

Ruth 3:1 | Seeking God's Best | 08.23.15

Have you ever lost something, only to discover another way.

This week I lost the plug-in for my portable speaker. We eventually ran it down till had no battery left and then frantically searched for the little transformer piece you plug into the wall. We had the base, and the chord, but we could not find the transformer. The chord has a USB end on one side and a mini-USB on the other. We have a lot of devices that use USB to charge so we started testing each one to see if any of those would charge the speaker.

Most of them most of them did not work because the adaptors volt and current were wrong, however we came to find out that we could not only charge the speaker with several other wall plugs but we could also use the USB on the computer to charge the speaker. I use the speaker often with the computer so this was a great discovery.

Now, I still haven't found the original, but my speaker is totally charged because I had to search out and find another way to charge it.

Often when we loss something we need, or don't have the best, it causes us to seek out another way.

The end of Ruth 2 and beginning of Ruth 3 is a pivotal point in the story where Naomi is up against a wall which causes her to seek out an unorthodox plan to secure a future for Ruth.

Chapter 2 **began** this turning point of Naomi's tragic story.

- Boaz was introduced
- **The Lord led Ruth to Boaz's field.**
- Boaz began to redeem Ruth and Naomi

Within a matter of 12-14 hours Ruth and Naomi's life goes from destitute, hopeless, helpless, and bitter, to sustainable, hopeful, helped, and thankful. The **climax of this turning point** is when Naomi learned that Ruth had gleaned 2 weeks' worth of barley in 1 day from none other than Boaz, one of their family redeemers!

At this point, **Naomi began to pick up the broken pieces** of her shattered life.

- She saw the Lord's hand of hesed working, healing her bitterness.
- She saw security in her future through Boaz's provision, as redeemer.

- She saw familial love through Ruth's labor of love in the fields as hesed.
- She saw her life beginning to be restored to normalcy.

She began to see the loss' in her life being reconciled in one way or another.

BUT the one thing she did not see happening, well, at least not fast enough, was Ruth being in a place of security, happiness, and prosperity. Ruth was living for Naomi, fulfilling her vow from chapter 1, enduring the loss she had experienced, all for Naomi's sake.

Seeing the short sightedness of these actions, **Naomi set out to concoct a scheme to place the eligibility of Ruth, in front of Boaz in a way that he absolutely could not ignore.**

Just as I had to search out and concock another way to charge my speaker, Naomi has spent the last two months seeking a way to reconcile (exchange) Ruth's current widow status with a marriage proposal.

Chapter 3 is the place where **I have dreaded** to get to because **I have so many questions!** Questions about

- cultural background,
- character motives,
- authorial meanings,
- recipient understandings
- dual and triple word meanings,
- and so much more.

The vast majority of my questions have no hard answers. At the end of the day, we have to take the text for what it says as a whole, **NOT what we think is implied in the minutia.**

The hard part as we come to chapter 3 is how the author builds suspense and intrigue through Naomi's use of sexual innuendo, provocative language, and promiscuous seclusion.

Naomi's instructions to Ruth are **borderline at best** and **purposefully seductive at worst.** **Yet the author makes it clear,** although motives and intents are unknown, **the result of the nights events further the providence and sovereignty of God in all three characters' lives, WITHOUT ANY IMMORALITY.**

What we will discover by the end of chapter 3, is

God has uniquely blend between HIS sovereignty and providence in chapter 2, and man's (Naomi, Ruth, & Boaz) initiative and seeking in chapter 3-4.

Each of these factors move one step closer to resolving the major conflict within the book of Ruth, there is no baby to carry on the name of Elimelech.

READ 2:23-3:5

1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?"

Chapter three begins a new phase of the story.

- The barley and wheat harvest are finished.
- Ruth has gathered, gleaned, and threshed enough food for the women for a year.
- All their immediate needs have been met thanks to Ruth's work and Boaz's generosity.

