

**The Proposal at the Threshing Floor:
Finding Rest and Redemption
Ruth 3:1-18**

We will examine a rather risky proposal in Ruth chapter 3 this morning, but our eyes will be fixed on a masterful portrait of selfless service between believers, and may our relationships with one another be characterized by this kind of selfless service as we all find rest and redemption in the Lord our God.

The book of Ruth takes place in days of the judges. There was a famine in Bethlehem so Elimelech and Naomi left with their two sons and went to Moab. All of a sudden, Elimelech dies. Naomi's sons soon after take foreign wives, and then the two sons die also! So we are left with Naomi and two daughters-in-law. Only one, by the name of Ruth, stays with Naomi on her way back to Bethlehem. Naomi is bitter towards God and feels empty in life.

When it seems to Naomi like God had disappeared, chapter 2 starts off with a bang. **Boaz** enters the scene. And God directs Ruth's path directly across his in the fields (**Ruth 2:3**). Boaz learns about Ruth's radical conversion (**Ruth 1:16-17**) and how she followed Naomi back to Bethlehem, even though it seemed that she was headed down a dead end. Ruth humbles herself before Boaz and he shows her great favor in the field that he owns. And Naomi begins to see a glimpse of hope for their redemption.

1. The Plan of the Proposal: Naomi Seeks Rest for Ruth (Ruth 3:1-5)

We must have fresh in our minds the encounter of Ruth with Boaz in the fields from chapter 2. We must remember that chapter 1 was all about depending on God in desperation, and that chapter 2 was all about finding hope! It is this hope that God gives to both Naomi and Ruth that propels the events of chapter 3 into action, to this plan.

a. The Objective of the Plan (Ruth 3:1-2)

As Naomi forms her plan for Ruth, she has one driving objective and that is Ruth's security, her rest, and her wellness. The use of the word "security" or "rest" in other good translations sets forward the idea of "finding rest in the house of a husband;" it is referring to a place of rest. Remember Naomi's

prayer to the Lord in **Ruth 1:9** for both Ruth and Orpah? It is the same word used here. Naomi is speaking of the security and tranquility that can be found in the home of a loving husband. One commentator has it well saying: “She is seeking to remove the disgrace of being a widow, to secure the economic necessities of life, and to calm her anxiety about the future.” Her sole motivation was that it might be well with her.

In verse 2, Naomi states the obvious and takes initiative reminding Ruth that Boaz is a kinsmen, or “close relative.” After all the barley and wheat was cut and gathered (anytime from May to June), it would be taken to the threshing floor, which usually would be a stone floor atop a hill near the crop. The threshed grain would be thrown up in the air with a fork and the heavier kernels would drop to the floor and the useless chaff would blow away in the afternoon/evening winds.

So Naomi’s objective for Ruth seems to fall right in line with the Lord’s plan for Ruth and Boaz. In **Ruth 2:3**, we see God in His providence crossing their paths, and now Naomi says for Ruth to stay on that path! She takes responsibility, as she trusts the Lord to provide for her prayers (**Ruth 1:8-9**).

b. The Order of the Plan (Ruth 3:3-4)

Naomi gives instructions, or orders, for Ruth to make herself look most appealing for visiting Boaz at the threshing floor at night. She prescribes what seems to be some kind of Jewish custom known to them, strikingly similar to Ezekiel 16 and the bride readying herself for marriage. It involved:

1. Taking a bath (something Ruth could have used by now).
2. Anointing herself (or putting on perfume/scented oils that would be for special festivities).
3. Putting on her best clothes (though she was poor and probably didn’t own a set of “Sunday bests,” she could wear a large and loose cloak, what this most like refers to).
4. Going down to the threshing floor (Boaz would be sleeping here guarding the heap of grain).
5. Being discreet (not rushing in and initiating the conversation and being loud for others to see).
6. Uncovering his feet when fed, merry and asleep (which would wake anyone up eventually).

7. Laying down (there is no hint in the text that this is referring to a sexual advance or to promiscuous/immoral behavior, though it is highly debated by liberal scholars).
8. Waiting (being ready to do what he asks when he wakes up—trusting the Lord significantly).

All that Naomi asks Ruth to do is a sign to Boaz that Ruth's mourning had passed, of becoming a widow nearly a year ago. Naomi is seeking to position her daughter-in-law in the best light so that Boaz may accept her and be prompted to act favorably once again toward her in marriage.

c. The Obedience to the Plan (Ruth 3:5)

Ruth agrees to do everything Naomi says without a question or a doubt. She remains faithful to her mother-in-law with greatest devotion and loyalty.

So that is the plan of the proposal in which Naomi seeks rest for Ruth.

