

Our Faithfulness to God in the Daily Routine

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[0 : 00] Let me ask you a question. What is your daily routine? Praying. Praying. All sorts of different things we could think of, aren't there?

Praying. Having our breakfast. Going to work. Time with family. Taking the rubbish out. What does a day in the life of you look like? Take a few moments and imagine that I've given you a piece of paper and a pen.

And imagine that I've asked you to just jot down a few keywords or sentences or pictures that just represent what an average day in the life of you looks like.

Now, there will be as many answers to that question as there are people. Think about it for a few moments. And I'm talking now about the ordinary stuff.

[1 : 08] The mundane stuff. My guess is right now you're thinking of images, or that's what I'm trying to get you to think of images, that might involve being in the kitchen, being in the bathroom, the school run, commuting, finding a parking space, filling up with fuel, ploughing your way through emails, replying to that text, eating a sandwich, shall I have ready salted or cheese and onion with that?

Running in to pick up a pint of milk on the way home, or grabbing a cup of coffee at some point. Replying to that text, what does an average day in the life of you look like?

Now, my guess is, as you ponder that question, behind it all, there will probably be two constant streams. And at times, some of those streams will peak, and sometimes they will go down into a trough.

But there will be times of happiness, and joy, and excitement, and anticipation, all kind of positivity. Blessings, if you like.

But there will also be a line, of what we might call battles. And there will always be those two things going on.

[2 : 46] And sometimes the emphasis will be more on one than the other. But by battles, I mean there will be things that you struggle with. Frustrations, anxieties, worries, big and small. Short, medium, and long term.

Problems, challenges. And they're always there. Life has been described by many different people over the years as a series of solving problems.

You've probably heard that old analogy, which is actually a dead analogy now, but the analogy of painting the fourth bridge. You know, it was always being painted, because you take so long to paint, by the time you get from one end to the other, well, the paint only lasts so long, so you have to go back and start all over again.

And so this went on for years and years. Up until about 15 years ago, they actually discovered then a type of paint that does last longer. And so for the first time in something like 120-something years, they no longer are continually painting this bridge.

But for 120 years, that was the reality. It was always being painted. Because as soon as you get one bit done, there's something else to happen. Now, as I say, it's a dead analogy now, but you get the point.

[4 : 02] As soon as we solve one problem or set of problems, something else pops up. And our daily routine takes place with that backdrop consistently.

Maybe there's something in us, and this perhaps is often the source of our frustration or perhaps even despair, which kind of tells us, well, of course, one day you'll get all this sorted, and win your hand, then you can get on with life.

But it doesn't happen because that's not life. And life for a follower of Jesus is ministry. Every follower of Jesus has a ministry.

And we can think to ourselves, well, if only I can get all that sorted, then I can get on with my serving Jesus and get on with my ministry. But, you know, the thing is, the problems are the ministry.

Whatever you're thinking of right now, when you think of those everyday things that make up your routine, and the problems and the frustrations that are therein, that's your ministry.

[5 : 09] So what might Ruth and her story, or this part of her story, have to tell us about what it might mean to be faithful to God in the midst of all of that stuff.

I just want to suggest two things that come from two passages that we've just heard. Two lines in that passage that we've just heard. The first comes from verse 2, in which Ruth says to Naomi, let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour.

And Naomi says to her, go ahead, my daughter. According to Jewish law, Leviticus 23 to be precise, when you harvested a field, you had to leave behind the scraps.

That was their security system. For those that were poor, marginalised, they could come along and help themselves to those scraps.

It was enshrined in Jewish law. But notice the sense of intention, the sense of expectancy that lies within this conversation here.

[6 : 43] See, this is Ruth, for this moment in her life, this is her daily routine. She's going to go out in the field behind the harvesters, picking up what she can find. Imagine the sense of vulnerability that she has.

She's miles away from home, she's left everything. She's left a place where famine was inherent.

They've had death and loss within their family. And her daily routine is going behind the harvesters, picking up what she can find.

