

Ruth 3
December 11, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you are looking for direction from God, how do you discern His will for you? [Let people engage this.]

Q: What if you're not necessarily looking for direction from God. Suppose life is going along well and you're feeling comfortable. How would you know if God is trying to do something special in your life? [Let people engage this.]

I wonder if God is trying to lead us to the plans He has for us, but we're missing it because we aren't open to change. If you're like me, change is not something I embrace easily. I have found in my life that God has had to "unsettle" me in order to get my attention because He knows me far too well! I was listening to an audiobook by Shauna Niequist, and she said, "When I get unsettled, I'm forced to move." I laughed in the car as I was listening to this because that is so true. When we're in bed and we have a little joint pain, or our head on the pillow is not exactly right, we are unsettled and have to change positions. We have to move!

DEB: Draw continuum of "Seeking God's Will" on board with three points. Far left = "over-eager" to do God's will (Paul is great example. See Acts 16:6-10), Far right = "Rebellious" to do God's Will (Jonah refused to go to Nineveh on God's command, Jonah 1:1-3, then found himself in the belly of the whale and had a "change of heart." God spits him out and says, "Let's try this again, and Jonah says, "Okay."), Middle = Unsettled (Naomi and Ruth), unclear, chaotic. This part of the continuum is characterized by the thought of, "Something needs to change. Something needs to give." There is a tension that remains until it's resolved. [Consider asking the class how they might modify this suggested continuum.]

Transition: I think Naomi and Ruth represent a place of unsettledness. Naomi has a strong faith in God, and she wants to utilize a Mosaic law that allows for a kinsman-redeemer to take care of Ruth so that Ruth (and Naomi) can be cared for and maintain the family tree of Elimelech. She wants Ruth to enjoy having a home, be loved by her husband, and bear children while she's young. Naomi wants to operate with the laws of God, so she is willing to see what plans God has for her and Ruth. Naomi gives Ruth specific instructions to discern if Boaz will be her kinsman-redeemer. Ruth had to be willing to do it! Ruth could have said "no." Maybe Ruth was content in being one of the servant girls in Boaz's field and was fine with that. The point is that God has his part in leading us to do His will, but our part is to step in faith to discern where He wants us next.

So as we read Chapter 3, I want us to consider that **all of us CAN discover God's sovereign plan for us BY showing a willingness to explore the opportunities He has prepared for us.** We need to be spiritually sensitive to the "who" and the "what" that is going on in our lives. There will be God's part and our part. Would someone read chapter 3 to help us get re-acquainted with the story line?

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.1:

- One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?”

V.2:

- Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.

V.3:

- Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking.

V.4:

- When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.”

V.5:

- “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered.

V.6:

- So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

V.7:

- When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. (The uncovering of the **feet** was a ceremonial act that was completely proper.)

V.8:

- In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet.

V.9:

- “Who are you?” he asked. “I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.”

V.10:

- “The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness (“hesed” means **loyalty**) is greater than that which you showed earlier (meaning loyalty to Naomi): You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.

V.11:

- And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.

V.12:

- Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I.

V.13:

- Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

V.14:

- So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “Don’t let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.”

V.15:

- He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town.

V.16:

- When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?” Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her

V.17:

- and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’ ”

V.18:

- Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

Process Questions:

Q V.1-6: What is Naomi’s game plan? [Ruth should clean up and dress nicely, wear nice perfume, and strategically place herself at the foot of Boaz by uncovering his feet and lying beside him on the threshing floor.]

Q: At this stage of the story, WHO is God using to show Ruth what He is doing in her life? [Naomi]

Q: Was Ruth necessarily looking for a change in her life? [It doesn’t appear so. She came home one day, and Naomi presented an idea to Ruth to better Ruth’s life.]

Observation: It appears that Naomi is looking after the best interest of Ruth.

Q: What did Ruth already know about Boaz? [He was a man of good standing; generous in his provisions, gracious to include her among the servant girls; assured her that she didn’t need to work another field.]

