

Entering a Deeper Relationship With God - Part 1

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[0 : 00] All right, well, good morning, everyone. We're so glad that you're here with us today, and we are still in the book of Ruth. And as we've been looking at the book of Ruth ever since Boaz came into Ruth's life, Naomi has been a different person.

If you remember where we came as we were looking at Ruth and Naomi as they came back from Moab, we're finding that Naomi was a bitter woman, and she was still bitter about what she thought God had done to her by taking her husband, by taking her two sons, and still bitter as she gets back into Bethlehem where the ladies are asking about, is that Naomi? And she says, don't call me Naomi, call me Mara. Don't call me by my given name, which means sweet or which means blessed.

And she's saying, call me Mara, which means bitter. But we see when Ruth meets Boaz, Boaz begins to show kindness to Ruth. Her concern, Naomi's concern, is no longer for herself and for grief, but for Ruth and what she believes God is going to be doing through her daughter-in-law and also about her future.

And we know that when we serve others, when we begin to take an interest in doing something to help an other person's life, often we ourselves get the greatest satisfaction and we receive the greatest joy from doing that.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German minister who was martyred for his faith, said this, he called Jesus Christ the man for others.

[1 : 46] And I believe that title is appropriate because Jesus, everything that he did was not for himself, but was for us. And he followed the Father and he was obedient to his Father while he was on planet Earth.

And everything he did was for us. We're told in Philippians chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, that we're to be humble, not thinking of ourselves better than others.

Don't just think about our own affairs, but be interested in others too and in what they're doing. And so that is what we're told to do as believers today.

Now, when the two widows came from Boab, their plan was to eke out a living and simply take care of themselves and hopefully find enough to eat.

But now Naomi's got a new plan and she knows that this plan involves Boaz and what Boaz was going to do as, and last week we heard, week before last, we heard the term kinsman redeemer, one who would be able to, under the Levite law, the Levitical law, be able to act as a redeemer, to be able to redeem persons, to be able to redeem property, and to be able to carry on the name of Naomi's deceased husband.

[3 : 12] And so that was her new plan. Ruth would ultimately marry Boaz and all of them could live happily ever after.

Naomi could tell from Ruth's report that Boaz would be in favor of the plan because of the way that he has been treating her. And so Naomi begins to set some things in motion.

And it was not really all that much out of order because in that day it was parents that took care of the wedding plans. As a matter of fact, very often it was the parents who took care of who they were going to marry.

And so they would arrange marriages. So Naomi wasn't so out of place in what she's doing. Now, we have to keep in mind as we go through the book of Ruth, The book of Ruth is not simply about... It's much more than the marriage between a foreigner, rejected alien, and a respected Jew. It's much more than a story about a widow and her mother-in-law and getting married to Boaz.

[4 : 24] It's so much more than that. As a matter of fact, it's also a picture of Christ's relationship to those who trust in him and to those who belong to him.

And so all throughout the book of Ruth, we see the picture of the way God works, the way the Lord Jesus Christ treats those who trust in him and those who belong to him.

And in the steps that Ruth takes here in this chapter, what we're going to see are similar steps, I believe, that we can take to grow in our relationship or to grow into a deeper relationship with our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And like Ruth, according to chapter 2, verse 2, we shouldn't be satisfied with just the leftovers in our relationship with God. We need to want him alone and not just what he can provide for us.

Because when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, he provided for us that for which we could never provide for ourselves.

[5 : 32] Because when we seek him, we also have all that he owns. And we know that our Lord and Savior owns everything. It's not the gifts that we seek, like the song says, but it's the giver of those gifts that we seek.

So in today's text, we're going to see that Ruth makes some preparations to meet Boaz. She is getting prepared to go back and to meet with him.

Now, there were other men who would have gladly married Ruth. We see that in verse number 10 of chapter number 3. And so we know that there were others that would have been willing to take Ruth in and to care for her, but they wouldn't have been able to do what Boaz was able to do as a kinsman redeemer and carry on the family name and to be able to redeem everything.

Only a kinsman could do that. And Boaz was that kinsman. And since Naomi knew that Boaz would be on the threshing floor that night, she goes to Ruth and says, Honey, this is what you need to do. And this is how you need to prepare yourself. And this is what you need to do when you go and you meet Boaz. That was kind of an accepted way of requesting this relationship with the kinsman redeemer.

