The Road
To
HOPE
STUDIES IN RUTH
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This book is dedicated to my beautiful wife Michelle.
The story of Ruth, a foreigner, coming to a strange land and finding her husband in an unusual way is especially relevant to us.
Ich Liebe Dich!
Chapter 1
Hope Forsaken — Ruth 1

Chapter 2
Hope Renewed — Ruth 2

Chapter 3
Hope Pursued — Ruth 3

Chapter 4
Hope Fulfilled — Ruth 4
When I was about 11 or 12, I fell in love with the book of Ruth. Perhaps, because it was short and easy to understand. Perhaps, because of its beautiful message. I took it upon myself to virtually memorize the book, and it has always stuck with me. I would like to ask you to make this book a part of your life. Make its message a source of inspiration to you. Read the book with your family. Share it with friends. It will only take about 20-25 minutes. I think a year from now, and years from now, you will look back upon the study of this extraordinary little book of the Bible as a special time in your life and spiritual journey. Let’s walk the road to hope.

Generally, when approaching a book of the Bible it is important to first examine the author of the book. This is not possible with Ruth. The book’s author is unknown. It is named after one of the key people within the story. The time of the book is the period of the judges (c. 1400-1100 BC). The time of the writing however, is apparently some time later than that, based on the completed genealogy at the end of chapter 4, and the explanation of some traditional legal
practices that would no longer be understood by the contemporary reader.

Some have suggested the story is just that, a story—make believe. Creative writing, not inspired writing. However, all Scripture is God-breathed and therefore true. The book itself is introduced as most other biblical narratives are introduced, “And it came to pass…” The author is telling us this is a true story. Other Scripture will bear this out in the end.

The book is also different from many others in Scripture because there are no didactic lessons—no direct teaching. God never speaks verbally in the book, and yet his hand of control and providence is seen miraculously and wonderfully throughout. That is why the book is part of the canon of Scripture. It teaches us to see God at work, even when it might seem, from our perspective, He is being silent. This fact will become increasingly obvious as we read through the book.

The message of the book of Ruth stands in contrast to the frivolities of the day. The period of the judges has been and can be summarized with the statement from Judges 21:25. It is the very verse that precedes the beginning of Ruth.

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

In contrast the book of Ruth provides a view of people who acted responsibly, rather than permissively, and with faith in God’s sovereign, superintending control. As you read on, notice this contrast. Ruth 1:

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his
wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. 3 Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. 6 When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. 8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. 9 May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.” Then she kissed them and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me -- even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons - - 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!”

14 At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to her. 15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” 16 But Ruth replied, “Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I
will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.”  

18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”  

20 “Don't call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

The truth of the book for all ages might be stated as follows: The Lord is faithful in His business of loving, superintending, and providentially caring for His people. God’s people should also be about His business in the ordinary activities of daily living. Since God’s people are recipients of His grace, they, like Ruth and Boaz, should respond in faithful obedience to Him and in gracious acts towards other people.

During a period of great irresponsibility in Israel’s history, the book of Ruth was a clear call to responsible living. Clearly this message is needed today as well. The book also answers many challenging questions we have, such as:

• Where is God in tragedy?
• Where is God, when we have no hope?
• How does God help me, when trying to be a person of integrity?
It also answers doubts we have, such as, “I can’t imagine anything great could ever come out of my life of faith.”

Let’s begin our look at Ruth to see these issues addressed and see these contrasts.

Let’s examine this passage through the eyes of the three women mentioned.

**Naomi**

The book introduces us to Naomi’s husband in the first two verses. The reader might think right away that this book is going to be about this man Elimelech. But then, something astounding happens. Verse 3. Elimelech dies. Whoa! It is like killing off Tom Cruise in the first scene of a movie. That just doesn’t happen. What could this story ever be about?

Verse 4 introduces us to one possible solution. The two sons marry. They and their wives will take care of Naomi. But then verse 5 erases that possibility, because both of the sons die as well. We are left with a widow, all alone in a strange country. But wait, there still might be a glimmer of hope, she has two daughters-in-law.

Naomi hears God has once again blessed her people in Israel and decides to return. God has sent the famine, and God has sent the prosperity of the harvest. The Lord is in control of these things.

Her two daughters-in-law come with her as she leaves, but Naomi realizes there will be no life for them in Israel. She can’t have any more sons for them to marry. They will be in a strange land where they won’t be readily accepted. It is not to their advantage to leave their own people.
The women protest however, and say they want to stay with their mother-in-law. They had known her for a long time, and they knew it would be hard and sad to let her continue on her own. Naomi, in essence, said to them, “Why would you want to hang around an old woman like me who is a jinx. Yahweh himself has caused me to suffer.” She saw her lot in life as being one where God was cursing her. Ah, but this is far from the case as we shall see.

For Naomi though, her life is a curse and she has become bitter. She even tells the city when she returns that her name is no longer Naomi (which means “pleasant”), but is now Mara (which means “bitter”). Talk about wearing your heart on your sleeve. Naomi appears hopeless. In that hopelessness she exaggerates her situation. Look back to verse 21. She says she went away full, but has returned empty. Who is right beside her?

Do you ever feel like Naomi? Have you ever felt like God is cursing you or that you are a jinx? Have you ever been depressed, discouraged, or hopeless? In that, have you ever exaggerated the hopelessness of your situation? Can you relate to Naomi?

Orpah

Next, there is the perspective of Orpah. Not Oprah—she is a talk show host. And not Orca—that is a killer whale. And not Okra—that is a vegetable that you fry up and eat in Louisiana. This is Orpah.