Observation: When God is on the move to lead Ruth in His will, He had already gone before her by giving her great favor with Boaz. So God was not only using Naomi as a key player to help Ruth discover God’s will for her, but He was also using Boaz.

Q V7-10: Q: When Naomi suggests that Boaz is an eligible kinsman-redeemer, how did Ruth look upon the idea? [She was totally in. Ruth was glad to comply with Naomi’s instructions.]

Observation: Ruth was already attracted to Naomi’s God. She wanted Naomi’s God to be her God. Ruth was on an exponential learning curve on learning about God’s laws, and especially the kinsman-redeemer rule. She trusted Naomi to spiritually guide her to see if God had chosen Boaz to be a kinsman-redeemer for her.

Q: When Boaz wakes up in the middle of the night and Ruth identifies him as her kinsman redeemer, what reaction does he have? [Very positive! He first says “Lord bless you, my daughter.” And then he credits her for showing him more kindness than before and for not going for the younger man! He’s pumped!]

Q V.11: How does Boaz take care of Ruth at this point in the story? [He tells her, “Don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All of my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.]

Q: Why should Ruth have ever been afraid in the first place? [She was a foreigner, and though she had been working in Boaz’s field, not everyone in town would have necessarily known that she was a noble lady. So Boaz is trying to help her feel safe and protected.]

Q V.12: Based on what we read, did Boaz “cover Ruth’s feet” upon her request? [No] Why? [Because Boaz was a man of good standing and was going to follow the rules. He knew that there was a kinsman-redeemer more closely related to Elimelech who could marry Ruth.]

Q V.13: How soon is Boaz trying to resolve who gets to be Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer? [By morning! At this point of the story, that was probably another three to four hours later. He’s on it!

Q: What commitment does Boaz make to her should the most eligible kinsman-redeemer say no? [He will be her kinsman-redeemer. One way or the other, Ruth was going to be taken care of.]

Q V.14-15: Boaz took care of Ruth in several ways. What do you see? [1. “Don’t let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.” Preserve her dignity and make sure there was no appearance of impropriety by Ruth or Boaz; 2. He sought to resolve who would become her kinsman-redeemer as quickly as possible; 3. Boaz generously provide food for her to take back home to Naomi. Boaz cared for Naomi as well.]

Observation V.16-18: When Ruth reports what happened, Naomi senses strongly that Boaz is going to deal with who will be the kinsman-redeemer as his top priority.

LOOK:

The Bible is clear that God is sovereign. He is in control. He causes all things to happen. He says ‘What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do’ (Isa. 46:11). Unlike our plans, God’s never fail. But the Bible also teaches with absolute certainty and great clarity that, in causing all things to happen, he does so in a way that upholds the ability of individuals to make willing responsible choices and actions. Exactly how God combines his control of all things and our willing responsible actions, the Bible does not explain, but it is full of examples of him doing just that. Ruth 3 provides three such examples, as Naomi, Ruth and Boaz each play their unique part at a particular point in the outworking of God’s great plan. He uses the active faith of his people.

Just as God was sovereignly working out His divine will through Ruth, He is doing the same for us. God is always doing His part. He’s introducing us to people whom He has already given us favor. He uses “Naomi” in our lives who plant new ideas that can create unsettledness that would lead to change. When Ruth was willing to risk and do what Naomi told her to do, only then would Ruth discover God’s will for her through Boaz.

Q: Where are you on this continuum? Has the Holy Spirit brought to mind new opportunities that have created an unsettledness or idea of change that you need to look at more closely? As we

begin to look at 2017, let's be committed to being open to discover God's will for us by *being willing* to explore opportunities that the Lord has for us. Remember, "God knows the plans He has for us; they are plans to prosper us, not harm us, but to give us a hope and a future." (Jer 29:11-12)

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 424-426). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

IV. Seeking Redeeming Love (chap. 3)

Naomi was no longer depressed. She became a matchmaker and prepared Ruth to seek the love of her willing kinsman-redeemer, Boaz. The turning point in the narrative is at hand.

A. *A plan for redemption (3:1-5)*

During the weeks of the barley and wheat harvests (cf. 2:23), Naomi had time to put her plan together. When the time was right she acted.

