

Following Directions

Ruth 3:3-10

Ruth 3:3-4 "Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your [best] clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; [but] do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. And it shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do."

It is difficult to wrap our heads around all the meaning in these two verses. The culture and time we are drawn into is very different from what we understand today. What we do know is that Naomi desired for Ruth to have a better future. That future seemed logically and rightfully connected to Boaz according to Jewish law. In the steps Ruth was to take, she would be letting Boaz know that she desired his action as kinsman redeemer of Elimelech's family name. The process of uncovering Boaz's feet and lying down at them gives information to Boaz that Ruth was indeed willing to follow what was expected under the law. It may be similar to Ruth saying she had been given direction by Naomi, understood the role of kinsman redeemer, and desired for Boaz to implement this law in marriage. Ruth was instructed to wait for Boaz to tell her his plan, "Then he will tell you what you shall do".

The *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary* addresses the actions in Ruth 3:4 this way, "Singular as these directions may appear to us, there was no impropriety in them ... in the case of Ruth, it was a method, doubtless conformable to prevailing usage, of reminding Boaz of the duty which devolved on him as the kinsman of her deceased husband. Boaz probably slept upon a mat or skin; Ruth lay crosswise at his feet – a position in which Eastern servants frequently sleep in the same chamber or tent with their master; and if they want a covering, custom allows them that benefit from part of the covering on their master's bed. ... there was no indelicacy in a stranger, or even a woman, putting the extremity of this cover over her."

Picture a large feast and celebration at the end of harvesting. It would be plausible that all those attending would put on their best attire, just as we would dress differently when going to a special party. Recall what we know of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth was faithful, she was a hard-worker, and she followed God. Boaz was a relative of Elimelech; he was honorable, kind and compassionate, and recognized and encouraged Ruth's devotion to God.

We read these few verses and have a difficult time comprehending the culture and the exact meanings of some actions. Imagine Ruth, from a different land and culture, hearing the instruction Naomi was giving her. Ruth must have trusted Naomi's wisdom and genuine care for her because she followed her advice probably without complete understanding of the laws and customs.

Ruth 3:5 And she said to her, "All that you say I will do."

Ruth took Naomi's advice and counted it as wisdom, even though the customs and actions described for her to follow may have seemed odd. Ruth trusted in Naomi's discernment of the laws.

- ♥ Do you seek advice from those who have more knowledge and understanding?
- ♥ When someone, out of love and concern for you, shares specific action for your benefit, are you willing to proceed with their instruction?
- ♥ Are we able to take direction even when we suppose our way is better? Even when we may not completely understand or even agree?

Patrick/Lowth/Whitby/Lowman Commentary says, “She put a great confidence in her mother’s prudence and piety, and trusted God would give good success to her design; which seemed not very modest, but had not other intentions than what was agreeable to the law of God”.

Naomi had made it clear to Ruth that Boaz was the wise choice for her future. She gave Ruth specific instructions to follow. Ruth’s actions would state her intentions to secure the family’s property and name with Boaz’s role as her kinsman redeemer under Jewish law. Ruth was also given clear direction to wait for Boaz’s response. Imagine Ruth hearing all this, taking a deep breath, and timidly moving ahead with this strange plan. Would this plan be accepted or rejected? What response would she receive?

To this point, it seems Boaz had given Ruth encouragement towards her future, Ruth stepped out in faith, doing what looked best and trusted God for the outcome.

- ♥ Consider. What happens to our thoughts when we place our trust completely in God’s hands?

Psalm 5:11 But let all who take refuge in Thee be glad, Let them ever sing for joy; and mayest Thou shelter them, That those who love Thy name may exult in Thee.

- ♥ Let us not miss the word ‘all’ in verse 5. Each translation I looked at used this adjective meaning complete or entire. Consider following the plans for constructing an airplane. How important would it be to pay attention to all directions exactly? Why?

Completely or entirely following God’s instruction is an important concept that we will take time to explore. Ruth did not follow some of Naomi’s instructions, she was careful to follow all of them. This is a picture of complete trust and total obedience, even though Ruth may not have understood the entire picture.

- ♥ Think for a moment. What would it look like to follow all God’s truths on a daily basis as we interact with one another?

We cannot only take a piece of truth that conveniently fits our lifestyle and thinking for the moment. Seeking to follow all God’s ways means we do not react according to others actions. This negates excuse in our failures. In other words, we are unable to justify a poor response on our part. When you are treated unfairly, spoken of unjustly, or receive hurtful words or actions, there is no freedom to respond with careless thoughts or words. When the road ahead looks unclear or even scary, you can continue to move forward if you completely trust in God. He is working to unfold His perfect plan. Obedience in the believer’s life leads to blessing.

Psalm 119:4-6 Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, that we should keep [them] diligently. Oh that my ways may be established to keep Thy statutes! Then I shall not be ashamed when I look upon all Thy commandments.

There are more than two dozen scriptures that command us to love one another. These commands are clear and there are no exceptions. Continuing on with the same thought above, the Bible does not say that we are to show care for one another only when we feel like it or it is easy or when others make us feel loved. God's word does not place conditions on showing love. We are to love one another even when we are slighted, hurt, accused, betrayed or experience any negative interaction. We should not respond according to our interpretation of others' actions. We are responsible to love one another regardless, showing mercy and kindness.

- ♥ Do you seek to obey God's word even when you may not understand and it seems especially difficult, for example, in *always* loving one another?
- ♥ Do you respond to God as Ruth responded to Naomi – all you say, I will do?

