

STUDIES IN RUTH

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1. A THEOLOGY OF PROBLEMS Based on Ruth 1:1-4

A woman who wanted her apartment painted while she was out of town was very fussy. She insisted that the ceiling be painted the exact shade of her ash tray. The painters after trying to mix this exact shade unsuccessfully finally hit upon a solution to their problem. They painted the ash tray with the same shade they used to paint the ceiling. When the woman returned she was delighted with the perfect match they had made.

Problems sometimes can be solved so easily, to the liking of everyone involved, but unfortunately, paint does not cover them all. Dr. Paul Tournier, the famous Christian

psychiatrist, says people come to him all the time for help in solving their problems, and he discovers they are caught in unsolvable vicious circles. They need faith to experience God's grace, but they need God's grace to find faith. They need forgiveness in order to love, but they need love in order to forgive and be forgiven. Self-confidence is needed in order to succeed, but success is need to give them self-confidence. The list can go on and on to the point that it leaves problem solvers wishing they had chosen math rather than people, for all math problems do have answers, but how do you solve the problems of people?

Sometimes it seems like you can't win. Like the little boy who came home from school and told his mother he was in a fine fix. The teachers says I have to learn to write more legibly, and if I do she will find out that I can't spell. Even kids feel the vicious circle. The reason advice columns are so popular is because everybody is looking for solutions to their problems. Marriage, family, sex, relationships of all kinds, the world cries out, "Help me with my problems!" And an array of experts are striving everyday to find answers to that cry. The most thought word in the English language, if not the most uttered, is help!

If you give a little thought to the professions of life, you discover they almost all revolve around problems. If there we no medical or physical problems, the doctors, nurses, and hospitals, with all of the surgeons and specialists would have no reason for their existence. They exist to solve problems. If there were no legal problems, the lawyers and judges

would be out of a job. If there were no problems with crime and fire, policemen and firemen could all be laid off. If there were no problems with the mental and emotional stress of life, the psychologist, psychiatrist, and counselors could all close shop. If cars, trucks, and planes, never developed a problem, the mechanics would all be useless. If ignorance was not a problem, teachers and universities could call it quits. We could go on and on making it clear that just about everything that life is about is some form of problem solving.

The entire Bible is a problem solving book. It tells us that God has a major problem.

How can He save fallen man who has disobeyed His will? The whole revelation of God is dealing with this problem. Jesus came to be the great problem solver. He healed people of their physical, mental, moral, and even social problems. He then died on the cross to solve, once and for all, the problem of sin, and make it possible for all sin to be forgiven. He then rose from the dead to solve the greatest problem in man's mind, how can I live forever? The Gospel is God at His best in problem solving, but even that does not end it all. Problems are what the rest of the New Testament is all about. The problem of weak Christians, baby Christians, backsliding Christians, rebellious Christians, and unsanctified Christians.

We could go on and on listing the problems the New Testament deals with, but the specifics are not our focus at

this point. This survey is to help us get the over all picture of the Bible and life so we can see the book of Ruth in its full context. Ruth is a book about real life, the real life of real men and women. The result is, it is a book which is problem oriented from the very first verse. It is one continuous battle to find sense in a world that so often seems senseless. The first problem of the book is:

1. A FEDERAL PROBLEM. The government of Israel in those troubled times was very poor. Every man did what was right in his own eyes. The judges were spectacular, but no one person can make a good government, and so people were at the mercy of circumstances, and had little control over their lives.

2. A FAMINE PROBLEM. Nature became a foe rather than a friend to man, and this is more than man can handle. Famine destroys plans and dreams. It forces people to make radical decisions, and this book starts with a man named Elimelech who was forced by the famine to take his wife and two sons, and move away from Bethlehem to the Gentile land of Moab. The problems begin to multiply like fruit flies on a rotten banana. The whole external world is messed up, and that messes up a lot of lives, and so you have the third problem-

3. A FINANCIAL PROBLEM. Here is one of many families who cannot make it in Israel. They have to pull up roots, and become refugees, hoping for a better life in a foreign land. But sometimes the solution to a problem leads to other problems, and they might even be worse than the problem they are meant to solve.

Back in the mid 1800's millions of blackbirds deviating from their normal migratory pattern decided to land on the farm of Dr. Fredric Dorsey, in the state of Maryland. He tried everything to get them to fly away, but to no avail. Guns and firecrackers were ineffective. So he scattered wheat soaked in arsenic over his fields. The blackbirds, eager to wash the foreign substance from their throats, rushed to the new by stream, and millions of them dropped dead in that stream. By the next morning the congestion of dead birds had dammed up the stream, and Dorsey's farm was flooded and completely under water. His solution was worse than the problem.

4. A FAMILY PROBLEM. This problem runs through all the other problems, for it is the family that suffers in a world of stress. The family is pushed and pulled and pummeled by the negative circumstances. Bad government hurts the family; bad crops and bad economy hurts the family; bad environment and rootlessness hurts the family. In verse 3 the ultimate in family problems hits us, as Elimelech dies, and leaves his wife and two boys without a husband and father. Put this on film, and you've got a tear-jerker, and we haven't reached the bottom of the pit even yet. The next two verses describe two of the shortest biographies of history. Mahlon and Kilion, the two boys of Naomi were married and buried, and thats it. It says they lived ten years with their wives, but their were no children, and they both died suddenly.

We are five verses into this story, and already every male has been removed from the stage by death, and we are left with three widows. The subtitle of this book could be, Murphy's Law In History, which says, if anything can go wrong, it will. You can count on it, Naomi believed in this law. The book of Ruth read superficially sounds like a story of trivialities, but when you see with your heart, and enter into the setting, and feel the emotions involved, you see it as a story of profound tragedy, and of how faith triumphs over tragedy. It is a book about the real world. The world of loss and grief and stress, and one problem after another. The whole book deals with problem after problem.

How do widows survive?

How do mother-in-laws, and daughter-in-laws relate?

How do you deal with suffering and depression?

How do you cope with failure?

How do you find a nice man?

How do you court again and remarry?

How do you win in the battle of love?

How do you respect the rights of others when they conflict with yours?

These are just some of the problems with book deals with. The good news is, this problem oriented book gives us a theology of problems. That is, it reveals to us how we are to look at the problems of life in order to see them as God sees them. They are real but redeemable. Even when the problems make life a hell, there is hope. The beauty of the book of Ruth is that it gives us a realistic and balanced

perspective that can make us relevant in the world as it really is. It forces us to recognize and acknowledge both the pessimistic and the positive perspective on problems. Let's consider first-

I. THE PESSIMISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON PROBLEMS.

By this I mean the realistic recognition that problems are very real. They can make life miserable and hard to bear, and there are no pat answers. In other words, there are things to really cry about. In verse 9 the three widows wept aloud, and after Naomi described the hopelessness of her ever providing her two daughters-in-law with husbands, verse 14 says, "At this they wept again." This is real sorrow, and when Naomi got back to Bethlehem she expresses her depth of sorrow and grief in verse 20 by saying, "Call me mara because the Almighty has made my life very bitter." The point is, her problems are very real, and there is no easy solution. She lost her entire family. It is true it could have been worse. Ruth might have gone back to her people and left her completely alone. But the fact is, she was no longer a wife or a mother, the two most important roles of a Jewish woman. These problems were never solved, for she never knew again the love of man, and she never again had a child of her own.

The story ends with her joy as a grandmother with her grandson Obed in her lap, but the fact is, some of the major problems of her life were never solved. In some ways her story is harder than that of Job. He still had his wife when

his battle was over, and she bore him more children, so that all of his problems were finally resolved. Not so for Naomi, for she suffered losses that were never restored, and we are forced to face up to the reality of the pessimistic perspective on problems. This simply means there are problems which have no solution. They just have to be endured. They are potholes in the road. They serve no good purpose, and they are not the means to a better end. They are just a pain and a nuisance, but they are part of the journey of life, and you need to put up with them if you are going to go anywhere.

The Christian does not escape the problems of life. Every disease and accident that happens, happens to Christians. They do not escape the ravages of war. When the blitz hit London, 36 of the 51 churches designed by the famous Christopher Wren were reduced to rubble. The stress of life hits the Christian family just as it does all other families. Jay Kesler, one of the leading authorities on the Christian family, and president of Youth For Christ, says in his book, *I Want A Home With No Problems*, "I don't believe there is a solution to every problem." That sounds so pessimistic, but it is not, for it is just pessimistic enough to be a Christian perspective. It is Christian to face up to the full truth of reality. Jesus did, and that is why He too had the pessimistic perspective on problems.

Was Jesus ever a pessimist? Of course He was. He faced up to the reality of problems that would not be solved. He wept over Jerusalem, for He knew they would not repent and so would be destroyed. He taught over and over again

of how His generation would be worse off in judgment than the ancient cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. He told of the evil spirit who left, and then later came back to find a man empty, and He took with him 7 other evil spirits, so that the final condition of the man was worse than at first. And so it will be of this generation Jesus said.

Jesus was a realistic pessimist in most all of His parables. He made it clear that much seed would never produce fruit. Weed would grow with the wheat, and be burned at the harvest. The bad fish would be thrown away. The goats would not be allowed to enter the kingdom with the sheep. Yes, Jesus was a pessimist, if you mean by this, He recognized that all problems will be solved. Jesus accepted the reality of evil, and clearly acknowledge that many would be loyal to evil to the end, and not take advantage of the solution to evil provided in the cross. Jesus had a pessimistic perspective in His theology of problems. That is why He wept, and that is why He said there are times when you just have to shake the dust off your feet and move on, for some people will never accept God's solution. He wept as the rich young ruler walked away. A Biblical theology of problems says, sometimes it is realistic to be pessimistic. But of course, it is never realistic to see only the pessimistic, for we need to see also-

II. THE POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE ON PROBLEMS.

This sounds like a contradiction, for the word problem is a negative word for a negative experience. If something is

not negative it is usually not called a problem. But we need to see there is a positive and happy side to problems. Problems call for problem solving, and problem solving is the catalyst for all progress. Regina Wyieman says of problems, "They keep us from settling into stagnant pools. They swirl us into the deepest currents of real living and make us reach out for the life-line of life."

No one is ever saved until they realize they have the problem of being lost. No one ever seeks forgiveness who does not feel the problem of their sin. Prodigals never return if they have no problems with their sinful lifestyle. Nobody changes their behavior until they see their present behavior as a problem. Problem awareness is the key to all progress. The people who do most to alleviate problems are those who are most aware of the problems. Thank God for problem solvers in the realm of science. They devote their lives to the solving of problems that most people do not even know exist. There are problems in our lifestyle, and in what we eat and drink and breathe, and these problems destroy lives by the millions. We would never know why, and never come up with a solution without problem solvers. People who focus on problems become a blessing to all of us, and give us hope that new solutions will continue to be found. This is the essence of science, the striving to prevent and solve problems.

You don't always solve all your problems, just as Naomi did not, but in spite of her depression and near despair, she pressed on in her problem solving and made a place for

herself in God's plan. By her wisdom and counsel she found a husband for her daughter-in-law Ruth, and she became the grandmother of the boy who became the grandfather of David, the King of Israel. She played the major role in the Gentile Ruth becoming a child of God, and an ancestor of the Messiah. She did not solve all her problems, but by her positive persistence she aided in God's plan to solve the problems of all the world.

The positive perspective of problems says, I will strive to use problems in such a way that they will benefit myself and others. If my problem cannot be solved, I will not give up or crack up, press on in hope that God will use my unsolvable problem to lead me in directions that fulfill His purpose. This is the story of Naomi. This positive perspective does not minimize the heartaches of life, and try to pretend they are no big deal. It recognizes they are as bad as language is able to convey, but they never close the door to hope, for God can and does work even in life's worse problems to produce possibilities that are positive. It is superficial to deny the reality of tragedy, but it is equally superficial to think that tragedy has the last word. The story of Ruth is a story of triumph in spite of tragedy, and it gives us the balance theology of problems. The total pessimist and the total optimist are both alike in that they are both unrealistic. If you want to really help and comfort people, and motivate them to press on, you must have the Biblical perspective that takes both the pessimistic and positive seriously.

What are the practical applications of this theology of

problems? First of all, it puts the right name on reality. It doesn't call evil good. Evil is still evil, even if God brings good out of it. The crucifixion was unjust and evil even if God did use it for our salvation. If your child blows out an eye with firecrackers, God may so lead that one eyed child to become a blessing beyond our dreams, but losing an eye by such violence is still bad and negative. Call it by its right name, and do not cover over the evil of life. A proper theology of problems enables us to be honest about the negative as well as the positive.

The Christian goal is not to cover up the evil, and figure out how it is good, but to overcome the evil with good. That is the message of the Bible in both Testaments. God does not try to turn vice into virtue, but rather, to develop virtues that eliminate the vices. Naomi did not turn grief into happiness, or depression into delight, for it cannot be done. These are real evils and cannot be made into good things. She went beyond them by her courage and faith, and persistence, to develop new goals and new purpose, and God blessed her with joy. Her tragedy never became a good thing. It cannot be done, but a bad thing can be overcome and motivate you to find new goals and dreams that are good.

To often Christian demand that the positive cancel out the negative so that we are not allowed to express our anger and bitterness about life's problems, as we see them expressed in the Bible. We suppress our problems, and fear it is not Christian to feel like Naomi, or Job, or David, as

they pour out their complaints. We hold it in and suffer the consequences of resentment, and all sorts of mental and emotional problems. The Bible would allow us to express our complaints and prevent these negative consequences. Christians have a right to have problems, and to feel they really are problems, and to say so. It is perfectly normal to have problems. We can even go so far as to say it is Christlike to have problems. Problems are not sin, for Jesus had no sin, but He had plenty of problems. He had all kinds of relational problems with His disciples, Jewish leaders, and crowds of people. He also had personal problems. Even as a child He had the conflict between obedience to His earthly parents, or being about His Father's business.

At the close of His life He said, "Now is my soul troubled." Jesus had enormous stress, as He had to cope with His disciples betraying Him and denying Him. The leaders of Israel would not listen to Him, and the crowds would not believe in Him. He had to endure problems we cannot grasp, for He had to take on Him the sin of the world. The awful struggle of Gethsemane, and the cry of despair from the cross is beyond our comprehension. A false unbalanced theology of problems would sweep these things under the rug, and play the game of cover up. These things would be blotted from the record, and Jesus would have gone to the cross with a smile on His face singing It Will Be Worth It All. He knew that to be true, but He also had to suffer real and tragic evil.

The point I am trying to make clear is that it is all right to have problems. It is not out of God's will to be frustrated and aggravated by the problems of life. It is sub-Christian to settle down in that dark valley, but it is not sub-Christian to go through it. Jesus was there, and He shared it with us in the Word so we could feel free to be honest about our own feelings in the same situation. The problems of life are not illusions, but real, and we have an obligation to be honest about them.

We don't always know how some of our problems will work out. Naomi never knew her grandson became the grandfather of one of Israel's greatest kings, and a part of the blood line to the Messiah. Ruth may have lived to the time of David and seen her great grandson, but it is not likely. The point is, these women did the best they could, and sought to do the will of God in their life time, and left the purpose of their life to God. They were not told they were to be a part of the blood line to the Messiah. Only the future would reveal the blessedness of their lives, and the purpose they played in God's plan of history. They had to live not knowing. They had to live and overcome problems by faith that God would make the battle worth while, and God blessed that faith.

It was a pain to press on. It would have been so easy for Naomi to give up, and just settle down in Moab, and die forgotten. It would have been so easy for Ruth to give the battle, and go back to Moab, and forsake her mother-in-law and the God of Israel. It would have been so easy for Boaz

to say, it is too complicated a mess, I will just let my relative take Ruth as his responsibility. They all faced problems, and by faith they pressed on in spite of their troubles to triumph. Problems are opportunities to express your faith, and your loyalty to God.

History began with a problem. Problems are more universal than sin, for Jesus had no sin but He had problems. Even before sin, Adam and Eve had a problem. Their problem was, should I obey God or not? Should I listen to the tempter and eat, or reject this as bad advice? Because they failed, we tend to think of problems as all negative, but not so. Jesus faced the same problem in His temptation, and that problem became His opportunity to reveal His perfect loyalty and obedience to the Father. Ruth and Naomi both had an opportunity to fail, and say, my problems are too great, I quit. But they both chose to go beyond their enormous problems to seek for God's best in a far from the best of all possible worlds. Because of their loyalty they are a part of God's Word to the whole world. Among the many blessings their lives give to us is the blessing of a balanced theology of problems.

2. ORDINARY PEOPLE Based on Ruth 1:1-18

What woman do you know who has had a thousand men propose to her from fisherman to millionaires; from the

penniless on the bowry to the prince of a royal European family? And who was still getting regular proposals after she was 70 years old? There was such a woman, and her name was Evangeline Booth. She was the first woman to be the general of the Salvation Army. She was a very unique and extraordinary woman. At the age of 63 she swam across Lake George in 4 hours. At age 70 she broke a wild horse that the owner was afraid to ride. There is much literature on this woman, for she was not one in a million, but one in a billion.

When gold was discovered in Alaska before the turn of the century, masses of men rushed to the Yukon. She knew the Salvation Army would be needed there, and so with a few trained nurses she was on her way. All the talk when she arrived was about "Soopy Smith" the killer of the Klondike. Soopy and his gang would ambush miners coming back from the gold fields, shoot them down, and take their gold. The U. S. government sent a posse after him, but he shot them all and escaped. It was not a nice place for a lady. Five men were killed the day Evangeline arrived.

