

## I

Ruth chapter three chronicles a short but pivotal series of events in the lives of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Though Naomi only appears briefly at the beginning and end of this chapter, her actions will trigger a cascade of events that continue to resonate today...

***“Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?’” (Ruth 3:1).***

Like many initiatives, this matchmaking endeavor arose from several contributing factors. For instance, Ruth had labored to glean what was left from the barley and wheat harvests to ensure that she and her mother-in-law had enough to eat. But the work of harvesting grain only lasted six to eight weeks, and the prospect of finding enough to sustain them throughout the rest of the year was quite remote. So, Naomi apparently realized that a long-term plan was necessary to help ensure their survival.

However, Naomi’s primary motivation stemmed from her desire to secure Ruth’s future. As a widow and resident alien in a foreign land, Ruth would find herself in a highly vulnerable position if Naomi were to pass away. In an age where an average lifespan might only reach fifty years, this was not an unrealistic concern for Naomi and her beloved daughter-in-law. But if Ruth could find the security and protection of a new marital relationship, things would be different.

It’s interesting to note that several Biblical translations (such as the KJV, ASV, and ESV) render this word **“security”** as **“rest.”** This suggests that Naomi’s aspiration for Ruth encompassed more than just a new marital relationship. It also implies that Naomi sought to ease the potential anxieties and uncertainties that a single woman faced in that culture and provide Ruth with the benefit of a husband and family of her own.

That responsibility fell to Naomi, given the fact that dating relationships (as we know them today) did not exist in the Biblical era. Since parents typically arranged spousal relationships for their children during that time, Naomi took it upon herself to make that arrangement on Ruth’s behalf.

## II

So, Naomi formulated a strategy that was designed to address the marital void in Ruth’s life...

***“Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking” (Ruth 3:2-3).***

As mentioned earlier, Boaz was someone who was more than just a member of Naomi’s extended family; he was a **“ga’al”** or **“kinsman-redeemer.”** As such, Boaz possessed the ability to redeem family property, liberate a relative from slavery, or enforce the law upon someone who killed or injured another family member.

However, the role of a kinsman-redeemer carried another obligation. If a man died without a son to continue his lineage, the nearest male relative bore the responsibility to marry the deceased man’s widow and raise an heir in his name. The first son born of their relationship received formal recognition as the rightful heir of the deceased (see [Deuteronomy 25:5](#)).

Nevertheless, there may be more to this account than it seems. For example, Naomi may have had a legal claim to marry Boaz herself. Since Naomi was also a widow (and a member of Boaz’ own family), she might have prevailed upon him to act as her own kinsman-redeemer and obtain the security of a marriage relationship with him.

Even if Naomi felt that she was no longer a [viable candidate](#) for marriage, the prospect of spending the

remaining years of her life together with Boaz must have been appealing. However, Naomi was likely [beyond her childbearing years](#) at this stage of her life. If she chose to invoke a prior claim upon Boaz, it would have meant the end of her late husband's family line.

If that was the case, then it means that Naomi selflessly waived her claim upon Boaz in favor of Ruth and the opportunity to continue her family's lineage.

### III

***“Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do.’ And she said to her, ‘All that you say to me I will do’” (Ruth 3:4-5).***

Although she was a relative stranger to that area, Ruth would have been familiar with the act of winnowing grain. However, she may have been less familiar with the local customs involved in that process. Therefore, Naomi was careful to brief Ruth on where she could find Boaz during that time and advise her of his probable schedule for the evening. Then she commissioned Ruth to undertake a covert assignment: she was to approach Boaz after nightfall, uncover his feet, and await further instructions.

This reference to “uncovering his feet” is subject to some debate among commentators. The simplest way to understand this custom is to view it as a gentle method that would coax Boaz from his slumber. The cool night air would be sure to induce a chill, and as Boaz awoke to reposition his blanket, Ruth would be there to greet him.

A more complicated explanation involves the use of the term “feet” as a metaphor for the male reproductive faculty. At the risk of getting ahead in our narrative, this gesture was understood to signify a marriage proposal in the culture of that era.

Despite any potential misinterpretations, Ruth and Boaz' subsequent behavior will confirm the fact that this symbolic act was devoid of any moral impropriety. As one commentary explains...

