

# God Works Thru Shattered Dreams: book of Ruth

The Story - part 9

November 6, 2016

Pursuing “happiness” on our terms leads to misery and/or “drama.”

God’s Larger Story is to get us to pursue holiness as the only route to true and lasting happiness.

## **DAY 1: Obstacle #1: Overwhelming Disadvantages (Ruth)**

1. After studying the book of Judges, this seems like a welcomed book! Simple, right? Poor girl meets rich boy. Boy rescues girl from poverty and marries her. Their son makes a grandma very happy. God did it! Is that the message of book of Ruth? That’s how it “reads” if life’s highest priority is to ensure a feel good story in this life. But if life’s highest priority is to live for God first, and to reflect him to the people in our world, the book of Ruth has a very different “read!”

2. What you will look for is how God engages with each of the principal characters in the book, to bring them to a place where they value Him more than they value the outcome of their own lives!

4. The message of the book of Ruth is simply:

“No matter what happens, God can reach into your heart with power to form you into someone who values Him above everyone and everything else. He is determined to reverse your values.”

*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. <sup>2</sup> The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion.*

*Ruth 1:3 Naomi's husband, died and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> They married Moabite women, one named Orpah (‘Stubbornness’) and the other Ruth (‘Friendship’). After they had lived there about ten years, <sup>5</sup> both 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 encourages both her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab.

5. Instead of staying in Moab, Ruth determines to go with Naomi and follow Naomi’s God! She gives up her culture, people, and language.

*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. <sup>17</sup> Where 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."*

6. Why did Ruth decide to leave her culture and history to go to Israel with Naomi? Ruth valued **relationships over advantages**. She had tasted of the goodness of God through Naomi, and then made choices in line with that commitment.

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

## DAY 2: Obstacle #2: Shattered Dreams (Naomi)

1. We all enter into adulthood with “dreams” of our future. 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. Juxtaposed against her dreams is her reality.

2. She’s faced famine, sold her home and land, moved to a foreign country, buried her husband, and buried both of her sons. 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.

*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?"<sup>12</sup> 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--<sup>13</sup> 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!"*

3. To Naomi, God’s plan looked like a catastrophe! No woman plans on burying her husband and sons. Naomi returned to her home in Bethlehem. The women were thrilled to see her. What do **shattered** dreams look like?

*Ruth 1:20-21 "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, because **the Almighty** has made my life **very bitter**.<sup>21</sup> 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.**"*

4. How does Naomi look at God after all her calamities?

5. Shattered dreams brings great confusion. God appears to be her enemy. Naomi is in the pit of despair. She was miserable, disillusioned, and broke.

6. How do you think you would have responded if you had been Naomi?

7. 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?

8. Though Naomi was sinking in depression, she still had a trickle of faith. How do we know? *She never gave up!* A microscopic speck of hope that her problems couldn’t douse kept her moving forward, though she could see no evidence that God’s Larger Story was still at work.

### DAY 3: Obstacle #3: Material Resources (Boaz)

1. When Naomi and Ruth go back to Israel, Ruth goes out into one of the harvest fields and begins to glean from whatever is left from the harvesters.

*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.*

2. Boaz (meaning, “In Him is Strength”) 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. How did the writer describe this meeting?

3. While virtually the entire first chapter of the book of Ruth is about the catastrophes of their lower stories, the writer now begins to give us glimpses into God’s Larger Story.

4. God providentially brings Ruth into contact with a man she’s never met, Boaz, in a land in which she’s never lived!

5. 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, it’s easy to make material resources too important, too high a priority over relationships and generosity. Money can skew your purpose.

6. Boaz exhibits the value of living His life for the Lord as his top priority. It’s evidenced by how he treats people and will be seen in his ethical dealings later in the story.

7. Boaz did not allow his wealth to numb his heart toward people.

8. When Naomi hears that God has brought Boaz into their lives, she is ecstatic. For the first time, she can now see God’s Larger Story!

*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."*

9. What differences do you see between how Naomi sees her life now in comparison to how she saw it when she returned to Israel (see Ruth 1:20-21).

10. 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.

11. How would your prayers to God have changed after seeing this take place?

## **DAY 4: God's Larger Story begins to unfold...**

1. Naomi tells Ruth how to handle the potential budding relationship, applicable in Hebrew culture.

*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. <sup>4</sup> 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. Boaz doesn't propose, and he tells her why. There is someone else who is the nearest kinsman (next in line to propose, as according to Jewish custom).

*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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. <sup>13</sup> 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."*

3. 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."*

4. Each of the three characters is driven more by what is right than their own personal "needs" or "desires." This is an example of what the bible calls, "holiness."

5. 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, additionally Ruth becomes the man's wife. The fellow declines. Boaz is now legally and morally free to be kinsman-redeemer. He proposes. She accepts!

*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.*

6. When the child is born, Naomi gets to see the hand of God through her shattered dreams. God has not given up on her in spite of the rotten things she said about Him back in chapter 1 to her friends.

## DAY 5: God interweaves His Larger Story with our smaller story

*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!"<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup> Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him.<sup>17</sup> The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*

1. "Naomi didn't know it then, but the grandson she held in her lap became the grandfather of David.
2. Naomi had no idea that her story would flow into the Larger Story of the Messiah to come! **Naomi** knows all that **now**.
3. Unfelt by Naomi, but vaguely sensed as an unquenchable hope, this hope ripened in Naomi into joy.
4. Human beings usually do not associate joy and hope in the same thought. But there is a very strong joy (though not necessarily felt as "happy") that serves as an anchor in the heart. That is the joy of anticipation—that God's Story is moving ahead, no matter how remote, distant, unseen and unfelt it may be to us!
5. As you finish reading the book of Ruth, what things stand out to you about:
  - a. God?
  - b. God's Story?
  - c. God's dealings with you?
  - d. Your involvement in God's Larger Story?
6. What's your biggest take away from the book of Ruth as pertains to God's Larger Story?