

Hanging out With Heros

RUTH

From the loser's lane
to the winner's circle



Lorraine
Peterson

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**RUTH: FROM LOSER'S LANE TO THE WINNER'S
CIRCLE**

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New International Version of the Bible

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RUTH: FROM LOSER'S LANE TO THE

WINNERS CIRCLE

Introduction

When Everything Goes Wrong

Do you feel as if you come from “the wrong side of the tracks”? As if your life is filled with tragedy and misery? As if there is no way to better your situation? Then the story of Ruth is for you. From her you can learn principles that will help you deal with prejudice and disaster.

Ruth lived in Moab, a country of idol worshipers next to Israel. She met and married a young man from Israel who had moved to Moab with his family because of a food shortage in Israel. From this family she learned about the true God. But tragedy struck. First, Ruth's father-in-law, Elimelech, died. Next, both her husband and his brother (who had also married a Moabite woman) died. This left three widows; Ruth, her sister-in-law Orpah, and their mother-in-law Naomi. In those days, there were no good jobs for women, so a woman (such as Ruth) not under the protection of a father, husband, or son was poverty-stricken. The three women had to do something.

Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, decided to return to Bethlehem, her hometown, so she told her daughters-in-law to stay with their parents. If they returned home, their fathers would provide for them and arrange marriages with new husbands. Orpah chose to go home. Ruth, however, chose to follow Naomi, and thus follow the God of Israel. Because the law of Israel prohibited intermarriage with pagans, Ruth gave up the chance for remarriage by going with Naomi. She had to leave her family, her friends, and her country with its familiar ways. She risked everything to follow God.

Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem at harvest time. Because the law allowed poor people and foreigners to enter the grain fields and pick up, or "glean," the leftovers, Ruth went out to gather grain for herself and Naomi. Ruth soon found herself in the field of Boaz, a rich and prominent man of Bethlehem who happened to be a relative of her dead husband. Boaz noticed Ruth and took a special interest in her. He treated her very kindly and told his reapers to drop grain on purpose so she could gather more. He also invited her to lunch and asked her to stay in his field where she would be well-protected.

Risking Rejection

Naomi knew the laws of Israel, so with great interest she watched the friendship developing between Ruth and Boaz. In Israel land could not be permanently sold because property remained in a family. (This prevented the rich from owning all the land.) A piece of property could be leased until the Year of Jubilee that came every fifty years. At that time all the land was automatically returned to the descendants of the original owner. Of course, if

all members of the original family had died, the land could be sold.

Maintaining the family line was considered so important that a childless widow could ask an unmarried brother-in-law (or nearest living male relative of the dead husband) to marry her. The first son of that marriage would bear the name of the woman's dead husband and thus continue the family line. In fact, a childless widow was expected to seek such a marriage. The man could refuse her proposal, but he would suffer disgrace for not fulfilling his duty to his dead relative. The man in a position to marry a widow, could buy back her late husband's land, and provide a son bearing the late husband's name was called a Kinsman-Redeemer.

Naomi hoped that through Ruth her family line could continue. Thus, the friendship between Ruth and Boaz encouraged her – Boaz was showing Ruth great kindness and giving her special attention. Naomi realized, of course, that Boaz might be unwilling to buck public prejudice to marry a woman of foreign birth. Nonetheless, Naomi also realized that because Ruth was a follower of God and no longer an idol worshiper, the ban against intermarriage with foreigners did not necessarily apply in this case. By her virtuous character Ruth had broken down the prejudice of many. Naomi, therefore, had reason to hope that Boaz would marry Ruth.

Legally, Naomi could have taken the matter to court, but she didn't want to subject Boaz to public pressure. Instead, she sent Ruth at night to the place where the harvested grain had been piled, where Boaz and the families of his workers would be camping for the night. Ruth was to wait until Boaz was asleep, then lie down at his feet. According to Oriental tradition, this gesture meant, "I want to love and obey you. I'm willing to be your faithful wife, but if you reject me because I'm a foreigner, I'll understand." Boaz immediately understood what Ruth was doing, even though he had just awakened from a deep sleep. She had proposed marriage. But she was allowing Boaz to reject her offer without the whole world finding out.

Naomi's plan, which seems very strange to Western minds, must be understood in the light of the customs and ideas of the ancient Middle East. Ruth was not being immoral or flirtatious by lying at the feet of Boaz. She was simply following an accepted custom.

