

Ruth 3

Actively waiting on the Lord

The harvest season was now over. Ruth and Boaz have been around each other for the past four months, likely with opportunities to interact, to get to know each other, to see each other in action and to develop some kind of relationship.

Now we see that Naomi has a plan. It has been said that it takes two people to make a marriage — a single woman and a desperate mother!

Was Naomi plotting with Ruth to hunt down a reluctant Boaz for marriage? Was she being manipulative or playing God? No, not at all. Naomi's plan was based on the unusual custom in ancient Israel — the meaning behind the Hebrew word *goel*. The kinsman-redeemer aspect of *goel* had several responsibilities as the head over a group of families. One specific role was perpetuating the family name of the deceased by marrying the widow of an extended family member who had no male child.

Therefore Ruth could appeal to Boaz to safeguard the posterity of Elimelech's family by taking her in marriage and providing an heir. If Boaz did not fulfill this duty toward Elimelech, then the line and the direct family of Elimelech would perish. It was considered an important duty of a kinsman-redeemer to hopefully provide an heir and thus preserve the family line.

This custom revealed what priority of God? To preserve the institution of the family in Israel.

This was designed as a pro-family rule. It remains important to God today. Jim Daly from Focus on the Family said, "A while back I asked former President George W. Bush to identify the most significant threat to the United States of America. I thought he would say it was terrorism. He answered immediately and without equivocation, "The deterioration of the family." Ronald Reagan once said, "As the family goes, so goes the nation." These two men understood God's perspective on the importance of the family.

What were Naomi's instructions to Ruth (vv. 2-4)? At the appropriate time, Ruth was to go in to the threshing room floor where Boaz was asleep, uncover his feet, and lie down.

How would you characterize Ruth's response to Naomi's plan (v. 5)? Submissive, obedient, trusting. Ruth humbly and wisely received the counsel of her mother-in-law Naomi.

Was Boaz, a man of character and integrity, critical of Ruth's approach? No. Which means that Ruth's approach, like everything that transpired between the two of them, was culturally and morally acceptable. This was not a sexually provocative gesture that Naomi instructed Ruth to employ. *Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer (v. 9)* was a culturally relevant way for Ruth to say to Boaz, "I am a widow, take me as your wife."

Did God rebuke, intervene, abort, or hinder the relationship? No. It was acceptable in God's eyes. Their hearts were right before Him. God honored their relationship and the way they conducted it.

Why do you think Ruth chose Boaz over younger men despite the significant age difference between the two of them? His kindness, maturity, Godly character — not infatuation. She had previously been married. Her marriage experience most likely enabled her to wisely assess the qualities of a prospective husband.

Why did Boaz tell Ruth to spend the night (v. 13)? To protect her. These were the days of the judges when there was much political and social instability in Israel. It wasn't unusual for gangs of thieves to come and steal all the hard-earned grain a farmer had grown. Boaz slept at the threshing floor to guard his crop against that kind of attack.

Why did he tell her not to tell anyone (v. 14)? Avoid possible gossiping. Harm her reputation.

But now they discover there's a problem – which was what (v. 12)? There was a closer kinsman-redeemer than Boaz – and therefore he had first claim to Ruth.

How would you describe the way Boaz handled this new kinsman-redeemer revelation? Boaz was a take-charge guy, unwilling to cut corners or manipulate. He knew that if this relationship-to-be was really of the LORD, then it could be done orderly, openly, and properly. If this was God's will, it was going to be done God's way.

What was the risk of confronting the closer kinsman-redeemer? Losing everything by doing the right thing. This confrontation would require Boaz to have tremendous trust in the sovereignty of God. But he knew that God had a plan and he didn't want to get in God's way.

How did Naomi respond to Ruth's after-action report (v. 18)? She instructed Ruth to wait. Naomi was not timid in her pursuit of her legal rights, but she also knew when to wait upon the Lord.

Application:

Not married? Just as Boaz placed his trust and his future in the sovereign hand of God, are you willing to trust in God to choose your mate and in His time?

How much do I do? And how much do I let God do? Naomi pushed the acceptable limits, but she knew when to stop and wait. We likewise have a responsibility to be active participants with God. But after we have done all we can, we must be content to wait upon the Lord. *Therefore, my beloved... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).*

Does the end justify the means? There could have been great temptation for Boaz to ignore the closer kinsman-redeemer, especially when the end looked so good and so right. It's a case of doing what is right in God's eyes as opposed what I may think is best in my eyes. **Do I ever try to help God get the job done?**

Ruth humbly and wisely received the counsel of her mother-in-law Naomi. **Spouses – do you view the counsel of your mothers-in-law in a favorable light?**

Boaz and Ruth were God-honoring people of character. Especially in this time of the Judges when, *Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25)* and ignored God's absolute moral rules. Boaz and Ruth stood out. They serve as role models for the proper way to conduct a relationship leading to marriage.

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