3:1. **Naomi** was a persistent person (cf. 1:8–15). She was now resolved to seek rest and security for her daughter-in-law through marriage. 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.

3:2. Naomi pointed out that since **Boaz** was a relative of theirs, he could be a **kinsman-redeemer** for Ruth. He had an open and willing heart. So Naomi suggested Ruth go to **the threshing floor** that evening. The people of Bethlehem took turns using the threshing floor. The floor was a flat hard area on a slightly raised platform or hill. In threshing, the grain was beaten out from the stalks with flails (cf. 2:17) or was trodden over by oxen. Then in **winnowing** the grain was thrown in the air and the wind carried the chaff away. The grain was then removed from the threshing floor and placed in heaps to be sold or stored in granaries.

Threshing and winnowing were a time of great festivity and rejoicing. Naomi knew that Boaz was threshing his grain on the day that she had chosen for her plan. She also knew that Boaz would be sleeping near his grain that night, to protect it.

3:3. Ruth was to prepare herself by washing and perfuming herself. The words **best clothes** may be rendered “a large outer garment.” This was to keep her identity from being detected. She was to observe Boaz **eating and drinking** but was not to **let him know** of her presence.

3:4. After Boaz finished eating and drinking, Ruth was to observe **the place where** he retired for the night. Under cover of darkness Ruth was to **go to Boaz, uncover his feet, and lie down** there. (On the meaning of the uncovering of the feet, see the comments on v. 7.) Boaz, Naomi said, would then **tell** Ruth what she was **to do**. The implication was clear that Ruth should do whatever he requested.

3:5. **Ruth** stated that she would act in full and unquestioned obedience to the directions of her mother-in-law (cf. 2:22–23).

B. A claim for redemption (3:6–9)

The preparation for the redemption experience had been carefully made. Now the plan had to be carried out.

3:6. Ruth **went to the threshing floor** and carried out the plan in exact detail as matchmaker Naomi had laid it out.

3:7. Some commentators suggest that what **Ruth** did presented an opportunity for immorality. But nothing in the passage supports this. Her mother-in-law had complete confidence in the integrity of the kinsman-redeemer. **Boaz** could be trusted to act responsibly. And Ruth was recognized by everyone as “a woman of noble character” (v. 11). The uncovering of the **feet** was a ceremonial act that was completely proper. Probably the scene took place in the dark so that Boaz had the opportunity to reject the proposal without the whole town knowing about it.

3:8–9. **Something startled Boaz in the middle of the night. He turned** to discover that **a woman was lying at his feet**. Boaz asked for the identity of his unusual guest (cf. 2:5). Ruth responded in humility (cf. 2:10): **I am your servant Ruth**. She had put herself under the wings of Yahweh (2:12), and now she asked to be put under the wings of Boaz. In the phrase **the corner of your garment** the word “corner” is *kānāp*, which is translated “wing” in 2:12. She used a poetic image that had its source in the blessing that Boaz had given her. A Moabitess widow was calling the attention of a noted Hebrew to his responsibility. He could now follow

through on his benediction (2:12) by becoming Ruth's **kinsman-redeemer** and providing her with the security of marriage.

C. A pledge of redemption (3:10–15)

Boaz joyfully received Ruth's proposal. The tension of the plot continued, however, because another kinsman had a prior claim on her.

3:10. Boaz gave no hint that Ruth had embarrassed him by her actions or that she had done something that was not within her rights or against the customs of the day. Rather than thinking suggestive thoughts as some might have done in such a setting, he immediately blessed Ruth: **The LORD bless you**. He again used the phrase **my daughter**, a reminder of their age difference (cf. 2:8; 3:11). He commended Ruth for her act of **kindness** ("loyalty," *hesed*; cf. comments on 1:8 - **The word kindness is the Hebrew word *hesed*. It is an important word in the Book of Ruth (cf. 2:20; 3:10) and throughout the Old Testament. It speaks of God's covenant loyalty to His people. It involves grace in that it was extended even when it was not deserved.**) that was **greater than** her decision to serve her mother-in-law. Boaz also commended her for not going **after** a **younger** man. He seemed to believe Ruth could have readily found such a match. He praised her for being willing to marry an older man in order to fulfill her commitment to her first husband, Mahlon (cf. 4:10), and the family name of Elimelech.