*“The full significance of these instructions is not known to us. Commentators have offered many explanations; among them the following are plausible: the exposure of his feet to the cold was to awaken Boaz; her position at his feet was one of humility in preparation to present a petition; or feet is a euphemism for sexual organs.*

*It is best to admit that we do not know the full implications of Ruth's actions. They reflect an ancient custom now lost to us. What is clear is that Boaz understood Ruth to be proposing marriage as a function of his kinsman's role... ” (1)*

(1) Arnold, Bill T. “A. Naomi's Instructions to Ruth (3:1-5)” In *Asbury Bible Commentary*. 353. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1992.

### IV

***“So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her. And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down” (Ruth 3:6-7).***

One aspect of Naomi's directive involved Ruth's appearance: “...***take a bath and put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes***” (Ruth 3:3 NLT). So, just as we might prepare for a potential romantic encounter, Ruth's appearance expressed her openness to the possibility of a relationship with Boaz.

And just as Naomi predicted, Boaz finished his evening meal and went to sleep alongside his harvest. While this may seem to be an unusual sleeping arrangement, we should remember that the end of the harvest represented a cause for rejoicing within that culture. It marked the end of several weeks of grueling work and the beginning of a period where one could find rest and satisfaction in the fruit of his

or her labor.

The Biblical book of Ecclesiastes tells us, ***“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1 KJV)***. For Boaz, it was now time to rest and enjoy the benefit of his effort. To quote another reference from Ecclesiastes, ***“The best thing we can do is eat and drink and enjoy what we have earned. And yet, I realized that even this comes from God” (Ecclesiastes 2:24 GNB)***.

However, Naomi knew of Boaz' likely whereabouts that evening for another reason. Remember that the sequence of events that occur in Ruth chapter three took place during the Biblical age of the Judges. That was a period of moral indifference and a time when ***“...there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25)***.

Thus, if “what seemed right” involved helping yourself to the proceeds of another person's labor, a man like Boaz might have little or nothing left to sell or eat. Therefore, it made good sense for Boaz to stay with his valuable grain until he could transport it to a secure location. That helps explain how and why Ruth found Boaz asleep near his harvest that evening.

V

Ruth's discreet encounter with Boaz under the cloak of darkness served another purpose that is easy to overlook. This strategy also tells us that Naomi and Ruth had no desire to coerce Boaz into doing something he might not wish to do.

If Boaz declined the opportunity to serve as Ruth's kinsman-redeemer, Naomi's plan would permit him to withdraw without external pressure. One source explains what that meant for Boaz...

*“...[Ruth] came in the night so that Boaz would not feel the pressure of public scrutiny. Boaz would have the opportunity to decline the proposal to redeem Naomi and marry Ruth without facing any public embarrassment.” (1)*

Boaz was thus free to choose his response to Ruth. In fact, this plan reflected Naomi's trust in Boaz as a man of character, for she simply told Ruth, ***“He will make it clear what you must do” (Ruth 3:4 GW)***.

So, Ruth did exactly as Naomi said- and it wasn't long before Boaz awoke to discover that he was not alone...

***“Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet” (Ruth 3:8)***.

While Boaz might have been prepared to defend his agricultural production from a potential thief, he was surely unprepared for the appearance of a young woman lying at his feet in the middle of the night. It's likely that Boaz rolled over to adjust his blanket only to find someone else there with him, a discovery that would surely startle anyone.

In his semi-conscious state, Boaz was unaware of who was there with him or what that person's intent might be. But those questions would be answered soon enough.

(1) *When Critics Ask A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, Victor Books, a division of Scripture Press Publications Inc.

VI

***“And he said, 'Who are you?' So she answered, 'I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative'” (Ruth 3:9)***.

Prior to the advent of batteries and electrical power, the only means of illumination available after sunset came through the use of a fiery torch, a flickering candle, or an oil-filled lamp. Unless Boaz had

a small lamp nearby, there was little or no ambient lighting to help him identify the person who was now beside him in the dark of night.

Therefore, it's easy to imagine that Boaz adopted a defensive posture while challenging this potential threat. Fortunately, Boaz received a response that immediately put him at ease: "...***'I am Ruth your maidservant. Spread your wing [of protection] over your maidservant, for you are a next of kin'***" (AMPC).

It's interesting to note that Ruth did not identify herself as "Ruth the Moabitess" in responding to Boaz' challenge, even though [she](#) was [identified that way](#) in the [opening chapters](#) of this book. Instead, Ruth self-identified as a "member of our family." From this, we can infer that Ruth's loyalty to her deceased husband's family surpassed her loyalty to her own native land.