[6 : 59] And so since she knew that night that he was going to be there, she started making plans. She instructs Ruth to prepare herself to meet him. So Ruth had this five-fold preparation plan to go out and to meet Boaz.

So let's take a look at her plan. And we see in Ruth chapter 3, verses 1 through 5, Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her.

So Naomi's got the plan. She says, My daughter, shall I not seek security for you? So in Naomi's mind, she's already got this kinsman redeemer plan going.

Shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.

Now I am sure the talk around town was all about Boaz and Ruth. And so when Naomi is out and about, because when we first saw Naomi in the book, she had shut herself in.

[8 : 08] She was, oh, woe is me and all bitter. Now she's seeing God being at work in her life. And now we saw last week that she was blessing God for what he was doing.

And blessing Boaz for taking an interest in her daughter-in-law. And so she's probably going out to the marketplace. She's out around town and you know she's hearing what's going on.

There's always going to be these busybodies who know everything, right? And so Naomi is hearing what Boaz's plans are. And so this is what she instructs her to do.

He is, in fact, he is going to be winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Therefore, here we go. Here's the plan that's beginning to unfold.

Therefore, wash yourself and anoint yourself. Put on your best garment. Go down to the threshing floor. But do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

[9 : 06] 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 to do.

And she said to her, all that you say to me, I will do. Now, since this book really is about the picture of Christ's relationship to those who trust him, let's take a look at the steps that Ruth takes that I believe we also need to take in order to grow into that deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

So what did she do first? The first thing that we see Ruth do is Ruth washed herself. Ruth washes herself.

First part of verse number three. Therefore, wash yourself. Now, in the East, during this time, especially with the conveyances, walking and the way they moved from place to place, there was a lot of dust.

And the heat getting sweaty and dusty made for a terrible combination. And also water was difficult to find very, very often.

[10:22] But there was one thing that was necessary for an Israelite. That was when time came to wash ceremonially, to be ceremonially clean, to wash before any major event, any major feast.

And so what we're seeing is with regard to the Jews, the law of Moses required ceremonial washings and taking a bath and changing clothes always preceded a special event.

So I think that's what we're seeing here. Part of it was to make herself presentable. But I think part of it was Naomi knew that something special was going to happen and that there was going to be a transaction that took place.

Actually, Naomi was telling Ruth to act like a bride preparing herself for the bridegroom. So we see her washing herself. And I think if we look at our own relationship with Jesus Christ, if we want to enter into a deeper relationship with our Lord, we must also, as Scripture says, 2 Corinthians 7, 1, Now, we know when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He provided forgiveness.

Now, that has taken care of our relationship. But when it comes to our fellowship, we're told that we need to wash ourselves. We need to prepare ourselves.

[11:51] We need to rid our lives of those things that are stinky and those things that would not be pleasing to God. And so we're told to, Jesus Christ took care of the hard part.

We've got the part of being presentable to Him since He has taken care of our sin problems. So when we seek forgiveness, God washes the record clean.

We know that's what He does. But only we can put out of our lives those things that defile us. And we know what they are. Just as Ruth washes herself, we can take a look into our own lives.

Maybe we need to clean our bookshelves. I'm not talking about dust. Maybe it might be our CD collection, our DVDs, whatever. Maybe there are things in our life that, if we take a closer look at, that do not please God.

And so we must separate ourselves from whatever defiles us and whatever grieves the Heavenly Father. 2 Corinthians 6 talks about that. James 4, verses 7 and verse number 8.

[12:57] The Old Testament, what would happen if an Old Testament priest defiled himself and then went into the Holy of Holies? Death.

So death would be the result. So it was important to God. And I believe it's as important for us and for the Jewish people especially that they prepare themselves and wash themselves before they came into God's presence to worship.

The Jewish people were conscious of the need for holiness as they came to worship Him. We see that in Psalm 15. We see that in Psalm 24, verses 1 through 6, the need for washing, the need for preparation.

But yet, how often we as New Testament Christians rush into worship or rush into God's presence through prayer, wherever it is, and not concern ourselves with cleansing ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh, from anything that is unrighteous in our lives.

And I believe it robs us of blessing. It robs us of God's blessing. Rather than saying, God bless me, I believe we need to begin with thinking about, God, help me to be blessable.

[14:20] Help me to be blessable. And then we can trust God to bless us in different areas of our life. Is it any wonder that worship often tends to be an empty routine?

Because we go through motions, but we're not heart prepared. We're not prepared in our hearts to meet with Him, to worship Him. And we're looking for the gifts and not necessarily for the giver.

