

# REDEEMING WHAT HAS BEEN LOST

## WEEK 2: TRUSTING GOD TO LEAD

After Naomi's life has been ruined by her husband's weak and faithless choices, instead of laying down and giving up, she rises up to return to God and His people. Along the way, she encourages her daughters-in-law to return to their homeland. While they might have the possibility of remarrying and starting a new life in Moab, in Israel as foreign non-virgins, they would most likely be subject to racism and sexual harassment.

Orpah listens to Naomi and returns home. Ruth, however, isn't convinced. In a moment, she makes a life-changing decision. Although things might be easier in Moab, she knew what that life held. She had grown up worshipping Chemosh. She'd seen what that god demanded. She also knew her people and what they were willing to sacrifice in order to live that so-called "easier" life.

Through the years, Ruth had seen Naomi worship her God and she knew that somehow He was different. In what was probably her conversion moment, she chose to put all her trust in this God she had never heard from or spoken to. In a moment of love and desperation, she put all her chips onto "Naomi's God" and tossed the dice...

Where fear and pride had caused Elimelech to lead them out during a famine, hope and humility brought Naomi and Ruth back in the middle of harvest. And Bethlehem was all astir. Remembering the rich, self-righteous family that had left a decade earlier they were stunned to see Naomi's desperate condition.

Instead of plastering on a fake smile and mouthing some religious platitude, Naomi is brutally honest about her emotional, spiritual, and economic condition. Where pride tells us that admitting pain reveals a lack of faith, we see that Naomi's openness revealed her willingness to be healed. Although Naomi wouldn't have seen it at the time, it was her faith that enabled her to admit her bitterness. Unbelief and pride lead to hypocrisy, but those who go out with tears return with joyful shouts (Psalm 126:6).

After the buzz of their arrival had died down, the hero of the book emerges: Boaz. In stark contrast to his pathetic relative Elimelech, Boaz is a man of true strength. In a fitting tribute, Solomon later inscribes his name on one of the pillars of the temple (1 Kings 7:21). In pillar-like fashion, Boaz gets under Naomi and Ruth to hold them up so that their lives will not crumble around them.

The two women are desperately in need of food, so Ruth asks permission to go and scavenge. As a destitute single woman in a foreign land, she's taking a great risk. But Naomi, seeing Ruth's courage and faith, allows her to go.

In Ruth's request to glean, we see a woman of noble character (Prov. 31). She does not complain about the hot, sweaty, labor. Although pride would tell her to be ashamed of asking to glean (a modern equivalent might be volunteering at the food bank for groceries) she chooses to work hard, even in the middle of a very painful and confusing time in her life. Also, she trusts that God will allow her to "find favor" in someone's eyes while she's working.

As she goes out, she “happens” to end up in Boaz’s field. The way that it’s worded makes it clear that it was not Ruth’s purposeful plan, but rather that God was working behind the scenes to make sure that she was in the right place at the right time. Although she didn’t hear His audible voice, nor see any angel, yet God was able to work through her simple decision about which field to work in. Throughout scripture, we see God working in similar ways. God Himself determines where and when we live and the overall direction of our life (Prov. 3:5-6, 16:9, Jer. 10:23, Acts 17:26, Eph. 2:10). Like looking at the backside of a needlepoint, we often feel confused by the tangle of knots and jumble of color, but if we keep listening and being obedient, we will end up seeing His incredible, meaningful, and beautiful work of art.

Not only did Ruth just “happen” to be in Boaz’s field, but he also happens to be making his rounds when she is there. His first words in the story are a brief prayer for his employees. Clearly, Boaz is more than your average businessman—he’s doing his work as unto the Lord, and has a wonderful way of blending his work and his worship (Col. 3:23). He’s probably gifted as an evangelist and pastor and so he cares for his workers and allows them into his life to see his faith in action. They feel his love, speak well of him, and also pray blessings upon him.

While inspecting his business enterprise and checking on his staff, he notices Ruth. Boaz asks his foreman about her, and he speaks well of her as a woman who has been working hard all day long to support herself and her mother-in-law. Even though Ruth is sweaty, dirty, a non-virgin foreigner without any lineage, money, or even food, Boaz might have fallen in love at first sight.

Why?

Because of the beauty of her love and faith. She was loyal to Naomi and had great faith in God—despite the fact that she didn’t have a long history with Him. Boaz initiates a conversation with her, and speaks with both care and counsel, addressing her as “my daughter.” Realizing that she has no husband, father, or brother, he takes responsibility to protect her, just like Paul instructs men to treat “younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim. 5:2).

Ruth and Boaz are a perfect match. Both are more concerned with caring for the needs of others than with their own. Ruth cares for Naomi, and Boaz cares for Ruth.

With wisdom and humility, Ruth then asks Boaz why he is being so generous. Does he want to sleep with her? Take advantage of or manipulate her? Or are his actions truly kind and generous?

Boaz answers by praising her faith in God and her faithfulness to her mother-in-law. Then he prays for that God would reward and protect her. Interestingly, Boaz then takes action to be the answer to his own prayer. He is just like Jesus who asked God to forgive those who were crucifying Him, even as He hung on the cross to pay the price of their forgiveness.

So Ruth, a despised Moabite who had long worshipped a false god, is rescued and blessed by her loving Maker. God places a strong, godly, and righteous man in her path who sees her situation, recognizes her character, and accepts responsibility to care for

her. Just as Boaz came into the field to speak with Ruth, so Jesus, our glorious Boaz, comes into our lives to rescue and redeem us.