

Ruth And Redemption

A collection of devotionals by Christine Wyrzten



Copyright © 2000 National Gallery, London. All rights reserved.

WHEN BREAD BECOMES SCARCE

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.

Ruth 1:1

Canaan, the 'land of milk and honey' was no longer characterized as the land of abundance. Bethlehem, 'the place of bread' was void of bread. God had been trying to tell His disobedient children what would happen if they did not repent of their sins. They had wandered far from the faith of their ancestors and even the Promised Land could be transformed into a place of punishment by a God who desires repentance. ***Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit. If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. Leviticus 26:20-21***

At first glance, Elimilech's care for his family could seem commendable. He took them to a neighboring country where food was plentiful. However, should he have ever have left Canaan? Should he not have stayed to deal with his sins and the sins of his countrymen that brought on the famine? It appears that he is running from issues. Instead of bearing God's reproof and turning his heart toward Yahweh, instead of trusting God to supply his needs, he transplants his family into a land that is prohibited. God told His people to settle in Canaan, not Moab.

It never pays to ignore flaming, personal issues. When they are exacerbated, we must deal with them. When anger is hot, ask God to reveal the roots of it. When grief is most severe, give into it and express it. When an addiction is at its worst, explore the need beneath the craving and turn to God. Running from problems has disastrous consequences. Ask Jonah. We simply take our issues with us into Moab. Dealing with them there is twice as hard. Today is the day of salvation. God restrains His hand of judgment as long as possible, giving His children many opportunities to repent. He aches for us to know His blessing.

Frantic activity can often hide issues I'm afraid to look at, Father. I will be still to hear You speak. Amen

UPROOTED AND DISORIENTED

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 Naomi. Ruth 1:1,2

After the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they enjoyed a time of rest and prosperity. New generations were born. The sons and daughters of the ones who had wandered the desert for forty years never experienced war like their ancestors, but neither did they know the Lord. The miracles God performed for their fathers were forgotten. The landscape of those descendants who lived by faith was pretty barren. Israel plunged into three hundred years of spiritual darkness.

Elimelech and Naomi's story takes place during this time period when God was corporately silent. Famine forced them to leave their home in Bethlehem. They took up residence in Moab because food was available there. Tragedy would strike them in this far away country, though. The hardships they would experience in Moab would set the stage for the rest of the story.

God took this couple to a place of disorientation. They found themselves in a hallway of transition. The door behind them, representing everything that was familiar and comfortable, was closed. Where they stood was dark. If they squinted their eyes, they could probably see another doorway at the end of the hall. Light peeked through the crack perhaps, but there was not enough to bring comfort. Their future was not yet discernable. Naomi would enter a time of loss, fear, bitterness, and instability. It would take time before her faith would become the source of her joy.

God once took me to this hallway. Most everything and everyone I had come to depend on were crippled or removed from my life. I was immobilized by fear and found I could only turn to God for survival. He spoke to me in the dark. He made great use of my disorientation by helping me sort through my beliefs about myself, others, and even Him. All the cards were on the table and I allowed God to re-write my internal world. A hallway need not be a wasted wilderness. It can be the catalyst for something infinitely positive. It was for Naomi. It was for me.

I needed the dark to see my need for You. Loving Father, Your ways, though they looked severe, were most kind. Amen

LED INTO NOTHINGNESS

Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. Ruth 1:3

Naomi followed her husband's lead and moved to Moab with their two sons. Shortly after arriving, her husband died, leaving her in a strange land as a single mother. She was a long way from home and far removed from extended family and friends. Death yields a mountain of grief and brings drastic adjustments. To survive a loss and begin to move on is always difficult, even more so without a support system around you. Naomi was alone.

Following someone else's poor leadership can often leave me in a vulnerable place. I may find myself shipwrecked because I deferred to another's decision that ended up affecting the course of my life. Without a firm understanding of God's sovereignty and His ability to redeem disastrous circumstances, I will make one of two unfortunate choices. I will become bitter toward the one who led me astray, leaving me in such a dire predicament. Or, I will condemn myself for having trusted someone so foolish. Did Naomi struggle with such issues? I'm not told. However, I understand human nature and wonder if she ranted at her husband's grave, *"Now look what you've done to me!"*

I have suffered undesirable consequences at the hands of another. Most likely, so have you. I trusted when I shouldn't have trusted. So have you. If I were to have the luxury of repeating portions of my life, I would make different choices. You would, too. But here's the thing. God is never stuck when we find ourselves stranded in Moab. I erroneously believed that my life's journey was made up of one correct path. If I was taken on a detour, I could never return to the right road. Not true. God is the One who fabricates roadways in the wilderness. When there seems to be no way out, He makes a way. He even provides streams of water along the way for my refreshment.

When I see no way of escape, my eyesight is simply limited. You will not only lead me out, but whisper wisdom in my ears while on the journey. Thank You, my Lord. Amen

COMPROMISE AND CONSEQUENCES

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. Ruth 1: 4-5

Naomi's story just seems to get worse. First, after moving to a strange land, she became a widow. She transferred her security to her two married sons. After a decade, they also died, leaving her isolated and vulnerable. All that remained were two daughters-in-law. Though her husband's initial concern for his family's welfare had been commendable, he compromised their overall well-being by moving them to a place God said was prohibited. Once there, his sons were tempted to take foreign wives. This was the family's second compromise. The *Chaldee*, the language used by sacred writers of certain portions of the Old Testament, suggest that the sons died so young because of their disobedience to God's law regarding the taking of non-Hebrew wives.

Compromise always has consequences. Whenever I have made unholy alliances, they have come back to haunt me.

- I agreed to co-write pieces of music with people I was at odds with spiritually. Anemic songs emerged from our collaboration.
- I signed contracts with companies, though I had serious misgivings. (I felt I was trapped because I saw no other options.) Our disunity put us at perpetual stalemates throughout our business relationship.
- I based many of my past ministry decisions on advice from unstable sources. I sought God as well, but His ways seemed odd to me, so I set His ways aside and followed those who thought they were wise. Everything in my hands eventually turned to ashes.

Who has access to my ears today? Through what grid will I evaluate their words? Whose counsel will I choose to believe? As I become thoroughly acquainted with God's precepts, I will be capable of shunning foolishness. Choosing to honor God's ways by establishing holy alliances will spare me pain down the road.

I will not join hand with anyone without knowing Your mind, Lord Jesus. Amen

GOD'S FAVOR IS NOT GONE FOREVER

When (Naomi) heard that the LORD had come to the aid of His people in Judah by providing food for them, she prepared to go home. Ruth 1:6

The land of Canaan had been in spiritual darkness. They had forsaken the God of their fathers and were walking in blatant disobedience. God brought the consequences to their sin. Famine was one of His judgments. That was the very reason Naomi and her family fled to Moab some years earlier. Now, she hears that there is food in Judah once again. God's blessing and favor is pouring out on His people - because of His mercy.

How unlike God we human beings can be! Unfortunately, human nature says that there are sins for which others will never be shown mercy. If I cross another person just the 'right way', there may be no admittance back into their good graces. I might forever pay for my mistake. Forgiveness will be withheld. Peace between me and the person I offended eludes us until they have a heart change. Churches can be like that; never letting you forget where you came from.

Sin separates me from feeling the presence of God. I can be sure that while I am stiff-necked, I will bear disciplinary consequences, designed to bring me to repentance. God is not cruel, though. His acts of discipline do not comprise '*punishment without a purpose*'. He is not vindictive, wanting me to suffer simply because I hurt Him and breeched our covenant of love. His love for me is faithful because of who He is, not because of how trustworthy I am. Saying "I'm sorry" is easy, but not cheap. His Son's blood paid for my right to remain a daughter who walks in the joy of forgiveness. When I sin, God will only give me enough correction to show me the way home.

Repentance will always swing wide - the front door to Your mansion. Thank You. Amen

I DIDN'T PLAN ON THIS

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. 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. Ruth 1:6-7

Much has been written about Naomi losing her husband and two sons and the grief she endured as a woman alone in Moab. Little has been written of the two daughters-in-law who married her sons, were widowed as young women, and found themselves poised on the brink of a major move to Canaan. They were presented with options that were far from their dreams. I'm sure they pictured growing old with their husbands in familiar territory. They grew up in Moab and probably expected to raise a family and live out their lives there. Their expectations were shattered.

I have had many surprises in my lifetime. ***"You'll never believe what happened to me since I last saw you"*** has initiated countless conversations with friends and acquaintances. Good news as well as bad news made up the content. Whatever seized me by surprise put me off balance. There was no way I could have prepared for the unexpected.

Today, a mother may hear the news that her child has leukemia. Another parent might stagger under the announcement that their child is about to marry someone less than ideal. A father may learn that he has been laid off from his job when he assumed he would enjoy his work until retirement. A church member may learn that their pastor has fallen morally. All these scenarios, and many others, leave us shaken and disoriented.