Orpah began to follow her mother-in-law and sister-in-law out of Moab to Israel, but was struck by the truthfulness of Naomi’s statements. She probably
thought to herself, “That’s right; there wouldn’t ever be another son to marry. That’s right; I would have to leave my people and my family and give up my gods. My life wouldn’t have much hope of being successful if I kept going. I better just return home where I will be safe.”

Consider Orpah’s actions. She seemed to want to do the right thing initially, and yet her desire for a future and comfort and security led her back home. She failed to recognize that Yahweh could use this situation for her benefit. She sought comfort and status quo over change and trial. Naomi’s negativity had affected her. We never hear from Orpah again.

How are we sometimes like Orpah? We have good intentions, but never carry through with them. We say we love people, but our actions show that love to only be on one level, because we love our own comfort more. We are only loyal when it is for politeness sake and not because we really are loyal in our hearts. We really care more about ourselves than others when it comes right down to it. We fail to see what God might have in store for us if we trusted in His sovereignty and providence. Can you relate to Orpah?

How about with regards to your spiritual growth? Are you patient enough and loyal enough and trusting in God enough to see Him bring it about? Or, do you lose confidence and cut and run when it looks like things will be tough?

Ruth

Finally we come to the title character. And “character” is a good word to describe Ruth, because
she is loaded with REAL character. Remember, character matters.

Unlike Orpah, Ruth is undeterred in her devotion to Naomi. Her loyalty is true. Her love is deep. These two qualities aren’t affected by the circumstances. Ruth is unconditional in her devotion to her mother-in-law. She confesses this with great and beautiful poetic words in this familiar passage of verses 16-17. Ruth says, in effect, “I believe in your God—Yahweh, and I will trust Him.” This is amazing considering the picture she has of Him. Think about it. Naomi has said that God has been and is cursing her. God has sent famine in the past to her people. God has been responsible for all these trials and sufferings and is the source of her bitterness. “Hey! Sign me up! I want a part of that!” Isn’t it amazing? Ruth says, “Your God will be my God.” What an incredible step of faith, directed from heaven. For, no person unmotivated by God, would ever respond the way Ruth did. God is working out His plan!

Ruth gave up her family and her country and its gods and virtually everything to go to a foreign country where there didn’t seem to be any real hope. It took courage and loyalty and love and commitment and a freedom from personal desires.
Can you relate to Ruth? Why or why not? Think about that for a moment. Which woman best represents the story of your life so far? Be honest with yourself. The challenge is to be more like Ruth. If we were all like Ruth, imagine what kind of influence we could have in the world. Do you have the optimism of Ruth, or the pessimism of Naomi? Guess what? God works and teaches.

The book of Ruth depicts four major truths about God and His plan. We will see them even more fully developed as this wonderful story unfolds, but let’s lay out these truths up front, so we can see them at work in each chapter.

1. God reigns: In nature and in people. His providence is at work always—the people of the day never doubted God’s involvement. Nothing can be properly understood about God outside of this God-centered perspective.

2. God’s providence is hard sometimes. Our lives don’t always take the course we would like them to take. But God is at work even in those times. God’s actions sometimes bring about pain, but always with a purpose—His purpose. As Job said, “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” We must never think God can’t work in our life because of our past sins. We can’t think past sins or mistakes
preclude God from working great things in and through our lives. Watch how this happens in this book!

3. No matter how hard things are (or seem), God is moving for His glory. Everything God purposes and does, is for His greater glory. Albeit hard to understand at times, it is still the case.

4. We will discover hope and courage and confidence as we are faithful to God and understand these first three truths. God will be glorified in us.

This is a book of hope. It is meant as an encouragement and exhortation to us as individuals. Let it speak to you in a mighty way for His glory.
The first question people usually ask of my wife and me is, “How did you meet?” Michelle is from Germany and I am from Arizona. We were separated by about 6000 miles, an ocean and age. How did that work?

A young German man, whose girlfriend was planning an exchange year in the U.S., was looking online for a church that might be able to provide a good host family. His search led him to a web site for a church called Cornerstone in Tempe, Arizona. And in fact after contacting the pastor of this church, a host family was found and the exchange year began. After the first semester, the young woman moved in with another host family from the church. After several months at this home, she invited a girlfriend from Germany to come and visit her. Her friend, Michelle, thought this was a great idea and arranged for the visit. And so she came and stayed in the host family’s house at 1420 South College Avenue in Tempe, Arizona.

My address at the time: 1419 South College Avenue, Tempe, Arizona.

That is the short version of the story. Oh and by the way, the web site for Cornerstone church that
started it all…was designed by me a few months earlier. The rest, as they say, is history.

Have you ever had a coincidental meeting like that? If you have, it is important that your worldview changes before we enter our next chapter. Once it has been changed, I would suggest never going back.

Coincidence? I don’t think so. Webster defines a coincidence as “The occurrence of events that happen at the same time by accident but seem to have some connection.” Do you know how many times the word coincidence (or any word like it) is used in the Bible? Zero. Zip. Nada. Not one event in all of Scripture is ever spoken of as having been coincidental. This adjective is never on the mind of any author or speaker in all of Scripture. Things don’t happen “by accident.” Events are never coincidental. Never. Never. Never.

Do you believe that? If you don’t, Scripture isn’t going to mean what it should to you. Period. You won’t understand the purpose for God’s revelation to us, if you believe in coincidence—events happening by accident or without a purposeful Sovereign God behind them.