2. The Execution of the Proposal: Ruth Seeks Redemption for Naomi (Ruth 3:6-9)

Keep in mind Ruth's words to Naomi back on the road from Moab to Bethlehem: **“Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. (17) Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:16-17)**. When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said no more (**Ruth 3:18**). And since the beginning of Ruth's stay in Bethlehem, she has only sought to bless Naomi and obey the Lord. So, what do you expect the execution of this plan to look like? I'd say she's going to be pretty accurate.

a. The Accuracy of the Execution (Ruth 3:6-7)

She did according to all that her mother-in-law commanded her. This is the unquestioning obedience that was characteristic of Ruth's life; she exemplified this in her steady faithfulness.

Verse 7's details show even further that she didn't deviate from the order of the plan. The phrase "**and his heart was merry**" refers to a sense of well-being and satisfaction with the day's work and the meal he had just eaten. After coming secretly to the end of the heap of grain she carries out the rest of the plan. And what kind of reaction would be expected in a scenario like this?

b. The Alarm of the Execution (Ruth 3:8-9a)

Boaz could have been peacefully asleep for a few hours by this time, until he was startled because of his feet being exposed to the cold of the middle of the night.

It is easy to become startled in your sleep. I have been known to wake up, tearing the covers off for the "spider" that I swore I saw. Or I'll start barking unintelligible commands at the wall nearest me. Who knows what I'm being startled by? But Boaz was probably even more startled, waking up with freezing feet and seeing someone there! It only seems fitting to ask, "**Who are you?**"

c. The Appeal of the Execution (Ruth 3:9b)

Slightly different than most proposals, we have Ruth asking Boaz to marry her, which would have been somewhat more normal at this time and this culture to arrange marriages. Notice that she doesn't take anything for granted by calling herself his "maid." She uses a metaphor using the words "spread your covering"—or "wings"—"over your maid," used in **Ezekiel 16:8** for taking in marriage. This draws our attention back to **Ruth 2:12**, when Boaz recognizes Ruth's faith and hard work unto the Lord, under whose wings she has come to seek refuge. She had put herself under Yahweh's wings when she came to Judah, and now she is seeking to put herself under Boaz's wings to find rest in him. In essence, Ruth asks Boaz to answer his own prayer from **Ruth 2:12**.

In saying, "You are a close relative," or, "You are a redeemer," Ruth was hoping that Boaz would see it as his duty/responsibility to provide a child for the family of Elimelech—for Naomi. Ruth's motivation was to benefit Naomi.

Now we've first seen Naomi's desire to seek Ruth's benefit, and now we see Ruth's desire to seek Naomi's benefit! This is the kind of behavior that should characterize the household of faith, the community of the redeemed.

Philippians 2:3-4 says, **“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; (4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”**

3. The Acceptance of the Proposal: Boaz Secures Redemption for Naomi (Ruth 3:10-15)

Now that the spotlight shifts almost entirely onto Boaz in the middle of the night, he could have totally dismissed Ruth and asked her to leave, especially with how bold her appeal was and the risky method of proposing, yet we see a starkly different response—one of acceptance, and not just a shallow, “Yea, ok, I'll do this small thing for you and help out the family, I guess.” No! His words are full of grace and kindness and certainty.

a. In Words (Ruth 3:10-13)

Boaz had inquired of her back in **Ruth 2:5** and he was fully aware of her story (**Ruth 2:11**), so maybe he was waiting for Ruth's time of mourning to pass before initiating anything towards her. Judging by the loaded response (all his words in verses 10 to 13), Boaz seemed to have had her on his mind.

i. Of Praise (Ruth 3:10)

His tender blessing reveals to us many things. First, he desires the Lord to bless her, showing that he recognizes the Lord's hand in all of this. Second, he respects her and shows a sense of responsibility towards her by calling her “my daughter.” Third, he commends her specifically for her character of kindness towards others. Her “first kindness” was abandoning her old lifestyle in Moab to commit herself to serving Naomi (**Ruth 2:11**). This “last kindness” is referring to her coming to propose to him seeking redemption for Naomi. Fourth, she is commended for **“not going after young men.”**

ii. Of Promise (Ruth 3:11)

Verse 11 is the “I do” to the “Will you marry me?” Now this is a large commitment, so why is he so confident that this will work? The basis of his confidence, that he would be pleased to marry her, is in her character—that she “loves the Lord her God and loves her neighbor as herself.” He promises to do for her what she asks because of her good reputation in Bethlehem and her “excellence” of character as an exemplary godly woman. These words “a woman of excellence,” are found also in **Proverbs 31:10** which says, “**An excellent wife, who can find?**” **Proverbs 12:4** uses the same words as well, “**An excellent wife is the crown of her husband.**”

Guys, you want a Ruth! You want someone who is faithful and kind in her character. You want to be able to answer that question in **Proverbs 31:10** with, “Here she is! She is rare and hard to find, but she is here and she is my wife.” How often do we tell our wives that they are our crowns?