However, Naomi sees an opportunity that she cannot pass by because Ruth is missing a huge part of life. So, she put together a delicate plan to seize that opportunity hoping to ensure a favorable future for Ruth.

So, after the harvest, Naomi drew Ruth's attention to her parental duty to ensure God's Best for Ruth.

Naomi's actions seek God's best for Ruth.

SEEK GOD'S BEST for others.

Notice Naomi is the initiator here. Unlike the narrator of chapter 1 & 2 or the Lord, **Naomi is the one who initiates this discussion and concocts this plan.**

*I don't think we should view this as bad or sinful yet. Naomi has not neglected the Lord. She is never condemned for leaving God out.

In fact, I view this is a good thing. Over the course of the last two months Naomi's bitterness has subsided. She is able to **see beyond the tragedy** of the past and **see into** the present and future as the **Lord's hand has moved** within her circumstances. **She sees an opportunity to act** for the betterment of Ruth and therefore she does so **with great precision.**

In verse 1 the author again reminds us of Ruth's in-law and outsider status. However, once again this is contrast with her familial treatment by the

characters, here Naomi. Naomi calls Ruth once again by the affectionate term, “*my daughter.*” The basis of Naomi’s plan takes place in light of Naomi’s parental care and responsibility for Ruth. **Naomi is seeking what is best for Ruth just as she had at the end of chapter 2.**

The emphasis of his verse is found in Naomi’s use of a rhetorical question, “*should I not seek out ... for you.*”

This reveals what is driving Naomi. As her mother, she desired something better! The answer is, “Of course!” Naomi should look out for the best interests of Ruth. Yes! Naomi should seek out the best future for Ruth possible!

The best in Naomi’s mind would accomplish two things.

First, Naomi desired to seek rest for Ruth.

Rest is literally “a resting place.” In the Hebrew, it is colloquialism, similar to us saying “settling down.”

It clearly carries the idea of marriage, home, security, and prosperity.

As a parent, Naomi wanted what was best for Ruth’s long-term stability. Naomi felt Ruth’s best included a person with whom share life and a place in which to settle down.

It seems during this period of Israel, marriages were arranged by the parents although children did have a say in the matter. Naomi desired to see to it that Ruth would not remain a widow, and therefor Naomi would seek to arrange a possible suiter. But not just any suiter.

Second, Naomi desired to seek Ruth’s **wellness.**

Wellness does not speak of Ruth’s health but of **Ruth’s earthly contentment and happiness.** Again this is another Hebrew idiom that is related to the idea of marital harmony, material prosperity, health and long life, and many children.

Naomi wanted Ruth to experience marital bliss, in the best possible light. She wanted Ruth to be with a person who would truly care and treat her properly giving her the bliss of marriage.

In verse 1 we see Naomi’s desire to secure the best possible future and wellness for Ruth. Yes, Ruth could endure while Naomi was alive, but what would happen after Naomi’s death? Ruth would be doomed to the live out her

remaining years as a widow. **Naomi's desire was to seek a way to secure a future for Ruth in light of the events of Chapter 2.**

I believe this is how we should view chapter 3; through the eyes of a mother, seeking the best for her daughter.

MOMS what wouldn't you do, in seeking the best for your child?

How close to the line would you get to seek out your child's best future?

To what lengths would you advise them to go, to test what is best for them?

It is within this context that Naomi seeks God's best for Ruth! I don't see selfish ambition within Naomi. In fact, Naomi is never revealed in that way. She exemplifies in chapter 1 and here in chapter a strong desire to seek God's Best for those around her.

I think is a good reminder to us. We should seek God's best in the lives of those around us!

Jesus said the highest law of God includes, "loving others as you love yourself."

The apostle John recorded that Jesus taught them, one mark of a true disciple is, to love others! This form of love is both in actions and attitudes. It seeks the rest and welfare for others.

I often think we miss many blessings in our own lives because we are so self-centered and consumed we are not seeking God's best for others.

When we don't pray God's best for others. When we don't seek God's best for others. When we don't invest God's best for others. We never experience God's best. God's best always includes seeking intentional relationships for his betterment.