At the end of the harvest, the owner of the land, and his workers and their families would gather for the final job, winnowing, that included a big celebration. They had already completed the hard work of threshing – breaking the husk from the kernel of grain, so now came the fun part. To winnow the grain, they would throw it into the air and let the wind blow the husks away. The harvesters often did this job at night to take advantage of the stronger breeze. When the job was done, they could feast. By that time, it was so late that all the families would sleep outdoors, on or near the threshing floor. J. Vernon McGee, recognized Bible scholar, comments “that the threshing floor was a public place and that these incidents all took place in the open. Both men and women were lying about the threshing floor. Entire families were gathered there.” (1)

(1) J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth: The Romance of Redemption*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982, p. 92.

After her silent proposal, Boaz told Ruth he would love to marry her. There was, however, a man related more closely to Ruth’s dead husband than Boaz was; legally, that man had the first right to marry Ruth and to buy the property of the family. Boaz, therefore, had to give him the first chance before he could make any promises. Wisely, Boaz told Ruth to leave before anyone sleeping on the threshing floor woke up. After all, if everyone knew Ruth wanted to marry Boaz, and the other relative decided to become Ruth’s husband, things could become very embarrassing. Boaz promised to ask the other man about the marriage, so Ruth didn’t have to worry about doing anything. She had fulfilled her responsibility.

In the morning, Boaz went immediately to the city gate, and there gathered the elders of the city, and his “rival,” for a court session. The other eligible relative refused the chance to buy the property and marry Ruth. Now Boaz was free to marry Ruth.

Almost as a fairy tale, this real-life love story ended in a happy marriage. Ruth eventually gave birth to a son, named Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who became the father of King David.

Ruth, therefore, was David’s great-grandmother and one of the ancestors of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Because Ruth followed God totally, her life

changed. Instead of being a desolate widow she became the wife of a loving, prosperous husband, and the mother of a son whose descendants would bless the entire world.

When Hope is Gone

“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. The man’s name was Elimelech, his wife’s name was 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. Now Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. ‘Look’ said Naomi, ‘your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.’ But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or 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. 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’” (Ruth 1: 1-5, 15-17).

When you visit your friend’s beautiful house and see that his parents really love each other and that the community respects them, do you feel a twinge of envy in your heart? Do you feel as if you come from the wrong side of the tracks? Do you wish you could be proud of your house and the job that your father holds? Do you feel hurt that your parents are divorced? Do you have trouble coping with your father’s drinking or your mother’s nervous condition? Do you work hard to hide “skeletons” in your family’s closet? Do you feel hopeless because your father died, or your best friend was killed in a car accident? If you can lay claim to any of the above feelings, the story of the life of Ruth will inspire and help you.

Ruth grew up in a pagan country of Moab. In Moab, perversions such as child sacrifice, immorality, and slave-like status for women were normal. Happily, she learned about the true God and a better way to live when she

married a man from Israel. And she grew to love his mother, Naomi, a very kind person. But when Ruth's father-in-law, her husband, and her brother-in-law all died, life suddenly seemed hopeless.

When Naomi started going back to Bethlehem in Israel, her two daughters-in-law walked with her. But Naomi, aware of the hard life a widow in a strange country could face, urged Orpah and Ruth to return to their homes. At this, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and left for home, but Ruth would not go back. She decided to follow the God of Naomi – no matter the cost – and the cost was very great.

In choosing to follow the true God, Jehovah, Ruth could never go home again, for she could no longer join in the Moabite's pagan worship. She had to leave her family and her friends forever. She had to face new and strange customs.

In choosing to follow Jehovah, Ruth gave up the idea of marriage and a home, the cherished dream of every woman. Jewish law forbade marriage to a pagan woman because God wanted to keep His people from idol worship. (Naomi's son had defied the law of Israel by marrying Ruth.) No husband would mean no income, because there were no paying jobs for women. Ruth therefore faced the possibility of a life of poverty and loneliness.

In choosing to follow Jehovah, Ruth gave up the right to make her own decisions. Because she was going to her mother-in-law's country and would be living with her, Ruth would be at Naomi's mercy. But worse, if something happened to Naomi, Ruth would be alone in a foreign land.