We must know the One who carves roadways in the wilderness. We must be able to hear the voice of the One whose plans for us are for good, not evil. We must stand on the truth that absolutely nothing takes Him by surprise. Not ever. My life is held safely in His grip and my foundation is secure even when I cannot see the form of it. God's plans and purposes for my life, known before the foundation of the world, are the solid platform beneath my feet.

I'm facing things I'm unprepared for. I don't have a plan, but You do. Let me hear Your voice. Amen

UNSELFISH CONSIDERATION

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. Ruth 1:8

Has anyone ever tried to make you pay for his or her own pain? Because they were miserable, they wanted you to be unhappy. They couldn't handle the thought that you might be enjoying better times. They felt entitled to your undivided attention. No doubt, you felt their anger as you tried to live your life. No matter how much compassion you extended to them, you felt like you never made a dent. Perhaps the relationship turned sour in your mouth.

Naomi was one who could have initiated such acts of selfishness. She was a perfect candidate to become a narcissist. She lived in a foreign country. All her blood relatives had died. She was alone, except for two new daughters-in-law. It would have been easy for her to bind them to her side somehow, to make them pay for her misfortune. Instead, she gives each of them a gift of grace. She releases them from their commitment to her. She understands that they are young, will most likely marry again, and would probably prefer to stay in their homeland with their family. She extended a gift that was costly to her. Freedom. She sacrificed her own comfort for their well-being.

We often feel bound to unhappy people. They play the part of a martyr flawlessly, attempting to force us into being God. They are masters at making others believe that their soul's prosperity depends on them. The problem is, no one can satisfy the soul except God. We can lead others to the water, even show them how to cup their hands and take a drink of everlasting life, but the rest is up to them. Reaching out to embrace someone like Naomi is satisfying in every way, but a 'Naomi' is rare. May God reveal to us, not only when we are to love others, but also when He has released us to go our way in peace.

Feelings of guilt are not always evidence that I have wronged another. I will be obedient to You only, Lord Jesus. I will love when You lead me to love, and sacrifice when Your promptings are the ones leading me. Amen

SHE MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING RIGHT

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." Ruth 1:10

We cannot conjure up tears for those with whom we share no positive emotional connection. We were created to be 'responders'. If others love us, we are able to love back. If others are generous with us emotionally in an atmosphere of trust, we love freely in return. If we are spurned, we instinctively draw back. If they are stingy with affirmation, we grow shy. If they are stoic, we lean toward stoicism. If they are cruel, we fight the urge to return cruelty.

Naomi's two daughters-in-law wept at the prospect of saying goodbye to her. She had offered them their freedom but it's clear they were in pain at the thought of taking her up on it. If Naomi had been a bitter widow, unable to invest in others, they would have jumped at the chance to leave. Their tears reveal that Naomi must have loved them well.

In an ideal world, children are connected to parents, and vice versa. There are tears of joy at reunions and tears of sadness at farewells. We might feel guilty when we don't have feelings of love for certain family members. There are children who dread seeing parents. There are wives who feel nothing for their husbands.

Lack of positive emotions is usually an indicator that something is wrong with the relationship. It could be that little was given - therefore little is felt in return. That is why Jesus modeled agape love; the kind of love that is not based on feelings. His love was proactive. Even though we rejected Him, He died for us.

Jesus understands the severity of our wounds today. He enters into our pain but then He offers us the grace to love in spite of them. If we become embittered, wither, and remain stingy with the great love with which Christ has loved us, then we live in defiance of the cross. We perpetuate dysfunction. How do we find the strength to initiate acts that don't match what is in our heart? God's Spirit, alive in us, enables us to extend one difficult act of love after another.

You don't judge me for not having feelings of love. You understand why I don't. I can love with my actions though. Please love through me. Amen

AT GREAT PERSONAL COST

They wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." 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?" Ruth 1:10-11

The gifts we remember most are often the ones that were given at great personal cost. Perhaps when you were small, you received a Christmas gift that left you openmouthed. Yes, it was what you wanted but you wondered how in the world your parents afforded it. You knew they didn't have the money for it. You understood that they moved heaven and earth to put that gift under the tree. A memory such as that stands out over a lifetime.

Naomi insisted that her daughters-in-law leave her because it was for their best. They were young. She was not. They had prospects of marrying again. She did not. Though their departure would leave her utterly alone, requiring that she make the journey back to Judah by herself, she still offered them their freedom. I can imagine they were deeply moved by such sacrificial love.

Oftentimes, God asks me to give up something precious so another can thrive. The sacrifice hurts profoundly. When I first consider the gift, there might be a sick feeling, knowing what it will require. I wonder if I can actually do it, the cost is so staggering. I usually teeter on the edge of indecision for a while, until courage and faith take over.

On another occasion, others ask me to give what is sacrificial! The thought doesn't originate with me. The one asking such a thing of me may not deserve it. The relationship doesn't warrant the cost. Because of that, I may categorically decline, feeling incredulous at the suggestion. I should always stop and pray. God may be asking me to make such a sacrifice 'as unto Him.' It is for my benefit, allowing me to taste of Christ's journey on earth when He gave outrageously to the undeserving.

***I'm out of my comfort zone. In fact, I'm squirming. But, I'm willing to follow Naomi's lead.
Amen***

IT'S A GOD-CONNECTION

Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. Ruth 1:14

Naomi had just urged her two daughters in law to return to Moab, to their families. She blessed them both with gracious words. One daughter-in-law said goodbye reluctantly with a kiss. There were many tears shed before she went her way. The other daughter in law just couldn't bring herself to leave. She clung to Naomi, not able to tear herself away.

Connections between people are interesting to consider. THE NOTEBOOK, a Nicholas Sparks' novel - turned movie, is about the power of love and its indestructibility over a lifetime. It is about a rare connection that binds two people together. Together, life feels right. Apart, there is an ache that never goes away; no matter how many years they happen to be separated.

I believe that God is the creator of unique spiritual connections. Orpah was able to kiss her mother-in-law farewell and return to Moab. Ruth, however, had a love for Naomi that simply couldn't consider separation. Naomi had been forthright in laying out the cost of such a sacrifice. If she followed her mother-in-law back to Canaan, not only would she live among strangers, but she would never again dwell in a land that worshipped her Moabite god. She would leave behind the security of familiarity.

I'm sure she did not take the cost lightly. Nor do I, when Jesus asks me to follow Him - in life and death. Every day, I say good-bye to other loves, to ways of thinking that might bring security because they represent a familiar default. Jesus calls me to accompany Him to new, uncharted territory. I cannot do otherwise because love and connection constrain me. To go my own way and do my own thing would mean that I would have to tear myself away from the company of His presence. That is not an option.

To follow in Your footsteps will mean sacrifice, but I can not live without You. I will not let go of Your hand. Amen

NO TRIAL RUN

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people [shall be] my people, and your God, my God. "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Ruth 1: 16-17

Most of us would never think of marrying someone without meeting that person's family first. What are they like? What kind of an environment has our potential mate been raised in? What are the forces that have shaped his personality? And finally, when we marry, we not only gain a spouse, but we inherit an entire family. Because of this, the gravity of the vows weigh on us, as they should.

Consequently, I am amazed that Ruth made a life-long commitment to Naomi, her family, her people, her homeland, and even her God, without ever having laid eyes on any of them. It would resemble committing myself to a foreigner, offering to move to that country and adopt his culture, his religion, and his family as my own. What a scary proposition. To make the comparison even more realistic, imagine that the foreigner was bankrupt - and had no tangible way to make a living. He was simply going back to his homeland in hopes of encountering better times.

Ruth followed Naomi in life and in death. She offers to die in the same bed. She doesn't even ask that her bones be carried back to Moab. She wants to be buried in the same grave with Naomi; wants their dust to mingle so that they may rise again together in the next life.

Ruth models love-based commitment to Christ. When I realized that He loved me, I offered to pick up my cross and follow Him. I took His people as my own. I gained a family of new brothers and sisters I'd never met. I agreed to support them, love them and pray for them even though we are diverse in culture, denomination, and biblical preferences. I know that we will suffer persecution on many levels and will always remain foreigners here while others seem so much at home. Ah, but there are rewards. We have been buried with Christ and are resurrected, daily, to new life with Him.

I won't deny there's a cost. You told me there would be. Make my soul one with Yours today and cause me to see the wonder of such a thing. Amen

IT CAN'T BE HER!

And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. Ruth 1: 19-20

When Naomi left Bethlehem, she departed with her husband and two sons. When she returned, she arrived on the scene with a strange woman. No husband. No children. Only a stranger. Something else struck the towns' people. Her countenance had changed. She had obviously experienced profound loss and hardship. Though she was close to emerging on the other side of her grief, she didn't know it yet. All the people saw was the effect of her pain on her face. Her old friends had a unified reaction, ***"Is this Naomi? It can't be."*** She had once been robust and full of life, now she was hollow and broken, evidenced by her new name. "Mara." "Bitter."

