



Ruth

HER NAME MEANS

"Friendship"

HER CHARACTER: Generous, loyal, and loving, she is strong and serene, able to take unusual risks, dealing actively with life circumstances.

HER SORROW: To have lost her husband, homeland, and family.

HER JOY: To discover firsthand the generous, loyal, and loving nature of God, as he provided her with a husband, a son, and a home to call her own.

KEY SCRIPTURES: Ruth 2–4; Matthew 1:5

Monday

HER STORY

*I*t was harvest time in Israel when Boaz first laid eyes on the young woman. The sun had painted the fields a tawny gold as workers swung their sickles in even rhythms through the standing grain. According to Israel's law and custom, the poor had the right to gather whatever the harvesters missed.

Ruth toiled quickly and efficiently, he noticed, stuffing grain into a coarse sack slung across her shoulder. Strands of black hair escaped her head covering, softly framing olive-colored skin, still smooth despite the sun. She rested, but only for a moment, her eyes wary for any sign of trouble from the men working the fields. Gleaning was rough work and dangerous, especially for an attractive young foreigner, alone and unprotected.

Everyone in Bethlehem had been talking about Boaz's relative, Naomi, and her unexpected return. Ruth, he knew, had come with her. He had heard of their shared tragedy and the extraordinary loyalty the young woman had displayed toward her mother-in-law, even promising to renounce Moab's idols for Israel's God. A man could wish for such a friend as Ruth had been to Naomi.

Determined to repay her kindness in some way, Boaz called to her, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you." The young woman smiled her agreement.

Later he spoke to Ruth again, this time offering bread and roasted grain for her dinner. When she finished eating, Boaz instructed his men to pull out some stalks of grain and strew them in her path. It was good to see her leaving that night with a bulging harvest sack.

Day after day, he watched her, aware that the wheat and barley harvest would soon be drawing to a close. One evening, Boaz and the other men were winnowing barley on the threshing floor. After he had finished eating and drinking, he lay down under the stars at the far end of the grain pile. With so many men to guard the harvest, robbers wouldn't dare approach. But in the middle of the night he woke with a start, realizing that someone *had* dared. To his surprise, he discovered the intruder was neither a robber nor a man, but a woman who lay at his feet.

She, too, was awake. "I am your servant, Ruth," she whispered. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."

He could hardly believe her words. The young woman had taken a remarkable risk, appearing at night and lying down so close to him. Quickly, he covered her, saying, "The LORD bless you. This kindness is greater than that which you showed Naomi: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask." So Ruth lay at his feet until morning, rising before the early light could reveal her presence to others.

But Boaz knew there was one obstacle that could yet spoil things. Naomi had a closer relative than Boaz, a man who could play the role of kinsman-redeemer, marrying Ruth and restoring her dead husband's name. This man was entitled to purchase a field belonging to Naomi. If he purchased the field, by law he had to marry Ruth as well. That would destroy Boaz's hope of making Ruth his wife.

Boaz wasted no time putting the case before the man, who seemed interested enough in the land. But as soon as the man discovered that marriage was part of the bargain, he relinquished his rights to the land to Boaz.

So the two were married and the older man welcomed the young woman into his home. And God blessed them with a son, whom they named Obed.

Pulling Ruth close to him, Boaz watched one day as Naomi held her grandson to her breast. Surrounded by the other women of Bethlehem, she looked young again, more like the woman he remembered when her husband, Elimelech, had been alive. He watched as the women talked with Naomi regarding the child: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

Yes, Boaz thought, his Ruth was better to Naomi than seven sons. And he was grateful for the friendship between the two women. Had Ruth and Naomi gone their separate ways, his life would have been so much the poorer.

The good-hearted Boaz felt strong and young again. But even he couldn't have realized how greatly God had blessed him in the person of Ruth. For their son, Obed, became the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David. In addition to being King David's great-grandparents, both Boaz and Ruth are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth, who is, after all, our own great Kinsman-Redeemer, uniting us to himself, healing our sorrows, and giving us, as well, a future full of hope.

GLEANNING

*W*hen Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, it was harvest time. They would not have the opportunity to plant their own grain and harvest it. So, unless there was another way to get food, they would starve. Naomi knew the Mosaic laws and urged Ruth to follow the harvesters and “glean,” or gather, what they left behind. In this way, Ruth would be able to provide food for both Naomi and for herself.

The laws of Moses directed landowners to leave some of the harvest behind for the “poor and aliens.” As a Moabite with no one to support her, Ruth fit both categories. Harvesters were not to reap to the very edges of their fields, nor were they to go over a field a second time to pick up what was missed the first time. This grain was to be left for the poor (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19–22). This “welfare system,” set up by Moses, took care of the needy by encouraging the rich to share their bounty with those less fortunate.

