

Ruth

Women of the Old Testament—part 2

Book of Ruth

May 15, 2016

DAY 1: Obstacle #1: Overwhelming disadvantages. Ruth

1. At first glance the book of Ruth reads like a Hollywood story. Poor girl meets rich boy. Boy rescues girl from poverty and marries her. Their son makes a grandma very happy. God made it happen. That's the story Hollywood would tell, but that's not the heart of the story!

2. In the book of Ruth, three people face obstacles. God meets them, less to "fix" the obstacles and more to change their heart, and further His redemptive story.

Ruth 1:1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. ²The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion.

3. Famine strikes Israel, a result of national disobedience and apostasy (Dt. 28-30). A desperate Elimelech ("My God is King") moves from Bethlehem ("house of bread") to pagan Moab seeking a new life in a new land.

Ruth 1:3 Naomi's husband, died and she was left with her two sons. ⁴They married Moabite women, one named Orpah ('Stubbornness') and the other Ruth ('Friendship'). After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵both Mahlon ('Sick') and Kilion ('Pining') also died and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

4. Ruth faces overwhelming disadvantages. She is a widow, in poverty, no land, no income, and no job prospects. Naomi is heading back to Israel where Hebrews hate Moabites. Naomi encourages both her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab. Ruth clings to Naomi to follow the God of Israel. She gives up her culture, people, and language because of her love for Naomi.

Ru 1:16 (Ruth) "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

5. Ruth valued relationships over advantages. She left her native land and people, sensing that God was redemptively moving in her life and in life. She had tasted of God's goodness even in her many "disadvantages"

6. Are natural disadvantages more important to you to overcome than an unholy value system?

DAY 2: Obstacle #2: Shattered dreams. Naomi

1. Today, we'll highlight Naomi's story, the mother-in-law of Ruth. As a newlywed Naomi had dreams of her own. Get married, build a secure home, have kids, watch them grow up, establish their own families and have grandchildren.

2. Reality has hit Naomi hard. She's faced famine, sold her home and land, moved to a foreign country, buried her husband, buried both sons, and has no grandkids to hold. Her plan had been for all of them to stay in Moab until Israel's **economy turned** around, then move back home, have grandkids, retire and live happily ever after. Her plan was set. Her dreams are shattered.

3. As she prepares to go home, she encourages her two Moabite daughters-in-law to stay in their homeland of Moab.

Ruth 1:11 Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?"¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me--even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons--¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!"

4. Naomi is a woman with shattered dreams. To the human eye, God's plan looked terrible. What woman thinks she will have to leave her country just to survive a famine? What woman plans on burying her husband? *And* her only sons?

5. Naomi returned to her home in Bethlehem. The women were thrilled to see her. What do shattered dreams look like? Shattered dreams shattered Naomi.

*Ruth 1:20 "Don't call me Naomi (the Hebrew word for pleasant). Call me Mara (the Hebrew word for bitter), because **the Almighty** has made my life **very bitter**.²¹ I went away **full**, but **the LORD** has brought me back **empty**. Why call me Naomi? **The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.**"*

6. This raises serious questions. Naomi was heartbroken and broke. But were the causes of her misery and disillusionment? Shattered dreams bring **confusion**. Did God **make** her life bitter? Certainly God allowed the circumstances of her life to play out. Did those circumstances, by themselves, make **bitterness inevitable**?

7. Her real anchor was "the God" who gives her the "good life." When suffering ensued, she lost all sight of the goodness of God. Now it appeared that God had become her enemy!

8. A significant shift is being undertaken in Naomi's heart. While her "plan" of the good life is gone, she holds on by a thread that God has a redemptive plan He is telling. How do we know that? Because she refuses to give up!

DAY 3: Obstacle #3. Material Resources. Boaz (“In Him is Strength”)

1. Naomi returns to Bethlehem, with Ruth at her side. Desperate for an income, Ruth begins to work the fields at gleaning time.

2. What no one can “see” is that God’s redemptive plan is moving forward! **Boaz** is about twenty years older than Ruth, a well-to-do Hebrew landowner, and related to Naomi’s deceased husband. **Ruth** shows up at his fields to help work them. Notice how the writer describes this...