When Ruth said to Naomi, "Your God will be my God," she gave up everything. But look again. Once Ruth gave God her life, God gave back to her more than she ever could have dreamed. The same can be true for you.

Make this promise yours; "Surely God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12: 2, 3). God wants to be your complete salvation – not just the One who saves you from hell, but the One who saves you from fear, who saves you from depression and despair, who gives you joy and gladness. If you completely give your life to God, He can turn things around – even if

you see no hope. God can make something beautiful out of your mixed-up life if you let Him.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord of the display of his splendor” (Isaiah 61: 1-3).

1. Jesus is the One who can do all these things (read Luke 4: 17-19).
Make a list of all the things Jesus can do for you.
2. Which of the blessings on your list do you need right now?
Receive from Jesus what you need.
3. According to the passage from Isaiah 61, God wants to make the poor and the brokenhearted into an advertisement of what God's love and power can do – “oaks of righteousness ... for the display of his splendor.”

The Fate of the Make-Believe Birthday Party

“Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, ‘Whose young woman is that?’ The foreman replied, ‘She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. 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.’ (Boaz said to Ruth,) ‘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.’ ‘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 your servant girls'” (Ruth 2: 5-7, 12, 13).

The parents of a boy with whom I attended grade school never let him bring friends home or plan anything special for his birthday. One day at school he announced it was his birthday. By the end of the day he had convinced himself that he was having a party, so he invited all of us to his house. But the guests found no cake or Kool-Aid – only an angry mother telling eager children there was no party. That boy could not change his situation either by wishing or by forcing the issue.

You may think that boy was very foolish. However, you probably do the same kind of thing – create a new situation by attitudes and actions that deny the truth. In fact, you probably know a bunch of kids like that in your school. Lizzie Leech, Paul the Proud, and Pitiful Patty will probably seem too familiar.

Lizzie Leech does everything possible to get attention. She wears bizarre clothes. She chatters nonstop to anyone who will listen. She lays traps for all the guys. She stays after class trying out for teacher’s pet. She cons kindhearted people into helping her with everything. With bitter determination she seeks acceptance, but instead drives everyone away.

Paul the Proud pretends he knows everything, acts as if he’s loaded with money, and considers it beneath his dignity to speak to underclassmen. He brags constantly about the great things he has done, the prizes he’s won, and the important people he knows. He never admits defeat or discouragement. Instead of drawing people to himself, he continues to build a brick wall around himself. People who know the truth would like to help Paul the Proud, but he won't let them.

Pitiful Patty’s life is one misfortune after another and, with the regularity of the morning news, she announces each new disaster to the public. (What a shame if someone were uninformed about the tough life she’s had.) She could never give up her horrible plight, however, because then no one would feel sorry for her. She dreams of a world in which she’ll have plenty of friends to sympathize with her – but at the moment fewer and fewer are listening to her woes.

Lizzie, Paul and Patty – each employs methods of making a bad situation worse, trying to force people to change their attitudes, or just pretending not to need help from anyone. No one will deny that these three, as many people, have been deeply hurt and carry the scars of those hurts. But there is a way out. And Ruth found it.

Ruth made the best of her circumstances. Because of her pagan background the Israelites would despise her, but she was willing to endure the prejudice. The law of the land allowed poor people and foreigners to enter the fields at harvest time and glean the leftovers. Ruth worked diligently at this backbreaking job, the only work she could get. She expected no favors. And when Boaz noticed her, she didn't make herself a pest by maneuvering for attention, but graciously received his kind words. Neither did she seek his sympathy by telling him the sad story of her life, hoping for a handout. Although she didn't beg for pity, she did not show arrogance, trying to give an impression that she could handle life without help from anyone. When he complimented her, there was none of Lizzie Leech or Pitiful Patty in Ruth.

As Ruth accepted her circumstances, she also believed God would take care of her no matter what. She knew that an all-powerful God had a plan, even for her life. This attitude gave her a humble, sweet spirit that won the hearts of Boaz and everyone in Bethlehem.

The Bible says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6: 6). How can you gain anything if you're contented with what you've got? Well, it works like this. Your contentment will make other people accept you and want to be your friend. And your lack of rebellion will enable God to give you great things. But trying to solve your problem by forcing people to change and directing your circumstances is like trying to create a birthday party that doesn't exist. Your manipulations will suffer the same fate as the make-believe birthday party.