That night she held a meeting on the banks of the Yukon River. She preached to 25 thousand men, and got them all singing songs they had heard their mothers sing, such as, Jesus, Lover Of My Soul, and Nearer My God To Thee. They sang until one in the morning. When it was over, and they sat around the camp fire to keep warm, five men with guns approached her. One said, "I'm Soopy Smith, and I've

come to tell you how much I enjoyed your singing."
Evangeline talked with Soopy in the white light of the midnight sun for 3 hours. He admitted he use to attend the Salvation Army with his grandmother and sing these songs.

Evangeline finally asked him to kneel with her, and the most notorious bandit that ever terrorized the North got down on his knees and prayed and wept, and vowed to stop killing, and give himself up. This kind of thing does not happen to just ordinary women. This is rare and unique, and way beyond the ordinary. Her life and gifts are the kind that keep Hollywood going, and which sell books and magazines, for her life is filled with thoughts and actions which are spectacular and amazing.

There are only two books in the Bible named after women. One of them is Esther, and she was in this category of extraordinary. She was a dazzling beauty, and she played a role in history that was public and spectacular, and she saved the lives of thousands of people. Hers too was a movie type life. But the other book of the Bible named after a woman is Ruth, and what a radical difference. Ruth was as ordinary as they come. Apart from a few words of beautiful commitment to follow Naomi, and a part from being a hard worker in the fields, she never did anything, or said anything spectacular. She is not described as being beautiful or brilliant. There is no great event of which she was a part. There is no great influence she had on her day that is recorded. She had no outstanding gift that ministered to people.

Ruth was just one of the vast majority of the human race of ordinary people. She lived in the time of the judges, but she was not Deborah leading the people of Israel to victory over her enemies. Boaz, the leading man in this story, was also no Gideon or Samson, doing wonders as a military genius or man of strength. Everybody in this book is ordinary. Obed, the baby who gives the book a happy ending, does not grow up to do anything of significance that we know of. There are no great battles, no miracles, and no profound theological statements in this book. Not one person in this book would have ever escaped from under the blanket of obscurity that covers over most of human history had this book not been written. Yet these ordinary people are the people we see in the genealogy of the Messiah. The judges, who were very gifted people, who made the headlines of their day, are not the people in the blood line to the Messiah. What is God trying to tell us by this? I think He is simply revealing-

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ORDINARY.

We have a tendency to think that history revolves around great events, and that to understand history we need to know the decisive battles of history. I think this way myself, and love to study the great battles and learn about the famous leaders in these events. We cannot dismiss them as insignificant, but we can recognize that they represent only a small part of history. It is the part that easiest to report and make interesting. The vast majority of history, however, is being made by ordinary people as they

struggle with problems, and either give up, or press on in faith.

Who cares about a couple of down and out widows in an obscure country trying to figure out how to survive, and find love and purpose in their lives. This is not material for the historians. They are looking at the generals and heroes, and the people who are making the decisive decisions of the day. This is what history is to men, but the book of Ruth tells us what history is to God. It is also the story of ordinary people, and He does care about this stuff that would not even make the back page of the newspaper. Maurice Samuel, the great Jewish author of our century, said of this book of Ruth, "It reminds us that life went on--the weaving of the creative side of life which lies in these daily domestic episodes, and not in the battles and in the ambitions of generals and princes. In the book of Ruth we have this reminder of the continuity of normal, good, loving people, even in the midst of very dreadful and destructive circumstances and events."

When Samson is out bashing in the skulls of a thousand Philistines, we think that is where the action is, and that is what God considers to be the important event of the day, but in reality, the real decisive event may be a weeping widow resolving to start life anew. The evidence indicated that Naomi's decision and Ruth's commitment to follow her played a far greater role in God's plan than any of the great battles that were raging all around them in the days of the judges. It would seem that the very purpose for the book of

Ruth is to teach us the importance of the ordinary.

How sad it would be to think that only famous people matter to God. God gave the unique gifts to the judges of Israel, and so obviously these special people mattered, and they were a part of God's plan. But Ruth tells us, God does not forget the masses and focus only on the few to whom He gives spectacular gifts. The book of Ruth is about an ordinary family doing the common place things of life. They were seeking to survive and get some stability. They wanted to be loved and raise a family, and be a part of a community. Such a story is a part of God's Word, because God reveals in it his perspective on the importance of the ordinary.

Why is this so important? Because the self-esteem of the majority of God's family depends on seeing this truth. One of the most interesting books I have read is by Gigi, the oldest daughter of Billy and Ruth Graham. Being the daughter of a very famous person, she always felt she could never measure up to what God expected her to be. She envied the godly women who seemed to be up there so far above her, and she went through a lot of depression, and even despair, because she was so ordinary. She writes, "Some people just seem to have an easy time living the Christian life. Not me! And, after leaving his calling card of discouragement on the doorstep of my heart, Satan also convinced me that sense I was not "perfect" I certainly had no right to minister to others. So I pulled a shell of low self-esteem about myself, cringing each time I was asked to

share my faith. I felt like such a spiritual failure that it would have been hypocritical to share something I didn't believe I possessed. I remained in this state of spiritual insecurity for several years, always striving, yet continuing to fail."

Then one day, as a shower of spectacular meteors filled the sky, and the president of the United States called on her--no, nothing like that at all. But rather, one day her two youngest children came running into her kitchen with their eyes bright with excitement. They had their hands hidden behind their back, and they were giggling with delight as they produced a large bunch of flowers they had gathered. She expressed her surprise and joy, and gave them each a hug, and ran to find a vase. As she tried to arrange a bouquet, the flowers kept tumbling out, and she then noticed the stems were all too short. The children had picked only the blossoms. She laughed at their simplicity, and suddenly realize how blessed she was with their gift of love, even though it was so ordinary. It dawned on her then that God must love us as we love our children. We don't have to be perfect to be loved. We don't have to do the amazing and spectacular for His approval. It changed her life to realize God can be pleased with His ordinary children doing ordinary things to express their love and faith. Gigi learned the importance of the ordinary, and has used her ordinariness for the glory of God.

God does not need a lot of superstars to achieve His purpose in history. If He did, He would have given

superpower to more than one person at a time, but God said, by His actions, one Gideon, one Deborah, one Samson at a time is enough. But he needs a vast army of ordinary people who will recognize the importance of the ordinary. Joseph Parker, in his famous People's Bible wrote, "The book of Ruth shows that the Bible is the Book of the people, a family Book, a record of human life in all its moods, circumstances, passions, and volition's. Many can follow Ruth who cannot understand Ezekiel..... If we were to ask what right has a story like Ruth's to be in the Bible, we might properly reply, by the right of human nature, by the right of kinship to the universal human heart..... We are surprised by the little things that are in the Bible. Wondering why they should come to fill up so much space in a book which we think ought to have been filled with nothing but stupendous events. This is not the way of God in the ordering and direction of human life. All things are little to God, and all things are equally great to Him. It is our ignorance that calls this little, and that great, this trivial, and that important. If not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father, we may be sure that He regards all such little stories as that of Ruth and Esther as a great consequence to the completion of the whole tale of human history."

We have not learned one of the most important lessons of life until we have learned the importance of the ordinary. Second we want to look at-

II. THE IMPACT OF THE ORDINARY.

The ordinary might be important to God, but does it have any impact on history? Yes it does. Charles Fuller called Ruth the Cinderella of the Scriptures. Cinderella was an ordinary person who received special blessings, and arrived at a position far above what would be expected. Ruth was a Moabite-a Gentile. She was not a part of the chosen people. She was widow and so poor she had to glean in the fields for survival. Like Cinderella, she started below ordinary, but by the providence of God she met her prince, and she married, and was exalted to a place of honor in the history of God's people. The impact of this ordinary woman on history is hard to determine, but what we do know tells us a lot.

Since the story is almost totally female oriented, in that it deals with the problems of Naomi and Ruth, and everyone else revolves around their problems, it has a great impact on our view of women in God's plan. Back in 1848 the language of the people who lived in the Sahara Desert was reduced to writing by women missionaries. The first book of the Bible they translated into this language was the book of Ruth. Who would ever dream that the first part of the Bible some people ever read was Ruth. They did this because they wanted to make a special contact with the women, for that was the most likely way to get the Gospel to them. Women are a key in many cultures, and so many women are being trained as evangelists.

The book of Ruth is a prejudice shattering revelation. These ordinary women knock the idea to kingdom come

that you have to be great to be used of God, or that you have to be male to be used of God, or that you have to be Jewish to be used of God. The impact of one ordinary female Gentile demolishes many of the prejudices that have hinder the cause of God. Ruth was no women's libber, and she was no fighter for Gentile rights. She was a very submissive person with no history of protest, but her story does more to exalt the rights and equality of the sexes and races than any war of which I am aware. Just by being what she was, and ordinary Gentile female, she has had an impact on all of history, and it will not cease to influence history until history is no more.

This has a theological impact because this is God's Word, and if God gives this much of His Word to working through the ordinary, then we learn from this that God is not limited to the supernatural. We miss this when we say, God was really there and working, and we mean by this, there was clear manifestation of the power and presence of God. There were miracles and wonders, and so God was there. The book of Ruth has a more widespread message than that. It says there was nothing but the ordinary and the commonplace, yet God was there working out His will in history for the salvation of the human race. Nothing spectacular happened, and no great words were said, and nobody was raised up on the wings of ecstasy, but God was there, and His will was being done by ordinary people doing ordinary things to solve ordinary problems.

The question is, which is most important, to know that

God is in the wondrous and the marvelous, or to know God is in the commonplace and the ordinary? I think the last, because He said, low I am with you always, and if we only realize it when life is on a mountain top, then we miss the presence of God in most of life, which is ordinary and commonplace. I need to know God is with me, not just when I worship and praise, but when I am doing the routine duties of life, and wrestling for solutions to the everyday problems of life. The book of Ruth is so valuable just because it is so ordinary, and helps us recognize the impact of the ordinary. It is about one ordinary woman, not an amazon, not a queen, not a superstar of any kind, but just an ordinary Gentile woman whom God used to be a link to the Messiah.

God's love is always wider than our conception of it, and so God has to be doing things constantly in history to remind us of the universality of His love. This story is first of all a story of the love of a Jewish woman and a Gentile woman. It is their love and unity that becomes the foundation that led to the romance of Boaz and Ruth, and which then lead to the marriage of Jew and Gentile. This book illustrates what God's will is for history, and that is that Jews and Gentiles become one as the people of God. The book does not say it in the profound theological writing of the apostle Paul, but by the providence of God in ordinary people's lives.

Ruth does not argue for anything. It just describes the events in the life of one family, and yet it has a deep

theological impact on all who will think about what it means for God to include this story in His Word. One book of the Old Testament named after a Gentile woman, and she is an obscure nobody of Moab. Why? Because God loves obscure nobodies of Moab, and everywhere else in the world, and in every age, and He wants to make them a part of the family of God. The impact of this ordinary Gentile woman becomes more and more impressive as we see what her presence in Israel meant. David was her great grandson. When David was trying to escape the wrath of King Saul, and was on the run, he felt an obligation to protect his parents. Where could he go to find a refuge for them? I Sam. 22:3-4 tells us: From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, would you let my father and mother stay with you until I learn what God will do for me? So he left them with the king of Moab."

David had a friendly relationship with the Moabites because he was part Moabite himself through his great grandmother Ruth. David had a great love for, and many relationships to, the Gentiles all around Israel. Many of his best soldiers and advisers were Gentiles. Even some of his personal body guards were Gentiles. When Absalom, David's son, stirred up a rebellion, and David had to flee, it was his Gentile friends that were loyal to him when the men of Israel turned on him. David said to Ittai the Gittite in II Sam. 15:19, "Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with king Absalom. You are a foreigner.....Go back and take your countrymen." But

Ittai, in words that sound so much like the words of Ruth to Naomi, responded, as surely as the Lord lives, and as my Lord the king lives, wherever my Lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be. David could not turn back this loyal Gentile friend, and so all 600 Gittites marched into exile with David.

Why is David the only king of Israel who has so many Gentile friends. There is no record of any king like David who inspired the loyalty of so many Gentiles. Why is there so much in the Psalms of David about God being the God of the Gentiles, and the Lord of all nations? Would you believe it is because of ordinary great grandma Ruth? We do not have the time to trace the impact of this one ordinary woman and her influence on the whole history of Jew and Gentile relations, but let me share one more genealogical gem that reveals why David was a Gentile lover, and why the Messiah has a Gentile and Jewish blood line.

In Matt. 1:5 we are let in on the startling revelation that the mother of Boaz was none other than Rahab the harlot, who was a Canaanites. This means Boaz was already half Gentile, and was very open to the possibility of marrying a Gentile like Ruth. Together they were more Gentile than Jewish, and this means that David's great grandparents were three quarters Gentile. This helps us see why David had a unique love for the Gentiles, and why he lead so many of them to be loyal, not only to him, but to the God of Israel.

In the city of Bethlehem, where Ruth and Boaz had their

baby Obed, 1186 years later, Joseph and Mary had their baby Jesus. It was no coincidence that He became a king over a kingdom of both Jews and Gentiles, for this was God's plan all along, and those with eyes to see could have seen it all along in the ordinary life of Ruth the Moabitess. Third we see-

III. THE IMMORTALITY OF THE ORDINARY.

The importance and the impact of the ordinary does not end with time. The book of Ruth does have very specific time limits. It starts in the first verse with the time of the judges, and it ends with king David. But the lessons of Ruth about the ordinary are timeless, and their significance will carry right over into eternity. In eternity the ordinary will gain equality with the prominent, as the redeemed come from East, West, North, and South, to sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The chorus of praise to God will not be of the select singers of the world, but will be a chorus of the redeemed out of every tribe and tongue and nation. Ordinary people of both sexes, of all races and colors, as one great family of God. The one common bond, not being their fame, their status, their gifts, their accomplishments, but, their faith in the God of all people.

From an earthly point of view this book of Ruth is lacking in events that are exciting. There is a hint of scandal as Ruth spends the night with Boaz, but without a great deal of blowing this out of proportion, there is little to recommend it for a TV mini-series. There are no bad guys,

and no great conflicts with violence. The story just would not sell. Yet, it made it into the Bible, the Word of God. You can either conclude that the Word is boring, or that its excitement lies deeper. What can be more exciting than the revelation that God loves and uses ordinary people, and that His plan take into consideration the importance of the ordinary. This is exciting because the majority of the human race, and the majority of the people of God are like the characters in this book-they are ordinary.

The implications of this truth are very paradoxical. If you believe in the importance of, and the impact of, and the immortality of, ordinary people, then you must conclude that there are no ordinary people. C.S. Lewis in his book *The Weight Of Glory* put it this way, "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.....There are no ordinary people. This is one of the messages of Ruth, and seeing this message should have a impact on how we see others, and our own self-esteem. All that we have and all that we are can be used for the glory of God, for God does wondrous things, not only through His gifted people, but also through the majority, who are ordinary people.

3. THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCE Based on Ruth 1:14-22

When Cecil B. DeMille was a nine year old boy, and old preacher came to Echo Lake, New Jersey to conduct a series of meetings. Young DeMille attended every morning, but one cold rainy morning he was the only one who showed up. He wondered if that man would preach to one small boy. DeMille describes that unusual scene-

If he preached under those circumstances I felt that he was a man of God. If he dismissed the service I felt that he would be false. And he did preach, although it was a very short sermon. Then he came down to the alter railing of the church and invited me to come up. He said: "My audience no doubt noticed that I did not take the collection at the usual time. I now invite my audience to come up and put the offering the plate." I walked up proudly to that alter, put my nickel in the plate and, as I did so, that old gray-haired preacher put his hand on my head and prayed a prayer in which he lifted my name to God. I shall never forget the feel of that old preacher's hands on my head. I have en-joyed the greatest honors of life. Here in Hollywood I have met the great of the earth. But I have never had any thrill as great as the feel of that preacher's hands on my head. It was a kind of ordination. That had much to do with my interest in producing Biblical motion pictures.

Millions have watched the Biblical movies of Cecil B. DeMille, but nobody even knows the name of the old preacher who put his hand on him as a boy, and thus, became a major influence in his life. Because of the impact of influence, that hand that touched the little boy, touched a whole world of people. The same story can be told on the negative side of influence. Vincent Teresa in his book *My Life In The Mafia*, tells of how his uncle would ask him to shine his shoes, and then give him ten or fifteen bucks. This made a deep impression on him, and he said to himself, I don't know what he does, but what ever it is I want to do it. That was the beginning of his desire to be a gangster.

Every biography written is a story of influences, and their impact on lives. The story of Ruth is no exception. Ruth abounds in illustrations of the impact of influence. Ruth would never have become a part of God's plan, and never would have become a believer and a part of Israel, a part from the influence of Naomi. Naomi, of course, would never have been heard of without Ruth, and neither would have been heard of without Boaz. Everybody in this story has a major influence on everybody else in the story. But there would be no story at all without the influence of Naomi. She is the key influence, but the influence was mutual.

Influence can be a two way street, as it was for Naomi and Ruth. Naomi influenced Ruth to come to God, and Ruth influenced Naomi, and made her a famous personality

for all time. Bach's, the Passion According To St. Matthew is generally acclaimed as the greatest choral work ever written in German. Bach performed it once in his day, and it was put away where it lay unperformed for 100 years. In 1829 Felix Mendelssohn obtained a copy of it and revived it. He unleashed a title wave of enthusiasm for Bach that has never ebbed to this day, and so Mendelssohn had great influence on Bach's fame, but Bach even more on Mendelssohn, for the 20 year old composer was converted to faith in Christ by his exposure to Bach. They lifted each other, just as did Ruth and Naomi.

The word influence has a fascinating origin. It originally referred to an ethereal fluid thought to flow from the stars, which affected the actions of men. It is of interest that the only use of the word in the King James Version refers to this connection. In Job 38:31 we read God's question to Job-"Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleides." Pleides is a group of stars. The idea behind a influence is that it is a power which produces an effect without any apparent force or direct authority.