3:11. Boaz then relieved any immediate fears Ruth might have had by saying that he would **do** as she requested. He might have sensed that she was apprehensive over how he might interpret her bold proposal. Boaz told her that **all his fellow townsmen** (lit., the "people of the gate," probably referring to the elders of Bethlehem) considered her a person of the highest reputation. **Noble character** translates *hayil* ("valor, worth, ability"), the same word used of the worthiness of Boaz (2:1; cf. Prov. 12:4; 31:10, 29 ["noble"]). They were truly a good match!

3:12. The narrative, however, was not nearing the end. Still another complication had to be unraveled. Boaz had already looked into the legal aspects of the proposed marriage; perhaps he had anticipated her request. He knew that Ruth by her marriage into Elimelech's family had a relative who was more closely related to her than he was. But Boaz would do all he could to see that the outcome would be one that satisfied Ruth's request.

3:13. Boaz acted responsibly in two ways: (1) He did not send her home in the middle of **the night**. He would protect her and he would touch her only if she could be rightfully his. (2) Also he protected the rights of her nearer kinsman. If the other relative wanted **to redeem**, that was his right. But if the nearer kinsman was **not willing**, Boaz would **surely** do so. He covered his pledge with a **vow**. There was no doubt about how Boaz wanted the matter to eventuate.

3:14. Ruth **lay at his feet until early morning**. She arose before daylight. Boaz did not want her life complicated by village gossips, so he urged her not to **let it be known** she had been at **the threshing floor**. Nothing had happened that was improper but gossipers are not careful about facts.

3:15. Into Ruth's **shawl** Boaz put **six measures of barley** for her and Naomi. Naomi was entering more and more into the fullness of her wise decision to return to Bethlehem. The "measure" was probably the seah (one-third of an ephah or about 10 pounds). Thus six seahs would equal about 60 pounds. Ruth was a strong woman to be able to carry such a heavy load. Probably Boaz placed the burden **on her head**.

Some Hebrew manuscripts read, **Then he went back to town**, but others have "she" in place of "he." Since Ruth returned to Bethlehem at that time and Boaz a bit later that morning (4:1), both renderings ("she" and "he") fit the facts.

D. An anticipation of redemption (3:16–18)

Naomi eagerly sought to know the outcome of Ruth's adventure and predicted that Boaz would quickly resolve the issues that day. Whatever the outcome as to who the redeemer would be, it would be Ruth's day of redemption.

3:16–17. **Naomi** sought to know how it had gone with **Ruth**. As before, she called Ruth **my daughter** (v. 1; 2:2; cf. 1:11–13; 3:18). Ruth gave her a full report and added that **Boaz had** given her the **barley** so that Naomi could share in Ruth's future fulfillment. Naomi had done her matchmaking well and had earned a reward. The aged widow could then rest assured that she would not be forgotten in the future.

3:18. Naomi and Ruth had done all they could. The initiative now rested with Boaz. Boaz would **not rest** till he had **settled the matter** that day.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 401-402). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

3:1–4 It is not clear whether Naomi was following a marriage custom of her time when she told Ruth to lie down secretly at Boaz's feet in the middle of the night. She does, however, appear to be applying a variation of the law by which a surviving brother was to marry his deceased brother's wife who had no children, in order to beget a son to continue his deceased brother's family's line (Dt 25:5–10). Naomi's tactics were morally questionable, since the term "his feet" could have been understood as a euphemism for Boaz's private parts (cp. 1 Sm 24:3, where the Hb is lit. "cover his feet"; also Is 6:2). Despite the risky situation, Ruth and Boaz acted in an upright manner.

3:9 When Ruth told Boaz to spread his cloak (lit. "wings") over her, she was not asking him to have sexual relations with her, since nowhere in Scripture do those words indicate sexual intercourse (Ezk 16:8, in fact, would suggest the opposite).