For all of that concern and fear and angst that will be built into her daily routine right now, notice, pay attention to the level of expectation that is in this conversation.

let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour. Go ahead, my daughter. There is this sense in Ruth and indeed in Naomi that God goes ahead of them into that day even though they don't know how it's going to fare.

As it happens, this story has a very happy ending, but they don't know that at this point. but they do have this sense of confidence that God goes ahead of them into this situation.

[8 : 05] And what I want to suggest to us is that whatever our daily routine looks like, this is a pretty good lesson that we can learn from Ruth. Whatever vulnerabilities may be ours, no matter what frustrations or struggles we may be going through, to make that our prayer, Lord, I don't know what's going to happen today, but you do and I'm going to trust that you go ahead of me into this situation.

And if that seems like a naive thing to say, just consider Ruth's situation as she takes precisely that attitude into her daily routine.

God's going ahead of me into this. I don't know what it's going to be, I don't know how it's going to turn out, who I'm going to meet, what conversations will happen, but somehow I'm going to trust that God's going to meet that need.

And I want to suggest that that's the challenge facing all of us as we face our daily routine, whatever it may be, to put God front and centre, knowing that he goes ahead of us, he goes before us this day or this week.

A business studies tutor was lecturing a group of business studies students on time management. They took a bucket and they filled it with rocks and you could just see a few rocks poking up from the top and they said to the students, is this bucket full?

[9 : 37] And they said, well, yeah, you can see it's full. This rock's almost overflowing. They said, well, actually, that's not quite correct. They took another bucket containing pebbles and they poured it into the bucket containing the rocks and as it did so, so they sort of cascaded down through the gaps and filled the gaps in between the rocks.

He said, is the bucket full now? And he said, all right, take your point, yes, it's full now. He said, you're still wrong. At which point, they picked up a sack of sand and poured that into the bucket and so it made its way into the little gaps in between the rocks and the smaller stones, the pebbles.

He said, is the bucket full now? He said, probably not. She said, you're right and she took a jug of water and she poured that into the bucket.

She said, I want you to remember that image whenever you're facing so many competing sets of priorities and claims on your life because there is only one way in which you could get all of those things into that bucket and that is if you start with the large things.

If we'd have done it the other way around or in any other order, it wouldn't have worked. You can only fit all of that into that space when you start with the large rocks and then you go down in size with the smaller things.

[10:59] Now that was a lesson in time management but it's a pretty good lesson when it comes to priorities in the wider sense. The calling of every Christian in every age is the calling to put Jesus front and centre.

Like Ruth, we don't know what's going to happen in our daily routine. We don't know what's going to happen the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year. Ultimately, we have this faith in Christ but for day-to-day living we don't know.

But this lesson we can learn from Ruth is that sense of expectation. We go into this day in her case to walk behind the harvesters and pick up what was left on the floor believing that God somehow has got it in hand.

Which leads us to the second thing. I said there were two things. Which is in the next verse when we read in verse 3 so she went out entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters.

As it turned out she was working in a field belonging to Boaz who was from the clan of Elimelech. Well, the story has a happy ending but at this point we don't know that.

[12:22] Unless, of course, you've read the story but Ruth doesn't know this. Naomi doesn't know it. But there's four words in those in that short sentence there that I want to draw attention to and it's just this.

As it turned out I didn't know what was going to happen but as it turned out she found herself in a field belonging to Boaz who eventually she was going to marry.

She didn't know that at that point. As it turned out you know we go through our lives we're kind of thinking well is this coincidence or is it not? And almost kind of subconsciously we can go into each and every day and face our routine thinking well is this luck?