Our face also wears our story. Yesterday, I sorted through some stray pictures that spanned more than two decades. I smiled as I re-lived special events with my family; birthdays, a favorite Christmas, a high school graduation. But then, I stumbled on numerous pictures of myself taken during a very difficult time. My face was old and drawn, smile was plastic, even my color was unhealthy. Those who know me now would be shocked to see how I appeared in those pictures. Afflictions bring about profound changes to a person.

Those who had seen Jesus preach on a hillside were taken back, I'm sure, by the different countenance they saw as He carried His cross. The One who once held children on His lap and enjoyed their precocious antics could also be heard crying out in the night to His Father. Oh, but here's the thing. God is sovereign - and never leaves us in a pit if we stay on the path He designed for us. Naomi's story took a drastic turn. Eventually, mine did, too. We know what happened to Jesus. His darkest hour gave way to a glorious resurrection morning.

I am often burdened. It can feel too heavy to bear, but I am never hopeless. I follow You - and You conquered sin and death. Amen

PASSING THROUGH GOD'S HANDS

Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me? Ruth 1:21

Naomi's words sound familiar. It was Job who said, "***The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.***" Our spiritual brother and sister remind us that all things pass through the hands of God, even Satan's arrows in Job's case.

When I come to an understanding that nothing happens to me without God's permission, it makes me angry. It causes me to distrust a God who claims to love His children. Doesn't He have me engraved on the palm of His hand? That is so endearing. How can He cherish me, yet allow me to be hurt?

At the fall, God conceived a way to bring good out of evil. He did not plan to make them equal so they would cancel each other out. No! The good that God would craft out of pain would far outweigh the bad - many times over. There would be no contest. This glorious phenomenon is available to everyone but not all will experience it. Why? Isn't everyone a candidate for such blessing? Yes, but only the one who chooses to believe, by faith, in the love of God despite the raging evidence around them that seeks to prove that God is cruel. Most of us get stuck by what our eyes can see and we withdraw our hand from God's hand.

At the very point I choose to distrust, I forfeit the opportunity to see my pain transformed. ***"God, here is my tragic story. I choose to believe You love me so I put my pain in Your hands. Bring something beautiful out of it."*** Only then will I see redemption. Only then will I bear a testimony of God's love and power. Faith is most profound when others hear me praise God, though they fail to understand why in the world I would do such a thing!

If I'm in pain, I'm halfway there. I see You, coaxing me to trust You so that You can redeem my story. Amen

WHEN REALITY SETS IN

And Ruth said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." Ruth 2:1

Decisions I make in the emotion of the moment can come back to bite me. Ruth was now in Bethlehem with Naomi. Perhaps the vows of love and commitment she had made to her mother-in-law were now tempered by the reality they faced upon returning home. The rosy colored glasses had cleared. They were confronted with their meager resources and the prospect of hard labor to make ends meet. Ruth is up to the task. Scripture does not suggest that she second-guessed her decision. There is no record of complaint, nor does she request to return home to Moab. Ruth asks to go to work. She has her sights set on the present, not the past.

Choosing to embark on a new venture is easier than seeing it through to completion. A fresh endeavor holds my interest while the thrill of a past commitment diminishes with time. Because of that, it is easy to become one who starts things but never finishes them.

With every dream, there is a reckoning. Once birthed, the beauty of it is often obscured by rigorous daily challenges. ***Daughters of Promise*** is certainly the ministry I dreamed of all my life. Its beginning was predicated by miracles too numerous to write here. When women come to Jesus at our events and learn to live empowered by His extravagant love, I hold this ministry in my hands with wonder. But I am not deceived. Those kinds of moments are set apart on the calendar by many more days of administrative tasks, financial challenges, and spiritual battles. I cannot be childish, only desiring what is fun and brings instant gratification.

Ruth was wise. Her life was not ruled by feelings, but neither were there an absence of them. Her life was lived in proper balance, rich in emotion but abounding in perseverance.

Continue to give me a heart for Your work, Lord. But when things get hard, give me tenacity and faithfulness. Amen

HARDLY A COINCIDENCE

Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. Ruth 2:1

Did it *'just so happen'* that Naomi had a kinsman named Boaz? I don't believe that for a minute. It was divine providence. Had Boaz been an integral part of Naomi's life prior to this occasion? We're not told. If their affiliation had been a distant one, it was to change drastically from this point on. Our intersection with people is never a mistake. It is always brought about by the hand of God. May I never call *'coincidence'* what God has strategically arranged.

- Twenty two years ago, my husband and I were able to adopt our second child because the director of an unwed mothers' home *'just happened'* to attend one of my concerts.
- The *Daughters of Promise* daily radio program is aired via a satellite that services several hundred stations because the program director for that network *'just happened'* to be sitting at my dinner table nearly 10 years ago.
- I had the privilege of leading my 95 year old family friend to Christ this past weekend because 80 years ago, he *'just happened'* to stop at my aunt's house to inquire about a job and ended up staying for the rest of his life.
- We live in our current house because God *'just happened'* to show me the house (and all the rooms) in prayer. This was years before we ever knew we were moving.
- I visited a mall with my sister several days ago. She *'just happened'* to enter a store to buy a pair of sunglasses. The clerk was in pain and I offered to pray with her. God healed her of her migraine.

Even a swift review of my life causes me to take more notice of today's events. Perhaps the stranger I meet will change the life of one of my children someday. Maybe the kindness I extend to a crabby waitress will be the catalyst that moves her toward God. Perhaps the prayer I offer, for the hundredth time, for a hurting friend will be the one that mobilizes God to move heaven and earth for her. If none of these are coincidence, are they fate? Oh no! If we are His children, we are led by the hand of God. Nothing happens to us today that takes Him by surprise. I can rest in such security.

I can look backward now and see Your hand, though I couldn't distinguish it at the time. May that give me confidence to trust You today and to be remain faithful. Amen

TALK WITH CREDIBILITY

Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the Lord be with you." And they said to him, "May the Lord bless you." Ruth 2:4

Boaz. What a man. What an employer! His first words of the morning to those who worked for him were expressions of blessing. He didn't arrive just to drill them with instructions for the day. He didn't ignore them, go about his work and just assume they would do theirs. He engaged them.

His workers received his words and wished him well in return. If Boaz had been a hypocrite, (all talk and no character), his employees wouldn't have returned the gracious blessing. They might have rolled their eyes and mumbled some kind of reply. Boaz must have built credibility with them prior to this particular day. His reputation preceded his blessing.

I know what it feels like to receive words from someone who has little credibility with me. When they give unsolicited advice, offer a prayer on the spot, or send a card that outlines one scripture after another, it feels lifeless. Their gestures are hollow. They seem more self-serving than sacrificial. Because there is a lack of affinity between us, their interest has little positive effect. Their prior track record with me, and others, erases the potential of any meaningful interaction.

I remember this lesson well today, as I am tempted to reach out. Have I earned the right to speak? Is there mutual respect? If so, then allow words of blessing to spill out! If not, then I must understand that ill-timed encouragement will be a waste of words. I should pray for them first, and then show the face of kindness for a season before opening my mouth. A well-known adage sums it up. ***"Build the bridge of friendship strong enough to support the truth."***

Reveal any part of me that is hypocritical. May I truly be authentic, not only to You but to others. Amen

LEST I FEAR I AM UNNOTICED

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" Ruth 2:5

In the days of Ruth, the poor were provided for if they were willing to work. Widows, orphans, and out of town strangers were allowed to walk through the fields and gather whatever grain the harvesters left behind.

This was Ruth's only option. One morning, she arose to go to work despite the heavy weights she carried emotionally. She was destitute with barely enough food to survive. She had lost her husband and was still in grief. And she faced danger as she worked in the field. (She lived during the time of the judges when lawlessness ruled and "every man did what was right in his own eyes.") Fear and uncertainty must have been her companions that morning as she faced the day ahead. She understood that she was in economic, emotional, and social bondage.

She did not know that the one who owned the land would take notice of her. She did not know that while she felt alone, he was being made aware of her plight. She did not know that he would make provision for her future. She labored quietly, only aware of her own heartbeat and her own thoughts. Perhaps she believed that the rest of her life would resemble that particular day. She did not know about redemption. It was out of the realm of her experience.

There are days I 'feel' alone. I am not. The King who owns the land takes notice of me. There are days I 'feel' that my life will always be what it is now. It won't. The King who writes the future has plans for me.

I forget to take into account redemption. It is always a bit beyond my grasp, but I'm learning. My King is the One who waits to offer me an exchanged life. Forgiveness instead of condemnation. Security instead of fear. Companionship instead of abandonment. Ruth could not see her destiny as she bent over to gather grain. But, it existed nonetheless.