Naomi's bitterness did not turn to jealousy, envy, or self-consumption. In fact I think a way out of her bitterness was planning this match making because she saw how it could be God's best.

I want to challenge you this morning with this thought ... **SEEK GOD'S BEST FOR THOSE AROUND YOU!** That is loving others! Whether this is of a spiritual nature, evangelizing, discipling, rebuking and correcting, restoring, OR a physical nature of advising, counseling, serving, helping, playing, fellowshiping, ...

Begin to see God's picture beyond yourself! Seek God's best for others!

I also see an important aspect to the context here ... That is to ...

SEEK GOD'S BEST in light of His providence.

There's more going on than just a mother's desire. **Naomi saw the hand of the Lord upon their lives throughout chapter 2 and she wanted to take full advantage of the Lord's hesed, seeking God's best for Ruth in light of his recent providence!**

Naomi prayed back in chapter 1 that the Lord would grant Ruth rest while on the road from Moab to Bethlehem. Back in chapter 1 however, Naomi **invoked Yahweh to secure these blessings towards her daughters-in-law.**

1:9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!"

Back in chapter 1, Naomi is helpless and destitute. She is widowed, a foreigner, childless, with no heir. She had no means, influence, or even knowledge to provide **rest** for her Orpah and Ruth. That is why she released them. The best for them, at that time, was to return to their home to be re-married within their Moabite culture.

By chapter 3, the setting and circumstances have changed enough that Naomi is now in a position to seek out a way to secure those blessings she prayed in chapter 1 because she has seen the Lord's hesed.

**Through the providence of God evidenced in chapter 2,
Naomi now can seek a future for Ruth in chapter 3.**

Ultimately, Naomi becomes the mediator of her own prayer.

Naomi's efforts model one way in which divine actions and human actions work together for God's best purposes. **We cannot deny God's providence in moving Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.** God has moved all the pieces of the puzzle together.

Naomi's instructions in v.3-5 are a response to what God has done and revealed throughout chapter 2. **They are based upon God's hesed.**

Naomi has not planned this blindly, this is not a whim, **yet in seeking out the best for Ruth, it will take a huge amount of faith and risk.**

HOWEVER, the greater the risk, often the greater the rewards!

So I want you to see that Naomi's seeking and planning is not independent of God's providence, **but rather in light of God's providence.**

- God had not just provided a place for Ruth to glean but **he had provided THE BEST POSSIBLE PLACE FOR RUTH TO GLEAN.**
- God had not just provided them with a relative to watch out for them **but THE BEST RELATIVE, A REDEEMER!**
- God had not just given them a harvest through Ruth's work **but THE BEST, AN ABUNDANT HARVEST WHICH WOULD LAST THE YEAR!**

God's best has been the answer to Naomi's prayers all along to this point, why should she give up now? Why shouldn't God's best continue? Naomi uses what God has done and how he has answered her prayers most recently, to seek God's best in a yes or no fashion.

Once again, I see her attitude and actions as honorable. I believe she is seeking God's Best, within God's providence. Her desire is one to follow.

This morning I want to pause here and ask you, are you a seeker of God's best? I think we all can put ourselves in Naomi shoes in one way or another. We have this strong desire for God to move and work in our lives and those around us. We may even see him moving and working, answering our prayers, putting the pieces of the puzzle together. Yet, are we seeking his best in our lives and the lives of those around us?

Not merely are you a seeker of God, because that is not what this passage is about.

Are you a seeker in that you not only ask for God's direction and providence but when you begin to see it, you act on it! When you come face to face with God's hand obviously moving and working around you, do you keep searching deeper?

I think most of us probably come to this point in Ruth and remove chapter one, Naomi's asking, and chapter 2, God's providence, from the context, because Naomi's plan seems questionable. Further, God seems distant and removed in this chapter, unlike the previous. Even the characters take on a differing tone, YET the book of Ruth, including here, demands an unbiased look at people seeing the Lord's hand in their life, and then responding to that in faith through a deeper and fuller way.