Proverbs 16:9 says, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.” Michelle and I had our little plans to go here and there and do this and that, but it was the Lord who directed and determined the times and places where we would be so that we would meet. As we reflect on our meeting, we are always amazed at what the Lord had done. Because as Proverbs 16:4 says, “The LORD works out everything for his own end.” Coincidence? No such thing. Not in Scripture. And there shouldn’t be in the mind of any Christian. Do we want to see and
understand what the book of Ruth is teaching? We must then begin to think in accordance with God’s reality.

Before we begin Ruth chapter 2, let’s recap the story so far.

We saw in chapter 1 how a man named Elimelech and his family left their home in Bethlehem to go to Moab because of a famine. Elimelech and his two sons die while in Moab, and the widow Naomi is left all alone with her two daughters-in-law.

Did you notice in chapter 1, the motivational factors at work in the minds of the people? Why did Elimelech and Naomi leave their home to go to Moab? They were experiencing a famine. They were seeking more food and a better life. What did they leave? They left the “Promised Land,” didn’t they? God had promised it to His people and it was theirs. But that wasn’t good enough for Elimelech and Naomi. And so they left seeking comfort.

Why did Naomi decide to return to her home? She had heard they had food again. Now I have heard of being controlled by your stomach, but… Her life in Moab had become hard, and so she sought more comfort and left for her homeland. Always looking for greener pastures. What about Orpah? She too eventually returned to Moab because she realized her life in Judah with Naomi would not be easy and she preferred her own comfort over her loyalty to her

HER NEGATIVITY WAS BLOCKING HER ABILITY TO SEE GOD’S WORK.
mother-in-law. None of these people seemed willing to rest in the arms of God’s control and providence. They were all seeking something better. They were impatient with their circumstances. God was dealing harshly with them, and they tried to get away.

But then there is the title character. Ruth. She stood out as an amazing person in the midst of all of this tragedy and suffering and selfishness. Ruth gave up everything to stay with her mother-in-law. She intentionally went into a more difficult situation. She left comfort. She gave up family and friends, with no assurances of a future. We said, “Who would do that?” No one, unless God was at work in their heart.

But Naomi couldn’t see this. Her negativity was blocking her ability to see God’s work, His sovereignty, and His gracious providence. Looking back, has that ever happened to you? Has your negative spirit ever blocked your vision of these? Maybe it is even happening right now. Are you failing to see God at work in your life? Are you failing to recognize His sovereign hand? Are you missing His gracious providence and care for you? As with Naomi, a negative mind will do this. It leads to a negative life where God is seen incorrectly, if at all. There is hope though. Let’s look at chapter 2.

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” 3 So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of
Elimelech. 4 Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The LORD be with you!” “The LORD bless you!” they called back. 5 Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, “Whose young woman is that?” 6 The foreman replied, “She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. 7 She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.” 8 So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. 9 Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me -- a foreigner?” 11 Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband -- how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. 12 May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” 13 “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant -- though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.” 14 At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.” When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. 15 As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don’t embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.” 17 So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. 18 She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough. 19 Her mother-in-law
asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!” Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said.  20 “The LORD bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.”  

21 Then Ruth the Moabitess said, “He even said to me, ‘Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.’”  

22 Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.”  

23 So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Did you notice how this chapter started? Chapter 1 ended with Naomi’s despair. She is not Naomi—pleasant or sweet—she is Mara—bitter. That despair caused her to forget the facts revealed to us in verse 1 of chapter 2. There was a relative in town. Why hadn’t Naomi remembered that? Bitterness blinds our perspective.

Not only is he said to be a relative of Naomi’s, but how else is he described? Wealthy and influential. Whoa! Sounds like a real catch. But Naomi isn’t thinking. God is though. Isn’t it fascinating that we are given the facts of verse 1 and then the story just continues—the participants are unaware of the situation.

Ruth exhibits some great initiative here in verse 2. She says that she is willing and wants to go collect some food for herself and Naomi. She does this of her own initiative. Naomi has probably just been sitting around moaning and groaning in her bitterness, and
Ruth realizes that they need to eat. So she sets out to find a field to glean in.

Well what do you know, she “happened” to end up in the field of a man named Boaz, the relative of Elimelech and Naomi. What a coincidence, huh? The author of Ruth is almost begging us to think this a coincidence so that he can teach us a lesson about how there is no such thing. Let’s avoid having to be taught that lesson and realize up front that something very purposeful is at work here. The line from Casablanca keeps running through my head as I read these verses. “Of all the gin joints in all the world, she had to walk into mine.” But this was not fate. God directed Ruth’s footsteps to Boaz’ field.

We are finally introduced to this wealthy and influential man in verse 4. Now, how do we usually think wealthy and influential people would treat their lowly workers? “Get back to work, you slackers!” “Hey! What’s the big idea taking a break on my clock?” “Go fetch my lawn chair and bring me a café latte while you’re up.” That is what we might expect, but Boaz is not that kind of a man. The author adds several seemingly inconsequential verses here to let us know that Boaz is a man of God. He greets his workers with, “The Lord be with you.” Do the workers see him as some mean ogre boss who is too good for them? No. They heartily and enthusiastically return the blessing, “The Lord bless you!” Exclamation point. They really love their boss. Is this guy too good to be true or what?

Boaz notices Ruth and asks his foreman who she is. The foreman gives Boaz the story and mentions how hard she has been working in the field all day. Boaz immediately makes sure that Ruth knows she is
welcomed. She can glean in the best spots and drink of their water and do so uninterrupted. Boaz set the stage, so her work would be fruitful. When Ruth saw Boaz coming over to her, she was probably a little afraid that he would kick her off his land. That would have been Boaz’ right. Instead he was kind and compassionate to her.

Then we come to one of the most significant passages of this chapter and in fact the whole book. Verse 10.