No matter how today may look or feel, I cannot judge the future by it. Your eyes see me. Your Son paid for my future. Amen

“STAY HERE WITH ME,” HE SAYS

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids." Ruth 2:8

I can only imagine Ruth's relief and her deep joy. Her story has taken a significant turn. Earlier that morning, she entered a stranger's field to gather the leftover grain off of the floor of the field. She was in danger. She was hungry. Her future was uncertain. Now, it is early evening. What a difference a few hours can make. The owner of land has not only noticed her but is reaching out in kindness. He assures her that her needs will be provided for. She may gather grain every day in the same field. She may dare open her heart to the idea of security - a luxury she hasn't felt since her husband died and her world was turned upside down.

The application here is staggering and obvious. My Father is the King. I am a citizen in His kingdom. He beckons me to come to Him everyday for more food than I can possibly consume. He has declared Himself to be my provider. My future is secure with Him. My identity as one that has rights to everything He has is never shaken! Yet, I often go to '*other fields*' to get my needs met. Perhaps when I do, He shakes His head in disappointment and mutters, "***Where are you going, Christine? Don't go anywhere else! Everything is here that you need. I've made this home for you.***"

Oftentimes, the grass seems greener at a distant field. It never is. I need to dig my roots in deeply today and stay home with Christ.

You invite me to make my home in You but oftentimes I am a vagabond, looking for crumbs from some other landowner. Forgive me! Amen

DARING TO BELIEVE IT'S MINE!

"Then Boaz said to Ruth, stay here with my maids. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them." Ruth 2:8-9

Ruth had hoped to come in under the landowner's radar. Not because she wouldn't have loved preferential treatment, but because she had learned some hard lessons about survival in this world. She was poor, new to the community, and just hoped to forage for grain quietly, without suffering negative attention. Not only does the owner of the field become aware of her, he is moved by her life's story. He gives her permission to do what she would have considered unthinkable ~ consider herself as one with his servants. She had full rights to be in his field, to gather grain with his maids. No longer was her attention on the threshing floor. She could lift her gaze to take in the expanse of the fields and dare to believe that any of it could be hers.

The tragedy of my life's story involves the love of Abba I never grasped, the promises I never thought were mine, and the inheritance I ignored because I didn't dare believe I could be the recipient of such extravagance. God's kingdom is rich with saints; saints who not only live now, but saints who have gone on before me. Each is given the right to stroll the fields of God's kingdom and enjoy the bounty. I have been invited to participate; yet often I believe the lie that I am unworthy. I resemble an outsider, looking in from the edges of the property, wishing I could be like the ones who move about freely, enjoying their privilege.

I see the landowner calling out, beckoning me, and calling my name. ***"Come on in,"*** Jesus says. ***"You belong here. You can dare to look up and behold the fields because they're yours. I've been waiting for you to arrive."***

I'm not going to wait to believe I'm Yours until I feel it. I'm going to live in the truth of it today as though it were true. That is the very essence of faith. Amen

THE FACE OF SKEPTICISM

Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

Ruth 2:10

She knew she didn't belong. Though Boaz had encouraged Ruth to 'make herself at home', her heart struggled to make sense of the invitation. His offer defied logic and feelings. It might have tapped into her skeptic side that said, ***"If something appears too good to be true", then it must be.***

Many years ago, our family moved to a small community in New Jersey. We started attending a church nearby and began to learn names and faces. One Sunday, I was made aware that a woman, who lived near us, in her thirties with two small children, had walking pneumonia. I wanted to reach out to her in some way. The next morning, I made homemade spaghetti sauce from scratch. It simmered all day.

At suppertime, I delivered a spaghetti dinner to her door. ***"Who are you"***, she asked. I explained that I was new to the area, to the church, and had heard about her illness and wanted to show her family the love of Jesus. Still, she shook her head in disbelief. ***"But, what do you really want? Nobody does this kind of thing for nothing!"*** She tried to make sense of my offer and was clearly not comfortable accepting the meal. I'm happy to tell you that she finally did and a friendship was born.

For many years, I wore the face of a skeptic. Each time I was confronted by the love of God and the radical forgiveness He offered, I never embraced it as mine. I was one who kept asking, ***"What's the catch?"*** Now, I know there is no catch. I'm not worthy but He has declared me worthy because of what Jesus did. My worthiness is a gift.

No gift is mine until I reach out to receive it. Jesus stands at the door with a banquet in His hands but I must move beyond skepticism before I can consume it. Today, I approach the banquet table with wonder, not distrust.

Like Ruth, I fall on my face today, Jesus. It is a wondrous thing that I have found favor in Your sight. Amen

IS ANYBODY WATCHING?

Boaz said to her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know." Ruth 2:11

I consider the day that Ruth made the choice to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem. Did she do so because she knew her actions would 'pay off' someday? Did she dream of being a hero? Did she make decisions out of a need for notoriety? Or, was she simply caught up in her love for Naomi?

I'm often struck by the fact that those who make the greatest sacrifices aren't aware that they have done so. They seem uncomfortable with praise. What they chose to do that was so noteworthy seemed to be the only option for them. They did not wallow in the costly consequences of their choice. They understood that doing what was honorable usually has its price.

Heaven will be full of unsung heroes. Jesus said, ***"If you suffer with Me, you shall also reign with Me."*** Who are the ones who will rule with Christ on some future day? Those who lived difficult lives here, made noble choices, and suffered the consequences knowing that they were laying up treasures in heaven. There are those who care for chronically ill family members. Each day they forfeit a social life because of the ongoing demands. Others sustained permanent injuries because of a choice to intervene during a crime scene. A friend of mine, in mid-life, adopted a foreign child and each day brings challenges that would break most people. Their son had been severely abused, was scarred emotionally and spiritually, and the outcome of whether he will ever live a productive life is uncertain.

When things get difficult, we often think we suffer in vain. We never know who is watching, though. Ruth did the right thing without considering a reward. She did not conceive that there would be someone like Boaz who would hear her story and see the beauty in it. Today, my choices affect others whether I am aware of it or not. May I run the race with honor.

Do a work in me, in the place where motives are shaped. I can be so selfish. Help me do the right thing for the right reasons. Amen

BECOMING GOD'S HANDS

*And Boaz said, "May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."
Ruth 2:12*

Some of God's children will bless others with their words but disappear from the scene when it's time to put an action with their blessing. Words can be cheap in the face of subsequent inactivity.

Boaz was a busy man. Yet, he didn't stop investing in Ruth's future after he offered her this beautiful prayer. Time revealed that he joined hands with God to bring her blessing about. He apparently understood that God is at work in this world through the hands of His servants. He recognized that a strategic opportunity was his to see that his prayer would come to fruition. He loved her with 'word and deed.' He would see to it that her work was rewarded, that her wages would be full, and that she would have a place of refuge.

I have certainly been one who has passed out my share of comforting words to others. ***"God will take care of you!" "He will bring good out of this tragedy somehow."*** These are true statements. But perhaps in certain cases, God wanted me to do more. I could have cooperated with Him to make the words I offered a reality in that person's life.

I damage the reputation of God's character when I tell others that God loves them, but then it appears that I don't. When I share that God is a merciful Counselor, and then I am unavailable emotionally. When I preach of God's justice, and then fail to react to unfairness. When I emphasize that God is gracious, and then I am stingy with giving others second chances.

If Christianity just involved words, how easy it would be. I could live a life of hypocrisy; impress others with words and live like the devil. It is 'love in action' which changes people.

I take Boaz' example to heart. Today, I will be generous with words and follow it up with some gracious gesture. Amen

YOU TREAT ME AS IF..

"Then Ruth said, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants." Ruth 2:13

The favor Boaz showed to Ruth opened her heart to him. Undeserved kindness usually does that as it melts away reserve. Ruth tells Boaz that he has treated her like one of his own, though she is not.

How often our experience is contrary. *"You treat me as if I were a stranger.."* we whisper to a friend who is estranged. *"You treat me as if you don't even like me.."* we might say to a spouse in the heat of an argument. The pain associated with such statements can be excruciating because the relationship warrants better treatment. Because of strain however, the heart's door is closed.

I'm glad to say that I have experienced the undeserved favor akin to what Ruth felt. *"You treat me as if you've known me all my life.."* I said to a new acquaintance. *"You treat me like a member of your family.."* I exclaimed more than once to a gracious host.

There might be someone who laments that they have never felt such favor. At that point, I encourage us to look to the deepest place in us, the place where the Spirit of God resides. He exists in our Spirit *only* because of undeserved favor.

- Abba adopted me even though I initially rejected His Son.
- Jesus died for me when it required radical forgiveness.
- God made me a joint-heir with Jesus. I get to inherit everything He has - though I've done nothing to deserve it.

No wonder I whisper, *"You treat me as if I've always loved You, always been faithful to You, and did something wonderful to deserve all this!"* What Boaz did for Ruth hints at more astounding spiritual realities. May they not be lost to me. May my joy be full!