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured

out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life” (1 Timothy 1: 12-16).

1. Which is more important: what you were in the past, or what Christ can make you in the future?
2. On which are you concentrating: your problems and your past, or what Jesus can do to change you?
3. Are you guilty of manipulating people or circumstances in order to improve your situation? What can you do today to change this habit?

Jesus Says, “Take Two Giant Steps.”

“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. 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.’ 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” (Ruth 2: 19, 22, 23).

You must decide whether to keep your job or go out for volleyball. Whom should you ask for advice? Your non-Christian friends? Your boyfriend or girlfriend? Or anyone who will listen? The answer to this question is important because your life is largely shaped by the people from whom you take advice. And if you face some extraordinarily difficult choices, good advice is critical. So take some pointers from Ruth.

Notice the steps Ruth took to get out of her tragic situation. First, she decided to follow God, no matter what the cost. Second, she accepted her situation

and didn't try to push people or manipulate circumstances to fulfill her needs. Instead, she trusted God. Finally, she took the advice of a godly person who cared about her – she obeyed Naomi, Ruth talked things over with Naomi and accepted her guidance. And because Ruth took advice from the right person, she made wise decisions.

The Bible says a great deal about getting advice from the right person. For example: “The plans of the righteous are just; the advice of the wicked is deceitful” (Proverbs 12: 5); and, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers” (Psalm 1: 1). In other words, “Happy is the person who takes no advice from people who don't follow God.”

Are you following the advice of non-Christians? If you are, that may be the reason you have so many problems. In fact, even the advice of half-committed Christians can be bad. (For example, a girl engaged to a non-Christian guy may tell you it's okay to date or marry a non-Christian) – even though the Bible says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6: 14).

Ask God to show you a wise, committed, strong Christian (who knows the Bible and is following God totally) from whom you can get good advice. This might be your pastor, an older Christian whom you admire, or a Christian friend. Maybe it will be someone you can write to. Even if you can't think of such a person right now, keep praying until God shows you one, because you need sound, spiritual advice.

You should not only follow godly advice, but you, like Ruth, should obey people in authority over you. Because Naomi was Ruth's mother-in-law and Naomi was providing her a home, Ruth had a responsibility to obey Naomi. And because Ruth obeyed Naomi's plan, even when she could have raised some logical objections, she was delivered from her miserable state. If you obey authority, God will also give you deliverance.

You make two kinds of decisions. One kind of decision is a matter of wisdom, such as deciding what to do with the money you've saved, or whether to study Zephaniah or Philippians in your quiet time. Wise, godly advice can help you make the right decision. The other kind of decision is a

matter of submission – whether or not, to obey authority. The Bible says a great deal about obeying authority, especially parents. Think about these verses: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6: 1); “The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures” (Proverbs 30: 17) – startling! If you want to follow God, you must obey authority. You have no choice. (The only exception is that extreme case in which obedience would require you to disobey God's Word – and even then, you must be respectful.)

If you're in a tough situation, obeying authority can be difficult. The devil always tempts the girl from the poor area of town, the boy from the broken home, or anyone with special problems, to become proud and independent, refusing to obey or take advice. The devil tries so hard to break down respect for authority because taking godly advice and obeying authority are two giant steps toward a new and better life.

“Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice” (Proverbs 13: 10).

“But Samuel replied; ‘Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king’” (1 Samuel 15: 22).

1. What are your reasons for not taking advice or obeying authority?
2. What are the dangers of refusing to take advice or obey authority?
3. Why is it sometimes easier to make great sacrifices than to be humble enough to seek godly advice and obey authority?
4. Are you refusing to obey an authority in your life? Is there some decision you must make for which you need sound, spiritual advice? Talk this over with God.

Rejects Recycled

“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? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight, he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. 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. 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.’ ‘I will do whatever you say,’ Ruth answered” (Ruth 3: 1-5).

Do you avoid certain people just because you're afraid you might say the wrong thing and give them a bad impression of you? Have you decided not to try out for the volleyball team because you might not qualify? Do you avoid parties because you're afraid you don't have the right outfit to wear and someone might make a snide remark? Do you continue to be a loner because you fear that your attempt at friendliness might be rejected? Fear of rejection can paralyze you.