Look at Ruth’s response to Boaz’ kindness. “Hey, you better let me glean here, I am your relative by marriage!” “Hey, I am poor, you owe me this grain you wealthy snob!” “Yeah! And you better keep being nice to me too.” “Hey, you can’t tell me where to glean and where not to, I will do as I please. I don’t care if this is your field.” Is that how she responded to his mercy and grace? Look at the verse.

She fell at his feet and bowed her face to the ground. The ultimate in humble postures and gestures. It is a sign of unworthiness. Ruth was surprised by the treatment. She had made no assumptions or demands. In fact, she had expected to be thrown out and mistreated—she was a foreigner after all. This kindness was unexpected. “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” The word “kindness” or “favor” is the Hebrew word chen—grace. Ruth was honestly and humbly asking Boaz why he would ever show such grace to her.

Remember, Ruth is the model in this story. She is held up as the example of how we are to live and think. Do you think like her? Is that how you respond to kindness? Is that how you have responded to God’s
grace? Every single Christian should fall to their knees and put their face in the dirt and ask that same question, “God, why did you show me grace? Why did you choose me? Why did you save me? I am so undeserving—so unworthy.” Human arrogance and pride and the desire for self-determination often block those words from our lips and our hearts and our minds. Instead, we exclaim, “You owe me,” or “I will take it if I want it.” No, we must instead have the mind of Ruth; humble, undeserving, grateful.

Boaz tells Ruth that he has heard all about her story, and asks that the Lord will even further bless her for her continued faith. She has taken refuge under the wing of a great God who will reward her fully. That prayer is already being answered and to a greater extent than even Boaz realizes.

There is a great metaphor here too. The protective wing of a bird. God had imprinted himself on Ruth. Just like the imprint of the first thing a gosling sees when it is born. Usually it is the mother. The goose, because of that imprint, follows the mother anywhere and everywhere. It doesn’t question, and doesn’t even really comprehend why it follows, it just does. The mother does her job; providing, caring, protecting and teaching. That is what has happened with Ruth, and with us. God imprinted himself on us by giving us new birth. It is His face we now see and follow. We question not His guidance. We rest securely in His providence and protection. And, we learn from Him daily. Now look at verse 13 as Ruth responds further. Another amazing statement here.
May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.”

Wow! She wants to continue in that grace and kindness. And, she calls him “lord”—in Hebrew, adon (shortened form of Adonai—used as a name for God) meaning “lord and master.” She restated her thanks and her unworthiness. What an incredible example Ruth is. This is Ruth’s six-part response to the grace of Boaz:

1. *Humility*—falling with her face to the ground
2. *Astonishment at that grace*— “why have I found favor with you?”
3. *A desire to continue in that grace*
4. *Respect*—calling him “lord,”
5. *Appreciation and thanks, and*
6. *A continued understanding that she was undeserving of such treatment.*

Actually, there is even one more part to her response. It is found in verses 14 and 15. Ruth continued to work. She doesn’t say, “Oh, now I am set...I never have to work again...Boaz will take care of me so I can just sit back and relax…” Boaz did take care of her, but Ruth continued to work. She knew that her mother-in-law had need of food, even though Ruth had all she wanted. She continued to work to spread that grace and providence around to others. That will be response number 7.
As she continued to work, Boaz became even more gracious to her. Wow! The lessons for life are just pouring forth from every verse of this chapter!

Ruth finished the day’s work and was diligent to sift out the grain and carry it home to Naomi. She even brought Naomi her leftover lunch. Look at Naomi’s astonishment in verse 19. “Where did all of this grain come from? Wow! May the Lord bless the stranger who was so kind to you.” Ah, but it was no stranger. It was Boaz.

The cloud of Naomi’s misery lifts. Rays of light begin beaming in on her previously grieved heart. Her eyes finally catch a glimpse of God’s beautiful providence and His directing hand. Look at verse 20. Naomi immediately recognizes that Yahweh has been at work all along. Not all translations make this equally clear, so let’s look at this section from the NASB so the pronouns don’t get confused.

*May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.*

It is Yahweh (the LORD) who has not withdrawn His kindness to the living—Naomi and Ruth, or to the dead—her deceased husband Elimelech. God has provided a plan to honor and save them. It was all coming so fast to Naomi. She is so excited she repeats herself. Then the reality of the situation finally comes to her. She at last remembers the significance of who this man Boaz is. He is their kinsman-redeemer. Boaz is the *ga’al*—the redeemer. A kin who can marry a
widow and preserve the family—redeem it. The symbolism is coming through loud and clear, isn’t it?

I love the New Living Translation here. “This is wonderful!” In essence, “Wow, we’re saved! Stick with this man and stay in his field, because he will protect you and you will be safe.”

Such it is with our redeemer, Christ Jesus.

Ruth’s dedication and humble, hard-working attitude was not short-lived either. Ruth continued to work daily in Boaz’ field; all through the barley harvest and then through the wheat harvest. She continued in the grace of Boaz. She continued to be humble and diligent, and she continued to faithfully provide and care for her mother-in-law.

That is what grace does. Contrast your life to Ruth’s so far. In what ways have you been like her? In ways have you not been like her? If you profess Christ as your Lord, does your reaction and attitude towards His unmerited grace display itself in your life and thoughts and theology? If not, ask God to help you be more like His example Ruth and;

1. Show more humility
2. Be more astonished at His grace
3. Have a greater desire to continue in that grace
4. Respect Him more and truly make Him “Lord”
5. Give Him more appreciation and thanks for what He has done for you and how He has directed your path.
6. Help you to continue to understand you are undeserving of such treatment, and
7. Keep you diligently doing His work, day by day.