Whatever I need, You reach out Your hand to give to me. Talk about favor! Thank You for loving me. Amen

SELF CONTROL AND CONSIDERATION

She ate until she was satisfied and had some left over. Ruth 2:14

Ruth and Naomi were poor. Because of that, they would have also been hungry if Ruth hadn't taken to the fields to gather stray pieces of grain from the threshing floor. I can imagine that she was famished when Boaz invited her to a meal. As he served her, it doesn't appear that she lost her manners. Though some might have seized the moment to eat voraciously, to the exclusion of their surroundings, Ruth did not. She ate just until she felt satisfied, and then left some of what was offered to her. She did not take advantage of Boaz' good nature.

This kind of gratitude and consideration are hard to come by. Make someone a charitable offer and you will often see them snatch the gift, fail to express proper gratitude, and then feel entitled to get the same thing given to them again. They fail to see that even this one-time expression was a gift from God's hand. Entitlement is a disease that erodes every relationship it touches.

I want to make sure that I am like Ruth.

- I may ask for an hour of another's time, an hour I feel I need desperately. Perhaps they only have ten minutes to give to me. Will I be satisfied and express my thanks?
- I may be hit with bad news today. A good friend may be legitimately too busy to give me the attention I crave. Will I connect with God to get my needs met and give her grace?
- An unexpected person might surface and offer me something extravagant? Will I make the suggestion to receive less, being sensitive that the gift may be too costly?

Without awareness, discipline, and being rooted in Christ, I could become a narcissist. Getting my needs met easily becomes my focus. Only God can help me see beyond myself. Even while in need, He can help me see others and enable me to confer upon them great value.

***It is good for me to receive 'just enough to be satisfied'. I do not need to hoard from others.
You provide everything I need. Amen***

TURNING DOWN FAVOR

At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain."

Ruth 2:14

Boaz graced Ruth with an invitation to dine at his table. The miracle is, she accepted. Though she had expressed her place to Boaz earlier ("*I have found favor in your sight, even though I am not one of your maidservants*"), she was able to receive his kindness without shame. Not only did she eat his food, but she allowed him to serve her. Her ability to receive had not been crippled by her life's story.

Given who I was fifteen years ago, I'm sure I would have turned down a similar invitation. "*I couldn't possibly take this request seriously,*" I would have thought. "*I don't deserve it. Surely the invitation must be a mistake.*"

How do I know? Because in the past I was skilled at discounting expressions of favor. If someone I respected wanted to be my friend, I assumed it was because they felt sorry for me. If I received a request to sing at some prestigious event, I was sure I was only asked because their 'first pick' had other plans. Unlike Ruth, I could never relax and 'enjoy the meal'. Brennan Manning says, "*Oftentimes we feel like a homely peasant girl for whom the prince has come to take a bride.*"

I have come to believe that my spiritual health is completely related to my ability to receive what God offers me. I take spiritual inventory today to assess whether or not my heart is completely open to receive all of His love, all of His mercy, and all of His forgiveness. My greatest prayer today is this:

Jesus, scale the walls of my fear. I give You permission to enter the places where I am entombed in shame. I want to receive all of You with joy. Amen

HE MADE IT EASY

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." Ruth 2:15-16

I would have loved to hear Ruth's account of this story. Perhaps she ran home to Naomi with her sack full of grain and said, "You know, for some reason, this afternoon was easier for me than the morning. I only had to work half the amount of time to get the same amount of grain. Isn't that strange?" She might have spent the evening scratching her head, trying to make sense of it all. The truth is, Boaz made it easy. He sent workers on ahead to prepare the stalks. Ruth's path was strewn with abundant amounts. He was conscious of her hard labor and made a way to affect it.

My favorite fairy tale as a child was Hansel and Gretel. I was charmed by the idea that Gretel had a brother who had made provision for their way home. Gretel just had to trust and make the difficult journey. Hansel made himself responsible for the rest. ***"Don't cry", he said. "I'll take care of you."*** Though she had to endure the forest, she was not alone.

I often think I am responsible for myself. The weight of daily provision weighs on me. With stooped shoulders, I conclude that if ground is to be gained, it's all up to me. I fail to see that it is God who prepares the way. He graces my life with the right contacts. He surprises me with unexpected provision. He gives me favor in encounters that are pivotal to my future. He brings clarity to confusing situations just in the nick of time. I have erroneously considered such moments "*coincidences*", but I know better.

Today, I will be conscious of Your gracious hand. I do not work alone. Amen

SHE PASSED THE TEST!

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." Ruth 2:15-16

The rules for the poor were clear. You could go to a farmer's field, bend over, and pick up leftover grain from the ground. The sheaves, rich in grain, were off limits. Imagine how tempting it must have been for those hungry and impoverished to steal when no one was looking. A rich supply of grain was just within their grasp, yet they couldn't touch it. It seems that Boaz understood the psyche of someone in need, how they might be tormented by the rules because of the power of their hunger.

Quietly, behind the scenes, he made provision for Ruth to touch what was previously forbidden. He opened his heart to her need and gave her permission to gather food from the best of his land. She had passed the test. Her character had been revealed by her life's story. What she had done in secret, anonymously, proved to construct a platform of credibility. She hadn't performed to become credible. She hadn't performed at all. Her character proved sterling without an awareness of the watchful eyes of spectators. Ruth had been faithful with little. Because of that, Boaz knew he was free to entrust Ruth with more.

I often think that no one is watching me. However, I am not an island and Ruth's story reinforces that truth. The sacrifices I've made, the decisions for righteousness made in the dark, the encouragement given to the weak and feeble-minded, all leave impressions that live on. The quality of a person's heart is not hidden for long. I wear my history like a garment around my shoulders for all to see. And every so often, God sends a Boaz my way to show me that He rewards the righteous. Whatever gift is given is a mere shadow of the glories and riches to come.

In Your kingdom, there are already NO restrictions. You have made all Your resources available to me because of Your mercy, not my goodness. Amen

EVEN THE DEAD MATTER

***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." The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead."
Ruth 2:19-20***

When we honor the living, we are also paying tribute to the dead in Christ. When Boaz honored Ruth, he not only touched Naomi's life but also the lives of Elimilech and Ruth's deceased husband.

We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. ***"Since we are,"*** scripture says, ***"let us lay aside the weights which so easily drag us down."*** I would imagine that everyone's audience is diverse. Yours will include the family members you loved, the mentors that shaped your faith, and the extended family of God who invested in your life. Mine will include the same kinds of people but the faces change.

Quite honestly, there are days I feel their prayers. I am in tune with their ongoing encouragement. I discern the reality that I do not make the smallest decision without the watchful eyes of those already in the heavenlies. My father and mother, both with Christ, are cheering me on. My dear prayer partner Iris, who died suddenly this past January, is smiling over my shoulder. In fact, our church is currently experiencing a tender move on God on our women. Many times, we remark to each other that Iris is busy in heaven, involved in our spiritual growth with her prayers.

Naomi was a widow, but she understood that in astounding respects, she was not isolated from the ones she lost and loved so deeply. There is always a connection between the living and the dead. That makes me sit a bit taller today; makes me stand at attention to consider things that might have gotten sloppy. I am stirred to do my best. The 'cloud of witnesses' is ever before me. I am motivated to honor Christ in the smallest things. Unseen faces cheer me on to make a righteous decision.

The grave has never stopped the advancement of Your Kingdom, Jesus. Thank You for still allowing those I love to extend their love towards me. Amen

SOLID FEEDBACK

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 2:22-23

A lot had happened to Ruth since she decided to go to a nearby field to reap grain. She didn't know that she would stumble upon a relative's land. There was no way of knowing that he would take personal notice of her. To heighten the intrigue, she couldn't have guessed that his attention to her would include such favor.

There was a lot to report when she went home to Naomi that night. She recounted the days' events, got Naomi's feedback, and acted on her advice. Naomi said, ***"Are you kidding? By all means, take what Boaz offered. Stay with his maids!"*** She validated the miracle of Boaz' favor and was pivotal in making sure Ruth stayed engaged in this unexpected turn of events.

Righteous feedback is critical to my journey of faith. As I take tentative steps forward, test the waters, and go back and report my findings to mentors and friends, they will often exclaim over things I feared were just coincidence. I can hear their collective voices over these past few years. ***"Really, Christine? You must investigate that. That's not an accident!"*** And, ***"I have a feeling that this person could be instrumental in your future. Don't give up praying for that relationship."***

I honor the friends who give me the joy of telling my stories. I trust I am as generous with my enthusiasm when it's time for them to tell me their stories. The 'hearer' is always critical. I am the most vulnerable when I share my stories of faith and wait for the other person to respond. His validation, or lack of, can be critical to whether or not I move forward. No wonder scripture tells us to choose our friends carefully. Our spiritual growth can often be measured by the quality of others' feedback.

I get it, Jesus. I'm not meant to live in isolation. Help me tell my stories to a champion of faith. Amen

RIGHT UNDER THEIR NOSE

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.