Ruth could have let fear of rejection ruin her life, because Israelite custom put her under obligation to find a husband, and the law required that she make the first move. This law of Israel must have seemed very strange to her. It stated that the closest, unmarried relative of a dead man should marry the childless widow, and thus continue the family line – but the widow was supposed to start the process. How scary! Being in love with Boaz, an eligible relative of her late husband, must have made the whole affair even more frightening. What if he rejected her? Although Boaz, as a relative of her deceased husband, was obliged to marry Ruth, another law forbade intermarriage with foreigners. This was a complicated situation, to say the least, and no one could predict how things would turn out.

Naomi's plan must have seemed dreadful to Ruth at first. Ruth was to hide by the threshing floor where all the workers of Boaz and their families were having a feast. Later, as they each found a place to sleep on the threshing floor, Ruth was to watch where Boaz lay down to sleep. Then silently, so no one would waken, she was to lie down by his feet. This was not immoral or

flirtatious. It was a Middle Eastern way of saying, “I want to be your wife,” because by law the widow had to propose the marriage that could carry on her dead husband’s family line. She could have done this in public court, but Naomi did not want Ruth and Boaz to be the subjects of gossip, should Boaz decide not to marry a woman of pagan birth. Ruth bravely obeyed Naomi’s plan.

Ruth found courage to carry out Naomi's plan because she was doing God's will. First, she was doing God's will by obeying His law. (God had instituted the seemingly strange law that told a childless widow to propose a marriage that would prolong the family line.) Second, Ruth was doing God's will by obeying her mother-in-law. (The Bible has much to say about obeying people in authority.) Because she was doing God's will, she knew she was accepted by God, even if she were rejected by Boaz. God would take care of her. This love story has a happy ending, but Ruth didn’t know that. When she lay down at the feet of Boaz, she willingly risked rejection, because she knew she was doing God's will.

You have complexes because you do things not based in God's will. You tried to be the main attraction of the evening but got laughed at? Your motive was not based in God's will. You blew your soccer team tryout and feel humiliated because you didn’t live up to your self-made standard? Your standard wasn’t one that God set for you. You wanted friends that would make you feel important and popular, but instead they only had needs of their own. Your standards for friendship weren’t based on God's Word, which says “A friend loves at all times” (Proverbs 17: 17).

God wants you to have good things, but He wants your motives to be pure. Psalm 67: 7 says, “God will bless us. And all the ends of the earth will fear him!” In other words, God wants to work on your life so others will be drawn to Him because of the good things He is doing in your life. He wants others to be favorably impressed by you, not so you can be named Miss Personality Plus, but so you can win other people into His kingdom. But God doesn’t construct no-fail humans. Instead, He teaches you how to deal with mistakes and face rejection.

If you feel rejected, take comfort in this thought: God loves to recycle rejects,

so they can bring glory to Him. He is making you into a person who can take some risks, who isn't afraid to fail. The secret is to base your actions on God's Word and God's will. Then you won't care if someone else thinks you're unsuccessful. If he rejects you, that's his problem. Jesus faced that kind of rejection and He never let it stop Him. God can free you from the fear of failure, so you can take the risks of faith.

“The Lord delights in the way of the man whose steps he has made firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand” (Psalm 37: 23, 24).

“For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity” (Proverbs 24: 16).

1. What does God think of someone who is following His path? Does it really matter if others don't think you're successful when you're following God's plan for you?
2. Why should you be unafraid to risk failure in something?
3. Does the Bible guarantee you'll never make a mistake, an error in judgment, or a social slip? Should you expect to never fail at anything or to never be rejected by anyone?
4. If you are following God and you fail at something, what is God's promise for you?

Your Prince Has Already Come

“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, Kilion 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, in order that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!’” (Ruth 4: 9, 10).

Ruth's life was transformed because she chose the true God, sought wise

advice, obeyed authority, and stuck with doing what was right. But despite her own efforts, her obedience, she would never have experienced this complete transformation without Boaz her deliverer, her “prince charming,” if you will. He was an eligible relative (kinsman-redeemer) of her dead husband, obliged to marry Ruth so the family line would not die out and lose the property. Boaz loved Ruth and willingly married her, even though she was a foreigner. He had the money to buy the inheritance because he had never gotten into debt himself. If Boaz had been unwilling or unable to buy (redeem) the land, Ruth could have never enjoyed her honored position in Hebrew history.