*Ruth 2:3 So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. **As it turned out, she found herself** working in a field belonging to **Boaz**, who was from the clan of Elimelech.*

3. What strikes you about the phrase, “as it turned out, she found herself...?”

4. Boaz meets Ruth and takes her under his wing, making sure she’s protected from the field workers and has enough food. He is generous and kind to her. When people have material resources, like Boaz, it’s easy to make material resources too important, too high a priority, over relationships and generosity. Money can subvert your highest purpose.

5. Naomi hears that Ruth has met Boaz and remembers that Boaz is a relative of her dead husband, she is dumbstruck.

Ruth 2:20 "The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to Ruth. "The Lord has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

6. Hebrew law stipulated that if a husband died there was a legal process to protect the interests of the widow, not by government but by extended family. The purpose was to keep family property in the hands of the family heirs and provide for the widow and kids. During the famine Elimelech sold their property, thus Naomi had nothing. But an extended family member could buy back the land and also be a husband for the widow to provide an heir to the family property. Thus the land, the widow, and the family interests are all kept intact!

7. Naomi is stopped in her tracks. God has not forgotten her. He’s working behind the scenes! The flicker of hope she had back in Moab was the right flicker of hope, not that her life will play out like she wants but that her life will play out in a way that God wants and is ultimately for her good! Different plan; different road; better road!

8. Consider the bleak circumstances Naomi had endured. She had let her circumstances be both the anchor and rudder of her life. When circumstances were good, she was happy. But when circumstances tanked, so did she.

9. Do you relate to Naomi? Have you allowed your circumstances to be your anchor and rudder? Or have you been dumbstruck when you realized God is telling a redemptive story through your life?

DAY 4: God's story unfolds through Boaz's obedience

1. Ruth and Naomi: Naomi realizes that Boaz, an in-law, is a kinsman-redeemer, and could be the guy to purchase back the family land and be Ruth's husband, giving the family an heir. She tells Ruth...

Ruth 3:3 "Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

2. When she uncovers his feet, she is asking him to be her kinsman-redeemer. It is a sign that if he proposes, she'll accept. That decision can be made right then and consummated right then.

3. Boaz is interested in marrying Ruth. The "opportunity" affords itself in the darkness. What would Boaz do?

4. Although Boaz wants to propose, he doesn't, and he tells her why. There is someone else who is the nearest kinsman.

Ruth 3:10 "The LORD bless you, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. ¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."

5. Boaz is a man committed to doing what is right, even if it costs him what he wants!

6. Ruth reports back to Naomi.

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

7. Boaz goes to the city gate and in front of ten elders gives the relative first rights to buy the property. He accepts. Boaz then says that if he does buy the land, Ruth becomes his wife. The fellow declines. Boaz is now legally and morally free to be kinsman-redeemer. He proposes.

Ruth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

8. When the child is born, Naomi again gets to see the hand of God through her shattered dreams.

9. Boaz resists temptation to take matters into his own hands. As a result, Naomi sees the hand of God like never before.

10. Do you face a test of temptation? Your response affects others around you!

DAY 5: God's redemptive story through Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz!

1. A son is born to Ruth. Naomi becomes a grandmother for the first time. The family land is back in the hands of the family.

Ruth 4:14 The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

2. Naomi didn't know it then, but the grandson she held in her lap became the grandfather of David!!!

3. The Messianic lineage of Jesus was moving forward! Of course, Naomi did not know that at the time, but she sure does now!!

4. After all Naomi had been through, from heaven's vantage point, how do you think she looks back on her earthly life?

5. What lessons should we learn?

a. No matter how badly dreams are shattered, God's redemptive story marches on through our story. (Naomi)

b. No matter how insignificant we may seem in God's story, we still matter! (Ruth)

c. No matter how much we may be tempted to build our life either on our financial wealth, or on taking advantage of tempting situations, obedience is always the way forward. (Boaz)

6. What strikes you most from the story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz?

7. What struck you most about God's dealings with them?