Ruth 3:1-2

What a pleasant break Naomi must have had from her grief. She donned a matchmaker's hat and began to plant a radical idea in Ruth's heart. Boaz was available. Boaz was a relative and a man of great honor. And, Boaz had already shown Ruth eternal grace. Once the idea was conceived, it seemed obvious. Boaz was in their daily landscape. Wasn't it possible that he was God's provision for their future?

Often, the answer I need is right in front of me, so obvious that I fail to see it.

Before moving to Georgia, a prayer partner told me that the small town of Athens, GA would have everything I needed for *Daughters of Promise*. Leaving the big city of Cincinnati, I doubted her words, though she felt God had given them to her. Yet, I will tell you this ~ Athens may be small, but each time I have need of anything and think about heading to Atlanta to find it, the answer turns up in Athens. In many cases, right around the corner from my home/office. It's a God thing.

What are you desperately seeking today? Perhaps the dilemma will be solved by narrowing your search to within your four walls. Or, down the street. In your office building. Within the church ranks. In your small town. God places us in strategic positions and then maximizes each important relationship. There is more mileage in each affiliation than we ever thought feasible. Don't overlook the obvious. When we finally discover what was there all along, God must exclaim, "*Yes, finally! Now, they'll soar.*"

*I used to whine that You fail to provide. I was blind to see Your answer. Now, I know better.
Amen*

OPTIONS, FINALLY!

Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Ruth 3:2

I can only begin to imagine Naomi's joy. Ruth tells her of a stranger's favor, a wealthy landowner who showed her great kindness. The landowner turned out to be a relative, a kinsman. She immediately knew the significance.

If an Israelite were in desperate financial straits, he would sell his field, or even himself, into slavery. The responsibility for redemption fell to his kinsman. God intended that the ransom be paid by those who had the greatest personal interest in redemption, the man's own flesh and blood.

Oh, the insight into the redemption this story provides. Like everything else in scripture, the book of Ruth has to be understood in relation to Christ's work and purposes. Boaz, living in Bethlehem, became Ruth's kinsman redeemer. Jesus, born in Bethlehem is my kinsman redeemer! Since redemption has to be a family matter, it was necessary for Jesus to become one of us. The price to redeem us from sin had to be paid for by a man of flesh and blood, a member of the family of humanity. Neither angel, nor any other person, could accomplish it.

What had once appeared hopeless to Ruth and Naomi changed instantly with the knowledge that a redeemer was on the horizon. Futility and resignation were replaced with hope. The story feels familiar. I once didn't know what to do with my sin, my failures, and the places where I had shipwrecked. Until Jesus arrived, any hope of redemption was impossible.

Oh, but He arrived on the scene, as He does each day, and presented me with a list of options. Mercy for condemnation. Grace for guilt. And, second chances for failure.

The word "trapped" should never be in my vocabulary. You can redeem absolutely anything.

Amen

CLEAR INTENTIONS

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." Ruth 3:3-4

Naomi recognized a golden opportunity. It was clear to her that their lives were about to change. Boaz was their relative and therefore, their potential kinsman redeemer. It was time for Ruth to invest in the relationship. Naomi's plan included boldness and vulnerability. There would be no mistaking what Ruth was going to suggest to Boaz. There wasn't much of a chance that he would fail to see the point of her visit. She would wear her intentions on her sleeve. Her courage inspires me. When needs are great, bravery is high.

I have missed many golden opportunities to sit at the feet of my Redeemer. I knew who He was and I knew His character. I had heard about His power. I was mildly acquainted with the nature of His love. Yet, I failed to don my best dress and show up for the meeting. When I did make time for an encounter with Jesus, I was reserved. I played it safe and wasn't willing to address my needs. I spent my time talking about others instead of myself. I dared not think that His love could affect the long winter's night of my soul. Now I know better.

Redemption is offered today but it takes two to make it work. God is willing to do His part because His love for redemption defines who He is. Perhaps He rubs His hands together in glee, just waiting for me to show up and ask for the riches of His kingdom.

It requires boldness and vulnerability on my part. I recognize that embracing any element of my old life brings little in return. My idols are old and worn out. The veneer is chipping.

Laying them at the foot of the cross takes guts but what God gives me in exchange is of infinite value in comparison.

I'm sitting at Your feet again, Jesus. I continue to trade in my tragic history for a new destiny. Amen

WHAT AM I DOING?

***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.
Ruth 3:7***

Have you ever taken a giant step of faith, found yourself in the middle of foreign territory and thought, "What am I doing? What have I gotten myself into?" We'll never know if Ruth had these thoughts as she took her place at the foot of Boaz' sleeping place. Surely she had some level of apprehension. Would he scold her? Would he feel embarrassed by her act of intimacy? Would he send her away, thereby severing any hopes of redemption? Would he lose respect for her? Would he withdraw his offer to allow her to gather grain from his fields? Personally, there was a lot at stake. There always is when we answer God's call.

Obedience puts us out of our comfort zone. Henry Blackaby refers to God's call on our lives as a "God-sized task". Not human sized, but God sized. God must empower His children to accomplish it because it will be humanly impossible. No wonder it feels intimidating. It requires a nerve I do not have. It calls on skills I have not yet mastered. It calls for connections with people that won't exist without a move of God's hand.

Today, I lead a ministry even though I told God I was not leader material. Once fearful, imprisoned by other's perceptions of me, and unaware of who I could become as a whole daughter of God, I was certain that God recruited the wrong person. At this juncture, I can see that He needed someone willing and teachable. It's all about what I allow Him to do through me. The task is still too large without God but that fact need never be an obstacle. I know the One I need to do the job and His character allays my fears. ***The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it. I Thess.5:24***

Okay, You see the obstacles, right? I know You do, and You will help me navigate this difficult course. Amen

CLAIMING WHAT IS HERS

In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. "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." Ruth 3:8-9

In the customs of Ruth's day, if a man was willing to serve as a redeemer, he would signal his intentions by spreading the corner of his blanket over the woman. Ruth made it clear what she was asking. She was not there to hint at promiscuity, but to pursue the redemption of her husband's family. She desired to put herself under Boaz' protection, as he was the person appointed by the divine law to be her protector. Family took care of family. God's laws were honorable.

Yet, I'm sure that there were men who followed the 'letter of the law', but with resentment rather than joy. The sins of humanity pervade every part of public and private life. The law, meant to lead God's children in the ways of life and joy, were often perceived as burdensome. Perhaps many women sought covering but when they got it, it lacked grace.

Much later, King David, Ruth's great grandson would write, ***"You, Lord have been my help. In the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy." Psalms 63:7***

He knew about redemption and the gracious spirit in which God provided it. David's words teach me that I can go to my Redeemer at any time and not fear refusal. My poverty does not disgust Him. My dishonorable state does not sway His commitment toward me. His love for redemption is fueled by His love for His children. He longs to redeem and is restricted only by our unwillingness to come humbly and ask for it.

Shyness never pays off. Ruth showed up, put her reputation on the line, and asked for what she wanted. She made her request, not in arrogance, but in faith of Boaz' good character.

I ask you to redeem the stuff of yesterday. I sit at Your feet and anticipate, with joy, the covering that is to follow. Amen

WISDOM DRIVEN DECISIONS

"The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor." Ruth 3:10

Ruth had impressed Boaz. So much so, that when he found her at his feet while he slept, he was not put off. She had built a proper track record; one that would erase potential suspicions of her character. She had shown discretion in the way she governed her life. Consequently, she gave him no reason to doubt her when he discovered her in his private quarters. ***"You have not run after younger men, rich or poor,"*** he said. In other words, ***"Though your pain was great and your situation desperate, you did not look for a quick and easy answer. Your goal was not to escape your problems with a counterfeit solution. You bore your burden with grace and waited for God's provision."***

I'm embarrassed to say that I have run after a few counterfeits in my lifetime. I can tell you this; though they alleviated the initial pressure, the fickle sources didn't satisfy.

- When I encountered someone in whom the Spirit of God dwelt strongly, I was tempted to crave their company instead of God's. It was easier. They represented Jesus to me, and they had skin on, which shortened my search for Him. I looked to them to meet my needs rather than take the time to carve out a relationship with Jesus. It was second-hand faith. Cheap, but attractive. What happened? The people were human. I grew disillusioned. They burned out from my expectations. Everyone involved got hurt.
- I also made the mistake of looking for the quickest way out of pain. When under financial pressure in the ministry, and in God's waiting room, I grabbed onto the first alternative that showed promise of a solution. I didn't think that God would give me the grace to wait for His perfect answer. I also failed to believe that I had what it took to persevere. We both lost.

"Christine, you're learning not to run after the 'quick way out'", I hear Jesus say to me this morning. I shake my head and agree. When I learn the hard way, I'm far more motivated to do it right the next time. Jesus is always the prize. My relentless search for Him never fails to bring complete satisfaction to my soul.