In the next two chapters, we will see how God blesses Ruth. That blessing is no coincidence. Because in God’s world, and I hope in yours, there is no such thing.
Robert had not had much success in life. He had dropped out of college in his second year. Finding a good job had been next to impossible. He moved from one town to the next, always looking for greener pastures, but nothing ever seemed to take shape. Now the better part of his life was gone, and he had nothing to show for it; barely enough money for his next meal, a miserable little apartment, and a bus pass.

Robert was good with numbers—always had been. But all that had brought him was a part time job as a runner for a local brokerage firm. His title was certainly a literal one. He ran from building to building carrying notes and memos for the company. One day Robert happened to deliver a message at the most opportune time. The man receiving the message was quite pleased and looked—almost stared—at Robert as he signed for the delivery.

“Is there anything else then sir?”

“You know, you seem a little old to be a runner. Instead of the usual tip, how about if I give you a tip that will mean much more in the future.”

Robert’s eyes gleamed for the first time in many years. “Are you serious?”
“Of course, I am always serious. Here is $100. A fine tip, but it can be so much more.” “How so,” Robert asked. Take it across the street and invest it in a company named NuTech. You will thank me someday.”

“Thank you sir, thank you.”

Robert placed the crisp $100 bill in his otherwise empty wallet and wondered to himself if he had every even seen one before. $100! Wow! Investments? Hmmm? It sounds like it might be kind of risky. I could lose it all. Then what would I have? With my luck the company would chapter 11 in a week. At least with this money I can eat for a month. There is no sense taking a risk. Besides, I don’t even know if I trust that guy. Why would he give me such a valuable tip? Who am I? He was probably just kidding to see if I will go through with it. Then he would just laugh at me for believing him. No. I am just going to hold onto this cash. Plus, I don’t even know exactly how to purchase stock. I bet this isn’t’ even enough to start. Yeah, I will just stick with what I have. Something better will come along later. About a month went by and Robert had spent most of his money. Some on food, some on other stuff. Thinking back, he couldn’t really remember where it all went. As he went to his next delivery, he recognized the suite number on the address. “I think I have been here before.” When he opened the door, the man behind the desk smiled when he saw Robert, but then began to frown as he looked at the worn out jogging suit Robert was wearing.

“Why are you still working here?”

“What do you mean?”

“You did invest that money didn’t you?”
“I decided that was too risky. Hey $100 might not be much to you, but it paid for a whole month of food for me.”

The man behind the desk picked up the newspaper in front of him, circled something with his pen, and handed it to Robert. Circled in blue ink was the headline, “NuTech stock continues to soar.” Robert began to wince as he read the first line of the story. “NuTech stock, which began trading just one month ago at $.25 a share, has now risen to a record high of $65 a share, creating one of the biggest single month profits in history for those investors who seized the opportunity to get in on the fledgling company.” Robert could read no further.

In chapter 1 we saw a man, Elimelech, and his family move from Judah to Moab to escape a famine. The man and his two sons eventually die in the foreign land, leaving his wife Naomi alone with her two daughters-in-law. At the promise of good crops, Naomi decides to return home, and one daughter-in-law decides to stay with her, while the other returns home to the comfort of her family in Moab. Ruth, a woman of great courage and faith, makes her home with Naomi. Naomi is bitter though at how the Almighty has dealt so severely with her, and so tells the town to call her Mara.

Ruth realizes that they must eat, and ventures out to glean some grain in one of the local fields. God leads her very footsteps to a relative of Naomi. A man named Boaz, who could serve as a kinsmen-redeemer by marrying into the family and thus saving it and protecting the family name. What a coincidence, huh—that she happened upon that field? But there is no such
thing as coincidence in God’s world. That brings us to chapter 3.

One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? 2 Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. 3 Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.” 5 “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. 7 When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. 9 “Who are you?” he asked. “I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.” 10 “The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. 11 And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. 12 Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. 13 Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.” 14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “Don’t let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.” 15 He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town. 16 When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?” Then she
told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’” Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

**Naomi’s Hope in Action**

As this chapter begins, it is Naomi who takes the initiative. In chapter 2 it was Ruth. But now that Naomi’s hope is once again alive, it prompts her to pursue that hope. She is a mother-in-law after all, and a good mother-in-law is always looking for ways to improve her daughter-in-law’s fortune. She has seen how kind Boaz has been to Ruth. She knows that God has been at work. She realizes that a Ruth-Boaz marriage would be a blessing to both of them, and to her. Ruth and Boaz however, aren’t making any attempts to advance the relationship. Most likely out of respect for each other.

Boaz is older and probably thinks that Ruth would desire a younger man. Ruth is younger and a foreigner and feels totally unworthy of even Boaz’ kindness, and would never presume upon him for anything further. But Naomi sees it as a perfect match. This is a hope that must be pursued and acted upon. “God didn’t bring us to this point for nothing,” Naomi probably thought to herself.

Naomi researches and then devises a plan for Ruth to put the question of marriage before Boaz. Ruth, although probably quite nervous of making any such movements, desires to be obedient to her mother-in-law, and to God. Naomi finds out that Boaz will be winnowing the barley. She knows that means he will be on the threshing floor in the evening and will
probably sleep near the grain to protect it from thieves—as was the custom.

Naomi might have thought the reason Boaz hasn’t made any moves is because Ruth is always working in the field. Boaz only sees her when she is hot and dirty and covered with grain dust. But, if he were to see her all cleaned up and smelling pretty, well then that might just be another story. But, there are subtleties here of which we need to be aware. Ruth must make it clear that she is seeking Boaz to take action, but must also be subtle enough, so as not to be seen as overly aggressive.

