

Servants, Serving Servants

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Serving in Obscurity and Leading with Integrity - Ruth

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EXERCISING YOUR LEADERSHIP ONE STEP AT A TIME

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I. Introduction

Ruth was a Moabitess. As a nationality, they were cursed by God and therefore not welcomed by His people. Boaz's workers made a point of saying she is a Moabitess (repeated numerous times). Ruth clearly understands how they would view her, as demonstrated by her request to glean, Boaz's protection of her, and her gleaning in the fields compared to those of the other women (2:6-10, 15-16). Her decision to serve meant she exposed herself to possibly the worst circumstances and the most difficult situation for Naomi. Her service exposes Ruth's character and her love for Naomi. The true nature of her heart is exposed in the midst of the troubles we encounter (Deut. 8:2-3). "The trusted servant did not just call her woman; he was careful to distinguish Ruth as a Moabitess. In other words, she is the lowest of the low, born from an incestuous relationship. The only thing that gave her value is that she was with Naomi who was a widow (Ex 22:21ff.*; cf. Ps 9:13*). A widow was protected by the Mosaic Law." Walton, J. H. (2009). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary \(Old Testament\): Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 253). Zondervan.

II. Compassion Shapes the Heart to Serve

Philippians 2:1-5

A. Ruth Clearly Understood Naomi's Circumstances:

1. Facts, Faith then feelings.
2. Naomi loved both girls to the point she changed from calling them daughters –in-law to be called "my daughters".
3. She saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her. Ruth's words expressed a love and loyalty that the older woman could not reject, and a determination that made Naomi give up urging her to return to Moab.¹

¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*](#) (Ru 1:18). Chicago: Moody Press.

4. Ruth's commitment to Naomi stemmed from her refusal to neglect someone who had no husband or sons, no skill to work and was too old to work the fields (widows by law were allowed to glean in the fields; Deut. 24:19-21). The same is requested of us in 1 Thessalonians 5:15-16.

B. Ruth Prove to be a Woman of Character:

1. A Genuine Soul:

- a) She confessed allegiance to the people of Israel (your people) and to the God of Israel (your God). Here was a stirring example of a complete break with the past. Like Abraham Ruth decided to leave her ancestors' idolatrous land to go to the land of promise. And Ruth did it without the encouragement of a promise. In fact she made her decision despite Naomi's strenuous encouragement to do otherwise.²
 - Contrary to many translations, Ruth here affirms that even in death she will not leave Naomi. What she means is that she intends to care for Naomi's burial and the rituals connected with death, and to be buried in the same place as Naomi. Being cared for in death would have been a typical concern to a childless widow, so this would be a significant commitment to Naomi. Ruth's decision to be buried in Naomi's land would show that she was totally setting aside her former allegiances and dependencies to cast her lot in with Naomi. Being buried in the same family tomb as Naomi would be further assurance that appropriate provisions would continue to be made for Naomi after death. Care for the dead was popularly believed to influence their existence in the afterlife.³
 - b) Where you go – Ruth with complete determination told Naomi that whatever righteous lifestyle and direction she chooses Ruth is going to imitate it.
2. Ruth's decision to follow Naomi's God is a big one because, given Naomi's circumstances, God does not look like He is favorable towards her.
 3. Ruth knew that to be among the Jews could be a horrible experience, but she was still going to make the Jews a people she would willingly live with, knowing what they thought of the Moabites.
 - a) Ruth the Moabitess – Several times the author reminds the reader that Ruth is a foreigner from a despised people (2:2,6,21; 4:5,10; see 2:10).

² Reed, J. W. (1985). [Ruth](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 420–421). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). [The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament](#) (electronic ed., Ru 1:17). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

4. Given you what she had left – Ruth’s love was so selfless that she did not ask Naomi to pay her; she only focused on providing Naomi with all she had left. It was all she had left after eating some of the grain.
5. There are several principles that can be gleaned from Ruth’s character as a single woman:
 - a) She was devoted to God [vs. 16; (Naomi 1:6,20-22; had a consciousness of God); 1 Cor. 7:32-35].
 - b) Loyal friendship (1:17).
 - c) Hardship is not God’s curse (vs. 20-21; 2:20).
 - d) Her testimony preceded her (2:8-11).
 - e) She worked hard with her hands to her satisfaction (vs. 14,18).
 - f) God provided protection (2:9,15).

III. Our Commitment to God Defines Faithful Service that Blesses

A. Her Testimony Establishes her:

1. God was ahead of the circumstances they both were to experience.
2. **Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem just as the renewed fullness of the land was beginning to be harvested-an early hint that Naomi would be full again.** Reference to the barley harvest also prepares the reader for the next major scene in the harvest fields.
3. Under whose wings you have come to seek refuge (2:12) – Boaz sees Ruth as surrendering her life to the Lord God. Not just to walk in His ways as she cares for Naomi, but to also experience His spiritual protection, which is evidenced by her working with the other maidens, based on the Mosaic laws, in his field.
4. Has been fully reported; Tell – Boaz tells Ruth he knows everything. This exposes the initial question to his lead servant in chapter 2, verse 5, so impressed Boaz that he sought out all the information. He was moved to show Ruth kindness because he was so impressed by her sincere love for God.