The story of Ruth and Boaz illustrates beautifully what Jesus did for you when He died on the cross. Just as Boaz was Ruth’s Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus is your redeemer, the One who has delivered your soul from sin. Just as Boaz was both willing and able to redeem Ruth’s family property, Jesus is willing and able to save you if you come to Him. Just as Ruth lay down at the feet of Boaz to tell him she wanted to be redeemed, you must come to the foot of the cross in surrender to Jesus and ask for His salvation.

Boaz’ payment to buy back the land and take Ruth as his wife transformed her total existence – past, present, and future. His marriage to her delivered her from the curse of being born a pagan. And the marriage not only wiped clean her past and gave her a honeymoon to enjoy at the present time, but offered the promise of a lifetime with Boaz during which they could learn to love and understand each other. It offered a lifetime of sharing Boaz’ wealth and prestige. It offered the joys of motherhood.

Jesus’ salvation, His redemption, offers you an even greater transformation. He blots out all your past sins, no matter how gross. He offers you the joy of daily fellowship with himself. He can restore every part of your life that has been scarred or perverted by the world and the devil; as you cooperate with Him, He will renew your mind, give strength and health to your body, straighten out your finances, and improve your relationships with family and friends. His salvation can give joy and purpose to your life.

It is true that God will not save anyone who refuses to believe; and He will not change the life of anyone who won't permit Him to reign. But let’s shift

the emphasis from our response to God, who offers such great salvation. The only reason you, or anyone, can go from a life on the wrong side of the tracks to a victorious and beautiful life is because Jesus died and rose again. The only reason you can have hope after tragedy and despair is because Jesus bought back and transformed every part of your life – ruined by the sin and selfishness of this world.

Jesus loves you much more than Boaz loved Ruth. It was this great love that sent Him to the cross. So, you don't have to sit around wishing someone would rescue you, because your Prince has already come. His name is Jesus, and He loves you enough to promise you a bright, beautiful future. Jesus will be your Boaz, but like Ruth, you must begin to believe – *now*.

“This is how God showed his love among us; He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4: 9, 10).

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding” (Ephesians 1: 7, 8).

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8: 32, 37).

1. Have you given your life to Jesus and accepted the salvation He offers?
2. What benefits are included in that salvation?
3. After Jesus has forgiven your sins and assured you of heaven, is that the end of what He wants to do for you?
4. If you've never received salvation, decide to stop sinning, then confess your sins (your acts of rebellion against God) to God, and receive the forgiveness of Jesus. Then ask Him what is included in

the “all things” He has for you today.

How to Steer Clear of Loser’s Lane, and Other Side Streets

“So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. 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’” (Ruth 4: 13-15).

The temptation to give up hits often. When geometry gets difficult, you drop the course rather than face hard work. When your parents seem even farther away from God than before, after your months of witnessing to them, you lose hope. When the job gets boring, you quit. When your friend lets you down, you dump him. When hardly anyone shows up for Bible study, you quit attending too.

Overcoming the effects of tragedy and the scars of life requires a hard-to-develop quality; loyalty – a willingness to stick with it no matter what. It’s much easier to think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence and jump from one thing to another. If you’ve been badly hurt by people, fear keeps you from building loyalty. You fear getting hurt again, so the first time a friend disappoints you, you bail out. Your life becomes marked by instability. The Bible, however, shows how you can overcome instability and develop loyalty: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest *if we do not give up*” (Galatians 6: 9).

Ruth developed loyalty. She gave up everything to follow God, and even when she was lonely in a new country and exhausted from overwork, she didn’t slip back into idol worship. Her loyalty to God was so well known that the first time Boaz spoke to Ruth he said, “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” (Ruth 2: 12). When going to the field to pick up grain day after day became tiring and boring, she didn’t quit. Although living with an older lady – and a mother-in-law at that –

couldn't have been very exciting, Ruth never complained. She worked hard to support Naomi, whom she respected and obeyed. And when Ruth married Boaz and rose above the shame and the poverty of her background, she could easily have forgotten all about Naomi. But she didn't. In fact, her love for Naomi was so obvious that everyone in Bethlehem talked about it.