Ruth also responded to Boaz with a phrase he would be quick to recognize: "***Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer***" (ESV). If that sounds familiar, it's likely because Boaz made use of nearly identical language in his initial conversation with Ruth: "***The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge***" (Ruth 2:12).

So just as Boaz utilized the imagery of a bird protecting its young under the sheltering presence of its wings, Ruth now used much the same language in presenting her request to him. Several Biblical translations employ the imagery of a *skirt (KJV)*, *robe (CJB)*, or *cloak (HCSB)*, to symbolize Boaz' position as a protector or redeemer.

If Boaz was willing to assume this role on Ruth's behalf, she would be certain to enjoy the rest and security Naomi sought for her. But how would he respond to that invitation?

## VII

***"Then he said, 'Blessed are you of the LORD, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich'"*** (Ruth 3:10).

It is evident from Boaz' response that he grasped the significance of Ruth's request: she was initiating a marriage proposal under the Old Testament Law. Nevertheless, we might question why Ruth approached Boaz with this proposal instead of the other way around. A closer look at Boaz' response offers a potential answer to that question.

Judging from his response, Boaz likely dismissed the idea of marrying Ruth under the assumption that she would prefer someone closer to her age. However, Boaz' response also demonstrated his appreciation for Ruth's God-honoring character. In saying, "***You have shown more kindness now than before...***" (HCSB), Boaz clearly referenced the loyalty, dedication, and love Ruth had shown toward Naomi.

Nevertheless, Ruth's proposal went far beyond devotion to her widowed mother-in-law. For instance, a marriage relationship with Boaz might lead to the birth of an heir who would carry on the family lineage of Naomi's deceased husband and son. So, instead of seeking a marriage partner from among her peers, Ruth deferred that option for the benefit of everyone.

## VIII

While Ruth 3:10 offers a positive appraisal of Ruth's character, this brief passage provides us with some insight we can use in making good relationship choices today.

As mentioned, Boaz likely assumed that Ruth would seek a younger (and presumably more physically attractive) marriage partner. However, Ruth apparently understood that those qualities alone were not

the most significant factors involved in such a choice.

The New Testament epistle of 1 Peter offers some guidance regarding the characteristics that hold the greatest importance when it comes to making good relationship choices...

***“Don’t be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God” (1 Peter 3:3-4 NLT).***

These verses remind us that genuine attractiveness starts from within. Boaz’ personal appeal was largely attributable to his inner strength of character. That quality drew Naomi’s attention and made him a natural match for Ruth, a woman of like-minded character.

Some other important elements of God-honoring character are found within the Biblical definition of genuine love...

***“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).***

In light of these things, we can say that Ruth followed a standard that God would later establish in the Biblical book that follows Ruth...

***“Don’t judge by a man’s face or height... I don’t make decisions the way you do! Men judge by outward appearance, but I look at a man’s thoughts and intentions” (1 Samuel 16:7 TLB).***

IX

***“And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11).***

A closer look at the language of this passage reveals an interesting aspect to Boaz’ description of Ruth as a ***“worthy woman” (ASV)*** or ***“a woman of noble character” (HCSB)***. Boaz’ characterization of Ruth employs the same word that is used to identify Boaz himself in Ruth 2:1. That portion of Scripture describes Boaz as ***“...a prominent man of noble character from Elimelech’s family” (HCSB)***.<sup>(1)</sup>

Therefore, we might conclude that Ruth and Boaz were ideally suited for one another, for they both displayed the virtuous characteristics of a God-honoring man or woman. In fact, it appears that Boaz was not alone in his appraisal of Ruth’s character, for he went on to say, ***“...everyone in town knows you are a virtuous woman” (NLT)***.

Ruth’s favorable public image also serves to remind us of a Biblical directive from 1 Peter 2:12: ***“...maintain good conduct among the non-Christians, so that though they now malign you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God when he appears” (NET)***.

The Apostle Paul echoed a similar theme in the New Testament book of Ephesians when he wrote, ***“... I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1 NIV)***. These passages remind us that others evaluate our choices and form opinions based on them. If we follow these examples and seek to conduct ourselves in a God-honoring manner, others are bound to take notice and receive the right example to follow.

So Boaz showed no hesitation at the prospect of entering a marriage relationship with Ruth in light of her character. However, there was a problem that might yet derail Naomi’s plan for them.