And ladies, here is your godly example in Ruth. You may think immediately, “I am the last woman to stand up and say that I am a virtuous or an excellent woman!” That’s ok. Ruth felt unworthy too (**Ruth 2:10, 13**). She too came a long way spiritually—I should say that the Lord brought her a long way. Becoming “a woman of excellence” doesn’t happen overnight. It comes about by faithfulness in each day and kindness upon kindness towards others.

iii. Of Principle (Ruth 3:12)

Here is a magnificent display of integrity and honesty on Boaz’s part. He doesn’t look at this young girl as an object he is to gain or trophy he is to earn. He mutes his fleshly feelings and quiets his selfish desire, responding with truth as a man of principle. He admits, “**There is a relative closer than I.**” Now the reader has been all excited and nearly hears wedding bells in his head until this fact is revealed. And it makes us wonder—“Will Ruth not marry Boaz after all?”

iv. Of Persistence (Ruth 3:13)

What Boaz says next displays his persistence for her good. He will not stop until this redemption is here. He says that either way she will be redeemed, whether it is the other man, or himself. He places the other man first because the other man has the right, but then he says that if for whatever reason he

cannot or will not, then surely he will redeem her. **“As the Lord lives.”** This is much more than the “As you wish” line in *The Princess Bride*. Wesley’s got nothing on Boaz because Boaz is a man who fears the Lord above all. He is good for his word and he is driven to secure redemption for Naomi.

b. In Works (Ruth 3:14-15)

If you are skeptical about this man’s words, then see his works. He is committed to secure redemption and takes it even further with his actions.

i. To Protect (Ruth 3:14)

Verses 13 and 14 overlap with this theme of protection. Boaz tells her to stay near him in the middle of the night so that she is safe, but then he tells her to leave before it is light enough to see. He does this to protect her from looking like a typical **prostitute** going out into the field at night and then coming back. He was trying to avoid even the appearance of evil for her sake, to maintain her “excellent” reputation.

ii. To Provide (Ruth 3:15)

Quite consistent with his acts of kindness and undeserved favor at the end of chapter 2, Boaz once again fills Ruth up with a generous abundance of food to take home to Naomi. Boaz faithfully functions as a channel of God’s grace and kindness to them (**Ruth 2:12, 20**).

4. The Results of the Proposal: Boaz Secures Rest for Ruth (3:16-18)

When Casey, my middle brother, proposed to Sarah we were very anxious to hear the results! Our grandparents were there, and parents, and Kathy and Cody and I. When Casey drove up to our grandparents’ house we were all filled with great expectation and smiles from ear to ear about how excited we were for them. But imagine the stress on our family if we had to plan a proposal and send Casey out to perform, and if we were working with the unknown element of whether or not she would say yes! We would be restless! And that is where we find Naomi when Ruth returns to the home in the city.

a. From Famine to Fullness (Ruth 3:16-17)

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One of the themes of the book of Ruth has come to a close, a resolution. Famine (**Ruth 1:1**) will no longer be a problem because the Lord has provided (**Ruth 1:6**), and specifically for Naomi and Ruth, Boaz has shown himself to be a generous man towards them. You remember Naomi's bitter words against the Lord in **Ruth 1:21**, "**I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty.**" Boaz says to Ruth, "**Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed,**" bringing closure to such a sad and sore season of life.

b. From Singleness to Security (Ruth 3:18)

And in our final verse Naomi says with confidence that the matter will be resolved "**today.**" She believes that her plan is successful in securing rest for her daughter (**Ruth 3:1**). Even when Naomi could jump up and down and try to take credit for such a successful plan for a proposal, she says for Ruth to, "**Wait,**" and trust in God's providence. But she is sure that because Boaz is such a man of his word that he will not rest until rest has been provided for Ruth.

So in conclusion we see Naomi seeking rest for Ruth, we see Ruth seeking redemption for Naomi, and we find Boaz securing redemption for Naomi and Boaz securing rest for Ruth, all selfless acts done with pure and selfless motive.

I desperately want to know what we can do to have that here in our relationships? What drives people to love so selflessly and serve others with such great devotion! Is it really possible for me to love you more than myself?

"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

We have a Redeemer who has done immeasurably more than Boaz did for Naomi and Ruth. We've been redeemed from our sins that we might have newness of life! We have been transformed in our nature! We have Christ in us! And since I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, we can be driven to love others selflessly!

We can love with greatest faithfulness! We can love others more than ourselves!

Mark 10:45 says, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”**

Commit your life to serving others and witness by faith the mighty and mysterious hand of God work out His purposes in our midst.