As I look at verse 1, in light of the whole of Ruth, Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount come to light. **TURN TO MATTHEW 7:7**

***“Ask, and it will be given to you;
seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you.”***

Naomi has asked, (chapter 1) and it has partially been given (chapter 2)
Naomi is about to seek, including Ruth her plan, she will find a willingness
of Boaz.

Boaz will finish things up in chapter 4 by going to the city gates and
confronting the closer redeemer, and opening the door.

**Just as Jesus’ words are meant to be understood within the providence and
goodness of God, chapter 3 must be seen within the context of the Lord’s
hesed.**

Look at how Jesus illustrates this truth in 9-11.

Jesus point is really simple: God desires the best for his children! Therefore,
ask, seek, and knock for God’s best.

Friends, **YOU SHOULD SEEK GOD’S BEST FOR YOUR LIFE!** Don’t settle for
anything less.

This is not rocket science, this is asking on a daily, regular basis. THEN this
means seeking! You have to plan, prepare, and then search it out!

Prayer is not a passive discipline ... Ask and it will be given to you, doesn’t
assume there is no work, or the answer is a free hand out. It means that God will
provide a way. God will often place people in your path (think Boaz), and your
own initiative (Ruth’s work) to give to you. We are failing because we are not
asking! Failing because we are not seeking.

When I was a junior in college, I had been going for 2 years to a church
about 20 minutes away ministering there but not fully involved because it
had a large active college group. I wanted to get more involved in ministry
and was hitting brick walls there moving up the line. The associate Pastor
there, was married to a girl from my youth group who was 4 years older
than me.

SO I prayed about it, then I talked the associate whose name was Rob
Love. He told, I have uncle in a little farming community in Western Illinois
who is looking for some help. It would require a lot of travel but ... there

was a huge reward for the right person to be able to minister and oversee a growing youth ministry.

Rob, arranged for me to meet with his uncle. Pastor Love and I met and talked about what the arrangement might look like. Expectations, schedule, ministry philosophy, ... all of those things just see if a weekend ministry would work with the church and with me. Further to see if it would be God's best for the church and God's best of me.

Well, the talks went well and then, we travelled to a town called Geneseo and Faith Baptist Church. And well the rest is called history.

I could tell you stories of moving to Dallas, moving back, job decisions, family decisions, every area of life of how seeking God has promoted his best!

Friends, if you are not seeking God's best, you're settling for second rate Christianity. This doesn't mean this is without trial or hardship. Seeking God's best is hard work, it's risky, it requires mature faith, but the rewards are life changing! I am here today because I sought the Lord. I believe with my whole heart, this is God's best for me, and I am God's best for you. When I say this I am bragging God doing something unimaginable through his providence.

When Naomi said, Should I not seek, she implies she is going to give it her best shot in light of what God has arranged to find a way to secure Ruth's future.

I wonder if we are too passive when we see God's hand at work. We pray and God answers but we don't follow through with seeking. Yes we are blessed as the Lord provides but **WHAT IF THERE IS MORE?** What if God has more for us? I think often he does! But we must seize the opportunities that present themselves?

I think this is the emphasis of Naomi's actions. She sees a God ordained opportunity, so she takes the initiative to seek Ruth's welfare for the future.

Similarly, Jesus instructions in Matthew 7 demand His followers go beyond a passive "wait and see" attitude, to be an active participant in the works of God.

God uses people as his instruments. When we seek we become those instruments.

God wants active followers of Jesus, not passive followers.

God wants doers, givers, helpers, speakers, encouragers, comforters, givers, and workers!

God wants people who take initiative, HIS initiative out of response for what he has done and is doing.

I don't know what you are going through today, this week, or this month. I do know God wants what is best. God wants you to ask, even more, God wants you to seek his way and will in your life.

We are challenged to be an active participant in our calling as a Christian. Are you seeking God's Best?