3:13 Why did Boaz tell Ruth to remain with him that night, potentially compromising her virtue, rather than sending her home immediately? In view of the general lawlessness and social disruption that characterized the period of the judges (cp. Jdg 21:25), sending Ruth home alone late at night would have placed her life in danger. The term translated "stay [here]" is never used in Scripture in the context of a sexual situation.

Prime, J. (2007). Opening up Ruth (pp. 65-76). Leominster: Day One Publications.

(3:1–18)

Operation Market Garden was a military plan aimed at liberating the Netherlands from the Nazis during the Second World War. It was a complex, ambitious, costly plan, which took a long time to prepare. Its implementation involved a huge number of people, each playing their part at a particular point in the plan's outworking. Sadly it failed. It did not achieve its objective.

God has a plan. In aim it is not dissimilar to *Operation Market Garden*. His plan concerns the liberation, or to use the Bible word, the redemption of sinful men and women. We might call it

Operation Kindness. It is a complex, ambitious, costly plan, prepared over thousands of years. Its implementation has and does involve a huge number of people each playing their part at a particular point in the plan's outworking. The difference with *Operation Kindness*, however, is that while *Operation Market Garden* failed, *Operation Kindness* has succeeded and continues to succeed as men and women experience the redemption that God accomplished through the costly sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross—the central point of the plan.

The sequence of events in Ruth 3 was all part of God's *Operation Kindness*. Reading the events of this chapter for the first time, the details may seem quite foreign to us. We may wonder why the chapter records the details it does. If the big aim of the story is to show us Ruth's place in *Operation Kindness* as the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David, the ancestor of the Lord Jesus, why did God the Holy Spirit not guide the human author to miss out chapter 3 and go straight to the events of chapter 4? But God the Holy Spirit has caused the details of Ruth 3 to be recorded for us and would seem to have done so for this specific reason: to illustrate that, as God implements *Operation Kindness*, he uses the active faith of his people.

The Bible is clear that God is sovereign. He is in control. He causes all things to happen. He says 'What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do' (Isa. 46:11). Unlike our plans, God's never fail. But the Bible also teaches with absolute certainty and great clarity that, in causing all things to happen, he does so in a way that upholds the ability of individuals to make willing responsible choices and actions. Exactly how God combines his control of all things and our willing responsible actions, the Bible does not explain, but it is full of examples of him doing just that. Ruth 3 provides three such examples, as Naomi, Ruth and Boaz each play their unique part at a particular point in the outworking of God's great plan.

God uses the active faith of his people as they take initiatives on the basis of his Word (vv. 1–4)

The chapter starts with Naomi taking the initiative. The barley and wheat harvests were drawing to an end. Naomi had a plan. The aim was to provide a home for Ruth in which she would be well provided for (v. 1). The target man was Boaz, who had already shown such great kindness to Naomi and Ruth, allowing Ruth to glean in his fields (v. 2). Naomi shared her plan with Ruth in great detail. She had done her research. She knew where Boaz would be, what he would be doing and when he would be doing it. She knew how to prepare Ruth for her part in the plan. On one level this may appear to be a piece of complex matchmaking—an example of an older woman helping a younger woman to get her man. The clue that tells us it was not is the description of Boaz in verse 2 as 'a kinsman of ours'. This explains the basis upon which Naomi acted. She acted in accordance with what God's law said about a kinsman, like Boaz, and the role of a kinsman in the preservation of the family name and the preservation of the family property.

In Old Testament times it was vital that a man's family name should be preserved. If he died without an heir, steps were to be taken to make sure that he had an heir who would carry on the family name and inherit the family property. The law said that the widow of the dead man should marry one of her husband's relatives, with the first son of that union becoming the dead man's heir:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. However, if a man does not want to marry his

brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to me.' Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, 'I do not want to marry her', his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, 'This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line.' That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandalled (Deut. 25:5–10).