(1) H2428 - hayil - *Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon (KJV)*. (n.d.). Blue Letter Bible.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2428/kjv/wlc/0-1/> The book of Proverbs is the only other place in the Old Testament to employ this word in a similar context. See [Proverbs 12:4](#) and [Proverbs 31:10](#) where it used to describe the virtuous characteristics of a noble woman.

X

***“Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I” (Ruth 3:12).***

While Boaz welcomed the opportunity to enter a relationship with Ruth, there was one potential problem: ***“...while it’s true that I am one of your family redeemers, there is another man who is more closely related to you than I am” (NLT).***

So now, a previously unknown person enters our narrative. We don’t know how this individual related to Naomi’s family, but Boaz apparently had no doubt about his place in the family lineage. With this in mind, we might ask why Naomi bypassed this family member (along with his prior legal claim) in favor of Boaz.

First, it's possible that Naomi made an honest mistake and simply assumed that Boaz was “first in line” to act as Ruth's kinsman-redeemer. Since Naomi had recently returned home after an extended residence in a foreign country, she may have lost track of all the limbs on the family tree, so to speak. Although it seems unlikely that Naomi could have made such a mistake in a culture that valued family relationships so highly, we can’t discount the possibility that she made an unintentional error.

Another option is that Boaz was Naomi's preferred choice for her daughter-in-law. Thus, she may have been willing to “bend the rules” in order to bring that relationship to fruition, irrespective of a prior legal claim.

Finally, Naomi may have been well aware of the fact that Boaz was not Ruth’s nearest redeemer. However, she wisely instructed Ruth to approach him anyway to force the issue. That would provide Ruth with the marital security Naomi sought for her, either through Boaz or this unnamed relative.

Regardless of Naomi’s motive, these events tell us something important about Boaz. It seems that Boaz refused to entertain the idea of marrying Ruth until he settled this question of legal precedent. As we’ll see, Boaz was willing to walk away from a relationship with Ruth (a relationship he clearly desired) if it meant doing something inappropriate.

In this manner, Boaz clearly lived up to his reputation as ***“a man of outstanding character” (Ruth 2:1 GW).***

XI

***“Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a close relative for you—good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the LORD lives! Lie down until morning” (Ruth 3:13).***

So, Boaz was prepared to abandon the possibility of a relationship with Ruth if it meant doing something legally improper. But if given the opportunity, he was ready to solemnize his commitment to her with the following vow: ***“...if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you” (ESV).***

If Boaz failed to honor that pledge, it would put him in violation of the Bible’s seventh commandment: ***“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).***

In light of these things, it may be difficult to understand why Boaz invited Ruth to ***“Sleep here until morning...”(NET).*** This seemingly indiscriminate choice is easier to understand when we consider the fact that Ruth’s visit put Boaz in a delicate position.

First, Boaz could have immediately dismissed Ruth. However, that would have forced her to travel home alone in the middle of the night. It was dangerous for a young woman to walk alone in the darkness, and Boaz apparently never considered that option for her own safety.

As an alternative, Boaz could have accompanied Ruth back home. While that option might seem preferable, it introduced a host of other issues. For instance, several questions regarding the propriety of their relationship were sure to result if anyone observed them walking alone together in the middle of the night.

Since women of ill-repute were the only ones known to be out after nightfall, such a discovery would cast a negative shadow over both of them. In a relatively small town such as Bethlehem, news of such a discovery was certain to spread throughout the town before day's end.

Given these realities, the best choice involved allowing Ruth to stay where she was, at least until the pre-dawn hours. This would help ensure that Boaz and his potential bride could "***Abstain from every appearance of evil***" (1 Thessalonians 5:22 MKJV).

## XII

***"So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another. Then he said, 'Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor'"*** (Ruth 3:14).

If Ruth's overnight presence at the threshing floor became known, it would surely release a torrent of gossip and rumor. So, Boaz took steps to protect Ruth's reputation by insisting, "***No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor***" (NIV).

Nevertheless, Boaz had a reputation to protect as well. For example, Boaz was known as "...***a prominent man of noble character***" (Ruth 2:1 HCSB) within his community. It also appears that he presented himself as someone who followed God (see [Ruth 2:4](#)).

With this in mind, the decision to keep Ruth's visit quiet served to minimize the potential for idle speculation. It also helped avoid the type of situation that Paul the Apostle described in the New Testament book of Romans...

***"You say it is wrong to commit adultery— do you do it? You say 'Don't pray to idols' and then make money your god instead. You are so proud of knowing God's laws, but you dishonor him by breaking them. No wonder the Scriptures say that the world speaks evil of God because of you"*** (Romans 2:22-24 TLB).