If you tell your child to get the garbage down to the road, that is not an influence, for that is a direct order by which you are exerting the force of authority. Now is you habitually get up from the table after each meal, and went to the garbage, and scraped off your plate, and one day your child got up and did the same thing, without ever being told, that would represent the power of influence. Influence tends to be an unseen, and unconscious means by

which actions and attitudes are changed. It is a flow of power from one person to another with no visible link.

Naomi had this kind of influence on Ruth. Ruth was a Gentile who worshipped the pagan gods of the Moabites. But something happened when she came under the influence of Naomi. Ruth was ready to renounce her family, her nation, her gods, and her life, in order to remain with Naomi. We are compelled to read between the lines here. Naomi cannot counteract the impact of her influence on Ruth. She tried to get her to go back to her old life and culture, but Ruth had been so deeply touched by Naomi's life, and her love for God, that her present depression and negative spirit could not quench Ruth's desire to be like her, and to be with her.

It is wonderful that our positive influence can be so strong that we cannot reverse it by our negative influence or authority. That is what we see here in chapter 1. Naomi said in her sorrow, and so blinded by grief, I have come back empty. Someone may have pointed out that Ruth was standing there, but Naomi, at this point, could not see the potential of Ruth. She had done her best to get rid of her, like a stray dog following her home. She did not realize that Ruth was her greatest treasure. She did not see her as a asset at all, but as a liability, and so she says, I came back empty.

Henry Drummond said, "There is nothing exaggerated more than the power of our words, and there is nothing we

exaggerate less than the effect of our influence." Here is Naomi feeling empty and worthless, with no assets, but because we know the impact of her influence on history, we know that she is rich in resources in Ruth. We want to learn from this wealthy woman weeping over her poverty some precious truths about influence that can change our perspective on life and history, and our role in it. The first thing we see is-

I. INFLUENCE IS INVISIBLE.

It is like gravity which is everywhere having an effect on all that is, yet we are not conscious of it. It is like salt in food, making a difference but not seen. Naomi was not even conscious of the fact that she was having an enormous influence on Ruth. Horace Bushnell, the great preacher of the 1800's, preached a sermon titled Unconscious Influence, which has had a great influence on Christian thinking. He used the text where Peter and John are running to the empty tomb of Christ, and John, being younger, out ran Peter, and got there first, and stood there gazing in. But Peter in his unusual impetuous way did not stop and gaze in reverent awe, but dashed past John right into the tomb, and the text in John 20:8 says, "Then went in that other disciple." Influenced by Peter John let down his resistance and went in. Peter did not shout, "Come in John," but Peter was just doing his own thing, and unconsciously influenced John to follow.

The point of Bushnell's sermon is that we all are

unconsciously influencing others, and so, paradoxically, we need to be more conscious of our unconscious influence. We need to be aware of the invisible flow of energy from us to others that motivates them to take action, or develop attitudes. This invisible flow of influence makes it possible for even the most gentle and obscure person to have an impact on other people. Andrew Robinson, one time chairman of the board of Westinghouse, tells of the strange experiment he saw performed in their lab.

A great steel bar eight feet long and weighing 1000 pounds was suspended by a slender chain from the ceiling. Parallel to it was a small cork suspended by a silk thread. The cork was slung into the steel bar, and, of course, had no effect whatever. But after about ten minutes of constant swinging of that cork into the steel bar, a little quiver could be seen, and after two more minutes a visible vibration could be detected. After 25 minutes the steel bar began to swing like a huge pendulum. The experiment proved that even the least likely force, with no visible influence can by persistence have an impact that is visible. This works with people as well as matter. Obscure people often become the primary influence in the lives of famous people. Ruth has a book of the Bible named after her, but she never would have been known had it not been for the influence of Naomi.

Wordsworth is a name we all have heard, but who is aware that this great poet was deeply influenced by his younger sister Dorothy. Her tenderness and sweetness as a

person molded his nature, and opened his mind to the influence of poetry. He lifted the race by his poetry, but he was lifted himself by the gentle nature of one the world does not know. He wrote of her-

**She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
And humble cares, and delicate fears;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,
And love, and thought, and joy.**

Henry Martyn began one of the great missionaries to the Indians, and his biography has been read by masses of people. But nobody ever heard of his special friend. Martyn was a weakling with a delicate and nervous temperament. He never went out for sports, and the boys took pleasure in teasing him. One older boy took it upon himself to protect Martyn from his tormentors, and help him with his lessons. He was a rather backward student, and needed the help. This friendship went right through college. Martyn was fitful, unstable, and temperamental, but his bigger friend was steady, patient, and hard working. He kept pushing Martyn to work hard, not for the praise of man, but for the glory of God. He kept him from evil company, and got him through school.

Martyn went on to become one of the heroes in the history of Christian missions. His friend passed into obscurity. His influence on Martyn, however, made him a key person in Christian history, even though his name is not even known. It is known to God. He is another example of

the invisibility of much of the Christian influence in history. The goal and meaning of life is not just to make a name for ourselves, but to be part of the flow of invisible influences that help all we come into contact with to be all they can be for the glory of Christ. We will come back to this as we look at the second truth-

II. INFLUENCE IS INEXHAUSTIBLE.

You cannot just influence one person, and that is the end of it. Naomi influenced Ruth to commit her life to God and His people, but it did not end there. In fact, it did not end anywhere, for the impact of that influence is going on right now as we study this book, and will keep on to the end of time, and through all eternity. There is no end to influence. It starts as a invisible flow, and becomes a river cutting a path through history.

Because Naomi influenced Ruth to become a godly woman, the name Ruth, though it had its origin in the pagan land of the Moabites, has become one of the most popular of Christian names. Ruth is the seventh most popular name in America, with over one and one half million bearing that name. Ruth gave this name a sense of dignity for all the rest of history. Her influence, by simply being a committed and loyal person, has become inexhaustible. Jezebel did that same thing on the negative side. Her ungodliness made her name unusable for the rest of history.

The study of influence reveals just how tremendous the trivial can be in its impact. Dr. Albert Schweitzer and his wife were being moved from one prisoner of war camp to another. They were so heavily laden with baggage they could hardly move. Just then a poor cripple came along and offered to help them. He had no baggage, for he possessed nothing. Schweitzer says in his autobiography that as they walked along in the scorching sun, "I vowed to myself that in memory of this cripple I would in the future keep a look out for heavily laden people, and give them a hand.

Little could that unknown cripple realize how his act of kindness would influence history. Forty years after this incident Schweitzer was in Chicago changing trains to go to Aspen, Colorado. As he stood on the station platform being questioned by reporters, for he had become a world famous personality, he saw a woman carrying a heavy suitcase. He immediately excused himself and asked the woman if he could help her. He got her to her train, and then returned to where the group, but they were all gone. Each of the reporters, seen Schweitzer helpfulness, were assisting others with heavy suitcases. Who knows how many acts of kindness have been generated by that one act of a cripple many years ago. The potential of any act of love is inexhaustible.

Canon Moseley said, "It is astonishing how much good goodness makes. Nothing that is good is alone, nor anything bad; it makes others good or others bad-and then others,

and so on, like a stone thrown into a pond, which makes circles that make other wider ones, and then others, till the last reaches the shore.....Almost all the good that is in the world has, I suppose, thus come down to us from remote times, and often unknown centers of good." Every act of love we do can start a chain reaction that will never end.

Gandhi, in his autobiography, tells of how a Christian author greatly influenced his life and thinking. He writes, "Tolstoy's, The Kingdom Of God Is Within You, overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me." Tolstoy not only influenced this man who changed the history of India, but he became one of the most influential men of letters in Europe. Solzhenitsyn says, one of the main reasons Christianity has survived among Russian intellectuals is the novels of Tolstoy. The question is, who influenced Tolstoy to become a Christian? The answer is another lesson on the inexhaustibility of influence.

Leo Tolstoy never knew his mother. She died when he was an infant, and his father died when he was nine. He was an orphan boy thrown into a very wild and turbulent world. He was taught there was no God, and that all religion was merely man's invention. Every time he sought to chose a pathway of goodness, he was laughed at and ridiculed. When he gave way to his lowest passions, and chose evil, he was praised and encouraged. He was fast on his way to becoming a totally godless and flesh centered person. Then his aunt Tatiana stepped into the picture. The book of Ruth is about how relatives influence one

another. Relatives are the key people in most lives, and so it was with Tolstoy. She became the mother he never had. She loved him and gave his guidance.

Tolstoy wrote later in life, "Aunt Tatiana had the greatest influence on my life. It was she who taught me, whilst yet in my childhood, the moral joy of a pure affection, not by words, but by her whole being, and imbued me with admiration for all good things. I saw how happy she was in loving and I understood the joy of love. That was the first lesson. And the second was that a quiet and lonely life may never the less be an exquisitely beautiful one." This unknown, unsung, never to be acclaimed, aunt, changed the course of history by her influence on one child, who, a part from her, would have been part of the world's problem instead of part of the answer. The impact of her influence flows on, and has an inexhaustible potential. Naomi only influenced one person, as far as know, to surrender her life to God, and that was Ruth. But the impact of that one life will go on having inexhaustible influence on lives all over the world.

Only a small percentage of people ever become famous, and so it cannot be God's plan that becoming famous is the goal of life. There has to be a purpose and a plan that all people can get in on, and that plan, it seems to me, is in the impact of influence. All people have influence for good or evil. If they are a tool for the kingdom of God, they will have an influence for good that will have effects for all eternity. Every child of God is an influential person, for

however insignificant their influence seems, they pass on the positive influence of the past, and add to the positive influence of the future, and so they become a part of the over all plan of God.

Think of that one lonely Samaritan traveling down a dangerous road nearly 2000 years ago. He had to make a choice, either to pass by or stop and help a beaten man. Why he stopped we do not know. Someone in his past influenced him to be caring and compassionate. For all we know, he had been helped by someone who found him in the same condition some years before. Whatever the influence, his act of love for a stranger has influenced all the rest of history. There are Good Samaritan Hospitals, Good Samaritan Nursing Homes, and Good Samaritan Ministries of all kinds.

The whole world has been lifted by one man's kindness. We do not even know his name, but he was an Atlas of influence, for he lifted the whole world when he lifted that helpless victim. We have no record of what that victim did in gratitude, but he could very well have become a social worker ministering to people who were victims of crime. For all we know, the world is full of people with compassion who have been influenced by this one unknown man. Only the omniscient mind of God could trace the impact of his influence, but we know it is inexhaustible.

All we know for sure about this man is that he suffered. Sometimes that is enough to influence all of history. Dr.

Touree grew up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in an immigrant Finish family of ten children. His mother suffered so with Rheumatoid Arthritis that he longed, as a little boy, to become a doctor. They were so poor, but he struggled for years to get through school, and finally was in practice for himself. One of the first babies he delivered was born an orphan, for the mother died and there were no relatives. He had compassion on the child, and this suffering scene moved him to specialize in Pediatrics. He started the Flint Area Health Foundation, and it became the largest public foundation in Michigan.

He gave his life to the care of needy children, and helped thousands of them through troubled times. There are hospital wings, and schools, named for Dr. Turee all over Michigan. Had his mother not suffered, her son may never have had the influence he needed to give his life to medicine. By her hurting, she sent a river of help through history to heal the hurts of others. This is how God can work in all things for good. It is by influence that even bad things can influence others for good. At his retirement party, Dr. Turee said, "Many people ask me why did I devote my life to the poor and disadvantaged when I could be in private practice and be a wealthy man? I tell them knowing from whence I came, and the fact that the greatest healer of all time, Jesus Christ, said when you do it unto the least of these you have done it to me-it is enough." Compassion for his mother got him going, and the compassion of Christ for all kept him going, and the result is inexhaustible influence flowing all through history.

The thing we need to see is that the rivers of influence in history are just like the rivers of nature. They are fed by many small tributaries-little streams that make it what it is. All great and famous people are what they are because of the influence of people that are never known. We all know of the Mississippi, Missouri, Amazon, and Nile Rivers, but who knows the names of the millions of streams that flow into them, making them mighty rivers? We do not have the slightest idea who it was in Naomi's past who made her such a godly woman. Who could have made her so strong that even in adversity and great loss she could so express her faith that a pagan girl would want to be like her. Whoever it was is a part of the inexhaustible influence of this book of Ruth. And who influenced that person, and so on, and so on it goes. It is impossible to trace influence, but all of us are having it. And our goal is not just to be all that we can be, but to influence others to be all they can be, for such influence, however invisible and unknown, will produce inexhaustible fruit for the kingdom of God. The third thing we want to see is-

III. INFLUENCE IS INEVITABLE.

You cannot avoid being an influence. Even if you go away and hide as a hermit, that will influence people. There is no escape, for just being alive makes us an influence in history. Since it is inevitable, we need to make the best of it. Influence is like the weather. It may be good, or it may be bad, or it may be just so so, but it always is. We have never experienced non-weather, nor can we

experience non-influence. It goes with the territory, because it is a part of life.

We are all products of influence. The very fact that we are here is because of influence. What we have for dinner is also due to influence, and the list could go on and on. We are products of influence, and we are producing influence. There is a never-ceasing flow of energy both to us and from us, that is making us and history what it is, for good or evil. Sarah Bolton wrote,

**The smallest bark on life's tumultuous ocean
Will leave a track behind forever more;
The lightest wave of influence, once in motion,
Extends and widens to the eternal shore.**

We are all making history, and influencing eternity, whether we want to or not. The purpose of the Biblical record is that we might see how people of the past have influenced history, and imitate their virtues, and avoid their mistakes. The practical purpose of Ruth is that we might be influenced by it to see the impact of influence that any of us can have, and, therefore, be committed to make it an impact for the glory of God, and the fulfillment of His purpose in history. May God give us the mind of Christ, and the fullness of His Spirit that we might be more aware of the impact of our influence.

4. DESIRABLE DETERMINATION Based on Ruth 1:14-22

Alexander Solzhenitsyn is one of the great modern examples of the power of determination. He served time in the Siberian waste land for making a disparaging remark about Stalin in a letter. He endured six years of imprisonment, when he suddenly discovered the joy of writing. He was suffering for his writing, but he felt an urge to write things down. His mind was alive with ideas he wanted to get into words on paper. But, of course, it was impossible to do, for any scrap of paper he would write on would be confiscated, and cause suspicion. No matter how innocent the lines, they could be construed to be a code of some kind, and he would be in deeper trouble.

I am sure we are all agreed, these are not the conditions conducive to producing a mediocre writer, let alone, a world famous writer. Only the most determined mind would even bother to try and figure out how to start a writing career in such a setting. Solzhenitsyn had just such a mind. He would write down 12 to 20 lines at a time, and then memorize them and burn the paper. Daily he would go over the lines in his head. He noticed the Catholics with their rosaries, and he saw how this could be an aid to his

memory. He made his own rosary out of a hundred pieces of hardened bread. The Catholics were annoyed at his religious devotion, for their rosaries only had 40 beads. Everywhere he went, as he stood in line, and marching to work, he was fingering his beads. Nobody could know that he was memorizing what he had written. By the end of his sentence he had 12 thousand lines in his head, and as a free man he quickly put them on paper, and was on his way to becoming one of the most read authors of the 20th century.

The old saying that where there is a will there is a way is confirmed over and over again. People with a spirit of determination are doing the improbable all the time, and by the grace and providence of God, sometimes even the impossible. Some people are just gifted with this spirit of determination. Most of the great scientist and inventors of history have had to have this spirit, for only those who can endure an enormous load of failure, disappointment, ridicule, and resistance, can ever survive long enough to produce anything new. Only the determined spirit is willing to risk doing what everyone else considers foolish.

All of Boston thought Frederick Tudor was mad when he conceived the idea of cutting blocks of ice from his father's pond, and shipping it to the tropics. But he did it anyway. He set sail with 130 tons of ice to the island of Martinique. The blazing sun was diminishing his frozen assets rapidly, just as everyone said it would. The ice cream he made in his hand freezer did become an instant success, and he made \$300.00 the first day. But he lost \$3,500.00 because his ice

melted too fast. That should have been an end of another hair-brained idea, but he was determined it could be done. He developed better ways to cut, pack, and transport ice. To make a long story short, the Tudor Ice Company made him a millionaire and the ice king. He was one of those people to whom you do not say, it can't be done. Longfellow, the poet, visited Tudor once, and he was taken to see his wheat field by the sea. Longfellow wrote, "Having heard that wheat will not grow in such a place, he is determined to make it grow there."

History is loaded with such determined people, and so is the Bible, and so is the book of Ruth in particular. The book only exists because of Ruth's determination to stick with Naomi regardless of the cost, and in spite of the opposition, and the unlikely prospects of a happy future. Take away this determined spirit of Ruth, and you are down to 65 books of the Bible, for Ruth would have gone back to Moab, and God would have had to find someone else to fulfill His purpose. Ruth is a powerful example of the destiny determining power of a determined spirit. Like Christian in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, she had many obstacles in her path, and only a very determined spirit could have kept her going. She had depressing circumstances, for they were basically helpless widows with all the men in their lives gone, and the future not looking very bright.

She had disappointments. First Orpha deserted the cause. She started as part of this weeping trio, but it was

soon a duet, for she turned back. She did not have the determined spirit of Ruth. She did not see beyond the clouds of the present the sunlight ahead, so she turned back to the known, rather than walk with determination into the unknown. She wept, for she truly loved Naomi and Ruth, but she could not face the fearful future with faith, and so she went back. This kind of peer pressure would be an obstacle to Ruth's determination, but she weathered that disappointment. Then she had the greater disappointment of being urged to go back by Naomi herself. Many people give their determination when the people they love most oppose them. It hurts, and feels like rejection, even if you know they think they are doing what is best for you. Ruth met this greatest obstacle head on, and confirmed Masfield's words, "There is no chance, no destiny, no fate, can circumvent, or hinder, or control the firm resolve of a determined soul."