Also relevant are the provisions of God's law for what was to happen when an Israelite family fell on hard times and sold their land. In such circumstances, the nearest male relative, called the kinsman-redeemer, was to redeem—to buy back—the land for his poor relatives:

If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold. If, however, a man has no one to redeem it for him but he himself prospers and acquires sufficient means to redeem it, he is to determine the value for the years since he sold it and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it; he can then go back to his own property. But if he does not acquire the means to repay him, what he sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and he can then go back to his property (Lev. 25:25–28).

These provisions of the law provide the background to Naomi's actions in verses 1–4. Ruth 2:20 reveals that she knew something of the law about kinsman-redeemers, since she calls Boaz 'one of our kinsman-redeemers'. On the basis of what she knew of God's law, and the circumstances that God had brought about, she took the initiative.

Her logic is revealed in these verses. Ruth was young. She needed a husband. Boaz was a kinsman who was favourably disposed to her. That night there was an opportunity. Naomi was exercising the logic of faith. Putting God's Word side by side with the circumstances God had brought about, she used her mind to determine a course of action in harmony with God's revealed will. It is a reminder that God has given us minds that are able to reason and think things through. Naturally our minds are warped and bent, prone to think in ways that are contrary to God's ways. But as we experience his mercy and start to live by faith in the Lord Jesus, taking his Word into our lives, he transforms us by the renewing of our minds, so that we can test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (see Rom. 12:1–2).

The knowledge that God is sovereign and will fulfil all his plans should not keep us from taking action. On the contrary, it should result in us taking initiatives on the basis of what he tells us in his Word. Banks accept standing orders from customers, instructing that certain payments are to be made until instructions are given to the contrary. God's Word contains his unchanging standing orders—his standing instructions—for his people. As we read them, he calls us, with the enabling of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to apply them to the circumstances of our lives.

True faith takes initiatives on the basis of God's Word. Applying it to marriage, imagine a young Christian man who feels attracted to a young woman. They enjoy each other's company and get on well. As the relationship develops he asks himself, 'Is she the woman I should marry?' What should he do? He should put his circumstances up against God's Word. What does God's Word say? Is she a believer in the Lord Jesus? If she is, good. If she is not, then to propose marriage would not be an initiative of obedient faith. If she is a believer, he should ask, is the growing friendship with her a help or a hindrance to his walk with the Lord Jesus? If the answer is, a hindrance, then asking her to marry him is unlikely to be an initiative of faith. The Bible also says that a husband must love his wife as Christ loves the church. The young man must ask if the woman he is considering is someone he wants to love and serve in that way.

Naomi illustrates the logic of faith: how we should put our God-ordained circumstances up against the standing orders of his Word and take initiatives in accordance with his Word. It is the logic that should apply to all the decisions of life. God gives us responsibility to make decisions, delighting to use the faith initiatives of his people in the outworking of his good purpose.

God uses the active faith of his people as they ask for protection on the basis of his Word (vv. 5–9)

In verses 5 to 9 we see Ruth's humble submission to her mother-in-law. 'I will do whatever you say' (v. 5), and she did (v. 6). Ruth's humble submission as, unknowingly, she plays her part in the outworking of God's *Operation Kindness*, reminds us of the humble submission of the Lord Jesus as, knowingly, he played his part in the same great plan.

As we examine what happened at the threshing-floor that night, two preliminary observations need to be made about details that may raise questions. First, verse 7 does not say that Boaz was drunk. He was 'in good spirits'. The harvest was good. He had enjoyed a good meal. He was rejoicing in the Lord coming to his people's aid by providing them with food. The Bible does not criticize godly people for being happy. Elsewhere it warns of the danger of drinking too much alcohol, which can lead to the sin of drunkenness, but that is not the issue here. Verse 7 records the facts without comment.

Second, there is no suggestion that anything immoral or inappropriate happened between Boaz and Ruth. There is no hint of sexual impropriety. Boaz was an upright man and Ruth a woman of noble character (v. 11). God's Word is clear that his good gift of sex is to be enjoyed only between those who are married, after they are married. There is nothing here to suggest that Ruth and Boaz misused God's good gift.