I'm not running after anyone or anything ~ other than You. Amen

I COULD LOSE IT ALL

Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Ruth 3:12

Just when Ruth's future began to appear secure, a technicality arose that threatened everything. There was a relative closer to her than Boaz. He had priority in the process of redemption. What kind of man was he? She had just come to know Boaz and discern that he was a man of honor. Had her heart settled only to be tossed into uncertainty again?

The twists and turns of life can be difficult. Often, what I hope for seems to come my way. It is just within my grasp and I am breathless with expectation. *"Will this really be mine?"* I ask myself. Just as I begin to believe that I can count on it, it slips away. A technicality, perhaps. Once the obstacle is dealt with successfully, it returns to me. But not always.

This summer, a promise was made to me and to our family that would have drastically affected our future for the good. It would also have impacted the ministry in immediate and dramatic ways. The possibility of this 'provision' began to emerge early this year. We faithfully nurtured it in prayer. By the middle of the summer, it looked certain. My heart began to relax. I dared get excited about it and put some plans on paper. It seemed providential and my heart was filled with praise. It was something only God could have accomplished and it appeared He was redeeming some of the ashes of the past.

One day mid-summer, it vanished. The person who made the promise had a sudden change of heart. God did not intervene in his free will. He never does. The man's sudden animosity was unexpected and hurtful.

What did God require of me and of our family? The same thing God would have asked of Ruth; to wrap our arms around the only One who sustains through these kinds of disappointments. If such a provision is to be made, He can certainly bring it another way. Just as Ruth's future was held secure in the sovereignty of God, so is mine. So is *Daughters of Promise*. I continue to pray for the man who played so carelessly with our hearts. And as for the broken dreams, I lift them daily to Abba's hands for safekeeping.

I really do trust You to give me what is best. Even with disappointment, there can be spiritual fruit. Redeem the ashes of ungodly men's choices against Your servants. Amen

SUSPENDED

"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." Ruth 3:13

There's nothing to do now but wait. Morning would yield the final decision as to who would redeem Naomi's property and take Ruth for his wife. Boaz was more than willing but there was another in line with first rights. This night would be characterized as 'the night of waiting.' Scripture doesn't tell us how Ruth spent the hours until dawn, but we can imagine. Her whole future lay in the balance. She probably slept little, tossed and turned, and wrestled with anxious thoughts. Perhaps silent tears rolled down her cheeks as she wondered what would become of her.

Waiting can be excruciating as our mind plays out the 'worst case scenario' for purposes of self-protection. I can't recall the 18th century writer who said, ***"If God be not worried, why should I?"*** It's a nice platitude, and even true, but hard to assimilate when emotions are turbulent. My heart feels stronger than the reality of my spirit, the place where Christ resides. It's an illusion! Spiritual truth need always be my compass.

When overcome by fear, I will benefit from engaging in these certainties. God does have me engraved on the palm of His hand. I am the apple of His eye. He saves me when I am crushed in spirit. He rescues me because He delights in me. He is Sovereign over the present and the future.

Does such a rehearsal of truths make a difference to my failing heart? Absolutely. A waiting room is just that - a place to spend time until the next event unfolds. The chairs are uncomfortable; the mood testy, yet my heart needs to be reminded that it's a temporary place. Morning is coming and the One who carves out the dawn is the One who conceives my destiny.

I don't want to just mark time in the waiting room. I want to remember it as time spent with You. Amen

UNEXPECTED GIFT

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. Ruth 3:15

Boaz had always been gracious to Ruth, but on this day, his grace reached a new level. Previously, he had allowed Ruth to glean in his fields. Though he made sure the grain was plentiful, she still had to work to gather food. However, on this particular morning, he gave her grain as a gift. No work was necessary because he filled her shawl with barley.

Did that mean she would never have to work again? No. This gift was, in no way, suggesting that she would enjoy a life of ease nor was it a license for entitlement.

Boaz is a picture of Christ. We are His bride, His precious possession. Our affiliation with Him is characterized by, both collaborative work, and gifts of grace.

- ***"The earth is His and the fullness thereof."*** Jesus has the authority to insure that my path is strewn with grain for the harvesting. I have to work to gather it, and I have to labor to bring about God's kingdom on earth. Nonetheless, my affairs are under His watchful eye. He has already prepared my path and calls me to follow Him. As long as I walk in His footsteps, there will be provision.
- As I work, I will also experience unexpected grace, just like Ruth. Gifts will come my way that I didn't even have to earn. My shawl will suddenly be full of grain. I won't be able to anticipate when it will happen, but oh, it will be welcome!

Just because Jesus promised to be my Provider doesn't mean He offers a free ride. I cannot be idle and expect Him to provide. But I can know this ~ He will punctuate my working experience with unanticipated gifts. The message is clear. I am His. He has made Himself responsible to meet my needs because of Covenant love. I am not lost if I am His priority.

I can recall many moments when Your unexpected provision came. I still thrill at the memory and I know You love me. Amen

DESCENDANTS INCLUDED

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.' " Ruth 3:16-17

Ruth's heart must have been moved by such a gracious gesture. Boaz didn't have eyes just for her to the exclusion of everyone else. He honored Naomi. Extended family was important. Redemption was viewed as not only personal, but familial. His priorities were a perfect reflection of His God.

God delights to touch the lives of each of my family members and their descendants. How do I know that? Nearly each time God spoke to the forefathers of our faith, He made promises that would include their offspring. God has a Father's heart. He knows that what matters to us is our children. Our family legacy is on His heart today because it is also on mine.

I have extended family members who weigh heavily on my spirit. They have not yet gotten serious about their relationship with Jesus. Perhaps life has not been painful enough to prod them reach out for His mercy. That will come. Change, loss, and overwhelming sorrow always come knocking eventually. Job said, ***"Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward."*** Pain is inevitable.

But I can rest in this ~ God is *for* them. If my heart aches, His heart throbs, too. I can already see how He has reached out to them in kindness. Just as Boaz sent grain to Naomi, God has already showered them with gifts they have not yet acknowledged. Their spirit is not alive to recognize His kindness.

God's mercy is longsuffering. I do not need to fear that He will tire of trying to connect. As long as they are my descendants, they are His priority. Reaching out to them is His passion and His creativity knows no limits.

Thank You for caring about my family - and for being kind on my account. I trust You with every one I love. Amen

RIVALS YET FRIENDS

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. Ruth 4:1

Boaz set the stage to have a delicate discussion with Ruth's rightful redeemer. He could have approached him with smooth talk, manipulative speech, even animosity. He chose the platform of friendship instead. One who trusts in God does not need to fear any man nor that man's possession. When God is our mutual Father, no one is shortchanged.

I can often covet what another person has. It appears that they possess nearly everything that I want. I believe that God has honored them and forgotten me. If I must deal relationally to that person, it is difficult to be authentic because of the envy in my heart. My speech is not congruent with my feelings. I am a hypocrite and with every word that passes between us, I fear they will see through my smile.

Most every tension in life boils down to a spiritual issue. If I envy others, what is my problem? I am choosing to disbelieve God. He does not play favorites! He has my very best in mind, though sometimes it's hard to tell because our lives are incomplete. We can't make judgments in midstream. He's not finished redeeming the ashes of our past. He's not yet rewarded our years of faithfulness. Even far more difficult to understand is the fact that others' prosperity can also be temporary. I may watch heartbroken as some tragedy comes knocking at their door. I am also unaware of the private agonies transpiring behind their picturesque exterior.

Competition doesn't exist in God's kingdom. Boaz knew that and trusted God to take care of his love for Ruth. Christian maturity allows me to fellowship with the very person who used to intimidate me. Jesus is the source of my security. Contented in His love, whom shall I fear!

If there is someone with whom I fail to be authentic, show me the source of the lies I've chosen to believe about You. Amen

WHAT AN ADVOCATE

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. 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." Ruth 4:3-4

Ruth was not only able to put her trust God that day, but also in Boaz. What a luxury! She knew he wouldn't sell her down the river. He didn't make promises in her presence only to look for the quickest way out of his commitment when away from her. She could depend on his care, both in and out of his company. We aren't always that fortunate.

Do you have something important on the line today? Are you dependent on others to represent you? Perhaps it's a lawyer who has had too much on his plate and your case hasn't been given the attention it deserved. Maybe it's a banker who won't consider extending credit to anyone he would characterize as 'someone of minimal risk.' Perchance, it's a counselor whose perception has been skewed by others' input. Lastly, maybe it's someone who calls himself a friend, but in your heart you wonder.

We all want a "Boaz" in that critical position. What do we do though, when we know that the one advocating fails to have our best interest at heart? Is our plight hopeless?