But it wasn’t a handout. The poor still had to work for their food, following along behind the harvesters and picking up what was left by them. Depending on the efficiency of the field hands and the number of fellow gleaners reaping the grain, it could be difficult to do much more than survive. When Boaz ordered his reapers to purposely leave behind stalks of grain for Ruth to pick up, he went beyond the letter of the law.

Boaz also ordered his reapers not to “embarrass” Ruth were she to glean in the wrong part of the field; that is, if she didn’t follow the rules exactly. His admonishment offers a glimpse into the heart and character of this man, who took great care to follow the Mosaic law and who, with Ruth, became an ancestor of Christ.

Was it by chance that Ruth “found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech [Ruth’s father-in-law]” (Ruth 2:3)? Of course not. Even in what appeared to be a chance situation, God was at work, divinely preparing for Ruth’s and Naomi’s sustenance. Never assume that what happens in your life is merely a matter of chance or coincidence. Remember: God is at work, divinely orchestrating events to bring about his purposes in your life.

HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

READ 2:1-4:22

1. Based on this part of the story of Ruth, what is Ruth known for? What reputation goes with her to the field? _____

2. Using verse, 7 17-18, describe what this day's work must have been like for Ruth? _____

3. When Boaz was sleeping at the threshing floor instead of at home, was Ruth's behavior immoral? What was she asking Boaz by her behavior?

4. Through Boaz, God honored Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi and to himself.

If you have been faithful through difficult circumstances, how has God shown his faithfulness to you? _____

5. What do you think was the happiest at this wedding? Ruth? Boaz?

Naomi? Why? _____

6. What does the outcome of this story tell you about God's providence, his divine guidance? _____

7. How have you experienced God's providence and his divine direction in your life? _____

8. After all of Ruth's sorrows, what is her situation now? _____

9. Naomi's restored joy is described, but nothing is said of Ruth's. In your own words, describe what sort of joy Ruth must have been experiencing?

10. Think about a time in your life when your joy was restored? _____

11. What character qualities do you see in Ruth in chapter 2? How does she act, and what is her reputation? _____

12. The ultimate loyalty to her late husband was for Ruth to marry one of his relatives and have a son in her late husband's name. At what point in the story do you see Ruth decide to attempt that? _____

13. What risk was Ruth taking when she lay down on the threshing floor at Boaz's feet? What does this say about her? _____

14. Where do you see God at work in this story? _____

15. In what areas of life are you called upon to be loyal? What, for you, are the risks and costs of loyalty? _____

HER PROMISE

All that Ruth did was done for love of her mother-in-law, and for love of Naomi's God. She made a promise on the road to Bethlehem that she was determined to keep. Though it was a promise made by one woman to another, it is often quoted in wedding ceremonies as an eloquent expression of love and loyalty between spouses.

Ruth had no way of knowing that her way of blessing Naomi would eventually become a blessing in her own life. That's just the divine irony of our God, who delights so much in seeing us love and bless others that he turns that love and blessing back on us in double measure.

Promises in Scripture

Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

—RUTH 1:16

*A generous person will prosper;
whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*

—PROVERBS 11:25

*Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

—MATTHEW 5:7–8

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

—1 TIMOTHY 6:17–19

HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

The women said to Naomi, "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

—RUTH 4:14–15

- REFLECT ON: Ruth 3–4.
- PRAISE GOD: That he provides for those who have no one to provide for them.
- OFFER THANKS: For the way God has used other women, your mother or mother-in-law, your sisters or daughters, to provide for you.
- CONFESS: Any tendency to compete with other women.
- ASK GOD: To help you appreciate your own mother and mother-in-law and to give you a vision of the power of two women, linked by love and faith.

Lift Your Heart

*I*t's easy to assume the important women in our lives know how much we cherish them. But Mother's Day cards and friendship cards, nice as they are to get and give, don't really do the trick. We also need to verbalize our love sincerely and regularly. Don't wait until Mother's Day to treat your mother, mother-in-law, or an older friend to tea or a leisurely lunch. Tell her just how much you care about her. (Make sure you take time beforehand to think about all her wonderful qualities. Take notes so that you can be specific.) You might even buy a small blank book and record all the ways she's blessed you. Decorate each page with colorful stickers or stencils. Package it with scented soap and bath salts and give it as a keepsake she can treasure.

Father, I thank you for the women who have played such an important role in my life. Please bless each one in a special way today and help me find ways to express to them my love and gratitude.