Naomi knows that Boaz is a man of honor. Her plan is dependant upon both of them acting according to their respectable natures. There is some risk in this plan. Boaz might figure Ruth is a prostitute who has come to sleep with him. He might drive her away without even finding out who she is. He might find the whole situation too pushy, and refuse to act. But Naomi realizes that God is at work for a reason, and it is time to put this trust and hope into action. Simply sitting around isn’t going to work. Resting on what she has, isn’t what God wants her to do. So she instructs Ruth to make this move. The hope God had given her inspired action. That is what it is meant to do. Hope, based on a dependence on a Sovereign God, motivates
Hope Pursued

us to pursue and to dream and act. It will inspire us to action and service. It will help us grasp a vision. That kind of hope comes from realizing that God is sovereign. If He wasn’t, there would be no hope. If we could only depend on ourselves, there would be little hope. But God’s hope never disappoints us. It does require action though (something Robert ignored and so missed the reward). A lesson I hope we understand.

More of Ruth’s Character

In chapter 3 we see yet another wonderful characteristic of Ruth. Obedience. Now it is one thing to be obedient to a boss or a parent. But to be obedient to your old mother-in-law and her crazy schemes, that is something completely different. Ruth has learned to trust in God and that trust has produced total obedience. Look at her reply in verse 5. “I will do everything you say.” When was the last time you uttered those words? When was the last time you thought them? Complete and unequivocal and unconditional obedience. Even in the face of possible humiliation. Even in response to a seemingly wacky plan of your old mother-in-law. What an example Ruth is!

On top of obedience Ruth adds another shot of humility. She tells Boaz that she is his servant in verse 9. Look at the remainder of her statement there. This is a beautiful symbolic phrase which recalls Boaz’ blessing upon her from the previous chapter. In chapter 2 verse 12, Boaz blessed Ruth saying,

*May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD,*
the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Do you see that word “wing” there? That is the Hebrew word *kanaph*. Ruth asks Boaz to “Spread the corner of your garment over me.” The phrase “corner of your garment” is also the Hebrew word *kanaph*—literally wing or skirt. Notice what Ruth has recognized. She has recognized that Boaz is the agent of God’s providence. Boaz is God’s wing of protection. God will use Boaz to answer his own prayer. Ruth also tells Boaz that he is a kinsman-redeemer, and is able to legally provide this protection.

**More of Boaz’ Character**

Boaz had previously shown his godliness and compassion and kindness. In this chapter he shows even more wonderful character.

Rather than looking upon Ruth’s actions as suggestive and immoral, he immediately recognizes her pure and honest intentions. But he sure could have taken advantage of the situation if he had wanted to. But he doesn’t. He commends Ruth on her loyalty to her family and for being a woman of great honor. He is humbled by her proposal and the fact that such a beautiful woman as she, would consider and older man like himself. Ruth is probably about 25 and Boaz is most likely 45-50.

Boaz immediately responds to her positively. God has been working on his heart as well. He knows that Ruth would surely make a wonderful wife, and will do everything he can to make that happen.
But there is a problem. The tension in the story builds dramatically here. There is a flaw in all of God’s plan. He brought Ruth home with Naomi. He preserved Boaz, a kinsmen-redeemer. He brought Ruth to Boaz’ field. But he forgot about something. There is another closer relative who gets first dibs on Ruth. As Ruth looked at Boaz horrified, she immediately began to wonder what terrible turn this would take. Why had God led her there only to see them get their hopes dashed? She would have been better off just staying at home.

Boaz realizes that God’s plan is flawed and he refuses to allow Ruth to go to anyone else. He will quickly come up with a plan to make sure no one knows about this other kinsmen-redeemer. Boaz is rich and powerful; he can make it happen. “I am not going to lose this woman.” He decides to amend God’s plan to make it work.

No. That isn’t what happens at all, is it? What does happen? Look at the faith of Boaz. He is honorable, even in the face of losing what he desperately wants. You see, Boaz has done his research as well. Perhaps he had always secretly hoped that he would someday marry Ruth. But he found out that there was another family redeemer who had first dibs. So he never really took the initiative. But now, motivated by Ruth and Naomi’s hope, Boaz knows what he must do. This must be done right. If God means for it to happen, He will have it happen in the right way.

First he must see that Ruth is protected. He tells her to stay there for the night where she will be safe, rather than walking back home alone in the dark. Then,
he must protect her honor. She is to leave early before anyone will see her, and instructs those who might have seen her that they are to tell no one. There will be no besmudgning of this pure woman’s reputation. Boaz also remembers to take care of her physical needs. He gives her a good portion of grain to take back with her. She can share it with Naomi. I think Boaz sensed that Naomi might have been the driving force behind getting the ball rolling, and he is most grateful for that and wants to continue to be in good with her.

Boaz tells Ruth that he will get right on this and offer her to the other man. If he desires to redeem her, so be it. But if not, he promised her he would. He was taking a great chance. After all, Ruth was a beautiful young woman, hard working and humble. It was risky to let anyone else have a chance at her, but he knew he had to do it. It was the right thing to do. God would be the guide. Boaz would put his trust and faith in God, and not try to hoard something for himself illegally. Boaz’ righteousness shines through once again. How would you have acted in such a situation?

Ruth may have been a little less confident in the plan, but when she returned home, Naomi reminded her to just be patient and watch for what God would do. Boaz is a man of honor, and he will settle this matter quickly.

