw her. Not only would it have been dangerous for Ruth to have gone home in the middle of the night but if anyone saw them together, how could it be explained? If word got out, the unusual circumstances might never be believed by anyone. Suspicion would fall on both of them, despite their reputations. If being in a field in broad daylight could have gotten her assaulted, what about during the night? This was FAR more dangerous than gleaning. This was in fact, an act of faith. This was faith that God would provide redemption through the redeemer. Again, this was a risky, courageous, humble venture on the part of both women, but especially for Ruth. This could have turned out very badly but in God’s powerful providence it did not.

Compare this story with Tamar’s. Tamar took matters into her own hand and played the part of a prostitute. Tamar did the wrong thing for the right reasons. Ruth and Naomi did both the right thing and for the right reason.

#### **6. Waiting is an act of faith**

The final principle brings our story to a close. Boaz is indeed a redeemer but there is a closer redeemer and he needs to wait and talk with him first. From a narrative perspective, this brought more tension into the story. This was yet another “cliffhanger.” But even in waiting we continue to see Boaz’s care for both women. He said to Ruth, *You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law*. Now compare this with what Naomi said in 1:21—*I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty*. The Lord had taken away all worldly blessings from her but now he was in the process of restoring them to a greater fullness than before. He gave her six measures of barley which amounted to double the 30 pounds that Ruth had gleaned the first time. The double portion of grain looked forward to the double blessing awaiting all three main characters,

First Naomi prayer, and then she laid out a detailed plan. Once the plan was implemented, the only thing left was for God to work out the details. Both Naomi and Ruth were waiting. In verse sixteen Naomi asked another really important question: “*How did you fare, my daughter?*” all that there was left to do was to wait.

Listen to how J. Vernon McGee described waiting on the Lord.

Martha believed in a resurrection. But listen, it makes less demand upon faith to believe that in a future day we shall receive glorified bodies than it does to rest now on the assurance that they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. It is easier to believe that the Lord is coming and the dead will be raised than it is to believe that tomorrow I can live for God. It is so easy to comfort people who are mourning and say, ‘Well, you’ll see your loved ones someday.’ That doesn’t take much faith. It takes a lot of faith to say, ‘I have just lost my loved one, but I am comforted with the assurance that God is with me and He does all things well.’ You see, although Martha knew from the Old Testament that there would be a resurrection from the dead, she didn’t believe that Jesus could help her now.<sup>2</sup>

I can relate to this sentiment. I have a 100 certainty that the Lord is coming again in glorious splendor but I don't always have 100% certainty that God will walk beside me tomorrow, that I will feel his presence. We should be waiting in eager expectation for both of these are they are both equally true.

**Rich Maurer**  
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<sup>1</sup> Hubbard, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Thru The Bible, Vol. IV, pg. 439.