The beauty of Ruth's example is that she reveals the distinction between being a determined person and a stubborn person. The mule-headed person does not win our admiration, for somehow this seems to be taking the virtue of determination to an extreme, and making it a vice. Only one of the 102 Pilgrim's on the Mayflower died on the voyage to America. William Batten died due to stubbornness. He ignored the warning that his refusal to drink lemon juice daily could lead to scurvy. He refused to swallow the sour stuff. He was determined to make it without the aid of this well-known preventative measure. His stubborn resistance was no virtue, and he paid for it

with his life. A determined person is not one who is closed to the wisdom and guidance of others. It is true, they have to resist the negative thinking that is constantly trying to cloud their dream, and rain on their parade, but they have to be open to any idea that can help them achieve their goal.

Ruth resisted all of Naomi's arguments for going back. She resisted the peer pressure of Orpha's decision to forsake her. She was as determined as one can get. Yet, as we read on, we see Ruth was so open, flexible, and ready to follow the advise of Naomi. In chapter 3 Naomi tells her to do some strange things, but verse 5 says Ruth responded, "I will do whatever you say," and she did. To be a determined person is not the same as being non-cooperative and stubborn at all. Ruth was not stubborn, but very pliable and cooperative. By her two fold response of determination and surrender to guidance, Ruth forces us to look more closely at the subject of determination. The first thing we see is that there is such a thing as-

I. DEFECTIVE DETERMINATION.

It is not an absolute virtue, but can even become a vice that hinders us in being a part of God's plan. Naomi was also determined that both Orpha and Ruth would go back to Moab, and she did her best to paint a negative future so they would. Her pessimism got through to Orpha, but failed to penetrate the deeper determination of Ruth. The point is, she too was determined. In fact, there are no non-determined people in this book. Elimelech was

determined to move out of Israel to Moab, and make a better life for himself. Orpha was determined to go back to Moab, and make a better life for herself. Naomi was determined to go back to Bethlehem to make a better life for herself. Boaz was determined to get Ruth as his wife and have a better life for himself. There are no characters in this book who are not determined.

When you study the evil characters of the Bible, you discover such things as the depraved determination of Herod to kill the babies of Bethlehem. You have the defiant determination of Goliath, and others, to destroy the people of Israel. You have the detestable determination of Ahab and Jezebel to rob Naboth of his garden. You have the devious and devilish determination of the Pharisees to trap Jesus by their trick questions. Satan inspires one despicable determination after another in his own determination to make evil superior to good.

Hitler was the power for evil he was in history, because of his deadly determination to destroy the Jews. Seldom does anyone become successful in evil or good without the spirit of determination. So what we need to see is that the determined spirit is not inherently good. There is a defective side to it. It is a tool, and like all tools it can be used for good or evil. The knife can save a life or take a life. The virtue or vice, therefore, is not in the knife, but in the one who possesses the tool. So it is with the determined spirit. Determination is only a virtue when it is energy devoted to taking you in the right direction to ward a

destination that is consistent with the will of God.

For example, there is nothing inconsistent with God's will to go to Florida. So if I am determined to go to Florida, that could very well be a virtue. But what if, in my determination, I hide in the back of a truck with a Florida license plate, and do not realize it is going North to Canada. My determination has now become a liability, for it has put me heading in the wrong direction. It has become a defective determination. Just being determined is not enough, unless it is energy taking you in the right direction to achieve a good goal. Because determination can become your worst enemy, as well as your best friend, you need to learn to use this tool wisely, or it can backfire.

Now the conflict of Ruth's determination and that of Naomi's, gives us an insight into how we can evaluate our determination to see if it is desirable or defective. One of these two ladies had to back off, and recognize their determination to have it their own way was defective, and not right to pursue. Naomi, wisely seen Ruth's determination to stick with her, back down, and practice what I see as deferred determination. To defer means to yield to the wishes of another. Naomi was convinced it was best for Ruth to leave her. She would no longer have to worry about anyone but herself, and no longer feel responsible for another's happiness, and Ruth would escape the difficult adjustment of finding acceptance as a foreigner in a new land. Naomi was honestly convinced it was the

wise and lovely way to go. But when she was confronted with Ruth's even stronger determination to stay with her, she had to evaluate her own determination. When two determined people meet with views that are incompatible, which one should defer to the other?

We know Naomi was wise in deferring to Ruth's determination, for her whole destiny depended on Ruth's coming with her. But does it help us, and give us a clue as to how to resolve a conflict of determination? Yes it does. It establishes a rule of thumb by which we can examine our situation. The rule of thumb is this: If your determination is negative, and the other is positive, you should defer, and yield to the positive. Like is too complex to call this an absolute law, but it is a rule of thumb that even God follows.

The reason this is the best way to go is because God practices this rule. God was angry at Israel for their sin and folly, and He was determined to wipe them off the face of the earth in His wrath. Moses was equally determined that God should show mercy, and give them another chance. God deferred his negative determination, and honored Moses's positive determination. What is good enough for God should be good enough for us all. God also deferred to Abraham when he was determined to lower the number of righteous people needed to spare Sodom.

Paul and Barnabus, you recall, came to a conflict of determinations. Paul was determined that Mark should not

go with them on their missionary journey, and Barnabus was determined that he should. Neither one would defer to the other. God used it for good, as they went their separate ways, and covered more territory, but later Paul acknowledged that Mark was a great servant of Christ, and we have the hint that Paul would have been wise to have surrendered his negative position, and deferred to the positive one of Barnabus.

The problem with being determined from a negative view is that you become a block and a hindrance to those who may have the destiny of the future in their decision. Such was the case with Ruth and Naomi. History reveals that those who are determined to take risks and strive for something new, are the ones who determine the future. It is not a virtue to be stubborn, and hold to a conviction when there is enormous evidence that it has no foundation.

Listen to this voice of a very determined person. "To me truth is precious....I should rather be right and stand alone than to run with the multitude and be wrong....The holding of the views herein set forth has already won for me the scorn and contempt and ridicule of some of my fellow men. I am looked upon as being odd, strange, peculiar....But truth is truth and though all the world reject it and turn against me, I will cling to truth still." This is from the mouth of Charles Silvester de Ford, who in 1931 wrote his book defending his conviction that the earth is flat. You can laugh at him, but he and many other pseudo scientists have a large gathering of people who hold to this

conviction with stubborn determination. The entire religious group called The Christian Apostolic Church in Zion, holds and defend this view to this very day. These deeply devout people feel the rest of the Christian world has been led astray by modern science, and they alone have preserved the truth.

These people have many other strange ideas. They consider themselves Christian fundamentalists, who take every word of the Bible as literally true, and they are determined to reject the findings of modern science. They fail to realize how many modern scientists they turn off to the Christian faith. Their determination is nothing but a stubbornness which has made many intelligent people mock the faith they represent. Frank Gunsaulas, a great preacher from Chicago, was introduced once as being a man with a backbone, because he had strong convictions. He responded by saying, "I hope I have a backbone, but I also hope it has some joints in it so that I may be able to bend. If it hasn't, then it isn't a backbone but a crowbar." He went on to say, "A great many people mistake their prejudices for convictions and take credit for being very strong-minded when in reality they are just stubborn."

Did you hear about the news reporter who was covering a terrible flood? The reporter rowed a boat down Main street and saw a woman sitting on her roof. Believing it would be a great place from which to cover the disaster, he pulled his boat over near the woman and dropped anchor. As they sat there, soon a chicken coop filled with chickens

floated by. Some time later a horse with a broken tether floated by. Within moments the reporter noticed a baseball cap floating on the water - traveling 40 feet, making a U-turn and returning to the point of origin. After watching the cap make several rounds, the reporter asked the woman if she noticed the floating, revolving cap. The woman said, "Oh sure, my husband, George, said he was going to mow the lawn come hell or high water!" Here is a case of pure stubbornness, and it is no virtue.

Naomi had her convictions too, but she was ready to back off, and not press them on Ruth, when she saw that Ruth's convictions was also strong, and that she was making a positive commitment, and all she was doing was fighting for a negative. She had a backbone with joints, and she bent for Ruth, and that joint in her backbone became the hinge upon which the whole story of Ruth turned. A stubborn Naomi could have stifled the plan of God before it even began. The book of Ruth teaches us that a determined spirit can be detrimental. Therefore, it needs to be examined and evaluated. And if found to be a matter to stubbornness, and resistance to more positive spirit, it should be deferred and surrendered for the sake of giving the positive a chance to work.

This means that the converse of this is also true. If you are one with a positive determination, you should be persistent in the face of many negatives, until they in wisdom yield. This is what Ruth did, and that is why her life is a study, not in defective determination, but in-

II. DESIRABLE DETERMINATION.

From the beginning to the end of the book Ruth's determination is devout, delightful, and desirable. She is one of those rare Biblical characters without any visible warts. She is not sinless we know, but there are no sins in the record. She is one of the most Christlike personalities in the Scripture. The other three women in the genealogy of Christ all have dark blots on their record, but she has none.

It is extremely difficult to be wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove. It is hard to be a determined person, and still be able to bend to the wisdom and guidance of others, so that you are not guilty of being stubborn. Michelangelo was such a gifted artist, and he has done much to glorify God through the works of man. But this determined man was also very stubborn, and it was not an asset to his personality. When he was painting the famous Sistine Chapel he was 65 years old. He fell and injured his leg. Typical of the stubborn male, he shut himself up in his house alone, and suffered the pain and the depression, and refused to see a doctor. Fortunately, he had a doctor friend who loved art, and who visited him and discovered his injury. In spite of Michelangelo's protest, he stayed and nursed him back to health. Being determined to do what is not wise is not a desirable determination. We need to learn to yield to those who know what is wise.

We should strive to bring good out of evil, and use life's lemons to make lemonade, but when this is used to cover up

the reality of evil and folly, it is a vice and not virtue. The Jews have a delightful story to illustrate the folly that can come from the determination to find value in all things. A fire broke out in the synagogue, and all the citizens of Chelm rushed to the fiercely burning building to extinguish the blaze. When the fire had been put out, the Rabbi mounted a table and addressed the crowd. He wanted to be optimistic in the midst of the charred mess, and so he said, "My friends, this fire was a miracle sent from heaven." There were murmurs of surprise all through the group. The Rabbi went on, "Look at this way, if it were not for the bright flames, how would we have been able to see to put the fire out on such a dark night?"

There is such a thing as superficial optimism, as we see illustrated in this limerick.

**There was an old fellow from Maine,
Whose legs were cut off by a train.
When his friends said, how sad!
He replied I am glad,
For I've now lost my varicose vein.**

Wiser is the way of Ruth, for she did not call evil good, but wept at the loss of their husbands. She wept at the lonely future they faced. It was not good, but very bad, yet she was determined to ride out the storm, and never turn back. You do not have to call everything good to believe there is good out ahead for those who press on in faith. It is like Columbus facing an unknown world, but with a

conviction that the dream can be fulfilled, if we only press on. Columbus was almost alone in his dream. The rest of the world thought him mad, and his own crew was about ready to mutiny, throw him overboard, and turn back to Spain. He was determined to sail on, and Edwin Markham describes his determination in poetry.

**The long day and the longer night,
And seas rushed by in eager flight.
Then frightened sailors raised a cry:
"We feel the terror of the sky.
Turn back, great admiral," they moaned:
"We cannot dare the dark unknown.
Soon we shall totter on the brink;
Soon into utter darkness sink!"
"No, no," the daring chief replied:
"The earth is round, the sea is wide;
Keep all the sails aloft, and steer
Into the West: The shores are near!"**

We know his was a desirable determination, for had all the others had their negative way, history would have been radically different. Columbus had a positive hope, and he refused to give it up, and his dream came true, just as Ruth's did. Ruth had to sail on and on in spite of the seemingly endless ocean of grief. She had to sail on in spite of Naomi's pressure to go back. She had to sail on in spite of being a foreigner, and a poor person. She had to overcome the barriers between Jews and Gentiles, she had a lot of hindrances to her hopes, but she was determined to

press on, and her dream came true as well. The book of Ruth makes it clear that life can be a battle to escape detrimental determination, and to embrace desirable determination.

The best of Christians fight against the detrimental. This is what the temptation of Christ is all about. To be so determined to achieve a goal that you will even go the wrong direction to get there. D. L. Moody tells of being on a train where some young men recognizing him began to mock him with hymn singing and mimicking his preaching. He was disturbed and called the conductor. They were quiet for a while, but they knew they were getting to him, and they started up again. Moody could feel the anger rising in him, and he came very close to striking one of them. He faced the conflict of a double determination. The negative was to express wrath, and the positive to express long suffering patience. Fortunately, his negative determination deferred to the positive, and he controlled his temper.

Jesus conquered temptation because He was governed by a desirable determination. He set his face steadfastly to go to the cross, and He endured all the pain and rejection, because of His determination to fulfill the Father's will. He had His destination determined, and He knew there was only one direction to go to get there. This kept Him from all deviations into deficient determinations. What you are determined to achieve determines your destiny. It was so with Ruth; it was so with our Lord, and it is so with us all.

James Cash was told by his father at age 12 he would have to buy his own clothes from then on. He was so proud of his first pair of shoes he paid for with his own money. He fell in love with clothes, and got a job with a dry good store selling clothes. As soon as he could he became a store owner in Wyoming. He was so determined that he succeeded in opening up a whole chain of James Cash Penny stores. His determination, however, drove him to a break down, and he ended up in a mental institution. While there he heard Christian music coming from down the hall, and it struck a responsive cord in his life, and took him back to his youth in Missouri. He went to that service, and then he got his life on a new track of determination, and for the rest of his life, it was J. C. Penny the Christian. He wrote, lectured, and put a fortune into the Layman's movement for a Christian World. His determination in going the right direction led him to a destiny for God's glory, and the eternal good of masses of people. May God motivate us by the determined spirit of others, and especially of Ruth, to be determined to achieve goals that are pleasing to God, for this means our destiny will be determined by desirable determination.

5. RUTH'S ROMANCE Based on Ruth 2:1f

Nowhere does history repeat itself more often than in the realm of romance. James Madison was the forth president of the United States, and he was the chief framer of the Constitution. He was the greatest scholar among the Founding Fathers. But when it came to romance he was no big gun. In fact, he was the smallest of all the presidents. He was so thin and frail that he weighed only a 100 lbs. at his heaviest. He was very slow and he was not magnetic.

He was jilted twice. He was 43 and still single when he met Dolly who was 24. At that young age she was already a widow because her husband died in an epidemic. She was taller and heavier than James, and there was just so much about them that was different. They were a highly unlikely pair to ever become a couple. But they did, and it was one of the happiest, most celebrated, marriages in the history of the White House. They were ideal for each other, and Dolly Madison added a flare and dignity to the White House that it never had before. James lived longer than any other president who served two terms until Truman came along and topped him by 6 years. His romance made his a story with a happy ending.

Thomas Jefferson, the third president also married a widow who was considerably younger than himself. History is filled with this theme, for if love does not make the world

go round, most agree it does make the trip more enjoyable.

So it is in the book of Ruth. Romance plays a major role in God's plan. I don't what God would have done had Adam not fallen for Eve, for the whole plan of God revolves around romance. Ruth is a story of romance, and there are so many parallels with her and Boaz, and numerous couples in history. Boaz was older, and he had status and security. Ruth was a lonely young widow. The potential for cupid is great if these two could only meet, but it seems so unlikely. Boaz is a big shot, and Ruth is not even on the social register. She is not only a poor nobody, she is not even a Jew.

People have a way of meeting, however, and sometimes it is by accident. In Oslo, Norway a motorist struck a young woman at a busy intersection. He wasted no time in getting her to the hospital, and he visited her everyday during her recovery. Eventually he asked her to marry him, and she said yes. They went on their honeymoon in the car that brought them together by accident. Verse 3 hints that it was by accident that Ruth and Boaz met. The KJV says, "And her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz." The RSV says she happened to come there, and the Living Bible says, as it happened. The NIV says, as it turned out. The point is, there was no plot or plan. Later on the plot thickens, and Naomi does deliberately plan for Ruth to entice Boaz into a relationship. But here at the start there is no plan. It is just what happened as Ruth went out to work to keep from starving.

The Hebrew word here is MIQREH, which means a chance event, or an accident. It would be a fascinating diversion to study the subject of chance here, but for now we will pursue romance, and just point out that most people in our culture who meet and fall in love do so by chance, as did Ruth and Boaz. No one but God could have known of the series of events that brought them together.

I am always impressed by the events that brought Lavonne and I together. Three of my friends and I were at a drive in on the edge of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. We were waiting for a girl to come and take our order for root beers. It was a hot summer night and the service was very slow. We were restless and decided to take off down the highway to the nearest little town to see what we could find. Who would ever dream that that decision would lead to three of us marrying three girls in the small town of Dell Rapids. It was all because of slow service at a root beer stand. We just happened to be at the right place at the right time. So it was with Ruth and Boaz. One of God's most useful tools in history is chance.

Chance does not mean that God is not in it. Margaret Hese, a writer for Scripture Press tells of how her happily married sister of 30 years met her mate. She was on a train when a soldier on leave sat down beside her. In the course of the conversation she noted that one of the buttons was almost ready to fall off his coat. She took out a needle and thread and sewed it on. They kept in touch over half a continent apart for several years, while dating others. He

found that he could not forget her. That sewing on of his button strongly touched him. This act of kindness changed their whole lives. The door of love is huge, but it so often swings on such a small hinge. Had he not by chance had that loose button the opportunity for her act of love would not have existed, and their first meeting may have been the last as well. Chance and romance are often partners. It put Ruth in the field of Boaz, and the first thing Boaz asked his foreman was, "Whose young woman is that? Romance almost always starts with-

I. THE EYES.

We can't say this was a case of love at first sight, but it was a case of interest at first sight. Sometimes the eyes do not like what they see, and it takes other factors to develop a relationship. John Keats thought Fanny Browne was awful looking, but after knowing her for awhile he thought she was the most beautiful creature he knew. Everyone else still thought she looked awful, but love is not blind, it just develops a vision of beauty that non-love never sees.