What a cliffhanger! The tension and drama in the story is wonderful. How will it turn out? Is God's plan going to work out, or is it flawed? It’s all kind of like a Jane Austin novel. Great personalities and romance and intrigue and drama. Will it all work out?
HOPE
FULFILLED
As we complete our look at the book of Ruth, we face a question. Will it be “Hope Defeated” or “Hope Fulfilled?” The previous three chapters have built us up to this point. Chapter 1 was “Hope Forsaken.” Chapter 2, “Hope Renewed.” Chapter 3, “Hope Pursued.” That brings us to chapter 4, and the dramatic question, “How will the story be resolved?” Will it be “Hope Defeated” or “Hope Fulfilled?”

The answer to that question will tell us what the book of Ruth is all about. Why is this book here? Why do these people’s little lives matter? What is the message in all this?

Have you ever driven on a winding road? How would you describe it? It can be pretty scary. You think, “Where does this road go? What direction am I going? When will I get there?”

What has the road been like for Naomi? In chapter 1 there was a famine, a long journey, a foreign land, the death of her husband and two sons, and a long journey back. Naomi was older, bitter, and discouraged. This led to her inactivity of chapter 2 and her inability to see some positives. In chapter 3 we saw that her whole plan might come crashing down because there
was another, closer relative who could marry Ruth. Far from a straight road, and far from being paved. Far from being easy and enjoyable. Far from smooth. Naomi’s ride had been full of bumps and turns. The question is, “Where does the road lead?”

Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, “Come over here, my friend, and sit down.” So he went over and sat down. Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, “Sit here,” and they did so. Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.” “I will redeem it,” he said. Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.” At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, “Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.” (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.) So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.” And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kiliion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!” Then the elders and all those at the gate said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into
your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem."  

Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."  

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.  

The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!  

He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”  

Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him.  

The women living there said, “Naomi has a son.” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.  

This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

It is great how chapter 4 begins. Naomi has told Ruth that Boaz will take care of the situation as soon as possible. She doesn’t know the outcome, but is confident in God and in Boaz to do the right thing. Then chapter 4 begins by telling us that Boaz is off, even while Naomi is speaking those words, trying to resolve the issue.

Boaz was moving forward with great confidence. He knew what had to be done and set about doing it. He called over the other relative and then ten of the local leaders so that this transaction was done appropriately. He didn’t want to leave anything up to chance or have anything happen that wasn’t public and legal. Boaz offered the man the land, and
said it was his for the taking. If he didn’t want it, Boaz made it clear that he would redeem it.

The man, thinking that this was easy land, thought, “Okay, shucks, I’ll take it.” He might have even been surprised that Boaz had been honest enough to offer it to him. The tension of the whole story is heightened at this point. It’s all over for Boaz and Ruth and Naomi. God’s plan failed. Their hope was in vain. It is a story of “Hope Defeated.”

But then Boaz reveals that the deal comes with strings attached—wedding strings. Naomi’s daughter-in-law must be taken as a wife to complete the transaction. The relative may have already been married and didn’t want to complicate his own life or the lives of those within his own family, and so told Boaz that he couldn’t redeem the land and gave it to Boaz.

Rather than signing a contract, in those days, it was the custom to remove your sandal and hand it to the other person involved in the transaction. That made it legal. The author is aware that even his readers might not know about this custom, and so describes to us, and them, what it meant at one point. This is now a legal agreement; Boaz can marry Ruth.

Boaz publicly declares this and his intentions. But within that declaration, another problem arises that we have probably not thought about yet. Perhaps even Boaz has not thought about it. Do you see it?

For the story to truly end on a positive note, something else must happen. Hope would not be truly fulfilled if the story ended right here. What must happen? A son must be born. Why is that a problem? Look back to chapter 1.
In verses 4 and 5 we are told that Ruth had been married to Mahlon for 10 years before he died, and yet had no son. This is not normal. It might be today, but it sure wasn’t back then. The purpose for marriage was to bear children. And, couples usually started on that goal right away. Unless, the woman was barren. The author has implied to us that Ruth is a barren woman. How can she now have a son? And by this older man even. Something has to happen. The family can’t continue unless Ruth can bear a son. This new tension mounts in the story, even as Boaz is completing his speech.

The public leaders applauded Boaz’ determination and honesty. They ask a blessing upon him and his bride-to-be. They ask that God will bless her as He did Rachel and Leah. What do we know about those two women? Both of them were barren for a good number of years before the Lord gave them children. God is going to have to perform that miracle again in Ruth if this hope is to be fulfilled. The leaders also hope that Boaz and his family will be considered great in Bethlehem with many descendants. See if by the end of the chapter this is fulfilled.

Wow! Now the pressure is really on. The marriage part has been worked out, but now a son must be born to carry on the family and to fulfill this blessing and the expectations of the whole city.

Boaz and Ruth marry and Ruth goes to live with Boaz. Can you imagine what that must have been like? Having worked in those fields all those many months, and now to be returning as the bride of the master. Does that sound like a familiar metaphor in Scripture?
Notice how quickly and marvelously the tension of this problem is resolved. Before we even get out of verse 13, the same verse we are told they got married, we are told that Ruth gives birth to a son. But what is so especially significant about how the event is described to us? Look at the verse again. What happened? The LORD, Yahweh, enabled Ruth to get pregnant and bear a son. It was a work of God. A miracle of God. Part of His wonderful plan, now being fulfilled. Ruth’s child was from the Lord.

Notice how the focus of the story then shifts again to Naomi. Ruth has been an example for us in this story, but Naomi is really the figure the story is about. The women of the city praise the Lord on behalf of Naomi, for God has blessed her once again. God did not leave her or forsake her. He has been there all along. In fact, he has done something for Naomi and her family that was more wonderful than any of them could have ever dreamed. The road was long and windy and bumpy but God had been directing her every step of the way.