The life of Ruth is not just a Cinderella story in which everything turned out well in the end. It is a monument to the way God honors those who live by His commands – Ruth lived out the command, “Let us not become weary in doing good.” She not only did the right thing, she stuck with it. And she reaped the benefits of one who doesn't give up.

The principles that worked for Ruth will work for you. First, *discover what is good and start doing it*. You find out what it is by studying the Bible. The following verses will do for starters: “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20: 12); “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Colossians 3: 23); “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people” (Galatians 6: 10). Ask the Holy Spirit to apply these verses to specific situations in your life and then act on the insight He gives you.

Next (and most hard to do), *stick with it*. Honoring your mom is easy – until an acid test situation arises. Working with enthusiasm is easy during the first two months of school – but maintaining that attitude through two semesters is tough. Helping people is easy – until they take advantage of you or display some of their unlovable characteristics. But hanging in there and obeying by faith, when no results are showing, will make the difference.

The recipe for transforming tragedy and trouble doesn't include any here-today-gone-tomorrow ingredients. Once you've started down the main street that leads to your goal, you can't turn into every side street and expect to reach your destination. You must continually do what is right – stick with it – because the side streets all have names like Trouble Trail, Discouragement Drive, and Loser's Lane.

“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the

name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man, he could not, because of the crowd. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today'" (Luke 19: 1-5).

1. List all the things that could have kept Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus.
2. What risks did Zacchaeus take, and what extra effort did he expend to see Jesus?
3. When doing the right thing takes a lot more time and effort than you anticipated, are you willing to stick with it?
4. Pray about the tough challenges that are requiring you to “stick with it.”

One of God's Billboards

“So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. And the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son.’ And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David” (Ruth 4: 13, 17).

Someone once wrote:

You're writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the things that you do and the words that you say.
Men read what you write whether faithless or true.
Say, what is the gospel according to you?

Paul wrote to his friends at Corinth, “ ... you are a letter from Christ,” a letter “known and read by everyone” (2 Corinthians 3: 2, 3). The same is true for you. Your life either encourages someone to come closer to God or acts as a

stumbling block to drive him further away. You know that others affect you this way. When Jim gave a great speech in English class about Jesus, and got an “A”, you were encouraged. After you found out that a Christian you respected was caught cheating on his income tax, you were tempted to become discouraged.

Although you should keep your eyes only on Jesus, not on some other Christian, the Bible commands, “Let us encourage one another” (Hebrews 10: 25). This often occurs, not through words, but through action. For example, one day after school I went to witness to a fellow-teacher who was facing an operation and was afraid to die. She told me that two Christian students had come the night before and also told her about accepting Jesus. I was encouraged! Your following God can encourage someone else.

Biographies of great Christians make good reading. That’s why God included stories of men and women of faith in the Bible – so you could learn from their mistakes and be encouraged by their victories. The story of Ruth, for example, teaches the value of obeying God and following His principles. As you read it you'll realize the love and mercy God showed to Ruth is also meant for you. The story of Ruth also demonstrates the effect a faithful life has on other lives. For instance, Ruth was the great-grandmother of David, a great man of God. Ruth and Boaz lived during a time when few people were obeying God (the book of Judges tells all about it), but they put God first. Ruth trained her son in the ways of God and her faith was passed on for generations. Thus, God used her to bless the nation of Israel through King David. But that’s not all. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a direct descendant of David, as was Jesus’ step-father, Joseph. Ruth, therefore, was given the honor of being an ancestor of Jesus.

Even that isn't the end of the blessings of Ruth’s life, because anyone born into a difficult situation, who has experienced great tragedy, can identify with Ruth. He can use her life as an example of how to face a hard situation. Ruth’s life is a reminder that God wants to transform each life into something wonderful.

You can be a “Ruth” for someone else. In spite of your circumstances – misfortune, calamity, family problems, social status – you can choose to

follow God. You can live by His principles. You can expect and receive His miracles. And God's blessings on your life will bring others to God. In a real sense you're one of God's billboards. What are you advertising?

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2: 21).

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4: 12).

“In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2: 7, 8).

1. Some people you know may never try to get to know Jesus, no matter how much they hear about Him. But if you truly follow in His steps, what will those people see?
2. In what ways are you to be an advertisement for Jesus?
3. When you make decisions, do you ever consider the effects your actions will have on others?
4. Are you willing to be a “Ruth,” one of God's billboards?