In addition to these things, we should consider the possibility that Boaz had another objective in mind. Remember that Boaz was an affluent business owner- and one rarely achieves such business success unless he or she is a skilled negotiator. Because of this, Boaz may have been working to formulate a strategy that would enable him to overcome the one obstacle that stood in the way of a relationship with Ruth.

Boaz will unveil that strategy in chapter four. But for now, we can say that it would not suit his purpose if it became known that Ruth had visited him. So a decision to leave in the pre-dawn darkness would help keep Ruth safe, protect their reputations, and permit Boaz to engineer a strategy that would enable him to win her as a bride.

## XIII

***"Also he said, 'Bring the shawl that is on you and hold it.' And when she held it, he measured six ephahs of barley, and laid it on her. Then she went into the city"*** (Ruth 3:15).

As was customary in that culture, Ruth's attire included a *veil* (MKJV), *cloak* (GNB), or *cape* (CEV). Although this article of clothing was little more than an accessory, Boaz transformed it into an object

of blessing and provision.

In a manner reminiscent of Jesus' experience with a poor widow who contributed two small coins as an offering ([Mark 12:41-44](#)), this passage reminds us that God can transform insignificant things into instruments of blessing for others. Such was the case with Boaz, as he used this simple article of clothing to provide for Ruth and Naomi's material needs.

However, the degree of Boaz' generosity is open to some debate. The original language of this passage simply tells us that Boaz "**measured six of barley.**" Since the text does not specify an exact unit of measurement, many translations render this quantity as six "measures."

But irrespective of the quantity of grain she received, Boaz was exceptionally generous to Ruth, and Naomi by extension.

XIV

***"When [Ruth] came to her mother-in-law, she said, 'Is that you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her" (Ruth 3:16).***

Anyone who has experienced the suspense involved in waiting for a highly anticipated piece of news can surely appreciate Naomi's response here in Ruth 3:16. In fact, it's easy to envision the various scenarios Naomi may have considered as she awaited her daughter-in-law's return: "*Ruth has now been gone for several hours. Was that a positive or negative sign? Did she remember everything I said? How did Boaz respond? Did he accept or reject her?*"

Naomi's response to Ruth's early morning arrival suggests that she may have been preoccupied with the events that were taking place between Ruth and Boaz that evening. At a hour when many were asleep, Naomi was ready to ask the all-important question: "***How did things turn out for you, my daughter?***" (NET).

However, many commentators do not view Naomi's question as a request for information. Instead, some view her inquiry as a request for *identity*. From this perspective, Naomi was not asking for a report on the events of the previous evening; rather, she was asking if Boaz had accepted her marriage proposal. If that was the case, then Naomi was seeking to determine if she was speaking to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, or Ruth, Boaz' wife.

Translations like the Revised Version support this interpretation by rendering Ruth 3:16 as follows: "***Who art thou, my daughter?***" This was a question that Ruth was pleased to answer in detail, for as this verse goes on to tell us, "***...she told her everything Boaz had done for her***" (NIV).

XV

***"And she said, 'These six ephahs of barley he gave me; for he said to me, 'Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.' Then she said, 'Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day'" (Ruth 3:17-18).***

So, Boaz reinforced his vow to Ruth with something of great value: "***...[Boaz] told me I must not come back to you empty-handed, so he gave me all this barley'***" (GNB).

This gesture tells us that Boaz' interests were not entirely focused upon Ruth and the opportunity to secure a relationship with her. As one commentary observes, "*In addition to being a further gesture of kindness on Boaz's part, the gift of barley served as a token of his intention to fulfill his responsibility as family guardian.*" (1)

For Naomi, this turn of events stands in contrast to the mindset that characterized her return to Bethlehem: "***I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?***" (Ruth 1:21

**ESV**). In this, we are reminded of God's promise from Psalm 84:11: "***No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.***"

So Ruth now joined Naomi in waiting to discover what their future held. However, Naomi's insight into Boaz' character and personality enabled her to reassure Ruth that they would not have to wait long: "***Just be patient and don't worry about what will happen. He won't rest until everything is settled today!***" (**CEV**).

As for Boaz, he will soon demonstrate the type of negotiating skills that enabled him to attain the position of "***...a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem***" (**Ruth 2:1 NLT**).

(1) *Net Bible Notes On Ruth 3:17* <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Ruth+3>