Alexander Dumas thought Sarah Bernhardt had the body of a broom stick, but when he fell in love with her he said, "If nature had somewhat neglected her body, it had richly endowed her mind." He saw the beauty of inner being, and he loved her. We do not know what attracted Boaz to Ruth so rapidly, but he wasted no time in making her acquaintance. Christopher Morley said, "Fifty per cent of the world are women, yet they always seem a novelty."

Boaz thought so about this new young woman in his field. We do not know what Boaz was doing before this. Maybe his philosophy was, the proper study of mankind is man, but all of the sudden he changed his major to the study of woman, and especially the one out in his field.

The Hebrew does not even have a word for bachelor, for seldom did one even exist in Israel. But here is Boaz who is a middle age man of means, and he is single. We don't know why, but we know he rapidly reversed his no romance state when he saw Ruth. Robert Louis Stevenson said, "A wet rag goes safely by the fire; and if a man is blind, he cannot expect to be much impressed by romantic scenery." For some reason Boaz spotted Ruth, and immediately he saw something romantic he had not seen before. She may not have been his first love, but more important, she was his last love, and that is true romance. The New York library has over 2,000 books on love, but man knows more about the rocks on the moon than he does about what makes certain people fall in love. Ruth and Boaz were not unusual people. They were just ordinary pleasant loving people, and they represent the majority of the romances of history.

The entire book of Ruth revolves around the romance of ordinary people. That is one of its purposes for being a part of the Bible. It is God's stamp of approval on the ordinary person as an instrument of His plan of history. It magnifies its significance of the commonplace people. From the moment Boaz meets Ruth the rest of the book is the story of how their romance developed and led to marriage. This is

an everyday story, and has been from the day Adam saw Eve. Ruth is considered to be a beautiful woman, and not because there is any description of her, but because the more you know of her total character the more attractive she becomes. People become attractive to the degree that you know them.

The reason most foreigners do not seem attractive to us Americans is because we do not know them. We see only the external form and face, and it is different and unusual. If we could know them, and hear their experience, their feelings, and their ideas, we would see more and more of their beauty. Romance is simply getting to know people well enough so that the eyes can see their beauty. The Gospels are the revelation of the life and beauty of Jesus in His attitudes and actions. It is by what we see in those accounts that we come to love Jesus. If there is anything lovely, Paul said, think on these things, for when you see loveliness of any kind you are in a state of romance. Romance begins with the eyes, but then it continues with the-

II. THE EARS.

Few things in life are more appealing to either males or females than hearing pleasant things about themselves. Listen to this lover's conversation.

**Do you think I am beautiful? You bet.
Are my eyes the loveliest you have gazed into? Shucks yes.**

**Is my mouth like a rosebud? Sure is.
Is my figure divine? Uh-huh.
Oh, Elmer, you say the nicest things!**

Most women would prefer less prompting and more spontaneity. This is what we see in Boaz. His immediate response in discovering who she was, was to go to her, and like a gentleman, make her feel as welcome and secure as possible. She was his guest, and not a lonely isolated stranger. She was to make herself at home and feel safe, for he had given orders that she was to be treated with respect. He made it clear that the men were not to touch her. A woman alone was open game, and had no protection unless she came under the care of a man with some power. Boaz gave Ruth that protection.

She is, of course, overwhelmed by this sudden good fortune, and she asks why he has shown her such favor. Boaz had done his homework. He knew all the good things about Ruth that were matters of public knowledge. The story of Ruth and her commitment to follow Naomi, and to leave her family and homeland had spread all over Bethlehem. The news traveled fast, and Boaz, who had never even seen Ruth, knew the whole account.

We need to pause here, and point out that talking about people is not the same as gossip. Gossip is the spreading of information, or disinformation, that in some way injurious to the people talked about. The talking and sharing of facts and information about people, and the events that are

shaping their lives is both legitimate and good. Here we see that the spread of the story of Ruth enabled him to have the ammunition he needed to penetrate any defensiveness she might have. He told her he knew just how wonderful a person she was, and he asked the Lord to richly reward her for her faithfulness.

Ruth responds to these pleasant words with pleasant words of her own. She expresses appreciation, and she acknowledges that Boaz has been a great comfort to her, even though she is nobody to him. Here are two people who recognize the ears as keys to romance. It is true we have to beware of the smooth talker who uses words to entice rather than to build up. Some guys really have a line, like the guy who said, "I'm sure I've seen you somewhere before. I've been to all the Miss America contest."

We need constant reminders that the abuse of anything is never an adequate reason for ceasing to use it properly. Smooth talk can be a virtue, and pleasant complimentary words can be the greatest source of encouragement we give to those we love. Spurgeon said, "I have no doubt that much sorrow might be prevented if words of encouragement were more frequently spoken...., and, therefore, to withhold them is sin." James said that when we know to do good and don't do it it is a sin. If you think you get through a day without the sin of omission, forget it. Not a day goes by but what we could have said something pleasant and complimentary that we didn't say.

The ears are a great source of romance. God gets His will done in history by people who know this and use it to kindle romance, or to keep an old fire burning. If someone you love is not encouraged through the ear gate today, you have cast a vote against romance. The eyes with their seeing are basic to romance, and the ears with their hearing are also basic, but there can be doubt that any successful romance will very soon involve-

III. THE MOUTH.

Boaz had just met Ruth, and they had a brief friendly encounter. His next move was to invite her to join him for lunch, and he provided the lunch. This was their first date. We say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, but it works for women as well, especially if they are as poor and hungry as Ruth. She kept part of her lunch to take home to Naomi. Ruth may be the first person on a date to ask for a doggie bag. Boaz was obviously interested in more than employer-employee relations. He was really a fast mover.

He was not as fast as the famous Dr. Wilfred Grenfell the medical missionary to Labrador. In 1908 at the age of 43 he was returning from a visit to England. On the deck of the Mauretania he saw a lady that charmed him. A few hours later he proposed to her. She said, "But you don't even know my name!" He responded, "It doesn't matter. I know what its going to be!" That was truly love at first sight. Boaz took the more traditional approach of at least

having a meal together before the wedding.

Food and love are linked together from birth. Being given food is the first expression of love that a child understands. It is his introduction to love, and all his life he will celebrate the love of family and special events by eating together. It is perfectly natural then that romantic love will quickly led to two people eating together. Dating and eating, and marriage and eating are inseparable. This is not to say there is never any unpleasantness connected with eating and romance.

Former president Lyndon Johnson tells of the time he invited Billy and Ruth Graham to the White House for dinner. He describes the scene: "I asked during the dinner if Billy would give me the name of a good vice-presidential candidate. Instead of answering my question he shot out of his chair and yelled, "Ruth, why did you just kick me under the table?" She winced in embarrassment. Then she took a deep breath and said quietly, "Bill, shouldn't you limit your address to spiritual matters?" There could have been conflict, but Billy recognized what she was saying was true. He reached across the table and squeezed her hand. He did not always heed Ruth's advice, and he came to regret some of his political involvement's.

The mouth gets involved in romance, not just because of the pleasure of eating, but the mouth is the key instrument by which people give guidance to those they love. Boaz gave such guidance to Ruth, and in chapter 3 the words of Ruth

to Boaz, which she had received from the mouth of Naomi, led to his determination to win Ruth as his wife. The mouth, or tongue, is a source of great blessing or cursing. In romance and marriage it plays a major role. Again we use Billy Graham as an illustration. He had constant temptations to go other directions than his ministry. He was once offered great financial support to run for president, and a Hollywood director offered him a star role in an epic extravaganza. A major TV network offered him a million dollar a year contract to host a talk show. Ruth said to him on each occasion of these tempting offers: "You're bounded duty to the Lord is elsewhere."

We are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and sometimes these words come through the mouth of those who love us best. Romance and the plan of God are not just linked in the book of Ruth. It is a part of all of history. Romance and redemption are inseparable. God makes the male-female relationship the symbol of His relationship to man. Christ is the groom, and the church is the bride. We are Ruth, and Christ is our Boaz. He is coming again to take us to the mansion He has prepared for the everlasting honeymoon.

Heaven will begin with a great wedding and the marriage supper of the Lamb. The eyes will see what none have ever seen before; the ears will hear what has never yet been heard, and the mouth will be filled with praise as never before, and we will enjoy eating like no gourmet as ever known. Joni, who is paralyzed and cannot use her legs,

says she will dance with endless romance in heaven. And that is what heaven will be, an endless romance. Ruth's romance was just one of many that led to the coming of Jesus into the world to complete the romance of redemption, and the greatest love story ever told. All of us can be a part of the world of romance by a wise use of our eyes, ears, and mouth in relation to those whom we love. These are all involved in the Gospel that leads to the eternal romance, and to the romance we enjoy in time. We need to pay attention to how we use them, and be more romantic in this world that always needs more love.

6. RUTH THE RISK TAKER Based on Ruth 3:1-13

Fort Lee, which is now Charleston, West Virginia was under attack in 1791. Colonel George Clendenin assembled his men to ask for a volunteer to ride to Lewisberg over 100 miles away to get powder. They were almost out, and their survival depended upon a renewed supply. No one volunteered, for it was a suicide mission. Then a high pitched voice cried out, "I will go!" It was the voice of Anne Bailey. She was no ordinary lady. The Indians called her mad Anne because she took so many risks. She fought the British and the Indians, and would roam the countryside alone to learn the ways of the Indians. She got so good at being a scout that she was often able to outwit the Indians. This is she did it again. She got through and brought back the powder, and Fort Lee was saved.

If you go to Charleston, you will find a museum and a main thoroughfare named after this brave woman who took risks that no man was willing to take. Women have been risk takers all through history, and there are volumes filled with their exploits. Quite often their risks are related to their romance. Isabella of Castille defied her half brother King Henry IV of Spain. He wanted to marry her off to an old reprobate for his advantage. She threatened to kill herself before she would do it. She was only 18, but she outwitted the king. She smuggled 17 year old Ferdinand into Castille disguised as a mule driver. They were married Dec. 19, 1469. Henry did all he could to make them miserable. He cut off all funds so they had to live in poverty. But their romance so captured the minds of the people that when Henry died the nobles united in declaring Isabella the Queen. She went from poverty to riding a white steed to receive her crown. The risk she took for romance changed the course of history.

Pocahontas took the risk of being the first Indian to marry a white man. Her husband John Rolfe took her back to England. Their wedding brought peace to the settlers and Indians in America, and she became the belle of London, as people were fascinated with her uniqueness and charm. She contracted pneumonia, and she died, but her risk for romance gave her a place in history. Women have been daring, brave, and courageous in all the battles and conflicts of history. It was a woman by the name of Emily Bronte who wrote the famous lines-

**No coward soul is mine;
No trembler in the world's storm troubled sphere.
I see heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.**

Females who have had an impact on history usually have to take some sort of risk, and such is the case with Ruth. She also took a risk for romance. If you look at the radical differences between Ruth and Boaz, you will be better able to see the risks involved.

- 1. Boaz is a Jew, and Ruth is a Gentile. This is a radical form of intermarriage.**
- 2. Boaz is an Israelite, and Ruth is a Moabitess. These two nations were bitter enemies.**
- 3. Boaz is middle aged, and Ruth is quite young.**
- 4. Boaz is rich, and Ruth is poor.**
- 5. Boaz has deep roots, and Ruth is a stranger and an outsider.**

The potential for problems is great. Any marriage counselor today would look at these elements and rate this relationship as high risk. What we need to see, however, is that the encourager of this risky romance is a risk taker. Naomi risked leaving Bethlehem to go to Moab with her husband, and it was a costly gamble. She took the chance of letting her two sons marry Moabite girls. That too was a high risk, but it did pay off as Ruth became a committed believer in the God of Israel. She took the risk of going back to her hometown in emptiness and defeat. She faced the risk of ridicule and rejection. Naomi is one of the most

courageous women of the Bible. Her courage and risk taking is what motivated Ruth to be a risk taker. The lives of these two women teach us some valuable truths about risk. First let's look at-

I. THE REALITY OF RISK.

It is a part of every life, and there is no escape from risk. If you think you can just do nothing, and, thereby, escape it, that can be the greatest risk of all. This epitaph illustrates the point-

**Here lies the body of Lester Lee
Underground.
He couldn't decide which side of the tree
To ski around.**

Any decision can be risky, but no decision can be the highest risk of all.

Naomi could see the risks of indecision. The harvest was over, and Ruth would no longer be going to the field daily to glean. She would no longer be taking her break with Boaz. Boaz could get so involved in his work that the romance between him and Ruth could fade. There was always the risk of someone else coming into the picture, and there was the risk of another relative deciding he would take over, and Ruth then would miss the chance to be with the one she really cared about.

There is always the risk of procrastination, which is not only the thief of time, but of all potential values from the trivial to the treasured. Richard Armour has put into poetry what we have all experienced in some way.

**One day a button's slightly loose,
The next its somewhat more so.
It loosens just a little bit
Each time I move my torso.**

**It hangs now by a single thread;
Its perilous, let's face it.
This button is a special kind;
I doubt I could replace it.**

**I ought to pull it off, I guess.
My wife should sew it on.
I wear it slightly longer, though-
That is, until its gone.**

Waiting until it is too late is not wise, and so we are often forced to take risks to make things happen, and that is where Naomi is coming from. This was the day of the Judges, and life was a risk because you never knew when someone could come and invade the land and enslave you. Even the everyday life of ordinary people was surrounded by risks. The reality of risk is especially evident in relationships. Love is always a high risk, for you invest a lot of yourself in a relationship of love, and that investment can pay off with great dividends, but it can also cost you a

broken heart. It is just part of the reality of risk in life.

Naomi and Ruth both risked loving and getting married, and both lost their mates, and had to go through the agony of grief. Naomi had children, and saw both of her boys die fairly young. It is risky to become parents, for it is costly, and children, like everything else you love, can be lost. Every time you choose to love, or to develop any relationship, you are taking a risk. Chuck Swindoll said he has a woman in his church who was married for 48 years. She was planning their golden wedding anniversary already. She came home one day and found a note telling her that her husband had gone off with another woman. This may be rare at that age, but it is the risk of the real world we live in.

There is much we can do to minimize the risks of shattered relationships, but the fact remains that you always stick your neck out to some degree when you open your heart to anyone. That is the vulnerability of love. Mental health and stability can only be achieved by recognizing the risks of reality, and being able to pay the cost. In *Journey Out Of Nowhere*, Nancy Covert Smith describes how she, as a Christian and good church member, ended up in a mental hospital. While there she came to realize that the doors are locked, not primarily to keep the patients in, but to keep the world out. She says that 50 to 60 percent of the healing process, which takes place, was due to the fact that the world was locked out. The mentally ill need protection from the reality of a risky world. They

need to feel safe and free from risks.

Only when they are ready to face up to the reality of risk again are they ready for the real world. Naomi and Ruth are amazing examples of strong healthy women, for with all of their sorrow, grief, and loss, they have not crawled into a cave to hibernate, and let the world pass them by. They are in there planning how to go out onto another limb, and risk getting hurt again. Healthy people recognize that the only way you can be happy in the kind of world we live in is to keep on risking, and sticking your neck out for the sake of love. The most realistic thing we can do in life is to face the fact that risk is a part of reality, and so we must go on loving and developing relationships. Ruth is no glutton for punishment, but she does relish the thought of being loved again, and so she is willing to face the reality of risk. Next let's look at-

II. THE RELATIVITY OF RISK.

Not even all reasonable risks are equal. Ruth took a risk going out to be a gleaner in the fields. She could have been rebuked, and run off as a stranger, or told to go elsewhere, and this would be demeaning. But the risk she took in boldly coming to Boaz requesting the role of the wife in his life was a radical risk. She could have been rejected, and had her heart broken. Boaz liked her, and he respected her, but he had not approached her with an offer of marriage. Her assertive behavior could have the effect of turning him off, and the whole thing could backfire, and leave her

crushed.

Ruth had a high capacity for risk. She risked her whole future to stick with Naomi. She risked her all to go into the unknown rather than take the low risk of going back to Moab. Now we see her ready to put all of her eggs in one basket again, and go out on a limb to win the man she loved. I have seen Christian women lose the man they love because they were not willing to take the risk of being bold like Ruth, and letting him know how she felt.

What we need to see is that risk is relative to the value that is to be gained. The higher the value the greater the risk we should be willing to take to gain that value. Love and marriage, and family were the highest values there were to Naomi and Ruth. This means the risk was one that was reasonable to them. A risk is an exposure to loss or injury. Nobody wants to suffer loss or injury, but if there is a reasonable chance the risk will lead to gain, then it can be wise to take that risk.

This means that the reasonableness of risk is relative to the values of the individual taking the risk. Like the man who was arrested for speeding. He was asked by the judge if he had an excuse. "Yes your honor," he said. "My wife's church was having a rummage sale, and I was hurrying home to save my other pair of pants." That was a reasonable risk for him, and if we only had one other pair of pants, we might consider it reasonable for us as well. Ruth considered her risk very reasonable for her. She had

faith in Naomi's mature wisdom, and her insight into human nature, and her grasp of the situation.