Ruth paid careful attention to Naomi's instruction. Often, we do not pay close enough attention to instruction; we remember only part but not everything. Our intentions are only as good as our actions. Consider how different the account we are reading might have been if Ruth had not followed through with the advice given her. For instance, we can think of many things we should do but if we never put those thoughts to work, they remain only thoughts.

Ruth 3:5 gave us Ruth's verbal response to Naomi. She said she would follow her instruction. Ruth 3:6 tells us that Ruth's response was genuine as she put information into practice.

Ruth 3:6 *So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her.* Ruth's action to observe Naomi's instructions gave honor to her mother-in-law. We will take a sideline here and consider several verses that speak of honoring parents by yielding to their instruction.

Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Deuteronomy 5:16 'Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Proverbs 1:8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching;

Proverbs 4:1 Hear, [O] sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding,

Picture a feast following the hard work of those employed by Boaz. Boaz has included himself among the workers to oversee that the grain is winnowed without unnecessary waste. Then as the evening winds down, with a full stomach and the satisfaction of a completed harvest, Boaz lies down on the threshing floor to sleep until morning.

Ruth 3:7 *When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down.*

The Targum, which is a translation of the Old Testament Scriptures in the Chaldee or Aramaic language adds, "He blessed the name of the Lord, who had heard his prayer,

and removed famine from the land of Israel". This is consistent with the honorable character we have seen in Boaz.

According to *Thomas Scott's* commentary, "His heart was merry" can be translated as "his heart was good and may be used to mark his cheerfulness and thankfulness for the plenty which the Lord has sent after the famine; and his subsequent conduct shows that his feast was consistent with temperance and piety". The word 'drunk' <shathah>, or drinking to full is different from the word used in **Ephesians 5:18** when speaking of *getting drunk* <methusko>, "**And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit**". One is having plenty of liquids as in quenching your thirst, the other is excess, becoming intoxicated with a substance that controls you. Instead of being filled or controlled with wine, we are to be filled with the Spirit.

After the celebration of the end of harvest, Boaz lay to sleep on the threshing floor and Ruth secretly, or quietly, places herself at his feet. To us, Ruth's action may seem overt, yet remember Ruth's character of virtue noticed by him earlier in Ruth 2:11-12. Ruth was simply obeying the instruction of Naomi and depending upon the honorable character of Boaz.

This strange interaction causes me to consider the necessity of moving forward in faith and trust in God's plan even when we do not clearly see or understand His ways. Our responsibility is to seek wisdom and guidance from His word. Often, we are unable to figure out every detail or turn. However, we can be certain that God will protect and guide those who sincerely seek to do His will. This takes a desire and purposed plan to spend time in God's word.

2 Samuel 22:31 "As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the LORD is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.

Psalm 36:7 How precious is Thy lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings.

Psalm 84:12 O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in Thee!

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

Isaiah 26:3 "The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in Thee.

♥ **Have you purposed to trust God's direction in your life? How does your response to trust God manifest itself in your life?**

Ruth 3:8-9 And it happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. And he said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."

Reading this verse tells us there was no indication from Boaz that Ruth would be sleeping at his feet. Picture, the middle of the night feeling like something was not quite right, even having a moment of fear, as you felt something at your feet. Upon asking who was there, Ruth answers with a request for Boaz to take her as his wife and protection. The phrase, "spread your covering over your maid" was a symbol of matrimonial protection according to the *Annotated Bible Notes*. Imagine how awkward this must have

been for Ruth and Boaz alike. She had willingly placed herself in a position that presented the possibility of rejection. She also trusted that Boaz would honor her virtue and not take advantage of her. We continue to witness Ruth following Naomi's direction and God's care and protection of his children. You can imagine Ruth almost holding her breath as she waits for Boaz's response.

Ruth 3:10 Then he said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.

Boaz responds favorably with a blessing toward Ruth. Ruth has shown care to follow what was expected of her according to Jewish law – that is to seek to continue the family name by appropriation of a kinsman redeemer. Remember the information we were given in Chapter two of Ruth's piety as she went home each evening after work instead of being out and about (Ruth 2:23). Finding a younger man, whether rich or poor, could have been the main concern for Ruth. Yet, she was more interested in carrying on the family's name and inheritance. This strongly speaks of sincerity in her desire to honor Naomi and her late husband's family. She is not focused entirely on her own benefits but on the greater good for those involved.

- ♥ Consider. **What is the difference between selfishness and selflessness?** There are times when doing the 'right' thing is difficult or does not seem rewarding. Taking care to know God's word, to seek His direction in all circumstances, is a benefit to each of us. Proof of our genuine desire to follow God puts our own wants last as we place His truths first. Selfish motives and actions please the doer; righteous motives and actions bless others and honors God.

Boaz was an honorable man. He did not take advantage of Ruth. Rather he recognized her virtuous character. Ruth chose to follow Naomi instead of staying in Moab, which would have proven a greater opportunity to marry. Ruth chose to dedicate herself to the care of her mother-in-law instead of going about the town in the evenings. Ruth chose to follow Naomi's instructions carefully instead of doing things her own way or perhaps in a way that made more sense to her at the time – even to the extent of placing herself in what might have been a questionable position. Her desire to be obedient is protected by God's hand and direction.

Romans 8:27-28 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to [the will of] God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to [His] purpose.

Choosing to observe Godly instruction is an example to follow.