B. Ruth’s Hard Worked Grew Out of Her Commitment to God, Naomi and the Favor God Extended (Ecc. 9:10):

1. She took it up; Carry; Stirred – Once Ruth had completed beating out the barley, her mind was to focus on continuously doing whatever it takes to get to Naomi so that she can take care of her.
2. She went into the city – Ruth, after a long day’s work, made it her mission to get to Naomi to provide her with what she had gathered for both of them.
 - a) “So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she gleaned and it was about an ephah of barley.” (2:17)

3. The mother-in-law saw had gleaned – Ruth came directly to Naomi. This is how purposeful she was. Once she was with Naomi, Naomi clearly understood what Ruth had accomplished. Being a Jewish woman, Naomi fully comprehended what it must have taken to acquire such a large amount of bailey in one day.
4. She took it out – Because her entire focus, all day, was to take care of Naomi, Ruth, after a long day's work, and a walk back to the city, she did not ask for rest. Ruth's complete focus was revealed when, upon arrival, she continuously focused on giving to Naomi what she had gathered in Boaz's field.

C. The Servant Served:

1. Upon hearing what Ruth did for Namoi, Boaz persistently emphasized to Ruth that she must not work in another field. These fields were only separated by hedges. Being a Moabite, looked upon as trash, he immediately offered her protection. She was a widow caring for another widow.
2. All that you have done for your mother-in-law - Boaz explained to Ruth, that it was not because of how she looked or how hard she worked. He extended favor because of how, from her own heart, on her own initiative, she would tirelessly labor, in the hot sun, for a person who she was not related to anymore and was helpless and destitute.
 - a) Ruth 2:8 -- The reaping was performed by women, while the assortment of sheaves was the duty of men-servants. The same division of harvest labour obtains in Syria still. Boaz not only granted to Ruth the full privilege of gleaming after his reapers, but provided for her personal comforts. (from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft)
3. Boaz persistently requested that Ruth stick like glue (same as is spoken for a married couple) to his field. Her every effort must remain cognizant of where she is located as she gleans.
 - a) It is good ... that thou go out with his maidens - a prudent recommendation to Ruth to accept the generous invitation of Boaz, lest, if she were seen straying into other fields, she might not only run the risk of rude treatment, but displease him by seeming indifferent to his kind liberality. Moreover, the observant mind of the old matron had already discerned, in all Boaz' attentions to Ruth, the germs of a stronger affection, which she wished to increase. (from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft)
4. Boaz made a concerted effort to communicate firm orders to all his staff that no one has any physical or sexual contact with Ruth (touch – 2:9). Not only did Boaz protect her by telling her not to stray into another field, but he also made sure no one on his staff treated her like trash because she is a Moabite. She is to be treated like one of the

other women, even when she is thirsty. She can drink from the same water jar; it is incredible for a Jew to allow a Moabitess to do.

5. Naomi valiantly serves the one who served her:
 - a) Naomi's word implies violence, as may be seen in other translations: "touch" (KJV, NIV), "molest" (REB, TEV, JB). **Rape was a possibility**, as we see from the Deuteronomic law prescribing death to any man who "seizes and lies with" an engaged woman "in the open country" (Heb. *sadeh*), where there was no one to rescue her when she cried for help. That man would be like someone who "attacks and murders a neighbor" (Deut. 22:25–27). The reader is relieved to learn that Ruth kept herself from danger by staying close to Boaz's female laborers (Ruth 2:22).⁴
 - b) Ruth had given up the possibility of remarriage in order to care for the aging Naomi, but now marriage suddenly again became a possibility. It was customary for Hebrew parents to arrange marriages for their children (Jud. 14:1–10). To find a home is literally to "find rest" (cf. Ruth 1:9), to be settled and secure in a home with a husband.⁵
 - c) She had a submissive heart (vs. 8-10). She had a heart that was not so damaged that it could not trust. It did not mean that she did not ask any questions (vs. 10).
6. Loyalty God's style always produces blessed results.

D. The Servant Blessed by God Forever (4:16-17):

1. The child, the gift for Ruth and Naomi:
 - a) Restorer of life – Ruth and Naomi now have a lost legacy (1:3-5).
 - b) Restorer of life – Ruth and Naomi now have a reason to live.
 - c) Restorer of life – Ruth and Naomi can now develop a family rather than just work and then die.
 - d) Sustainer – Because Obed is a boy, he can eventually sustain their lives.
2. **Born** – God opened Ruth's womb, but Obed was Naomi's child.
3. **Name** – They named him because they wanted him to continuously have a reputation, fame, and memory before the people and the nations. His name means 'worshipper,' 'One who serves,' 'Servant of the Lord,'
4. **The father** – Obed, is the beginning of a legacy that lasts forever.

⁴ Hamlin, E. J. (1996). [*Surely there is a future: a commentary on the book of Ruth*](#) (p. 28). Grand Rapids, MI; Edinburgh: Eerdmans; Handsel Press Ltd.

⁵ Reed, J. W. (1985). Ruth. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 424). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

5. **Love** – Ruth consistently demonstrated an unspeakable love of strong emotional attachment to Naomi.
6. **Better** – Ruth’s love was a pleasant and excellent life experience with practical benefits beyond seven sons.

IV. **Conclusion**

We first think of being in positions of leadership based on how the world defines leadership. The Lord defines leadership in this manner:

And hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 And calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 "But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:41-45; NASB)