This was not a haphazard hair-brained scheme of a couple of emotional women. Emotions were, no doubt, at a high pitch, but the whole thing was well thought out. The close she was to wear for this encounter, the perfume, the timing of it, every detail was rehearsed to minimize the risk of blowing it, and to maximize the chance for success. When we look at this account with our Western eyes we see the risk as being somewhat risqué, and hazardous from the point of view of being inappropriate. To slip under the covers of a man asleep in the middle of the night all alone is not the kind of risk any mother, or mother-in-law, would encourage a girl to do in our culture.

Preachers and Bible commentators spend a lot of time trying to justify this whole female scheme. All we need to recognize is that you cannot justify what is a custom in one culture by trying to make it acceptable in another culture where it is not the practice. There is no point in trying to make this an acceptable way for a young woman to approach a man in our day. In the first place, it is not a custom in our culture for farmers to sleep out by their harvest, nor is it a part of our culture that a relative has any obligation to marry a widow to produce seed in order to keep the name of his deceased relative alive.

There is no comparing of apples with oranges, and so all we need to do is recognize that what was happening was

perfectly consistent with the godly people involved. Naomi would do nothing that would risk Ruth's reputation, or bring disgrace on the family name. Boaz was shocked to be awakened in the night, and to find a woman at his feet. This was not a routine occurrence, but he was pleased with the gesture, and the whole method of their approach.

It was risky, for there was affection between them, and this approach could have led to premature intimacy. That, of course, is the risk in developing any relationship. Naomi had confidence, however, that Boaz would treat Ruth with respect, because he did love her. His very love for her was the reason he would not lose the chance to be a gentleman, and be worthy of her love. He was deeply impressed by the need to get the legal questions settled so as to be free to have Ruth as his own. He would not violate the laws of the land. He had to respect the right of his near relative to redeem Ruth if that was his will. Ruth did not have the freedom to be his until he worked out an arrangement with the nearest relative.

Knowing Boaz as a gentleman, and a man in love, and a man who would not break the law and injure his relatives, make this far less risky than it appears to us. Naomi knew what she was doing, and Ruth took the risk of faith in her guidance. It was a reasonable risk. Ruth was not going after a raise or better working conditions. She was going for a partnership in the whole estate by marriage.

When she said to Boaz as he woke up, "Spread the

corner of your garment over me," she was using familiar language of that day. It was, in fact, the same that God used to take Israel as his wife. In Ezek. 16:8 we read God saying, "I spread the corner of my garment over you.....and you become mine." At a Bedouin wedding, even today, the groom will say, "From now on nobody but me will cover you." To cover one with your garment is to possess that person intimately. It is the equivalent of a marriage proposal to ask one to cover you with their garment. Ruth was asking Boaz, "Will you marry me?" This was bold action based on confidence that he loved her.

It was a relatively safe risk, for she had plenty of reason to believe that Boaz loved her, and would be happy to have her for a wife. There were the complications with the nearer relative, however, and because he had the first chance to claim her, there was some risk involved. Ruth is putting all her cards on the table so Boaz can see and know where she is coming from. This gives him the motivation to fight for her with the assurance it is what she wants. The greater risk would have been to let him operate in the dark not knowing her true feelings. You are almost always on the right path when you risk letting people know that you like them or love them. Next let's look at-

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF RISK.

Since risk is inevitable, and the greatest risk may be in trying to avoid all risk, we have a responsibility to be risk takers. That is, we are obligated to have values and goals

worth taking risks for, just as did Ruth and Naomi. Had they not been risk takers their story would not exist, and God's plan would not have been what it was. God's plan, and their place in that plan depended on their being risk takers.

They were risk takers for what was right, wise, and reasonable, and they were richly rewarded for their risks. Their very success, however, can lead us to a very wrong conclusion about risks. We can jump to the false conclusion that risks that are right will always pay off. If we mean by this, we will always have a happy ending like Ruth if we take risks, we can be very disappointed. Risks are just that, they are risky. If risks never led to loss, they would not be risks. Many times we can risk doing what is right and lose by it. In the play Gloria II by the Refreshment Committee we see her take a risk and refuse to compromise her loyalty to Christ, and it all turned out to her advantage, and she had a happy ending.

The fact is, however, that there is a good chance that your loyalty may cost you a heavy price. It is a risk many have taken around the world that has led to persecution. The more you apply the truth of God's Word to everyday life, the more you risk the offence of the world. Jesus did not avoid rejection and hostility by His uncompromising stand against the legalism of the Pharisees. It cost Him his life. Many have risked their life to obey Jesus.

We are responsible to take risks for God's Will in life,

and not just when it is going to pay off. We are not called to a risk free life, but to a risk full life. We are called to love, and love is loaded with risk. If it doesn't work, you are facing the risk of rejection, and this can hurt. If it does work, you face the risk of disappointment and loss of that love, and that hurts too. There is no escape of being hurt in this life. If you don't care, you suffer the hurt of not being loved. If you do love, you suffer the hurt of loving, and the hurt of loss of love. You will hurt one way or the other, but the Christian is called to take up the cross, and this means to take on the responsibility of risking the hurts of love.

Ruth and Naomi aided each other in being responsible for love. They took the risks necessary to see each other have fulfilled lives. The story has a happy ending because they took this responsibility of risks on themselves. In every story with a happy ending somebody has to take risks. God honors the risk taker. Look at Peter. He was the only disciple that denied Christ outright. He was the disciple who sank into the water, and needed to be rescued by Jesus. He was the only disciple who had to be rebuked by Jesus, and told to put his sword. Peter made more mistakes, and suffered more rebukes than any other disciple. Why in the world would Jesus make him the leader?

The answer is simple. Peter was the only one who would risk his neck to follow Jesus into the place of His captivity, and then have to face the risk of denial. Peter was the only one who would take the risk of leaping out of the boat to come to Jesus on the water. Peter was the only one who

would take the risk of drawing his sword to fight for the protection of Jesus. Peter was a risk taker, and though it is true that they reveal the reality of Murphy's law, his mistakes, because he was willing to take risks, make him the kind of person Jesus needed, and so it was with Ruth. She pushed open the door into the life of Boaz, and by her assertive risk taking pushed herself into the blood line of the Messiah. Ruth is only famous, and was only used of God, because she was a risk taker.

7. THE CLEVER COUPLE Based on Ruth 3:1-4, 4:1-10

A young couple who had just gotten married, and who had received many valuable wedding gifts, established their home in the suburb. One morning they received in the mail two tickets for a popular show in the city. A note said, "Guess who?" The couple were amused as they tried to find the identity of the donor, but they could not find out who sent them. They used the tickets, and they had a delightful evening. On their return home, late at night, still trying to figure out the mystery, they found their house stripped of every article of value. On the bare table in the dinning room was a piece of paper on which was written- "Now you know!"

Crooks have so many clever ways of robbing people that it has given the word clever a bad name. Vincent Teresa in his book *My Life In The Mafia* tells of numerous clever

schemes he used to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars from innocent people, and sometimes not so innocent people. One that shows the thought and planning of these people is one I want to share. There was a big horse race called the Constitution Handicap. They put a fortune on Flauntless Light to win. Non-clever people would give their horse drugs to help him win, but the Mafia knows the winner will be tested for drugs, and so they bribed the stable boys of the other five horses in the race. They juiced those five with a depressant. Their horse won by 7 links, and they made a hundred and sixty three grand. There was a big stink over the race, but the only horse that was checked was their horse, and he was clean. Clever schemes like this enabled them to rip off billions of dollars a year.

Because history is full of the clever schemes of con men, and because the fall of man began with the clever, cunning, and crafty scheme of that old serpent the devil, we have a tendency to put cleverness in the category of vice rather than virtue. The Jews did not do so, however, but recognized cleverness as a great virtue, and one of the most powerful weapons in the cause of righteousness. Yes, they said, evil is clever but it is the task of the righteous to outwit the evil. The book of Esther is about a very clever man named Haman, who out of personal pride almost succeeded in getting the Jewish people exterminated. He was only foiled in his plot because Mordecai and Esther were even more clever, and they were able to turn the tables on him, and he was hung on his own gallows.

The whole theme of wisdom in the Old Testament deals with the virtue of being clever enough to outwit the clever appeals of evil. The fool falls for the wiles of the devil, but the clever stay one jump ahead of him. After all, what is the battle of life all about? It is about outwitting all the clever ways of the evil one to keep us from fulfilling the will of God. Cleverness is part of the image of God in us. He is the most clever of all Persons in the universe. His wisdom is a marvel as we study His creation. His cleverness in figuring out how to outwit Satan, and save a lost world, when Satan seems to have all the advantages of a fallen free willed creature who tends toward evil.

Jesus faced the clever tempter, but He was more clever than the first Adam, and He outwitted the old serpent and all his agents. No trap set for Him by the Pharisees could ensnare Him. Jesus said that we are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, and He practiced what He preached. He lived His whole life outwitting the devil, and He died a spotless Lamb of God for the sin of the world. He was, without question, the most clever man whoever lived. He was a perfect man, and a perfect man by definition is clever. There are few, if any, who become key links in the plan of God who are not in some way clever, and this goes for both Ruth and Boaz. They were just ordinary people, but they were clever people, and from their story we can learn why it is important for us to strive at being clever. By their cleverness they got themselves into the blood line of the Messiah. The first thing we want to see is that-

I. COMPLEXITY DEMANDS CLEVERNESS.

Boaz and Ruth had something of a romance going, but it was not what you would call a whirlwind romance. He watched her labor in the fields, and they ate lunch together. They both found it pleasant, but this was not going anywhere. Ruth was dressed in her old work clothes, and after a hot morning in the sun she probably did not have an attractive aroma about her. The point is, Boaz had never really seen Ruth at her feminine finest. She was just one of the gang.

A woman has to be clever in such a situation. How can she ever convey her feminine charms while dressed like a farmer, and smelling like the farm? This is where the clever female mind has to be creative to overcome the obstacles to true romance. When two women like Naomi and Ruth put their heads together to figure out how to entice a man into a relationship, you can count on it, he is as good as hooked. Fishing for men was a female practice long before Jesus called His disciples to the task with a whole new slant.

You will observe that carrying scrolls of Moses to the field was not one of their ideas. In fact, there is nothing spiritual about their plot at all. They sound as secular as Hollywood hussies trying to entice their third husband. It seems so worldly clever to be getting Ruth all dolled up and perfumed to go and entice Boaz. The clear command of Paul was to not be conformed to the world. But if the world

uses common sense and cleverness to attain evil goals, does this mean the Christian is forbidden to use common sense and cleverness to reach godly goals? Of course not. The Bible describes the temptress out to entice men into sin, and she is bathed and perfumed, and dressed to kill.

Here we see two godly women trying to make a big impression on a godly man, and they are using the same strategy as the temptress. The reason, of course, is that godly men are just as attracted to nice clothes and pleasant perfume as are the ungodly. These two ladies are not trying to get Boaz to give them a loan so they can set up a shop in Bethlehem to sell perfume and women's clothing. They are out to make Ruth look and smell so attractive that Boaz will say, "I must be out of my mind risking the lose of this beautiful creature by not taking action." Their clever scheme of giving Boaz a vision of Ruth in all her loveliness, in the middle of the night, so that she was like a pleasant dream, worked like a charm. The next day Boaz was up bright and early resolving the legal issue that kept him from having Ruth with him as his wife every night. Now that was clever work even though it added to the complexity of their lives.

How can God bless this seemingly secular scheme? Many Christians feel that all attractive dress is worldly, and some go so far as to forbid their men to wear ties. It is a sign of spirituality to be plain, drab, and the opposite of the world where diamonds are a girls best friend, and mink is a close second. Some have learned to be clever in just the

opposite way from Ruth and Naomi. Amy Charmichael was the first missionary to be appointed by the Keswick Convention.

For 55 consecutive years she served in India. Before she went to India she went to Japan for training, and there she learned a valuable lesson on clothing that changed her whole life. She went with a fellow worker to visit an elderly lady who was ill. She listened to the Gospel, and seemed ready to turn to the Savior. Then she noticed the fancy gloves Amy was wearing, and she was distracted from the message. Amy went home saddened, and she removed her English gloves, and put on a simple Japanese garment, and never again wore anything but simple clothing lest they detract from the Gospel.

Her life was blest of God, as was Ruth's, yet they were being clever in such opposite ways. One wore clothing to be attractive, and the other used clothing so as not to be attracting away from the Gospel. There is no contradiction in these two beautiful lives. They were each doing what was clever in a complex world to achieve goals God had called them to reach. It is time to focus on definition. What is cleverness? It is the showing of great practical intelligence. It is being resourceful in attaining goals in spite of obstacles and difficulties. Ruth and Amy had different goals, and that is why each was being clever even though they were doing just the opposite thing.

Ruth's goal was to marry and bare a child. That was

God's calling and purpose for her life. The use of all her femininity was wisely used to achieve that goal. Amy never married, and never had any reason to try to be attractive to the opposite sex. Her calling was totally different, and she achieved it fruitfully by giving up the need to show any feminine charm. Not all people are called to the same goals in life. Many are called to remain single. Our goal is to be as clever as possible in fulfilling our calling, and not to judge those who have a different calling because they approach some things from an opposite perspective. I have always been middle class, but I once heard the testimony of a man who lived and worked among the upper class. He did things I would never do because he had to in order to be a part of his circles, and be a witness there for Christ. He wore clothing and ate in places I would never dream of doing, because it was a part of his culture. It made sense, and so we need to recognize people have to be clever in different ways to do the will of God in their circumstances.

Mary Liu was sold as a slave girl to a Chinese women, and after much abuse she was thrown out on a trash heap to die. Throw away people have always been a part of our tragic world. A missionary walking passed heard the smothered sobs of this pathetic creature. She reached in the pile and found this mutilated mass of misery. Both of her feet had been burned off. Her life was saved, however, and in the mission hospital a pair of wooden feet were made for her. Her mangled fingers had to be amputated, but one thumb was saved. The long story of her recovery and redemption in Christ leads to her becoming the editor of

two Christian magazines for women. The two were The Messenger, and The Star.

When the Japanese took over her town she had to use her wits to preserve her precious stock of paper. She took all her trash and the junk she could afford to lose, and she stacked it all in carefully arranged bundles in a conspicuous place. Her valuable paper she threw in a dark corner, and made it look like worthless stuff. It was made to look sloppy, and with no care or order. When the inspectors came they saw how she treated the trash with concern, and they ordered it carted away immediately, and they left all her good stuff.

The World Day Of Prayer Committee marveled that Mary Liu went on publishing her Christian literature month after month, and year after year, when all others in China had ceased for lack of paper. Her cleverness kept her in business for the Lord. It is not everyone's calling to be deceptively clever toward those who would hinder your ministry, but it was Mary's calling, and who would want to criticize her for outwitting her enemies, who would have shut down her ministry? David faked madness when he might have been killed, and his life was saved. She faked concern for junk, and indifference to valuables, and her ministry was spared. It is a complex world, and cleverness is sometimes essential to the achieving of good goals.

The world recognizes this. They have to deal constantly with obstacles to good profit making goals. A major oil

company built 5 pilot gas stations near Los Angeles, and 3 near Philadelphia, which require no human attendant. The motorist puts his credit card into an outdoor computer terminal. If the card is valid, the customer pumps his own gas. The computer issues a receipt, and later tallies a monthly total. That is clever enough, but the added touch is what makes it great. If the card is listed as stolen, or lost, the computer swallows it, and gives the motorist no gas.

Even the world is in constant battle with the evil forces that hinder good and honest goals. If you are not clever, you are a sucker for the clever schemers who will rob you blind. Cleverness is vital to godliness simply because ungodliness is so clever. If you are not clever you will not be very effective in overcoming evil with good. If you are not victorious over evil, you will be a victim of it, and so you have to be more clever than evil is.

Let's look at Boaz for awhile, and see his cleverness in a situation where there is really no evil foe, but there is competition. The competition here is not between good and evil, but between the good and the best. It would be good for the nearest of kin to redeem Ruth, but in the light of the fact that Boaz and Ruth were in love, this good would be bad in comparison to Boaz having the right to marry her. It is sort of like, it is good to lose one eye compared to losing both of them, but that does not make it the best alternative. The best is to lose neither eye. The best in this setting is for the good not to happen so the best can.

We know that is just what did happen, but it could have been different had Boaz not been clever. He had to so present the whole issue in such a way as to be an un-salesman. I don't know if there is such a word, but that is what Boaz was doing. He was not trying to sell his relative on a deal. He was trying to unsell him. This called for the clever use of psychology, just as selling does. I had to be an unseller myself with my grandson. We were talking about good guys and bad guys, and he said he wanted to grow up and be a bad guy. I could see he was testing my reaction. I calmly accepted his statement and proceeded to look at whether this was a goal he really wanted to aim for. I pointed out that bad guys often have to spend a lot of time in jail, and they often lose the love of the people they care about, and they make God angry at them. He agreed it was not the best way to go. I had to unsell him on the idea of being a bad guy.

Boaz had to unsell his relative on the idea of being the kinsman-redeemer of Ruth. He does this by first being a seller, and telling him the good news. He tells him that he is first in line to buy the property of Elimelech. Boaz suggests that he use his option of nearest relative, and he talks as if it is a matter of indifference to him. He is as cool as cool can be. He says, "I'm next in line, but only if you don't want to buy it, I will. Why don't you go ahead?" It all seems like a mere matter of business, and the nearest kin says, "It sound good to me. I will redeem it."

Now Boaz uses his shock strategy, and he throws in the

bad news. His relative is thinking this is a good deal for me. I will have more property, expanding income, and greater status. Boaz says, "I just thought you ought to know that on the day you buy the land you also acquire the widow of the man who owned the land, in order to maintain his name." J. Vernon McGee says, "He was using some of the wisdom of the serpent here." Right away the man felt the pressure of this demand. He was frightened to think how close he was to making a deal that would back him into more complexity than he could handle.