So let's, first of all, make ourselves clean for the Savior. And that's what we see in Ruth's preparation of washing herself. Part of that process, 1 John 1, 9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So we know that part of the preparation is confessing any known sin in our lives, cleansing ourselves, removing from ourselves, casting off like an old garment, those things which would weigh us down.

So that's the first thing we see is she washed herself. The next thing Ruth did to prepare was to anoint herself. Ruth anointed herself.

[15:28] We see that in the second portion of verse number 3. Therefore, wash yourself and anoint yourself. Now, Eastern peoples used fragrant oils not only to protect their sin, not only protect their bodies, protect their skin, but also for healing and also to be pleasant to others.

And it was especially important, especially with where she was going and what she was going to be involved in. And a bride would pay particular attention to care or to wear fragrant perfume that would at least make her nice to be near.

Because remember, we're talking about the Middle East at this time. A lot of sweat, a lot of dirt, a lot of dust. And so baths were few and far between.

But when they did, they put on these fragrant oils, these perfumes, in order that they would at least be a little nicer to be near. We see that in the Song of Solomon 1, 3, 12 through 14.

All these verses talk about putting on the fragrant perfumes. But anointing oil also stands, also is symbolic of something else, of the Holy Spirit, where the Holy Spirit anoints us with power and with ability.

[16:54] So anointing oil also speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of believers. Now, all believers have received God's Holy Spirit.

Once we've trusted Christ as our Savior, we have been given the Holy Spirit. We've been baptized into the body of Christ through God's Holy Spirit. We also have the presence of the Holy Spirit, which teaches us, which convicts us, and which helps us to go through our life and gives us the power to live a life that's holy and pleasing to God.

So therefore, we ought to be a fragrance, a sweet-smelling fragrance before God, but also before others. Now, the more that we are like Jesus in character and conduct, the more that we will, in effect, smell better and nicer to be near, if you think about it.

So as we anoint ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in our lives, we're going to be more pleasant to be around, and we're going to be more Christ-like.

Dr. A.W. Tozer once said, If God were to take the Holy Spirit out of this world, much of what the church is doing would go right on, and nobody would know the difference.

[18:17] We have so much in the way of human resources that are available to the church today that we can manage to, quote, serve the Lord without anything changing.

Because we have a lot of resources in the way of music, the way of sound, the way of Internet, and everything that we have, and we have intellect, and we have innate abilities, that it's often that we can literally go through the motion and appear to serve the Lord without the unction of the Holy Spirit.

Because what Tozer said, we could take the Holy Spirit away, and much of what goes on in the church today would be unnoticeable without the Holy Spirit.

Because we tend to do it in our own strength, rather than, before we do anything, to say, God, I can't. But You can. In order for us to accomplish Your will, we need Your strength, we need Your power, and we empty ourselves of ourselves, and we're trusting You to fill us with Your Holy Spirit, and provide the power and the unction to accomplish Your will in our lives.

Now, while on earth, Jesus Christ obeyed His heavenly Father. Jesus lived His life and work through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

[19:52] We see that in Luke chapter 4, verses 16 through 19. Because the Trinity worked together. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

And if the sinless, spotless Son of God, Jesus Christ, needed the Holy Spirit's power while He was on planet Earth, how much more do we need the Spirit's power to work in our lives?

Now, do we witness to others without asking for God's help? Do we... It's important that everything we do, do we teach a Sunday school class and say, I got this covered?

Or do we stop and say, God, I need You to speak through me. I need You to touch the lives of those that are in this class. Before we do anything, do we ask, God, would You empower me to accomplish Your will today?

So, we need God's Holy Spirit to empower us to accomplish His will. So, Ruth anointed herself. If we are to grow into that deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, it's a matter of trusting God's Holy Spirit to anoint us with His power and with the ability to please our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[21:13] So, we cleanse our... We rid ourselves of any known sin by cleansing ourselves. We trust God's Holy Spirit's power to make us presentable to Him.

And then, thirdly, Ruth's act of preparation was she changed clothes. She changed her clothes. Therefore, wash yourself, anoint yourself, and put on your best garment. She was to put off the garments of a sorrowing widow and dress for a wedding.

She was to be preparing herself to meet Boaz. Now, Ruth probably didn't have a large wardrobe. Not like our wardrobes where we go into a closet and we see 30 changes of clothes and not a thing to wear.