Is this coincidence? We don't know. Think of that story years ago there was a pilot who successfully safely crash landed a plane and he was being interviewed afterwards and he looked remarkably calm but what perhaps he didn't realise he was saying was actually quite telling as he kind of blurted out this answer as the microphones were put in front of him and said how are you feeling? And he said well by chance I was lucky fate was on my side thank God. As it turned out life can be full of solving problems it can also be full of coincidences it can also be full of coincidences so often people say answers to prayer are coincidences in which God coincidences in which God chooses to remain anonymous can't be verified can't be falsified but living by faith is living under that conviction that God has got it in hand as it turned out as it turns out as we make our way through our daily routine living under that conviction I don't quite know how it's going to turn out but I believe that it will turn out between 1901 and 1920 the Bishop of Durham his name was Handley

[14:38] Mool I think it's pronounced Handley Mool was Bishop of Durham and during his time in that role there was a horrific mining tragedy and he was faced with the task of visiting the families of 170 miners who had died and as Handley Mool sat in his study wondering how on earth he was going to face that challenge he prayed really hard and he picked up a bookmark that his mother had given him years ago it was a hand stitched bookmark and he was looking on the reverse side of this and just seeing that the tapestry there and it was just a mess as it is the reverse side of any piece of tapestry and as he looked at this he just kind of ran his thumb over it and thought to himself yeah that's the mess that's going on right now that's the mess that doesn't seem to show any sense of beauty or reason just chaos

I don't know what to make of it and he turned that around and saw the other side where it was embroidered simply God is love we have ultimate promises of eternity but we're not there yet we have that ultimate promise that as it turns out God's got it in hand but sometimes it doesn't feel like it and our daily experience our daily routine can be just one of staring at that reverse side of the tapestry but our call is to live under that conviction turn it over in eternity and you'll see he's got it all in hand see these God's sense of time is very different to our sense of time because God by definition is eternal but we live in the confines of time and space for God you know one fleeting moment a thousand years is like a fleeting moment to him to us it's not because it's that daily experience of time and space and routine and struggles and wrestling and doubting and pain and

anguish but in

God's time he's got his hand on it he sees the other side of that tapestry in his time our calling is to live by faith under the conviction that it is there it is taking place you know thinking about time we often complain don't we about the speed with which it takes things to get through the post you may have heard that story it was 2021 there was a guy in Crystal Palace in South London that received a letter the thing that was so unusual about it was that it had a George V stamp on it when he opened it up it wasn't addressed to him and he could tell it was very old when he opened up the letter it was a letter that had been posted from Bath from somebody on holiday in 1916 only took 105 years to get there what made me laugh was that the Royal

Mail spokesperson afterwards said incidents like this happen occasionally it got there and we are uncertain as to what happened in this instance thing is all the while throughout those 105 years that letter had been posted it was on its way it was going to get there God's promises can be hard to understand and can be hard to trust in at times our call like Ruth is to trust to trust in him that as it turned out God was working on it in his own time so let's pray together now and as we pray let's revisit those images that I invited you to bring to mind a few minutes ago let's take a moment to be still you might find it helpful to close your eyes because I'm going to invite you to picture in your mind some images that represent a day in the life of you let's just pray through our daily routine right now

Lord thank you that you have been there and that you are there all the time Lord our sense of time is different from yours from your vantage point in eternity Lord help us to trust in you and to be faithful to you in our daily routine first let's just take a few moments just to imagine what we might be doing at eight o'clock tomorrow Holy Spirit would you renew in us that confidence that you are there already preparing whatever we're going to be there when we get to eight o'clock tomorrow may we know your presence with us now I invite you to turn your thoughts to midday or thereabouts tomorrow where you'll be what you'll be doing who you'll be with

[21 : 15] Holy Spirit may we know that you will be there help us to be faithful to you whatever we're going to be up to at that point and now turn your thoughts to about six o'clock early evening tomorrow what you're going to be doing who you're going to be with Lord as we think about tomorrow evening wherever we may be whatever we're going to be up to may we know that you are with us that you go ahead of us Lord as we face our daily routine this day tomorrow and this week and each day help us like Ruth to have that expectancy that you go ahead of us help us like

Ruth to know and to trust and to believe that you've got it all in hand that things will turn out right Lord be with us in the waiting be with us in the praying help us to be faithful to you and to know your faithfulness to us in Jesus name Amen Amen