When it was only land it was all to his advantage, but if he has to take Ruth and raise up a child for her deceased husband, then that child will eventually get the land anyway, and not his own children. So he backed out of the deal, and he gave Boaz the right to redeem. Boaz was really doing his relative a favor by presenting the case in such a way as to unsell him on the idea. He was clever because he got what he wanted, but he did it, not by deception, but by a shocking and overwhelming presentation of the truth with all of its implications. It was too much for the man to absorb, and the complexity made it look too risky, and so he backed out.

Cleverness is the ability to skillfully work your way through complex circumstances to a goal that is your aim to reach. Godly cleverness is aiming for a goal that is pleasing to God. Boaz was blessed with godly cleverness. This is a virtue that has changed the entire world in which we live. The example of one man's life that is astounding in its

cleverness is that of Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators. He died in April of 1982 at the age of 85. His career in missions started in 1917 as a Bible salesman in Guatamala. He discovered that 60% of the people could not read the Spanish Bibles he was selling, and so he, with no linguistic training, just settled down in a small Indian village, and translated the New Testament into the Indian language. He spent 11 years doing that. His philosophy was, "Do one thing and do it well." As he learned more about the fact of hundreds of languages with no Bible, he founded a school called The Summer Institute Of Linguistics.

He learned another lesson in Guatamala, and that is to cooperate with the local authorities. He was dragged before the mayor of a town for distributing Bibles without permission. He apologized and never forgot that missionaries are guests, and the government is the host. We must get their approval. This became a distinguishing characteristic of his organization. The first copy of the New Testament he sent to the president of Guatamala. He spent hours waiting to see officials to get them involved in his projects. There is no other mission movement like Wycliffe. It reports to the government, and not the national church. He gets contracts with the government, and so he is serving them.

He got into Mexico where other missions were being rejected, and he even got the government to pay for part of the work. His workers had special favors not granted to

other missionaries. Their visas were made permanent when all others had to get theirs renewed every 6 months. This pattern continued all through South America and the Philippines. While other missions were fighting for survival, they saw pictures of Townsend in the paper with the Presidents, generals, and leaders of the land. Other missionaries became jealous of this special treatment, but it was his clever strategy that enabled him to achieve his goals.

In 50 years he went from one employee to 4,255 people, and became the largest Christian mission in history. At the beginning of the 20th century there were only 67 languages that had the Bible. Now, some portion of the Bible exists in over 2000 languages. All because of his cleverness in doing what others did not see as the key to reaching goals. Cleverness got the Word of God into the language of millions, and cleverness got Ruth and Boaz into the Word of God. Cleverness committed to God is one of the most powerful tools in history. We need to ask ourselves about what we are doing to love God with all of our minds. What are we doing to use our minds and cleverness to achieve goals for the glory of God and the good of His people? May God motivate us to learn from this clever couple to be clever ourselves for the kingdom of God.

8. THE COMPLEXITIES OF LIFE Based on Ruth 3:10-13, 4:1-6

Not far from the scene where Ruth proposed to Boaz in the middle of the night, Musa Alami made a proposal of his own. This Arab boy was educated at Cambridge, and he went back to Palestine where he became very successful. But political turmoil came and he lost everything. He went out into the bleak desert between Moab and Israel, and proposed to turn this desert into a rose. Where nothing had ever grown before, he would make it into a farm by the use of underground water. He got the same response that Noah got in building the Ark. The people laughed and ridiculed the idea as preposterous. The Bedouin sheiks all said it could not be done. The government official agreed it could not be done. The scientists confirmed it that it could not be done.

To add to these minor complexities he had to face the fact that he had no well drilling equipment. Based on this preliminary information most people would have given up before they started. But people who know that life is complicated do not turn back because of complexities. Musa used poverty stricken refugees to dig with shovels. They had nothing to lose, and the project gave them some hope. Day after day, and week after week, they dug and dug the big hole in the desert. They became the laughing stock of the area. For 6 months they dug deeper and deeper into the dry sand. One day the sand was wet, and so were the eyes of the diggers, for they wept when water was found in the desert. The sheik laid hands on Musa and said, "Thank God. Now Musa, you can die." They meant, you have done what none other thought could be done. You have fulfilled

your purpose in life, and you can die happy.

Musa went on to develop a ranch in the desert. It was 3 miles long and 2 miles wide with 15 wells. He raised vegetables, bananas, figs, and citrus fruit. He build a training school to teach farmers and technicians. Others followed Musa until 40 thousand acres were under cultivation where once there was only sand. The shortest distance between two points may be a straight line, but seldom is life so simple that we can reach our goals by traveling a straight line. Usually any goal worth reaching calls for traveling an up and down winding road of complexity with obstacles, road blocks, and detours. Life is seldom a 100 yard dash where you get ready, get set, and go, and a few seconds later the goal is crossed. Life is more like a cross country marathon through winding trails, over hills, through swamps, and you cross the goal line weary and battered.

The story of Ruth seems so simple on the surface. Ruth meets Boaz; they fall in love; they get married, and they live happily ever after. But as we read the story carefully we see it is more complex then this. Boaz loves Ruth, and she loves him, but he is not free to respond to her proposal of marriage. There are technical legal matters that throw a monkey wrench into this otherwise simple romance. There are rules that govern the marriage of a widow, and so there are rights of other relatives that Boaz is obligated to respect.

The whole chapter is about the complexity of responsibility. Naomi is fine now, and in her own life she is adjusted, but Ruth complicates her life. She feels responsible to try and find a secure future for her. Love always complicates life. If you demand that life be simple, then avoid love at all cost, for love is complicated, and it adds a load of responsibility. The hermit has the truly simple life, but for all who develop relationships there is the inevitability of complexity.

The civilized people become the more complex they become as well. There are more and more laws that are needed to regulate the relationships of people. The law of levirate marriage is the issue here in Ruth. It was designed to keep the name of every man alive in Israel, even if he did not have a child. This was cared for by the law that demanded the man's brother, or if he had none, the closest relative, to marry his widow, and have a child that would carry on the name of the deceased. Elimelech and Mahlon were both dead end branches of their family tree, and their only hope of survival in a genealogy of Israel was for Ruth to have a child. This was a great law for preserving the names of the dead, but it often became very complex for the living. For example, the Jewish Rabbis had some very confusing and contradictory issues arise out of this law.

It was permissible for a man in Israel to marry his niece, that is his brother's daughter. Now suppose this man died childless. The law said that the brother was to take the widow and marry her, but in this case the brother was the

father of the widow. This would be incest which is clearly forbidden by the law. So in this case the man is both commanded and forbidden to do the same thing. The Jewish Rabbi's wisely said, there has to be exceptions in complex cases. In this case it could not be the nearest relative, but the next nearest relative who was responsible.

Boaz was the next nearest relative in the case with Ruth, but the exception did not apply here, and so he has to level with Ruth. He makes it clear that he is saying yes to her proposal. He accepts the offer to redeem her and become her husband, but it is not that simple. He has to give the nearest relative his legal right to take that option for himself. So what we see here is-

I. THE BURDEN OF COMPLEXITY.

I cannot imagine that either one of them got any sleep that night. They had just agreed to become husband and wife, and yet the whole outcome was up in the air, and depended upon a third party who was not involved in their romance at all. What a burden that life cannot just be simple and easy. Why must there always be some obstacle, or some crazy flaw in the thing that adds pain where there should be only pure pleasure? Why must there always be a but at the end of so many good sentences? I adore your work, but. I agree with you, but. I love you, but.

If only it was true that only the ungodly had to face the complexity of life. They do, of course, and in fact, add

enormous complexity to the already normal complexity of life by their ungodliness. I read of two thieves who had the most simple robbery planned. They jumped out of their hiding place to relieve the 20 year old restaurant manager of his 17 thousand dollar night deposit. He was so frightened that when they told him to put up his hands, he threw them up and the money sack went flying onto the roof. It was now too risky to take the time to get it, and they fled away empty handed. What a delight it would be if only robbery and things in that category were complicated. Unfortunately, every day life of ordinary people gets complicated too.

- 1. The worst toothache comes when your dentist is out of town.**
- 2. The vacant parking space is so often on the other side of the street.**
- 3. The lane you just got out of now speeds up, and you are sitting still.**
- 4. Grass seed always grows better in the driveway cracks than on the lawn.**
- 5. The worse damage comes after the warranty has run out.**

These and a thousand other such complexities do not happen to publicans and sinners only, but to the saints as well. We all live in the same fallen world where life seldom stays simple. Sometimes the ungodly have an advantage, for the simple thing is so often the sinful thing. Just do as you please, and do what comes natural, and do what is self-centered, it is easy and simple. While the way of

righteousness may be very difficult and complex. You have to figure out how to control your old nature, and suppress the tendency to sin. You have to argue yourself in to obedience to the will of God. The sinner has such a simple decision, and you are struggling and wrestling with emotions and convictions.

C. S. Lewis expressed in a letter to a child the complexity of his task as a teacher. He wrote, "I am so busy marking examination papers that I can hardly breathe! The very good ones and the very bad ones are no trouble, but the in-between ones take ages." This is so true to life. The very good and the very bad are easy to distinguish, and they are simple concepts to deal with. The complexity is in that vast gray area that covers most of the controversial issues of politics, ethics, and religion. Christians tend to end up on all sides of an issue, because there is always some truth and value being fought for in every perspective. This is the world where we really live. The ivory tower is attractive, and a fun place to visit, but we can't live there.

Lavonne and I have many times asked each other, as we drive together, "Is that a male or a female thumbing a ride?" It is a complex world where even a simple thing like determining the sex of someone is so difficult that you are never sure. One man complaining in a store of this very thing said to the customer next in line, "I don't understand youth today. Look at that youngster over there. Is it a boy or a girl?" "It's a girl," was the reply. "She is my daughter." "I beg your pardon," the man apologized. "I

wouldn't have said that had I known you were her father." "I'm not," was the comeback. "I'm her mother." Such is the complex world we live in.

Jesus had a perfect life, but He never escaped the burden of complexity. How do I honor my mother and father, and also be about my heavenly Father's business? That was one of His burdens of complexity. How do I love my enemies, and yet let them know just how intolerable their evil ways are? Jesus had to love the Pharisees; even eat with them; call some of them as His disciples, and yet denounce them as the hypocrites that they were. He had to live in obedience to the Word of God, and yet reject false interpretations of it that would lead Him to abuse it for self-centered goals. This He could have done by turning the stone to bread, or by jumping off the temple. It can get complex when someone is saying, "Don't you trust the Lord? Don't you stand on His promises? He said that He will lift you up and not let you dash your foot against a stone. Prove your faith, and show that you believe by jumping." It can seem so right when it is all so wrong, and the complexity can lead to confusion. This has caused believers to take a leap of faith, and end up crushed by their presumption.

Jesus told His disciples to pick up all the leftovers after He fed the multitude, and they had 12 baskets full. Jesus was not wasteful, and yet He let Mary pour out valuable ointment on Him that could have fed the poor. He had to face the complexities of living a conservative life, and yet know when to enjoy the luxury of extravagance. He faced

the complexity of looking on men who were doing history's most representative sin. They were rejecting God's gift and killing His Son. He, as the Lord of justice, had to respond to this injustice with wrath. But as the Lord of love, who came to die for all sin, He had to pray, "Father forgive them." Jesus carried the burden of complexity all through His life.

Coming back to Ruth, our Redeemer's ancient ancestor, we see that Jesus understands the complexity of life, and we can recognize we do not face them alone. He will help carry the burden of life's complexity. One of the burdens we see in Ruth is the burden of secrecy. There is no immoral behavior between Ruth and Boaz, and yet it is understandable that he urged Ruth to slip away before sun up, and not let anyone know that a woman had come to the threshing floor. Secrets are legitimate just because life is complex. You can't explain everything to everybody so that they understand or believe. You are better off not having to explain. People know they can't believe everything they hear, but they can repeat it, and much gossip that is damaging to others is based on information that should have been kept secret.

I read of a very unusual accident where an elephant crushed in the side of a woman's station wagon in Vancouver. The vehicle was still able to move, and so after exchanging insurance information with the elephant owner, she was on her way. But then she got caught in a traffic jam caused by another accident. When the ambulance

arrived she was next to the scene of the wreck, and the ambulance driver ran to her car to assist her because of seeing the side caved in. "Oh no," she said, "I was not involved in this accident. An elephant just sat on my car." Hearing this the ambulance crew and a policeman quickly pulled her from the car and got her to a hospital for possible shock and head injuries.

The woman would have been wise to keep her elephant event a secret. That was just not the place to try and explain things. A mere statement that this is an old accident could have prevented the whole silly scene and inconvenience. Secrets are the only sensible way at times, and certainty this was the case with Boaz and Ruth. The whole world is told in God's Word, for it was innocent, but this was not the time to let the neighbors know. There are many things you have to keep secret in life because explaining them is just to complicated.

Sometimes, however, the secret gets out, and then the burden becomes even heavier and more complex. There is a natural human tendency to judge the actions of others. Elimelech is harshly judged by many Christians as under the judgement of God because he left Bethlehem during the famine. Naomi is harshly judged for letting her two boys marry Moabites. She is also blasted for encouraging this seemingly naughty night on the threshing floor. It is amazing how critical and judgmental Christians can be toward those whom God has clearly used to accomplish His purpose. God has not given the slightest hint that He is

displeased with their behavior.

It is no wonder that Paul makes a big issue of the idea that servants stand or fall before their master, and not before the other servants. If other servants are the judges, there are few, if any, who could escape judgment. But thank God He is the judge, and He honors Ruth and Boaz, and He rewards them richly for their behavior. God could have kept this whole story secret, as he did the story of others in the blood line to His Son, but this story He has made known just because it is so unique and complex, and reveals all the more the wonder of His grace. These two were doing their best to find God's best, and He honored them for it. Now let's look at-

II. THE BLESSING OF COMPLEXITY.

We need to see that if life was simple, and all we had was straight lines, the story of Ruth would not have a happy ending. The whole beautiful outcome of this romance was due to life's complexity. The rival relative who had first choice wanted to redeem the property of Elimelech, and so the whole romance of Boaz and Ruth could be coming to a screeching halt if he is willing also to take Ruth as his wife.

When Boaz confronted him with the fact that he would have to take Ruth with the deal, he immediately saw how this would complicate his life, and endanger his own estate. It was too risky, and too complicated for him, and so because life is not simple Boaz got the chance to choose

Ruth for himself. His greatest blessings came to him because of complexity. He was second in line, but that was good enough, for because of complexities he ended up first in line, and was able to have love, marriage, and family. Many of the kings and queens of history were people who are far from being heirs to the throne, but because life gets so complex the highly unlikely thing happened, and they were able to become the next in line.

If life was simple because God's nature was simple, we would not even exist. God would have destroyed the world long ago. But God's nature is complex, and His love restrains His wrath. It makes Him longsuffering, not willing that any shall perish. All are saved because of the complexity of God's nature.

If life was only simple, Boaz would have married a Jew, and all Jews would marry Jews, and no Gentile would ever get into the blood line to the Messiah. But life is complex, and so the unusual happens all the time, and this produces many of life's greatest blessings. Jews were not suppose to marry Moabites, but because life is complex Ruth became an exception to the rule, and a symbol to the whole world that God is not a legalist, but a God of grace. If life was simple Goliath would have fed David to the birds, for he had superior strength and weapons. But life is complex, and victory does not always go to the strongest. Complexity makes it possible for the weak to triumph, and God uses the foolish to confound the wise. Complexity is what makes the wonders of God's working in the world possible.

Complexity is what makes life possible for all men, and abundant life possible for sinners saved by grace.

If God granted your request for ultimate simplicity you would be an amoeba. This one celled creature has very few problems in its simple life. But as life becomes more and more complex, life takes on higher and higher qualities, and has the potential of receiving greater blessings. Do not denounce complexity just because it can be a burden. The alternative is to lose the image of God in which we are created. The more man regresses from the image of God the more simple and primitive he becomes. He lives for the flesh only, and for simple greed and self-centered satisfaction. The more man moves toward God the more complex he becomes, for he develops the higher self; the inner man of the spirit. He becomes more creative and complex in all of his values, and he reaches out beyond the self to love others. Jesus is the only perfect example of the ultimate in complexity.

Because life is complex Ruth and Boaz became mates, and because life is complex we have the highest privilege of life of being a part of the bride of Christ. If life was simple Ruth would have listened to Naomi and went back to her people, and she would have lost her chance to be a part of God's people. Complexity is what enables people to see life from different perspectives so that not all are made pessimistic by the burdens of life. Complexity is the basis for the blessed differences that gives us balance in life.

Gigi, the oldest daughter of Billy Graham has 6 children of her own. One summer afternoon with 6 weeks left before school she was running out of creative ways to keep these energetic children entertained. So she hit on the idea of fixing up the old sandbox. After pulling the weeds, and getting it in shape, she called the local sand company. When the truck arrived it was so heavy that it made deep trenches in their yard, and it broke off several branches from their trees. Then the driver began to slide down the hill toward the lake, and he plowed a gaping hole on the way. He sank up to his axles, and he could not move. He had to call in another truck. A large tow truck came and made more deep trenches in the yard. In trying to pull the other truck out he dug into the yard and broke the sprinkler pipes, and up rooted some small trees. He also got stuck. Another call to the company resulted in a 18 wheeler arriving.

By 8 o'clock that night, after 5 and a half hours of destruction, they had five tons of sand beside the sand box, and a yard that looked like a battlefield. It was a disastrous day, but as she tucked in her 8 year old for bed he prayed, "And thank you Lord, for the exciting day, and for all the entertainment we had." She had to laugh and recognize that God wants us to see life through the eyes of children, and see the fun and humor even in the ridiculous and difficult. Complexity makes us aware that there is more than one way to look at things. We don't have to be locked into the negative, but can see that life is complex, and so we always have choices. The happy ending of the story of

Ruth, and the happy ending for millions of stories, are due to the reality of the complexity of life.