Have you noticed in this book that God never speaks. Most Old Testament books include God’s commands, or God’s utterances, or a description of God’s actions. We have none of that in the book of Ruth. God is silent. And yet the work of His hands
shouts from every verse. That is why the book is here for us. To see God at work, even when we can’t see it or hear it outright. It is for us to recognize God’s hand of providence and direction. It is to give us that hope, a hope in a Sovereign Lord.

There have been many wonderful lessons and twists within the book, but the significance of it all, is found in the final few verses.

Ruth’s child is given the name Obed, who is the father of Jesse, who is the father of David. Now obviously we know that the book was written in the time of David since we find out that he is born.

Put this all together now. Think about it. Here we have a barren foreign woman losing her husband and returning to a country that held no promise. Then we have Boaz. When we meet him, he is a wealthy and influential man. But do you know where he comes from? His father was Salmon. That may not mean much to you. But do you know who his mother was? Look at Matthew 1.

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, 4 Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David.
Wow! Boaz was the son of Rahab—who had been a prostitute. So the son of a non-Jewish prostitute marries a barren foreigner. What good could ever possibly come from that? What kind of a messed up plan is this?

Well, in Ruth, we are told what the purpose for all this was. It brings about the birth of David, the King. Wow. Boaz and Ruth are the grandparents of King David. Imagine that! What fulfillment! Talk about having your hope fulfilled and rewarded! It doesn’t get any better than that. Or does it?

If Boaz and Ruth are crucial to the birth of David, for what other event are they crucial? The birth of Christ! This son of a prostitute and barren foreign woman are brought together by seeming coincidence and inconceivable (pardon the pun) events to provide a crucial link in the birth of our Savior, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. That is what this story is all about. The Lord works in mysterious ways. The road may have curves and bends and bumps, but it always goes exactly where God has planned for it to go. How amazing! How wonderful!

But guess what? Naomi had her doubts, didn’t she? The road didn’t look like it was going anywhere, did it? She was discouraged—even bitter. She had lost hope. But look at how God worked. Look at how He motivated and renewed her hope and prompted her to act upon that hope. And, look at how God fulfilled that hope. Can you think of any greater fulfillment, than to be a part of the birth of Christ and the salvation of all of God’s people?

What a great message from a great little book. Significance beyond measure or comparison, out of
despair and emptiness. Remember, Naomi thought she had returned home from Moab with nothing. Nothing? How about the Savior, the Messiah!

So how about you? Where are you right now along that road? Maybe you think the driver has fallen asleep—kind of like Naomi thought. “This road doesn’t go anywhere. Nothing good can happen. We might as well turn around or just stop and park so that nothing worse happens.” Are we the kids in the back of the car screaming, “When are we going to be there? Why is it taking so long? Do you even know where we are going? Hey, Billy is bugging me, tell him to stop. I’m hungry. I am tired. I don’t like this road.”

Are you “Hope Forsaken,” “Hope Renewed,” or “Hope Pursued?” Where are you right now? Understanding where you are and where you are going will help you to see things properly, and help you evaluate what you need to do next.

If you are “Hope Forsaken,” God is going to prove you wrong. He is going to show you how wrong you are and what little faith you have. If you are “Hope Renewed,” that understanding should motivate you to action—positive action. If you are “Hope Pursued,” then you should see yourself in positive action and in wanting to move things forward and should be putting your full faith and trust in God and His plan and purpose and direction. That is when you will see “Hope Fulfilled” in ways you never thought possible. Blessings beyond your wildest dreams and prayers. Ruth went out hoping just for enough food to take her through the next day. She ended up re-married, with child, and in the very line of Christ. Don’t ever sell short God’s plan for your life.
If however you feel you are “Hope Defeated,” and that God has already carried out His plan and it hasn’t worked, you have missed the whole message. But I trust you aren’t a person without hope; a person who fails to trust in and see a Sovereign God at work. I trust you are a person of our faithful Creator and Lord, who knows that God’s hope does not disappoint.

The road, my friends, is often long and winding and difficult. But the message of the book of Ruth is that, no matter the surface of the road, no matter what we go through, God is taking us where He wants us to go. The road does go through. It is not a dead end. God’s path always goes where He wants it to go.

Ask yourself where you are as an individual. How does that relate to this wonderful story of God at work? Oh, to have a glimpse of what God can do! If God can produce a King and a Messiah from a Moabitess and the son of a prostitute, just imagine what he can do with us! Have hope in His plan.
About the Author

Evan D. Baltz’s passion for the Word of God is evident in his writings. Over the last 20 years his presentation of the Word, whether it be through proclamation, teaching, or the written word, has dynamically drawn people into a deeper understanding of God. He combines an irreverent sense of humor with a scholarly reverence for Scripture, making his books enjoyable, thought-provoking, and instructive for young and old, new believer and theologian.

Evan graduated from Bethel Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree in 1992 after receiving his Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Iowa State University. He has served both as a youth pastor and senior pastor, as well as speaking at numerous conferences and retreats. Several of his articles and sermons have been published nationally.

In 1997 Evan founded Exangello Ministries, which seeks to “proclaim, declare, and publish abroad the Word of God.” The ministry’s web site has maintained a web presence for more than seven years, and has been visited by thousands of people from around the world.

Evan and his wife Michelle now make their home in Cave Creek, Arizona.

Don’t miss these other titles available from Evan D. Baltz:

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"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

—1 Peter 2:9