What verse 9 shows is that this encounter in the middle of the night was all on the basis of God's Word. As Ruth asked Boaz for his protection she did what Naomi had told her to do (v. 4). She noted where Boaz was lying, went to the place where he was lying, uncovered his feet and lay down there (v. 7). There is nothing romantic about smelly feet! In the middle of the night something startled Boaz (v. 8). What? We are not told. Perhaps a spider ran across his nose. Perhaps his feet felt cold. He discovered a woman lying at his feet. 'Who are you?' was a reasonable question to ask (v. 9). Again, notice Ruth's humility in her reply: 'I am your *servant* Ruth.' Then notice her request. 'Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer' (v. 9). It was a request for protection. The word 'garment' is the same word translated 'wings' in 2:12. Having taken protection under the Lord's wings, she was now asking for protection from a man God had provided, who was qualified to give her the protection she needed.

In this, Boaz is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. He prefigures the Lord Jesus, the kinsman-redeemer God has provided for all who will humbly ask him to protect them. Ruth's humble request therefore illustrates what is involved in both becoming and being a Christian. Becoming a Christian involves humbly asking the Lord Jesus Christ for protection as the Redeemer who died on the cross. All need his protection—his protection from the condemnation sin deserves. Self-protection is impossible. Only through his redeeming sacrifice on the cross is protection from condemnation available for all who take refuge in him.

Living as a Christian also involves asking for his protection each day. To seek that protection is an act of humble reliance. Protection is needed against the raging desires of our sinful nature; against the lure of the pressures of this world; and from the schemes of the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Recognizing these great dangers, we

should be asking our Redeemer continually for protection. It is as we, his people, ask him for protection that the Lord Jesus implements his kindness plan in our lives and, through us, in the lives of others.

God uses the active faith of his people as they accept responsibility on the basis of his Word (vv. 10–18)

That is what Boaz did. It becomes clear that he was under no legal obligation to act. He was not the nearest relative (v. 12). There was a kinsman-redeemer nearer than him. ‘The LORD bless you’ (v. 10) indicates that Boaz recognized the Lord’s hand in what was happening. What follows shows his willingness to accept responsibility. The words of verse 11 are words of commitment. ‘And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask.’ There was the obstacle of the nearer relative to be overcome, but he committed himself to act on behalf of Ruth and Naomi. He accepted the responsibility of acting for their good, on the basis of God’s Word. He promised to do so promptly (v. 13). He gave evidence of his commitment as he sent Ruth home with six measures of barley.

In this Boaz again points us to the Lord Jesus. In his humanity, the Lord Jesus accepted responsibility on the basis of God’s Word. Even on the cross he demonstrated his obedience to God’s law as he fulfilled his responsibility to his mother by arranging for her to be cared for by John (John 19:25–27). As he died on the cross he accepted responsibility for the sins of his people as he took their condemnation, so that they would be set free from condemnation.

The way Boaz accepted his God-given responsibility also sets a pattern for us to follow. Active faith means accepting the responsibilities God’s Word sets out for us. This includes the responsibilities of parent to child, child to parent, husband to wife, and wife to husband. In our relationships with fellow-Christians we have a God-given responsibility to encourage and care for one another, to sympathize with and serve one another, to speak the truth in love to one another, and to teach and admonish one another. In our relationships with non-Christians we have a responsibility to live before them in a way that makes the gospel of the Lord Jesus attractive, taking opportunities that come to speak of him.

It is noteworthy that as Naomi, Ruth and Boaz all revealed their active faith in what God has said in his Word, they all acted with unselfish, generous, costly kindness. Naomi took the initiative for Ruth’s benefit, not her own. Ruth submitted to Naomi and asked Boaz for protection for Naomi’s benefit and for the sake of her deceased husband. Boaz committed himself to acting for Ruth and Naomi’s benefit. Each of them therefore points us to the Lord Jesus and the greatest act of unselfish, costly, generous kindness—his redeeming death on the cross. It is as we continue in the pattern seen both in Ruth and most wonderfully in the Lord Jesus Christ, that God uses our active unselfish faith in the continuing implementation of his great *Operation Kindness*.