But she found whatever she had that was the most presentable clothes that she had and she puts that on. So, she probably had at least one special garment for special occasions.

[22 : 17] So, this is what she puts on. And Naomi had the faith to believe that Ruth would soon be going to a wedding. And that's the faith that she has. Now, in Scripture, what does clothes represent?

Clothes also have a spiritual meaning in Scripture. What about the Garden of Eden? Remember that? After they sinned, what did they look for?

They looked for clothes. And clothing was in the form of a fig leaf, of fig leaves in the Garden of Eden. Our first parents tried to cover themselves after they sinned.

But who was the only one able to truly clothe them? God was. By providing the sacrifice. And through this blood sacrifice, God provided the skins for them to wear.

And so, clothing, even all the way back to the Garden of Eden, was significant. You see, what did it symbolize when Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves the best they could?

[23 : 19] Man's trying to be presentable to God in man's own ability. But God provided what only He could provide at that time. And so, clothing is something important that has a spiritual meaning in Scripture.

The Jewish priest wore special garments that nobody else was permitted to wear. Clothing had a special place and it had a special significance. salvation in the New Testament is pictured as taking off the grave clothes, taking off the smelly, rotting grave clothes and putting on brand new clothing. That's a picture of what happens when we trust Christ as our Savior. Our sins are forgiven and we have new life in Christ and we have new garment to wear, spiritually speaking.

putting off the old life and putting on the new person. We can't come into God's presence with our own righteousness because all, the Bible says, all of our righteousnesses, all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags and it's reprehensible to God.

We can only come in the righteousness and even the Bible talks about being clothed in His righteousness. So in order to come into a relationship with Christ, we need to be willing to put off our old garments and to be willing to clothe ourselves or allow ourselves to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

[24 : 54] And that's how we are accepted in the Beloved. Now, if we are obedient, obedient to Him and we seek to please Him and to be part of His will, we will confess our sin, seek His cleansing, and if we want to enter into a deeper relationship with our Lord, then as Ecclesiastes 9.8 says, let your garments always be white and let your head lack no oil in preparation for Him.

So, but that's not all Ruth did. She didn't just wash herself, she didn't just anoint herself, and she didn't just change her clothes. She also prepared to meet Boaz by learning how to present herself to Him.

There was a proper way to present oneself to a potential kinsman redeemer. There was a proper way for Ruth to present herself to Boaz.

And Naomi was well-schooled in this process, being a Jewish woman, being someone who knew the customs of that time.

So let's take a look, verse number 3 again, therefore wash yourself, anoint yourself, put on your best garment, and then she tells her what to do. Go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

[26 : 19] 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 to do.

Now, there was nothing improper about this procedure. We might think, well, that was a little forward of Ruth. Well, it was the only way that Ruth could offer herself to the kinsman redeemer.

She had to put herself at the feet of the Lord of the harvest, and he would do the rest. So suppose that on her way to the threshing floor, Ruth decided to take a different approach.

Well, you know what? That doesn't make sense to me, and so I'm going to do it the way that I think is best. You know, why lie at the feet of the man that you want to marry?

Why uncover his feet and ask him to put a corner of his blanket or a corner of his mantle over me? What if she had used another approach? I think Boaz would have been confused.

[27 : 20] That's not normal. That's not the way we do things around here. What did she have to do? She had to learn the customs. She had to learn what was proper. She had to learn what was expected.

The entire enterprise might have failed. The Old Testament priests knew exactly how to enter into the presence of God. What did God do? God gave them a prescription. He gave them a list. If you want to come into my presence, this is how I expect you to do it. But what is mankind? What is our attitude? Well, whatever feels good.

Well, I don't know that I agree with all that stuff the Bible says, but I'll just go worship God in the forest. I'll just go worship God on the lake.

And you know what? It doesn't matter. Well, God said, if you want to worship me, worship me, come to me in spirit and in truth. He says, don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together.

[28 : 22] He says, if we come to him, we must humble ourselves. He says, we must wash ourselves or we must make ourselves clean. If you want to come to him, we, and so there's this list of things God says, this is what's pleasing to me.

And so just as Ruth had to learn what was pleasing and what was proper, we need to prepare ourselves and do things God's way if we want to enter into that deeper relationship with him.

We know how to approach God because he has explained it to us in scripture, whether it's in our private communication or whether it's in our public worship. We have no, we have no right to alter the principles that God has given us.