When men fail, God is there. There is nothing so disastrous that He is crippled. He is the Redeemer; credible by His defeat over the enemy, and over sin and death. When I walk in the ashes of others wrongs committed against me, God may grieve with me over my hurt, but His hands are never tied. Though He sometimes takes time to act (requiring trust in His sovereignty), His purposes are never thwarted by the hands of fallible men. The best thing we can pray today is, "Thy Kingdom come, Lord."

Two worldviews are colliding, Lord. I will do battle on my knees to arouse You to bring about justice today. Your kingdom come. And, Your will be done, indeed. Amen

HE HELD HIS BREATH

*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."*

Ruth 4:5-6

The stakes are high. If God moves, Boaz takes Ruth as his wife. If God doesn't, she will belong to another. One can never know for sure if God will intervene when we ask Him to. It's all about divine timing. It requires the ultimate act of trust to believe that if God does not move, it is not betrayal or indifference. The time is just not yet ripe for redemption.

I just returned from a weekend of ministry on the Gulf Shores of Mississippi. God moved in tender, profound ways that will impact those women for a lifetime. In the context of ministry however, we faced four major obstacles. We tried to problem solve each one ahead of time and couldn't. We committed them to prayer, as we always do, but prepared to serve under significant restraints. Guess what? This time God intervened. Each roadblock was taken care of through measures that could only have been providentially orchestrated.

Unless God had spoken to Boaz ahead of time and assured him that Ruth would become his wife, I can assume that he faced that tenuous meeting with the same fears I experience when my life hangs in the balance. Holding my breath is not a sin. Sin will occur should I choose to believe lies about God because He moved in ways that disappointed me. At the point my theology darkens, I have stepped into a dangerous place.

If God had answered Jesus' prayer in the garden to allow the bitter cup to pass from Him, we would never have had a Savior. Jesus' deliverance was certain and glorious, but the resurrection came after Calvary.

*Abba Father, just as You arranged the details of Your Son's life, I can trust You with mine.
That doesn't erase suffering, it just glorifies it. I renew my trust in Your divine judgment.
Amen*

HEALTHY ACCOUNTABILITY

Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess as my wife."

Ruth 4: 9

Boaz declared his intentions to the elders and the people. They were witnesses to his words, party to his plans. He did not need to be shy about the announcement of his upcoming marriage. God had moved and that was more than enough to give him confidence. He had not written his own destiny. God had created the path to his future. Consequently, apprehension was absent.

I have lived in the public eye since my early teens. Self-doubt was my companion until the last decade. Though my life has been on display (attracting curiosity seekers about my activities and views on various issues), I have never shared myself with ease. Witnesses to my life characterized me as fearful, somewhat withdrawn. The reason? I did not know how to hear the voice of God, so I was void of a reliable, internal rudder. I could declare nothing with any amount of certainty.

Oh, how things have changed. God is about to take me to uncharted territory. I am preparing to unveil a new form of 'strategic prayer' that will drive the future focus of ***Daughters of Promise***. The study is expansive. The material is new, requiring me to even name the concept. **Personalized Prayer Mapping**

Until last weekend, only a few in my circle of friends knew of this vision. That all changed several days ago. God led me to share my future plans with a group of witnesses in Mississippi. I was able to communicate my vision with boldness and clarity. That was possible only because I am learning to hear God speak, recognize His fingerprints, and hear Him say - "***This is the way. Walk ye in it.***" So many who heard were affirming, though it would be unrealistic to believe that all will be. The point is - I can be upfront and steadfast regardless of public opinion. When God opens the door, no man will have the power to inflict shame and uncertainty.

I don't know how I made it so long without You. I used to study Your Words, but now I know the feel of Your hand and the tonality of Your voice. Amen

THE POWER OF A BLESSING

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. Ruth 4:11

If I could begin to grasp the power of my words, I would do away with careless speech and make every word count. I would realize that a blessing takes root. It is not lost to time and space, disappearing into thin air. God instituted a world of sowing and reaping. Whatever we sow will bear fruit. That includes our words.

The elders who pronounced the blessing over Boaz that day couldn't see into the future. Yet, they had the past to review. They had inherited a culture that knew the power of blessings and curses. Therefore, they were quick to infuse the moment with profound meaning with their speech. Boaz and Ruth would bear a son. He would be the grandfather of King David, who would rise up out of Bethlehem. From King David's lineage would rise up another King from Bethlehem, the Lord Jesus Christ. The power of a blessing, indeed!

We have a tradition in my Methodist church. I have grown to love it. At the conclusion of the service, with everyone standing, our Pastor Doug will raise his hand. Thoughtfully, he will pronounce a blessing over us that includes a summation of his sermon. I have watched many close their eyes, almost as if holding their breath, to take in his words. It is a holy moment. We realize, as a congregation, that his words take effect. They go straight to our spirit where the Spirit of God resides. I can imagine that the Holy Spirit seizes the words and goes right to work stirring up the seeds of righteous fruit.

On a more personal note ~ I realize that I have the power today to bless another. As I embrace a friend, may I realize that what I whisper in their ear just may be the catalyst for profound change. And conversely, what I spew in anger has the potential to become their prison. May my language leave a taste of the divine.

"I bless each one who reads this, Father. May they stretch out of their comfort zones to reach out to You. May they discover the riches of Your love and grace. May Your warring angels stand guard over their homes. May You be the glory in their midst. Keep them from evil and give them the strength to stand firm against our enemy. May their children prosper spiritually. May You be the guest at their dinner table. Surprise them with profound conversation. Amen"

"HE LOVES ME. HE LOVES ME NOT"

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." Ruth 4:13-14

While the book of Ruth begins with Naomi as the main character, she takes a back seat for a while as Ruth becomes the central figure. It's hard to forget Naomi though as Ruth and Boaz take center stage. Her story is unforgettable. She married, bore two sons, and sojourned to a foreign land in hopes of a better life. Instead, she fell on hard times. Her husband and her two sons died, leaving her with two daughters – in - law. She traveled back home to Bethlehem to be amongst family. When she arrived, they didn't even recognize her. Hard times had taken their toll. She had changed her name to "Mara" - which means "bitter."

Life resumed. Ruth went to work; met Boaz, and things appeared to be looking up. Did Naomi's bitterness begin to abate with the presence of hopeful news? Or, did she continue to believe that God had forgotten her? Perhaps she feared that the rest of her life would be characterized by tragedy. I cannot help but believe that the birth of her grandson opened her eyes to God's favor and sovereignty. God had not forgotten her after all. Ruth was needed to establish the line of David. Naomi's life experiences, shaped by the hand of an all-knowing God, had been the catalyst for that to happen.

"Bitter" can also describe a prolonged period of my life. It might seem that God has turned His favor on others. ***"What have I done wrong?"*** I might ask. Heaven may be silent. My only lifeline is Scripture, which assures me that God's love is constant, His sovereignty unquestionable, and His redemptive power most assuredly steadfast. If I hold on to faith tenaciously, I will experience a moment when God's purpose becomes clear. I will echo Naomi's thoughts as she held her new grandson. ***"I never should have doubted. God really does love me!"***

This reminds of me the childhood game I played as I plucked the petals of a single daisy, one by one. ***"He loves me. He loves me not. He loves me."*** May God grow my faith to such proportions that my trust in His heart is not determined by the ups and downs of my life.

My name need never be "Mara". I am never forgotten. I am always loved and ever Your priority. Amen

NURSING HER HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

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. Ruth 4:16

The story of Ruth and Naomi concludes with this tender scene. Bitterness receded with the entrance of a new life. Naomi was given the privilege of becoming Obed's nurse. So much so, that the residents of the town called him "Naomi's son". The elders of the village blessed him. Naomi heard their pronouncement and most likely felt hope in her spirit for the first time in years. Perhaps she felt the hand of God on the child as she held him close to her breast. She was called upon to nurture the body, soul, and spirit of the very one who would establish the generational line of Jesus Christ. What a privilege. She finally experienced redemption.

I, too, have experienced a move of God's hand, moving me from a prolonged period in the desert to a time of realized destiny. The seed of it was conceived in my spirit, the place where God speaks. I watered it with prayer. Daily, I spoke the Word out loud over it. Eventually, it was birthed. It took form and I held it in my hands with wonder. *Daughters of Promise* It was mine to nurture; a gift that will eventually take me into old age. It will also bring the message of Jesus Christ to future generations.

Though this is His ministry, God doesn't do all the work. If He did, I would never have to probe the mysteries of my calling. I would miss the wonder of turning ideas over and over again to glean every possibility of their potential. I carry *Daughters of Promise* in my heart, labor over it with joy, and dare to dream dreams that are bigger than myself so that it is all about God's glory.

Naomi hung on through the hard times. Ruth put feet to her faith and took it to the front lines. They were both rewarded with a son of promise. They infused his life with the wonder of God and empowered him to pass on a godly legacy that we enjoy to this very day.

*I am reviewing what You have birthed in me. Forgive me when I've been prone to bury it. I will work with it and nurture it - so that it can become the joyous thing You have in mind.
Amen*