9. GODLY GRANDPARENTS Based on Ruth 4:13-17

Among the many things that makes man unique in creation is the presence of, and the influence of, grandparents. F. W. Boreham many years ago pointed out that in the vegetable world, "The bursting buds of spring push off the last lingering leaves of the previous season, and thus decline to have anything to do with the generation that preceded them, to say nothing of the generation before that. Among animals and birds a certain filial affection is sometimes found for fathers and mothers, but of the grandfather and grandmother never a trace. But a man is so much greater than either a tree or a beast that a special factor is introduced into his training. He comes under the influence not only of teachers and tutors, of fathers and mothers, but grandfathers and grandmothers as well."

The impact of grandpas and grandmas in history is beyond calculation. Most of the famous people of the Bible from Adam and Eve on were grandparents. Often the grandparents played a key role, if not the major role, in the way history went. Hezekiah was one of the best kings God's people ever had, but his father was Ahaz, and he was one of the worst they ever had. But his grandfather was Jotham, and he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord.

Hezekiah took after his grandfather rather than his father, and the result was victory for the kingdom of God.

Because of the powerful influence of grandparents there is always hope even if one generation goes astray, because the next generation can be brought back, and in that lies the glory of grandparents. They often bridge the gap between parents and children, and they make major differences in the course of history. The relationship of grandparents and grandchildren is so unique because it is so full of hope and expectation. This explains the mystery of how a boy who is not good enough for your daughter can father such marvelous children. And it explains why the girl unworthy of your son can bear such brilliant beings as your grandchildren.

It is a strange question to ask, but the book of Ruth makes us ask it: Is a baby on the day of its birth more a child or a grandchild? In other words, who is to be more congratulated, the parents or the grandparents? For some reason the book of Ruth votes for the grandparents, and it makes this passage one of the most powerful exaltations of a grandmother you will find anywhere in human literature. It is almost as if the goal of this book was to come to a happy ending with grandma Naomi holding grandson Obed in her lap, and everybody singing her praises.

Note how suddenly the story of Ruth and Boaz comes to an end. Their romance has dominated the stage for most of the book, but their wedding and 9 months of pregnancy,

and their whole life together is wrapped up rapidly in verse 13. When Ruth gave birth to that baby boy, she and Boaz left the stage, and the spotlight focuses on grandma Naomi for the closing scenes of the story. There is not one more scene about the parents, for the star now is grandma. All of the praise and rejoicing now revolve around her. Naomi has a kinsman- redeemer. Naomi has a comfort for her old age. Naomi has a grandson, and they say she has a son.

This radical removal of the parents, and this thrusting of grandma and grandchild front and center is a powerful revelation of just how important a role grandparents play in the life of a child, or should we say, can play, or should play? Every person in the blood line from Adam to Christ was a grandparent. The genealogy that ends this book is a list of people all of whom became grandparents. Obad, the baby of Ruth, was the grandfather of King David. What a delight it would be to know more about these grandparents, but the book ends with a special emphasis on grandparents, and with such a deliberate focus on Naomi that I do not know of anywhere in the Bible where you can find a better text for grandparents day.

Someone may point out that Naomi was not Ruth's mother, but her mother-in-law, and so technically she was not the grandmother, but just the opposite is the case. This first child of Ruth and Boaz was to preserve the name and inheritance of Ruth's first husband and Naomi's son Mahlon. It was equivalent to Mahlon's son, and thus, technically it was her grandson. But who cares? Who cares

about the grandparents of George Washington, or Lincoln, or any other famous man or woman? Apparently God cares, for the book of Ruth only exists because all of these people were grandparents and great grandparents of David, the great king of God's people. God is into genealogies and roots. And so God is into grandparents. God has so made life that grandparents play a major role of what happens in history, and it is because of their special love and influence on grandchildren.

So great is this influence that even parents who fail their children can become such successful grandparents that the family tree is healed, and restored as one that bears fruit for the kingdom of God. There are many ways in which the role of grandparents is superior to the role of parents. We can't cover all that is precious about the grandparent-grandchild relationship, but we can look at the two R's of this relationship suggested by our text. These can instruct and inspire us to make the best of this great blessing God has given, not to animals, not to angels, but to man. The first R is-

I. ROOTS.

The book of Ruth exists to trace the roots of David the king of Israel, and there is no way to do this apart from getting into the lives of grandparents. This is true for all of us. It was true for the only man in all of history who had two letters written to him which became a part of God's Word to the world. Those two letters are I and II Timothy.

One of the things we know about Timothy is that his Christian faith had its roots in his grandmother. Paul tells it clearly in II Tim. 1:5, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and I am persuaded, now lives in you.

Paul made a major point of the roots of his faith, for the fact is, what the grandparents were makes a big difference in the majority of lives. There are millions of ungodly grandparents who make their grandchildren like them, but Christian grandparents do the same, and give the faith of their grandchildren deep roots, it is hard for me to imagine that I would be the Christian I am without the influence of my grandmother. My father ran away from home at 18, and he became a cowboy. He roamed all over the country with rodeos, and was far from being a godly man in his youth. My parents did not go to church when I was growing up, and I never remember any instruction in the things of the Bible in my home.

It was my grandmother who read her Bible, who prayed, and who gave me a comic book Bible when I was a child. That book changed my life, for it made me fall in love with the Bible stories at a early age. It was my grandmother who would argue and defend the Bible, and the Christian way of life, at family reunions where her own skeptical sons, who were my uncles, would challenge her faith. I can't begin to measure the impact of that one woman in my life. She never led me to the Lord, but she gave my Christian faith its

roots. When I became a part of the family of God, I already had family in that family.

The older I get the more I realize how important roots are, for had I not had the roots I had, I do not know where I might be in my relationship to Christ. My mother's mother did not have the spiritual impact on me as did my father's mother. But my German Lutheran grandmother still gave me roots. I belonged to a greater family of people than just mom and dad, and that is important for establishing identity.

Margaret Mead, the noted anthropologist, has said a lot of controversial things, but you will find no authorities debating her statement in her article Grandparents and Educators. In it she said, "Somehow we have to get the older people, grandparents, widows and widowers, spinsters and bachelors, back close to children if we are to restore a sense of community, a knowledge of the past, and a sense of future to today's children."

Rootless people are the result, at least in part, of being ripped away from the influence of their grandparents. Grandparents can be just that, parents who are grand. They do not have to be the disciplinarians of life, and so they are more free to be the teachers of values. They have opportunities to talk and share in ways that parents often do not have, or do not take advantage of, because they do not see from the same perspective as do grandparents. Leo Tolstoy said, from birth to the 5th year is an eternity, but

from 5 to old age is a step. It is a gift to be there for the one to 5 period of their life in order to be the place of refuge and an oasis in the hard land of growing up.

Grandparents are often the key to a child's self-esteem. Children are difficult and life is complex, and often parents give most of their energy to discipline, and only a fraction to love. This is where the grandparents can add the ingredient that makes the family balanced. In troubled families they are even more important. Dr. R. Lofton Hudson of the American Association For Marriage And Family Therapy tells of one of his clients who was working through her emotional problems. He asked, "Who was the biggest influence in your growing up? I don't know who the significant others were in your life with your father gone most of the time, and your mother running around and getting drunk. Who did you look up to?"

"That's easy," she replied. "It was my grandfather and grandmother. I didn't spend much time with them because my mother hated them. They were daddies parents. But the loved me and told me so." Dr. Hudson said, "How could they have influenced you much when you seldom saw them?" She responded, "Oh, but they believed in me. They made me believe in myself. I remember once my grandfather talked to me and said 'Ellie, I want to tell you something. You don't have to let your parents problems ruin you. There is something great in you. There is not telling what you can become. The world out there needs you.' I shall never forget that speech. He made me believe

in myself."

There is a powerful influence of even a rare opportunity to build up your grandchildren's self-esteem. Don't sell yourself short. You can be the key, with even a few brief words, to the encouragement of your grandchildren. Grandparents provide the opportunity for grandchildren to develop roots, and establish an identity that is not limited to the present, which may be far from ideal. Grandparents can help them have roots that reveal a larger picture in which they are a part. The next R we want to look at is-

II. RENEWAL.

The grandchild- grandparent relationship is a two way street. The child has as great an impact on the adult as the adult on the child. In verse 15 the women say of baby Obed, "He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age." This little guy was to be to Naomi all that Geritol is today, and more. There is something about a grandchild that can change the whole psychology of life, and bring hope and joy to the forefront. Pro. 17:6 records this universal reality: "Children's children are a crown to the aged." Your children may have kept you poor, but their children will make you rich. They renew your spirit, and give you a whole new role in the world of loving, lifting, and serving.

Until this scene where Naomi becomes a grandmother her life has been one trial after another. Life has been a

burden, and she has suffered sorrow and grief beyond the average. She has suffered the loss of her husband and two sons. She has had to endure the life of poverty and despair. She has had to bear the responsibility of caring for Ruth, and trying to get her established in a home of her own. Naomi has had little joy in this story until this closing scene where she is grandmother. Now it is almost a heavenly scene. All tears are wiped away, and there is a spirit of praise and joy, for now her whole future looks bright, for she has a grandson.

The event of being a grandmother has changed the whole psychology of her mind, and she is in a state of renewal. Dr. Lewis A. Coffin in his book The Grandmother Conspiracy wrote, "As soon as a person becomes a grandparent he or she undergoes a radical personality change-stern fathers become cooing grandfathers: harpie-type mothers melt and crawl on the floor, sing lullabies, and cram cookies and cookies and cookies down their sweet little grandchildren's throats, take them to the ice-cream store, bake cakes and pies for them, and stand back admiringly as the little ones swell, tweet their obese little checks approvingly, and raise a terrible hue and cry if anyone tries to interfere."

They often become a problem to their children because they allow the grandchildren to do what they forbid. My grandson Jason is a jumper. He loved to climb up on things and jump to me. Once I let him stand on the roof of the car and jump off to me. It was pure pleasure for both of us, but my daughter almost flipped when she saw it. A child was

injured near her by climbing on the car, and she was teaching Jason never to climb up on a car. And here I was having fun with him doing the very thing he was not to do. I let our grandchildren bounce on our bed, and play with my tape recorder, and who knows how many others thing they are forbidden to do by their parents. The point is, there is a different psychology between grandparents and grandchildren then between parents and children.

Grandparents have changed from when they were parents. They now value relationship with a child higher than things, and so they risk more for the sake of relationship. My parents would never let me drink coffee. They said it would stunt my growth. But grandma always let me have coffee. Of course, it was one part coffee for each one thousand parts of milk, but I always felt like it was a big deal to get my glass of coffee with the big people.

The reason grandparents tend to spoil grandchildren is because of this renewal in the minds of the grandparents. They are so grateful for the new joy and pleasure of life that they say thanks by being over indulgent. This makes the grandparent-grandchild relationship one which is dominated by the positive, and it is one of fun. The fun is mutual, for most grandparents get more laughs from their grandchildren than they do from comedians. I can't imagine being with my grandchildren for an hour without some laughter at the cute or ridiculous things they say.

One little girls said, "I am sorry grandma I scratched my

arm on your cat." Another little girl who was taken to a theatre for the first time tickled her grandfather by whispering, "Grandpa what channel is this?" For renewing and refreshing fun I'll take grandchildren over the comics. It is not all fun, of course. I had to watch my grandson fall out of the swing, and almost fall from the monkey bars. I watched him stumble and almost bash his head into the concrete. He missed catching a frisbee which hit his lip and it swelled up for a while. There is a price to pay for the laughs you get. Someone said, "Children are always a handicap to grown ups who want to lead a dull life." The beauty of being a grandparent is that the price is so minimal compared to that of parents who must endure childishness 24 hours a day.

One of the reasons grandparents are often more fun than parents is because they have more time. Parents are so loaded down with responsibility that they do not have the time for fun with their children. A 9 year old girl has written this description of a grandmother, and it has become a classic.

"A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own,
So she likes other people's little girls. A grandfather is a
man grandmother. He goes for walks with the boys
and
they talk about fishing and tractors and like that.
Grandmas don't have to do anything except be

there.

**They're old, so they shouldn't play hard or run. It is
enough if they drive us to the market where the
pretend**

**horse is and have lots of dimes ready. Or if they take
us**

**for walks, they should slow down past things like pretty
leaves or caterpillars. They should never ever say
'hurry
up.'**

**Usually they are fat, but not too fat to tie kids shoes.
They wear glasses and funny underwear. They can
take
their teeth out and gums off.**

**It is better if they don't typewrite or play cards
except**

**with us. They don't have to be smart, only answer
questions**

**like why dogs hate cats and how come God isn't
married.**

**They don't talk baby talk like visitors do, because it is
hard**

**to understand. When they read to us they don't skip,
or**

mind if it is the same story again.

**Everybody should try to have one, especially if you
don't**

**have television, because grandmas are the only grown
ups**

who have got time.

Time is one of the treasures of life that grandparents have learned to use more wisely. Dale Evans Rogers has written a lot about her 16 grandchildren, and her advise is, if you want to establish a warm bond with your grandchildren, get rid of the parents. That is, be alone with your grandchildren. It will be a time of learning, growth, and renewal for both generations. She wrote, "One of our grandchildren was spending the weekend with Roy and me, and I was clowning around with her in the kitchen. Suddenly she put her hands on her hips, cocked her head to one side, and stared at me. I knew one of the those piercing statements that children are prone to make was forthcoming. A child has not learned the art of tact, and frequently her remarks unveil a trait or weakness in us adults that we'd rather not have exposed. This time, however, her comments were welcome. She said, 'Why, grandma, you have fun. I thought grandmas were too old to have fun!' Lord, help us grandparents to be young at heart with the young."

But lets not leave grandpas out, or older grandchildren either. One of their older granddaughters who graduated from the Bible Institute of Los Angeles wanted Roy to take her hunting as a graduation gift. It was very unusual in that she had never had an interest in hunting, but Roy took her, and a week later he got this letter from her.

Dear Grandpa Roy,

I want to thank you so much for the "bestest" present I've

ever gotten. Beside the excitement of learning to shoot
a gun,
watching the dogs work and later even cooking a
pheasant, my
most favorite part was being with you, just you without
a crowd.
I guess I enjoy being comfortable when you feel
comfortable. I
wish I would have caught on to the fact that you're a
neat
grandpa about 20 years ago, when I was hiding in
closet from
you! I couldn't think of adequate words to thank you
so I
drew this picture for you, because I want you to know
there is
something about a grandpa that no one else can copy.
Spending
time together with you meant more to me than any
other present
you could buy. I really felt loved...and love is the most
precious
gift I can think of to give to anyone.
I love you, Grandpa.

Time alone together with grandchildren is one of the
most fun, educational, and influential experiences of life.
Grandparents can learn plenty too. One grandmother
wrote, "I've been an artist for 40 years. My grandson has
taught me a new way to paint. I always thought I had to set

aside a whole day, decide on my subject, study it, get equipment and paints together, then spend the rest of my time-uninterrupted-until my picture was completed.

My grandson, age 4, comes bursting in, exclaims, 'Maw Maw, let's paint a picture!' He works on the back ground, but tells me what he wants me to paint as the main idea. At Christmas, it was Santa Claus. Sometimes its monsters. In 10 minutes we have completed an entire picture-colorful, exciting-satisfying to both of us.'

The relationship of grandparents and grandchildren is like the period of courtship, whereas that of parents and children is more like that of marriage. The first is more dominated by fun, and the second by responsibility, and that is a major reason why there is a different psychology at work. One little girl said, "Grandparents are like this. When you tell them you want to do something, they will say that is what they want to do. They will even say it when they don't exactly mean it. But after they do it with you, they will have fun anyway. This can be a problem for parents. Judith Viorst tells of getting her children back from a fun filled week with the grandparents. She writes, "After 7 days of paradise my children returned to plain, ordinary, grumpy, preoccupied me. The reentry problem was shattering. The kids kept asking what wonderful plans and pleasures I had arranged for them today. And I kept telling them I wasn't their social director. It was only after considerable scolding and weeping that we all finally got use to each other again."

It is one of the paradoxes of life that after great fun there is weeping and wailing because it cannot last forever. It is a price worth paying, however, for it deepens the roots, and opens channels of renewal, and that is what the grandparent-grandchild relationship is all about. The evidence is enormous that grandparents are key people in the lives of most children. Grandparents are one of God's major weapons to keep His plan unfolding and progressing. We see it in David's heritage in Ruth, but the stories are endless, and they are going on today in the lives of millions.

In China a grandmother took her sick grandson to a mission hospital in Canton, and not only was the child healed, but she became a Christian. She returned to her village and shared Christ with another grandmother. She prayed with her for her sick grandchild, who was also healed. That whole family became Christians, and one son became a Baptist pastor. The baby who was healed grew up to be a medical doctor, and his son grew up to become the president of the Baptist World Alliance. He was David Y. K. Wong. It was all because of a grandma who cared.

Godly grandparents have such a powerful impact on the lives of grandchildren that one is not far from the mark to say that the church and the Sunday School, and all other arms of the kingdom of God are supplements to the influence of grandparents. They change the course of history, and no matter how rotten a generation becomes, there is always hope for renewal because the next generation can be turned toward righteousness by the

grandparents. Eight year old Ann Johnson wrote this poem which expresses the influence of millions of grandparents on their grandchildren.

**My grandma likes to play with God,
They have a kind of game.
She plants the garden full of seeds,
He sends the sun and rain.**

**She likes to sit and talk with God,
And knows He is right there.
She prays about the whole wide world,
Then leaves us in His care.**

**May God help all us to be aware of the importance of
our role as godly grandparents.**