The principles are clearly stated in God's word. Just like the prodigal son, we can come to the father just like we are. The prodigal son didn't have to come home and wash himself and be clean and be prepared before the father accepted him.

No, how did the father accept, how did the father accept his son wearing the same clothes he had probably been feeding pigs with down the road before he ever got to the front door?

[29 : 36] So that's how he accepted him and that's how God accepts us, just the way they are. But he didn't expect him to stay that way. Go take a bath. Here's a nice change of clothes for you to wear.

So, when we assemble for worship, we must be careful to worship him in spirit and in truth like we're told in John 4, verse 24. Follow him. The principles we've been given in scripture.

And when we worship him, we don't do that which is right in our own eyes. We do things according to his plan. So, that's what Ruth did. Ruth learned how to present herself to him.

And that's what we do when we study scripture. We learn what pleases God. And we're not left to our own devices. We learn what's pleasing to him.

We learn how to approach him. We learn how to accomplish things in his power. So, you want to enter into a deeper relationship with God?

[30 : 36] How do we enter into a deeper relationship with another person? Find out what they like. You know, there's a lot of talk about the five love languages.

We were talking about that, I think, it was Wednesday evening. Well, there are certain things that really excite you that don't excite someone else.

There are things that really get or that make me feel loved or make me feel appreciated that to you might be, eh, that's no big deal.

So, it's important that we learn what or how we each operate if we want to grow into a deeper relationship.

It's the same with God. How do we want to grow into a relationship with God? Find out what pleases him. Rather than, well, you know what, this is what I feel like doing, knowing that that's not what pleases God.

[31 : 36] So, therefore, if we want to enter into that deeper relationship, find out what pleases him. And then, finally, Ruth promised to obey.

You see that in verse number five. And all that Naomi said to Ruth, Ruth's response was, all that you say to me, I am going to do.

I will obey. She was not only a hearer of the word, but she was also a doer. A willingness to obey God, I believe, is a secret to a deeper relationship with him.

After we've prepared ourselves, after we've learned what pleases him, after we learn what's the correct way to approach him, at the end of the day, it's, are we going to obey or not?

Are we going to come with a willful spirit or are we going to come humbly before him and show that we care and love him by obeying him?

[32 : 43] I think it's a secret of knowing what he wants us to do and being blessed when we do it. John 7, 17, if anyone is willing to do God's will, he shall know or he needs to know concerning what the teaching of God is.

So we need to understand and we need to know. You see, the will of God is not like a cafeteria. We go and we pick what we like, leave what we don't like. It's all or nothing.

God says, this is what pleases me, this is how we're supposed to live, this is what we're supposed to do, and we're simply to obey the will of God. It's not well, explain it to me, God.

No, God said it, and as the bumper sticker says, that settles it. God said it, that settles it.

Very often we come to God with a hidden agenda. We come to please ourselves, or we come to God because we believe that if we go to him, he'll give us what we want.

[33 : 50] or maybe it's a maybe it's a foxhole agreement. God, if you do this, then I'll do this for you. That's our agenda.

We wanted to get something, so that's why we do something for him. That will only lead to confusion, and that will only lead to grieving God's Holy Spirit. So as we wind this down, in conclusion, let's cleanse our lives of anything that doesn't belong and anything that's not pleasing to our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Secondly, let's allow God's Holy Spirit to empower everything that we do. Let's not be like the quote, if God doesn't show up, then it won't work.

Let's trust Him that if He doesn't empower us, there's no way that we can accomplish His will in our lives. So trust Him. Thirdly, let's learn how to please God.

And that comes from learning His Word, spending time in His Word. And then lastly, determine to obey God completely. God, help me, give me the power to obey Your Word, to obey Your will.

[35 : 11] If we want to grow into a deeper relationship with Him, we'll look at these things that Ruth did to prepare herself to meet Boaz. And I believe this is a beautiful picture of the relationship of Christ, those who will come to Him, those who will trust Him, and those that are His.

The Bible talks quite a bit about the relationship being like a bridegroom to a bride. Revelation talking about that. New Testament talking about our preparing ourself like a husband loves a wife, like a bride preparing herself for the bridegroom.

So let's prepare ourselves to grow into that deeper relationship with Him. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank You that You've given us the plan.

Father, we thank You that You've given us the picture of what it takes to truly be pleasing in Your sight. We thank You for being who You are. We thank You for loving us.

We thank You for always being there for us. Be with us this morning, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.